

THEOLOGY

A Parent's Guide to
THE BIBLE

axis

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We read the biblical text in order to hear it, in the fullest sense of the word, and then to welcome it and host it in our lives and bodies...When we host this text, it goes in so deep that it gets imprinted onto our cell structures. It enters our bodies, but not like lemonade sipped on a veranda: it infiltrates us like a virus.

—Anna Carter Florence, [*Preaching As Testimony*](#)

A Parent's Guide to **THE BIBLE**

Contents

“Not like lemonade”: Learning to hear and host the Bible	1
What are some misconceptions about the Bible?	1
How do I help my kids have the right framework for viewing the Bible?	2
What questions do teens have about the Bible?	3
How do I help my teens “hear” Scripture?	7
How do we incarnate the Bible?	8
What difference does this make for reading with my teenager? . . .	10
So how should my family and I read the Bible?	11
What if my child is completely uninterested?	14
Final thoughts	15
Related Axis Resources	15
Recap	16
Discussion Questions	17

“Not like lemonade”: Learning to hear and host the Bible

It’s probably not very often that we hear the Bible talked about like a virus imprinted in our cell structures, but what if Anna Carter Florence is on to something here? What if much of our conversation about the Bible is missing the point? What would it be like to imagine that the Bible has the power to change how we live from the inside out? How would it change the way we read or talk about the Bible? How would it help our teens to view the Bible as relevant to their everyday lives, rather than an outdated list of arbitrary rules to follow? What if the Bible helped us start more conversations and ask more questions, rather than ending conversations and winning arguments?

We’ll use Florence’s words “hear” and “host” to structure a conversation about how we can read the Bible well and teach our teens to do so, too. It sounds strange, but we want to get it inside of us, as if we are being infected by a benign virus that spreads and changes us!

What are some misconceptions about the Bible?

Let’s be honest: We *all* have misconceptions about the Bible. And we all need help recognizing these ideas as misguided, as well as relearning what is actually true about the Bible. Below are some of the most common misconceptions about the Bible that teens may believe without even realizing it.

- **The Bible is an encyclopedia, owner’s manual, or rulebook that answers every specific question** our teens might have about dating, occupation, friendship, college major, etc. If our students come to expect the Bible to be a step-by-step manual or field guide to every situation in life, complete with specific instructions and absolute answers to every problem they face, they will be disillusioned and disappointed.
- **The Bible has to be read literally.** This belief says that the best way to understand Scripture is to interpret all of it literally without taking into account

the author's intent, historical context, literary genre, or metaphorical meaning.

- **I can read it by myself at face value and understand its meaning.** The Bible is complex, messy, and frankly sometimes hard to swallow. There are stories about genocide, slavery, and end times that confuse even the most ardent biblical scholar. That's why our teens need to read scripture in community, use wise commentary, and approach the text with a level of humility realizing they are joining an ancient conversation about God that Christians and Jews have been having for over 2,000 years.
- **The Bible is one book with one author.** Actually, our sacred Scriptures are a collection of writings from various authors in various historical time-frames, speaking to a wide variety of people. We should be cautious when saying, "The Bible says . . ." just as we would never say, "[The Public Library says . . .](#)" when quoting Jane Austen or William Shakespeare.
- **The Bible is "repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned,"** as [this recent GQ article](#) stated. And if smart, well-educated people are describing the Bible in this way, who is your teen to disagree? In fact, many teens who hear similar sentiments are totally derailed by them, feeling offended but also wondering if it's true.

A great starting place for helping teens learn more is [How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth](#), a highly acclaimed introduction to methods of reading the various parts of the Bible, written to be accessible to people who haven't had a lot of higher-level training in biblical studies.

How do I help my kids have the right framework for viewing the Bible?

In order to better comprehend the Bible, we need to understand the back story, so that's where we need to start with our kids. We know (from the Bible!) that, through His love, God created everything that exists and called it good. We know that God cares deeply for all of creation and is pained by the brokenness that has come into it.

Because the creator God delights in creation and cares for its flourishing, He is always

working to bring about the restoration of all things. In order to do so, God chose an obscure family in the deserts of the ancient Near East to be His people and a blessing for the entire world. Then God became human in the person of Jesus to claim the final and decisive victory over sin and death. He made it possible for creation to be reconciled to Himself, restored to wholeness.

