

THE PROPER USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE MINISTRY OF TEACHING
"REMEMBER THESE THINGS":
REFLECTIONS ON THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER

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The Proper Use of Scripture in the Ministry of Teaching "Remember These Things": Reflections on the Second Epistle of Peter

John Isch

Memory is a wondrous thing. Consider the second letter of Peter. Here is a Christian, full of life and experiences, knowing he will soon leave "the tent of this body." What does this great Christian remember—that incredible sermon at Pentecost? the empty tomb? Jairus daughter rising from her bed? the great catch of fish? the cold courtyard at Caiphas' house? the searching forgiving questions of Jesus that early morning at Galilee? Of all the things Peter could have remembered and described, he speaks of only one—the transfiguration that he, James, and John had witnessed. Why did he cite that incident?

He did so because for Peter and his readers that clear and convincing testimony to the authenticity of Christ also made the message that Christ bought certain and convincing. "The word of the prophets" had now become certain with the certainty of who Christ was. The word that Peter believed in and preached was to serve as the norm for every other teaching, for this word did not originate in "the will of man," but through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1:21).

Now Peter was concerned that his readers "remember these things" (1:15), the things which God revealed in His word. A teacher is someone who helps others remember, for there is little point in teaching if nothing is remembered. Therefore *the proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching is to "remember these things" in our own lives and to help and guide others in this same blessed remembering.* We will use Peter's second epistle to reflect on five parts of this thesis:

1. "Add to your faith" (1:5) The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching is done by one who lives the word she teaches.
2. "Springs without water, mists driven by a storm, cleverly invented stories" (2:17, 1:16) The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching is to use Scripture in that teaching.
3. "The words spoken in the past" (3:2) The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching emphasizes the setting of God's revelation.
4. "Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (3:18) The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching considers the characteristics of the child.
5. "You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place" (1:19) The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching results in independent, habitual Bible readers.

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"Add to your faith" (1:5)

**The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching
is done by one who lives the word she teaches.**

In simple and direct words Peter urges his readers to "participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world" (1:4). Peter illustrates this life of sanctification as a growing and developing process whereby the fruits of faith such as goodness, knowledge, self-control,

2Pet. 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: ² Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness; brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹ and you

perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love are incremental (1:5-7). Such growth is a necessary and natural result of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence. This growth is also to be found in a teacher's life and this growth is part of the proper use of Scripture.

Two qualities from Peter's list, faith and knowledge, show the importance of Scripture in the life of the teacher. Through such faith and knowledge the teacher becomes a model to illustrate how the Scripture, in Peter's words, "keeps us from being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8).

The word "knowledge" has several meanings in Scripture. In its most profound sense it includes knowing the message of salvation, a trusting faith in that message, and a faith-instilled desire to live as God commands. This knowledge begins in the fear of the Lord (Pr 1:7), a lack of this knowledge destroys (Hos 9:16), and this is the knowledge Paul describes himself as having (2 Co 11:6). Clearly, a Christian teacher needs such knowledge.

Knowledge also can refer to something more narrow: an intellectual understanding of Scripture. Apollos is described as having this kind of knowledge (Ac 18:24). A teacher of religion must know the content he is to teach; he must know the story of God's dealings with men as revealed in Scripture. Such knowledge is a gift of God who created our minds and our abilities. This knowledge also results from a diligent and consistent study of God's word. The preparation for every lesson taught in Word of God or Bible history class begins with a careful reading of the account from the Bible. The teacher does this reading whether it is the first or fiftieth time he teaches the lesson. This knowledge also results from a habitual pattern of daily Bible study, unrelated to class preparation.

Even in secular subjects there is a noticeable difference between a teacher who knows his subject thoroughly and one who knows only enough of the material to get through the lesson. A knowledgeable teacher is more confident and self-assured, he is comfortable with digressions from what he has planned, he is more willing to respond to questions raised by the class, he easily alludes to other areas of the subject, and he is generally more interesting because the examples he uses are richer and more frequent. The same is true in teaching religion. One of the easier things to observe in a religion class is the teacher's knowledge or lack of knowledge about Scripture. Granted lapses of memory, there is no substitute for knowing the Word you are to teach.

Many years ago, one writer described the qualities of a Bible-saturated teacher:

[This knowledge] is very different from the thin dribble of Bible that satisfies most of us, a sort of Bible dampness that requires the pressure of some terrific calamity to squeeze out a drop of sacred thought. Bible saturation is good for the daily toil and the daily pleasure. It gives us a Wednesday and Thursday Bible as well as a Sunday Bible. It makes the Bible our meat and drink, our home-ly meal, and not our occasional medicine.

A second characteristic that Peter mentions is faith. This is also the other part of the broader definition of knowledge. Of course, a teacher does not have to be a believer to bring others to faith. We believe in the efficacy of the word. That is, Scripture teaches that its power to convert is not dependent on the person or the means by which it is proclaimed. If an unbeliever knew the teachings of Scripture and he correctly taught law and gospel, the Holy Spirit would work faith in those who heard him.

will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ¹² So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. ¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2Pet. 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will

Nevertheless, we affirm that a teacher of religion also believes and trusts the message he teaches. Paul's listing of qualifications in Timothy and Titus does not realistically allow for the possibility of a hypocrite occupying the office of the public ministry. The salvation of the teacher is as important as the salvation of the students, and for his own salvation the teacher must believe what he teaches. It is also very unlikely for someone to teach correctly the Scripture if he does not value the Bible sufficiently to believe and trust in what it says.

The teacher of Scripture then combines, as guided by the Spirit, this knowledge and faith in his life and by that serves as a model to those he teaches. This is probably the greatest challenge to a teacher of the Scripture because it requires him to teach the religion class in all that he says and does. The religion lesson continues beyond the class period and it is taught by deeds as well as words. This is frightening to some teachers. They feel they are being held to a higher standard of conduct than those who are not religion teachers. They protest that they accept responsibility for what they teach in class, but they should not be held accountable for what their behavior teaches. They claim that they are entitled to some kind of life of their own outside the school. These protestations may have a logic in another context, but they do not hold in the public ministry or in someone who teaches God's Word (1 Ti 3:3-7; Tit 1:6-9; Jas 3:1; 1 Pe 5:3b).

A life that belies the Christian message confuses believers and unbelievers. This second epistle of Peter is an affirmation of this truth. Actions that contradict the message of Scripture bring shame to the church, consternation to the believers, comfort to the ungodly, and may even cause persons to lose their faith (Mk 9:42-43).

Children and young people are particularly susceptible to this confusion. They often do not understand well the abstractions of religion, such as forgiveness, neighborliness, stewardship, or charity. However, they do understand what people do. This is the concrete that they see and experience and from which they learn. It is unreasonable that teachers should claim that what they do should be separate from what they teach. What teachers do is part of what they teach.

The modeling of the Christian life that is obligatory for teachers is best done in the context in which it typically occurs. Role-playing is a useful method but the message is best modeled in real life. A teacher who makes evangelism calls teaches the lesson more effectively than the teacher who sets up a role-playing situation in the classroom.

The student also must understand what is being modeled to learn the modeled behavior. What you see may not be what you get. If a teacher does not carefully teach children and young people what is involved in certain behaviors, the children may fail to learn from the modeled behavior or they may learn incorrectly. For example, more than one child has puzzled at the behavior of adults who bow their heads when they sit in the pew after entering church. One child, when asked what he did when he bowed his head as the adults were doing said, "I count to twenty." Modeling without instruction can be confusing.

Children also must understand the motive for behavior. If they do not receive instruction on motivation, they can become like Pharisees, whitewashed tombs, whose actions were commendable but whose hearts were dead. There is a frequently-told story that illustrates this: A Christian and an unbeliever were neighbors. The Christian, although he never said anything to his unbelieving neighbor, lived his Christian life. He was kind and helpful, friendly and willing to lend a hand to his neighbor. He taught his family well and they too lived in faith and trust in God's love and promise. One day the unbeliever came to the Christian and

secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. ⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶ if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— ⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. ¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; ¹¹ yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. ¹² But

said, "I am very impressed by your and your family's lives. You live in a way that I want to live and I've decided to make a great change in my life to be like you. I'm going to become a vegetarian also."

Modeling is an important way of teaching and learning. It is important because it reinforces and provides examples for what has been taught. Modeling and teaching Scripture go together. One without the other is an incomplete and often a wrongly taught lesson.

