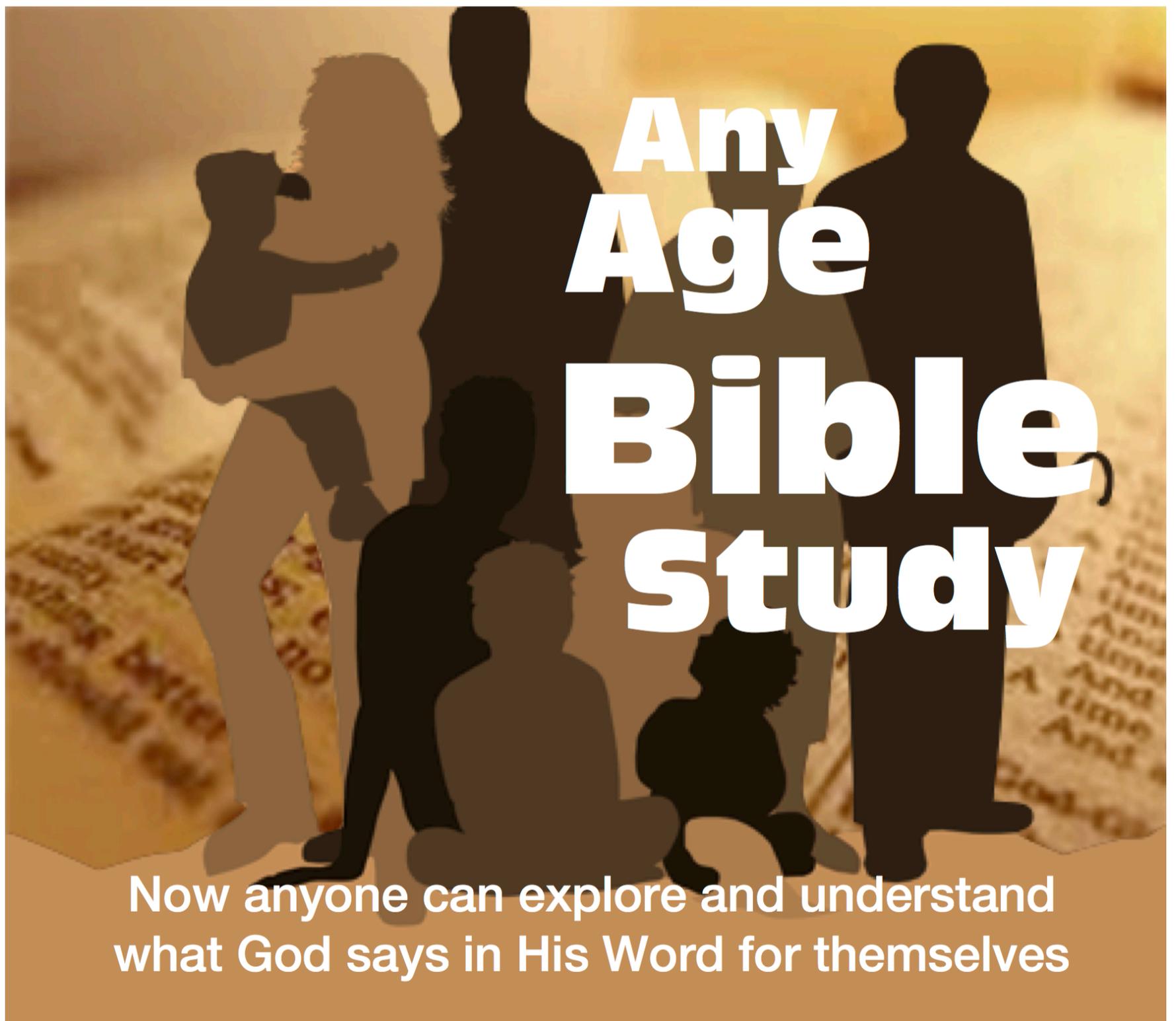


Lee Gugliotto, Ph. D.

Sitting at Jesus' Feet



ALONE. AS A FAMILY. AS A COUPLE. AS A CLUB.

Introduction



Where do we start?

Do you play football? The Green Bay Packers do; they're a professional football team. Once, when they lost a game they should have won, their coach--Vince Lombardi--called a special team meeting.

The team expected Coach Lombardi to scold them for playing so bad, but he didn't. Instead, he said, "We must get back to basics." Then he shocked everyone by picking up a football and telling them, "Gentlemen, this--is a football!"

As Coach Lombardi showed his team the basics of football, so they could play their best., this book will show you the basics of Bible study, so you can study your best. Before we go any further, then, let's start at the beginning: "Boys and girls, this--is a Bible."



What is a Bible?

A different kind of book

It comes from God

Before the Bible, people learned about God and the world from nature:

The countless stars at night, the blazing sun rising and setting every day across a huge sky, convinced them that an impressive God **created** everything

The many types of animals, trees, plants and flowers appearing in all sorts of sizes, shapes, and colors showed God's **great imagination**

The way the earth comes "back to life" in the spring, after nature appears to "die" during the fall and stays buried throughout the winter showed God's **awesome power**

But, people needed to know **more** about God and their world than nature could tell them. So, God did something wonderful: He used a bunch of guys in beards and sandals to tell the rest of the people what they still needed to know.

Here's how He did it:

First, God told or showed the Bible writers something to share with others

Then, the Holy Spirit guided the writers as they used their own experiences, education, and personalities to put God's thoughts into words

Like the apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God." So, the driving force from start to finish—God—is behind every word we read in the Bible. That's why we call the Bible—**God's Word!**

It took a long time to write

The Bible was not a rush job. God worked with 40 different writers over a period of 1800 years to produce the Bible. God wrote the Ten Commandments on clay tablets—while the human writers wrote on small sheets of dried papyrus plants or long scrolls of animal skins from sheep, goats, and cows.

It has two main sections

The **Old Testament** comes first:

- It has 39 books
- It took around 1700 years to write
- It was written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages
- It covers the history of God's people from the creation - to 432 years before Jesus
- It prepares us for the **New Testament** by setting the stage for Jesus to arrive

Christian versions have **four main parts**

1. The five books that **Moses** wrote about the beginning of the world and the birth of God's people

Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy

2. The books about **Generals, Heroes, Heroines,** and **Kings** that describe the ups and downs of Israel in the Promised Land

**Joshua Judges Ruth 1, 2 Samuel 1, 2 Kings 1, 2 Chronicles Ezra
Nehemiah Esther**

3. The books written by **Poets** and **Smart Guys** to show that God can answer any questions we may have about life

Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon

4. The books of the **Prophets** that pointed Israel to Jesus and the awesome future God planned for them

Major Prophets [major only because they wrote longer books]

Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel

Minor Prophets [minor only because they wrote shorter books]

**Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum
Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi**

The **New Testament** comes next:

- It has 27 books
- It took around 100 years to write
- It started, spoken in Aramaic, then was written in Greek
- It covers the birth of Jesus, His life and ministry on earth, His death, burial, and resurrection, and the ministry of His followers
- It picks up where the **Old Testament** leaves off and finishes the story of God and the kingdom that started in the **Old Testament**

It also divides into **four main parts**:

5. The **Gospels** that announce the birth of Jesus and tell His life story from four different angles

Matthew Mark Luke John

2. The **History Book** that describes the birth of the church and tells the amazing story of the first Christians

Acts

3. The **Epistles** or **Letters** that explain how to live the life Jesus won for us on the cross--every day

Romans	1,2 Corinthians	Galatians	Ephesians	Philippians
Colossians	1,2 Thessalonians	1,2 Timothy	Titus	Philemon
Hebrews	James	1,2 Peter	1,2,3 John	Jude

4. The last book of the Bible, the **Book of Revelation**, that shows how God's people who are suffering today--still win in the end

Revelation

Jewish versions have **three main parts**

Consisting entirely of the **Old Testament**, Jews call their Bible, "TaNaKh" blending the first Hebrew letter for each section into a single word:

1. "Ta" stands for the Law, the Torah, or Five Books of Moses
2. "Na" stands for the Nevi' I'm, or Prophets
3. "Kh" stands for the Ketuvim, or Writings

