

The
**FAMILY BIBLE
DEVOTIONAL**

STORIES FROM THE BIBLE
TO HELP **KIDS & PARENTS**
ENGAGE & LOVE SCRIPTURE



SARAH M. WELLS

“When it comes to reading the Bible with my kids, I am among the well-meaning and terrified. I find that I don’t know where to start or how to navigate past my own faith baggage to engage my kids in healthy, wonder-filled conversations about God’s story. This Bible devotional offers a way in. It honors questions, engages creativity, and is flexible enough to work for your particular family, no matter where you’re at. What a gift!”

ADDIE ZIERMAN, author of *When We Were on Fire*
and *Night Driving*

“*The Family Bible Devotional* is a great resource for parents who want to engage their children in fresh and meaningful discussions about the Bible as they explore stories and passages together. Fun activities, interesting facts, and thought-provoking questions will turn family devotions from boring to exciting. I wish I had this book when my kids were growing up!”

CRYSTAL BOWMAN, best-selling, award-winning author of over 100 books for children, including *Our Daily Bread for Kids*

“*The Family Bible Devotional* has added a fresh new dimension to mornings with my 13-year-old daughter. Background information, Scripture unhampered by verse notations (it reads like a story!), and thought-provoking questions and prayer prompts not only serve to structure our discussions during busy breakfast time, but challenge us to consider Scripture from new perspectives. My daughter has been inspired to ask tough questions and deepen her understanding of the Bible, all before the school bus comes around the corner!”

TANIA RUNYAN, poet and author of *How to Write a Poem*, *How to Read a Poem*, and *How to Write a College Application Essay*

“In this excellent devotional, Sarah Wells has packed a lifetime of inspiration and joyful applications that will guide families into a deeper appreciation of Scripture.”

DANDI DALEY MACKALL, award-winning author of over 500 books for adults and children, including *My Bible Animals Storybook*

“When writing for children, especially when topics are confusing or tough to wade through, I think it’s important for kids to have a narrator they can trust, and Wells doesn’t disappoint. Her writing is friendly and thought-provoking, and the activities she’s designed to go along with the devotions are creative and fun. Here’s a family devotional that allows parents to walk alongside their children as they explore God’s story, and find their place in it.”

CALLIE FEYEN, author of *Romeo & Juliet: The Teacher Diaries*

“This book is truly a gift: fun, creative, and sound. My family loved it!”

CRAIG HOVEY, author of *Unexpected Jesus: The Gospel as Surprise* and *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today’s Church*

“A love of Scripture is something that is taught. Sarah Wells has created a tool that can help parents do just that for our children. Thanks, Sarah, for writing such a great resource for families!”

STEVEN COLE, Executive Director, The Brethren
Church Denomination

“Trying to engage the whole family in Bible study in a way that feels authentic and beneficial often leaves me feeling lost. But Sarah Wells is a trustworthy guide. *The Family Bible Devotional* makes Scripture accessible and memorable. My kids kept bringing up the stories they’d heard in this devotional for days after we read them—and I learned new things, too.”

AMY PETERSON, author of *Dangerous Territory: My Misguided Quest to Save the World* and contributor to *Our Daily Bread*

“I like it a lot!”

ROSIE, age 9, who kept reading the book on her own
after family devotions were done

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**Our Daily Bread
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Introduction

“Scripture is like a river again, broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim.”

—Saint Gregory the Great, *Commentary on the Blessed Book of Job*,
written between 578 and 595 AD

This family devotional aims to cultivate healthy conversation between parents and their children about the Bible and its stories. The Bible is a challenging text, woven together and written with intention, to help us find meaning and understand the world in which we live through the lens of faith. Through God, the Bible writers sought to make faith relevant for the next generation. Not just so that faith wouldn't fizzle out and become irrelevant, but because they found their understanding of who God is and how God relates to people so important and meaningful that they could not imagine letting their story—our story—end.

Even though the Bible as we know it hasn't had any new books added to it or removed from it in the last sixteen hundred years or so, we are a part of its ongoing tale of faith and relationship with God, who continues to reveal himself in powerful ways through the Holy Spirit.

We are a part of God's unfolding story, a magnificent story that begins ages and ages before the chapter we're in right now. To see ourselves as part of God's story means that we must also know what precedes us in this narrative. What is our faith's history? How have people pursued God in the past? How can we know who he is and what he values? Should we make it up as we go along, or should we benefit from thousands of years of study, thought, consideration, and prayer to arrive cushioned by the labor of men and women who have come before us?

