

WHY AND HOW TO TEACH BIBLICAL DOCTRINES TO THREE-, FOUR-, AND FIVE-
YEAR-OLD CHILDREN THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

BY

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Abstract

Children's learning begins at birth and continues throughout their lives. Learning during early childhood also has a major enduring impact that, in the case of religious instruction, lasts even beyond our temporary lives on earth. Though most academic research on religious instruction for children fails to hold to true to God's Word and recommends unsound teaching (or no teaching at all), effective methods for secular instruction can be applied to accurate biblical teaching. Reading religious books that are designed to teach biblical truths to young children is a very simple and very effective way to help them and their parents or adult readers grow in faith and in knowledge of God's Word. This also strengthens the relationship between children and adults and sets that relationship on a course for open sharing of faith throughout life. An original example of a book for parents to read to their children to teach biblical truths is provided in Appendix I.

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Introduction

God exhorts fathers (and this applies to mothers as well) to “bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). God desires that each generation be taught God’s truth by the preceding generations. Parents are on the front lines in this campaign to raise up, by God’s grace, the next generation of God’s servants. Parents are not alone though—there are pastors, teachers, staff ministers, relatives, and fellow Christians who want to support and help them.

A question that needs an answer, or at least some guidelines, is this: *When to teach what to children?* Certainly a newborn does not need to have the real presence of the Lord’s Supper explained to them right away. Nor should a born-and-raised Lutheran be exposed to the doctrine of the Trinity for the first time on his 18th birthday. Somewhere in between those two extreme examples is a good time to teach the many truths of God’s Word to children.

I will focus our attention on the younger side of that spectrum, namely, ages three, four, and five. My perception is that these preschool and kindergarten-aged children are generally instructed in the same way; they are told simplified Bible stories along with a basic application based on the story. For example, the story of Noah building the ark and being kept safe through the flood, with the application that we too can trust God to keep us safe. Children become familiar with Bible stories and gain knowledge of how they can follow God’s will, which is good.

However, it does not seem that biblical doctrines or truths are taught topically to this age group (with Baptism being a possible exception, although that is usually taught through a story as well). I contend that teaching some biblical doctrines topically can be done with this age group. Parents may feel (and often are) ill-equipped to teach even a Bible story with simple application, let alone figure out how to teach a doctrine with an age-appropriate presentation. A good solution and encouragement is available. Parents and children both enjoy reading books together. Biblical doctrines can be taught at an age-appropriate level by parents reading simple and accurate books to their children. A parent who might otherwise feel incapable of teaching their child can feel very capable reading a book.

Academic research on this topic is scarce. I had originally hoped to find religious academics that were using the latest instructional methods to teach the Bible to children, but that is generally not the case. The research I found specifically about religious instruction for children

was for the most part unusable because of flawed theology. For example, one author cites a good deal of research and concludes, “Only a few concepts of Jesus are suitable for this age level... the death of Jesus is not good news for this age level... nor does resurrection mean much to children under seven.”¹ This attitude forgets that God’s Word is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,” (Ro 1:16) and recommends withholding the Gospel from children!

Despite a current lack of good research in academic circles, this area of research is important for a number of reasons. First, as has already been stated, God wants children to be taught and instructed, and children can certainly believe in God by his grace. Jesus himself encourages, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Mt 19:14). Second, secular research into children’s development shows that young children are capable of learning much more than what has traditionally been assumed. For example, an article explains one teacher’s method for introducing a surprisingly impressive vocabulary to her kindergarten class. One student, assigned to check the weather, reported that it was brisk, because, “Well, it’s colder than cool, but it’s a long way from frigid.”² Third, it is considered general knowledge that the earlier education begins, the better. In this case, it is a crucial time for parents to either cultivate good habits for sharing their faith with their kids, or they will be left with bad habits. Fourth, this is a field of research where false theology spoils the results. Therefore, secular sources and theologically compromised sources cannot be counted on to produce useful research. They can study how children learn, but they do not study how children learn God’s truth. Fifth, pastors who seek to assist and encourage parents, and even more so in the absence of a Lutheran day school, receive very little formal instruction in teaching preschool-age children. Therefore, a goal of this thesis paper is to offer a more in depth look at current theories of children’s development in the early years, with a special focus on language and literature comprehension. This could guide pastors to a more thorough working knowledge of developmentally appropriate ways to minister to three, four, and five-year-old children.

¹ Krych, Margaret A. “Interpreting Christ to Children in Parish Education.” *Word & World* 3, no. 1 (December 1, 1983): 63.

² Holly Lane and Stephanie Allen, “The Vocabulary-Rich Classroom: Modeling Sophisticated Word Use to Promote Word Consciousness and Vocabulary Growth | Reading Topics A-Z,” *Reading Rockets*, 2010, <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/40991/>.

Mirroring somewhat the rationale given above, I have six goals for this thesis project. First, I will present a brief, useful overview of current theories of early childhood development. Second, I will present a more specific and in depth overview of theories and guidelines for age-appropriate literature for adults to read to children. Third, I will present a theology of children's growth in faith. This section will seek to show how children's faith is treated and displayed in the Bible. Areas of agreement, where current secular research agrees with the Bible, will be highlighted, and areas of conflict between secular research and the Bible will also be pointed out. Fourth, there will be a discussion of the benefits of reading books with children. This discussion will include secular benefits, but will focus more on the spiritual benefits. Benefits received by the children, as well as those received by the parent readers will be explored, with special focus on the growth of the relationship between parent and child. This is for two primary purposes: to give reasons to encourage parents reading to children and to show why attempting to teach biblical doctrines at such an early age is useful, worthwhile, and will pay dividends. Fifth, since there are some topical religious books aimed at the age group in focus, I will review currently available books. I will focus especially on Northwestern Publishing House (NPH), Concordia Publishing House (CPH), and Zonderkidz in this review. Finally, sixth, I will present my own best effort at producing a children's book text and illustration descriptions that presents the basics of the doctrine of God's omnipresence. I will point out editorial decisions and explain the rationale behind them. I will also give recommendations on other biblical doctrines that could be taught through books.

Teaching biblical doctrines to young children through age-appropriate literature is beneficial to children, to parents, and to the parent-child relationship. As family units experience and enjoy those benefits, a congregation and church body will also be blessed. Teaching biblical doctrines to children need not wait until catechism class; it can be done well and effectively when good children's books are available. The following paper presents my research and conclusions on why and how to teach biblical doctrines to three, four, and five-year-old children through children's literature.

Literature Review

Current research in this field can be divided into three basic areas: children's development, children's literacy, and children's spirituality. These areas can be thought of in a tiered manner; each serves as the foundation for the next.

Due to the work of Jean Piaget beginning in the 1920s, children's development became its own field of research. Piaget's stages of development are still used as a basic guide to understanding children's development. Much research has been done since, to the extent that there are plenty of research-based, multi-hundred page textbooks available. These textbooks, while perhaps each highlighting different facets of children's development, report the same popular, current theories of development. Two examples have both been required textbooks at Martin Luther College (MLC): *The Young Child: Development from Prebirth through Age Eight* and *Literacy Development in the Early Years: Helping Children Read and Write*.

Narrowing the field to children's literacy, the number of resources available remains numerous. In this case too, while different theories persist, current textbooks report the same basic patterns of development. Children's literacy research prefers to focus on a child's ability to write and to read himself, rather than on children's ability to understand language, spoken or read. This research was not as useful as I had hoped, since my aim was to discover what children can comprehend being read to them by adults. One important feature of children's literacy development is exposure to new words and ideas. An interesting study reports the statistical differences of word usage in the home and extrapolates that by age three there can be a gap of over 30 million words heard between children in high-income homes compared to children in low-income homes.³ Just as running one mile each day would not prepare a person for a marathon, so also children need adults to read and speak to them in ways that are on the edge of or beyond the children's comprehension in order to keep growing in their abilities to read, write, and speak.

Research in children's development and literacy is secular in nature, but is very useable and applicable to teaching children the truths of the Bible. Regrettably, as previously stated, academic research on religious instruction, done by secular or religious individuals, is often not usable. Research in this area suffers from a moderate to an extreme extent because of false ideas held by the researchers, in regards to what the Bible teaches that a person ought to believe, and in regards to what the Bible teaches about the spiritual abilities of children.

One good feature of this research is the intention to apply the latest learning techniques to children's learning of religion. However, there are several negative features. First, faith is often

³ Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, "The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3," *American Educator* 27, no. 1 (2003): 4-9.

equated with knowledge or the ability of expression. No resource has stated that explicitly, but many stated that if a child could not comprehend something abstract (such as the idea of atonement) they should not be taught it.⁴ This assumes that a child's faith cannot believe something that is not consciously comprehended. This error stems from a lack of recognition that God's Word works supernaturally, not just psychologically.

Children's spirituality research is often treated as an art with the focus on expression, rather than as a science like mathematics which focuses on getting the right result. Researchers consider traditional, "This is God's truth that you should believe"-style of religious instruction as a damaging, old-fashioned pedagogy. Instead, an expression-oriented, no-wrong-answer style of instruction is promoted.⁵ While it is important to promote a healthy self-esteem and different ways for a child to express himself, in the case of the Bible there are specific, absolute truths that educators must seek to impart to their students.

Two similar problems also occur. One problem is that God's truth is confused or rejected by the researcher, and therefore, their methods of assessment are flawed because they are seeking wrong answers and calling them correct.⁶ A second problem, researchers sometimes ask for God's truth from children who come from faiths that do not teach God's truth, such as religiously Jewish children.⁷ How could children ever respond correctly or accurately if they have not been taught it? This illustrates what I consider to be a major challenge in children's spirituality research: Studies ought to be done on a denominational basis so that the children questioned or observed have been taught the same things. In some denominations, that would not work because they accept a plurality of teachings.

Another branch of spirituality research comes from Howard Gardner, who first proposed the theory of multiple intelligences. Spirituality is tentatively labeled "existential intelligence"

⁴ Krych, "Interpreting Christ to Children in Parish Education", 63.

⁵ J. Cheryl Exum, "What Does a Child Want? Reflections on Children's Bible Stories," in *Text, Image, and Otherness in Children's Bibles* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 335.

⁶ Gerhard Büttner, "Where Do Children Get Their Theology From?," in *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education*, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 230 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 364. This author reports an account of little girl who was scared and "felt God" while hiding during an argument her parents were having. This sort of immediate experience (whether it was actually God or a psychosomatic occurrence) is not data that can be compared.

⁷ Ann M. Trousdale, "'And What Do the Children Say?': Children's Responses to Books About Spiritual Matters," in *Spiritual Education* (Portland, Or: Sussex Academic Pr, 2005), 23–39.

but does not meet the full criteria for being considered a “full” intelligence, mostly because of the lack of ability to isolate spiritual activity to an area of the brain.⁸

Because of the failings of academic research into children’s spirituality, I conducted several interviews via survey as well as one face-to-face interview. I interviewed professors at MLC and active WELS early childhood teachers who could give expert, experienced, and most valuably, biblically accurate comments and answers. I also interviewed parents of children at two WELS preschools in order to understand how parents teach their own children God’s truths.

Overview of Early Childhood Development

Exploring how children develop in early childhood could easily turn into a paper of its own. There are many different theories, and each has received published support and published criticism. These different theories can be grouped into a few categories for organized discussion.

Most theories of development differentiate in how a person is thought to gain knowledge. For example, through internal reasoning, through observation, or through action and review are different ideas of how a person can gain knowledge. I will briefly cover twelve different theories of development. One result of looking at twelve different theories will be to demonstrate that there are many facets to development, and no single theory explains everything (although some theories are much more versatile than others.)

We start with a few basic views. Empiricism views the mind and world as two separate realms. The mind encounters the world through our senses. Learning happens as “our senses operate like a camera and our mind like unused film that gets exposed as we look, touch, listen, taste, and feel the world around us.”⁹ Pure empiricism would suggest learning by rote and focusing especially on concrete facts.¹⁰

Nearly a complete opposite of empiricism is nativism, the idea that “we are born knowing everything we will ever know about the world.”¹¹ The issue, then, is how to cull that information from the depths of the mind into usable, working knowledge. The Socratic method, a style of

⁸ Ian J. McCoog, “The Existential Learner,” *Clearing House* 83, no. 4 (May 2010): 127, doi:10.1080/00098651003774828.

⁹ David Elkind, “Montessori and Constructivism,” *Montessori Life* 15, no. 1 (December 1, 2003): 26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* A striking example is related in a brief anecdote. A teacher rejected wallpaper with plums on it because plums don’t grow on walls. He was interested only in the facts.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

questioning deductively, sought to follow this approach and draw out, through logical deduction, inborn knowledge and understanding.¹² A nativist believes, “Children figure out how language works...even without practice, reinforcement, modeling offered by adult language.”^{13,14}

These first two theories essentially mark both extreme ends of the spectrum on learning. Other theories lie somewhere in between. One theory, very similar to the nativist theory, is the maturational theory. This theory considers skills and abilities to be genetically preprogrammed. There is a type of “unfolding” when previously latent traits are exposed as genetics express themselves during growth. The maturational theory gives only a very limited role to environmental influence in a child’s development.¹⁵

Another early view is the psychosexual theory developed by Sigmund Freud. Today, Freud’s theory is viewed as “simplistic and overly focused on sexual feelings,”¹⁶ but served as the foundation of modern psychoanalysis. Freud felt that inborn drives emerge during development and that early childhood experiences have lasting effects into the adult years.¹⁷

A more general theory, expanding on Freud’s, is psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis seeks to understand and discuss both conscious and subconscious thoughts and feelings. Through this, it seeks to explain behavior.¹⁸

A colleague of Freud’s daughter, Erik Erikson, proposed the psychosocial theory. He focused especially on the relationships that a person has throughout their lifetime. Erikson felt that relationships within the family and in society would give positive and negative influences on behavior. He also felt that development did not stop after childhood, but continued in stages

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Lesley Mandel Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years: Helping Children Read and Write*, 6th ed (Boston: Pearson, 2009), 101.

¹⁴ For those of a science fiction bent, Chomsky describes children as having a built-in LAD, or language acquisition device. Ali Asghar Kargar, “The Ecology of First Language Acquisition Nativism and Empiricism: An Appraisal and a Compromise,” *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 3, no. 5 (September 2012): 870.

¹⁵ *The Young Child: Development from Prebirth through Age Eight*, 5th ed (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill/Pearson, 2009), 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

lasting through adulthood. Erikson proposed eight stages, each based on a conflict, that once solved would lead to the next stage.¹⁹

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian theorist, suggested the sociocultural model. He especially focused on differences between cultures, explaining that different cultures promote and encourage different traits. Additionally, he felt that language and thought were very closely tied together.²⁰ The way a language works affect the way a child's development occurs. He also explained a theory called zone of proximal development. He describes this concept:

The child is able to copy a series of actions which surpass his or her own capacities, but only within limits. By means of copying, the child is able to perform much better when together with and guided by adults than when left alone, and can do so with understanding and independently. The difference between the level of solved tasks that can be performed with adult guidance and help and the level of independently solved tasks is the zone of proximal development.²¹

A school of thought very different from the inward-focused psycho/social theories is the behaviorist model. The classic conditioning theory was initially developed by Ivan Pavlov. Pavlov's famous experiment involved pairing the sound of a bell to giving a dog meat powder. Eventually, the dog would salivate at merely the sound of a bell because it was associated with meat powder. Further studies were done by E.L. Thorndike and John B. Watson. Watson was so certain of the behaviorist methods that he claimed he could take any baby and train them into any profession through controlled experiences.²²

Going beyond classic conditioning, B. F. Skinner created the operant conditioning theory. This theory focused on the response of an individual to a stimulus. Conditioning is done through positive and/or negative reinforcement to produce a desired response. Skinner promoted the idea that positive reinforcement is much more effective than punishment, because punishment can lead a child to seek ways to avoid punishment without performing the desired behavior.²³ Behaviorists believe that a child's learning comes through imitation of adults.²⁴

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 12.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

²¹ Kargar, "The Ecology of First Language Acquisition Nativism and Empiricism: An Appraisal and a Compromise", 872.

²² *The Young Child*, 13.

²³ *Ibid*, 14.

²⁴ Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years*, 101.

