



## How Young Is Too Young? Any Child Can Read the Book of Mormon

by Vicki Lynn Rasmussen



Do the words "read the scriptures" bring any of these things to mind: something to look forward to each day; an uplifting experience; an opportunity to learn something; a responsibility; a chore; something hard to remember to do; something hard to find time for; reading that is very difficult; feelings of guilt? The phrase "read the scriptures" can mean many different things to each us.

We probably start somewhere at the bottom of the above list, and slowly move our way up. There are some things we are taught to do (over and over) that just seem a little harder to do than other things. Maybe we have risked the thought that some of the things we are taught to do would not seem so difficult if we had the right training early on! Author Sydney J. Harris said, "The best things you can give children, next to good habits, are good memories." The good habit of scripture reading is a gift we can give a child.

Just as "read the scriptures" means different things to different people, there are also many ways to read them. We can read a little, or a lot. We can read consecutively, or skip around by subject. We can mark our reading with colored pencils, or we can memorize special passages. We can read aloud or silently, and we can read alone or with others. But the two most important things we can do are to be sure to read something, and to enjoy it.

To make reading the scriptures more enjoyable we need to pay special attention to when we read them. For instance, a good time to read is when we are fully awake! To make sure that we read something, it is good to begin by reading a small amount. This will also effect how much we like to read them. At any age, acquiring a habit of reading the scriptures begins by not biting off more than we can chew.

To a child especially, a four-inch thick, large print, leather bound, gilt-edged quad can seem as intimidating as an elephant! But if we take a look at its most basic elements, it's really just a bunch of letters and numbers. A step up from that are words, then phrases, sentences, verses, and finally chapters. To help a child develop a habit of using the scriptures daily begin by giving them their very own two dollar Book of Mormon that they can mark in.

If a child has a 3x5 card with a letter of the alphabet written on it, they can refer to it to find several more of them in their book. A child can easily find five letters at one sitting, mark them with a colored pencil, and each time they find one, recite the name of the

letter. A child will find it especially enjoyable if you sit beside them while you read and mark your own scriptures.

When a child can remember the letter of the alphabet the following day, write the next letter on a card --- and so on. Repeat this process again to teach a child to read numbers. After going through letters and numbers with a child review the letter cards again, one by one, so a child can learn their various sounds. Offer the same card each day until it can be read easily. Introduce a "word" card periodically in between the letter and number cards. Choose words that are good to know by sight: the, I, and, it, is etc.

When a child knows the letter sounds, and can read letters, numbers, and about fifty words, they are ready to set aside the cards. (Fifty-four percent of the words in the Book of Mormon are just fifty words.) Take turns reading aloud together from the beginning of the Book of Mormon. It only takes a few minutes to go through two verses a day. Circle the verse numbers to keep track of where you are reading. It is a rewarding experience for a child to read words they already know. Pointing to their words with a pencil will help remind a child when it is their turn to read. You read the words in between. After a while a child can read a new word occasionally. As time goes by add another verse, and talk briefly about them.

When a child can read most of the words in one scripture column, they are finally ready to read one page silently. It is always important for a child to underline any words they don't know. Go over them together afterwards. Eventually a child will be able to read one chapter (or read for twenty minutes), and tell you something about what they have read. As a child reads the Book of Mormon over and over throughout their lives their understanding of it will grow. There are about as many lessons in there as there are individuals who read it.

We will find many benefits to spending a few minutes in the scriptures each day with a child. We get to spend one on one time together while learning about the things that matter most. A child will also acquire a habit of scripture reading while at the same time absorbing valuable reading skills. All these things will bless our lives immeasurably. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Mmm --- tastes like chicken!