

The Bible and the Child

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TAKING CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE WORLD

THE BIBLE AND THE CHILD (ONE)

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 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 struggle with certain books of the Bible and incomprehensible doctrines also need urgent assistance. Some casual readers of the Bible are like the fearful travellers on the downward road to Jericho, when they see the state of the poor bleeding man accosted by robbers and left for dead they quickly race past on the other side. You cannot afford to do that with Scripture, nor can you leave it all to the pastor to explain - the hard sayings of Jesus or the mystery of suffering, and so on. We have teachers in the church to explain things to us, we have excellent books to help us (the use of study books to help us reading the bible is an important topic we have yet to deal with), and we each one have the illumination and insight from the Holy Spirit to help us as we read. 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” (2 Peter 1:21) (NKJV).

You find the Bible boring? Keep reading and you just might stumble on some treasure along a pathway you have trodden a million times before. The Holy Spirit thankfully is unpredictable, spontaneous and blows where He wills to blow, exactly like the heart of a child.

The title for these 3 articles is borrowed from a book by Campbell Morgan who was a famous Bible teacher; the book was dedicated to his 8 grandchildren. I write these short articles with great thankfulness that some 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 family. 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 with the Bible). I will talk later about having a Bible that allows you to paste in it your personal insights and comments.

A crucial change took place in my life at the age of 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 the 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 became the caretaker which meant opening up the 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 another visit to the tabernacle or the offerings with the intricacies of endless and complicated typology. On Tuesdays I attended Children’s Bible Class where we would continue our endless 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) novel. I loved reading. My delight as a child on Christmas afternoon was to curl up with a new story book and lose myself in a world of boy’s adventures.

On the 18th of October 1950 I gave my life to Jesus, or rather I sang my way to Jesus in 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 that I looked around the room to see if God was there (I didn’t see Him). The missionary who took upon himself to lead 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 and did not go to church).

Two things that are of supreme importance are (1) the background of a Christian family, and (2) the need for childhood conversion. The first was exemplified in my old auntie and granny who had come to the Lord in a revival at Ancoats in Manchester spearheaded by Frank Crossley a famous businessman. Crossley buses and heavy industrial machinery were famous early in the twentieth century. Frank's sister Emma was a friend of my auntie and visited Amy Carmichael in India. If you visit the generating plant for heating and lighting at Warwick castle, which is down by the river underneath the castle you will see two large Crossley engines which provide the energy supply for the castle. The second matter of importance was my childhood experience of salvation. As I sang my heart responded to Jesus' invitation. Going home I experienced the joy of the Lord and danced round a post in the road (quite out of character for me!).

One of the favourite Sunday School stories, alongside "Noah's Ark" and "David and Goliath" is the call of Samuel. When God called to him he had not yet learned to recognize the Lord's voice. He heard His voice but did not recognize it. We may consider that the message that he received for Eli was most unsuitable for a child to communicate. It was a message of severe judgment on him for allowing his godless sons to pollute and discredit the offerings of the Lord by their greed and sensuality. That is not the point of the story for me because I read these crucial words about young 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 us they are profoundly important. The godly background is there with a praying and caring mother who has given her child 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. 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 (1Sam.3:7); I love to underline verses in 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.

A further point which comes out of this passage (v3), a verse eloquent yet profound 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 and the young Samuel as he also lies down in his bed in an adjoining place, *“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 lies down next to the old. God’s hope is not in the old man but in the young child. Eli has failed and he has little spiritual sight left, he was 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 daily 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 done this. When God’s sovereign purposes and a godly woman or man responds to Him willingly God initiates a new day, a new chapter in His great purposes. Hannah’s barrenness was an occasion of grief and reproach, 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”* (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.” For me prayer was elective, determining the future course of my life and helping 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.

Our children must be led to Jesus against a background of godliness 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 Steve, Manjit and family in America. Our children have a happy way of reminding us of the moments we may wish to forget when we were bringing up your children. “Do you remember Dad when you gave me a good hiding for saying ...?” Mistakes hopefully are swallowed up in love, but there were plenty of them. One thing Steve feels deeply about (remember we brought up our children living in a House Church) and that is the presence of God, and the moving of the Holy Spirit in our meetings which has a powerful impact on our children. They grew up in the atmosphere of God’s presence and they 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 such as Mr. North and Norman Meeten.

Not one of our children regrets the way we brought them up and three of them are serving the Lord to-day and bringing up children that love the Lord. 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, it is mind boggling and heart humbling. Many of you also can look back and thank God for His sovereign hand on your life from earliest childhood. similar testimonies. 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. They watched two people loving each other, making mistakes, but serving God the best way they knew how in the context of the church and beyond. God gave us the privilege and responsibility of raising godly children and thus maintain the candle of the Lord in His tabernacle. God invests the future of His work in the hands of our children. If we and they fail He will go out into the world to find children like Samuel, whose hearts will heed the call of the LORD. He will not allow His cause to fail. There are promises in the Bible on which we can anchor our faith for future generations. Pray for your future grandchildren and

great grandchildren that a godly line will continue through to successive generations. 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 to an end, resulting in the clamour for a king.

