

# Give Your Children a Heart for God

By Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Many parents are confused about how to give their children a vital introduction to the Scriptures. Here is helpful advice.

*"Thy words were found and I did eat them. And Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart."<sup>1</sup>*

Scripture abounds with examples of men and women who loved and obeyed God's Word and received great blessing as a result. David's esteem for God's Word is evident in Psalm 119: *"I will delight myself in Thy statutes; I will not forget Thy word...And I will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved...O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day...How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"<sup>2</sup>*

The sweet psalmist of Israel describes some of the results of this attitude toward God's Word. *"Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart...Through Thy precepts I get understanding...Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them."<sup>3</sup>*

It is the privilege of every child of God to enjoy the spiritual nourishment of God's Word. Christian parents have the added privilege of leading their children to share in its richness. Indeed, Scripture describes the parents' responsibility in this way: *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day (i.e., to love God with all your being), shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children..."<sup>4</sup>*

## No Generation Gap

Psalm 78:5-7 indicates one of the reasons God made His Word clear to adults: *"For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the words of God, but keep His commandments."*

Judges 2:10 records the tragic consequences of the generation which neglected God's command in Deuteronomy 6: *"...and there arose another generation after them which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel."* When God's people fail to teach His Word to their children, then their children forget God.

Most Christian parents can readily understand the high priority that God assigns to teaching His Word to their children; yet many parents express a sense of inadequacy when faced with the realities of leading their children to know, believe, love and obey Scripture. How is this enormous, yet vital task to be accomplished?

1. Deuteronomy 6 points out that God's Word is to be on one's heart. How many children have parents who dust off their Bibles to take them to church on Sunday morning, only to replace them on the shelf for the rest of the week? Imagine the positive influence on a child who sees his parents read and study their Bible every day of the week. As I grew up, I knew,

as consistently as breakfast would be served, that my father could be found reading his Bible before breakfast - 365 days a year!

2. Parents must love the Lord themselves. And they must model obedience to it. One of the earliest truths modeled in my home was the absolute authority of Scripture in all matters of doctrine and practice. The Word of God was the fixed benchmark that determined all other guidelines. Unfortunately, however, many children in Christian homes observe their parents obeying Scripture only when it is convenient. At other times its principles and dictates are ignored. Such children may grow to have little respect for God's Word.

## **Faith Comes From Hearing**

1. Another principle is suggested in II Timothy 3:15. Paul reminded Timothy that *"from a child (infancy) thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."* Timothy certainly did not read the Word himself as a young child. His grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice, must have read it to him.

Psychological studies reveal that a child may acquire a second language through the playing of recorded speech in that language before the child can even speak. Parents can have the privilege of guiding their child's first conscious thoughts to the Word of God.

The pastor of one of the world's largest churches tells how he took his newborn son in his arms at the hospital and showed him the Bible, saying, "David, this is God's Word; this is God's Word. I want you to know it and love it all your life." As soon as the baby was taken home from the hospital, his father began to read the Bible to him each day. Today David is an effective pastor who loves and preaches God's Word and who will undoubtedly teach his children to do the same.

2. Children should have their own Bible as soon as possible. This is recommended even before they are old enough to read. Children will develop an early love for God's Word when they are encouraged to open their own Bible to the passage being used during family devotions, and to carry their Bible to Sunday School and church.
3. As soon as your children are capable of doing so, they should be helped to memorize the names of the books of the Bible in order. This will be a valuable lifetime tool.
4. In addition to owning a Bible, your family should have some aids to Bible study, such as a Bible dictionary,<sup>5</sup> a concordance and a book about Bible customs. Use these frequently to broaden understanding of the Bible. Your children's love for the Word will be enhanced by familiarity with the people and lands of the Bible.
5. There is tremendous value in memorizing Scripture. This is often much easier for children than for adults. The psalmist knew that hiding God's Word in his heart would help keep him from sin.<sup>6</sup> Very young children may start by memorizing parts of verses. By the time a child is in grade school, he is capable of learning longer passages and even whole chapters.

As children memorize Scripture, they need to be helped to understand what each word means. Often, simple visual aids can be drawn to assist comprehension. Of course, regular review of memorized Scripture is essential for long-term retention.

