

# How to Read the Bible — as a Family

By Janine Petry

One activity that doesn't naturally rise to the top in most homes is reading the Bible together. Here is an idea for how to find the time for this activity.

Whether it's pizza-and-movie Friday, game night or outside play on a long evening, families find things they enjoy doing together. And my family is no different. We've got our favorites, but there's one activity that doesn't naturally rise to the top of our list: reading the Bible together.

The one activity we know to be vital, Bible reading, is met with more resistance than we'd care to admit. And if you've ever tried to start a family Bible reading routine only to shelve it for another year — until your children “are older” — you're not alone. But my family is beginning to see the value in a simple, guiding principle: Read the Bible anyway.

The principle seems too simple, doesn't it? But we've practiced daily Bible reading, whether we are able to do it creatively or not. When we don't feel prepared for family Bible time, we read the Bible anyway. When no one's excited about Bible time — we read the Bible anyway. Whether we had a great morning or a rough evening, or we still have too much to do — we read the Bible anyway.

This phrase frees us to stop looking for the perfect setting, time, book, behavior and attitude — things we won't ever find — and keeps us coming back to what matters most: an intentional focus on God's Word. For us, it just doesn't happen any other way.

Although there is no perfect “formula” for establishing a Bible-reading time, the following suggestions might be helpful as you make time to read the Bible with your family:

## Set expectations

As we read the Bible, my husband and I first make our expectations clear. We require every family member to treat other members with respect and courtesy, and pay attention. Paying attention and respecting authority are disciplines children need to learn. Part of loving one another means that we are respectful of others' responses and exercise self-discipline during Bible time so everyone feels comfortable sharing and exploring the Scriptures.

## Read right from the Bible

Some families choose to supplement their devotional time with resources that keep everyone interested and engaged. Although there is value in these books, it's also important to read directly from God's Word. To begin, especially with young children, work through one book of the Bible, and start with just a few verses a day. Since young children like repetition, you can

repeat the selected verses many times during a single day — once in the morning, at lunch, after school, at dinner and then at bedtime. If it's a short selection, your children may be able to repeat it with you.

## **Let them play**

Preparing a selection of “Bible-time” toys or picture books for smaller ones can be helpful when you have a mix of younger and older children. Allowing children to quietly examine toys or look through Bible-story illustrations can help them participate in a way that is suitable for them when you are reading a longer Bible passage. But don't forget them. Even with a longer passage, pick out a short verse that they can act out or repeat after you. In other words, set aside time to engage them, even as they play alongside.

## **Ask questions, and let your kids ask questions, too**

Questions are “meeting places,” allowing the family to interact with one another and the Word. For older children, ask a question about a passage you've read, and listen carefully to their answers. Give your children a space to ask questions, too. Sometimes they will have questions, and sometimes they won't, but they will know that there is an opportunity for them to ask. And when they ask, even if the question is simplistic, respond thoughtfully, without a lecture. A short answer will encourage them to ask more questions later. If you don't have a clear answer, research the topic together and pray for God to reveal the answer.

## **Explore different learning styles**

Instead of always reading the Bible while your children listen, consider having older kids dramatically read the words of those who speak while you narrate the passage. Or pass the book around and have each person read one verse or one line or even one word, if your children are able to connect to the Word in that way.

When you are able, take the next step and begin a more thorough examination of Scripture together. But even when you don't have a formal study, you can connect with each other and God by encouraging a full range of creativity, whether illustrating, retelling or acting out a Bible story. Or if your family needs to relax, play Pictionary together, taking turns drawing and guessing familiar Bible verses. When you encourage everyone's participation, you give family members active roles and help them connect directly to the Word while reinforcing their value and unique contribution to your family's Bible time.

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