

# The Bible and the Child

*“and that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1Tim.3:15).*



“The Infant Samuel” James Sant (1820-1916)

Derrick Harrison MA

## ***1. The Bible and the Child***



*"Children are not a distraction from more important work, they are the most important work." ~ C.S. Lewis.*

The Bible was written for children, for their nourishment, their spiritual and intellectual development and for their enjoyment. Looking at it from a child's perspective the Bible takes on a new look altogether. Imagine looking out on the big world from the viewpoint of a little mouse like Stuart Little - how different things would look and what fun and what terrors! The Bible requires a vivid imagination to make it live and a child has one.

Of course, there are whole tracts of rough terrain and perilous pitfalls in the Bible that are impossible for a child to cross without some help, but a whole lot of adults also struggle with certain books in the Bible and with some doctrines which need some simple explanation. You can't expect anyone else to explain to your children about the hard questions which arise when we read the Bible with our children. We do have teachers in the church to explain things to us, we have excellent books to help us, and most important of all, each one have the illumination and insight from the Holy Spirit to help us as we read - and we have our own stories. The author of Scripture and the One who inspired holy men of God to write is the same Holy Spirit who illuminates Scripture as we read it,

*"For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2Pet. 1:21; NKJV).*

However, it is *our* joyous responsibility to make the stories and texts of the Bible to live for our children – for this we will need drama, integrity and imagination!

Do you find the Bible boring? Keep reading and you just might stumble on treasure strewn across the pathway which you have walked a million times before. The Holy Spirit is unpredictable, unconfined, spontaneous and blows where He chooses, *exactly* like the heart of a child. As a child I delighted in the Scriptures but I knew the

presence of Jesus in my heart, and therefore He appears at every turn in the road, often hiding so that he can leap out from behind a bush and surprise me! The man who led me to Jesus was exuberant, full of energy and laughter. He played the piano with such energy and enthusiasm it made my playing seem lifeless and ordinary – I dare not take my eyes off the sheet music in front of me! My young heart leapt in his presence. I imagined Jesus to be like him – I still do.

The title for these 3 chapters is borrowed from a book by Campbell Morgan who was a famous Bible teacher; he dedicated the book to his 8 grandchildren. I am thankful that many of my earliest memories are associated with Christian influences on my life. Godly values were at the root of family life and I grew up with the Bible revered in our home. My granny was appalled at my inability to read so she took a fine print Bible and tried to cajole and to pressure me to read (I have always had an aversion to tiny small print Bibles from that unhelpful encounter). I will talk later about having a Bible that allows you to write in it your personal insights and comments. It is interesting that you can now buy a Bible with space for you to do your journaling - I like that idea very much. I have a pastor friend called Patrick in Kenya who learned to speak English by reading the English Bible (fortunately it was not a King James version).



A crucial change took place in my life when I was seven, when I gave my life to Jesus. My family had moved from the Salvation Army, where I had been dedicated under the “Army” flag which proclaims “the blood and fire.” I once heard a crackly recording of William Booth on the radio saying, “I like my religion like my tea – hot!” Later we joined the Brethren Assembly whose religion was anything but hot. My auntie was the caretaker which meant opening up the Gospel Hall before the Sunday morning meeting. Wednesday night was the Prayer meeting and Bible Study. Not much prayer took place and Bible studies usually involved yet another visit to the tabernacle or the offerings, explained by complicated typology. On Tuesdays I attended the Children’s Bible Class where we would continue our never-ending journey through the Wilderness with the Children of Israel. This was a high point in my week as I had *freedom* from restrictive family rules that seemed to govern my entire life. We also had exciting Bible quizzes and a chapter read from a children’s (Christian) adventure story. I loved reading, my delight as a child on Christmas afternoon was to curl up with a new storybook and lose myself in a world of boy’s adventures.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 1950 I gave my life to Jesus as I sang a simple children’s chorus,

*“Into my heart, into my heart,  
Come into my heart Lord Jesus.  
Come in to-day, Come into stay,  
Come into my heart Lord Jesus.”*

The presence of God was so tangible to me that I looked around the room to see if God was there (I didn't see Him). Going home I experienced the joy of the Lord and danced round a post in the road (quite out of character for me!). This chorus is beautifully sung by a Christian group called "Selah."<sup>1</sup> I sang it in the presence of Jesus and my heart was filled with overflowing joy. The genuineness of my encounter with Jesus proved real in the years that followed.

Actually, my child conversion was the most important event in my life.

The Brethren missionary who led me to Jesus said that I must go home and tell my parents what I had done. I remember telling my Mum. Within one month Mum and Dad also gave their lives to Jesus (they had made no profession of faith before this time and they did not go to church), but my mother had been brought up in "the Army" and had sold the "War Cry" in the local pubs with her older sister Elsie, but she had not been going to church for several years.

The first thing that was of supreme importance for me as a child was the stability and nurture of a Christian home, and this was embodied in my old auntie and granny who had come to the Lord in a revival at the Star Hall in Manchester, a work of God spearheaded by Frank Crossley a famous industrialist. Crossley buses, cars and heavy industrial machinery were famous in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Frank's sister Emma was a friend of my auntie and visited Amy Carmichael in India. If you visit Warwick castle, you will find that the generating plant for heating and lighting is powered by two powerful Crossley engines.

