

Nuts & Bolts Parents Guide

Cultivating learning and wonder together

Practical help for everything around your Bible Blocks time.

Preparation • Family rhythms • Participation • Questions • Starting again



Find your situation. Choose a helpful next step.

A companion to your series and activity guides, with everyday advice for the family you have and the evening in front of you.

The life around the blocks

This is the Nuts & Bolts guide: a practical companion for preparing, gathering, wondering, making adjustments, and beginning again. Reach for it when you need help with the life around your Bible Blocks time.

Keep the core familiar

Your series and activity guides explain the central experience: grab a Story Block and the Activity Block, hear the story, retell together, and choose one additional activity. Follow those guides for narratives, backgrounds, and activity ideas. This companion helps you make room for that experience in the family you actually have.

Find the situation you are in

Use the next two pages to jump to a situation. You can read one page, try one idea, and return later. Related-page links offer a next step when the first adjustment is not enough. The printable reminder and planning pages at the back are there to use if they help.

Start with the child and the evening

A hungry child, a curious child, and an overwhelmed child may all leave the table for different reasons. Notice what is happening before choosing a response. Offer a small way to join, keep a kind boundary when needed, and leave room to shorten or stop the gathering.

Let preparation serve the relationship

The Scripture reading, handwriting, and prayer practices in this guide are invitations for the parent. They can deepen your understanding without becoming a requirement before you begin. Candles, block hunts, planners, and special jobs are optional too. A welcoming adult and a simple return to the story are a good beginning.

Grow into a family rhythm

Try one change at a time. Keep what helps your family listen, ask, and participate. When something does not fit, adapt it. You are building a shared practice that can change as children grow, schedules shift, and new questions arrive.

Keep in mind You do not need to read this cover to cover. Find your situation, choose one helpful response, and begin there.

Before and during a gathering

Select a situation or page number to jump to the guidance. Each topic works on its own; you can return to the index from any page.

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Start with the closest situation. You can also use the response page near the back when you need a quick next step tonight.

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← Preparation, setup, and family rituals

Meet the story yourself

Preparation can give you a little more room to listen. When the story feels familiar, you can spend less energy finding your place and more energy noticing your children.

Begin with the short narrative

Read the family narrative once while looking at the six pictures. Notice how the story moves from its beginning to its ending. Turn the Story Block as you read so you know which pictured moment comes next. Say the story aloud in your own words; this often reveals a place where you need to look again.

Read the whole Bible passage

The narratives are intentionally brief, usually 100 words or fewer. That makes them approachable for children, but it also means that dialogue, setting, connections, and sometimes whole exchanges have been shortened. Read the passage named in the story guide so your understanding is larger than the summary.

Read the short parent background

Use the background in your series' Parent's Companion or Deep Dive PDF to understand the setting and the movement of the passage. Choose one helpful detail to keep in mind. Most of what you learn can remain in your own understanding until a child's question makes it useful.

Choose one verse and pray

Select a brief verse from the passage to return to during the week. Pray for each child by name, and ask for patience and attentiveness in yourself. You can do all of this in one sitting or spread it across several small moments.

Keep in mind If you have only a moment: read the narrative, locate the passage, and pray. Begin together, then return to the background when you can.

Also helpful: Read the fuller passage, p. 6 • When you feel unqualified, p. 8

Read beyond the summary

The pictures help a child remember. The short narrative helps a child follow. The Bible passage gives both their meaning and their boundaries.

Notice the movement

Ask yourself: Where are we? Who is here? What happens? What does God say or do? How do people respond? What has changed by the end? You do not need a written answer to each question. Read slowly enough to see the shape of this particular passage before deciding what to emphasize.

Look just before and just after

A few surrounding verses may explain who is speaking, why a crowd is present, or how this episode connects with another. Begin with the passage identified in the guide. When several Gospel accounts are listed, read one account all the way through first and name any comparison you make. Avoid quietly combining details into a single account.

Keep three kinds of statements clear

The text tells us: an action, a spoken sentence, or a detail actually recorded.

The background helps explain: context that makes the passage easier to understand.

We wonder: a possible feeling, motive, or detail the passage leaves unstated.

This distinction gives imagination a useful place while helping children learn to read carefully.

Let the passage set the emphasis

In Mark 4:35-41, the storm becomes calm, but the story ends with the disciples asking who Jesus is. A conversation can include fear and trust while still returning to that question. Avoid turning the account into a promise that every frightening situation will end immediately if a child prays. Read what happens here before drawing an application. [1]

Keep in mind A helpful sentence: “Let’s see what the Bible tells us about that.”

Scripture example: Mark 4:35-41. See reading notes on [page 48](#).

Also helpful: Correct a detail kindly, p. 38

Let the background help

The parent background is there to equip you for a conversation. Read it with the question, “What helps me understand this story more clearly?”

Carry one useful detail into the evening

You might learn why a meal mattered, what a place name means, or how a repeated image connects with an earlier passage. Choose the detail that makes the story clearer. If it needs a long explanation, save it for a question later. Children can enjoy the story before they understand every part of its world.

Turn information into an invitation to notice

After learning that a shared meal can communicate welcome, you might ask, “Who is at the table with Jesus?” Let the child look, remember, and answer. Then add a short explanation if it helps. A well-timed sentence can open up a scene without stopping its momentum.

Keep the story bigger than a behavior lesson

Begin with what the passage reveals about God, Jesus, and the people involved. Then consider a response. A story about Jesus welcoming someone can invite your family to practice welcome, but it is worth lingering first over what Jesus actually does. Children need time to meet the story before being asked what they should do.

Make room for what you do not know

Say, “I don’t know yet. Let’s come back to that.” If the answer matters, make a small note and return to it. When a background suggests a possibility, preserve that wording: “This may help explain...” or “Some people understand it this way...” You can be trustworthy without sounding certain about everything.

Keep in mind Before gathering, finish this sentence for yourself: “One thing I want to notice in this passage is...”

Also helpful: Follow up on a question, p. 34

When the Bible feels unfamiliar

You can lead a small family gathering while still learning your way around the Bible. Begin with the actual story and let your children see how you learn.

Make the first task concrete

Find the passage listed in the series guide. Use your Bible's contents page or search the book, chapter, and verse in a Bible app. Read the short narrative, then the passage. Mark the place so the family does not spend the evening watching you search. One familiar story is enough to begin.

Borrow the guide's structure

Read the narrative aloud if telling it from memory feels difficult. Use the pictures to keep your place. Look at the short parent background when a name, custom, or phrase is unfamiliar. You can say, "I'm learning this story too." You do not need to perform expertise.

Use ordinary explanations

If a word is unfamiliar, try a short explanation in the sentence where it appears. When you are unsure of a name, check a reliable pronunciation source or make a reasonable attempt and keep reading. Leave yourself a note to check later instead of allowing one word to stop the gathering.

Choose a trustworthy next source

For a question the companion does not answer, return to the passage and its surrounding verses, then consult a reliable study resource or a trusted church leader. If an answer involves interpretation, name that. "This is how our church understands it" says something different from "This sentence explicitly says it."

Lead the parts you can lead today

You can welcome a question, read carefully, admit uncertainty, and pray simply. If a passage connects with painful experiences in your own life, choose the support and pacing you need. Start with a story you can explore calmly rather than making the hardest passage your first evening.

Keep in mind Try saying: "Let's learn this together. I'll read, and we can look for what happens."

Also helpful: [When you do not know, p. 34](#) • [When leading feels heavy, p. 42](#)

Write, notice, and pray

Handwriting Scripture is one optional way to slow your own reading during the week. Treat it as a practice of attention you can return to when it is helpful.

Copy a manageable portion

Write a verse or a few sentences by hand, keeping the Bible open beside you. Over several days, you might copy the whole passage in small portions. Include the reference and translation so you can find it again. If writing is difficult or unhelpful, read aloud, listen to the passage, or dictate a short observation instead.

Pause over one detail

Notice a repeated word, an unexpected action, a question, or a response. Under your copied text, add one sentence such as, “I hadn’t noticed that Jesus speaks first,” or “I wonder why this detail is included.” Keep your observation separate from the Scripture you copied. You do not need a polished devotional thought.

