
Introduction

The greatest hope of all Christian parents is to see their children come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Most parents would climb the highest mountain or slay the fiercest dragon should it guarantee their children's salvation. But just as our conversion was a work of grace, so the conversion of each of our children depends upon the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, not our labors. And yet we are not powerless to act, for in God's kindness he chose to partner with us in his saving work by giving us something to do.

We get to tell God's story to our children—the mighty life-transforming message of the gospel. The gospel, the Bible tells us, is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). We are sowers who plant the seeds of faith each time we speak the truth of God's story to our children. Like a farmer sprinkling the newly planted seed with his watering can, we send our prayers to God while we keep our eyes fixed upon the soil of their lives, waiting to rejoice with the first sprouting leaves. Even then, though we've sown the seeds of the gospel, we still marvel and wonder about how they sprouted (Mark 4:26–29).

The gospel story, filled with adventure, suspense, drama, and mystery, easily captures the attention of our children. A good book is said to come alive when you read it if it captures the imagination. The gospel story in the Bible goes a long step further: It *is* alive and able to cut through the hardest sinful heart, giving life to the deadest, unbelieving soul.

Like a double-edged sword cuts an apple in two, the Word of God cuts through our

pride to show us our sin. Then it points us to Jesus, the only hope for our forgiveness before a holy God. As John said toward the end of his Gospel, it was written “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). We are saved, and our children are saved by the Holy Spirit as we review the story of Christ in the gospel.

Why is it, then, that, for so many Christian families, the Bible sits on a table unopened or remains hidden on a shelf, sandwiched between storybooks and a dictionary? One common explanation that some good Christian parents offer is that they don't know where to begin. The Bible seems long and sometimes complicated. They are not sure how much to read at one time or what to say to their children about what they just read. They are not sure where to begin or how much to share and, if they give it a try only to be met at the end by their children's blank stares, they get discouraged.

Many parents have burst out of the gate running like a racehorse with all the excitement of how the Bible was going to transform their children, only to tire after the first bend in the track. Somehow their Bible ends up back on the shelf with the other books. Discouraged, they say to themselves, I guess I must not be one of the super-parents who can explain the Bible with commentaries and teach their children words from the original Greek.

There are no super-parents. We all struggle, and we all need help to stay on course. That is where I hope *Old Story New* can help

make sharing the Bible with your children a whole lot easier. By dividing the Bible story into shorter parts and giving you everything you need to lead a ten-minute family devotion, *Old Story New* does the hard work for you. Simple discussion questions (and answers!) for each day's devotion help you interact with your children over what you read to them. You'll get fewer blank stares, and you will be surprised at how much they understand and remember from day to day.

As you read and discuss God's Word, you can be sure the Holy Spirit is also at work drawing your children closer to God and opening their minds to understand the life-giving message of the gospel. Remember, our job is to plant the seeds and water—God is the one who makes the seeds grow.

All You Need Is Ten Minutes a Day!

If you can find ten minutes a day, you can use this tool to pass on the most valuable treasure the world has ever known. Contrary to what many believe, daily family Bible study need not take a lot of time. God can use a short, simple family devotion consistently practiced over time to yield more fruit in the lives of our children than we realize—a quick daily devotion not as easily derailed by our busy schedules. Each day as the gospel is presented, God is at work.

Our hope in God is to see our children reading their Bibles and having devotions on their own, not because they have to, but because they want to. The truth of God's Word brings us to Christ and is effective to sustain us and help us to grow all of our days. There is simply no greater delight for Christian parents than watching the Spirit of God guiding their children through faith-filled study of God's Word. No earthly treasure compares.

God's Word, when hidden in our hearts as children, is used again and again in our lives later on. The Spirit of God will bring it back to our minds to help us in our walk with God

and to enable us to encourage others we meet along the way.

Every family can find a few minutes in the daily routine. Some families gather for their devotional at the start of their day; others try the dinnertime approach. Lay the devotional book and your Bible(s) beside your plate at the dinner table. As soon as everyone is finished eating, take ten minutes for family Bible study. *Old Story New* does the work for you! All you need to do is read the passage of Scripture for the day, follow that with the short commentary, and then ask the listed questions. Finish it all up by inviting one of your children to pray.

It's Simple to Use

Old Story New when used with *Long Story Short* is a family devotional program designed to explain God's plan of salvation from Genesis through Revelation. *Long Story Short* covers the Old Testament, and this volume, *Old Story New*, covers the New Testament. Together, they provide three years of family Bible study! For every Old Testament lesson your family will learn the answer to the question, "How does this passage point forward to Jesus?" For every New Testament lesson the question is, "Where is the gospel?" Since the Bible is the story of God's unfolding plan of redemption, every passage of Scripture points forward or back to Calvary.

Each week starts off with a creative activity, exercise, or bit of trivia to introduce the passage. On days one through four you review a portion of the week's Scripture passage. Special attention is given on day three to connect the current passage to the gospel. On day four we've added a question for your older children to ask *you*, and on day five you and your family will investigate a Bible passage from the book of Psalms or an excerpt from one of the prophets to discover how the passage points forward to Christ.

