

Engaging the Word: Books on Bible Study for Leaders to Read Together

Three Christian educators review several groundbreaking books in the area of Bible study with children, youth, and adults that leaders could read and discuss together to gain critical skills used in *The Inviting Word* curriculum. Plan ahead and order the books from your local bookstore.

Reviewers: Nancy G. W. Parr, Marian R. Plant, and Carol A. Wehrheim

***The Bible – A Child's Playground* by A. Roger Gobbel and Gertrude G. Gobbel (Fortress Press, 1986)**

A key element of communication within groups, especially those based on supportive relationships like churches and families, is to talk "with" and not "at" or "to" one another. This is the foundational message in *The Bible – A Child's Playground* by A. Roger Gobbel and Gertrude Gobbel. Too often Christian educators (leaders and parents alike) talk "to" or "at" children about the Bible instead of allowing them to experience it with one another or by themselves. The Gobbels base their work on the premise that "children should have direct access to the Bible" (p. ix). Their purpose in writing the book was "to set forth an approach that provides an opportunity for children to become actively engaged with the Bible" (p. ix). It is written to help leaders teach in a way that allows and encourages children to ask questions about the Bible and to experience the Bible in a way that will make it come alive for them.

Some of the chapters are "An Event to Be Engaged and Interpreted," "Adults Assisting Children," "On Snippets, Rewrites, and Children's Books," and three chapters focusing on the Bible and early, middle, and late childhood. Read this book and talk about it with other leaders and teachers. It can help you to experience the Bible in a new way, and discover anew the words of God speaking to you through the voices of the children you teach.

***Transforming Bible Study with Children: A Guide to Learning Together* by Patricia W. Van Ness (Abingdon Press, 1991)**

In this very readable and user-friendly book, Patricia W. Van Ness brings to life an approach to the nurturing and educating of children within the Christian faith. The approach is grounded in the Bible and in the intrinsic spirituality of children. It is an approach which not only transforms Bible study itself, but is transforming for those who engage in it. Van Ness draws on insights gained in more than forty years of working with children and youth in the church, as well as a decade of using Walter Wink's book *Transforming Bible Study* with children, youth, and adults. The result is a book that is solidly rooted in faith development and spiritual awareness theory and rich in practical applications.

Chapter 1 examines what we do and don't do to nurture the spiritual development and biblical awareness of our children. Chapter 2 leads us carefully through the process of the "Transforming Bible Study" method. Here we are shown how to bring our children or youth to real engagement with scripture, starting with our own engagement. Chapter 3 helps teachers and leaders move beyond many of the stumbling blocks that are common in educational settings in the church. Chapter 4 considers the effect

"Transforming Bible Study" can have on worship and other activities in the life of the church community. Beg, borrow, or buy this book! The personal stories and examples it contains will be valuable for anyone who knows in their souls that children have enormous capacities for spirituality, truth- discernment, and faith.

Scripture and Imagination: The Empowering of Faith by William Beaven Abernethy and Philip Joseph Mayher (The Pilgrim Press, 1988)

Drawn from the authors' parish experience and Doctor of Ministry thesis along with their attempt to make the Bible relevant in the lives of persons today, this book centers on a six-step process for empowering faith. The steps are:

1. Sharing and Prayer: A time of gathering before God, including an exercise related to the theme for the meeting.
2. Personal Horizon: The presentation of the personal experience of one person, planned in advance.
3. Biblical Horizon: Reading of a scripture passage selected for its connection to the personal experience and a guided meditation based on it.
4. Pooling Images: Participants offer images received during steps 2 and 3.
5. Making Connections – Merging Horizons: Group work to discover connections among steps 2, 3, and 4 and their meaning for faithful living.
6. Closing Sharing and Prayer: Participants invited to tell of personal implications before leader closes with prayer.

Central to this process is the preparation by the leader and the presenter, who meet with an enabler, someone with expertise in biblical interpretation. Critical to its success are persons who are willing to speak of their own lives and others who are willing to listen actively.

The authors suggest various ways the "Empowering" process can be used. Users of *The Inviting Word* resources would be particularly interested in the outline for Bible study found in Chapter 11. Although it requires ninety minutes, this process could be a useful adjunct adult experience to a Sunday morning group using the "Liturgy of Learning."

The book includes examples, quotes from participants, and help for beginning groups. The closing chapter contains examples for those with limited experience in guided meditations based on scripture.

Nancy Parr is a United Methodist pastor in Horseheads, New York. She has served as a campus minister and is currently on the district's Committee for Ordained Ministry.

Marian Plant is a United Church of Christ pastor from Illinois who has been active in Christian education for twenty years. Currently, she is a doctoral student in educational psychology.

Carol Wehrheim is an editor, writer, and Christian education consultant living in Princeton, New Jersey. She is editing young children and adult materials for *The Inviting Word*.

Reprinted by permission of United Church Press from *In Season: A Magazine for Lectionary-based Curriculum for the Whole Congregation* vol.1, no.3, spring, 1995.