

we need it and He forgives us endlessly. It is a daunting thought that we can be an example of God to our children, but there is no harm in telling them that is why we do what we do whilst admitting we are poor imitations.

A clear lesson for us to learn, of course, is that the Almighty tirelessly taught His people, "I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, sending them persistently" (Jer. 35:15), and that is where our emphasis should lie. Punishment may reinforce teaching, but it is no substitute, and, as in everything else, we are by our actions teaching our children, for good or ill, an understanding of God.

Living

If we ask ourselves why we go to the meeting, read the Bible, etc., the answer should be that we want to. We want to find out more, to worship God, to thank Him and to be friends with people who think like we do. So the best thing we can do

for our children is to help them to feel like this as well. And the best way to do this is to live our faith. We can make the family strong and show our faith by making the time to eat together, to spend time with each other, show we love each other, talk together and to be honest with each other.

Unfortunately, there is no magic curriculum that will ensure children will turn out the way we want them to; but there are certainly things we can do that will help, and things that will put them off. Beyond that we can only pray for them, and make their acceptance of Christ an assumption rather than an aim.

God chose Abraham so that "he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has promised him" (Gen. 18:19). May we as parents accept the same calling, and in God's mercy receive the same blessing.

Reading the Bible with children

Many of the articles collected in this Special Issue emphasise the importance of regular Bible reading with children as part of the daily routine. Chris and Gill Tarry (The Hague, Netherlands) look back to the years when their children were small and explain in a very personal way how they introduced them to Bible reading. They outline a routine which worked for them and may help others also.

"Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD: 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, shall be upon thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:4-7, RV).

ONE OF THE greatest joys in life is giving birth to your own healthy child. What a wonderful gift from God! Suddenly all the verses in the Scripture about childbirth, the experiences of the parents of the Bible, particularly Mary at the birth of our Lord, all become doubly

and personally full of meaning. One even begins to understand the love of the Father for His own Son. Our initial excitement was enough to keep us awake all the first night while the baby slept happily on!

Early years

In this early period, keeping the baby happy and our own routine on an even keel was enough to keep us busy. Our constant prayer for the child was that he would grow up to serve his Lord. By the time of the birth of our second child, two years later, the older one was already enjoying stories, and Bible stories¹ with a prayer were part of the bedtime routine. As the younger one grew, he

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1. Attractive and well-illustrated Bible story books are produced by many publishers, but not all of them are as accurate as we would like. Books by trustworthy publishers are stocked at the Christadelphian Office. Lion is one of these and Walker Books another. Stories and tapes are produced by Candle. Christian Focus, Scripture Union, Peter Haddock, Frances Lincoln and Award are other publishers with books stocked by the Office. A list of the publications stocked by the Office for children can be found in the current price list.

was included in the night-time ritual of an amply illustrated Bible story book, a hymn and a prayer, all at infant level. The routine each evening was that they were dressed in their night things, had an ordinary story, a Bible story, a hymn and a prayer and then were taken straight to bed. This time was very special as there was no conflict, and it was a happy, intimate family time, shared by all members of the family and any visitors such as grandparents. This made bedtime a special and positive experience. We used the *Sing to the Lord* hymn book, which has several very simple songs that lend themselves to actions—much enjoyed!

When we felt they were capable of more, but were not yet able to read, we chose a few psalms that we felt were suitable for young children to learn. They were short but with memorable words and ideas. Each night after the Bible story we recited one of these. We began with one verse and added a verse each night until the psalm was complete. This would be returned to as we learnt other psalms.

We were conscious of the Scriptural example of the morning and evening sacrifice, so we changed our morning routine to rise fifteen minutes earlier than before to give time for Bible reading, a hymn and a prayer before breakfast. We found that this was a good discipline and worked as part of the children's routine—they accepted it. A good time to introduce any changes was at New Year or birthdays.

Daily readings

The children were in the Isolation League Sunday School from a very young age. Once they were able to read we used the daily reading tables provided by the League, which would have a link with the Sunday lesson. It wasn't long before we felt they were ready to tackle the Bible Reading Companion, and, thanks to the wise advice of a visiting brother, we tried the Good News version. This version has been produced with people using English as a second language in mind.

The simple language, along with the telling line-drawings, made this activity very acceptable for our boys. They were both avid Lego builders, and found the Good News version of the construction of the tabernacle quite comprehensible and fascinating. Another part they thoroughly enjoyed was the Proverbs, with the very clever drawings accompanying that book. This was very pleasing, as we have always felt that Proverbs should be compulsory reading for all young people. In later

years, of course, they moved onto more reliable versions, but for an introduction, the Good News version was ideal.