Pray for each child as a whole person

Bring the child's joys, worries, friendships, questions, and ordinary needs before God. Ask that they come to know and love him. You can pray about the story's invitation without deciding in advance what each child must say or feel. Let your prayers include gratitude for who your children are today.

Pray for your own presence

Ask for patience when someone interrupts, humility when a question is difficult, and the freedom to stop when your family needs to stop. If you feel rushed, take a breath before inviting everyone over. Your own willingness to listen is something you can practice alongside them.

A prayer to begin with

“God, help me listen to your word and to my children. Give us curiosity, patience, and joy together. Meet each child in the questions and needs they bring today. Help me trust you with what grows over time. Amen.”

Keep in mind The practice can stay small: a few copied lines, one thing noticed, and one prayer.

A gentle rhythm for the week

Stay with one story for several gatherings when it is fruitful. Familiarity gives children more chances to recognize a picture, join a sentence, or notice something new.

Before your first gathering

Read the narrative and the whole passage. Look through the background. Choose a key verse that belongs naturally to the story, and mark it in your Bible. If it contains an unfamiliar word, decide on one simple explanation. Set aside any question you want to think about more carefully.

In the small spaces between gatherings

Return to a few verses while drinking coffee, waiting for an appointment, or winding down at night. Copy a short section if you want to. Pray for your children by name. If you are parenting with another adult, share the verse and one useful observation so either of you can lead.

Just before you begin

Choose the Story Block and one possible activity. Put paper and drawing tools nearby if needed. Hide the two blocks if you are using the search. Mark the key verse, silence avoidable notifications, and decide who will supervise the youngest child and any lit candle. Keep this setup small enough to repeat.

After a gathering

Ask yourself two questions: “Where did my child connect?” and “What made it harder to join?” Keep what helped. Change one thing that did not, such as the time of day, how long you talked, or who held the block. You are learning your family's rhythm through ordinary attempts.

When a week gets away from you

Pick up the same story without catching up on missed evenings. Read, retell with help, and pray. The next opportunity is a place to begin again. A regular rhythm can include interruptions, travel, illness, and days when everyone needs an early bedtime.

Keep in mind Use the reusable planner only if it makes the week easier. A marked Bible passage may be all the planning you need.

Also helpful: [Weekly planner](#), p. 45

Choose the time and place

“Bible Blocks night” can happen whenever your family has a workable pocket of time. Look for a moment you can welcome rather than a time you regularly have to rescue.

Choose a real opening in the day

Try after dinner, before the bedtime rush, or on a slower morning. If children are hungry, meet that need first. If a late gathering repeatedly ends in tears, move it earlier or choose fewer evenings. Observe your family over several attempts before deciding the routine is not working.

Give a brief transition

Tell children a few minutes ahead what is coming. If they are finishing play, help them reach a stopping point: “Park your vehicles, then we’ll gather.” A familiar cue can do the announcing. Avoid beginning with a long demand to abandon something absorbing without warning.

Choose comfort and visibility

A table makes drawing and shared pictures easy, but a rug or sofa may work better for your family. Everyone needs a way to see the pictures and hear the story. Keep enough light to read comfortably. Let seating support participation, with a safe place for movement and younger children.

Reduce competing demands

Put away unrelated screens and turn down background noise. If you use a phone or tablet for the narrative, open the page beforehand and silence notifications. A device can be a reading tool; show the children what you are using it for and keep the intended page ready.

Set a modest stopping point

Begin with one story, a supported retell, and one small activity. Watch the children more than the clock. If you want a time boundary, tell them what will finish the gathering: “After this drawing, we’ll read our verse and pray.” Leave longer exploration for evenings when there is room.

Keep in mind If the same evening repeatedly feels difficult, change the time or setting before adding more demands.

Also helpful: [Help attention return](#), p. 25 • [When the routine changes](#), p. 39

Keep the setup small

A few things in a familiar place can make it easier to begin. Choose a setup that still works when you have very little energy.

Keep a small story basket

Store the blocks, your Bible or reading device, and a little paper with drawing tools. Include the key-verse reference if you use one. Keep matches, candles, and materials unsuitable for younger children under adult control. A basket is useful only if it makes the next gathering easier.

Choose supplies after the activity

Most evenings can begin with what is already at hand. If you choose an idea that needs preparation, gather only what that activity uses. Leave elaborate projects for a day when you want them. Both a Quick Start and a Deep Dive can use a no-prep option from the activity guide.

When the Story Block is missing

Use the matching six-picture page in your series guide while you look for the block later. If that is not available, read the narrative or passage and help retell in words. When the Activity Block is missing, name an activity you know. The misplaced object does not need to cancel the gathering.

When the digital page will not open

Use your Bible or an already downloaded copy of the guide if available. You can also choose a familiar story. Avoid spending the whole gathering troubleshooting while the children wait. Restore the page afterward and consider keeping your current story available offline.

Reset lightly at the end

Return the blocks and Bible to their place. Keep a drawing only if the child wants to, or take a photo with their agreement. Let children help in ways suited to their ages, without turning cleanup into another long activity. The aim is to leave a simple starting point for next time.

Keep in mind Useful to have: two blocks, the story, and a welcoming place. Add materials when they serve the evening.

Also helpful: [One adult leading](#), p. 16 • [The smallest workable evening](#), p. 44

Begin without a big launch

A first evening can be simple. The same is true when you are returning after a long gap or introducing Bible Blocks to a new caregiver.

Show what the blocks are for

Let children age five or older look at the Story Block with you. Point out that its pictures help the family remember one story. Show the Activity Block and explain that you will choose a way to explore. Keep the introduction brief enough that the children soon experience what you mean.

Model before you ask

Read or tell the story and show the pictures. Retell it yourself while inviting help. A child who has never done this should not have to guess what a retell sounds like. End with one small activity, then use your chosen closing.

Introduce one extra ritual at a time

You could begin with only the repeated verse and prayer. Add the candle or block hunt another evening. If you introduce everything at once and it feels complicated, simplify the next attempt. A recognizable routine can grow through use.

Explain expectations in usable words

Choose a few things everyone can practice: handle the blocks gently, give others space to contribute, and ask for help or a break. Show what those expectations look like. If a child needs support with them, make the next step smaller and practice again.

Return without a speech about the gap

After time away, say, "Let's share a story together." Choose something familiar and model the flow again. Avoid asking children to prove what they remember before welcoming them back. The first returning evening can be as small as the very first one.

Keep in mind A beginning does not need to establish the whole habit. It only needs to give your family a place to start.

Also helpful: [How often and which story, p. 14](#) • [Restarting after disruptions, p. 39](#)

How often? Which story next?

Choose a frequency your family can sustain and a story you can return to with interest. There is no catch-up requirement for missed evenings.

Choose a starting rhythm

You might gather several evenings a week, on a weekend morning, or after one particular meal. Give it a try and notice whether the plan fits. If daily gatherings become a repeated struggle, choose fewer and protect a warm welcome when they happen.

Stay long enough for familiarity

Returning to a story gives children opportunities to join a line, notice a new detail, and try a different response. You can keep the story and key verse while changing the activity. A child who wants to tell it again may be enjoying new confidence.

Move on when it is helpful

You do not need to complete every activity face. Move to another story when interest fades, when a child requests it, or when your series plan leads onward. If the story was difficult, you may choose a more familiar one for the next gathering and return later.

Distinguish familiar from stale

Ask, “Would you like to lead this story, try a different activity, or choose our next story?” If the child wants more ownership, a new role may help. If they are simply ready to move on, accept that. Novelty does not have to be a daily requirement either.

Use order when it serves understanding

Follow a series' suggested order when later stories depend on earlier events. When stories can stand alone, offer a limited choice between two. A child's question or a season of the year can also guide selection. Keep enough context that the passage still makes sense on its own terms.

Keep in mind A sustainable rhythm includes returning, moving forward, and missing a day without debt.

Also helpful: Boredom and reluctance, p. 29 • What progress can look like, p. 41

Share the lead with adults

Parents, grandparents, and other caregivers may lead with different strengths. A few shared expectations can keep the experience familiar while allowing different personalities.

