



**The *What?* *Why?*
and *How?*
of Writing
Bible Study
For Teenagers**

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Introduction

When it comes to Bible study curriculum, youth workers fall somewhere on a scale. On one end there are those youth workers who only teach curriculum they've purchased. On the other end are those youth workers who write all their own lessons. *My experience is that the majority of youth workers fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum.*

Most youth workers will take a blended approach, incorporating a mixture of both self-written Bible study curriculum and "off the shelf" curriculum.

Because of this, I wanted to pass along some thoughts on crafting your own Bible Study lessons.

It's not a comprehensive document, or anything like that. It's just a simple framework to help guide you as you think about your "big picture" Bible study philosophy, and the actual construction of lessons.

We love partnering with you as you lead students closer to Christ. If you have any questions or thoughts, or if there's anything else we can help you with, don't hesitate to sound off in the comment section on the original blog article where this little guide can be found, by **CLICKING HERE**. Or feel free to email us at info@youthministry360.com.

The "What?"

I originally crafted this little outline for a youth ministry class I taught. In an effort to streamline the talk, I used a "What? Why? How?" framework. Let's go ahead and look at the "What?" of crafting your own Bible study curriculum.

*[NOTE: What I'm about to advocate is tedious. Plain and simple. It's a level of organization most people don't have. And I think the reason for this is simple: It's very hard work on the front end. But hear me say this: This is one of the most common questions we hear from youth workers. **And so I took the liberty of going pretty in-depth here.** If you have a firm grasp on your big picture Bible study philosophy, I'd encourage you to skip this section. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, I'd encourage you to continue on.*

*For those of you who give this section some attention, I'll warn you: If you embrace this concept, you won't have it figured out overnight. It's going to take a while. But I've seen this strategy implemented over and over again in youth ministries across the country. In big churches and in small churches. **And my experience is that those who invest the time and effort on the front end see huge dividends at the end of the process.** Most of you won't fully embrace it and I get it. But if you currently operate without a big picture Bible study philosophy, my challenge to you would be to attempt to incorporate **SOME** of what follows, even if you don't go all out.]*

Before you can write a Bible study lesson, or lessons, you have to answer one question: *What will I write about?* But before we talk about a specific passage, I want to challenge you to think "big picture." I want to challenge you to think about your Bible study philosophy as it pertains to your youth ministry.

Put simply, you have to have a plan. Well, I guess you don't have to. In fact, plenty of people don't. But if you want to lead students to any sort of depth in their spiritual lives, it's essential to have a plan. (It's hard to lead someone if you don't know where you're headed.)

If we don't have a vision for teaching the Bible to our students, we leave a lot on the table. I know you and I both want to be as effective as possible given the limited time we have with students. That's why a big picture plan is vital.

So, what goes in to coming up with plan to teach students the Bible? This little document isn't the place to fully flesh out what this could or should look like, but we can begin to ask the right questions . . .

There are two different concepts to consider when thinking about your big picture Bible study philosophy:

Answering "The Vision Question"

When it's all said and done, when students have passed through your ministry, they will have had countless encounters with God through engaging with the Bible. **What's your vision for these encounters?** How do you want to see them changed? Let's define this as "The Vision Question" (you'll see why in a minute.) It's an important question, as who students will become starts with what they know about God. *A knowledge of God is the foundation transformation.* The Bible is God's most complete way of teaching us about Him and His ways. Thinking about your big picture plan starts with what you want students to know about God and His Kingdom through encountering Him in the Bible.

The answer to your "vision question" may look slightly different than mine. And I'd challenge you to think long and hard about this. But, I'll start you out with what I think are some basics in what I want students to learn through engaging with Scripture.

- *I want them to know the Big Picture story of Scripture.* I want them to understand God's original creative intent. I want them to understand God's plan to redeem all humankind from sin. I want them to see God's plan for the eventual perfection and restoration of His original creative intent.

