

All Things...

Engaging with the Bible

ideas to use with children and young people



From The Go Team



DIOCESE OF
Bath & Wells

Living the story. Telling the story.

All Things Engaging with the Bible

Introduction

This booklet provides you with a range of ideas to help children and young people to engage with the Bible creatively. The Go Team have collated some of their favourite ideas and ways to help children and young people connect with God through reading His word. You will find ideas for various age groups that you can adapt as necessary for your context. As we seek to live and tell the story of Jesus, we hope and pray that these ideas will help you and provide you with some inspiration for your toddlers, children, youth and families. Many of these ideas have been trialled and tested by ourselves and others. A number of the ideas have an online link for you to follow for further explanation.

For further help and support do contact one of the Go Team Advisers. We would love to hear your stories and experiences of using this resource. Please share them with us through sending us an email or sharing your photos with us on Twitter (@GoTeamAdvisers) and Instagram (goteamadvisers).

For more resources and to sign up to our newsletter **Inform** visit:

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/children-young-people>

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Under 5s

5 Recommended Bibles

1. **The Beginner's Bible**, edited by Catherine DeVries & published by Lion Hudson.

Suitable for ages 2-5.

The Beginner's Bible is full of well known Bible stories, written in a language suitable for this age group and illustrated to support the stories. Pictures are vibrant and the text is easy to read.



2. **The Big Bible Storybook**, by Various Authors

Suitable for ages 0-5

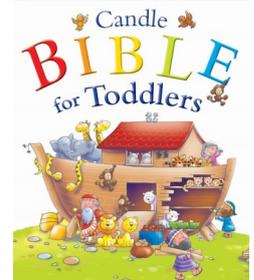
188 stories from the Old and New Testaments, introducing children to characters of the Bible from Genesis through to Revelation.



3. **Candle Bible for Toddlers**. By Juliet David

Suitable for ages 1-5

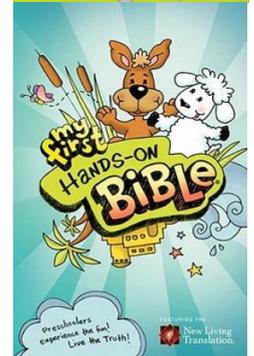
This Bible covers 133 favourite stories from both the Old and New Testaments, with only two to three lines of text per page, and scripture references throughout.



4. **My First Hands-On Bible**, by Tyndale House

Suitable for ages 3-6

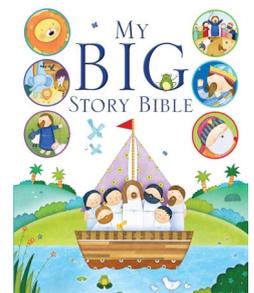
My First Hands-On Bible is the pre-schooler version of the popular Hands-On Bible. It includes "Jesus Connections" to help children see Jesus throughout the Bible



5. **My Big Story Bible**, by Josh Edwards

Suitable for ages 3-4

The Big Story Bible takes you on a journey page by page as each one of your favourite Bible stories comes to life



10 Ways to Help Under 5s Engage with the Bible...

1. Short, engaging stories

To enable under 5s to engage with the Bible, be sure to choose an age appropriate Bible (see suggestions on p. 3). Remember, their attention spans are often shorter than ours, so keeping the stories short is important, but make sure you still share the main point of the story. At this age, you are just trying to introduce children to the basics of the Bible, so you don't need to worry about going into huge depth, with lots of teaching points. Use the pictures in the Bible you are using to help keep the toddler engaged and talk through what they can see.

2. Repeat Stories

Young children thrive on repetition. It may drive you mad, but toddlers love repetition, so don't be afraid to read the same story a few days in a row and then repeat again the following week. By approaching the reading of the Bible in this way, you find that you are amazed at what they remember, pick up and understand.