Agree on the small essentials

Share the current story and key verse. Agree to welcome questions, help with retelling, keep participation manageable, and close kindly. One adult may enjoy reading voices while another enjoys conversation. Both can lead the same core experience.

Divide actual jobs

If two adults are present, decide who will guide the story and who will support the younger child or manage the candle. Trade roles another evening if useful. Let the leading adult finish a thought before offering another explanation; two competing sets of directions can be hard for children to follow.

Leave a short handoff

"We're using this story, this verse, and one activity. Sam likes to point; Maya wants to read." That may be all a grandparent or caregiver needs. Show where the resources are. Avoid handing over an elaborate script unless the person wants one.

Discuss differences privately

If adults disagree about a correction or an interpretation, avoid turning the gathering into a contest. Say what you can say honestly, then discuss the difference later. When beliefs differ, name your family's understanding without asking children to judge which adult wins.

Work with the household you have

One adult may carry the practice even when another does not participate. In families using more than one home, keep your own welcome predictable and avoid asking children to report or compare the other household's practice. Share resources with other caregivers when appropriate and welcome what they are able to offer.

Keep in mind A clear handoff can be three things: the story, the familiar ending, and what helps each child join.

Also helpful: [When one adult leads, p. 16](#) • [When the work feels uneven, p. 42](#)

When one adult is leading

You may be reading, helping a preschooler, and caring for a baby at the same time. Build the evening around what one available adult can actually manage.

Choose a setup you can supervise

Keep the family within the space you can attend to. If you use a hunt, make it visible and close by. A flameless candle can preserve the opening when you need to move around. Skip any extra that requires you to be in two places at once.

Prepare only the immediate next step

Open the story and mark the verse before inviting everyone over. Have a younger child's own suitable toy nearby. If you will be feeding or holding a baby, choose a comfortable position and an activity you can guide with words or gestures.

Give older children useful, optional roles

An older child can find the passage, show the pictures, or start the retell. Let them decline a job without losing their place in the gathering. Keep supervision of younger siblings with you rather than making the older child responsible for a successful evening.

Pause without apologizing for family life

Say, "The baby needs me. Keep your place; I'll come back." If you can return, give a one-sentence reminder of where you were. If you cannot, finish with a short prayer or warm closing. A pause does not erase the moment you already shared.

Protect a little attention for each child

Invite one thing from each child without requiring equal-length turns. If a younger sibling needs most of your attention tonight, tell the older child when you can hear their question and follow through when possible. Sometimes the longer conversation belongs outside the shared gathering.

Keep in mind Simplify the arrangement until you can supervise and participate with the energy you have.

Also helpful: Including little ones, p. 26 • When you are depleted, p. 42

Give the evening a shape

A repeated opening and closing can help your family recognize this shared time. The ritual described here comes from the Merrill family's own Bible Blocks evenings.

A familiar beginning

Before gathering, hide the Story Block and Activity Block. Come together at the table with a candle. Invite a volunteer to read the week's key verse, then pray briefly. Send the children to find the blocks and bring them back. The search adds anticipation before you settle into the story.

The familiar Bible Blocks middle

Read or tell the narrative while showing the pictures. Model a retell when needed, then invite the children to help retell it. Choose one activity and explore together. Quick Start and Deep Dive describe how much room you give the activity; either can be adapted to the children and energy you have today.

A recognizable ending

Read the same key verse again, pray, and blow out the candle with adult help. The repeated verse places the story inside words from Scripture. Closing in the same way also lets children know that the gathering has ended, even when it was short.

Keep the ritual flexible

The candle and search are optional. A small lamp, a flameless candle, or simply opening the Bible together can mark the beginning. Choose an opening you enjoy and can sustain. On a busy evening, shorten the search and the activity while keeping a warm welcome and a clear ending.

Keep in mind Gather • Verse • Pray • Find the blocks • Read • Retell • Explore • Verse • Pray • Close

Also helpful: [Make the search work, p. 18](#) • [Repeat a key verse, p. 19](#)

Begin with anticipation

The block hunt can be a small shared delight. Help it lead naturally toward the story by keeping the search brief, cooperative, and easy to finish.

Hide for delight, not difficulty

Choose reachable places in a clearly named area. An adult can hide the blocks, or a child age five or older can help on a rotating turn. Have one child seek the Story Block and another seek the Activity Block, or let everyone search as a team. Offer hints before frustration takes over.

Gather before the search

Welcome each child to the table. Explain what comes next in a few words: “Verse, prayer, then we’ll find tonight’s blocks.” Invite a volunteer to read. A child who is learning can share the reading with an adult; a nonreader can listen or echo a short phrase. Give anyone permission to pass.

Pray simply, then give one clear invitation

You might pray, “God, help us listen and learn together tonight. Amen.” Then say, “The blocks are in the living room. Find them together and bring them to the table.” Avoid adding several new instructions while children are already moving. A successful hunt ends with both blocks ready for everyone.

Help the energy settle

As the children return, give the blocks a clear landing place and name the first task: “Set them here. Let’s find our first picture.” If racing makes the transition difficult, try walking detectives, a warmer-or-colder clue, or one hidden block and one waiting at the table.

Keep the candle with an adult

An adult lights the candle and keeps it on a stable surface beyond children's reach, away from paper and sleeves. Someone must stay with a real flame during the hunt; if everyone leaves, extinguish it first or use a flameless candle. At the end, the adult manages the candle and any child's turn to help blow it out.

Keep in mind The search is shared preparation for the story. Keep prizes, speed contests, and hard hiding places out of the routine.

Also helpful: Fair turns and competition, p. 28 • Children helping lead, p. 22

Return to the same verse

One key verse can accompany a story across the week. Repetition gives everyone familiar words to return to while the surrounding story gains detail.

Choose a verse that carries the story

Look for a sentence that names an important action, invitation, promise, or question in the passage. Read it in context before selecting it. A verse should help children remember what the story actually says. If it is long, read the whole verse yourself and invite the children to echo a short phrase.

Keep the invitation open

Ask for a volunteer; avoid making reading aloud a test. An adult can always read. A confident reader might want the Bible, while another child prefers to say one familiar word with you. Use the same translation through the week when possible, and explain an unfamiliar word in ordinary language.

Let the verse become familiar naturally

Read it at the beginning and end of the gathering. On another day, say it during a car ride or while setting the table if the moment feels natural. Memorization may grow through returning to the words, but children do not need to perform the verse before the family can move on.

Close while everyone can still join

Signal the end: “One more picture, then our verse and prayer.” Read the verse again. Invite a brief response, a thank-you, or a prayer request, and let children pass. Pray in a sentence or two and close the candle ritual. There is no need to add a final teaching point after everyone thinks you have finished.

Share the ending fairly

If several children want the candle turn, decide the rotation before you begin. A child can help an adult extinguish a real candle when appropriate, or switch off a flameless one. Another child might close the Bible or return the blocks. These jobs are ways of belonging, with turns that can continue next time.

Keep in mind A short gathering can have a complete ending: the verse, a prayer, and a warm goodbye to story time.

Also helpful: *Praying without pressure*, p. 21

Wonder with an open Bible

Wonder grows when a child has time to notice, speak, and be taken seriously. You can offer a question without deciding exactly how the conversation must unfold.

Begin with something visible

Try, “What do you notice in this picture?” or “What changed from the beginning to the end?” Listen before adding your own observations. A child may begin with a tiny detail. Follow it toward the passage when you can: “You noticed the boat. What happened while they were in it?”

Ask one question, then wait

Choose a question you are willing to explore together. Leave a real pause for thinking. If your child is quiet, offer a smaller invitation: “Would you like to point?” You can also share your own observation and keep going. A string of questions can make a conversation feel like a quiz.

Welcome imagination and name its place

“How might it have felt to be there?” invites a possibility. “What does the passage say happened?” asks about the text. Both can belong, with the difference made clear. If a child invents a detail, try, “That would be an interesting part of a pretend story. Let’s check what happens in this one.”