This devotional book can be used differently depending on the ages of your children. Since this book is rich in gospel truth, it works for families with children of all ages. Take a

look at the following categories to find the one that best describes your family.

If Your Children Are Preschoolers

The best time to start consistent daily Bible study is with children in the four-through six-year-old age group. *Long Story Short* and *Old Story New* work wonderfully with children in this age group. Don't be fooled by your five-year-old's inability to answer the listed questions. Children at this age can often understand much more than they can express. Consider some of the following techniques:

- ∴ Feel free to skip the discussion questions and just read the answers, most of which are in complete sentences. The first time through, use the study to familiarize children with the Bible. If your child starts the program at age four, he or she will finish three years later at age seven with a tremendous foundation of gospel truth that has accumulated day by day and week by week.
- ∴ You can also skip over the creative introductions and save them for a second time through when your children reach grade school.
- ∴ Try rephrasing the questions to make them very simple or by making them multiple choice.
- ∴ Another parent can be the helper, actually whispering the answers to your children. This might sound dishonest but in reality it is the repetition that helps them remember the material.
- ∴ You can make up simple questions for your toddlers yourself. Basic questions about the characters such as, "How did Jesus heal the man?" are great for younger children.

If Your Children Are in Grade School

Elementary school is the time to call for your children to participate with you in family Bible study. Don't be afraid to call them to that participation. Some children might be reluctant at first, but persistence soon pays off. Even the most challenging child is able to handle ten minutes a day. Remember, day by day they are being exposed to the gospel truth God uses to transform lives. The creative introductions at the beginning of each week will pique the interest of your children. Read them yourself a day or so ahead to give you time to gather any objects needed for the lesson.

Start by making sure all your children have a Bible. You might have toddlers mixed in with your grade school students. That's okay. Just have them open up their toddler Bibles to the right page (that means anywhere close). Read through the passage for the day. On days when the passage is shorter, try having your older children read. (Remember, labored reading won't encourage them or the others, so wait until your children can read well before passing that responsibility to them.) If you have toddlers in the mix, let them come along for the ride but don't cater to their lower learning level. All day long they are learning by watching the older children in their daily routines. They learn about God the same way.

Read the passage, the short paragraph summary, and then move to the questions. Here are a few ideas to consider to make your discussion time work well:

- ∴ After asking a question of your family, look back in the passage and tell them which verse to look for to find the answer.
- ∴ Encourage all attempts to answer the question even if they miss the answer.
- ∴ Consider inviting children to add to their brothers' and sisters' answers.

Sometimes children who are reluctant to start an answer can add to an answer to expand it.

- ❑ Don't be afraid to call on your older children. If they seem stumped even after you tell them which verse they can find the answer in, give them clues.

Finish by asking your children to pray. Help your youngest children by having them repeat after you. As your children grow older, encourage them to pray on their own. Always help them along if they get stuck. Soon, they will be praying on their own without your help.

If Your Children Are Moving Out of Grade School

Long Story Short and *Old Story New* work well with older grade school children and young teens too! They set a wonderful example for their younger brothers and sisters in answering the questions and even leading the devotions themselves.

If you have a teen who thinks the Bible studies are too easy or boring, try this exercise. Open up randomly to one of the Bible studies and start asking her a few questions. She is sure to find out like we all have in our lives that everybody needs to review.

Try some of the following ideas with your older children:

- ❑ Use your older children to lead the creative introductions at the beginning of each week with their younger brothers and sisters.
- ❑ Try holding your older children in reserve, allowing the younger children to answer first. Then, have the older children amplify the answers their younger siblings gave.
- ❑ Pair up a younger child with an older child and allow the older child to help give the answer to his younger brother

or sister. This might sound like cheating but the value is in hearing and remembering the details of the gospel over and over.

- ❑ Consider where your children are in their lives on a given day. Feel the freedom to add a more subjective question to draw them out about how the passage relates to their lives personally. Questions like, "What does God want to teach you from reading this passage?" can be used for any lesson.
- ❑ If your mix of children includes a teen, assign her to lead the Bible study once a week. Encourage her to read the passage and the devotion a day in advance to become familiar with what is being asked. If you pull her aside later and offer some encouragement, she will be all the more eager to lead Bible study again.

Remember, the devotional is designed to work through simple repetition over time. If you skip a day, that's okay, just pick up where you left off.

Reaping the Harvest

So, there is no need to climb a tall mountain or go toe-to-toe with a dragon to battle for your children's salvation—God will do that work. Remember, we plant the seed, do a little watering, and then God makes it grow—that is his promise! Consider these words from Isaiah:

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so

shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:9–12)

God's Word will accomplish his purpose and will not return empty. So, as you faithfully lead your children through the devotions in this book, don't just read it as history. It is history, but it is so much more! Lead with expectation that the God of history will visit with your family. Wait and watch to see what God will do. Cling with faith to this hope: that through the gospel proclamation in your home, the Holy Spirit will regenerate the hearts of your children and lead them to faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone!