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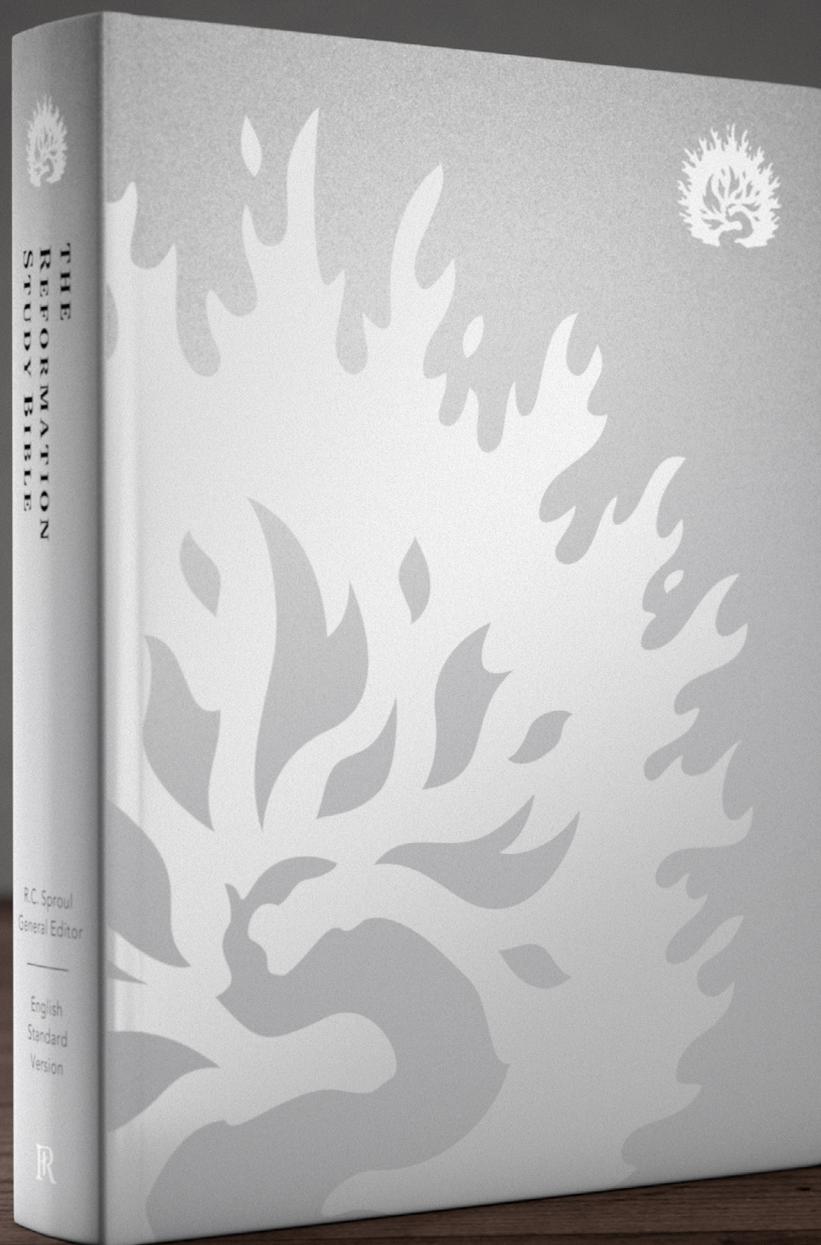
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Children
Come to
Jesus*
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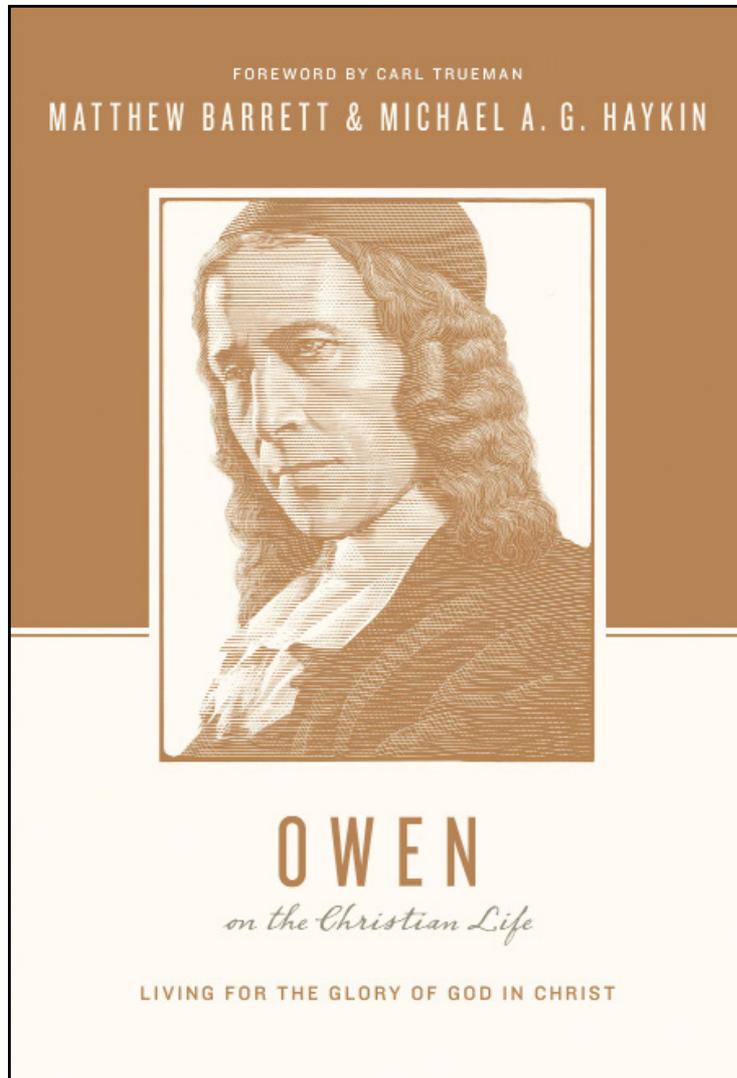
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OWEN

on the

CHRISTIAN LIFE

John Owen is widely hailed as one of the greatest theologians of all time. His many works—especially those encouraging Christians in their struggle against sin—continue to speak powerfully to readers today, offering much-needed spiritual guidance for following Christ and resisting temptation day in and day out. Starting with an overview of Owen’s life, ministry, and historical context, Michael Haykin and Matthew Barrett introduce readers to the pillars of Owen’s spiritual life. From exploring his understanding of believers’ fellowship with the triune God to highlighting his teaching on justification, this study invites us to learn about the Christian life from the greatest of the English Puritans.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Ministry is complex. Business meetings, sermons, youth group, small groups, counseling sessions—the list is endless. In the midst of these many important ministries, sometimes churches can neglect one of the most important ministries of all. That’s right, children’s ministry. This is a dangerous thing to neglect. After all, the children filling our churches will carry on the torch long after we are gone. Therefore, whether or not they are being taught sound doctrine should never be underestimated.

But where does this teaching really begin? It begins in the home, when mom and dad take time out of their busy schedule to sit down with their little ones and tell them about Jesus and the great things he has done for our salvation. If you’re anything like me, this is much easier said than done. Home life can be just as busy as church life. Yet, could there be a more important 15 minutes in the day than when dad and mom read the Bible, sing songs, and pray with their children? I think not. Ironically, in my experience it’s not just my kids who are spiritually nurtured during this family worship time, it’s me too!

Having in mind the importance of teaching our children the core doctrines of the faith, this issue of Credo Magazine brings together some outstanding contributors to teach both parents and those in ministry alike how to better approach children so that they know God in a saving way. Perhaps the words of Jesus should hang as a banner over this issue of the magazine: “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). 

Matthew Barrett
Executive Editor

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With Nancy Guthrie

*Nancy Guthrie teaches the Bible at conferences around the country. She and her husband, David, are the co-hosts of the GriefShare video series used in more than 8,500 churches nationwide and they also host Respite Retreats for couples who have experienced the death of a child. Guthrie is the author of numerous books including *Holding on to Hope*, *Hearing Jesus Speak into Your Sorrow*, and the five-book *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament Bible study series*.*

No doubt about it, Nancy, you have had an impact on so many women in the church. However, sometimes the role of women is overlooked in churches. As you look at the evangelical church today,

How can churches do a better job of incorporating women into the life and ministry of the church?

I'm not sure I'm a good person to answer this question, because it just hasn't been my experience. I have been so affirmed and encouraged to serve and lead in the churches I've been a part of. I understand, however, that many women feel as if they are overlooked or limited by the leadership in their churches, and I'm sure that is frustrating. I don't presume to tell the church how to "do a better job," but I would discourage women from approaching church with a sense of "How is the church going to open a door for me to use my gifts and allow me to fulfill my sense

I HAVE AN ENEMY WHO IS ALWAYS TELLING ME THAT THE BIBLE WILL NOT BE INTERESTING OR UNDERSTANDABLE. HE'S ALWAYS TELLING ME THAT WHAT I REALLY NEED IS AN EVENING OF MINDLESS TELEVISION RATHER THAN TIME IN THE WORD. AND SOMETIMES I LISTEN! WHAT WE REALLY NEED IS TO REFUSE TO BELIEVE THE LIES OF THE ENEMY EVEN AS WE OPEN THE WORD WHEN WE DON'T FEEL LIKE IT AND THINK WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR IT, SO THAT WE DISCOVER OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT GOD'S WORD MEETS OUR DEEP NEEDS AND SATISFIES OUR DEEP HUNGER AND RE-TRAINS OUR DEEP DESIRES.

of calling?" I would encourage them, instead, to look around asking the question, "What are the needs that need to be met, and how can I be a good steward of what God has entrusted to me to meet those needs?" As I look around the church it seems to me that there is so much to do, so many ways to serve, so many people who need to be listened to and loved on and disciplined. Jesus left all of us—men and women—an example that we

should follow, which is to pick up the towel and do the lowly task that needs to be done, not jostle for a place at the table.

It is really hard work being a mother, as you know from firsthand experience. The responsibilities sometimes seem overwhelming. Setting aside time to study the Bible can feel impossible. What advice might you give to mothers feeling this tension?

I read an assumption in your question, a common assumption that does not always serve women well. Yes moms are busy. So are dads. Pretty much everyone in our modern age has responsibilities that sometimes seem overwhelming, and setting aside time to study the Bible can "feel impossible." But here's the thing: We all pretty much do with our time what we want to do. Or, another way to say it is that what we really want to do, we make time to do. Because we want to spend time on Facebook or watching Netflix or exercising or making our own baby food, we do. So the tension—at least for me—has had less to do with availability of time but more with lack of desire, even lack of belief that I truly do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

I have an enemy who is always telling me that the Bible will not be interesting or understandable. He's always telling me that what I really need is an evening of mindless television rather than time in the Word. And sometimes I listen! What we really need is to refuse to believe the lies of the enemy even as we open the Word when we don't feel like it and think we don't have time for it, so that we discover over and over again that God's Word meets our deep needs and satisfies our deep hunger and re-trains our deep desires.

Many have heard your story about the grief you and your husband experienced after losing two children to a rare genetic disorder called Zellweger Syndrome. If you could say just one word of encouragement to women reading this interview who are experiencing similar grief from losing a child, what would it be?

I would say that Jesus is a safe person to draw close to in the midst of your grief. He knows what it feels like to be “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Matt. 26:38). But he is also a healer. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to bring healing. You may need some time and space to be sad for a while. Sometimes we are in more of a hurry than God is and less patient with ourselves than God is. But as you fellowship with Christ in your sadness, expect and long for him to do a healing work in you, to generate joy in the midst of the sorrow so that the time will come when the sorrow won’t have as much of a hold on your life and emotions and relationships as it does right now.

Tell us about Respite Retreats, which you and your husband, David, host for couples who have faced the death of a child. What are these retreats like and how might they help couples who are hurting deeply from the death of a child?

At Respite Retreat David and I spend the weekend in a lodge outside Nashville with 11 couples who arrive so very sad, and all I can say is that the Holy Spirit shows up and does a work of healing. Not everything is fixed, but progress is made, perspective is gained. Here are a few things participants who came to a recent retreat

had to say about what happened to them over the weekend:

“I don’t feel so alone.”

“It seems like so many people who experience loss seem to find the silver lining—after the hard thing, everything gets better. I appreciate being here with people who didn’t get the silver lining. Nothing came along that fixed it all.”

“I appreciate not having to qualify everything I say. I can express the darkness in my soul without everyone assuming that I’m walking away from Jesus.”

“People around us immediately began to tell us after our daughter died that God was going to use this in our ministry as if that was the only value of her life. But here, her life mattered.”

“It is tough to leave and go back to where our child is not there. I’m going to take back with me the instruction to talk back to the voice inside me that is telling me what is not true.”

“I know I’m not done with grief. I’m going back to the grind and the grief will still be there. But I want to grieve well. I’m praying to return to joy.”

“I had a block of time to be a sad dad, which was refreshing.”

“We’ve been to several other grief support groups, but none has been Christ-centered. It has been great to spend the weekend with wounded but not defeated people who have an anchor, a center.”

“I’ve been blessed by the collective wisdom of this group as well as the understanding of others who get why I want to sleep with my son’s blanket.”

“This has re-calibrated our grief and propelled us forward. We have felt adrift, and this gave us direction.”

“I can let go of the resentment I’ve had that I was owed more days with my child.”

Credo Magazine is all about books! And we know that every writer is indebted to voices of the past. What three books have influenced you the most and why?