Respond honestly to hard questions

For a question the passage leaves open, say so. For one you need to research, write a few words and return to it later. If your child is frightened or troubled, first hear what they mean: “Tell me what is worrying you.” You can postpone an explanation while still offering comfort and taking the question seriously.

Allow the evening to remain unfinished

You might end with, “I’m still wondering about that too.” A drawing, a question, or a new observation can be the fruit of the gathering. Children do not have to name a moral lesson every night. Over time, keep coming back to God’s actions, people’s responses, and the words of the passage.

Keep in mind Useful invitations: “What did you notice?” “What makes you think that?” “Shall we look together?”

Also helpful: Following up on questions, p. 34 • Imagination and the text, p. 38

Pray without making a test

Prayer can be brief, honest, and shared in different ways. Invite children to join without requiring a public performance of faith.

Offer an invitation with a real option to pass

Ask, “Would anyone like to pray, or shall I?” A child can listen, echo a phrase, name a thank-you, or ask you to pray for something. Let silence remain an available response. An adult can carry the prayer whenever that helps.

Model ordinary language

Use a sentence about the story or something in your family's day. “God, thank you for welcoming us. Help us welcome others.” Children do not need a special voice or a long speech. If you use a familiar written prayer, explain words that are unfamiliar.

Help with long or competing turns

If several children want to speak, name the order and invite one prayer or thank-you each. An adult can gather the rest into a closing prayer. Avoid ranking prayers by length, wording, or how grown-up they sound.

Take a request seriously without promising an outcome

If a child asks for something unlikely, notice the longing underneath and bring it honestly to God. You can say, “We can ask, and we don’t know exactly what will happen.” Avoid telling a child that enough belief or correct behavior will guarantee the answer they want.

Keep private things private

Ask before repeating a child's personal request to other people. If an older sibling laughs, interrupt kindly and protect the child's turn. When a request opens a painful conversation, listen and offer to talk afterward instead of requiring the child to explain everything in front of the family.

Keep in mind Try saying: “You can pray, give me words to pray, or listen with us.”

Also helpful: Prayer in a hard season, p. 37 • Honest doubts and objections, p. 35

Let children help shape it

Children can help make the ritual feel like something the family shares. Offer responsibilities that fit their interest and ability, with adults carrying the overall structure.

Offer a few real choices

Let children choose between two stories when both fit, select an activity, or decide who will read first. Offer choices you are willing to honor. You can keep a clear boundary around the time available while giving a child room to influence what happens within it.

Rotate desirable jobs

Reader, picture holder, clue giver, and closing helper can all be valued roles. Decide turns before the job begins. If you forget whose turn it is, acknowledge that and make a simple plan. Avoid awarding every desirable role to the child who was quietest.

Keep adult responsibilities with adults

Adults manage flame, supervision, and limits. Children can assist at an appropriate level, including switching off a flameless candle or choosing a hiding place with help. A child-led evening still has an adult available to guide and support it.

Try a child's idea in a small form

If a child wants a long treasure hunt or a new opening song, try one clue or one verse first. Then ask whether it helped the family begin. You can say, "That was fun. Next time we'll make it shorter so there's room for the story too."

Avoid turning the ritual into a reward system

Let the opening and closing remain part of the family's shared time. If you need to address behavior, do so directly. A child should not have to display a particular emotion or produce a right answer to have a place in the family rhythm.

Keep in mind Children can contribute ideas and jobs while adults keep the gathering manageable.

Also helpful: When turns become a contest, p. 28 • Keeping clear limits, p. 33

Understand the child at five

A five-year-old may be curious, energetic, talkative, and still learning how to wait, shift attention, and take turns. Start with the child you have today.

Hold time estimates lightly

The CDC lists attending to an activity for about five to ten minutes among common five-year milestones. That is a broad developmental reference, not a required length for your Bible Blocks gathering or a rule for every child. A particular evening is affected by tiredness, hunger, interest, and the way you invite participation. [2]

Build a gathering from small pieces

A story, a supported retell, a pose, and a short prayer ask for different kinds of participation. Begin with a brief gathering, perhaps five to ten minutes, and observe what helps. Your family may sometimes enjoy 20 or 30 minutes; that time can include searching, moving, drawing, and conversation. It need not be continuous seated listening.

Look for signs of connection

Notice whether a child turns toward a picture, supplies a word, imitates an action, asks a question, or later mentions the story. These are useful things to notice alongside spoken answers. Looking away, shifting position, or keeping hands occupied does not by itself tell you whether a child is following.

Offer the support that fits

If “Tell me the whole story” is too much, ask for one picture. If a spoken answer is difficult, invite pointing or a gesture. If a child has already told the story several times, offer a new responsibility or a closer question. Change the invitation before assuming unwillingness.

Choose an encouraging measure of progress

Ask, “Did we share a moment of attention?” and “Was there a way for each child to join?” Over time, look for familiarity with the story, growing curiosity, and a willingness to return. A difficult evening does not tell you what a child understands or how their faith is growing.

Keep in mind Follow your children’s attention. Begin small, allow movement, and continue when there is interest.

Developmental reference: CDC, Milestones by 5 Years. See [page 48](#).

Also helpful: [Active bodies](#), p. 24 • [Different invitations](#), p. 27

Give active bodies a part

Try making movement part of the invitation. Offer it before the evening turns into repeated reminders to sit still.

Offer a workable place to listen

A child might stand beside a chair, sit on a cushion, or lean against a parent. Choose a position that keeps everyone safe and lets others see and hear. You can say, “You may stand here while I read.” There is no need to require eye contact as proof of attention.

Put movement inside the story

Invite one gesture that belongs to the passage: walking in place, reaching out a hand, or making gentle wave motions. Give it a beginning and ending: “Show the wind with your hands. Now let’s see the next picture.” Storytelling, pretend play, and movement games are among the activities Harvard’s child-development guide uses to practice developing attention and self-regulation skills. [3]

Give a small, useful job

Ask a child age five or older to turn the Story Block at your cue, show the next picture, or carry the Bible to the table. Keep the job small enough to succeed. Rotate roles across gatherings so one child is not always the reader and another always the helper.

Try a quiet occupation for the hands

A child might draw while listening or hold a familiar, age-appropriate soft toy. Watch what happens. If it helps them stay with the group, keep it. If it becomes a competing game, change the arrangement together. You are trying an adjustment, not choosing a permanent rule.

Use a short reset when needed

Pause to stretch, press palms together, or walk to the doorway and back with an adult. Then point to the next picture and give one clear task. If moving makes it harder to return, try a quieter reset next time. Offer support according to the child’s response.

Keep in mind Try saying: “Your body needs to move. Let’s find a way to move and stay with the story.”

General play principles: Harvard Center on the Developing Child. See [page 48](#).

Also helpful: [When the thread slips](#), p. 25

Help attention return

When the thread is slipping, make the next step easier to see. A small change is often a useful first response.

Notice what may be getting in the way

Has the adult explanation become long? Is the child waiting through several other turns? Is the room loud, the light uncomfortable, or bedtime already overdue? Respond to the immediate situation. A drink, an earlier gathering tomorrow, or a shorter explanation may be more useful than another reminder to concentrate.

Move closer and give one invitation

Use the child's name kindly, show the picture, and say what to do: "Find the boat," or "Turn to the next face." Allow time to respond. Avoid stacking directions such as sitting down, putting something away, answering a question, and remembering whose turn is next.

Offer two acceptable ways to join

Try, "Would you like to point or tell?" "Stand beside me or sit here?" or "Make one pose or watch mine?" Both choices should be genuinely available. If the child needs to watch quietly for a while, keep the next invitation open.

Keep turns brief and visible

Say who goes next before passing the block. Let one child add a sentence, then another add a detail. Adults can carry the rest of the retell. A child who knows when their turn is coming has less to keep track of while listening to everyone else.

Hold a clear boundary kindly

When behavior prevents others from joining, state the limit and the alternative: "I won't let the block be thrown. I'll hold it, and you can point." Or, "We need to hear your sister. You can make your sound when she reaches the storm." If it continues, pause and help the child settle nearby.

Keep in mind Reconnect → make the next step smaller → offer a way to join → close if the family has had enough.

