

A GOOD LOOK AT KIDS' BOOKS

If all three are there, it can go anywhere. If they aren't all there, then use with care.

	<p>PUT ON YOUR KID HAT</p> <p>Pictures Appropriate for age and content</p> <p>Language Conveys what kids will understand as written (not reading between the lines).</p> <p>Poetry Rhymes are easy to read. Rhymes are not made at the expense of what child can understand or the truth to be conveyed.</p> <p>Believers "Child of God", "People of God", "Church", "Friends with God" used in a way that children understand/how to become. Not "super children," but all people who are believers.</p>
	<p>WHAT'S THE POINT?</p> <p>Sum Up What is the author's message to the kids?</p> <p>Size Up Is this message good and true, as will be understood by the kids?</p> <p>Take Away What truth do the kids take away? Or, are asked to respond to?</p>
	<p>PRESENTS TRUTH</p> <p>Soundness Does the author present sound doctrine, as kids will understand the text?</p> <p>Size Up If not completely sound as written, how much adaptation will the parent reading the book need to make it sound?</p> <p>Confusion If the child reads the book by themselves, will they be confused or misled by what is written? Could this book be used by a parent to discuss w/ & teach the child discernment?</p>
	<p>PERSONAL APPLICATION</p> <p>Audience Who is the book written for: A believer or a non/not-yet believer?</p> <p>Promises Does the text hold out God's promises, without explaining that these are for Christians?</p> <p>Response Is any response encouraged? What is it? Do the kids know how to do this?</p>
	<p>PROCESS TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN</p> <p>How to If the text presents the Savior, does it also, somewhere, tell how to become a Christian?</p> <p>Problem Does the author skirt around the problem of sin/ the need to repent or is it just believe?</p> <p>Assurance Does the author give assurance of salvation, just because a child prays a prayer?</p> <p>Next Steps Does the author speak of a change of life, becoming a part of a church body, speaking to someone else about decision, life of discipleship?</p>
	<p>PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE PRESUMED</p> <p>Equipped Does good use of this book require a parent to "know better" and change wording as they read?</p> <p>Believer Does the author assume the parent is a believer?</p> <p>Equipping Does the book help equip parents with language for further conversation on this topic?</p> <p>Notes Are there any extra notes for parents/teachers at back for further help on becoming a Christian or talking to children on this topic? If promises of God given as comfort to children, do the notes contain these an explanation that they are for those who are believers and who have repented and trusted in Jesus as their Savior?</p>
	<p>POSSIBILITIES</p> <p>OTC Over-the-Counter book, useful for all, with no explanation.</p> <p>Prescription Helpful book, but something needs adding or the reader needs to know already. Best given personally with a caveat. Good for some, in the right setting.</p> <p>Controlled Closely Controlled/Banned book. Needs to be used with much understanding and suggested with great care. Or, contains so many issues that it's best not used at all.</p>

Introduction

My guess is you've heard of the missions "10-40 Window". It refers to the geographical area of the world with the most unreached peoples and the least gospel access in the world. But did you know that in children's ministry, there's another window frequently mentioned. It's the "4-14 Window", referring to ages 4 to 14, the age range which, in God's sovereignty, continues to be most fruitful for conversion. This is why I care so much about good teaching for kids at church, and with putting good books into the hands of parents to use with their kids at home: to sow deep and wide in this very fertile soil of souls.

I am far from alone in this passion. The market for Bible curriculum and Christian books for kids is saturated with resources in the English-speaking world. But unfortunately, not all these books are "created equal." Instead of helping with conversion, there are many that bring confusion. I'd like to explain what is so often causing this problem in hopes of helping you grow in discernment as you choose and use books with children. And, to learn how to even turn books which are even less than helpful into useful tools for you and your family.

It all starts with the three "P's". Let me introduce them to you and show you how to use them to take a good look at Christian kids' books.

The three "P's" are:

- God's Promises
- God's People
- God's Plan of Salvation

The "Problem" with God's Promises

Authors of kids' books love to hold God's promises out to kids to comfort and encourage them. But God's promises are for who? God's people. And how do we become one of God's people? By God's plan of salvation: repenting from our sins and trusting in Jesus as our Savior.

