Teaching reading using



the Bible

And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:15

Our family's testimony with practical hints.

Dave and Debbie Klein

Preface

The following pages are offered as a testimony of our limited experience in teaching reading using the Bible.¹ The Lord has greatly blessed us, so we just want to share about it.

This is not written because we feel that teaching reading using the Bible is the only acceptable way. Nor do we have Bible verses to prove you must do so. Nor is it written because our children have become exceptional readers. Nor because we feel we are exceptional reading teachers. We are not laying out a program for you to follow. We just wanted to give a testimony of things the Lord has taught us.

Our belief is that literacy is so important to God, **for the purpose of learning his Word**, that if we as parents follow his commandments, reading is just kind of thrown into the deal.

Any homeschooling parent, shopping for a reading program, will find many different methods and products. Additionally, we listen to the recommendations or warnings from fellow parents. Experts have many theories in reading instruction. However, none of these theories assume parents are trying to follow Deuteronomy 6:7-8

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in 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.

¹ We don't mean a children's "Bible". We don't mean a children's Bible *version*. We mean the same Bible we use in our family (King James).

Not too long ago many parents taught their children to read. There was a time when many children entered school already knowing how to read. And some, we are told, learned to read *from the Bible*.

What we are hoping to explain in these pages is not so much a new, improved way to teach reading. You will not find a program to follow step by step. The world does not need another phonics curriculum! Rather, we want to be a **testimony** to how when we, as parents, simply try to be more and more faithful to God's instructions to parents (especially in Deuteronomy 6:7-8), it is as if God just throws phonics instruction in for free! But the foundation for that instruction is a life that is increasing in its pursuit of hearing and doing the Word of the LORD.

In other words, we hope to be an encouragement to your family in focusing on God's Word in your daily life. As the Lord tells us

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." Matthew 6:33

Could teaching our child to read be part of "all these things"?

We invite you to read our testimony and think about it.

In Christ, Dave and Debbie Klein May 8, 2010

Chapter 1: Why Teach Your Child to Read Using the Bible?

- **1.** It demonstrates that we reject the world's assertion that reading the Bible is not for children, but agree with Paul's commendation to Timothy "that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation..." 2 Timothy 3:15
- **2.** Because the child is familiar with the Bible from their earliest days, using the Bible gives them a head start on reading comprehension.
- **3.** Our child has portions of it memorized already. As reading begins, our child has a boost with remembering the many irregularities in English spelling.
- **4.** Our child enjoys having their own Bible and equates it with being BIG.
- **5.** Our child will need the Bible their whole life long.
- **6.** Rather than giving our child a taste for silly phonetic characters, we are giving them a taste for God's Word.
- **7.** The Bible, unlike phonics readers, is SUPPOSED to mean something! Rather than sweating over consonant blends, our child asks questions about the meaning of the verse!
- **8.** There are no pictures, so less invitation for our child to guess words.
- **9.** They can begin to participate more in family Bible reading and follow along in church meetings.
- **10.** We do not need extra accessories, and the Bible is totally portable. Washer on the blink today? Bring the Bible to the laundromat!
- **11.** When we teach reading using the Bible, we don't drop our child off at a certain "grade level".
- **12.** Every time you sit down to learn to read with the Bible, you are guaranteed to be blessed!
- **13.** The Bible is the most important book ever written.

Chapter 2: Building a Christian Home



"...that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Colossians 1:18

As christian parents, we recognize the importance of teaching our children, loving them, providing for them, disciplining them, and protecting them. As they get older, and possibly even more are entrusted to us, we begin to see our great need for the Lord's grace and help and wisdom and so forth. We begin praying more and seeking wisdom in the Bible. Perhaps we begin our parenting career with much self-assurance, and the Lord humbles us. Or perhaps we begin clueless, and the Lord leads us into his will.

Either way, in a christian home, with parents continuing to walk with the Lord day by day, we begin to accumulate disciplines and priorities that are very conducive to *reading instruction for our children, especially if that reading instruction is from the Bible.*

These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine

HEART:



We jokingly call this a subversive plot. We parents think Deuteronomy 6:7,8 is all about teaching our **children**, but first God says, "these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart We have found that many of the christian disciplines which were sorely lacking in our early years as believers have been

developed and strengthened because we have recognized that *the* Lord requires parents to establish them in their homes. We are convinced that parenthood is God's discipleship program for parents!

The nuts and bolts....

Say you had a car. Or a bunch of cars. Say you've been driving for decades, so you've had *many* cars. You learned to tune them up and do oil changes and even rebuild engines. And now you've got a new car, and it needs some maintenance.

What is the first thing you'd do?

Well, obviously, the first thing you don't need to do is run to the auto shop or hardware shop and invest in tools! You've already been taking care of cars for decades, and you've had so many different vehicles that you probably have everything you need already.

If we try to use that analogy to illustrate the workings of a growing, christian family, here are some of the things that, as we

grow in the LORD, we may already have "lying around the house"



We may already enjoy listening to recorded sermons and testimonies. It is possible that from our children's earliest days, they are hearing God's Word, on Sundays, on sermon CD's, at Bible studies, etc.

When our children were all young, we discovered the Bible on cassette (oops, we're dating ourselves <g>). We were a bit surprised to realize that our children enjoyed listening to the cassettes, and eventually set up a player so they could listen at night as they drifted off to sleep. After a while, we realized they were learning the Bible from memory through those cassettes. We began to select certain sequences and books for them to listen to. Sometimes they'd have requests!²

Boring? No, they didn't find them boring. We've often heard "Children will appreciate what their parents appreciate." We have found that to be the case. (Of course, part of that is limiting the competition, and that was also a factor for us.)

² Of course, just putting the Bible on cassette in a player is not *equivalent* to discipling children or teaching them the Bible. Also, we were somewhat selective, and chose certain parts to not put in the tape player. The scripture instructs *parents* to teach their children, not give them Bible on cassette, or children's "Bibles."

Do they understand all of what they hear? Not completely. But that is a natural part of learning. When something is new, you don't understand it all.

Just think about the time before your child ate solid food. For months, they would observe you putting stuff into your mouth when you sat down to eat. They began to learn what would be good to eat and what would not be good. It seems like it works the same for spiritual food.



Another thing that our children learned to take an interest in was recorded sermons. We would often look for topical sermons or favorite preachers and listen to the sermons. Suddenly we noticed them listening attentively, asking questions and noticing when the tape needed to be flipped over. Occasionally, we might pause the tape and explain, "He's talking about Noah," or "Moses," etc. Again, if we had an interest in it, it was never long before they would also begin asking

questions or even wanting to put the tape on. (*Their growing familiarity with the Bible* really helped our children to pay attention.)



~

When our oldest was about 6 years old, we felt convicted that our children needed to be with *us* on Sundays, not in children's programs. We felt that Sunday school and church programs weren't giving them a realistic picture of what God intends the church to be.

We prepared our children for sitting in the service by telling them about the special time we had on Sundays. We got the older ones Bibles or tablets, and reminded the children repeatedly "Look at the brother speaking." We look back on that time as an important turning point in our family, as the children began to recognize why we assembled as a church.

Where are we going with this? "Follow me as I follow Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1



It just seems like if we are already moving more and more towards trying to follow the LORD faithfully, both in seeking to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" and pursuing things that help us to grow in Christ, we are laying the best foundation for teaching our child to read using the Bible. With daily, copious exposure to the Bible and discussing it, we are providing the "live culture" that contributes to our child's growth in not just reading, but thinking about and obeying God's Word.

Chapter 3: The Pre-reading Years

"Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths." Ps 25:4

"When do you know it's time to begin reading instruction?"

"At what age should I start teaching him to read?"

"Are there physical cues that show a child is ready to read?"

When does reading instruction start?

In our opinion, this is the wrong question. It is yet a common one, and every parent asks it in one way or another. Why? Because it is likely how we were taught. We likely entered school and in a certain level of school, we were taught phonics, etc.

We would like to share some of our observations.

