



“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” - Proverbs 22:6

Selecting Children’s Bibles and Story Books for the Home

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God clearly gives parents the gift of children and the privilege and responsibility to teach them his truths (Ephesians 6:4). What an awesome and intimidating task! Children’s Bibles and Bible story books were created as resources to assist parents in this responsibility. A large variety of such books are available to us today. Problems ensue, however, when children’s books do not agree with Scripture in critical details and, therefore, can, unintentionally for the parents who are rightly trying to bring God’s law and gospel to their children, introduce falsehoods. Parents may not feel comfortable evaluating these books to see if they teach God’s Word in its truth and purity. What is the loving Christian parent to do?

First and foremost, parents must go to the original source: God’s inspired Scriptures. II Timothy 3:16 states, “All Scripture is God breathed and is useful **for teaching**, for rebuking, for correcting, and **for training in righteousness**,” (emphasis mine). As a teacher or parent, the first task in preparing a Bible lesson is to read it in the Bible. If one is to bring materials into the home to teach God’s lambs his precious Word, one must know what is in that Word.

The Bible is an amazing book, easy enough for young children to learn God’s plan of salvation and complex enough for adults to learn God’s truths throughout life. Only God in his almighty wisdom and power can accomplish this.

Based upon the unerring Word, the following is a list of criteria I use to select children’s Bibles and story books for the classroom and for my godchildren. Before listing my criteria, a few misunderstandings or misconceptions regarding teaching little ones God’s Word need to be addressed and clarified.

Misunderstandings or Misconceptions about Teaching Little Ones God's Word

1. The Bible is too hard for young children to understand.

Have you looked at the words God uses in the Bible? Take John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." This verse contains 24 words, but 19 are one syllable. That's 80%. Look at Luke 2:1, "And it came to pass in those days. . ." Check out the Ten Commandments. God uses little words, packed full of meaning, to teach his truth. Young children can understand this. My first and second grade students read aloud our lessons from the Bible. I am amazed at their ability to read and understand the Scriptures, sometimes far beyond what one would expect at a young age. This was the Holy Spirit in action. Do not hesitate to read the Bible aloud to and with your children.

2. All Children's Bibles and Bible story books are mostly the same.

They are not! Authors and publishers have many different philosophies and beliefs regarding the Bible. False ideas and traditions creep into some books. Believers, such as Noah, Abraham, and David may be portrayed almost as superheroes or real "good guys" rather than the sinful humans they and we are, and whom Jesus came to save. Jesus may be a "nice guy" who taught ideas it would be good for us to follow and improve our lives on this earth. Faithful Christian parents must evaluate these books to ensure that the Jesus portrayed is the same Jesus in whom we believe based on his Word.

3. Children aren't interested in "old" books about the Bible.

Again, another falsehood is that older materials are too out of touch or uninteresting for children. Most of my materials date back to the previous century and are still valid. Admittedly, some words in the text may need explaining or updating, but a book faithful to Scripture is always a valuable resource. However, I find that many newer books are not faithful to Scripture and include many myths and unsubstantiated traditions.

Guidelines for Evaluating Children's Bible Books and Music

- **Language and illustrations appropriately portray Scripture**

Of course, we have no photographic evidence of Biblical events. And one doesn't necessarily need pictures to teach Biblical truths. However, most children's books contain drawings of some sort. Are they realistic or cartoonish? Is the language

reflective of that in the Bible? Does the book give the impression that these events are real or more like fairy tales and moralistic stories?

- **The Fall into Sin (Genesis 3)**

Is the promise of the Savior included? Many books include God's consequences for Adam's and Eve's sin (law), but do not include verse 15, where God gave the first promise of the Savior (gospel).

- **The Flood (Genesis 6-9)**

Was Noah selected by God to build the ark because he was a nice man or because he "walked with God" in faith (Genesis 6:9, Hebrews 12:7)? Noah showed his faith by obeying God and trusting him. The first task Noah did upon leaving the ark was build an altar and offer sacrifices in thanksgiving to God (Genesis 9:20). Is this included in the lesson?

- **Abraham (Genesis 12+)**

Abraham and Sarah were elderly, 100 and 90 years respectively at Isaac's birth. Is their portrayal in the book reflective of this?

- **David and Goliath (I Samuel 17)**

What was the source of David's bravery when facing the giant? David trusted in God, not his own abilities. Are his faith and trust shown, or is David some sort of superhero who made a lucky shot?

- **The Wise Men (Matthew 2)**

Many traditional stories have evolved about the Wise Men, or Magi, over the centuries and most are contrary to Matthew's inspired account. How many Wise Men visited Jesus? Matthew does not specify. All we know for certain is that there were two or more. Where did they find Jesus? Not in the manger, but the "house" where the family lived (Matthew 2:11). Were the Wise Men kings? They weren't but were what we would call astronomers and served as royal advisors. What were their names? Matthew does not say. Accurate books will only state what is contained in Matthew, which is more than enough to show the faith of these men and their joy that the Father kept his promise and sent their Savior.

- **The Lord's Supper (Matthew 22:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, I Corinthians 11:23-26)**

Many books indicate the Lord's Supper merely represents Christ's work of redemption. Beware! Jesus in Scripture clearly teaches we receive his body and

blood in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins. (See Martin Luther's Small Catechism, "The Sacrament of the Altar".)

- **Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 27, Luke 23, John 19)**

Does the text give the clear reason that Jesus gave his life on the cross? Does the text include Jesus' words, "It is finished"? (John 19:30) The text should leave absolutely no doubt that Christ paid for the sins of the world and sinful man has nothing to do with his salvation. Jesus did all of it. This is the most important criteria of all.

It is rare to find sources that meet all referenced criteria. In such cases, parents must be aware of the discrepancies and be prepared to teach their children the truth from Scripture. This is why studying the Bible is so important.

As examples of Scripturally sound books and resources, the following are in my personal library after use in my classroom.

- Marian's Big Book of Bible Stories and Marian's Favorite Bible Stories by Marian Schoolland. Published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, original printing 1948, and revised several times. I have the 1979 printing. It's a good resource for younger children.
- Egermeier's Bible Story Book by Elsie E. Egermeier. Published by Warner Press, revised printing in 2007. This resource is better for children in primary to middle elementary grades.
- The Story of God's Love, a Summary of the Holy Bible. Published in 2019 as part of the Wartburg Project which translated Scripture into the Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV). This volume could be considered a simplified Bible, taking EHV text and placing it in chronological order. Originally conceived as a Bible history book to be used to teach children, it is an excellent resource for children and adults. (p. xvii)
- The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ; A Harmony of the Four Gospels, compiled by Aaron Michael Jensen. Published by Northwestern Publishing House in 2018. Similar to the previous volume, it takes events of Jesus' life and ministry recorded throughout the gospels in chronological order using EHV text. Again, it is an excellent resource for both children and adults.

- The “Arch Books Bible Story” series was published by Concordia Publishing House during the 1990s through 2010s. Each book teaches a story from the Old or New Testament in language suitable for children.

Pastor Joel Stuebs (St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Mishicot, WI) recommends Children’s Illustrated Bible, written by Selina Hastings and published by DK Publishing, 2002. He and his wife used this volume in their home when their children were young.

Thank you for assuming the responsibility and privilege of bringing Jesus to your children in your home. He will bless your efforts in ways you cannot imagine!