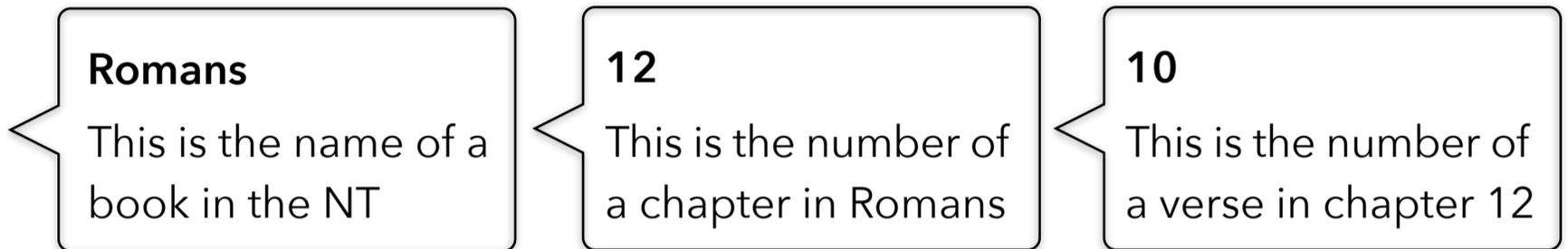
New Testament writers and speakers abbreviate "the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings," as simply, "the Law and the Prophets" (Jesus in Matthew 7:12, 22:40 and Luke 16:16; John in 1:45 of his Gospel; Luke in Acts 13:15; and Paul in Romans 3:21). Though they share the same books, TaNaKh differs from the Protestant Old Testament in the order of the books, the numbering of some verses, and its emphasis on the LORD as both Creator and Redeemer.

It shows where you are

The Bible has its own system of coordinates--like a map does. When you want to look up something in the Bible or tell someone else where to find something in the Bible--all you need is its **chapter** and **verse**!

For example, suppose someone asks you to look up **Romans 12:10**; what should you do?

Step number one is--to find out, "What does **Romans 12:10** mean?"



So, if someone asks you: "**Look up Romans 12:10,**" they're really saying, Go:

- To the **New** Testament
- To the book of **Romans**
- To the **12th chapter** of Romans
- To the **10th verse** of **chapter 12**

Whenever you look up a reference in the Bible, here's what to do:

- Identify the **Testament, Old or New,** that contains the book
- Go to the **Testament** that contains the book
- Go to the **book**
- Go to the **chapter** of the book
- Go to the **verse** of the chapter...and you are there!



What is Bible Study?

Not what you'd expect

Now you know what a Bible is and how to work with it - but you still need one more thing before you can study the Bible: you must know what **Bible study** is.

What it's not

Some people would rather visit the dentist than study the Bible. Just the words "Bible study," give them a big, red, itchy rash. If you ask, "Why?" some of them might say, "I'm too tired and can't find the energy to study," or "I'm too busy and can't find the time to study." What they really, mean to say is, "I haven't got a clue how to study." In fact, most people don't even know what Bible study is!

- Some people consider Bible study a **lecture**. They think they need **teachers to explain the Bible to them**. That's because they rely on other people too much and can't study the Bible for themselves any more. All they get is bits and pieces that are as plain as the nose on their face. The deep stuff is over their heads, unless they can get somebody to explain it to them.
- Others consider Bible study a **research project**. They think they are supposed to **figure out what the Bible means**.

What it is

Actually, Bible study is **spending time with God, allowing Him to explain what it means.** You see, God speaks to us through the Bible: its words speak with His voice. This book will show you how to make **God** your teacher, so you can learn the Bible--directly from Him. Think about it. You won't have to rely on other people, anymore: you can have God all to yourself - every time you open His book!

What it is for

People have many reasons for studying Scripture, from gaining personal knowledge to going one up on others who challenge their beliefs. The fact is, Bible study brings us together with the LORD, as a family - with one hitch: how do you study with children without watering down the experience?

The concept of family appeals to virtually everyone - even in the secular world. Take for example, the Fast and Furious franchise, one of the most successful movie ventures, ever. 16 years and 8 films later, the series has "thrived by steering away from the first three films' narrow focus on street racing and urban car culture in the U.S., which appealed to a limited audience, and reframing the series as stories about a close-knit team that pulls off daring heists around the world." As Troy Craig Poon, president of director Justin Lin's production company, Perfect Storm Entertainment told Variety's Marc Graser: "think what people resonate with in "The Fast and the Furious" is these characters become a family, an unconventional family. People from around the world can't wait to see this non-traditional family come together."

The family concept overrides the lawlessness of the franchise characters, or so says Donna Langley, co-chairman of Universal Pictures: "while "Fast" has evolved into a legitimate action franchise, "what's unique is that we've maintained the heart and soul of the original film - a movie about family, people with a code and characters that are archetypal even though they're anti-heroes and on the wrong side of the law."

In a secular world that tries to imitate the church, the Christian community has lost sight of what it means to be a family gathered around God's Word, seeking advice together from our Heavenly Father. Most households divide Bible study in two: one for adults and another for kids, without realizing the harm this does to a family. Laboring under the misconception they can teach the Bible to underage children, parents unwittingly expose them to truths beyond their capacity to understand. Filtered by their undisciplined minds and unbridled imaginations truths emerge as childish impressions. I recall my own inability to deal with the word, "Colossians," morphing it into "Galoshans," to fit the image it triggered in my head. When my mother read the letter that Paul wrote to the Colossians, I envisioned him speaking to rows of rubber boots!

Instead of explaining texts to children, expecting them to grasp even some of their meaning, parents should generate interest in God and His Word, as early as possible, or

so Moses recommended to God's people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. He called on mothers and fathers to "**teach diligently** [what God commanded them] **to your children**" (Deuteronomy 6:7). Normally, the Old Testament uses one of two other words to describe the role of parents in passing down God's instructions to their children: yara, "to point out" or lamad, "to goad, or train." But the word translated "teach" here, essentially means "to whet," to excite or stimulate - in this context - the child's desire, interest, and appetite for God and His Word.

Since the children in the context of Deuteronomy 6 rely entirely on their parents, either talking with (v.7) or asking (v.20) them for information about spiritual matters, this appears to be the goal of instructing children who cannot educate themselves. So, spiritual education of children divides into two phases - before and after they can read.



Educating Children before They Can Read

Deuteronomy 6 is a virtual mission statement for parents of pre-school children. It lays out a detailed plan of action for them, starting with their attitude toward the LORD God and His commands.

Attitude

According to v.5, before parents can get children interested in God, they must have a great personal interest in God, themselves. The verse advises them to, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart." This is the foundation for true obedience of His commands, because they must also make His orders a matter of the heart rather than the head (v.6). In the same way, the first four of the Ten Commandments explain how to love God, before the last six describe how to love our neighbor.

Method

A favorite in both the Old and New Testaments, repetition saturates young minds with information, embedding images as it corrects former misunderstandings. So, Moses recommends repeating them over and over at every opportunity to the kids, "talking about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you go to bed and when you get up" (v.7). This 24/7 lifestyle in public as well as behind closed doors implies a heartfelt commitment to God's Word, consistent with verses 5 and 6 and leads us into verses 8 and 9.

Example

Many church-members can recite scripture, quoting it word for word; but few actually live it - the next requirement of parents raising children for the LORD. Moms and dads must "practice what they preach," backing up what they say with a consistent example worthy of imitation. So, v.8 calls on parents to let God's commands control the way they act and think. In this way, children can see for themselves, the relation between God's Word and behavior as the outcome of a mental process. Gradually, they realize that God expects them to carry out His instructions just like their moms and dads.

But, it is not enough to make the process of heartfelt obedience come to life. Parents must also show their boys and girls how to live for God wherever they are, any time of day. That's why Moses warns parents to let God's Word guide the way they live at home or away from it (v.9a), and to demonstrate the same loyalty to scripture at the end of the day as when it began (v.9b). Children may not have the ability to read books, but they can read people. They notice disconnects between what we say and how we act, as well as whether or not we are consistent. Attempts to excuse ourselves only tears us down in their eyes. Worse yet, they resent demands to do what their parents will not.