We have observed that there is much "black box" thinking in reading instruction. There are a few basic methods of teaching letter sounds, there are a few philosophies on how to handle the MANY irregularities in English words. But just about every expert says, in effect, "You give them the letters and some sounds as needed, and somewhere along the road, the system 'clicks' in a child's mind and he starts reading." When the reading system clicks in a child's mind, you can see it by the way he blends the letters together to read words. In describing the learning process, Ruth Beechick explains:

Blending skill is one of those things you cannot hurry in children. You can't sternly shake your finger at Johnny or promise him cake if he gets it right. All you can do is give him opportunities to learn it, and one day you will see he is beginning to catch on. That is a great day.³

³ From <u>The Three R's</u> by Ruth Beechick, page 13. Mott Media, Fenton MI 2006. We highly recommend this book.

That evasive "click" has been the fly in the ointment of many anxious homeschooling parents, the cause of many purchases of additional curricula, remedial resources, videos, and thoughts of quitting homeschooling.

Since even experts disagree on many aspects and sequences of reading instruction, we parents can feel somewhat unqualified to venture an opinion of our own. One expert warned that going against *his* instructional recommendations for teaching children to read "may also give rise to far-reaching damage to their emotional life."⁴

But all that aside, we again return to the words of Jesus:

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." Matthew 6:33

How does that apply to reading? Well, our feeling is that "When do you know its time to begin reading instruction?" is the wrong question. It is based on the assumption that what precedes "reading instruction" (which almost always means a program or curriculum) is not reading instruction. Again, let's look at Deuteronomy 6:7-8:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in 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.

We have found that, through the years, as we became more consistent with our family's daily devotional times (which we share in the morning and evening), our pre-readers are getting a steady diet of Scripture. While we work on memorizing passages

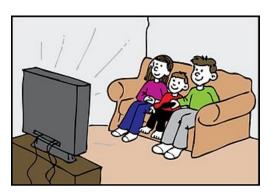
⁴ Per Dr. S.T. Orton, cited in <u>Alphaphonics</u>, by Samuel Blumenfeld, The Paradigm Company, Boise 1992

verse by verse, whether they vocalize or not, they memorize too. This gives us all the benefit of talking and walking and sitting and ending the day with God's Word.

What is the goal? That our children hide God's Word in their hearts, as much as possible, as we also do the same. Possibly, experts would say this is also important for vocabulary building, developing abstract thinking and listening skills. But we just see that we are obligated to have God's Word in our hearts and teach it to our children! We will make sure they do hear his words!

The method that God commands us to use in Deuteronomy 6: 7 – 8 is probably what the experts would call "immersion." It's pretty universally regarded as the best way to learn. And we all **know** that this method works, because we see it working in the world! Jesus said, "...for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Luke 16:8b

The world realizes the effectiveness of God's instruction to parents in Deuteronomy 6:7-8 and uses it for its own goals...



"when thou sittest in thine house"



"and when thou walkest by the way"



"and when thou liest down"

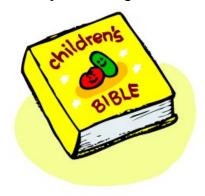


"and when thou risest up"

More and better!

When phonics programs first came out, they were not likely developed with the assumption that parents were immersing their children in the Bible. Well, we *know* that is true, because what is one of the unending pleas of elementary educators? "Parents, read to your children!" It is no secret that the few hours spent in actual reading instruction in the schools is not sufficient for reading instruction.

If we parents simply try to obey God's directions in Deuteronomy 6:7-8, we are doing, as a by-product, one of the most important things needed to help our children learn to read.



What about Children's "Bibles"?

With our oldest children we used a popular "Children's Bible." Having not grown up in christian homes, we appreciated the simple text,

endearing artwork, and seemingly comprehensive scope. However, as our children began being more and more immersed in the real Bible, we and **they** noticed inaccuracies. We realized the cute illustrations could be somewhat misleading; in some cases, they could constitute adding to the Word of God (through pictures, which depict details that are simply unknown).

Also, it occurred to us that if you set a children's "Bible" next to another illustrated children's book, say Pinocchio, it could be a little difficult for a child to distinguish that the children's Bible is true, but the other false. Well, that is just our take on the matter.

Chapter 4: The Tale of the Hungry Triangle

(Or: "How we always had taught reading")

In years past, we taught reading with a phonics program consisting of a parent guide, some paper craft activities, and a set of brightly-covered phonics readers, containing short narratives of (need I say?) fictional characters made of geometrical shapes. These friendly alien-looking beings often found themselves in unusual predicaments due to seemingly random circumstances. But to the trained phonics teacher, they were not random circumstances at all. They were about the ONLY circumstances you can come up with using nothing but the short vowel sounds and single consonants.

