



THE BIBLE
AND
CHILDREN

The Consultative Group on Ministry
Among Children is grateful to the working group which prepared
this book. The members were

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THE BIBLE AND CHILDREN

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Consultative Group on Ministry among Children

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Introduction

THE BIBLE is important for adults and for children. There are many reasons for this. It is a book of stories, adding up to one great story. It is a collection of writings that explore experience of God and insights into human existence. It asks basic questions about the world and salvation, about the nature of God, and his relationship with his people. The Bible is a source of inspiration and understanding to be read with loving and prayerful attention. It is a precious inheritance to be guarded and celebrated. All Churches accept that it provides authority for the faith and conduct of God's people. We see too that it is rich in imagery, with layers of meaning which Christians discover and appreciate as they grow in faith.

The Bible is a complicated collection of books; written at different times and with different intentions. It is no longer possible to discover all the circumstances in which events were recorded, and details of some of the events themselves are confused. The episodes and teachings which we find in the Bible belong to differing cultures, and the reader's understanding of them is coloured by his or her own culture. There are problems, too, of language and translations.

So the Bible is a book for those of simple faith, as well as for those who are searching for meaning for their lives. It is also a book for theologians who can contribute significantly to the understanding of others.

Our task here is to indicate some of the ways in which different approaches may be made to sharing the Bible with children.

The Importance of the Bible for Children

Oh no! It's my turn to take the 7-10s tomorrow! I haven't had a moment to think about it all week — work has been absolutely draining. I haven't felt like doing anything but flop into a chair once I've fed everybody and got things more or less ready for the next day. I should have thought about it earlier today, but there was the jumble sale, and then Diana's dancing class, not to mention having to sort out Grandma's ailing dog. Now here we are, almost midnight on Saturday, and I haven't even looked at this week's Bible passage. Better have a quick glance through it now — 1 Corinthians 10. 4 — who chooses these pieces anyway? Well, I suppose I'll have to make something of it.



THE BIBLE IS so central to the Christian faith that we must use it, with children and with adults. Most of us are not biblical scholars and no-one can ever fully understand any text, nevertheless we need to have some understanding in order to be able to share something with the children as a basis from which further discovery can develop. When we first read a passage we must do so carefully and at least try to appreciate its context within the particular chapter or book of the Bible. We need to find some sort of meaning in it.

For example, if the text for a particular day was *Luke 14. 16-24*, on first reading this could be taken as a simple story of ungrateful guests. Alan Dale in his New World translation entitles the story 'Rude Guests' and it could well be that this is an appropriate level for the children.

Thinking about this story a little more, reading it in several translations, reading the rest of the chapter, and reading the similar story in *Matthew 22* puts the meaning in a slightly different light. Luke, earlier in the chapter, talks about humility, "everyone who uplifts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be uplifted", and a little later he speaks of inviting not guests who can repay your hospitality but those who have no means of repaying. Perhaps this last aspect is the one most appealing to us nowadays.

This passage also contains the familiar picture of the Kingdom of God as a party or great feast. Here the story is of men who are too busy for the Kingdom of God.

A parable like this has some meaning for almost everyone but other passages may face us with difficulties. In this case we need to read carefully and think about why it is difficult. It may be that our first instinct is correct that it is totally unsuitable for the children. We then need to look for an alternative. If, however, the problem is our own difficulty in understanding or in accepting what the passage says, we could be helped by talking it over with another adult. That adult could also share directly with the children.

On occasions we need to seek a passage ourselves. Perhaps the theme is 'Forgiveness', and we want to find suitable Bible references. Some immediately spring to mind — the Lord's Prayer or the story of the Prodigal Son — but it is worth searching for other appropriate passages before making a choice. The use of a concordance is invaluable here. It will send you in all sorts of directions and hopefully in that search you



will find something which speaks to you. You will certainly begin to think what forgiveness means! *Luke 2. 5 & 6* emphasises a continuing forgiveness and perhaps this might be worth pursuing. The more we explore the richness of a theme, the more we will be able to respond to the children's questions and ideas.

It is important to be open about our approach to the Bible. A newly discovered passage may fill us with enthusiasm and spark off an interesting session. A difficult passage may challenge us to tease out the meaning. Sometimes a passage may be so daunting that we feel we must lay it aside, but we must be wary of coming to this decision too frequently. The Bible is, after all, a whole library of books, not just one volume, and we cannot expect to find all of it equally appealing or helpful. However, the value of the whole 'book' must always be kept in mind. Remember it is all too easy to stick to the familiar passages — be prepared to be challenged by something new.

So far we have deliberately avoided mentioning ages or age groups of any children. It is unwise to draw any hard and fast age boundaries

for the use of a particular passage. Group leaders are aware of the range of ability and experience within their own groups so we should interpret terms like 'children' or 'young people' in the light of our knowledge of our own groups.

In choosing a particular Bible passage there are useful questions to ask ourselves — some are about the *suitability* of a passage for our particular group and some are concerned with our *reasons* for using the passage.

If we are assessing the *suitability* of a passage we could ask

- will the story catch the imagination of the group?
- is their knowledge of the background and context of the passage adequate?
- is the group ready to explore the truth within the story?
- will the use of this particular passage with this group, in this context, destroy its true meaning?
- why am I using this particular passage

Some of the *reasons* for using a passage could be that

- it is an example of how people explained their existence and their world;
- it is a historical record of pre-Christian events;
- it illustrates the beginning of Christian thought;
- it illustrates the kind of lifestyle and moral code of pre-Christian society;
- it is concerned with the historical Jesus and the society in which he lived;
- it illustrates how Christians were and are expected to behave and challenges our own behaviour;
- it shows Christ as healer;
- it helps to identify those searching for God or trying to respond to his call;
- it shows Christ as teacher;
- it helps to develop our relationship with God and Christ; — it is an example of God made man with human feelings and weakness;
- it clarifies our perception of God;
- it challenges our preconceived ideas;
- it is a wonderful piece of literature;

- it can extend or reinforce what we have already discovered;
- it can stimulate discussion and further our understanding;
- it illustrates the developing relationship between God and his people;
- it illustrates precisely a point we are trying to make.

We may see from this that the same passage may be used for several reasons. It could be confusing to justify every reason or tease out every shade of meaning on one occasion. An adult might well enjoy the complexity of this exercise but with children it is best to keep to only one or two aspects.

We need to plan carefully in advance so that we can cover the important points. At the same time we must be ready to adapt to whatever happens during the actual session. We should welcome contributions from the young people which might well lead us in an unexpected or useful direction. We need to find ways of enabling children and young people to discover and share their own experiences and reactions. For instance, the 'Rude Guests' story may relate closely to the home experience of a child. How often has a mother spent hours preparing a meal only to find that her family turn their noses up at it? The children may not understand why mother gets so cross.

We sometimes find it difficult to express our understanding of the Bible. When adults and children share their views of the same passage everyone in the group is enabled to reach a fuller understanding.

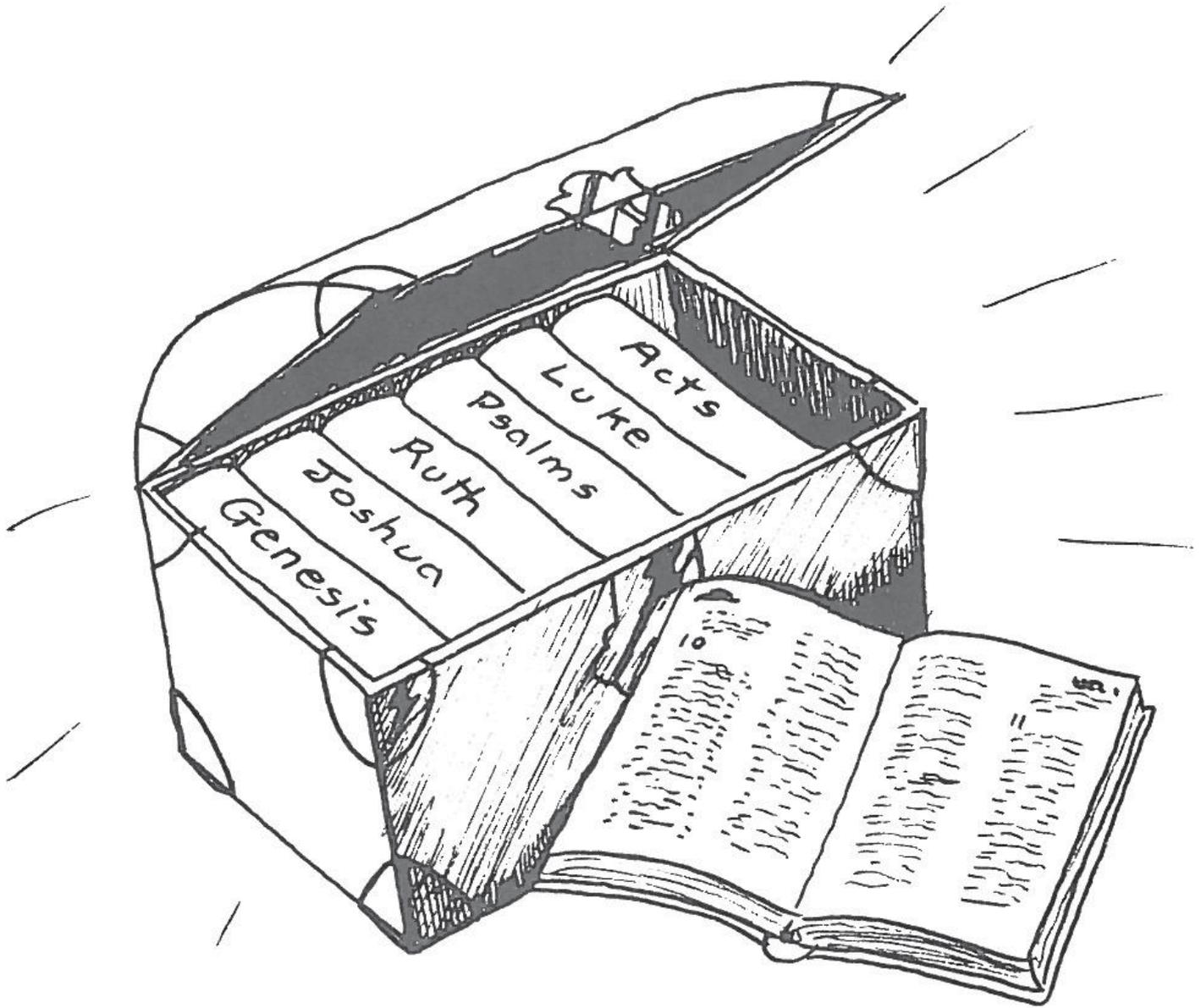
Their Story — Our Story — God's Story

“Naomi and Reuben are in the Bible, but my name isn't” Gerald complained. The other young people in the group asked if they had Biblical names too? Rachel, Rebecca, Sarah, Jonathan, Paul — yes, they are all Biblical names. What about the grown-ups? Mary, Esther, Suzannah, James — the list grew longer. But who were all these Biblical namesakes? We decided to find out. The adult helpers chose one name — their own, or one that appealed to them, and promised to spend one Sunday in the next twelve months talking about their Biblical ‘character’. The volunteer who took on Esther found herself researching all sorts of things — early feminist ideas for a start. She found enough material not only for a Sunday morning session with the 11-14 year olds but for an evening talk with older teenagers. In the process she learnt a lot herself and really enjoyed doing so.