What's more, God remains active and present on earth as the Spirit who empowers and instructs His people. As Christians, we're called to live in ways that bring the kingdom of God to earth. God didn't leave us alone to do this work. Not only did He give humankind His very Spirit to help in this work, but He also gave the Scriptures to guide, instruct, and inspire humankind. As faithful followers of Jesus, we are to follow His example, the guidance of Scripture, and the Spirit so that we can participate in God's plan of restoration for all things.

Although it might seem redundant to rehash this story, establishing this framework is vital for a conversation about the Bible. If we want to talk about what the Bible is and how to read it well, we have to keep a laser focus on why we have the Bible in the first place. It's quite simply this (and this is from the Bible's own words): to teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness so that all of God's people may be equipped to join in the work (check out [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)). No matter what we believe about the Bible, approaching it with this kind of framework is foundational for deepening our relationship with it, as well as our teens' capacities to read it well and find it relevant to their everyday lives.

What questions do teens have about the Bible?

Sometimes it's hard to remember that our kids are only just embarking on their faith journeys when we've been on ours for so long. So it's easy to forget that they're going to have fundamental and pivotal questions about what they believe and why they should believe it. But rather than being afraid of their questions or worried that their questions will become skepticism and eventually unbelief, we need to allow them a safe place to ask their questions, then go on a journey of discovery with them. Here are some big questions teens often ask about the Bible:

How did we get what we now call “the Bible”?

The product of two historical communities (ancient Israel and the early Christian

movement) and their respective relationships with and responses to God, the Bible is comprised of 66 books written in various genres (poetry, confessions, stories, histories, prophecy, and wisdom) and divided into two testaments. Most of these books are anonymous in their authorship and composition. And though the process used by ancient Israel to canonize their sacred texts is largely unknown to us, we do know it took about five centuries for the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) to come into being. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people already considered the Law, the Prophets, and other Old Testament writings to be sacred. The Torah (i.e. the first five books of our Bible) was likely completed prior to the fifth century BC. The Prophets were finalized and considered sacred by the second century AD.

On the flip side, we know a great deal about how the early church chose the sacred writings (see below) that we now call the New Testament. It was completed by the second century AD, and it should be no surprise that it was primarily Paul's letters that were the first Christian literature because he designed them to answer immediate questions and pressing problems in the early church. The first Gospel written was Mark (around 66 AD), followed by Matthew, Luke, and later John.

How did the early church determine which books were sacred?

In his book [An Introduction to the New Testament](#), Raymond Brown provides the three major factors the early church used to determine if a text was sacred or not. First, it must have **apostolic origin**. The Gospels and writings were either directly attributed to apostles or were written in the name, spirit, or authority of Jesus' first disciples. Second, it had to **conform to the rule of faith**, meaning the text adhered to the standard orthodox beliefs already in practice by Christians by the turn of the first century. And finally, a text was considered sacred based somewhat on **the importance of the Christian community it addressed**. Brown says, "Those for whom the writings were intended had a role in preserving and winning acceptance for them" in the canonization process. For instance, the church in Rome was one of the major factors in preserving and elevating Romans, Mark, and Hebrews.

Why do we call Scripture "sacred"?

To call the Bible sacred Scripture is to refer to both its **status** and its **function**. By status, we mean that, for Christians, this collection of writings continues to be the most important document we know. It's our guide, the source of truth, and the lens by which we make sense of the world around us. Most importantly, it points us to Jesus.

In [The Heart of Christianity](#), Marcus Borg informs us that the Bible also performs **four specific functions** in the life of a believer. First, it is our **foundational document**, much like the Constitution is for the United States. Without the Bible as our framework, nothing in our lives makes any sense. Second, it is our **identity document**. The stories, vision, and wisdom contained in this incredible collection shape who we are and where we are going.

Third, the Bible is our **source of wisdom**. It answers the basic questions of life, including “What is real?” “What’s my purpose?” “Where does evil come from?” and “How shall we live?” To be a follower of Jesus means that we are in a continual conversation with the Bible as we allow it to shape our identity and vision for the future.

