

# Virtual Christian MAGAZINE

*hope and encouragement for the real world*

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*by Hector Earle*

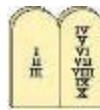
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### Are We on the Threshold of a New Age?



As we enter the year 2000, what can we expect in the years ahead? Will we see a man-made utopia courtesy of wonderful new technological marvels, or a time of great crisis? Or might we see something entirely different and unexpected on the world scene--the dawn of a new age unlike anything mankind has ever experienced? Only the Bible can give us the right answer.

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# Virtual Christian MAGAZINE Editorial

## Bible Education for Our Little Ones

by Stan Cook

Bible education is a prominent topic in the lives of my wife Holly and I, primarily because we have three children age 5 and under. Sometimes, though, the topic of Bible education can be a somewhat controversial one. In our church area, we are currently working with other parents to develop a Bible education program for our "young youth" (the preschool set, essentially) and are working through some of the basic questions of any Bible education program. Among these questions--who's going to do it--where--how? And sometimes, even "why?"

Psalms 78:1-6 addresses the "why":

"O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old--what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, His power, and the wonders He has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands."

This passage in Psalms tells us that what we're teaching our children is not just for our little ones. We need to have the foresight that one day they are each going to grow up and possibly have little ones of their own. (If it happened to me, it can happen to anyone!) What we need to be doing now with our young people should have a lasting positive impact for generations to come--to our descendants who will learn about our wonderful Creator long after we are gone.

It is our belief that the lessons have to be fun for the young people. If they don't have a good time, they're not going to want to come back! It's been a joy already to watch some of the youngsters, who I didn't know really well at first, start to open up more and become more comfortable. We firmly believe that we can have fun and learn at the same time. For example, we recently had a lesson discussing God's creation of Adam and Eve. We brought building clay for each of the children to play with, and we talked about how God formed man out of dirt. So we did the same with our clay. Each child did an excellent job making his or her



own "person." Unfortunately, we noticed that there was nothing we could do to make our "people" get up, walk and talk. Only God can do that!

Bible education is definitely a team effort. It is important to have a group of parents (not to mention church leadership) with a common goal. Without that support, the process can become bogged down and difficult.

In our particular area, we have chosen to develop our own "curriculum." There are several excellent programs available through various resources, but we decided that we could come up with some more personalized lessons if we did them ourselves. In working with some other curricula in the past, we've found that what works for one particular area does not necessarily work for another area or instructor. If the instructors aren't enthused about the program, the children are certainly going to notice, and they aren't going to have as much fun!

We want the lessons--the point of what we're doing--to be planted in the hearts of these wonderful kids. Every lesson has a "point." For instance, what is God trying to tell us here? Why did he put this in the Bible?"

We also try to include a memory verse with most of the lessons. The older ones really excel in this area. The 5 and 6-year-olds have done a good job of remembering their Bible verses from week to week.

It's obviously nice to have young people be able to recite Bible verses and I'm very proud of them. But we are after more than just "cute." There are several areas we are striving to develop as we work with our youth.

### **We want our youth to know that they have a responsibility.**

Rev. 20: 11-13 addresses this principle:

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done."

We are all going to be judged. We are all going to have to stand before God and be accountable for our actions. Despite our best intentions, none of us can stand in for any of our young people. This makes it all the more important to make use of the time now to show them His love--to show them His commands--so we can live in a way that's pleasing to our Father in heaven.

### **We want our youth to know their shepherd.**

John 10:14-15 states, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--just as

the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep."

How does this happen? Well, put another way - if we don't show them, who will? Jesus did lay down His life for us. Our children need to know that. They need to know deep within themselves that Jesus loves them enough to have given His life for each one of them! What a secure, comforting feeling it is to know that we have a heavenly Father who deeply loves us! Our kids need to have a deep, ingrained sense of God's love for them, which will not be shaken no matter what they face in their futures.

Psalms 103:13-18 demonstrates the love God has for His children. "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him; for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children's children--with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts."

This is the kind of love our Father has for us and we need to be sure our young people know that!

### **We want them to have FUN!**

God's word and His law do not have to be boring or constraining for kids. There are so many things that can be done as "real-life" fun illustrations of God's principles. Here's an example of one thing I want to do when the weather gets a little warmer. A popular preschool television show has a game where the characters play "sink or float." Basically, they look at several objects and try to decide if the objects are going to sink or float in water. One night at home, during bath time, I had an idea based on this. I tested it in advance to make sure that several of the kids' playthings would all sink (I admit I "stacked the deck."). Then, while our children were in the bathtub, I brought out these objects and asked if these were going to sink or float. We noticed that every one of them sank, and we also noticed that not one of our children could sit on top of the water--every one of them sank into it! Then I brought out the story of Jesus walking on the water. Our children were definitely more impressed by "walking on water" because they could see the object lesson.

