

June—August 2010

In the spirit of the training month (June!), it seemed like a good idea to collect together the articles that might help you think and act in a way that is pleasing to God. Here are the three substantial challenges taken on in this latest *Parramatters*:

1. Discipline your life (a.k.a. read 150 Psalms in 30 days);
2. Teach your children the gospel; and
3. Live biblically.

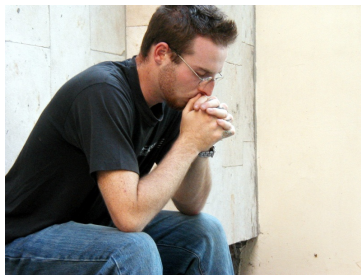
Challenged or just feeling pooped? Read on to see what Tim Keller has to say about being a long-distance Christian. Christina has a helpful review of Bibles that support you to faithfully teach the gospel to your children. Lastly, Costa has a fascinating review of the good and bad resulting from one man's attempt to live a literal Biblical life.

—Daniel M

## Long Distance Spirituality

*Tim Keller*

Years ago, on the advice of an older and wiser Christian, I began trying to pray through the Psalms once every month. Don't be too impressed—I seldom make it through all 150 of the psalms every 30 days. However, by making that the goal I am able to eventually ponder each one at least several times a year.



One psalm especially has always caught my attention—Psalm 71. It might be entitled a 'Psalm for Old Age.' In verse 5 the psalmist says, "For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth," and in verse 9, "Do not cast me away when I

am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." This text has been of more interest to me as I have grown older, but I usually think, "no use preaching on this psalm to a young congregation like mine." And yet, I've come to see there is a lesson here for all of us, and especially for the young.

The psalmist says that from his youth he has relentlessly worked at three things. He has "always" taken refuge in God during times of distress (verse 3), "always" praised God as an act personal discipline (verse 7), and "always" put his hope in God for his future. The first practice has to do with how he has processed his suffering and disappointments, and the second practice has to do with daily prayer. He recounts that he has never let anything turn him aside from these disciplines:

**Though you have made me see troubles,  
many and bitter,**

## **P a r r a m a t t e r s**

**you will restore my life again;**

**from the depths of the earth**

**you will again bring me up.**

[...]

**I will praise you with the harp**

**for your faithfulness, O my God;**

**I will sing praise to you with the lyre,**

**O Holy One of Israel.**

**My lips will shout for joy**

**when I sing praise to you--**

**I, whom you have redeemed.**

—Psalm 71:20,22-23

The third is the most foundational of all. He does rigorous self-examination regarding the fundamental trusts of his heart. He is careful to know what he actually rests in and lives for, and he continually re-focuses his soul's deepest hopes on God. Over the decades, the Psalmist has simply not let up on these commitments. As a result, he is literally bursting with desire to let people know what he has found in God.

**Since my youth, O God, you have taught me,**

**and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.**

**Even when I am old and gray,**

**do not forsake me, O God,**

**till I declare your power to the next generation,**

**your might to all who are to come.**

—Psalm 71:20,22-23

In 1836, Charles Simeon retired after fifty-four years of ministry at the Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge, UK. There he had been engaged in a ministry of expository preaching that had sent several generations of young Christian leaders out into British society. He had accomplished far more than 99.99% of ministers ever do. Yet a friend discovered that this elderly man was still rising at 4:00 a.m. every morning to light his own fire and to spend time reading the Bible, praying, repenting, and spending time with God. His friend thought this was over-kill.

*“Shall I not now run with all my might when the winning-post is in sight?”*

“Mr. Simeon,” he pleaded, “Do you not think that, now that you are retired, you might take things more easily?” “What?!” replied the old Charles Simeon, “Shall I not now run with all my might when the winning-post is in sight?”

I am neither of advanced age nor a young man, but I know why Simeon could not imagine taking things “more easily.” It was because the praising, the hoping, and the resting becomes better and better if you are willing to give it daily attention for years and years. The one hundredth time through the Psalms or the Proverbs will yield astonishingly sweet, comforting, and convicting insights, because the more you know the Bible as a whole the more sense its particular parts make. And the more you know

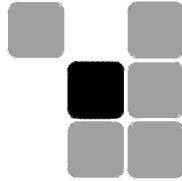
your own heart the more you know how to work on it, how to move past your discouragement, your peevishness, and your self-pity. But it takes years of relentless discipline. It is similar to how it takes years of practice to enjoy the power of playing the piano beautifully, but what we are talking about goes beyond even that in complexity and depth.

When it comes to the spiritual disciplines, don't be a sprinter. Be a long-distance runner.

*Dr Tim Keller is an author and the Senior Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, USA.*

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## Children's Bibles —Review Christina Thomas



Sing along...