Also helpful: [Change time or place, p. 11](#) • [When a boundary is needed, p. 33](#)

Welcome younger siblings

Bible Blocks is designed for ages five and up. Younger siblings can still share the family moment without being expected to follow the full story-and-activity sequence.

Give them a place near you

A baby may be held or settled safely nearby. A toddler may stay on a lap, watch briefly, or play beside the group with their own age-appropriate toy. Keep their place within adult supervision. Joining the opening or the final prayer can be their whole contribution today.

Offer one small way in

Show a picture while you hold the block. Name one person or object. Invite the child to point, copy a simple gesture, or echo an easy word if they want to. Respond to their interest: “You saw the boat. Yes, there’s a boat.” Harvard describes these responsive exchanges as one way adults support early communication. [4]

Keep product use appropriate

These family-time adaptations do not change the product's ages-5+ guidance. An adult or older child can hold and show the Bible Blocks while a younger sibling watches, points, or uses their own suitable toy. Follow the product's age and safety instructions for the blocks and any materials you use.

Let participation come in small visits

A younger child may join a sound, wander within a safe supervised space, and return for the prayer. Welcome the return without asking them to catch up. If they need feeding, changing, or comfort, meet that need. With two adults, one can support the little one; with one adult, the gathering can pause or shorten.

Leave room for the older child too

Give the older child a turn that is not interrupted when you can, even if it is just one sentence. If they want a longer question after the shared ending, return to it when you are able. Let older siblings help by choice without making them responsible for keeping a toddler involved.

Keep in mind For a younger sibling, being welcomed into a shared moment can be enough. Participation can grow over time.

Responsive interaction: Harvard Center on the Developing Child, Serve and Return. See [page 48](#).

Also helpful: [One adult leading, p. 16](#) • [Different stages together, p. 27](#)

One story, different invitations

Keep the family with the same story while adjusting what you ask each child to do. The examples below are options to try, not age tests or a sequence every child must follow.

While you read

Younger sibling: watch one picture while an adult holds the block; respond to a familiar word or sound.

Child beginning the full flow: point to the matching scene or turn the block when invited.

Child ready for more: notice an action or question in the Bible passage that the short narrative leaves out.

While you retell

Younger sibling: copy one gesture or supply an animal sound that belongs to the story.

Child beginning the full flow: finish a sentence or tell what happens in one picture.

Child ready for more: connect the beginning and ending, or explain what led from one event to the next.

While you explore

Younger sibling: imitate a simple pose or use their own age-appropriate drawing materials with supervision.

Child beginning the full flow: choose one pictured moment to draw, act, or talk about.

Child ready for more: explain a choice, compare two responses, or look up a connection with you.

While you pray and close

Younger sibling: listen nearby, make a familiar gesture, or join “Amen.”

Child beginning the full flow: offer one thank-you or ask an adult to pray for something.

Child ready for more: pray in their own words, read the key verse, or help everyone remember the next gathering.

Share space fairly

Start with a small invitation so each child has an opening. Then offer an extension to anyone who wants more. If one child answers everything, say, “Keep that thought. Let’s give everyone a moment.” Interest, communication style, and familiarity matter alongside age.

Keep in mind Use the invitation that fits this child in this moment. A capable child can still prefer a small part tonight.

Also helpful: [Making room for each voice, p. 28](#)

When siblings compete

Shared time can bring out competition for a block, a job, or an adult's attention. Give each child a clear opening without expecting identical contributions.

When one child answers everything

Thank them for the thought, then protect another turn: "Hold your next idea. Your sister gets a moment." Ask the quieter child whether they want to point, speak, or pass. If needed, take one contribution from everyone before inviting second contributions.

When children correct each other

Give the storyteller room to finish. Say, "Let's hear the whole part first. Then we can check together." Ask siblings to offer help with permission: "Would you like a clue?" Keep the passage available for checking instead of making the most confident child the family's answer judge.

When a job becomes a prize

Separate the job from status. Rotate the reader or closing helper across evenings, or split a task into clear turns. State the order before passing the block. If remembering turns is difficult, make a tiny note after the gathering.

When someone says, "That's not fair"

Acknowledge the concern and explain the plan briefly: "You had the first turn last time. Tonight it's his turn." Fair participation may involve different support for different children. You can say, "She needs my help with this. Your question still matters, and I'm coming back to it."

When older children want more

Give them a closer observation, a connection to investigate, or an optional leadership role. Avoid making every older child's turn a lesson for the younger ones. They also deserve a place to ask their own questions and enjoy the story.

Keep in mind Try saying: "There's room for your idea. First, let's make room for theirs."

Also helpful: Rotating jobs, p. 22 • If conflict keeps escalating, p. 33

When a child does not join

“No,” silence, and “This is boring” can mean different things. Start by finding out what is difficult instead of deciding immediately that the child does not care.

Check the immediate situation

Is the child tired, interrupted in play, unsure what you want, or worried about being wrong? Ask a small question privately: “Is this too long, too hard, or just not what you want right now?” Their answer may be incomplete, but it can help you choose a first adjustment.

Offer a low-demand place

A child can watch, listen nearby, point once, or help with a familiar job. Explain any household expectation kindly: “We’re sharing a short family time. You may sit or stand here, and you can pass on speaking.” Keep public reading, prayer, and declarations of belief voluntary.

Make the task clear

“Tell the story” may feel large. Try, “Show me one picture you remember,” or “I’ll say the first part; you can add a word.” Model it if needed. A small successful turn may be a better invitation than repeated urging to participate fully.

Respond to boredom with curiosity

If the story is familiar, offer a new role or move on. If adult explanations are long, shorten them. If every gathering has become a string of questions, try sharing your own observation and doing an activity together. Ask what the child would enjoy contributing next time.

Return to a persistent pattern later

Outside the gathering, ask what they like, dislike, or wish were different. Change one thing and notice the result. Protect the relationship if a particular format keeps producing conflict. You may need a different time, a shorter shared portion, or a one-to-one conversation.

Keep in mind Keep an invitation open without making a public struggle out of a child’s reluctance.

Also helpful: Fear of getting it wrong, p. 30 • When reluctance involves belief, p. 35

When getting it right feels big

Some children hesitate because they want the perfect answer, drawing, or retell. Make room for trying, changing an idea, and receiving help.

Reduce the size of the task

Offer one picture, one line, or one simple mark on the paper. Let the child tell you what to draw or say while you help. If they ask you to start, model a small beginning rather than producing an elaborate example they may feel they have to match.

Name what you notice concretely

Say, “You noticed that the person came back,” or “You tried another way to show the boat.” Focus on the observation or effort you actually saw. Avoid comparing siblings' work or making every contribution a judgment about ability.

Let revision be ordinary

You can say, “I mixed up those two parts. Let me look again.” When your child changes an answer, welcome the closer reading. Keep mistakes separate from character: forgetting a detail does not mean someone was careless or disrespectful.

Give children ownership of their work

Ask before correcting a drawing, adding words, or sharing it with someone else. The drawing may be meaningful to the child even if you cannot identify it. Try, “Tell me about this part.” If they want to stop, save the work or leave it unfinished.

Keep factual help gentle

You do not have to treat every answer as accurate to keep the experience encouraging. Acknowledge what connects, then check the passage together. Offer a clue without a score or a public comparison. The aim is to help the child see more clearly and remain willing to try.

Keep in mind Try saying: “You can start small. We can check, change, and try again together.”

Also helpful: [Checking an inaccurate detail, p. 38](#) • [When siblings compare, p. 28](#)

Make the space fit your family

Children vary in how they communicate, respond to noise and light, and join a group. Start with supports you already know help your child.

Make the next step predictable

Describe the plan in simple words: “First the story, then one drawing, then prayer.” A few quick sketches on scrap paper can help if your child likes seeing the sequence. Give a brief warning before changing activities, and explain changes to a familiar routine before you begin.

Adjust the sensory experience

Try normal room lighting if candlelight makes the pictures harder to see. Choose a flameless candle if a real flame, smoke, or scent is distracting. Reduce background music if it competes with voices. Offer a comfortable seat or standing place, and let a child watch rather than join a loud act-out scene.

