

Tough Stuff
PARENTING

PAUL BASDEN & JIM JOHNSON



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Tough Stuff Parenting

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Introduction

Jim Johnson

Remember back in high school when the teacher told you to close your books and pull out a pen and a piece of paper? You knew what was coming—the dreaded pop quiz. Your palms started sweating, and your heart began racing as waves of panic swept over you. Moments later, your inner monologue kicked in:

“Why didn’t I pay attention in class?”

“You could at least have scanned the chapter, you dummy!”

“I’m doomed... there goes my GPA!”

Looking back, a pop quiz probably didn’t keep you out of the college of your choice, but it sure could shoot your anxiety level through the roof. What a relief it was at graduation when that little voice inside said, “Whew, no more pop quizzes.”

And then you had children.

How quickly that pop quiz panic returns when your nine-year-old asks, “Mom, you and Dad aren’t ever going to get a divorce, are you?” Or your twelve-year-old wonders aloud, “Dad, why does God allow earthquakes to kill so many people?” Or when your sixteen-year-old daughter returns from a sleepover and stuns you by asking, “Mom, when do you think I should go on birth control? Most of my friends are already on it and are having sex with their boyfriends.” Or when your son comes home from his first semester at college and reasons, “Dad, if I had been born in Dubai, wouldn’t I be a Muslim?”

If you've got young kids, you probably realize these questions are coming very soon. You can already see the wheels turning in their little heads, and you know it's only a matter of time. Plus, you've heard other parents' horror stories, and you want to be proactive. You want to stay at least one step ahead of your kids.

If your kids are older, you may have already been asked questions like these. Your kids took you by surprise, and you weren't ready. Truth be told, you panicked a bit. And your answers...well, they were all over the place. You weren't very convincing to your child or even to yourself. You're determined to be better prepared next time.

We understand. That's why Paul and I wrote this book. We want to help you get ready.

Our work is based on the convergence of two other resources we want to open to you—the Bible and our life experiences. As you read, you will notice that we always turn your attention back to the Bible. It doesn't directly address a lot of the questions children dredge up, but it points us to God and his way of living. Jesus put it like this in what many call his Great Commandment:

One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"

Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:35-40 NLT).

What Jesus reveals to us is this: All the principles, laws, and commands in the Scriptures are examples of what it means to love God fully and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. The Bible couldn't possibly address every question because it was written in a unique historical context. But the Bible clearly points us to the One and the

Way who is timeless and leads us and our children to the abundant and full life Jesus describes.

The second resource I mentioned is the open book of our lives. Paul Basden and I are co-senior pastors of Preston Trail Community Church, located in one of the fastest-growing and most kid-centric cities in the United States: Frisco, Texas. Each month, more than 5,000 parents make their way through the doors of our church, and like you, they are struggling to find some sure handles that will help them guide their children through crucial spiritual and moral issues.

My wife, Robin, and I have raised three sons. Paul and his wife, Denise, have raised two daughters. Our children are all on their own journeys and, with various rates of speed and success, are pursuing the lives to which God is calling them. The good news about our kids is that even though they have taken courses along the way that we would have not chosen, the relationships have remained intact. Today they are not only our children but also beloved friends.

In these chapters, we open up about our lives and share some of our best and worst moments of parenting. As it usually goes, our negative examples will probably be most memorable and helpful, so we offer them in the hope that you can avoid our pitfalls and mistakes. We don't think for a minute that we had all the right answers when we were raising our kids, and we're certain we don't have them all now. But it's our prayer that we can point you in the right direction to get the information you need, help you discover an effective approach to answering the tough questions your children will ask, and ultimately get you on your way to equipping them to lead faithful lives as they grow into young adulthood.

A Quick Aside About the Book

Paul and I cofounded our church in 2002 and have shared the yoke of leadership and teaching since the beginning. Clearly, this is not the norm, and people often ask us about the arrangement and how it works. After sharing our usual bullet points in response, we

close by saying, “Between the two of us, we make one pretty good senior pastor.” Paul and I both feel that this has been the most productive and satisfying chapter in our ministry lives. And we think our people have benefited greatly from our partnership in the gospel too—especially by hearing God’s truth communicated regularly from our unique perspectives. This is our hope for this book as well.