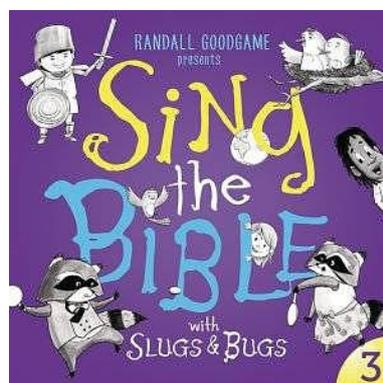
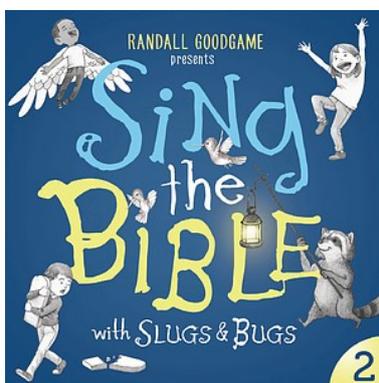
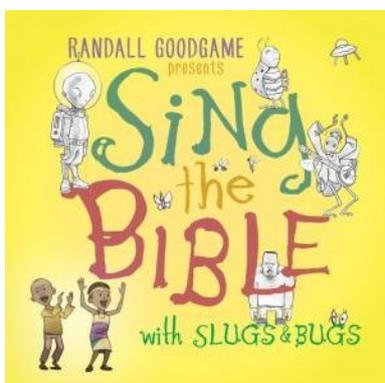
3. Use toys to play out the story

By using figures, cuddly toys or items you already own, try to play out the story using toys. By playing it through with the children first, they will often go off and do it on their own in time. Similarly you can try to act out the story with young children—just be prepared for them to take the story in an unexpected direction!



4. Sing and Dance!

There are lots of songs that either tell Bible stories or share Biblical truths. Find songs that are toddler friendly and use them share Bible stories with young children. You may like to come up with some basic actions that you can encourage the children to join in with.



5. Story Stack

The Story Stack cups are a hugely helpful storytelling tool. They are a set of stacking cup characters for use as visual aids in telling bible stories to children aged 3 and over, helping them to listen and be involved.

They are like actors on stage or television and can play the part of many different people in various stories. The cast of 24 is **sufficient for the telling of many bible stories**. A character who plays the part of one of Jacob's sons in an old testament reading will reappear as a disciple in a new testament one. The leader can use the suggested, numbered cast lists for the printable stories or ask the children to cast the characters themselves.

The cups are durable, meaning the children can play with them, plus they can be easily cleaned. Due to their stacking nature, they can be stored easily and take up a limited amount of space.

Visit their website (<http://www.storystack.co.uk/>) to order a set and to print the pre-written bible story scripts. Alternatively, you can create your own characters, as there is a Storystack Figure template on their website, to enable you to design your own characters.



6. Play Areas

A number of churches have play areas/children's corners for children to explore their Christian faith and Bible stories through play. Young children learn through using all the senses, including looking and touching. In a church play area, children should be surrounded by and play with images of the Christian faith.

You can change your area and theme it around a specific Bible story, enabling children to engage with it in an interactive and multi-sensory way.

In the area, include obvious ways of looking at the story, through having pictures and some story books with words, that adults can read to the children. Think of the characters and objects in the story and fill the area with as many props as possible in relation to that. You may like to include play-dough or similar, if choosing to make play-dough, is there a specific scent you can add to the play-dough that reflects the story? Young children respond well when all senses are engaged. Be creative and be sure to have plenty of things to provoke the children's creativity.

7. Godly Play

Godly Play is a story telling method that can be used with all ages. It has been successful with toddlers, primary school children, secondary school students and even adults. Godly Play invites listeners into the story, absorbing them in the narrative, using simple props and movements along the way. Godly Play uses 'I wonder...' and open-ended questions to help listeners reflect and think through the story. Sand, wooden figures, felt and gold boxes are materials often used to accompany these stories, paired with space and silence. The well-tested story scripts are based on the Bible and say only what needs to be said—there are a series of Godly Play books, containing numerous story-telling scripts, they can be bought through places such as Amazon or contact your Archdeaconry based Go Team Adviser who can help you in borrowing some of these books or to access a trainers and some training locally. You can also access Godly Play videos on YouTube to assist you in understanding this storytelling technique.



