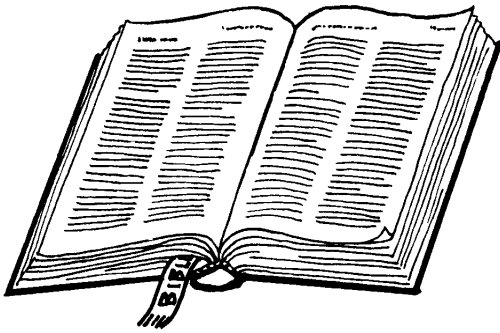


# Five Tips for Making Scripture Come Alive for Teens

By Valerie Zahirsky, M.Div.

Church school teachers of teens have a great opportunity – and daunting responsibility. They are working with students who may be impressionable, yet jaded; curious, yet already set in their patterns of thinking; proud, yet subject to self-doubt. For the admirable and creative teachers who work with our church school teens, here are some ideas and suggestions for imparting practical lessons from Scripture.



## Ask open-ended questions about Bible stories.

Teens often are willing only to give us as much information as we ask for. On their own, they will not expand on an answer, so questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no" may only get as far that one-word response.

In a similar way, questions that ask only for factual answers - names, places, dates - may not lead any further than the one or two words needed to supply the fact. Take the time to prepare questions that call on the students to make choices, think something through, or consider their own feelings. For example, in studying the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses, review the facts of the story. Then ask, "What

did Moses do when he came down the mountain and saw the people worshipping a golden calf? Do you think what he did was right? What do you think you would have done?"

Some teachers prepare a weekly **"thought question"** for their students. At the end of class, before the closing prayer, they put it on the board and ask students to think about it during the week. The "thought question" forms the introduction for the following week's class session.

## 2. Encourage growing knowledge of the Bible.

Teachers of all age groups know the importance of handling the Bible with reverence and referring to it often, so that students get a sense of its importance in the classroom. Teens are ready to see the Bible as something worthy of serious study. They are ready to become familiar with the **reference books and tools** used in undertaking that kind of study. Knowing about and using these resources helps teens understand that scholars respect the Bible. They will see that educated, highly intelligent people spend their time and brain power to look more deeply into the meaning of Scripture, and to devise resources for doing so.

Guide students in using biblical commentaries, concordances. Gospel parallels, Bible dictionaries, maps and charts, and other resources. If you don't feel confident about using these things yourself, ask your parish priest to work with you or to suggest someone who would be able and willing to do so.

### 3. Encourage memorization of Bible passages.

Some teens have been memorizing scriptural passages for years; many teachers of younger age groups include memorization as part of their teaching. But in the teen years, filled as they are with challenges and moral dilemmas, such memorization can be especially helpful.

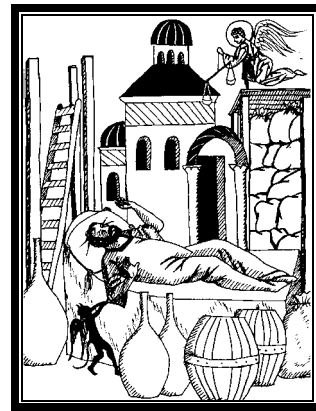
In her excellent little book of essays entitled ***Growing in Christ***, Mother Raphaela, abbess of the Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery. Otego, NY, writes about "climbing the spiritual ladder." She recommends that we use **psalm verses like a tennis racket** – to bat away thoughts and feelings that bombard us and distract us from our awareness of God's presence.

Another current book refers to **memorized verses as bullets** that can be used to shoot Satan in times of temptation. The image is more violent, but the idea is the same: Memorized verses can help one overcome temptations and distractions. They can help one find peace, and give God room to work in one's life. Certainly this is something from which teens can benefit. Even if they already know some verses by heart, they are ready now to learn longer passages. They can also talk about and interpret the passages so that they have meaning and are not just bits of rote learning.

### 4. Relate Bible passages to today's media.

While we do not want to make the Bible secondary to what is seen on movie and TV screens, we can seize opportunities to reinforce a Bible teaching by discussing something teens may have seen or read.

To take one recent example, in the movie ***About Schmidt***. Jack Nicholson, as the title character, retires from his job as an insurance salesman. One day he visits his former company and talks with the young go-getter who has replaced him. The younger man assures him that, yes, the work he was doing just before his retirement will be carried on in the same way he had carefully planned. Confident that his work legacy is secure, a smiling Schmidt leaves the office. He is startled to see, in a pile of trash in the company garage, a large pile of very familiar papers. He realizes that his painstaking work plan is not really going to be carried on - it has literally been trashed. This movie scene offers a powerful way of discussing Matthew 6:19-21, which cautions us not to lay up earthly treasures. It might also help reinforce the story of the foolish rich man in Luke 12:13-21.



There are many ways to help students deepen their love, respect, and appreciation for the Bible. For teens, those teachings can be the most vital source of sustenance in their journey through an otherwise complex and confusing world.

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