When the "light goes on" and we see these young people really begin to grasp a concept which God shows us in His word, we are more and more excited to show them even more in the most fun, exciting way we can. The stories are obviously valuable, but we also want them to be able to recall the lessons from these stories when they're facing difficult times. For example, when someone hurts them, instead of wanting revenge, they can hopefully reach the point where they remember the story of Joseph and how he forgave his brothers. These stories can and will apply to their lives. We need to do our part to thank God for each of these little children and the opportunity we have to help them grow in their knowledge of Him.

# Why Did Pamela Die?

*God notices, cares, and gives us the help we need when we ask for it.*

**By Barbara Wesley**



**I**N THE SUMMER OF 1973, my husband John and I happily anticipated the birth of our first child. Several of our friends were new parents. As we held and played with their babies, we looked forward to holding our own. We had taken childbirth classes; we had the crib and the clothes. We'd prepared the baby's room, and we had chosen several names. We were ready!

The pregnancy had been normal and healthy without the slightest complication. Even the labor progressed well right up until the moment of delivery. Suddenly, the doctor was urgently asking me to stop pushing. The umbilical cord was wrapped tightly around the baby's neck. (My husband and I were frightened, but I knew that one in five babies are born with such complications. In most cases the cord can be slipped over the head with no problem.)

Panic set in with the delivery of our baby when the doctor had trouble getting her to breathe right away. Our little girl was born alive but died a few hours later. I can still hear the footsteps in the hallway and the doctor's voice, "...heart just stopped beating," as he and my husband came into my room to tell me she was gone.

Pamela was buried on the day we should have been bringing her home. Because I was still in the hospital, my husband had to arrange her funeral without me. As we went through the motions of the next few days, we learned that an unmarried teen in our church congregation, who had managed to hide her pregnancy, had given birth to a healthy baby girl.

Everything seemed so unreal. I longed to wake up and find that the last few days had been only a bad dream. Much of the next several weeks will forever remain a blur in my memory. There was disbelief, shock and numbness. My husband and I alternately comforted each other and retreated inward when we did not want to add further to the other's pain.



I had an overwhelming need to know why my baby girl had died. What had I done wrong? Was I being punished? What lessons did I need to learn so badly that it took losing my baby to learn them? We were ready to be parents and to share our love for each other with a child. Why was the teenager's baby healthy while mine died? It wasn't fair! Why didn't God heal my baby? Did she die because I lacked faith? I kept asking myself: Why?

What haunted me most was a belief I held at that time. I believed that Pamela was not healed because her parents lacked faith. Could this really be true? I knew God can and does heal. But I also knew that sometimes He chooses not to. Ecclesiastes 9:11 came to mind as I tried to find an explanation for our loss, "...the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all."

Many scriptures comforted me during this time. One was 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted (tested) beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." This assured me that God knew I could find the strength to go on. God does not lie, (Titus 1:2) so I knew he would give me strength. Another comforting scripture was Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

We had planned for me to stay home after the baby came, but there was no point after Pamela died, so I went back to work. I felt so sorry for a woman from another department when she asked, "Didn't you just have a new baby?" She was horrified that she might have added to my grief. Another coworker, a single woman about my age, came in to show off her new baby. God, why did my baby die?

We went back to church. Our friends didn't know how to respond. A friend told me later that she was afraid we would be hurt more at the sight of their healthy babies. The teenager I mentioned earlier brought her baby to a church gathering. I met a young unmarried woman from another congregation who had recently given birth to twin sons. My baby had two loving parents. God, why did my baby die?

In His time, God gave us a son and then another daughter. Both were perfect and beautiful, and each time my tears of joy were mixed with tears of grief for the baby we had buried. Thank you God, and God, why did my baby die?

Over the years I have come to understand that God has a unique plan for each of our lives. He wants us to become perfect, as Christ our older brother is perfect. That perfection was learned

through the things that He suffered (Hebrews 2:10).

Pamela's death helped me learn some incredible lessons in faith and in living. The first is that we can never really know what someone is going through if we have not experienced the same trial ourselves. A woman I knew only slightly wrote a long, comforting letter and told me how she had lost a newborn. We became close friends. I have been able to write that same letter twice to others.

I also learned never to belittle someone else's grief by seeming to measure it against my own. A woman expressing her sympathy stated that my grief could not be as great as hers when she lost a 2-year-old child. After all, I didn't have two years of memories. Didn't she understand that I'd have given my heart for two years? Or two months? Or two weeks?