- *I want them to know the character and nature of God.* His attributes. The ways He has interacted with His people throughout history.
- *I want them to have a full understanding of the Gospel and its deep reaching effects on every aspect of their life and this world.* I want them to understand all that Christ is, and the nature of His life, death, and resurrection.
- I want them to have an understanding of what it looks like to *live each day as a Christ-follower.*

So, the first concept in defining your big picture plan to teach students the Bible is articulating what you want them to know. The second concept is a little simpler.

Duration/Frequency

Simply put, this is defining your palette. **What do you have to work with?**

- The first question is one of duration. How long do you have students in your ministry? 6-12th grade? 9-12?
- The second is a question of frequency. How often do you teach them each week? Do you have one opportunity to teach? Two? Three?

Once you know what you want to teach and how often you have the opportunity to teach, you're ready to build your plan out. **Now, this is the part that gets mechanical. As I mentioned, for some of you this may be a little painful.** But while it's not the only way to go about it, it *does* work. Again, I'd encourage you to embrace it at some level.

I like to encourage youth workers to start with thinking about what they consider is their "main" time of Bible teaching. If you only meet

once a week, this is easy. If you have multiple opportunities for meeting with students each week, decide what for you is the main time of Bible teaching.

Then, the first step in crafting your plan is to write down how many slots you'll have in a ministry year for this main meeting time.

- If this is all new to you and you're taking baby-steps (There's no shame in it. Everyone has to start somewhere!), just shoot for one year at a time.
 - **For example:**
 - You define your main meeting time as Wednesday nights.
 - You meet 36 Wednesday nights a year.
 - Thus, your "snapshot" is 36 *main* teaching opportunities for a given ministry year.
- If you're going "all in," you'll do this for the full duration of the time your students are in your ministry. So, you might have four or six different year-long snapshots.
 - **For example:**
 - You define your main meeting time as Sunday mornings.
 - You meet 48 Sunday mornings a year.
 - Thus, your "snapshot" would be 48 *main* teaching opportunities times the full duration of your youth ministry.
 - If you have students from 9-12th grade, the full view would be 48 opportunities times four years, or 192 main teaching moments. *Told you it was mechanical* 😊

Now that you've defined the *main* teaching opportunities you have to work with, it's time to take your answer to "The Vision Question" and overlay it on these opportunities. In other words, you've

defined what you want students to know. **Now, the hard work begins.** This is where you decide how you will break down what you want to teach over the course of one, four, or six years!

Before you walk away, this is where I'd like to both interject a moment of sanity and bring us back around to our discussion of curriculum!

My advice to youth workers at this point in the process is to begin to try and plug-in a mix of purchased curriculum and written curriculum.

- *There are excellent year-long curriculum options available to you that may very well meet your needs.* Only a small percentage of youth workers write all of their curriculum from scratch. Many are able to purchase a 36 week or 48 week curriculum that satisfies their main teaching time.
- *My experience is that most people use a combination.* You may find a couple of 12-week options that work for you, but you want to create a couple of six week studies, or a few four week studies to round out your calendar.

A Few Closing Thoughts on Answering the "What?" Question.

- **Many of you will have more than one teaching opportunity each week.** The process for determining what to teach in these secondary moments is identical to the one just described. After defining your main teaching opportunity, you simply move to the next weekly teaching opportunity.
 - Consider the purpose of this secondary time. Is it deeper discipleship with a smaller group? Or is it the opposite? A more "open group" with a larger number of students?
 - The purpose of these meetings will help dictate how you put into practice the remainder of what you want students to know.

- **Don't forget about Retreats, Summer Camp, and Mission Trips.** These are, as you know, awesome opportunities to teach the Bible. And if they are a part of your big picture plan, you have a great opportunity to be even more intentional about this time of discipleship.

Listen, I know this isn't the most invigorating stuff in the world. (OK, maybe it is to some of you "process junkies" out there. But you already know you need help. 😊) It's tedious. And I think it's OK to admit it. **But as tedious as a big picture Bible study philosophy sounds, I'm just not OK with the alternative.** I don't think it's a great idea to "take it as it comes." I think discipleship should be much more intentional. And I think it starts with a plan.

