



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 Beyond Noah's Ark  
(*Children*, pp. 29-35)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Nurturing Children in Faithfulness  
(*Children*, pp. 89-93)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:  
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### Christian Reflection

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# Beyond Noah's Ark

We want to guide our children into Scripture's rich banquet of stories of promise, deliverance, human failure, and divine forgiveness and fidelity. But how should we go about imparting to them a deep knowledge of the Bible?

### Prayer

Gracious God, help us to guide children as they grow up in the midst of this fast-moving and often confusing culture, and to give them opportunities to love Scripture, to pray, to study, and to worship you.

In the name of your son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

**Scripture Reading:** 2 Timothy 1:1-7; 3:10-17

**Responsive Reading (Psalm 78:2-4, 6-8)**

I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.

**We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.**

That the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and rise up and tell them to their children,  
so that they should set their hope in God,  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments;

**and that they should not be like their ancestors,  
a stubborn and rebellious generation,  
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,  
whose spirit was not faithful to God.**

### Reflection

Timothy, converted perhaps on Paul's first visit to Lystra, joined the missionary's team on the second visit and became a valued helper (Acts 16:1-3). Paul acknowledges that Timothy's faith grew from seeds planted during childhood by his Jewish mother and grandmother as they shared all the Scripture with him.

We face challenges in sharing the Bible with children today:

- ▶ *Finding time in a busy family schedule.* "Take heart from the fact that you don't need to find large chunks of time," Garrett counsels. "And don't be discouraged if you can't make it a time for the *whole* family: start one-on-one with a single child if that is what you can manage." Read the Bible a few minutes before mealtime grace, include a passage in a child's bedtime readings, or start a brief family devotion time. "Once the seeds have sprouted, you may find that God-talk also happens readily at other times throughout your days: while riding with your children in the car, reflecting on a TV news report or an incident at school, or discussing a routine matter like recycling or feeding the family pet."



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- ▶ *Answering children's questions.* "Your children will ask you questions about faith that will stump you," Garrett admits. "As parents, however, giving a wrong answer is not such a great risk. There are other, greater risks: the risk that by avoiding our children's questions we will convey that home is not the place to discuss deep or serious matters, and the risk that our sons and daughters might miss the grand opportunity to live as children and friends of God." Garrett suggests that we learn along with our children, one Bible book at a time. Devotional books with readings and prayer for children are helpful; but she cautions that "story Bibles" leave out too much, especially the parts of Scripture like the Psalms that cannot be easily fitted into the story format.
- ▶ *Going "beyond Noah's ark."* Ignoring the honest teaching of Psalm 78, we prefer to tell children an "easy Good News," that all's right with the world and we should just try harder to be good. Yet, "the Bible helps us understand what it means to be human: fallen and living in a fallen world, but beloved, and ever with reason for hope," says Garrett. "Why, then, do we so seldom go beyond the stories of Noah's ark, David and Goliath, and Jesus blessing the children? Wonderful as these stories are..., there is far more to tell."

Indeed, the Bible asks us to imagine "a new and bigger world than the one we have previously known," Garrett observes, and "to give the Bible to our children means allowing them to enter into that world and inhabit it for a time. We cannot control all that they will take away from the world of the Bible, but we can trust that they will be richer and more competent human beings because of what they encounter there."

### Study Questions

1. What methods and opportunities of sharing Scripture with children have been successful in your family?
2. How does your congregation help parents answer children's questions and explore the Bible 'beyond Noah's ark'?
3. Westerhoff identifies four stages of faith: *experienced*, *affiliative*, *searching*, and *owned faith* (*Children*, p. 91). Describe the faith of the children who are in your care. How can Scripture reading and study benefit them at each stage?

### Departing Hymn: "Lord, Open Now My Heart to Hear"

Lord, open now my heart to hear  
and through your Word to me draw near;  
your Word my soul with joy will bless,  
your Word brings peace and happiness.

Your Word will deeply move the heart,  
your Word will perfect health impart;  
let me your Word e'er pure retain,  
let me your child and heir remain.

*Johannes G. Olearius (1671), translated from German by  
Matthias Loy (1880); text adapted from verses 1 and 2.*

*Suggested Tunes:* CANONBURY or HESPERUS

# Beyond Noah's Ark

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

### Teaching Goals

1. To reflect on the value of reading Scripture with children.
2. To consider how we can respond to three challenges: finding time for sharing Scripture with children, answering their questions, and leading them to explore the riches of the Bible beyond their favorite stories.
3. To share our experiences in exploring the Bible with children.

### Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Children (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the hymn "Lord, Open Now My Heart to Hear," locate the tune CANONBURY in your church's hymnal. (An alternate tune is HESPERUS.)

### Begin with a Story

"Stephanie Paulsell, now a professor of theology at Harvard, writes, 'When I was a little girl, I used to read psalms every day with my father. He reads six psalms a day and writes down one verse from each in a little notebook, whatever strikes his heart on a particular day. I used to sit in the backyard with him and talk about which verses we might write down. I loved the feeling of handling those holy words with my dad as a child.' That is what we want to give to our kids: a sense that handling these words is both a privilege and a great source of joy!" (*Children*, p. 32).

### Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude the prayer time by reading together the prayer in the study guide.

### Scripture Reading

Ask two group members to read 2 Timothy 1:1-7 and 3:10-17 from a modern translation.

### Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

### Reflection

Group members may focus on a few of the challenges that adults face in sharing the Bible with children. If members are just starting to study the Bible with children, the most relevant challenges may be finding the time for the activity and answering children's questions. The challenge of exploring "beyond Noah's ark" becomes more important as adults gain experience in studying Scripture with children.

Another variable to consider is a group member's own experience with Bible study. Those who are just beginning to read the Bible carefully may need to hear the honest questions, doubts, and learning experiences of more practiced readers in the group. The lesson should encourage adults at all levels of experience to share Scripture with children. The point is to learn *with* the children and to make Scripture

central to our faithful walk with God. Explore how group members can support and encourage one another as they study the Bible with children.

### *Study Questions*

1. Members might share how they find time to share Scripture with their children. Perhaps a single time or schedule is successful, or they are experimenting with different times as their family grows and their children mature. Do they have resources to recommend for reading the Bible with children? Encourage members to share their frustrations and failures as well as their successes.
2. Encourage members to reflect on the congregation's Bible study programs for children. Do children have guided opportunities to ask their questions and explore the Bible with one another, or is their study regimented and instruction-based? What range of biblical books and forms of writing (letters, songs, stories, parables, proverbs, etc.) do they study? Do they memorize Scripture, discuss biblical concepts, and explore widely within the Bible?

Children also learn by hearing the Bible read frequently and discussed honestly in worship, and by observing adults interpret and apply Scripture in conversation.

Members should also reflect on how adults in the congregation study the Bible. Are parents reading the Bible in ways that enrich their understanding? Are they exploring and asking their own questions? Are they networking with other adults who could help parents answer their children's questions or would be resources for their children? Does the congregation offer resources and training for home Bible study? Are parents familiar with kid-friendly translations, such as the NIV (New International Version), the CEV (Contemporary English Version), or the NLT (New Living Translation)? A church library might have a collection of devotional guides for children, or parents might share these in a book coop. Susan Garrett and Amy Plantinga Pauw's *Making Time for God: Daily Devotions for Children and Families to Share* is a valuable guide because it addresses a range of difficult biblical passages as well as the more familiar stories and themes.

3. Faith is *experienced* when one is aware of the faith of others; it is *affiliative* when one chooses to belong to a community of faith; *searching faith* is characterized by embracing doubts and experimentation; and *owned faith*, which is traditionally called "personal conversion," is faith that possesses its holders. Westerhoff does not assign an age-range to each stage, and persons' faith may remain in a stage for varying lengths of time. In this discussion we will assume that the individual is a child or young person during these stages.

Members might describe the faith of their children and relatives, or of children whom they know within the congregation.

Exploring the Bible at the stage of *experienced faith* guides one to understand the faith experiences of others. Adults can direct the child to their own favorite stories, meaningful instructions, significant psalms, and so on, as a means of sharing their faith. Even now, the adults might share biblical passages that they struggle to understand or apply. The child should also read the foundational biblical passages that outline the story of God's creation of the world, its fall into sin, and its redemption. These passages, with special emphasis on those passages that are basic to the congregation's theological understanding, prepare the child for *affiliative faith*. During this stage, the child learns to read the Bible under the direction of the faith community. As a child continues to explore the Bible with *searching faith*, the child's questions may lead the child to study specific parts of the Bible, or to re-read portions with particular issues and problems in mind. A maturing *owned faith* will be interested in exploring more nooks and crannies of the biblical story, for now the person senses a call to take up a role in the larger story of God's redemptive plan for the world.

### *Departing Hymn*

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.