Social cognitive theory is a further adaptation of behaviorism. A strong emphasis is placed on role models, to the extent that a child might learn from a role model without any further reinforcement. Albert Bandura emphasized that learning often comes from imitation without any direct instruction.²⁵

The bioecological systems theory attempts to include the complexities of life interactions. Considering a child's experiences, this theory can be pictured as concentric circles which represent systems with differing amount of effect on the child. These systems, beyond the individual, are the microsystem (home, school), mesosystem (interactions between systems), exosystem (parents' social network, parent's work), and macrosystem (cultural and social attitudes). The interplay of all the different relationships in all the different systems affects the development of the individual.²⁶

Jean Piaget's work in the early 1900s led the way for constructivism. This theory focuses on how children "think and process information"²⁷ and treats the mind "like an artist who takes something from himself or herself and something from the world and then brings them together to create something that cannot be reduced to either one."²⁸ A crucial part of Piaget's theory is that young children think differently than older children and adults. Piaget incorporated this concept into his stages of development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations.²⁹ Ages three to five fall into the "preoperational" category which extends to age seven, whereas adults and older children are capable of formal operations. In the preoperational stage, children learn language rapidly, but are not yet capable of logic. Friedrich Froebel, a constructivist and inventor of kindergarten, also emphasized the role of learning by discovery, another major facet of constructivism.³⁰

With so many theories that all seek to explain learning in different ways, one can imagine that there are at least as many different methods of instruction recommended for children to

²⁵ The Young Child, 14-15.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 17-18.

²⁷ The Young Child, 15.

²⁸ Elkind, "Montessori and Constructivism", 27.

²⁹ Bobby Ojose, "Applying Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development to Mathematics Instruction," Mathematics Educator 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 26-30. This resource gives thorough explanations of the development in each of Piaget's stages.

³⁰ Elkind, "Montessori and Constructivism", 27.

optimize learning. Some common examples are Reggio Emilia, Experiential Learning, High/Scope, Bank Street, Waldorf, Montessori, and Head Start.^{31,32} The High/Scope method of instruction will be explained for two different reasons. One, it is based on the constructivist model which I find most compelling. Two, recent graduates of MLC are trained in High/Scope. It only makes sense to gain an understanding of MLC's chosen method of early childhood instruction.

The High/Scope approach for preschool education began as an experiment in Ypsilanti, MI, in the 1960s. There was concern at the time that at-risk kids from poor neighborhoods were underperforming in school. The hope was to design a plan for preschool that would boost children's performance throughout their schooling and into their future lives. The research that was done and program designed that was designed have developed into the modern High/Scope method which continues to be revised according to further research and review.

From its founding, a major goal of High/Scope was to provide results that validated their new approach. With others, David Weikart (High/Scope founder³³) and Lawrence Schweinhart (current High/Scope Foundation president³⁴), have continued to track the original classes of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project. According to a 2005 follow-up study, at age 40 program participants were less likely to have been arrested five or more times, and more likely to be employed, to own their own home, car, graduate from high school, and have a savings account.³⁵ Program participants also, on average, earn significantly more over the course of their lives.³⁶

However, despite glowing statistics in High/Scope's self-research, there are some who dispute these claims. A proponent for the Direct Instruction method (which was comparatively put down in the High/Scope study) responds, "The conclusion is suspect because it is based on

³¹ Bridget Walsh and Karen Petty, "Frequency of Six Early Childhood Education Approaches: A 10-Year Content Analysis of Early Childhood Education Journal," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 34, no. 5 (April 2007): 301–305, doi:10.1007/s10643-006-0080-4.

³² Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, Sonja Sheridan, and Pia Williams, "Five Preschool Curricula -- Comparative Perspective," *International Journal of Early Childhood* 38, no. 1 (January 2006): 11–30.

³³ HighScope, "About the HighScope Educational Research Foundation and Early Childhood," About Us, 2013, <http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=761>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Mary Hohmann, *Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs*, 3rd ed (Ypsilanti, Mich: High/Scope Press, 2008), 8.

³⁶ Clive R. Belfield et al., "The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program," *Journal of Human Resources* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 162–190.

woefully small groups of subjects and because the study is laced with inconsistencies, mathematically impossible numbers, and logic that is inadmissible in rigorous scientific endeavors.”³⁷ Another researcher also states, “Differences between open [High/Scope] and academic [Direct Instruction] preschool models are, in practice, modest.”³⁸ Both negative reviews are from educators that support other methods of instruction, while High/Scope’s own report has a self-promoting interest. The exact truth of High/Scope’s effectiveness is somewhere in between, and no method of instruction can be the best method for every single child. High/Scope is an effective method, and was selected as the curriculum for MLC.

Along with an underlying constructivism, expressed in the over-arching principle of active participatory learning, High/Scope incorporates elements from other theories as well. The main focus is on interaction as the basis for learning.³⁹ Humans are assumed to develop capacities in predictable sequences throughout their lives, but it is also understood that each person is unique despite the general predictability of human development.⁴⁰ Because of these general patterns, “there are times during the life cycle when certain kinds of things are learned best or most efficiently.”⁴¹ The process of learning is called developmental change and includes assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation means “using our existing knowledge and behaviors to explore new things”⁴² while accommodation means “changing our mental models of how the world works to take new and sometimes contradictory information into account.”⁴³

High/Scope presents a Wheel of Learning to describe its curriculum principles. The center hub, which has been mentioned above, is active participatory learning. Surrounding and support are four other principles: adult-child interaction, learning environment, daily routine, and assessment.

³⁷ Siegfried Engelmann, “A Response: How Sound Is High/Scope Research?,” *Educational Leadership* 56, no. 6 (March 1, 1999): 83.

³⁸ Russell Gersten and W. a. T. White, “Castles in the Sand: Response to Schweinhart and Weikart,” *Educational Leadership* 44, no. 3 (January 1, 1986): 19.

³⁹ Hohmann, *Educating Young Children*, 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 15.

⁴² *Ibid*, 16.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 16.

The adult-child interaction is important for creating a safe and supportive environment. The goal of a safe environment is to enable children to express themselves confidently and explore the world openly. Adults create this environment through positive interaction, such as encouragement and problem-solving with the child.⁴⁴

The learning environment is important—it should be full of appropriate materials and organized well. A large variety of materials should also be easily accessible to the children. Zones for various types of activity (such as building or role play) should be set up.⁴⁵

A consistent daily routine allows children to anticipate the flow of the day and have control over what they do. A crucial part of the High/Scope routine is the “plan-do-review” process. This process allows children to plan their activities and then attempt them, but what makes it especially effective is the reviewing process. After spending time in an activity, adults then encourage children to talk about their experience (“What happened?” “How did it go?”) or to “write” or draw about their experience.⁴⁶ Such review time allows children to solidify in their minds new information that they have gathered while “doing.”

Adult educators, in teams, assess children’s development. Daily notes, often anecdotes of things the child did during the day, help in daily planning. In order to assess, children’s activities and behaviors are matched to Key Developmental Indicators (KDIs).⁴⁷ KDIs are a wide range of small tasks, such as counting, filling and emptying, fitting things together, taking things apart, and starting and stopping on cue.⁴⁸ Some KDIs in the area of literacy are talking with others about personal experiences, describing objects and events, making up stories and rhymes, reading stories, or scribbling and inventing spelling.⁴⁹ A child that has not yet developed in certain KDIs can be guided toward experiences that will facilitate development of those skills. KDIs also help children to continue developing and strengthening the skills they already have.

Children’s Literacy Development

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 6-7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid* 321.

Theories of how children develop literacy have changed along the various theories of child development. Prior to the 1900s “it was generally assumed that literacy began with formal instruction in first grade.”⁵⁰ In fact, an idea called “reading readiness” evolved, assuming that children should not be pushed to learn to read until they are naturally ready. Some instruction in pre-reading was done, including auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, visual motor skills, and large motor skills.⁵¹ This method was replaced as child research progressed, especially in the 1960s.

Research led to the realization that children learn about literacy in different ways prior to the beginning of their schooling. This idea is called emergent literacy. Emergent literacy understands that reading, writing, listening, and speaking are interconnected and are learned in a variety of ways, even through everyday activities such as observing a parent reading a newspaper.⁵²

Similar to emergent literacy, but broader, is the concept of whole language. According to literacy expert Lesley Mandel Morrow, “Whole language is a philosophy about how children learn, from which educators derive strategies for teaching.”⁵³ Literacy activities are built into other aspects of the curriculum and aspects of literacy such as reading, writing, listening, and oral language are each given equal emphasis.⁵⁴ “Language is a whole...Language should not be separated into pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.”⁵⁵

Whole language approaches began to be combined with thematic instruction. In this case, literacy is not taught as a subject, but is integrated into various thematic units. Literature supplements the general theme of the unit.⁵⁶ A unit might be “farm animals” with readings and stories about pigs, cows, etc.

Whole language thematic instruction led to certain problems. Many teachers, in part due to a lack of training in whole language methods, made a wholesale move away from teaching

⁵⁰ Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years*, 22.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 23.

⁵² *Ibid*, 24.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 24.

⁵⁴ Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years*, 25.

⁵⁵ Pan Ling, “The ‘Whole Language’ Theory and Its Application to the Teaching of English Reading,” *English Language Teaching* 5, no. 3 (March 2012): doi:10.5539/elt.v5n3p. 149.

⁵⁶ Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years*, 26-27.

explicitly in small groups, which led to a number children getting left behind in literacy development. Teachers also felt that phonics could not be taught with whole language approach, but the two are not mutually exclusive as Morrow states, “This was not the case at all.”⁵⁷

A current standard “theory of learning” is the balanced literacy approach. This is not a theory in its own right, but rather an admission that no single theory or approach to teaching literacy fits every child. “All forms of expressive and receptive language work together. The balance should be provided in every aspect of literacy instruction.”⁵⁸ According to the International Reading Association, a teacher needs to know each student and the various teaching methods in order to tailor teaching to the child’s achievements and needs.⁵⁹ A balanced approach seems to be the most logical and humble teaching philosophy, but also the most difficult and time-consuming to put into practice.

Most research focuses on the end result of literacy development, a mature reader, writer, and speaker. For this thesis, the focus is centered on the benefits and usefulness of children being read to and what they can learn from it. Three to five-year-olds are able to hear and understand much more than they are able to read. Also, prior to being able to read, children need to be read to, in fact, one recommendation states “about 1000 books need to be read to a child before he or she enters kindergarten to help the child acquire concepts about books so he or she is ready for experiences in reading and writing.”⁶⁰ This recommended reading is more than pronouncing words on a page—it involves print reference, explanations, repetition, and interaction. These will be discussed further in the benefits of reading.

Characteristics of Age-Appropriate Books

Since reading is an integral part of children’s development, and this thesis proposes that children will benefit greatly from reading high quality, accurate, religious books, it is important to understand what characteristics to look for in an age-appropriate book. It is also important to remember that every child is unique; the guidelines given should remain flexible.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 27.

⁵⁸Yildiz Uzuner et al., “An Examination of Balanced Literacy Instructional Model Implemented to Youths with Hearing Loss,” *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice* 11, no. 4 (September 1, 2011): 2127.

⁵⁹ Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years*, 28.

⁶⁰ Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years*, 189.

Three, four, and five-year-olds grow and develop at a rapid rate. This leads to a number of differences between three-year-olds, four-year-olds, and five-year-olds, and even between older four-year-olds and younger four-year-olds, older three-year-olds and younger three-year-olds. The most noticeable difference is in attention span. One early childhood teacher estimates three-year-olds at five minutes, four-year-olds at ten, and five-year-olds at fifteen minutes of attention, without props (T1).⁶¹ Another teacher gives three-year-olds ten minutes and five-year-olds thirty minutes or more (T2). Having spent a year presenting Bible stories weekly at a preschool, it was easy for me to see how much three-year-olds squirm, talk, and poke more at the beginning of the year than at the end of the year, which demonstrates the increasing attention span.

Attention span directly affects book length. A three-year-old will not sit through a book that is too long, and it may be surprising how long it can take to interactively read a book. It is easy to tell when a child's attention span has been exhausted, and through trial and error, this will help an adult reader to learn to choose appropriate length books. As the attention span increases through age five, it is important to find books that are not so short and easy that they no longer hold attention.

Interest is another important consideration; each child has different topics that will interest them. Through regular reading, these preferences and interests will become apparent. While keeping this in mind, it is also important to remember, as a professor of mine was fond of saying, "People don't know what they like, but they like what they know." In this context, that means an adult reader should not be afraid to choose new topics and new books as well as reading old favorites.

Illustrations are also a must-have for interest. One book-writing WELS teacher states, "Color is good, and I made [my books] interactive" (T3). Illustrations help children follow the flow of the story as the main action or point of each page is drawn out. A primary consideration for quality illustrations is color. Bright colors are much more eye-catching. Also, a simple picture is often more effective than a detailed, full-page picture that leaves no negative space.

Children's developing abilities are also reflected in their ability to interact with the story. Listening and observing is standard for three-year-olds, who are also able to answer general

⁶¹ The full text of all parent and teacher interviews and surveys are printed in Appendix II. References in parentheses refer to which parent or teacher and which question, if applicable, the quote is from.

questions about the story. As children mature, four-year-olds, with their larger vocabulary, are able to hold more of the story in their working memory. They can also retell much of the story with the aid of the illustrations and also answer general questions about the story. With an ever-increasing vocabulary, five-year-olds are able to retell stories in much greater detail and to explain the sequence of events. Readers are also able to make comparisons to real life situations, and five-year-olds will be able to understand (T2).

Vocabulary level is an important consideration. In general, children should understand most of the words in a book, with a couple of novel words in the story too. In order for children to develop vocabulary, they need “to be exposed to vocabulary from a wide variety of genres.”⁶² As mentioned in the introduction, children are capable of a surprising vocabulary. A key to this is excellent vocabulary modeling. The teacher who had kindergarteners capable of explaining words like “brisk” spent a good deal of time preparing and planning how to model word use for her students. Here is a description of her process:

Ms. Barker explained that it was all part of the design of her circle time. At the beginning of the year, children learned the basic concepts through repetition and practice. Her challenges at that point were to keep the concepts understandable and engaging. As the children mastered the basics, her efforts turned to building on this solid foundation of knowledge. She used the classroom jobs to expand her students' vocabulary. Although at the beginning of the year the zookeeper "feeds the hamsters," by midyear the animal nutrition specialist "provides nutritional sustenance to our rodent friends."

The kindergartners in Ms. Barker's class were all comfortable using words that we do not typically expect to hear 5-year-olds using. Their comfort came from their teacher's careful approach to developing their vocabularies through modeling and meaningful practice. Their well-developed vocabularies will undoubtedly serve them well as they learn to read.⁶³

Such rigorous planning is well beyond the average adult reader, but this does not prevent children from learning a large vocabulary. A part of children acquiring new vocabulary is being exposed to new words. “When children hear and discuss the language of books, they internalize what they have heard; the language soon becomes part of their own language.”⁶⁴

This vocabulary discussion expects the concern, “Big religious words are too much for children, so they can't be taught religious topics.” Understandably, words like “justification” and

⁶² “Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children. A Joint Position Statement of the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children.” (July 1998), <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED420052>, 7.

⁶³ Lane and Allen, “The Vocabulary-Rich Classroom.”

⁶⁴ Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years*, 122.

“propitiation,” which many adults do not use regularly, seem impossible for young children to learn. While those specific examples may be beyond young children, smaller “big words” might be used in their place. Rather than having children attempt the five syllables of justification, let them master the verb “justify” first. For example, “Jesus justifies sinful people. Do you know what that means, justify? It means Jesus says, ‘You are not in trouble,’ to people who do bad things. Jesus justifies people.” This is an example of scaffolding, building in steps on concepts that are already understood. Similarly, many other religious words, such as redeemed, reconciled, sin, saved, forgive, and resurrection can be used with their definitions, rather than being replaced by their definitions. A veteran teacher puts it plainly, “You explain it in terms that they understand. For example, sin is not listening to God and not doing what God tells us to do” (T1). Religious books for children do not need to avoid religious jargon either. In fact, religious books should serve as an easy way to expose children to religious words and their definitions and meanings.

Certain features of writing should be used in connection with vocabulary learning. Repetition is a key component for children’s retention of new vocabulary. Along with repetition, a rhythm, rhyme, or pattern (or a combination of those features) also helps to make the story more memorable to children, and gives them a chance to participate as the story is read and reread to them. One author writing about picture books for children comments on appropriate language, “The language of picture books is rich, evocative, and sensuous. It has to be worthy of being read aloud. Rhyme, cumulative refrains, rhythm, alliteration, metaphor, simile, all properties of good poetry can be employed.”⁶⁵

A Theology of Children’s Growth in Faith

After exploring children’s development and literacy from a secular cognitive standpoint, it is important to see what the Bible says about children’s faith, growth, and development. The Bible makes explicit statements about children, as well as displaying some implicit points. I will review accounts of children being highlighted in the Bible as I present a theology of children’s growth in faith.

⁶⁵ Joanne Rocklin, “Inside the Mind of a Child: Selecting Literature Appropriate to the Developmental Age of Children” (n.p., October 2010), ERIC *EBSCOhost*, 7.