Many of these authors write their books as if they're talking to young Christians rather than young people. Their aim is to explain God's promises in language the young believers can understand and can apply these promises to kid situations as believers, as our little brothers and sisters in the faith. You will notice a lot of "assumptive language" in books like these. There's a lot of "we" and "you" and "us" when talking about God's promises or in the prayers at the end of a devotion. Bible verses or Bible truths originally written to God's people in context, are woven into their language in ways that sound like they are the possession of every child reading/listening to the book.

Now praise God, the 4-14 window reminds us that many people ARE converted as children and these promises/prayers are theirs to enjoy and take comfort from. But the thing is, not all kids ARE saved or at least not yet saved. And many times, it can be very difficult to discern who is, and who isn't. To hold out the gifts of the gospel without presenting the need for the gospel can be confusing to adult and to child and can lead to false assurance as well as missed opportunities for the gospel.

Do No Harm

This is why I'm on the lookout each year for books about God's promises that also clarify that those promises are God's gifts to God's people; and, which also tell the God's plan of salvation, so the kids, too, can know how they can become one of God's people. This is far better than rather just assuming the

reader knows the need for the gospel first, or is already converted. If kids/parents don't know how to be saved, or understand they need to be saved in order for these promises to be for them, books like these may do more harm than good.

Another related issue is how the idea of repentance is either not included or so carefully disguised that to become one of God's people can sound like easy believism. The word "repent" may be a big, confusing Bible word, but the idea can be conveyed in simpler phrases like "turn away from disobeying God, and live your life for Him". But the important thing is that the idea of repentance is there. Many people believe in God and even say they trust in Jesus as their Savior, but do not understand they need to turn and live a new life for Him.

What to Do

Since there are so many books that are missing the P's of God's people and God's plan as they hold out God's promises to kids, what can we do? Here are a few suggestions that can help you make most any book into a good book.

Read the book yourself.

Read the book yourself, looking for the three P's or anything else of particular care for your kids. Get a sense of how many times God's promises are being held out to the reader in a way that is confusing. Once you have a feel for how much of the book needs modification, you might do one of the following with it.

THEN,

1. Keep the book, Change the language.

Now that you know what might be missing, add it in. If you're reading a book to a child, you can just change as you go.

2. Keep the book, Change the use.

If you find a book, you like but missing a "P" or two, or have another issue of concern, you might use it as a read-aloud family devotional book and have a discussion over it. That allows you to build discernment in your children, and that is a very important skill for us to develop in our children.

3. Keep the book, Change the reader... to YOU!

Kids' books are great for parents to learn helpful language to talk to their kids. You might find a book that you as the adult can learn a lot from and use some of the concepts when talking to your kids without actually reading the book to your kids.

4. Change Books

If the language is just so consistently confusing, you may just want to choose a different book that would fill the same need.

About These Book Lists and Resources

The favorite books on my book lists are those with all three “P’s”, or with some sort of format that does not lead to confusion over conversion. However, in some topics, there aren’t “three P” books written yet. I’ve tried to find the best books I could for these topics, and I have tried to flag those books with a note of some sort on the lists.

I hope you will find the lists useful. I pray that God uses your efforts with books as well as with His work in your life to show children the good news of the gospel that they might turn and trust in Him as their Savior, too.

Connie Dever

Thoughts on Choosing and Using Books with Your Children

When Should I Start Reading to My Child?

Short Answer: As soon as you want!

Reading is simply another form of language, so why not? Most parents begin talking to their children from birth, and children begin absorbing understanding through voice tone even before the words make sense.

But, if you begin reading to your young infant, don't do it with the agenda of getting them to polish off the Bible by the time they are one! (This sounds ridiculous, but it's amazing what ideas we eager parents get into our heads!)

Do it to begin the pattern of enjoying time together, cuddled on your lap, listening to your voice and with an open heart.

Gradually, as your child develops, watch for cues that they are ready for more. You will see them begin to point to pictures or bring you particular books to read (usually over and over again!). Then you know they are engaging with not just the feel of reading, but the content of what you are reading. That's when you can begin to really think about using books to fill their hearts and minds with truth.

Bible Storybooks FAQs

#1: What's the difference between a Bible storybook and a full Bible? Which would you recommend to using?

A Bible storybook is a collection of Bible stories, written by an author, while the Bible is...well.... the Bible- a translation of the entire Old Testament and New Testament into a particular language by a group of Bible scholars.

