

Contents

Foreword	9
Introduction: Not-So-Quiet Times	13
1. We Read the Bible: And It Comes to Life	19
2. Moving Days: How God Jump-started Our Bible Reading	29
3. Delight to Obey: How God Grows Our Desire to Follow Him	49
4. When the Going Gets Tough: How We Get through the Hard Passages	61
5. O God, You Are My God! What Happens When We Memorize God's Word	75
6. Sovereign Timing: How God Continually Orchestrated Our Reading	81
7. We Did It! You Can, Too	91
8. Sweeter than Honey: Lessons I Learned	97
9. What Next? What Happens When We Cross the Finish Line	133
The <i>Together</i> Appendix	147
Getting Started	149
Essential, Really Helpful, or Handy Resources	152
Small Group Questions	156
So Many Bible Translations	173
An Everyday Dad's Starter Guide	177
Acknowledgments	180



In a recent interview for a magazine article, I was asked: “What impact did the Bible have on your coming to faith in Christ, and what impact has it had on your growth as a disciple?” To which I quickly responded: “Everything!”

I can’t thank the Lord enough for the blessing of having grown up in a Word-saturated environment. My parents loved the Lord and it showed. They modeled a high view of Scripture; they were consistently in the Word themselves and sought to make it a part of the fabric of our home life. Plus, they gave us plenty of positive exposure to others who loved Christ and honored His Word.

Those early experiences of learning God’s Word and (so important!) seeing it lived out, gave me a priceless gift

that has been with me all of my life: *an appetite for God*.

The fact is, we all have appetites. I am deeply grateful for the ways my parents helped to foster in us an appetite for what really satisfies . . . Him! More than anything else, they wanted each of their seven children to know and love God; so they made sure our lives were planted in His Word. It's not that we talked about the Bible all the time or that our family perfectly lived up to its ideals—we didn't. Yet they were intentional in their efforts to make our home revolve around the Lord and His Word. I am still reaping the benefits every day of my life—still hungry for God, and eager to cultivate that appetite in others.

Regardless of your spiritual upbringing, if your hunger for God isn't what you wish it was, if you desire for your children to have a life-long passion for God and His Word . . . read on.

For sure, spiritual appetites can't be forced. Parents can't make their children want to walk with God; God has to turn on the light in their hearts and draw them to Himself. But there is much that parents (and caring friends) can do to create an atmosphere conducive to spiritual growth, and to nurture in their children a desire to know and prize Christ.

Carrie Ward was a young mom with two "little ones" when our lives first intersected. A dozen years later, there are four school age children, the oldest of whom stands a

head taller than his mom. In that span of time, it has been a joy to watch Carrie develop an insatiable appetite for God, and then to see the journey God has taken this family on, as she has been the impetus, together with her husband Wes, to “salt the oats” to help make their children thirsty for God.

The last chapter has not been written in the lives of the Ward children—or in any of our lives for that matter. This is a journey, the final destination of which will not be reached in this life. But I know that a foundation is being laid in the hearts of Graham, Maggie, Benjamin, and Emma, that is going to stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives. I do not believe they will easily be able to forsake the God they have been growing to know and love while sitting around the kitchen table day after day with their mom and an open Bible.

What God has done and is doing in Wes and Carrie’s family is unusual—but that’s not because they are some special breed of Christian, or have some secret ingredient available to them that is inaccessible to others. I believe God wants to bless your family with a fresh measure of His presence and grace. The book you hold in your hand will inspire and encourage you to be more intentional in seeking Him—as a parent and together as a family.

NANCY LEIGH DEMOSS

Introduction: Not-so-Quiet Times

[Jesus] said, "It is written:
'Man shall not live on bread alone,
but on every word that proceeds from
the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4

On a wintry Monday morning, my kids and I were reading in 2 Kings 3 the account of the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and the king of Edom joining forces to battle against the Moabites. There's a great story here of how God provided water for these armies, but here's the verse that stopped our reading:

Now all the Moabites had heard that the kings had come to fight against them; so every man, young and old, who could bear arms was called up and stationed on the border. (2 Kings 3:21 NIV)

My youngest daughter, Emma, asked, “What does it mean, all ‘who could bear arms?’”

I replied, “It means anyone who could handle a gun.”

Not realizing what I had just said, I went on with the reading. All my children were looking at me with puzzled expressions when my youngest son, Benjamin, articulated the question on everyone’s mind: “They had *guns* in the Bible?”