8. Go Outside

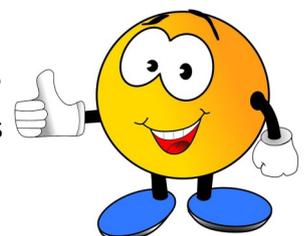
Young children need a variation in environments, can you do some of your storytelling outside? Can you tell the parable of the sower in a garden? As you tell the story, encourage the children to think about the sounds they can hear and the things they can smell. You can follow the story with a time of exploration in the garden, finding things that grow and things that aren't growing as successfully as others. To bring the story alive and real for this age group, allow them to plant seeds of their own. Another example would be the story of the Lost Sheep or share Psalm 23—do you have an opportunity to go onto a farm or into a field? In all cases, please be aware of health and safety and complete appropriate risk assessments, but use your locality to enhance your children's engagement with the Bible.

9. Big Pictures

Young children may not be able to write or use words easily on their own, but they are learning words, vocabulary, language and are often able to point things out and understand what we are saying, even if they don't have the vocabulary to answer out questions. Use a big picture that tells a story. Point out and name the different things in the picture. Use sound and touch and smell. Point to things: Who's that? What's that? Be creative and record some sounds: Listen! What's that sound?

10. Make it fun

In this section, there are lots of things you can do to help under 5s engage in the Bible, but above all, make it fun. Don't worry about key teaching points at this stage, just share the story in a way that excites the children.



Children 5-11s

5 Recommended Bibles...

1. Rhyming Bible, by Bob Hartman

Suitable for ages 5-9

Bob Hartman is well known for his storytelling, with the popular Lion Storyteller Bible being used by Open the Book teams across our country and beyond. This bible gives more creative Bible stories, which great illustrations to go with them.

2. The Jesus Storybook Bible, by Sally Lloyd-Jones

Suitable for ages 4-10

This Bible features 44 bible stories, from creation through to Revelation. All of the stories seek to point the reader to Jesus, clearly showing God's big story.

3. The Action Bible, by Doug Mauss and Sergio Cariello

Suitable for ages 8-14

The Action Bible is an exciting full colour comic-book style picture Bible. It features 215 stories, all in chronological order.

4. Children of God Storybook Bible, by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

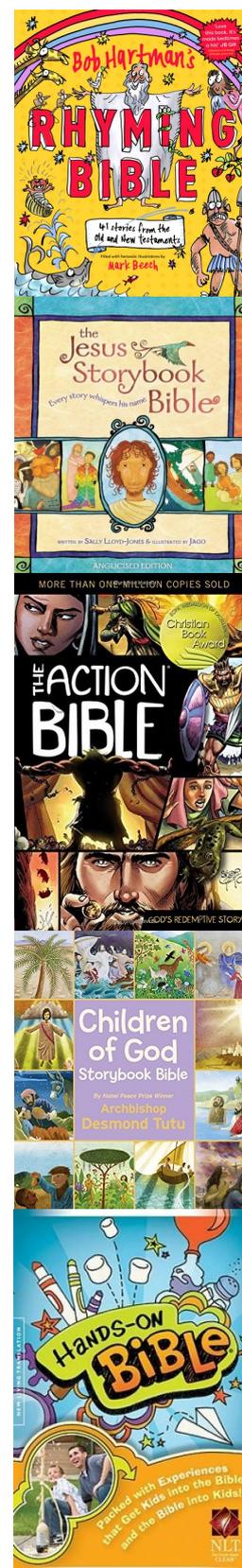
Suitable for ages 4-7

Desmond Tutu retells 56 Bible stories highlighting God's forgiveness and reconciliation for all. With a rich display of culture from contributing international illustrators this Children's Bible represents a global faith.

5. Hands-On Bible

Suitable for ages 8-11

This somewhat different Children's Bible helps 8-11's do more than read the words, it encourages play, creativity and fun. With hundreds of games, crafts, cartoons and activities, this Bible really does offer a hands-on experience.



