

The Importance of Biblical Literacy for the Next Generation

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A look at the problem...

Every study of the internal life of the churches shows that they are becoming increasingly less literate biblically.

Dr. David Wells, *The Soul-Shaping Reality of the Gospel*, www.ligonier.com

We will not believe more than we know, and we will not live higher than our beliefs. The many fronts of Christian compromise in this generation can be directly traced to biblical illiteracy in the pews and the absence of biblical preaching and teaching in our homes and churches.

Dr. Albert Mohler, *The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy*, www.albertmohler.com

What is meant by biblical literacy?

Biblical literacy is the ability to rightly read and understand the Bible, using the proper tools of study, thereby becoming well acquainted with the Bible's character (innate qualities) and content

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.—2 Timothy 2:15

- » Basic biblical literacy, even in an intellectual sense is essential for true saving faith. The mind must rightly comprehend what it is that the heart must respond to. For example, the mind must have some intellectual comprehension of the gospel before the heart can rightly respond in true saving faith. This definition does not negate the very necessary role of the Holy Spirit to give spiritual understanding.
- » This definition also implies a personal interaction with the Bible. It pictures a young person who opens his Bible and quietly reads a passage of Scripture to himself. He studies the passage using the tools he has learned. He then is able to rightly understand the meaning of the text.

Why biblical literacy is so important? A brief summary of preconference Session 2

1. Biblical literacy is necessary to bring about faith—***Romans 10:17*** and ***John 20:31***
2. Biblical literacy is necessary for Christian growth—***John 17:17*** and ***1 Peter 2:2***
3. Biblical literacy is necessary for guarding true doctrine—***Titus 1:9***

When should we begin the process of biblical literacy?

During childhood, especially in the home beginning with parents but also in the larger Christian community, namely, in the church—***Deuteronomy 6:6-7*** and ***2 Timothy 3:14-15***.

What does biblical literacy “look” like—what should it include?

For children, Bible literacy should encompass teaching the whole counsel of God by studying the Bible from these key perspectives:

- **Chronological Bible stories**—Ideally in the preschool years with content that includes both Old and New Testaments and emphasizes key biblical themes
- **Biblical theology**—The main storyline of the Bible: God’s redemptive purposes through the Person and work of Jesus
- **Systematic theology**—Key doctrines of the Bible
- **Moral instruction**—The Bible’s moral commands, instruction, and guidance
- **Gospel**—Explicitly teaching the essential truths of the gospel

How should we go about teaching biblical literacy?

- Teach precept upon precept by introducing specific Bible skills and concepts at appropriate ages
- Teach in a way that encourages the children to be actively involved with the text
- Teach in way that encourages a right heart response

The “How To’s” of biblical literacy—A three-fold focus:

The Bible is...—Defines the Bible’s character or innate qualities and is meant to shape the children’s attitude and demeanor as they study the Bible. These qualities carry a weight and dimension for understanding the authority of Scripture.

Bible skills—Specific tools and skills that should be introduced and mastered to aid the children in reading, interacting with, and understanding the Bible’s content and message.

Bible content—Body of knowledge or scope of biblical teaching that should be presented. This is given to demonstrate how the “whole counsel” of God can be integrated over a period of years from nursery to youth. These are suggestions only, but please note that, for the most part, they do follow the scope and sequence of the Children Desiring God curriculum.

Nursery Level

The Bible is...

- » God speaking to us

Bible Skills

- » Hear and pay attention to the Bible, Bible memory

Bible Content

- » Basic, simple Bible stories that introduce children to God

Additional tips

- » Speak and pray Bible verses.
- » Tell simple Bible stories.
- » Present key Bible themes.
- » Begin Bible memory with a few simple, key verses.

Preschool

The Bible is...

- » God's Word, true, very special, trustworthy

Bible Skills

- » See how the Bible is used.
- » Recognize key people, places, events, in their proper order.
- » Memorize simple verses.

Bible Content

- » Chronological Bible stories with an emphasize on important biblical themes

Additional tips

- » Use the Bible as you teach.
- » Look for opportunities to read directly from the text.
- » Expand and continually review key biblical themes.
- » Make simple connections and point out progression in the individual stories as well as the Bible as a whole.
- » Use key themes and stories to present a simple Gospel message at the appropriate level.
- » Use activities that review key people and events as well as chronological order.
- » Encourage Bible memory in the class and at home with simple yet faith nurturing verses.
- » Demonstrate through your words and actions the uniqueness and trustworthiness of the Bible.

Kindergarten

The Bible is...