My head hit the table. My kids burst into laughter. I mumbled from my hunched-over position, “No, they did not have guns in the Bible.” They laughed even louder, and I joined in.

When I gained my composure, I started again with verse 22.

When they got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water. To the Moabites across the way, the water looked red—like blood. “That’s blood!” they said. “Those kings must have fought and slaughtered each other.

Now to the plunder, Moab!”

But when the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites . . .”

“Saw their guns!” my oldest son yelled. This sent us into another round of laughter. Benjamin said, “We laugh a lot when we read the Bible.”

It’s true. We do spend a lot of time laughing—sometimes over the surprising situations of Scripture, sometimes over the funny remark of one of my children, and sometimes just over

Mom's attempts to read and explain.

There are also moments of tension, excitement, disappointment, and openly displayed awe as we read God's Word. That's one thing I've learned about reading the Bible to children: they don't hold back their emotions. When we read, they react!



Little did I know when I began reading the Bible with my children ten years ago, that all of that energy and display of emotion would breathe new life into my study of God's Word.

NOT TOO LATE . . . AND NOT TOO EARLY

I put my faith in Christ as a child. At a young age, I had a simple understanding of these basic facts: I was born a sinner; my nature is inclined toward sin. God, the Creator of all, establishes that there is punishment for sin. He will judge my sin, and I *should* receive His wrath.

But I have been rescued. God, the judge, extended mercy to me. Even before I was born, even before I had committed the sins God knew I would commit, He provided deliverance. He sent Jesus to earth, and Jesus took my punishment.

Jesus took on human flesh, walked on the earth as I do, and was tempted as I am, yet He did not sin. Jesus lived a perfect life. He did not deserve any punishment. But Jesus performed the ultimate act of love. He stepped

into my place and took the penalty I deserved. God, who decreed the punishment for my sin, also took the punishment for my sin.

As a result, I can put my faith and trust and hope in Jesus. I can believe what He did, and the righteous life that He lived can be counted as mine.

With the faith that God gave me, as a child, I believed, and I continue to believe.

Over the years, however, I faced a recurring struggle when it came to reading God's Word. I was taught how important it is to read Scripture on my own, and I knew this was true. I was shown numerous techniques and methods for studying the Word. But when it came time to sit down and read my Bible, I tried and failed.

My acceptance by God was (and is) by grace alone through faith alone. My acceptance is not based on whether or not I have read the entire Bible. However, as the years went by, I became increasingly aware that my maturity as a follower of Christ was being affected by my lack of knowledge of God's Word.

I tended to repeat the same cycle. First, there would come a challenge of some sort to read my Bible daily, and

I would think, *This time I'm going to do it.*

I'd start off strong and optimistic, reading every day for a week

(maybe two). Then the

Bible reading was choked out by other things, until



YOU'RE NEVER too old and never
too young to hear God speak.



the attempt eventually fizzled all together.

The Bible seemed so big and difficult to understand, at times even boring. My self-discipline wasn't strong enough. My attention span wasn't long enough. My sense of Christian duty was not robust enough to maintain the reading long-term. Each attempt to read the Bible was clouded by guilt, frustration, and the seemingly inevitable failure.

All around me, Christians seemed to have mastered this discipline. Why couldn't I? I was beginning to think it was too late for me.

Before you start to get caught up in what sounds like despair, let me assure you, this is a story of hope—marvelous hope! When I was thirty-six years old, God gave me a new, fresh, strong desire to read His Word.

And God didn't just give me a desire, He gave me a plan.

The plan was clear. I was to read the entire Bible *with* my preschool children.

You might be thinking that trying to read the whole Bible to preschoolers would hold me back in my study of God and His Word. Or you may be thinking that my Bible

