

TEENTEXT

Leader Guide

YOUTH BIBLE STUDY THAT MEETS TEENS WHERE THEY LIVE



TEENTEXT *MIDDLE SCHOOL*
GO DEEP. BE REAL. LET GO.



TEENTEXT *HIGH SCHOOL*
GO DEEP. BE REAL. LET GO.

TeenText is published by The Educational Center ~ 704.375.1161
www.educationalcenter.org ~info@educationalcenter.org

TeenText Weekly Studies: Online video-conferencing platforms

At **TeenText** we know how difficult the time of COVID19 has been for local churches and bible study groups. We recognize these unusual times led us all to embrace new and different ways of *being*. Bearing all this in mind, we have tried to make **TeenText** translate more effectively to a digital platform (Zoom or other video-conferencing technologies). We developed our Virtual Tips during COVID19 but they work for any groups that meet virtually for whatever reason.

Technical Matters:

Face the Light. Whether you are using a laptop or your phone, the placement of light is key. It's best not to have the camera face the light directly. Natural light is usually the best. If you're working in a room without windows, experiment with what you have. Use lights within the room and move them until you get the desired effect. If you're using a laptop with a built-in webcam, there probably isn't a way to adjust the angle other than to put your laptop on a higher surface. You can use a box or some stacked books on your desk or table.

It's important to have a practice run with a couple of people before your group meeting begins. That way you can spot any problems beforehand.

Practical matters:

Discussions, prayer, encouragement, worship and fun can all happen online, even if it all occurs slightly differently.

You will all get used to how this works and your group dynamic will also develop over the weeks. Again, it may be slightly different.

Even if your group is smaller than it would be face to face make sure to really connect with those who are present. And if possible connect with those who are unable to be present so that no one feels disconnected in this time.

- We realize not every student has a Bible in the various translations we employ: New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Common English Bible (CEB), and The Message (MSG). *Biblegateway.com* is a great resource for students to view scripture passages in a web browser. All of the versions we use in **TeenText** (as well as many others) are available here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>
- All of the activities in our **ENGAGE** section have been modified with virtual platforms in mind. The activities are individualized and employ materials students would have in their homes.
- Songs, images and video clips are still included as ways to get students thinking about the weekly themes more broadly. All of these can be shared from the leader's computer by using the screen share function on Zoom and Google Meet. You can also share the entire PDF lesson via this function as well. Here are more specific instructions for each platform:

Zoom

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362153-Sharing-your-screen>

Google Meet

<https://support.google.com/meet/answer/9308856?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en>

- To kick off a group meeting on a video conferencing platform we suggest choosing two students to read the weekly text aloud one at a time. Then ask the entire group (including the leaders!) to read it together. It's a great way to lend a cohesive group feel to a remote meeting experience.
- Utilize the **BETWEEN SUNDAYS** section to stay in touch with students during the week. Present the questions during your meeting and follow-up with a group text before your next meeting. Encourage the students to share their thoughts and reflections with the group via text.

Above all, keep the sense of fun and community with your youth groups. Enjoy your time together. And please reach out to us if there are other ways we can assist you as you continue to explore God's story with your youth during this unprecedented time.

TeenText Middle School

TeenText High School

Lectionary-based TeenText helps youth connect the text on the page with events in their daily lives. Through a series of guided, open-ended, text-related questions, teens begin to see the Bible as a vital, dynamic relevant resource; one that can inform them throughout their lives. TeenText enables youth group leaders to facilitate discussions and present supplemental materials to journey along with their group's spiritual growth. There are 12 monthly issues of TeenText per year (52 weeks). Each issue contains all the Sundays for that month. TeenText is delivered monthly via email as a PDF.

<https://educationalcenter.org/>

Leader Guide

TeenText *Middle School*

TeenText *High School*

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What is TeenText?

TeenText is a lectionary-based resource for middle and high school youth. It is an adventure into the biblical stories! TeenText brings the stories to life with carefully crafted questions that engage youth and leaders alike. TeenText promotes discussion, critical thinking and creative listening. It brings movies, TV, art, music, poetry, literature, and current events “into dialogue” with the Bible story.

Simply put, it connects the text with teens’ real lives!

TeenText goals:

- To create a safe space where youth can dig into the story, ask the tough questions, and value their own interpretations of the text.
- To enable youth to discover the uniqueness of their own stories, and how their stories relate to God’s.
- To encourage youth to go deep and take chances.
- To make it okay to be uncomfortable or puzzled by biblical stories.

How is TeenText different from other resources?

TeenText is about questions, not answers.

TeenText does not suggest a “right way” to interpret the story.

The TeenText way of teaching is called “maieutic” from the Greek word for “midwife”. Behind our method is the belief that we all carry within us the archetypal stories of the Bible, and by working with carefully-worded questions, the learner can connect the biblical story with his/her own life. TeenText helps youth get out of their heads and into their hearts. Over time, the TeenText process helps them see the Bible as a vital, dynamic, relevant resource, one that can inform them all throughout their lives.

What is Go Deep, Get Real, Let Go?

Going deep means digging into the story and not just seeing what is most evident. It means crawling around in the text until it starts working on you. It’s reading the text over and over, acting it out, talking about it until it starts to come to life. And it means “reading the Bible again for the first time” to borrow from Marcus Borg.

Being Real is about connecting the story to the world around us. It’s about recognizing how this narrative is playing out still, today, all the world over. It’s about understanding how powerful and alive the bible stories still are...thousands of years later.

Letting Go refers to the activities, music, film, movement and other ways of encountering the story and responding to it. It’s about letting go of old notions of what the story means and letting in new perspectives. It’s about letting go of expectations and being open to surprises. It’s about letting the story “have its way with you”. Letting Go means mustering up the courage to be willing to be transformed by sacred scripture.

