



How to Lead
A Teen Bible Study
(And Not Die)

**Five Tips Every
Youth Leader Needs to Know**

HANNAH DUGGAN

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A YOUTH LEADER

One of my earliest memories is a log home tucked away somewhere in the Northwest United States. To this day, I can't remember where it was, but I remember the fresh scent of pine that drifted through the two-story house. I remember the way the fire crackled in the great room downstairs. And most of all, I remember my parents putting me to bed far

too early by my reckoning. At the competent age of three, I was the only child present on the youth retreat my parents were leading. And promptly at 7:00 I was brushed, be-jammied, and put to bed so that my parents could lead a youth Bible study unhindered.

I lay there in the dark of my room contemplating the lack of justice in the world. I had been betrayed. Had Mommy and Daddy not asked me to be good? And had I not been exemplary? What was the point in locking me away in a cedar-scented tower? I *loved* Bible study. People sang (a past time for which I had the fondest affection), talked about Jesus (a subject on which I considered myself an authority), and there was usually food. This—*this*—was cruelty.

The toes of my footy pajamas slipped softly onto the wood floor. I must escape detection at all cost, or the authorities would be alerted, and my bid for freedom would be short-lived. Not a floorboard creaked as I slid my way across the bedroom to the door that my mother had left slightly ajar.

Laughter beckoned me from beyond my cage. The door would find me out. I just knew it. It would squeak, or someone would see it and my brief jaunt would end. I gave the door a gentle tug, and it opened noiselessly.

Clandestine liberty was mine.

As soon as the Bible study group down stairs came into view, I dropped to the ground like the firefighters on Sesame Street had taught me. On all fours, I crept to the

wooden railing that looked over the great room and saw my parents, oh so innocently teaching the Bible to a room full of teenagers. And they thought I was in bed. How precious. Maneuvering to lay on my tummy, I propped my chin on my three-year-old fists, and peaked my face through two railing posts.

And I watched.

I watched the teens curled up on couches and cross-legged on the carpet. I watched the way they laughed and listened. The teens that circled up in that living room would grow up to be pastors, youth leaders, and Bible study teachers themselves. But that night, they were a couple of kids asking questions about Jesus. I watched them from my perch for five glorious minutes, until I was spotted. A sophomore boy caught a glimpse of me, and I knew it was over. But maybe I'd misjudged him. Maybe he wouldn't spill my secret.

He pointed directly at me. "Um...sorry to interrupt, but...um..."

The little rat.

My parents both saw me, and my mom started in my direction.

Needless to say, my liberation ended then and there. I was plunked back into bed and warned that further attempts at escape would be futile, humiliating, and result in my ultimate destruction. I gave up, choosing to live another day.

Something about that scene stayed with me for the rest of my life. The image of

those teenagers, gathering on couches, cushions, and bean-bag chairs to talk about Jesus stayed tucked between the pages of my memory like a polaroid. As I sat through youth group in high school, and as I teach teen Bible studies today, I pull out the faded memory and smile. Because all these years later, I'm still captivated by the moment when two or more people go before the Lord together, and He is there with them.

Being a youth leader is a terrifying prospect. Almost any public speaker will tell you that a living room of twenty is more intimidating than a crowd of two-hundred. Why? Because they are not an audience or an obedient mass come to listen. They are people. People who sneeze while you're teaching. People who bring dinner to youth group and make your living room smell like kimchi. People who text during prayer. People who zone out. People who laugh when they're not supposed to laugh. People who glare at you while you're imparting the Words of Life. People who break down and expect you to...I don't know...do something?

I hear from first-time Bible study leaders on a regular basis. Nearly all of them say the same thing: "I've never done this before. I don't know how to do this. I'm afraid I'll do it wrong."

I'd love to tell you that there is no way you can do it wrong. But, sadly, I've seen so many Bible study groups go by the wayside or socially self-destruct. This does not mean

that they were a failure. God is going to accomplish His good purpose whether your Bible study feels successful or not. He is going to do good things through your study because you have made yourself available to His service. But how can you lead a home a youth group that will actually thrive? How can you be a leader that encourages teens in their pursuit of God? How can you make your high school kids feel welcome and supported and loved?

In all the many Bible study groups that I've been a part of and taught, I've noticed a pattern, a distinct difference between the Bible study groups that fly and the ones that flop. So often it's the details that can make or break your study. These five tips are the things that I have learned along the way as I have taught God's Word to teens all over the world.

