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Send out your light and your truth! Let them guide me. Psalm 43:3

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### Equipping Children and Pre-Teens to Read and Study Their Bibles

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## Equipping Children and Pre-Teens to Read and Study Their Bibles

## Introduction

An old saying goes that to feed a village for a day, give them fish. But to feed them for a lifetime, teach them how to fish. A similar statement can be made about the Bible and children. To feed a child spiritual food for a day, teach them a Bible lesson. But to feed them spiritually for a lifetime, instruct them how to study the Bible. In the Christian home, in the church, and in the Christian school much is done in the area of teaching children the contents of the Bible, but little if anything is done along the lines of teaching them how to read and study the Bible. Even an internet search for “children and the Bible” turns up “stories about Jesus” or “Bible stories for children.” If today’s children are going to be tomorrow’s parents and the future leaders in our churches and communities, it is crucial to begin equipping them early to be effective instruments for the kingdom. Scripture is our resource for equipping the people of God. Therefore, understanding and interpreting that resource is foundational.

This article attempts to offer some guidance about teaching children (ages eight through ten years) and pre-adolescents (ages eleven through thirteen years) how to study the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Five steps will be presented that are crucial for children to learn for engaging in Bible study, regardless if it is a biblical narrative, poem, Epistle, etc. The five steps are: 1) Properly locating the start and finish of a complete literary unit of thought and expression, 2) conducting some basic research on the historical situation of the author and first audience of the text, 3) determining what the text teaches about God, 4) inferring the text’s meaning to the first audience and 5) establishing the practical significance of that teaching for today. Each step has one or more core activities especially designed to distill the teaching content and engage the children with the main learning objectives. The core activity is aimed at the intermediate ages, but is

suitable for older children as well. Further, the core activities focus on allowing the children to speak and listen to one another. The focus in education on literacy reinforces individualism. The church needs to encourage the oral interpretation and understanding of the Bible in order to teach and remind her members they are saved into a family. Bellous argues “to exclude conversation among the pre-literate young is to silence them by disallowing them the use of their primary means of consolidating and conveying personal and social identity” (2000, p. 13). The paper will also explain reader-response theory and discuss the problems associated with this approach to reading as it relates to Bible interpretation.

The approach presented in this article can be applied to teaching the Bible with any age. That is by design, for the goal is to teach children to become participants in hearing the voice of God within the redeemed community. A similar methodology that is used by all members who bring their own background experiences into the interpretive community fosters unity within diversity. The community should negotiate the meaning through discussion, and children need to be trained to participate because they will make meaningful contributions to the conversation. The theological understanding among the church members should be as high as that of the ordained ministers. The interpretation of the word of God is to be done in community with all members. Karl Barth contends that the interpretation of Scripture is not the “concern of a special office but of the whole Church” and that “no member can remain a mere spectator” (1978, p. 714). He goes on to say, “Those who are silent in deference to scriptural learning, the congregation which is passive in matters of biblical exegesis, is committed already to secret rebellion” (p. 715). Further he affirms it is “no longer a true congregation of Jesus Christ” (p. 715).

### Step One: Choose a Text by Locating the Start and Finish of a Complete Thought Unit

Do not cut a poem, paragraph or story in half. This might seem like an odd statement; however it is important because early in a child's Christian education they are encouraged to memorize Bible verses that often fragment whole literary units. The meaning of some verses can be misunderstood if taken out of their written context. Reading only isolated verses while ignoring complete literary units can lead to incorrect interpretations of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> In addition, memorizing a verse encourages theology to be formed out of passages torn from their literary context.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, an educator should use wisdom when selecting verses for children to learn.

For Bible study purposes children should study a passage that is a complete literary unit of thought and expression. Wilhoit and Ryken (1988) refer to complete literary thought units as a book of the Bible, a whole chapter, a whole paragraph, a complete poem or an entire story (p. 132).<sup>4</sup> Ideally a whole book of the Bible should be read in its entirety in order to get the author's overall message. However, when children are just beginning to learn interpretation skills a whole book is too much material to manage effectively. The first step in Bible interpretation is to have the children locate the beginning and end of a story, poem or paragraph they are going to interpret.