#2: What are some things to consider in using a Bible storybook?

The Advantages: A Bible storybook --like a good sermon-- can add descriptions about people and places that were known and assumed by the original writers and readers of the Bible, but that aren't obvious to us. They can use language that may be much more suitable for younger children to understand. They can give spiritual insights that help both child and parent learn important truths about God and how He wants us to live. These are all wonderful things.

The Tricky Parts: But, Bible storybooks have their downsides, too. In an attempt to bring the story to life and "up-to-date", authors may take quite a bit of creative license with language and emotion-adding things that may or may not be true. People who write Bible stories for children have to walk a very thin tightrope between bringing a story to life and not adding to it what isn't there. Authors also may choose to shift the true main point of the story to something more to their liking--often a more simple, moralistic application. You must be on your guard to edit on the spot.

Tips for Choosing a Bible Storybook (as well as other Bible-based books)

#1 Theology: Check for sound theology! The story of Noah is often a good story to look at for this. Is it a story of the animals in the ark, or of the mercy and holiness of God towards sinful people? Praise God there are more and more good Bible storybooks with great theology available! But sometimes these books are so bad that you just can't use them. Other times, there are books with only largely good theology that are so attractively done, that you may choose to edit as you read them aloud rather than not use them at all.

#2 Pictures: Do they show Jesus' face or not? Christian Focus books and Ella Lindvall do not illustrate Jesus' face, feeling that is breaking the 2nd commandment regarding graven images. Many others disagree. They don't believe it breaks the 2nd commandment to carefully use pictures to help teach young children.

#3 Creative License: Does the storybook add details that bring light to the story, but are in keeping with the original Bible text? How much license does the author take in adding extra details (especially emotional) that are not clearly inferred by the original Bible text? The Jesus Bible Storybook (Sally Lloyd-Jones) is an example of a Bible storybook that takes quite a bit of creative license, both in language and emotion enhancement. The Read-Aloud Stories (Ella Lindvall), The Children's Story Bible (Catherine Vos), The Big Picture Bible (David Helm), and The Beginner's Bible (Zonderkidz) are all examples of ones that do not.

#4 Main Point: Does the author seem to bring his own (often moralistic) main point to the story, or does he stick to the main point of the original text? (A favorite example: Is the feeding of the 5000 about a little boy who shared his lunch or is it about Jesus revealing Himself as the Bread of Life, the Manna from Heaven, come to save God's people?)

#5 Child-Appropriateness: Are the stories the right length and the right language for your child?

#6 Story Choice in the Collection: Does the book offer enough stories? A good cross-section of stories from every part of the Bible?

#7 Use: Are you looking for one-off stories or for something more like a Bible overview?

#8 Appropriate Applications: Does it offer any resources to help you and your family apply the Bible truths to your life?

Tips for Choosing a Bible for Your Child

#1 What's Your Goal?

Is your goal to begin to familiarize your child with a Bible version he will use for the rest of their life, even if it is above his comprehension level (many times by quite a bit)? Realize that you will probably need to do more picking, choosing, and explaining of passages for your child to understand what you are reading, if this is your approach.

OR

Is your goal to start your child in the process of understanding/reading with a Bible closer to his own comprehension level? If so, look for an easier translation, written on (or closer to) their level and “promote” them up gradually to Bibles with higher reading level as you go.

#2 Early Readers: They might be reading, but are they understanding?

There is a difference between what your early reader can read and what they are retaining. The technical words for this are “de-coding” (spelling out/pronouncing words) and “comprehension” (understanding and remembering what the words actually mean). Early readers are often working so hard to spell out or pronounce the words (de-coding) that there is little brain space leftover for comprehending at the same time. Check on how much they are comprehending by asking them a few questions about what they read. If they are remembering very little, chances are it's that they are so busy de-coding. You may want to choose a simpler Bible version or largely stick to reading aloud to them as their reading skills improve.

#3 Take Some Translations for a Test Drive

Try out some different translations on your children and see what works best for them, based on your goals.