Mom and child would sit at the desk, with a book opened up to the first page. The book was named after its phonetically regulated protagonist. We'd slowly sound out the three-letter name. Done. We'd turn the page. The action on the first page was simply, again, the name of the main character...possibly for reinforcement. Done.

The next page would have a short phonetic statement concerning the picture on the page.

That is where we got into trouble.

Never mind that three letter cards were on the desk, to cue the child to what sound each letter made. The child would take a look at the picture, and make up a lengthy and **non**-phonetically proper narrative of what he thought was going on, such as:

"The square guy doesn't know why the triangle guy ate his hat"

Mom would quickly realize that the picture should not be there to cue the child, if the child is expected to read the letters. So, quickly, Mom covers the picture. Ha! Try that again!

The child says nothing. So, Mom helpfully shows them the appropriate letter sound. The child's eyes go to the letter card, where Mom points with one hand. The child says the sound. Then, the child's eyes go to the phonics reader, where Mom has isolated the single letter being sounded, and the child tries to remember the sound. Then Mom points to the next letter and letter card. Then, at the end of the word, Mom says, "What does it say when you put it all together."

"Come on, what does **m** say?"

The child says nothing.

Mom repositions both of her hands, and the letter sounds are worked on again.

"What does m say?"

Child asks for a drink.

Mom's eyes start glazing over.

Now, this was the normal procedure for us in our early homeschooling perfectionist days. Oh, to be young again.

But in reading the actual instructions, Mom finds that you don't force the child to sound out letters the first time. You merely show them how it's done. Further, you read the book to the child several times, over successive days, demonstrating how the letters sound. Just be patient, the book tells Mom, and it will soon click.

While the instructions don't say this, common human experience is that when you read a book to a child over and over...what do they soon do?

They memorize it.

Focus

Something that we only saw in retrospect was that the focus was on the skill and not on the *content* of the text. And why should it be on the content? There is simply nothing meaningful to be gained from the geometric conflict described in the phonics readers. After our experience with teaching reading with the Bible, we recognize where our focus should be: on reading and understanding God's Word, not merely reading for the sake of reading. That focus is a benefit we just never got from the phonics readers. For us, it has made a difference.

Chapter 5: How we came to use the Bible to teach reading

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:18

For most of our years of homeschooling, our family missed out on one of the best opportunities to use our time effectively while reinforcing before our children the importance of God's Word. That opportunity was teaching reading with the Bible.

But during those years, we still enjoyed homeschooling, our children still learned to read, and we kept pressing on in trying to keep God's Word as the foundation and focus. By no means have we attained perfection in this, but we thank God for what he has taught us, in his Word and through our brothers and sisters in Christ

Because the point of this testimony is not to point you to a reading program, but rather, to point you to God's Word, we will describe how we came to this idea, by means of what we call...



1. We began to realize that in many ways, using curriculum often superimposed an unnatural restraint on family life that was necessary in the classroom environment, but served no purpose in the home. For example, in a classroom, it would not necessarily be wise to use real money in a classroom of 3rd graders to teach money skills. But at home, it would be silly to cut out little coins when you have a nearby piggy bank that needs an inventory taken.

- 2. We realized that there was nothing magical or scientific about the children's literature recommended in our phonics curriculum. Most of them were just perennial favorites among librarians. We realized if we preferred to use what we already had in our home, that would suffice.
 - 3. We realized that phonics programs were not designed with the assumption that children are being immersed in any type of literature on a regular basis, let alone the Bible.
 - 4. We realized that our phonics readers were not even of the genre of literature that we felt was beneficial for us and our children. They were divorced from the warp and woof of family life. Why have our children's first reading experience come from that? (However, our Bibles get a lot of use. And while we are at it, we are memorizing it.⁵)
 - 5. For many years, the Lord has been impressing on us the need to think on truth. Without much intentional effort, we found we had eliminated just about all fiction from our family's library. Aside from Pilgrim's Progress, there remained about only one source of fiction on our bookshelves: the phonics readers.