Many discussions on the teaching of Scripture begin or end with the person who teaches. This may sound a bit teacher-centered to some. But those who know Scripture and its power, also know that there is no practical way to separate the message from the messenger. And for the sake of the messenger's salvation, we should not try.

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**"Springs without water, mists driven by a storm,
cleverly invented stories" (2:17, 1:16)**

**The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching
is to use Scripture in that teaching.**

This second thesis sounds like a tautology: how can you teach Scripture without using Scripture? Peter knew this was not a tautology and he knew people who did teach Scripture without Scripture: "They secretly introduce destructive heresies ... they exploit you with stories they have made up ... they mouth empty, boastful words ..." (2:1,18). Unfortunately such people are still with us today and the words, "springs without water, mists driven by a storm, and cleverly invented stories" describe many religion curriculums today.

The following is an illustration of such a curriculum. It is from a junior high school religion curriculum published by a Lutheran synod. The objective for this lesson states that "students will understand that Jesus' disciples are called to be peacemakers, [they will] see that striving for peace involves work and struggle, and [they will] commit themselves to the promotion of peace." The lesson begins with a two-page story on the life of Albert Schweitzer. The children discuss this story to establish the point that a Christian has reverence for life and he or she works for world peace, even as Schweitzer did. Next the students discuss the second and fifth petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Here the points made are that a godly life will strive for peace within families and within the world and that a spirit of forgiveness will keep us from going to war with other people. Finally, in the fourth section of the lesson, children are instructed to read Isaiah 11:1-10 and Ephesians 2:11-16. Here the discussion and activities for these references bring out that in Jesus peace will reign on earth and Jesus has broken the tension between Jews and Gentiles. Then follows an activity for the children to mark actions that either promote peace or do not promote peace (e.g., "always strive to be number one," "look for good points in people who oppose you"). Finally, there is an assignment that includes memory work, some writing and drawing activities that focus on a reverence for life, and some suggestions for devotions and prayers.

Let us consider this curriculum with the three phrases of Peter: springs without water, mists driven by a storm, and cleverly invented stories.

Springs without water

The student materials in this curriculum are attractive and colorful. The activities and the assignments are thought-provoking and engaging.

these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. ¹³ They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. ¹⁴ With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! ¹⁵ They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. ¹⁶ But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness. ¹⁷ These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸ For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. ²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred

Junior high students would likely find the material interesting and the class stimulating. The materials are an attractive and inviting "spring"; but it is a spring without water, containing only dust. The peace the lesson describes is not the peace Isaiah describes. Isaiah's peace is to troubled consciences and reconciliation between God and men that the Branch of Jesse will bring. Peace among nations can be a fruit of the gospel, but it is not the gospel nor the reason for which Christ came into this world. There is no conviction of sin or proclamation of the gospel in this lesson. There is no preaching of either law or gospel in any of the eight lessons in the booklet. There are 31 objectives in the teacher's manual for the eight lessons. None of these objectives relates even peripherally to the central doctrines of Scripture: sin, grace, or the nature of Christ. The second booklet in the series does preach Christ, sin, and salvation. But one lesson in this second booklet states that Christ is our savior because "he has come to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. This is what it means to say that Christ redeems us." Sin is described as something within us that refuses to trust in God and the law is presented somewhat confusingly as either a guide or rule: "God gave [the commandments] out of love for us and because God wants peace, order, and justice for our lives as we await the completion of the kingdom's coming." The student actually learns more in this curriculum about the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr., St. Francis, Deitrich Bonhoeffer, Elizabeth Fedde, J.S. Bach, and Polycarp than he or she does about the life and work of Christ.

The religion found in such waterless-spring curriculums is simple, dead, and unscriptural: "God loves you very much and He will make your friends like you, your parents love you, your school work easier, and your dog well. Your task in life now is to go out and be nice to everyone." There is no sin, no redemption, and no eternity. Religion is for the immediate concerns. It is the best good-luck charm in the world and it is a sure way to end discrimination and all the bad things in this world."

Consider another example:

The children read Psalm 95:1-7. The title of the lesson is "Focus on hands." The teacher's manual suggests that the teacher "have each person look at his/her hands, then respond spontaneously as a group" to questions such as, "What would it be like to be without hands?" The teacher also could direct the children to "look through magazines to find pictures of hands expressing feelings and actions of hands. Make individual or group montages." The teacher also should have the children form a circle, hold hands, and sing, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." The manual also suggests, "With the group in a circle holding hands or possibly putting hands and arms around each other's shoulders or waists, the feeling of closeness is communicated. Our hands bring us closer together." The teacher also can read a poem about hands. Then the students can "go to the table where there is clay. Play and create with the clay in any way that expresses your feelings in response to what we have done or to the poem." The sessions concludes with the teacher asking, "What have you learned about Psalm 95?"

This is a waterless spring.

Mists driven by a storm

The second point is a bit more subtle. To illustrate this point, think about the arrangement of the Albert Schweitzer lesson described above. You will recall that the story of Schweitzer formed the basis for the discussion about peace. Only after the point was established from the life of Schweitzer did the teacher then refer the children to Scripture. The discussion on the Scripture text was used to complement an already-established

command that was passed on to them. ²² Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

2Pet. 3:1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. ² I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. ³ First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and

lished truth. Scripture was not the foundation or the starting point of the lesson. Kenneth Heintz calls this teaching the illustration rather than the text. ("Teach the Text, Not the Illustration," *Lutheran Education*, March/April 1985, 222-227). A teacher uses this approach because he or she mistakenly believes Scripture is too cognitive or remote from the lives of children and thus she needs a good illustration to teach the affective goals of the lesson. Conversely, this backward teaching can be found in religion lessons for older students and apparently is inspired by the belief that Scripture is too simple and something more profound and sophisticated is needed. In this type of logic, a story about Albert Schweitzer is better than a story from Scripture. One suspects that this type of teaching also results from a belief that a truth must be abstracted from every lesson. Nailing down the truth becomes more important than what that truth is based on. A curriculum writer for the Schweitzer lesson may have thought: "A religion lesson must teach a truth. The truth this series calls for is peace on earth. What story can I use to teach the importance of peace? Ah, a story on Albert Schweitzer. Now after I've used the Schweitzer story to teach the truth, what Scripture passages also show that?"

A religion lesson or curriculum is a "mist driven by a storm" when the basis or content of the lesson is a secular or contemporary event. Like an early morning mist, there is no substance to such a lesson.

Teachers need to be alert to such lessons or curriculums. Most readers would recognize the danger of basing a religion lesson on a secular story or a discussion of a current event. Most Lutheran teachers today also understand that teaching may become overly cognitive and lacking in affective goals; but they also understand that the problem is their teaching, not Scripture. In our current religion curriculum and in the new religion curriculum, ChristLight, the lesson is built around a fulfilled aim or truth. Each lesson has a particular truth that is to be taught. That type of teaching also can result in a "mist driven by a storm." In our curriculum the truth is established on the basis of a narrative or story from the Bible (Bible history classes) or from several Bible references and passages (Catechism classes). This procedure is certainly preferable to the Albert Schweitzer approach. But there are still traps in such a procedure. The first is in the approach or background to the lesson; the second is in the application.

In many new religion curriculums and probably also in the new ChristLight curriculum, the approach, introduction, or background has grown in length and importance. The findings of cognitive psychology and the perceived need for motivating students have emphasized the importance of the introduction to a lesson. Scaffolding, advance organizers, and anticipatory set have made their way into the vocabulary of religion teachers and curriculum writers. So now what was generally a brief paragraph of two or three sentences in the teachers manuals has become an extended list of worship activities, games, and stories. The introduction to the lesson could become longer than the lesson and the point of the lesson may be taught in the introduction rather than through the Scripture narrative. This, in fact, is what I term "naive teaching" in religion, teaching done by persons before they have training in religion methods and by persons who don't understand the basis of a religion lesson. Such teachers teach an "Albert Schweitzer" lesson. They typically begin by using a contemporary or familiar event in the children's lives, such as teasing or opportunities to witness to others. These events are discussed and analyzed and the point (or moral) is established that we ought not tease or we should witness. Then the teacher tells the story of the Good Samaritan or Philip and the

everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Ethiopian. After a brief discussion of the content of the story, the children are asked again to tell why they shouldn't tease or should witness. The children say they shouldn't tease because it's not nice or they should witness because that is a fun thing to do. The lesson ends and the mist blows away. The approach has become the heart of the lesson and the point of the Scripture narrative is vague or unimportant.