The Bible as story and stories

THE BIBLE IS important for the Church's worship and devotional life and also for its nurturing of children and adults in the faith. It contains the written account of the developing relationship between God and his people.

The Bible is a treasure trove of stories; stories of heroes and villains, real and symbolic; stories of legend and myth and of historical events; stories of wealthy rulers and poor peasants, of good people and wicked people, of wise and foolish. Some stories are conveyed economically in a few words while others are long sagas covering years and generations. Within these are conversations and laws; poetry and



inspiring prose. The whole adds up to one great story, of how God revealed himself and of how men, women and children gradually came to know him, to enter into a living relationship with him and together became his people.

The climax for Christians is in the gospel accounts of how Jesus of Nazareth was born, lived, died and was raised from the dead. We see how some of the people of God recognised him as God's own Son and began to follow in his Way. The story of the people of God is unfinished, continuing in the Church from the first century until now. It is our heritage and we ourselves have a part in the on-going saga of how people become God's through Jesus Christ and work with him in his world.

Our children, too, are part of that story. They are involved with us in the fellowship of the Church. We need to enable them so to hear about God and his people through the many and varied parts of the Biblical record that they may deliberately choose to make the story their own.

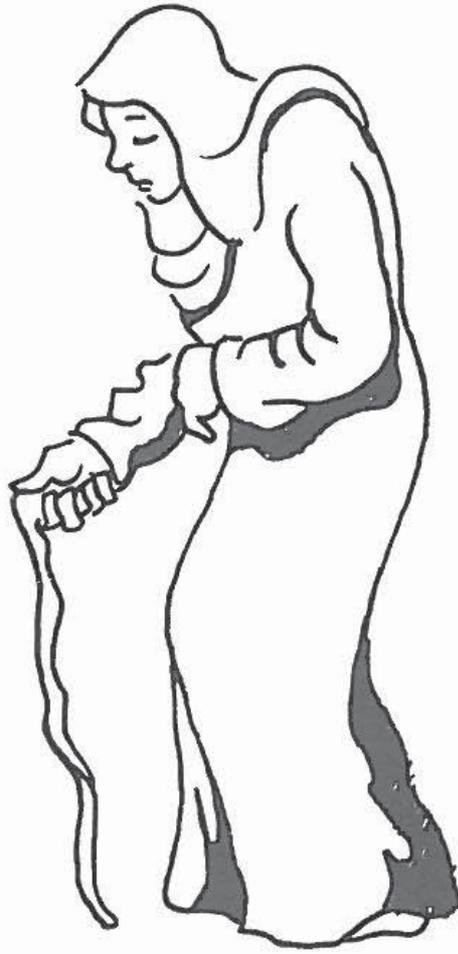
Thinking about the Bible as story is not just an interesting exercise for scholars. It is important for anyone who is concerned with helping adults and children to grow in understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Suppose you are considering a particular Bible passage — because it is the reading for a particular Sunday, or because part of it has been suggested in the notes you are using for your session with the children, or because a word or a story in it seems to have some link with an experience or question with which you are trying to come to terms. An appreciation of the place of the passage in the life of God's people in the past and its relationship with Christian experience in the present is necessary in order that the passage should have meaning and significance.

We can perhaps see this more clearly in relation to a particular passage, for example *Luke 13. 1-12*. This section contains a comment by Jesus on the killing of some Galileans by Pilate, the parable of the unfruitful fig tree, the healing of the crippled woman on the Sabbath and the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. You may have come to this text because it is a lectionary passage, or because your published notes have suggested that you tell the story of the crippled woman to the children, or perhaps because one of the children in your group is disabled.

The Bible Story and Our Stories

In approaching the passage yourself before exploring it with children of any age, ask first what is its place in the on-going story;

- begin with the immediate — you are reading it here and now, is it a new part of the story for you?
- if not, what associations does it raise for you of other times when you have read it?
- what thoughts and feelings are aroused in you as you read it?
- what experiences link with parts of the passage?



Sadly, you may have known someone killed in an accident or by violence. You may have seen such an event and therefore share the disciples' questions.

You may have had a fruit tree which was bare of fruit but, after care and treatment, bore fruit the following year; you therefore understand the gardener's hope.

You may be physically handicapped or know someone who is; you may have experienced healing and ask why God does not always heal.

You may have baked bread or seen a mustard tree and its tiny seeds so that the image evokes thoughts of God's secret working for you, too.

You will have your own experiences of sin and forgiveness, of being lifted up by God and being enabled to become more the person you believe he wants you to be.

It is in these experiences that Luke 13. 1-12 meets your own life and the Biblical story of the people of God starts to become yours.

The Story of the Bible Story

This is, however, only part of the picture. *Luke 13. 1-21*, like any other passage, has its own story which is also part of the whole. Part of this story lies in the process of writing down and translating which has culminated in the particular English versions which you are using. Scribes, translators and scholars have chosen one word rather than another. They decided on one interpretation and discarded another. The words you now read are coloured by their choices. A good commentary will give you at least the outline of this part of the story.



Another part of the story is Luke's part. Why did he put these particular bits together in this way? Where did he hear or read of the different elements? What experience and thinking led him to choose these sections and put them together in this way at this particular point in his gospel, for the readers he had in mind? Again, a good commentary will give you some clues about this.

The Particular and the Whole

The gospel of which this chapter is a part is only one section of the New Testament and the New Testament is only one part of the Bible. Other parts of the New Testament and the Old Testament relate to the experiences and stories contained in *Luke 13. 1-21*.

If, in considering verses 1-5, you were thinking about the nature of sin and God's judgement and his forgiveness, there are other passages which show the experience and reflections of Biblical writers on this. *Romans 2. 1-16* deals with God's judgement on sin, and *Romans 5. 12-6. 14* with God's way of dealing with sin and setting us right with himself through Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, the book of Job wrestles with the question of whether suffering should be seen as punishment for sin. Much of the writings of the prophets deal with questions of law and sin and God's gracious patience with the sinner.

The patience of the gardener with the barren fig tree *verses 6-9*, is reminiscent of the patience of Hosea with his unfaithful wife. Both help us, as we read the stories, to understand something of the loving patience of God.

The story of Jesus' healing of the crippled woman on the Sabbath and the reaction from the synagogue official can best be appreciated when you know the importance of the law in the developing relationship between God and the Jewish people, *for example Deuteronomy 4. 1-14*. The prophets' condemnation of empty ritual and the kind of legalism which keeps the letter of the law and destroys its spirit, *for example Micah 6. 3-8; Amos 4. 4-5. 27*, also adds understanding.

These are only a few examples from the broad background to *Luke 13. 1-21*. Many others could have been given.

The Bible Story and the Children's Stories

In exploring the passage for yourself and with the children it is important to be aware of the strands of this story and be able to relate the particular part to the whole. Obviously we cannot read every relevant passage each time, nor have the whole story in the forefront of our minds. We can make links with other parts of the story and so deepen our understanding and become more aware of the place of this particular part of the story in the whole story.



When exploring a particular Bible passage with children, their experience is also part of the whole story. If, therefore, we are planning to explore *Luke 13. 1-21* with the children, our next step is to consider their experience and their stories. We need to plan ways in which there can be a meeting, a linking-up, of their experience and the experience of the Biblical writers. If our children have watched television, they may have seen news of disasters and asked why they should happen. Children will have had various experiences of disability or illness and healing. They may have seen, or even helped, a gardener at work at a fruit tree, pruning and spraying so that it will bear good fruit. They may have baked bread, or perhaps you could arrange for them to do so. More significantly, they will have had their own experiences of doing wrong and being forgiven and helped to do better.

Our task is to explore the Bible with children so that they can appreciate its on-going story, relate it to their own story and be able, if they so choose, to make it their own. We need to link the various aspects of the Bible story with our experience and the children's experience.

Choosing Passages

We may be considering a particular passage like *Luke 13. 1-21* because it has been suggested by the curriculum notes we use. Obviously we cannot use too many of the relevant Bible passages on any one occasion or the children will be confused and overwhelmed, not helped.

We need to be selective in choosing additional references. Many passages which come to mind in our reflection on a particular theme or experience contain more than one idea or story. Therefore we make choices. Our choice of related passages, particular verses or themes should not be haphazard, or biased, or more limited than necessary. Over the years, the selection of Biblical material, and of the experiences to which we relate it should enable the children to become familiar with the richly varied story of the people of God. The ways in which we choose and work with a particular passage should be consistent with its place in the whole Biblical account, and with our understanding of the nature of that account.

