

Teaching children the Bible

Teaching children the Word of God is the only way of preparing them to make the most important decision of their lives—where they will spend eternity. A wise man, through observation and the Holy Spirit's inspiration, came to understand this important truth: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" Proverbs 22:6.

Because it is so important to shape and guide children, God has given them the capacity to receive and understand spiritual truths from an early age.

Children are trusting by nature and will believe whatever adults tell them—be it fairy tales, arbitrary facts or Bible stories. They believe the miracles in the Bible without question and find it easy to talk to their unseen friend Jesus. Children are also keen to discover and learn new things. They easily learn new songs and Bible verses and they love to listen to stories.

But where does one start, and is it enough to keep telling children the same Bible stories? Although children have the same Holy Spirit who indwells adults, and although God's Word is as powerful in their lives as it is in ours, a structured plan will go a long way to helping them 'fit the pieces together'—not just getting the Bible stories in the right order, but realizing how the truths of the Bible form part of their everyday lives.

Bible teaching plan

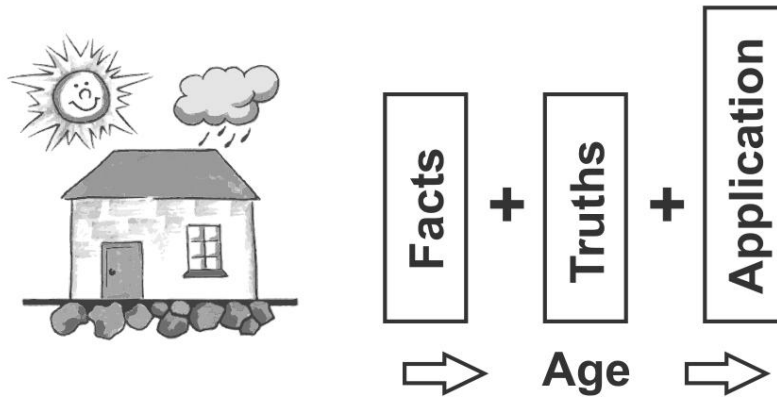
Facts, Truths and Application

A child is never too young to hear about creation, about God's love, about Jesus, and about the many wonderful Bible stories. There is no specific order in which stories need to be told. Every story helps us to get to know what God is like, what we are like, and the way God wants us to live.

When teaching the Bible one can use three progressive steps:

- telling the details of the Bible story;
- adding a spiritual lesson;
- applying the truth of God's Word to everyday life.

Facts, Truths, and Application build on each other as the child progresses from infancy to adulthood.



1. Facts

A house without a foundation is unstable and, eventually, it will start to crack and crumble. Relating this analogy to our spiritual lives, the facts we learn from the Bible are the foundation stones upon which our spiritual insight is based. Without Bible knowledge there is little to build on and our hearts become the construction ground of false teaching and worldly philosophies; and because these are not based on the truth of God's Word, our spiritual lives stand on shaky ground. Bible knowledge does not ensure salvation but it does give children the opportunity to build their lives on the foundation of Truth.

Facts from the Bible can be taught from the earliest years of a child because these relate to the characters and events that make up the many well-loved stories. The 'Who, What, When and Where' are the facts of a Bible story.

(At a young age when children are not yet able to differentiate between fact and fiction, it is important to let them know that everything they hear from the Bible actually happened. The Bible is true—it is not just another story book.)

2. Truths (spiritual lessons)

A solid foundation without a house built on it has no real purpose. The Bible is far more than a historic record of events—it is God's Word to us. As such, every event and teaching in the Bible has been included for a reason. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

From the lives of people, and God's dealings with them, we learn about God's character; about our nature, and about our relationship with God. These lessons are spiritual truths which lead to Life and godliness. Spiritual truths can be taught to children from their preschool days.

3. Application

The roof makes the house practical by completing the purpose for which it was built. The application of the truth makes the lesson practical by drawing attention to the purpose of the story (see examples; Luke 10:36-37 / John 13:12-14).

From the age of 7 or 8, children develop a spiritual awareness and a growing consciousness of right and wrong. At this stage of their lives it is important to link the spiritual truths (lessons) from the Bible to their everyday lives. The application of the *written* Word makes it the *living* Word because it changes us and leads to life (Hebrews 4:12).

Creatively weave in the application with the story rather than tagging it on at the end with a phrase like, "Now what can we learn from Gideon today?" To keep children from 'switching off' at the end of the story, highlight a specific truth or make a quick detour to a relevant application as you tell it. You could say something like, "Can you imagine what Gideon must have been thinking? We can't know for sure what was going through his mind but we do know that he believed and trusted God. And that's what God wants us to do too. He wants us to trust Him even when we don't know how things are going to work out. But let's find out what happened next..." In this way, children will keep listening and associate events in the life of the Bible character with their own lives.

The importance of making the Bible exciting and real to a child cannot be overemphasized. Unless the Bible is relevant to the everyday life of a child and unless the child develops a meaningful relationship with God, the Bible stories he or she has been taught may eventually be equated with fables and childhood stories. Sadly, if the Bible is perceived to be a children's story book or a moral guide, it will probably bear the same fate as the early readers and picture books the child outgrows during the early teens.

To summarize; by the time a child reaches the pre-teen years, the content of what is taught should include the following:

- **Facts** - what new facts have I learnt? This leads to Bible knowledge.
- **Truths** - what lessons have I learnt? This leads to spiritual understanding.
- **Application** - how can I apply this to my life? This leads to spiritual growth.

You can create your own lesson, and even your own curriculum, based on this simple guideline. Because the Bible is the Living Word of God, any and every part of the Bible can be used to help children grow in character and faith: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" Romans 10:17.