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⁵ A resource which has blessed us is the booklet "How to Teach Your Child a Verse a Day," available free on our website: www.inkleinations.com.

⁶ For more information on this important topic, see "Reality and Unreality," available free on our website.

Putting two and two together

Finally, the ultimate reading goal we had for our children, and we could tell you that right off the bat, is that they are able to read the Bible. To be more accurate, our goal was not that they could READ, but that they read the BIBLE. Sure other books, but they are nothing compared to the Bible.

With that goal in mind, we just jumped in and read the Bible. Well, Mommy did. Sammy sat, listened, and asked questions.

A rock and a heart place

Before we emphasized any reading, the little boys and I had the normal routine of reading scripture as we rocked under a pine tree in our lawn swing, a precious time.

How much scripture? Well, the entire story of Noah's ark held their interest. Or the entire story of the fiery furnace, or the creation week, or the entire book of Jonah! (No doubt the rocking chair helped, too!)

Without intending this, it became apparent that the boys were memorizing the text. If there was a pause, they could fill in words...sentences....verses. No flash cards, no quizzes, no stickers.

When we started learning letter sounds, we just began at the story of Jonah. I read most of the text, but would select smaller words for Sammy to try. It was just enough to challenge him, but not so much that it was a big chore.

It became apparent that if he knew what the word was supposed to be (because he had it *memorized*), he would look at the word and work out the letter sounds, because he knew what the word was supposed to be.

This eventually culminated in the day he asked:

"Is the "p" silent? Because it's supposed to say 'salm'."

We found his reasoning amazing, but then realized, why should we? English is so nutty, with so many unpredictable exceptions, so you have to memorize them. If our child memorizes them by familiar words from the Bible, the job is done. There are no extra points earned if he connects dots or spins a spinner or sings a song to do so.

It really seems like *scripture memory* adds such an important dynamic to learning to read phonetically. He is honestly sounding out the words. **He is not just mindlessly saying words that start with the same letter, as our older kids would do when we used illustrated phonics readers.** When he was starting out, just reading familiar Bible passages, he knew what the word was *supposed to be*, and he would work with the letters there to make it right. From there, he went to unfamiliar words using the same approach.

So it seems that if we are trying to do our job as parents, that it also gives us the greatest opportunity to immerse them in all the funny phonetical rules. We feel this is the "real world" when it comes to reading, unlike graded readers which purposely refrain from introducing certain sounds or rules until the child is "ready." Again, those readers are simply not designed for children who are DAILY learning the Word of God!

By focusing on familiar passages, we just plodded away at the smaller words using single consonants and short vowel sounds. Next, we worked on the "th" sound, since that came up frequently. But really, it was the memorization factor that greased the wheels.

Chapter 6: Farther Along



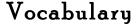
Well, we didn't promise a reading program, but rather our testimony. But we wanted to share some additional things we have done in teaching reading which have been beneficial for us⁷. Overall, each lesson time consisted of just reading side by side. We did not follow a lesson plan, but had the goal of just teaching understanding of the passage being read. Since we would read the same things over and over, there was no pressure to try to explain everything every day.

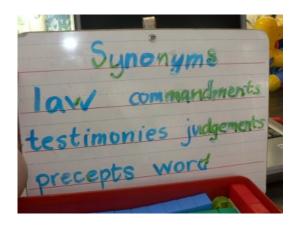
This is not an exhaustive list but we hope it will give you some ideas. These ideas came to us generally as we just sought to help our child *understand the Bible*.

⁷ Reading and writing instruction really go hand in hand, but for the purpose of this book, we are leaving off the details of what we have done for writing. We will say that our children's main writing instruction has been through the writing of letters to family and friends and through copying the Bible. You can find a good amount of information on Bible copying on our website www.inKLEINations.com. Look for the tags "Bible copy" or "little ones and the Bible" on our blog.

Bible Navigation

- Before our child could read, we put post-it note tags in his large-print Bible on familiar stories: Jonah, Noah and the ark, Daniel and the lions, the fiery furnace. The notes had a title and a simple picture (of a lion, ark, fire, fish). This way, he could turn to the story we were to read.
- As we looked at a page in the Bible, we would explain what was the actual Bible text versus notes, references, and footnotes, chapter headings, the meaning of italic words, etc. We discussed verse number and chapters. Different Bibles denoted the beginning of a chapter differently. One always used an enlarged first word, rather than a 1, for the first verse.
- We showed him the table of contents and how it is used.