Offer more than spoken answers

A child can point, gesture, sign, draw, use their usual communication device, or ask you to speak their words. Wait for their response without rushing to fill the space. Avoid insisting on eye contact, a particular prayer posture, or public reading as the only way to participate. Use the language in which your family can participate most comfortably; an adult can explain an unfamiliar word in the language the child knows best.

Adapt the hunt and the activity

Bring a hidden block within easy viewing or reaching distance for the child who will retrieve it. A child who cannot move around the room can direct a partner with clues or choose between visible hiding places. For a younger sibling, an adult can reveal the block while the child points. Keep the role meaningful and appropriate to the child.

Protect a way back in

A quiet place beside the group or a brief pause with an adult can make returning possible. If your child already has support strategies from home, school, or a clinician, use the familiar ones. Invite them to tell or show you what helps. You do not need to settle on the perfect arrangement before sharing a story.

Keep in mind Change the setting or the invitation when that helps a child participate. Keep the welcome recognizable.

Also helpful: [Ways to respond](#), p. 27 • [A workable setting](#), p. 11

When the evening unravels

Sometimes the kindest next step is to stop. A familiar ending can help you close without turning a hard evening into a verdict on the family.

Pause the teaching

If someone is crying, frightened, or overwhelmed, lower the demands. Attend to the child and to everyone's immediate safety. Put the blocks aside, reduce the noise, and offer closeness if it is welcome. A distressed child does not need to answer a story question before receiving comfort.

Make the ending very small

You might say, "We're having a hard evening. We'll finish here." If the family can manage it, read the key verse and pray one sentence. Otherwise offer a brief blessing and close. You can return to the story another day without repeating everything that was missed.

Repair your own part

If you raised your voice, name it plainly: "I got frustrated and shouted. I'm sorry. I'm going to try again more gently." Take responsibility without asking the child to make you feel better. A parent can demonstrate what repair looks like in the same space where the family talks about grace.

Save the behavior conversation for later

When everyone is calmer, briefly name what happened and practice a better way to ask for a turn or use the blocks. Keep the next Bible Blocks invitation warm. Avoid using God, prayer, or Bible knowledge to shame a child about an evening that was hard.

Change one thing next time

Try gathering earlier, having a snack beforehand, shortening the hunt, or choosing a movement activity. If the same difficulty appears, ask the child what might help. One adjustment gives you something useful to observe; changing everything at once can make it harder to learn what fits.

Keep in mind You can protect the relationship, keep a boundary, and end the gathering. Those choices belong together.

Also helpful: Safe, clear limits, p. 33 • Supporting the tired parent, p. 42

Keep boundaries kind and clear

Making room for movement and different kinds of participation still includes protecting people and shared materials. Set a limit around the specific behavior, then offer a workable next step.

Say what needs to stop

Use a brief, concrete sentence: “I won’t let the block be thrown,” or “We need to hear your brother.” Move the block out of use if needed and attend to anyone who was hurt. Avoid making the behavior a statement about whether the child loves God or belongs in the gathering.

Offer the nearest useful alternative

“I’ll hold the block, and you can point.” “You can make the storm sound when I give the cue.” “You can stand beside me.” The alternative should make sense for this child right now. Repeating a long explanation rarely gives them a clearer next step.

Pause if the limit is not holding

Stay nearby and help the child settle. If one adult cannot safely support everyone and continue, stop the gathering. You can say, “We need a break. We’ll come back another time.” Keep supervision and care in place while the story waits.

Return to repair when everyone is ready

Later, name the impact without a lecture: “The block hit your sister and hurt her.” Help the child take an appropriate repairing step, such as checking on her or returning something gently. Practice how to ask for a turn. Do not require a public prayer or an immediate display of emotion as proof of remorse.

Plan for the repeated difficulty

If the same problem recurs, change the arrangement: shorter turns, an adult holding the block, a closer seat, or less waiting. Notice what happens just before the difficulty. If you already use a family support plan, keep your approach consistent with it.

Keep in mind A limit can be firm and brief: stop the behavior, support the child, and make the next step clear.

Also helpful: [Closing a hard evening, p. 32](#) • [Preventing turn disputes, p. 28](#)

When you do not know

A question does not need an instant answer to be welcome. You can help children learn how to ask, look, and return to something that matters.

Find out what the child is asking

Try, “What made you think of that?” or “Tell me a little more.” A question about heaven might be curiosity about a picture or concern about someone who died. Listen for the question underneath before giving a long explanation.

Name the kind of answer you can give

If the passage answers, read it together. If it offers clues without settling the matter, say so. If you need to learn more, say, “I don’t know yet.” Avoid filling a gap with a confident guess that you may later need to undo.

Choose whether to stay or save it

Follow a question when the family is interested and has room. If it takes you far from the story or one child needs a much longer answer, say, “That matters. Let’s write a few words so we can come back.” Finish the shared gathering, then make time for the follow-up.

Make a promise you can keep

Choose one question to investigate instead of collecting a long homework list. Look again at the passage, use a trustworthy resource, or ask a knowledgeable person you trust. Return with what you found, including any uncertainty. “I checked, and the passage doesn’t tell us” can be an honest result.

Let the follow-up be a conversation

Share the answer in a small amount and ask whether it addresses the child’s question. Some questions will remain open or deepen as a child grows. Keep the note if useful, but avoid turning the question page into a record of answers the child is expected to accept.

Keep in mind Try saying: “I’m glad you asked. Here’s what I know, and here’s what I still need to look at.”

Also helpful: [A page for following up, p. 46](#) • [Questions involving belief, p. 35](#)

Doubt, disagreement, and fairness

A child may say, “I don’t believe that,” “That seems unfair,” or “How do we know?” You can make room for the objection while speaking honestly about your own faith.

Listen before defending

Ask which part troubles them. They may be responding to a word, an imagined detail, a difficult event, or a larger question about God. Repeat what you heard in your own words and let them correct you. Avoid treating an objection as an attempt to ruin the gathering.

Say what you believe plainly

You can say, “I believe this tells us something true about God. Let’s look at what it says.” Distinguish your conviction, the passage’s wording, and questions Christians understand differently. A calm explanation can leave room for the child to keep thinking.

Avoid forcing agreement in the moment

Do not require a child to say they believe, pray a particular confession, or produce the approved feeling to finish the evening. They can listen and ask while you continue to guide the family’s practice. An honest question is something you can return to.

Take moral concerns seriously

If the question is about suffering, punishment, exclusion, or fairness, acknowledge the weight of it. Look closely at the passage and its context. Avoid a quick phrase that dismisses the child’s concern. You may need more reading and a conversation with a trusted pastor or teacher before offering a fuller response.

Keep curiosity respectful

Children can challenge an idea without mocking a sibling’s contribution or a person with different beliefs. Model language such as, “I see that differently,” and “Help me understand.” If adults need a longer discussion, arrange it outside the shared gathering.

Keep in mind Try saying: “You can tell me what is hard to believe or understand. We can keep talking.”

Also helpful: [Difficult passages](#), p. 36 • [Looking for a careful answer](#), p. 34

When a story is frightening

Scripture includes danger, violence, death, and grief. Think about the actual passage and your child before choosing how much to read together tonight.

Read it yourself first

For a passage you expect may be difficult, read beyond the short narrative beforehand. Notice the details that could need explanation. Choose whether to use the series narrative, a brief truthful summary, or the full passage. You can postpone a story while you prepare to explore it more carefully.

Keep the account honest and proportionate

Use direct, age-appropriate language without adding graphic detail. Avoid changing a difficult event into something the passage does not say. You can acknowledge, “This is a sad part,” or “People were hurt here,” and explain more as the child is ready.

Do not require a child to act it out

A child can observe, draw a different moment, or choose another activity. For scenes involving harm or distress, use a brief narrated reference rather than asking someone to perform the frightening action. Follow the child's response and stop if the activity is upsetting.

Respond to the fear that is present

Ask, “Which part is worrying you?” A child may think the event is about to happen to them. Explain the difference between the story's setting and your family's immediate situation, without promising that nothing difficult will ever happen. Offer comfort, a pause, or a familiar closing.