While it is important to select a passage for study that is a self contained unit, one should be aware that some units may be a part of a larger thought unit. Isolating a paragraph or single narrative does not rule out the possibility that the text before or after the selected passage might all be associated with the selected passage. A group of paragraphs can be a segment of thought and expression. Likewise, several stories might be associated with one another. An author's

message might encompass several stories and his message can only be understood when the narratives are read together. For instance, this is true in Luke 15. The three parables Jesus tells about the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son should be interpreted together. He told all three to address the criticism of the Pharisees. It will be the task of the educator to be careful in paragraph and narrative selection to avoid fragmenting a larger thought unit. The instructor will need to determine if there is an important connection between paragraphs or stories before deciding what units the children are to study.

### *Core Activities*

Use the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle to help children understand the importance of studying complete units of thought. Like a jigsaw puzzle, where each piece contributes to the whole picture, each Bible verse contributes to the whole message of the passage or thought unit. One piece of a puzzle hardly provides the complete image. One verse barely communicates the entire teaching.

Another effective way to help children comprehend the importance of this concept is to demonstrate it with a genre of literature that is more familiar to them. For instance, offer to have them read a comic strip. Then proceed to cut out one frame of the entire strip for them to read. When they object, ask them for the reason that this it is not acceptable. They will notice this does not allow them to grasp the entire story line. Explain only having one scene of a comic strip is like only reading one verse of a Biblical story, paragraph or poem. Reading complete literary thought units is foundational for interpreting the meaning of any text including the Bible.

Have the children look up a few popular verses and locate an entire story, paragraph or poem they are taken from. For example, instruct them to find John 3:16 and then locate the start and finish of the narrative by naming the entire verse reference. Have them give a brief summary

of the story. This can be done with other genres of literature such as the Epistles. For example, have them find Ephesians 2:8 and locate the beginning and end of the paragraph where this verse is found.<sup>5</sup>

#### Step Two: Research the Historical Background of the Author and First Audience

Once a passage is chosen, the next task in Bible interpretation is to discover some basic information about the author, the first audience, and the historical situation in which they relate. This is important because whenever something is read or someone is listened to, one must decide what is being said and what it means. Because our reading and conversation usually occurs in familiar situations with familiar people, our understanding about what is being said is relatively simple.

This is not true when we read the Bible. When we read the Bible we are reading a text from a time and place different from our own. Biblical authors composed their material in order to communicate specific instructions to an ancient people from a different culture and time period than the modern reader. To minimize this time gap Donald Keeseey (1987) advises, “if a poem [or any work of literature] is the product of an author and the author is the product of an age, then nothing less than a full understanding of that age—the author’s entire political, social, and intellectual milieu—is required if we are to fully understand that author’s art” (p.11).

Children should be taught to research the writer and the circumstances of the original audience of their study passage. This is crucial in order to gain a perspective on why the author takes the particular slant that he or she does. Investigating background information related to the author and audience of a piece of literature can help illuminate a text’s original message.

#### *Core Activity*

*Christian Perspectives in Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Fall 2009

The author, audience and historical situation can be known for certain if the writer states them in his document. Other times there is a question about who composed a particular book of the Bible, his intended recipients and the historical circumstances. However, basic questions about the author, audience, and the audience's situation at the time of writing can be answered from a good Bible dictionary, one-volume commentary or study Bible.

Using a good Bible dictionary or study Bible, assign the children the job of determining the author of the particular narrative you are studying, the situation surrounding the book, the audience of the book, and finally the purpose for which it was written. By the third grade children are able to alphabetize and use a dictionary. A little research project with a good Bible dictionary or other resource could be an enjoyable time of discovery for children.<sup>6</sup> Later in the process, the young Bible students will need to make inferences about how various texts might have been important to first audiences based on their historical situation.

### Step Three: Focus on What the Study Unit Teaches About God

With a basic knowledge of the author and first audience along with some understanding of their particular circumstance, the next undertaking in Bible study is to read the text. Using an age-suitable Bible translation, have the children individually read the story, poem or paragraph underlining any word(s) or portions of the narrative they do not understand.<sup>7</sup> This reading is primarily aimed at encouraging the children to comprehend the general idea of the passage. When they have finished reading, ask the young students to share what they underlined. Address their questions, but do not spend too much time on this portion of the lesson.

Have the children read the text a second time to discover what the text teaches about God. The major function of Scripture is to teach about the main subject, *God*. Significantly, the Bible opens with the statement, "In the beginning God . . ." introducing the main focus of Scripture.