• In reading through a passage, we would stop as needed to explain words or terms. Since we use the King James version, there are often words or usages that are not used in modern speech. We thought this would be a hang-up, but it hasn't been. As foreign languages go, Elizabethan English is not too much of

- a challenge for little children, and they don't use it in place of regular speech (except for designated days when we try to speak exclusively in Elizabethan English just for fun!).
- Synonyms are fun, and as we went through Psalm 119, we made lists of synonyms for "law."

Reading to your child

- We have them listen for a certain name or word.
- We pick several favorite Bible stories, and read them several times a week. We never run out of things to talk about, even though we read them over and over. Plus, they memorize the words without effort
- We have noticed that when English peculiarities (of spelling, etc.) emerge, or archaic words, we can just briefly explain it and go on. The more Bible mileage they get, the more they are able to accept and be familiar with the irregularities and archaic words.⁸

⁸ A very helpful, free resource, also available on our website, is the article "Teaching Children to Understand the Bible" from which comes this story: "Two small children were...copying Genesis 5 into their notebooks. The five year old leaned over and said to the seven year old, "BEGAT means they had children." No one had told him. He could understand the word by the way it was used in the story."

A Bible Notebook



Starting from before they can read independently, we use a composition book and usually write a page or two per lesson. The content varies, and at the beginning, Mom does most of the writing. Then we move to tracing letters, and finally copying. The content varies:

- Sometimes we use it to illustrate a part of the story, like Noah's ark, or the camp around the tabernacle. This could also branch out to learning about compass points or
- Sometimes we use the page to illustrate spelling rules, such as forming irregular plurals.
- Sometimes we might classify words into groups, explain homophones, how to form possessives, etc.

Again, our goal is: What does the child need to know to understand this verse? Much of the learning involves the actual

understanding of the passage we are reading, not the attainment of a grade level of reading.

Wow! It really worked!

From our earliest days of homeschooling, we felt that if homeschooling was really the Lord's plan for families, it wouldn't be dependent on man-made programs and such. It would be a tool for us to teach and train our children in the way they should go. We have had (and continue) to rethink many of our assumptions about what we are trying to accomplish and why and how. God continues to show us how little we know. We are grateful!

Recommended Resources

Throughout this booklet, we have mentioned several free resources available on our website: www.inkleinations.com.

We also *highly* recommend the talk: "Homeschooling vs. Discipleship" by Jonathan Lindvall, which you can hear online at www.boldchristianliving.com.

Additionally, we have been blessed by many books by Ruth Beechick. She was once an expert in institutional schools, but later devoted her talents to serving christian homeschoolers. Some books that we have really enjoyed by Ruth include:

<u>The 3R's</u> -- this covers reading, writing and math and is extremely helpful for new homeschoolers with young children.

<u>The Language Wars</u> – miscellaneous essays.

<u>Heart and Mind</u> -- very interesting look on the connection of heart and mind, and how the words are used in the Bible.

<u>A Biblical Home Education</u> – this covers all subject areas, but has very interesting information regarding tutoring, specifically reading instruction.

Seek ye first
the kingdom of God
and his righteousness,
and **all these things**will be added unto you.

Matthew 6.33

"Is the 'p' silent? Because it's supposed to say 'salm'."

-- a six year old

For most of our years of homeschooling, our family missed out on probably the best opportunity to use our time effectively while reinforcing before our children the importance of God's Word!

Teaching Reading Using the Bible

We invite you to consider teaching your children to read using the Bible too! Why?

The Bible is the most important book!

The Bible is a real book which we need all our lives!

The Bible is a familiar book!

We already have numerous opportunities throughout the day to teach our children using the Bible!

The Bible has no pictures to invite them to guess words!

.....and more!

<u>www.inkleinations.com</u>

encouraging families who desire to "Seek first the kingdom of God..." Matthew 6:33

Dave and Debbie Klein
61 Harneywold Drive, Saint Louis, MO 63136