

The Parent Child Bible Challenge



-By the Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie, Rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Fort Washington, PA, Founder of The Center for Biblical Studies and The Bible Challenge
www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org



Point your kids in the right direction – when they're old they won't be lost. – Proverbs 22:6

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength. These words that I am commanding you today must always be on your minds. Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting around your house and when you are out and about, when you are lying down, and when you are getting up... – Deuteronomy 6:5-7

“I want my children to know the Bible,” is the emphatic statement clergy and Christian educators hear often from households. We want to know scripture, and we want our children to know scripture as well. If you are like this, then join The Bible Challenge and become a Bible reading household.

The average church only has 40 hours in a given year to influence the life of a child. The average parent has 3,000 hours per year to influence a life. Think about it. You are your child's most influential spiritual teacher. The gift of your time will build their confidence and faith in God. If you have a good church, you need its support, encouragement and expertise to help you be your child's primary spiritual influence. But without your commitment and attention, the church can do little to make a spiritual impact upon your child.

A study of households who regularly attend church found that few parents discuss spiritual issues with their children. In another survey of 80,000 people, 87% claim it is of great importance to understand the

Bible. Throughout the Bible God uses families as a way to tell a story of love, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing. The Bible is God's family story. Together, as church and family, we invite you to learn how to read the Bible with your child or children and emerge from God's story as people of God, changed, and excited to do God's work.

The purpose of The Parent Child Bible Challenge is to:

- invite families to become fully engaged in The Bible Challenge
- explore how the church can support families in reading an age appropriate Bible
- share how the church and families grow together and are strengthened in their relationship with God through regular Bible reading

Reading and learning the Bible together as a family does the following:

- helps families grow closer
- opens communication
- helps kids know that faith practice begins at home
- transforms our lives every day and all the time

Let's team up and discover how The Bible Challenge will engage your household. We want to hear from you. Let us know of your interest by visiting us at: www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org and signing up to participate in The Parent Child Bible Challenge.

Not long ago, one household shared with us that they wanted very much to be grounded in God's Word. They needed more guidance, however. Without guidance, it is the blind leading the blind. Our children teach us much as we participate together. They want to know the Bible. So, why not learn with them.

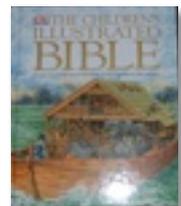
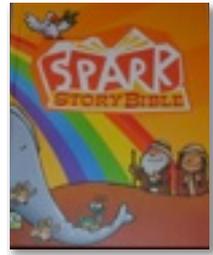
How do we study the Bible as a family?

Here are some steps in helping our children in The Bible Challenge that might help us as well:

1. Pick a readable story Bible – There is a rich selection of Bibles now available for children, which are far more engaging for most children

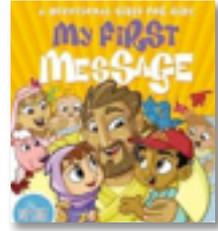
than the traditional adult Bible.

- **Read *The Spark Story Bible*** – This children’s Bible is ideal for ages two through second grade. This story book is nicely illustrated, theologically sound, engaging, and thought provoking. Mr. Squiggles worms through every story and keeps children’s attention. *The Spark Story Bible* engages both reader and listener with activities and questions. It captures important biblical stories that children can appreciate and avoids stories that are inappropriate for children. Visit: www.sparkbibles.org to order it.
- **Read *The Story for Kids*** – This seamless collection of Bible stories published by Zondervan has been stitched together into one continuous narrative that reads like a children’s book. Boring and repetitive parts of the Bible are eliminated. There is also an adult version of this same book simply called *The Story*, which is excellent reading for any parent. After reading *The Story for Kids* your child and you will have a much better understanding of the Bible. Visit: www.thestory.com to order.
- **Read *Deep Blue Kids Bible*** – We recommend this new Common English Bible for children 7 to 12. This translation introduces us to a crew of friends, Asia, Edgar and Kat, who dive deep with us in our reading, asking the hard questions, navigating us from place to place, revealing explanations for difficult stories, and helping to equip us with rock solid faith. Visit: www.deepbluekidsbible.com to order it.
- **Read *The DK Children’s Illustrated Bible*** – This gives us the best known Bible stories appealing to the early reader, told in clear, lively language. Parents will learn as well while reading with their children. Visit:



www.dk.com children's illustrated Bible to order.

- **Read *My First Message*** – This is a children's version of the best-selling adult paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, a pastor and teacher, who brings the original biblical language alive to the modern reader with a paraphrase of Scripture using contemporary language. Visit: www.messagebible.com to order.