10 Ways to Help Children (5-11s) Engage with the Bible...



1. Make a model/s

You will need one or more of the following: Play-dough, Lego, Playmobil craft materials, junk, paper and pens, clay, natural things e.g. sticks, stones, leaves.

After sharing a Bible story, encourage the children to make a model or models to reflect and illustrate the story they have heard. This will help them to remember the key parts of the story as well as reinforcing it in their minds. There are many ways in which you can do this, choose one or a selection of the above materials and allow the children the freedom to create whatever they like in relation to the story. They may even choose to take different parts of the story and have models to help retell the whole thing. Take photos of their completed models, as you can use them as a reminder for the children and you maybe able to use them when telling the story in the future.



2. Interviews

Share a Bible story with the children. Choose some of the key characters in the story and allocate children or adults to become those characters. Sit them in interview seats at the front and encourage the group to ask the characters questions. If it were the Christmas story, you may choose to have a Mary, Joseph and a Shepherd. Questions may include things like 'How did you feel when the angel visited you?' 'How did you feel the first time you met baby Jesus?' 'What did it smell like in the stable?'

Being that you are doing this with children, anticipate some unexpected questions, but encourage the children to ask the characters any questions they choose that relate to the story and the individual characters. Allow the characters to answer as accurately as is possible.

3. Put the story in order

When sharing a Bible Story with children, why not print either words or images of the story and get the children to put the story in order. Think about your children, can they read the words or would pictures be better? Can you find images that have both words and pictures? A Google search for the story can often provide a range of results or alternatively 'Free Bible Images' (www.freebibleimages.org) is likely to be a helpful website for you to visit.



4. Storytelling

What different storytelling methods can you use to tell Bible stories? If you are storytelling without holding a Bible in front of you, always remember to tell the children that story you are sharing is one from the Bible. Here are some different ways in which you can tell Bible stories:

- ❖ Puppets—using puppets for telling Bible stories can be hugely engaging for children. Check out One Way UK (<https://onewayuk.com/>) for some amazing puppets and scripts.
- ❖ Props—try to use props that will enhance the story you are telling. For example, if you are telling the story of the prodigal son, you may have some coins to represent the son being given his inheritance, some party poppers to represent his partying lifestyle, an empty plate and pig to represent him losing everything, a welcome home sign for him returning to his Father and a robe, ring and sandals to represent his Father celebrating the lost son being found.
- ❖ Acting—getting the children to be in the story is another great way of engaging them in the Bible. Choose the key characters and if possible, give them a costume to wear. Direct them to do specific things and move around appropriately as you tell the story.
- ❖ Sounds story—some stories work brilliantly when you get the children to interact with you and either make sounds or repeat/echo phrases. For example rushing wind, rain, animal noises, cries for help etc.

5. Ask Questions

Having shared a Bible story with children, ask them questions, to help them in their understanding. Here are some examples of questions:

- ◇ What did you think of the story?
- ◇ How did it make you feel?
- ◇ Who would like to be in the story? Why?
- ◇ What might we be able to learn from the story?
- ◇ What can we learn about God in this story?
- ◇ If you could change anything about the story, what would it be and why?

You may like to choose a few of these questions to use with your group. You may be surprised at their responses. Don't be afraid to let them lead you in your questions, depending on their reaction to the story.

6. Bible Story Quiz

This one certainly won't be a new idea on you, but create a simple quiz in relation to the story you are sharing. You may like to use it immediately after sharing the story and then use it again to begin the next session. Small prizes are good, but make sure it's not the same children who win every week. It can be upsetting and discouraging to those who struggle to retain information, those with additional needs and for those who are shy and reserved.

7. Take Home Bible Reading Ideas

It's brilliant that we can share Bible stories with children in our groups and activities, but ultimately we want children to engage with the Bible at home. There are a number of ways in which you can encourage that. Signposting children to age specific Bible reading notes is one such way. You may like to create a basic reminder sheet/card with a question and story reminder to take home after your session or post something on a linked Facebook/social media platform for parents to share with their children.