But even if you have avoided this Scylla of the approach, there remains the Charybdis of the application. Consider again a typical lesson: the teacher has an introduction that does what introductions are supposed to do—provide a setting of time, place, or conceptually for the truth of the new lesson, without teaching that truth. The teacher tells the Bible story and through discussion questions or some other comprehension strategy she establishes the truth. The teacher writes the truth on the chalkboard, pauses, takes a breath, and says, "Now let's see what this means in our lives." She then draws examples from the students or supplies her own that illustrate in today's world the sin shown in the Bible lesson or the guidance in sanctification illustrated by a character in the Bible story. The scenario ought to be familiar to all religion teachers and if pressed, somemight even be able to outline the parts of the lesson plan that describe these activities.

I have no intent to derogate the plan or these pieces of a religion lesson. The plan provides an important structure for a religion lesson and the method of teaching religion is an effective strategy that lets the word of God predominate in the lesson. But teachers need to reflect and analyze what the application can do to a religion lesson. First, there is a sense given that the real part of the lesson, in terms of interest and relevance, is in the application. The story is about strange people long ago. The application takes us away from these long-ago and far-away people. We can't really appreciate a Bible lesson until we put it into a contemporary setting. A lesson without a taught application in this perspective seems an incomplete lesson. We learn a Bible lesson when we "see what it means in our lives." The characters in the Bible narrative are really not like us because the meaning of the events and doings of God in their lives are really not the same as in our lives. We have to get out of the time and place of the Bible, away from people who rode donkeys and wore funny clothes, and we have to talk about people who ride airplanes and wear Adidas before we can see the meaning of the religion lesson. The Bible isn't understandable without our illustrations, we believe, and our illustrations thus may come to replace the text of Scripture.

Of course, the above is an exaggeration, an exaggeration to make a couple points. First, the text of Scripture is the only basis of what we teach. We can regale our students with endless anecdotes from our lives, we can skillfully exercise our Socratic questioning skills, we can hold stimulating discussions, we can break our classes in dozens of cooperative work groups. But if what we teach, if the realization of our sinful condition, the balm for our conscience, the direction for our life of sanctification come from anecdotes or logic, we will indeed have religion lessons that are "mists drive by a storm." In addition, the parts of a religion lesson must serve the teaching of the word; they have no point apart from that service. Finally, as useful as the structure of a religion lesson has, the structure also must serve the teaching of the word. When it doesn't, it is best discarded.

cleverly invented stories

The third in this trilogy of word-less religion classes is a lesson whose Bible content or presentation has been altered in such a way as to raise



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questions about the truthfulness or reality of the content. In this category are included most video presentations of Bible stories, some renderings of Bible stories in contemporary language (See Box 1), and methods of teaching that fantasize the story. These content changes and presentation modes are done—to judge charitably—to engage the interest and attention of children and to make the Bible relevant in their lives. The authors and producers say, “We need to make a video of Bible stories as interesting and technically advanced as Star Wars, we need to produce a book with the ‘pick-me-up’ attractiveness of Superman Comics, we need to devise a presentation with a character as engaging as the purple dinosaur Barney. We need to do this because that is what children are like and want today.” Thus Turner Entertainment and Hanna Barbera have series of videos, which while not on the same level as Star Wars or Fantasia, do encourage the same fantasy. One of the largest selling Bibles is the Picture Bible—a full-length cartoon rendering of Scripture. While Barney has yet to make his debut into a religion curriculum, most other cartoon characters have.

Many Christians have mixed emotions about these types of Bible presentations. These presentations often involve content changes that are related to the issues of children and fantasy, a combination the Christian often has a difficult time resolving. Fantasy and imagination are important human characteristics. They are part of God’s creative gift to us. They are also particular to and charming characteristics of children and we recognize their role in social and cognitive development. We know many Christians dislike imaginary characters such as Santa Claus, Easter bunnies, and Halloween inventions. We are uncomfortable with such as these because they aren’t real and they intrude themselves and their messages in Christian times and places. Children, we feel, shouldn’t be distracted or misled by these fantasies. But we also understand that childhood without fantasy and imagination, without that imaginary playmate and that wonderful and engaging dollhouse and sandbox would be a different and poorer childhood. Thus we are ambivalent toward childhood (and adult) fantasy. At least Albert Schweitzer was a real person.

So what are we to do with robots, flying houses, and singing squirrels appearing in Bible lessons? This observer has concluded that they have no place or function in religion classes, home devotions, or Bible study. A presentation that uses the technique of time travel to introduce modern characters in a Bible story is a wrong presentation of the Word. A Bible story told by a teacher using an animal puppet as the teller is a wrong presentation of the Word. A telling of the Palm Sunday story from the perspective of the donkey is a very bad idea. A picture showing Garfield at the foot of the cross pondering the significance of the event is very distasteful and offensive. Any un-real adaptation or addition to a Bible lesson, either in content or mode of presentation, confuses the real with the fantasy and can lead to the conclusion that the entire lesson is fantasy. Then you have a “cleverly invented story.”

Years ago when television had notions of being educational, Walter Cronkite was host to a program entitled “You Are There.” The introduction to each program intoned this message. “All things are as they were then ... except YOU ARE THERE.” In the programs Cronkite would be a television reporter at the time of some major historical event. He would interview the characters and the program would reenact the story. The Christian religion seemed more respected in those days and I don’t recall any program that directly showed Christ. But there was something monumentally incongruous about a television reporter holding a microphone in Julius Caesar’s face while Caesar stares bemusedly at the unseen television camera. The viewer had to keep shifting between thoughts of “What is

Box 1

Totally Awesome! The Valley Bible

So like there was this old dude who has two sons, the younger one was like y’know a total babe, for sure. The older one was a total zod, like a real space cadet, totally. So the young dude is like freakin’ out, like totally bored and stuff. There was nothing to do, like nothing. So he goes to his dad and says, “I’m sure, I’m going to stay here the rest of my life. Like gag me with a spoon. I mean barf me out. This place is totally gross, like grody to the max. I want like my share of your mega-bucks so I can like pig out on junk food and buy clothes, for sure.” So his dad like gave him his share of the mega-bucks and like this young babe went totally spaz. For sure. Like scarf and junk food and lowies to the max. And rolfing all night long. Like totally freaked out. I am so sure. Gag me.



real?" and "What is make believe?" I have the same feeling when I see a video with a robot helping Joseph and Mary on their journey to Bethlehem. Questions about what is real and what is fantasy are not questions we want children to ask in a religion lesson. Religion lessons ought not have impossible or imaginary characters or events as part of the content or presentation. The Bible is true and real. Time travel is imaginary. Both can exist in a child's life, but they cannot exist together.

Someone once observed the effort of religion curriculum writers to make religion relevant to children. Writers sometimes try to do this by leaving out the hard parts like sin and death, by emphasizing the nice parts like love and shepherds, by incorporating cute things like Precious Moments characters, and by adding color and movement in cartoon videos. The result is a children's religion. Such a religion is abandoned by adolescents along with their Teddy Bears and other childish things. Much is made of the need to adapt the religion curriculum to the children of today. We shouldn't lose sight of the point that children are the ones who need to be changed. And changing people is something Scripture does very well.

.....

"The words spoken in the past"

The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching emphasizes the setting of God's revelation.

In sharp contrast to these fables, wind-blown mist, and water-less springs, Peter testifies that he has been an eyewitness to the reality of Christ's majesty and he confesses that he has the word of the prophets made more certain. Here is a teaching and a religion curriculum with substance. This substance and surety come primarily from Christ, the eternal Word and the truth that this content did not have its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (1:21). The substance and surety also is a part of the setting in which God revealed His nature and His actions. The narratives in Scripture do not take place in some Hindu mythical kingdom or otherworldly place. They took place in an actual place and at an actual historical time. The landforms that Abraham saw can be seen today. The ground on which Jesus walked is land on which people today walk. If there had been anything they could have said to each other, Nehemiah could have talked with Socrates and Daniel with Croesus. People today can and do trace their ancestry to Abraham. The setting of Scripture is real both in space and time.

This historical perspective of the Bible narratives is also a valuable counterbalance to modern approaches to Bible study. The emphasis in Bible study and many religion curriculums is that the student is to discover the meaning that the Scripture text or narrative has for him. In literature this relativism goes by the name of deconstructionism. Deconstructionism discards or denigrates an objective meaning inherent in the text or in the author's mind. The real meaning of the text is in the reader's

Variant Readings
Nine Versions of the Same Story

The Paralyzed Man
The Original

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" (Mark 2:1-12)

The Paralyzed Man

At another time, Jesus was in Capharnaum. When the people heard that he was staying at a certain house, they went to see Him and to listen to His teaching. Soon a great crowd gathered in the house, and the doorway was jammed with people trying to get in. Outside in the street there were many more who were trying to see Jesus over the heads of those in front of them.