“Dear Lord you are our Father and we need your help, please be kind to us and save our children. We have given our children to you, and we “as fathers have sought to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4) (NKJV). Bless them with your fullness and fulfil the promises that you have given to us for each of our children.”

*“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.
(Psalm 127:3-5) (NKJV)*



THE BIBLE AND THE CHILD (TWO)

I can speak of my love for the Bible that began when the old elder of our Brethren Assembly arrived early for the Meeting each “Lord’s Day” morning. He had been somewhat of a gentleman and a man of business, coming from a family that had their own shop in the town. He wore gaiters over his immaculately polished black shoes and wore black pin-striped trousers and I remember as a child that he was very wrinkled and had a long hooked nose. I never really felt much love 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 word “seven” – one chapter for each day of the week (I must have thought that was a reasonable amount of chapters to read in a week). This procedure was uncomfortable to me because it put me to some inconvenience each Sunday morning. 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, resulting in a love for the great mega narrative of the O.T. and the stories about Jesus in the N.T. The book of Revelation used to scare me. I remember seeing a “lantern slide” presentation of the Pilgrim’s Progress which had the same frightening effect on me.

Looking back I feel that the Scriptures, with their never ending 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 stark 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 catapulted into his broad forehead that instantly killed him. The sound of a mallet can be heard as a brave woman Jael hammers a tent peg into the forehead of the military Commander Sisera as he sleeps 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 Scriptures in childhood are the true 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 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 roof tiles removed from the ceiling 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 hearing these stories your child will 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: *"Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her "Talitha, cumi,"* which is translated, *"Little girl, I say to you, arise"* (Mark 5:41) (NKJV). A powerful and soundless miracle of resurrection took place immediately and she rose up in her bed and walked. There are 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 poise 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 are demonstrations of His attributes, which reveal His inner Being to us.

In the Bible class I attended as a child there was a beautiful picture of Jesus with children around Him – they were attentive to His words and there was an atmosphere of family love. They were not little children, they were my age and they were all from different countries. One was sat on His knee and Jesus had His arm round another; the others were standing or sitting, but all were turned to Him – listening with joyful attention to His words. There was so much love here in the presence of Jesus and interestingly I did not feel excluded from that family group but every week I would revisit that picture and join with those children in the presence of Jesus. How I loved that beautiful picture, its rich colours and the grouping of children from around the world. It was hung in a big black polished frame in a huge meeting room that was more like a Victorian living room with high ceilings and elaborate cornices. The room was rented and I remember that the couple who ran the weekly Bible Class were from our Brethren Assembly.

When I said that 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 on to which was placed figures or text and so 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 background and when I took on a Sunday School class at the age of 12 it was with great delight and enthusiasm that I used my own flannel graph 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 when at the age of 14 my grandfather died. I called him “Pop” and he was in heart terms, 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, enlarged by the fact that I was a melancholic by disposition and I could not bring friends home. I was discouraged from having friends in case they should have an adverse influence on me. Through

the years people have found my seriousness and my silences rather “off putting” as if I was strongly censoring them for some unknown misdemeanour!

One word describes my consciousness following my grandfather’s death and that is loneliness. Can a child of 14 be lonely? Yes, desperately and especially in the last hour of the day. It was at that time I sat up in bed, took out my Bible, a notebook and a pen and began at the beginning of Genesis to read and to write what God showed to me.

From the first day I opened my Bible God opened up to me the Scriptures and I wrote freely what came to me sentence by sentence. Each evening it happened again for me, as I read another chapter and began to write my childhood comments on Scripture. I discovered my spiritual gift as God gave to me the joy of revelation to replace my loneliness. No man can teach from the Scripture unless it has first been revealed to him. 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 nor family who came alongside me.

In those days the Brethren (a denomination of Christians) were renowned amongst Evangelicals for their knowledge of Scripture. They held Conferences at the New Year 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 was “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. All God’s children can 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 used to prayed the words of Ps.119:18 before they began to read their Bible,

“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Your Law”

Another verse which comes earlier in this psalm says,

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

One of the most famous hymn writers from Great Britain is William Cowper who wrote this hymn about the Bible (circa 1770).