Twenty-three years after Pamela was born I became a registered nurse. Now, because of what I have experienced, I feel more prepared to help others in their trials. I can apply James' words, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (James 1:2-3). Comfort is in the bond that is established when I say to a patient or a patient's family, "I have also been through this, and I know it is difficult," or "I can't know exactly how you feel because I haven't been through it, but I know this must be difficult for you." That bond helps both of us do what is necessary in the healing process.

My husband and I have hope in the promise of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Pamela will live again. We will have a part in loving, nourishing and rearing her in the coming Kingdom of God. Sometimes it is still hard to know why we lost her. Trials such as these are enormously difficult. But I do know that God notices, cares, and gives us the help we need when we ask for it.

He will make all things right when He returns. In the meantime, the lessons we learn not only enable us to grow toward perfection but also allow us to help others along the way.



# Who's Teaching Our Children?

*What can parents do to combat all the negative influences?*

**By Hector Earle**



I AM A CHRISTIAN day school teacher/principal in Canada. I'm also the father of three beautiful daughters, so I know that being a parent in today's world is a complex responsibility and the pressures can be staggering. Many parents are overwhelmed with their child rearing responsibilities and the kind of society in which we live. Consider for a moment the barrage of outside influences on our children.

For example, the media. James Dobson, in his book [\*Parenting Isn't for Cowards\*](#), indicated his research showed that most teens, by the time they have reached the ripe old age of 17, had watched an average of 18,000 murders on television. He goes on to say that, in effect, they have "participated" in countless rapes, gougings, decapitations, machine gunnings, bombings and knifings since toddlerhood.

Then there are the hundreds of bizarre video games and evil Web sites depicting the bad, the very bad and the ugly.

Peer pressure continues to play a negative role, as it has in previous generations. Each teenager knows that safety from ridicule can be found only by remaining precisely on the chalkline of prevailing opinion. For, as Dr. Dobson says, "...the youngster whose emotional needs and self-doubt are the greatest, he dare not run the risk of defying the will of the majority on even the most trivial matter."

How can we gain and maintain a positive impact on our children against this endless avalanche of pressures?

God holds us accountable to teach our children His moral laws.  
"And these words which I command you today shall be in your



in this world of uncertainty.

heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). God's eternal values are invaluable for all generations. Children need them today more than ever to equip themselves

God has given us precious children to be brought up in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Here are some practical biblical points for us to keep in mind in our awesome task of bringing up children in this current age. While the list is by no means exhaustive, these points do focus on lasting values instead of the world's preoccupation with temporary gain.

1. **Put God first:** "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart..." (Mark 12:30). Parents should take time to teach their children that God is the Creator who gives us our very life. Children should also learn to turn to God for help whenever frightened or anxious. Help them develop the habit of reading the Bible and praying. It's very important to be an example when teaching children to read their Bible and pray. Many well-meaning parents stress this, but children rarely see parents doing it themselves. Pray with your child. Jesus said if we seek God's Kingdom first, all the lesser things in life will be added as well. Children ought to be keenly aware of this.
2. **Empathize with the feelings of others:** "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). The preoccupation with self appears to be the prevailing attitude of society today. If not counteracted, this narcissistic attitude can devastate our youth and will lead to false hope and despair. Our Savior on many occasions literally went out of His way to teach and set the example of serving, helping and empathizing with the feelings and needs of others. Parents should help their children to understand and empathize with the needs of others at a very young age by helping them learn not to be selfish and demanding. Instill in them the need to share and not to criticize and put others down. Most of all, parents should help their children to see themselves and others the way they are -- as people made in the very image of God with incredible potential and purpose, both in this life and in His Kingdom to come.
3. **Seek God's will in life:** "Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God" (Psalm 143:10). The purpose and plan of salvation taught in church should be reinforced in the home at every opportunity. Seeking God's will includes respecting and honoring parents as preparation for obedience to God. Children must be taught to respect parents and appreciate both aspects of God's nature: love and justice. In doing this a child will learn that there are many forms of benevolent authority outside himself to which he must submit. When the child sees the home and church in harmony with God's will, he will understand the meaning of sin and its inevitable consequences.
4. **Understand God's universal laws:** "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV). Children should be taught that all of mankind's problems are a result of breaking God's laws. The very definition of sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), for only His law is perfect. Without it society



eventually crumbles. James Madison, fourth president of the United States, realized this all too well. He said, "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future... upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves, according to the Ten Commandments of God." Understanding the laws of God (including the rewards, successes and happiness for keeping them and the wretchedness, misery and pain for violating them), can lead children to be truthful and honest in everything they say and do.

