

READING TO CHILDREN

by Darrel Huisken

The freshly bathed children listen attentively as mother reads them a bedtime story. Father enjoys listening although he does not often admit it. It is the first time since breakfast the family is again together. It is the first time all day that the children have sat quietly. The sedative works, for soon they are off to bed and to sleep.

The noon hour is over, the last home run struck, the last touchdown made, the last goal scored. The anxious and exhausted soon sit quietly, for they know that story hour follows noon hour.

The once rambunctious sit in rapt attention as the minister tells them another of those spellbinding stories from the Bible. The stories of creation, the flood, the plight of poor Joseph in Egypt, the children who mocked the prophet Elisha, the trials of Daniel and his friends, the birth of Jesus, and hundreds more.

These three incidents involve reading and telling stories to children. This practice of telling stories and reading to children has a firm basis, the Word of God.

The basis for talking to and reading to the covenant children is found throughout the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments. There are several in the Old Testament; four stand out. The first one is found in Exodus 12 where the Lord, through Moses, exhorts the children of Israel to tell their children about the blood on the doorposts in the celebration of the Passover. Another occurs in Deuteronomy 6. Again the Lord exhorts the people of Israel to teach their children God's law: "when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Still another is found in Joshua 4.

Joshua here reminds the children of Israel of their obligations to tell their children the meaning of the twelve stones piled up on the bank of the Jordan River. The last one comes by way of implication. The book of Proverbs is replete with the phrase "My son," implying that as Solomon instructed his sons in the ways of the Lord, so covenant parents are to instruct, discuss, tell, and exhort their children in the ways of Jehovah God.

The New Testament supplies two examples. The first is from the Lord Jesus Himself. When the disciples wanted to send the little children away, he rebukes and says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not." A second example is that of Timothy who knew the Scriptures from the mouths of his mother and grandmother.

These are but a few; there are many more. These suffice to show that parents and teachers in the place of the parents must read to their children and tell the children about God's Word and World. The basis is firm, and the benefits are many.

In the home, first of all, there is the benefit of getting the whole family together to do one thing. The bonds in the family are also strengthened through this mutual endeavor. Through reading to their children, especially from God's Word (the *sine qua non* of good family reading), parents learn to know their children as they never knew them before. In the home the children can be exposed to the kind of reading they ordinarily do not get in school, for example, religious periodicals, biographies, church histories, certain types of fiction, and poetry. The primary book that reads excellently aloud is the King James Version of the Bible. The

beauty of its cadences and its simple but majestic descriptions cannot be excelled by any other version of the Bible. Reading aloud as a family activity is on the wane; a revival is long overdue.

In the school the benefits are many and varied. One benefit to all teachers, no matter in what grade he teaches, is that he establishes a lasting and personal rapport with the children entrusted to his care. Reading aloud to children often brings out "that other side" of the teacher that the children do not often see. Another benefit is that the pupils are introduced to literature, especially in the primary grades; and literature that the children do not always choose to read in the middle and upper grades. Reading aloud to children also serves as a supplement to the pupils' reading, for many children re-read for themselves what the teacher has read to them previously. It introduces them to good books in a charming and painless way. Still another benefit is that the children learn to listen to their teacher in a relaxed atmosphere. And added to this benefit is another, that of asking and answering questions that do not often come up in class. Sometimes the reading of a story, especially to older children, affords the children an opportunity to ventilate their feelings on certain subjects that trouble them. Almost every teacher worth his salt knows that reading aloud has sedative powers. When the filmstrip projector does not work, when the class ends early, when the rain does not stop for three days straight, when the heat is oppressive, or when the pupils are keyed up before a program, the wise teacher takes out a good book and begins to read.

Soon the cares of moment are set aside and the children are off to Narnia, Plum Creek, or the back of the North Wind. And it works!

Some of the fondest memories that children have of their ministers is their ability to catechize by telling Bible stories that were real, vibrant, and meaningful. This storytelling, which is directly related to reading aloud, again has the benefit of establishing between catechumen and catechete a lasting trust and rapport. Like the teacher, he reveals oftentimes "that other Dominie" that children do not see when he is on the pulpit, and like the teacher, he asks and answers questions that often do not arise anywhere else. Like the teacher, the minister uses his story telling to bridge the gap between what a child can read and cannot read. But unlike the teacher, the minister uses this method to indoctrinate the children in the name of Christ. He really preaches to them. This method is unique; may it continue.

The foundation is firm and sure for reading to and telling stories to children. The benefits are many, both to the children and the one who reads or tells the story. May God grant the grace so that the children rise up and call those blessed who instructed them. May they echo the words of the children in Psalm 44:1 as they say: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days in the times of old." May the covenant seed of today promise, "I will make Thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee forever and ever." (vs. 17)

"No one is really equipped to face life who cannot face it from the bastions of an education based upon the knowledge of God."

W. Vander Hoven