Four men came along, carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They tried to push their way through the crowd and enter the house, but the people would not make way for them. Finally they thought of a plan. The

mind and understanding; every reader has his or her legitimate meaning. A current example of that personalized or relativistic approach to Bible study is the Serendipity Bible. The focus of most of the thousands of discussion questions in this Bible is on the personal meaning the text has. Now there is nothing improper about looking for personal meaning in the study of the Bible; the Bible is a very personal book in that it speaks to individuals about sin and salvation. But in Bible study and in religion classes, the student must first see the objective truth that is in that Scripture text, which was placed there by a real author with just that intent, and that contains a propositional or given revelation, apart from any private meaning. Peter affirms that in this epistle when he states—as an established truth—“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (1:21). Students first learn a biblical narrative and understand the historical setting of the narrative, and they see that the events had a particularly meaning to the characters in the story. God had something to say to these persons whose story is told in Scripture. The students can then understand that God’s message transcends time and place and has meaning for all persons in all eras. Relativism has no place in this perspective.

In the religion curriculums used in our synod, all the way back to and before Ernst’s *Biblische Geschichte*, we have used a chronological approach to our curriculums. Each year in late August or early September, 31,243 children in WELS elementary schools have the common experience of hearing a teacher begin the year’s study of religion with the words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The new ChristLight Coordinated Religion Curriculum will continue this tradition, even more so. In our current curriculum in grades kindergarten through fourth grade, Old and New Testament stories are included in both yearly cycles. The new curriculum will return to an earlier approach where each yearly cycle in a two-year pattern teaches either the Old or the New Testament lessons, but not both.

There are compelling theological reasons for this chronological emphasis. The Old Testament prophecies point to a Messiah who came and revealed Himself in the New Testament. The Old Testament has its meaning and fulfillment in the New and the New Testament looks back to and references the Old. There also may be philosophical and psychological reasons for this chronological emphasis. When we structure a curriculum around the history of God’s people, we are emphasizing to students the reality of the stories and we are providing a structure or organizer into which students can incorporate what they learn: Abraham had a son named Isaac who had a son named Jacob who had several sons We are, in fact, one of the few churches which still uses the chronological or historical sequencing of Bible lessons in a religion curriculum. Even the LC-MS is apparently having second thoughts about that approach in their religion curriculums.

The chronological design has been effective in helping our students acquire a broad understanding of the entire revelation of Scripture. We hope they have also acquired an appreciation of and a sensitivity to the historical setting and reality of the Bible narrative and are by that better able to interpret Scripture. The downside is that we haven’t had much practice in developing good topical approaches, particularly at the elementary school level. Our topics

houses of the time had flat roofs, so they climbed up to the roof of the house and lowered the stretcher with the sick man on it through an opening in the roof.

This act of faith pleased Jesus very much and He said to the sick man, “Son, thy sins are forgiven thee” (Mark 2:5).

Hearing this, some of the Scribes who were there were scandalized and thought to themselves. “Why does this man speak thus? He blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins but only God?” (Mark 2:7-8).

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why are you arguing these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up thy pallet and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He now turned to the sick man—“I say to thee, arise, take up thy pallet and go into thy house” (Mark 2:8-12). Immediately the man rose, took up the stretcher on which he had been lying, and carried it away, glorifying God as he walked along. And the people seeing him, gave praise to God, saying, “Never did we see the like” (Mark 2:12).

Bible History, Benziger, 1931 (#7)

Jesus and the Paralytic

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that He had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and He preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blasphem-

tend to be somewhat forced themes tying several lessons together, e.g., "Sinful self-reliance needs to be changed to reliance on God," as the theme for the three lessons, Jacob and Laban; Jacob's Return, Prayer, Wrestling With God; and Peter's Deliverance From Prison. (ChristLight Coordinated Religion Curriculum, Cycle 1, 1st quarter)

The other downside in this chronological emphasis is that it occasionally leads us into cul-de-sacs. For example, in cycle 1, third quarter, the suggested lessons include Saul is Chosen, Victory; Saul Takes Sin Lightly, Rejected; Saul's Jealousy, Jonathan Defends; David's Conduct in Persecution; Idolatry of Solomon and Jeroboam; Hezekiah and Assyrian Invasion; Hezekiah and Isaiah; Return Under Ezra and Nehemiah; as well as some of the better known stories from this part of the Old Testament. There is nothing inappropriate about the selection of these stories and they are part of the chronology of the Old Testament. But they are also scheduled to be taught to four- and five-year olds. Such stories present a considerable challenge to the authors of the new curriculum and they will continue to present a challenge to teachers of young children.

A chronological or historical sequence in a religion curriculum may have a theological and pedagogical relevance appropriate more for adolescents and adults than for young children. The historical setting is important and God's dealing with His people occurred in real time. However, using an organization scheme, such as a topical system, rather than a chronological, Genesis to Acts, arrangement will still allow the teacher to teach the Bible as a story of real, time-ordered events. In fact, the "realness" of the scriptural narrative is to be found more in the persons and actions of the story than in the way we sequence the stories. The task of the teacher in presenting "the words spoken in the past" is to make the persons and events of the Bible narratives real, not just historically real, but also real in terms of those who hear that narrative.

To illustrate, a visiting pastor once gave a devotion to our college students as part of an evangelism presentation. The devotion was based on the Old Testament Passover and the selection of the lamb for the sacrifice. As he recounted the events for the preparation for the Passover, he took the role of a child. The dramatic moment came when the child realizes what will be sacrificed—the pet lamb. The effect on the audience was impressive. Everyone in the assembly understood—emotionally and intellectually—the narrative and how that Old Testament event pointed to a greater sacrifice of God's beloved Son. The assembly also understood how that yearly celebration affected and taught the Jewish family, father, mother, and children. The chaplain in the devotion made the story real. He made it real not by placing the story in its historical setting—although that was part of it. He made it real by showing that the characters were real. Because God worked through him and his skill, that story is now more a part of the lives of those who witnessed that devotion. Much is said about the need for affective objectives in religion classes. Affective objectives include, among other things, a curriculum that provides for and a teacher's skill that promotes a student's grasp of the personal reality of that story. God works through teachers, expecting them to use the skills He provides. When He does this and when we are faithful to our ministry of teaching, "the words spoken in the past" become words for today.

ing! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and He said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" *Bible History, NPH, 1984 (#1)*

The Man Sick of the Palsy

Jesus had been on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, in the land of the Gadarenes and Gergesenes. But the people there did not welcome Him, for, after He had driven devils out of two men, they asked Jesus to leave their country. So the Lord and His disciples returned to Capernaum. This story shows us how differently the people there acted, and how He proved to them still more that He was truly the Son of God.

And He entered into a ship and passed over and came into His own city. And, behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying upon a bed, which was borne by four. And when they could not come nigh unto Him for the press, they uncovered the roof where He was and let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, "Son, be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee."

And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, "This man blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins but God only?" Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier to say, 'Thy sins be forgiven

.....

“Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (3:18)

The Proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching considers the characteristics of the child.

Growth is a familiar theme in both Old and New Testaments. The writers were often men of the earth who knew planting and harvest; they also knew people and how people grow. Thus the writers remind their readers of growth and encourage them to apply that metaphor to their lives. Peter’s closing words in his epistle also do this.

These words fit all believers because growth, spiritual growth, is part of the definition of spiritual life: we grow and live and we live and grow. But Peter’s words are also words teachers say to children and they are words that can guide us in our selection and use of Scripture in our teaching ministries. We will consider just one aspect of this guideline for teaching: the selection and rewriting of Scripture narratives for teaching children.

Religion curriculum writers in our conservative synod have not taken readily to rewriting Scripture for use with children. A.F. Ernst’s text (1884), J.P. Meyer’s text (1928), and even R.M. Albrecht’s and O. Hagedorn’s *Stories From the Bible* (1947) used the KJV text, with no modification or explanation. Even the reprinting of the Meyer text (*Bible History for Christian Schools*) kept the KJV translation as is. Ernst’s text did make a concession but only in the different selection of stories for lower, middle, and upper grades. Only in 1955 with the publication of *Bible Stories* did we have a “written down” Bible story book for our schools. Our current religion curriculum has three books (*Children’s Garden of Learning*, *Primary Bible History*, and *Children’s Bible History*) with reworked texts. The text for middle grades (*Bible History*) uses the NIV text without change. The new curriculum will have rewritten stories for the grades below five.