5. **Be involved and set the example:** "Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord... not by way of eyeservice... doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6: 4, 6). Your example teaches your children to honor God and respect others even more than your discussions with them. Research has shown that the child learns by observing what parents do. Therefore it's important to be the kind of person you want your children to be. Children learn to deal honestly when parents deal with them truthfully. They learn the importance of keeping their word when parents follow through on promises. They learn to be kind when they see parents helping the needy. Aside from the spoken word, parents can teach values in subtle ways as well, such as obeying the laws of the land and showing respect for government. There are endless other opportunities for parents to teach honesty and values to their children. The key is to try to conscientiously strive to set the best example possible for your child.

In summary, parents should take the time to teach morals and values according to the spirit and attitude of God's law, which are summed up in the two great commandments -- love toward God and love toward neighbor. We live in a secular, selfish society where self-sacrifice is out and self-gratification is in. Our children pick up on this through television, peer pressure, magazines, drugs and music. To counteract these worldly influences, right values must be taught and lived in their presence.

As writer Jerold Aust stated in our sister magazine, [\*The Good News\*](#): "Perhaps the acid test of a good parent is to ask the question: Would you be happy if your children grew up to be like you?"

# Reading Together

*When family members read aloud together,  
lots of good things happen  
including learning, laughter and love.*

**By Don Hooser**



## **Rewards of reading together**

**R**EADING TOGETHER IS AN ANCIENT TRADITION that is being rediscovered with delight in the United States and many other countries. Many families vouch for the importance and pleasure of reading together. It is a family activity *par excellence*.

However, many people lack the ability and/or desire to read. Thus they read very little. Lack of skill leads to lack of interest and enjoyment, and lack of enjoyment leads to lack of motivation to improve one's skill. It can be a vicious circle.

Most children learn to read well enough to get through school, but then many of them stop reading any more than is necessary. Schools have produced *schooltime* readers, but not *lifetime* readers. While teaching students *how* to read, schools have failed to teach students to *want* to read.

## **Missing motivation to read**

Why don't more people relish reading? The search for the answers to that question began in earnest with the 1955 publication of the book *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Since then much research has confirmed a major factor: The turned-off readers were not read to as children.

Since reading is the single most important skill in education, the National Commission of Reading was formed in 1983 to study what works and what doesn't work in teaching reading. After two

years of intensive research, the members published their report in 1985, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. Note their conclusion: "The single most important activity... for eventual success in reading is *reading aloud* to children" (emphasis added). If parents want their children to be readers, they need to read aloud with them.

Why is this so? First, success in many endeavors often depends most of all on *attitude*. More than any other single activity, in or out of class, reading aloud has the greatest impact on building positive attitudes about books and reading.

A secondary reason is that regular reading aloud strengthens children's language skills in reading, writing and speaking. Why is that so? Because it improves children's *listening* comprehension. *Listening* comprehension must come before *reading* comprehension.

In the United States, Jim Trelease is the most well known advocate of reading aloud to children. Those who read his book, *The New Read-Aloud Handbook*, will likely be sold on the value of reading aloud together. The book answers the common questions on this vital subject and teaches how to be a more effective reader when reading aloud.

### **Overcoming obstacles to reading**

Why aren't parents, grandparents, older siblings and teachers reading aloud to children like they used to? Largely because of television, overly busy schedules and modern education that places too much stress on assignments that can be measured and tested. But parents shouldn't rely totally on schools to teach their children to read. And we can choose to turn off the TV and give children the full attention they long for and need.



Busy and don't have time? A mere 15 minutes a day is often sufficient, unless you and your child opt for more. We all have the same 24 hours in each day. We choose to spend our time doing the things we think are most important. We each must decide: How high on my priority list is the academic, mental, emotional and spiritual development of my child? And how important is it to spend time with my child and nurture family love?

Youngsters need to be introduced at a very young age to the pleasure, joy and adventure of reading. Parents who tell stories, read to their children, and have their children read to them are molding them into devoted readers. They are instilling in them a lasting love of literature, a deep appreciation for prose and poetry, and a fondness for lifelong learning. Adults can ignite the spark of desire in their toddlers and continue to fan the flames throughout their youth.

### **Later benefits from reading to children**

Some parents stop reading with their children as soon as the children can read for themselves. This is a mistake. When a child becomes a reader, he can take his turn at reading aloud, and reading together continues to have all the same benefits and pleasures. We never get too old to enjoy a good story.

As a child gets older, reading together is important in a different way. It helps to keep the lines of

communication open. Children may open up more about a relationship problem after reading about a similar problem. As children face increasing moral temptations and dilemmas, the situation in a story and the relaxed togetherness with parents may lead to a helpful discussion.