You have to understand that I started working at a Christian publishing company in 1984, right out of college, and worked as an editor and publicist in Christian publishing until about 2009 when I started writing and speaking full time, so books have been such a big part of my life. However, because so many years of my life I was a more general evangelical, and didn’t really begin to grasp and embrace the Reformed faith until 2003 or 2004, some of the books that had a big influence on me in the past aren’t the ones I would necessarily value or recommend today. A friend gave me a copy of *Desiring God* in 2004, and certainly that book, and the way it drew me into the preaching ministry of John Piper, marked a huge turning point in my grasp of the gospel of grace. When I realized that I needed to go back to the drawing board on how to read and understand the Old Testament, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* created a paradigm shift, and Michael Williams’ *Far as the Curse Is Found* was incredibly helpful.

So if you have worked in and around Christian publishing for thirty years, what are some things you learned from authors you worked with that have carried over into your life as an author?

I remember the first time Max Lucado came to meet with the team at Word, and he said when people finished a book he wrote he didn’t want them to say, “What a great book!” but rather, “What a great Savior!” I remember when Marabel Morgan (Yes, that Marabel Morgan, of *saran wrap The Total Woman* fame) told me, “Don’t marry a man until you can say that he’s the finest man you’ve ever met.” (Advice followed and proven profitable.) I remember walking into Anne Ortlund’s office after she’d received a royalty check and she was giddy over being able to write checks to send them off to missionaries. Peggy Campolo, Tony’s wife, told me that when her kids got excited about dad having some notoriety she told them, “It’s nice to be important, but it’s more important to be nice.” I learned from the boldness of Anne Graham Lotz whose aim when speaking was to present the gospel clearly even if it meant she didn’t get invited back.

Of course I also learned from the negative example of some authors, many of whom were thoroughly disappointed with what happened with their books—disappointed with the cover, the marketing, the media coverage, the sales, etc. I learned that some really great books don’t sell at all and that some really awful books become bestsellers. I learned that some authors really only have one book in them and keep writing the same book over and over again.

But probably the best thing I’ve learned is that books are powerful. Books go places we cannot go and speak to people we will never meet. I’m always so amazed when I get letters from people on the other side of the world who tell me they read one of my books, and it helped them not feel so alone in their sorrow or encouraged them to love and trust Christ.

Many of the Bible study resources you have written focus on seeing Jesus in the Old Testament. For the average lay person, however, it may come as a surprise to learn that the book of Numbers, for example, actually has a lot to do with Jesus. How can reading the whole Bible in light of Christ help Christians grasp the larger story from Genesis to Revelation?

When I was teaching the first book in the series, *The Promised One: Seeing Jesus in Genesis* at my own church, a godly older woman who had been a leader in Bible study for many years came and sat beside me and asked, with tears in her eyes, “How come I’ve never seen this before?” And that experience has been repeated over and over again as men and women tell me how they’re being impacted by the studies.

Somewhere along the way in modern evangelical Christianity, perhaps in the Sunday School movement that recruited and depended upon untrained teachers and perhaps in the how-to, self-improvement mindset that infiltrated the church, we lost a sense of seeing the whole Bible as one story of God’s outworking of his plan to redeem all things through Christ. We lost the aim of adoring Christ through Bible study. And there is something uniquely beautiful and meaningful about seeing the person and work of Christ through the lens of the Old Testament—from the picture of the ark in which we find safety from the storm of judgment, to the Passover lamb whose blood marks us for mercy, to the promise of a king who will reign in perfect justice and righteousness forever, to the husband who is willing to go to the slave market to buy back his adulterous bride and take her to his home to purify her and love her.

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY IN MODERN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY, PERHAPS IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL MOVEMENT THAT RECRUITED AND DEPENDED UPON UNTRAINED TEACHERS AND PERHAPS IN THE HOW-TO, SELF-IMPROVEMENT MINDSET THAT INFILTRATED THE CHURCH, WE LOST A SENSE OF SEEING THE WHOLE BIBLE AS ONE STORY OF GOD’S OUTWORKING OF HIS PLAN TO REDEEM ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST. WE LOST THE AIM OF ADORING CHRIST THROUGH BIBLE STUDY.

Since you have worked in publishing and have written a number of books, you probably have people who want to write a book ask you how to make that happen. What advice do you have to offer to people who want to write and publish?

Just yesterday I met with a woman who was trafficked for many years, is being gloriously transformed by Christ, and has a desire to write her story so that, as she said, “other people can be set free.” The day before that I met with a friend who has a special needs daughter and posts the

most beautiful pictures and writing on Instagram (ebrown_photo) and is wondering about how to turn it into a book. I don't really have much to offer people who ask me about these things, since really it is only what a potential publisher thinks that matters, but I do have one mantra that I find myself saying over and over which is this: Everyone tells you to tell your story, that your story has power. And I would say, your story has power to create lasting impact to the degree that you use your story to tell God's story. My story and your story might move people, inspire people, entertain people, or interest people, but only God's story can make someone who is spiritually dead come to spiritual life. Only God's story can impact a person in a way that will last into eternity. So figure out how to use your story to tell his story.

MY STORY AND YOUR STORY MIGHT MOVE PEOPLE, INSPIRE PEOPLE, ENTERTAIN PEOPLE, OR INTEREST PEOPLE, BUT ONLY GOD'S STORY CAN MAKE SOMEONE WHO IS SPIRITUALLY DEAD COME TO SPIRITUAL LIFE. ONLY GOD'S STORY CAN IMPACT A PERSON IN A WAY THAT WILL LAST INTO ETERNITY. SO FIGURE OUT HOW TO USE YOUR STORY TO TELL HIS STORY.

When you're not writing or speaking, what do you enjoy doing the most and why?

Our neighborhood is adjacent to a fabulous park, and I look forward to walking in that park every day that I can get over there. Sometimes it is me and my iPod listening to podcasts such as The White Horse Inn, audio from various conferences, seminary lectures, or sermons from some of my favorite preachers such as Colin Smith, Liam Goligher, Sinclair Ferguson, Alistair Begg, Dick Lucas, or John Woodhouse (notice any similarities?). But most often it is walking with one or more of my friends, catching up and praying together about our children and our churches and our dreams and desires as we walk. I am so grateful for godly friends to whom I can confess my sins and name my fears and laugh out loud as we walk in the beauty of the park and the safety of each other's company.

If you could sit down and order your favorite meal, what would it be?

It would be hard to beat a petite filet and baked potato. But there would have to be really good bread on the table, and perhaps a warm chocolate dessert with vanilla bean ice cream to top it off. I know that many people would enjoy a glass of fine wine with that meal, but I don't imbibe. I'm holding out for the really good stuff that will be served at the wedding supper of the Lamb. ■

TOUGH QUESTIONS

AT WHAT AGE SHOULD A CHILD BE BAPTIZED?

by Bobby Jamieson

I don't think Scripture provides a black-and-white answer to this question. On the other hand, I think that baptizing children tends to lead churches to separate what Scripture joins together, like baptism and church membership, and the label "membership" and its inherent responsibilities. So I'd recommend that, in general, churches wait to baptize young believers until they reach something like "functional adulthood."

First a word of defense: just about every credobaptist church will "delay" baptism for someone. If your lower limit is age six, what about the exceptionally mature four-year-old who comes to you next week? Or three? Or two?

Baptism is a Christian's public profession of faith in Christ and a church's affirmation of that profession. So the question is not simply, "Who can profess faith in Christ?" but "Whose profession can the church affirm?" Baptism is a believer's public

identification with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), which means baptism should be inseparable from entrance into the public people of God on earth, the local church. Baptism is the front door of the church (Acts 2:41). So, except where no church yet exists, Christians should always be baptized into church membership. At whatever age you begin baptizing young believers, baptize them into church membership.

Some churches that baptize young children do baptize them into church membership, but that status of membership is emptied of most of its responsibilities, such as giving and receiving corrective discipline. This runs the risk of making membership a meaningless label, something we can re-shape at will. So I would discourage churches from developing a "two-stage" membership system for children and adults. Church membership should be a package deal. The privileges and responsibilities come together.

And if churches that typically baptize, say, six-year-olds started only baptizing into membership, and keeping membership's privileges and responsibilities together, that's going to exert some real upward pressure on the age at which they baptize.

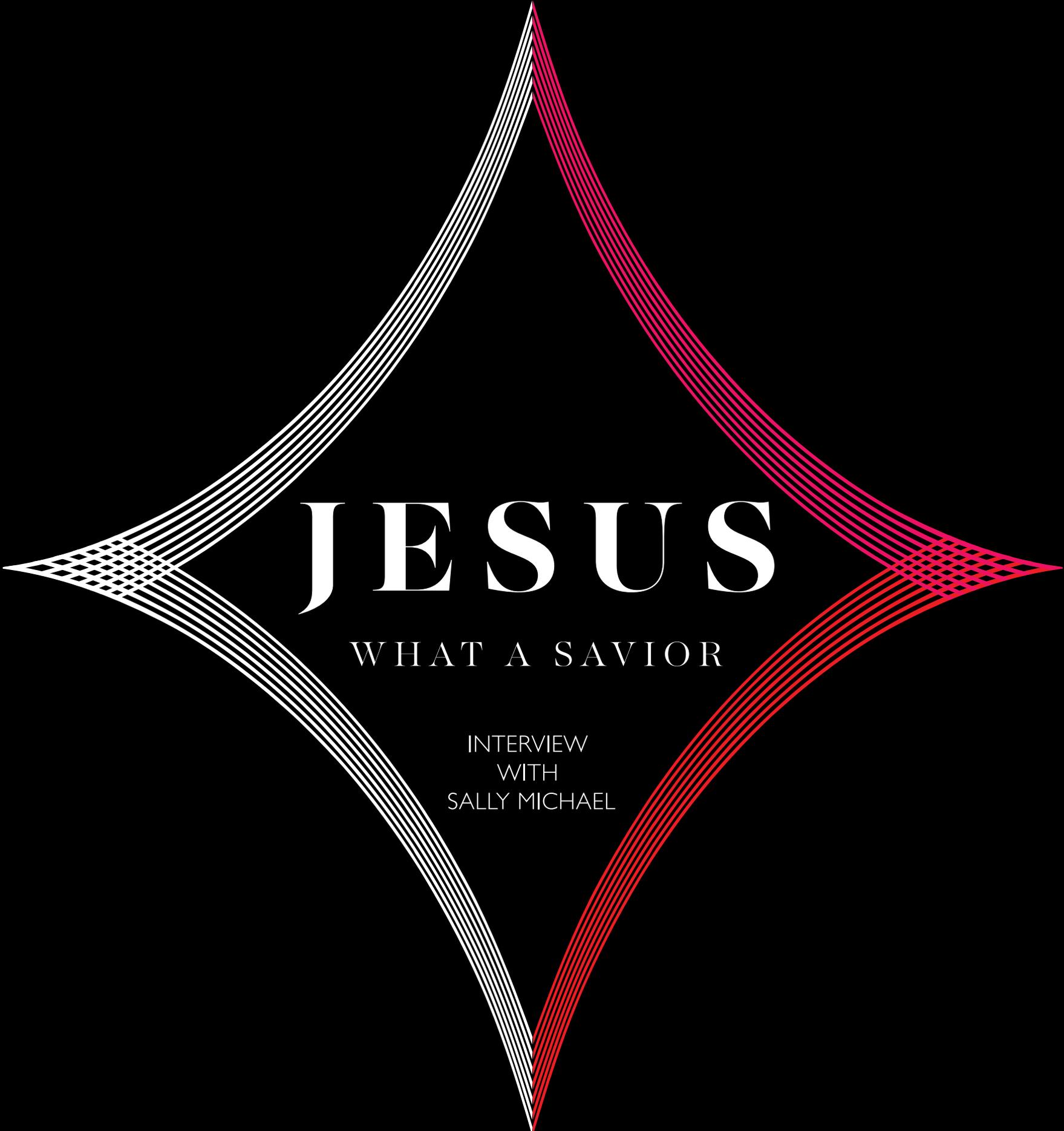
Another consideration here: for children in Christian homes, their God-given dependence on their parents and desire to please their parents makes it difficult for a church to tell if a child who looks like a Christian really is one. You could say that the persuasive power God has given parents and the pliable posture he has given children combine to create a kind of static interference that prevents a church from getting an accurate read on a child's spiritual life. They effectively disable the church's "credible confession" radar.

So, I'd recommend that churches only baptize the children of believers when they have at least one foot firmly in adulthood—say, they've started college, or moved out and taken a job. If the young

person is from a non-Christian family, I think a church could responsibly baptize them a few years younger, since they are swimming against the current and taking initiative to participate in the life of the church.

*Bobby Jamieson is a PhD student in New Testament at the University of Cambridge, a member of Eden Baptist Church, and the author of *Going Public: Why Baptism is Required for Church Membership* (B&H, 2015). *

**BAPTISM IS A CHRISTIAN'S
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IN CHRIST?" BUT "WHOSE
PROFESSION CAN THE
CHURCH AFFIRM?"**



JESUS

WHAT A SAVIOR

INTERVIEW
WITH
SALLY MICHAEL

Sally Michael is the co-founder and publishing consultant of Children Desiring God, and she developed their widely used Sunday school curriculum for young people. She is also an author and a speaker, and she served as Minister for Children at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for sixteen years. In this interview, Matthew Barrett, executive editor of Credo Magazine, talks to Sally Michael about how parents and churches can more effectively teach God's Word to children.

I. There are tons of children's books on the market today, all claiming to teach children about God and the Bible. Some are good. Some are bad. So tell us, what makes a good children's book and what should parents be looking for?

Very often children's resources that teach about God are evaluated much the same way secular resources are evaluated: Are they engaging? Does the language communicate with children? Are the pictures colorful and interesting? While these may be appropriate areas of evaluation, if we miss the more important, weightier areas of evaluation, we are in danger of making grave errors in judgment. Some of these more important areas include the following:

- Is it true to the text of Scripture? In retelling Bible stories in a child-friendly manner, an author may use some poetic license. However, it is important to discern if the author's imagination contradicts the biblical text, so one point of examination is to check for biblical accuracy. When the facts of Scripture

are misrepresented, clearly the story is in error. (For example: In telling the events after Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the garden, Scripture records, "But the LORD God called to the man . . ." I have seen this retold as "God called to Adam and Eve" or "He called, 'Children . . .'" This may seem like a slight deviation, but it undermines the foundations of biblical manhood and womanhood.)

