

Reading the Bible with Children

TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

by Joyce Peachey Lind

One of the six practices that form faith is “Learn the Bible together.” Reading the Bible with children provides an opportunity to grow in faith through listening and responding to stories together. When we read alongside our children, we can help them see how God’s story connects with our own stories. Here are some practical tips for reading together.

Introduce the Bible as a library of books that tell us about God. Explain that there are many different stories in the Bible, many different authors, and many kinds of writing or genres. The Bible contains history and stories of people who lived long ago, as well as books of law, poetry and wisdom, gospels, and letters. Before reading a story, name the book where the story is found and find it in a Bible. Say whether the story happened long before the time of Jesus, when Jesus was alive, or after Jesus lived on earth.

Read from a story Bible. Choose a story Bible that uses simple language that children can easily understand while also staying faithful to the biblical text, such as *The Peace Table: A Storybook Bible*. Invite children to explore the storybook Bible on their own and notice what interests them.

Define words and concepts. As you read a Bible story aloud, be alert for words that might be unfamiliar or difficult for a child to understand. Clarify words and concepts as you go and encourage your child to tell you if they aren’t exactly sure of the meaning of a word.

Make predictions. When you get to a place in the story when something interesting is about to happen, pause your reading and ask your child to predict what will happen next. This can build interest and keep them engaged in the story.

Invite questions. When you read Bible stories together, encourage your child to share what they are thinking. Ask, “What did you notice?” Affirm curiosity and listen for what your child thought was important in the story. Engage their questions and wonder with them. Share your own thoughts and questions about the story and acknowledge that some things that happen in stories in the Bible are hard to understand. Encourage them to continue thinking about their questions.

Be honest about hard stories. Acknowledge violence or difficult passages calmly. Soften wording in a story if needed, based on what you know of your child. But don’t shield your child from all the difficult parts of the Bible. It can be helpful for children know that the people in the Bible encountered the same kinds of difficulties and hurts that exist in our world.



Illustration by Elisa Chavarri

Look for God in the story. As you read, help your child think about the ways God shows up in the story. How was God with people in the story? What did God do? How did God communicate? Point out attributes of God and talk about ways we can recognize God's presence in our own lives.

Engage stories creatively. Whenever you can, make time for creative or artful responses to the story. Work together or invite each person to create their own art. Here are some ideas:

- Use LEGO® bricks to create a story scene.
- Imagine how a person in the story might have looked and draw that character.
- Read a psalm and have children draw a picture that includes the images that are named.
- Invite children to show the facial expressions that match people in the story.
- Create a mini-drama and act out the story.
- Take turns acting out a part of the story and see if the others can guess what part they are acting out.

Follow your child's interests. Just like adults, children may be drawn to some stories and not others. Some children prefer listening to narrative stories while others may prefer the poetic language in Psalms. Ask your child if they want to reread a familiar story or if they want to hear something new.

Enjoy reading together. Most importantly, create a relaxed atmosphere of warmth and wonder as you read Bible stories together. You don't need to turn every Bible reading into a lesson or a discussion. Often it is enough to simply enjoy the story together and let it stand on its own. It may be the first reading of a story that will become familiar over time, or it may be a story that comes up in a conversation many days later.

Reading the Bible with children helps them connect faith to everyday life and grow curious about what it means to live as followers of Jesus. When we make these times positive and engaging, we help children experience reading the Bible as something they will want to return to as they grow.

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