Just to be clear, this book is not the key to having an explosive youth group that becomes a mega church. This guide is about being faithful with the few people that God has trusted to your care on a Wednesday or a Sunday or a Friday night.

If you're looking for more Bible study resources, visit my website:

www.authorhannahduggan.wordpress.com

You'll find books, leader guides, printable Bible study flyers, and memory verses to

help you lead your youth group closer to God.

Most youth leaders that I've talked to put way too much pressure on themselves. If you're just starting out in youth ministry you need to know something.

It is *not* your job to hype people up into a state of revival. It is *not* your job to be the coolest, trendiest leader ever. It is *not* your job to bring every teen weeping before the throne.

That is the job of the Holy Spirit.

Your job as a leader is to create an environment of welcome and acceptance where high schoolers feel loved. From that place, your job is to surrender yourself completely to the work of Jesus Christ. Let Him break your heart for the members of your group. Let Him be the Center of your group's attention. Let Him lead you to the throne and bring you to your knees, and one day you will look up and realize that your group followed you there.

As Bible study leaders, we're not perfect, but we were never called to be perfect. We were called to be willing. If you're willing, if you want to lead a teen Bible study as you draw closer to your Savior, this book will make it that much easier. Enjoy these five tips from a fellow Bible study leader, and I will see you at the throne.

If you are a youth leader
who listens
you will be a youth leader
worth listening to.

» H A N N A H D U G G A N «

www.authorhannahduggan.wordpress.com

TIP #1:

THE GIFT OF SHHH

One of the hardest jobs that any Bible study leader faces is the job of directing the conversation. When working with teens, this means coaxing them into conversation. We'll discuss several ways to do that in later tips. However, the more difficult part of this job comes when you have to shut someone down. We've all been in a small group that took some hairy conversational turns or was dominated by someone with the gift of gab. This

plague has thrown many a seasoned, youth group veteran.

There are different methods to deal with this problem. Naturally, as the leader you don't want to come across too harsh and hurt feelings, but keep in mind that if you don't keep this problem in check, tensions will arise. If you don't take control of dangerous conversational turns, feelings will be hurt. At which point, your youth group will divide into factions, there will be a civil war in your living room, and somehow it will all turn out to be your fault.

Okay, so that's not always how it goes, but it is a problem that has imploded more than one youth group, and you can prepare for it with the following steps:

1. Set the Ground Rules. Talk about the importance of small group discussion with these kids. Be sure that your group is clear on what this time is for (openness, the pursuit of God's Word, accountability, etc.) and what it is not for (gossip, excessive drama, backbiting, etc.). Be sure that they know that the goal of group discussion is a time for everyone to share, not a platform for one or two people to dominate.
2. Have your notes ready. As a leader, having a game plan for your time of Bible study will not only build your confidence, but also allow you to guide the conversation if it starts taking an awkward turn. Don't misunderstand, I'm very against groups that are ruled by a schedule. In my experience, the best ministry

- happens along the way in the spontaneous, unplanned moments. As a leader, you should be willing to throw out your schedule altogether if the Lord leads you to. But having one in your pocket will never hurt you.
3. Reroute. Have you ever gotten lost while following a map system on your phone? That sweet little digital assistant never freaks out on you, does she? She never starts yelling at you, "Did I say turn left? No. I didn't. I said turn right. Y'know what? Just pull over. We are so lost." What does she do? She seamlessly reroutes your course until you arrive at your destination. You need to be your group's navigator. Sometimes the discussion will take strange turns and get completely off track. That's okay. Especially if you're teaching middle and high school kids, you will have to persevere to stay on subject and keep them focused. But if at all possible, don't bring the conversation to a screeching halt. Reroute it. In all the years, I've been a part of small group studies, there have only ever been a few instances when the topic was so inappropriate or theologically unsound, that it required a leader's firm voice. This does happen, and if it does you cannot be afraid to step in and lovingly say "That's not what this discussion is for. We need to move on." But nearly every conversational error can be solved with a simple reroute by the leader.

Some of my favorite transitional phrases:

- “That’s great. Next question.”
- “Would anyone else like to share something?”
- Or (when the situation is dire) “Anyway, back to the subject..”