Finally, Scripture also **functions sacramentally**. A sacrament is simply a visible sign of divine grace or, in layman’s terms, it’s the physical object that bears the divine into the world. The object might look normal (e.g. bread and wine), but in reality it functions to invite us into God’s presence. In this manner, the text is a vehicle by which God speaks to us and becomes present with us. The “inspired” aspect of the text didn’t just happen in its origins, but happens each time we pore over God’s word. The Holy Spirit is inspiring us to hear, see, understand, and put into practice the truth claims of God.

How can we believe in the authority of the Bible?

In order to answer that, we have to understand different types of authority. In [an interview](#) on the subject of the Bible’s authority, Glenn Paauw, the founder of the [Institute for Bible Reading](#), calls the authority of the Bible “narrative authority,” not “referential authority.” That is, the Bible is *not* authoritative because it’s the exhaustive reference book of ideas on how to think, what worldview to maintain, what politics to support, what rules to obey, and what car to drive.

Instead, the Bible *is* authoritative because it is the authentic story of a God who loves creation and is working always to bring it to wholeness. It’s the account that tells us most clearly about the life of Jesus, which we are to imitate in order to participate in God’s plan. The Bible is the best and earliest collection of resources that narrate and recount what Jesus’ life was like. In our Scriptures, we see most directly the shape of Jesus’ life and the lives of those who were nearest to Him. But more than that, we have the story of His people, the people of Israel, and the texts that recorded and formed their identity throughout generations. We don’t get to have Jesus without the history of Israel. We also don’t get to have the New Testament without the Old Testament. And,

we don't get to know Jesus outside of the biblical narrative.

Together, our Scriptures provide the context and tell the story of God's desire to restore creation to perfect union with Himself through the work of Jesus and the power of the Spirit. The Scriptures are inspired by God (some translations even say "God-breathed") to tell this story. They have the capacity to invite us into it and teach us how to participate in God's plan. Just like Anna Carter Florence describes, as we get further into the text of the Bible, it begins to get into us. It begins to shape the way that we are living, teaching us what God expects of God's people and showing us how Jesus and His first followers lived. The text has the capacity, power, and authority to ignite our imaginations and command our obedience by shaping our lives to look more and more like Jesus. The Bible doesn't say, "Look at me!"; it says, "[Look through me](#) in order to see Jesus." The very purpose and center of Scripture is Jesus Christ.

How can it be written by humans and be God's Word at the same time?

Similar to the way that Jesus is both divine and human, the Bible also combines both divine and human elements, "and these two natures are [not warring with each other](#)." Glenn Paauw [explains](#), "Our holy writings were inspired by God, and they do His work in the world, but these writings came to birth in real human history." Understanding these two natures is vital for hearing and eventually embodying the Bible in daily life. Scholars call them the **eternal significance** and the **historical/human particularity** of the text.

Because of the life-giving presence of the Spirit of God who lives in the people of God, these same ancient words retain the capacity to be meaningful for all humans throughout all of time—this is the **eternal significance** of the Bible. The great majority of Christians across traditions and denominations share some sort of conviction that the Bible is "divinely inspired" or "holy," so in many ways, this eternal significance is the easier concept to grasp. However, where so many Christians diverge and descend into unfruitful and distracting controversy is regarding the human element—the **historical/human particularity** of the text.

As the authors of *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* put it, "Precisely because God chose to speak in the context of real human history, we may take courage that these same words will speak again and again in our own human communities and histories." Thus, the human side of the Bible is our encouragement and hope. Because we see that God has spoken to people in the past, we understand He desires to continue speaking

and working in the lives of real human beings and communities.

However, this human side of the Bible is also our challenge since it means that the words that God speaks to us today were first the words that God spoke to people in wildly different situations. We trust, because of the eternal significance of the Bible, that the words speak to us as well. But applying these truths requires careful interpretation in order to hear the words clearly across the millennia. That's why digging into the particular history of ancient Israel and the early church enhances our understanding of God's word by placing it in real human history, delivered to us by real human hands.