8. Bible App for Kids

Free to download on Apple, Android and other devices

The Bible App for Kids is a hugely engaging way for children to connect with the Bible. It is an eye catching, child friendly and fun app, that allows children to explore stories from the Bible, whilst being set challenges and collecting rewards along the way.



9. Guardians of Ancora

Free to download on Apple, Android and other devices.

An amazing virtual world and a place where Bible stories come alive. Children can run, jump and explore Bible stories, they can listen to Bible Stores, complete quests, watch videos and complete quizzes. It is aimed at those aged 8 to 11 years old. Scripture Union have also produced two Guardians of Ancora Holiday Clubs that you may wish to look at.



10. Treasure Hunt

Children love treasure hunts! How can you creatively allow children to engage in the Bible through treasure hunts? Some stories will be easier than others when it comes to exploring them in this way. Look at your chosen Bible story and collect as many items as possible that link to the story. Hide them around your space and then get the children to find them.

Alternatively, why not look to use 'Spy pens/Invisible ink pens' (available on Amazon and similar sites) - using the invisible ink pens, draw clues to the story on paper and place them around your space. Giving the children the UV lights attached to the pens, get them to go around the room, collecting the clues to the Bible story. More than anything, activities like this create memories for children, storing the Bible stories in their mind to recall in the future.



Youth 11-16s

5 Recommended Bibles...

1. **The Good News Bible: The Youth Edition by Bible Society**

Suitable for ages 12-18

This youth edition Good News Bible features elements of journaling, as well as its own YouTube playlist with 30 videos to help further unpack and explore key themes and issues raised in the Bible.

2. **NCV Youth Bible by Thomas Nelson Publishers**

Suitable for ages 14-18

The NCV (New Century Version) Youth Bible gives your teens a directly relevant modern English translation Bible. Plus, over 470 real life stories and hundreds of background Bible facts that connect with the hearts and minds of teenagers in schools, colleges, universities, home and church.

3. **Soul Survivor Youth Bible by New International Version**

Suitable for ages 11-16

Contains over 500 extras from the Soul Survivor leadership team. It is described as a well-balanced, relevant, and jargon-free Youth Bible.

4. **Authentic Youth Bible, by Authentic Media**

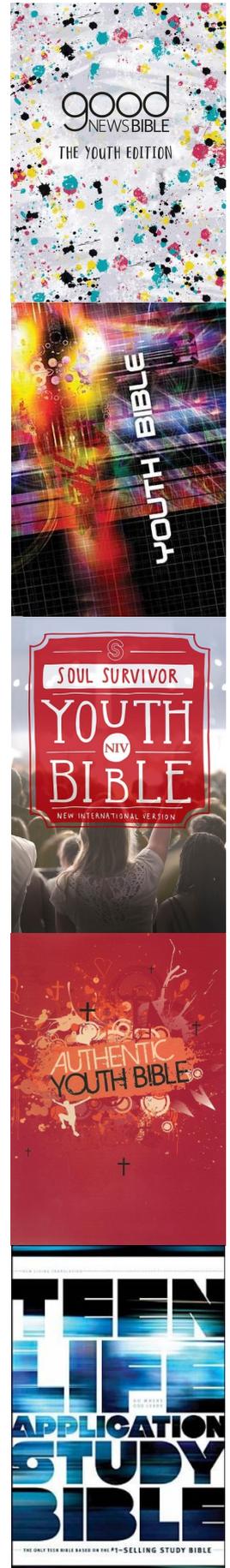
Suitable for ages 13-18

The Authentic Youth Bible is a popular choice for school leavers and youth groups as well as for personal use. Features include 164 pages of additional Bible study material, 24 colour topic based inserts covering subjects such as relationships, peer pressure and trusting God and 275 'Insights' which help explain the meaning and context of key passages.