Our conversation as Christians, and especially as Christian leaders, is to be full of grace and seasoned with salt, not the other way around. Have grace on your teens. The fact that they are coming and speaking is a miracle in itself. They won’t remember everything you teach at this Bible study, but they will remember the feeling of being valued and loved. However, as the leader, you have been put in a place of authority. James 3 tells us that teachers will receive a stricter judgment. What you allow within your group sets a precedent and a standard. From the beginning, make your Bible study a place of grace and discretion that allows people to be honest, but does not lose sight of Lord.

TIP #2:

WHAT THE KIDS ARE SAYING

Let me be clear. I do not expect you, as a leader, to create a Snapchat account, buy yourself a pair of skinny jeans, or Google, "What the kids are saying." (Especially that last one. Please don't do that.) Not only is this uncomfortable for you, it's uncomfortable for the kids too. Rather than make you part of their world it makes you a poser. In youth ministry, it is so easy to feel inept and uncool, but your kids (even that crew of popular girls in the

corner) do not want you to be cool.

In today's world and Christian climate, we try so hard to be cool. They don't need another cool kid to hang out with (or an adult who's trying to be a cool kid that they will want to hang out with). They need a leader. If you don't know what a hashtag is, if you've never heard of John Cena, and if you can't Dab to save your life, that's okay. Your kids probably won't hold it against you. In fact, they will probably enjoy educating you in the ways of their tribe. A lack of knowledge will not hurt you, but a lack of interest will. Let me explain.

There are a few, key, buzzword phrases that will cause your kids to shut down and clam up. Throwing out common adult sentences such as "You kids are so addicted to your phones," and "Snapchat is the devil," is not going to help you connect with them. Now, are those phrases true? Frankly, it doesn't matter. If you make your kids feel like bad kids or sell outs, they will never open up to you. Your teens were born into world based in technology and entertainment. That is not their fault, and even though competing for their attention with these devices is annoying, you cannot blame them. I'm not saying that you should let technology rule your youth group. I'm saying that technology and entertainment with boundaries can be a great connecting point for you and your kids. If you're teaching a Bible study, by all means, ask them to put their phones away and focus in, but don't be afraid to be a part of their world.

You're going to have kids from every social group. Ask that jock about their latest game. (You might not have a clue what they are talking about, but be interested, listen, be their biggest fan.) Can't get that one girl to come out from behind the book she brought? Sit down next to her and ask what she's reading. (Don't be intimidated by her death stare. She's probably terrified by all of the real people in the room.) Ask your kids what shows they would recommend on Netflix. And they might recommend horrible, filthy shows, but even that conversation opens the door for you to talk about your standards and what you choose to watch.

Your kids hear blanket statements all the time, and demonizing their tech or their entertainment will make you one more adult who doesn't get it. Obviously, there are limits and lines. Obviously, I'm not asking you to sell out as a youth leader. You're not going to go smoke so that you can connect with stoners. You should in no way compromise the responsibility you have as a leader to set an example for your kids. You need to be above reproach, but as leaders sometimes, we need to take a close look at our soapbox. We need to make a big deal about the things that are a big deal and choose our battles wisely. Because if we're always ranting about the evils of technology in general, they will tune out. And when it's time to discuss the very real evil of porn, we will have already lost them. Don't lose your kids' attention by majoring in the minors.

As you lead your youth group, you will have to battle with technology and

entertainment. It's going to happen, but you can also use those things as a platform to reach those kids. So many adults have condemned your teens and driven them away over issues that were not even sin. If you are a leader who is willing to listen, you will be a leader worth listening to.

TIP #3:

LET THEM EAT CAKE

I love food. You love food. Jesus loves food. (He created it.) This might seem like a trivial point, but one of my favorite fun facts about Jesus is that He loved to share a meal with His friends. In Matthew 9:11, the Pharisees' biggest complaint about Jesus was that He ate with sinners. Think about that for second. They weren't upset that Jesus was preaching to sinners or even hanging out with them. They were upset that He was eating with them.

That means that whenever they saw Jesus with sinners, there was also food involved. In the Hebrew culture, to eat with someone was to become one with them. The Jewish people were not ever allowed to eat with a Gentile (a non-Jewish individual) or a sinner as it would have them unclean.

Then Jesus comes on the scene. He ate with Matthew the tax collector and all his trashy friends. He ate with the lying, cheating Zacchaeus. He drank water with the woman at the well. Everywhere He went, He became one with us, and at the end of all things, every sinner on earth will pull up a chair at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

Many of Jesus' miracles, parables, and deepest truths took place around a table full of food. His first miracle took place at the wedding in Cana, and He broke the bread of Communion at the last supper. Jesus very often fed souls and stomachs simultaneously.