In imagining the scenes of the Bible and what could have happened, is the narrative within the realm of biblical possibility? Are the extra-biblical statements historically accurate? For example, to say that Nineveh "was a city with many temples to the gods" is not a recorded fact in the book of Jonah, but it is historically accurate. Does the author use tentative words like "might" or "maybe" in recording extra-biblical material? For example, "What might Abraham have been thinking? Could he have been sad about leaving his home?"

- Is the book doctrinally sound? It is tempting to sacrifice correct doctrine in order to make a book "child-friendly." But a good resource preserves the integrity of correct doctrine, presenting these truths in understandable

EVERY MOMENT OF DISCIPLINING A CHILD CANNOT BE A MOMENT OF PRESENTING A COMPLETE, CLEAR PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL, BUT EVERY DISCIPLINE MOMENT DOES BECOME A "GOSPEL MOMENT."

GOOD BIBLE RESOURCES PRESENT GOD, NOT MAN, AS THE MAIN CHARACTER OF THE STORY OR TEACHING. THEY SHOW GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD AND IN THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS RATHER THAN HIGHLIGHTING THE ACTIONS OF MAN. THEY CLEARLY IDENTIFY GOD AS THE HERO IN EVERY BIBLE STORY AND LEAD CHILDREN TO SEE HIS ATTRIBUTES AND RESPOND TO HIS CHARACTER. THE GOAL OF A GOOD BIBLE RESOURCE IS TO EXALT GOD, NOT TO MAKE CHILDREN FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES, TO TELL AN ENTERTAINING STORY, OR MERELY TO TEACH GOOD MORALS.

ways to children. Careful, clear wording is very important as children are vulnerable to misunderstanding. For example, when a book states that Jesus called the disciples because he needed helpers, it is teaching doctrine, but it is not correct doctrine. Jesus is not needy—in any way or at any time. God is totally self-sufficient (Acts 17:25), and good resources clearly teach a correct view of God. Some may object that the author is not saying that God is a needy God, but we have to bear in mind that children do not have the breadth of knowledge or depth of understanding that adults do. So they are not able to perform the mental gymnastics that will help inform their understanding of “Jesus needs helpers” in light

of what is true about Jesus. Instead, children, being naïve, may simply take statements like this at face value and consequently form an inaccurate view of God.

Good resources also do not compromise on teaching the “hard” truths—like God’s wrath against sinful man or God’s providence over suffering. We must not neglect the difficult doctrines—neither those which are difficult to understand nor those which are difficult to accept—while at the same time recognizing that there are age-appropriate ways of teaching and expressing these truths.

- Is the book “God-centered”? Good Bible resources present God, not man, as the main character of the story or teaching. They show God at work in the world and in the lives of individuals rather than highlighting the actions of man. They clearly identify God as the hero in every Bible story and lead children to see his attributes and respond to his character. The goal of a good Bible resource is to exalt God, not to make children feel good about themselves, to tell an entertaining story, or merely to teach good morals.
- Does the book put the truths taught within the framework of the “whole counsel of God”? While a book may focus on a theme such as God’s promises or God’s love, there should always be the balance of the complete teaching of Scripture informing the narrative. For example, a book about God’s love should not convey that all of God’s actions toward his children are “feel-good” loving actions. Scripture clearly states that God disciplines those he loves (Heb. 12:6), so this aspect as well as many other balanced aspects of God’s

love should be portrayed. In other words, even a thematic study should include sufficient teaching to promote a biblically accurate perception.

- Does the book challenge the child's faith? Does it promote personal application? In all our teaching of children, including teaching through books, we must aim at the heart and not merely at the head. While it is true that "faith comes by hearing" (Rom. 10:17), we must be careful to go beyond knowledge and encourage personal interaction with truth. A good children's resource will help the child see that the truth in the story or teaching directly applies to his life, challenging the child to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8).

It is a deep sadness to me that many good theologians accept sloppy teaching in children's books and recommend books that clearly compromise doctrinal truth. Children's literature should be subjected to the same careful scrutiny that is expected of adult books.

2. What is the number one mistake churches make when structuring and developing a children's Sunday school curriculum for the first time?

I think the number one danger is making a curriculum choice based on the "bells and whistles" that make children's Sunday school fun at the expense of good content. To evaluate material based on interesting graphics, video content, or the number of activities rather than on the biblical content of the material and how it is presented is to err on the side of entertainment

IN ALL OUR TEACHING OF CHILDREN, INCLUDING TEACHING THROUGH BOOKS, WE MUST AIM AT THE HEART AND NOT MERELY AT THE HEAD. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT "FAITH COMES BY HEARING" (ROM. 10:17), WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO GO BEYOND KNOWLEDGE AND ENCOURAGE PERSONAL INTERACTION WITH TRUTH. A GOOD CHILDREN'S RESOURCE WILL HELP THE CHILD SEE THAT THE TRUTH IN THE STORY OR TEACHING DIRECTLY APPLIES TO HIS LIFE, CHALLENGING THE CHILD TO "TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD" (PS. 34:8).

rather than focus on real learning. Real learning involves engaging the mind, not providing active or entertaining components. The goal of the material should be to present solid truth and promote spiritual growth.

Another problem that is prevalent is allowing current trends to inform your content rather than carefully formulating a scope and sequence that emphasizes correct doctrine and the full counsel of God. The material becomes "lop-sided," and children receive inaccurate, insufficient, and sometimes even spiritually harmful teaching.

I THINK THE NUMBER ONE DANGER IS MAKING A CURRICULUM CHOICE BASED ON THE “BELLS AND WHISTLES” THAT MAKE CHILDREN’S SUNDAY SCHOOL FUN AT THE EXPENSE OF GOOD CONTENT.

3. There are loads of children’s books and Bibles that walk children through the storyline of Scripture. However, books that focus on individual doctrines of the faith are harder to come by. Tell us, what are the benefits of parents teaching their children not only the Bible’s story but the doctrines of the Christian faith (e.g., divine providence, inspiration of Scripture, attributes of God, etc.) ?

For years the church instructed the young through the use of catechisms, carefully acquainting children with the doctrines of the faith. This doctrinal foundation enables children to discern truth from error, provides children with a solid platform of truth to stand on, and gives children biblical answers to questions they face in the world and in their own hearts. Today we are in danger of neglecting doctrinal grounding in favor of telling the “story” of the Bible. Reducing Bible teaching primarily to “telling the story” may produce spiritually immature believers and may prevent others from making a genuine commitment of faith because their understanding of God, man, sin, and redemption are insufficient. Our children will face serious assaults on Christian beliefs,

and they must be prepared to give a solid answer based on Scripture, lest they succumb to the world’s unbelief.

4. In the midst of parenting, it can be tough trying to incorporate the gospel message. In moments of chaos and frustration, sometimes discipline turns into “Just stop it!” How might parents take advantage of those moments, especially moments where a child has sinned, in order to teach their little ones about Jesus and the cross?

Every moment of disciplining a child cannot be a moment of presenting a complete, clear presentation of the gospel, but every discipline moment does become a “gospel moment.” We must remember the elements of the gospel—God is holy and just, man is a sinner by nature, sin is an offense to God, man is incapable of changing his own heart, Jesus came to provide the payment for sin we could not pay and to give us a new heart, Jesus imputes his righteousness to those who trust in him, God is merciful and offers forgiveness to repentant sinners, and those who trust Jesus live in obedience to his ways. All of these gospel truths can be incorporated at some time or another in disciplining our children. It may be a simple statement like “Hitting your brother was sinful”

THE QUESTION WE MUST ASK OURSELVES IS NOT, “AM I A PERFECT EXAMPLE FOR MY CHILDREN?” BUT “AM I AN AUTHENTIC EXAMPLE FOR MY CHILDREN?”

THAT CHILDREN MORE READILY ACCEPT THE “HARD TRUTHS” THAN ADULTS BECAUSE THEY DON’T HAVE THE EMOTIONAL HANG-UPS THAT ADULTS HAVE WITH THESE TRUTHS. AT FIRST, THESE ARE INTELLECTUAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN, AND THEY ARE NOT COLORED BY THEIR EXPERIENCE. BY STARTING WITH THE FOUNDATIONS OF TRUTH, CHILDREN THEN INTERPRET THEIR EXPERIENCE IN LIGHT OF THESE TRUTHS. WHAT I HAVE SEEN AS A RESULT IS A STRONGER TRUST IN GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL WORKS, A GREATER ACCEPTANCE OF LIFE’S DISAPPOINTMENTS AS BEING A GOOD PART OF GOD’S OVERALL PLAN FOR THEM, AND A CONFIDENCE IN ROMANS 8:28. THEY REACT IN MORE MATURE WAYS THAN EXPECTED AS THEIR THEOLOGY INFORMS THEIR EMOTIONS RATHER THAN THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

or “Selfishness is sin and separates us from our good and holy God.” Leading children to see their need of a Savior because of the sin in their hearts is gospel teaching.

In disciplining children, we must be careful not only to identify their actions as sinful but also to impart to them an understanding that they have sinful hearts which must be redeemed by Christ. We must be careful to point to Jesus as our sin-bearer and the only source of true righteousness. We must lead them to ask forgiveness from God and from those whom they have offended. We must demonstrate the mercy and forgiveness of God as well as the consequences of sin. And we must be diligent to restore the relationship with a child we have disciplined, demonstrating that true confession and repentance leads to a restored relationship between God and his children.

5. One of the hardest moments for Christian parents is when they feel like they just aren’t setting a good enough example for their children. In those moments they feel as if they have totally undermined any witness to the gospel. But can parents use their visible failures and shortcomings to teach their children about Jesus?

Good parenting is not about perfection but about direction. We will sin and we will fail our children, but the more important reality is, “Are we growing in grace? Do we bow humbly before the Lord’s discipline? Do we repent of our sin and ask forgiveness of those we sin against? Do we show our children our need for Christ and our dependence on his mercy, grace, and discipline?” It is a powerful moment for our children when

we confess our sin: “Mommy was wrong when she spoke harshly to you. That was not following the way of Jesus who tells us to ‘admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.’ Will you forgive me for sinning against you?” This is a good example. The question we must ask ourselves is not, “Am I a perfect example for my children?” but “Am I an authentic example for my children?”

6. What encouragement can you give to the dad or mom who feels discouraged because their child has been taught all the right things, has memorized all the right verses, and yet still doesn’t seem to be interested in the things of God?

Well, channeling Winston Churchill, “Never give up! Never give up!! Never, never, never, never, never, never!” Persevere in prayer. Trust the God of the universe who is working his perfect will and has the power to change hearts in a moment. Humbly submit to God’s right to bring your child to faith using any means he pleases. Keep on teaching winsomely, keep on sharing the work of God in your heart, keep on living authentic, godly lives in front of your children. Show your children that Jesus is your greatest treasure, and don’t give in to discouragement or despair. God is faithful and his ways are right. Hearing is still the means of believing, and prayer is God’s ordained means of promoting his work in the world and in the hearts of man.

7. We typically think of the doctrines of grace as doctrines that one comes to learn about

later in life, when one is mature and knows a lot about the Bible already. But is there an advantage to teaching these doctrines to children while they are young? How might these doctrines provide a foundation that parents can build upon?

For years in our church, my husband and I heard John Piper proclaiming the doctrines of grace in the sanctuary with clarity, depth, and life-transforming impact, but in our Sunday school classes our children were often being taught only a few basic biblical truths, distorted truth, or sometimes even untruth. When we were placed with the responsibility of children’s ministry we determined that children would learn accurate doctrine and the full counsel of God, which set us off on an unanticipated journey of producing teaching materials now available through Children Desiring God. What we have seen in teaching these truths at a young age is that children more readily accept the “hard truths” than adults because they don’t have the emotional hang-ups that adults have with these truths. At first, these are intellectual issues for children, and they are not colored by their experience.

WE WOULD HEARTILY AGREE WITH OSWALD CHAMBERS’ STATEMENT THAT “PRAYER DOES NOT EQUIP US FOR GREATER WORKS— PRAYER IS THE GREATER WORK.”

GOOD PARENTING IS NOT ABOUT PERFECTION BUT ABOUT DIRECTION.

By starting with the foundations of truth, children then interpret their experience in light of these truths. What I have seen as a result is a stronger trust in God's providential works, a greater acceptance of life's disappointments as being a good part of God's overall plan for them, and a confidence in Romans 8:28. They react in more mature ways than expected as their theology informs their emotions rather than the other way around.

8. Families are often occupied with countless events and activities: Vacation Bible School, AWANA, Bible Camp, and the list goes on. In the midst of so much “doing” parents can forget to pray for their children, or they misjudge the significance of prayer in the Christian home. How important is prayer and does it really make a difference?

This is an easy question to answer and every one of your readers will probably answer it the same way: prayer is of the utmost importance. Every parent quickly understands that his or her child has a sin nature and that he or she is incapable of changing the child's heart. If we ask ourselves questions like, “Does my child's heart for God depend on God's efforts or mine? Is the work of creating spiritual hunger in my child dependent on my work or is it a result of God's work?” we will

quickly acknowledge that though our efforts are important, they will prove fruitless unless God is at work in the child's heart.

We would heartily agree with Oswald Chambers' statement that “Prayer does not equip us for greater works—prayer is the greater work.” However, the real question we have to ask is, “Do we live in accordance with our beliefs?” In other words, we may confess that spiritual fruit is the result of God's work in our child, but in reality, we may spend little time and effort in prayer for our children. What we really need to do is align our practice with our theology. ■

WHY
CHILDREN
— *MUST LEARN* —
CHURCH
HISTORY

By Simonetta Carr

With so much to teach our children and so little time, why should we include church history? What did Isaac Newton mean when he said he could look further because he stood on the shoulders of giants? Should we limit ourselves to stand there, taking advantage of the accomplishments of our great predecessors, and only look forward? This conclusion may seem natural in our age, when we're told we should live in the present and look to the future. Newton's reasoning, however, was most likely very different. There are many reasons why we should look to the past and guide our children in that discovery.