Reading together helps bond families. Reading, unlike TV viewing, is a social experience. The family can stop at anytime to talk about the story and to laugh or cry together. Reading funny, sad and inspiring stories builds emotional bridges as members share matters of the mind and heart. And reading together is an ideal time to get close together, snuggle and benefit from the healthful tonic of touch. The whole experience creates pleasant memories.

Reading to your children is one of the best gifts you can offer your children. Strickland Gillilan illustrates this in a poem entitled "The Reading Mother:"

*You may have tangible wealth untold:  
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.  
Richer than I you can never be--  
I had a Mother who read to me.*

Fathers, too, need to be involved as much as possible. When mothers do all the reading, boys can subconsciously get the idea that reading is not masculine and then lose interest. This is one reason why most of the children in remedial-reading classes are boys. Clearly, fathers need to be fully supportive participants in the action of reading together.

What about the competition of TV? Spending significant time watching television has many negative effects. Even when a family avoids TV's moral trash, TV viewing usually takes away time that could be spent in more beneficial activities including reading, thinking and communicating. Unlike reading, passive TV viewing stifles imagination and creativity. Intellectual junk food will stifle children's mental and emotional development. Children's TV viewing time needs parental regulation and rationing.

### **Making reading aloud interesting**

If mishandled, reading aloud together can be monotonous and boring. Here are a few suggestions to keep it interesting:

- Make good choices for materials to read--not too difficult and not too easy for the child.
- Read together regularly. Choose reading together frequently rather than a few long sessions. Don't let a session go longer than a child's attention span.
- Be enthusiastic and put expression in your voice. Change your tone of voice to fit the dialogue. If a story contains words or sections that are boring or too difficult for the child to understand, just skip over them or change them. In other words, talk the story.
- Vary the pace. Don't read too fast, and slow down during suspenseful parts.
- Take time to discuss what you just read.

### **Suggestions for reading**

*What* should you read? There is a vast variety of valuable literature to read--wonderful books,

stories, poems and articles. Pick subjects that you know will be interesting as well as wholesome and profitable to your children. Choose literature that clearly communicates right versus wrong, that glorifies virtue and condemns vice. We can learn so much about how to live and how not to live by the heroes and villains of fiction and nonfiction.

*The New Read-Aloud Handbook* gives many suggestions for good read-aloud books (not all good books are good for reading aloud). Author, Jim Trelease, also edited a book entitled *Read All About It!* The subtitle is "Great read-aloud stories, poems, and newspaper pieces for preteens and teens." Both books are published by Penguin Books.



The most highly recommended book is a perennial bestseller around the world--the Bible. Even when the Bible is judged only as literature, the literary scholars of the world collectively rank it as the world's greatest piece of literature.

A number of great men and women of history have revered and read the Bible. Notice what the following U.S. presidents have said:

George Washington: "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

Abraham Lincoln: "This book... is the best gift God has given to man... But for it we could not know right from wrong."

Theodore Roosevelt: "A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education."

Franklin D. Roosevelt: "I feel that a comprehensive study of the Bible is a liberal education for anyone. Nearly all of the great men of our country have been well versed in the teachings of the Bible."

### **Family Bible reading**

Everything that has been stated in this article is applicable to reading the Bible aloud together. When families read the Bible together, they are drawing closer to each other as well as to their Creator, who inspired the Bible.

Children and adults love stories, and the Bible is largely a collection of stories. Even most of the instructive parts are presented within a story flow. The Bible has an abundance of action and adventure, heroes and villains, tragedies and triumphs, drama and emotion.

Some have made brief attempts at reading the Bible and concluded it is hard to understand and boring. When reading to children, remember the suggestions above for making it interesting. One can skip sections that are less interesting or hard to understand without distorting the overall message. Also, sections can be paraphrased or summarized in one's own words.

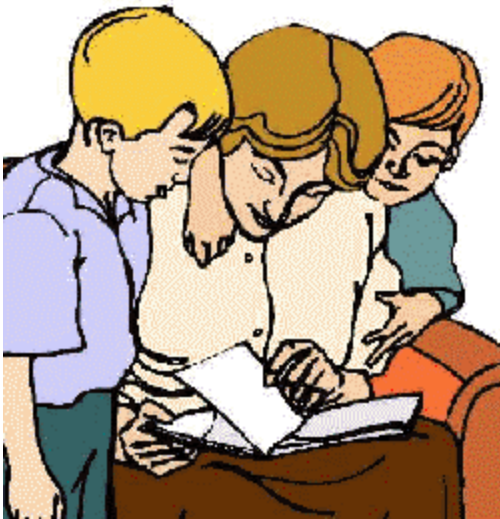
Children will understand much better when a parent chooses a modern version of the Bible. Though some versions of the Bible are more accurate than others and should be relied on for serious study, almost any version of the Bible conveys the overall lessons fairly accurately.