Your kids have short attention spans. They zone out. Some leaders fear that food will only add to this problem. It's messy, it's distracting, and it can be a lot of work. But Jesus, in all His Godhood, is well-familiar with our human weaknesses. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust (Ps. 103:14). He knew that while His audience's spirits were willing, their flesh was weak. When He'd taught the people all day in Matthew 14, He had compassion on the crowd and told His disciples, "Give them something to eat."

It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive on your part. You can even ask the kids to bring something. But food brings people together, no matter what culture you're a part

of. Kids respond to it, and it is one more way to make them feel noticed and loved.

How many of our fondest memories include food? Late night talks over a carton of ice cream. Hot summer afternoons with a glass of lemonade. Counseling over a cup of coffee. Food is not only an inclusive symbol of community, it's away for you to build fun moments that your youth group kids will remember.

Get creative! Have a campfire worship night and end it with s'mores. Take them out for street witnessing and ice cream. Don't make the moms (or yourself!) do the baking to raise funds for that mission trip. Make a day of it. Have your kids over and get them in the kitchen. Make them chop, mix, and taste test those bake sale snacks. Will it be messy? Yeah! But when was true ministry ever neat and tidy?

What kind of kids do you want to raise up in your youth group? When we think of incredible Christian young adults, we think of characters from the book of Acts like Stephen the Martyr or Phillip the Evangelist. The apostles raised up these young men to be a powerful force in the Kingdom of God. That's what we want, isn't it? We want to raise up teens that are going to take a stand for their faith and spread the Gospel. But where did Stephen and Philip start? Acts 6 tells us that their ministry began with serving tables.

Food can be a great catalyst to teach your teenagers servanthood. Put on a Valentine's, Mother's Day, or Christmas dinner in your church, and let those kid be involved in every part of it. Let them help plan, cook, serve, and clean up. Give them the

chance to experience the blessing of serving.

When feeding five-thousand, Jesus didn't just tell His disciples, "Stand back, boys. Let Me show you how it's done." He included them in every part of the miracle. Even the loaves and fishes that He multiplied were borrowed. And what was the result? Everyone involved—from the disciples that passed out the food to the mom that packed that kid's lunch—got a front row seat to Jesus' miraculous power. The Master at the Wedding of Cana wasn't the one blessed by the water turned to wine. The true blessing was for the servants who saw the miracle firsthand.

We are called to a life of servanthood. As a youth leader, you know that the best part of ministry is standing behind the scenes, watching God weave our feeble efforts into an eternal work. When we invite our teens into the trenches of ministry alongside us, we set them up to see the power of Jesus Christ firsthand.

TIP #4:

NOT A NINE-TO-FIVE

Famous last words: "Youth ministry is easy, right? I mean, it's just one night a week...right?"

Well...sure. Until you've got teenager sobbing on your couch long after everyone else has left.

Until that quiet girl calls you up and timidly tells you that she bought you a ticket to her middle school play.

Until that one kid calls you up lost and drunk at 2:00 AM.

Okay. You'd better let go of that whole "One Night a Week" fantasy right now. It ain't gonna happen.

Youth ministry has a way of becoming an on-call job. This is especially true if you've got kids from troubled homes who need extra love. God has called you to minister to these kids, no matter how needy they are, no matter how stressful the job. However, there are some important things you should keep in mind.

1. Set your emotional boundaries. This sounds harsh, but having grown up in a ministry family, I know firsthand that boundaries will save your life and your mental sanity. I have seen so many people in the ministry burn out by trying to save everyone. This is particularly prevalent in the early years of ministry. In your youth group ventures, you are going to have messed up kids, and you will want to rescue them. The truth is, you can't. Only God can rescue them, and even then, only if they want to be rescued. The ugly truth of ministry is that only a percentage of the kids you teach will pursue God when they graduate. And if you put the responsibility of their souls on your shoulders, it will tear you apart. From the beginning, you need to commit the souls of your kids to God, and leave them in His hands. You need to have an unconditional love for the kids that you serve, but that does not mean that you need to buckle yourself into

- their emotional roller coaster. We are called to be spiritually invested, but there is nothing wrong with taking an emotional step back. You will be healthier, happier, and more able to give them the counsel they need if you draw your emotional boundaries early on.
2. Set your time boundaries. Your time with God and your time with your family are sacred, and you will need to protect them. I've heard it said that if the Devil can't make you bad he will make you busy, and—once again—I've seen this simple miscalculation upend individuals, families, and whole ministries. It starts with an innocent enthusiasm to serve, but if we cannot learn to delegate and guard our time, the ministry will become a burden we were never meant to bear. Jesus' yoke is easy, His burden is light (Matt. 28:11). The ministry is by no means a cakewalk, but if we find ourselves weighed down by the burden of ministry, chances are, the burdens we are bearing are self-inflicted.