While authors had diverse purposes for writing, such as gospel proclamation (John 20:30-31) or presenting an orderly account of Christian origins (Luke 1:1-4), they all have an overarching goal to teach about God. The Bible relates how he has performed, despite the acts of fallen people. Children should always be encouraged to inquire of the text, “What does it teach about God?”

This task has its challenges because often Bible lessons focus on biblical characters like Moses, Abraham, Peter and Paul. Children and teachers have been indoctrinated into gleaning lessons from human characters. However, these actors are secondary to God who is the main topic of the Bible. Focusing on human actions of the text distorts its integrity by changing a theological book into an anthropological book about people (Greidanus, 1988, p.162). For instance, in Matthew 4:21-22, a focus on the immediate and radical response of the disciples who leave their boat and their father and follow Jesus as a model of Christian obedience overshadows the more critical theological message. That message is the power and effectiveness of Jesus’ word in calling them to follow him. His authoritative spoken command caused James and John without hesitation or question to drop everything and follow him. A focus on the disciples as examples misses the theological focus of the text.

A further problem of focusing on Biblical characters instead of God is that the meaning and significance of a passage changes as readers identify with different characters. This causes the interpretation to be arbitrary and subjective. How is the reader to know what character they are to model unless the author specifically demands the reader to follow or not to follow a particular person in the text (Greidanus, p. 162)? To illustrate this point, consider Exodus 6:28-7:13, when Moses expresses to God his personal inability to communicate to Pharaoh. As a result of Moses’ voiced lack of confidence, God releases him from that duty. Aaron becomes the

spokesperson to Pharaoh. Is the reader to follow the lead of Moses or Aaron? Bible stories do not normally contain explicit morals. When a narrative does not clearly condemn or commend an action, the readers should be hesitant to find moral lessons (Doriani, 2001, p. 197). Focusing on God rather than the various supporting characters is a principle that is primarily true for Biblical narrative, though it can apply to the Epistles with “characters” such as Paul and Philemon. For instance, are Paul’s prayers exemplary for Christians?

In some cases the author did intend the original audience to identify with a certain character. This is true, for instance, in Hebrews 11. It is also likely that the Israelites were to see themselves in the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Greidanus, 1988, p. 162). God’s promises to them were their promises. The key to knowing if the author intended the reader to identify with a character is to attempt to hear the text as the original audience would have heard it. Greidanus states the Israelites would have clearly seen the child given to Abraham and Sarah as part of their story, but they would not have seen in Abraham’s lying about his wife’s identity a lesson they should personalize (p. 179). Thus there can be certain careful limited identification with characters. It also may be legitimate to identify with a character other than God if the character directs the reader to identify with sinners who are in need of mercy and grace. For example, everyone should identify with the prodigal son who is welcomed home by the loving father. All individuals are sinners separated from the love of God prior to their conversion.

Some Biblical passages do not directly speak about the nature of God. This is true for example in the imperative portions of the Epistles that make a demand on the reader. However, biblical imperatives do indirectly teach about God. For instance, the command to find gainful employment and give of one’s resources to the less fortunate (Ephesians 4:28) may not be a direct statement about the nature of God, but it does have as its very basis the divine character.

The act of giving is a reflection of God's provisional nature. When a person gives of his or her resources to one in need it reflects to that individual the provisional character of God.

### *Core Activity*

One helpful learning technique to get children acclimated to looking for God in the text is to give them a purpose for reading. Reading with a focus or goal helps both adults and children to read more intelligently. To give them an objective when they read and to help them to focus on God rather than the characters, they should be instructed to look for the following:

1. What God says,
2. What God does or does not do,
3. The relationship between God and the characters in the narrative,
4. What the narrator says about God,
5. What other characters say about God,
6. What traits the text reveals about God,
7. What God might be doing through another character.

These elements of the text point to God, his nature, attributes, character and the ways he is accomplishing his redemptive purposes. Once the attributes of God are discovered and their potential meaning to the original audience determined, then the task of deciding the contemporary significance is not far away.