Often in our use of the Bible with children in church we are guided by the particular curriculum material we follow. The writers will have tried to bear in mind the kind of points made here. However, they certainly cannot always produce material which will enable us to use the biblical passage with our particular children. The children need to relate it to their previous contact with the Biblical story, and with their own experience and that of the church as they know it. Each child is unique. Each group has its own experience and knowledge. There is no way in which notes for the guidance of leaders can always be right in every aspect for every group. We should not, therefore, rely completely on published notes, but should be ready to adapt them. We should plan our use of the Bible with our own children to suit their needs and experience.

Planning

It is no easy task to bear in mind the various aspects of the Biblical story and of the Church's story and relate these to the children's experience. Often it is left to chance. We end up with pieces of Biblical knowledge related only in a haphazard way to our experience and the history and beliefs of the Church. Our responsibility for the nurture of children in the faith requires us to build up a coherent story.

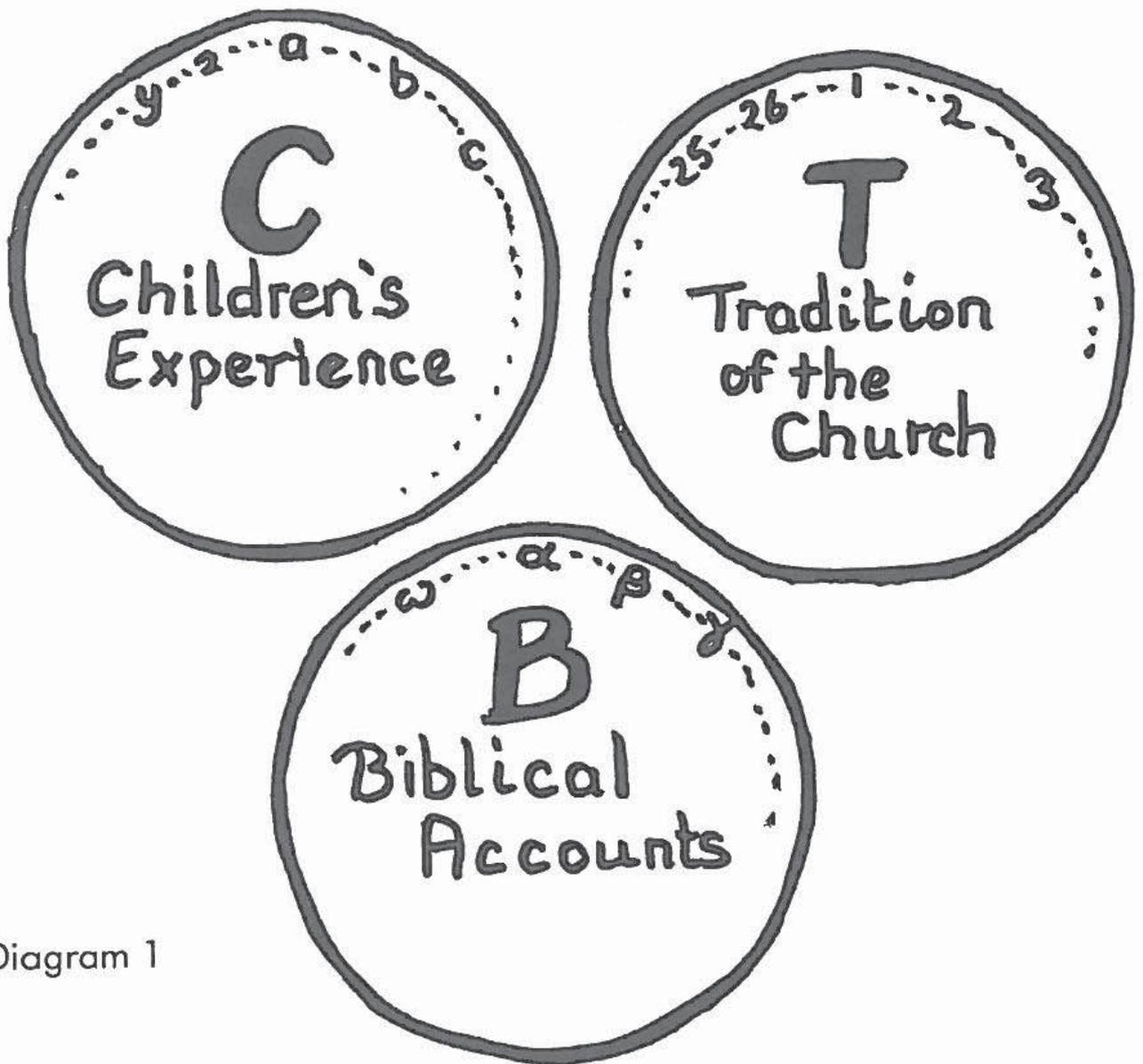
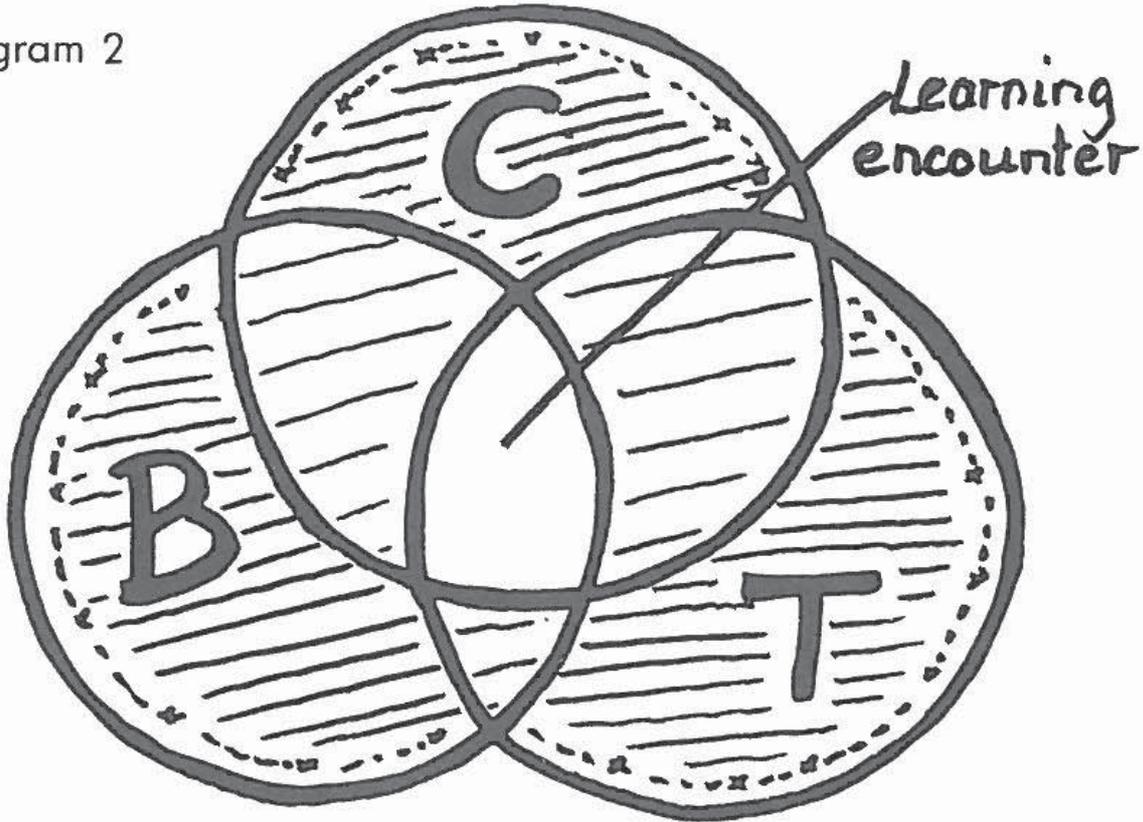


Diagram 1

A diagram might help to make sense of complex and varied factors. Diagram 1 pictures the experiences of the children, the traditions of the Church and the Biblical accounts as three circles.

In planning, we have two tasks. The first is to bring together the three circles so that parts which are relevant to each other can be combined to enable the children to learn. (See Diagram 2.) The second is to see that, over a period of time, all parts of the three circumferences are touched on and form part of the learning experience and contribute to the development of each child's own story.

Diagram 2



Suppose your leaders' notes for a particular session suggested *Luke 13. 1-21* as the Bible passage to be studied. In planning for your own group of children there are a number of questions you would want to ask and steps you would want to take. First you would think of the children's experiences which might be relevant and list them. List A indicates some possibilities.

List A

*Love of parents
being lost and found
death of grandmother
visiting a local orchard
breaking a window and
owning up
fighting with a friend
knowing a disabled person
watching TV news of violence
having measles and getting
better*

List B

*Suffering, deserved and
undeserved
healing
death and grief
success and failure
estrangement from God and
from each other and
reconciliation
sin, penitence and forgiveness
love and failure to love
hope and despair
patience and fulfilment*

Then you would list relevant experiences of the Church. See List B. This list will be more general but if you can note a few stories as you make the list you would avoid deciding to use a particular experience and then failing to find an appropriate story. The stories may be of people you know, from the Church's history, or from the World Church.

Then, from your own Biblical knowledge and by means of a concordance, you would list other Biblical references which are relevant. List C suggests some related passages.

List C

The story of Cain and Abel, Genesis 4. 1-16
the parable of the Prodigal Son, and Jesus' reply to Peter about forgiving until seventy times seven, Matthew 18. 21-35
the story of Naboth's vineyard, 1 Kings 21
Amos' condemnation of the sin of Judah and Israel, Amos 3-6
Isaiah's picture of the Suffering Servant, Isaiah 52. 13-15
psalms of penitence, Psalm 51
the healing of Naaman the Syrian, 2 Kings 5. 1-27
Job's suffering, Job 1, 23, 38, 40, etc.
The festival of unleavened bread, Exodus 13, etc.
the Last Supper, Matthew 26. 26-30 and parallels
Manna in the wilderness, Exodus 16. 4-32
the affliction which plagued Paul, 2 Corinthians 12. 7-9

Look at these three lists side by side, and compare also with *Luke 13. 1-21*. See what links you could make between them. For example:

A) measles + B) Naaman + C) arthritic healed in a healing service + *Luke 13. 10-13*, healing of woman with 'a spirit of infirmity' is one possible link.

