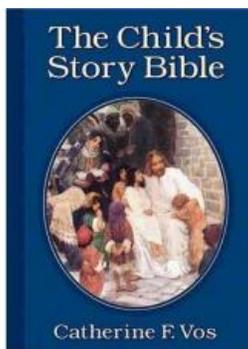


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And For Older Children . . . Respect Their Desire to Read and to Learn

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Several readers of these articles and listeners to the radio program responded to the article on Bible story books for young children by asking about a book for older children as well. Thankfully, there is (as several readers pointed out) a wonderful resource in *The Child's Story Bible* by Catherine F. Vos.

The Child's Story Bible goes far beyond the picture book format and will appeal to school-age children. The book is older than virtually all of the parents who will be reading it to their children. The enduring popularity of the book is at least partly due to the fact that Vos did not write in a childish manner, but instead assumed that children will want to learn and that they can handle a substantial story from the Bible — not just a story summary with pictures.

In other words, Vos had the ability to tell the story to children without writing in a condescending manner. The stories are wonderfully written and parents will enjoy reading them as much as children will enjoy hearing them.

Of course, many children will be able to read these stories for themselves — or at least to try. Let your children cut their teeth on this collection of stories from the Bible.

Most children will hear these stories for the first time as a parent or other adult reads to them. This is a truly special time for both parent and child.

Here are a few suggestions for maximizing the reading experience for school-age children.

1. Read at a specific time set as part of the ritual of the child's life. Children thrive on structure and are motivated by anticipation. Make a special reading time part of the family's day. The obvious time for this is bedtime, and for good reason. The child senses the end of the day is near, knows sleep is coming, and is more likely to be both calm and attentive.

Furthermore, the child is more likely to anticipate a special time of closeness with Mom or Dad (or both) at bedtime, dressed for bed and gathered with parents to end the day. There is nothing wrong with reading to the child at any hour of the day, but bedtime is undeniably special.

2. Read in a clear voice and avoid both excessive drama and a lifeless reading. A listless and lazy reader will lose the child's attention, but an excessively dramatic reader will make the child grow accustomed to drama — often at the expense of thoughtful content and retention. You want the child to be fully drawn into the story, but you also want the child to be thinking about the story and its meaning.

3. When reading a Bible story, help the child to find the actual text of the account in the pages of the Bible. The child needs to learn to read the Bible itself — not just Bible story books, and to know that the Bible is God's perfect and sufficient Word.

4. Place the story in its context within God's plan and within the Bible. Help children to understand how every word of the Bible is fulfilled in Christ and finds its meaning within God's plan to redeem His people from sin.

5. Recognize that many of the stories of the Bible teach a clear moral lesson — a lesson that children clearly need to learn and take to heart. At the same time, recognize that these accounts are never *merely* morality tales. Point your child to the big picture.

6. Never read down to your children, treating them as dull. Instead, give them a substantial story, lay out the narrative, and then trust that they will want to learn and to push themselves toward understanding. Then, be the human agent of that understanding by explaining the story with patience, creativity, and insight based in the fact that you know both the story and the child or children hearing it.

7. Be as honest as the Bible in revealing the strengths and weaknesses of God's people. Children need to know that God loves us *in spite of* who we are as sinners, not *because* of our supposed worth. Children need to learn moral honesty and to know that all (even you, dear parents) are sinners.

8. Ask your children questions about the story to measure understanding, and make sure to see if they have any questions. Ask questions the next morning, during the day, on the playground, in the car, and when the child is in the bathtub. Encourage conversation about the Bible and Bible stories.

9. Ask older children to help with the reading and to grow accustomed both to reading for themselves and to reading aloud. There is much too little reading of the Bible aloud to the congregation in many churches. Let the recovery of reading aloud the Word of God begin in your home.

10. Finally, teach them to pray the Scriptures, talking about the story just read and its biblical text as you pray. Pray that God will apply His Word to their hearts, thank God for His Word and for His love, remind them of Christ and His promises, and entrust them to God for the night and for eternity.

No moment invested in teaching your child the Bible and reading Bible stories is ever wasted time. If your reading of a story is interrupted by circumstances (or by a child who has lost the fight against sleep), just pick it up the next time and move on. Enjoy every moment while your children are at this precious and promising stage of life.