Opinions

Opinions reveal the truth about us, far better than our words or actions. Based on the way we look at things and relate to reality, unguarded views expose who we really are and reveal the true value we place on our so-called values and principles. Moses mentions two: the LORD God and His Word.

The LORD God

So, if we want to interest our children in the LORD and His Word, we must fear, or respect Him so much, we would never serve anything or anyone else (v.13) and resist the urge to worship any of the gods, or idols of our neighbors (v.14). What's more, you must never ask God to prove Himself (v.16). For all your claims to love God and His Word, a lack of respect for Him will give you away as a slave to self, an enemy of God, and headed for destruction (v.15).

God's Word

Equally important to this mission is your true opinion of what the LORD has to say. We must not become like Saul who modified God's instructions instead of carrying out what he was told. So, Moses tells us to diligently keep God's commands (v.17) in order to do them (v.18). The word "keep" means "to guard, or reserve," just as we say we put things in the refrigerator to "keep, or prevent them from decomposing." Building on 4:2 where he defined "keep" as, "Neither add a thing to what I command you nor subtract from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God," Moses says "keep" God's commands in order to "do" them, because we must take God's commands just as He gives them - without alteration - in order to carry out exactly what He says.

Taking into account what Moses said earlier, only a love for God deep enough to cherish His Word in your heart will overpower urges to modify what God says. Counting on this phenomenon, Jesus said, "If you love me keep my commandments," (John 14:15). In contrast to Jewish slavery to the Law, Jesus stresses God's desire for obedience based on love. He wants parents to demonstrate compliance with God's commands based on a warm parent-child relationship with Him. Children should obey because they "want to" rather than "have to."

Opportunity

The Bible teaches us to wait for God to open doors rather than impetuously invading others' space. So, for example, Paul delayed his return to Corinth because God opened a "wide-door" of evangelistic opportunity in Ephesus [his way of saying God gave him divine permission to win souls there] in spite of human resistance (1Corinthians 6:9). Even Jesus, "stands at the door and knocks," waiting for us to willingly open it and let Him in (Revelation 3:20). Even so, many parents still barge into children's minds and force ideas on them. No wonder kids resist and often reject what their moms and dads tell them.

The same God who opens doors for Gospel ministry outside the home, also creates opportunities to reach children in it. The repeated reference to parents with the word, "you" in Deuteronomy 6, makes it clear that God expects them - rather than pastors, school teachers, or other church leaders - to personally educate their children in spiritual matters. Read the chapter for yourself and list everything He wants "you" to do.

Case in point. Throughout North America, children taught by their parents know scripture better than those who rely on professional educators and Bible classes. Following the disappointing results of the first Valuegenesis report in 1990, the Seventh-day Adventist Church beefed-up ministry to young people, even rewriting Bible lessons for youth of all ages. Those who responded ten years later to the follow-up Valuegenesis questionnaire did show a greater faith maturity, but admitted that they spent less time reading their Bibles. In other words, they were able to repeat what they were told by the church - through its revised lessons - but they didn't get it from the Bible. What's the difference as long as they get it," you may ask. Only this: secondhand information from others can never replace firsthand experience with the source.

It may amaze you to know, kids who learned scripture at home spent more time in God's Word than those enrolled in SDA schools. Despite earning a grade in Bible as part of their daily curriculum, they treated Bibles like their other textbooks, setting them aside over weekends, refusing even to take them to worship. It seems that kids persuaded against their will are of the same opinion still. Unlike professionals, parents educate children 24/7 with the necessary reinforcement of their lifestyles, etc.

To counter the effects of being told about God whether they are interested or not, Moses advises eager moms and dads to wait till their children ask questions about God's

instructions - *before* they remind them of what God has done for His people since the beginning (verses 20-23). When kids voluntarily break the pane of resistance to know what you have to share with them, explain that God expects them to study His Word and live by it, so He can continue to bless and keep them His people, as He has done for faithful others up to the present time (v.24). Love for God and His Word are signs of a true relationship with God and real respect for His Covenant (v.25). That's another reason why Jesus told His disciples: "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). As the Net Bible says: "Obedience is the proof of genuine love."



Secrets of Successful Pre-School Education

When Jesus called His disciples, He wasn't looking for employees, puppets, or gofers. Though rightfully their Master, He preferred to call them "friends", and told them, "everything the Father told me" (John 15:15). Doesn't it make sense, then to follow His lead, and view your children as *equals* rather than *subordinates* as you pass on whatever the Father has revealed to you. Instead of *apprentices*, treat them as *classmates* in the School of Christ.

You see, unlike Jewish disciples who mastered their rabbis and went on to start schools of their own, no one ever graduates from the School of Christ or stands in His place (Matthew 23:8, 10). In fact, any attempt to claim you have - will only lead to rebellion. After all, even the most respectful children still resent living up to the expectations of someone who is less than perfect. To avoid the trap too many parents have fallen into, let your children know that Christ is the **ONLY** Teacher and both you and they are His students. Explain that you are still learning from Him and invite them to join you in His class so you can learn together. Then, wait for opportunities to pass on what Christ has taught you when they ask questions or turn to you for help. Study, pray, and practice your faith shoulder to shoulder to serve and enjoy God hand in hand.

From the main ways to draw children's attention to God, here are a few we have tried and recommend:

Attention Getters

Recitals

Read to your children from the Bible, not to commit the stories to memory, but to draw them into its action. Using thought for thought rather than word for word translations, help them to see God through the eyes of the writer and characters. Urge them to experience God like the men, women, and children in the text. Show them the blessing of a relationship with the Almighty, and expose the desperation of trying to live without one. Instead of clueless memorization, aim for curious recognition of the story and a desire to know more about God.

Sing-a-longs

Music has a way of getting through to children like nothing else. According to Google, *"The playing and listening to music have positive effects on the brain.... Music activates several regions of the brain, including auditory, motor, limb and emotions. The emotional and cognitive benefits of music are due to these activations."* So, pick songs that kids can identify with and instead of the lyrics, focus them on the spirit of each tune. When you sing, "Father Abraham," for example, help them to feel like one of the great patriarch's descendants, marching through this world on their way to the Kingdom. Guided by the One who sees and knows everything, they follow a path unknown to everyone else. The One who loved them enough to die for them will lead them by the hand to His Father's house where they will live forever.

Plays

Nothing enables children to experience Bible texts better than dramatic exercise. Playing biblical characters permits them to act the part and identify with scripture's heroes or villains. Instead of telling them about who they portray, let them feel what it is like to be that person. They will gain a sense of walking with or without God, of living with or without hope, of knowing grace and mercy or futility and condemnation. A skit based on Romans 7, for instance, will give a child firsthand familiarity with the hopelessness of dealing with sin. Failing to stop itself from doing bad, or to make itself do good has the potential to point the child to God for help, as it did, Paul.

Promises

From an early age, children look forward to the fulfillment of the good things their parents tell them will happen. If these projections fail to come true, they feel disappointment and grow resentful toward the moms and dads they believe let them down. Salvation takes trust in God and confidence in His promises. You must show them that God always keeps His word, that more than forecasts of what may or may not come about, His promises are guarantees of what must happen. Use this format to describe biblical prophecies, especially about the Savior - from OT predictions *about* Him to the incarnation *of* Him. Don't forget to include His unselfish journey to the cross, the grave, and the right hand of God - for our sakes.

Make sure they understand that God let nothing stand in the way of keeping His word - giving up His only divine Son to rescue them from a world doomed to disappear and take everyone with it - and deserves their tireless trust and confidence. As Moses said, we must always tell our children that everything God did in the past, He did for them. This adds depth to His love, intensifies His faithfulness, and personifies the whole history of salvation. Jesus did agree to die for us before the foundation, or beginning of the world (Revelation 13:8), came at just the right time to give His life (Romans 5:6), and rules on our behalf until death is defeated and God grants us immortality (1Corinthians 15:54).