### Step Four: Determine the Passage's Main Teaching to the First Audience

While an interpreter cannot verify with the author what he desired to say, one can infer with some level of confidence the meaning the writer intended. Marilee Sprenger (2005) defines *inferring* as the ability to come to a conclusion based on evidence. The notion of the author's presumed intent suggests authors have a purpose for writing. A writer might be trying to correct

*Christian Perspectives in Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Fall 2009

a particular behavior or persuade his audience to embrace a particular point of view. Usually an author's intent must be inferred from the literary text, but sometimes the author has stated the intent in the passage. Some passages were not necessarily written to address a particular situation. This is true with regard to the Psalms and Proverbs, which were composed to address life in general.

An example of attempting to uncover the biblical message for the first audience can be demonstrated in the narrative of the miraculous rescue of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3). The original audience of exiled Jews would have heard a specific message in this account. Having been defeated by the Babylonian army and deported to a foreign country, the Israelites may have wondered if God was more powerful than the gods of their pagan captors. However, upon hearing this account many who doubted would have been encouraged, realizing God had not abandoned them and was still sovereign. Approaching the text in this manner attempts to hear it as the ancients would have heard and understood it.

#### *Core Activity*

Sprenger (2005) recommends differentiating between facts and inferences when analyzing literature. She says, “Facts are something we can observe, and inferences are interpretations.” Using a two column chart labeled “what I know” or “what I can observe” and “my interpretations” can serve as a tool for the students to separate their findings and conclusions. It is essential to provide time for the young students to share their answers. Talking will reinforce the children are members of a group. Verbal communication reinforces and amplifies this social connection.

An example of “what is known” in the book of Daniel is the situation of the original audience. They were captive in a foreign land. An illustration of “my interpretation” would be to

infer the exiles in captivity likely were reassured to know God had not abandoned them and was still all powerful. The children will enjoy the detective work this approach provides.

Good questions help one to make educated inferences. Children need to be taught to ask the following: What is the author's message? Why do you think the author wrote the story and why? What do you think is the most important thing to remember about the story? Does the writer use a particular person in the story to express his message? Is the author trying to convince you to think or feel a certain way? If so, how does he do this? How might the characteristics of God have been meaningful to those who first heard the text? What did these words mean to the original people who heard it?

In order to gain clarity the educator may need to ask questions that probe children's answers. For example, "Where in the text do you find support for that?" or "Tell us more about . . ." or "What do you mean by . . . ?" Robert Hillerich (1978) remarks, "When children are not called upon to justify their conclusions, predictions or inferences their ideas become nothing more than creative expressions" (p. 65). Biblical interpretation is not an exercise in creativity. The teacher or educator who does not require the children to justify their answers is not fostering critical thinking skills. Without support from the text, conclusions likely will be incorrect.

#### Reader Response Theory: A Potential Obstacle to Proper Bible Interpretation

Reader response theory is a technique of interacting with literature currently being taught in many school classrooms. If children have been exposed to the theory it has the potential to create confusion about a Bible study approach that focuses on discovering the author's meaning. Reader response theorists claim a transaction occurs between a fictional narrative or poem (as opposed to an expository text such as a newspaper) and the reader. Readers take a stance toward

the material they are reading that ranges from "efferent" (reading for practical information) to "aesthetic" (reading for enjoyment and appreciation). When a reader connects with a poem or narrative in an aesthetic or emotional manner, the reader's life experiences help to formulate the meaning of the text (Wolf, 2004, p. 32). The reader connects with the events of the story and relates them to his or her own life events, both past and present. According to reader response theorists, readers do not try and determine the author's meaning as they read. In fact, they say the author's meaning is unknowable. Instead readers negotiate or create meaning that makes sense based on what they read as it interacts with their own background and knowledge (Tompkins, 2003, p. 6).

This approach has become popular for numerous reasons. A cornerstone of reader response theory is validating and privileging the diverse voices that arise from the students. All responses are considered valid and have worth because they affirm that a personal engagement with the text has transpired. In other words, responses show that they have read the text. Other objectives of the response-based approach to reading for children are noted by Purves, Soter, and Rogers (1995). These objectives are that it 1) helps readers to feel secure with their own responses to a literary work, 2) encourages readers to look at the reasons for their responses and in doing so they get to know themselves better, and 3) causes the readers to note the different responses of other readers and have respect and tolerance for those differences (p. 59). When different readers' responses are similar, it causes the reader to note the similarities among people.

Some teachers have expressed concern about this methodology because so much preeminence is given to the reader's personal transaction with the text. As a result, other ways of engaging the text are neglected. In order to correct this one-sided approach a few teachers are encouraging students to look for author created literary elements in their reading such as plot,

setting and theme. Further, they are to consider the author's background in addition to noting the personal feelings the text invokes.