Like all people, children are sinful from the time they are conceived, as King David asserts (Ps 51:5). Jesus is the Savior of the whole world, including children (2 Co 5:19). Like all people, children receive the full benefits of the forgiveness Jesus earned through faith. (Eph 2:8-9). This faith in the Gospel promises is created by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God (Jn 6:63, Jn 3:5, Tit 3:5).

A crucial point is that children can have faith. Jesus says so himself, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Mt 19:14, Mk 10:14, and Lk 18:16). Jesus also makes this point clear in the Great Commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). Surely children are included in “all nations” and are therefore to be made into disciples through baptism and teaching. This is also evidenced in Paul’s words to Timothy, “from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures” (2 Ti 3:15). Paul also traces the human origins of Timothy’s faith which illustrates the process of teaching God’s Word. “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also” (2 Ti 1:5).

Not only can children have faith, but expanding on the Great Commission, they should be taught God’s Word. God makes this desire clear in his instructions concerning the Passover, “And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians’” (Ex 12:26-27). Although this is an Old Testament regulation that is no longer binding in the New Testament, the principal expressed is still valid. The Israelite children were not intended to mechanically participate in the Passover celebration; they were supposed to understand, and this understanding would come through explanations from their parents. Applications to modern times abound. Rather than telling a child fidgeting in the pew to, “Shhhhhh! Be quiet!” in an exasperated, strained whisper, a parent can explain *why* people are quiet in church—to show respect to God, to help other people focus. Similarly, the whole service can be explained: why Christians tend to worship on Sunday, why our churches use liturgies, what the different songs and parts of the liturgy are talking about, why our churches are furnished the way they are, why we bow our heads and fold our hands to pray,

etc. All of these things can be explained (and re-explained) to children to help them grow in their understanding and to reinforce their faith.

Moses makes a further point in Deuteronomy:

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates... In the future, when your son asks you, “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?” tell him: “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders--great and terrible--upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers” (Dt 6:1-9, 20-23).

Once again, in the latter part of this section, the point to explain what God has said to children so that they can understand it is reinforced. But there is also more than that—the people of Israel were to saturate their lives with God’s Word, with a specific purpose to “impress [God’s commands] on your children” (Dt 6:7). At home or away, early or late, God’s Word is in focus. Once again, though the new covenant is very different from the old covenant, God’s desire that the faith be taught and passed on to children is still the same. In our modern times, we too can direct children’s focus to God’s Word, with devotions, prayers, songs, stories, and books.

There are also many examples of how children’s early learning makes a difference in their lives. The book of Proverbs shares some wisdom about raising children, “He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge” (Pr 14:26). Just one of the ways a parent’s secure fortress serves as a refuge for the children is through passing on the faith. The children also have a secure fortress in the Lord through faith.⁶⁶ Perhaps the most recognized and clearest summary of this point is found in Proverbs 22:6, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” To put it in other words, the way a child is raised is usually the way the child will live and behave as an adult. The point is very clear: childhood

⁶⁶ A similar passage with a broad meaning that shares the same specific application is Proverbs 20:7.

training is effective, important, and has long lasting results. However, the results are not only in the future. Children are affected in the present as well, as the following passages exhibit.

Children's actions reflect on their parents and training. A misbehaving child is an embarrassment to a parent. Even more so, a misbehaving child is fodder for any critic to ridicule a parent. That is the reasoning behind this proverb, "Be wise, my son, and bring joy to my heart; then I can answer anyone who treats me with contempt" (Pr 27:11). A well-behaved child does just the opposite—he gladdens the parent and silences critics (at least, critics in the area of parenting).

It is interesting that children's behavior is quickly judged, and yet it is popular in today's society to want to assume the innocence of children, or downplay the fault of a child in misbehavior. The blame is often deflected to bad parenting, bad societal influences, or a bad socioeconomic situation. Yet, despite the desire to avoid saying a child did something bad and it was his own fault, the proverb accurately observes: "Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right" (Pr 20:11). Actions of an adult are the gauge by which an adult's character is judged; so too with children. Examples of a character judgment are: "He's got to buckle down and use his gifts," "He's very helpful," or, "She's a good kid."

Three specific cases in the Bible display the effects of children's learning, namely, Moses, Samuel, and an Israelite slave girl in Aram. After being claimed by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was raised by his birth mother until he was weaned, very possibly to the age of five, and maybe even until age seven. After that, he was raised in Pharaoh's court. As an adult, Moses continued to feel a strong identity with his people, the Hebrews. He was even moved (sinfully) to murder an Egyptian slave master for beating his fellow Hebrew! That he would have such a strong connection after being raised in an Egyptian court and after enjoying Egyptian life to prefer his Hebrew people is impressive. Adopted children do often have a strong desire to meet their real parents, Moses' learning and experiences when he was with his own people as a small child likely played a large role as well.

The boy Samuel lived an adopted existence as well. Though his mother came to visit him each year, he grew up with Eli at the temple of the Lord in Shiloh, because his mother had dedicated his whole life to serving the Lord. Even as a young boy, Samuel's faith can be seen in action when the Lord called him. Three times he heard a name calling, and ran to see what Eli needed, eager to help. The next day, after receiving a prophecy from the Lord that condemned

Eli, Samuel “told [Eli] everything, hiding nothing from him” (1 Sa 3:18). These fruits of faith were known firsthand only to Eli. Samuel must also have had a habit of producing fruits of faith, because the Holy Spirit gives us this further testimony, “And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men” (1 Sa 2:26). The boy Samuel’s early training in God’s service was evident in his life as a boy, in addition to staying with him throughout his life.

A third example of a child’s faith in action comes from II Kings chapter 5. An Israelite girl had been taken captive by Aramean soldiers in a raid. This girl, presumably torn away from her family, served as a slave in the household Under Naaman’s wife. Naaman was the commander of Aram’s army, and he had leprosy. Most people in the slave girl’s position would likely have enjoyed Naaman’s suffering, since he was ultimately responsible for sending the raiding party that had seemingly ruined this girl’s life. More so, many of her fellow Israelites would have doubted Elisha’s ability or willingness to heal Naaman. In spite of that, this girl lets her faith shine; she tells Naaman’s wife that he can be healed by the prophet in Samaria! Despite the understandable reasons for bearing a grudge against Naaman, this slave girl wants him to go to Elisha and be healed, and she knows God can do this!

Parents of young, believing children could probably tell quite a few more stories where their children speak or follow God’s Word in a wonderful way. These stories would also show that children not only can have faith, but that children’s faith shows, now and into the future.

God does not give very specific instructions for how to teach children in the Bible, but he does make it clear that children should be taught, even immersed, in God’s Word from an early age—and he shows us that by his grace, children are brought to faith and nurtured in their faith even from infancy! Some aspects of children’s development observable in the biblical record do fit well with current theories of early childhood development. This relationship, however, is one-directional and limited. Theories of development that fit with the biblical record are not thereby proven to be the most correct or ultimate theory. Theories of development also do not verify the biblical record. These areas of agreement are also subjective and can be debated.

One aspect of child development found in the Bible is seen in Deuteronomy Chapter 6, where God wants children to be immersed in his word, talking about it day and night. The active learning concept of learning through experience, exploration, and exposure matches this sentiment. The more children are exposed to God’s Word, the more they are able to explore it

and experience it, and internalize it. Deuteronomy chapter 6 also encourages adult interaction and explanations, especially when children have questions. The High/Scope principle of adult interaction and especially adults taking advantage of a child's particular interest to guide them to further understanding matches well with this concept.

Concerns about Religious Instruction for Children

There are two main areas of concern that some express about religious instruction for children. Both concerns affect the content children should be taught. The first concern is that the Bible presents topics that are violent and scary beyond what children should be exposed to. A feminist theologian questions, "Why are children brought up to call God good? If we did what he did or threatened what he threatened, we would be unjust and merciless."⁶⁷ This claim is often made especially against violence in the Old Testament, such as God commanding the Israelites to wipe out the nations of Canaan (Dt 20:17) or Levi and Simeon deceiving and murdering an entire village (Ge 34:25). This claim is also made about the death of Jesus, the idea being that the concept of death is too scary for children. "The death of Jesus is not good news at this age level. Instead, the child hears bad news of a kind person suffering."⁶⁸ Two responses can be given. First, children do not need to be taught and have explained to them every gruesome detail of sin described in the Bible at an early age. Children cannot learn the entirety of God's Word from ages three through five. They should be taught the basics, most especially the Gospel message that they are saved through faith in Jesus. This would necessitate telling them who God is, who Jesus is, and how Jesus saved us. Therefore, Jesus' death must be told. Death scares people, but the solution is not to pretend death does not happen. The solution is the Gospel. What is truly scary is not knowing the Gospel message. Through faith in the Savior Jesus, a person has spiritual life, and will enjoy eternal physical life as well in heaven. Death is scary to someone who does not know the Gospel, but death is overcome for those who do know.

Further, if Jesus' death is not too scary or violent for children according to God (since "faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of God" (Ro

⁶⁷ Catherine Madsen, "Notes on God's Violence," *Cross Currents* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 231-232.

⁶⁸ Krych, "Interpreting Christ to Children in Parish Education", 64.

10:17) which is focused on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection), then other violence in the Bible does not have to be considered too scary or violent for children either. (This does not mean that it must be taught though.)

The second concern is that many concepts are too abstract for children to comprehend. "Some have thus concluded that because of the mental limitations of preschoolers (and even older children) the church has nothing to offer youngsters,"⁶⁹ Examples are the Trinity, vicarious atonement, the union of Christ's natures, or the power of Baptism. No adult can claim total understanding of these concepts, so the argument that they are too abstract for children and therefore they should be ignored when teaching children is illogical. Children can be taught accurate ways of speaking about doctrine and can be taught simple, accurate applications. They do not have to understand the first time something is presented, but instead, through regular presentation, they slowly build knowledge. The hypostatic union can be explained, "Jesus is God. Jesus is a human. Jesus is not half human, he is all human. Jesus is not half God, he is all the way God. Jesus is both God and human." Note that the truth is stated, repeated, and the logical problem is not confronted. Children can believe logically contradictory statements without realizing the logical inconsistency. In fact, because of this, it may be easier to teach a child these topics than an adult.

Benefits of Religious Books

Religious books offer many benefits, both for the children and the adult readers. A wonderful situation is that religious books still offer all of the same benefits secular books can and provide additional spiritual benefits that secular books cannot offer.

A crucial part to gaining secular benefits lies in the style of reading. While reading the plain text with feeling and showing the pictures is a perfectly acceptable way to read to children, more can be done.

An important first step is repeated reading. Children do not learn concepts with only one exposure, nor with infrequent exposure. "Read [a book] once and then 6 months later his memory will be slight" (P14 Q1). Parents report their children's memory is excellent with repeated reading. "They seem to remember every story" (P13 Q1). "I think they remember [books] pretty well. Even my 2 year old will go get a book I ask for and say a word from it

⁶⁹ Handbook of Preschool Religious Education (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Press, 1988), 7-8.

before we start reading it” (P7 Q1). Parents also report how children are eager to read their favorite books over and over again. Preschool teachers also use the same Bible story for an entire week and can expect children to be able to tell the story by the end of the week (T1 Q1, T2 Q1).

In efforts to teach vocabulary, print reference is a useful tool. Print reference involves pointing to the printed words on the page as they are pronounced or explained. This can also involve pointing to a word and then pointing to the illustration of that word being carried out. An example is found here:

The title of the story that I’m going to read is *Harriet, You’ll Drive Me Wild* [Fox, 2000]. This is the title on the front cover of the book. The author of the book, or the name of the person who wrote the books, is Mem Fox. Here is her name. And the illustrator, the person who drew the pictures, is Marla Fransee. Here is her name on the book. All books have titles and authors, and if they have pictures they also have illustrators. The next time you look at a book, see if you can find the title. It is always on the front cover. Also look for names of the author and illustrator. For some books, like this one, *No David* [Shannon, 1998], the person who wrote the book is the author and is also the person who drew the pictures, and his name is David Shannon.⁷⁰

Print reference is especially helpful when encountering and explaining a novel word. Part of print reference is a full explanation. Rather than saying only, “Redeem means to buy back,” over explain: “Jesus redeems us. That means Jesus paid for us. Jesus paid for us, he redeemed us.”

Interaction is also important for reading. Interrupting the story line to ask questions is worthwhile. Questions can be about what has happened so far in the story, what the picture shows about the story, or what children think will happen next. (This last type of question should then be followed up on, whether they are right or wrong.) Questions can also be asked about any explanations given.

With this thorough reading method and plenty of time spent reading, children will increase their vocabulary, learn concepts and skills for their own reading and writing, and be better prepared for school. Perhaps the most enjoyable secular benefit is the growing and strengthening of their relationship with their parents (or other readers.) Parents report: “They look forward to [reading] and if we have a night that gets too late and we try to skip reading they get upset and want to read” (P7 Q5). “We can sit close, giggle, and just be together” (P6 Q5). “[Reading] is a nice, calm time together” (P17 Q5).

⁷⁰ Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years*, 189.

In the midst of these secular benefits, with religious books, children receive spiritual benefit as well. The material and vocabulary children are learning and remembering is God's Word. Similar to memorizing lines and songs for a Christmas service, children internalize truths of God's Word. This increasing knowledge of God's Word will serve to strengthen their faith and give them a solid foundation on which to continue building.

Children are also famous for repeating what they are exposed to. While this can lead to embarrassing situations when children blurt out something in the wrong context, in the case of exposure to religious books, this can easily lead to children expressing and sharing their faith with their friends or using their knowledge of God's Word as they role play.

While children's benefits are the primary purpose, adults cannot help but benefit from reading religious books to young children. For parents, the primary secular benefit is the time spent with their children. It was evident in the questionnaires sent to parents that the parents looked forward to reading time as much as the children do (P17 Q5, P11 Q5, P2 Q5). Aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings, cousins, and caretakers can enjoy this too.

Parents and adults also reap spiritual benefits from this. Many readers will be able to review truths of God's Word along with the children or will have the opportunity to learn truths of God's Word for the first time. This will also help them build or continue a habit of talking with their children about their shared faith in Jesus. Most surveyed parents reported that they regularly do talk with their kids about God's Word (All parents except one, Question 6). A habit like this started in early childhood will hopefully continue to be a major part of the relationship throughout life.

Many parents may also feel ill-prepared to explain different biblical truths to their children. It may be that the parent does not know something or does know it but is not able to explain it in a way that children will understand. The benefit of religious books in this case is to offer a simple, age-appropriate way to explain biblical truths. Through continued use and practice, a parent will also likely begin to learn how to explain biblical truths to children in their own words.

Review of Current Children's Literature

The majority of books designed for early childhood are simplified Bibles or books that tell one Bible story (ex: Noah's ark). However, there are some books available that seek to teach a truth of God's Word. In this review, I have selected a few books from Zonderkidz and

Concordia Publishing House. I had originally planned to review books from Northwestern Publishing House, however, NPH has very few books that might fit into this category, and their books are noticeably higher priced than books from CPH or Zonderkidz. Because of the higher price, parents are very unlikely to purchase these books, and therefore are not likely to be exposed to them, whether or not the books are high quality. (With the rapid expansion of early childhood centers, preschools, and child care center in the Wisconsin Synod, this seems like a prime area for NPH to expand as well.) I also selected a few books from my local public library. I selected these three publishing houses because NPH and CPH regularly publish doctrinally sound material. I selected Zonderkidz because their books are very popular and parents are likely to come across Zonderkidz's resources. I chose books from my local library to see what was available there and whether it was accurate or not. This is not an exhaustive review of all available books, but an attempt to find books that WELS parents have easy access to and are therefore likely to use. This review is intended to rate some examples and give a general impression of the state of current literature for young children. Each book or book set will be rated according to two criteria: Is it developmentally appropriate and is it biblically accurate.

Since the 1960s, the Berenstain Bears have been featured in a number of books and have seen a few different publishers. Currently, Zonderkidz sells the largest selection of their books. These books are well-illustrated, with plenty of color and depictions of the action of the text and mood of the characters very clearly. As far as the length of the books, they are not developmentally appropriate for three and four year olds, but a five year old may have the attention span to listen to the story. The vocabulary (in the books I read) includes a number of longer words. For example, in *Slumber Party*, the following longer or novel words are used: chicken coop, clubhouse, sorority, protested, slumber party, privilege, responsibility, boom box, commotion, harsh, investigate, and disgrace. Some of these words are explained in the text, other words would require the reader to explain to a child. A few (like "sorority") may have been much more common in casual conversation when the book was written. The number of novel words is probably too many to attempt to teach and explain in one sitting; a reader would want to pick out only several to teach. The Berenstain Bears series focuses very well on specific applications for children to live in a God-pleasing manner. However, there were no explicit mentions of God or Gospel-based motivation for doing the right thing, leaving the reader to make that connection on their own for the children they are reading to. These books are

beneficial in that they show and discourage wrong actions while describing and recommending correct actions but these books skip repentance and absolution from God.