Choose a useful time to return

A frightening question may be easier to discuss in daylight or one-to-one. Revisit it when the child wants to, and seek thoughtful help with interpretation when you need it. If a child remains troubled, pause that material and use the people and supports your family trusts.

Keep in mind You can tell the truth, keep detail appropriate, and stop an activity that is upsetting.

Also helpful: When the story touches real loss, p. 37 • When the question is about God, p. 35

In a hard family season

Illness, loss, separation, and other changes can affect what a family has room for. Let your gathering become smaller and more attentive to what people are carrying.

Let the moment be honest

You do not have to create a cheerful atmosphere when the family is sad. Say something simple about the present: “We’re missing Grandma tonight.” Allow a child to speak or be quiet. Avoid requiring everyone to explain their feelings in turn.

Choose the passage with care

Use a story you can read truthfully and calmly. Notice whether a familiar account has become newly difficult. You can stay with a gentle, familiar passage or set Bible Blocks aside for a time. Keep stories from becoming a way to push a particular response to grief.

Pray without guarantees

Bring your family's hopes and needs to God while being honest about what you do not know. If a prayer has not been answered as a child hoped, listen to their disappointment. Avoid implying that the outcome depends on the child's faith, goodness, or ability to pray correctly.

Make space for ordinary needs

A meal, rest, a cuddle, or practical help may be the family's immediate need. A verse and a brief prayer can accompany that care if welcome. With a change between households or caregivers, protect the child from pressure to take sides during family faith conversations.

Receive help beyond the gathering

A short family ritual cannot carry every need in a hard season. Welcome trusted relatives, friends, church support, and other appropriate help. If a child raises a question that needs a private conversation, keep it out of the spotlight and return when you can listen.

Keep in mind A steady welcome may be the part of the rhythm you can keep right now. Let that be enough.

Also helpful: [Prayer without pressure, p. 21](#) • [When the adult is depleted, p. 42](#)

Help the story stay true

Children mix up sequences, borrow details from other stories, and imagine things that are not in the passage. Help them learn to check without making retelling feel like a test.

Listen for the main thread

Let a child finish a brief thought before correcting. If the central events are clear, you may not need to interrupt a small wording difference. Retelling in a child's own words will not sound exactly like the narrative. Help where the meaning or sequence has changed.

Acknowledge, then check

Try, “You remembered the meal. Let’s look at who was there.” Show the relevant picture and read the short section that answers the question. Invite the child to try the sentence again if they want to. Avoid setting up a sibling to announce the correction.

Separate imagination from recorded detail

Say, “We can imagine that he felt lonely. Does the passage tell us that, or are we wondering?” This keeps imagination available while naming its limits. A drawing or pretend voice can suggest a possibility without becoming a fact about the story.

Name when accounts differ

If children remember a detail from another Gospel account, look at the references together when useful. Say which account you are reading tonight. You can compare them later without quietly adding every remembered detail to the passage in front of you.

Correct yourself just as openly

If you supplied an inaccurate detail, say, “I checked and I told that part incorrectly.” Read what the passage says and continue. Let children see that careful reading includes revising your own understanding. You are practicing attention together.

Keep in mind Try saying: “That’s an interesting thought. Let’s see what belongs to this passage.”

Also helpful: Protecting willingness to try, p. 30 • Reading beyond the summary, p. 6

When the rhythm changes

Travel, sickness, guests, school changes, and busy seasons can interrupt a good routine. Keep a small point of continuity when it helps, and restart without making up a backlog.

Take only what helps on a trip

One familiar story and its pictures may be enough. A saved digital page or the Bible passage can support a short gathering when the blocks are at home. Let the place and timing change. You can return to the fuller routine when you return home.

Use a smaller version during illness

A child may want to listen to a familiar story beside you, or may simply need rest. Read a verse or pray quietly if welcome. Skip the activity and search. Resume when the family has more energy rather than turning the practice into another demand during recovery.

Explain the routine to guests briefly

Tell a visitor, “We share a short story and choose an activity. You’re welcome to watch or join.” Do not surprise a guest with a reading or prayer assignment. Keep the gathering comfortable for children who do not know the story or share your family's beliefs.

Rebuild after a schedule change

When a new school term, job, or caregiving arrangement changes your day, choose a new anchor rather than forcing the old time to work. Try it for a few gatherings and reassess. Keep one familiar cue or ending if it helps the family recognize the practice.

Begin after a gap

Choose a familiar story. Model the core flow again and make the first return short. You can say, “I’m glad we have a moment together.” There is no need for a lecture about consistency or a promise to gather every night from now on.

Keep in mind Carry one familiar piece through a change, or set it down and pick it up again when you can.

Also helpful: Beginning again, p. 13 • Finding a new time, p. 11

Let wonder follow you home

A family gathering can leave a question, a phrase, or an image that returns later. Make space for those moments without turning the whole day into a lesson.

Notice when the child makes a connection

If a child mentions the story in play or conversation, ask what reminded them of it. Listen before explaining. You can return to the passage later if their connection raises a question. A brief exchange during ordinary life can remain brief.

Return to the verse lightly

Say the week's verse when it naturally fits, or invite a child to help find it again. Keep repetition warm and unforced. The verse does not need to become a password, reward requirement, or correction for every difficult behavior.

Let a question travel

A walk, drive, or quiet moment may offer more space for a question than a group gathering. Ask, "Were you still thinking about that?" If the child has moved on, leave the invitation open. If they want to talk, follow their actual concern.

Make one response concrete

A conversation about welcome might lead you to invite someone to join a game. A prayer might prompt you to check on a neighbor. Let the response grow from the passage and the family's real circumstances. Keep it small enough for children to understand and take part freely.

Leave room for ordinary play

Children do not have to produce an application or religious explanation for every drawing and game. Let them enjoy what they are doing. If they borrow a story image in play, you can be curious about it without taking over the play to deliver another lesson.

Keep in mind Notice and respond when a connection appears. You do not have to manufacture one.

Also helpful: Remember a question, p. 46 • Noticing growth over time, p. 41

Notice what is growing

You may wonder whether a small, interrupted gathering is making any difference. Look for a pattern of opportunities to listen, know the stories, ask questions, and respond.

Look for ordinary signs of familiarity

A child may recognize a picture, anticipate a moment, ask to hear a story again, or connect two passages. Those are things you can notice without keeping a score. An older child may ask a harder question rather than give a more polished answer.

Listen to the relationship as well

Are children comfortable saying they are confused? Can they ask for help, disagree respectfully, or return after a difficult evening? These questions help you consider the atmosphere you are creating. They do not give you a measure of a child's inner spiritual life.

Use reflection without testing everyone

Occasionally ask, “What do you enjoy about our story time?” and “What would make it easier to join?” Let children answer differently. If the family likes revisiting a drawing or question, do that. There is no need to turn every gathering into a memory check.

Let your own growth count

You may understand a passage more fully, interrupt less quickly, or become more comfortable admitting uncertainty. Notice those changes too. A shared practice gives adults opportunities to learn and repair alongside children.

Hold outcomes with humility

A routine cannot guarantee a child's beliefs or a particular spiritual response. Keep offering Scripture, love, honesty, and room to wonder. If the format stops helping, change it. Faithful care can include making the gathering shorter, taking a pause, or finding another way to listen together.

Keep in mind Ask what the practice is making room for, then adjust the parts that crowd out listening and connection.

Also helpful: When you feel discouraged, p. 42 • A rhythm you can sustain, p. 14

For the tired parent

The adult brings a body, a mood, and a whole day to the gathering too. Your energy belongs in the plan.

Name your capacity honestly

Ask yourself whether you have room for a full gathering, a small version, or a pause tonight. Use a familiar narrative and a brief retell when words are hard to find. Skip the extras. A short prayer can be the ending without an explanation of why you did less.

Release the performance

You do not have to create a moving conversation, maintain a perfect atmosphere, or get through every idea you prepared. Children may remember the block hunt more than your best explanation. Keep making room for the story without demanding visible results each evening.

