

Biblereading

WITH YOUR KIDS

a simple guide for every father

JON NIELSON



matthiasmedia

SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Bible Reading with Your Kids

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*For my parents, Niel and Kathleen, who read and taught
God's word to me. I am forever grateful.*

*And for David Helm, who leads his family and his
church according to God's good word.*

Introduction

IN 2011, MATTHIAS MEDIA published *One-to-One Bible Reading* by David Helm. I was working for David as he was writing this book, serving as the Director of Training for the Charles Simeon Trust in Chicago (an organization focused on equipping and training pastors in biblical exposition). I had a front-row seat to the formation of that book, and saw the way that a simple passion for reading the Bible one-to-one in the context of the local church had gripped David's heart. This was all taking place in his congregation long before he began to design this simple and practical manual for Christians.

But there was another aspect of David's commitment to Bible reading that gripped and shaped me during those years of service under his leadership (he was my pastor, as well as my boss). It was the way that he consistently, clearly and carefully read and explained the Bible every

night over dinner to his five children. In 2007-2008, as I dated my now-wife, became engaged, and prepared for marriage, the Helm family regularly invited us into their home for dinner. We would ‘sit in’ on normal week-night family dinners, after which the Scriptures would be opened, the word read, and the passages discussed. The discussions were sometimes serious and often full of laughter, as well as humorous insights from the kids. Most of all, the discussions were always fully participatory—David’s children were engaged with God’s word! The simplicity and profundity of these after-dinner times in God’s word have influenced me to this day, as I now am raising three young children of my own. I want them to know Jesus, by hearing and believing God’s word. I’m forever grateful for David’s example to me during those years around his table.

So, when Matthias Media approached me about writing a follow-up book to David’s *One-to-One Bible Reading*—a book that would be focused on helping fathers read the Bible with their children—I jumped at the opportunity. This was not least because of my relationship with David, and the significant impact of his example to me. But it was also because I’m now working hard at figuring out how to do this well with my own kids.

Christian fathers, this book is for you. Please receive this from a dad of young kids who does not claim to have yet ‘arrived’ in this discipline, but has become only more and more convinced of the foundational importance of exposing our kids daily to the powerful word of God. Is there any more fundamental and important calling that

we have as fathers? This is about pointing them to the only Saviour and Lord, by the surest means that God himself has provided for us.

This book is a simple, practical guide for reading God's word with your children. I offer this book to you humbly, praying that it will help you in this most important endeavour.

Jon Nielson

Part I
**Why and
how**

VERY FEW PEOPLE WOULD disagree that exercise is good for us, and that we should exercise regularly. Yet many people who'd agree with this statement would still fail to actually *do* regular physical exercise. For many people in need of more exercise, it takes something somewhat drastic—a foreboding word from a doctor, a surprising number on a scale, a disheartening lack of 'fit' from a familiar pair of pants—to jerk them into a realization that regular physical exercise *must* become part of their life.

I think it's often like that when it comes to the subject of this little book. Very few fathers in local churches today would disagree with the statement: "Fathers should read the Bible with their children". That sounds like a very good thing, and a very godly commitment. Why, then, do so few Christian fathers seem to actually do this with regularity?

I would argue this is the case for two main reasons. First, Christian fathers have not yet been fully convinced that reading the Bible with their children *must* be done. Second, Christian fathers do not yet fully know *how* to read the Bible with their children as they grow. So it's the 'why and how' of this important task that I'll address in this first part of the book. In part II, I'll move on to give some very practical examples of what this can actually look like, based on my own experience of reading the Bible with young kids.

1 Theological foundations

A CHRISTIAN LEADER once wrote:

The education of children for God is the most important business done on earth... To it all politics, all war, all literature, all money-making, ought to be subordinated; and every parent especially ought to feel, every hour of the day, that, next to making [their] own calling and election sure, this is the end for which [they are] kept alive by God—this is [their] task on earth.¹

1 RL Dabney, *Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney*, vol. 1, Sprinkle Publications, Harrisonburg, VA, 1994 (originally published 1892), pp. 676-677.

I really think most truly Christian fathers, who genuinely know and worship Jesus Christ, honestly do believe those words. If questioned about what is most important to them in all the world concerning their children, they would answer something along the lines of: “That they love Jesus and live faithfully for God”. The question for this first section of the book is... by what means will this happen? That is, what is the best and surest way that we, as fathers, can “educate children for God”, as the quotation above urges? My conviction, which I believe to be the clear teaching of Scripture, is that the surest path to salvation is steady and consistent exposure to the powerful word of God. To arrive at this conviction, we may need to be reminded about what a right view of the Bible actually looks like. What really is the Bible? What does God promise that it can—and will—do in the lives of our children?

First, the Bible truly is the *living word of God*. The apostle Paul declares that all Scripture is “breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16). The apostle Peter asserts that the prophets of old spoke and wrote as they were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). He also identifies the writings of Paul as synonymous with Old Testament Scripture (2 Pet 3:16). What do these affirmations about Scripture mean for the way we read it, study it, receive it, and apply it? It means that we approach God’s word—the Bible—in a *fundamentally different* way from any other piece of literature we have ever before held in our

hands.² The Bible is different from the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Homer, or Shakespeare. The Bible is different even from books *about* God written by brilliant theologians. Why? Because the Bible, most basically, is *God speaking*. It is so true that the Bible is God’s living word that we can say, very confidently, that where the Bible speaks, God speaks.

It’s this conviction that will fuel our desire to put our children in contact with Scripture very regularly. They have a Creator—a God who made them, designed them, and who loves them dearly. And, he’s a Creator who longs to speak to them. It’s our responsibility to allow our children to begin hearing from their Maker from the earliest of ages. When we begin to really understand the Bible as the *living word of God*, we become enthusiastically committed to helping our children listen to it!

Second, the Bible is the *authoritative word of God*. Hopefully, as we raise our young children, we are helping them understand the structure of authority in the family. We are teaching them that one of the most immediate ways they live well is by submitting to our authority as their parents. They are called to obey us—to listen to our words, and abide by our instructions. Yet, there is an even greater authority to which they—and we—are called to submit: the authority of the Creator God and his word to

2 At the same time, we also need to recognize that we come to the Bible using many of the same reading skills with which we approach any piece of literature—skills which our young children may not have acquired at all yet or are only just beginning to learn and practise. I’ll have more to say about this later.