Another series available from Zonderkidz is the “Made by God” series. One installment, *Rainforest Animals*, gives facts and pictures about anacondas, Bengal tigers, spider monkeys, and toucans. It reminds the readers that these animals were placed by God in their habitats and designed by God to thrive in their natural habitats. It is refreshing to be able to read a book about animals written with a biblical basis rather than an evolutionary basis. This book helps to promote an attitude of looking at the world with God’s Word in mind.

One book for young children offered in the Veggie Tales franchise, is titled *It’s Finally Christmas*. This book shows different characters and tells one secular aspect of Christmas they each like. The language is simple and comprehensible, and the illustrations are well done. Each page features one of the unique, colorful Veggie Tales’ characters with a very obvious, big expression on their faces and a drawing of that character’s favorite Christmas item. Those are the two objects in the text (the character and what they like) and are prominently illustrated. The final page states that everyone’s favorite part of Christmas is that Jesus was born on Christmas day. This book teaches nothing at all about Jesus or why his birth was wonderful and is something to look forward to. Another page or two could fill this void.

CPH offers the Arch Books series which specializes in retelling and illustrating Bible stories. I am mentioning this series because it is well-known around the Wisconsin Synod although it focuses on narratives rather than topics. The text is often longer and is written poetically in four-line, rhyming stanzas. While this makes the text flow, it is less understandable for children because of this style of writing. These books are well-illustrated, but for younger children, the text will not be understood and would need to be adapted or simplified in some way.

CPH also publishes the *Follow and Do* series written and illustrated by Joni Walker. This six-book series has a book on each of the chief parts of the catechism (Lord’s Supper, Apostles Creed, etc.) The text of these books is the catechism text along with the “What does this mean” explanations from Luther. As far as text for children is concerned, Luther language is far beyond young children’s ability to grasp. For parents, this is a wonderful catechism review opportunity. Even the chief parts of the catechism, like the Lord’s Supper exposition, are beyond children’s comprehension. However, other parts, like the Ten Commandments, are something they can

understand, though Luther's explanations are beyond them. One option with these books is to skip the explanations and just read the catechism section, and explain what the illustrations are showing. Because this option requires the parent to supply explanations for the text which is not age-appropriate, the books' usefulness is reduced. This series is doctrinally sound. Another strength of this series is the illustrations. It would be a good series for a knowledgeable adult to adapt, but it would be a difficult series for most adults to use well.

Another book from CPH is *God Makes Me His Child in Baptism*. This book briefly relates a young boy's observance of his baby cousin's baptism, and then focuses especially on being a part of God's family and living like a child of God in baptismal forgiveness. The application section is well done, explaining the lasting benefits and effects of baptism and its comfort when a believer sins. This book does not use the word faith, but does very well avoiding that abstract term. It instead focuses on having the promises of God, being part of God's family, and having the Holy Spirit live in a person's heart. This book is accurate, shows appropriate application, and is well illustrated. It would help a reader explain baptism to a child very well.

Another series from Concordia is entitled *God, I Need to Talk to You about....* I read two of the 24 books in that series, one about greed and one about laziness. The books give a child's first-person account of a problem that arises from a sinful attitude. Problems arise from the sinful attitudes, both conflicts with others and missing out on blessings that would come from a proper attitude (such as wanting to give to missions but having no money because of spending it all on selfish purchases.) In the end, the correct attitude is reflected ("I want to serve God by obeying my parents,") but, best of all, the last page states the main reason we serve God: because Jesus took our sins away, and we are thankful for that. The illustrations of children acting out the plot do a good job of displaying the emotions that the text is describing, complementing the story nicely. These books have a number of positive features: they are short and quick to read, they offer specific, age-appropriate applications of God's Word, they list supporting passages that adults could look up for more information, and most importantly, they restate the basic gospel message on the final page. I highly recommend these books for parents of four and five-year-olds.

A final book from Concordia is *3 in 1 (A Picture of God)*. This book uses an apple as a running analogy for the Trinity throughout the book. Some aspects of this comparison are very helpful, but others are misleading. For example, it is misleading to point to peel, flesh, and core

as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because each person of the Trinity is not one third of God, such that only one third of God died on the cross, but the other two thirds of God were still alive. Comparing faith in an apple seed to grow into a tree and faith in Jesus to give a wonderful new life also seems confusing. The running analogy seems to be pressed too far, and I would recommend avoiding this book because of the likely confusion it would cause.

Faith: Five Religions and What They Share offers an age-appropriate summary of the five largest world religions. This book portrays Christianity from a secular view of one among many compatible religions, and does not understand that Christianity is the correct continuation of Old Testament Judaism (and does not note that it is a continuation from the Old Testament at all). This would not be a good book to teach about Christianity, nor about other religions, since it makes claims of similarity and compatibility that are simply untrue.

A Book About God is an exceptionally well-illustrated book that seeks to explain the concept and presence of God to young children. The illustrations are oil paintings of high quality that adults can appreciate as art. In contrast, it seems a majority of children's books are illustrated like cartoons. (Which is not bad, but it made these illustrations stand out.) I also appreciated the vivid and accurate colors. This book makes comparisons to nature, but some are inaccurate or poor comparisons. God is compared to sunlight that is always with us, even faintly at night. The abstract concept, that God is always with us, is accurate, but the comparison to the sun, which seems very weak and ineffectual at night, could lead to a child wondering if God is weak or ineffective sometimes. I think it would be very difficult for a child to understand the one comparison and at the same time avoid the other comparison. A later comparison to air being all around us seems more apt for making this point. Some comparisons are helpful, such as saying God is like the sea, in that we do not understand all of his mysteries. In this case, I would avoid the book because of the poor comparisons, although the illustrations are exemplary and some of the comparisons are helpful.

Examination of Artifact

I will now present my own best effort at producing a children's book that demonstrates the recommended features. For reference, the book is in Appendix I which begins on page 38. This examination is divided into two major sections: pre-writing decisions and writing decisions.

The first section compares and contrasts decisions that would affect any book and the second section highlights decisions I made specific to the book I wrote.

Because the goal of this book was to teach a biblical doctrine, the first aspect to settle was the topic and key points that needed to be included. After reading *A Picture of God* my interest was piqued to use biblical descriptions of God's omnipresence to explain that attribute of God in a child-friendly way.

The style of the book was the next issue. Nearly all children's books are a narrative style, and follow a character through an experience to a resolution. Narrative is a good choice because it easily holds interest and naturally flows. My fear with a narrative style for delivering densely doctrinal content was that in order to deliver all the content and maintain a realistic narrative, the end result would be far too long for my target audience of three-year-olds. I chose instead to write in a more expository style in order to fit more content into fewer words.

Related to that choice was the decision to use the second person for writing. While most children's books use the third person, and some use the first person, very few books use the second person. I chose to write in second person for two main reasons. First, because expository writing is naturally weaker than narrative in holding interest, I wanted the second person to help hold interest by making the issue more personal for the child. Second, a major goal for this book is to help parents learn how to speak with their children about biblical concepts in developmentally appropriate language. It is most natural for parents to speak to their children in the second person, and so a book written in the second person matches the pattern of speaking. The book-reading experience ends up bordering on a conversation, and lines from the book could be used verbatim in a natural conversation later.

Once the style and person were decided, I next gathered resource material—in this case, every Bible passage that had anything to do with God's omnipresence. It was important to see how the Bible explains omnipresence, especially through word pictures. My presumption is that any analogy, word picture, or way of speaking about a topic inspired by the Holy Spirit is more accurate and more helpful than one I might make up. Even if a biblical description fit Hebrew culture but not modern American culture, a study of the biblical description in the light of Hebrew culture would likely yield a parallel description that fits modern American culture.

I next gathered a list of questions to ask and re-ask myself during the writing process:

- Is this too many pages?

- Is this sentence too long?
- What can be illustrated?
- Is this vocabulary necessary? How can it be explained?
- How does the Bible explain this?
- Should this explained in another book?
- How will a parent use this book?
- How is this book fun?

These questions are subjective, except for the fifth, which makes getting *an* answer to each question easy, but finding the perfect answer to each question very difficult.

The outline for the book began with a four-point outline: truth, need, comfort, action. The goal of this basic framework was to ensure that the book would not only teach a truth about God (truth), but also make that truth personal to the children (need, answer), and give a specific example of how a Christian lives in light of the truth (action). The framework outline is as follows:

- Truth: God is always everywhere
- Need: We feel scared and alone
- Answer: God is always with us and cares for us
- Action: God always listens to our prayers

This framework was then expanded into a detailed outline, with each point becoming a page in the book:

- I. Truth: God is always everywhere
 - a. Where is God?
 - b. King David
 - i. Up in the sky
 - ii. Deep under the water
 - c. Jeremiah
 - i. Close
 - ii. Far away
 - iii. Everywhere
 - d. Right here, right now
- II. Need: We feel scared and alone

- a. Scared and alone in the dark bedroom
- III. Answer: God is always with us and cares for us
 - a. In God's family
 - b. Jesus' promise to be with us
 - c. God protects us
- IV. Action: God always listens to our prayers
 - a. God hears our prayers

Pages 3-10 explain the Truth and page 11 transitions to the Need which is covered on page 12. Pages 13-15 explains the Answer, page 16 shows a Christian Action, and page 17 summarizes the truth a final time.

It may seem disproportionate for the Need to occupy only a single page. Other topics may require more than one page, keeping the Need section to a minimum seems appropriate. Word count and number of pages are very limited in a children's book, and the Need, while important to the logical flow, is the element of the story least intended to be taught. Space is reserved for the other three key points. Also, if the example or explanation of the Need is well-chosen, it will be something that children experience regularly and first-hand. Therefore, in the case of the Need, children are reminded of something they already know, but in the Truth, Answer, and Action, they are learning or relearning something they do not learn from observation. This may not be the case for every topic, but I think it will hold true for most.

Equally as important as the text are the illustrations. Because I have not been blessed with artistic gifts, there are instead written descriptions of how each page's illustration should look and what those illustrations will be displaying about the text.

A key concept for the illustrations is the idea of "2 characters." While the text has no protagonists from beginning to end, the intent is to have the same two young children featured in a majority of the illustrations. This will give some continuity to the book. The intent is also that children will see these two characters doing the same sort of things they would and be able to relate to the characters.

Another theme in the illustrations is a spyglass. The two characters are intended to trade off using the spyglass in the Truth section (and the spyglass could also be seen laying somewhere in the bedroom scenes.) The spyglass serves to visualize the idea of searching for something. On the final page, the spyglass will be present but not in use, showing that the "search" is over.

Since God is invisible, any visual representation of “God” was intentionally avoided, except for page 14 in which Jesus is pictured, but that is done in a thought bubble. Even borrowing a visual representation from the Old Testament would lead to confusion because at the present time, God does not make himself visible.

A majority of the vocabulary should be familiar for children. The word “protect” on page 15 might need to be explained, but it is in parallel to “safe” on the same page. Similarly, the word “prayer” on page 16, while likely known by children from experience, is also explained as talking to God on the page too, to reinforce the meaning. Otherwise, this book does not teach significant vocabulary. The vocable “omnipresence” is beyond what ages 3-5 need to know and was not included for that reason.

There are several aspects of this book that are not fully completed. The most obvious is the illustrations. Another is the flow of the text which seems to be “choppy” in the second half of the book. A final issue, the book has not been test-read to any children, mostly due to the fact that the illustrations are incomplete. There is more work to do on this book, but I hope in its present form it serves to demonstrate a way to teach a biblical doctrine to young children.

Many more books could be written; there are many truths in the Bible that are not highlighted for children until they begin catechism classes. However, books could introduce these truths much earlier. Each of God’s many attributes is a suitable topic, to name a few: eternal, unchanging, loving, omniscient, and omnipotent. Other important topics include sin, grace, election, worship, and end times. It will take a lot of work to pare down a doctrine to a simple statement of truth, but it can be done. Some topics may require multiple books—not everything about a topic needs to be covered in just one book.

Conclusion

Much research has been done in the area of early childhood development and literacy. There is also much to learn in the Bible. The latest secular research that informs the latest methods in education can be used to teach the truths of the Bible to young children. Doctrinally sound believers cannot rely on others to make high quality, doctrinally sound teaching materials for young children on their behalf. Secular researchers and religious educators that hold to some heterodox doctrines do not produce doctrinally sound materials. This is because they either do not know correct doctrine or they do not understand that children can learn truths of the Bible.

From a secular, research-based standpoint, Jesus' resurrection may be too abstract for a three-year-old to understand intellectually. Faith is not equivalent to intellectual understanding though. Faith is a gift from God worked by the Holy Spirit, and Jesus even praises the faith of a little child as something to be highly prized.

Research shows that there are many ways to teach children effectively. Reading books is one time-tested, effective method. Reading books to children is something adults enjoy and do willingly, leaving no reason not to choose any high-quality, developmentally appropriate, doctrinally sound religious books that are available. Such books can be used to nurture children's and adults' faith as well as build a healthy relationship between child and reader that is open to faith-sharing conversations.

The current number of resources that fit the criteria outlined is few. Parents do not have enough of these books to keep their children supplied with new books at regular intervals. Educators do not have enough published books to fill a curriculum. May God bless us with pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and lay members that have the skills and desire to tackle the worthwhile task of producing high-quality, developmentally appropriate, doctrinally sound children's literature for three, four, and five-year-olds. God bless their work.

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Appendix I

1

Peaking in from side of the page, two children with one of them looking through a spyglass. (2 characters stay the same throughout, though they are not given names.)

Where is God? (Everywhere!)
written by Samuel Pappenfuss
illustrated by _____

This book teaches God's **omnipresence**. Some key truths about this are:

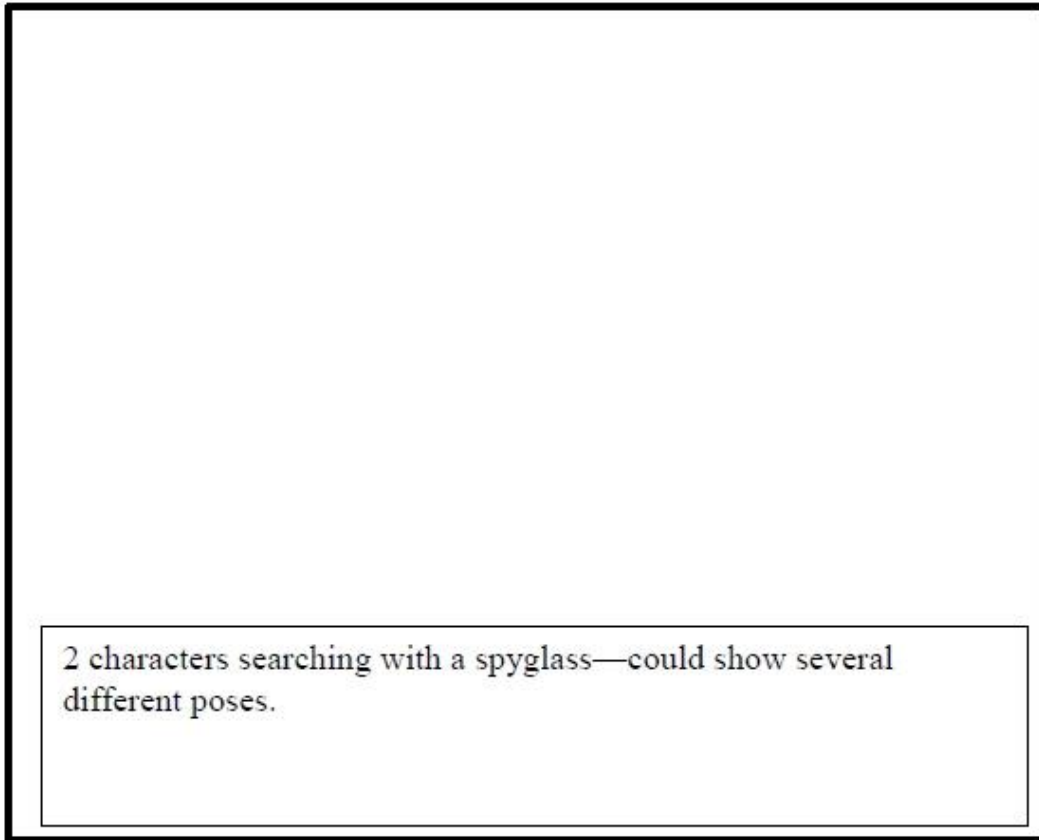
- God is everywhere.
- *All* of God is in *each* place.
- God is active—he's not just sitting there.

