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# Part 1

## 10 Priorities for Guiding Children to Understand and Treasure the Bible

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### Introduction

In Bible times, it was a traditional Jewish custom for parents to begin instructing their children in the Scriptures when they reached five years old (early childhood).<sup>4</sup> In the case of Timothy, we are told that his mother and grandmother were instrumental in that instruction (2 Timothy 1:5). At some point in Timothy's life, the Apostle Paul also became a teacher and mentor. In order to prepare and encourage Timothy to stand firm in his faith during the trials that were sure to come, Paul reminded Timothy,

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it<sup>15</sup> and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,<sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)*

These timeless words serve to remind every believer, in each successive generation, of the great responsibility entrusted to us. The sacred writings—only the Old Testament at that time—were diligently taught to Timothy in a manner that guided him toward

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<sup>4</sup> *The Reformation Study Bible*, edited by R. C. Sproul (Sanford, Fla.: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1764.

## Sample

faith in Christ, trained him in godliness, and equipped him for a life of fruitful service.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, “acquainting” children with the Scriptures is not simply teaching them *facts about* the Bible. It’s not simply making sure they read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It’s not simply teaching them the essential doctrines of the Bible or encouraging them to memorize a certain number of verses. The aim and goal should be to...

*...acquaint our children with the breadth, depth, and authority of Scripture so that they would come to know, honor, and treasure the God of the Bible, setting their hope in Christ alone, and be trained and equipped to live as His faithful disciples for the glory of God.*<sup>6</sup>

This statement could be used as a helpful definition of what is meant by “biblical literacy.” Defined as such, biblical literacy aims toward *heart transformation*, resulting in repentance from sin, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, walking in newness of life, loving God as your greatest treasure, and submitting to His ways. In a sense, biblical literacy is the wood and fuel of Christian discipleship which, Lord willing, is set aflame by the Holy Spirit in the lives of our children and students. *We* cannot set the heart aflame (regeneration), but we are called to carefully instruct them in how to properly read, examine, study, meditate on, and rightly respond to the Bible, providing all the necessary wood and fuel for the Holy Spirit to act upon.

That said, is this what is actually happening in the majority of Christian homes and churches?

*Every study of the internal life of the churches shows that they are becoming increasingly less literate biblically.*<sup>7</sup>

*We will not believe more than we know, and we will not live higher than our beliefs. The many fronts of Christian compromise in this generation can be directly traced to biblical illiteracy in*

<sup>5</sup> See also: John 20:31; Romans 10:17; Romans 15:4; John 17:17; Colossians 1:9-10; 2 Peter 1:3.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from the Truth78 Vision Statement: [Truth78.org/vision-overview](http://Truth78.org/vision-overview)

<sup>7</sup> David Wells. “The Soul-Shaping Reality of the Gospel: An Interview with David Wells.” January 1, 2011. [ligonier.org/learn/articles/soul-shaping-reality-gospel-interview-david-wells](http://ligonier.org/learn/articles/soul-shaping-reality-gospel-interview-david-wells)

## Sample

*the pews and the absence of biblical preaching and teaching in our homes and churches...This generation must get deadly serious about the problem of biblical illiteracy...*<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, when it comes to children and youth, I have seen the problem of biblical *illiteracy* creep into even the most biblically solid churches. There may be a wonderful variety of robust Bible classes for adults, and yet children's and youth classes might offer a minimal amount of actual Bible teaching. Furthermore, intentional and ongoing Bible instruction is often absent in many Christian homes. And finally, if we understand that biblical literacy is much more than an academic pursuit—not simply what they know about the Bible, but a pursuit that involves coming “to know, honor, and treasure the God of the Bible, setting their hope in Christ alone...”—then the manner in which we acquaint our children and youth with the Bible also must be considered.

So what would a serious commitment to biblical literacy look like in our homes and churches? What would serve to undergird and focus our efforts? I would like to propose 10 foundational priorities to consider.

### **1. Impress upon children a reverence for the holy nature of the Bible.**

Years ago, I inherited a beautiful cut-glass beverage set that had been a wedding gift to my grandma. It is a valuable and precious heirloom. But what if you came to my house and saw that lovely beverage set filled with rusty nails, screws, nuts, and bolts in the garage? What would this communicate to you, and why would it matter?