God is a God who works through human beings, and we know that humans are messy creatures. We even find the biblical authors arguing with one another when it comes to certain things. **Instead of causing a crisis of faith, these are incredible opportunities to join the ancient conversation about God.** Some Christians will find this a difficult posture to take, but humility and honesty are always important qualities to sustain when listening to and applying the Bible. By keeping the focus on God's plan of restoration, we're able to approach the Bible in the confidence that God has been partnering with humanity since the beginning of history and the Bible tells part of that story. Seen this way, what matters is not our defense of the Bible, but rather our willingness to join in the story it's telling (more on this later).

A large part of our concern in reading the Bible well is appropriately balancing the emphasis we place on the eternal significance and historical/human particularity of the text. We look to the words in the Bible for eternal guidance, for truth, and for instruction in right living. We are met by the particular stories, songs, prayers, poems, and histories of the people of God, and we learn to "make them our own" or "apply them to our lives." When we read the Bible today, we have to be aware of its ability to speak to us. We have to be willing to learn and to hear, trusting that the Spirit will move and speak to us in our own time in the same way it spoke in history to real human beings of the past.

How do I help my teens "hear" Scripture?

Hearing Scripture in order to join in the mission of God to redeem and restore all of creation is a very different objective than simply reciting what is written or being familiar with what the Bible says. Remember, the Bible isn't an encyclopedia or a cookbook; it's

more like a story we've been invited into that we're seeking to hear and embody. But learning to hear it well is no easy or simple task.

In Christian communities, people often tell us to “read the Bible.” However, the tricky part is that reading is never exactly the same as understanding. So comprehending any text well requires careful attention to the ways in which we read and interpret. Just like we don't read advertisements, textbooks, magazines, novels, or poetry all in the same way, reading the Bible well requires careful attention to the text, to our own situations or contexts, and to the situation and context of the author. The crux of the matter is that learning to truly hear the Bible is a careful process of **interpretation** and **contextualization**.

For starters, we need to read the Bible in context. Glenn Paauw [explains](#):

When the Bible's authors and editors chose to use particular literary genres, they were in effect offering covenants to readers. Readers can accept those covenants by acknowledging those genres and then following the conventions that go with them. It dishonors the Bible not to read poetry as poetry, parables as parables, or apocalyptic visions as apocalyptic.

As C.S. Lewis once said, the reader of any kind of literature has an obligation to the author to [receive the text on the author's terms](#). We need to hear the author's original intent before deciding what it means for us. It's important to remember that the Bible was not written directly to us, but it most certainly was written for us. Hearing Scripture on its own terms reminds us that we are in some ways reading someone else's mail. We are eavesdropping on an ancient spiritual conversation between God and His people that was recorded over thousands of years by different writers living under radically different circumstances than we are.

How do we incarnate the Bible?

James 1:22 says very simply, “Be doers of the word.” Do more than read it; live it out. Welcome it into your life in a way that makes a difference in the way you live and worship—even when it's uncomfortable. As Florence says, let it be like a virus in your life that grows and “infects” more and more of your body, influencing everything you do and say. Though admitting we're wrong or need to change is uncomfortable, it's the

only way to become more like Christ.

The “narrative authority” mentioned before is the perfect bridge between hearing the Bible and letting the Bible permeate our lives. In a [lecture](#) called “How Can the Bible be Authoritative?” Bible scholar N.T. Wright uses a helpful illustration for this kind of narrative authority. Imagine that the first four acts of a five-act Shakespeare play are found in a dusty closet. The four acts are amazing, detailed, and well-written, but the play is unfinished! In order to write an appropriate ending to the play, Shakespeare scholars gather from all over the world. These are people who have studied and learned about him and his plays for years. Together, they begin to write the fifth and final act of the play. They have to be creative and imaginative, but they have to do so while being faithful to the first four acts. They can’t just write whatever they want. The first four acts have a kind of “narrative authority” over what can and can’t happen in the ending of the play. Instead, by carefully studying the first four acts, the writers are inspired and instructed in how to carry the story forward toward completion.

Wright suggests that this is very similar to what it’s like to live as a Christian. Carefully studying the biblical story instructs and inspires people to complete the story in their own lives and to participate in the overarching story of God and His people. Wright sums it up like this:

God wants us to be people, not puppets; to love Him with our mind as well as our soul and our strength. And it is Scripture that enables us to do that—not by crushing us into an alien mold but by giving us the fully authoritative four acts and the start of the fifth, which set us free to become the church afresh in each generation.