The comfort of God's omnipresence is:

- God is always here to hear our prayers.
- God is always with us to care for us.

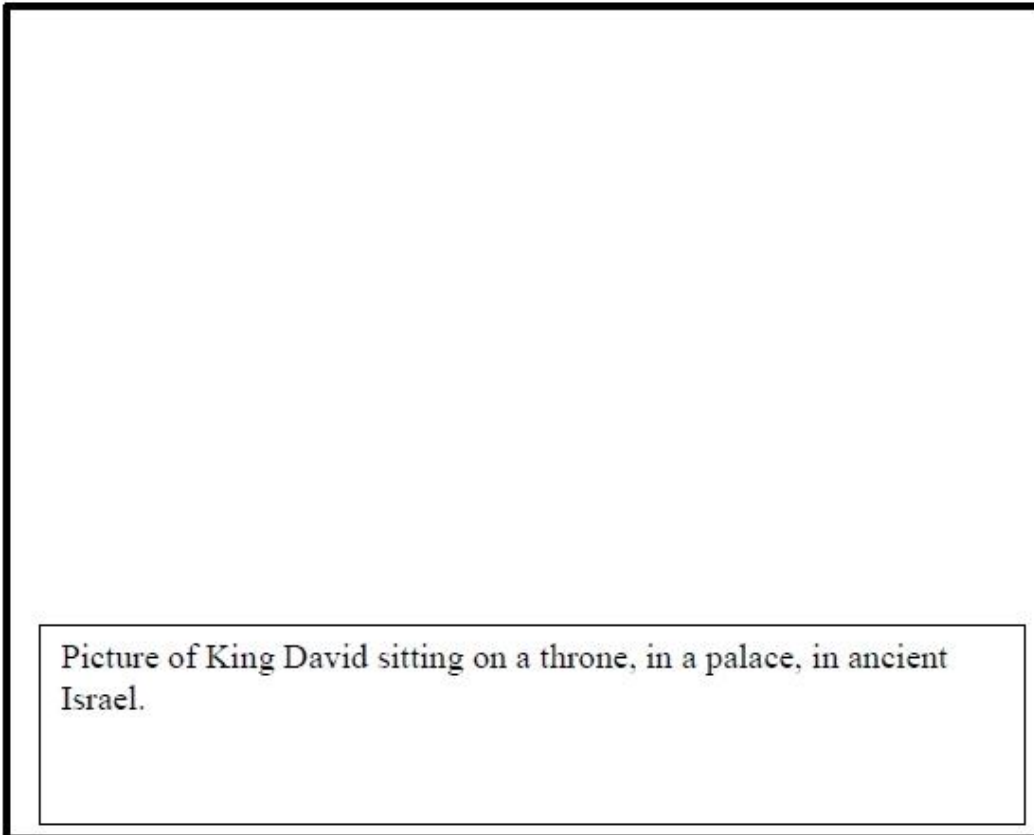
Intro to parents explaining what the book is teaching and what the comfort is. Keep the layout simple. Many books that have an explanation page have a full page of a small print that is uninviting—don't be like that—use bullet points, large font.

[Illustration is text.]



2 characters searching with a spyglass—could show several different poses.

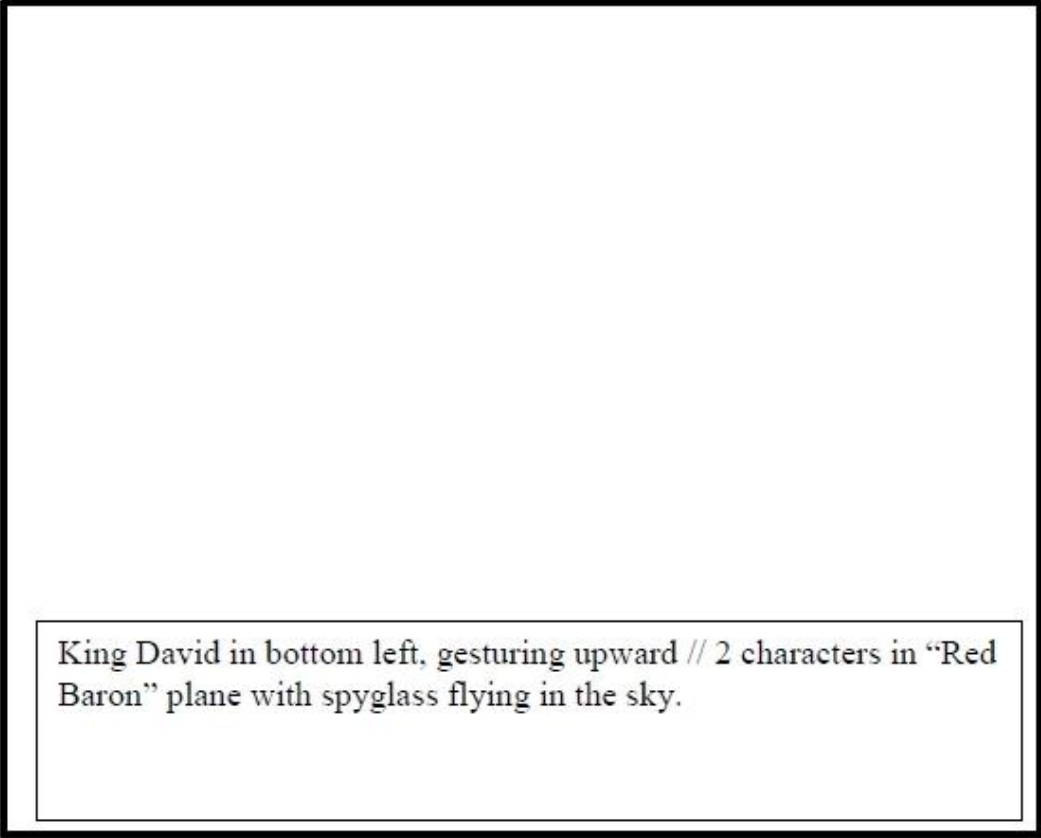
Where is God? How can you find him? Well....



Picture of King David sitting on a throne, in a palace, in ancient Israel.

A long time ago, King David knew where God is.

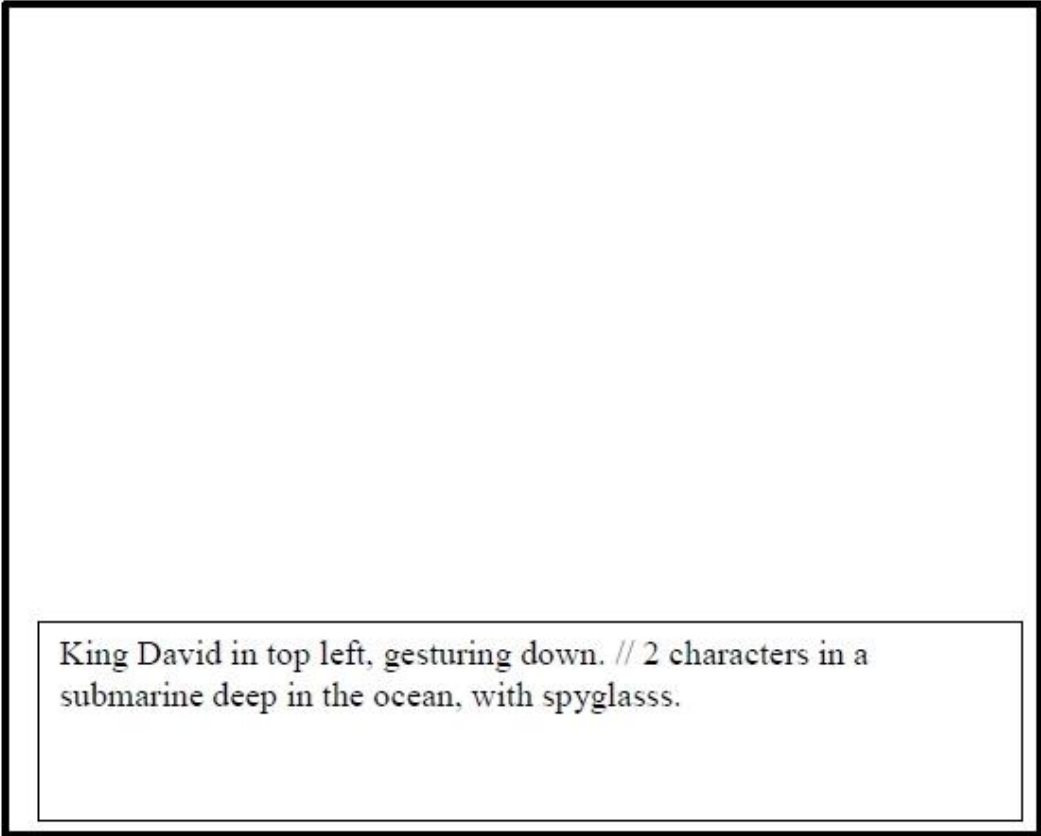
Psalm 139



King David in bottom left, gesturing upward // 2 characters in “Red Baron” plane with spyglass flying in the sky.

King David said, “Up in the sky, God is there.” But you can’t see God.

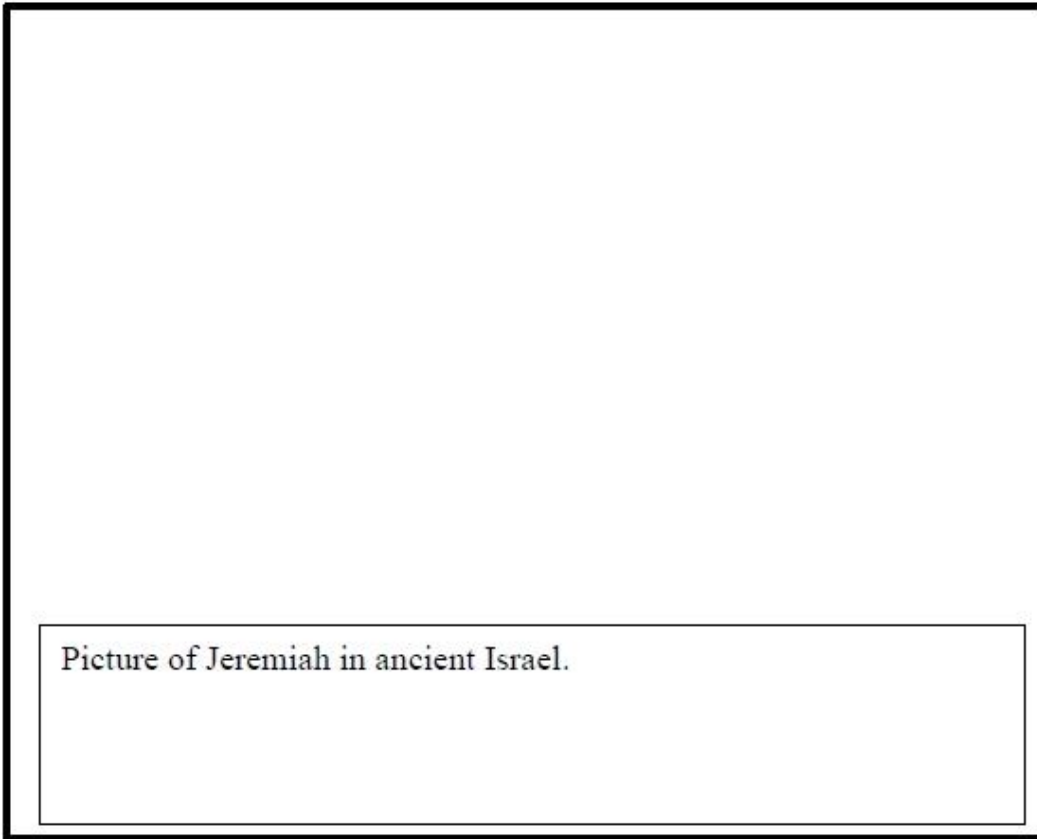
Psalm 139:8



King David in top left, gesturing down. // 2 characters in a submarine deep in the ocean, with spyglasses.

King David also said, “Down, deep under the water, God is there.” But you can’t see God.

Psalm 139:8



Picture of Jeremiah in ancient Israel.

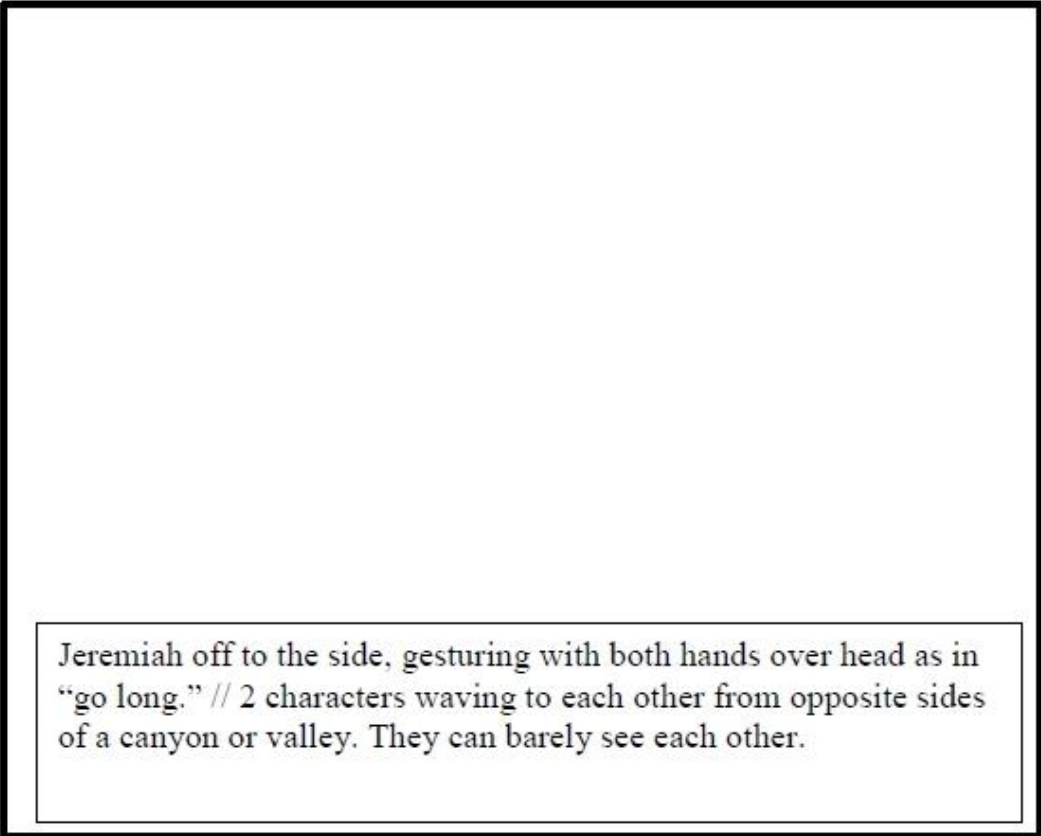
Another man, named Jeremiah, talked with God about where God is.

Jeremiah 23

Jeremiah off to the side, with hands demonstrating “close” (which could two hands either measuring something short or gesturing to the nearby ground.) // 2 characters close together waving “Hi” to one another.

Jeremiah learned not only is God close...

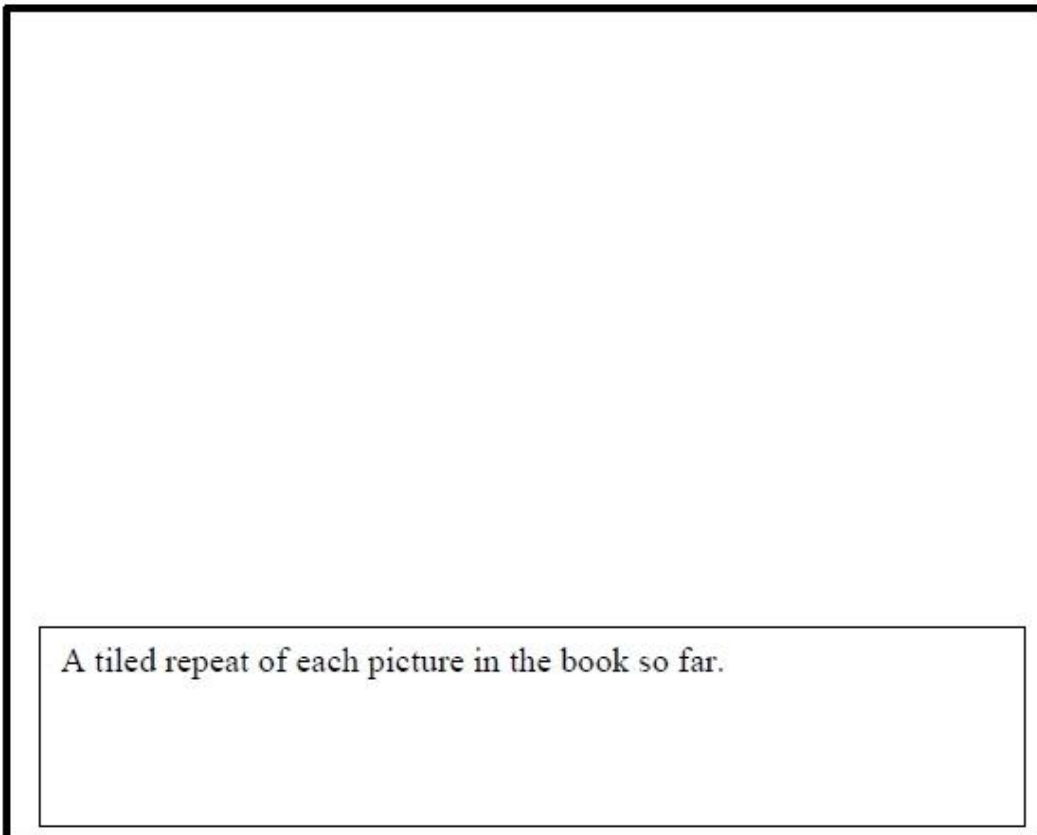
Jeremiah 23:23



Jeremiah off to the side, gesturing with both hands over head as in “go long.” // 2 characters waving to each other from opposite sides of a canyon or valley. They can barely see each other.