You will notice that one of us is the primary author of each chapter. Our goal is to identify a high-stakes issue and then bring relevant biblical texts into the discussion. We then offer possible approaches you can use as you interact with your children. We recognize that you will have to apply our guidance in different ways and at different times to fit the age and maturity level of your children. We have provided some helpful tips at the end of each chapter that are broken down by age group and are designed to help you think through how to proceed and get the conversations started. So whether you read the book straight through or dig into the chapters most pertinent to you, we hope this book will help you navigate this crazy world of parenting.



1

The Bible

Paul Basden

Richard Lederer is a funny guy. But all his humor is borrowed. Armed with a PhD in English, he has taught the Bible to high school students for almost three decades. After sharing some of the zany test answers he has received, he found out he wasn't alone—teachers from around the country started sending him wacky answers their students had submitted. When he compiled them into one essay, the results were surprising, startling, and ultimately hilarious—especially if the students thought their answers were factual! Several years ago, he published a compilation of his favorite Bible bloopers written by students. Here is a sample.

- In the first book of the Bible, Guinnessis, God got tired of creating the world, so he took the Sabbath off. Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. One of their children, Cain, asked, “Am I my brother’s son?”
- Noah’s wife was called Joan of Ark.
- Lot’s wife was a pillar of salt by day but a ball of fire by night.
- The Jews were a proud people, and throughout history they had trouble with the unsympathetic Genitals.

- Jesus enunciated the Golden Rule, which says to do one to others before they do one to you. He also explained, “Man doth not live by sweat alone.”
- The people who followed the Lord were called the 12 disciples. The epistles were the wives of the apostles. One of the oposums was St. Matthew, who was by profession a taximan.
- St. Paul preached holy acrimony, which is another name for marriage. A Christian should have only one wife. This is called monotony.¹

Perhaps you have never been that biblically illiterate. But if you have ever tried to talk to your kids about biblical matters, you know it can be a tough conversation.

Why Is It So Hard?

If you're struggling to have great conversations about the Bible with your kids, rest assured you're not alone. But why is it so difficult to discuss the Bible with your children? One answer stands above all others: The Bible is a tough book to understand. Even Simon Peter, who walked and talked with Jesus, said as much.

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16).

If a disciple from Jesus's inner circle confessed that even he struggled to understand the writings of the apostle Paul, we're in good company when we have biblical comprehension problems.

Another reason it's hard to talk to kids about the Bible is that kids can ask tough questions. Here are a dozen doozies asked by children like yours:

- Why did God create the world?
- Who created God?
- Were there dinosaurs on the ark?
- What does God look like?
- Does God have friends, or is he alone?
- Where does God live?
- Does God sleep or rest?
- Does God cry?
- How can Jesus fit into my heart?
- Is there a McDonald's in heaven?
- Why did God make mosquitoes?
- Is Santa Claus God's really rich brother?²

I will never forget the Sunday morning I got stumped after worship by a fifth-grader who asked to speak with me. We had no sooner sat down in the atrium than she asked, “If God knows all things, then why did God let Adolf Hitler come to power and eventually kill more than six million Jews?” Her parents had already tried their best to offer an acceptable answer, but she was not satisfied. So they sent her to me. Even with eight years of theological graduate study, I found myself at a loss for words. What does one say, what *can* one say, in the face of such a profound question? I may have given her a few helpful insights, but the age-old dilemma she articulated remained a mystery. She went home that day with her question unanswered.

Realizing these two difficulties, I have two aims in this chapter. The first is to equip you to talk to your kids about the Bible, God, and what Christians have historically believed—regardless of who initiates the discussion. The second is to provide assurance that the Bible can help you find intellectually satisfying and morally clarifying answers to the big questions in your own life, which in turn will prepare your discussions with your kids.

The Bible Is a Big Book

Of all the things you can tell your children about the Bible, I believe this is the most important: The Bible is God's big book that tells God's big story. That's more than a mouthful, so let's break it down.

Literally, the Bible is a really big book! It doesn't matter if it's the NIV or NLT or KJV translation, paperback or hardback or even online...the Bible is a large, long, and laborious piece of literature. The typical English version has about 800,000 words on 2,000 pages in small print. It's likely bigger and longer than any other book you own or have read.

Here is a high-level summary of what you will read when you open your Bible.

- The first three-fourths is called the Old Testament, or the Jewish Scriptures. It tells about God's creation of the world and his formation of Israel as his chosen nation to bless the world.
- The last one-fourth is called the New Testament, or the Christian Scriptures. It tells about God sending Jesus into the world, followed by God sending the Holy Spirit and the church into the world to continue the work of Jesus.
- The Bible has two testaments (or better, two covenants) but only one God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is none other than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven, he was praying to the same God to whom Moses and David and Esther prayed.
- The Bible is composed of 66 books written by more than 40 authors across a span of 1,200 years (from 1100 BC to AD 100). It's more of a library or anthology than a book.

We believe all 66 books of the Bible are inspired by God, but we don't believe all books or passages are equal in usefulness, relevance, or applicability. For example, the New Testament Gospels of

Matthew and Mark are easy to read, they are filled with exciting and inspirational stories and teachings, and they are helpful for following Christ daily. But the same cannot be said for the Old Testament books of Leviticus or Lamentations. Without considerable knowledge of Hebrew history and culture, those books make little sense to today's reader. So I never recommend that someone start reading the Bible wherever they choose and expect that it will be a profitable exercise. If you begin reading randomly, you may end up stopping for good. In the Old Testament especially, it's just too easy to get bogged down in ancestry trees, land assignments, and kosher laws.

The Bible is indeed a big book—in many ways. It can be intimidating if you don't know your way around it. But what makes it worth reading and studying is this: We believe it is God's book.

The Bible Is God's Book

Prepare to be misunderstood when you say this. Your child will think you're saying that God literally wrote a literal book. Kids think concretely. That's how their minds work. And that won't change until they're well out of childhood. Their brains can't fathom abstract answers until their teen years, and even then, their frontal lobes are just beginning to develop. When a younger child hears that the Bible is God's book, he or she may say, "I get it! God wrote the Bible just like Daddy writes a list, Mommy writes a note, or I write on my tablet. God just used a really big pencil to put the words on the pages."

An older child may conclude, "I'll bet God handwrote the Bible on some kind of non-decomposable paper and then dropped it from heaven to earth. Or maybe God spelled it all out in the skies like a skywriter, and then someone took a picture of it with their smartphone and downloaded it to a Word document. And that's how we got the Bible."

Don't be surprised or shocked at this kind of literal thinking—it's what we should expect from our children. It's normal. It's how God

wired their brains. Once you've heard their ideas, you can go on to explain what you mean when you say the Bible is God's book.

First, you mean it's all about God. He's the main character. Hundreds of other human characters are highlighted, including Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, Ruth and Esther, David and Solomon, Elijah and Elisha, Mary and Joseph, Peter and Andrew, James and John, and Paul and Silas. But remind your kids that in every Bible book and Scripture story, the main character is always God. This insight alone will help you talk to your children with clarity.

Second, the Bible is God's book because God inspired it. This is not the same as a country music song being inspired by a bad breakup or a bar brawl. (I'm remembering the classic lyric "I wouldn't take her to a dog fight, not even if she had a chance to win.") Rather, God inspired the Bible in the sense that he guided many writers, over multiple centuries, to write down his mighty deeds of redemption. Without overriding their distinct style of communication, God stimulated and supervised their thoughts and words so that they penned what future generations would need to know about who this God really is. God planned for the personalities of the authors to shine through their writings, but ultimately they wrote what God wanted us to know. In this broad sense, we speak of God being the final author of the Bible and the Scriptures having divine author-ity.

In summary, the Bible is God's big book—it is his gift to us so that we can know him and his purposes. It is not a book of fables or fairy tales, filled with phony stories beginning with "Once upon a time" and ending with "And they all lived happily ever after." It is neither a good-luck charm you carry to ward off evil or misfortune nor a textbook for science, history, economics, or mathematics. It is God's book, God's Word, and God's message to us. It is God's way of revealing himself to humans so we can know who he is in a personal way.

The Bible Tells Us God's Story

If you're familiar with the Bible, you may object, "The Bible is not one big story. It's a collection of dozens of little stories." In many ways, you would be right. The Bible is filled with hundreds of rich and riveting narratives. In it you will find the stories of creation, humanity's fall into sin, the first murder, the flood, the call of Abraham to father a new nation, the exodus from Egypt, inhabiting the Promised Land, inept judges, countless kings, courageous prophets... and that's just the Old Testament! The New Testament records Jesus's humble birth, eye-popping miracles, and sharp conflicts with religious leaders; his cruel crucifixion and triumphant resurrection from the grave; and the start of the early church, which against all odds, permeated the Greco-Roman world with the good news of God's kingdom made available in Jesus.

But behind all the individual stories is one big story. It is this big story that connects the dots and makes sense of all the small stories. If I had to boil the big story down to one short phrase, it would be this: God is redeeming the world through his Son, Jesus! It is Jesus who gives us the key to understanding the big story in the Bible.

We see this clearly at the end of Luke's Gospel, where the risen Jesus is leading his followers into a profound new understanding of himself.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:44-47).

Jesus couldn't have been more pointed. The eternal purpose of

God is to redeem the world through his Son. The Old Testament points forward (though not clearly) to Jesus and ultimately finds its fulfillment in him. The New Testament points backward (with great clarity) to Jesus and shows his central role in reconciling the world to God through his sacrificial death and supernatural resurrection.

When you talk to your kids about the Bible, try not to get sidetracked by the details of each individual story and forget the big story. The big story is first and foremost about God, who has revealed himself last and best through Jesus the Messiah.

Remember Your Crucial Role

Out of his goodness and grace, God has invited us parents to play a major role in the training of the next generation in his ways. That means we must know the Scriptures well if we are going to teach our children well.

Immediately prior to entering the Promised Land, Moses explained to the Israelite parents what God expected of them in training their children to know and follow biblical truth.

Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up again (Deuteronomy 6:4-7 NLT).

These words still apply to parents today, as do the words of Paul the apostle when he provided parenting instructions to believers in the early church: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

God entrusts to parents the primary responsibility of raising their

children—to teach them to love the Lord and follow his ways. As you consider this sacred opportunity, let me offer encouragement, warning, and hope.

First the encouragement: If you will do your part, God will do his part...and more! Your part is to faithfully teach and model for your children what it means to be a Christ-follower in today's world. God's part is to empower and animate your words and actions so that your children see Christ in you, are drawn to Christ in you, and want to follow Christ for themselves. God will always do his part when you do your part.

Next the warning: You have just one chance to raise your kids. The average parent has 18 years to make an eternal impact on their children before the kids leave home and strike out on their own. You have only one life, and your child has only one life. How you use your life to raise your child is crucial. You can't raise your kids without a spiritual rudder and then suddenly call for a do-over if they morally capsize at age 18. None of us can wipe the slate clean and start over again.

But there is hope. No one is perfect, especially when it comes to parenting. We can't turn the clock back—but God can always redeem our mess-ups. Second chances and new beginnings are what grace is all about. When my daughters were teenagers, they tried my patience more than once. At times I lost my cool or said or even yelled words I regretted. And yes, I told both of them I would pay for their counseling when they got older and needed therapy for any daddy-daughter wounds I had inflicted. The hope of parenting is not that we will do it all right, but that God will somehow make it all right by the power of grace.

If you want to impact your kids for Jesus, both in this life and for eternity, then take seriously God's invitation to teach your children well. Make it a priority. Let it become as important to you as eating three meals a day, using deodorant each morning, or checking your

Facebook news feed regularly. It must become a fixed, consistent, valuable part of your daily life.

Knowing how crucial your role as a parent truly is, here are some steps to take on the road to family discipleship.

Read the Bible for Yourself

We've all heard, "You can't take someone where you haven't been." In the context of raising your children, here's what it means: If you want to help your children explore the wonderful world of the Bible, you must know it yourself. You must read the Bible on your own.

How do you start? Here are some specific ideas I have practiced over the years that have made a remarkable difference for me. They aren't original, but they have helped me better understand the Bible and, in turn, know and love the God revealed in the Bible.

Choose a modern translation.

English translations have never been more accessible or user-friendly than they are today. I prefer reading the New International Version (NIV) or New Living Translation (NLT). Some of my more artistic and creative friends like to read the poetic paraphrase of the Bible by Eugene Peterson called *The Message*. Don't get hung up on translations—just find one and read it.

Select a format you enjoy.

You may favor the traditional hard copy Bible with a cover on the outside and pages on the inside because for you there's something sacred about holding the Scriptures in your hands. Conversely, you may prefer to read the Bible from an electronic device with internet access, such as your smartphone or tablet. God doesn't have a preference of format. He just wants you to be still, be quiet, and prayerfully read from the layout that helps you most.

Follow a daily Bible reading plan.

If you want to design your own plan, I recommend starting with the Psalms and Proverbs in the Old Testament and the four Gospels,

Acts, and James in the New Testament. Those eight books will almost always connect you to God. Begin with any one of them, and you will see what I mean. If you prefer a predesigned reading plan, you can utilize online tools or apps, such as Bible Study Tools, Bible Gateway, or YouVersion. They feature several approaches to help you enjoy reading a portion of the Bible each day.