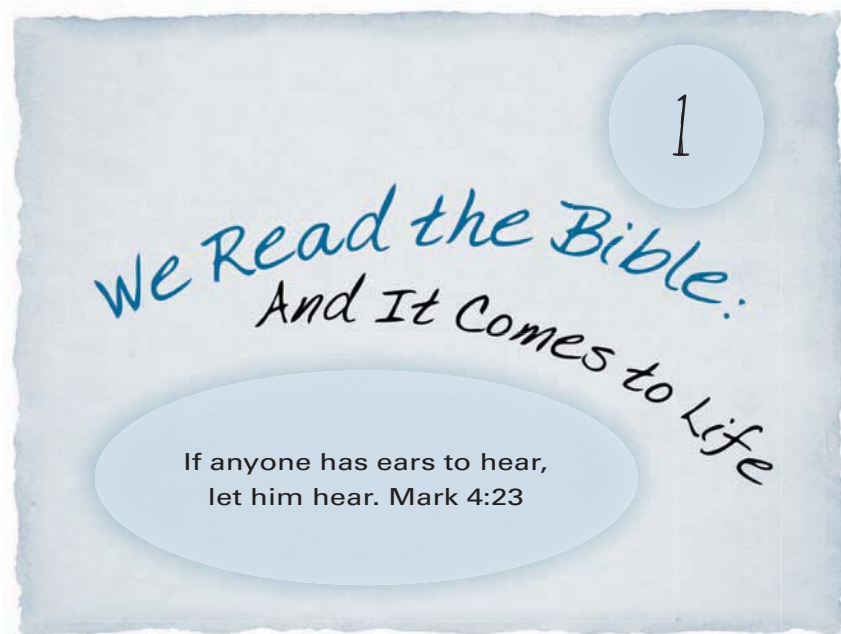
reading would be, at best, chaotic.

Well, I won't tell you my Bible study time has been quiet! But God used these fun, energetic, spontaneous, and insightful little people to make His Word come alive to me. I have learned more about God with this small community than I would ever have learned on my own. And, not only that, this discipline that once was a struggle for me has become the joy of getting to know God.

Do you want to have consistent time in God's Word? It's not too late. Do you want to get the Word of God into the hearts and minds of your children? It's not too early for them to hear God speak. My prayer is that God will use our testimony to awaken in you the belief that it is possible to consistently read and study the Bible. I am confident God can grow in you and your children a hunger for—and a great delight in—His Word.

Augustine said, "When we read Scripture, God speaks to us." I can say with confidence that you're never too old and, as our story will tell, never too young to hear God speak.

We're reading God's Word, and He is speaking to us.



On the day I started out to read the entire Bible with my three children, I was euphoric. This was going to be great. I sat down at breakfast and read, “In the beginning God created . . .” Somehow, naively, I expected my children, the oldest of them only four years old, to share my enthusiasm. I expected them to be filled with wonder. I expected them to be wowed by the reading of God’s Word. I expected them . . . to listen. What was I thinking?

My first three mornings went something like this.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.”

“Can I have some more toast?”

“Uh sure, just a second. *‘By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.’*”

“Are we gonna have to take a nap today?”

“Yes! God rested, and so should you. Where was I? *‘Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it—’* Where are you going?”

“I need to wash my hands.”

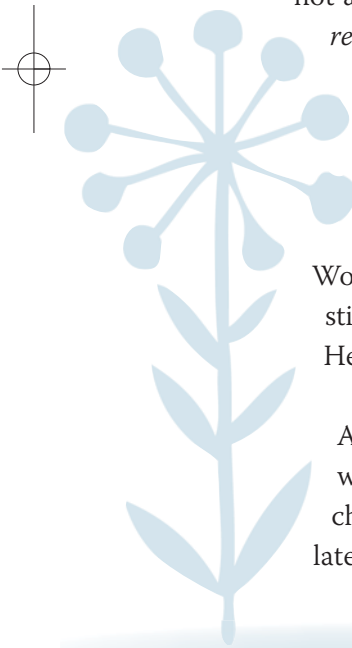
“Can you wait just a minute?”

“Sticky! I’m sticky!”

It was a scene made for YouTube. While I was reading about the fall of man, my little ones were spinning in their chairs, standing in their chairs, and asking questions not at all related to Adam and Eve. I thought, *I am reading out loud to myself*. This might not have been a bad thing, but it was not exactly what I had in mind.

Our trip through the Bible began with me wondering what in the world I had undertaken. Could I do this without lots of pictures? Would they ever be able to listen, or at least be still—or even just be quiet? God was merciful, and He did not leave me in this predicament for long.

On day four I reached the story of Cain and Abel. Mind you, while I read, the children were as wiggly and talkative as ever. The story was chopped in pieces as I stopped to answer unrelated questions or jumped up to get more food.



Once the reading and waffles were behind us, I sent Graham and Maggie off to play in the living room while I began cleaning up. But before I finished clearing the dishes from the table, I realized what it was they were playing. They were “playing” Cain and Abel.