...but God is also far away!

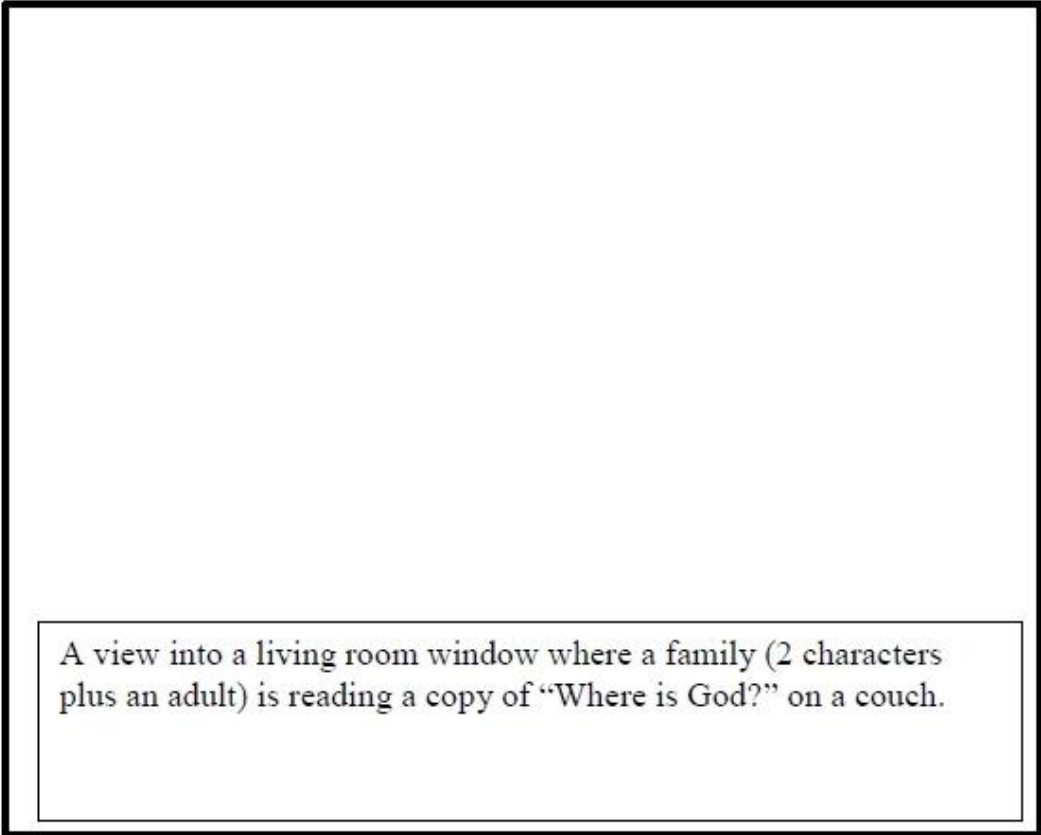
Jeremiah 23:23



A tiled repeat of each picture in the book so far.

God is here and God is there—God is everywhere!

Jeremiah 23:24



A view into a living room window where a family (2 characters plus an adult) is reading a copy of "Where is God?" on a couch.

Just like God was with King David and Jeremiah, he is with you right now too! But you can't see God.

2 characters, sitting up in their beds, looking nervous or anxious in a dimly lit bedroom.

Being alone is sometimes scary, especially in the dark. If you are afraid alone in the dark, remember:

Psalm 23:4

2 characters, sitting up in their beds, no longer looking scared or anxious (a neutral expression would be good.) A thought bubble picturing the scene of their baptism.

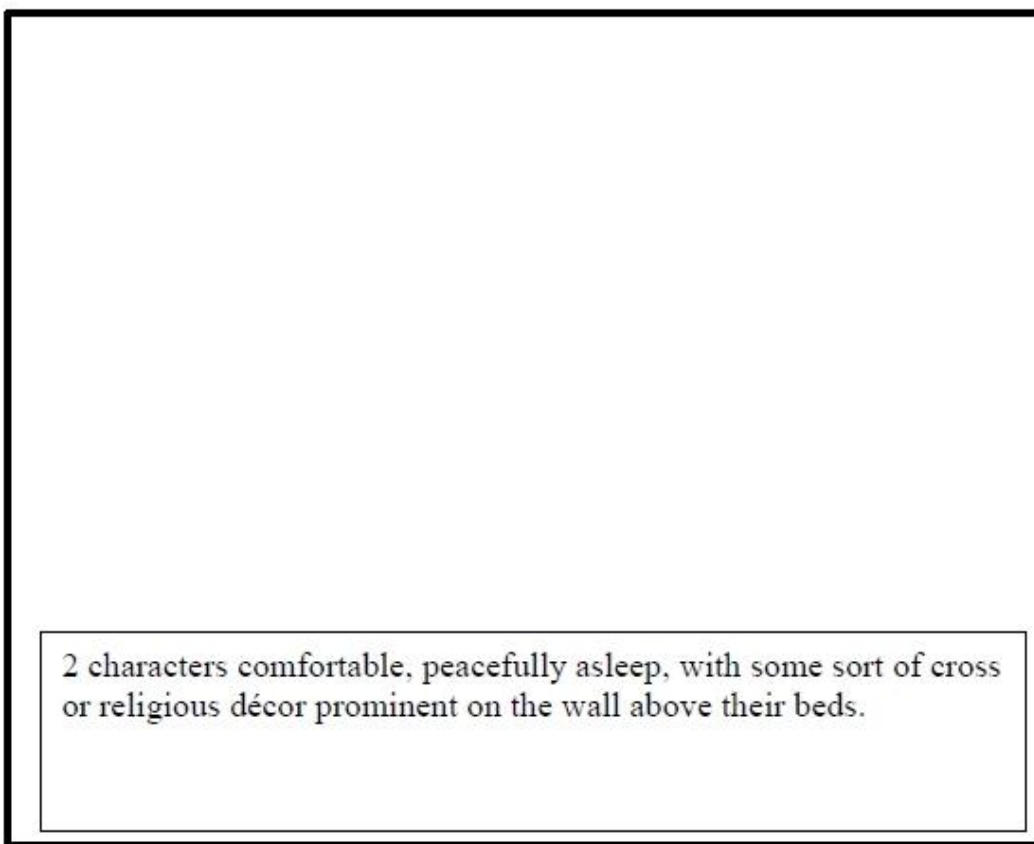
You are in God's family. You are God's dear child.

Galatians 3:26-27

2 characters, sitting up in their beds, now with smiles. A thought bubble picturing Jesus holding the 2 characters, one under each arm.

God is here because Jesus promised, "I am always with you."

Matthew 28:20



2 characters comfortable, peacefully asleep, with some sort of cross or religious décor prominent on the wall above their beds.

God is always here to protect you. He keeps you safe.

Psalm 46

2 characters praying before bed, each in a different praying position.

You can also say a prayer to God. God always listens when you talk to him and he is always there to hear you.

Psalm 116:1-2

2 characters holding spyglass but not using it. Both gesturing,
“Everywhere.”

Where is God? God is everywhere! (But you can't see him.)

Isaiah 66:1

Appendix II
Interview and Email Survey/Interview Transcripts

Professor and Teacher Email Interview/Surveys

Teacher #1

A: These questions are answered from the perspective of teaching ages 3-5.

1. When you teach a Bible story, how do you assess retention? In your experience, how much do children retain?

A: The same story is told, not read, each day for a week for ages 3-5. By Wednesday, they are helping to retell the story when the teacher gives them sentence starters, "Jacob and his mother _____." By Thursday, many are able to retell portions by saying, "Tell us what happened when Jacob lied to his father." By Friday, some are able to retell the entire story. This depends on the child's age and language use.

2. Do you teach any biblical topics apart from a story? If so, how? (For example, teaching about Baptism.)

A: No, only when they connect to a story for these ages.

3. Sometimes children may not understand something, but are able to repeat it. As that pertains to biblical knowledge, how beneficial would it be for children to know statements of biblical truth that they don't understand the meaning or implications of?

A: God's Word is effective and powerful. I believe that the Holy Spirit works faith as the children listen to his Word. They grow in their understanding with each retelling throughout the year. Hearing parents tell how the child retells at home, sings the Word, and connects with God's Word tells me that the Word does not return "empty".

4. How crucial is parental involvement in a child's retention of learning?

A: Where the Word is heard, shared, and lived in a home is highly evident in a child's words and actions.

5. How does the parent/child relationship grow through shared reading?

A: The Bible story is sent home each week. When parents tell of reading it together, some have said, "My child knows more than I do." Out of the mouths of children!!

6. How equipped are parents to explain biblical concepts to their children? If a parent came to you asking for help in this area, how would you respond and what resources you would recommend?

A: It depends on the parent's background and their knowledge of Biblical concepts. I would recommend *The People's Bible* as a resource for parent's growth. There are several children's Bibles for this age that are used at the MLC ECLC. They are used mainly as a picture source, but can be useful to parents whose background is minimal.

7. In your experience, how does comprehension of spoken/read words increase from age 3 to age 4?

A: Four year old children have more vocabulary and are better able to hold mental images and words in their memory. They need pictures in sequence or other story props to aid their retelling. Three year old children are mainly listeners and observers. That is a main reason for having three and four year old children together. The threes learn from the fours.

8. In your experience, how does comprehension of spoken/read words increase from age 4 to age 5?

A: Five year old children are more verbal than fours and able to retell with more detail.

9. In your experience, what are the changes in attention span from age 3 to 4, and from age 4 to 5?

A: Threes can attend to listening for about 5 minutes without use of pictures or props. With each year, I'd 5 more minutes to the listening time for each additional year. Having ages 3-5 in a group at the EC Learning Center, the Bible story time lasts about 15 minutes each day. This includes telling the story and connecting a memory treasure and a song. This is the challenge of a 45 minute Sunday School lesson with this age.

10. How do you explain or use religious vocabulary with children? (Examples: salvation, sin, justification, redeemed etc.)

A: You explain it in terms that they understand. For example, sin is not listening to God and not doing what God tells us to do. They know what it means to not listen to parents or do what they say.

11. Respond to this concerned parent: "Why try to teach biblical concepts to such young children when even adults can't understand them?"

A: Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me. Of such is the kingdom of God." "Out of the mouths of infants you have ordained praise." God tells us to do so. With God all things are possible. I may not understand how little children grow in their faith, but the Word is powerful and active. As I listen to children sing, *For God So Loved the World*, or retell Bible stories, I am amazed at their trusting faith.

Teacher #2

A: These questions are answered from the perspective of teaching ages 3-5.

1. When you teach a Bible story, how do you assess retention? In your experience, how much do children retain?

A: We have 1 lesson for the whole week so we can assess retention when we review the story later in the week. We often ask who, what, where, when type questions as we review. Sometimes I ask what our story was about, or who remembers who was in our

story? 4 & 5 year olds have way better retention than that of the 3 year olds. Often we have a song we sing during circle time that coincides with the bible story. This also aids in the retention. Visual aides also help! Sometimes I am surprised by the detail they recall! Definitely the Holy Spirit at work!

2. Do you teach any biblical topics apart from a story? If so, how? (For example, teaching about Baptism.)

A: Biblical topics....we have a stop light for behavior control. When children misbehave and move their clip to yellow for a warning we take time to remind them of the rules. I have in the past used this time to remind them how we all have rules to follow including the 10 commandments, being nice to our neighbors, etc. When they move to red which includes a time out it is the perfect time to talk about how we all sin and how God forgives us and we forgive them for their behavior. We also have them apologize if they have wronged someone in the class and have that person say they forgive them. When they come the next day they are back on the green light, like it never happened...all is forgiven. We discuss baptism when we study the story of Jesus being baptized and how that makes us a child of God!

3. Sometimes children may not understand something, but are able to repeat it. As that pertains to biblical knowledge, how beneficial would it be for children to know statements of biblical truth that they don't understand the meaning or implications of?

A: Statements of biblical truth is still God's word which we know is how the Holy Spirit works. Even from the mouth of children the Spirit can work faith as they tell others the biblical truth.

4. How crucial is parental involvement in a child's retention of learning?

A: Parent involvement only magnifies children's retention. The more involved parents are in their child's education the better the retention.

5. How does the parent/child relationship grow through shared reading?

A: Shared reading! Every year at our orientation meeting I hand out a study that has proven "the number one factor to children's success in school is reading with your child." Not only does it benefit school success but it creates and strengthens the emotional bond between parent and child. To me there is nothing better than to curl up and read with your child!

6. How equipped are parents to explain biblical concepts to their children? If a parent came to you asking for help in this area, how would you respond and what resources you would recommend?

A: Depends on the parent. I would encourage them to read the Christlight bible story that we send home every week with their child and to do the follow up family time activity with them. I would also invite them to a bible study with us so they could strengthen

their faith. I would also invite them to come worship with us and encourage Sunday school for them and their child. Visits with pastor would also be encouraged

7. In your experience, how does comprehension of spoken/read words increase from age 3 to age 4?

A: comprehension 3-4 depends on the child of course, but generally they can answer general questions about the story.

8. In your experience, how does comprehension of spoken/read words increase from age 4 to age 5?

A: again comprehension 4-5 depends on the child but generally they can not only answer questions but can retell the story and sequence the events. You can expand on details and use real life examples that they can relate to and also relate to the story.

9. In your experience, what are the changes in attention span from age 3 to 4, and from age 4 to 5?

A: attention span 3-4 go 5 to 10 minutes during circle time, bible story, etc. 4-5 easily go to 30 minutes

10. How do you explain or use religious vocabulary with children? (Examples: salvation, sin, justification, redeemed etc.)

A: Usually the vocabulary we use with our preschoolers is basic and simple. we will use sin, forgiveness, commandments, baptize, God's people, promises, saved, heaven, etc. Redemption, sanctification, etc. we do not use the words but teach the concept in a way they can understand.

11. Respond to this concerned parent: "Why try to teach biblical concepts to such young children when even adults can't understand them?"

A: Because they can understand them! The Holy Spirit works thru God's Word and that is why we share it with them! Go and make disciples of all nations, Teaching and Baptizing them! This is our mission!

Teacher Interview (transcribed from recording by Kim Pappenfuss)

Teacher #3

Author: I have eleven questions that I have been asking different teachers, and I have a couple just for you about your books. Can you describe the purpose for making your books?

T3: Yeah. It started when I was teaching Sunday school. I needed something that would hit three, four, five year olds, and we were on the Christ-Light cycle up there, but it didn't start with creation, and I, with the little ones I really like to start with creation and work my way through the Old Testament and then the New Testament because so many of

them don't even know why Jesus is here. So basically I just went to the Bible and I went with the text that was in the Bible, but if there were vocabulary words that I thought were too difficult for them to understand, I tried to make the sentences a little more simple, and I'm not a very good illustrator, so I just ripped construction paper and taped it down and put it on my computer and used a lot of ink.

A: See now, that actually makes me feel much better because I've been wondering . . . part of my thesis goal is to write a book, and I've been wondering what to do about illustrations because . . .

T3: I can't draw, so I . . . yeah . . . and then I . . .

A: This looks pretty good, and you can have the colorful--I think getting colors is a big thing, very useful thing.