If, however, the children had previously looked at a number of Biblical stories of healing; or if one child's grandmother had recently died; you might reject that particular emphasis. In that case, you might link:

— with the younger children —

(A) baking bread + (B) unleavened bread + (C) patience rewarded + *Luke 13. 20-21*, parable of yeast;

— with older children —

A) knowledge of a disabled person + B) Job, or Paul's affliction + C) the story of Joni, or David Watson's autobiography 'Fear No Evil', or a topical example from television or magazine + *Luke 13. 10-17* healing of crippled woman.



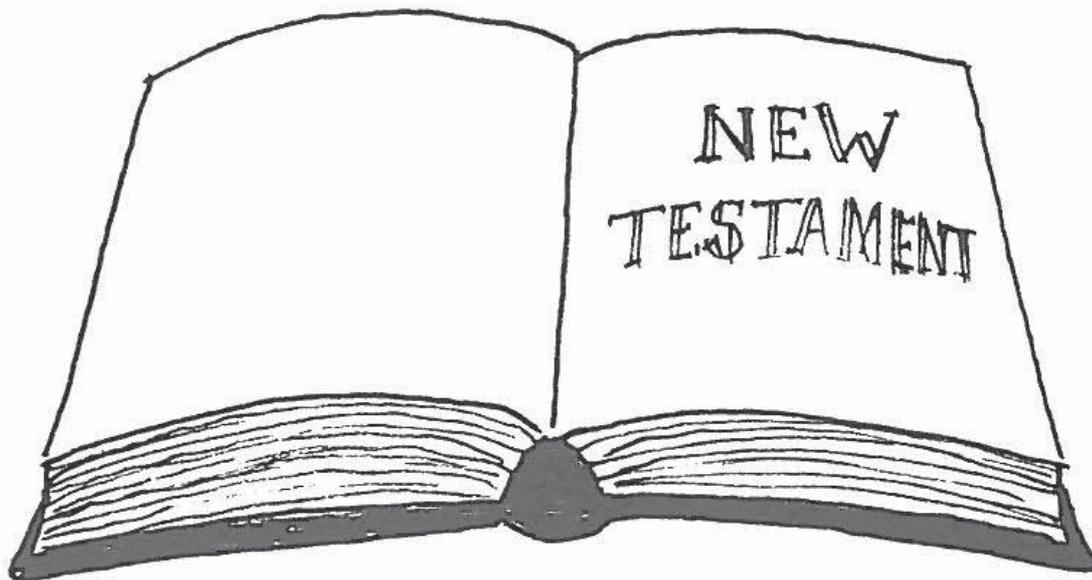
Many other links could be made. Your choice would depend on:
the age and experience of the children;
their previous knowledge of the Bible;
what was of particular present concern to the church;
aspects of the church's experience you had already covered;
your own experience knowledge and skill;
the particular period of the Church's year.

Given the same passage on another occasion you would make other choices in order that, eventually, the children would be able to explore all important aspects of the three fields of experience, their own, the Church's and the Bible's.

Stories are to be lived and enjoyed. We must communicate the joy, the strength and the challenge which people know when they recognise that they belong to the people of God. The children will then be able to make their own choices. With this understanding they will be better prepared to face the choice between faith in Jesus Christ and rejection of him.

Jesus of Nazareth

On Good Friday, Jane looked not so much sad as puzzled. At last she asked her father 'How can Jesus be a man and put on a cross? He was only born last Christmas!'



BEING A CHRISTIAN involves knowing about Jesus, forming a relationship with him and following his example. However, in these days of a largely secular and multi-faith society, we cannot take it for granted that our children realise this. We need, at some stage, to confront them with this very basic understanding. Perhaps the younger children simply need to understand why they come to church on Sunday. We help them to recognise that they come to learn about Jesus, to pray and worship, and to share with other children and adults who love him.

With our older ones we may need to look more objectively at the demands and joys of being a Christian. Discovering the important facts about Jesus will be part of this exploration — that he was born, died

and rose again to save us and bring us to God; that he shows us by words and actions what God is like; that he challenges us to respond to him and to work out our relationship with him. The children's knowledge of Jesus and their response to him will be most effective when it is shared with adults at home and in the church as well as in the children's group.

With children of all ages, we share the great stories of the life of Jesus. We celebrate his birth, his death, his resurrection and his ascension. We retell these events in music and drama as the children join in worship and fellowship with the rest of the Church. In this way even the youngest children absorb a sense of the importance of these events and a realisation of their significance. Here is a secure framework within which the older children can question the mystery of all that happened.

At some point youngsters need to know that the Christian calling is based on our response to Jesus, who is alive and invites us to follow him. We must not assume that they know what this means. We can help them understand by looking at the changes in the lives of the disciples who put their loyalty to Christ first. Following Jesus meant being with him, learning from him, trying to be like him and to do his work with him. We can also look at examples of Christians who have followed him in the past and those who respond to his call today.

Looking at accounts of Jesus' Baptism, the Temptations, the Transfiguration, his final journey to Jerusalem, as well as at the Last Supper and the Crucifixion may help the older ones to understand Jesus' own response to God. We can help them to sort their way through the layers of meaning in the imagery used in these accounts. For example, what is the significance of the Temptations by the devil? What do we mean by the devil? What kind of ministry was Jesus being tempted to give? What kind of ministry did he engage in? What would we have seen if we had been there in the wilderness? It is important to appreciate the richness of the picture language used, and to look below to its inner meanings, and around it to its association of ideas — all without being so heavy handed that its relevance is spoiled!

One obvious place to look for meanings is in the teaching of Jesus and, particularly, in the parables. With all ages we can explore the meanings of parables in various ways which are appropriate to the children. For example, if we are looking at the parables in Luke 15, we



discover that they are about reconciliation, about being lost and found. For the youngest children this last aspect is the one best explored — in drama, in recollected experiences from the children's own lives, and so on. We may share a variety of stories about being lost and found, or losing and finding, before telling them the 'story that Jesus told' (*Luke 15. 4-6*). With older children we may find it more profitable to look at the story of the Lost Son (*Luke 15. 11-32*). We can help them appreciate the detail of the story (Why was it so awful to look after pigs?). Working out modern versions of the story can sharpen their understanding of the original. We could also ask 'Why did Jesus tell this story?' What did it mean to his hearers?

The learning of the younger children tends to be isolated and fragmentary. As they grow up we can help them become aware of the main threads of Jesus' teaching — relationship with God the Father, the coming of his kingdom, the call to new life and new ways.

However, Jesus' teaching is not confined to words. He did not just say 'Let the children come to me'. He took them on his knee and blessed them. His action in clearing the Temple spoke louder than words. Even the youngest child can appreciate what these actions mean. In the same way they can see Jesus' love and concern for people as he heals the sick.

Yet we do not want them to see Jesus as a magic man who heals people and commands natural forces in response to a whim or to show off his power for its own sake. With older ones we can begin to tease out the context of the miracles. What purpose did they serve? What did they show of God's power? What does wholeness mean? It is good to look at advances in medicine and surgery today and consider a doctor's problem in deciding what is best for a patient and for the family. They can experience praying for the sick, asking for God's presence and love to sustain and bring about the ultimate good of the patient.

In looking at the nature miracles we need to search for the truth about God which is revealed by the action of Jesus. For example, what did the disciples learn from the stilling of the storm? What can we learn from it? Although we should share honestly our own perplexities about the miracles, we should acknowledge the mystery and be very cautious about explaining them away. Children and adults need to come to terms with their own understanding of them.

With younger children we can only tell miracle stories if they seem appropriate to the children's needs and understanding. It can be marvellous to thank God for our sight and all we can appreciate around us. We can talk of Bartimaeus being cured of blindness and his joy and thankfulness. Can we ever explain satisfactorily to a young child why his blind friend or relation has not been cured by Jesus also? We can talk about all that is done to help blind people today and the ways in which they can help us. We should be careful and sensitive about children's misunderstandings and frustrations.



The greatest miracle of all is the Resurrection. At some stage we will want to tease out the purpose of the crucifixion and experience the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life which the Cross and Resurrection bring. We want to point to the joy of the disciples and of Christians through the ages who discovered that Jesus was alive and with them. Above all we long to share with the children our own awareness of his loving and living presence. The convictions of adults are caught by children of all ages as we celebrate the story together. This is more important than any explanation.

Our knowledge of Jesus comes through prayer and Bible reading, through stories told and celebrated as the Church worships and shares in his risen life.

A Resource and Inspiration for Living

Vicky was talking, with the other children, about heaven.

'Mr. H was saying, the day before, that if you keep on being a Christian and do what God says you could find the kingdom of heaven. He's been doing that for about twenty-five years and he's had a hard life he says. It's a hard job to be a Christian.'

WE HAVE SEEN that the Bible is important as story and as the record of Jesus of Nazareth. The way we respond to that story shapes and directs our lives. It is the Bible as a whole which should do this, not just texts or parts, although particular sections or interweaving themes may have more relevance at different times and in different contexts.

For example, when the people of God were about to enter the promised land after their journey through the desert, Moses presented them with a challenge:

'Today I am giving you a choice between good and evil, between life and death. If you obey the commands of the Lord your God, which I give you today, if you love him, obey him and keep all his laws, then you will prosper and become a nation of many people. The Lord your God will bless you in the land you are about to occupy. But if you disobey and refuse to listen, and are led away to worship other gods, you will be destroyed — I warn you here and now. You will not live long in that land across the Jordan that you are about to occupy. I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God's blessing and God's curse, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Choose life.' (Deuteronomy 30. 15-19, GNB)

We all have to choose — whether we are young or old. It is a basic theme of human life. Sometimes the choices are far reaching in their

consequences — buying a new house or getting married or making friends. Sometimes they are less significant — what shall I wear? What shall I have for lunch? Choosing, our example, is one of the themes that runs through the Bible. It will be helpful to follow it through. As we do so, we shall discover a wealth of inspiration which may challenge us and our children.