We Can't Hide from the Past

When we read Newton's quote, it's easy to forget he could benefit from the discoveries of the giants who went before him because he thoroughly studied their teachings. The past is part of us. Church history is embedded in the doctrines we take for granted, in our interpretation of the Bible and in our liturgy. It even influences the way we see other Christians and the world around us, and the way we face certain choices and challenges. Studying church history helps us

to understand what we believe and why, and to make informed decisions.

Church History Helps Us to Appreciate God's Sovereign Plan

In spite of the church's problems, failures, and divisions, Christ has kept and is still keeping the promise he made in Caesarea, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). It's important for our children to know that the story of God's preservation of his people in Jesus Christ—the overarching theme of Scriptures—didn't end with the Book of Acts. It has continued throughout the 2,000 years of history from the apostles until today and will continue until the consummation. It includes us and our children.

Studying church history helps us to see beyond our limited and immediate situation. It gives us confidence in God's promises and moves us to praise him for their historical fulfillment, saying, like the prophet Samuel, "Till now the LORD has helped us" (1 Sam. 7:12). This appreciation of God's help and sustenance in the past is frequently encouraged in Scriptures.

THE PAST IS PART OF US. CHURCH HISTORY IS EMBEDDED IN THE DOCTRINES WE TAKE FOR GRANTED, IN OUR INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE AND IN OUR LITURGY. IT EVEN INFLUENCES THE WAY WE SEE OTHER CHRISTIANS AND THE WORLD AROUND US, AND THE WAY WE FACE CERTAIN CHOICES AND CHALLENGES. STUDYING CHURCH HISTORY HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE BELIEVE AND WHY, AND TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS.

It's also important, as much as possible, to give our children a general idea of the whole history of the church and not only of the periods or individuals we particularly like, because God has been with his church and has preserved his gospel in every age.

Church History Helps Us to Appreciate Tradition

The word tradition makes some Protestants uncomfortable because of the meaning it has acquired in the Roman Catholic Church. When the Reformers talked about tradition, however, they referred to the church's general consensus of interpreting the Bible. Much of our Protestant tradition is exemplified in our historical confessions and creeds.

While it's true that the tradition of the church has no authority independent of the Scriptures, this tradition is very valuable as a summary of biblical doctrine. We're still exhorted to examine "the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). At the same time, the creeds and confessions our forefathers have prayerfully and carefully drafted and the church has wisely tested prevent us from being "carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14) and from reinventing a sound and proven theological wheel.

Church History Helps Us to Appreciate our Church Family

Learning from others and taking their ideas into serious consideration is a wonderful exercise in humility and respect. We should take our children through the pages of church history as we would take them to a foreign country, teaching them to see things from a different perspective, without superimposing our experiences and ideas.

Eric Ives, author of *Lady Jane Grey: A Tudor Mystery*, wrote, "In the West, growing secularization ensures that relatively few people even understand the issues which meant so much to [Jane]." Making an effort to understand unfamiliar issues by becoming acquainted with historical characters and their times will bring us closer to our church family of pilgrims and strangers of all ages. Biographies are especially valuable in this sense, as they help us to gain deeper insight into the convictions, dreams, fears, and concerns of others.

IN A SENSE, THEN, WE ARE TRULY STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF THE THEOLOGICAL GIANTS OF OUR PAST AND BENEFITING FROM THEIR TEACHINGS. BUT JUST STANDING THERE AND LOOKING FURTHER MIGHT NOT DO US MUCH GOOD. IN FACT, AS HISTORY TEACHES US, IT'S DANGEROUS TO LOOK FORWARD WITHOUT A STRONG KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST. IT'S MUCH SAFER (AND HUMBLER) TO SIT ON THEIR SHOULDERS, WHERE WE CAN INTERACT WITH THEM, DRAW FROM THEIR WISDOM, AND BE DEEPLY TOUCHED BY THEIR DEVOTION.

Church History Helps Us to Understand Theology

Our Christian doctrine didn't develop in a vacuum. Contrary to what some people believe, it was not shaped by a few men in some ancient church council. In fact, church councils have often been called to discuss and find biblical answers to questions that had been widely circulating among the people.

For example, the Council of Nicea was the result of a long, even literal fight between the followers of Arius and those who maintained the doctrine of the full divinity of Christ. Most of the bishops who attended the council had suffered greatly under the Diocletian persecution. Some had lost some limbs or their sight.

To them, the doctrine of the true nature of Christ was of the utmost importance. An attendant to the council, Athanasius, continued to defend this doctrine at the cost of exile and under a constant threat of death. Reading about this passion challenges our insipid convictions and comfortable lives and moves us to take into deeper consideration that invaluable doctrine.

Likewise, understanding Luther's heart-wrenching struggle of conscience and his gradual and conflicted discovery of the gospel gives us a much deeper understanding of this gospel and a fuller appreciation of its ramifications.

In a sense, then, we are truly standing on the shoulders of the theological giants of our past and benefiting from their teachings. But just standing there and looking further might not do us much good. In fact, as history teaches us, it's dangerous to look forward without a strong knowledge of

the past. It's much safer (and humbler) to sit on their shoulders, where we can interact with them, draw from their wisdom, and be deeply touched by their devotion.

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FAMILY WORSHIP

WHAT'S THAT?

By Jason Helopoulos

My two children (Ethan, who is six, and Gracen, who is nine), my wife, and I were sitting on the couch following dinner. We had just read through Matthew 17 and the account of Christ's transfiguration. Our discussion ranged to contemplating the wonderful vision which awaits the Christian in heaven, where we will gaze upon the glory of God in the person of Christ forever.

As we imagined this beautiful promise, my son asked, "Daddy, if I am in heaven, will I see Christ's glory?" One small, two-letter word in his question grabbed my attention. I asked, "What do you mean by if, Son?" He paused for a few seconds and then looked into my eyes and said, "I don't know if I will be in heaven. I have such bad thoughts." He had never expressed this sin or fear before. I asked, "What do you mean, Son?" He replied, "I have such mad thoughts about other people. I get mad at them and think bad things." My six-year-old son was opening his heart, revealing his personal struggles with sin and his own doubts about salvation. I seized the opportunity and replied with tears in my eyes, "Oh, Son, please know that Christ's death is sufficient for all your bad and mad thoughts. His shed blood is enough to cover over any and every bad thought you have ever had or ever will have. You only need to trust in Him as your Savior."

In one sense, this was a unique night. In another sense, it was quite routine. The question was different, but the circumstances were the same. Most

evenings we attempt to follow dinner by engaging in family worship. We are not the first to do so. In fact, family worship has a long and fruitful history among the people of God. Christians long considered it essential to a life lived unto Christ. The Westminster Assembly considered it a disciplinable offense if a father was not leading his family in daily worship. Why? Because worship is the central act of the Christian's life.

God's people are worshippers

This is what God's people do. We are worshippers. This is our identity and it informs our practice. Whether at Mt. Sinai, the Temple or the synagogue, or the houses in Acts, God's people worship when they come together. It marks our corporate life. It also marks our individual lives. Individual Christians seek the Lord in prayer and Bible study as a necessary component of their Christian walk. In truth, if worship were absent from an individual's life, we would find their faith

FAMILY WORSHIP HAS A LONG AND FRUITFUL HISTORY AMONG THE PEOPLE OF GOD. CHRISTIANS LONG CONSIDERED IT ESSENTIAL TO A LIFE LIVED UNTO CHRIST. THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY CONSIDERED IT A DISCIPLINABLE OFFENSE IF A FATHER WAS NOT LEADING HIS FAMILY IN DAILY WORSHIP. WHY? BECAUSE WORSHIP IS THE CENTRAL ACT OF THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE.

suspect. If worship were absent from a church, we would doubt its life in Christ. And so we must also recognize that as worship is to fill the Christian church and the individual Christian life, so it is to fill the Christian family's life together as well. Jonathan Edwards once commented that our families are to "be as it were a little church." As such, they are to be filled with worship. Being a Christian family means more than just putting a sign over the mantle that says, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." As Christians, we desire that our families are centered upon Christ, filled with the worship of Christ, and affected by the means of Christ. And the church throughout the ages has maintained and seen evidence that family worship is one of the chief means of doing so.

What is family worship?

What is family worship? It is simply those living under the same roof gathering together in a time of worship with one another. It could be a husband and wife, a mom and her two children, or the family of four and Uncle Leroy who lives in the garage apartment I know that may sound scary, but it doesn't need to be scary. In fact, it

**WHAT IS FAMILY WORSHIP?
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is quite simple and very easy. Family worship takes ten, fifteen, or at most twenty minutes and includes reading the Bible, praying together, and singing to our Lord. It doesn't require erudition, ordination, or a Ph.D. It is simply God's people gathering around God's Word, seeking God in prayer, and singing praise to His holy name.

Family worship as a means of grace

When some hear a call to the practice of family worship, their legalism alarm begins to sound. This is unfortunate. Can family worship become legalistic? Of course it can, as with most good disciplines of the Christian life. But it should not become so. Family worship is not meant to be a weight, a burden, or a guilt-inducing torture mechanism. No, just the opposite. It is a means of grace. God has given us His Word, prayer, and song to feed, nourish, and shape our hearts and souls (Phil. 4:6-7; Col. 3:16-17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is a means by which we might delight in his person and grace. When it begins to feel like a weight, remind yourself and your family members it is a means of grace. When your family has missed a few days in a row, a week, or even weeks, don't get discouraged. Don't feel like you have to start the giant wheel turning again. Remind yourself it is a means of grace, pick up your Bible, and start again. When a night of family worship fails miserably and you begin to walk away discouraged, remind yourself it is a means of grace. It is not a weight. It is not a burden. It is not meant to be guilt-inducing. It is a gift from the hands of our heavenly Father (James 1:17).

FAMILY WORSHIP IS NOT MEANT TO BE A WEIGHT, A BURDEN, OR A GUILT-INDUCING TORTURE MECHANISM. NO, JUST THE OPPOSITE. IT IS A MEANS OF GRACE.

There are many benefits to family worship, but when I think of family worship my thoughts often turn to Psalm 78. Asaph is concerned with passing on the faith to the following generation. He says we must “tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might, and the wonders that he has done” (Ps. 78:4). Yet he doesn’t want this truth just preserved, but also believed and cherished by the generation to follow. He desires that they “set their hope in God and not forget his works, but keep his commandments” (Ps. 78:7).

And in our families there is no better way to do this than through regular, consistent, and intentional family worship. Make no mistake, family worship does not guarantee that our children will seize upon the faith. It is no magic elixir, but it does center our homes upon Christ and regularly places our family members in the way of God’s means of grace. No matter how spontaneous I may be, sharing the truth of God and His mighty works “off the cuff” could never equal what we do in regular daily family worship. It is the best means for effectual evangelism and discipleship in the home. The great accounts and truths of the Scriptures are set before us every night. We are daily

seeking the Lord’s throne of grace in united prayer. And we are offering thanksgiving and praise to God as we join our voices in song. Each of these elements of family worship conveys to the minds and hearts of those gathered the truth of God and his mighty works in a full, regular, and consistent way that no other practice in the home can rival.

When I survey the history of the church, it is hard not to notice the fruit family worship has produced. When I survey my current context, it is hard not to see the benefits that have accrued in the families around me who practice family worship. And when I take stock of my own family, I rejoice at the benefits we have witnessed. It isn’t always easy. Sometimes it isn’t even enjoyable, but it is always worth it.

Homes centered upon Christ

The morning following my son’s revealing question, I was getting dressed and preparing to go to work. I heard my son in the adjoining room asking my wife if he could play on the iPad. Now, you have to understand that my son loves the iPad—maybe a little too much. His mother and I, being the prison wardens we are, restrict him to

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twenty minutes a day. He was lobbying to use those allotted minutes early in the morning before the start of school. I heard his mother rightly inform him that school was first and if he did well in school then he could play the iPad later. I listened to his frustration grow with each attempt to change his mother's mind, but she was immovable. All of a sudden, the door opened and his little six-year-old feet stormed out of the bathroom. He made it about three steps down the hallway and then he began to cry. I noticed it was a unique cry. It didn't appear to be a cry of disappointment or even anger. It was far softer. I sat on the bed and called him over to myself and placed him upon my knee. He laid his head on my shoulder with tears rolling down his cheeks as I asked, "Son, are you having bad thoughts about your Mommy?" He replied in a broken and weeping voice, "Yes, Daddy." And I said, "Oh, Son, do you remember what we talked about last night during family worship?" He said, "Yes, Daddy." And I proceeded to tell him again, "Christ's shed blood for sinners is sufficient to

cover over your sins, every bad thought you have ever had, including these. You just need to trust in him. How about we confess this sin to Christ and ask for forgiveness right now?" And he said, "OK, Daddy," and we prayed and he confessed. Family worship is a means of grace and the best way I know to center our homes consistently, regularly, and faithfully upon Christ.

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**FAMILY WORSHIP IS A MEANS
OF GRACE AND THE BEST WAY I
KNOW TO CENTER OUR HOMES
CONSISTENTLY, REGULARLY, AND
FAITHFULLY UPON CHRIST.**

TOLLE LEGE: GIVE THEM TRUTH

By Starr Meade

Our children cannot apply Scripture without knowing what it says. They cannot love Christ without knowing who he is. They can't obey God without knowing what he has commanded. And they will not know these things if we do not provide deliberate, thorough, rigorous instruction, just as we would do for subjects like math or grammar.