*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.*



THE BIBLE AND THE CHILD (THREE)

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 he wanted to show that circumcised Jews were also eligible for the blessings of universal salvation. Before we enlarge on the subject of young Timothy I want to introduce to you a famous Scottish preacher and writer, Alexander Whyte. He spent six years writing a series of books called "Bible Characters" which are outstanding (the whole series are in the Library and I strongly recommend them). He wrote about Timothy and his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois.

Lois was a God-fearing woman who "made the tremendous mistake of giving her only daughter Lois 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 who had every good intention 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 suggested 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 their lives was also in Timothy (1Tim1:5). The dual impact of godly parent and Holy Scripture had opened up the heart of young Timothy to God and 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 may have seen his stoning and his being raised again by the power of God. Who knows?

This careful and systematic reading of the Bible to 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 Kate was still a baby Barbara and I were on mission in Cumbria. We had a college friend Pat, a single woman student who used to rock Kate in her arms and sing to her Charles Wesley hymns. Now Kate leads worship in her church (she does not sing Charles Wesley hymns!). Pat was doing exactly according to Paul’s instruction.

We have no way of estimating the power of the Scriptures when read by someone who loves 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. Of course our children have to keep on responding to the Lord throughout their childhood. The response I made in my heart at the age of 7 is very different from the whole hearted response I made to the Lord at the age of 18. Earlier experiences may not involve repentance, but later ones must involve repentance and conscious yielding of one’s entire life to God.

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 friend Valmir who has just returned to Brazil after spending several years here as a missionary 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.

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

"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, [a] if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1Pet.2:2-3). (NKJV)

Footnotes: 1 Peter 2:2 NU-Text adds up to salvation.

The 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 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. He was also a witness to the healing power of God (Acts Ch.14). We owe it to our children that they experience 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 that began simultaneously at the time of the Charismatic Renewal.

Twenty five years ago we moved to Smethwick and built our own church building and opened our doors to the community, but before that time we had enjoyed 13 years in Harborne, Birmingham as a "House Church." Our church began in our flat when we were students at Birmingham Bible College and that was 44 years ago.

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 great apostle (read 1 & 2 Timothy). 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 will be the most important study that you 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 Jew taught from these same Scriptures and applied them to Christ that Timothy's eyes were opened and faith quickened in his heart and he was won to the Saviour and became a Christian. Through his companionship with the apostle and resulting from sharing in His apostolic labours Timothy became the young man that Paul entrusted with the pastoral, teaching and

evangelistic ministry 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 child's life has the most profound influence on its 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 life ever lived. Timothy heard nothing of this until he heard it from the mouth of Paul and hearing the story of Jesus immediately responded to Him. The Old Testament Scriptures create a hunger and thirst for Him who is hidden there in the Old Testament and fully revealed in the New Testament.

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 head 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 and the Bible is still the best seller and printed in more languages than any other book.

The Bible Society has recently celebrated the 80th millionth Bible being printed and distributed 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

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 important to see Mum and Dad free in the presence of God enjoying the family of God and singing praises to Jesus.

And then of course we have the Epistles, the letters of the apostles Paul, Peter and John, alongside other letters which face us with some challenges! How do we tackle adult issues that are may be beyond the grasp of a child? Examine the material that is available for kid's to read the Bible daily and you will see how they tackle Bible reading with lots of cartoons and lots of things to do alongside reading a few 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 to send 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 akin to the greatest classic of Christian literature "The Pilgrims Progress" written by John Bunyan who was imprisoned several times in Bedford jail for preaching. He was fettered by chains but dreamed of a poor man called Pilgrim who was bowed down with a heavy haversack on his back. It was as if it was 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 who try divert him from his quest) eventually comes 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 there 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 fell off and rolled down the hill, he was free! He then continued his journey with a glad heart to the celestial city, but this was not the end of his trials!

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 MacDonald¹ 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 kids, and I can remember on one holiday in Wales when Steve and Manjit who had not been married long went off together along the beach at Tenby for a special afternoon together which included a picnic and very old copy of Bunyan's "Holy War" to read together.

We have a story to tell to our children that far exceeds anything in the Old Testament! We can tell my child about Jesus! We can fill my 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 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 a Saviour we love. Begin now and continue throughout their childhood. You 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 nourish 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*

¹ MacDonald wrote the children's fantasy novels: "The Princess and the Goblin," "The Princess and Curdie," and "Back of the North Wind."

generation.” These three 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 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 Mums and Dads 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. As mentors of our children we impart instruction primarily by example, so that we must ourselves be avid and consistent readers of Scripture in the context of our home and family. The love we have for the Word of God we will transmit to our children. We cannot start too early as demonstrated by the example of Lois, Eunice and the child Timothy. The great challenge that we face with our own children in the age of computer games, X boxes, DVD’s, TV and so on is to still find prime time for Scripture and prayer (and not rushed in at the end of the day)! The church needs to engage in continual prayer for our Christian 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.