

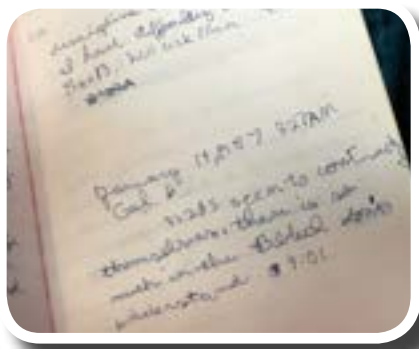
22 IDEAS

TO HELP TWEENS AND TEENS

LOVE THE BIBLE AND

DRAW NEAR TO GOD ON THEIR OWN

When I was twelve, a youth pastor challenged our Sunday school class to read Proverbs each day. He must have said something about writing down what we were learning, because I started writing down my thoughts when something was particularly challenging. It was at this time that I started taking seriously the responsibility of learning what was in God's Word. However, I continued to struggle with feeling guilty about all the things I didn't understand, and especially that I never seemed to be able to read consistently every day for more than a few weeks. Now, many years later, remembering my immaturity, errors, and doubts has been helpful for me as I consider my own children and their habits and loves.



Young people are often discouraged because they have unrealistic expectations about what they should know.

Last year, I posted [22 Ways to Help Children Love the Bible](#). Many of the ideas I wrote are things we did when our children were younger. Our children are now entering their teen years (10, 12, and 13 years old). Although some of the ideas I wrote are still relevant, my goals have shifted a little. I still want them to delight in God's Word. I'm still sharing what delights I am reading, but I'm also more deliberately nurturing their initiative and independence. My children don't read the Bible with the independent discipline of a mature adult. Like I was, they are easily discouraged, easily feel guilty, and easily get

“Galatians 6:2 and 5 seem to contradict themselves. There is so much in the Bible I don't understand”

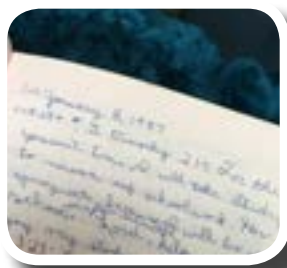
— Journal entry, Age 13

off track. They are also sometimes way off on their interpretation and understanding of passages. Sometimes I discourage their independence by my criticism. I may be right, but if I reinforce their belief that they can't understand the Bible like grownups do, then my criticism at that moment might cause more harm than good.

Because I'm emphasizing initiative, much of our interactions about the Bible are more questions than directives. Questions are important, not just for the answers our children give, but also for the priorities

we convey, and the thought process we are teaching. Questions help our children clarify their own understanding, and help them examine their own hearts. Obviously we don't ask these questions every day; cultivating an independent love for God and his Word is a long-term goal that takes years of effort and prayer and Holy Spirit intervention. From this perspective, here are "22 Ideas to Help Tweens and Teens Love the Bible and Draw Near to God On Their Own."

Cultivating an independent love for God and his Word is a long-term goal.



I'm glad the Holy Spirit kept teaching me in spite of my terrible exegesis!

"2 Timothy 2:15. For the present time, I will take 'study' to mean my school-work."

—Journal entry, Age 13

1. Provide highlighters and undated journals. Encourage kids to write down the entire verse that challenges them when they find one. Compiling a list of the verses God has used in their lives will be a big encouragement. Teach them by example! You don't have to be a writer, or a great student of the word to have a blank book that you write in whenever you are challenged by a passage.
2. Make Bible reading "rules" to feel nearly invisible or allow a great deal of room for their personal choices, in order for them to develop autonomy in their Bible time. An "invisible rule" is anything you do that encourages your children to act in a certain way, without their being aware of your intervention. For example, when given choices, children often feel ownership of their actions more than if their parent simply told them to do a certain thing. Ask them where they like to read, how they like to read, whether they think better reading in the morning or night, and so on, and let them make decisions shaped by their own answers. Plan a regular space in the schedule for Bible reading, even if you do not always enforce or check up on who read what. A helpful comparison for me has been considering that when my children were young, I did force them to brush their teeth. As they got older, I gradually have withdrawn my input into how they brush their teeth. I buy new toothbrushes or toothpaste. I might tell them that I can tell they are not brushing their back teeth well, or that they have bad breath, but I no longer brush their teeth for them!
3. Print out Bible reading checklists for them. I like non-dated checklists (like [this](#) or [this](#)) because my children are especially susceptible to discouragement when getting behind. Perhaps your children will respond better to dated checklists (like [this one](#)). Make extra copies available in a drawer or shelf. If they have a phone, show them apps that have Bible reading plans. I use the [YouVersion](#) app on my phone, but there are plenty of others!
4. Consider how your schedule facilitates Bible reading time. For example, I've deliberately kept my mornings as streamlined as possible. Because our mornings are relatively slow-paced, I'll let my older children "get out of" chores if they're reading their Bible. They can do their chores after Bible reading (an unwritten rule).
5. For my child who doesn't like to read, I've been encouraging memorization as a