The most important person in my life was my grandfather who had no son of his own and gave his love and attention to me. He was more than a father to me – I was "the son of his old age." I grew up with him. He mentored me and taught me in the context of a loving relationship. I worked with him gardening, and when we got an allotment behind the house, I did the labouring for him – 32 rows of potatoes each year, and a grass path surrounded our allotment which had to be cut several times a year with hand-shears – by me! My family believed in work as a means of character-building and discipline. It worked for me because I actually agreed with their way of thinking. Work was very much a feature of life. I can recall polishing a dozen pairs of shoes at a time (there were 7 of us in the family). These shoes and boots of various sizes had to be brushed and polished to perfection. I very much wanted to please people, not out of weakness but out of genuine desire.

One of my favourite Sunday school stories was the call of Samuel. When the Lord first called his name, he did not recognise the sound of God's voice – it was an unfamiliar voice. We may think that the message that he received for Eli the High Priest was most unsuitable for a child to communicate. It was a message of severe judgment on Eli for allowing his godless sons to pollute and discredit the offerings of

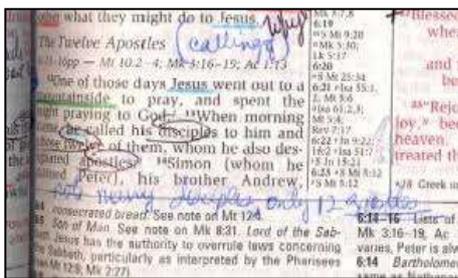
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<sup>1</sup> Selah, – "You Deliver Me" CD

the Lord by their greed and immorality. That is not the point of the story for me, rather it is the comment of the writer about the child Samuel,

*“Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the LORD yet revealed to him” (1Sam.3:7).*

These words are in brackets in the text of Scripture but for me they are profoundly important. The godly background and influence in his life is his praying and caring mother who has dedicated him to the Lord’s service. The child is doing little tasks for Eli in the tabernacle – closing the door at night and ministering to the Lord. It is a pity that Eli had not taken the same diligent care and attention in the rearing of his own sons that he now lavished on the child Samuel. This night of God’s visitation to Samuel was his salvation experience. Samuel had been nourished and cared for by Eli and blessed by his mother’s powerful intercessions, but had not yet given his heart to the Lord Jesus.



I have underlined this verse in my Bible (1Sam.3:7); I have always loved to mark my Bible and to make comments on the text. *Thus, I make my Bible my own possession.* Buy yourself a Bible that has wide enough margins to accommodate your comments and insights. Reading a verse will bring other verses to mind, perhaps a verse you

read yesterday. Develop your own cross reference system that will eventually cover the entire Bible. Marking your Bible is an art and literary form unknown to any but devout lovers of Scripture. It is a record of a multitude of insights from God, and if you have any grandchildren of your own you will be able to pass on these treasured, worn out Bibles to remind them that their grand-parents loved Scripture.



**Joshua Reynolds, “The Infant Samuel”**

1Sam.3:3 is a verse which is eloquently descriptive, yet profound and begins by describing the nearly blind Eli as he lies down to sleep in his bed with the flickering taper of the nearly extinguished light in the temple still giving a meagre light. The young Samuel also lies down in his bed in an adjoining room and goes to sleep, *“and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the LORD where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down” (1 Samuel 3:3; NKJV).*

The young boy lies down next to the old man. God’s hope is not in the old priest but in the young boy. Eli has failed and he has little spiritual and physical sight left, he is almost blind. In one sense it is a desperate hour – the light in the temple has almost gone out and this state of things is expressed in an earlier verse,

*“And the word of the Lord was precious in those days, there was no open vision” (3:1).*

The word of the Lord was precious because it was rare due to closed ears and eyes. We had a text on the wall of my old auntie’s bedroom which was employed as a prayer before the daily reading of the Bible,

*“Open thou my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Thy law” (Ps.119:18).*

The old had expended all its energies and resources and God was about to do a completely new thing, it was about to break forth. This new thing began in God’s strategic timing and in the heart of a childless wife called Hannah. How many times in Scripture God has worked through desperate hearts to ensure the future for His people? When God’s sovereign purposes and the intercessions of this godly woman come up to the throne of God, He instantly moves to fulfil His will. God initiates a new day, a new chapter in His great purposes for Israel. Hannah’s barrenness was an occasion of grief and reproach to her, but she turned her pain and disappointment into prevailing prayer. Samuel was born out of his mother’s travail in prayer. She said, *“For this child I prayed” (1Sam.1:27).*

Prayer here is elective. How many of us are here as a direct result of prevailing prayer? This is certainly true for me. The man who led me to Jesus did not leave it there. He wrote to me and prayed for me constantly. I have a letter he sent to me in 1957; he writes ... *“I am praying for you that one day you will be a missionary and a preacher.”* Prayer helped determine the future course of my life and helped to steer me through the troubled waters of my teenage years, through to the place of total surrender to Jesus at the age of seventeen.

You will find that my document transits from *my* childhood to *our* parenthood, which extends its interest from the child to the parent and then to *our* children. The reality of God’s working in my life must be reproduced in my children. How are children going to be saved who are brought up outside a Christian home? Children today have never heard the name of Jesus! The Sunday School Movement was set up to address this matter – but children don’t go to church anymore and children are taught in school about life outside of God. Am I living in a fantasy world? No, the Christian family is the hope of the world. Take a look at the painting by Harold Copping (p11) entitled: “The Hope of the World.” Of course, Jesus is the “Hope of the World” but in a real sense these children who are so attentive to Jesus’ words are also the light of the world. The gospel we speak and live is the only hope for the world’s salvation, but the hope for the world’s future is our children and their children. I have a particular interest in the work of God which takes place during times of renewal or revival. The story of children in revival is amazing. The last time I was in Zimbabwe I was ill with food poisoning and I read a book about children in revival in Scotland and the last meeting I took, this book was still in my mind. I gave an

invitation for the children to give their life to Jesus. On my first visit to Albania about 13 years ago I saw a group of young boys and the Lord told me to share my story about coming to Jesus as a young boy. I gave an invitation and these boys came rushing to the front; today they are key workers in the church and several have recently got married to wonderful Christian women.

