

Reading the Bible with Your Child

by: Cynthia Gray

The Bible is a book that is meant to be read aloud and shared with children and adults. Many of the Bible stories were originally handed down orally; prophets proclaimed their stories, and preachers whispered them as prayers. Your child is beginning to learn about the Bible in Sunday School. This is an opportunity for you to make the Bible an important part of your daily family activities.

Children learn communication skills through hearing and using language. Listening experiences can enrich language learning. It is important to read to your child from infancy, and you should continue all through your child's school years.

Reading aloud is important for many reasons:

- * It creates a rich shared experience.
- * It helps expand a child's vocabulary.
- * It stimulates the imagination.
- * It promotes a child's desire to read independently.

Why is it important to share the Bible with your children? Passages in both the Old and New Testament refer to the need for all people to learn and live God's truths. Deuteronomy 6:4-7 states it most concisely:

Hear, O Israel, The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

The truths and glory of the Bible are most easily and best learned when they are heard from a child's earliest days and repeated throughout the child's life.

When you read the Bible to your young child, you need to tell short stories to allow for your child's attention span. You can do this by dividing Bible stories into shorter episodes. For example, instead of reading the whole creation story, you could read or tell and discuss each day separately. The Christmas story is easily broken down into smaller segments: Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem, the angels visiting the shepherds, the shepherds going to the stable, and the wise men following the star. One way to help young children remember stories they have heard is to use props. Play with a Noah's Ark set while telling the story. Let your child retell the story by using the figures.

When choosing Bible stories to read to your young child, keep in mind your child's age and abilities. You may also wish to focus only on certain parts of a story. For example, children enjoy hearing the story of Noah and the animals, but it would not

be age appropriate to focus on the reasons for the flood. Children especially enjoy stories that focus on children, such as Jesus and the children or the boy who shared his lunch.

Young children enjoy bright and vibrant pictures as part of their storytelling experiences. There are many good children's Bibles and Bible storybooks available to choose from, books containing colorful illustrations. It is important to have an adult Bible to read from occasionally. By age five children are ready to listen to stories with few or no pictures, as this allows their imagination to flow.

Your child should also see you read from the Bible for your own enjoyment, because the behaviors you model are the behaviors you will most likely see your child use in the future. When your child sees you spend time reading the Bible, he or she will see a greater importance in reading the Bible and will value it even more.

Reading and sharing Bible stories with your young child can become an important part of family life. Young children are fascinated by the story of Jonah and the giant fish and warmed by the story of Jesus and the children. Make reading to your child a priority in your family life. It could turn out to be the happiest fifteen minutes of your day.

Great Bibles for Young Children

- *The Beginner's Bible for Toddlers*. Published by zonderKidz (Zondervan), 2007.
- *My Toddler Bible*. By Bethany James. Tyndale House, 2008.
- *The Beginner's Bible*. Written by Karyn Henley. Published by Zondervan, 2005.
- *the Jesus Storybook Bible*. Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones & Illustrated by Jago. Published by zonderKidz (the children's group of Zondervan), 2007.
- *The Family Story Bible*. By Ralph Milton. Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- *Play and Pray Bible for Young Children*. By Jody Brotsma. Group Publishing, 1997.

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