Notice when you need a reset

If you feel yourself tightening up or speaking sharply, pause before the next instruction. Take a breath, get a drink, or say, “I need a moment.” If you have already shouted, apologize plainly and shorten the gathering. Your repair can be simple and sincere.

Share what can be shared

When another adult is available, ask for a concrete task: choosing the story, helping a younger child, or leading one evening. If you are carrying the practice alone, reduce the routine to what is sustainable. Accept practical help where it is available without making a complex plan for someone else to follow.

Choose one adjustment for next time

You might move the time, use the same story again, or let another adult read. Avoid answering a hard night with a more elaborate plan. If the practice repeatedly leaves you depleted, take a pause and think about a smaller version that fits this season.

Keep in mind You are part of the family being cared for. Choose a rhythm that leaves room for your needs too.

Also helpful: One adult leading, p. 16 • A small version for tonight, p. 44

An evening with the storm

An example for a six-year-old and a three-year-old sibling, using Jesus Calms the Storm. Adjust the length freely; this could be a brief gathering or a longer conversation.

Beforehand

Read Mark 4:35-41, the short narrative, and the parent background. Choose Mark 4:41 as the repeated verse; an adult can read it. Keep the story's question about Jesus in mind. Hide the two blocks in easy places and set out a flameless candle if one adult will supervise the hunt.

Gather, read, pray, and search

Come to the table, turn on the candle, and read the verse. Pray briefly. Invite the six-year-old to find the blocks; the three-year-old can point out a hiding place with an adult. Return to the table with an adult holding the blocks for everyone to see.

Read and retell with help

Read the family narrative while turning the block through its pictures. Model a short retell. Invite the older child to tell one pictured moment, then another. The younger child can make gentle wave motions when the storm appears. Carry the parts neither child remembers, keeping the whole story connected.

Choose Act Out

Invite a few simple poses for moments actually in the passage: riding in the boat, sleeping, the storm, and the calm. Let the older child help narrate while the younger one copies a gesture if interested. Keep motion and volume comfortable for the family. No props or rehearsal are needed.

Ask one question, then close

Ask, "What did the disciples wonder about Jesus at the end?" Let them answer or listen as you point back to the verse. Read Mark 4:41 again. Pray, "Jesus, help us know you and bring our fears to you." Switch off the candle with a child's help and finish.

If the evening changes

If the younger child needs care, pause or have the older child show one final picture. If the act-out grows too loud, make the last pose together and move to the verse. If the older child has another question, save it for a quieter moment when you can listen.

Keep in mind The opening and ending stay familiar. The amount each child contributes can change throughout the evening.

Example based on Mark 4:35-41; see [page 48](#). The exact activities are suggestions for family use.

Also helpful: The opening and closing, p. 17 • Including a younger sibling, p. 26

Choose the next helpful step

When the evening is slipping, pause long enough to notice what kind of help is needed. Start with one response and see whether it helps.

They are interested and still participating

Continue while the family has room. Let a child finish a thought or stay with an activity. Signal the ending before energy runs out. A useful question or a longer drawing can be enough for the evening.

Attention is drifting, but everyone is comfortable

Give one clear invitation, shorten a turn, or add a movement that belongs to the story. Ask for a point or a word instead of a full explanation. If it helps, continue with a smaller plan. See [page 25](#) and [page 24](#).

A child is upset or behavior is preventing others from joining

Pause. Attend to the child and any immediate safety need. State a brief boundary if needed, then offer support. Continue only if the family can rejoin comfortably; otherwise close. See [page 33](#) and [page 32](#).

Someone is hungry, tired, ill, or needs care

Meet the need. The gathering can wait or become a verse and prayer. If you pause and return, remind everyone where you were in one sentence. See [page 16](#) and [page 37](#).

A question needs more than this moment can hold

Acknowledge it and ask what the child means. Follow it if the family has room; otherwise make a brief note and name a time to return. Keep the promise modest and follow through. See [page 34](#) and [page 46](#).

The whole evening needs to be smaller

Skip the hunt and candle. Read or tell the story, help with a tiny retell, and pray. If even that is beyond the family's capacity, offer a warm closing and return another day. You do not need to earn permission to stop by finishing a checklist.

Keep in mind Notice the need. Make one useful adjustment. Continue, pause, or close with care.

One story for this week

Use this page if a few notes help. Leave anything blank that you do not need. You can also make this plan aloud with another caregiver.

Story and Bible passage

Name the story and the passage you want to read in full.

Our key verse

Write the reference and the words you want to return to.

One thing I noticed

A detail from Scripture or the parent background; a question to revisit.

A prayer for our family

Name a child's need, a gratitude, or the patience you want to practice.

One possible activity and one way for each child to join

Keep the invitation small. Include a place for a younger sibling if needed.

Afterward: keep this / adjust this

What helped us connect? What might make the next gathering easier?

If you do not make a plan: read the narrative, retell together, and pray. You can begin today.

A question to return to

Save one question that matters to your child. A short note can help you follow through; this is not a worksheet children have to complete.

What did my child ask?

Keep their own wording if you can.

What seemed to matter to them?

A detail, a worry, an objection, or something they were curious about.

Where can we look?

The Bible passage, surrounding verses, the parent background, or a trusted resource.

When will we return to it?

Choose a realistic moment, and who will follow up.

What did we learn, and what is still open?

An honest answer may include uncertainty or a question to explore later.

One remembered question and a thoughtful return can be enough. Leave the rest of the page blank.

Tonight's simple rhythm

A reminder of the optional opening and closing around your familiar Bible Blocks experience. Adapt the length and the extras to your family today.

Before you gather

Choose a Story Block. Mark your key verse. Have the Activity Block nearby, or hide both blocks if using the search. Choose one possible activity and make a supervised place for younger siblings.

1 Gather, read the verse, and pray

Welcome everyone. Light or switch on the candle if using one. Invite a volunteer or adult to read the week's verse. Pray briefly.

2 Find the blocks and return

Give a clear search area, help when needed, and bring the blocks to their place. Keep a real flame supervised by an adult throughout.

3 Use your familiar core flow

Read or tell the story, show the pictures, and help retell together. Your series guide and Activity Block Parents Guide provide the narrative and activity instructions.

4 Explore as long as it is useful

Choose one additional activity, or make a fuller Retell activity your exploration. Keep the invitation small, help each child find a way to join, and move toward the closing when the family has had enough.

5 Read the verse, pray, and close

Repeat the key verse. Pray simply. Extinguish the candle safely with adult help or switch off the flameless one. Finish warmly.

Keep in mind On a very full day: skip the hunt and candle. Read, help retell, and pray. Return to the rest another time.

Sources and further reading

The family rituals, scripts, planner, and Bible Blocks adaptations in this guide are practical suggestions. The resources below provide Scripture and general developmental context; they do not evaluate this particular Bible Blocks routine.

1 Scripture

Mark 4:35-41, World English Bible. The worked example and reading discussion follow this account. The closing question keeps attention on Jesus' identity. Read the full passage before using the short narrative.

[Read Mark 4 at eBible.org](#)

2 Attention around age five

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Milestones by 5 Years.” Includes a broad five-to-ten-minute attention milestone for activities such as stories or crafts. It is background context, not a prescribed devotional length or an assessment based on one evening.

[Read the CDC's five-year milestones](#)

3 Play, storytelling, and developing self-regulation

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, “Executive Function Activities for 3- to 5-year-olds.” Describes pretend play, storytelling, songs, and movement games, with support adjusted to the child. This guide applies those broad ideas to family Bible exploration.

[Open the Harvard activities handout](#)

4 Responsive interaction with little ones

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, “Serve and Return.” Explains the value of responsive exchanges between a young child and a caring adult. A gesture, sound, or pointed picture can begin that exchange.

[Read about serve and return](#)

Use alongside your Bible Blocks guides

Core flow and activity names follow the *Bible Blocks Activity Block Parents Guide* and *Encountering Jesus Parent's Companion*. Use your series guide for narratives, backgrounds, passages, and activities. Rob Merrill shared the candle-and-search rhythm. The situation guidance is practical advice to adapt to your household.

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Nuts & Bolts • A Parents Guide to Learning & Wonder

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