Another criticism of reader response theory is the tendency to believe that any response is as good as another (Wolf, p. 32). However, as one writer puts it, if every interpretation is as good as any other, then why bother to think at all (Elkins, 1976, p. 121)?

A reader response approach to Bible interpretation can be dangerous because it suggests the reader has a role in formulating the original meaning of the text.<sup>8</sup> It has the potential of causing confusion about who creates the meaning of a passage. A reader that embellishes and re-creates the text might ignore or think irrelevant the author's intended meaning for the first audience. Further, reader response theory gives significant flexibility to what a text can mean. What the child thinks is most important is not necessarily the author's original message or main idea (Harvey and Goudvis, 2007, p.167). For example, children will see in the narrative of Noah and the ark the variety of animal life. But was this the author's motivation for writing? What did he intend it to mean? To ask what a piece of literature means is to ask what the author meant when he or she created it (Keesey, 1987, p. 9). The author of Genesis was more concerned with showing God's judgment and grace, not the zoo on the ark. Readers of the biblical text need to yield themselves to the Holy Scriptures. That means one must acquiesce to the intent and the teaching of the author, both human and divine.

#### Step Five: Find the Contemporary Application of the Narrative, Poem or Paragraph

Late fourth- and early fifth-century theologian Saint Augustine asserted that a person has not comprehended any part of the Bible until the text has caused that person to build up a love for God and a love for his or her neighbor (*On Christian Teaching*, 1.36.40). This is the final life-changing goal of Bible study, to be spiritually transformed people. This is crucial for

children to understand as they learn Bible study skills. The aim is not simply for head knowledge, but a change in character and behavior that reflects the image of God.

This final step aims at transformation of character. It aims at determining the contemporary significance from the text's ancient meaning. The word *significance* can be defined as "how the ancient meaning or theme of a passage can be applied and lived out in the reader's life today." It refers to how the reader is to respond to the original meaning (Stein, 1994, p. 44). It is how the ancient meaning gives direction and speaks to the Christian and the Church today.

There are multiple ways a text can be significant. Significance can also be different for different individuals. For example, Ephesians 6:1-2 says, "Children, obey your parents as believers in the Lord. Obey them because it's the right thing to do. Scripture says, "Honor your father and mother." That is the first commandment that has a promise" (*NiRV*). The *meaning* of the passage is the author's insistence on respecting the authority of one's parents, letting them influence a child's behavior. The text also stresses the necessity of showing parents the dignity they deserve.

The *significance* of the passage likely will be numerous and diverse for different people. For one individual, the significance of the text might emphasize the need to listen to his or her parents. For another person the significance of the verses might stress the responsibility to support his or her elderly parents. From the author's intended meaning there are many possible areas of significance for the readers.

Sometimes the significance of a text can be made rather directly from its ancient meaning, like the above example from Ephesians. Other times it requires the reader to apply some methodology in order to move from meaning to significance. For instance, much of the Bible is

written in narratives that do not directly state what the reader is to do or not to do. Often, in these cases, personal significance can be determined by focusing on what the passage teaches about God. When narratives show God acting in ways that display the attributes which the Christian is capable of demonstrating, then the believer ought to imitate those character traits (Dorani, 2001, p. 195). For example, when the patience of God is revealed in the Bible, the Christian should be motivated to model patience in his or her life. Christians should seek to be true to the task for which they were created, to be image bearers of God. When a text does not reveal an attribute of God that can be personally demonstrated, such as God's omniscience, then focusing on the character of God should cause people merely to "respond with an expression of loyalty to their Lord and demonstrate their willingness to serve only him" (Woudstra, 1994, p. 4).

Finally, one should be cautious about attempting to find application, doctrine or devotional content in every historical narrative. Merrill (1995) correctly contends that

Most of the stories in the Old Testament will have meaning for some readers some of the time, but not necessarily for all readers all of the time. Readers who demand something applicable to their lives on the particular day they happen to be reading a historical narrative is likely to find some meaning that the story never intended. (p.106)

### *Core Activity*

Again, appropriate questions asked of the text can help draw out personal significance from the passage. Some examples of revealing questions are as follows: Does the text provide information for the reader or direct one to adopt a particular behavior? Does it teach God is Love or love God? Is it a text that encourages faith or actions? Who might benefit from the text?

