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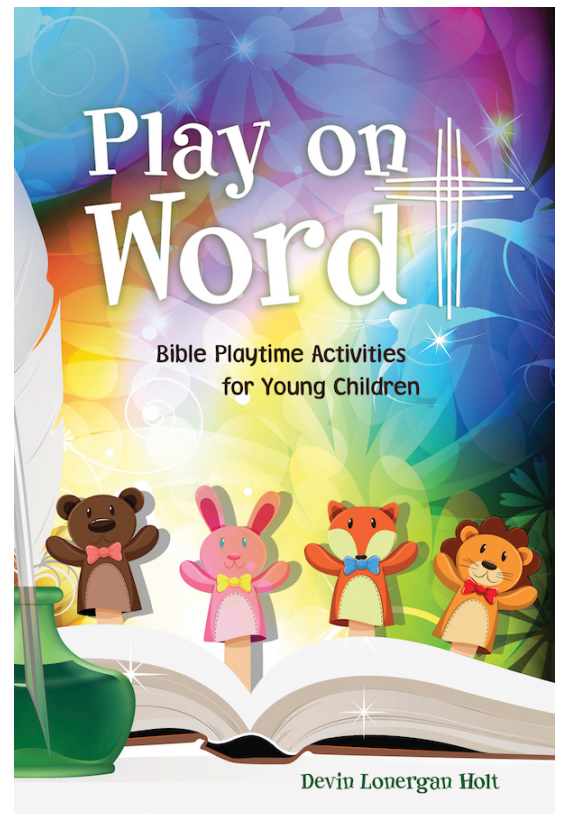
PLAY ON WORD

BIBLE PLAYTIME ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

DEVIN LONERGAN HOLT

Preschoolers and toddlers learn best through play, and we all learn best by experiencing things for ourselves. This activity book helps you use playtime to guide your young children through their faith walk.

Play on Word contains 52 fun and simple lessons that equip parents to play Bible stories with their children. Each lesson includes thoughtful notes of purpose, short lists of common toys and household materials, and scripts that can be read aloud during this family devotional time.



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About the Author **Devin Lonergan Holt**

DEVIN LONERGAN HOLT loved teaching Sunday school. The “little lambs,” as they were called in her church, were so quick, bright, and ready to absorb. As she taught more, Devin realized the kids were capable of more. So, she began writing her own lessons, incorporating facets of

playtime into Bible time. The children soared—and Devin’s heart soared. She was content to write the lesson during the week, teach it on Sunday morning, and then shove it into a desk drawer, never to be seen again. Each lesson had served its purpose and was a job well done. Until one day, during her own devotional time, Devin heard that still soft voice telling her to “Go to the drawer and do something with it.” Five years later, the lessons are available in the form of a playful parent-child devotional, *Play on Word*. Devin holds a bachelor’s from Hendrix College and a master’s in psychology from the University of Oklahoma. She continues to write *Play on Word* lessons while she works at the local elementary school and raises her two children in North Texas.

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Suggested Interview Questions

For Devin Lonergan Holt, author of
Play on Word

Q: How has the *Play on Word* medium of teaching Bible stories through play not been utilized by other authors and publishing companies yet?

A: I was surprised myself! I scoured the shelves of bookstores after I had the idea to write *Play on Word*. I thought, “Surely, I am not the first mom to think of using toys to teach Bible lessons and to reach children on a whole new level.” Play and tactile learning at church and Sunday school are becoming more popular these days. Play and tactile learning at home to learn letters, numbers, and shapes has been around for centuries. But teaching an at-home Bible lesson using play and tactile learning really is a new concept. I call it “Bible playtime.” It is fun for the children, thought provoking for parents, and rewarding for everyone when they see their children really grasp a concept—literally and figuratively.

Q: When did the idea first come to you to write a parent-child devotional?

A: Honestly, when I started writing these lessons, I never dreamed that I would end up writing a book. I was a stay-at-home mom who enjoyed teaching Sunday School. Initially, I tried to use the curriculum that I was given, but the 2–3 year olds in my class were capable of expanding their minds beyond the color pages I was handing out and the Bible story I was reading aloud. So, after a few weeks, I sat down with a pen and paper and got to work. If the lesson was supposed to be about Jesus’ first disciples, I read the scriptures, brainstormed, and prayed about how to teach “fishers of men.” Then, I cleaned my mop bucket, raided the drawer of bathtub toys for fish, went to the kitchen for some slotted spoons, and my lesson was all but ready. I will never forget the kids’ smiles and their connections with the lesson each week. I would receive emails from parents saying things like, “my child is retelling today’s Bible story to me in great detail! What did you guys do in there today?” and “Thank you so much! I’ve never seen him so excited about Sunday School!” After three years of writing lessons and teaching them, my own

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daughter was off to kindergarten. I was praying about what to do with my time in her absence, and the answer came to me. It was a very strong calling. It was unmistakable, actually. I needed to adapt the lessons I had already written, create more lessons, and compile them into a book, which would help more families grow in their faith.

Q: What is your greatest hope in writing this book?

A: My greatest hope is for children and their parents to grow closer to God through Jesus. Are the children going to grow in their faith through *Play on Word*? Yes, they would have to close their eyes and sit on their hands not to! And please know that *Play on Word* can help parents grow in their faith too. My “lesson goals” in the chapters are written as little notes of purpose to parents. They are meant to inspire parents to teach well and grow themselves. Each chapter’s script and action instructions are there to take the guess work out of Bible playtime. The entire book is laid out for the whole family to play together, learn together, and grow in their faith...together.