- » God's story written to us
- » Right and true
- » To be believed and obeyed

Bible Skills

- » Learning the books of the Bible
- » Begin to recognize key words from the Bible

Bible Content

- » The redemptive storyline of the Bible with emphasis on the Gospels and the Person and work of Jesus

Additional tips

- » Whenever possible first read a Bible story directly from the text, then go back and explain it.
- » Write out key Bible terms and give simple and accurate definitions.
- » Write out key verses and ask questions related to the verses.
- » Personalize the Bible so that the children understand the message is for them.
- » Emphasize the authority of the Bible—The Bible is to be believed and obeyed.

1st - 2nd Grade

The Bible is...

- » Written by God and answers the most important questions about God and the world
- » Powerful and eternal
- » Provides protection from sin

Bible Skills

- » Looking up Scripture passages and reading from the Bible
- » Identifying and defining Bible terms
- » Answering questions from text

Bible Content

- » Systematic approach to the doctrines of God, man, Jesus, and redemption
- » Thematic study of God's faithfulness to His promises throughout Scripture

Additional tips

- » Each child should have his or her own Bible:
 - A "real" Bible with the full text, both Old and New Testaments
 - Font and format that is easy to read, with an overall structure that is easy to use
 - A translation that is accurate yet readable
 - Few, if any, commentary notes within the actual Bible text
 - Communicate with parents regarding expectations and other considerations (i.e. cost)
- » Teach the children how to find things in the Bible: Book, chapter, and verse.
- » Demonstrate how to examine a simple passage (1-2 verses) of Scripture in order to understand its meaning and then make personal application.
- » Expand the children's scope of biblical texts by including passages throughout the Bible.
- » Use a variety of relevant texts to demonstrate how key doctrines and thematic truths are arrived at.
- » Encourage use of a Bible reading plan in the home.

3rd - 5th Grade

The Bible is...

- » God's divinely inspired Word
- » One complete story, progressively revealing God's purposes
- » Necessary for salvation and applicable to all people
- » Completely reliable and is a sure guide for all of life

Bible Skills

- » Understand the basic structure of the Bible (i.e. law, history, wisdom literature, prophets, gospels, epistles, etc.).
- » Learn how to observe text for context, key words, questions, and implications.

- » Be able to point out key connections between Old Testament people and events and the Person and work of Jesus

Bible Content

- » Biblical theology with an emphasis on how Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament redemptive promises
- » Systematic study of salvation with an emphasis on sanctification, including moral instruction
- » Thematic study of God's character as revealed through His names

Additional tips

- » Involve the children in reading the text during the lesson.
- » Use guided questions and explanations to help the children properly interpret the text.
- » Have the children observe a text and note key words, phrases, patterns, and simple context.
- » Demonstrate how to look for and make connections between important Old and New Testament concepts.
- » Introduce some basic study helps such as a concordance, Bible dictionary, maps, and timelines.
- » Show the basic chronological order of the books of the Bible.
- » Assign activities that encourage personal Bible use/study.

6th - 8th Grade (Youth)

The Bible is...

- » Absolute and objective, providing the ultimate standard for all that is true
- » Inerrant and infallible
- » Characterized by its clarity, necessity, and sufficiency
- » God's authoritative Word and is relevant to all of life

Bible skills

- » Be able to use proper Bible study tools and methods in order to properly observe, analyze, evaluate, summarize, understand, and apply Scripture
- » Be able to give summary statements regarding key Bible doctrines

Bible content

- » Seeing God's providence throughout Scripture
- » Thematic study of how biblical truth relates to all of life
- » Thematic studies on gospel living: The importance of submission to Jesus and abiding in Him

Additional tips

- » Teach basic hermeneutics (tools of interpretation) and study skills in which the students do the following:
 - Ask "Who, What, Where? When? Why? and How?" of the text
 - Examine proper context—interpreting a passage in reference to the whole
 - Note types of expression (i.e. figurative language such as hyperbole, metaphors, analogies, etc.)

- Look for repetitions, lists, contrasts, and comparisons
 - Notice and understand nuance
- » Encourage the students to use underlining, highlighting, etc., as they examine the text.
 - » Refrain from simply “telling” the students what the text is saying. Instead, give them time to study, discover, and respond to its truth.
 - » Continually emphasize the authority and relevance of Scripture.
 - » Make clear connections between biblical truth and the students own lives and experiences.
 - » Try to discern the distinctions between intellectual vs. spiritual understanding.
 - » Provide students with basic evidence for the reliability of the Bible (i.e. the number of first-hand witnesses, historical and archeological evidence, the number of manuscripts).
 - » Encourage use of age-appropriate Bible studies for personal use at home.
 - » Review the major doctrines of the Christian faith.