### *Conclusion*

This paper has suggested some fundamental steps to teach children in the realm of Bible reading and study. The basics include locating a complete thought unit for study, conducting some basic research on the author and audience of the passage, seeking to discover what the text teaches about God, making inferences about the author's message to the first audience, and finally, applying the text to one's own life. Children should be encouraged to summarize all these steps in their own words. Summarizing, restating or teaching to a partner what they have learned will not only help them understand it more fully, but will also make it easier for them to remember the steps.

Piano students must diligently practice their scales. Basketball players must repeatedly work on free throws. These drills work by isolating a particular skill. The same is true of the skills put forth in this article. Children need to be given the opportunity to practice them often. It will not be sufficient to only present the content and move on to the next lesson. It is only with a repetitive approach that children will be equipped to be effective parents and leaders of tomorrow. Beyond these basics, a more developed curriculum is needed which elucidates more specific training about how to instruct children to interpret various Biblical genres such as narrative, poetry, and the Epistles.

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*Christian Perspectives in Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Fall 2009

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<sup>1</sup> Eight through thirteen year-olds can achieve roughly the same objectives, with the older students simply practicing the skills in more depth.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 3:20 is a verse often taken out of a larger thought unit. In this verse the risen Jesus states, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If any of you hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with you. And you will eat with me" (*New International Readers Version*, hereafter *NiRV*). Frequently this passage is understood to be an invitation from Jesus to a non-believer to put his or her faith in him. However, this verse is a part of the letter to the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22). Rather than an invitation to the unredeemed, it is a call for the church collectively and individually to return to active fellowship with their Lord. Matthew 18:20 is another passage where the literary context is regularly neglected. The verse states, "Where two or three people meet together in my name, I am there with them" (*NiRV*). This verse is usually seen as evidence for God's presence in the midst of a small gathering of Christians. What is not considered is God's presence is promised at the occasion of a church discipline situation. This is evident from the larger literary context of this verse.

<sup>3</sup> It is important for children to know the chapters were added by Stephen Langton in 1227 CE (Brake, 2008, p. 33). Verse divisions in the Bible were not part of the original author's text. They were added by Robert Stephanus (Estienne) in the sixteenth century (Brake, 2008, p.163). Often his selection for verses was done poorly, but most readers are unaware of this fact and accept them as inspired (Brake, 2008, p. 147).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to understand the paragraphs were not inspired either, but were decided by the translators of the Bible version the reader is using.

<sup>5</sup> Most Bibles have paragraph divisions marked in some fashion. The instructor should show the children how the paragraphs are indicated in their Bible to assist them in this activity.

<sup>6</sup> An example of an appropriate text for this exercise is *The Holman Illustrated Study Bible* (2006). It provides the author, audience, and purpose of each book in the introduction as well as other valuable information.

<sup>7</sup> One of the aspects of a Bible translation that affects the reading level is the use of lengthy sentences. Paul's letters are frequently filled with long, difficult sentences. This often makes it hard even for an adult to determine what he is trying to convey. David Dewey has compared the reading difficulty of Ephesians 3:1-10 between two meaning-driven translations, the *NiRV* and the *New International Version*, hereafter *NIV* (2004, p. 72). The *NIV* contains 164 words in five sentences. The same passage in the *NiRV* has 193 words in twenty sentences, making it easier to understand and read by a child. The *NiRV* takes into account the problem of long complicated sentences and breaks them down into shorter sentences for ease in reading. In addition to using shorter sentences the *NiRV* is also sensitive to vocabulary. In order to make it easier for younger readers to comprehend the meaning of a passage the *NiRV* employs simpler words and phrases compared to the *NIV*. For example, in Ephesians 3:1-10 the following changes have been made from the *NIV*. The word "redemption" has been changed to "set free," "lavished" has been worded as "poured" and the phrase "reached fulfillment" reads "history completed." The *NiRV* is written for a third to fourth grade reading level audience. The *NIV* is written for a slightly older reader.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth J. Archer maintains a narrative critical approach emphasizes the text itself rather than the world behind the text. In addition, it focuses on the fact that communication involves a reader to hear the text (2004, pp. 166-170). The author of this paper agrees with this more moderate form of reader response criticism which does not ignore completely the biblical author's intended meaning.