We need to cling to every one of the worthwhile goals in our list. But we also need to back up a step and acknowledge the priority of—yes, I'm going to say it—filling children's heads with knowledge of Christian truth. God could have ordained for us the ability to simply intuit truth about him—but he didn't (although most Americans act as though he did). He ordained a book, studied like any book, as the primary means of acquiring knowledge of God. Yes, we may rely on the Holy Spirit to bring to our children's minds what they need to know when they need to know it, but God has ordained Word and Spirit to operate together. In his usual way of working, the Spirit will not bring to our children's minds what has never been put into

them. We worry that if our children don't act on each piece of biblical information we give them, they are not making proper use of God's truth. We need to realize that, with children, a large part of our teaching must have, as its goal, the simple provision of information to believe. If our children possess an adequate, Christ-centered, biblical belief system, we can guide them in applying it now, and they can find ways to apply it again and again later, all through life. In one sense, right believing is its own application.

This excerpt is taken from Give Them Truth: Teaching Eternal Truths to Young Minds (P&R, 2015), 25, and is used with permission.

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**MORE
THAN
CHARACTER**

What Bible Stories Teach
Us About God

By
Starr Meade

“**A**nd the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land,” you tell your students (Jonah 2:10). If your audience is made up of three-year-olds who are unfamiliar with this story, they breathe a collective sigh of relief that Jonah is okay after all. If your audience consists of fifth-graders, at least one of them is waving his raised hand in a desperate desire to insist that the fish could not have been a whale, no matter what the pictures indicate. You move on to the next part of the story, pointing out that now, when God again tells Jonah to go preach in Nineveh, Jonah goes. With the story over and attention spans just about used up, children begin to squirm, and you realize you have no more than ninety seconds left to get your application across.

You urge them to consider that, though they will probably never be swallowed by a great fish, if they disobey God as Jonah did, they will be inviting certain misery. God has their best interests at heart, you remind them, and “there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey.” Class ends and the children leave, hopefully heading off to be just a little more obedient than they would have been had they not attended Sunday school today.

GOD IS THE MAIN CHARACTER OF EVERY BIBLE STORY. THE BIBLE TELLS THE GREAT STORY OF GOD SAVING A PEOPLE TO BE HIS PEOPLE, IN SPITE OF ALL THE OBSTACLES AND PLOT TWISTS ALONG THE WAY. EACH INDIVIDUAL STORY WE TELL TO CHILDREN IS AN EPISODE IN THAT MAIN STORY, AN INCIDENT THAT MOVES THE PLOT ALONG AND BRINGS US CLOSER TO GOD’S KEEPING OF THE PROMISES HE BEGAN MAKING IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN. WHAT MATTERS IN EVERY BIBLE STORY IS WHAT GOD DOES.

What’s missing from this storytelling scenario? I maintain that the main character is missing. Jonah is not the main character of this story; God is. His activity, not Jonah’s, should be our focus.

God is the main character

In fact, God is the main character of every Bible story. The Bible tells the great story of God saving a people to be his people, in spite of all the obstacles and plot twists along the way. Each individual story

we tell to children is an episode in that main story, an incident that moves the plot along and brings us closer to God’s keeping of the promises he began making in the Garden of Eden. What matters in every Bible story is what God does. The most important application of every one of the Bible’s stories is not how I can imitate (or avoid imitating) the human character; the most important

application is what I should know and believe about the character of God. This becomes obvious when we consider the purpose of Scripture. Was God’s purpose in giving us his Word to hold up human examples of moral glory? Or was it to reveal himself to us, along with the salvation he provides?

Yet when we tell stories to children, we almost always focus on the human character. When we get to the end, we almost always offer an application

for the story that involves doing (or not doing) what that character did. Why do we do this? For one thing, it's what we're used to. Both fairy tales and Aesop's fables, standard fare in children's literature, wind up with some version of "and the moral of the story is..." And when adults told us Bible stories, when we were children, the adults often drew those kinds of morals for us as well.

For another thing, making a moral point the main point is the easiest thing to do. In most Bible stories, we can see at first glance behaviors that can be quickly labeled either good or bad. Working out what the invisible God is up to may take a little more study. And finally, looking for good behavior to copy is our default setting as sinful humans, isn't it? Don't we always have to remind ourselves that we're not supposed to be working our way into God's favor? Don't we always have to remind ourselves that the real story is what God does for us, not what we do for him? This is true even for those of us who know good and well that biblical

HOW DO WE START READING AND TELLING BIBLE STORIES SO THAT THE FOCUS IS NOT ON THE HUMAN CHARACTER BUT ON GOD? ONE OF THE SIMPLEST THINGS WE CAN DO IS TO TRAIN OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN TO ASK TWO QUESTIONS OF EVERY STORY IN THE BIBLE. THE QUESTIONS ARE: WHAT IS GOD DOING IN THIS STORY? AND WHAT DOES THIS STORY SHOW US ABOUT WHAT GOD IS LIKE?

Christianity is built on God saving sinners who can't save themselves; we come to the end of a Bible story and automatically look around for what we should do.

Two key questions to ask when reading a Bible story

How do we stop telling Bible stories like this? How do we start reading and telling Bible stories so that the focus is not on the human character but on God? One of the simplest things we can do is to train ourselves and our children to ask two questions of every story in the Bible. The questions are: what is God doing in this story? And what does this story show us about what God is like?

Consider a few examples. I have no idea how much water Rebekah had to draw from the well to satisfy the thirst of ten camels (Gen. 24), but I'm confident that her task was a tedious one there under the sweltering sun of a dusty Middle Eastern desert.

All the servant had asked for was a drink, but Rebekah herself offered to water the ten camels, and all for a complete stranger. The story carries a sharp rebuke to my self-centered littleness, yet that's not its main point. What did God do in the story? God answered the prayers of Abraham and of Abraham's servant, and he provided a suitable bride for Isaac. The provision came through God's orchestration of a meeting between the servant and Rebekah at the well and through God's work in Rebekah's heart to cause her to make such a selfless offer to a stranger. Without God's actions in this quiet little story, his promise to Abraham of offspring (and to Adam and Eve of a child who would crush the serpent) could never have come true. Without this unlikely incident of hospitality in the desert, there would have been no mother

I KNOW A HUSBAND-WIFE TEAM OF SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN MOLINE, IL, WHO CREATED A BULLETIN BOARD IN THEIR CLASSROOM WITH THE HEADING “WHAT DID GOD DO?” ON ONE SIDE AND ANOTHER HEADING “WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT GOD?” ON THE OTHER SIDE.

for Isaac’s children and so no twelve tribes of Israel, to whom would be given the Scriptures and from whom would come the Messiah. In this story, we see God’s rule over circumstances and over hearts. We see his goodness in answering prayer, his faithfulness to keep his promises, his power to accomplish his purposes. If we only focus on Rebekah, exemplary as she is, we’ll miss these lessons about God.

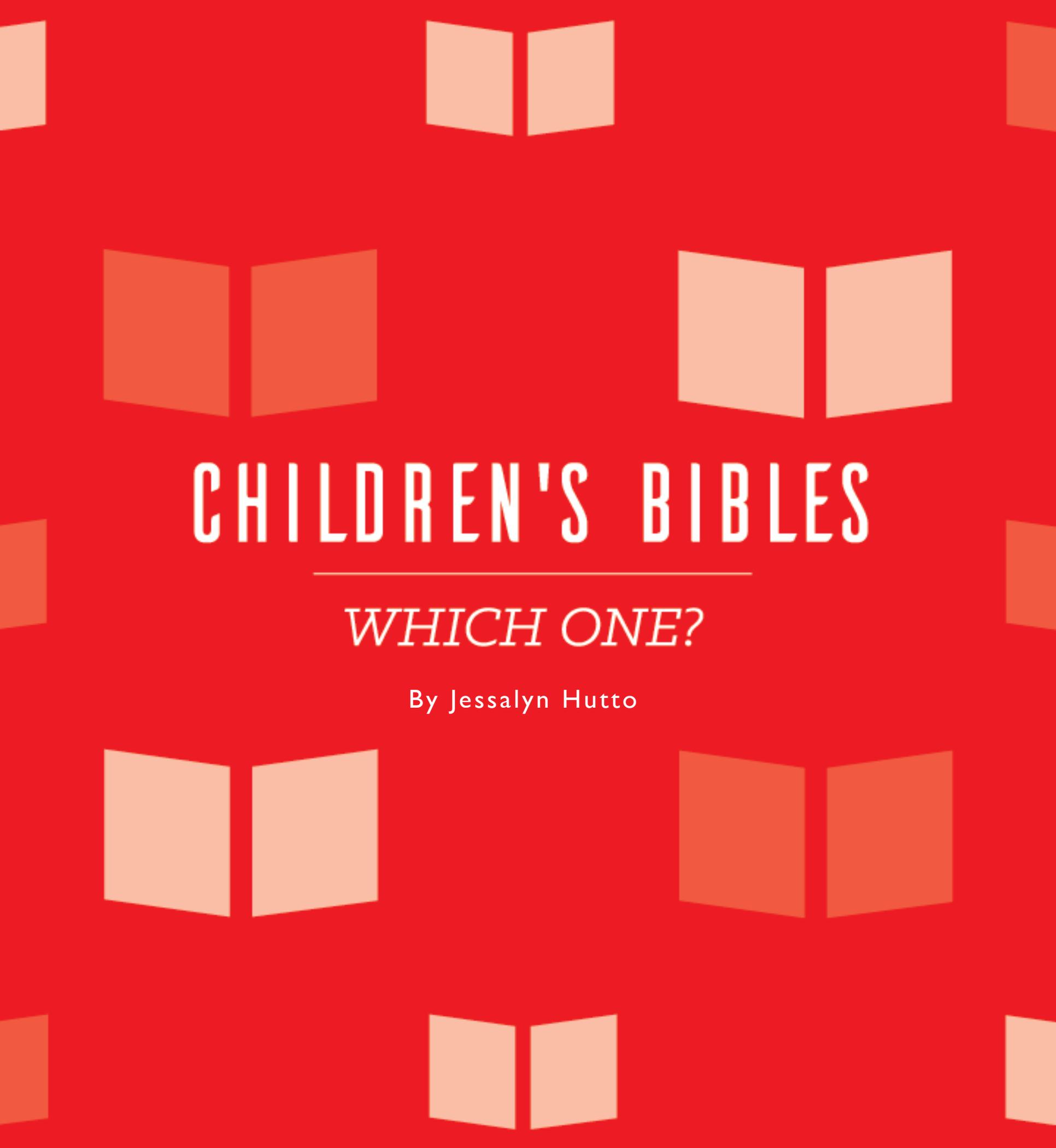
Or consider the familiar tale of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They risk a hideous death by fire to remain worshipers of God alone, refusing to bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s statue. Yes, their example shines, and we should pray that God would enable us (and our children) to imitate these three. But the more important thing to notice is what God was doing in this story and what it teaches us of him. The account of God preserving the three young men who remained true to him, even against the fury of a world power and the physical reality of a fire heated seven times, provides a tangible illustration of the message of the book of Daniel, this story’s source. Rulers of this world will rise to dizzying heights of power and will trample underfoot the people of God and scatter them to the winds; God’s people will look, and probably feel, hopelessly small and weak; but their God is the Most High. His kingdom alone will endure, and his people will rule with him forever. The story tells us more than just

that we should be courageous for God. It gives us a rock-solid reason for doing so when we read it in its context of a whole book shouting hope to the defeated, exiled people of God.

Back, then, to our story of Jonah. What is God doing in the story? All kinds of things! He speaks; he rules (wind, waves, pagan sailors, a huge fish, a reluctant prophet, evil Ninevites, a plant, a worm, the sun, and a scorching wind); he saves physically; he changes hearts; he brings repentance; he teaches his people; and he works in them to make them like himself. On many levels and with many people, he saves. What do we learn about God from all this? We learn that he makes himself known to his people. We see that he is sovereign over all creation and over every heart. We discover some measure of how good and how gracious he is. In the story of Jonah, God demonstrates his great grace to so many who deserve his wrath, and he calls us to have his great heart of compassion toward others.

Keep God at the center

I know a husband-wife team of Sunday school teachers in Moline, IL, who created a bulletin board in their classroom with the heading “What did God do?” on one side and another heading “What do we learn about God?” on the other side. Every time they study a Bible story with their class, they invite children to write answers to those two questions on three-by-five cards and bring them up to pin in place. This is a simple practice, but these teachers are training their students to think—even of Bible stories—in a way that keeps God, not man, at the center. 



CHILDREN'S BIBLES

WHICH ONE?

By Jessalyn Hutto

Children are naturally captivated by stories. Their budding imaginations crave tales of thrilling adventure, brave heroes, and sacrificial love as ferociously as their stomachs crave food. Never has a parent had to bribe his or her child into curling up on the couch together to enjoy a good story. Happily, this makes the monumental responsibility of sharing the world-altering, soul-saving gospel with our little ones a joyous and altogether natural task, because the gospel is unmistakably the *greatest* story ever told.

Therefore, reading the Bible with our children can be a delight, an adventure, even a thrill! Within the covers of our Bibles, God's story of love toward humanity has been penned for our families to relish over and over again. And yet, diving into the 66 books of the Bible is often an intimidating task for parents—especially if they are just becoming literate in its various genres, themes, and storylines themselves. It can be hard

to know where to start, and even harder at times to know how to explain the trickier parts of the Bible to little ears.

This is where I wholeheartedly believe that children's storybook Bibles *can* be an asset to parents. While these books should never be used as a substitute for the actual God-breathed Scriptures, they can be used as a helpful supplement in a child's regular intake of the gospel story. These books can help in two ways: First, they give children a broad understanding of the Scriptures. Because these Bibles typically pick out the most important moments in salvation history, children can quickly develop a firm mastery of the overarching biblical narrative from its beginning to its end. Second, storybook Bibles are helpful as they give parents the tools to explain difficult concepts to children in a way they can easily comprehend.