Find a regular time and place to read your Bible.

Your life stage will influence what time and place works best for you right now, but beware of making too many excuses—they may indicate you are trying to avoid meeting with God. My wife and I have two adult daughters, so we have the freedom of reading the Bible every morning in our den without fear of being interrupted by the pitter-patter of little feet. We sit in separate chairs; she has her Bible reading plan, and I have mine. We commonly interrupt each other to share what God is teaching us. I love meeting my wife and the Lord each morning with a cup of coffee in one hand and my Bible in the other. It's among my favorite moments of every day.

Of course, if your kids are younger, you will have to be creative in finding time to read God's Word. You may be able to find a few moments here and there in the nooks and crannies of the day—those small segments of five or ten minutes when there is minimal chaos and a whisper of peace. Grab those moments as gifts from God and read a few verses for inspiration and strength!

Read slowly and thoughtfully.

This advice may seem counterintuitive at first, but it's crucial. In our fast-paced world, we often scan rapidly rather than read carefully. For some things, rapid reading is fine. But when it comes to the Bible, less is more. It takes time to get used to the rhythm and flow of Scripture—it's unlike anything else you read. I always say God doesn't give extra credit for speed-reading. In fact, just the opposite—he reveals himself to those who linger unhurriedly and pause to ponder the Word before them. When you invest in thoughtfully

reading the Word of God, your return will be a personal experience of the presence of God.

Read with your spiritual eyes open.

The human spirit is where we connect with God's Spirit.³ It is where, as my father used to say, we "do business with God." Having a receptive spirit means you freely ask God to reveal to you any sins you need to avoid, any promises you need to claim, any examples you need to follow, and any commands you need to obey. As you open yourself to God's book before you, you are fully committed to being an open book before God. Such openness is modeled in the prayer that concludes Psalm 139: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

Memorize and meditate on passages that speak to you.

I began memorizing Bible verses in college when our campus minister challenged me to learn two verses a week for the whole semester. I did it successfully, so I tried it again the next semester. And then the next. By the time I graduated, I had well over 100 Bible verses committed to memory. Sadly, I can't seem to memorize Bible verses as easily today as I could back then, but the ones I memorized back then are still with me today. They help me think like God thinks. They help me appropriate Jesus's "mental map" into my way of thinking.⁴ You have to know what Jesus is thinking if you want to follow him.

Those seven ideas can help you read the Bible for yourself and become a lover of God's Word. Then you will be excited about taking your children where you've been.

Read the Bible to or with Your Kids

If your children are too young to read, you can read the Bible to them aloud. If they're old enough to read, you can read it with them.

Either way, I recommend using a children's version of the Bible. Our grandsons are learning from *The Jesus Storybook Bible*.⁵ We also love *The Bible App for Kids*, an interactive online children's Bible produced by YouVersion.⁶

As to the best time to read the Bible to or with your children, many parents have discovered that bedtime is the best time. It's when many kids are most receptive and open to your influence. When our daughters were young, we tried reading the Bible to them at breakfast, but between them being sleepyheads and us feeling the pressure to get them out the door and to school on time, it was a challenge. So we changed our plan. We moved Bible reading to bedtime, and that is when we had the most success. That is when they were quiet, lying down, and open to spiritual things.

Talk to Them About the Bible

This is more than just reading the Bible to or with them. This includes asking them to share what they heard or learned during the reading time. You may be surprised at what they say—children can listen while they're fiddling with their bedcovers or spinning like a top. So listen carefully, because their words provide a peek into the window of their souls. Kids have not yet learned to be people pleasers or image polishers, so they say what's on their minds. Their words will tell you where God is working in their lives. But you must ask them.

Some parents fear this means they have to be Bible-answer experts. Not true. You simply have to be on the journey yourself. Share what you can, and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but let's try to find the answer together." Blessed are the parents who have heart-to-heart conversations with their children about spiritual matters.