Role Play

What better way to help children experience the Bible than to have them interact with you and others to acquire the skills, traits, and attitudes of Bible personalities. Acting out or performing the part of speakers or characters in the text is a way to train and acquaint them firsthand with God's expectations and the consequences of carrying out or contradicting them. According to the Corporate Training website: "*In training scenarios, the principle applied is: I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.* Role play makes sense of theory. It gathers together concepts into a practical experience."

Role play can either lay a foundation for learning, or seal a learning experience. Instead of tying together facts or recommendations, role play enables children to put principles and precepts into action by emulating role models who exemplify them. Introduced to what you want them to assimilate, you will find it easier to reinforce lessons by showing them other characters who either agree with, contradict, or incorporate some of the desired traits. In the same way, role play can help kids sum up what you have shown them, so you can assess how well they understand texts.

What better way to point kids to Christ or to help them understand the plan of salvation than for them to pretend they are a sacrifice or a piece of sacred furniture, or to act out the ministry of the priests, Levites, and the High Priest - in a life-size sanctuary? Let them step in Christ's ascended shoes to see the difference between His Melchisedek and Aaron's priesthoods.

Prayers

Many believe that prayer changes things, as if God can't act without advice or prompting from us. But the truth is, God already has a plan and is the only One smart enough to come up with and carry it out. Though He intervenes supernaturally at times, prayer usually changes people who then bring about changes. So, instead of praying for God to change others, it's best to pray for Him to change you so you can become a factor in changing them. As the HealingIsYours website remarks: "He [God] is all-powerful and He is able to bring answers to your prayers. It is He who will enable you to change your circumstances, your relationships, and your attitudes." Case in

point: the son of a famous evangelist overheard his frustrated dad pleading with God for the wisdom to end the boy's rebellious ways. Impressed by his father's sincerity and trust that God had the answer, the lad went off to pray for himself, changed, and grew up to succeed his pop in the ministry.

At the heart of prayer is the relationship with God. One of the most potent ways to practice His presence in your life and world, prayer develops faith in God. The Healing Is Yours website goes on to say: "God wants you to trust Him and to take your eyes off the circumstances of your life. By reading, memorizing, and repeating the words of the Bible (the Word of God) your mind will be renewed and your life will change. Yes, prayer changes people. As you meditate upon the Word of God, you will sense His presence, and in His presence there is fullness of joy and there are pleasures forevermore. Therefore, let me encourage you to pray on a regular basis. Just talk to God and let Him talk to you. As you learn to agree with God's Word in your praying, you will experience unity with Him, and you will be able to live in His kingdom of love and joy on a daily basis."

Don't forget to model your reliance upon God for your children with frequent displays of prayer. Pray in every circumstance. Invite them to join you in prayer - for them, others, or situations they consider urgent. Consistently offer or encourage them to ask you to pray. Turn your prayers into conversations with God - talking *with* rather than *to* or *at* your Heavenly Father - and your child will find it easier to start praying with you, and ultimately graduate to praying on his or her own.

Service

One of the most effective ways to train children for the LORD is to involve them in service. If you want the kids to serve the LORD, then get them started working for Him. Our own children were never closer to God than when we included them in our work - like the time we launched a massive prison ministry for our congregation. Though only 10 to 12 years of age, we took them with us to visit and interact with inmates in person, and urged them to take collect calls from those who phoned for help. You should have seen them searching their Bibles for texts to offer godly advice, as well as leading murderers, robbers, and other assorted tough-guys in prayer. Their spirituality hit an all-time high, the Mt. Everest of mountaintop experiences with God.

To succeed at what they do for God, children will have to lean on Him. As they learn to rely more on the Almighty to help others, they will also grow more dependent on Him for themselves. Service will improve their personal relationship with God, each other, and with you. Instead of a boss/employee connection with you, and a coworker mentality among themselves, service provides opportunities to become a team that answers to God. In fact, supporting each other, parents develop a healthier bond with children when they forge a triad together with God. As Solomon explained: "Two are better off than one...Three are even better, because a triple-braided cord is not easily broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12). Give it a try. Believe me - it works!

Games

Ministry takes a terrible toll on a pastor's family. Ask my wife. Along with the hurt, she'll also remind you of what we did to counter the wear and tear of dealing with other people's problems as well as our own. *Family Game Nights* enabled us to build relationships, connect with our children, make memories, have fun, and learn in the process - in spite of the wounds we experienced healing others. According to the My-Little-Poppies website: "Children are doing so much more than simply having fun when they are engaged in play. Playing games works on a host of skills, including:

- *Verbal communication*
- *Self-regulation*
- *Turn-taking*
- *Sharing*
- *Listening*
- *Cooperation*
- *Focus and attention*
- *Following directions*
- *Creativity*
- *Social skills*
- *Learning to handle wins and losses*
- *Cognitive skills such as counting, color/shape/pattern recognition, strategy, problem solving, early literacy, etc."*

Rather than some frivolous option, "Play is the science of childhood. Children learn how to navigate their world through play. And, when parents play *alongside* their children, they have the opportunity to work on those precious social skills *while having fun*. Playing a game presents many opportunities for teachable moments *and* you are building relationships and making memories in the process! While direct instruction of social skills has its place, there is something to be said for the hands-on, experiential learning that playing games together provides."

Of course, you can't ignore the subjects of the games you play with your kids, because they will slip under the radar, land in their minds, and influence what they become. So, avoid secular and always play spiritual, Bible-based games to have the best effect on your child's development. Either purchase the commercially produced versions or come up with your own - based on scripture. Whichever you choose, the kids can't lose! Everyone wins!

Models

When God wanted to live among His people to prove His love and demonstrate His commitment to them, He ordered Moses to build a sanctuary. Because it also pointed to His Son and His saving ministry in the remote future, the structure sported details known only to Him. So, He commanded, "You must build this Tabernacle and its

furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you” (Exodus 25:9). To make sure craftsmen constructed it to His exact specs, the LORD showed Moses a scale model of the final plan and insisted that it turn out *exactly* like its 3-D miniature. The LORD knows that a precise physical representation beats blueprints every time.

The same is still true for your children. Instead of dry texts, try using interesting models to help the kids see rather than imagine the ark full of animals, or visualize the priests at work in the sacred courtyard, or picture that fateful day at Golgotha. As an added stimulus, let the youngsters help you make the models using the Bible text for step-by-step instructions. Not only will biblical models replace secular decorations in their rooms, but as long as those replicas last, they’ll have graphic reminders to explore firsthand for more insights that can also correct as well as refresh their memories.

Show and Tell

One of the greatest skills you can help children to develop is the ability to go from biblical principle to real life. Unfortunately, only a handful of Christians can transition from words on a page to reality. So, here in North America, many teachers have adopted a teaching tool called, “Show and Tell,” to help students merge the classroom with the world in which they live. Setting aside a time each day for this exercise, teachers encourage young children to bring items they have selected to class and describe them to their classmates. I personally hated to let a day go by without showing and telling something to the other kids in my school.

Ask your children to show and tell the family about someone or something that reminds them of the Bible. They can clip it from a magazine, snap a picture with a smartphone, download it on their computers, or even bring physical objects to the Family Altar and explain its resemblance to persons, places, or things in scripture. This will help them to view the world from a spiritual point of view and to recognize the impact the Bible has made on the world. Practiced daily, connecting scripture with everything around them may even become a way of life. Pray for it!

Visual Aids

Preschoolers listen more eagerly when visual aids illustrate what the Bible says. Seeing what they are told makes it easier for them to identify what they hear and helps build the vocabulary they need to penetrate the text and become part of what’s happening in it. Avoid interpretive materials that slant the text toward opinion and stick with those that simply illustrate what the text says. Try not to transplant your beliefs in the child. Instead of using movies, pictures, felts, or other clever devices to drive them toward your or other’s conclusions before they have the tools to analyze and evaluate the text for themselves. Instead, let the Holy Spirit guide them to an inspired perspective from which He will enable them to see the truth of it when they naturally acquire the maturity and tools to decode what they read, connect/compare its contents with what they already know, and think deeply about it.