method for meditation. “How do you remember and think about the Bible?” I meditate by reading, but I’m learning that he meditates by hearing Scripture in his mind.

6. Remember that your children are learning by overhearing how you use Scripture while talking through problems with your spouse and friends. If Bible language or biblical perspective is not a part of your vocabulary or thoughts, focus more on how to grow in this area personally. Then share what God is teaching you!

7. Ask your children what they loved about their reading that day and why. By asking in this way, we are communicating that drawing near to God is emotionally satisfying. If they didn’t read anything that they loved, encourage them to finish off their Bible reading with a passage they DO love.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. John 14:26

8. Minimize criticism when their interpretation isn’t exactly right. Choose your criticism wisely. Too much correction can discourage young people from independent study and reflection, and leave them dependent on someone to interpret the Bible for them. (Consider our Heavenly Father’s example. He does not correct our misinterpretations all at once. Consider also his emphasis to seek, ask, knock, draw near, and follow. These words all emphasize direction more than accomplishment.) Resist the urge to clarify with

declarative statements. Instead help them think by asking questions.

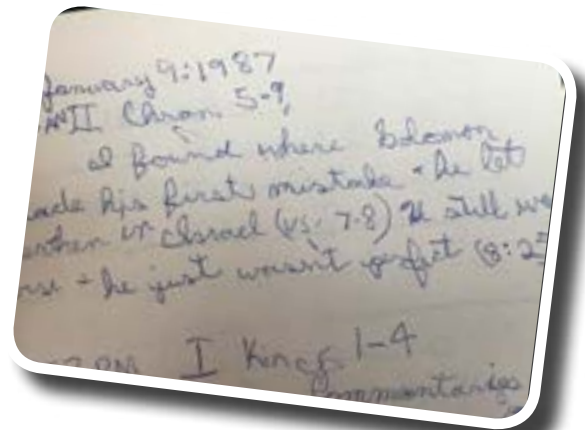
9. Ask them what Bible passages or phrases are stuck in their minds. (You can laugh together at how easy it is to forget what we read by mid-morning.)

10. Ask them what Scriptures they are studying in their Sunday school class or Bible study.

11. Tell them what you read when you’re discouraged, or don’t feel like reading the Bible. (I read Psalm 119.) Share passages that are encouraging or challenging to you, and explain why they are meaningful.

12. Buy them a real Bible (not a cheap one). My goal has always been for my children to recognize their Bible as a precious book, and not simply a prop. Sometimes practical actions we take help them understand its value. For example, some people create a special place for their Bible, or have a special bag for it. Journal Bibles that allow children to interact with the Bible artistically can help them treasure it personally. One friend bought a special Bible that was especially durable for her son. My Bible as a child growing up had

The struggle to understand something confusing (Can you be wise and still sin?) was more important than my conclusions.



“2 Chronicles 5-9. I found where Solomon made his first mistake. He let heathen in Israel (vs. 7-8). He still was wise. He just wasn’t perfect (8:29)”

—Journal entry, Age 13

wide margins that I wrote in, and I still use a wide margin Bible to this day.

13. Give them a sense of time and goal making. Give them some spiritual goals for ideas, and then ask them what they would like to accomplish. Perhaps a goal is to read the New Testament through, memorize a particular passage, or to read Proverbs every day for a month. Help them accomplish those smaller goals, and then celebrate with them when they meet them.

14. Plan other short-term goals as a family (read a book of the Bible, or all read the same passages each morning for a set time), and use these times to follow-up on their reading. After the goal is met, back off for a time on following their Bible reading closely. Daily keeping them accountable can help them develop the discipline of good habits, but then backing off for a time helps them to seek God (or not) on their own.