We're about to explore with our children stories that show us how we can engage with God. The Bible has endured centuries of criticism, wear and tear, translation, oral tradition, transcription, condemnation, misinterpretation, abuse, and praise. It is worthy of wrestling with. It can handle our poking and prodding, our questioning and doubting. It is filled with imperfect people who yelled at God, denied God, cried out for God, wrestled with God, and crucified God, and yet God was ever patient, ever merciful, and ever present with his unfailing love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

As a parent myself, I want my children to know and understand God's Word (as best as it can be understood). I want them to have answers for the hope that they have. But I also want to empower them to ask questions. This life is hard. I don't have all of the answers. You don't have all of the answers. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't dig into the hard questions. What safer place to do that than around the dinner table with your parents? What safer place to humble ourselves than with our spouses and children, admitting we sometimes just don't know?

The questions in this devotional are intended to spark conversation about and to develop a knowledge base of the biblical stories that form the narrative of our faith. I suspect that by exploring these passages with your children, you might find yourself challenged anew by *their* questions, and perhaps even humbled back to the reality of God's God-ness and our human-ness. My hope is that these devotionals will be a companion on your family's faith journey.

Tips to Keep the Kids Engaged

I practiced each of these devotions with my three children, ages six, ten, and eleven, mostly around the dinner table while we were waiting for the kids (particularly the youngest, slowest eater) to finish their meals. I learned a thing or two about how to prevent my kids from hating this time (and made some drastic revisions to the first draft because of this!):

1. **Don't read to your kids; read *with* your kids.** Invite your children (even the youngest ones) to take turns reading the Bible passages. This will help them focus on the Bible stories. I chose to include full psalms in some places because these poems are some of the most powerful examples of how God listens to the full spectrum of the human heart, even the parts that make us uncomfortable.
2. **Skip things.** If your kids don't respond well to a question, move on. Judge your children's attention spans each time and adjust your expectations for what they can handle. You want them to engage and love Scripture, not reject and dread reading it.
3. **But don't skip the activities.** I'll be honest—the activities were my least favorite thing to write. I am not a crafty craftsman. I *live* for words. But my kids? They love active learning. This is where the rubber meets the road. Pairing the Bible passages with the activities will help them see how the words of the Bible are active and present in their lives.
4. **Move at your own pace.** Sometimes we read devotionals a few nights in a row and other times, because of sports practices and dinner commitments and bad attitudes, we waited a week and a half before getting back into the material. Make space for reading together, but allow yourselves freedom to deviate from that routine when needed.

5. **Have fun!** Crazy things happen in the Bible. Allow for some craziness, some bold questions, and some honesty about this crazy sacred text of ours. That honesty can crack open our hardened hearts and make us more vulnerable, authentic followers of Christ. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12 NIV).

And God Said It Was Good

SETTING UP THE STORY

The stories in Genesis were originally passed down from parents to children by a thing called *oral tradition*. The stories that were told were shared in ways that helped people memorize them and repeat them so they could be shared again with future generations. You might notice that some stories in Genesis sound like poems or short stories. Stories like the first one in the Bible help us understand our relationship to God and to the world.

READ: GENESIS 1 (NIV)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed

in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image,

in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

TALK ABOUT IT

- What are some patterns you hear when you read this story?
- What do those patterns tell you about God and the creation of the world?
- When God creates people, how are they described? What jobs does God give them?
- What do you think it means to be “made in God’s image”? How does it make you feel?
- Is there anything that confuses you about this first story? If so, it’s okay! Do you have any questions about Genesis 1? It’s time to ask your questions about the Bible.

Parents: During each family devotional, there will be the opportunity for asking questions—the parents get to ask questions, and the kids get to ask questions too. If you don’t know the answer, it’s okay to say so. As parents, we can empower our children to ask questions about God and the Bible. This curiosity and freedom will pave the way for a meaningful and healthy relationship with God as they grow into adults.

Be willing to share your own questions about God or this particular story during this time. Sharing our own journeys of faith with our kids will help them see how you can have doubts and fears and still love God and be loved by God.

CLOSING THOUGHT

The first chapter of Genesis sets the scene for all of the Bible. It establishes God as the boss. He is the author of the story of creation, from the first burst of energy in the universe to this very second—and beyond! Notice how everything God creates he calls “good.” The sun and the moon and the stars, the light and the dark, the water and the air and the land, the plants and the animals—all good, good, good. Everything God created is good because God is good!

