

Teaching children the Bible

Teaching children the Word of God is the only way of preparing them to make the most important decision of their lives—where they will spend eternity. By observation and inspiration, a wise man came to this conclusion: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” Proverbs 22:6.

Because it is so important to shape and guide children, God has given them the capacity to receive and understand spiritual truths from an early age.

Children are trusting by nature and will believe whatever adults tell them—be it fairy tales, arbitrary facts or Bible stories. They believe the miracles in the Bible without question and find it easy to talk to their unseen friend (Jesus).

Children are also keen to discover and learn new things. They easily learn new songs and Bible verses and they love to listen to stories.

But where does one start, and is it enough to keep telling children the same Bible stories? Although children have the same Holy Spirit who indwells adults, and although God’s Word is as powerful in their lives as it is in ours, a structured plan will go a long way to helping them ‘fit the pieces together’—not just getting the Bible stories in the right order, but realising how the truths of the Bible form part of their everyday lives.

Facts A house without a foundation is unstable and eventually cracks and crumbles. Relating this truth to our spiritual lives, as Jesus did; basic facts from the Bible form the foundation upon which spiritual insight is based. Facts can be taught from the earliest years of a child because they relate to the characters and events that make up the well-loved Bible stories.

Spiritual truths However, a solid foundation without a house built on it has no real purpose. Every event and teaching in the Bible has been included for a reason. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The Bible is far more than an accurate record of historic events—it is the Word of God. From the lives of people and God’s dealings with them we learn about God’s character, about our nature and about our relationship with God. These lessons are spiritual truths which lead to life and godliness. Spiritual truths can be taught to children from their preschool days.

Application From the age of 7 or 8, children develop a spiritual awareness and a growing consciousness of right and wrong. At this stage of their lives it is important to link the spiritual truths (lessons) from the Bible to their everyday lives. The application of the *written* Word makes it the *living* Word because it changes us and leads to life (Hebrews 4:12).

However, one should avoid tagging on a spiritual truth at the end of a Bible story with a phrase like, "Now what can we learn from Gideon today?" To keep children from 'switching off,' rather tie in the application along with the events as you tell the story. You could say something like, "Can you imagine what Gideon must have been thinking? We can't know for sure what was going through his mind but we do know that he believed and trusted God. And that's what God wants us to do too. He wants us to trust Him even when we don't know how things are going to work out. But let's find out what happened next..." In this way, children will keep listening and associate events in the life of the Bible character with their own lives.

The importance of making the Bible exciting and real to a child cannot be overemphasized. Unless the Bible is relevant to the everyday life of a child and unless the child develops a meaningful relationship with God, the Bible stories he or she has been taught may eventually be equated with fables and childhood stories. Sadly, if the Bible is perceived to be a children's story book or a moral guide, it will probably bear the same fate as the early readers and picture books the child outgrows during the early teens.

To summarise; by the time a child reaches the pre-teen years, the content of what is taught should include the following:

- **Facts** - what new facts have I learnt? This leads to Bible knowledge.
- **Spiritual truth** - what lesson have I learnt? This leads to spiritual understanding.
- **Application** - how can I apply this to my life? This leads to spiritual growth.

You can create your own lesson, and even your own curriculum, based on this simple guideline. Because the Bible is the Living Word of God, any and every part of the Bible can be used to help children grow in character and faith - "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" Romans 10:17.