This is not to say that children's Bibles can't also be a detriment to our children at times. For instance, many such books morph the Bible into a succession of moral anecdotes meant to teach

READING THE BIBLE WITH OUR CHILDREN CAN BE A DELIGHT, AN ADVENTURE, EVEN A THRILL! WITHIN THE COVERS OF OUR BIBLES, GOD'S STORY OF LOVE TOWARD HUMANITY HAS BEEN PENNED FOR OUR FAMILIES TO RELISH OVER AND OVER AGAIN. AND YET, DIVING INTO THE 66 BOOKS OF THE BIBLE IS OFTEN AN INTIMIDATING TASK FOR PARENTS—ESPECIALLY IF THEY ARE JUST BECOMING LITERATE IN ITS VARIOUS GENRES, THEMES, AND STORYLINES THEMSELVES. IT CAN BE HARD TO KNOW WHERE TO START, AND EVEN HARDER AT TIMES TO KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN THE TRICKIER PARTS OF THE BIBLE TO LITTLE EARS.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT CHILDREN'S BIBLES CAN'T ALSO BE A DETRIMENT TO OUR CHILDREN AT TIMES. FOR INSTANCE, MANY SUCH BOOKS MORPH THE BIBLE INTO A SUCCESSION OF MORAL ANECDOTES MEANT TO TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO ACT BETTER. WHILE A CERTAIN LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY WITH BIBLICAL CHARACTERS AND STORIES IS GAINED FROM THESE BOOKS, SOMETHING DANGEROUS LURKS WITHIN THEIR COVERS: A MORALISTIC, WORKS-BASED UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANITY. THIS IDEA THAT THE BIBLE IS PRIMARILY ABOUT MORALITY IS A HUGE DETRIMENT TO OUR CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL COST. INSTEAD, CHILDREN'S BIBLES SHOULD STRIVE TO MAKE JESUS' GOSPEL OF GRACE THEIR PRIMARY FOCUS, AS THIS ACCURATELY REFLECTS THE HEART OF THE SCRIPTURES.

children how to act better. While a certain level of familiarity with biblical characters and stories is gained from these books, something dangerous lurks within their covers: a moralistic, works-based understanding of Christianity. This idea that the Bible is primarily about morality is a huge detriment to our children's understanding of the gospel and should be avoided at all cost. Instead, children's Bibles should strive to make Jesus' gospel of grace their primary focus, as this accurately reflects the heart of the Scriptures.

Thankfully, there are some wonderful storybook Bibles that do just that. Below I will give an overview of the four most popular and helpful children's Bibles currently on the market. These Bibles are all faithful retellings of the Word of God that avoid the trap of moralism.

THE BIG PICTURE STORY BIBLE

The Big Picture Story Bible, by David Helm (Crossway), is written for the littlest of readers (ages 2-5) and makes a wonderful first Bible for children. Its large illustrations are colorful and interesting, and the amount of text on each page is kept to a minimum. The narration is both simple and conversational. All of these characteristics are a great help in holding the attention of squirmy toddlers and preschoolers.

The Big Picture Story Bible excels at what it aims to do: provide a big, understandable picture of the Bible's one overarching storyline. Beginning at creation and the fall, it traces God's plan to redeem his creation and restore the kingdom of God. In fact, one of the biggest themes running through this storybook is the kingship of Jesus. While this children's Bible

does not go into a lot of detail or give a lot of doctrinal explanation, it does succeed in providing its readers with the grand plan of redemption, which makes it a perfect introduction to the Word of God.

THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE: EVERY STORY WHISPERS HIS NAME

The Jesus Storybook Bible (Zondervan), by Sally Lloyd-Jones, is by far the most popular of the four storybooks I am recommending, and for good reason. Its author, Sally Lloyd-Jones, is a gifted storyteller who captures the imaginations and hearts of her readers. Children are rarely content to read just one chapter of this book!

The goal of *The Jesus Storybook Bible* is to connect every story to Jesus, and it does this faithfully by devoting the last couple of paragraphs of each chapter to an explanation of how the story either anticipates or foreshadows Jesus' sacrificial death. Great emphasis is placed on the imperfections of the biblical characters in order to show children the beauty of the one perfect Savior: Jesus. In this way, it doesn't set up the biblical characters as ideals or heroes, but rather as those who need salvation as desperately as we do.

The overarching theme of this book is God's rescue plan and, to use Sally's description, his "never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love." It is filled with vivid, creative, and large pictures that draw children in. The amount of text on each page is fitting for a kindergartener's attention span.

It is important to note that out of all the storybooks I am recommending, this one takes the most

creative license with each story. As a storyteller, Lloyd-Jones takes some liberties in describing the biblical accounts, such as narrating what the biblical characters were thinking and even by changing minor details from time to time. While these negatives should be noted, I still find this storybook to be unparalleled in its ability to convey the loving heart of God and humanity's desperate need for the Rescuer.

MIGHTY ACTS OF GOD: A FAMILY BIBLE STORY BOOK

Mighty Acts of God (Crossway), written by trusted children's book author Starr Meade, is a storybook Bible written with the whole family in mind. It contains ninety separate stories, each of them one-to-two pages in length. The stories are faithful to the original biblical text, told in an engaging way, and accompanied by beautiful artwork. At the end of each chapter is a helpful section titled "As for Me and My House..." which provides questions pertinent to the story that can be used to spark further discussion.

Refreshingly, the focus of *Mighty Acts of God* is placed squarely on the character and attributes of God rather than on the deeds of human characters within the stories. It aims to enlarge a child's perception of God, as each story builds upon the previous one, revealing more about the Lord and his love for humanity. This leads to many Reformed doctrinal concepts, such as predestination and justification, being introduced throughout the book when appropriate. These terms and concepts are highlighted with a different font color.

Also worth applauding in *Mighty Acts of God* is the weight given to New Testament stories. Often, children's Bibles give short shrift to the life, miracles and parables of Jesus, but Meade

dives into the New Testament stories before even hitting the halfway mark in her storybook, giving her readers a greater intimacy with the Savior to whom all the other stories have been leading.

THE GOSPEL STORY BIBLE

The Gospel Story Bible (New Growth Press), by Marty Machowski, is by far the most comprehensive and detailed Bible storybook of the four I've recommended. It contains a staggering 156 stories within its pages: 78 from the Old Testament and 78 from the New Testaments. It is written as a family devotional, much like *Mighty Acts of God*, with discussion questions following each story.

The focus of Machowski's Bible is to explain how the gospel of Jesus is the one unifying theme of Scripture. Aside from clearly explaining how each story relates to the gospel, this Bible also accomplishes this by doing a lot of cross referencing within each chapter. Old Testament stories often contain helpful and illuminating New Testament references. While these may pass over littler ears, elementary-age children and parents will benefit from seeing how the entire Bible agrees with and clarifies itself.

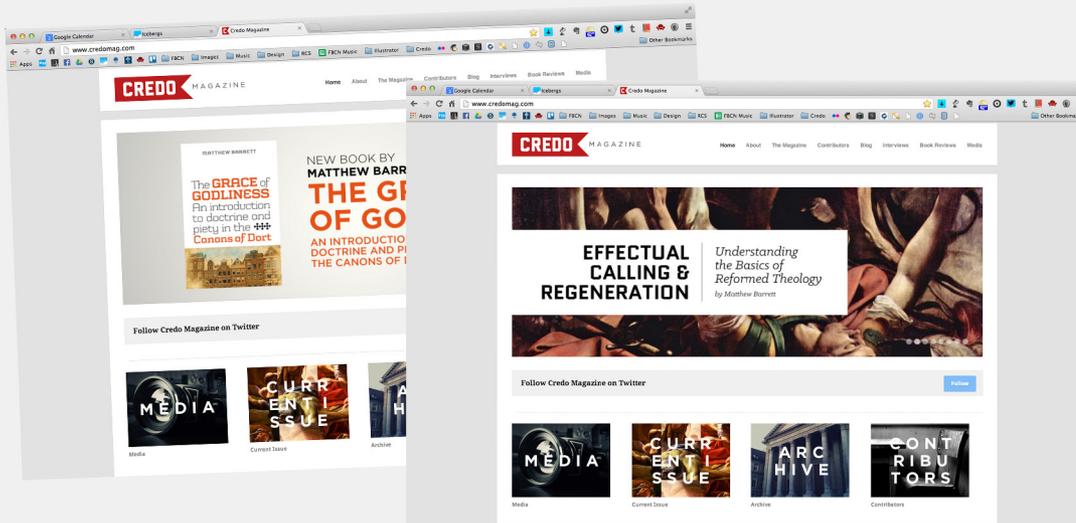
A unique feature of this storybook is its inclusion of the pastoral epistles. *The Gospel Story Bible* explores the important themes in these letters and places them in their historical context—a truly monumental accomplishment for a children's Bible! Each of its 156 stories is accompanied by a colorful, somewhat abstract illustration that is meant to provide additional opportunity for discussion. These unique illustrations may not be as attractive to younger children, as they tend to

be more symbolic than realistic.

While its storytelling is not as captivating as the previous recommendations, *The Gospel Story Bible* excels in its commitment to detail and accuracy, making it a tremendous resource for families who want to deepen their knowledge of the Word together.

Jessalyn Hutto is a regular contributor to Credo Magazine and the author of Inheritance of Tears: Trusting the Lord of Life When Death Visits the Womb. She lives near Houston, Texas where she serves alongside her husband in his ministry as a church planter. They are blessed to have four young children: Elliot, Hudson, Owen, and Roseveare. She frequently writes about theology, shares personal devotions, and reviews books for women at JessalynHutto.com. 

CREDO



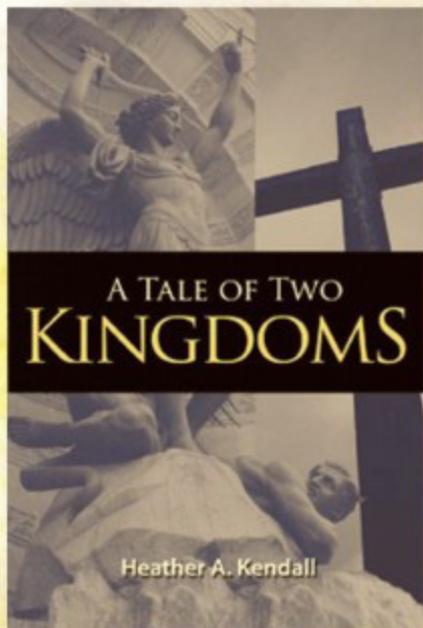
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Discovering The Big Picture in the Bible



We live in a day when it is vital for Christians to communicate the big picture of what our faith is all about...A Tale of Two Kingdoms is a helpful tool in doing just this. It sets forth this big picture, with God at its centre, in a non-technical way but one that is faithful to the Bible.

Dr. Michael A.G. Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

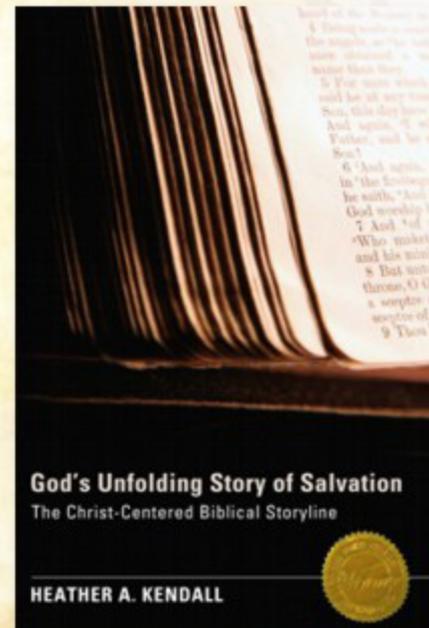
- A history of God's Plan of Salvation
- Includes a Bible timeline and all the Old Testament prophets

• Told from the point of view of God, Satan and people

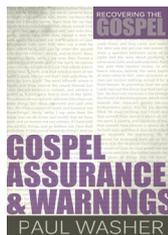
- The Christ-centered biblical storyline
- Thirty-eight lessons and questions
- An individual or group Bible study

"God's Unfolding Story of Salvation" is a biblical complement to Heather Kendall's earlier work...It is highly recommended for study groups as well as individuals who desire a clearly written, biblically accurate, spiritually encouraging treasure that lucidly documents with Scripture the Christ-centered message revealed in the progressive unfolding of redemptive history.

Gary D. Long, Th.D. Faculty President, Providence Theological Seminary



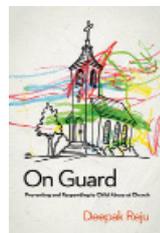
BOOK REVIEWS



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GOSPEL ASSURANCE AND WARNINGS

By Paul Washer

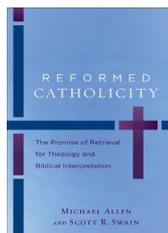


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ON GUARD

*PREVENTING AND RESPONDING
TO CHILD ABUSE AT CHURCH*

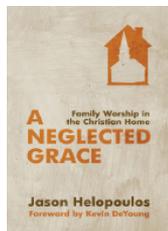
By Deepak Reju



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REFORMED CATHOLICITY *THE PROMISE OF RETRIEVAL FOR THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION*

By Michael Allen and Scott Swain



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A NEGLECTED GRACE *FAMILY WORSHIP IN THE CHRISTIAN HOME*

By Jason Helopoulos



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MARIE DURAND

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CONVENIENT LIKE STYROFOAM

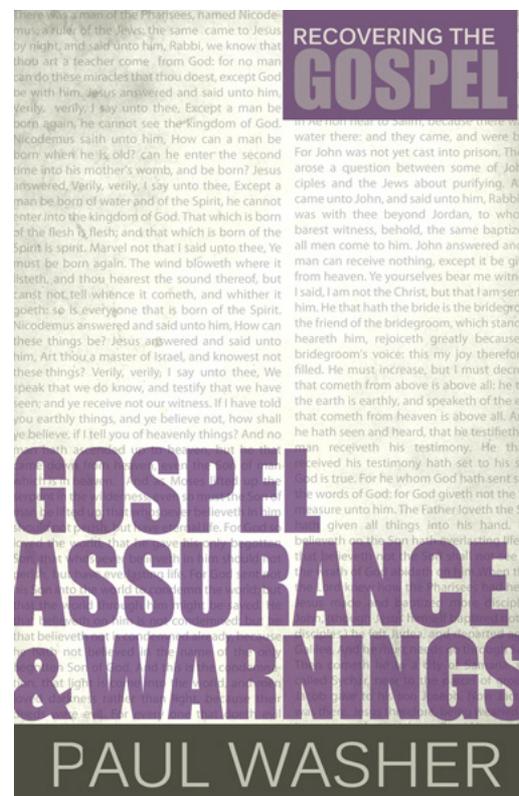
PAUL WASHER ON
THE IMPORTANCE
OF GOSPEL ASSURANCE

by Joey Cochran

Many characterize Paul Washer, founder of Heart-Cry Missionary Society, as a fire and brimstone preacher. They compare him to the Puritans or Jonathan Edwards. I imagine he would embrace this characterization.