I have written very simply about the importance of the Bible in the life of a child and then about the Bible in the context of the family because I know about those things first-hand. However, I have not given you any details about how to conduct devotions with your children based on Scripture. Last year I was in Tanzania with my daughter Beth and we had a day of teaching at the S.U. headquarters with our missionary friend Penny Elliott who was a children's worker in the church at RRCC many years ago. Beth took the first session, sharing about how she does devotions with her children and I hope Beth will have opportunity to share this later.

Our children will be led to Jesus in the context of godliness and love in the home. John Baptist and Jesus came from a godly home background, read the Gospel account of Luke. We are not demanding perfection here – far from it. Barbara and I have just returned from visiting our son Steve, Manjit and their children in America. Our children have a happy way of reminding us of the moments we may wish to forget when we made mistakes bringing up your children - *“Do you remember Dad when you ...?”* Mistakes are thankfully swallowed up in love. We also did plenty of good things with our children, creating happy memories to be recollected and retold in future years. One thing Steve feels deeply about, (remember we brought up our children living in a house-church) was the presence of God, and the moving of the Holy Spirit in our meetings which had a powerful impact on our children. They grew up in the atmosphere of God's presence and witnessed the great love that we had for each other. They encountered the power of the Word of God ministered by godly preachers and Bible teachers.

Our children do not regret the way we brought them up and several of them are serving the Lord to-day and bringing up children that love the Lord Jesus. Godly children are a gift from Him, and their love for Jesus is entirely due to the grace of the Lord. I could never have imagined the results that followed from that night when I sang my way to Jesus and gave my heart to Him. Each one of us can look back and thank God for His sovereign hand on our life from earliest childhood. My wife Barbara had more to do with the success of our home life than myself, although our marriage and our love for each other has had a profound influence on our children – and still does. They watched mum and dad loving each other, making big mistakes, but serving God the best way they knew how in the context of the church and beyond.

*“The child must see in his parents the joy that Christianity brings” Andrew Murray.*

God gave us the privilege and responsibility of raising children and thus maintaining the candle of the Lord in His tabernacle. God's investment for the future of His work is in the hands of our children. If we and our children fail, He will go out into the world to find children like Samuel, whose hearts will gladly respond to the call of the LORD. He will not allow His cause to fail.

It is a sad fact that the fallout from Christian families is immense, so few children from Christian homes choose to follow the faith of their parents. Samuel like Eli faced ungodly offspring and thus brought the credibility of the priesthood into question, resulting in the clamour for a king to rule over them.

There are promises in the Bible on which we can anchor our faith for future generations of our children. Pray for your future grandchildren and great grandchildren that a godly line will continue through to successive generations,

*“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children” (Prov. 13:22)*

*“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,  
The fruit of the womb is a reward.  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,  
So are the children of one’s youth.  
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;  
They shall not be ashamed,  
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.  
(Ps. 127:3-5; NKJV).*

A prayer for Father’s help in raising godly children,

*“Dear Lord you are our Father and we need your help, please save our children and fulfil your promises to Christian parents. We have given each of our children to you, and we, as fathers and mothers have sought to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph.6:4; NKJV). Holy Spirit bring our children to the feet of Jesus – to yield their hearts to Jesus. Fill them with your life, energy and joy. Call them into the service of the King and give to them the privilege of being end-time labourers in your harvest-field.*

## ***2. The Bible and the Child***



I can speak of my love for the Bible that began when the old elder of our Brethren Assembly enquired each Sunday about my daily reading of the Bible. He always arrived early for the Meeting each “Lord’s Day” morning. He was a middle-class gentleman and a man of business, coming from a family that had their own large and imposing double-fronted shop in the town. He wore gaiters over his immaculately polished black shoes and wore black pin-striped trousers, a camel coloured waistcoat and tailored black jacket to co-ordinate with his trousers. I remember as a child that his face was very wrinkled with deep furrows in his brow (I hoped that I would never have furrows like that) and he had a long hawk nose. I never felt deep affection towards him. He used to bring his Bible in a special bag under his arm. He would make his long walk to my seat at the back of the huge Hall and lowering his face to mine would ask me kindly how many chapters of the Bible I had read that week. I felt that I always had to reply with the appropriate number of chapters – one chapter for each day of the week (I must have thought that that was a reasonable number of chapters to read). This procedure put me to some inconvenience on those Sunday mornings when I would have to get up early and catch up on the chapters I had not read during the week. In hindsight I thank that old elder for making me accountable to him, resulting in a love for the great narrative of the O.T. and the stories about Jesus in the N.T. The book of Revelation scared me. I remember as a child, seeing a “lantern slide” presentation of the Pilgrim’s Progress which had the same frightening effect on me. I had been blessed with a vivid imagination, but fuelled by childhood fears.

Looking back, I feel that the Scriptures, with their numerous stories are written with children in mind. As a child I could not visualize the Garden of Eden to my own satisfaction but the Bedouin tents of Abraham and the great expanse of the desert

skies and the hot arid desert sands were well within the grasp of my childhood imagination. Children have a great ability to articulate their imagination – the deception of Jacob in broad daylight, the eagerness of David to meet the grotesque and ugly blaspheming giant Goliath and the stone that he catapulted into his broad forehead that instantly killed him. The sound of a mallet can be heard as a brave woman named Jael hammers a tent peg into the forehead of the military Commander Sisera as he sleeps exhausted in her tent, drugged by her milk potion. She pins his head to the ground! (This is not quite the bedtime story to read to your little boy or girl – nightmares to follow later!).

The most visited Scripture narratives in childhood are the wonderful stories of Jesus' miracles. I was introduced to these in Sunday school and still love them to-day more than any other part of the Bible. I believe the ministry and the teachings of Jesus are the foundation of my life and the life of the church. Paul says that "Jesus Christ Himself is the cornerstone of the church" (Eph.2:20) and Peter gives a summary of His life and ministry in his first sermon,

*"Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst" (Acts 2:22; NKJV).*

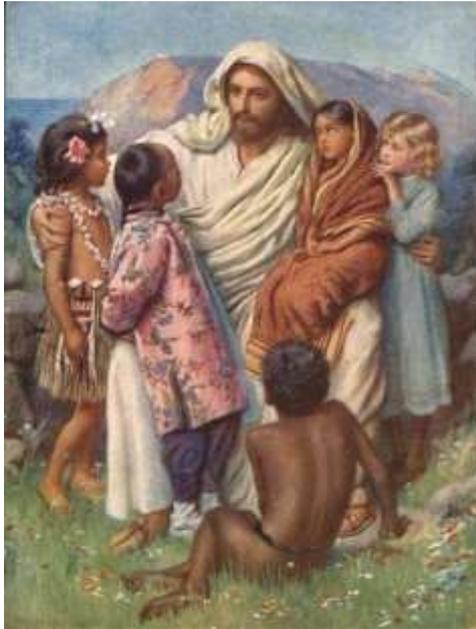
In your imagination's eye you can hear the clay tiles removed from the roof of the house where Jesus is teaching. All eyes are turned to the hole in the ceiling as bright sunlight suddenly floods the room and a sick man is carefully lowered to the floor. Jesus is filled with wonder at the faith of this poor man's friends. How can a child's heart not be captivated by such stories and miracles? Wonder is quickly translated into worship, and reading these stories your child may also believe and come to love the Saviour who forgives and heals.

The miracles of Jesus are so central to my childhood perception of Him. As the years have gone by, I have come to love particular miracles, my favourite is that of the young girl who died and was raised by Jesus. He leaned over to take her hand and spoke gently and kindly to her:

*"He took the child by the hand, and said to her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41).*

A powerful miracle of resurrection took place at that moment and she immediately rose up from her bed and ran into the arms of her parents. This is one of those significant occasions when the original Aramaic language has been retained in the Greek text of Scripture (cf. Mk.14:36; 15:34; Gal.4:6; Rom.8:15). Jesus would have spoken a Galilean form of Aramaic (Mat.26:73). There is a painting of this amazing story in the Palace of Culture in Leningrad, it is life-size and the artist captures the movement of Jesus as He gently leans over to speak to the lifeless form of the child. He didn't shout at her or rebuke anything, He spoke so as not to alarm her, but spoke life into her and she was instantly raised from the dead. Jesus has power over death. This gracious action of Jesus reveals His omnipotent power and His loving

nature. The actions of Jesus demonstrate His divine attributes, which reveal God's inner being.



**Harold Copping, “Jesus the Hope of the world”** In the Bible class I attended as a child there was a beautiful picture of Jesus with several children around Him who are attentive to His words and their eyes are focused on Him. They are not *little* children, but they were older than me. They are from different continents of the world. An Indian girl is sitting on His knee and leaning into Him and Jesus has His arm round two other girls; a Chinese boy in a beautiful silk gown and shining black hair with pigtails is leaning against Jesus’ other knee, looking up into His face. They are listening with joyful attention to His words. There is so much love here in the presence of Jesus. I get the opportunity to revisit

this picture every week and join with these beautiful children in the presence of Jesus. I really love this painting, its rich colours and the group of children from around the world. The picture sits in a big black polished frame in a large meeting room; the setting and decor reveal its original use as a Victorian lounge with its high ceilings and elaborate cornices. The room is now rented out and the couple who run the weekly Bible Class are from my Brethren Assembly.



Every week we resumed our journey with the Children of Israel through the Wilderness (it took *them* 40 years!), this was made possible by use of a teaching-aid called the “flannel-graph” which consisted of a picture background onto which was placed figures or text, which meant that the story was related graphically by cut-out figures that stuck on to the flannel background. I used to love it, and I made my own flannel-graph when I took on a Sunday school class at the age of 12. With great delight and enthusiasm, I used to teach my class.

Jesus was a great story teller, the stories He told are called parables. The later apostles did not seem to have this gift to tell stories; instead their lives provided another mega story, which we call the story of the early church.

My experience of Scripture took a massive leap forward when at the age of 14 my grandfather died. I called him “Pop” (my 15 grandchildren all call me Pops) and in terms of my own heart, he was my father. He nurtured my growth and development from earliest childhood. We slept in the same bed and in school holidays I went to work with him in a large country garden where he was the gardener. He had been formerly a coal and lead miner on the Pennines in Cumbria and in his later years

was a sick man. When he died my world fell apart and I experienced excruciating loneliness, accentuated by the fact that I was a melancholic child by disposition. I was strongly discouraged from having friends in case they should have an adverse influence on me. Through the years a few people have found my seriousness and my silences rather “off putting” as if I was strongly censoring them for some unknown misdemeanour!

One word described my private world following my grandfather’s death and that was loneliness. Can a child of 14 be lonely? Yes, desperately and especially in the last hour of the day before sleep when I was alone with myself. It was at this crucial time I opened my Bible and with a notebook and pen I began to write my own childhood commentary on the verses I was reading. Beginning at Genesis ch.1 I began to write down what God was showing to me night after night. From the first day I opened my Bible, God revealed to me the Scriptures and I wrote freely what came to me, sentence by sentence. I discovered my spiritual gift as God gave to me the joy of revelation to replace my loneliness. No one can teach from the Scripture unless it has first been revealed by the Holy Spirit. Loneliness is a heart condition and underlines our need for friends to love and to enjoy, friends who empathise with us and encourage us in our seasons of grief and pain. I found God in His word but I had no friends my own age or family who came alongside me at this time. The family were probably seeking to come to terms with their own grief.

The Brethren denomination was renowned for their knowledge of Scripture. In my teenage years I attended a Conference on New Year’s Day for the purpose of expounding the Word of God. I used to go alone to these Conferences and later I would write up my notes and engage in further Bible study. My heart and mind were “strangely warmed” during these times of “in depth” Bible study. *The Scriptures have the power to impact our heart and mind and provide one of the primary means God uses to quicken our understanding.* We need this ministry of the Holy Spirit working through Scripture due to our utter ignorance of truth and righteousness apart from His revelation. All God’s children may continually experience the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture.

We need the Bible to completely change our thinking and our values and for this to take place continually. Unless the Word of God has a central place in our life and in the life of our church, we will move off centre. Scripture must impact our patterns of thought, our values and our decisions. We are not only Bible believing Christians but we *think* Bible and our *actions* are informed by the Bible. There is a consistency between what we read in the Bible and who we are in real life. This is what the Scriptures means by godliness, or to borrow a biblical phrase, “to be spiritually minded.”

Christians often pray the words of Ps.119:18 before they begin to read their Bible, *“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Your Law.”*

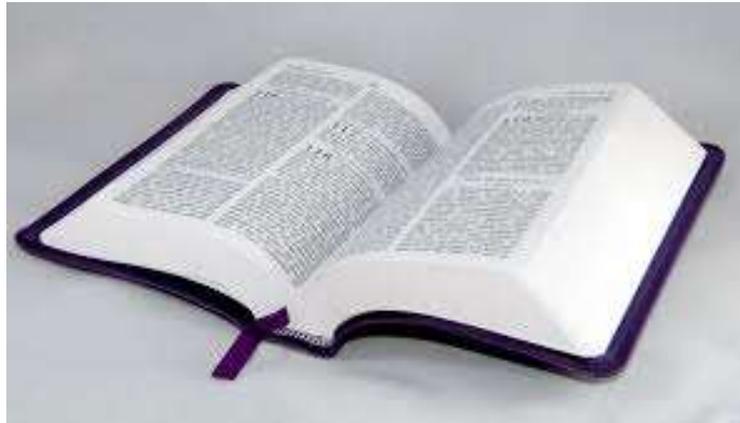
Another verse in the psalm says, “Your word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (v11).

This hymn written by William Cowper, expresses the importance and the awesome splendour of the Bible and the ministry of the Spirit revealing its truths,

*A glory gilds the sacred page,  
Majestic like the sun;  
It gives a light to every age;  
It gives, but borrows none.*

*The Spirit breathes upon the Word  
And brings the truth to sight;  
Precepts and promises afford  
A sanctifying light.*

*The hand that gave it still supplies  
The gracious light and heat;  
His truths upon the nations rise;  
They rise, but never set.*



Derrick Harrison, March 2011

### ***3. The Bible and the Child***



Timothy had been denied the rite of circumcision by the priest of the local synagogue because his father was not a believer in the God of Israel. The matter was not rectified until Paul took the young man Timothy and circumcised him. He did this because of his mission to the Jews and thus he wanted to show that circumcised Jews were also eligible for the blessings of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Alexander Whyte, a famous Scottish preacher who wrote about the family of Timothy says that Lois was a God-fearing woman who “made the tremendous mistake of giving her only daughter Eunice in marriage to a man who was still an absolute heathen.” How two such women fell into this trap was probably due to the good intentions and wishes of Eunice’s fiancé of becoming a Jewish proselyte. Lois “could hold out no longer and gave her long-withheld consent to this mixed marriage. And in this way Eunice, a daughter of Abraham became the married wife of this still heathen man; his wife, and in due time the mother of his uncircumcised sons.” The fact that Timothy was not circumcised speaks for itself. It would seem that “Peter’s beautiful promise” regarding the salvation of the unbelieving husband had not yet taken place,

*“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Pet.3:1-2; NKJV)*

Alexander Whyte suggests that after the birth of Timothy these two women of such genuine faith (2Tim.1:5) “set themselves *all the more* to a far more Scriptural, a far more prayerful, and a far more obedient, life than ever before,” because of the ungodly influence of Eunice’s husband in the home, and that “the two sorely chastened women succeeded in all but compensating their spiritually fatherless child, we have Paul’s testimony to that, and a testimony that Timothy must all his days have read with tears and thanksgivings,”

*“... and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2Tim.3:15; KJV).*

Paul recognized that the same genuine faith that characterized the lives of these two women was also in Timothy (1Tim1:5). The dual impact of a godly parent and the daily reading of Scripture had opened up the heart of young Timothy to God. When Paul came to Lystra and Derbe (Acts Ch.14), no doubt Timothy was one of those new disciples who associated with the apostle and he may well have witnessed his stoning and then him being raised again by the power of God.

This careful and systematic reading of the Bible with our children begins at the earliest age, Timothy was “a child” and Dean Alford in “The Greek Testament” says that this expression carries the learning back to his extreme infancy. When our daughter Katie was still a baby Barbara and I were on mission in Cumbria. We had a college friend Pat who was a single woman student who was at Bible School with us, when we were on mission, she would rock Katie in her arms and sing to her Charles Wesley hymns. Now Katie loves to lead in worship! Pat was following Paul’s instruction, but she was singing Scripture in verse rather than reading it. We have no way of estimating the power of the Scriptures when it is read by those who love the Lord Jesus.