T3: Yeah. Color is good, and then what I did, because I have little ones, then I made it interactive. So that kept the real little ones, I think I even had a two year old in there. Now this isn't super durable, but it.... I made enough so each family had one in the home that they could take with them.

A: Ok.

T3: Usually my serpent would get chewed on, but it helps them to understand the story. What I like too is then I could flip the book since it was bound, and the text is on the back, so the kids always just saw the picture. And one thing I've learned when I was doing some reading recovery education when I was working up north is spacing too for early readers, just to make sure there's enough space between each word so that they can see that there is space there and it's not one long word, so that was another thing I incorporated. But that's basically why all this started, and then each week I would make a new book for the lesson. I did try because it would get kind of crazy, I was trying to save on color, so I made them smaller eventually, and then I really started getting tired of staying up until five o'clock in the morning, so then I even incorporated some of the Christ-light pictures from the copy masters, but it wasn't nearly as exciting as the color, as you can see. I think that's a lot more appealing.

A: Yeah, I was going to say, even I'm more appealed to the colorful.

T3: Exactly. And the kids didn't really enjoy coloring them like I thought they might, so then for Noah I tried colored paper to save some money that way, and then I used one object on each page to kind of represent what we were talking about at the time. But again, I went with --sometimes I looked for clip art, but depending on how big you make it, some of it would look fakey. I would say the illustration part was the most challenging for me, so I would just make ones. One person, it would be the whole tribe! It was the ink that got really expensive, because Concordia--have you looked at the Arch Books?

A: Yeah. Those are some books I'm going to do a little write-up about too, and I remember those from when I was a kid too.

T3: Right. And those are neat. I guess when I've used them in my classroom, it's hard to keep [the kids'] attention the whole time. I think some of them get a little long. I don't know if they have been improving that over the years.

A: Yeah, I remember I know when I was growing up, my parents --I found out when I learned how to read that they weren't reading what was written, that they were just using the pictures to tell the story because I think they're a little bit wordy and they try a little bit too hard to rhyme rather than making easy sense for kids.

T3: Right. I do like Concordia's illustrations in most of their Arch Books and their new Bible history book too. The illustrations are beautiful. If they could bring the text down to a kid's level. If you knew a really good artist, that would be cool.

A: I actually met an artist in Findlay last year as a vicar, and her ideal dream is to illustrate children's books someday.

T3: There you go.

A: So, I just gotta get some children's books written here.

T3: Yeah, exactly! Because there are, I would say, Concordia with the Arch Books, they're very specific, the titles are. They are starting to add a few more, but like we said, they are just really long, and the kids, especially the little ones, they lose their attention.

A: I guess that kind of fits with another question too. Do you hold yourself to any specific guidelines when you are thinking of how to make a book for a story. Is there a word count you are going for, or a number of lines on a page, or . . . ?

T3: I don't. I guess I kind of think about who I'm writing the book for--specific students in mind. And when I was using these, I wanted to get in as much that was right from the Bible in here, so I basically, everything that was in the NIV 1984 text, (maybe that's even illegal what I did), but I didn't copy it but I paraphrased it and kind of changed the language a little bit. My husband never told me it was bad, so maybe it's not too bad (laughter) nowadays anyway. But if I were to do this again, I guess in my own classroom I have a lot of really early readers, so a repetitive phrase is a neat thing to incorporate. That way even the kids who aren't reading yet can pick up on that one sentence that repeats over and over again. I don't know if in your studies you've come across any big books that were written by Carrie Schmeling back in the early '90s.

A: I haven't, but if I told Karis, she could probably tell me about them.

T3: Yeah. Ask her about the --it's a creation book and a Noah's ark book. She has a repetitive phrase in each one of those. Her creation book is called *It is Good* and that's on

each page--"It is good." And so, even though all of my kids can't read, they know when that's coming and they can successfully . . .

A: . . . be a part of it. (pause) Could you just maybe describe your process maybe a little bit more from planning the book to writing it out.

T3: Sure, sometimes I try and, well, let me show you with my creation book I've used. This was a text I received from another teacher, but I like to sometimes set it to music because that's that repetitive thing too. This one goes to the tune "Are You Sleeping?" Books I would write now for my classroom if I were starting over again, since this was Sunday school focused, I tend to do more of this kind of thing where it's repeating, and this is an echo book, so there's more of that. So even my readers can read along with me, and then my nonreaders can repeat it. That early reading, that repetitive phrase. So that's what I start with first: what is the main idea that I want to get across in this book? And I try and come up with a phrase or a sentence that repeats throughout the book that is getting that main truth across. (pause) It is so hard to explain too because it's one of those things. Even when I would write these books, I would start with the text, and then I had to kind of determine how much to put on one page and how could I illustrate what I was writing about so that they could make that connection too. So that's another thing you want to kind of take into account. A lot of times in kindergarten classes we have what's called leveled readers, so you're really beginning readers along with the repetitive phrasing, they're just learning sight words, which, if you look online you could find those too. Sometimes they call them the Fry's word list or the Dolch word list. A lot of those words--like "the", "was", "is"--those are words that kids just naturally learn how to read as they're *learning* how to read too. So those are good words to incorporate in your repetition of phrases or just in your text in general, especially if you want to target early readers. Something like these Scholastic--this was a level 3, so it's not quite as easy. It has a lot more words actually. But on their level 1--I think is their lowest--or they have like a beginning level 2 where they'll just have like one or two words on each page. So I guess you kind of have to decide who your audience is going to be, and even with something that . . . Teachers are always looking for books too that parents can read to their kids that aren't real long. I've found that parents--even something like my Moses book--I don't know that any of my parents of my school would even read this to their kids because they'd probably see there are too many words on the page and it's too long for them. They like simple. The more white on the word page the better. [laughing]

A: Gotchya.

T3: With lots of illustrations. Yeah.

A: I suppose, because that keeps kids more interested, and the parent says, "Good. I've got this under control."

T3: Exactly. (Laughter)

A: That fits with one of my other questions. Do you find that parents are willing or not willing to read to their children?

T3: In my situation where I work, I teach at a choice school. So at our school it's really difficult to get some of the parents to read with their kids, I think, because so many of them don't feel comfortable reading, which would probably be good if you did develop something that was easier sentence patterns and things because maybe they would feel comfortable reading to their kids too. But overall I would say in my experience, most parents will read to their kids.

A: So then, you do have experience working with non-church parents?

T3: Mmmhmm.

A: Do you think they are more or less willing to read religious books to their children?

T3: That's a good question. I do have one student, and her mom flat out told me she won't because that is not part of her belief system, but most of my parents are pretty willing to do that. They're more willing to read a book than they are the actual Christ-light lesson that goes home. I think, again, because the illustration isn't probably as appealing as what a book is, and just all of those words, you know, typed--what, 8, 9 font-- on the back of the leaflet, I think it's just overwhelming for some people.

A: Ok. Alright. Those are my questions specific to your books. Here are other questions that I've been asking other teachers. When you teach a Bible story, how do you assess retention?

T3: I usually do it through asking questions and also a project. I always try and have a project along with my Bible lesson. I'm a big pusher of reading, so I'll take whatever our Bible passage is for the week, and I'll have the kids, like for Joseph, they they made Joseph's coat, and then we had our Bible verse written, but I have the words typed out and cut individually so that kids have to unscramble the Bible passage and put it on the bT3m in correct word order. And then as we're doing that, we discuss even more, you know, about the Bible lesson, and we act it out and . . . Those are pretty much the main things we do. They love to act it out because they always want to be hero! [laughter]

A: Alright. In your experience, how much do your children retain?

T3: At my level, it's pretty amazing. We only have one to two lessons a week, so we're always reviewing the Bible lesson. I would guess out of my sixteen, fourteen are solid on all of the Bible lessons we've had. Two have a hard time retaining a lot of things in school, so . . . the class I have this year is pretty good.

A: No. 2. Do you teach any Biblical topics apart from the story?

T3: Well, in kindergarten we incorporated a lot. In public school they have something called "guidance class" where they teach social skills and how to be friends and those kinds of things. But at my school I can teach it as part of God's Word, but I always tend to that more in the afternoon and incorporate it in our afternoon devotion. But it's always coming up. My kids are so inquisitive, especially since [for] so many of them Christianity is new to them, so they have questions about everything. They'll look at my books and my Bible story books I have at school, and they're always asking questions about what they're seeing in the pictures and . . . yeah. That's why I like books. They're very inquisitive. It's a good conversation starter for sure. Yeah.

A: Ok. So, just to summarize, you kind of teach a topic as it comes up and gets asked about. So you're answering a question, getting an attentive child that's ready to hear what you have to say.

T3: Exactly.

A: No. 3. Sometimes children may not understand something, but they are able to repeat it. As that pertains to Biblical knowledge, how beneficial would it be for children to know statements of Biblical truth, even if they don't understand what it means?

T3: That's a good question you've raised because with the discipline this is something I've gone back and forth in my head with all the time. Because you teach the kids, you know especially in our WELS school, you know you discipline law and gospel. They get so robotic at apologizing to a friend and immediately, "I forgive you." And you can tell that it's not sincere, so I struggle with that very point that with some of these things are we teaching them to be automatic and they're not even understanding what it means? That's the one example I think of the most when I think of [not understanding] Biblical truths. As far as just the message of salvation, the group I have right now is very interested and inquisitive about it. I have kids from all different church bodies, so the conversations we have are interesting. Today we were talking about baptism, and I have the kids who have the pools for baptism and, you know, can't be baptized until they're older, and then I have kids who are telling me their parents are baptizing them at hotels, and it's very interesting. [Laughter]

[...]

A: No. 4. How crucial is parental involvement in a child's retention of learning?

T3: I believe it to be very important. I think kids, not only do they practice what they're learning at school at home, but I think it just validates that what we're teaching them is important. If a parent doesn't give the same message that what they're doing in school is important, then the kids kind of have the same attitude, you know--"I don't need that." So even if it's something simple, that's what I tell my parents, you don't have to make your kid go crazy and write their alphabet forwards and backwards and upside down. Just sit and talk with your child and read with your child and care about your child. That's the biggest thing, especially with the young ones, that we try and get them to interact because

so many parents think if they buy their kids something, that that's showing them their love, and then they don't actually interact with them though, so that's tough.

A: Yeah, that's gotta be tough too when you know that that's how their home life is.

T3: Yeah! And their parents--and the parents think it's right--that's what 's frustrating, so you have to educate the parents. So if you could write some parenting books . . . (humor)

A: [Laughter] Maybe I'll just put that in the recommendations for further study.

T3: There you go! That would be good.

A: How does the parent-child relationship grow through shared reading? It's kind of similar.

T3: I just think that bond, you know. I even think of in the afternoon with my students I have an assistant too, and we spend twenty-five minutes after lunch just reading books with the kids, and sitting. And they like, you know, they'll snuggle in, and they just feel that closeness, and when they're not getting that at home, I think that really hurts, because they just want that attention, and when they don't get it, it shows at school. They act out because that's the only way they know how to get attention then is by raising a ruckus.

A: Yeah, I think a lot of parents would feel really awkward if they realized how easy it was for teachers of their kids to know how their home life is (humor).

T3: Right! I know.

A: I think a lot of parents just assume, "My kid just does whatever they do, and they're normal." Teachers can say, "Well, this kid's parents probably do that, and this kid's parents are probably like that," and it's just obvious to tell in the classroom.

T3: Right, yeah.

A: No. 6. How equipped are parents to explain biblical concepts to their children?

T3: In my classroom we're teaching both basically, the parents and the kids. Sometimes when the kids go home, and they will repeat something that I've taught in my Word of God lesson, I've had parents tell me, "I had to go and look because I didn't think that was right." So it is kind of neat to see how the Holy Spirit works that way, working through the little ones to correct their parents even. I haven't here had anybody come at Salem and just ream me out for teaching something that they don't believe in to their kids, but there our principal and school board is pretty up front about [saying], "If you come here, this is what you're going to learn," so that's helpful to have that backing too. Right now they all seem pretty appreciative of the fact because all of my students' parents seem to have a wanting or desire Christianity in some way or another, so they knew that they were going to hear that coming here, so that's helpful.

A: Continuing that question, if a parent came to you asking for help in explaining the Bible to their children, how would you respond and what resources would you recommend?

T3: I usually just take them right to the Bible itself. I also refer them to a Concordia Bible that I have, the Bible story book, and I like that one too because it actually has vocabulary terms listed in the lesson itself. Have you seen that?

A: I am not familiar with that one.

T3: I should have brought it along. They sell it in the bookstore. It's really neat. It's intended for, I believe, like a fifth grade textbook. The illustrations are really pretty, and then they have some really easy questions at the bottom. I believe it's the ESV translation that they use, so it is pretty literal in some spots. But it's a nice resource for parents. It's tough to find a good Bible history book that's not too lengthy, and this one is good. It's not too long, but it's not too short, and they explain what the simple truths are. I have not had a parent, though, come to me with a question from our actual Christ-Light lesson. I send those home every week, but like I said before, I don't know if anybody reads those or not. And if it's a real deep doctrinal question, then I like to get the pastor involved at that point because then maybe they'd be interested in taking instruction class if it's a nonmember, so that's what I tend to do.

A: No. 7. In your experience, how does comprehension of spoken or read words increase from age three to age four? I don't know how much experience you have with those ages.

T3: Three to four, it is pretty significant, I would say. When I first started teaching at Salem a couple years ago, I was teaching three year olds, and the class that I have in kindergarten now was that first class. So just seeing how much more they're comprehending from [age] three [compared] to five is amazing. And they are very inquisitive. If there's something they don't understand, they will ask, especially while I am reading. Sometimes it gets to be so much I have to ask them to stop and ask their questions at the end. And that's where that whole language piece, again, with just the parents reading to them and hearing books at school is big. So I guess that's the one caution when writing books for younger children, you want to include some difficult vocabulary so their vocabulary is continuing to grow. You don't want everything so easy so that they don't have the opportunity to learn new words and new concepts. So it's kind of like that delicate balance you have to . . . I would say if there's one or two bigger uncommon words in a book, I think that's good for kids and for adults too because it just . . . The one thing I would recommend, though, is if you did have, like if you were doing the story of David and you were referencing specific parts of Goliath's armor, I would make sure that whatever vocabulary word you chose, you would make sure that that's in the picture, like the shield, so then the parent can reference that and then the child can get an idea of, "Oh, that's a shield. That's what it looks like." So making those connections, because that's great. Definitely that helps build vocabulary and comprehension.

A: And I guess, you kind of answered the same thing--my next question was from age four to age five. You kind of showed in the previous answer from age 3 to age 5.

T3: Yeah, those whole early years, even all the way down to [age] 1, when they're learning to speak and that development is happening, they say early childhood really is from birth to age 8, where anywhere between that window is when that development really takes off, and for some kids it happens really, really young, even at 1 or 2. We have three year olds at our school that are already reading, and I have kids in kindergarten who only know eight letters of the alphabet, so it's really a big window. Usually by age 8 they say that's kind of where it tops off, and everybody is almost on the same playing field again when it comes to reading and comprehension, and you know, there's not such a vast difference as there was from the beginning. It kind of catches up.

A: Mmmhmm. They all kind of get caught up.

T3: You know, you still have your differences, but you can tell that they're, that it's close again. Kind of like when a baby is born and some will crawl earlier than others, or sit, or walk. The same is true with reading and language.

A: Yeah, for some their brain develops and then they get it all of a sudden.

T3: Right. Exactly.

A: I asked it because it seems that--is it Piaget--is that how you say it?--

T3: Yeah.

A: --with his breakdown like age two to seven is one group, and so all of the research just deals with the whole group all at once. I am trying to focus on three, four, and five year olds, but I can't find any research that says anything about, well a three year old can do this, and a four year old can do this that a three year old couldn't do. And then a five year old can do this that four year olds couldn't do. You know, I can't, it seems like they just all kind of treat it as this is the process, and maybe it's partly because kids go through it at different times. It's not like every three year old can do this.

T3: Right. And Piaget too, it might have been that his research was so early on that today—I'm trying to think if there's someone I could...

A: Karis has told me about somebody, Ericson...

T3: Oh,

A: He's a big one that like has continued that research. That's what she said.

T3: Ok, and then another one you might want to tap into a little bit that's good with development is Reggio It's an early childhood philosophy basically, but in the studies you

can read a little about child development too, and just kind of touches on how kids develop at different rates, but you should be able to get some kind of baseline somewhere. Maybe even looking in some of the High Scope. Just research High Scope once and see what you come up with. They have a lot of charts and graphs that show a child at this age should be able to do this. A child at this age should be able to do that.

A: Yeah.

T3: At MLC that was kind of their main focus with early childhood education, and I know, I think, they're kind of switching from the High Scope model towards Reggio, so they might even have something or somewhere they could direct you to for that type of stuff.