I watched them take turns playing the part of Cain. They would walk off in the “field” together, and Cain would whack Abel over the head with some sort of invisible farm implement. This may not sound like the sort of interaction a mom should be excited to see between her children, but I was thrilled. They were listening! Whether or not they intended to listen, they had definitely *heard* the story in great detail.

From that point on, I didn’t obsess over trying to get them to hang on every word. I did try to teach them to sit still, be quiet, and pay attention, but each morning as they were smacking, squirming, and blurting, I knew they were also hearing. They were hearing the Word of God. This was what I wanted, because if I could read God’s Word and they would hear it, God could use it to change their hearts. This was the encouragement I needed to keep going. And keep going we did.

Reenactments of the Cain and Abel variety became an almost daily occurrence. Biblical epics became

commonplace in the Ward living room, our standard After-Breakfast Theater. Stuffed animals were gathered by twos and led into the ark (a blanket draped over the dining room chairs). Abraham and Isaac climbed the mountain, and Isaac was incredibly thankful for the ram. Joseph was sold into slavery. Moses threw off his sandals in front of the burning bush. Joshua marched around Jericho. I waited with much anticipation to see how my children would interpret each day's Bible reading.

One day a man of God came to Jeroboam to speak a word against the altars and idols that Jeroboam had built.

Now when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him." But his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. The altar also was split apart and the ashes were poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. The king said to the man of God, "Please entreat the Lord your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me." So the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king's hand was restored to him, and it became as it was before. (1 Kings 13:4-6)

This story captivated my children. All day, and into the next, my little people ran around the house yelling, “Seize him!” Then one itty-bitty hand would wither. (It was interesting to watch a preschool interpretation of one’s hand drying up. It reminded me of the shrinking of the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. They would pull their hands to their chest and then sort of scrunch up in a ball on the floor. It was more like their whole bodies had withered.) After that, a three-foot-tall “man” of God would pray, and the little hand would be restored. It was great. Even my hand withered (and was promptly healed) a few times.

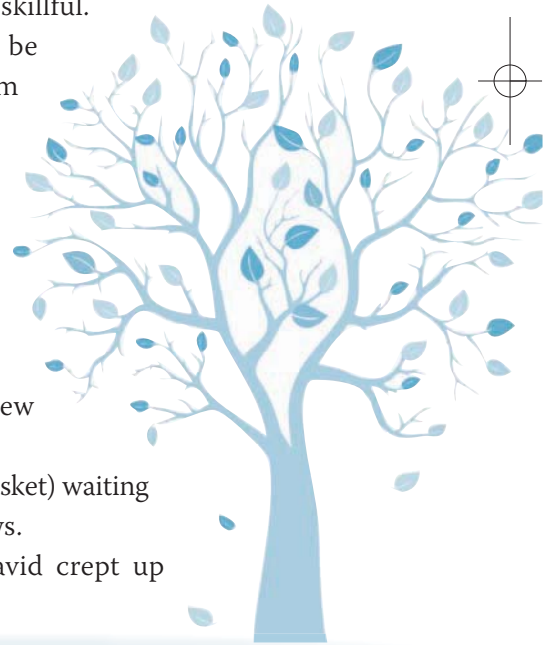
By the time we got to stories of David, the acting had become quite skillful.

Goliath stood on a chair to be more “Goliathy” and yelled, “Am I a dog?” I fed David a line, “I come to you in the name of the Lord.” Then David made one adept swing of his slingshot. Goliath died several times that day, always dramatically.

Another day David was playing his harp when Saul threw a spear at him (or was it her?).

David hid by the stone (a basket) waiting for Jonathan to shoot his arrows.

In the cavelike closet, David crept up





MY SON the pharaoh jumped to his feet and shouted a command to his servant: “After them!”

behind Saul to cut a piece from his robe (bathrobe).

The acting was larger than life—and hilarious. I loved it! God created children with a wonderful imagination and a great capacity for playing pretend. My children didn’t just hear the account given in the Bible; they put themselves in the story. Along with the fun, something significant was happening. The Lord was reinforcing what we had read. Their play not only reinforced God’s Word in their minds, but in my mind as well.

From the beginning I had been praying that God would help them remember and understand more than I thought they were capable of. And as we moved through the Old Testament, God continued to reinforce His Word to our children. I saw this at work on a grand scale the day we read Psalm 105.