The LC-MS also did not rush into rewritten children’s texts. CPH’s much-reprinted and renamed editions of *One Hundred Bible Stories* contained unadulterated KJV text, sometimes relieved with explanatory footnotes. You can still buy the book: same colored pictures, same KJV text, but now in paperback for \$9.95. That book is a living testimony to the enduring power and hold a textbook can have. There were, and still are, those classic Bible story books by E.E. Egermeier and Catherine Vos, but those, at least in our schools, were not used as textbooks in religion classes. They were more suited, as we saw them, as afternoon devotion material.

The hesitancy or disinclination to rewrite Scripture for a children’s religion textbook has some thoughtful lessons and raises some questions about how we use Scripture in our teaching. The WELS did not believe it to be wrong to rewrite Scripture for children. Luther wrote a *Passionale*, a Bible history book with pictures and explanatory text for children as a companion book to his catechism. The German Lutherans who immigrated to this country had written-down Bible story books for children, often with color pictures. But the German fathers also had debates and questions regarding developmentally appropriate material for children. The best known and worst aberration was Tuishon Ziller’s (1817-1882) religion curricu-

thee,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins,” then saith He to the man sick of the palsy, “Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.” And he arose and departed to his house.

But when the multitude saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

Bible Stories, CPH, nd (#5)

Jesus Heals a Sick Man

On the shore of the Sea of Galilee was a city called Capernaum. Jesus often came to this city to preach. Many of His friends lived there.

One day when Jesus came to Capernaum, a great many people gathered to hear Him preach. They crowded into the house. Even the street outside was filled with people. Four men came to the house brining a sick man to Jesus to be healed. The man was sick with palsy and could not walk. He had to be carried on a bed.

When the men could not come near Jesus because of the crowd, they carried the sick man up the stairway to the housetop. They made an opening in the flat roof, and let down their sick friend on his bed right before Jesus.

Jesus was glad to see how much faith and trust these men had in Him. He said to the sick man, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven.”

Some of Jesus’ enemies were also present in the house that day. When they heard Jesus speak of forgiving sins, they said to themselves, “How dare this man say that? Only God can forgive sins.”

Jesus then turned to the sick man and said, “Arise, take up your bed, and go home.” At once the man stood up, picked up his bed, and went to his house.

The people were filled with wonder. They praised God, saying, “Never before have we seen such things.”

Bible Stories, NPH, 1955 (#9)

lum. Because he considered the Bible too difficult for young children, he based his religion curriculum on fairy tales in grades one and two. Reu's comments on Ziller's curriculum are strikingly similar to the issues raised in part two of this essay. In evaluating Ziller's scheme Reu said, "The putting of [fairy] tales into the service of religious instruction might involve the risk, by no means to be underestimated, that confidence in the truth of what is taught in the period devoted to religion is shaken, and the child becomes inclined to consider the subsequent biblical stories as mere tales, at least to view their thaumaturgic character with skepticism" (*Catechetics*). Reu, however, was not above expanding and altering a Bible story for pedagogical purposes. He wrote a series of books (*How I Tell the Bible Stories to My Sunday School*) in which he scripts out how he tells the Bible stories. The stories are very long, sometimes over 7000 words, containing his own interpretations (Jesus' mother taught him arithmetic because there were no schools), his own brand of psychology (babies are unconscious), and miscellaneous tidbits (Jerusalem was the same size as Dubuque).

But children were tougher years ago, readability formulas were not yet discovered, and television had not yet reduced the attention span of children to half a commercial. So now we and nearly every other religious publisher rewrite Scripture for children.

Rewriting Scripture for a children's book presents a considerable challenge. One is struck by the terseness of the account in the Bible and most rewriters apparently want to correct this brevity. Their rewriting generally produces a longer text. The chart (Table 1) below is the result of a demented flurry of readability analyses. There are nine rewritten versions of the lesson, Jesus Heals the Paralyzed Man (see side boxes). The account in Mark is also included. The readability of the rewritten texts is generally better than the original, the sentences tended to be shorter, but in some cases the number of sentences in the passive voice increased.

TABLE 1
Readability and Rewrites

Book	Grade Level	Words	Reading ease score	Passive voice (%)	Average Sentence Length	Average Word Length (Syllables)
#1	7	241	77	8	18.5	1.31
#2	2	529	95	7	8.8	1.23
#3	5	304	86	8	12.6	1.28
#4	5	382	88	8	12.8	1.25
#5	7	280	77	13	18.6	1.31
#6	4	445	91	5	12.3	1.22
#7	6	318	83	10	15.9	1.27
#8	6	588	83	12	14.7	1.29
#9	4	246	88	10	12.3	1.26
Mark	7	241	77	8	18.5	1.31

The writers also wanted to explain and add to the picture of the original text. A stairway, for example, appears on the side of the house in many of the rewritten versions of this story. Presumably this comes as an archeological induction rather than an analysis of

The Paralyzed Man

Jesus had visited many cities of Galilee preaching and teaching the Word of God. Wherever He went, He had attracted large crowds who listened to what He had to say and who brought their sick to Him that He might heal them. Now Jesus came back to the city of Capernaum. Since He had been rejected by the people of Nazareth, the city where He had been brought up, He now made Capernaum His home city. It was also the city where some of His disciples lived. Here He would return for rest and from here He would set out on His travels again.

It didn't take long before the news of Jesus' arrival spread quickly through the city of Capernaum. Soon a crowd gathered at the house in which He was staying. The people filled the house so full that not another person could get inside. So some of the people had to stand outside. There were so many of them that they filled the courtyard and overflowed into the street.

While Jesus was busy preaching to the crowd, four men came to the house where Jesus was. They were bringing a sick friend to Jesus, so Jesus could make him well. The sick man was paralyzed, so they carried him on a stretcher. They tried to make their way through the crowd to take their friend to Jesus. But since the house was packed to the doors and no one was willing to step aside and lose his place, they couldn't get through to Jesus.

But the four men would not give up. They were determined to see Jesus because they believed that He could heal their friend. So when they saw that they could not get to Jesus through the crowd, they climbed the stairway on the outside of the house which led up to the flat roof. There they made an opening in the roof by removing the tiles. When the opening was large enough, they tied four ropes to the corners of the stretcher. Then they lowered the paralyzed man down in the

the words of the text. Generally we aren't upset over such additions to Scripture. Pastor Franzmann in his writing of the *Children's Bible History* does this rather frequently. These additions are implied in the narrative, they add something useful to the picture we have of the original text, and they often preempt a child's question. We are more uncomfortable, however, with a watering down of the narrative or with interpretations of the events that are wrong or at least questionable. Box 2 shows one such "watering down." The reader isn't always quite sure what the writer did with the Zacchaeus story. Sin seems to have become like a grubby hand that you can decide to wash clean. Salvation becomes a warm fuzzy feeling. The rewriting seems uncomfortable because it doesn't ring true. When the rewriting is more clearly a bald-faced interpretation, we notice it quickly. Note, however, that Lutherans and Catholics do this equally well (Box 3).

Box 2

Zacchaeus sat with his head in his hands. He was thinking about a problem he had. Today was the day that Jesus was coming to town. Wherever Jesus went there were such large crowds that it was very hard to push through to see Him. And, to make things even worse, Zacchaeus was a very little man. He was almost like some of the midgets you may have seen.

As he sat there thinking, he got a brainstorm. "That's it," he shouted as he jumped up. "That's exactly what I'll do! I'll climb a tree."

He began looking for the perfect one. Not just any tree would do. At last he found a sycamore tree that seemed just right. It was next to the road that Jesus would use. He scrambled up to the biggest branch that leaned over the road. He wiggled around until he felt comfortable. Then he waited.

In a short time he heard voices from a distance. He peeked through the leaves and looked. Sure enough! He could see the huge crowd. They were coming straight down the road, right toward him. Zacchaeus was so excited. He watched them come closer and closer. Soon he could see Jesus Himself.

Just as Jesus came to the tree, He looked right at Zacchaeus and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry, come down from that tree. I'm coming to your house for supper."