Talking to Jesus in the presence of our children should be as natural as talking to the other members of our family. We, like Lois and Eunice can make it so natural for our children to believe in Jesus and to respond to Him as they respond to the love of their parents. If we love Jesus, we will naturally impart that love to our children. Our daughter Beth who is involved in ministry at RRCC with her husband Gareth and her children Amelia, Phoebe and Hope, has always loved the Lord Jesus and cannot recall a specific moment when she gave her heart to Jesus. Now I like that, because she has grown up *continually* responding to Jesus’ love. Of course, our children have to keep on responding to the Lord throughout their childhood, their teenage years and into adulthood. The response I made in my heart at the age of 7 was very different from the whole hearted response I made to the Lord at the age of 17. Earlier experiences in childhood may not include repentance, but later responses must involve repentance and conscious yielding of one’s entire life to God, believing that He receives the offering up of ourselves to Him. Jesus gave all of Himself for me and He has brought me to the place of sacrifice where I give myself entirely to Him. I am conscious that He has accepted the sacrifice and that in response He gives all of Himself to me.

Paul says that imparting Scripture from the devotional heart of the mother or grandmother will make a child “wise unto salvation” (2Tim.3:15). My missionary friend Valmir, who returned to Brazil after spending several years here working for the Lord, shared with me how his daughter Priscilla, while sitting on her dad’s knee asked if she could receive Jesus into her heart. Of course, her dad was so blessed to lead his daughter to Jesus. At the age of 4½ she had become wise unto salvation, and was baptized at the age of 12. Wonderful! It was Priscilla who many years later reminded her dad about that holy and transforming moment in her childhood when she gave her heart to Jesus. She is now married and has a beautiful Christian family.

Return for a moment to the infant Timothy and his imbibing of Scripture which was as instinctive to him as drinking his mother's milk. The infant child is cradled in his mother's arms as he drinks to his fill. Too young to coordinate his thinking, the little child moves by instinct and appetite and so it is with feeding on Scripture. The matter is not to do with intelligibility but desire, the loving and devotional reading of the Word of God into the heart of the infant. Peter says,

*“As new-born babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1Pet.2:2-3; NKJV).*

A footnote here links our text with 2Tim.3:15; *concerning the fact that the reading of Scripture leads to salvation.* Both Peter and Paul are agreed about this. For Timothy the crisis of salvation came to him when he heard the apostle preaching in his town and he was impacted by the word of God preached in the power of the Holy Spirit – but his heart had already been opened by the purposeful reading of the OT scriptures from earliest childhood. He was also a witness to the healing power of God (Acts Ch.14). We owe it to our children that they also encounter the power of God in the context of the church of which our family is a part. The church is the family of God. Our four children grew up in the church – *literally*, because we were hosting the church and we lived in the same house, and raised our family there. We once went to a “Parent’s Evening” at school to view Matthew’s work and the teacher said to us, “Your son tells lies, he said that you lived in a church.” I said to his teacher, “Well actually we do!” We were part of a network of house churches which began simultaneously during the time of the Charismatic Renewal. Our children were impacted by the presence of God among His people; they were blessed by the love from brothers and sisters in the church and also by men and women of God who stayed in our home.

It was on Paul’s visit to Derbe and Lystra on his second missionary journey that Timothy was recommended by the elders of his house church to accompany Paul and thus learn from him. Paul also recognized the call of God in Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). No one could have foreseen how he would become such a key worker and companion of the apostle (read 1 & 2Timothy), even to the time of his death. But let us not forget that it began with 2 faithful women who did not neglect the one thing needful of mothers and grandmothers with regard to little children and that is to read the Scriptures with devotion and love, believing in the power of the Word of God to feed the heart of a child.

The next stage of reading does involve intelligibility, as the child grows up from childhood to teenage years. I am writing an article on the childhood of Jesus as part of an ongoing Bible study on the life of Christ and suggested that such a project will require a life-time of study and may be the most important study that you and I will ever undertake. Luke is the only Gospel writer who refers to the growth of Jesus throughout childhood,

*“And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him” (Lk.2:40; NKJV).*

These words are reminiscent of similar words describing John the cousin of Jesus, later known as the Baptist,

*“So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel” (Lk. 1:80; NKJV).*

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he charged him to abide in the things which he had learned and had been assured of, adding, *“knowing of whom you have learned them, and that from a babe you have known the sacred writings,” (2Tim.3:14).* As we have said already, Paul is referring to the training by his mother and grandmother. The sacred writings refer to the Hebrew Scriptures, now known to us as the Old Testament. It was when Paul, a devout Jew taught from these same Scriptures and demonstrated their fulfilment in Christ that Timothy’s eyes were opened and faith was quickened in his heart and he was won to the Saviour and became a Christian. Through his companionship with the apostle and sharing in His apostolic labours Timothy became the young man that Paul entrusted with the pastoral responsibility, the teaching ministry and the evangelistic outreach of the church at Ephesus. But it is interesting how Paul charges him to be true to his early training, and thus shows the value of it. My hairdresser said to-day that he had heard some psychiatrist saying that the first 3 years of a child’s life has the most profound influence on the child’s future development – an interesting statement in the light of Timothy’s experience!

Of course, we have much more scope than Eunice or Lois had at their disposal because we have not only the Hebrew Scriptures but we also have the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the greatest life-story ever told about the greatest person who ever lived. Timothy heard nothing of Jesus until he heard it from the mouth of Paul and hearing the story of Jesus, he immediately responded to Him. The Old Testament Scriptures create a hunger and thirst for Him who is hidden there in its pages, waiting to leap out and show Himself at God’s precise moment in history.

