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Faithfully Reading Scripture with Kids

Rebekah Earnshaw

Dordt University, rebekah.earnshaw@dordt.edu

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Faithfully Reading Scripture with Kids

Abstract

"Children have a knack for reflecting our actions and attitudes, so cultivating our own love and reading of Scripture is vital."

Posting about shaping our children's spiritual growth from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/faithfully-reading-scripture-with-kids/>

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in things

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Faithfully Reading Scripture With Kids

Rebekah Earnshaw

Is this an aspiration? Is this a guilt trip? Maybe it's a click bait headline for the seven steps to a perfect children's devotion or quiet time? Maybe it's someone else's problem and I'll scroll past as fast as I can to avoid the trigger for my grief, or I'll forward the link as quickly as I can to the person who really needs this? Or maybe this is worth the three-minute read because hearing God speak and being encouraged in that is worth it?

"Faithfully" says something—many things—about how we want to pursue this task. At a minimum, faithfully describes that as we read Scripture with kids, we want to be full of faith. And that means not simply full of warm fuzziness and inspirational thoughts, but rather, full of faith in the one who is forever faithful to us in Christ. Faith never floats free, because it always has an object, which is someone or something in whom we trust and to whom we show our devotion and allegiance by our actions. We undertake to faithfully read Scripture with our kids because we trust the one who creates, saves, and perfects all things and, by the life and strength that his Spirit gives, we long to be faithful to him.

Reading full of faith means we know we can't do this on our own, and therefore we will pray and ask for God's help, his illumination, and application of his Word by his Spirit as we read. Reading full of faith means that we know our Heavenly Father already loves us so much that he has given Jesus to be our Rescuer and King and is with us by his Spirit, so that this can't make him love us any more than he already does and forever will. Reading full of faith means we know that God has promised to save us by his Word and therefore we will expect new life, and the fruit of faith, hope, and love, the blossoming of the Spirit as we listen. Reading full of faith means we know that God is the one who loves and saves, so that it's not up to us to save our kids, as much as we want that more

than anything else for them. And pursuing this, full of faith, means we know that reading Scripture to them doesn't make them saved and God doesn't owe us their salvation if we've done it "right." We pursue this, full of faith in a Heavenly Father who loves us and loves our children even more than we do. We are full of faith in the God of grace.

The activity here is reading, and reading takes time. Reading Scripture, or anything for that matter, isn't an instantaneous process, where the ideas are downloaded into our consciousness in a moment. The Word needs to be heard, understood, remembered, and dwelt upon. It requires access to the Word in a language you know, in a format that is accessible, and in a genre you comprehend. And hearing someone read means being able to hear them, focus on their words, and have words explained if you don't know what they mean. Our trust that God speaks clearly does not mean that he speaks shallowly. God speaks in a manner that requires digestion and would be honored by a lifetime of study. Many Psalms counsel us to meditate on God's Word. The people returned to Jerusalem after exile and renewed their covenant with a whole week of Scripture reading, with explanation, to all who could understand: men, women, and children. Jesus loved his Father's Word and was found discussing it with the leaders in the temple. Reading is part of loving God with our minds, and we should expect that reading is a mentally engaging and demanding activity.

Scripture is what we wish to read, because we believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. As we pursue our task, we should be aware of what we are reading. A children's Bible storybook is a storybook and not a Bible. A devotional is not Scripture. A catechism is not Scripture. A paraphrase of Scripture is not a Bible translation. All these, and many more resources, can teach precious Biblical truths, but they are not themselves Scripture. All may provide nutritious morsels, but they have been pre-packaged. As such, we should exercise wisdom in our selection and know that there is a fuller feast beyond these.

I have been greatly blessed spending seasons hearing from such resources day by day, at least partly because this reminds me that I do not read Scripture alone. The very fact that I read in English and from resources that discern and teach Biblical truths in this manner, reminds me that I am part of a great community of God's family who have heard and told these truths again and again across the years. Reading Scripture always happens in fellowship with God and with his people, and hearing from Biblical resources for children makes me thankful for this. It also reminds me that I'm inviting these children to join a family that is much bigger than my nuclear family. Reading Scripture with kids happens as part of a great big family, meeting in congregations outside our homes and across the world week by week. We read Scripture together.

Here we are already sliding into our final consideration of who we read with and what our relationship is with them. The dynamic of an adult reading with a child reminds us that the Christian life is spoken of as new birth and growth in maturity in Christ. Children see their future and model themselves from the grown-ups around them. This is true for every aspect of their life. There is immense value to ingraining habits of hearing from God and speaking with God with our children day by day, even from their first moments. As we anticipate their future participation in God's family as fully grown members, there is something to be said for modelling reading Scripture to children, even before they are able to read a Bible themselves; it's never too late to start. I know many children of pastors who "play" church and give sermons to their toys, because they know this is important, even if they can't tell you why. Because we are constantly called to grow in Christ, in reading the Bible, regardless of our age, we might benefit from that pedagogical staircase where we first hear someone else; next, we join in with them; third, they join in with us; and finally, they listen to us. We all may benefit from seeing and hearing others go before us. Children have a knack for reflecting our actions and attitudes, so cultivating our own love and reading of Scripture is vital. Kids know and value what the adults in their lives treasure.

Kids are always learning as someone reads with them, and therefore, the reader always teaches. This comes with responsibility, which should be expected. Thankfully, God is the ultimate teacher and, hence, the reader does not need to know all the answers, nor do they need to be perfect in order to take on this role. Because both the reader and listener are hearing God's Word together, both are learning and discovering the answers to their questions and growing in their love and knowledge of God. There is joy in not simply reading to an object, but reading with a person who is, like me, a beloved child of our Heavenly Father.

Reading with kids also reminds us that we have not yet finished the race. As we age, sometimes we forget the wonder of growing an inch taller, of today tying our shoes when we couldn't last week, of now knowing how to read when we didn't a year ago. This constant growth and change of childhood makes evident so many things essential for our own practices of reading Scripture and especially our reading with children: humility, because I don't know it all and I get things wrong; gentleness, because what is obvious to me isn't obvious to everyone; patience, because it won't all be done today; and perseverance, because this is hard.

Faithfully reading Scripture with kids isn't a box we can check "complete" and move on. It's a snatched sentence at breakfast, a garbled verse amidst toothpaste, and the investment of moments that shape a life in Christ.