Zacchaeus couldn't believe what he heard. He was so surprised that he almost lost his balance. As fast as he could, he tumbled down and took Jesus to his home. As they ate supper Jesus told Zacchaeus that if he believed that Jesus would clean his heart from sin he would go to heaven someday. Zacchaeus answered, "I do believe. I do. I do."

Jesus said, "Zacchaeus, today you became a child of mine because you have trusted me. I love you and will take care of you forever."

These observations about the process of rewriting Scripture to meet the development needs of children help us evaluate our attitude toward the text of Scripture as it is used in our teaching ministry. When teachers encounter rewritings of Scripture, the first thing that likely comes to mind is "verbal inspiration." The WELS doctrinal statements define this as "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is in its entirety, in its parts, and in its very words inspired by the Holy Spirit." Teachers may have different understandings of that however. There is a belief by some teachers that a Bible history book is a second hand version of the Bible; it is not the real thing because it doesn't have the "real words." There are some teachers, for example, who use the Bible as the textbook in primary grades because they believe that it is a better religion class if nothing "stands between the children and the Bible."

crowd right in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw how strongly they believed that he would help, He said to the paralyzed man, "Cheer up, My son! Your sins are forgiven you." When some of the Jewish religious leaders who were in the crowd heard this, they said to themselves. "Who does He think He is? He is blaspheming. Only God can forgive sins. Why, He is claiming to be God!"

But Jesus knew what they were thinking. He asked them, "Why are you thinking such evil thoughts? Why is this blasphemy? Do you think it is easier to say to this man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, and walk'? There is no difference because only God with His power can forgive and only God can heal. But now I want to make it very plain to you that I, the Son of man (the promised Savior), have the power and right to forgive sins. To prove that to you I will heal this man." Then He turned and said to the paralyzed man, "Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home!"

And the man sprang to his feet, made his way through the crowd and went home!

When the crowd saw this they said, "We've never seen anything like this before." They were filled with fear and wonder, and they glorified God, because He had given to men the power to heal and to forgive sins.

Children's Bible History, NPH 1973 (#8)

One Very Amazing Day

This has been the best day of my life! It all began when I heard Jesus was coming back to Capernaum. I just knew I had to see Him. But how? I was paralyzed. I couldn't move from my bed mat.

So four of my friends offered to carry me to Jesus. But when we got to the house, there were so many people that we couldn't get near the door. Then my friends had an idea. [Read Mark 2:3,4 to see what they did.]

I landed right in front of Jesus! I'll never forget what He said to

Box 3

Which is the Lutheran version and which is the Catholic version?

One day, toward the end of His public life, Jesus and the apostles were walking through the country to the east of the Jordan. They were near the town of Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus turned to them suddenly and said, "Whom do men say the Son of Man is?"

The apostles answered, "Some say, John the Baptist; others, Elias; others, Jeremia, or one of the prophets." Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:13-15).

Simon Peter answered in the name of all the rest, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Then Jesus said to him, "Blessed art thou, Simon, BarJona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to thee, but my Father in heave. And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heave; and whatever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:17-19).

By these words, Jesus revealed to Simon Peter and to the rest of the apostles the great work they were to do in the world. Peter would be the head of the apostles and holder of sole authority. His infallibility would be passed on to his successors, and only he and his successors would make laws to bind the whole Church. God would watch over all the apostles and protect them from error. Later, after His resurrection, Jesus would again assert the primary of Peter in His Church.

After this the disciples had reported what other people were saying about Him, Jesus put the question very bluntly to His disciples, "But you—who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered for all of them, "You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the true and living God!"

Jesus said to him: You have been wonderfully blessed by God, Simon! You did not get this great truth out of your own heart and mind. No human mind could ever find this saving truth. God Himself has opened your eyes and shown this to you.

"And I now tell you, You are Peter, a stone" (this is the meaning of the name 'Peter') "and upon this rock" (a solid bed of rock) "I will build My Church, for its only foundation will be the truth concerning Me which the Father has revealed to you. Hell and Satan will fight with all their weight against My Church, and they will use many godless men to try to destroy it, but they will not succeed."

All agree that it is good for children to read from the Bible. But we need to be careful that we do not pervert the teaching of verbal inspiration by attaching some magical effect to the words found in the Bible. Children can easily get a magical or talismanic picture of God's Word. The Moslem religion views its Koran that way. Siegbert Becker writing on verbal inspiration said, "Words are sounds with meanings attached to them, and it is the divinely intended meaning communicated through divinely taught words that is important. ... verbal inspiration does not mean the truth of God can be expressed in only one set of words arranged in one grammatical form..." ("Verbal Inspiration and the Variant Readings" in L. Lange. *Our Great Heritage*, Vol I, pp. 168-169, Milwaukee, NPH, 1991). The divine truths can be expressed in "other words" and those other words can be found in a written-down Bible history book. "Getting children into the Bible" is a good slogan as long as we don't let it

me. [Read Mark 2:5. What did Jesus say?]

I don't think the Pharisees were too happy to hear that. But I was. We've all done wrong things—things that make us feel sick inside. So hearing Jesus' words made me feel clean and good.

But Jesus wasn't finished. He told me, "get up, pick up your mat, and go home."

Guess what? I got up! Me! I actually stood up. You never heard such cheering. People were praising God and saying how amazed they were. No one was more amazed than I was!

What a day! When my friends carried me to the house and we saw those crowds, who'd have thought I'd be walking home?

This has been quite a day! Most upsetting! I must say I'm amazed. Perhaps I'll tell you about it. Then you can tell me what you think.

Let me begin by saying that I am a Pharisee. Yes, a Pharisee. Isn't that wonderful?

I live by the Law. I hardly ever do anything wrong. I'd have a lot to brag about if I weren't so humble.

With people like me around, why would anyone want to hear Jesus? But they do. People flock to Him. We Pharisees decided to keep an eye on Him to find out what He was up to. So we went to hear Him teach. But so did everyone else. We just barely got inside the house.

All of a sudden, we heard scraping and digging on the roof. Someone was making a hole in the roof! Then, to our surprise, a man on a bed mat was slowly lowered in front of Jesus.

And what did Jesus do? He smiled at the man and said, "Your sins are forgiven," Did you ever hear anything like that? We Pharisees were shocked. We thought, "Who does Jesus think He is? No one but God can forgive sins."

Somehow Jesus guessed what we were thinking. Most upsetting! He stared right at us and said, "Which is easier—to

mean more (or less) than our desire and attempt to foster in children the attitude and belief expressed by the psalmist when he saw God's Word as "sweeter than honey" (Ps 119:103).

There is much more that could be said about how Scripture is adapted to the characteristics of children. For example, what constitutes a "good" narrative in Scripture? That is, what kinds of narrative are best suited to make a point clearly to children? The Good Shepherd, the Boy Jesus in the Temple, David and Goliath are great tales in children's literature. Certain Bible stories such as these three are found in all Bible story books for children. Certainly one assumes the stories are selected because they contain teachings which Christian parents and teachers believe children need to know. But these stories also hold a particular interest for children. Perhaps God in His wisdom planned it that way and He caused to be included in His inspired Word certain stories that would draw children into that Word. Thus He made the great task He gave teachers and parents easier: "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deu 6:7).

.....
"You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place"

The proper use of Scripture in the ministry of teaching results in independent, habitual Bible readers.

The best teacher is the one who works himself out of a job. Teaching is a profession under the most rigid of sunset laws: The students will leave your classroom in spring, they will leave your school in the eighth or twelfth grade, they will graduate from college. The measure of your success as a teacher is when your students no longer need you. Because the task of teaching will end, the wise teacher trains students to teach themselves.

New Testament believers have the word of prophecy made more certain because we have the evidence—Christ—of its fulfillment. Now our willing responsibility is to pay attention to it, to study it, to meditate on it, to pray it, to live by it. No one can do this for us. The way we remain true to what we have been taught is to be like the faithful Bereans: "they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Ac 17:11).

Studying the Bible as the Bereans did is important, not as an act of veneration of the text, but to see what those words have to say about our origin and our natural condition, about our salvation and our mission in life, and about our resurrection and eternal life. Bible study, as many are now saying, is a sad lack in many lives and a necessary part of every life.

There are three types of Bible study. First, there is group Bible study. Groups of persons come together for the express purpose of Bible study; in fact, that is frequently the sole reason they do come together. Each year about 12% of WELS communicants participate in group Bible study. The success of a Bible class, humanly speaking, is a reflection of the person leading the Bible study, and to a lesser

forgive sins, or to make a paralyzed man walk?"