Pray the Bible with Them

"Praying the Bible" may sound like a strange phrase, but it simply means praying with your kids about what you just read. So when you read with them about courage or faith or honesty or God's peace, let those topics inform the prayers you say with your kids. You will be

leading your children in a two-way conversation with their heavenly Father—first they listen to him speak through Scripture, and then they speak to him through prayer. As Mark Batterson says, “The Bible is not meant to be read through—it’s meant to be prayed through.”⁷

Conclusion

When your kids want to know about the Bible, tell them it’s God’s big book that tells God’s big story. But don’t stop there! Commit yourself to reading and loving God’s Word so you can become the kind of Christ-follower who naturally reads and talks about and prays the Bible with your kids. As I look back on my childhood, I realize that my parents read the Bible to me daily when I was growing up. After I got married, my wife and I did the same with our daughters. Now our oldest daughter has three boys and reads God’s Word to them every day. I am thankful for the promise found in Exodus 20:6, which I have seen come true in my life and family for three consecutive generations: “I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands” (NLT).

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Dear Lord,

You’ve entrusted us with one of the biggest jobs in the world—raising our kids so they will find and follow Jesus Christ. As parents, we know our task is to lead them to love your Word so they can know and love you forever. But we also feel the heaviness of this role. On our own, we are totally inept. But in your strength, we trust that we will be competent to read, discuss, and pray the Scriptures with our children. Help us then, Father, to love our kids the way you love them, to point them to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and to grow in our own faith so we can help them grow in theirs.

Amen.

Breaking It Down for Every Age

The Bible isn't just another big book lining the family bookshelf—it's God's big book. The best way to answer the question "What do I tell my kids about the Bible?" is to read it for ourselves and grow in our own knowledge of and love for the God revealed in its pages.

Elementary-Aged Kids

Don't miss the opportunity during these young years to help your kids develop a foundational understanding of the Bible as God's big book. Identify the best time of day to read the Bible with your child. Choose a version that will capture his or her attention and imagination, such as *The Jesus Storybook Bible* or *The Complete Illustrated Children's Bible*, and make that habit a part of your regular family rhythm. If your family attends church, your child will learn about heroes from the Bible, such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul. Help them understand that all these important people are supporting characters in God's big book. Sometimes they made wise choices, and sometimes they made foolish choices, but the significance of their stories is found in their connection to God, the Bible's main character. All their stories matter because of the role they play in the overarching narrative of how much God loves us and wants a relationship with us. Help your kids come to know that God is the main character of the Bible and that he has revealed himself most clearly through his Son, Jesus.

Tweens

During the tween years, life becomes more complicated. Suddenly schoolwork is more challenging, friendships are more treacherous, and peer pressure is more intense. One of the greatest gifts you can offer your tween during this stressful season is to help him connect real life with God's Word. When he comes to you with an issue or concern, listen. Empathize. But don't miss the opportunity

to point your tween back to the Bible. Help him identify a key verse that speaks comfort, encouragement, or wisdom into the situation. Take the time to pray that verse with your preteen and encourage him to memorize it as well. Committing Bible verses to memory during this season of life will help establish a firm foundation in God's Word that will yield blessings far into the future.

Teens

During the teen years, your child will be preparing to launch from your home and into a culture that generally regards the Bible as irrelevant to real life. Help your teen place her confidence in the Bible by encouraging her to build a relationship with Jesus. Countless age-appropriate resources are available for Bible study—find one that piques your teen's interest and points her toward the Gospels. You may feel as if your child prefers to keep you at arm's length during these years, but she is likely hungry for your undivided attention. If she is open to it, offer to study the Bible with your teen and prioritize a weekly time and place for that to happen—maybe a local coffee shop or other favorite hangout. Helping her grow to love the Bible doesn't mean having all the answers but instead having a willingness to learn and grow alongside her. If your teen would respond better to a Bible study with peers in a small group setting, help her connect with small group resources offered by your local church.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. How much of God's big story have you explained to your child?
2. What would need to change in your schedule for you to be able to read the Bible to or with your child every evening?
3. Have you tried any Bible reading plans to connect with God? If so, were they helpful? If not, what plan sounds good to you that you could start soon?

4. Do you have a regular time and place to meet God daily and read his Word? If not, when and where would you like to start?

Additional Resources

If you are interested in further reading on this subject, these resources may be helpful.

For Parents

The Reason for God by Tim Keller (chapter 7)

Understanding the Bible (expanded edition) by John R.W. Stott

The Bible Jesus Read by Philip Yancey

For Children and Teens

The Complete Illustrated Children's Bible by Janice Emmerson-Hicks

The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones

The Student Bible

The Student Bible Dictionary (expanded and updated edition) by Johnnie Godwin and Phyllis Godwin