15. Ask them what passages they want to memorize, and then memorize it as a family. Have a few ideas up your sleeve for your reluctant children who might need a bit of prompting!

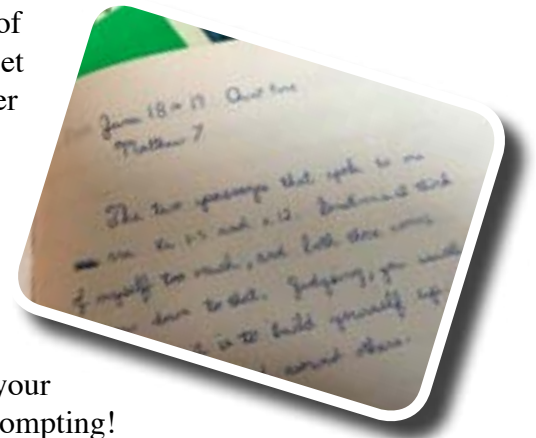
16. Help them experience what an active reader of the Bible looks like. One morning I asked my math-loving son what he does while he's reading word problems. He's alert, looking for the main question, building an equation as he reads. He checks for understanding. After he talked about it, I told him that I want him to read the Bible in the same way. Since he doesn't consider himself a good reader right now, it was a helpful comparison.

17. Use time in the car to listen to a portion of Scripture together, and then ask them how the passage can encourage them or challenge them during their day. The car is a great time both for listening, and for talking about the Bible. For a free audio resource, check out [Faith Comes By Hearing](#).

18. Do not underestimate the value of listening to the Bible, especially for auditory learners. Consider other ways that a non-reader can learn to love the Bible. In my case, I had to humbly acknowledge that my preferred way to learn the Bible wasn't the same for my children. One of my surprises was how much my children preferred a Kindle version of the Bible. I've had to back off on my assumptions that a print Bible is superior in every way for learning God's Word.

19. Point your children to older people (teenagers, college students, grandparents) who love God's Word. If you don't know any, then pray for some. When you invite these Bible lovers to your home for coffee or dinner, ask (in the presence of your children) "What have you been reading in your Bible lately that's been challenging or encouraging to you?"

20. Regularly ask, "What are some questions that you asked yourself as you read this passage?" Share with them some of the questions you asked. No matter how they answer, you are



When we emphasize the result instead of the process, we may be neglecting to trust the Holy Spirit.

helping them understand that we ask questions to help us think about and apply what we are reading. Check out [this website for ideas](#) that gives specific questions to ask while you are reading Scripture.

21. Ask them what it means to “draw near to God.” Reading the Bible on a strict schedule is only one way to draw near to God. Help them to understand that some days are better for memorization and meditation. Some days are better for reading something new. Other times are better for prayer and reviewing the things God has been teaching me (by reading the verses in my journal). Often we draw near to God in multiple ways. More important than “do I read the Bible every day” is “am I drawing near to God in some way, each day.”

22. Do not be discouraged at shallow or sporadic independent spiritual insight. When we emphasize the result instead of the process, we may be neglecting to trust the Holy Spirit to do his work that he promised to do (John 14:26). We may also be inadvertently encouraging fake fruit when we emphasize right answers over genuine feedback and responses.



As my children grow older, I am more often reminded that I cannot control their choices like I did when they were preschoolers. Instead of increasing the intensity of control, I’m finding myself more inclined to pray for God’s perfect parenting in their lives! I am regularly challenged by my lack of trust after I have done my best to teach and nurture my children. If the Holy Spirit is all-sufficient in my life to teach me, then he is all sufficient in my children’s lives, too.

I am always challenged to be faithful in my own life when I am burdened for my children’s lives. May we all examine our hearts, pray for our children, and trust God who is the perfect Father, full of mercy and love for his children.



Michelle Brock is the author of the [Topical Bible for Kids](#) and the upcoming *Parenting with Mercy* (coming Spring 2017). She comes from a family of Bible lovers, and is passionate about sharing that love with her husband and three children. She also loves the coffee her husband roasts weekly, the poetry of TS Eliot, rocks, and sea-shells. Read more from Michelle at <http://www.as4me.net/>, or send her a note at brockme@gmail.com or on Twitter [@michelleebrock](#).