We used to talk to them about the Scriptures as our spiritual food, which we really need three times daily, like our food. So we found that a reading before breakfast, another after school and a third after the evening meal meant that we did not suffer from spiritual indigestion by trying to read all three at the same time. What was really interesting, of course, was the way they imbibed the Scriptural message without being indoctrinated.

We sought to be positive when discussing the chapter, and, as they grew in experience, we found the need to explain *false* doctrine to them in answer to their questions. We did not need to teach true doctrine, which they had picked up for themselves from reading with us. When explaining the theory of evolution to the eldest I remember his hearty laugh at such a ridiculous idea! Their unquestioning acceptance of the basic doctrines of our beliefs was a huge boost for our own faith.

Later developments

As they grew beyond young childhood and became avid readers, we changed to the Revised Standard Version, but kept the routine of a reading and prayer (no longer a hymn) three times a day as far as we possibly could. It was this regular, early-established habit which saw us through the next years.

It is said that to establish a good habit you need to keep it up daily for a year. The early teenage years are not easy, and maintaining this discipline was not always popular. We made mistakes by not always conferring with the boys about the best times, but mostly just trying to fit it into our own very busy routines. Discussion after the readings also needed sensitive handling. Because of the regularity of the exercise, discussion of the chapter was not always necessary. Using modern versions as we did, it was possible to let the Word speak for itself.

At that time we were living in virtual isolation, and we knew the importance of friends their own age who had the same background, so we were glad to be able to let them attend Bible camps for children and young people. There they heard the same message along with friends, and these times were a special treat for them. They both separately came to the conclusion at an Isolation League young people's Bible camp that they had

to be baptized, and so they were both baptized together on the same day later that year following sound instruction by a local brother.

The foregoing has been our personal experience, and we are happy to share it, glad that by God's grace it seemed to work in our case. We know that we had ideal conditions in some respects as we were both at home at the beginning and end of the day and were able to give the time each day to reading with the children. We know that in many families this is much more difficult, but we are convinced that it is worth making

other sacrifices to ensure that the children grow up with a sound knowledge of the Scriptures. It particularly helps during the period when teenagers are inclined to turn away from their parents and perhaps may not respect them in the same way, at least for a time. The instruction we give them comes from a much greater source of authority than parents, and they have already learnt to respect that. One thing we learn from teenage children is that we as parents are full of failings, but the Word is infallible—and what a blessing it is!

The changing scenes of life

Babies and toddlers

David and Sophie Nicholls (Solihull, UK) take us through this key stage of child development and child-parent bonding.

THE ARRIVAL of your child is a wonderful thing. There is nothing like the joy experienced when your child is safely delivered and you return home with a bundle of new life and know for sure that nothing will ever be the same again!

Babies come with baggage, and no one prepares you for the fact that this wonderful little person takes over every room in the house with clothes, bibs, nappies, toys, cots, pushchairs, etc., etc. But it is not until the family settles down and gets into a routine that the changes the baby has made to the parents' life hit home. No longer can you both go out to the Bible Class or the Sunday night meeting, sit through a meeting together, have a leisurely lie-in or a quiet meal together; and yet the blessings that your child brings far outweigh the fact that you don't have a moment to yourself or that unbroken nights are a thing of the past.

Psalms 127:3-5 says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man [and woman] that hath his quiver full of them". Whether we have a quiver full (five?) or just one or two, how glad we are to be blessed with them!

This psalm begins, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it". This is the best advice to any parents with young children. Live your life in the Lord, and plan your daily lives around things linked to the Truth, and you will build your home upon that firm foundation, whose Builder and Maker is God.

Children are, as it were, a clean piece of paper, not written on, unmarked. The beauty of children is their innocence and their absolute trust and dependence on their parents. The influence we have over our children, and the example we show them at this time, are fundamentally setting the scene for their future. The things they absorb from their environment shape them as individuals.

Mother and toddler groups

A great opportunity exists while you have a babe in arms to meet with other Christadelphian mothers at a mother and toddler group during the week. This is a very healthy environment for both mum and baby, as mums can find it very difficult to be without adult company during the day, and it's good for babies and toddlers to mix with other children of the same age, as friendships between them develop. As we well know, friendships made in the Truth are the ones that last and, it is hoped, stand the test of time. The toddler groups allow the children to play and do kids' things in a very loving atmosphere, and they are always encouraged to listen to a Bible story,