Bible Translations *(and some notes about our favorite ones)*

READING LEVEL	TRANSLATION
3rd Grade	New International Reader's Version (NirV)
Good NirV Choices: NirV Adventure Bible for Early Readers Kids' Quest Study Bible	
	This is a full, simplified version of the NIV 1984. It is more accessible to both preschoolers and elementary-grade children.
7th Grade	New King James Version (NKJV)
7th-8th Grade	Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)
Good HCSB Choice: HCSB Illustrated Study Bible for Kids	
	The "Southern Baptist" Bible is far more than its nickname implies. While it has updated scholarship, like the ESV, it often scores higher than the ESV in terms of readability for younger children especially. If only they could match the quality of notes in the ESV Study Bible!
7th-8th Grade	New International Version 1984 (NIV 1984)
Good NIV 1984 Choice: NIV Adventure Bible, 1984	
	The version has long been the highly favored translation among evangelicals. It is very readable in both word choice and sentence structure. Most suitable for 5th grade and up. It is, however, being replaced by the NIV 2011, which is headed in a distinctly different direction (read below) NOTE: Soon these will only be available through the used Bible market! Right now you can still get them through www.christainbook.com . Apparently, Zondervan sold the end of their inventory to them. Buy now, if you want a new copy!
7th-8th Grade	New International Version 2011 (NIV 2011)
	The NIV 2011 has replaced the NIV 1984. It is not simply an update of scholarship, but a shift towards gender-neutral language. This is because of the NIV's commitment to keeping up with cultural changes in language. Furthermore, this same commitment means there will be other updates in this version in the future. So, to tie yourself to this Bible version is to tie yourself to further changes--difficult for curriculum writers and those who hope to memorize a Bible version that will remain available for years to come. For this reason, many conservative evangelicals are holding tightly to their old NIV 1984's or shifting to other translations, frequently the ESV or the HCSB.
10th Grade	English Standard Version (ESV)
Good ESV Choice: ESV Seek and Find Bible, ESV Grow Bible	
	Definitely the up-and-coming translation among reformed evangelicals, but test drive it with the ears of a child. Sometimes the language and sentence structure are not easily understandable to younger children. The Study Bible versions do have extremely useful notes and very helpful maps.
11th Grade	New American Standard Bible (NASB)
12th Grade	King James Version (KJV)

Bible Hybrids

A Bible hybrid is a Bible that is a cross between a full translation Bible and a Bible story book. It is like a full translation Bible because every word in it is from a direct translation of the Bible text. But it is also like a Bible storybook, because it only includes selected stories or passages.

#1 The Day-by-Day Begin-to-Read Bible

A collection of the simplest stories included in the Day-by-Day Bible, listed below. Lots of pictures.

#2 The Day-by-Day Bible

This fuller version contains many more passages from every book of the Bible. It is not primarily story-centered, but passage-centered, so it is beginning to feel much/can be used much more like a regular Bible. No pictures.

Other Special Features of The Day by Day Bible

- Chronologically ordered so that different parts of the Bible that fit together are presented together. So, the Psalms about David are slotted in the stories of his life from 1 Chronicles. The letters of Paul are slotted in with stories from the Book of Acts, etc.
- A checklist for reading through it in 365 days. Nice bite-sized chunks.
- Good bridge for non-readers to confident readers.
- Tons of good lists in the appendix to help you decide what to read to your child, whether with this Bible translation or another version. (lists: Stories by Bible Book; Stories in Chronological Order; 100 Key Teaching Stories; 100 Bedtime Stories; and 100 Stories for Good Family Discussion.)

Should I Do Bible Memory and/or Catechism with My Children?

No one can dispute that young children have an amazing ability to learn and memorize--often the quickest and easiest in their whole lives! Why not harness this skill for the sake of learning Bible truths?

Bible memory verses and catechisms are concise ways of putting a whole library of Bible truth in children's heads. While some people balk at the idea of helping children memorize concepts deeper than they can fully understand, others see the goal not so much as achieving full, immediate understanding in a young child today, but leaving a legacy in his head for the future. Also, remember that God's promises are written for God's people. If you are teaching children God's promises, through either catechism or Bible memory, make sure you weave the gospel into your teaching so the kids can know how these Bible truths can be THEIR Bible truths. And certainly, pray that the Holy Spirit do the good work that only He can do to bring them to repentance and faith in Christ.

Be careful in how you teach these truths to your kids. Don't exasperate them! Yes, they may be little memory sponges, but you can harden their hearts and discourage them with the very truths you want them to love by forcing them to do too much, too soon and in a format that just isn't appropriate or effective for them.