Now consider the Bible. What will our children and students observe about our demeanor and interaction with God's Word? Will they observe reverence and honor? Will they see us handling and interacting with God's Word as if we hold a priceless treasure in our hands? Are we giving them an understanding of the magnitude of what it means that Scripture is *God-breathed*, meaning that God

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<sup>8</sup> Albert Mohler. "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem." January 20, 2016. [albertmohler.com/2016/01/20/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem-4](http://albertmohler.com/2016/01/20/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem-4)

## Sample

is the source and ultimate Author of the Bible and, therefore, the Bible holds absolute authority over our lives? Will they hear us speak in a manner that shows unwavering confidence in God's Word as absolute, unchanging Truth? (See these references on the *inerrancy* of Scripture: Proverbs 30:5; Isaiah 40:8; Isaiah 45:19; and John 17:17).<sup>9</sup> Will we demonstrate that the Bible is understandable, clearly telling us about the most important things, especially what is necessary for us to be saved and to live a life that is pleasing to God? (See these references on the *clarity* and *necessity* of Scripture: Psalm 119:130 and Romans 10:13-17.) Will we communicate to them that the Bible we hold in our hands is *complete* and contains everything that is needed for life and godliness? In other words, the Bible is *sufficient* to answer every spiritual question and need that we have (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

It used to be that most Bibles had very classic-looking covers with the words "The Holy Bible" front and center, "Holy" meaning set apart and utterly unique. However, many Bibles marketed for children today look more like comic books. Does that help or hinder children in having an awe-filled respect for God's Word?<sup>10</sup>

Both in the classroom and at home, our demeanor toward the Bible should reflect a holy reverence. On more than one occasion, I have stopped a Sunday school lesson because I observed children treating the Bible in a flippant or disrespectful manner: standing on their Bibles, using the Bible to sword fight with someone sitting next to them, throwing it haphazardly on the floor, or just playing with the pages. I reminded them that this is God's holy Word. It's not to be trifled with. One simple way to continually remind children of this is to say something like this: "Listen very carefully and pay attention. We are going to read from God's Word. God's words are holy, righteous, and good. They are the most special words of all!"

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9 I highly recommend Jon Bloom's short article, "Be Ready to Answer Your Kids' Questions About the Bible," published on October 13, 2014, on [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org) ([desiringgod.org/articles/be-ready-to-answer-your-kids-questions-about-the-bible](http://desiringgod.org/articles/be-ready-to-answer-your-kids-questions-about-the-bible)). Another resource that is extremely helpful for introducing children to the holy nature of the Bible is the book, *God's Word* by Sally Michael ([Truth78.org/gods-word](http://Truth78.org/gods-word)).

10 Also see "Four Compelling Reasons to Use a Printed Bible When Teaching," published August 22, 2019, at [Truth78.org/Truth78.org/blog/post/four-reasons-to-use-a-printed-bible-when-teaching-children-and-youth-2](http://Truth78.org/Truth78.org/blog/post/four-reasons-to-use-a-printed-bible-when-teaching-children-and-youth-2).

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*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)*

These timeless words, written to Timothy by the Apostle Paul, serve to remind every believer in each successive generation of the great responsibility entrusted to us. We are to diligently teach God's truth—the Bible—to our children and students in a manner that guides them toward a vibrant faith in Christ, walking in His ways, and being equipped for a life of fruitful service. This is the essence and goal of *biblical literacy*.

This two-part booklet has been written to help inspire and better equip the church and home to raise up a generation of children who *know* and *love* the Bible. Part 1 provides 10 foundational priorities to pursue. Part 2 gives practical guidance for training children in various age categories to read and study the Bible.

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Jill has taught Sunday school for more than 30 years. Her desire for God-centered, Gospel-focused, biblically rich teaching led her to write children's and youth curriculum for Truth78. Some titles include *Jesus, What a Savior!*; *The ABCs of God*; *To Be Like Jesus*; and *Your Word Is Truth*. Jill also develops training seminars, articles, and other resources relating to children's and youth ministry. She and her husband, Bruce, live in the Minneapolis area and enjoy spending time with their daughter Sarah and her husband Matt, son Jacob and his wife Amanda, and a growing number of grandchildren.

Truth78 is a vision-oriented ministry for the next generations—that they may know, honor, and treasure God, setting their hope in Christ alone, so that they will live as faithful disciples for the glory of God.

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