There was a choice faced by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was a choice faced by the people of God as a whole. The Old Testament reveals a people who were only occasionally prepared to choose life. For the most part they seem to have preferred to go their own way — to put their trust in their own efforts or in 'foreign gods'.

One of the tasks of the prophets was to warn the people of God of the consequences of their self-centred way of life. Amos spoke to a nation which was prosperous and where worship seemed to flourish. The prosperity, though, was at the expense of the poor and the worship was empty. The consequence of all this was clear to Amos but unwelcome to his hearers. The only hope for them was to let 'justice flow like a stream and righteousness like a river that never goes dry' (*Amos 5. 23, GNB*).

Another prophetic task was to offer a vision of hope. For example, at the time of exile Ezekiel gives the people a picture of God giving a new life to dry bones (*Ezekiel 37. 1-13*). In spite of their continual failing God loved his people and offered them fresh hope of life in their own land. We, today, also need the warning and the vision in order that we and our children might choose life.

In the New Testament the emphasis changes from hope for a place for the Jews to call their own to the Kingdom of God which includes all people and all creation. The choice is still the same. Jesus comes to show God's love in person and says 'Follow me.' In his teaching, Jesus gives a radical challenge to the way people live their lives. In the beatitudes, Jesus turns on their heads many of the popular values and assumptions of life and instead teaches that the meek will inherit the earth, that the merciful will be shown mercy, that peacemakers are blessed, and so on (*Matthew 5. 3-12*). These are the values of the kingdom which Jesus comes to proclaim. It is by these that all those who respond to Jesus are called to live. Here is the inspiration for living. In the story of Jesus of Nazareth we find the resource for living.

The Gospels record how some are able to respond positively but others cannot face up to the demands of 'choosing life'. Thus the grasping tax collector Zacchaeus is transformed in life-style when Jesus asks him to come down from the tree, *Luke 19. 1-10*, but the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus asking about eternal life goes away sadly because the cost of the kingdom is too great — he is not prepared to lose his possessions, *Matthew 19. 16-22*. These are stories and decisions which children can appreciate.

The first Christians, after Pentecost, tried to adopt a lifestyle that demonstrated the life of the kingdom. They shared their money and possessions with their fellow believers, *Acts 2. 43-47*. Sadly, for some the



demand of offering all to God was too much. The story of Ananias and Sapphira was recorded as a warning to those who pretended to be offering everything when in fact they were holding something back for themselves, *Acts 5. 1-11*. In many places in his letters Paul has to remind the churches that their lifestyle must reflect and proclaim their faith.

In the New Testament there is only one person who lives the human life as God would have it lived — Jesus. His is the humanity towards which we grow and he is the one who makes it possible for us to grow. As Paul said, *'Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.'* *Philippians 3. 12-14*

In the Old and New Testaments we find stories of individuals and whole peoples catching a vision of life lived in faith — sometimes responding gloriously, often failing miserably. These stories come as a challenge to all who read them. They also come as a comfort as we are reminded that in our failure God is still present and still offers us forgiveness and the possibility of new beginnings. We need to share this vision with our children. Telling them how other people today have been inspired and how the Bible may help and inspire them will raise their expectations.

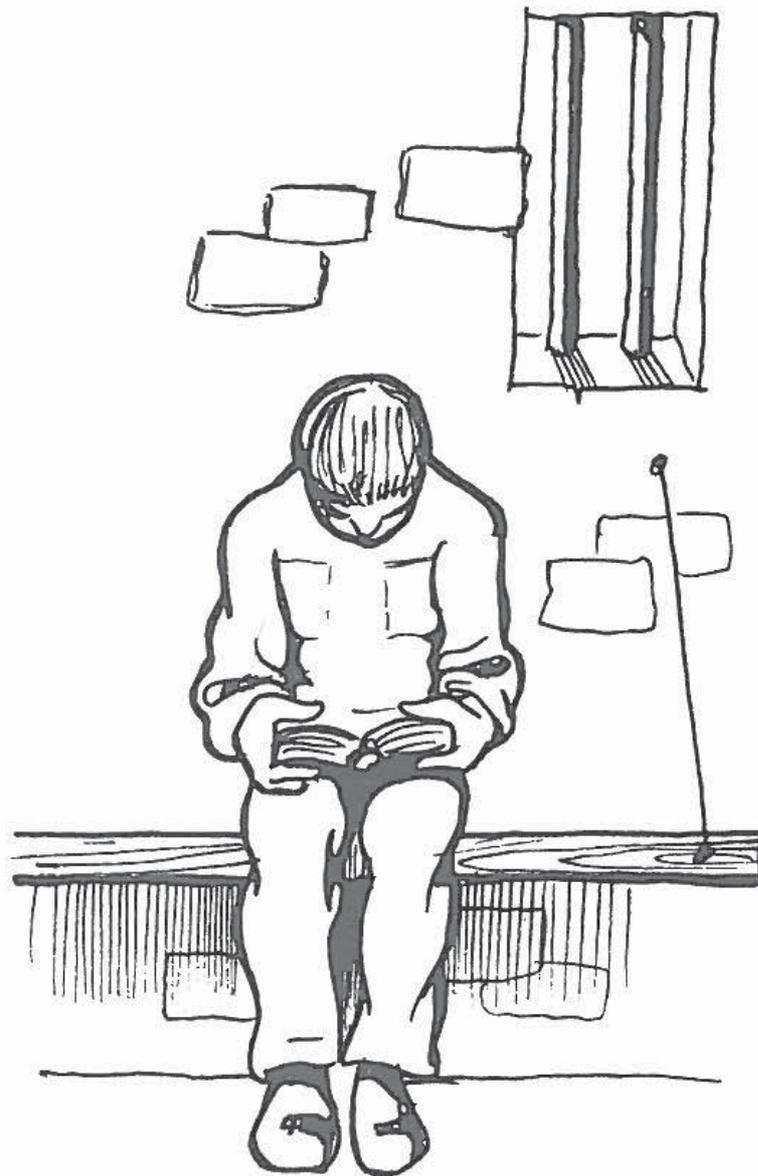


For example:

— The children at London Road Church had been looking at Paul's letters to new churches. Not long before, they had had a visit from a missionary who had told them about new churches being started in

South America. They decided that they would write to one of these new churches to encourage them. When they received a reply in return they were very excited.

— Martin works for a relief agency in the Sudan. He was challenged to take up this work by the writing of the prophets. He also finds the encouragement to continue to work in a hopeless situation by reading the story of Jesus in the Gospel.



— Vic was a young man in prison. He read the Bible in his cell and found that it made a dramatic effect on his life. A few years later he was ordained as a minister.

— Winnie is an old age pensioner. She has lost her husband and lives alone. She reads the Bible regularly and says that it helps her to cope with her loneliness and approach her own death with hope.

— St. Mark's had a series of house groups discussing the book of Acts. As they read the story of the early Church, the groups became convinced that their church was too inward looking. Inspired by the story of the spread of the good news, they began to organise activities of their own which would show the love of Christ to the people in their community. One thing they did was to organise a lunch club for old people.

— A group of villagers in Brazil sat round talking about the Old Testament story of Exodus. As they thought about the way God had delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, they began to see that God might wish to save them from their own slavery to poverty. They involved other villagers in their conversation and from this grew programmes for education and health care run by them for their own village.

All these are merely glimpses of the way in which the Bible can act as an inspiration and a resource for people today. At the same time, there is always the danger of misusing the Bible by making it support particular causes, prejudices and half-truths. We can hear its words of comfort and be deaf to its words of challenge. When reading the Bible, individually or in groups, take care to avoid reading only those safe familiar passages.

What of us? We can read the Bible records and the everyday examples as though they are merely interesting stories which do not in any way affect our own lives. Or we can allow them to touch our own experience and that of the children so that what we read challenges and changes the way we live. When we tell a story to the children showing how the Bible has inspired someone to particular action, we need to allow time and opportunity for the children to consider the significance for their own lives. If we use imagination and enthusiasm in exploring the stories and their implications for us, the children's imagination and enthusiasm will be caught and they too will find the Bible an inspiration for their living.

For example:

— Jesus blesses the children, *Matthew 19. 13-15*. Describe the scene to

the children and then divide them into three groups — parents, children, disciples. Act out the scene. Afterwards, ask the 'parents' why they wanted to take their child to Jesus; the 'children' why they wanted to meet Jesus, the 'disciples' why they wanted Jesus to be left alone. Let the children express their feelings about being in the particular role. It surprises many leaders how even young children are able to explore in this way using their imagination.

— Bricks without straw, *Exodus 5*.

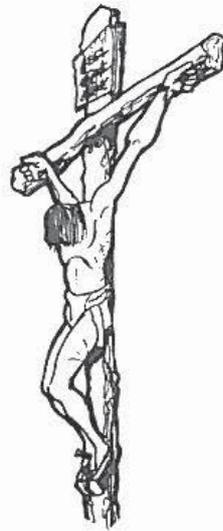
This is an exercise more suited to older children. Set the scene by telling briefly the story from the earlier chapters of Exodus. Divide the children into groups of four. Give each person in every group a role — Moses, Pharaoh, slave driver or Israelite. Read out Exodus 5 in a modern translation while the children follow it in the Bible. Leave periods of silence for the children to think about how they would be feeling as their character at these points in the story. Then ask each member of the group to tell the others about their reactions to the part they played in the story. One or two Moses, Pharaohs, Israelites, slave drivers can tell everyone what they said in their group.

By identifying in imagination with characters in Biblical stories children, and adults, are able to add another dimension to their experience and understanding of the story.

Using the Bible for Prayer and Spiritual Growth

It was a bright, crisp, spring morning. A mother was hanging the washing on the line with half an eye on what her toddler was up to in the garden. She saw him bend over and reach his hand out to the opening tulip. She went nearer — was he about to pull it up? No! He stroked it — so gently — and, as she too bent down, she heard him saying, 'Well done, God. Well done, God.'