Well, of course, that was a trick question. It's not a matter of which is easier. They're both impossible for any ordinary man to do.

But, as you can tell, Jesus doesn't act like any ordinary man. He claimed He could forgive sins. And to prove His power, He told the man to get up and walk. And, uh, well, the man got up and walked... Look, this is really most disturbing, and I would like to know what you think of it all.

Bible Discoveries, Cook, 1992.
(#2)

The Forgiver of Sins

Jesus was teaching in the single room of a house with a flat roof. The room was crowded and the street outside was thronged with people struggling to see Jesus.

Suddenly, over Jesus' head, there came a thumping and a bumping, and a thin shower of dust fell from the ceiling. Everyone looked up. Lumps started to fall out of the ceiling, and soon there was a hole showing the blue sky, and with four cheerful faces peering over the ragged edge. Then down through the hole came a man on a stretcher supported by ropes held by the man's four friends who were determined that he should see Jesus—even if it did mean knocking a hole in someone else's roof.

Jesus looked at the man on the stretcher. "Son," he said softly, "your sins are forgiven."

But there were those in the crowd who whispered, "Blasphemy. Make a note of it. Who can forgive sins but God?"

As if he had heard them, Jesus asked a question: "Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say to this poor man, 'Get up and walk'?"

He challenged them with his eyes. But no one dared answer. "You must learn," he said, "that I, the Son of Man, have power to

extent the particular method and materials. Although there is often a faithful core who attend any type of Bible study, many people move in and out as time and interest allow. The varieties of group Bible study are limited only by the imagination. School faculties meet in the morning before school for Bible study. Pastors have their "winkel" groups. Sunday between-service meetings draw large crowds in some churches. Tuesday afternoon, Thursday evening, Monday Breakfast are well-used times for Bible study. Even home-based Bible studies, the modern equivalent of Spener's *collegia pietatis*, have become common and convenient for many persons. There are Bible classes for particular groups, there are three-week and there are two-year Bible classes. Some are loosely structured; other are organized like an academic course. Publishing houses find a ready market for material for such group Bible studies. When congregations are looking for approaches to spiritual renewal, they are encouraged to increase the amount and quality of Bible study.

Another type of Bible study is that done in the home by families. Typically this is part of a family devotion and ideally the entire family reads and discusses together a portion of Scripture. The only information on the frequency of this type of family Bible study is from the *Profiles of Lutherans* study of WELS members in 1981. In that survey 11% of the lay members reported daily family devotions. The study also found 56% of the pastors and 25% of the Lutheran teachers responding had family devotions. These numbers may be optimistic given the somewhat biased sample from which the data were taken. It is anyone's guess whether these numbers have increased or decreased in the 12 years since that study.

Our Synod is serious, however, about helping families have devotions and Bible study. The new religion curriculum explicitly includes family activities that follow from the religion lessons the children have learned in the Lutheran elementary school, the Sunday school, or the vacation Bible school. These suggestions as well as the materials the children bring home should encourage families in Bible study and regular devotions. Also, the new publication, *Wellspring*, is specifically intended for devotional use in families. This monthly magazine has articles on families and daily devotions for the family.

The third type of Bible study may be the most elusive. This is the private and personal Bible study many Christians do. This is the *meditatio* that Luther urged upon pastors. There is little data on how frequently our members do private Bible study. Again, the *Profiles of Lutherans* study showed that 10% of lay persons, 71% of pastors, and 41% of Lutheran school teachers had daily Bible study. The numbers appear impressive. But the lay sample, as noted above, may be biased in favor of the active member, and the pastor and teacher data do not indicate whether this Bible study was part of the class or sermon preparation or whether this was aside from that. Also, the data are twelve years old.

Even if we had a good picture of how frequently this type of private Bible study is done, there likely is considerable variation in how it is done. There is material on the market for private Bible study, but people may not be as systematic in this type of Bible study as they would be in group or family Bible study. The *Peoples' Bible* is a major successful effort in encouraging private Bible reading. Despite these encouraging signs, there is a fruitful area for teaching and encouraging more private Bible study, particularly in children and young adolescents. We may, in fact, be pleasantly surprised by the

forgive sins." Then to the paralyzed man he said, "Get up. Roll up your stretcher. God home."

There was a terrible pause. The man struggled to his feet and stood, filled with wonder in the midst of the silent crowd. He rolled up the stretcher and walked stiffly at first like someone who had just laid aside a crutch. The crowd parted before him like traffic before an ambulance. With the stretcher over his shoulder he went out of the door and singing down the street.

The Bible Story, Oxford, 1968 (#3).

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

Jesus often came to a little city on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He made this city his home because the people of Nazareth didn't want him any more. Whenever Jesus came to his home town, he would preach to the people and heal the sick.

One day Jesus went into one of the houses. When the people heard that Jesus was back in town, many came to the house to hear him preach. So many came that the house was soon filled with people. No one else could get in.

Four men, who had a paralyzed friend, heard where Jesus was preaching. Because their friend could not walk, the four men put him on a cot and carried him to the house.

The men tried to get into the house to get near Jesus, but the crowd of people kept them from getting in. So they carried their sick friend up the steps leading to the flat roof of the house. After they were on the flat roof, the men made a large opening in the roof. The opening was right over the place where Jesus was standing. The four men tied ropes on the ends of the cot and carefully let their friend down into the house. The cot with the man came down right in front of Jesus.

Jesus knew the sick man and his friends believed that he could heal. He said to the man lying on the cot, "Son, be happy, because

number of our children and youth who, if not habitual, are already frequent Bible readers. But more could be done.

There appear to be two specific traits that we as teachers can encourage in children and young people to help them. These are the traits of independent and habitual; that is really what we want: people who can read their Bibles without assistance and people who read their Bible as regularly as they perform other daily habits.

Consider first the notion of an independent and habitual reader. Think of something of which you are an independent and habitual reader: the sports section of a newspaper, a particular cartoon, the stock market listing, the bridge column, the *Reader's Digest*, or whatever. How did you become an independent reader? You became an independent reader, first, by mastering the content. You learned what the numbers on the stock market listing mean; who plays for which baseball team and what standings, batting averages, and earned runs mean; or the nuances of the particular humor in *Farside*. You don't need to ask anyone now what the joke means or what a person does when he redoubles his bid. You are an independent reader because you know what you read.

How did you become a habitual reader of that particular thing? You probably had an interest in the subject or an affinity for a particular kind of humor. As you gained familiarity with the subject, you found your interest increasing and you found enjoyment discussing what you knew with others who shared your interest. You might even become irritated if the paper fails to arrive or the magazine gets lost in the mail. You have the habit.

Such independent, habitual reading is a ritual with many people. Independent, habitual reading of the Bible however may be much less prevalent. Part of the reason for the difference is in ourselves and part is in the society in which we live. There is a part of us that does not want to read the Bible or hear its condemnation of our sin. Nor does society in general look with favor on the Bible reader. Reading the Bible instead of a newspaper while riding the commuter train may earn a Jesus-freak label. Society is not kind toward what it considers a fanatic, particularly a religious fanatic.

But part of the difference in what we read habitually and independently and what we do not lies in our training and in the schooling we received. For many the Bible was never a book to be read as a book. Rather it was a place where passages were found to prove a point, a place where a particular story or person could be located, a place that contained a beautiful poem, or a place where a comforting verse could be found. In effect the Bible was a reference book, a place of bits and pieces, not a seamless story of God's dealing with men. In part, this is the way we were taught to use the Bible. In an earlier generation, also, the King James Version did not encourage us to read more than brief, familiar passages.

The Bible also has a unique significance as a book. The confirmation Bible was a very special and often expensive gift. Its leather cover, crisp pages, and inscribed name and date did not invite or encourage casual or habitual use. It just did not seem right to underline in it or to jot notes in the margin. The sponsors who gave that confirmation Bible to us might not approve. Then, too, you were writing your own words in God's Word. Often, the Bible sat on the shelf, remaining as new as it was when received.

Thus for many the Bible became something they could not read independently because its language was archaic and they lacked an

your sins are forgiven."

Some teachers of the law were in the house. They did not believe that Jesus was God, who had come to be their Savior. They hated Jesus. These enemies of Jesus thought to themselves. "Why does this man tell such a wicked lie? Only God can forgive sins."

Jesus knew what his enemies were thinking. He turned to them and asked, "Why do you think such thoughts? Is it easier to tell this sick man his sins are forgiven or to make him well? Only God can forgive sins and only God can heal with a miracle. I will show you that I am God by making this man well. Then you will also know that I really am able to forgive sins."