2. Get excited about reading the Bible – Children draft off the emotions of their parents. When we are excited, they share our excitement. Reading the Bible is a spiritual practice that allows us to enrich our lives with our children. We have an incredible once in a lifetime opportunity to help them know of God's inspired Word and life saving story. Get started with the story of creation in the Book of Genesis. The Old Testament has some of the best stories in the entire Bible. Read stories of struggle and joy and journeys of wonder and delight. Be amazed by the crossing of the Red Sea, Ruth's faithfulness, David standing up to Goliath and Esther's courage. Let Jesus change our lives with his miracles and compassion.

3. Take turns reading on a regular basis – Challenge one another to retell the story that you have just read. Start to learn the names of the various books of the Bible as well as names of various parables and stories. Get to know individual books of the Bible and strive to see the big picture and how these books and stories fit together.

4. Show them how the Bible is like real life – Jesus tells us in Luke 6 about ways to live and love, how forgive and how to care for others. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us step by step how to forgive one another. The Bible gives us real life stories and real life solutions so that we can build God's kingdom here and now. The apostles' letters tell us how to care for one another and follow Jesus' way. Join your children at bedtime and read a story each night. Talk about how the story is or is not like real life. Ask how the Bible's teaching helps us to build a better

world and become better people.

These are God's stories given to us to show us how God brings hope, healing and love. Sad stories end with joy. Joyful stories are complete with responsibility. We are God's people, loved and cherished by God. Sometimes, the stories don't tell us what we want to hear. If so, then what is God teaching us? If you don't know something, say, "I don't know why this happens in the story." Then ask, "What do you think?" Your children will teach you, and you will grow together in faith.

5. Read and retell – Pick a favorite Bible story or verse and read the verses before the verse and then the verses following. Ask some questions: What does the writer want us to know? Where are you and I in the story? What is God asking us to do in this story? How would you feel if you were in this scene? What do you smell, touch, see and feel? If you could change how the story ends, what would you change? How would you tell this story in your own words? At the conclusion of each reading, ask your child: 1) What do today's readings tell us about God? 2) What did we learn about how to treat other people? and 3) What did learn about our family and how we should live?

6. Pick a designated time and place and get started – Read in the same place at the same time each day. Bedtime is a great time to read, but do what works best for your family and you. You may try reading an entire gospel together such as the Gospel of Luke to learn more about Jesus' life. Then try reading the Book of Acts to learn about how the Church began. Offer up prayers of thanksgiving for a life renewed and anchored in God's Holy Word.

7. Keep a gratitude journal – Each time you finish your Bible reading, write in your gratitude journal about three things that you are thankful for. Count your blessings and give thanks.

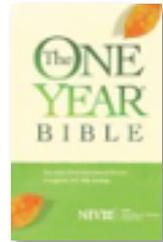
8. Give space to talk – How will your children apply these stories in their lives? If, for example, your daughter is sad because she was mistreated by a classmate, in your Bible time you may want to look at stories about love (Matthew 22:34-46), forgiveness (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32),

helping (Luke 10:25-37 and friendship (Luke 19:1-10). You don't have to have all the answers. Reading the Bible stories will give you a safe platform for your discussion. In time, your child might be able to say to her classmate, "I don't know why you had to be mean to me. I want to be friends."

9. Set goals – The seasons of Advent and Lent (those times before Christmas and Easter) are often set apart as intentional times to know God working in our lives. Decide to read together Monday through Saturday each week during Advent and Lent. Take Sunday off to listen to the Bible being read in church.

More Options and Going Deeper

1. Read a One-Year-Bible – A One-Year-Bible consists of selected readings for each day taken from the Bible, using lessons from both the Old and the New Testament. This is an excellent way to become introduced to regular Bible reading as your child grows older. At the conclusion of each reading, ask yourself: 1) What do today's readings tell me about God? 2) What do they tell me about other people? 3) What do they tell me about myself? Ponder these questions alone, with a friend or a group. Google: *one year Bible* to find several good options available through Amazon.com



2. Harness the power of technology and download the Bible for free – Children are digital natives and love technology. Consider downloading the Bible on your iPad, iPhone, Kindle or Nook. Keep the Bible with you at all times. YouVersion.com and bible.com offer numerous Bible reading plans from read a Bible in a year to Bible reading plans exploring faith, love, etc. The site includes downloads of mobile apps and apps for smart phone iPad, Blackberry and Android phones.



Oneyearbibleonline.com offers a reading plan divided into daily readings containing a passage from the Old Testament, the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. Biblegateway.com is a great searchable Bible with multiple options for finding just what you need. Bibleresources.bible.com is another site with good resources. Amazon.com, Zondervan.com, and BN.com offer an array of Bibles and downloads available for Kindles, Nook Readers, Smart phones, Blackberry and Android Phones, NIV Audio Bible Dramatized and CD.