Q: What was your writing process like?

A: Once I finished adapting my previously written Sunday school lessons, I realized I was going to need to start writing [more lessons] from scratch. I wanted the book to have 52 chapters in the hopes that families would make time for one lesson per week. Writing was such a joy. I would sit with my dogs, my coffee, my Bible, and a blank page of my notebook. As I flipped through the pages of my Bible and/or skimmed through the topic index, I would pray, “God, what should I write about this week?” Inevitably and always in a timely fashion, the lesson topic would become very clear. Then, I would think about what toys or household items, which can be found in almost every home across America, that I could utilize to teach the week’s concept. Once those two decisions were made, I sat at the computer, and the words just poured out. I felt very blessed and close to God during the writing process. If families enjoy playing the lessons half as much as I enjoyed writing them, then we will all be delighted with *Play on Word*!

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Q: What is your favorite chapter?

A: So many chapters resonate with me. If you asked me this question when my daughter, Anna, was two years old, I would have said the “Jesus Feeds 5,000” chapter. Holding a fish and a loaf of bread while she saw a picture of 5,000 people made Anna more curious about the details of the miracle. I thoroughly enjoyed explaining that Jesus used two fish and five loaves to feed all those people. Then, being in disbelief with her as we surrounded ourselves with 12 baskets, which would have been filled by the leftovers of Jesus’ miracle, was a blessed time for us as we truly absorbed, acknowledged, and stood in awe together. But, now that my daughter is older, I would say the “David and Goliath” chapter is my favorite. Children in today’s world are facing Goliath-sized problems. They need to know that faith, focus, and the love of God will protect them and help them succeed. So, whether we were at home on the part of the lesson where Anna was trying to find something in the household that was 10 feet tall, naming the problem, and facing it, OR my sweet girl is out in the school yard today and recognizing a problem, she knows that God does love her and will protect her.

Q: Will there be a Play on Word II?

A: Yes! God willing, there will be a sequel! There could be an entire series! I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but the Bible is a pretty big book. It has thousands of pages of lessons and teaching points for parents and children. So I will never run out of source material. And there will always be a need for more *Play on Word*. There’s no such thing as too much growth, too much faith, and too much love for God.

Q: Who is your target audience?

A: If any parent, grandparent, older sibling, uncle, aunt, or godparent has a child that they want to spend time with and grow in faith with, together, they make the perfect team and target audience.

Q: Does Play on Word really work?

A: Absolutely. I’ve worked with dozens of children, including my own. One Sunday, my family, myself included, overslept and missed Sunday school. So, we pulled out a *Play on Word* chapter. We played a lesson about forgiveness. We took turns with

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a dry erase board, drawing a picture of an event that happened during the previous week that we needed to ask God for forgiveness regarding. My son tossed scissors to someone who requested them at school instead of walking them over, I judged someone driving recklessly in the grocery store parking lot, and my daughter didn't obey me the first time I asked her to clean up her toys. After we identified our "sins," we took turns with the eraser, which we called "Jesus." "Jesus" wiped away our "sins" and made us "clean" just as easily as the eraser wiped away the picture leaving the dry erase board clean. That morning, we played, laughed, felt remorse, and then experienced relief, together. Afterwards, my son, who was 11 at the time said, "Mom, this is really good stuff. I actually learned something!" It was so fulfilling and humbling to see my family benefit from my writing and to hear them glad about my calling.

Q: If you could set up the perfect Play on Word Bible playtime, what would it look like?

A: That's the beauty of *Play on Word*. You can pick any chapter for any week based on the needs of your family. After a long week, a single and hard-working mom could set aside a Saturday afternoon for the "Parable of the Sower" chapter. She could take her son to the park to seek out and identify the needed materials (i.e. a seed, rock, plant with roots, thorns, and soil). The two can spend their time reading the script, getting their hands dirty, and playing out how to "be the Good soil," how to be grounded in God, and how to grow in the light and goodness of the earth.

Here's a totally different scenario: A grandfather could be in charge of his granddaughters on a given day. Looking for a fun and easy activity to do together, they could pick the "Paul's Letters" chapter. He already has everything he needs. He can sit down after breakfast and before nap time with pencils, markers, paper, envelopes, and a Bible to teach the girls that they can have influence, as Paul did. They too can send letters of "good news" to loved ones. *Play on Word* was written for any caregiver in any region of any socio-economic status to grow with his or her child closer to God through Jesus. If you have faith, a Bible, a place to call

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home, and a child under the age of 8, you can have the perfect *Play on Word* Bible playtime anytime.

Q: Why do you think Play on Word is an effective tool for teaching Bible lessons and growing faith in children?

A: As nurturing, Christian caregivers, many parents try to make time each day/week for their own personal devotional time. Well, their young children are capable of absorbing their own devotional time...***if*** it is delivered in a way that they can truly grasp and retain it. *Play on Word* is that venue. For example, you can tell a child that a bunny is soft. You can show a picture of a bunny that looks soft. But children will not truly comprehend the concept of a bunny's ultimate softness until they hold one in their hands, play with it, and snuggle with it. At that point, they will not only believe, but they will never forget. The same holds true for *Play on Word* Bible playtime. It is a tool that gives parents an opportunity to connect and communicate God's love, and, as a family, they can believe, never forget, and grow together in Christ.

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