5. **Teen Life Application Study Bible, by Tyndale**

Suitable for ages 14-18

Combining traditional study-Bible features like book introductions, textual notes, person profiles, and maps with application-oriented features focusing on choices, real-life issues, and real-life stories of actual teens.



1. Compare different translations

As our young people get older, they are able to notice the differences in different translations of the Bible. Mix things up in your groups and allow them to experience different translations. Using *The Message* and *The Word on the Street Bible* can enable young people to more easily relate the Bible to their day to day lives. It's really important that we find ways to allow young people to encounter Jesus as they read the Bible and to understand and grasp that the Bible is a relevant to them today as it was for those in the first century. Reading a passage from something like the *New International Version* or the *New Living Translation* and then also looking at a more contemporary version such as *The Message* is one recommended way of doing that.

2. Ask Questions

As suggested in the children's section, it's important to keep asking questions. One way to structure that is as follows:

- i. Search for the facts: What is the context? Who is in the reading? What do we know about them? Where is the story taking place? Why is this happening?
- ii. Understand what it means— ask the young people: What speaks to you in this reading? What confuses you? Explore together what the phrases and words mean.
- iii. Application: What does this mean for me? What actions do I need to take having read this? What do I need to remember? How is this reading going to change me?

3. Lectio Divina

This is an ancient practice of 'praying the Bible'. It is a slow contemplative method, designed to ensure we meditate and think deeply on God's word. There are 4 stages to this method:

- i) **LECTIO**—reading: Read the passage slowly. Ask the young people to think of a word or phrase that stands out to them. They don't have to know why, just which one has struck them and then leave some time for quiet. Some of the group may like to share their word or phrase. There is no right or wrong answer!
- ii) **MEDITATIO**—meditation: This time ask the young people to imagine themselves in the story, either as one of the characters or seeing it from the outside. Ask them to imagine what it looked like, smelt like, felt like. As you read the passage again ask them to think about how they feel, and how they react to what is going on in the story. Read the passage and leave time for quiet. Some of the group may like to share their thoughts. Again, no right or wrong answer!
- iii) **ORATIO**—prayer: This time, ask the young people to think about what God might be trying to say to them in this passage. After you read the passage leave a slightly longer time for quiet. Do not share after this time but instead turn thoughts into prayers. Ask the young people to talk to God in their hearts about what this passage means and what God is saying to them through it.
- iv) **CONTEMPLATIO**—contemplation: This time, after reading the passage spend some time pondering what God has been saying, and what you think you need to take away from this prayer time. After some time of quiet, some of the group may like to share their thoughts and experience.

(This has been adapted from: <https://dowym.com/resources/lectio-divina/>)

4. Photo Storyboard or Animation

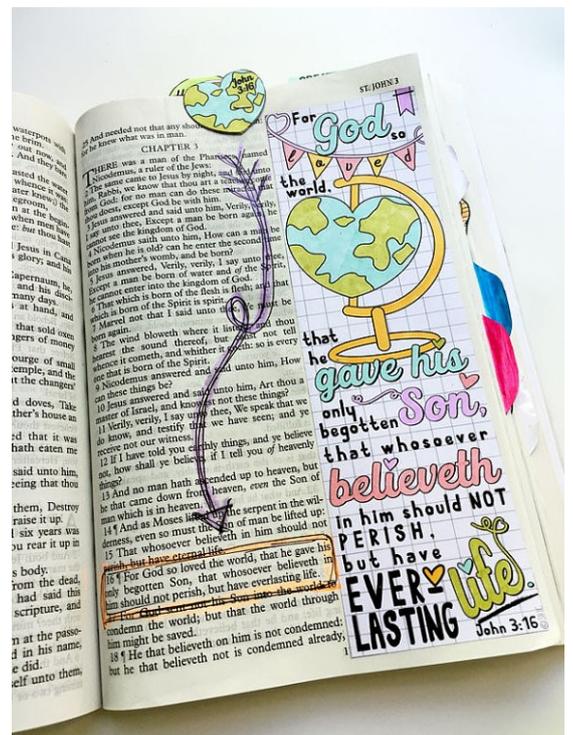
Challenge your young people to recreate a Bible story in photographs, animation or video. It is likely that a number of your young people will have phones, so challenge them to reimagine and create a story by either taking photos or similar to do so. You may like to put a limit on the number of photos (no more than 10) and on length of animation (no longer than 2 minutes). Download to a laptop and find ways to use their creations with the wider congregation as a way of empowering the young people.