THE BIBLE HAS given many people inspiration and encouragement in particular circumstances. It has also helped many to develop their personal relationships with God. It is a resource for prayer and spiritual growth.



At the moment of greatest anguish Jesus is reported to have cried out "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?", *Mark 15. 34*. At this time of agony Jesus expressed his desolation in words from the Scripture which were familiar to him. They are the opening words of Psalm 22, a Psalm which begins in anguish and ends with the assurance of God's salvation. "People not yet born will be told: 'The Lord saved his people'", *Psalm 22. 31*.

Christians throughout the ages have used words from the Bible to express their own feelings at times of extreme sorrow or joy. This is only possible if the words are familiar to us. It will only be possible for children if we help them to know some of these Biblical treasures. They need to associate them with their own experiences. Here are some ways of doing this.

One simple method is to use Biblical responses in litany type prayers. So, for example, we ask the youngsters to suggest particular things for which they wish to say thank you. We listen to each contribution and say after each one

'Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good.'

and the youngsters reply:

'And his love is eternal.' (Psalms 118. 1, 136 and others)

The words need to be written up for everyone to see and tried over once before you ask for the first thanksgiving.

If you have a large group you may find it easier to collect all the ideas together, write them up for everyone to see and then group them before using a response. It might sound like this:

'We thank God for computers, televisions and videos "Praise the Lord"

Response by everyone: *"Praise the Lord, my soul"* (Psalm 146. 1)

*'We thank God for football, for swimming, for games with our friends
"Praise the Lord"*

Response: *"Praise the Lord, my soul", etc.*

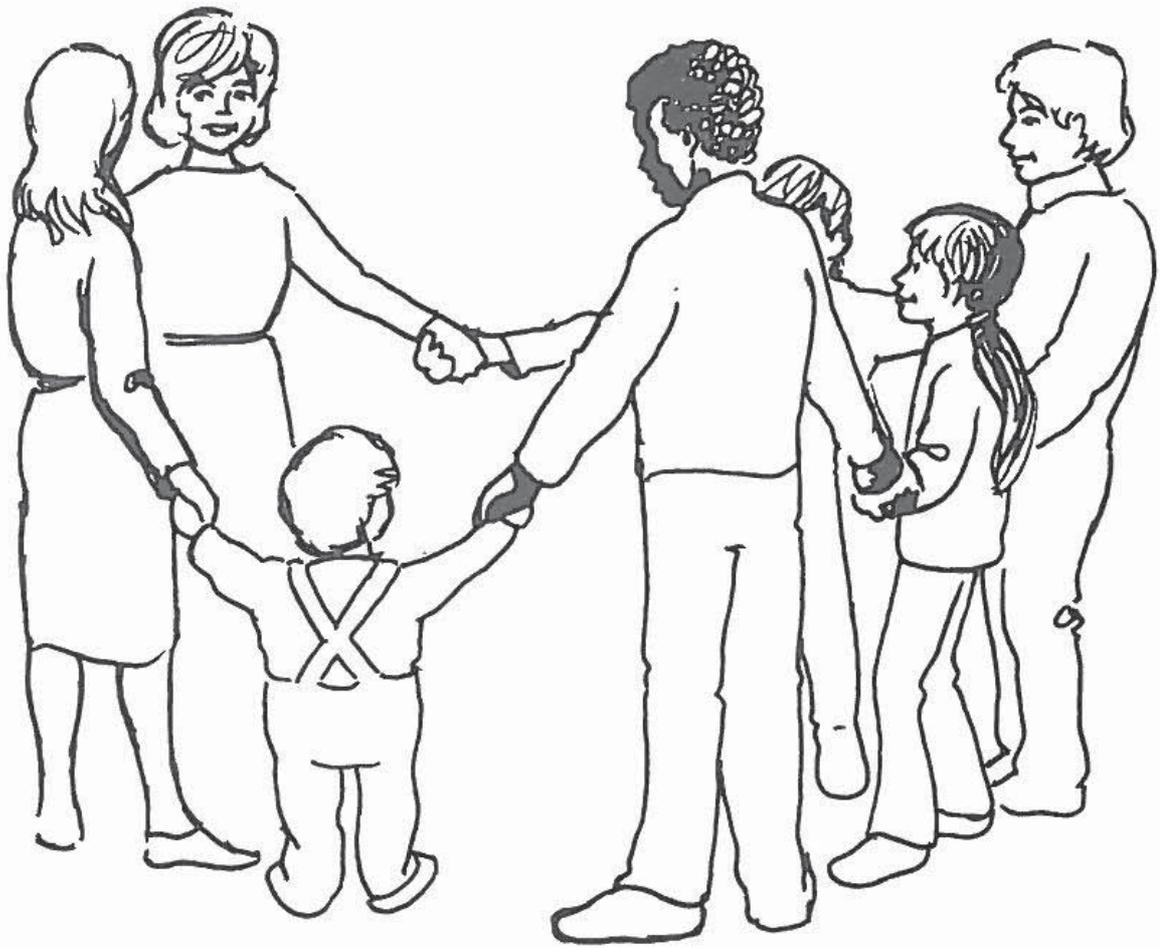
There are many verses, particularly from the Psalms, which can be used and become familiar in this way. For example, Psalm 75 *"We give thanks to you, O God. We give thanks to you"* or Psalm 8. 9 *"O Lord our Lord, your greatness is seen in all the world"*. Similarly prayers can be built up, using the children's ideas of those who need help, with words like

"Hear my (our) cry, O God"

Response: *"Listen to my (our) prayer",* from Psalm 61. 1.

These litany prayers are suitable for all ages, and the ideas of young adults and adults can be incorporated into them. Everyone can then build up a collection of familiar phrases from the Bible.

At other times our feelings of thankfulness and praise can be expressed in a Biblical prayer, and the words may well have the power and richness we associate with poetry rather than everyday conversation. Of course there are times when silent appreciation or very ordinary words can be used to express our awe and worship of God. There are also moments when great words are appropriate.



*"Holy, holy, holy!
The Lord Almighty is holy!
His glory fills the world" Isaiah 6. 3*

*"Our Lord and God! You are worthy to receive glory, honour and power.
For you created all things and by your will they were given existence and
life" Revelation 4. 11*

*"Lord God ... may you be praised for ever and ever! You are great and
powerful, glorious, splendid, and majestic. Everything in heaven and earth
is yours, and you are king, supreme ruler over all ... Now, our God, we give
you thanks, and we praise your glorious name." 1 Chronicles 29. 10-13*

These are but a few of the possibilities. One such passage can be used over a few weeks in worship. It can be spoken by the leader, or the children can repeat the words, phrase by phrase, so that they become known and form part of the collection of familiar words which can be recalled when needed.

Of course, there are other kinds of prayer which can be used in the same way. Psalm 67 contains verses which might well be used to pray for God to be acknowledged throughout the world: *"God has blessed us; may all people everywhere honour him"*. Psalm 46. 1-3 would make a helpful introduction to our prayers at times of disaster: *"God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid ..."* A lovely ending to a time together might be to use 2 Thessalonians 3. 16: *"May the Lord himself, who is our source of peace, give you peace at all times and in every way"*, or Psalm 121. 7, 8: *"The Lord will protect you from all danger; He will keep you safe. He will protect you as you come and go for ever"*.

Obviously, we need to judge carefully when it is appropriate to use such prayers, and to maintain the balance with more homespun prayers.

The problem is not that of seeing that the children understand every individual word. We should use prayers when they easily relate to the content of what we are doing, or the mood and feeling of an occasion. The understanding will be developed by the context in which they are used. The imagery and poetry of some of these passages will allow them to be appreciated at different levels. We are therefore talking about words and prayers which are as appropriate for adults as for children.



For both adults and children, words set to music are often remembered very easily and recalled with little effort. We only have to think about the familiarity of passages used in Handel's *Messiah* to appreciate this. Modern musicals like *Godspell* achieve this also, as do hymns and choruses which we sing regularly. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God' (*Matthew 6. 33*) is a good example of this. Psalm 23 as sung to *Crimond* is another example. So often the music recalls other associations too, like an occasion when we sang it or heard it. Remembered feelings of fellowship or inspiration can add to the richness of the music itself.

We need to look for opportunities outside the normal routine where particular words would be appropriate. Use in this way the words will become more significant. We can say, 'Praise the Lord, my soul, O Lord my God, how great you are' (*Psalm 104. 1*) at a celebration party. We can use 'Praise him hills and mountains, fruit trees and forests, all animals tame and wild, reptiles and birds. Praise the Lord' (*Psalm 148. 9, 10*) out of doors.



'Homespun' prayers also can remind us of Biblical words and stories, and so help us to relate Biblical experience to everyday life. For example, where children are familiar with the story of the stilling of the storm, or have just heard the story, the words 'Be still ... there was a great calm' (*Mark 4. 3*) might

be used as an introduction to a prayer of trust in God to help us in all the things which frighten or worry us. The words of Bartimaeus 'Jesus Son of David, take pity on me' (*Mark 10. 47*) might be used as part of a prayer for those who need help and healing, and so on.

We may also look for other ways to familiarise people with helpful passages. Small children may enjoy making large pictures to illustrate a passage. Psalms 104 or 148 and Genesis 8. 22 lend themselves to this treatment.

Others may like to look quietly at selected pictures or slides which illustrate some of these passages while the verses are read; or they may like to work out a sequence of pictures or slides for themselves. What pictures would they choose to capture the significance and the mood of Psalm 121 or Psalm 23 or of 1 Corinthians 13. 4-7, for example? The words will certainly acquire new levels of meaning as the selection is made, and the results may be shared with others.

Choral speaking, too, helps people to concentrate on words and meanings. For example, 1 Corinthians 13. 4-7 or the Beatitudes (*Matthew 5. 3-12*) may well be spoken in this way by a group of children or adults or both. The passage needs to be written up on a large sheet of paper or on an overhead projector or typed out so that the phrasing is clear.

e.g. 'Love is patient and kind.

