PARENT LINES

© Priscilla Du Preez / Unsplash

Volume 47 ▪ 2026-2027 ▪ Number 1

The spiritual nurture of children...

Teaching the Scriptures to Children | Tim Kennedy

Our children's greatest need is to come to a living faith in Jesus Christ. We are responsible for helping them reach this goal. It is difficult to imagine a goal we would work harder to reach. How can we best work toward this goal?

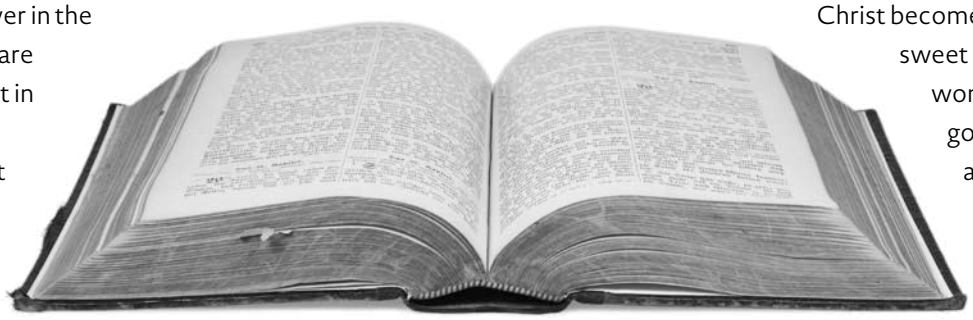
We must remember that finding and using the "perfect" method of Bible instruction (if such a method even exists) can never substitute for loving our children like our heavenly Father loves us and following Jesus in our daily life. The dad who reads to his family a Bible portion that has warmed his heart and is changing his life, and lovingly urges his children to receive God's Word, performs a work the Spirit of God blesses in His children.

There are a large variety of instructional tools and methods available to us today. We should choose methods that will help us reach our goal, rather than hinder us. Our methods should complement the process the Scriptures say will stimulate and nurture faith. Our methods should also be formed in light of what we know about the nature of children.

The Old Testament stories prepare children to exercise faith in Christ by showing them both the magnitude of our need (because of sin) and the impossibility of a human deliverer providing what we need. Paul speaks of this power in the Scriptures to prepare the heart for Christ in 2 Timothy 3:15, where he says that the Scriptures can make one wise unto salvation. Though he lacked the New Testament writings, Timothy was able with the witness of the Old Testament to understand his need before God (become wise) and begin to exercise genuine faith in the God who promises deliverance.

That does not mean children should only read Old Testament stories until they come to an accountable age. Our children should repeatedly hear the complete redemptive story—man's need, man's failure to take care of his problem, God's promises to meet man's need, and God's glorious solution in Jesus Christ. We should read and discuss with them the Old Testament accounts in such a way that they glean the complete redemptive message, rather than only isolated accounts of Israel's history or lessons from Old Testament characters' lives.

Reading the stories of redemption as God gave them allows our children to grasp the magnitude of their need and the grand scope of His redemptive plan. It allows God's message to speak to their hearts and prepares them to understand the Gospels and Acts. Then we can read the Gospels and discuss them as God intended: as the record of His provision for man's need. The life of Christ becomes more than just sweet stories about a wonderful man doing good. Each story is, as John tells us, an *explication* (the meaning of



© cinoby / Getty Images

"declare" in John 1:18) of God the Father.

Of course, little children will not grasp all the nuances of revelation or the intricacies of God's redemptive plan. But who does? Very early, children can comprehend the wonder and beauty of God's love shown through Christ.

Children should be helped to read sequentially through the life of Jesus and through the account in Acts of the beginning church. The kinds of stories children read should vary from age to age, keeping the cognitive abilities and spiritual sensitivity of the child in mind, just as we did with the Old Testament. So, for example, we will probably avoid telling the crucifixion story in detail to very young children or tell stories above their ability to understand.

One goal of Bible teaching is to stimulate in children a love for learning about God. Consequently, we do not want Bible reading to create confusion or fear. We cannot avoid the inevitable sorrow over the way Jesus was treated by men or the fear of judgment, but we try not to bring children to such crises before they are emotionally mature enough to handle them.

John Comenius once said the fundamental principle in education is that the teacher must plant seeds, not plants. We plant seeds—initial precepts—when we read to toddlers Bible stories that illuminate Jesus Christ and the Father's goodness and greatness. The character of God, as perfectly revealed in Christ, provides the standard by which children can begin to understand the rightness of correction and reproof they receive for their errors. We tell our children, as we read, that Jesus is the perfect One. He made us to be like Him.

As children grow into the age of correction, they begin to understand better that Jesus' perfection is beyond their natural ability to reach. They need His help to overcome their failings. They learn to pray for His assistance and to worship and sing praises to Him. The seeds sown in their very early years have grown into young plants, ready to be watered and fed upon Jesus' commands to love one's neighbor as oneself, to give generously, and to forgive others. At the same time, since their intellect is maturing, they can visualize better the world in which Jesus lived and the sequence of Israel's history—so they should be reading again the record of God's dealing with man, which led up to Jesus' appearance.

As children begin to understand abstract concepts, and as they become more accountable for their choices, they benefit from reading Jesus' discourses, the parables of kingdom living, and other more difficult passages. They can read more of the Acts, appreciating better the difficulties Paul faced in his ministry.

A good method, then, for teaching children the Bible, is to read chronologically through the Scriptures over and over, each time adding new stories suited to the child's stage of emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development. It is a joy to sit down in the evening and read one-on-one through the redemption account with a preschooler, using a good Bible story book. How suitable it is to do repeated chronological readings during family devotions may depend on the age span of your children. When the age difference is great, the children's "Bible" subject in school may be the best time to read the Scriptures chronologically.

Of course, this "method" must be infused with parental love and godly devotion. In this way we can give our children the best opportunity to come to a living faith in Jesus Christ.

Reprinted with minor adaptations
from *LightLines*, May 2002

Christian Light ParentLines is published by Christian Light Education, a division of Christian Light Publications, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22803-1212. Ken Kauffman, editor.
ParentLines is printed two times a year as a service to Christian parents and is distributed in conjunction with Christian Light LightLines, a publication for Christian schoolteachers. **ParentLines may be freely copied for distribution to parents.**