The point of the Bible is not to win arguments, prove ourselves right, or to debate scientists, nor is it to rigidly follow a set of rules so we can be “holier than thou.” Instead, its point is to instruct and inspire the people of God to live faithfully to God’s call and mission in the world. Wright expands on this further in his book [Simply Christian](#):

The Bible isn’t there simply to be an accurate reference point for people who want to look things up and be sure they’ve got them right. It is there to equip God’s people to carry forward his purposes of new covenant and new creation. It is there to enable people to work for justice, to sustain their spirituality as they do so, to create and enhance relationships at every level, and to produce that new creation which will have about it something of the beauty of God himself.

The Bible's authority is not meant to be wielded as a weapon, but is an invitation to join the story of the God whose work is told in its pages. Through its authority, the Spirit continues to work in all of the people of God throughout time and space.

What difference does this make for reading with my teenager?

A close examination of what the Bible is and how we should read it well has a specific relevance for those of us who are involved in the lives of teenagers in the 21st century. The American culture that once automatically assumed the Bible is authoritative over human life is long gone. As we seek to follow Jesus' command to "make disciples" from Matthew 28 in our everyday lives, we have to recognize the challenges we face in convincing people that the way of Jesus is the best way of living.

Your teens and their friends live in a culture that is highly skeptical about what a 2,000-year-old book could say to them in the 21st century. They've heard all sorts of people use the Bible to justify a politician's [sexual encounter with a minor](#), to claim the [inevitability of poverty](#), or to [belittle contemporary scientific research](#). To the already-suspicious-of-authority Millennials and Gen Zers, traditional religion is doubly worthy of suspicion. Too often, Christians use the Bible as a bludgeon rather than a balm, as a conversation-ender rather than a conversation-starter.

There are many Christians who lament the loss of Christian influence or power in society and want to fight to get it back. You may even be one of them. But more important than mourning that loss of power is turning to the task at hand. How do we live as Christians in the world around us? What we might find as we increasingly experience life in the minority instead of the cultural majority is that we are better suited to read and interpret the Bible from the margins. The New Testament was written by a beleaguered minority in the Roman Empire to a small group of brave, creative, and hopeful believers. The goal was to encourage and instruct them to keep living like Jesus in the midst of a world that refused to do so. Maybe we could learn to be more like the early Christians: brave, creative, and hopeful.

As we teach and train the young people of the world to be Christians, the Bible must be at the center of what we teach because the Bible leads us to Jesus. The Bible isn't

an end in itself, it always points us to the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ and what that means for us today. We have to be drawn into the story of God again and again. As you adventure down this path of exploration and reading, don't pretend that you have all the answers figured out. Be honest with your kids about the questions and frustrations you have. They have them, too! Adventure into the Bible together. Read it together. Explore the resources listed in this Guide together. More than anything, Millennials and Gen Zers value authenticity. The gift of being sincere is one that you can give long before you have the entire Bible figured out perfectly. (Hint: You probably won't ever get to that point, so it might be good to start being as authentic as possible.)

Through this process of humble and authentic reading, we can learn to join generations of believers who've wrestled with the text throughout the centuries. Together, we can live as the fifth act of the play, as the continuation of the story of God's work in the world. The stories and truths of Scripture will draw us in, encouraging and instructing us on how to live and worship. They will do so not because the Bible has a list of these things hidden somewhere in the back, but because they will begin to get inside of us and inside our communities. This is how the Spirit of God moves to shape God's people: not like a leisurely sip of lemonade on a warm day, but like a virus that can spread and shape the way we live.

So how should my family and I read the Bible?

No matter how the above suggestions for how to think and speak about the Bible are striking you, it is most likely true that you and your teen could benefit from a deeper and better reading of Scripture (who couldn't?). Here are some practical suggestions for how you and your teen can read the text in order to better hear and live out the words of the Bible:

- 1. Read it!** It sounds dumb to say, but believe it or not, it's really easy for Christians to talk a lot *about* the Bible but neglect to actually read it. The way that we learn to navigate the divinity and humanity of the the Bible in order to hear and apply the text is through reading it. By doing so, we become more effective and faithful participants in God's plan for restoration. The rest of these suggestions are aimed at particular reading strategies, but they all depend on our willingness to read the text

and invite it to change our lives.