He does not tickle people's ears nor leave them unprepared to stand before Christ. Rather he lovingly pleads for the possibly unaware and unconverted professing Christians to examine and test to see if they are in the faith (2 Cor. 3:5). This is the aim with which Washer approaches the third volume of the *Recovering the Gospel* series: *Gospel Assurance and Warnings* (Reformation Heritage Books).

This series and volume conclude with the following quote from Charles Spurgeon:



If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for. (252)

Perhaps each volume of this series, and especially this third volume, *Gospel Assurance and Warnings* (2014), should be read in this light. Washer loves and pities the unconverted—especially those deceived into thinking they are converted—with immense tenacity. So much so, he is unwilling to be silent about their plight.

Washer is unwilling to be silent about the flimsy substance of American Evangelicalism. And he is direct in his reproach. He reproaches those who fill pulpits. “Because of an evangelical pulpit weakened by ignorance, pragmatism, and fear, the professing church is filled with individuals who have never really been confronted with the gospel of Jesus Christ” (7). These are bold claims with which many preachers will take offense, but are they unwarranted?

Perhaps people have rested their salvation on a flimsily fabricated Styrofoam doctrine of assurance—piling upon it helpings of carnality—believing it would bear the weight. The convenient doctrine of praying a prayer, convenient like Styrofoam, falsely assures people, according to Washer. Maybe this flimsy plate is durable enough to hold piles of carnality, but will American Evangelicals awaken to the haunting reality that easy-believism is vulnerable and disposable like flimsy Styrofoam, which smolders in the smallest campfire and is crushed by the smallest toddler’s hand? Should preachers heed this prophetic warning from Washer: “How many millions of people will evangelical ministers and ministries send unprepared to stand before the judgment throne of Christ?” (242). Thus, Washer sets out to correct this wayward understanding of salvation that many embrace today.

Gospel Assurance and Warnings is potentially the most comforting and discomfiting read on assurance, depending on the reader, of any book I have read. Part one walks readers through an exposition of 1 John. Washer encourages readers to seek assurance by examining their lives through a series of tests given in this epistle. These tests in-

clude: walking in the Word, confessing sin, keeping God’s law, imitating Christ, loving Christians, rejecting the world, remaining in church, confessing Christ, purity, practicing righteousness, overcoming the world, and believing in Jesus.

There is a fine line that Washer walks in the tone of *Gospel Assurance and Warnings*. He succeeds in neither breaking the bruised reed nor finding figs where there are none (Matt. 7:16; 12:20). He asserts, “We must learn to console and assure the weakest saint who is broken over his many sins, but we must also learn to warn the false convert whose life is a barren and fruitless tree and whose settled manner of living is a contradiction to the gospel” (17).

Washer does not preach perfectionism by dismissing the presence of sin in believers. “The mark of the true believer is not sinless perfection but that sin becomes more and more repugnant to him” (29). It is not the presence of sin which is eliminated in believers, but it is our disposition towards sin which is altered. The truly converted despise what was once cherished and cherish what was once despised; Christians will know the loveliness of Christ.

Washer does not expect that every Christian will become a “Super Christian,” or that progressive sanctification comes at the exclusion of spiritual lapses. “The most mature and devoted believers are sometimes painfully neglectful of the spiritual disciplines that promote moral purity and conformity to Christ” (111). Still, characteristic of Christians is a longing to keep God’s law, practice righteousness, and pursue holiness.

“The Christian practices the righteousness that is shunned by the unbeliever and shuns the sin the unbeliever continues to practice” (124).

Part two warns empty confessors—the unconverted professors of Christ—and those who preach a false gospel, using exposition from James 2:19 and Matthew 7:13ff. In part two we see that, perhaps, the popular and trendy methods of presenting the gospel may be misguided at best and deceitful at worst.

Washer argues that modern practices of evangelism are practically and theologically contrary to both Scripture and the historic practice of Christians. He says we’re asking the wrong questions today. “Millions of people sit in church pews who are unconverted yet assured of their salvation because at one time they gave right answers to wrong questions” (159).

Are you a sinner? Do you want to go to heaven? Will you pray with me? These are insufficient questions to ask as we discern God’s powerful work of election and regeneration. Rather, we should look for fruits like faithfulness, perseverance, submission to Scripture, and a longing to know and be known by Christ.

One of Washer’s most potent remarks regarding true conversion is this:

We decide to bear fruit because we desire to bear fruit, and these desires flow from our new natures. God does not make us willing by manipulation or coercion, but by the act of recreation. It is certain that we will bear good fruit because he has transformed us

into the kind of trees that do so (223).

This is precisely what comes into play when we consider the discomfiting elements of Washer’s conversion claims. When we look at statistics—like the growth or decline of evangelical Christianity, depending on your reading of the recent Pew Report or Barna Groups research on Millennials, who walk away from the Christian faith—we sense great concern and discomfort over the present and the future of the church.

Could it be that these people didn’t walk away, but never entered into the Way? Could it be that they were those who still traveled down the broad path because they were never called to the narrow gate? Washer says, “We enter into the kingdom by passing through the narrow gate, but the evidence that we have passed through this gate is that we are now walking in the narrow way” (189).

Washer essentially argues that American Evangelicals need to trade their Styrofoam doctrine of assurance and return to fine china: a doctrine of assurance built on testing and examination. They must not only be concerned about a past conversion story of praying a prayer, but with an ongoing story of sanctification, marked by obedience, submission, fruitfulness, and faithfulness to Christ.

Joey Cochran

*Pastor of Middle School Discipleship
and Communications*

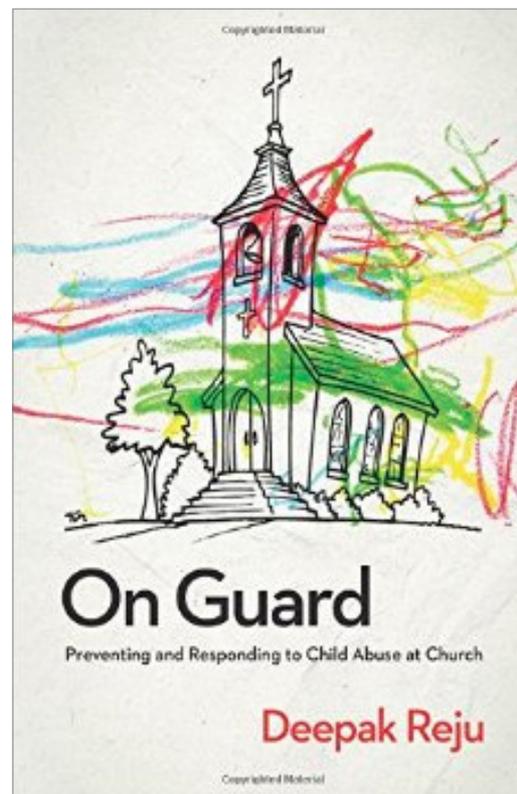
Calvary Memorial Church, Oak Park, Illinois 

ON GUARD AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

DEEPAK REJU EQUIPS CHURCHES TO ACT NOW

by Michael Nelson

In a world where sin exists, we should not be surprised by the things that occur around us. Even the most heinous acts should not catch us off guard. As the book of Judges implies, in a world that denies God as king, man does what is right in his own eyes. Even within the church, we ought to never let our guard down as to the sin that might occur. By God's grace, many churches tend to be trusting places where everybody is welcome and anybody can easily get involved. To some degree that shows the character of Christ and we can be thankful for that display of love. But to another degree this opens up the door for those who shouldn't be trusted to walk in, create havoc and destroy lives. As we watch the news at night and see the horrible things that happen in the lives of children, the church should not think that it is im-



mune to these tragedies. *On Guard* (New Growth Press, 2014), written by Deepak Reju, is a guide given to help churches prevent and respond to child abuse. It contains valuable information that every pastor and lay leader ought to be privy too. It shows us the realities of abuse that occur against children, but yet it provides wisdom for the church in protecting children and reacting rightly in the event of abuse.

There are three reasons why every church leader should read this book: first, *On Guard* is clear and direct. *On Guard* is divided up into three sections. Section one begins with the problem of child abuse, section two gives strategies for protecting against abuse, and section three gives strategies for responding to abuse.

The chapters are generally short and to the point. Throughout every chapter Reju is clear that “children are among the most vulnerable in our society today” (15) and he clearly writes with their best interests at heart. Even with repentant offenders, Reju is direct about what their involvement in the church should look like, while prioritizing the needs of the abused and children in all circumstances. Protecting our children is key, not only for their sake, but also for the church’s gospel witness before an unbelieving world. It must be clear that “our ethical and moral responsibility as Christians is to protect the children whom God has entrusted to us” (153).

Second, *On Guard* is thorough and detailed. Reju identifies two different type of predators: the power predators and the persuasion predators. He thoroughly describes both, but is especially thorough on how to protect against the persuasion predator or the “safe” adult who infiltrates his way into the church. In addition to protecting children from adult predators, Reju also takes time to address child-on-child sexual abuse. Though these types of cases only account for six percent of all perpetrators, Reju says that all abuse is wrong and damaging, which is why he chose to address this as well (165). *On Guard* seeks to help churches, and through addressing all issues carefully, the church is better served.

Third, *On Guard* is practical and applicable. It is one thing to talk about strategies and ideas, but another to implement them. Wicked people do unspeakable wrong against children (2), so to leave this sort of subject in a theoretical world would do no service to children or to the church. Therefore, mostly based upon his personal experience,

Reju offers suggestions for implementing every strategy. He offers sample policies, screening applications, training scenarios, etc. Reju also offers bullet points explaining how to define abuse, how to profile an abuser and how to minister to the abused. Even resources for companies that specialize in check in and checkout systems are provided (64). Almost every possible circumstance is addressed or at least alluded to and Reju gives application to preventing and responding to these circumstances.

Whatever stage your church is in, whether it is forming a policy to protect children, has one in place, or is even in the midst of an abuse situation now, *On Guard* will prove to be an invaluable resource. Reju will address topics that have perhaps never been considered and he will answer questions that have been raised in the past. Not only is *On Guard* easy to follow, but it is easy to reference as well. It is well worth the investment.

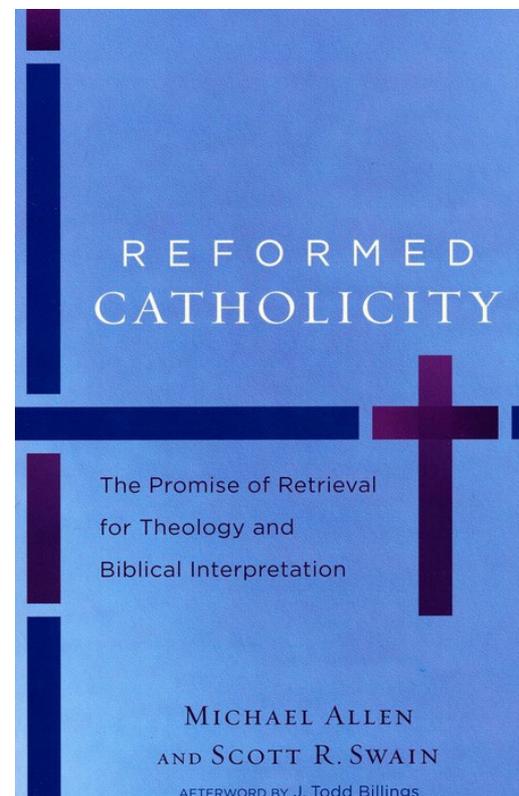
Michael Nelson
Pastor of First Baptist Church
in Grandview, MO ■

REFORMED OR CATHOLIC?

EXPLORING AN OLD HERITAGE WITH
MICHAEL ALLEN AND SCOTT SWAIN

by Miguel Echevarria

I grew up Roman Catholic. I have a deep appreciation for its liturgy, councils, creeds, and its rootedness in centuries of Christian history. Often I have felt like a tree without roots, obligated to detach myself from everything that occurred before the Reformation. I no longer feel this way. Over the last few years I have devoured books on the movement known as the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS), which have taught me that I can still (and should) identify with the church's catholic past—not the Roman Catholic church in particular, but the universal catholic church, grounded in two thousand years of common orthodoxy. I am a Baptist who now values the church's shared past as a guide for reading Scripture. Michael Allen and Scott Swain's *Reformed Catholicity* (Baker Academic, 2015) has contributed to



this watershed in my life. My suspicion is that it will do the same for others.