Remember: your point isn't just to check off the list that you taught these truths to your children. It's to try to make them stick in places where they will stay for years. Better to do less but do it well, than to think you've done it all and done it poorly or at the cost of a soft heart.

And one more thing: there is more than one way to skin a rabbit! Bible memory and catechism doesn't always have to take a recitation format. There are many Bible verses and catechism-like questions and answers put to song. There are games you can play to help them learn, too.

If nothing else, check out the resources for Hide 'n' Seek Kids and Deep Down Detectives at www.praisefactory.org. All the Bible verses and catechism-like Big Questions are set to song; and, there are simple movement activities (called Music, Movement and Memory) you can do with them. For elementary-aged kids, all 104 Praise Factory scripture verses are also set to music. And, there is a section of games that can be used as a fun way to memorize any Scripture verse.

What Books Can and Cannot Do

WHAT BOOKS CAN DO:

#1 Books can help you present truths in an orderly fashion.

#2 Books can be a springboard into important conversations with your children.

#3 Books can help you learn good language to use with your children (or other people's children) on their level as you have those important conversations.

#4 Books can help leave a library of truth in your children that can be used by God their whole life: a kind of time-release capsule of wisdom and knowledge.

#5 Books can be used to build discernment. Discernment is one of the most important skills you can teach your child as they read. That is, being able to read something and compare it to the truth they know, filter out what is not true, and learn from what is. Parents can use books as tools to build discernment as they read them together and pause and ask questions, such as: "What do you think about what the author just said?" Does that sound like Bible truth? Why or why not? What might be better to say than what the author said?" etc.

#6 Books can provide a wonderful time of sharing for you and your child. You can build memories and intimacy as you share thoughts, time, and the warmth of touch with your arm around them.

WHAT BOOKS CAN'T DO

#1 Books can't provide a one-size-fits-all formula for teaching every child. And if the book you read says it can, beware! It can't!

#2 Books can't save your child. No amount of books or information can bring salvation to your child! This is a work of God, by His Holy Spirit, in His perfect timing, according to His perfect will.

#3 Books can't replace the testimony of a godly, faithful life, only enhance it. Books are one thing, but real life is another. How you live is the blank canvas for the truths you teach. Life paints them in vibrant, unforgettable colors. And remember: while God's righteousness and love might be what we would always desire the canvas of our lives to show (and thank God for when it does!), God is just as faithful to use our failings to display Himself. When we do fail and humbly seek His (and others') forgiveness, God is kind to use these times to reflect His mercy and compassion towards sinners--namely us and like our children. Our lives are much more about the business of REDEMPTION, than they are a picture of PERFECTION, as much as we might wish it to be otherwise. And through all of it, the truths about God we tell our children are brought to light.

#4 Books can't replace your common-sense knowledge of your own child. It will take your discernment to know what the right type of book and the right pacing of learning is best for your child. What if your neighbor's child can read already and yours doesn't? Don't push your child to hurry up and read if they aren't ready. Help your child enjoy books as he is able. (FYI: reading is a developmental skill that can fully develop as late as 2nd grade! Be patient!) What if your friend's child has read and memorized the entire

book of Leviticus and can recite it backward in Hebrew...while your child can hardly sit still let alone say their ABCs? Stop comparing! Help your child learn, read, and memorize as she is able! The point is to make a connection with your child, where they are, not to keep up with the Jones!

Also, just because a book tells you to do something, doesn't mean you should do it...unless it's the Bible, of course! Weigh what you know about your child with what the book is asking them to do or understand. Is he ready for it, or would he be better off with a slower, simpler pace; or, a faster, more complex pace?

#5 Books can't replace the wisdom of parents with children older than yours. It is easy to read a book and latch onto a particular system or ideal, only to find that you and/or your child is frustrated. This is especially true if you are an eager first-time parent. Seek out older, seasoned parents or even teachers who you know! They are invaluable resources! Parents with older children often have wrestled with similar issues and are able to give you good advice about how to use books to teach biblical truths to children and pitfalls to avoid. It can be especially helpful to particularly seek out parents who have a similar type of child as yours. Perhaps you have a wiggly Wade or a studious Susan. Talking to parents with older children of the same type can help you learn more about how to reach and teach your particular type of child, given their strengths and weaknesses.