What does Cost and Promise mean?

We often use the terms “cost” and “promise” to zero in on the CHOICES presented to us in a story. Take the Lazarus story. He’s dead and in the tomb. Jesus arrives on the scene. He goes to the tomb and loudly says, “Lazarus, come out!”

TeenText might ask, “What would it cost Lazarus to come out of his tomb?” In other words, what does Lazarus LOSE if he chooses to come back to life?

Then we might ask, “What’s the promise in Lazarus’ choosing to leave the tomb and come back to life?” In other words, what will Lazarus GAIN?

Then, the questions might reverse: “What’s the cost of staying in the tomb?” and “What’s the promise?” What might Lazarus GAIN by remaining entombed? And what might he LOSE?

This line of questioning is meant to help youth realize that with every choice and decision, there is something to gain and something to lose. We believe that looking at stories in this way uncovers the options that *real people had in real life situations*. And we believe that we have the same kinds of options today.

What is the role of the TeenText leader?

TeenText leaders are NOT EXPECTED TO:

- Be biblical scholars!
- Have all the answers!

TeenText leaders ARE EXPECTED TO:

- Prepare for the session:
 - Review the text and background (Entering the Story)
 - Preview any music, film, art, or other auxiliary materials for appropriateness
 - Set up the classroom space.

Listen, listen, listen.

Be willing to be surprised!

Be willing to grow in their own spiritual awareness.

Meet the youth where they are....not where you THINK they are!

Encourage youth to go deep, get real and let go!

Invite youth to take on *leadership* roles. By suggesting movie clips, music, TV, videos, current events or questions, the youth themselves take ownership of the process.

TRUST that your youth know a lot!

REMEMBER: each TeenText session flows like a discussion among friends—going from the safe and casual to the deeper and more personal sharing. **REMEMBER:** the people in the stories were real people with real feelings, fears, hopes and dreams. Often the questions will ask youth to *imagine what a character in the story might have felt*. Role playing, acting out the story, is a great way to get under the words and into the feelings.

HELPFUL HINT: use the words in the story itself to help youth make connections—that is, to think metaphorically about the text. This is how they discover that these ancient sacred stories are still alive and kicking!

What's included in each week's lesson plan?

Each week's lesson includes:

1. **Setting the Stage:** A list of all materials you may need to guide the session.
2. **Today's Text:** The weekly biblical text.
3. **Entering the Story:** Relevant historical background on the text for youth group leaders. Provides information to put the story in its original context. (For instance, the parable of the prodigal son has more impact if the youth know the cultural significance of pigs and inheritance customs.)
4. **Exploring the Story:** Open-ended questions that get youth into the story by asking:
 - What is actually taking place in the story? Who are the characters? What's the setting? The aim is to hear the story "for the first time" even if you know the story by heart. **GOING DEEP**, digging deeply into the story.
 - Where is this story taking place in the world around us? In our school? Our church? Our country? Among our friends? Why and how is this story relevant today? What difference does it make? **BEING REAL**, getting into the story by seeing it as a current reality.
 - How is this story my own story? How am I like these characters? How is my life "plot" like this biblical plot? What part of me is like the prodigal son? What part of me is like the son who stayed at home and played by the rules? **LETTING GO** is letting the story work within you, letting the story become part of you, allowing the story a place in your heart, not just your head.
5. **Exploring Further:** Suggested activities that help connect the text to the teen and are age-appropriate. Suggested music, video, film clips, visual art and/or other cultural offerings that may shine another light on the text.
6. **Between Sundays:** Additional questions for continued "during the week" reflections on the text.

How are the sessions organized?

This is what a typical session might look like, although you are encouraged to adapt to suit your group's needs.

1. Opening ritual: Gather in a circle and light a candle in the center of the circle. It is important to arrange the youth in a circle, where everyone is equal and all are important. The lighting of the candle can serve as a prayer of invocation. You might say, "we light the candle to remind us of the presence of God among us, between us and within us". *The candle is central to the method, and we use it to symbolize the story that sits in the center of the group and offers its light.*
2. Review TeenText Guidelines: These guidelines help ensure that dialogue, not debate, drives the discussion. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the day's questions. All answers are valid, and no consensus or agreement on what the story *means* is necessary. It will mean something different to each youth.
 - "I" statements are encouraged.
 - Pauses between responses are important.
 - The goal is not consensus, agreement, or "right answer".
 - You do not have to explain, justify or defend anything you say.
 - You can change your mind as often as you like.
 - Silence is vital to the process. It is okay if nobody talks.
 - What is shared in the group stays in the group.
3. Today's Text/Encountering the Story:
 - Have youth read the text silently.
 - Have one person read the text aloud while others close their eyes and try to "hear" the story as if for the first time.
 - Have a second person (it's good to have a boy and a girl read) read the text aloud while others close their eyes.
4. Work with the questions:
 - GO DEEP – what's happening in the story?
 - BE REAL – how is this happening the world around me?
 - LET GO – how is this story my own story?

HELPFUL HINTS: Don't expect to use all the questions provided

Allow for silences and reflections.

Ask "how do you FEEL" rather than "what do you think".

Avoid suggesting a meaning for the text.

Listen to responses carefully and ask relevant follow-up questions.

Have fun and don't forget to use your sense of humor!

5. Present the "Between the Sundays" questions.

6. End with closing ritual. Gather in a circle around the lit candle. While holding hands, express gratitude for the gathering, the insights, the laughter, the fun, the sharing. Ask for guidance in working with the story during the week. Together, lean in and blow out the candle!