But from where does tradition come? In what way is it beneficial? Allen and Swain argue that church tradition is a fruit of the Spirit that illumines one's reading of Scripture. Such a view does not contradict *sola Scriptura*. Contrary to modern thought, *Sola Scriptura* "was not intended by its original advocates in the time of the Reformation as an absolute rebuke of tradition or a denial of genuine ecclesial authority" (49). Even so, it "is taken by many to involve not only a claim for the Bible but also a claim against tradition and the church" (49), though this was not the perspective of the reformers. The reformers were not modernists trying to break with their ecclesial past.

They recognized church teachings that were consistent with Scripture, seeing them as Spirit-given guides to faithful reading and living. They did, however, eliminate practices that were out of step with the Bible, such as absolution and penance. A view of Scripture divorced from tradition is not *sola Scriptura* but *solo Scriptura*, the bastard child of modern rationalism and individualism.

A vital part of ecclesiastical tradition is the rule of faith (*regula fidei*). Allen and Swain define the rule of faith as “an ecclesiastically authorized representation of Scriptural teaching whose hermeneutical function is to provide not only a starting point for biblical exegesis but also direct exegesis to its goal, which is the exposition of each particular text of Holy Scripture within the overarching context and purpose of the whole counsel of God” (99). Patristic, medieval, and Reformation interpreters recognized that the Spirit uses the rule of faith as a confessional standard to guide the church’s reading of Scripture.

The reformers, then, like their predecessors, valued the creeds, councils, and church doctrines as guides along the path of Christian reading and living. One can therefore be catholic and Reformed without holding to all Roman Catholic doctrines. Christians do well to retrieve premodern approaches to Scripture. Yet one must remember “that for the catholic-reformed tradition, God’s Word in Scripture always stands above the church and its post-biblical tradition” (158). Tradition functions in service of, and not on par with, Scripture.

Reading *Reformed Catholicity* should drive us to retrieve our catholic roots, going beyond the reformers to the Apostle’s Creed. We can be Re-

formed and rooted in the teaching of the apostles, thus being “catholic-Reformed” (153). Allen and Swain have pushed me further in this direction, helping me to be more comfortable with the church’s catholic past. I hope the same for students and pastors—for the “church needs pastor-theologians who are willing to dig deep into the biblical insights of the catholic and reformed treasury of teaching and practices, rather than being guided by the latest whims and trends” (157).

Miguel Echevarria

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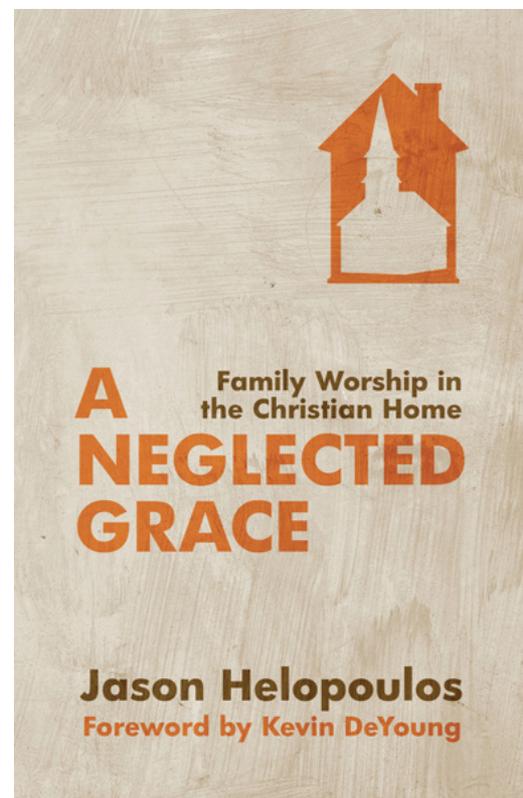
FAMILY WORSHIP?

JASON HELOPOULOS SAYS
IT'S TIME TO BRING IT
BACK INTO THE HOME

by Timothy Raymond

While I've read only a handful of books on family worship, I wouldn't be surprised whatsoever if Jason Helopoulos has written the best book on the topic. *A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home* (Christian Focus, 2013) is a nearly-perfect gem for calling, equipping, and motivating Christian families to engage in this most simple but essential means of grace.

The book is characterized by both general virtues which are found in several books on family worship and one unique feature which I've not encountered in others. As far as general virtues, *A Neglected Grace* is brief, simple, easy-to-read, deeply realistic, practical, and immediately applicable. It includes most of the same teaching, ideas, and suggestions you'll find in other books



on the topic, such as Joel Beeke's *Family Worship* or Donald Whitney's *Family Worship: In the Bible, in History & in Your Home*. Helopoulos commends Christian families gathering once a day for approximately 10 to 15 minutes to read the Bible, sing God's praises, and pray together. If this is not explicitly required by Scripture, it is at least implied (chapters 1 and 2), and is simply an intentional way to apply Ephesians 6:4 (chapter 3). An appreciated strength of *A Neglected Grace* is Helopoulos' awareness of the challenges and difficulties of real life and speaks to things such as single-parent homes, unconverted spouses, hyperactive children, and the excessively busy pace of modern American life (chapter 8). The book concludes with several personal testimonies of parents who have recently begun practicing

family worship and a few sample plans for getting started. Fortunately, Helopoulos is able to do all of this in a volume most could read in an afternoon.

The truly unique feature of *A Neglected Grace* is its regular emphasis on family worship as a joyful means of grace, as opposed to a painful burden designed to weigh us down with guilt. From my reading, I do not recall this truth being the repeated refrain of any other book on the topic. This emphasis is implied in Helopoulos' title and is peppered throughout the course of the book. Helopoulos believes the key to perseverance in family worship is when Christian parents see it as a privilege, not a drudgery. In the Introduction he writes:

My great challenge in writing this book was to do so in a way that would show the benefits of family worship—how important and beneficial it is for the Christian family—and yet would do so in a way that would not lead struggling husbands, fathers, and mothers to be weighed down with guilt. If this book increases guilt in the reader, then my prayer is that it quickly goes out of print (15-16).

Toward the end of the book, Helopoulos again emphasizes this reality:

Family worship is an instrument through which God gives us grace. . . . it is not something that should be a burden. It is a joy. Since it is not to be a burden, we should not be hard on ourselves if we miss a night. . . . Family worship, like all kinds of worship, is a means of grace and is not to be viewed as a burden or a task to be accomplished. It is something we do in response to God's grace, not to earn it (75).

This, in my opinion, is what sets *A Neglected Grace* apart from other books on family worship. What motivates true Christian growth and perseverance is not guilt but gratitude for grace. If more Christian families viewed family worship not as a new Law of Moses but as a joyful means of grace, a way to simply take hold of God's gifts, I imagine we'd see far more family worship in our churches.

As I conclude this review, I'll mention my one and only concern with *A Neglected Grace*, which has nothing to do with its content or approach. My concern is that many of the very people who most need to read this book probably won't simply because they aren't accustomed to reading books. This is a perennial problem in Christian ministry and I haven't yet discovered the solution. Perhaps if a pastor were to read this book with or to a small group of men, or turn the content into a sermon series or Sunday school class, possibly there would be greater success in the implementation of its principles. Otherwise, I fear that many copies of *A Neglected Grace* will adorn shelves but never change lives.

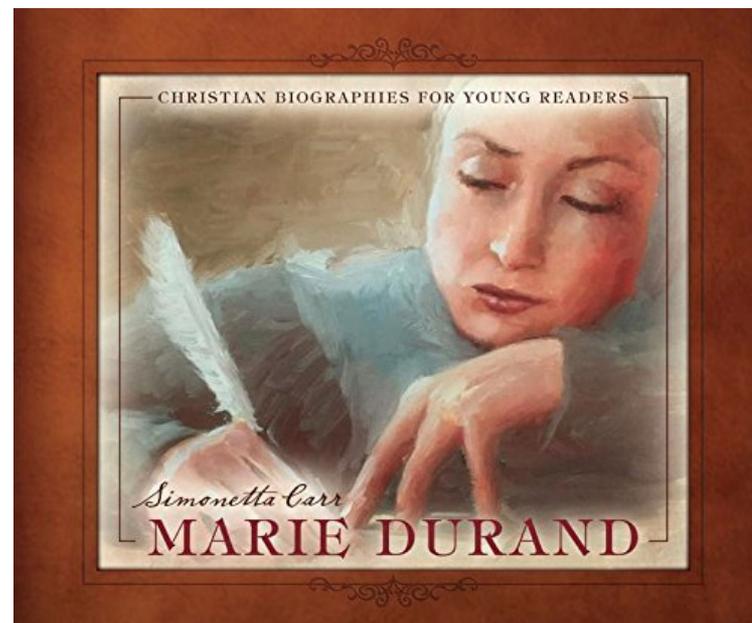
In conclusion, I heartily recommend *A Neglected Grace* without reservation. In my humble opinion, it is the best book currently available on the topic. The wise pastor will keep a stack on hand, distribute them to parents freely, read it with others, teach its contents to his congregation, and model its principles in his own family.

Timothy Raymond
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A Woman Who Knew Her Need of a Savior

SIMONETTA CARR
INTRODUCES YOUNG
CHILDREN TO MARIE DURAN

by Kimberly Campbell



C. S. Lewis, the famed Christian literary scholar and author, warned his audience about the dangers of “chronological snobbery.” He defined it as the exclusive valuation of one’s own generation—the inability to learn from the past and glean from history the lessons we need to learn to apply today. J. I. Packer captured the essence of this fallacy when he quipped: “The newer is the truer, only what is recent is decent, every shift of ground is a step forward, and every latest word must be hailed as the last word on its subject.” It’s easy to point fingers, but how can we overcome this all-too-common tendency? There are many possible solutions, but reading great biographies ranks at the top of list.

Out of my top ten favorite books, two are biographies. Both of them tell the stories of godly men

who knew their need for a Savior and took the gospel to people who had never heard of it. Adoniram Judson and Jim Elliot were men of God who lived multiple generations before me, but through their biographies I could see and appreciate the sovereign work of God throughout them. Unfortunately, I didn’t read these biographies until I was in seminary. Certainly they would have been more formative in my life had I read them earlier.

Remedying this time-delay on great biographies, there is series written for school-aged children, *Christian Biographies for Young Readers*, that aims to teach young readers about God’s faithfulness to preserve the gospel and the church throughout history. From Augustine to Martin Luther to Lady Jane Grey and Marie Durand,

historical characters can come alive to children (and the adults who read to them).

In content, these books have beautiful illustrations, photographs, and reprints of letters to help distant history march into the twenty-first century. In each case, the main character is presented as someone who needs the Gospel as much as anyone else. One beneficial aspect of this approach is that it frequently steers the minds of children to realize that the God who worked powerfully in the past is still alive and active in the world today.

In Marie Durand's biography (Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), Simonetta Carr introduces young readers to French history (useful for homeschooling families), the persecution of faithful followers of Christ, and how God is an ever present help in times of trouble. They will read the story of a woman who knew her need of a Savior and imparted truth, life, and hope to those around her.

As one who delights to read biographies and also desires to teach my sons more of how God holds all of history in his sovereign hands, I'm thankful to have a series of biographies that can whet my children's appetites for history and the world. I want my children to be readers and to fill their minds with truths about God. I want to instill in them a biblical worldview at an early age. This series helps parents with similar goals to do just that. But more importantly, it shows them the characteristics of a God who saves his people for their good and his glory.

Kimberly Campbell
Mount Vernon Baptist Church
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First Principles

TEACH YOUR KIDS THE BIG WORDS

by Matthew Barrett

C. S. Lewis once said that if he had a seminary the test one must pass in order to graduate would be to explain a difficult theological truth to a dock worker. But perhaps I might tweak Lewis' insight a little. In my seminary, the test would be to explain big, theological words to a child. If one can explain a word like "justification" to a child so that they understand the concept, then one is worthy of the title, "theologian."

Dock worker, child...either way, the point is an important one: the great truths of the Christian faith must be clearly explained to our children so that the Word of God is stored up in their hearts (Ps. 119:11). Unfortunately, too many churches and parents think doctrine does not matter. And so they and their children never take the time to

learn terms and phrases that beautifully wrap the many theological presents of the Christian faith. However, doctrine impacts doxology. If we get doctrine wrong, even if it is by neglect, we run the risk of misunderstanding who God is and what he has done. And if we get God wrong, we are in danger of worshipping someone or something made in our own image. So doctrine matters because worship matters.

That said, we cannot deny that sometimes the big words that contain doctrinal truths are intimidating. If we as adults find this to be true, then how much more so for our children? Some will be tempted at this point to dump theological terms. But isn't there a better solution?

WE CANNOT DENY THAT SOMETIMES THE BIG WORDS THAT CONTAIN DOCTRINAL TRUTHS ARE INTIMIDATING. IF WE AS ADULTS FIND THIS TO BE TRUE, THEN HOW MUCH MORE SO FOR OUR CHILDREN? SOME WILL BE TEMPTED AT THIS POINT TO DUMP THEOLOGICAL TERMS. BUT ISN'T THERE A BETTER SOLUTION? RATHER THAN THROWING OUT THEOLOGICAL TERMS, WHY NOT KEEP THEM AND EXPLAIN WHAT THEY MEAN?

Rather than throwing out theological terms, why not keep them and explain what they mean?

There is no doubt about it, this takes work! But let me give you a word of encouragement as a father of three young children. God has given children amazing minds. When they are young, they are like a sponge, soaking up what they see and hear. I have often been shocked to discover that while Daddy could not remember a person's name or where he put his wallet, my children don't seem to share in my amnesia. This became all too real to me when I began implementing the long-lost habit of catechizing one's children. We moved

from question to answer and while I had to remind myself the next day what the catechism said, my children knew the answers right off the top of their heads! It was at this point that I thought to myself, why can't our children learn rich, deep, time-tested, theologically-fancy words that have for so long helped Christians throughout the ages understand the great doctrinal truths of the Christian faith?

My hope and prayer is that the next generation would grow up learning the big words of theology because behind them can be found the fundamental truths and pillars of Christianity.

Matthew Barrett
Executive Editor 

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