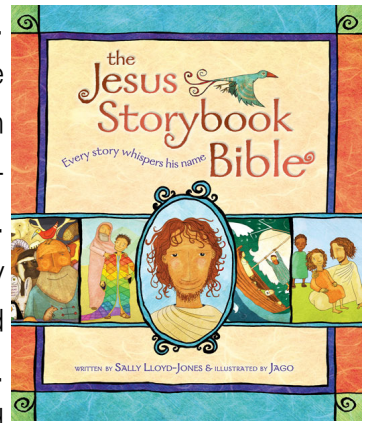
**The best book to read is the bible.  
The best book to read is the bible.  
If you read it everyday,  
it will help you on your way,  
oh, the...best book to read is the bible!**

Yes, but why is it that the other childrens stories often seem a whole lot more exciting, desirable and interesting than the word of God?

"The Big Picture Story Bible" by David Helm and the "Jesus Storybook Bible" by Sally Lloyd-Jones are two great childrens Bibles that will have you cheerfully singing along with your young ones.

It is no easy task to bring the long text of the Bible alive for young ones and most kids Bibles do

a pretty average job. But I think there are two ways in which both these Bibles distinguish themselves. The first is that they read well! They sound good to read out loud. They are clear and understandable.



The second distinguishing feature is that both understand the overarching message of the Bible. They tell the Old Testament Stories and show how they point to Jesus. They explain the significance of Jesus miracles showing how he fulfilled the promises!

So many kids Bibles are a collection of seemingly rather unrelated stories—each about different heroes. But to quote Sally Lloyd Jones at length:

**"No, the Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne—everything—to rescue the one he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!"**

**You see, the best thing about this Story is—it's true. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.**

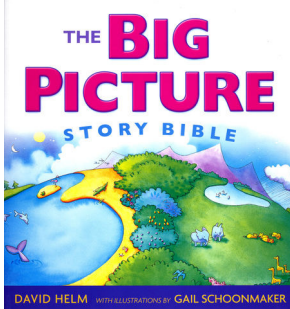
**It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the centre of the Story, there is a**

baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle—the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture. “

An introduction like that speaks for itself. The “Jesus Storybook Bible” only covers 44 stories from the Bible but the selection covers the key thrust of the Bible. The author does a good job at pointing to the ultimate significance of the Bible stories included by tying them to the perfect king or saviour that is to come. I think it’s a great read for children aged between about 5 and 10.

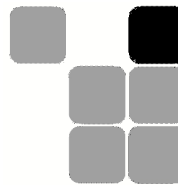
Even simpler still, the “Big Picture Storybook Bible” is a brilliant summary of the message of the whole Bible. And a five year old can understand it all! There are lots of big bright pictures so that there are no more than a couple of paragraphs on a page and little ones are kept stimulated. An adult friend of mine borrowed the book to get a clear picture herself of the whole message of the Bible and that’s not a bad use of it either. You can’t go wrong recommending this as your child’s first Bible and it would make a good present for a newborn.

Two books that may even have your children asking to read a Bible story! After all, it is the best book to read! So instil solid beliefs and habits in your children young and be encouraged to enjoy reading every day!



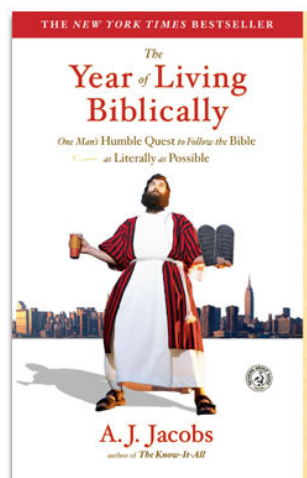
## The Year of Living Biblically —Review

**Costa Kamarados**



Imagine if you embarked upon taking every single commandment, rule and precept in the Bible and attempted to apply it to your 21st century life. Would it be possible? Would it be necessary? What would your family and friends think of you? Brave, stupid or a bit of both?

That’s exactly what A. J. Jacobs did in 2006. He mined the Bible for all its rules and regulations, over 700 of them and declared that he was going to live them out to the letter; right down to his leather sandals, staff and clothing that was of course made with only one type of fabric so as to avoid breaking one of the commandments (Leviticus 19:19).



*The burning question is:  
why?*

The burning question is: why? Jacobs is the editor at large of Esquire, a well-to-do international magazine and his project arose out of two concerns. The first was the rise of fundamentalism. Jacobs wanted to know and understand why so many people take the Bible literally. Secondly he wanted to have something meaningful to pass onto his children. Though Jacobs has Jewish roots he confesses that he is agnostic, something that he does not want to give to future gen-

erations.