Educating Children Who Can Read

Before anyone can truly study the Bible in the conventional sense, they need to know two things: (1) how to read, and (2) how to understand language.

What it means to read

The *Oxford-American Dictionary* defines “read”: to look at and comprehend the meaning of (written or printed matter) by mentally interpreting the characters or symbols of which it is composed. But, in its basic sense, readers simply recognize words and remember what they mean. At first, we know letters by sight, remember how they form words, and recall what each word means. Then, over time we learn to grasp what groups of words mean - from a sentence to a paragraph until we can work with Bible texts one passage at a time. To understand God’s Word, we must take on these groups of sentences/verses that talk about the same person, place, or thing and serve as the basic unit of Bible study.

What it means to understand language

Essentially, language is a system of communication based upon words and the formation of words into sentences. Grammar, another name for the system, studies both the forms that words take and the ways we arrange them. Whether spoken or written, we have the ability to combine individual words into an infinite number of sentences that talk about virtually anything and everything.

Though today’s schools teach grammar as early as the first grade, kids still have a difficult time mastering the fundamentals of language until they reach the sixth grade. While pre-schoolers identify what they hear with certain meanings, it takes time for them to match meanings with the forms of words that writers, speakers, and actors use to share information. With the help of a good dictionary, children can eventually

decode any sentence if they know the way each form functions to contribute something to the whole thought.

Alas, any attempt to have children do this before they have the tools and maturity for it may prove disastrous. Working with an incomplete apparatus for understanding is just as harmful as tackling a text short of all the facts. You may say, "We already know what's right and we will see to it that our children adopt our correct beliefs," but childhood is not a time for indoctrination, though many parents believe it is. They subscribe to the view that they and the church must work together to save their children. Others take the stance that only Christ saves and do everything they can to connect their child directly with the Savior. Regrettably, too many parents rely on their church to hold their kids to what they told them during their formative years, instead of enabling youngsters to embrace truths for themselves that will last a lifetime.

A surprising number of church members believe salvation comes from belonging to a church, attending it faithfully, and living by its teachings. This institutional point of view distorts the way they look at the Bible and practice what they think it teaches. So, for example, many accept the prevailing view that Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it," means that sons and daughters will miraculously return to what their parents told them as children. So, they "get their licks in early," bombarding a captive audience of children with cherished beliefs, counting on the church to resume and finish their work later when the child comes back to the congregation.

But more accurately translated, "Get a child started in the way he should go and when he grows old he will still be walking in it," this text promises that boys and girls who truly convert during childhood remain believers for the rest of their lives. While many parents blame the world, most children defect to the world when they grow up because their parents taught them what to think instead of who to believe in. Attachment to teachings cannot match the power of a spiritual bond to Jesus. On top of that, they compound the problem by confusing a return to church with going back to Christ, relying on membership in the church in place of a personal relationship with Christ to save their children. That's why families generally protest "cleaning [their children's names from] the [church] books" after years of absence from church life. Wrongly likening church membership to salvation, many parents equate removal from the church register with giving up on their kids - despite the admission by most church leaders that joining a church does not mean you belong to Christ.

In one denomination, when asked about the spiritual condition of its members in 1893, a church leader candidly replied: "It is a solemn statement that I make to the church, that not one in twenty whose names are registered upon the church books are prepared to close their earthly history, and would be as verily without God and without hope in the world as the common sinner." In other words, less than 5% of its members had a relationship with Christ that would survive their death. Yet, parents in that religious group

still cling to the false hope that should their wayward children start attending church again, they will make it to heaven.

When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved," they replied: "Rest your faith entirely on the LORD Jesus Christ, and you will be saved along with everyone in your household" (Acts 16:30-31). You see, people don't join the church to get saved, but because Christ is already saving them. That's why Protestant churches used to call themselves "meeting houses," places where believers merely gathered for prayer, study, and worship. So, instead of bombing young children with your beliefs to control their early thinking, hoping your church will preserve that mindset, get little ones into a relationship with Christ as early as possible and the bond with Christ should last as long as they live.

Understanding language without grammar

To get children started at the earliest possible age, don't wait for them to develop enough competence at grammar to study the Bible. I mean, even college students still struggle with parts of speech. Why, to some of them, a gerund is just a kind of noun that looks suspiciously like a verb!

You can get the same results by switching to a simpler system that kids can master sooner than the tougher traditional parts of speech. While we will provide more practical details later, here, for now, is the way we have children ages 5 and up label what they find in the text. Instead of eight categories, we use only five tags: *links*, *persons*, *places*, *things*, and *empowering words* to identify what's in the text. In a nutshell:

TAG	DESCRIPTION
LINKS	Words that set up a comparison, contrast, or connect persons, places, or things
PERSONS	Human or divine beings
PLACES	Physical or abstract locations
THINGS	Material objects
EMPOWERING WORDS	Words that give person, places, and things what they need to play their part

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to recognize and identify these five types of words in scripture. Kids are already familiar with them and require little training to employ this simple terminology. The entire quintet of virtually turnkey markers is ready for their immediate use.

Tips for studying with children

In her lone literary effort, "I Remember," Christian author Vetress A. Arnold recalls studying the Bible as a child. She writes: *"I remember going to Bible study with my sisters. I loved going because we would always learn things about God, Jesus, and what the Bible said. ...We could walk to Bible study because this lady that lived around the corner from us held it at her house. I usually skipped or ran because I wanted to be one of the first*

ones there....There were lots of children and some of us would always have to sit on the floor. But we didn't care. We are just glad to be there. Her house was always warm, and sometimes we had hot chocolate, and sometimes we had cookies....I vaguely remember her using a felt board that was used to display Bible figures or certain scriptures. It was so cool because stuff seemed to stick to it like magic. Nothing ever fell off, and everyone in the room could see. She told stories and read to us from the Bible. We got to ask questions and sing songs, too....This woman always welcomed us in her house. It was like we were all her children and she was happy to see us. She was so kind....the Twenty-third psalm...makes me feel as if all is peaceful, and the need to worry doesn't exist. There is compassion and sincerity. That's how I felt about Bible study too. At the end of every Bible study we held hands and prayed. We were safe and happy."

A godly teacher, lessons from the Bible, and a friendly, informal atmosphere add up to warm memories of a very pleasant spiritual experience. The author's eagerness to attend, even if she had to sit on the floor exemplifies the desire to know and the kind of enthusiasm every parent would give a right arm to see in their own home. No Bible thumping, indoctrination, or arguments. Just the Bible, a kind spirit, and fun.

Now, contrast this with the same author's remarks about recent studies she has visited. She says very frankly: *"Sometimes I still go to Bible study. But it's different now. It seems everyone is trying to make a point about what THEY think the scripture says. There are arguments over whether the term "man" used in the Bible refers to men and women or its just a sexist interpretation of the author. There are wise cracks over the fact that wisdom takes on the feminine gender and that men would do well to pay closer attention to women (or what, go to hell?). There is resentment over passages that say women should consider their husbands as their masters (maybe that's why I'm not married cuz ain't no man gonna tell me what to do!)....it saddens me when I think back on the feeling I used to get from going to Bible study as a child and the feelings I leave with now. There is something to be said for child-like innocence. It's a different kind of attitude that allows the mind the freedom to absorb without prejudice or suspicion. It's a different kind of attitude that can allow for wonderful memories."*

Shifting the focus from Christ to self, trying to satisfy who we are rather than God, drains the happiness from Bible study. It turns an opportunity to behold the LORD and be changed into a forum for self-righteous egos, unwilling, unyielding, and unable to tolerate anything but their own thoughts. The clash of opinionated points-of-view banishes humility, welcomes pride, and invites Satan to feed the chaos. Unlike the warmth of her childhood memories, the author now leaves with anxiety in the place of peace, resentment instead of joy, and a desire to be somewhere else rather than return.