In a later part of the Bible, one of God’s followers, Paul, says in Philip-
pians 1:6 that God is going to keep on doing the good work in us and on earth until we’re a finished product, fine-tuned and complete. In this way, the creation story described in Genesis 1 doesn’t end. It’s still happening, in you and in me and in the world all around us.

PRAYER PROMPT

If God called all of creation “good,” then we can too! As we pray together tonight, let’s name off some of the things God created that we’re thankful for, that make us laugh or feel amazed. Everything in the universe reflects the good work that God has done and continues to do. Let’s pray together Psalm 148, in which the songwriter calls upon creation to praise God too.

ACTIVITY #1: TAKE A HIKE!

Get outdoors and explore! What do you see around you that God made? What do you smell? What do you hear? What is it about creation that you love? What do you see that you are grateful for?

ACTIVITY #2: I SPY, A TO Z

Can you name one thing God made for each letter of the alphabet? Put your minds together to see what crazy things in nature you can name that God made.

Creation Stories

Other tribes and cultures all around the world have their own creation stories like Genesis. Even though the stories vary from culture to culture, it seems as if God wrote into our DNA a desire to understand where we came from and what it is we're doing here. People all around the globe are seeking meaning in life. We can be grateful that God revealed himself through Jesus Christ so that people everywhere can have access to a better understanding of who God is and how he relates to us.

The Word and the Light

SETTING UP THE STORY

Did you know that there is another creation story in the Bible? It happens in one of the books that talks about Jesus. It is the book of John. In *that* creation story, John tells us that Jesus (John calls Jesus “the Word”) was God and was with God in the beginning, creating right alongside him! Some people think that’s why the Genesis story says, “let *us* create mankind in *our* image,” because of the way that God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were working together to create everything, including men and women. Let’s read John 1 to see how “the Word” and the last story we read connect.

READ: JOHN 1:1–18 (NLT)

In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He existed in the beginning with God.

God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize

him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

TALK ABOUT IT

- What do you learn about Jesus (or The Word) from these verses?
- How do you think Genesis 1 and John 1 are connected? (Flip to pages 13–15 if you want to reread Genesis 1.)
- Who was John and what was his job?
- What does this passage say about why Jesus came?
- There is a lot of figurative language in this introduction to Jesus.

Do any of the sayings confuse you? If so, it's okay! Do you have any questions about John 1? It's time to ask your questions about the Bible.

CLOSING THOUGHT

In Genesis 1 we saw how God created everything, and everything God created was good. In John 1, God reveals even more of himself through his Son, Jesus. Because Jesus is the light of the world, we can travel through our lives with his light guiding us, showing us faith, hope, and love, even in the darkest times.

As we continue to study the Bible, we'll do so with Jesus-colored glasses, remembering that the Word (Jesus) was with God in the beginning, creating right alongside him. With those Jesus-colored glasses, the whole Bible—and the whole world—is illuminated with the true light that gives light! Through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we can find meaning and light in a world of darkness.

PRAYER PROMPT

The passage we read today talked about the light shining in the darkness and how the darkness has not overcome it. Sometimes it feels as if the darkness in our world overpowers the good. Let's pray today that God would show us his light, his hope, and his peace, even when things feel hopeless, dark, and scary. You might also pray together Psalm 23, one of the most beloved poems in the Bible. God's light triumphs over darkness and will never leave us.

ACTIVITY: SHINE A LITTLE LIGHT

Have your parents help you gather a candle and a match and come together in one room of your house. Draw the shades and turn off lamps until the room is as dark as you can make it, then light the candle. How did the darkness make you feel? What happened to the darkness when the candle was lit? How did the light make you feel? Talk about how God is described as the light of the world, the true light that gives light, and think some more about what that means for us.

Two Johns!

Just like today, there are sometimes people in the Bible who have similar or the same first names. The author of the book of John was one of Jesus's twelve disciples. He's also the author of three letters that are collected later in the Bible—1 John, 2 John, and 3 John—as well as the book of Revelation. The “other” John mentioned in the first chapter of the book of John is John the Baptist. John the Baptist was Jesus's cousin. He baptized Jesus and talked about Jesus to people all over the region right before Jesus began traveling, teaching, and healing people. But really, both Johns are witnesses to Jesus's ministry and model how we can be witnesses for Jesus with our words and deeds.

About the Author



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