Beware of safeguarding, in that you may want to ensure young people only take photos of objects and scenes that don't contain other people or ensure you seek permission of those included, particularly those under 18.

5. Journaling and Scribbling

It is now possible to purchase Bible's that give wider space and margins for scribbling, doodling and journaling as you read. For some young people, this can be really helpful. Another way of doing this is to print a passage from the Bible, for example Psalm 23, ensuring it is central to the page and gives lots of space to doodle and scribble around. Give the young people space to look at and reflect on the word. Give them good quality pens and pencils. As the re-read the Bible passage encourage them to ask God to speak to them through his word, writing and/or drawing the things that come into their mind. It may include feelings, situations, people or any number of other things. Ensure that the young people know that this is between them and God, that there are no wrong answers and that this is a space to encounter God through scripture. For some young people, they want to have headphones in while doing this, don't discourage this, potentially suggest that they choose to listen to something that allows them to be reflective and quiet.



Offer the young people an opportunity to feed back to larger group and help them unpack anything they are unsure about. For those for whom this connects, encourage them to do this at home when reading the Bible.

6. The Bible Project

The Bible Project is a non-profit animation studio that produces short-form, fully animated videos to make the biblical story accessible to everyone, everywhere. They create 100% free videos, podcasts, and resources that explore the Bible's unified story. The Bible Project produced high quality videos that will help young people to engage with scripture using a different medium. This is a particularly helpful site for those with additional needs and for whom reading is a challenge.

Visit The Bible Project website and find helpful videos to enhance your sessions, plus encourage your young people to access this at home: www.thebibleproject.com



7. Bible Apps

For young people, their mobile phones are never far away from them. Encouraging young people to download apps that enable them to connect to the Bible is a positive way in which to do this. Here are some that we recommend for young people:



Read Scripture: This app links to the Bible Project, using their videos to complement Bible reading. There are videos to explain each book of the Bible as well as a year long Bible reading plan.



YouVersion: This is probably one of the most well-known Bible apps out there. It is also great for teenagers, as it has specific Bible reading plans for teenagers. Why not select one for the whole group to do at home between sessions?



Dwell Audio Bible: Dwell has been called "the Spotify of Scripture". It is an audio Bible that allows you to select different voices and ways to listen to the Bible. For some young people, this maybe particularly helpful in helping them to find time to listen to God's word.

8. Be creative

Just like we suggested earlier in this booklet, allow your young people to be creative when engaging with the Bible. We may think that Lego, Play-dough and craft type materials are more suited to the younger age groups, but often we find that the older age group find that being creative is something they get fewer opportunities to do within school/college, therefore, having the freedom to do it in our groups can be helpful. Provide them with materials and task them with recreating Bible stories out of Lego or play-dough. Talk through the stories and the application of them as you go.

9. Symbols Method

This method can be used within small groups when exploring the Bible together. It can be used with many passages from the Bible, including the parables, the Psalms and the epistles. Read the chosen passage together, giving a short time to reflect individually. Then use these six symbols to direct and guide your discussions.

- ↑ Discuss something in these verses about Jesus or God
- ↓ Discuss something in these verses about human nature
- 🕯️ Discuss a new discovery made by reading these verses
- ! Discuss the most exciting verse and why
- ? Discuss anything not understood of that calls for exploration
- ← Discuss a call for action made by these verses

(Idea adapted from Top Tips: Exploring the Bible with Young People
by Terry Clutterham & John Stephenson)

10. Go outdoors, recreate and imagine Bible stories

Sometimes we can become attached to the space in which we usually meet, but often it's when we step out of the familiar that we create memories. The same can be said for how we engage with the Bible. When preparing your session, look at the Bible story and think where that story may have taken place, is there somewhere near you, where you could recreate that scene. When telling the story of Jesus appearing to his disciples on the beach, if you live near a beach, go to the beach and tell the story, if not, go outside and have a BBQ—why not cook fish fingers (be mindful of health and safety and complete appropriate risk assessments)? Jesus told stories up mountains, can you find a hill and take your young people for a walk and really reflect on the location, the smells, how the people must have felt. There are many opportunities and possibilities, be creative and try to create lasting memories for your young people of your group engaging with the Bible.