## Family Devotions

Every family needs to set aside time each day to gather around God's Word. This time is often called family devotions or family worship. Many different approaches have been suggested.<sup>7</sup> The specific methods and format should be as individual as your family. A few guidelines, however, may prove helpful.

1. Family devotions should be scheduled for the same time each day and this schedule adhered to as consistently as possible. In this way children learn to attach a high priority to time for God's Word.
2. Family devotions should be kept short enough to be meaningful to all members of the family. If a four-year-old is expected to listen to his daddy read the Bible for 45 minutes each day, he will soon dislike the whole idea of reading the Bible. It is better for him to hear Scripture read for 10 minutes on a daily basis.
3. Involve as many family members as possible in the worship time. Children who are old enough can share in the reading of Scripture. All the children should be encouraged to offer thanksgiving to God and to pray for specific family and personal concerns in addition to the needs of your church and friends.

## Give Your Children a Heart for God's Word

Family devotions should center around God's Word. This seems patently obvious, but many family devotional books simply tell interesting "moral" stories. Such stories can be valuable if they serve to illustrate a point of Scripture applied to contemporary living.

The family should be concerned with answering three basic questions about any passage of Scripture: (1) What does it say? (2) What does it mean (i.e., what are the principles that this passage was intended to teach?) and (3) What should I do? This final question encourages both parents and children to apply the Word in specific and measurable ways.

## Ways of Life Teaching

Deuteronomy 6:7 teaches that parents are to teach God's Word, not only on occasions specifically designed for that purpose, but "*when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.*" In other words, the teaching of God's Word is to be a natural, conscious, consistent way of life in the Christian home. This is one of the most precious and neglected principles of the Bible.

Imagine the multitudinous opportunities to teach God's Word to children during the course of an average day. Mornings would be gloriously pleasant if families woke up praising God with Scripture: "*this is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.*"<sup>8</sup> "*It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness.*"<sup>9</sup>

Mealtimes can be opportunities to stop and thank God for His goodness. It would be good to begin at breakfast with a verse for the day.

Children will learn to pray biblically if parents pause to pray with them before they run off to school.

When the children are home in the afternoon, rather than allowing them to fill their minds with television, they can be encouraged to play, work and study creatively. Even those "secular" moments can be used effectively to teach biblical principles of sharing, responding to irritation under the control of the Spirit, speaking kindly, being diligent, etc.

As children live and grow in the home, even the décor can reflect the preeminence of God's Word. Scripture quotations on plaques and even simple note cards over the kitchen sink ("*And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*")<sup>10</sup> serve as constant reminders of God's words.

It is a joy to take advantage of spontaneous moments to sing with children. Many verses of Scripture have been set to music that children can easily learn. Or make up your own songs! If you feel self-conscious about this, get your children to try it.

Bedtime need not be an unpleasant struggle. Why not play a tape or record of scriptural songs as your children go to sleep? This is still another way to fill their minds with the things of the Lord. They will wake in the morning with their first thoughts on God and His holy Word.

Make it a firm habit to treasure, study, practice and teach God's Word in your home. Make God's injunction a constant reminder: "*Only take heed to thy self and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy son's sons.*" Remember...when the Lord said... "*Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.*" ...*Thou shalt keep therefore His statutes and His commandments which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth which the Lord thy God giveth thee, forever.*"<sup>11</sup>

1. Jeremiah 15:16; 2. Psalm 119:16, 47, 97, 103; 3. Psalm 119:2, 104, 165; 4. Deuteronomy 6:5-7; 5. The Children's Illustrated Bible Dictionary by Gilbert Beers (Nelson Publishers) is an excellent resource; 6. Psalm 119:11; 7. One of the best family devotional plans is Master Builder by Life Action Ministries, Buchanan, Michigan 49107; 8. Psalm 118:24; 9. Lamentations 3:22, 23; 10. Deuteronomy 6:9; 11. Deuteronomy 4:9, 10, 40.

*Revive Our Hearts* is made available through the generous gifts of supporters. Your gift is appreciated to help keep this ministry touching the lives of women through the radio and Internet. Visit [www.ReviveOurHearts](http://www.ReviveOurHearts) or call 1-877-432-7894 to partner with us.

Copyright 2001-2005 *Revive Our Hearts*. *Revive Our Hearts* is an outreach of [Life Action Ministries](#). All rights reserved. Used with permission.