3. Listen to the Bible – There are many resources today that will allow your children and you to listen to the Bible as you ride in the car, drive to school, walk your dog, travel, do arts and crafts or relax at home or in bed. For audio learners this is especially helpful. You can listen to the Bible in a variety of translations by using apps and programs from: Audio.com/Bible, listenersbible.com, BibleGateway.com, YouVersion.com or www.faithcomesthroughhearing.com. *Faith Comes through Hearing* provides audio programs to listen to the Bible in 692 languages. You can listen to the entire New Testament in 28 minutes a day for 40 days.



4. Scripture Memorization – Scripture memorization is a great way to develop your faith and increase your knowledge of the Bible. When we memorize something, it becomes part of us. We can recall it, recite it and use it to form our thoughts, guide our decisions and articulate our beliefs. Bible memorization helps to form our character and shape our virtues. There is even an app called *BibleMinded* that allows you to memorize verses on your own or by following one of several plans.

We suggest reading a chapter of the Bible a day and highlighting one verse to memorize. Write it down on an index card. Spend a few minutes trying to memorize it. Take the index card with you and practice reciting it as you drive to school, study or rest. By the end of the day, you should have it memorized. Review your index cards once a week.

5. Read the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts – If reading a lot of the Bible seems too daunting, begin slowly. Read Luke, a gospel rich in stories about Jesus' life and ministry and full of great parables. This will

give you an introduction to the life of Jesus. The Book of Acts will teach you about how the first Christians began to spread Jesus' message and love.

6. Do a Parent Child Bible Challenge or a Family Bible Challenge for Lent – Commit to reading a children's Bible with your child for the 40 days of Lent and invite other families to join you. Get together for play dates and discuss it. Gather with other parents to share your experience and learn from theirs.

7. Utilize different learning styles – Because children have different learning styles, engaging the Scriptures using different methods is helpful. Visual learners benefit from watching the Bible stories. Enjoy *Veggie Tales* or your favorite Bible stories on Youtube. Tactile learners enjoy manipulatives. Find a favorite Bible verse, cut it into individual words and make it into a puzzle. Auditory learners appreciate hearing the Word read. Practice various techniques in studying the Bible.



8. Share your joy of reading the Bible with someone else – If you have enjoyed and benefited from reading the Bible on a regular basis, share your experience with a friend or family member. Consider purchasing a Bible as a gift for them. Tell them about The Bible Challenge, or get their permission to sign them up as a participant. Consider re-reading the Bible with them and meeting regularly to share your thoughts and experiences. It will deepen your relationship with one another and with God

Testimonials

I am always looking for ways to do more things together as a family. My son, Trey, is required to read 20 minutes every night. Sometimes this is a real struggle for him. He loves picture books and I knew he would love *The Spark Story Bible*. Here was an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone – join The Bible Challenge and satisfy Trey's reading

requirements. I went home that night with great anticipation and announced that we would be reading the *Sparks Story Bible* for 20 minutes every night Monday through Friday for eight weeks. We often exceed the 20 minute timeframe. At this rate we will have finished the whole Bible before our eight weeks are up. Trey eagerly gets out his reading progress report after we finish each night and records the number of minutes and the number of pages he read – **Karen, a parent**

I love reading the Bible. I love learning how God reveals God's self through Scripture. Most of all, I love reading the Word with others and watching how God is revealed to them. My five year old grandchildren spent a big part of our week on summer vacation wondering, pondering and learning God's miracle of Moses leading the Israelites from slavery and bondage into freedom. The grandchildren learned that God helps us make good choices, especially in difficult times. Together, we all discovered God's greatness of salvation in God's Holy Word. I'll cherish it forever. – **Hillary, a grandparent**

I love reading the Bible. It is so moving. I always say "No!" when we have to go to bed (when the Bible story is over). We do gratitude journals after we read the Bible. I like writing about what I am grateful for. – **Teddy, age 7**

I used to not know a lot about the Bible. I thought it was all about rules. I also used to think it was about compliments. That Jesus was sent to the world to thank people. It's good to learn more about God and Jesus. It's hard for young people to learn about God without reading the Bible. – **Margaret, age 9**

When you read the Bible you start looking at the world in a new way. A flower becomes a miracle. – **Caroline, age 11**

We hope that you have a great experience with The Parent Child Bible Challenge. If this spiritual experience touches your heart and nourishes your soul, we invite you to contribute to the Center for Biblical Studies so that we can continue to promote The Bible Challenge and others may

benefit from the reading of God's Word each day and participating in The Bible Challenge.

Your gift can be made out to "St. Thomas Episcopal Church" with a memo for "The CBS" and sent to St. Thomas Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 247, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, 19034.

May God's light and love shine through you each day,

The Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie and the Rev. Hillary West
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Founder of The Bible Challenge and the Center for Biblical Studies.

To join The Parent Child Bible Challenge, please e-mail:

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St. Thomas' Church

W H I T E M A R S H

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