- 2. Read larger, natural sections of the text.** Read whole chapters or even whole books at a time! Start with books such as Ruth, Jonah, or Esther that tell compelling stories. Too often we learn to read the Bible as though it were a textbook—begrudgingly and in small compulsory sections (thanks to things like chapter and verse numbers, [which were added into the text much later](#)). We can forget that it is literature, with complex and compelling characters. It has plot, movement, and texture. It has heroes, villains, and everyday people! If you need help transitioning into this kind of mindset for reading the Bible, you're not alone. Max McLean has worked to recover the storytelling tradition of the Gospels in his captivating performances of [Mark's Gospel](#). Additionally, there are a few books that have been written to help spark your imagination in reading the Bible. Check out [The Story](#) or [The Message](#). (There are many people who have raised a stink about interpretations like these, but they can be very helpful for reimagining what kind of literature the Bible is. The point is not to use these to replace the bible, but rather to help us read it with more creativity and imagination.)
- 3. Utilize structure.** Enroll your teen in a reading plan that will help guide them through the Bible and hold them accountable for their reading. We talk a lot about how our access to technology has the potential to distract us, but there are some really useful resources that can help redeem our technology. Two great apps with available reading plans (and social accountability options!) are [The Bible](#) and [ReadScripture](#) apps. Both offer a wide range of plans and resources to augment or give structure to daily readings of the Bible. A particularly helpful feature in ReadScripture is an extensive collection of videos. These provide narrations that help to tell the whole story of the Bible in informative and imaginative ways. Another option is to follow a plan for reading the Bible every day with millions of others by following the daily [lectionary readings](#).
- 4. Get some help.** In addition to reading the Bible, resources abound that can help ascertain specific meanings and interpretations of the text. The [Interpretation Commentary Series](#) is a famous and critically acclaimed series of commentaries written to be accessible and helpful for devotional and ministry purposes. Resources like this one help us to understand the meaning of the text. They bridge the gulf of the millennia stretching between us and cultures in which they were written. These

are not the Bible or in a position of authority over the Bible; at their best, they help us to read the Bible more carefully and with more comprehension so that we can live more and more like Jesus.

- 5. Ask friends from other denominations** (if you don't have any yet, make some!) what they teach or believe about the Bible. There are myriad ways that Christians through the centuries have articulated their beliefs about the Bible. If we talk to others in a spirit of humility, we'll learn from each other and will benefit the Church as whole. Ultimately, don't be afraid of encountering fellow believers who may approach, read, or apply Scripture in ways that are foreign to you and your faith tradition.
- 6. Use other resources that bring the Bible to life.** Generations are becoming increasingly post-literate, meaning they relate less to the printed word and more to videos and images. There are some excellent video resources becoming available that bring depth and life to God's story, as well as help teens better grasp their role in it. One excellent resource we highly recommend is [The Bible Project](#).
- 7. Read together and out loud.** For most of its history, in order to know God's Word, one had to either hear it read aloud or memorize it. This is because the written word was not accessible to the vast majority of people for most of mankind's history, but thanks to the printing press, not only is the Bible [the best-selling book of all time](#), the [average American home has 3 Bibles](#) on its shelves, offering an unprecedented level of access to anyone. However, this created a new phenomenon for God's people: We read it in isolation 95% of the time. [The Community Bible Experience](#) seeks to remedy that problem through Bible reading plans used in group settings in order to facilitate constructive dialogue that questions and ultimately sharpens our understanding of God and His Word. Beyond that, make family Bible reading and discussion time part of your daily and weekly routine. (The discussion is important! Don't just read and move on. Take time to digest and wrestle with what was read together.)
- 8. Journal.** Encourage your teen to write down their own thoughts about what they're reading, what God reveals to them, what questions they have, and what new ideas or convictions He has given them as they encounter the text. This can also serve as a record through the years of how God has worked in their lives and opened their hearts and minds to deeper understanding.