Jesus turned again to the sick man and said, "Get up. Take your cot and walk home."

At once the man stood up. He picked up his cot and walked out of the house and went home. He was no longer paralyzed. All the people were surprised when they saw the miracle Jesus had done. They praised God and said, "We have never seen such wonderful things happen before."

Primary Bible History, NPH 1982 (#6)

Jesus Heals the Man Sick with the Palsy

In a city called Capernaum there lived a very sick man. He could not move, so he had to lie helpless in bed.

One day some friends told him that Jesus was in Capernaum. The sick man believed that Jesus could help him. He wanted to go to Jesus.

So his friends laid him on a mat and carried him to the house where Jesus was teaching the people. But when they got there, they found the house so crowded with people that they could not get in.

The friends knew what to do. They carried the sick man up an outside stairway to the roof. They made a hole in the roof, tied ropes to the mat, and let the man down into the house through the

in-depth familiarity with its content. Then, too, when Bible study was a subject in the Lutheran elementary or high school, it may have been taught so that we were not encouraged to be the habitual, independent readers we could be.

The methods we use to teach Bible study should contribute to the goal of producing independent, habitual Bible readers, or at least they should not detract from that goal. This goal goes beyond the time of school. A habitual and independent Bible reader is one who continues reading the Bible throughout his life. How do you teach, in a school setting, children to do something outside school and beyond the days of schooling?

In the classic terms of educational psychology, this is the transfer problem. We conduct classroom devotions and we hope this habit of devotions carries over into the non-school setting. We have prayers before meals and at the beginning and end of the school day; we then hope children develop the habit of praying when they are not in school. Too often, however, the transfer does not occur. There is something about a school setting that says to children that what you learn in school is only a "school thing" and it lacks relevance or use outside school. This happens partly because school is seen by some students to be unrelated to life. This failure of transfer also occurs because some teachers do not show students how school learning can be used in life. We shall use both these ideas in considering methods in teaching Bible study.

If "school things" and "life things" are different in students' minds, we might overcome the transfer problem by disguising "school things" so they no longer look like "school things." In other words, teach and do Bible study in a way that is different from a school subject so it looks as unlike a school subject as possible. This is a bit of a challenge because you are doing it in school. But perhaps you can examine how you teach and do Bible study with children and eliminate or modify those teaching procedures that are particularly "schoolish." Let's look at two examples.

Recitations are very much a part of school. The students are questioned on material they have read or studied. The teacher conducts this recitation and evaluates the students' responses. Perhaps we can consider a method that avoids this type of questioning and that does not have the teacher in such a directing and evaluating position. A method, for example, might involve students studying cooperatively in groups of three, discussing the text they have read.

Homework is another "school thing." Perhaps we can select or modify a method so that there are no traditional kinds of assignments. The activities also could be individualized with children choosing their follow-up project.

Teachers also can show students how Bible study can be done at home or in other non-school settings. The method should include opportunities and directions for Bible reading outside school. Perhaps there needs to be regular discussions with the children about the where and when of Bible reading. The same time and place do not work for all, and teachers can guide children in finding their time and place outside school where they can do Bible reading and develop a habit for that time and place.

Making Bible study a non-school thing and helping children find times and places for Bible reading outside school won't solve all the difficulties of transfer. For some very busy people (and

hole.

Now the man was right in front of Jesus. Jesus knew he was sorry that he had sinned, so He said to him. "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

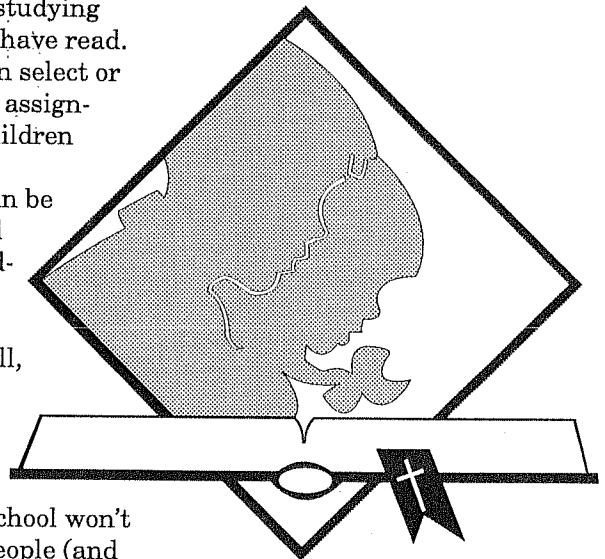
But the Pharisees and teachers of the Law began to think to themselves, "Who is this fellow...? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking, so He said, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." Now Jesus said to the man, "Get up, take your mat and go home."

As soon as Jesus had said this, the man got up. He picked up his mat and went home. Thankful and happy, he praised Jesus for forgiving his sins and making him well.

Then everyone praised God. They said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Stories of God and His People,
CPH 1992 (#4)



children), finding the time and the place can be very difficult. But we have to start and school is one place to begin deschooling Bible study. A program for teaching habitual, independent Bible readers ought to include the following.

1. a method that places the student in direct contact with the Word. Children should study from the Bible rather than from a worksheet or another substitute. In fact, worksheets ought to be banished from Bible study.
2. a method that teaches comprehension skills.
3. a method that is as unlike other school procedures as we can make it.
 - a. no grades
 - b. activities and Bible selections that are flexible and adapted to individual students or small groups of students
 - c. the Bible reading is done at home, not in school
 - d. the discussions of the readings are led by students, as much as possible, not by the teacher
 - e. the discussions are in small groups, not in classroom size groups
 - f. there is no penalty for not having the Bible reading read before the discussion
 - g. students are encouraged to find their own time and place at home for the private Bible reading

People who do become habitual, independent Bible readers do so because God has guided them to grow in the Word. Our nature makes it a difficult task sometimes. And it is sobering to realize that humanly speaking we always only one generation away from losing a valuable blessing (Box 4).

The apostle Peter whose letter forms the basis of this essay would rejoice over our work of helping students be independent, habitual Bible readers. He wrote his epistle "to stimulate you to wholesome thinking" (3:1). That is why God gave us the Scriptures so that we may be stimulated by the Spirit to understand our natural condition and to learn how Christ has made us the "kind of people we ought to be."

A succinct definition of teaching is the process of taking someone from where he or she is to someplace else. Peter would understand that. He knew what he had been and what he had become. He knew why this had happened. He remembered. He may have cited only one incident in this letter, but he remembered that empty tomb and that memory was his assurance of the new heaven and earth.

We have also been taken from certain destruction to an inheritance in a "new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." The tomb is still empty. Although we don't have the privilege of walking with Jesus to Emmaus, we can walk with Him through the Word which the Spirit inspired. That is more than enough for our own lives and for the lives of those we teach.

April 17, 1993

Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission. Parts of this essay also found in *The Generation to Come: Teaching Religion in the Lutheran Elementary School*, Copyright © 1991, Dr. Martin Luther College

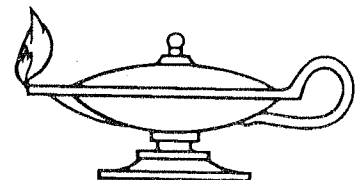
Box 4 One Generation Away

There was once a sincere Christian father who faithfully read his Bible each day. After supper he would retire to his bedroom with his Bible. He would remain there, alone and quiet, reading and thinking. He had a favorite cat that would try to follow him into the bedroom. But the cat was a nuisance and distracted the man while he read. So the father regularly put the cat out when he went into the bedroom. Each day the routine was unchanging: supper, pick up the Bible, go to the bedroom, put the cat out, read for twenty minutes or so, and return. Day after day, year after year.

His daughter observed her father as she grew up. She saw how the daily Bible reading strengthened and comforted him. She saw how wise and understanding he was. She saw how he was able to deal with the good and bad things of life much better. She resolved that she too would be a Bible reader when she grew up and had a family.

But her life was different. She moved to a large city, married, had a fine son, and an interesting career. She tried to spend time reading the Bible. In the evenings, she would pick up her Bible and head for the bedroom. She also loved cats and she would put the cat out before going into the bedroom. But there were business meetings, club meetings, PTO meetings, and this and that. The time she spent Bible reading was less and less. But she always hoped her son would grow up and read the Bible as his grandfather had done.

But her son's life was very different. He went to college, married, had a fine family, and became a very busy engineer. He had no time for Bible reading, but he did put out the cat.



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