



How a Church Can Promote Literacy

IDEAS FOR EDUCATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Do you want to show the love of Christ in your community? Then teach the children to read. Yes, we want to make sure everyone has adequate food and shelter, but the ability to read is a gift that will keep on giving.

But besides the overall value of literacy, we also have an interest in teaching children to read the Bible. It's good for them to hear *the Bible* read at home and in church, but until they read it for themselves, it will always seem like someone else's story.

Literacy will open up a whole new world for them, not only educationally, but also spiritually.

What can a church do to promote literacy? Here are some ideas.

A REGULAR READING NIGHT

Once a month, or maybe once a week, host a Reading Night at church. Have cookies and punch.

Make it a fun experience. Invite parents and children—but other adults could get involved too.

This event might include:

Performance. Have a master storyteller present a Bible story, using pictures and flash cards with key words. (A youth leader or teacher might do this well.)

Story-sharing. Have groups of people create their own stories, then take notes, so they can present the stories to the full group. (Getting kids excited about making up stories is a first step toward motivation to read and write them.)

Read-to-Me groups. Using easy-to-read storybooks, give children the opportunity to read out loud to a few adults—not only their parents, but others too. Practice patience and encouragement with them.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

A church can encourage its families to try certain activities to help their kids read. Or perhaps a few families could get together for some of these.

Word walks. Build vocabulary by taking a walk and teaching the words for what they see.

Take a tablet (paper or computer) to write down the names as they learn them.

Storymaking. On index cards or slips of paper, write 20 (or more) words for basic objects, people, or actions. Put the cards in a bowl and have the child draw three at random. Then, with the child, create a story about those three words.

Quote book. Encourage older children to create a quote collection and maintain it. You could start with their favorite Bible verses, things their pastor or Sunday school teacher said, even funny lines their friends said.

ONGOING CHURCH PRACTICES

Besides the regular reading night (see above), there are many other routine ways a church could promote literacy among children. Here are a few:

Book access. Gather a collection of children's books at various reading levels. Make these available for families to borrow. (If you have a church library, do families know about it? Are the lending policies helpful?) Perhaps there could be a "children's book table" in the church lobby.

Print out and share "Stories of Jesus." We've created this literacy-helpful set of Bible story booklets as an online pdf for computer, tablet, or phone, but it can also be printed out. Teach families how to use this material electronically, or print out the pages for them to read.

Book on a hook. At least one public library has experimented with outdoor book access. Choose a children's book (or perhaps the "Stories of Jesus" pdfs), create a weather-resistant cover (or laminate the pages), and tether it to a park bench (or in your church's own playground space). This way, kids can read while they play.

Incentive programs. Offer some appropriate reward (cookie? badge? event?) for a child who reads through the five parts of "Stories of Jesus." Or at older levels, you could honor kids for reading a certain number of books of the Bible, or other books.

Child-friendly Bible versions. Make sure you're not forcing children to read a Bible far beyond their reading level. There are many child-level translations available nowadays, including the Contemporary English Version. (The CEV can be found at Bibles.com and elsewhere.) Make these available to children and their families.