A: Alright. My advisor for this project is Professor Loomis at MLC, so maybe I'll just ask her about that High Scope stuff.

T3: Yeah, ask her if there is somewhere she can direct you to get a better feel of that.

A: Ok.

T3: Yeah, it really is fascinating, those early years.

A: How do you explain or use religious vocabulary with children? For example, "salvation", or justification", or the big words like that?

T3: Yeah, "salvation" I start already with Adam and Eve and explain that to them, that God had a plan and this Jesus is God's plan. And then I try and transition from that to that salvation is a gift from God. "Justification", that gets tricky. I never come right out and say, "Justification is" "Salvation", I do actually bring up the term after a while because I think that something that some of my higher level kids can just hear and over time through the examples I talk about, Jesus saving us, they can make that connection better. Justification is tricky. I don't know if I have ever come right out and used that term with the little guys. I guess I do more explaining what it is more so than this is what it is and this is the word that describes it because I think that it is tricky. Did you find anyone who used it? [laughing]

A: Not yet.

T3: Ok! [Laughing] Even in Christ-Light they don't. I don't even recall "salvation" coming up as a key term that you would teach to the little ones. I don't know where that's even introduced to be honest with you.

A: Yeah. Part of my goal with that question is to kind of see how far people go with big words and where you kind of say, "Well, maybe when they're older."

T3: Well, I guess I kind of gauge it on my kids and what types of questions they're asking. The kids who, you know, it is just going to go over their heads, I just let them kind of...ok. Now this is the time for those higher level kids who are really curious about this and they've obviously heard these kinds of terms before. I don't think I've had any... I'm trying to think if there's something recent that...usually they...I did have one student once ask me about purgatory as a four year old, so that was a term, but he had Catholic family members, so that was interesting to try and...I think when all was said and done, though, I don't think he understood really, honestly, what it even meant, and I probably...I don't know if I even helped him to understand what it wasn't, but I finally just said, "There's a heaven and a hell, and you're going to go to heaven if you believe in Jesus, or hell if you don't." But there are kids out there that will once in a while ask questions like that, and that's... if you used a word like "salvation" in your book, I guess if you had some sort of illustration that referenced, if you had a picture of Jesus coming out of the tomb, that would help them make that connection, though. I wouldn't discourage you from using it.

A: Last question. Respond to this concerned parent. Why try to teach Biblical concepts to such young children when even adults can't understand them? So, I guess maybe just an example of if you're talking about the Trinity.

T3: Oh, sure, pick an easy one, right! [laughing] I'm doing parent-teacher conferences.

A: See, I feel like that's when a parent would say, "*Adults* don't understand that, so..."

T3: I'm so thankful I haven't had a situation like that but, I would just bring them back to the Bible. I guess that's the first thing I would do. First, I would text my husband real fast and say, what's a good passage I can go to quickly [laughing] and then take them back to the Bible. That's when we rely on our pastors, though too, because when it starts to get where parents are questioning a lot, even when they've been told that this is what your kids are going to be taught, I always tell them [the pastors] there's something going on, that that parent is looking for some spiritual guidance or just has questions about. Usually it's something spiritual, and usually, well in my case when my husband's been the pastor, there have been underlying issues, and then he can help take them to that next step. But you have to have that teamwork because sometimes it is, I feel just gets to be too much for the teacher at some point and you need to have your pastor buddy to help you out a little bit. Sometimes they just need someone to talk to and open up to. But I would definitely start with the Bible, and if they still are questioning, sometimes I know I've had colleagues who especially with creation, that's one where sometimes parents will just push and push and push. In that case I have just looked at them and said, "Well, we believe Scripture to be the true word of God, and this is what the Bible says, and this is what we believe," and usually they are quiet after that or they will ask more questions and the Holy Spirit will work in their hearts and they will see it to be the truth, but yeah, that can be the interesting part of the ministry for sure. [laughing]

A: Yeah, when people don't follow the American common sense to let everyone just be nice.

T3: Exactly. "This is my truth. What's your truth is your truth."

A: Which is good, though. If they don't ask, then you can't tell them the truth, so...or at least you don't have that opportunity to do so.

T3: Right, it kind of opens the door. Yep, for sure.

A: Ok, well those are all my questions.

T3: Alright.

Parent Interview/Surveys

Parent #1

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
After one time, they know how much interest they have. After several times, they can help me read. 😊
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
 - A) Purpose—To find a love of reading, quality time together, and to enrichen their knowledge and understanding.
 - B) Goals—to enjoy books and be able to read and understand them more then they're ready.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Their interest, topics they understand, appropriate content for them.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
We use the context, look at the pictures, Good (if necessary 😊)
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It enrichens it; it's quality alone time we get to share with them.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
We do—not often enough. Our children are finally at ages where church won't be just about keeping them focused. Once we attend church more, we're hoping to open our home to more discussion on Jesus and the Bible.

Parent #2

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
My children tend to enjoy the same books repeatedly to the point they can remember the words—after time they like to switch to a new story.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
To enjoy reading, entertain, and learn.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Age appropriate, positive message.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
Explain the word in a different manner or use it in a sentence and example that is understandable.

5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It is a peaceful transition time at night, they sit physically close to me, I engage each child on their own level and am able to give them individual time.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
We review what is taught in church and I listen to what the children understand from those teachings and enhance each thought.

Parent #3

My child is a 5 yr old girl. To answer your questions:

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
For new books, I would say only about half, and only the parts in the story that she really finds amusing. Regarding her favorite books that are read over and over, she practically will memorize them.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
I read to my child in the hopes that she will one day become a good reader and like to read; or so they say it helps achieve that goal when you read to your kids.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
We read all kinds of stories/books. Obviously ones with pictures helps with attention :)
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
My child always asks 'what does that mean' when she doesn't know a word, so I will define the word, usually using synonyms.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
Over the years, I have been the main parent to read to her, and now it seems that it is I whom she prefers to be read to by. If Daddy offers to read, she says 'no, I want Mommy to.'
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Yes, several times per week I read to her from a children's bible (that has pictures), and sometimes she asks crazy questions about death (Jesus helps me answer those). One time she said she wished that Mommy and Daddy would never die and I ended up telling her that we live forever, just not here on earth. She was all smiles after that :)

One thing that I've noticed that catches her attention more when we read the children's bible is if we look at a map afterwards. For example when Abram/Abraham walked to Canaan, we traced his steps on the map and saw how far it was that he had to walk.

Hope this helps. If you have any more questions for me, feel free to ask. I hope God shows you favor when writing your thesis.

Parent #4

Mr. Pappenfuss,
Here is the response to your questionnaire.

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
My daughter often remember books and stories I have read to her that I have forgotten. We do lots of reading together usually 2 or more hours of reading per day. I am a homeschool Mom and Jaynie will often participate in the read-a-loud portions of our families at home studies.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
My purpose and goals pertaining to my child's reading are to foster a love of reading that will lead to independent study habits. Once a child has mastered reading there is no limit to what they are able to learn on their own and they then may cultivate their own interests and goals for pursuing their God given gifts.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
The books I choose are varied. My daughter is 5 years old. When she began showing an interest in reading at age 3, I wanted her to experience success, so I started with an alphabet chart and praised her for "reading" letters and then progressed to a word family chart and after she had master these I brought out Dr. Seuss "Hop on Pop and "Go Dog Go". When success came with these simple silly books I introduced her to the first grade bible reader from the My Father's World curriculum. Now I encourage her to choose books from the Library with morals to the stories such as Curious George, Clifford, Thomas the Train, and I allow some Little Pony and Barbie books but I review them to make sure the content is what I consider appropriate. Jaynie enjoys having the Little House books by Laura Ingalls Wilder read to her at night for bedtime.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
If Jaynie does not understand a word, I often will re-read the sentence to her slowly and ask her what she thinks it means when she takes the time to listen to the word in question in context. If she still does not understand the meaning, then I offer her synonyms and opposites until she and I are both confident in her knowing the word. I will often revisit the word or words and quiz her on the meaning when we are through. Sometimes for fun I pose the question as a "candy question"—she can win candy for a correct answer.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
Teaching a child how to read and/or reading to them can greatly strengthen your relational bond. If you are careful to pay attention to the kinds of stories and books your children enjoy and how they react to certain characters and story plots, it can give you great insight to who God designed your child to be.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
My children and I read the bible daily and talk about our faith in Jesus at home and with others. I often read to my children books based on the lives of missionaries this gives great testimony to faith that others have and demonstrates how obstacles are able to be overcome in life by this kind of faith.

Parent #5

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
They usually remember the books very well. They begin to like certain stories and want to read them over and over. Eventually they memorize the words of the story that go with certain pictures, even though they cannot read yet. You can tell which stories make certain impressions on them because they will talk about specific things from the stories for days.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
Our purpose is to get our children to enjoy reading which will hopefully stay with them the rest of their lives. We started reading to them when they were babies. Even though they couldn't understand us, they were very attentive. They have loved reading books since then. Our goal is to teach them that reading is fun while being educational. When they get to school age, they won't see reading as a chore, but actually enjoy it. We also ask questions now and then to see if they can remember what the story was about and what they learned from the story. They will sometimes sit by themselves with a book and tell the story from what they remember.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
We read all different types of books. Fun books, silly books, learning books, etc. We started out with short books, where the stories weren't too complicated. As our children get older, we can see what their interests are and we try to read books they we know they would be interested in. We also look at their age and things they are dealing with at the time (like sharing, saying sorry, learning to tie shoes, learning to read) that may help in their growth. We also listen to them about the books they like. They may be in the mood for a book they know by heart or a sing along book, etc.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
If they don't understand a word, they will ask what it means. We try to explain what it means by using other words they are familiar with. Sometimes it's hard and they don't understand, but we keep trying. They are so interested in learning new things when they are young. We stop throughout the story to interact with them and briefly discuss the page we just read. It makes them think about what they're reading and not just listening and looking at pictures. We can associate the story with their own lives, which makes it more understandable to them.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
Reading with them makes us closer as a family. It's our time together, just us enjoying a story. They really enjoy sitting on our laps being close to us as we look through the books together. We take them to the library and let them pick out books. It's an outing for the family that they get excited about. We read stories every night before bed and it has become part of their routine. They like reading more when we are reading with them.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Yes, we talk often about Jesus with our children. We pray together before meals and before bed. They discuss Jesus and the Bible in school and when they get home we discuss with them what they learned. As they have gotten older, they communicate better with us and what Jesus says they should or should not do. They are clearly

understanding what his message is and enjoy relating that message to us and discussing it. We have children's Bibles for them which is in a format they can understand. Words that they can understand with pictures, etc. We have read the regular Bible and it doesn't keep their attention as much as the Bibles that have been made for children.

I hope this was helpful.

Parent #6

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
Erin remembers a great deal and learns a lot from the books we read. Especially those we read often.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
First and foremost we read for the pure enjoyment of being together. You have a special time with just you and your child.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Usually when we read we take turns choosing which books to read. We learn lots of new vocabulary from reading.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
We pronounce the word and explain what it means in a manner she understands.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It is a very loving, cuddling time for us. We can sit close, giggle, and just be together.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
We do, sadly most of the time it's after Sunday school when they've had a lesson. Over the last year or so though we have lost several family members so we've had many talks about heaven and how we still love those who have gone before us. Erin worries sometimes if I will still love her when I am in heaven. I have assured her that I will always love her. Sometimes I'm not sure they best way to explain things.

Parent #7

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
I think they remember them pretty well. Even my 2 year old will go get a book I ask for and say a word from it before we start reading it. Ex: "bear"
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
I want them to enjoy reading. I also want them to learn from it, but mostly to enjoy. The learning is part of the process.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
When they are little, I choose them sometimes or read the ones they go and pick. The older ones (4 and 6) I let them choose. If I suggest one, they sometimes like that too.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
We talk about that word and what it means.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?

Not sure but it is something we do every night before bed. They look forward to it and if we have a night that gets too late and we try to skip reading they get upset and want to read.

6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?

We will do the little children Bible stories from school and from the little Bible and other book from 3k and 4k last year. I would say 3 times per week on average. (I have a 2 year old, 4 year old, and 6 year old.)

Parent #8

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
Remember them very well, especially if they are books that they like.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
Bonding, Nap + Nighttime routing, get them to enjoy books/interest in reading
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Before they can choose their own books, we choose age-appropriate books, some educational (colors, numbers, shapes) + other stories based on characters or interesting. When they can choose we buy them books based on their interest, or that may teach them valuable lessons.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
Try to explain it in their terms as best we can.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
Something for them to look forward to doing with us at nap or nighttime. They feel comfortable bringing books up to us to read randomly during the day. Just something that we can share together.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Yes, nearly a daily basis. Say prayers daily. Oldest child is in Sunday school and also attends St Pauls to. He is starting to develop a better understanding of Jesus /God and their meaning in our lives.

Parent #9

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
Very much—sometimes memorize
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
To show them / teach them reading skills / enhance imagination / introduce them to something new
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
My child picks often or we read books that have a good message.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
Explain them the meaning
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It's cozy time—we learn together!

6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Yes, we read her Bible stories, talk about Bible verses and attend church. At least 3x a week.

Parent #10

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
They remember most of them ☺
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
We read to our kids because it gives us “down” time together. We love book and they love to look and read them.
Purpose: to have that time set aside to laugh and learn with them and instill a love for reading.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
We pick them out together: seasonal, favorite authors, subjects, pictures
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
I finish the sentence and go back and explain it to them.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
Some of my favorite memories are sitting with my kids and reading. I will miss that when they get older.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Everyday!

Parent #11

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
Very much
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
To develop their vocabulary
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
I choose age appropriate books that I enjoy reading to them.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
I explain the meaning of the word or use a familiar word in its place.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It's created 'snuggle' time (my kids are ages 1 and 3)
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Yes, daily and nightly though prayers.

Parent #12

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
Almost word for word
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?

- Learning to recognize words while enjoying the story
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Not too complicated for their age—they like interactive books/popup books.
 4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
Explain what it means
 5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
They love to sit and listen
 6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
[no response]

Parent #13

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
They seem to remember every story.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
Purposes: A) Quiet Time B) Learning C) A chance to sit close D) Fun
Goals: to teach them learning is fun
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
I choose books by their interests (kids), to teach a new concept, and to broaden their interests with topics that are new to them
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
I explain it by comparing it to something they do understand ie a situation or thing they've seen or done
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It makes us closer
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
We talk with our kids about Christ when a situation presents itself...meal time, bed time, sibling arguments, changing of seasons and plants and animals, holidays, Sunday school, we have some Christian based books.

Parent #14

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
Depends on how often you read that book and the interval of time between readings of that title. For example, if I read a book 2 or 3 times over 3 nights—a week or a month later he will still know that book. Read it once and then 6 months later his memory will be slight.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
To teach, train challenge, explore new things, people, places and situations.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Many times they will pick, sometimes we do. We have always encouraged variety and the kids now choose accordingly.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?

Define, explain using real world examples, then ask them for an example or demonstration of the word.

5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It provides us with family time.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Every day—talk about. Weekly, family Bible study and reading (our oldest who is 6 loves to read for all of us)

Parent #15

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
My daughter remembers books very well.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
Learning and for fun
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
educational
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
Explain it to them
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It has made our relationship stronger.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Sometimes, but not often.

Parent #16

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
Most or all of the story.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
To get them ready for school and advance their skills above their peers.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
By age
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
Pronounce and explain it
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It is in our nightly routine
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Yes, daily.

Parent #17

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
They remember their favorites, mostly the funny ones.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?

- So that they will like to read.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Something that fits with the season
 4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
Explain it to them
 5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It is a nice, calm time together.
 6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Yes, weekly.

Parent #18

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
I would say 80%-90%.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
Spending time, learning words, enjoying stories, learning lesson
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Stories from my childhood and stories that may have a good lesson to them
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
We sound it out and talk about what it means.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It is definitely a bonding time.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Yes, we try to incorporate it every few days and especially Sunday and the importance of church, Christmas as well and what it is about.

Parent #19

1. How much do your children remember the books that you read to them?
Quite a bit. They sometimes remember unique facts. Typically they remember stories with repetitive language.
2. What are your purposes for and goals of reading to your children?
To model a love of reading and lifetime reading behaviors. To promote positive early literary habits—and time for calm snuggling.
3. How do you choose which books to read to your children?
Our kids choose from the many we have at home and some from school or library.
4. If you encounter a word your children don't understand, what do you do?
If they ask we explain it. Sometimes we ask them what it means.
5. How has reading with your children affected your relationship with them?
It has a positive effect.
6. Do you talk with your children about faith in Jesus and about the Bible? If so, how often?
Possibly once a week or when we choose a story from our stash about Jesus—and during goodnight prayers. ☺