Before he embarked upon his journey he enlisted the help of a group of religious people to guide him – his “Spiritual Advisory Board” as he dubbed them. This group consisted of conservative Christians, Orthodox Jews and Evangelicals; they would be there for him to provide prayer, answers to questions and any help they could. With everything in place Jacobs grew his beard long, rented out a sheep for some shepherding and bagged himself some pebbles just in case he needed to stone an adulterer. Off he went to spend a year living biblically.

I can say that it is nothing less than a funny, honest and inspiring read. To be sure, the premise is preposterous but there is great joy and humour in following this man as he desperately

*What made it such a joy was seeing his behaviour being shaped by scripture.*

seeks God. On occasions it is like watching a car crash but thankfully no one gets seriously hurt.

What made it such a joy was seeing his behaviour being shaped by scripture. He stopped telling white lies. He no longer kept a record of wrongs – in fact he used to record all the times he won an argument over his wife on his PDA. It was great watching him learn to forgive; watching him obey the Bible.

It was also fascinating seeing grasp with the concept of prayer. At first he had no idea, but he learnt to stop and find time to pray and reflect on God, on his day, on other people’s needs. To begin with he felt totally stupid “talking to no one”

but he did find purpose and meaning in prayer.

It was engrossing watching him tackle the Bible’s commands about “the little sins”. He found it quite easy to spend a whole year not killing anyone, but the thought of not gossiping and not coveting and not lying was a huge challenge. Given that he is a journalist living in New York this must have posed quite a challenge!

It was also encouraging to watch Jacobs not overlook what he calls “the irrational”. Often he would come across a rule that to his mind made no sense whatsoever. So off he would go to his spiritual advisory board. However, often their response would be “We don’t know either. But we obey because God has told us to do so...” As such it was great watching this agnostic with a science background obey laws that seemed to serve no purpose whatsoever. Jacobs learnt trust and obedience and reverence.

Now whilst he spent an inordinate amount of time in the Old Testament, Jacobs had a Christian spiritual advisor who told him the gospel; that Jesus had fulfilled the law, that his project was fundamentally flawed and pointless. It was good to see the gospel reflected in the book in this way.

However what his conclusion is disappointing. At the end of the book Jacobs stresses the need to apply “Cafeteria Religion” to the Bible; that is, to pick and choose the bits that are good and relevant but not arcane or hurtful. Commands and verses about tolerance, loving your neighbour and compassion are in, while those that declare homosexuality a sin or seem to promote intolerance and violence are out. From someone with a background in science I’m surprised that he

*(Continued on page 6)*

## P a r r a m a t t e r s

didn't see how illogical his conclusion was. Who decides which bits to obey and to reject? If he's willing to concede that God wrote one bit, how can he reject another just because it disagrees with his own world view? Wasn't that the point of the project? So it's a sad, if somewhat expected end to the book.

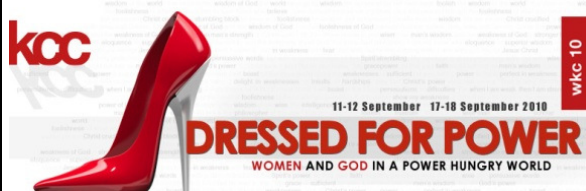
But what stayed with me after reading his book was his determination to live out what the Bible says and his resolve to apply it to the 21st century even at great cost. He put himself at odds with his culture, wife and ultimately with his own attitudes. He was being truly non-conformist.

And so the question that rings out from Jacobs' book is "Am I that committed to God's word?" My theology is very good at declaring Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament and so I quickly dismiss the Ten Commandments, but how do I go at heeding Jesus' words not to hate or not to commit adultery in my heart? How many of us would be willing to form a spiritual advisory board that we could go to with questions, to listen to their opinions or heed their corrections? So many of us conduct our lives as solo Christians.

If you were to live biblically, what would it look like? What would your family and friends think of you? Brave, stupid or a bit of both? Or would they see that the Bible is alive and active in this and every year? If you want a good read and some unlikely encouragement in your walk with Christ I recommend "The Year of Living Biblically" by A J Jacobs.

# What's On?

## Women's Katoomba Convention



Contact: Debbie Tattersall  
debrat@optusnet.com.au

## Gingerbread Houses

Dec 4 Wenty

Dec 7 Carlingford



## Carlingford and Wentworthville

### Presbyterian Church

Roselea Primary School

North Rocks Rd, Carlingford.

Morning—10.30am

Evening—6.00pm

Wentworthville

7 McKern St Wentworthville

Traditional—9am

Family—10:30am

### Contact

Luke Tattersall - 9863 8366 - luket@zip.com.au

Mike Whiteman - 9484 1240 - whiteman@tpg.com.au