So, that's the answer to the "What?" question. Before you can write the first word of a lesson, you have to know what purpose it serves.

Now, let's move on to the "Why?" In doing so we'll be going from a 30,000 ft. view to a tight close-up, so keep your hands and feet in the vehicle as we make our descent . . .

The "Why?"

So, you know what you want to teach. You've identified a passage. And now you come to the "why?"

Put simply, the "Why?" is all about application.

The "Why?" answers the question, "Why do we want students studying a particular passage?" *How do we want to see them be changed as a result of knowing and living out this particular truth?"*

- It's the question, "Why are we teaching from this passage in the first place?"

There are a few different ways to think about what we want to see happen in the lives of students as a result of engaging with a passage of Scripture. **For simplicity's sake, I'll boil it down to three main categories** (I do a much more in-depth treatment of this in my book, *The 7 Best Practices For Teaching Teenagers The Bible*. You can access a sample by **CLICKING HERE**.

- **Application of biblical concepts that impacts students' vision**

Take 2 Corinthians 5:17 as an example: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." The application here is all about helping students see how this affects the way they see their life. Some people would call this application that impacts their worldview. Questions that flow from this sort of application are similar to these:

- What does being "in Christ" mean for their day-to-day living?
- What does it mean to be a new creation?
- How does having their old, sin-enslaved selves actually put to death change the way they see their lives?

This seems to me to be most common example of application found in Scripture.

- **Application of biblical values that changes what students feel is important**

Matthew 5:27-28 is a good example of this: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The Kingdom ethic of sexual purity is important to God. It's a value that Christ-followers are called to hold. This application changes what students value or feel is important. Questions that flow from this application are similar to:

- What do students lives look like when they too value sexual purity?
- What happens in students lives when their priorities adjust to reflect that which God values?

This seems to be the second most common type of application found in Scripture.

- **Application of biblical skills that changes our behavior**
Matthew 6:9-13 speaks to this type of application: “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’” Jesus’ giving of the Lord’s prayer is the passing along of an implementable model. Students are called to apply this new “skill” to their faith lives.

I’m willing to say this is probably the least common type of application.

So, let’s bring this around to writing curriculum.

Once you’ve answered the “Why?” you know how you will shape your lesson. The “Why?” is a great roadmap to craft Bible study. My advice is to try and summarize the application from a passage in one sentence. For example, in [Engage](#), our 4-session study on engaging culture with the Gospel, we looked at John 15:18-21:

[18] “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they

will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Before we began writing this lesson, we summed up the application like so:

The point of the lesson is that your students would accept, and maybe even embrace the fact that if they live as they are called to live, they will be treated unfairly because of it.

Knowing why you’re teaching a specific passage is related to knowing how you want to see students apply a passage’s truth in their lives. **Your lesson plan should be aimed at driving this point home, and leading students to discover ways it fleshes out in their own lives.**

We’re in the home stretch now. We’ve defined the “What?” and the “Why?” Now let’s define the “How?”

The “How?”

This last question is where we’ll get down to the nuts and bolts of crafting a Bible study lesson. I don’t have enough time to go into a super-in depth treatment, and I’m not really dictating process. The right way to look at this section is maybe more of the components of writing a Bible study lesson. Your process might differ from mine, but these are some common elements.

The “How?” is all about how you want the lesson plan, or plans, to look and function?

Let’s answer this by examining three different categories:

- The Mechanic
- The Artistic
- The Organic

The Mechanic

The mechanical look at writing a lesson plan focuses on the structure and format of a lesson. Here are a few different components of the mechanic.

Research

Research is the background work you're going to do to prepare to write a lesson. I think there are at least two types of research:

- Scholarly
 - This is your background study that will inform the Bible study portion of your lesson
 - This is where you'll explore the cultural context of your passage, any word studies, bring in other Scripture references, answer tricky questions, etc.
 - This is another one of a few spots where I do a much more in-depth treatment of in *The 7 Best Practices For Teaching Teenagers The Bible*. Again, you can view a sample by **CLICKING HERE**.
- Cultural Color
 - This is the work of connecting the timeless truth of Scripture with the changing cultural landscape of today.
 - This is where your cultural connections come in.