What if my child is completely uninterested?

This is a tough situation to be in. On the one hand, we recognize the power of God's Word to change lives, but on the other hand, we know that breathing down their necks and forcing them to read the Bible every day may just make them dig in their heels and become even more obstinate. So what do we do?

First, let's recognize that a forced relationship with Christ is no relationship at all. This is precisely why He gave us free will and the ability to choose, even if that meant choosing to walk away from Him. He wanted us to choose of our own volition to follow Him. The same goes for our kids. So forcing them to have daily "quiet times" could do more harm than good.

However, we also need to recognize that they may not be interested in God's Word because we've done a bad job of showing its beauty, power, and relevance. If that's the case, then we can endeavor to change that by slowly changing how we approach, talk about, and interact with God's Word ourselves. We can implement new habits in our own lives, as well as in our family routines. Even if our kids won't spend time in God's Word on their own, they're still part our families and therefore required to partake in family activities (even if begrudgingly).

Often, a person's level of desire to read God's Word directly correlates to their beliefs about who God is. If we have a faulty view of Him (misogynistic, cruel, judgmental, racist, etc.), then of course we wouldn't want to read His Word or learn to be part of His story. So we also need to be sensitive to and understanding of that in our kids, allowing them to be open and honest and gently guiding them into a more true belief about who He is. Their desire to know more about Him will increase if this happens.

Finally, we need to pray for God to change their hearts. They're in a time of their lives when they're learning to own their faith, instead of rent it from us. That may mean times of wrestling, doubt, frustration, questioning, or even anger. Through it all, the best thing we can do is pray fervently for and with them, as well as trust that God is fighting for their hearts harder than we are. After all, [He is patient with us](#) and desires that all should come to repentance.

Final thoughts

Understanding the Bible is not easy. In fact, it's something we'll never be able to do 100% because God is beyond our comprehension. And that's ok! Instead, we need to help our teens realize this truth while imparting to them a desire to learn as much as is humanly possible while on this earth. Knowing and loving Him is [the best work we can ever do](#), and though counterintuitive, undertaking this task will actually fulfill us and our families in ways we can't possibly imagine.

Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a **free** weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [Bible Video Kit](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to the Evidence for the Resurrection](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to a Doubting Teen](#)
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A Parent's Guide to **THE BIBLE**

Recap

- There are many misconceptions about the Bible that can impact how we interact with it.
- If we want to talk about what the Bible is and how to read it well, we have to keep a laser focus on why we have the Bible in the first place.
- If your kids are asking deep, important questions about the Bible, it's important to not panic or see them as bad, but to go on a journey with them to find the answers.
- Learning to hear the Bible is a careful process of interpretation and contextualization.
- The Bible was not written directly to us, but it was written for us.
- Carefully studying the biblical story instructs and inspires people to complete the story in their own lives and to participate in the overarching story of God and His people.
- When reading the Bible, prioritize reading larger, natural sections of text; utilizing structure; getting outside help; discussing with friends from other denominations; using resources that bring it to life; reading together and out loud; and journaling.
- If a child is uninterested in reading God's Word, it could be because of their views of who God is, their inability to understand it, their lack of tools, or how they've seen us interact with and talk about it. It's important to pray for them and change our habits in this instance.

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!

A Parent's Guide to **THE BIBLE**

Discussion Questions

- What do you think the Bible is? Why?
- What is the overarching narrative of the Bible? Why does it matter?
- Do you feel like you know how to read the Bible well? Why or why not?
- Is the Bible interesting to you? Do you feel like you understand it?
- What do you think is missing from your ability to engage with the Bible? What would help you understand it better?
- Have you ever found videos or podcasts or something similar that has helped you? If so, why did you find it helpful?
- Do you feel like the Bible applies to your life? Why or why not?
- How do your friends talk about the Bible? Do you think that's good or bad? Why?
- Have you ever come across something in it that confused or concerned you? What'd you do?
- How does it make you feel when you hear other people talk about God as being misogynistic, cruel, contradictory, judgmental, racist, etc.?
- Do you think we as a family have a good perspective of God and His Word? Why or why not?
- How can I better support you in your journey to know God?

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