

Text Connections

At the Branch we are committed to ***mobilizing discipleship, authentic community, and creative outreach***. One of the ways these commitments are brought to life is in the context of TEXT CONNECTIONS. We want to encourage believers to connect their personal devotions to committed discipling relationships and organic outreach. Every day, people at the Branch are reading their Bibles individually and regularly connect to ask each other 3 questions:

1. **HOW HAS GOD TRANSFORMED YOUR LIFE SINCE OUR LAST CONNECTION? (BE HONEST)**
2. **HOW DID GOD SPEAK TO YOU THROUGH YOUR BIBLE READINGS? (BE CONCISE)**
3. **HOW IS GOD INVITING YOU LIVE DIFFERENTLY IN LIGHT OF THIS CONNECTION? (BE SPECIFIC)**

****EXAMPLE ON BACK****

Reading the Bible alone is great BUT real growth and transformation happens in the context of relationships. Living life alone does not accurately reflect the One whose image we bear. At the Branch, we believe that God will manifest his transformative presence in your life as you take the step of faith to supplement your private readings with consistent connections with another believer.

Will you join a Text Connection?

Basic format:

- I. **READ** - You agree to read certain sections of your **Bible** (not devotionals, companion guides, etc.) **PRIVATELY** every week. Selections should average 7-10mins of reading per day. It is helpful to keep some kind of journal or write in your Bible as you go so that when you get together your thoughts are already formulated, fresh, and ready to be shared.
- II. **CONNECT** – You meet with a fellow believer **ONCE A WEEK*** at a set time and place (get creative) for a recommended 15-45 min discussion surrounding the three aforementioned questions followed by prayer for one another—specifically asking God to empower each other to live differently in the coming week and to give you clarity as to who we can be inviting to join the Text Connection.
- III. **INVITE** – Both you and your Text Connection partner are encouraged to invite **ONE** other friend, family member, co-worker, etc. who is **NOT** a believer/or consistent churchgoer to READ and CONNECT with you during the first year. The goal is to grow your Connection from two to four people. Once you get comfortable meeting as a group of four, you and the person you invited will form a separate 1-to-1 Text Connection (as will your previous partner and their invitee) and the process restarts.

Optional Resource:

- **One Year Bible (NLT**)** – **Recommended print option**
I believe the portions of this text are too large to ingest in one day. However, if you enjoy feasting on God's word in bigger portions then feel free. If using this resource I recommend an alternate usage—effectively turn it into a Two-Year Bible (a great resource that is now OUT OF PRINT). Read the OT and Proverbs sections one day and the next day cover the NT and Psalm portions of the prescribed reading. This format helps keep you from getting stuck in dryer portions of the OT or NT by provided portions of multiple texts in easily digestible snippets. Ignore the dates so you don't get discouraged.

**This is the recommended frequency for Connections. It is the not the rule. Some meet once every couple of weeks or more frequently than weekly. The goal is to connect with regularity.*

***I always recommend the NLT translation because it is a faithful translation that is easy to read and especially helpful to engage new believers. Still, your favorite translation will do just fine and so will any mutually agreed upon reading plan.*

Example:

- 1) **How is your life different since last time?** At your last CONNECTION you had just finished the Book of James and had shared that God had spoken to you through 5:9 “Don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.” The Holy Spirit pointed out that maybe you do a little too much worrying and squawking about so-and-so’s work ethic in the office instead of focusing on the ways you could improve yourself. You made the prayerful commitment with your Text Connection crew to bite your tongue when tempted to gripe about them this week and to turn the temptation on its head by taking the time to pray for them and your own heart concerning them. Now is the time to confess how you did at that commitment. Share your testimony about how God came through or how you might have fallen short (**BE HONEST**). We will not always be perfect and will not always change over night. Take the time to encourage one another and “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb 10:24).
- 2) **How did God speak to you through your reading?** This week part of your reading took you through the first couple chapters of the book of Isaiah. You learned a lot about how seriously God takes sin and developed a few questions along the way. You might take a minute or two to share these thoughts but be sure to focus on how God specifically spoke to you through the text (**BE CONCISE**). Well, you were never able to shake the feeling that God is asking you to be more appreciative in light of Isaiah 1:3 “Even an ox knows its owner and a donkey recognizes its master’s care—but Israel doesn’t know its master. My people don’t recognize my care for them.”
- 3) **How is God inviting you to live differently?** How is God asking you to be a doer and not just hearer of the Word? Being more appreciative is a big goal. What are some concrete ways you haven’t been appreciative of God’s work in your life that you can identify and change this week (**BE SPECIFIC**)? Maybe it’s as simple as committing to be verbally thankful to your parents this week. Or maybe God wants you to direct a larger portion of prayer time to gratitude. Maybe He wants you to take a spiritual mentor out for lunch just to thank them for being used by God in your life. Be *specific* so you can in turn be *honest* next week.

Next week for #1 you would ask something to the effect of: In the specific ways you committed to be more appreciative last week, did you follow through? Did you let the voice of God transform that area of your life or did you just listen to God’s voice and not act (James 1:22-25)?