A portion of this psalm recounts the story of the children of Israel being brought out of Egypt with wondrous signs. This triggered their memory of Moses confronting the pharaoh. When the eating and reading were over, the acting began.

My older son, Graham, seized the role of Pharaoh sit-

ting in his thronelike leather chair. Benjamin was now old enough to participate, but on this particular morning he was more like a guard in the pharaoh's palace, watching the story unfold. Emma, our newest arrival, must have been playing the part of an Egyptian baby—too young to appreciate the drama. Maggie, three, was Pharaoh's trusted servant.

I leaned over the kitchen counter, completely captivated but trying not to be spotted for fear they might stop the performance.

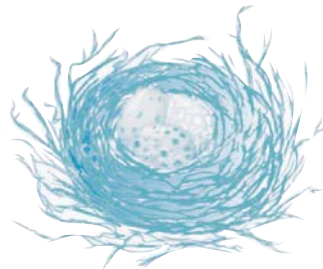
"Bring him in," declared Pharaoh in a demanding tone.

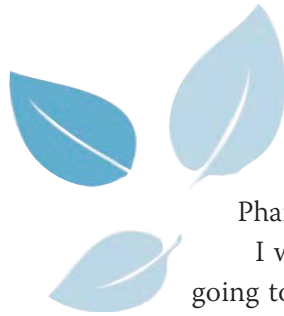
Maggie, the servant, quickly ushered in an *invisible* Moses. (The invisible Moses was an interesting twist.)

There was a muffled conversation between the pharaoh and the invisible Moses. Pharaoh suddenly became quite agitated and yelled, "No! Send him away." At this, the servant hastily escorted invisible Moses out of the presence of Pharaoh.

After a quiet moment Pharaoh began to shout in alarm, "Oh, oh, blood, blood!" and then an urgent "Go get him." The servant wasted no time in retrieving Moses.

Hushed whispers were exchanged, and again, Pharaoh grew agitated. "No!" he exclaimed, and Moses was again sent out of the palace.





There was a brief silence before Pharaoh howled, “Oh, oh, frogs, frogs! Bring me Moses!” Moses reappeared (tricky for an invisible Bible character, mind you!), accompanied by Pharaoh’s faithful servant, of course.

I wondered if the children were actually going to remember all ten plagues. However, without any planning on their part, they condensed the story and skipped right to the end.

Once again there was a conversation between Pharaoh and “Moses,” but in the end the pharaoh yelled the inevitable “No!” and out went Moses. At this point Pharaoh, with a surprising amount of sincerity, cried out, “My son, my son!” as he (apparently) saw his lifeless first-born. This time the pharaoh told his servant to go and inform Moses that he and his people could leave Egypt. So Maggie went to one side of the room, made a grand sweeping motion with her arms, and yelled, “You can go.”

Oh, but the story didn’t end there! A moment later, my son the pharaoh jumped to his feet and shouted a command to his servant: “After them!” The pharaoh and his servant began the chase, through the living room and the kitchen, around the corner to the dining room, and back to the living room. By the time they reached the living room the second time, Pharaoh was yelling, “They’re crossing the Red Sea. Let’s go after them!” Then, at one end of the living room, he collapsed, giving a great per-

formance of a drowning man.

However, his servant did not remember accurately all the details of the story, and she kept running. My son popped his head up and yelled, “No, Maggie, you have to stop. You drown in the water.”

My daughter didn’t really like this idea. With a confused expression, she looked to me for the answer. I said, “Yes, Maggie, if you’re with the pharaoh, you drown in the sea.”

With an awfully serious look on her face, she said, “Can we play this again? Next time I’ll be Moses.”

As my children have grown, the performances of Living Room Bible Theater have become less frequent, although it occasionally recurs spontaneously. But how thankful I am for those rich Old Testament accounts! I’m so thankful for little children and the sense of wonder they express. I am thankful for the way God made their minds like little sponges, soaking up details that I sometimes overlook. I’m thankful for those days of rehearsing Bible stories in our living room. I have watched my children remember, and help each other remember, passages in remarkable detail. As our reading continued, God also answered my prayer that they would understand.

I praise God for the way I have witnessed His Word being implanted in the minds of my children. But before we ever started this Bible reading adventure, God got my attention and did a work in my own heart.