Wouldn't you like your children to say the same things about time in the Bible with you that the author said about Bible study during her childhood? Then, recreate the learning environment that her tender mentor did - complete with all the warmth, kindness, and geniality she put into her scripture sessions with neighborhood kids. Here's how:

Set a time *with* rather than *for* them

Kids like routines - but they hate the pressure of deadlines. So tell them it's an *appointment with God* and ask them what's the best time for them - before or after dinner, just before bedtime, whatever. Bible study is an interview with God who alone can explain it to them - the right way, every time. Weekends are a world of their own, so you may schedule studies at different times altogether. Besides studying together, encourage them to study or at least read the Bible, alone and daily. Eventually you want the kids to study on their own. And, whatever you do, be consistent. Changing the times you meet may give the impression that you considered something else more important - at least enough to preempt your "appointment with God". Stick to the schedule to show them the priority of Bible study and that they mustn't miss opportunities to be with the LORD.

Invite their friends

Peer pressure begins early, so tell them their friends are welcome to join the study. This saves them the trouble of admitting they study the Bible or having to explain themselves. The fact that classmates and playmates come to the study reinforces what you are trying to do with them.

Always *begin* and *end* with prayer

Prayer addresses God. It assures children that God is present and that the appointment is underway. Offer to pray, but let the children pray if they want to. Eventually you want them to pray spontaneously and consistently - for themselves. If you pray, show them the unselfish, intercessory side of prayer. Ask them if there is anything they want to ask God - help with the study, something that is troubling them, or on behalf of someone else. Also show them how to depend on God by praying whenever opportunities arise during the study - from divine help with something they can't understand to showing them you need God's help, too. Always close with prayer to dramatize the end of the appointment. Include thanks for the time God spent with you, how sad you are at the thought it's over, and how much you look forward to the next time.

Bring everything with you

Make sure they have everything they need. Kids tend to forget things and may use a failure to bring worksheets, handouts, or some other vital item as an excuse to draw back from what they are supposed to do or even drop out. Instead of asking them if they didn't bring something they should have, simply make the items available for them to take when they need them. Children get easily embarrassed and don't have the mental or emotional mechanisms to deal with shame in front of their friends, or to handle your disapproval in public. Spare them from humiliation and do everything you can to facilitate their interaction with God. Let the LORD discipline them, instead as the writer of Hebrews explains: "Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live

forever? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way" (Hebrews 12:9-11).

Gear the study to *their* needs rather than *your* agenda

Nothing kills interest faster than forcing kids to deal with something they can't identify with. This usually happens when we, rather than they, pick the texts for study. Eventually we want the kids to consult the Bible for advice when they or others they care about need guidance. So, make it a point to study what they consider relevant. Ask them what is happening in their lives, what may be troubling them, or what they want to know more about. Train them to match what they suggest with texts in the Bible. Let them see for themselves that God speaks their language by showing that He talks about the things that matter to them through His Word. Open their eyes to the One who watches non-stop over and always knows what's best for them.

Teach them to discover for themselves

In her popular guide to inductive Bible study - *The Joy of Discovery* - author Oletta Wald encourages readers to dig to learn something new rather than interpret the text by what you already know. Talking from experience she recalls: "I had been a student of the Bible several years before I became a discoverer on my own. I could follow the suggestions of others and answer the questions they asked, but I floundered when I tried to launch out on my own. I did not know where to start or what to do. The treasures of the Bible seemed locked behind abstract words. I always had to depend on someone else to open the door." Sound familiar? It should. It's the story of nearly 9 out of 10 church members.

Then, she had a breakthrough studying for the ministry "at the former Biblical Seminary in New York," where she was taught, "how to explore the truths of the Bible in a methodical and systematic way. I learned," she recollects, "some steps to take when studying a passage. I found that it was like working a combination lock. When I followed the steps, the word opened up to me. I felt free. I realized that I was no longer dependent on others to gain insights into scripture. I had become a discoverer." Looking back over years of rewarding analysis, she concludes: "In a new way, Bible study became more meaningful and personal. Most of all it was deeply satisfying to know how to discover the truths in God's Word. I had experienced the joy of discovery in Bible study!"

Isn't that what you want for your kids? Then, train them to discover truths leaning entirely on Christ and the Spirit. Work yourself out of a job. Always ask them if they want to read. Instead of scolding them if they won't, ask them to read with you. If you correct or criticize them, they will see you trying to replace God as the authority when

they study. Try sharing insights from the LORD to get them back on track. The Holy Spirit will back you up for opening a door to its guidance. Eventually you want the kids to study with Christ, on their own.

Regrettably, parents generally rely on “Bible studies” to save their kids. Instead of using scripture like a torch to help kids find their way to Christ, they weaponize the Bible to brainwash children into surrender. For a refreshing change of pace, since today’s children view parenting as a way to deprive them of choices, make the study about Christ – getting to know and fall in love with Him – rather than referring to sins, heaven, hell, and conversion. Let Christ speak for Himself through His Word and He will draw the kids into a personal relationship far more redemptive than adherence to a set of beliefs, subscription to a sacred lifestyle, or membership in any church.

So, instead of fill in the blank studies that lead them to other’s conclusions from the text, let them dig in and find answers for their own questions. Countless participants at our workshops over the years have stood and cheered the moment they connected with truth in the Bible. Your kid’s eyes will bulge and they may even give you a high five to celebrate what they discover. But it won’t stop there. The experience will, as it has for innumerable others, ignite a burning desire to study with Him as the Teacher for the rest of their lives. Seeing firsthand what He alone can do will make their bond to Him grow stronger and more intimate every day. They’ll never settle for anything else, ever again and nothing will ever overthrow their personal relationship with Him.

Study Aids

As we have already pointed out, audio/visual assistance aids the learning process. So, get creative. Amplify God’s still small voice in the text. Paint pictures from the descriptions in each passage. Screen out anything that would compete with Christ for their attention. Campaign for the Savior by designing things like bookmarks that put sound study principles at kids fingertips, utilizing coloring books that feature Christ as the main point of scripture, or lining up Christ-centered tapes and videos that point them to Christ, etc. John drew his readers’ attention away from the spectacular images in Revelation and directed them to Jesus by introducing the book as, “the revelation [or unveiling] of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:2). As a result, everyone looks for the Savior, in every line of the book – the only way the book makes sense, the solitary path to understanding its abstract imagery and flamboyant language.

Be Human

When David wanted the people to see that God, not he, was the true King of Israel, he humiliated himself, dancing before the ark like some fool jester. He wasn’t worried about losing face before the people. Knowing that his authority came from God, he benefitted from boosting the divine reputation. The same holds true for parents. To paraphrase John the Baptizer: authorized by God to raise children for the LORD, parents only gain strength from decreasing, so God may increase.

So, don't be afraid you don't have the answers or understand the text. Frequently ask God for help, pausing to pray with the children for God's guidance. Remind them that you are their classmates in the School of Christ and still learning like them. Inject humor when you can and make your studies, fun. Laugh a lot. Be yourself. Let them be their selves. And, ask them to help you sum up in the fewest possible words, what you've just learned. Instead of praising them when they contribute to the study, praise the LORD together for what He has allowed them to see and show to you. Otherwise, you will inflate their egos rather than build up the LORD. Then, smile and move on to deeper things, together.



Grammar-free Bible Study

My favorite author used to say: *The word of the living God is not merely written, but spoken. The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we open God's word, and with what earnestness would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience [or, a formal interview granted by and] with the Infinite One.*

An audience with God is not an academic exercise

Too many people, today treat Bible study as some form of mental exercise, as though understanding the Bible is within the grasp of human intelligence. But the apostle Paul makes it clear that we do not have the capacity to detect the meaning of divine things. He told the Ephesians: "I'm asking God to bestow a gift from his glorious, unlimited resources and give you inner strength and power through his Spirit, so Christ will live at your core through faith. Then, sinking your roots in the ground of his generosity, you will be able to grasp with all of God's people how wide, long, high, and deep is his love that goes far beyond human knowledge. In the end, you should be completely filled with everything God has to give" (3:16-19). Wonderful as they are, our God-given minds cannot measure the infinite dimensions of God's love - unless God confers abilities above and beyond our natural faculties through his empowering Spirit.

