

An interview with Champ Thornton, Author of *The Radical Book for Kids: Exploring the Roots and Shoots of Faith*



The Radical Book for Kids by Champ Thornton is a fun-filled explorer's guide to the Bible, church history and life for boys and girls ages 8 and up. Along with examining some of the most exciting realities in the universe, the handbook is vibrantly illustrated and chock-full of fun facts and ideas. Deep truths are communicated to elementary and middle-school aged kids while stimulating their curiosity and sense of adventure within a gospel-centered framework.

Q: Your new book is *The Radical Book for Kids*. What makes the book radical?

In this book, I introduce young readers to the stories of men and women who have lived out their faith in Jesus in radical ways. God sustained them to trust him despite great opposition and difficulty. The book also focuses on the radical roots of our faith. (The word "radical" comes from the Latin word "radix," which literally means "roots.") So in many ways it is a "root" book, leading young minds on a tour of the roots of their faith — a tour of the Bible, what it teaches, how to read it and why we should believe it and tell others about it. *The Radical Book for Kids* also includes radical fun with a 3,000-year-old game, a secret code, hands-on activities, fun facts and more. It's radical strength, depth and fun.

Q: How did your children provide inspiration for writing this book?

My wife and I have three children, all currently under the age of twelve. So this age group is on my mind and in my heart regularly. I want them to grow up to know God, trust him, love him and serve him with all of their lives. This book is an attempt to point my kids and others toward that goal. In the background of this desire is that in 2003 I was diagnosed with a blood clot and a genetic blood disorder. When you're 29 years old, you think you're fairly invincible, but God brought into my life a daily reminder of my mortality. I've not had another scare like that since, but God has used this diagnosis to raise my awareness of the importance of passing along to the next generation the good news of Christ and the truths of His Word.

Q: *The Radical Book for Kids* is described as a fun-filled explorer's guide to the Bible, church history and life. What are some of the specific topics kids will be able to explore?

In *The Radical Book for Kids*, readers of all ages will be able to explore topics such as:

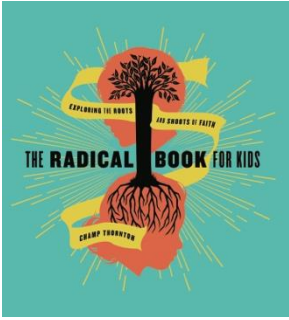
- The Bible in one sentence
- How to read the Gospels
- The names of God
- How we know the Bible's true
- The secret to growing up
- How to deal with parents who aren't perfect
- How to make good decisions

In addition to these topics, there are also fun-focused and practical application chapters too.

Q: You say you want to whet kids' appetites for God and the Bible by giving them samples of various aspects of the faith. What are some of the samples offered in the book?

The Radical Book for Kids opens doorways to rooms to be explored later. It cracks doors and provides glimpses into the lives of faithful men and women through church history, such as Augustine, Martin Luther, Amy Carmichael and Sarah Edwards. Sometimes the focus is on someone famous, such as John Bunyan, or in contrast someone nearly forgotten, such as Hannah Faust.

Other open doors included are theological topics: the gospel, union with Christ, the mission of God, and the names of God. Daily Christian living is also explored: how to pray, how to grow as a Christian, a theology of work, how to deal with heart idolatry, what to do when you're angry, what to do when you're afraid and what to do when bad things happen. Then there are just practical matters of biblical wisdom, such as how to make good decisions and how not to apologize.



Q: The book is a vibrantly illustrated book, full of charts and visual aids. Can you describe more about the format?

This book presents 67 short chapters containing a wide range of topics presented in a variety of creative ways. There's nothing boring about God — He's the most engaging, creative, vivid and energizing Being in the universe. In fact, just look at the universe He's created! A riot of colors, sounds and smells, tastes and textures. This is beauty, but His *truth* is just the other side of the same coin. God's beauty, truth and goodness are all different expressions of the same reality — God's reality. So, He's the farthest thing from boring, and when we teach about Him in a way that's uninteresting, we misrepresent Him. We wanted this book to engage minds with truth, ignite hearts with His goodness and captivate imaginations with His beauty. And Scot McDonald's creative design work has brought all the wonder-filled fun-factor I had hoped for when writing the book. Vivid colors, eye-catching pictures, hand-drawn sketches and illuminating sidebars fill its pages.

Q: How is *The Radical Book for Kids* designed to be used? Can kids go through the book on their own, or is it best for parents and children to read it together?

This is a book kids, ages 8 and up, can read on their own. For curious readers, a table of contents and index make topics easy to find. So kids can explore their book however they like: hopscotching around via topic or just reading straight through. For kids of younger ages, parents can also read this book aloud in family devotions. Bible teachers can use it to supplement their main curriculum. For parents or teachers, there are plenty of places to stop reading and to discuss issues posed, consider questions asked or just laugh at something funny.

As the book has been previewed, I've learned adults have found this book useful for themselves or to give to others who are growing in their faith.

Q: Do kids need to have some kind of church background to get the most out of the book, or can it serve as an introduction to the Bible and Jesus?

This book assumes no prior knowledge of Scripture or Christianity. Terms and concepts are explained along the way. The format of the book also doles out truth in digestible portions. First, the chapters are generally pretty short; some are only two pages long. No reader should get bogged down. Second, the book unfolds in a sequence that aids comprehension and application of the Bible. *The Radical Book for Kids* starts with a summary of the Bible, then an overview of its various parts. Only then is there a discussion about how someone could read the Bible personally each day. From there the book periodically presents a chapter about how to read certain portions or genres of God's Word: law comes first, then stories, then poetry and wisdom, then prophets, gospels and finally, toward the end of the book, the New Testament letters. In this way, learning is progressive.