With all these things in mind, be available to your kids. Within the boundaries that you have set up, be there for them. Go to their games, watch their performances, and cheer them on. Listen to them cry on the other side of the phone. Be the one who picks them up from their broken home and takes them out for coffee. Love them unconditionally, the way that Jesus has loved us. Know that not all of them will respond,

know that as a follower of Christ, you will sometimes be despised and rejected for the help that you offer. Center yourself on the fact that as much as we love the kids, we're not in it for them. We are youth ministry because we have been appointed by God Himself. That means that regardless of the teen's response, we will continue to love, continue to teach, and continue to make ourselves available.

TIP #5:

FIND YOUR MOXIE

Moxie

noun | mox·ie | \ 'mäksē\

(def.) *the required nerve and/or determination to don one's game face get one's butt in the game* (See also: spunk, guts, or grit.)

Every youth leader needs to spend a little time searching for their moxie. I know it's in there somewhere.

Youth ministry is an unprecedented adventure of revealing the grace of God to teens. But it has a way of taking us all back to our worst high school insecurities. As you prepare to lead your teens closer to their Savior you need to be daily battling against the Enemy in prayer, and fighting for your confidence.

As leaders, we often try to compensate for our insecurities by impressing the kids with our spirituality.

I've seen youth leaders take this route, and rather than draw kids to your fabulous walk with the Lord, it repels them. Why? Because they're intimidated. Because they suddenly feel sub-par. No one wants to follow a super Christian. No one wants to share their struggles and weaknesses with a super Christian. Your kids don't need a super Christian to lead them. They need a flawed disciple, who is vulnerable about their weaknesses and follows hard after their Savior.

Your kids have seen enough photoshopped perfection. They've seen enough smoke screens. They want authenticity, not flawless pressure.

Youth ministry is terrifying, but so many youth leaders try to be the coolest, most put-together, most spiritual youth leader to ever live. You don't need to be any of that.

You are enough.

You have been give all that you need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:6). You

have been chosen, adopted, and appointed by Christ to reach these kids with the Gospel. If He wanted someone perfect, none of us would be in the ministry. He picked you. And you are not too young or too old or too weak or too sub-par to do what He has called you to do.

The best mentors in my life were always the ones that showed up to church willing to admit that it had been a battle to get there.

The people I learn from are the ones who are vulnerable enough to share their struggles with me.

The teachers I will never forget, are the ones who showed me love.

Your kids do not care if your house is a mess.

Your kids do not care if you speak Greek.

Your kids will not remember a display of your impressive Biblical knowledge.

In fact, they probably won't remember most of the things you say.

They will only remember how you said it.

They will remember sinking into that bean bag chair and borrowing your beat-up Bible because they never remembered to bring theirs.

They will remember the time they spilt milk on your couch, and you didn't get mad.

They will remember that you laughed at their jokes and treated their feeble answers like pearls of wisdom.

And if they remember that you did these things in the name of Jesus, then you, servant of the Most High, have done your job.

Hannah Duggan is the author of several works, including the bestselling devotional, *Just Us Girls*. As a Bible teacher, missionary, and youth leader, she spends her time investing in the lives of teens and young adults. When she's not writing or teaching retreats, she is serving at her church, Calvary Chapel Hamakua and spending time with her parents and two younger brothers.

To learn more about Hannah, her books, or her ministry visit

www.authorhannahduggan.wordpress.com

To get in touch with her or find out how she can connect with your Bible study group, write her at www.authorhannahduggan@gmail.com

Copyright © 2017 by Cross Hill Press

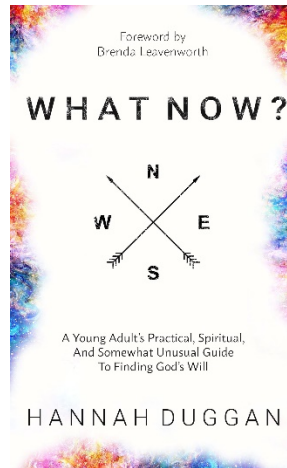
All scripture unless otherwise quoted are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information retrieval systems, without prior written permission from the publisher, except for the brief passages quoted in reviews.