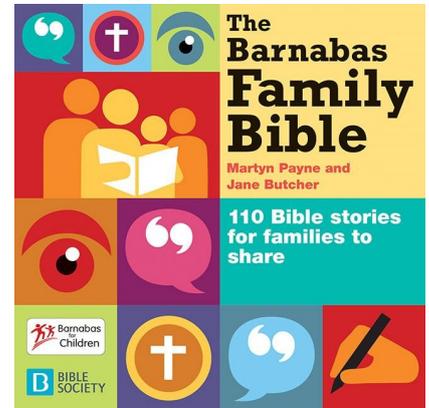


Exploring the Bible with Families

As people working with children and young people, it is also important that we help families to engage with the Bible. We may provide opportunities for families to engage with the Bible through things such as Messy Church or Café Church or through the many other creative ways in which we do that across the Diocese. Beyond that, some of our families may require support, guidance and help in doing this in their own homes. This is not an exhaustive list, but here are some recommendations:

The Barnabas Family Bible by Martyn Payne & Jane Butcher

This Bible is a great resource that you can recommend families use at home. For each of 110 Bible stories, there is the Bible text to read together, followed by a simple explanation, some questions to discuss as a family, a prayer and an activity. This is simple in its approach, it doesn't need any planning or preparation and does not need to be a daily resource, but it's one that can help families, of all ages, engage in the Bible together.



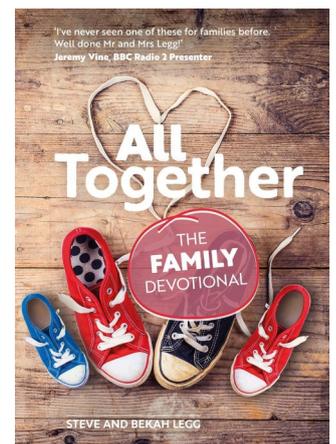
God Venture

God Venture have produced a number of resources to help families engage in the Bible together. Some of those resources are freely downloadable and accessible, whilst others can be purchased. Check out their website for ideas and resources for families—www.godventure.co.uk

The Family Devotional by Steve & Bekah Legg

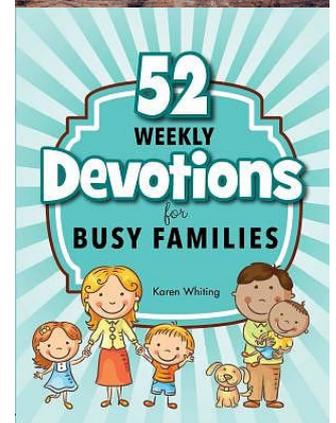
This is a 12 week devotional that enables families to come together over breakfast or dinner, on the sofa or at the table, to explore God's Word.

This isn't the only devotional of this type available, Steve and Bekah have published a number of other 12 week resources.



52 Weekly Devotions for Busy Families

This resource contains 52 weekly devotions comprising of stories, hands-on activities, memory verses, and relevant discussion questions. Its design is flexible, enabling busy families to use it in a way that best suits them.



Lectio for Families app

Lectio for Families is a free devotional app from 24-7 Prayer that helps families to read the Bible and explore faith through conversation and prayer together. Designed for families with children aged between 7-11 years old (but likely to be suitable for those who are younger and slightly older too) and written for families to do together, it includes daily Bible readings and a weekly memory verse, read by children. Each day there are questions to pause and talk about, and creative prompts to pray in new ways.

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