However, some content goes way beyond the basic knowledge of the Bible as well. Ideally, the book could serve a wide variety of readers — both those who are familiar with God's Word and also those who aren't.

Q: What was the most difficult theological topic to explain, and how did you break it down in a way kids can understand? Will parents learn anything by reading along with their children?

There are a number of higher-level theological truths presented in *The Radical Book for Kids*. Although it may not be the most difficult of all topics to explain, there's more to one of the most familiar passages in the entire Bible than meets the eye. To help understand how the whole prayer hangs together, I compared the Lord's Prayer to a letter (or email) that a kid might write home from camp.

First, there's a longing for things to be set right — to be at home finally where, in the prayer, God's name is treasured, His kingdom has come and His will is being done. Until that happens, many requests are asked of the Father (to provide, forgive and guard from evil), just like a kid might write home asking his parents for things.

I tried to include topics that are sometimes complex because I want all readers of all ages, including parents, to find this book a helpful and enjoyable learning experience.

Q: What are some of the fun, hands-on activities included in *The Radical Book for Kids*?

Kids will find instructions and opportunities to do some fun stuff. Activities include how to make your own pottery, how to make a (safe) sling shot like King David's, how to make a functioning sundial, how to make a miniature catapult and how to set up and play a game that's as old as Abraham. In addition to hands-on activities like these, there are other fun elements: making a secret code, learning elephant jokes and trying to answer Bible trivia questions that are scattered all throughout the book.

Q: You also provide sections with practical advice, such as “How to Clean Your Room” and “What to do When You're Angry.” How do those chapters fit in with the idea of the book as a whole?

In this book I aim not only to deepen the faith of young readers, rooting them in the Bible and its truths, but also to strengthen their daily life of faith in Christ. I hope to strengthen daily faith by introducing radical role models — the lives of men and women from church history. But this daily faith dimension also has practical, real-life aspects for kids. They have to learn to deal with heart issues, such as anger, forgiveness, guilt, fear, and disappointments. Kids also need to mature in more mundane matters such as being a good friend, avoiding harmful friends, making wise decisions and keeping your life (or room) organized.

Q: How can parents take a more active role in their children's spiritual growth?

The active role parents can take in the spiritual life and development of their children operates in the context of relationships. If spiritual growth is the “traffic,” then those vehicles travel best on wide, well-maintained highways of relationships.

From this perspective, *The Radical Book for Kids* is a tool parents can use, but it can't replace time invested, interest shown, grace given and love displayed. As a resource, this book can be read together by parents and children, or perhaps even better, it can become a starting point for discussion: “What did you think were some significant statements in this chapter? What did you like? What questions did this section bring to your mind? What's the hardest thing about this chapter — to understand? Or to apply to life?”

In addition to these kinds of discussions, it's hard to overstate the importance of prayer for parents actively encouraging their children's spiritual growth. Although God uses human means (conversations and prayers), the only one who can ultimately change your children's hearts (and that is what we're aiming for as parents) is God Himself. So we must always bring our children's spiritual growth before the Lord, asking Him to work the grace and love of the gospel of Christ into our children's hearts.

Q: Do you have any advice for parents who want to make spiritual development part of their family culture but are struggling to know where to start?

Here are four ideas. First, for parents who've not been making this kind of development the priority they'd like, I'd recommend that parents openly talk to their children, sharing in humility where they've fallen short in this area and what they hope to change in the future. Repentance before God and even before our families is a good place to start — and to continue.

Second, I'd keep expectations fairly low. Instead of planning to have family devotions seven days a week, it might be better and more realistic to aim initially for two-to-three days per week. Even then, that family time in the Word and prayer might only last five minutes (perhaps even less for younger children).

Third, depending on where your children are in their spiritual growth, you may want to pray out loud for them (even at times when you're in their presence). For example, “Father, I pray you would change [child's name]'s heart so he/she wants to obey [or spend time in the Word — whatever the issue may be].”

Fourth, you may want to start by reading and memorizing one of the Psalms together. My wife and I read this advice years ago and have found it very helpful in our own family. Even very little children can participate, reciting together a verse (or verses) from the Psalms, as a parent reads out loud. The verse may be read several times during each family devotion time, and a new verse could be added every few days as previous verses become more and more familiar. In this way, throughout several weeks, you might be surprised to discover how quickly your family could memorize an entire Psalm. Favorite psalms for our family have included Psalm 1, 23, 100 and 103.

Q: What is your hope for the children and families who read this book?

On one level, I hope those who read this book — whether children and teens or their parents and grandparents — would come to love, trust and follow the Lord Jesus Christ more. It's my prayer this book will be used by God to grow deep roots of faith in all who read it.

In addition to this, it's my hope that the middle schoolers and young teens who read about the spiritual disciplines, the names of God, biblical wisdom, union with Christ or men and women who gave their lives for the Lord will one day come back for more as they later decide to explore more deeply and widely the riches of God's truth. In other words, I want to scatter a packet of assorted seeds across the minds and hearts and imaginations of the next generation, which in God's time and by His Spirit will take root, sprout and bear much fruit. If this book makes children and teens (and adults) more curious and thirsty to know God and the good news of His Word, then it will have done its job.

Champ Thornton invites you to connect with him at www.champthornton.com, on [Facebook \(Champ.Thornton.7\)](#) and via [Twitter \(champthornton\)](#).