Yet, plenty of people, probably most, still strain their brains trying to figure out what verses mean. Oh, they may pray for divine guidance, but instead of relying on the Spirit to penetrate the mysteries of the text, they surround themselves with reference books, Bible software, and other forms of manmade perception to make heads or tails of scripture. Like some defiant child with the “terrible two’s,” they try to go it alone – with God standing by, in case they need Him. But no one knows the Word like He does. After all, it is HIS Word, isn’t it? So, the next time you open your Bible, try asking Him to explain it rather than trying to figure it out. Consider study time an “audience with the Infinite One” and humbly enter his presence as you would approach a revered king or queen. He wants you there, so do not hesitate to ask Him questions about the text and listen for the still small voice that gently whispers eternal truths without fanfare or spectacle. That’s the ONLY certain way to make sense of Bible texts.

Human effort may enable us to scratch the surface of scripture, but even an inspired scholar like Paul admitted to the Romans: “Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways. For who can know the LORD’s thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen” (11:33-36). No one can match the Creator’s genius, or even come close to it. So, instead of clever ways to pry truth from scripture, Bible study employs divine communication skills – simple tools and techniques demonstrated by Christ, the prophets, and other Bible personalities, that allow God to explain what he says in his Word – to us. We need His explanations, because God only grants us the ability to receive and get the meaning of what He tells us, not to find it out on our own.

My wife, Jo and I routinely informed those who attended our seminars and workshops of this simple fact: faith trumps human intelligence when it comes to Bible study. Or, to put it another way: those who depend on God get closer to the truth than those who rely on their gray matter. Rather than wise men draining truth from its pages, Bible students are more like children who climb into God’s lap and simply request: “Tell me a story, Daddy. Tell me a story.” We did our best to replace the false impression of scholars poring over their Bibles while God watches, with the image of an infinite genius explaining infinite truth to infinite morons. In case you missed the point, compared to the infinite genius, God – we are infinite morons! And, Bible study is a miracle made possible by our generous God who freely grants comprehension of infinite truth to those who ask for it (cf. James 1:5 – “If any of you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not think less of you for asking”).

The goal of true Bible study

You’d be surprised at what passes for Bible study, these days. The expression, “Bible study,” means just what it says: study of the Bible, not using the Bible to study something else. Yet, making use of the Bible and clever, attractive packaging, all sorts of promotions

masquerade as the real thing. What's more, regardless of their bent, these scriptural advertisements usually share the same goal: to convince people of what to believe so they can join the church and get saved. Treating people as targets for baptism, they usually differ in one respect: the beliefs they promote or encourage. And, to enlist subscribers to their views, they typically offer a fill-in-the-blank, true or false, or multiple-choice format that steers prospects to their predetermined conclusions. Then, once those who complete the so-called "studies" agree to it, the sponsors baptize them into their church. In a nutshell then, most of today's "Bible studies" aim for baptisms as part of some systematic search for new members.

Not exactly what Jesus had in mind, according to the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus informed the disciples: "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth." He had frequently referred to Himself as "the Son of man," from Daniel 7:13-14, predicted to receive upon his arrival in heaven: "authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed". "Coming with the clouds of heaven," after His resurrection (cf. Acts 1:10), "He [Jesus] approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence," to accept the authority He announced in v.18. But notice: Jesus claims jurisdiction "in heaven *and* on earth," expanding the Son of Man's rule to cosmic proportions. That's because He is also the Messiah, David's descendant destined to sit at God's right hand, as co-regent of the universe (Ps. 110:2).

At His ascension, the Father invites Jesus to, "Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet" (Ps. 110:2). Meanwhile, "The LORD will extend your [Jesus'] powerful kingdom from Jerusalem; you will rule over your enemies" (Ps. 110:3). So Jesus orders the disciples to: "make disciples," an expression that translates literally, "make pupils of," or "enroll students" for Him from "all the nations." And in Acts 1:8, Jesus promises to empower them for this global mission - with the Spirit (at Pentecost) - so they can testify to Him starting in Jerusalem, then "throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." To fulfill the prophecy in Psalm 110:2, then, Christ has us reaching out for Him, the (Father's) "Anointed, or hand-picked" King, enrolling student/subjects from all of earth's families for His School now, as well as the Kingdom to come.

As for baptism, rather than a rite of entry into local churches, Jesus considered it the rite of initiation into the School of Christ. In those days, teachers renamed new pupils to project their goals for them. Working with students made in God's image, shattered at all points by Adam and Eve's fall, Jesus ordered the disciples, "baptize [new students] in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Since they don't fit the combined name of the Trinity - the Persons in the godhead that said, "Let us make man in our image, to be like ourselves" (Gen. 1:26) - Jesus brands them with it to project what they will be when He has finished discipling them: restored in the image of the Trinity, or the Creator God.

The apostle Paul reflected this completely Christ-centered view of his own mission when he announced: "Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power" (1Corinthians 1:17). The great church-planter explained his priority on preaching, telling the Romans: "So then, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how can people call on him if they have not believed in him? How can they believe in him if they have not heard his message? How can they hear if no one tells [the Good News]? How can people tell the Good News if no one sends them? As Scripture says, 'How beautiful are the feet of the messengers who announce the Good News'" (Romans 10:13-15).

Paul uses a series of questions to describe what it takes for people to call on the name of the Lord and get saved. First, they have to believe in Christ when they hear about Him. Second, someone has to tell them about Christ so they can hear and believe. And, finally, someone has to send messengers to announce the Good News about Christ to them. Then, he quotes Isaiah 52:7 to emphasize the awesome privilege of delivering the Gospel as the best news anyone can receive. Apparently, his highest joy in ministry, even greater than baptizing converts was leading people to Christ - satisfying the deepest longing of their fallen hearts with the news of Messiah's arrival.

That's what Bible study is all about - connecting people with Christ. Or, so Christ insisted when He scolded His fellow Jews for misplacing faith in scripture instead of Him: "You study the scriptures," He began, "because you think they give you eternal life; but they point to me, yet you refuse to come to me so you can receive life" (John 5:39-40). Jesus wanted the religious leaders to know that true Bible study always leads to Him. Had they come to scripture searching for truth instead of confirmation of what they already believed, they would have recognized their need for Jesus. So, instead of peddling your beliefs, show Jesus to the people in every text. Jesus did that for the disciples on the road to Emmaus; so should we. In the Gospel ministry, exposing people to Christ should always precede doctrine, because a relationship with Christ reduces natural resistance to truth and makes people more receptive to spiritual teaching.

Congregations meet because they already have a saving relationship with Christ, not to get saved. In fact, evangelism is something every believer should personally do, 24/7 at home and in public (Acts 2:42-47a). What's more, it is the LORD who adds converts daily to the church through the individual efforts of its members rather than the church enlarging itself (Acts 2:47b). Then what is the purpose for meeting together? According to the writer of Hebrews, the church assembles as a group, "To motivate one another to acts of love and good works...and...encourage one another all the more as you see the day [of Christ's return] approaching" (10:24, 25). In the face of considerable Jewish and Gentile hostility, the early church drew inspiration from those brave enough to meet, and considered "community cohesion...an important coping response" (IVP New Bible Commentary) to resist opposition and any efforts to disband it.

The mindset of true Bible study

People approach Bible study from two chief attitudes: **deductive**, basing interpretation of a text on pre-existing knowledge; or **inductive**, postponing interpretation until all the facts are in from the text under study. The first relies on **theology**, either borrowed from scholars or personally acquired to size up the text, while the second relies on **principles of interpretation** and **study skills** to extract information from the text.

In the purest sense, a deductive study starts with a premise or a topic, then searches the Bible for verses that support it – the origin of modern “Proof-Text,” or “Topical” studies that string verses together to teach a pre-planned lesson. So for example, let’s say we start with the general statement, “Left-brained people are analytical.” Someone might notice: “Since Christian motivational speaker, Jeanne Robertson calls her husband ‘Left-Brain,’ he must be analytical.” Using the general statement as a starting point, the deductive thinker draws the conclusion that Mrs. Robertson’s husband submits whatever he sees or hears to a logical examination.