What does the Bible say about itself? The apostle Paul reminded Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, *Today's English Version*). Paul knew that reading the Scriptures was and would always be the most profitable reading possible.

Paul told Timothy, "from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation..." Timothy was greatly blessed to have been grounded in the Scriptures during his early years. His grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice had taught him God's Word and had been his role models of faith (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15).

### The importance of teaching children

In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus Christ revealed that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our fellow man. The Bible can be summed up as the Instruction Book that teaches us how to love God and how to love our neighbor.



In stating the first great commandment, Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Notice what follows: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Words are "in your heart" after you repeatedly hear them, think about them, believe them and apply them. To "teach them diligently" is partly accomplished by parents reading the Bible to their children and explaining its passages. To "talk of them" shows the importance of encouraging interactive responses, comments and discussion during Bible reading time. It also indicates that parents should frequently point out biblical principles and their applications during each day.

In describing the new covenant God said, "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10). Parents can greatly aid the process through family Bible reading. Another help to internalizing God's Word is memorizing key scriptures. Encourage children to learn important verses while they have strong memories.

Why is family Bible reading so important? First, God's Word is the *most important subject* by far for our children to learn! Secondly, childhood is the *best time* to start learning God's Word.



Children are naturally more teachable and pliable than. As the saying goes, "As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined."

The Bible also verifies that information and lessons taught during childhood can have a lifetime effect. "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6, New American Standard Bible).

### **Parental responsibility to teach**

The value of fathers reading to their children was mentioned earlier. Notice that the Bible, too, emphasizes the need for fathers to be fully involved in the spiritual education of their children: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, Revised Standard Version).

Family Bible reading and family prayer are two vital ways to fulfill this admonition. Fathers reading with and talking with their children helps "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6).

According to the Bible, teaching children is a top-priority parental responsibility. It is a priceless accomplishment when children establish a habit of reading and studying the Bible that lasts for life. It's even more wonderful when this gratifying family tradition carries on from generation to generation.

The apostle Paul wrote of the need for people to have "the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Parents can help cultivate in their children a love for the truth of God's Word which, in turn, will lead to wisdom, faith, character and eternal life.

When families read aloud together, and especially when they include reading the Bible, they truly are spending quality time together. Their minds are enriched and expanded as they explore great literature. Their personalities and character are molded both by the wonderful words and the way those words are spoken and shared. Very likely, the children will become better readers, they will enjoy reading more, and they will become lifetime readers.

# Posting the Ten Commandments Is Not Enough

By Larry J. Walker



**T**HE UNITED STATES CONGRESS recently approved posting the Ten Commandments in schools to help prevent school shootings. This surprising turn of events poses some challenging questions.

How ironic that the document's author cannot be spoken about or spoken to in the classrooms. Discussing the Ten Commandments in school would be construed as a violation of students' rights. Prayer to the God who authored them is not allowed in the classroom.

Evolution is taught as a fact in many schools today; creation is often ignored, even as a scientific possibility. How much credibility can be attached to the Ten Commandments when scientific and historical information from the Bible is ignored or dismissed as a fable or fairy tale?

Our Constitution and Bill of Rights were framed to guarantee freedom of religion. Yet our society seems to promote freedom from religion. As a result, our schools have become secular institutions unable to promote or provide the spiritual values that underlie our national heritage.



Parents often fall woefully short of instilling proper values in their children. My wife and I reflected on this phenomenon on a recent camping trip. The silent beauty of the forest camp was often punctuated by a mother yelling at her infant daughter or a father's

steady stream of four letter words to his teenage son. How ironic that in a society where tests, permits and legal requirements abound, no training or instruction is required for "making babies" (to quote [Dr. Laura Schlessinger](#)).

When God gave the Ten Commandments, He also said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). The precedent for posting the Ten Commandments originated with God's injunction to "...write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (verse 9).

Israel's experience, recorded for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11), documents the futility of posting the commandments without following the rest of the instructions. In order to love God, we must internalize His laws and teach them to our children. As a part of society at large, we tend to grasp at portions of the package, the Ten Commandments for instance, in an effort to fix what has gone awry. In the same breath, however, we deny other essential components of the picture: prayer, recognition and acceptance of God, adherence to His plan for eternity, etc. This half-hearted effort at restoration is destined to fail for it excludes essential pieces of the big picture.