It is not jealous or conceited or proud.' (*1 Corinthians 13. 4-7*)

The group is divided into two or three groups, (e.g. light voices together, deep voices together) and the phrases apportioned to each group. The copies need to be marked accordingly, and, after a first reading through, decisions made about where to emphasise words, make pauses, etc.

We will have done a great service, if we can help children and adults become familiar with words which can be recalled in times of stress or of joy. We can also find stories about people praying which will inspire and encourage. We will want to look at the example of our Lord himself. 'And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place and there he prayed', we read in *Mark 1. 35*. 'And after he had taken leave of them (the disciples) he went into the hills to pray' (*Mark 6. 46*). What can be more important for our children in this noisy, pressured society than to encourage them to cultivate and look for moments of peace and quietness to be with God? Of course, it will not be enough just to say this. We need to

practise using that quietness with them. We could think through the story of Jesus with Zacchaeus (*Luke 19. 1-9*), and enter the experiences and feelings of Zacchaeus himself perhaps. Just as the psalmist says, we need to rest in the presence of God, 'Be still and know that I am God' (*Psalms 46. 10*).

We need to be sensitive to the amount of time a group can sustain a meaningful silence, being ready to move on when the first signs of restlessness occur. But do not underestimate the ability of young children to be quiet, nor indeed the depth of their spirituality generally, which can be greater than that of adults.

The authors of the Gospels are careful to tell us that Jesus prayed before making any important decision. Jesus relied on God's guidance and strength to see him through. So, for example, he spent a night in prayer before



choosing the Twelve (*Luke 6. 12-13*). Particularly, of course, he prayed in Gethsemane before the Crucifixion "'Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done ..." ... and being in agony he prayed more earnestly;' (*Luke 22. 42-43*). Stories such as these may

encourage the children to see how God's will for us, too, is made known. Our relationship with him deepens as prayer becomes a natural part of our lives. Can we help them to 'talk through' with God the forthcoming and past events in their lives as a regular feature of their daily living?

We may like to look at some of the teaching of the Bible about prayer. The personal and secret nature of prayer (*Mark 6. 5-15*), the need to pray for our persecutors (*Mark 5. 44*), the understanding benevolence of God (*Mark 7. 7-11*), the need for persistence (*Luke 18, 1-8*), the call to pray always (*Ephesians 6. 18, Colossians 4. 2, 1 Thessalonians 5. 17*) and of course the pattern of prayer in the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer has been used by Christians both as a prayer of fellowship which binds all Christians together and as a model prayer. As a model it firmly reminds us of the relationship with God within which we pray. We begin with 'Our Father'. Then we look at the nature and majesty of God before asking for basic needs. Many of our prayers are formulated in a similar way, first looking at God himself before looking at our inadequacies and needs.

Teaching about prayer in the Bible must be set in the context of the relationship between God and the world, between God and his people. Jesus' closeness to God, his Father, makes prayer the natural way to face arrest and death in the Garden of Gethsemane. The psalmist's whole view of life and death is coloured by the awareness of the caring presence of God, so he can see God as his shepherd (*Psalms 23*). What we are trying to do with the children is to foster that kind of awareness of God and relationship with him.

Also in the Bible are accounts of more dramatic confrontations with God, like those of Isaiah, Jeremiah or Saul (*Isaiah 6. 1-8, Jeremiah 1. 4f, 15, 15f, Acts 9. 1f*). Here we see the mystery and otherness of God as well as the practical service which he requires of his followers and to which they must respond. We must not use the stories to force artificial experiences in our young people. Such stories prepare the way for what God wants of them and affirm the experiences which they may already have had. The younger children too can understand the impact which meeting Jesus had upon his followers — the marvellous directness of his call to the fishermen 'Follow me. I will make you fishers of men'; the joy of Zacchaeus as he climbs down from the tree to entertain Jesus and put himself into his hands; the relief of the paralysed man as he bumps down on his mattress beside Jesus and hears what he most wants to hear, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'.



These experiences are matched for us all as we encounter Jesus in our private and our corporate prayers. He has always known us and has a use for us. He knows what we most need. His love and care surround us and he demands of us a loving response and working out of our discipleship. These are deep and mysterious experiences of being in the presence of God and responding to his love, as real for the young as for the old.

The Bible in the Family

A conversation in the car was prompted by some discussion of how my daughter's preparations for her imminent trip to Germany were going. Her father asked:

"Are you going to be a wise or foolish virgin?"

"What are you talking about, Daddy?"

The Biblical allusion was lost on her — so we started to tell her the story. We found, to our shame, that we disagreed on the details. So, once we got home, we looked up the story and got it right!

FOR THE BIBLE to be really a part of children's Christian experience they need to meet it, not only in Church and in learning groups, but also in the home. Some parents who already read the Bible with their children may want to explore new ways. Others who have found it difficult to establish a pattern of Bible reading at home may be looking for ways of beginning. What are the realistic possibilities for today's families?

As in everything else, the very young children will take over the practices and attitudes of the adults with whom they have closest relationships. So reading the bible or hearing Bible stories needs to be a shared treat. Adults and children feel a warmth and closeness in doing something which all enjoy and which brings them close to a loved 'friend'. It may be appropriate to make this a daily or weekly routine — part of the time shared in the early evening or at bedtime, or whenever is right for the family.

Be prepared to read the same favourite Bible stories over and over again many times. Do not be too surprised if Beatrix Potter or the Mister Men take precedence from time to time. We make the Bible seem different and special because of our own attitude to it. We are not talking about a hushed voice or an artificial piety, of course, but a sense



of our own anticipation as we hear again the good news of God's love.

Try to be sensitive about the stories you choose to read with the younger children. Some small children are very distressed by the story of the infant Samuel, for example. They worry about a mother abandoning her baby in a 'church'. They cannot understand the idea of 'giving a child to God' in this way. Some children see beyond the fun of the animals going into the ark, or people walking through a sea, and ask how God could choose to destroy animals and people, and what had they done to be so wicked. So choose with care, not necessarily always selecting the 'happy' stories, but being sensitive to the possible reactions and responses of your own children.

A book like 'Listen!' is invaluable. It has carefully worked out themes like 'Food, glorious food' and 'Everyone is welcome in the people of God' and uses passages from the Old and New Testaments in simple language. Alternatively, use a Bible Reading scheme for young children. The Bible Reading Fellowship and the International Bible Reading Association both produce material. See if your church uses a scheme.

You may want to pray together informally when the story is over — to thank God for our food today after the story of the feeding of the five

thousand perhaps. The story of Zacchaeus may prompt us to pray for Mr. Jones, the old man who lives alone at the end of the road and might be lonely. The children's ideas and our own are equally important and should be included. With children of all ages we need to exchange ideas which are not artificially devout or conformist. To be direct and honest in our comments is important. 'I enjoyed that' may be enough, or a satisfied sigh. 'I found that very difficult — what do you think?' may be an appropriate comment after a particular reading.



'That's all very well for our young children', you may say, 'but encouraging the older ones is a different matter'. Older children might adventure into new stories and they may prefer to read to us. Look for appropriate times to be together as clubs and groups take over their time and ours. We must respect their wishes to read alone, to be in contact with God for themselves, or, sadly, to choose to give it a miss!

It's great if young people will continue to join in family stories and prayers but it is not easy for them. Some want to do their own thing and are embarrassed by entering into activities which they associate with being little. If adults in the family share in bible reading and prayer, children will see that it is not just a childish activity.

Family commitments often make it more and more difficult to get together. However, special occasions may be marked by reading and praying together: on birthdays or baptism anniversaries, at Christmas

and Easter, for Mothering Sunday and so on. Despite the problems it is also helpful for the family to spend a little time once a week looking together at part of the readings of the Sunday Service. Even if children go off into classes for part of the service time, they may well be exploring themes based on the same readings. A little time spent thinking about the text will often make all the difference on the day itself — for everyone.

What can we do to help our older children continue or begin again their reading of the Bible? We could see that they have new books to use as a stimulus. They might enjoy 'New World' or 'Winding Quest' or 'Bible Bits', or a new copy of a modern translation. We might encourage them to try out one of the Bible reading schemes. If we read our Bibles ourselves we should be sure that they know we do and we should discuss it with them sometimes as subjects arise naturally.

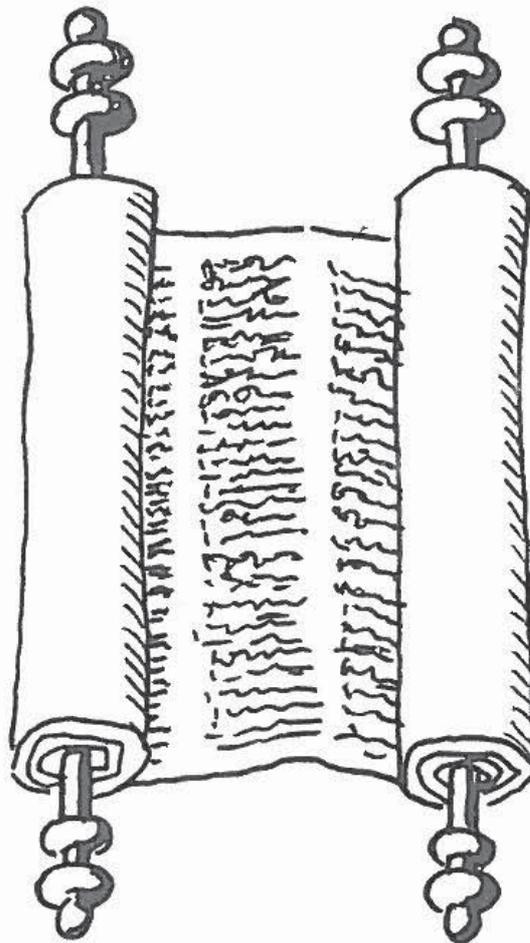
For most of us the written word of the Bible has a special place as something to be thought over carefully and quietly. But we must not forget that there are other ways now. What about listening to a taped



story with the little ones; or giving the older ones a tape like Frank Topping's 'Voices in My mind'; or watching an appropriate video, from 'Jesus of Nazareth' for example. Why not listen to music and songs based on the scriptures, or play computer games based on Bible stories? Reading is not the only way.