A deductive thinker would approach the Bible the same way. Starting with the general premise, “Sin leads to death,” he or she “must...go to Scripture to find passages that support that statement. He might cite Romans 5:12, Romans 6:23, Ezekiel 18:20, and Jeremiah 31:30. If he finds that Scripture does indeed support his premise that sin leads to death, he can then make a more specific application: we are all in danger of death, because we are all sinners (Romans 3:23)” (from the gotquestions.com website)."

Inductive study does the opposite, taking a verse or a passage, breaking it down, and examining its details to draw out the meaning. So, suppose a woman comes across a large stack of letters tied together with a ribbon. She unties it and starts reading the letters. The first is a love letter written to her by her husband before they were married. So, is the second and every other after that. Taking the first love-letter as a sample of them all, she concludes, “This must be the letters my husband wrote to me during our courtship.”

Inductive thinkers size up scripture the same way, typically starting with the background of the book that includes the passage they want to study. They can’t even begin to analyze a text unless they know who wrote it, to whom he wrote and why, what he wrote about, plus where and when he wrote it or it takes place.

Next, zeroing in on the actual text, they would identify how the passage fits into the book so they can see the context – the setting for the passage, the immediate circumstances and its relationship to what comes before and after it, so it can be fully understood. Then, they break down the text into linking words, persons, places, things, and empowering words, so they can capture the flow of thought, look up the persons, places, and things, and check to see how the empowering words enable them to play their part in the passage. Finally, they interpret the text using what they’ve learned from it to understand and explain it. This allows them to move from the past to life today, as they strip each verse down to its original principle or precept to apply it to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

While we may benefit from both approaches, students must be especially careful to avoid the pitfalls of deduction. First and foremost, deduction relies on content, the words in the text, to connect verses together across the span of scripture. A favorite of Jewish rabbis, they also used “catchwords” to link texts they believed described or explained their ideas or theories. Unfortunately, focusing entirely on the words in the text determined to make their point, they ignored context to draw unwarranted conclusions from the text. That the NT reproduces this format of exposition does not justify its use by today’s Bible students. Under divine inspiration, the Bible writers avoided the errors of Jewish commentators to produce authentic interpretation. Directly supervised by the Holy Spirit they crafted brilliant, faultless versions of earlier texts.

Among the ways they showed the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, NT writers used the midrashic method that produced interpretations “from [or, based on] a careful search” of scripture for details. *“Occasionally Scripture is the starting point for the pattern, working from quoted Scripture to the current event, which was the rabbinic norm of operation. But most New Testament testimonia [worked] from current event back to the quoted Scripture, as in ‘This took place to fulfill what by the Lord had been spoken’ (Matt. 1:22).”* The particular text quoted and the modifications in it reflected the essence of the larger Old Testament/New Testament context according to the [inspired] exegetical insights [from a careful analysis of the text] of that writer. So when Matthew cited only Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23, he probably had the entire section of Isaiah 6-9 [that he had studied in-depth] in mind.

Implicit [or, implied] midrash within the actual text itself, appears in two basic forms. First, there are *double meanings*, which contain a play on the words involved. For instance, Matthew says that because Jesus lived in the town of Nazareth, thus fulfilling the prophecies that suggested the Messiah would be a Nazarene, someone who was either a pious Nazirite (see Judges 13:5-7 in the LXX), or a *netzer*, someone who was the branch of Isaiah 11:1 (see also Isaiah 49:6; 60:21; 61:3 Jeremiah 23:5).

There were also *interpretive alterations* made in the original text itself. These were made by inserting words or phrases that do not appear in the original passage, such as the way Paul slipped in the term *everyone* in Romans 10:11 (NIV) so as to make Isaiah 28:16 fit better into his argument that God extends an invitation for salvation to all of earth’s families. Or sometimes the New Testament writers substituted words or phrases, such as when Paul in Galatians 4:30 (NASB) wrote “son of the free woman” for the expression “my son Isaac” so as to better adapt Genesis 21:10 to his line of reasoning. “Son of the free woman” sharpens the contrast between slavery to the Law associated with circumcision and the old covenant and represented by Hagar and Ishmael, and the freedom of the new covenant associated with faith and grace and represented by Sarah and Isaac.

“Explicit [or, obvious] midrash consisted of the text plus exposition, such as we commonly find in rabbinic commentaries. The form most often used in the New Testament is known as the proem midrash.” The word *proem* refers to a preface or preamble to a speech.

"The synagogue version of the proem midrash went something like this: (a) a text from the Pentateuch was assigned for use that Sabbath; (b) a second text—the proem or opening—served to begin the oral discourse; (c) the exposition or discourse contained additional Old Testament verses, parables, or other commentary, all of which were linked to the initial texts by repeated catchwords; and (d) a final text, which usually repeated or alluded to the text for the day."

Pesikta Rabbati was a medieval Midrash on the festivals of the year. The word *pesikta* means "section," and this Midrash consists of a series of separate sections of homilies – meant for spiritual edification rather than doctrinal instruction. Its stories on the pentateuchal and prophetic lessons of festivals differed from most earlier midrashim (the plural for midrash) that are continuous commentaries to the Bible. It is called *Rabbati* ("the greater") probably in contrast to earlier, less advanced versions.

Here is one of them, Pesikta Rabbati 33:7 that reveals this basic *proem* pattern.

Original text	Isa. 51:12
Second text	Hosea 6:1
Exposition	Parable and application linked to the second text
Additional text	Lam. 1:13
Concluding text	Isa. 51:12

Isaiah 51:12 proposes the subject for the midrash. Then, Hosea 6:1 serves as the proem or preface to the lesson that is linked to it. The homily adds Lamentations 1:13 to the lesson so it can conclude, or climax with a closing reference to Isaiah 51:12.

Although they closely resemble each other, there are differences between New Testament and rabbinic exegesis. New Testament midrashim may not (a) have an initial text from the Pentateuch, (b) have a proem or second text, or (c) end with a final text that corresponds or alludes to the initial text. Generally, New Testament midrashim have an eschatological [or, end time] bent, because the Bible moves from shadowy preview to glorious fulfillments as redemption works its way toward the Kingdom of God. Here is a New Testament madras without the Pentateuchal text for the day:

HEBREWS 10:5-39

Verses 5-7	Initial text: Ps. 40:7-9
Verses 8-36	Exposition with additional quotes (verses 16ff., 30) <i>linked</i> to the initial text by the <i>catchwords</i> "sacrifice" (verses 8, 26); "offering" (verses 8, 10, 14, 18); "for sins" (verses 8, 17, 18, 26)
Verses 37-39	Final text and application alluding to the initial text with the verbs "to come" and "to please" (Isa. 26:20; Hab. 2:3ff.)

Psalm 40:7-9 serves as the basis for the theme in verses 5-7 for the entire midrash.

Then, beginning the exposition in v.8, the writer teaches that God incarnated or gave Messiah a flesh and blood body so He could be the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice for sin. After His offering, God installed Messiah as co-regent of the universe at His right hand. Sitting down on His throne also signifies that, unlike earthly high priests who kept standing at the time of writing to offer additional sacrifices, Messiah completed His priestly work. He is after all, according to Psalm 110:4, like Melchizedek who was both a king and priest of the Most High God. Considering the need for both Christ's sacrifice and priesthood to live a full Christian life, he wraps up his exposition with a warning against ignoring or discounting Messiah's complete ministry and rebukes the Hebrews for even contemplating a return to Judaism.

Finally, in verses 37-39 he completes his call for faithfulness to Messiah and reminds his readers once again of the terrible ramifications for deserting the Savior - based on the original text, Psalm 40:7-9, as quoted in verses 5-7.

A final word of caution. While inspiration protected the writers of the New Testament from error, today's deductive thinkers, driven by their premises and the need to prove them, might read into the text what isn't there. What's more, if their basic premises aren't true, then conclusions they draw from them may also be false. On the other hand, less likely to let preconceived notions bungle their efforts, inductive students tend to lead the truth out of a text rather than make it reflect the personal idea or viewpoint of the so-called interpreter. Given the choice, then, between one mindset or the other, go with the inductive. It is always better to rely on the infallible God to unfold truth than to lean on all-too-human scholars, theology, or a denomination.

The skills for true Bible study

People