The culprit behind such faulty reasoning is human nature (Deuteronomy 5:29, Hebrews 8:8). "Because the carnal mind is... not subject to the law of God" (Romans 8:7). The New Covenant offers the means to offset the pulls of human nature and impart the motivation to obey God's laws (Hebrews 8:10). This is the starting point for successful parenting.

The next step is learning how to rear children according to the Bible. The Bible is full of advice regarding children, parents, and their interaction and responsibility to one another. [Focus on the Family](#) is also an excellent resource for Bible-based information on marriage and family.

Posting the Ten Commandments in schools is not enough. It is certainly a start, but the Ten Commandments must also be written on the hearts of parents and taught to our children. We can make a difference by setting an example within our own families--an example that can inspire others to implement biblical family values.

## Virtual Christian *Letters to the Editor* MAGAZINE

I would [like to write a letter](#) to the Editor

### [If Everyone Kept God's Commandments](#)

THANK YOU! I am going to use this article in my high school Sunday school class this morning. Keep up the good work!!!

Debbie

### [A Lesson From Tony](#)

I just read your story on Tony. It was a good one. I just found out that a friend of mine just took their life four months ago. I have the same questions you had. What if I had taken more time to with them? Would it had made a difference?

Thanks for the encouragement.

Doris Smith

I am inspired by reading the article about Jerry and choices. It was extremely helpful. Thank you.

Ken

### [St. Valentine, Cupid and Jesus Christ](#)

I read your article about the origins of Valentine's Day and I was especially surprised to know cupid was an image carried over from the Roman Gods. Very interesting information. Thank you. My question is:

Why would the Christian TV Network TBN not have this information and with it choose not to air such a large valentines celebration as they did tonight (Sun. 2/13).

I watch TBN frequently and frankly even before I read your page I was surprised to see the display of celebration of Valentine's Day they were exhibiting.

I respect them and the ministers who air on their Network but this is confusing to me. What's your opinion of the Holiday being portrayed as good by Christians in such an influential position as they

are?

*It's normal for human beings to accept their family, regional and national culture as proper. Few people ever question why they observe certain holidays. Few even question why they worship God the way they do and if their practices are pleasing to Him.*

*It is our hope at VCM to motivate people to explore their Christian culture and see if it is pleasing to God as revealed in His Word.*

*For further information on this subject you can request these free booklets from the United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027 or visit our web site at [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org): Holidays or Holy Days-Does It Matter Which Days We Keep? God's Holy Day Plan-the promise of hope for all mankind*

*--Gary Petty*

Hello to Gary Petty,

I perused with interest your article on Valentine's Day. Imagine someone wanting to get a card with a heart for his beloved....! I now await an even more important article regarding the pagan origin of many wedding customs. (You do want to protect Christians, don't you?) I have a small book *How to Plan a Beautiful Wedding* by Sallie Newton. She obviously did some historical research on weddings. (Not nearly the details of the article on Valentines, to be sure.) This information (and more that can be found in so many encyclopedias) is critical for all Christians who want to avoid doing pagan things. Please research and write about: Engagement and wedding rings, white worn by the bride (most pagans have something significant to say about white!), bridesmaids and groomsmen (just in case these antedate the Middle Ages), and most of all, throwing rice--does birdseed count for those worried that expanding white rice will kill birds--clearly a fertility rite. I may have left out something obvious, but I know you will be able to offer the complete picture.

I await an article in *VCM* or the *Good News* so all true Christians can eschew anything that might have a pagan derivation.

By the way, what wedding traditions do you allow?

Your Brother in Christ,

Garvin G.

*Obviously it is impossible, and undesirable, to remove all ancient non-biblical influences from our lives. It can be argued that certain aspects of Western culture, including our school systems and democracy, are traced to pagan Greece. The diversity of human beings and geography produces different customs, dress, music, etc. which in no way reflect spirituality. The point of this article, and our stance on Christmas, Easter and Halloween, is, "How does God want to be worshipped?" It is a proclivity for human beings to try and create*

*God in our own image. This way we can make images, worship saints, or declare Mary as co-savior. A person who loves His Creator wants to please Him, not because it earns the person salvation, but because of a Father/child relationship with Him. One of the most important aspects of our relationship with God is that we bring nothing to the table.*

*He is the One who creates, forgives, calls and converts. He determines how human beings are to relate to Him. Jesus said "true worshippers with worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." As I mentioned in the article the apostle Paul commanded the New Testament Church not to syncretize paganism with the worship of God. Either this is still true today, or we must take the approach that Paul is only writing to first century Christians and we've outgrown his teachings.*