The Old Testament is accessible to children, providing a scope for an expansive imagination and providing a narrative that begins in Genesis and comes to its climax in the New Testament in the amazing ministry of Jesus in the four Gospels - His story is the mega story of all history. History is His-story. His life is still impacting millions of people throughout the world today and the Bible is still the best seller and printed in more languages than any other book. The Bible Society has recently celebrated the printing of the 80 millionth Bible and its distribution in China. Wycliffe Bible Translators, the world’s largest scripture translation organisation, believes Bible translation into all of the remaining 2,200 languages used by some 350 million people is possible by 2025 at a cost of 1 billion dollars. The influence of Jesus’ life is more powerful than ever. More people are coming to Jesus Christ than ever before.

Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world and is growing faster than Islam. Glory to Jesus!

We also have in the New Testament, the book of Acts which records the story of the birth of the church and its early history and the amazing spread of the gospel in the Roman Empire. This book is accessible to our children as they leave their childhood behind and begin to find their feet in the family of God and begin to enjoy worship. Children happily do not make the sharp distinction between home and church that adults tend to do. It is so wonderful to see Mum and Dad enjoying the presence of God, singing praises to Jesus and worshipping God in the Holy Spirit – and they too, quite naturally enter into the joy and happiness of the people of God.

The Gospels lead in to the book of Acts and then we have the Epistles, the letters of the 3 key apostles - Paul, Peter and John, alongside other letters. The NT concludes with the book of Revelation which is all about the future, the return of Jesus and the new heaven and earth.

How do we tackle adult issues that may be beyond the grasp of a child? We can simply say, like Jesus to His disciples, that there are some things that still lie hidden from their understanding, things which God will reveal in due time. Children understand that kind of explanation. Even Jesus did not know the time when He would return to earth again because Father had not yet revealed it to Him. The great thing is that children will not be fobbed off with some dismissive comment or faked answer.

Examine the material that is available for children to read the Bible and you will see how they tackle Bible reading with lots of cartoon pictures and things to do alongside reading verses from the Bible. Do not abdicate your responsibility to your children when it comes to supervising and managing their reading of Scripture and take it on yourself to explain to them the difficult parts of the Word of God – that is a challenge for each one of us!

The concluding book in the Bible is the Revelation, a book which sends shock waves through the heart of a child with a vivid and alarming imagination. It is time to hide under the bed covers to avoid the awful judgments of God. This is not a book for the over serious child to read alone. It is in some ways like to the greatest classic of Christian literature, “The Pilgrims Progress” which was written by John Bunyan who was imprisoned several times in Bedford jail for preaching. He was fettered by chains and he dreamed of a poor man called Pilgrim who was bowed down with a heavy haversack on his back full of heavy rocks.

Bunyan realized that this heavy load was the burden of his sin. It got heavier and heavier as he progressed on his journey to the celestial city. This journey through perils (he falls into a bog and struggles to gain the dry land) and temptations (people try divert him from his quest), he eventually coming to a hill and as he looks upwards he sees at the top of this green hill that there is a solitary cross and as he fixes his

attention, he realizes that it is the cross where Jesus died for his load of sin. As he looks there and believes that Jesus died on the cross for his sin, suddenly the great load on his back falls to the ground and rolls down the hill, - he is free! He then continues his journey with a glad heart to the celestial city, but this was not the end of his trials and temptations!

What is terrifying to a child of similar imagination to Bunyan are the graphic descriptions of his adventures along the way, – fierce and ferocious lions who strain on their chains to devour him, an enormous giant who imprisons Pilgrim in Doubting Castle, a bog that sucks him in as he struggles with his increasingly heavy burden, arrows that are shot at him from behind, and evil powers wielding swords that seek to kill him. This is not good bedtime reading for your child, but wait a few years and the story becomes a great play to act. The famous Victorian novelist George MacDonald<sup>2</sup> used to travel from place to place with his family (he had a large number of children), and they would act this story of Pilgrim's perilous journey to the celestial city. It was always a favourite with the Bible students in Zimbabwe. My son Steve has read it to his children and I can remember one holiday in Wales when both he and Manjit (they had not been married very long), went for a walk along the beach at Tenby for a special afternoon together which included a picnic and reading a very old copy of Bunyan's "Holy War."

We have a story to tell to our children that far exceeds anything in the Old Testament! We get to tell our children about Jesus! We can fill our home with the sound of His name and we can tell again to our children how Jesus fed the multitudes with 5 loaves and two small fish, a gift from a small boy, and we can describe in great detail and with animation those incidents of healing that we love. We can win our children before the first shadows of doubt arise in their hearts. We can teach our children to love Jesus by listening to stories about the Saviour we love. Begin now and continue throughout their childhood. You may have a believing husband, Eunice didn't, - but she persisted in her faithfulness and won her son by reading Scripture to him. The same Spirit who inspired Scripture now illuminates Scripture to us and makes it the means of our child's salvation and the means of their growth "in wisdom and stature."

The key to the world's future lies in the Christian homes that we have established and nourished with the Word of God. Our children are a "heritage from the Lord" and we must prepare them to live for the Lord in the midst of a "crooked and perverse generation." These Scriptures from the Old Testament are a mandate from God to instruct our children,

*"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you*

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<sup>2</sup> MacDonald wrote the children's fantasy novels: "The Princess and the Goblin," "The Princess and Curdie," and "Back of the North Wind."

*rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut.6:6-9; NKJV).*

*“Which we have heard and known,  
And our fathers have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children,  
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,  
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (Ps.78:3-4).*

The great challenge raised by this subject of “The Child and the Bible” is (1) the responsibility of parents to put Scripture in its central place in the family and (2) to help their children to establish a regular pattern of reading the Bible daily *and to read Scripture together with them*. As mentors of our children we impart instruction by example and therefore must see that we are consistent readers of Scripture ourselves in the context of our home and family. The love we have for the Word of God will impact our children. We cannot start too early as demonstrated by the example of Lois, Eunice and the infant Timothy. The great challenge that we face with our own children is that their iPhones have already gripped their attention and become their vital means of communication alongside all the amazing accessibility provided by the multi-media to a fascinating world outside the home. It has become difficult to find prime time for Scripture and prayer (and not rushed at the end of the day)! The church needs to engage in continual prayer for our families, the devil who challenged Pilgrim at every turn is still engaged in warfare against our families, especially when it comes to reading the Bible.

Derrick Harrison

February 2011

### ***A Postscript***

The Bible is a wonderful book for those who are happy to linger in its pages at leisure. Rushed reading of Scripture does not please the Lord and it does you no good.

For centuries the Bible impacted the English language and it has become the language of communication in so many countries of the world today. Queen Victoria said that it was the Bible that had made the British Empire the greatest in the history of the world. We no longer have an Empire but the Bible is ever extending its influence throughout the world fulfilling the prophecy,

*“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab.2:14).*

Of course, the reading of the Bible goes alongside the reading of good Christian books. It is disturbing to realize many Christians do not read their Bible daily and it is also disturbing to see that most Christians have no programme of reading either.

There seems to be little interest in Christian education and the church will suffer as a result. It will become weak and unintelligible in the knowledge of God. Preaching is orientated towards Scripture but does not expound Scripture. In Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians he used several times the word "ignorance." His repeatedly exclaimed with incredulity - "don't you *know*?" The truth when it is comprehended and understood is the surest safeguard against carnal practises in your life or in the church and against false teaching. The truth makes men and women of us; it instructs our conscience and guards us against sin. Scripture meditated on and prayed over strengthens the heart and instructs the mind. Paul said to the Corinthians, "We have the mind of Christ." I believe that is one of the most amazing statements in the Bible! I always ask my students – "What does that statement mean?" Read the entire epistle and you will see that in every challenging situation he had the mind of Christ. I don't know about you but I need to read Scripture. I know if I don't read the Bible, I am making shipwreck of my Christian life, I am pulling the plug on my spirituality. Let me remind you of Paul's wise words to young Timothy,

*"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come give attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching.*

*Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of hands of the eldership*

*Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress will be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the teaching. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save yourself and those who hear you" (1Tim.3:12-16).*

I ask myself: "Who am I to instruct dad's and mum's, by telling them to put the Bible at the centre of their homes and to make Bible reading a priority in the life of their child?" All I say is that for me the Bible was of central importance – keeping in mind that there was not a lot to distract my mind, my life was very ordinary and I grew up without a television (see did my children). Nevertheless, I recall as a teenager introducing a family altar into our home, reading each evening the "Daily Light" before kissing each member of the family good-night! This practise was continued long after I left home. I also remember the responsibility I felt towards my grandfather and so as a teenager I began reading the Bible to him each night before he went to sleep.

I have Christian friends whose children are not the Lord's and I am convinced that the fault does not lie with them. If personal godliness was any guarantee of child salvation their children would be saved. I did not write this article to boast or for you to think that I have been more successful than others, or to teach you how to raise your children. At times it may look like that. I actually wrote this article with joy in my heart at the Lord's faithfulness to me personally. At the same time, I realized that my personal life is not a model for anyone else. Each one of us is so unique! I believe

that the priorities which I have emphasised are sound and effective, but you have noticed that I have kept things very simple. If my children love Jesus it is due entirely to the grace of God, to my godly and praying wife, and to the many wonderful Christians who loved our children so much. I have dear Christian friends who are standing in faith for the salvation of their children, knowing that the Lord is faithful to fulfil His promises.

When I look at my life, I see the amazing grace of God extended to me from earliest childhood, even reaching back into the womb where my mother conceived me. When I look back over my life, I am not thinking of accomplishment or success, life's buffetings help us to see things more realistically, – I am overwhelmed by His grace and I wish that I had loved the Lord more, I wish I had prayed more and been more diligent in relating to my Christian friends. I almost envy Paul when he says, "I have finished my course!" I delight in my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and I am blessed. I am always overwhelmed when close friends confide to me that they pray for me daily and I am blessed by faithful men and women who support me financially up to the present time. I don't deserve blessings from any source, but I receive blessings entirely because of grace and love given to me by God and His precious saints. I weep in thankfulness for such overwhelming love.

My love for the truth of Scripture is being poured into students in different countries; I trust that young men and women will get a vision of the greatness of God's word and make it the cornerstone of their life and ministry. The prayer of the Brethren missionary for me has been truly fulfilled when he prayed that I would be a preacher and a missionary. He constantly prayed for me with tears and I am here today because of his prayers. I have indulged myself in reminiscing about my childhood, please forgive me. If you have read up to this point – thank you! I close with a prayer for our children,

*"Dear Lord you are our Father and as a Christian family we need your help in raising our children to love You and to know your Scriptures. Please save our children. We have given our children to you, and we, as fathers and mothers we seek to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph.6:4).*

*Dear Lord Jesus come into their hearts and be with them throughout their childhood and teenage years – like Hannah we give our children to You and desire for them to be engaged in Your eternal purposes for this world's salvation. We ask You to fulfil the promises that you have given to us for each of our children."*

Albania 21/04/2015