It would be good if we could introduce our children to other ways of becoming familiar with the Bible text, the Bible stories and the Bible truths. The Bible contains the essential story of our faith. Here is an opportunity for families to rediscover its richness and its ability to feed our faith.

Useful Resources



There are many publications which relate to the use of the Bible with children. Some are books for children themselves to read, or have read to them. Others are books for the adults who will be sharing with the children in looking at the Bible. In both groups there are books about the background to the Biblical writings, about the way in which these were put together and transmitted and about the interpretation of the Bible and its relationship with everyday life. For the adults there are also books which deal with everyday life. For the adults there are also books which deal with children's experience and ability to understand the Bible. Here is a list of some of the publications available.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

The nature of the Bible record

Getting to Know About National Christian Education Council

This series provides interesting and useful background information about Biblical times and is designed for 8 to 12 year olds. Titles include *Houses and Homes, Clothes, Animals and Birds, Festivals.*

The Children's Bible Atlas by Martin Gilber W H Allen

This refreshingly different approach began from the author's journey in Palestine with his 11 year old daughter. It has much in style and content to interest a teenager.

Lion Handbook to the Bible Lion Publications
Learning About the Bible

Published in one volume or in separate sections the *Handbook* gives a guide to the books of the Bible and is suitable for use by teenagers as a simple introduction to the nature of the biblical record.

Learning About the Bible is a simpler version for 5 to 8 year olds.

Bible Content and Interpretation

Little Fish Books Scripture Union

These are tiny little books for very young children, with coloured pictures on each page and a short simple text to read to them.

Talkabout Stories Bible Society

A series of small books of individual Bible stories illustrated in an unusual style, they are intended for young children up to about 6 years.

They are also available in a larger format edition called *What the Bible tells us.*

Palm Tree Bible Stories Palm Tree Press

This series of little Bible story books for under 7's has simple texts and amusing illustrations. There are 'favourite' stories from both Old and New Testaments.

Rainbow Books

Church House Publishing

These are short Bible storybooks intended for 6 to 9 year olds. Each one tells a Bible story, setting it in its context, and engaging the child in dialogue. Full colour 'frieze like' illustrations are on each page.

Listen! by A J McCallen

Collins

A book of Bible readings in a very simple version arranged under themes like 'Flowers are beautiful', 'Bread from heaven', 'Teach us to pray'. Suitable for use with or by young children up to 10 or 11 years.

Praise! by A J McCallen

Collins

A collection of songs and poems from the Old and New Testaments in a simple version. Could be used with or by children up to 10 or 11 years.

Good News Colour New Testament

Bible Society

This useful version includes a reading plan and introductory notes as well as illustrations.

Bible Stories Retold by David Kossoff

Collins

In his own inimitable style David Kossoff retells Old Testament stories to make a continuing narrative. Well presented with illustrations and pithy comments, this book is attractive reading for anyone over about 9 years old.

Winding Quest; New World; Portrait of Jesus

by Alan Dale

Oxford University Press

Selections and translations in the light of modern Biblical scholarship, these books give 10 to 18 year olds a captivating introduction to the Old and New Testaments.

Best Bible Bits by Janet Green

Church House Publishing

A Secondary school class decided to write to some well-known people about their favourite Bible passages. This fascinating book is the result of their enterprise.

The Davidson File by Stuart Jackman Lutterworth Press
This book retells stories from the life of Jesus in the format of sensational newspaper articles.

Bible Storytime International Bible Reading Association
A series of small books for younger children, each one containing a selection of Bible stories together with activities and prayers.

The Bible for Today by James Clarke Lutterworth
This starts from questions asked by teenagers and seeks to show them the relevance of the Bible.

BOOKS FOR ADULTS

Bible Study

How to Read the Old Testament by Etienne Charpentier SCM Press
How to Read the New Testament

These books are good introductions to the Old and New Testaments. They are not difficult to read, except in one or two places, and do not assume that you are a Biblical scholar already.

Transforming Bible Study by Walter Wink SCM
Experiments in Bible Study by Hans Reudi Weber
World Council of Churches

These both introduce exciting new ways of studying the Bible with groups. Hans Reudi Weber describes a number of studies in detail. Walter Wink gives more attention to the reasons for the methods used, describing particular studies as examples.

Children's Experience

The Bible — A Child's Playground by Roger & Gertrude Gobbel SCM
This book explores the task of teaching children the Bible and encourages the practice of presenting children with the direct Biblical text and enabling them to engage with it. There is stimulus here for further thinking and discussion among those responsible for Christian nurture and nurture programmes.

Child in the Church

BCC

This is the result of work in 1975 and 1980 by the British Council of Churches Consultative Group for Ministry Among Children. It faces some of the fundamental theological and educational issues and suggests how these might affect practice.

How can a Child Choose Faith

United Reformed Church

This is a set of discussion leaflets dealing briefly with the questions raised in *Child in the Church*.

Onward Christian Parents by Terence Copley

Church House Publishing

This is a practical, down to earth book about Christian parents bringing up their children. It faces the problems head on and indicates some ways to cope.

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES

There is a varied selection of audio-visual material available. The following have been found useful.

Cassettes

Voices in my Mind — CTVC — for 11s and 12s upwards

Happy Shepherds — CTVC — for under 6s

Do It Yourself Cartoons — Bible Society

Ladybird and Palm Tree produce selections of Bible stories on cassettes with accompanying illustrated books.

Sounds of Living Water contains a selection of the hymns and songs from the book of that name by Celebration Press.

Sound Strips

Hippity Dog a series produced by Church Pastoral Aid Society.

Scripture Union produce a range of sound strips.

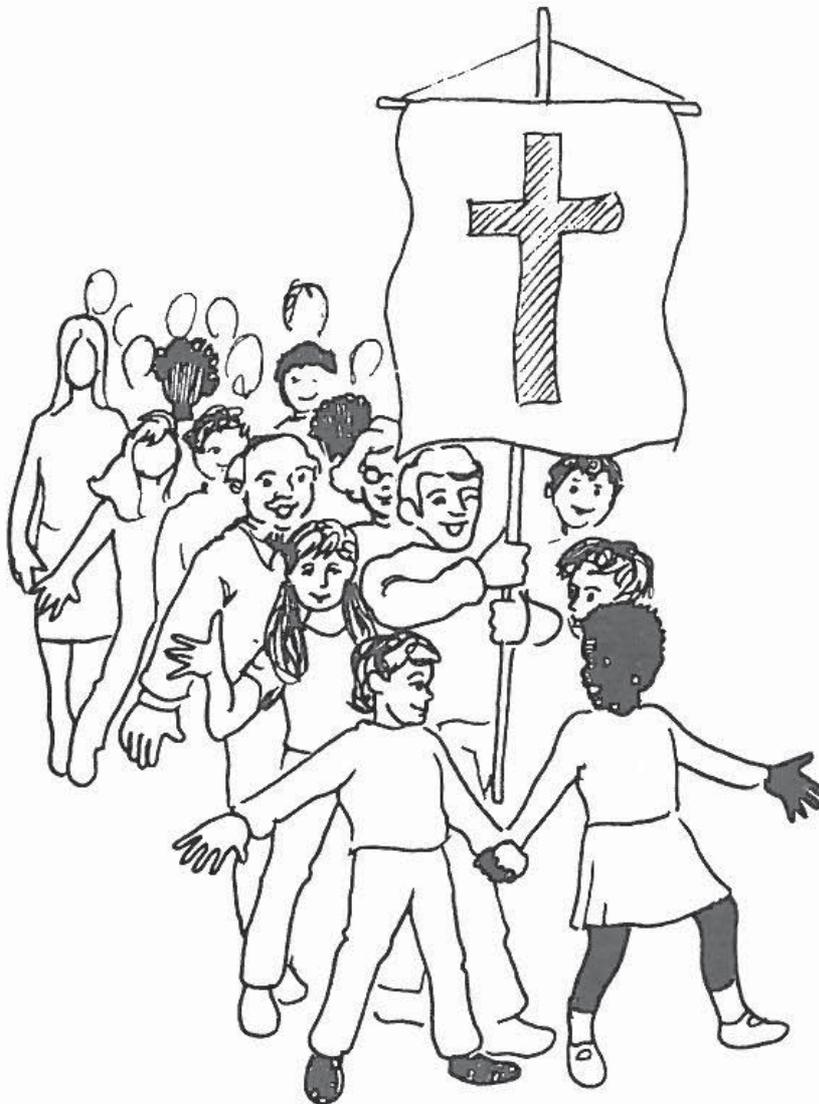
Video

Jesus of Nazareth — in four parts — Channel 5 Video.

Scripture Union and CTVC produce a range of video programmes.

Microcomputer Programmes

Scripture Union, Argos Press, Church of Scotland, Christian Education Movement and MIRE (Micros in Religious Education) are all producing computer programmes to encourage children to explore the Bible. Some are excellent, others less good. Most of them at present are produced for running on BBC 'B' Micro and ZX Spectrum 48K, but this is a rapidly developing area.



THE BIBLE AND CHILDREN

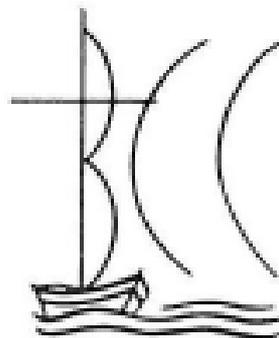
This book aims to bring a fresh approach to using the Bible with children in a Christian situation, to pass on our sense of its value to our children and to make it available to children as the word of God.

We hope it will help parents, leaders, ministers and everyone who uses the Bible to identify their own attitudes to the Bible — how they feel about it, how they use it — and to examine how the Bible is used by their Church and by their local congregation.

We hope, too, that it will help them adapt its use to the needs of children and to develop good practice in reading and talking about the Bible with children.

The book provides guidelines on how to choose, criticise, adapt and work with material from the Bible, and shows adults how they can share their own understanding of it with children.

Also included is a list of resources to stimulate and inform adults' own Bible reading and to use with children.



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