*You mentioned weddings in your letter. I feel that Christians should be careful about mingling any custom that reflects the character of pagan gods, goddesses, demons or superstitions like fertility rites. On the other hand, the Bible doesn't reveal a God ordained marriage ceremony. This would allow for local customs in a greater degree than a religious holiday that promotes a form of worship condemned in the New Testament.*

*Thanks for the letter. I hope you find more of the GN and VCM thought provoking.*

- Gary Petty

### [True Freedom](#)

Thanks to John Rutis for the article on "True Freedom". It is very helpful and encouraging, in addition to corrective. I thought the expression "another leg to the stool" was great. I don't remember hearing that one before - very effective. Thanks so much ... I plan to print it out and read again, and probably again and again.

Lois Baughman, Oregon

### [The Christian Battle](#)

I think Christian writers tend to idealize the life of a soldier, looking upon him as someone with far vision and high ideals. About the only place I've ever seen any is in the movies. In most cases soldiering is a matter of survival, of yourself and your buddies. Viet Nam surely taught us that.

As to soldiers keeping themselves from entanglements in the world, it just isn't so. Paul's words to Timothy are dated. They may have applied in the case of mercenary or slave soldiers recruited in the days of the Roman Empire. But we're talking about hired murderers here, and I suspect what kept them dedicated and pointing forward was a very undesirable fate if they turned back or got defeated. Fear is a great motivator. Today's soldier is very much entangled in his world, with mortgages, car payments, night school, family, and social life. Sure, he has to be ready to go off at

a moment's notice, but he has no illusions of grand purpose to it all. Rather, its "get in, get the job done, and get home". And hope to survive. And hope the politicians don't mess up the peace. The world has changed a great deal since the days of the "Timothy" soldier. Soldiering is a lot more complex. Christian living is a lot more complex. The "soldier" model needs an update that we can relate to. There are a whole lot of new threats: untrustworthy leadership, squandered funds, internal division, misguided zeal, unclear objectives, enemy propaganda, sniping and sabotage, lack of support. A lot of these threats also are experienced by the modern Christian.

Yours truly,

J. Knutson

### [God's Plan For Eternity](#)

I am downloading articles from *VCM* to take to church tomorrow and while this one--God's plan for us--was printing, I read it for myself. My niece's father died last week, and I thought I'd send the article to her. But, since we believe that no one has "gone to heaven, except Him who came down from heaven" I decided against sending it to her. I wouldn't want her to receive any misinformation about this subject.

I have no way of knowing her thoughts on this subject, but I do know she is seeking God's will in her own life and I would not be at all surprised if God called her one day soon. Please pray for her. Her name is Cynthia. Thanks for all the spiritual food. You serve a wonderful "meal."

B. Childs

### [Dispelling Myths of Christ's Birth and Childhood](#)

The time of Jesus' conception is documented in the book of Luke 1:26: "And in the Sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth." The following 5 verses is when the angel Gabriel prophesies the birth of Jesus. The sixth month would of course be counting from God's first month, April (Abib).

*The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc.) defines Abib as, "First month of the Hebrew year." See Exodus 12:2, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." This was when the Passover was instituted and when God delivered Moses and his people from Egypt. (see Ex. 13:3)

So counting six months from April would mean that Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, from the prophetic word of the angel, Gabriel, in the month of September. Since we all know that a woman bears a child for approximately nine months, than that proves that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ was born sometime in the month of May. This also means that the observance of December 25 as the birth of Jesus is a lie. Since Jesus said, "I am the way, the TRUTH, and the life..." (John 14:6). He would be going against His Word if He honored the fact that the majority of Christians celebrate December 25 as His birth, which I must state again is a lie. Besides, no where in scripture does it say to honor his birthday to start with.

This is why I will not celebrate Christmas. I'm not sure of the exact pagan history of the holiday of Christmas, but I do know it is a form of blasphemy to the Lord, it is not scriptural, and it is a lie.

Thanks,

Brian W. Davis

### [Home is Where Our School Is](#)

My name is Karen Herschleb and I used to teach in the public school system. The reason I left was that teaching isn't what it used to be; unfortunately, it's become mostly "classroom management" due to a lack of instruction at home in basic acceptable conduct. I'm convinced that home schooling is the only way to combat the growing "intolerance" of basic Christian values in today's public schools. I appreciated this article very much. I was wondering if there would ever be a interest in sharing Sabbath School lesson ideas. Basically, I create mine from scratch every time due to the variety of ages & capabilities within our small local group of kids.

Please let me know if you know of anyone in particular to contact to share ideas with.

Regards,

[Karen Herschleb](#)  
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