Individuals may request permission to reprint this content by emailing the author at authorhannahduggan@gmail.com.

For more information, send inquiries to PO Box 501, Honokaa, Hawaii 96727.

All images supplied by Adobestock.



WHAT NOW?

A YOUNG ADULT'S PRACTICAL SPIRITUAL, AND SOMEWHAT UNUSUAL GUIDE TO FINDING GOD'S WILL

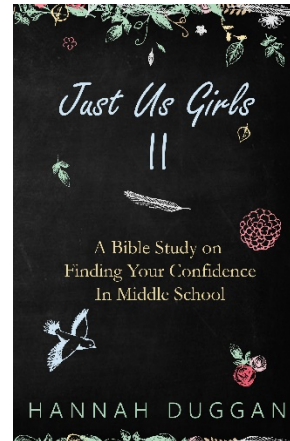
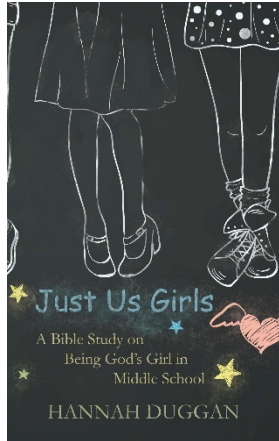
As young adults, we question every decision. We live in the fear that our futures will crash and burn. We're terrified of messing up and missing out. Our lives are characterized by hard questions, and we're disillusioned with cliché answers.

But what if I told you that you're right where God wants you? What if I told you that He's not afraid of your hard questions? What if I told you that God's will is right front of you?

What Now? is equipped with practical tools, spiritual breakthroughs, and somewhat unusual tips on how to find direction—not just for our futures—but in every area of our lives. If we dared to live the life God offers us, we could:

- Abandon our insecurities
- Break free of the lies that deny us our destiny
- Forge relationships that last
- Take on the future fearlessly

The greatest revivals in history started with a few young adults who took God at His Word. There is no end to what He can do when we're brave enough to ask Him, "*What Now?*"



JUST US GIRLS:

BIBLE STUDIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS

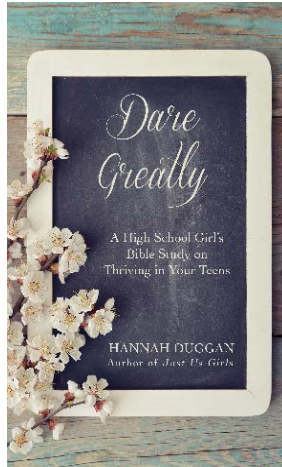
Middle school isn't easy.

It's when you're figuring out who you are, who you hang out with, and what you believe. It's when friends become enemies and boys become...cute. It's obvious we need some girl time. I'll bring the discussion.

You bring the chocolate.

We all need a day now and then when it's *Just Us Girls*.

These twelve-week studies are each complete with sixty daily devotionals, breaking Bible study down into bite-sized chunks for pre-teen girls. Volume I covers twelve issues that every middle school girl goes through, from drama to body image to finding your true identity. Volume II tackles one of the toughest topics known to middle school—confidence. This book dives into subject like where to find a good friend, what to do about bullies, and how to use your secret weapon. These books are perfect for individual devotions, mother-daughter prayer time, or group Bible studies!



DARE GREATLY

A High School Girl's Bible Study on Thriving in Your Teens

School. Eat. Sleep. Repeat.

Sound familiar? In high school, our lives fall into the same nerve-wracking pattern, but what if it didn't have to be that way?

What if stress and fear didn't dictate our decisions? What if we dared to do great things for God, not someday, but right now?

Because we were never meant to be "okay" girls living "okay" lives. You are God's warrior. His secret weapon. His game-changer.

This Bible study is more than a survival book for high school. *Dare Greatly* is a guide to discovering our God-given potential in our crazy, stressed out, homework-driven life. Because in Him, we have the ability to:

- Live Our Lives Exceptionally
- Conquer Our Fears Courageously
- Run This Race of Faith Dauntlessly
- And Dare Great Things for the Kingdom of God

You don't have to wait until you graduate high school to change the world. It starts right now. So grab your Bible, grab your pens, and jump in. I dare you, beloved. I dare you to *Dare Greatly*.