Structure

There are a few things to consider when thinking about the structure of your lesson.

- Lesson Organization
 - There are a lot of ways to structure a lesson.
 - I tend to take a very simple approach to lesson organization:
 - Thematic Intro
 - Set the Biblical context
 - The actual Bible study

- Close with application
- Figure out a structure that works for you.
 - One way to do this is to go to any major curriculum provider and download samples of their curriculum. Get an idea for a structure you like.

Lesson Components

The lesson plan itself is just the start. You can stop there, of course. But you could also go a little deeper. Here are a few additional components to consider when writing a lesson plan:

- Parent Content
 - Whatever you can do to more effectively partner with parents to disciple their teenager is a big bonus.
- Out of Class Content for Students
 - Could be devotional in nature
 - Could be articles to read, YouTube videos to watch, etc

Technology

You have the opportunity to leverage technology to make your lesson more interactive and engaging, as well as involving students more in the ownership of learning. Given your resources and context, it's important to consider ways you can leverage technology to make your lesson more interactive. More so, given what you have to work with, what are ways you can leverage technology to allow students to take more ownership of their learning?

The Artistic

This is my way of describing the creative elements of a Bible study lesson. Now, before I go on, let me say that this is not as essential as some people make it out to be. And that comes from a guy who puts a VERY high value on creativity. But if creativity is not your thing,

don't force it. We have to know that God's Word is sufficient. And a good study of it will never return void. But I would encourage you to consider what you can do to add some creative elements to your lesson.

What do I mean?

- Any graphics, images, or design features
 - Presentation Software
 - Images
 - Environmental design elements
 - Props
- Any specific “look and feel” for the lesson or the series
 - Is there a catchy name or symbol?
 - Is there a “creative vehicle” that's going to carry your theme?
 - Example: ym360's “Pause” curriculum
- Any other creative element that adds to your students overall Bible study experience
 - Video
 - Music
 - Etc.

Here's a word of advice about creative elements: Any artistic element should serve to help your students grasp the truth of Scripture you're trying to teach. If it doesn't accomplish that, it may end up being a distraction.

The Organic

I use the term “organic” to describe the “people” element of a lesson. This is basically all the interactive components of a dynamic Bible study lesson. I spend two to three chapters in *The 7 Best Practices For Teaching Teenagers The Bible* fleshing this out in more depth. But here is a quick overview of some of the organic components.

Planning For Interaction

If we don't plan for interaction, such as discussion or other interactive components, we often default to lecture. **Which is lame.** Be intentional about carving out space for interaction in your lesson plan.

Vary Your Activities Up

This is where the discussion of learning styles comes in. This is an old, educational principle that has recently had some light shone on it. Research has shown that learning styles aren't as hard-wired as we once thought. However, I still like to think in these terms. Why? Because I think we all have certain *preferences* for learning. And if we're not intentional about varying it up, we tend to write Bible study lessons that primarily meet our preferred learning style. That's why varying it up is important.

There are dozens of different models of learning styles. I actually prefer an older, more simplified approach to talking about them, as all we're really trying to do is make sure we're not getting in a rut when it comes to writing activities. I like to think about the following categories of learning styles:

- Auditory
- Visual
- Kinesthetic

Auditory is of course those activities that accomplish learning through listening. Visual is of course accomplished through seeing. And kinesthetic is a learning style that happens through moving around, or feeling, or doing.

As you craft Bible study lessons, make sure you keep you vary your activities to meet the needs of multiple different learning preferences.

Closing

So, that's a super quick run-through of the *What? Why? and How?* of writing Bible study for teenagers. I pray you were able to glean some new truth from this little outline. And again, if you have any questions or thoughts, or if there's anything else we can help you with, don't hesitate to sound off in the comment section on the original blog article where this little guide can be found, by

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