

The Bible in Everyday Life

USING THE
BIBLE IN
EVERYDAY LIFE
Heather Reid

READING
THE BIBLE
WITH FRIENDS
Zoe Hardy

LISTENING
TO GOD
Fran Boydell

HARRY POTTER
AND THE
TRUSTWORTHY TEXT
Rachel Lotherington



Woman (Hebrew *ishah*). Woman, with man, was made in the image of God. 'Male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27).

welcome...

I confess to a 'hot and cold' relationship with God's Word. There have been times when reading the Bible has set my mind ablaze with the wisdom of my Father, and my heart has sung with joy at being able to know God so intimately. There have been times of grief and pain, when the words of God, heard in a sermon or through a snatch of song, have comforted me. There have been other times, though, when I have been afraid to open my Bible, knowing that I would be challenged, or rebuked. Other times it has seemed just too hard to keep reading and thinking; the familiar words have lost their potency.

Reading through the articles in this issue of ishah has encouraged me to look at God's Word afresh, and to listen with joy and anticipation to what God has to say to me. It has affirmed my belief that the Bible is the chief means by which God communicates to us, through which our thinking and lives are transformed, wherein we can revel in the sea of his love for us. The articles of this issue have fired me up for a new year of knowing God through his word.

Heather Reid challenges us to ponder on how God relates to his people through the Bible. Fran Boydell, Rosie Leslie, Miranda Starkey and Zoë Hardy share their practical experiences of engaging with the Bible in their everyday life, and of the power of God to work through his Word.

I pray that as you read through this issue of ishah, you will be encouraged to deepen your relationship with God through his Word. May God's words be as meat to our bodies, and a light to our feet in our journey heavenward!

Bei-En Zou

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our aims

1. To value the Bible as God's inspired Word to us and the ultimate authority on matters of faith and practice, through thinking hard about how the Bible applies to our everyday lives.
2. To encourage women to grow in godliness and maturity in Christ.
3. To equip Christian women to be creative, confident and effective in communicating the gospel.
4. To give women in a variety of roles and situations the forum to think about contemporary issues from a framework of Biblical theology and to articulate their thinking in a manner that stimulates themselves and others to live lives that are more faithful to God's Word.

ISSUES TO COME...

ISSUE 20:

Cherishing Children

ISSUE 21:

Be Not Afraid

Using the Bible in Everyday Life

BY HEATHER REID

Over summer I received a series of 'prayer' emails from a friend on a beach mission team. One simple sentence set me thinking: 'M. has also given [the team] a brief talk on the five love languages, and on identifying our own so that we can know how to best encourage each other whilst on mission.'

It made me think about relationships and what makes them work. Most of the books on my book shelves seem to have a common answer, albeit with a slightly different emphasis. The key factor which makes any relationship work is communication. This sounds simple, but the process of communication is so complex that most of us never get it right.

Communication is not only about thinking, speaking and listening. It is primarily about hearing and responding to what the other person is trying to communicate. This is where the real difficulty lies. According to the communication gurus, in any conversation, the words we use can make up as little as five per cent of what we communicate. The rest is communicated non-verbally. The famous Greek orator Demosthenes (4th century BC) said, 'All speech is vain and empty unless it be accompanied by action'. People tend to believe action more than words!

Actions speak louder than words

So what has this got to do with using the Bible in everyday life?

Over 50 per cent of the Bible is narrative: stories about God relating to people. This shows that the Bible is more than a set of rules for living; it is a record of God's relationship with his people throughout history. The manner in which the Scriptures are referred to by Jesus and his apostles indicate that they are the means by which God's revelation of himself is made known. We see some of this in 2 Timothy 3:14–17.

Paul first tells us that the Scriptures are able to make us 'wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus': they reveal Jesus and point towards him. Second, Paul mentions four things that Scripture is useful for; two (teaching and rebuking) are directed at our thinking and knowledge and the other two (correcting and training) are directed at our lives and practice. If we truly listen to God in the Scriptures they will transform both our thinking and practice to become more like him.

Listening to, meditating on, memorising and obeying God's Word are therefore the cornerstones of a good relationship with God. We can see this in places such as Deuteronomy 11:18–19 (NIV). Here God makes it very clear that the secret to a good relationship with him is to listen to and to live his Word:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up...

Constant reflection on the Word of God is essential to protect us from godlessness. Places such as Psalm 1 and Psalm 119 also indicate that God's Word is to infuse every thought and every

action. But how can this be? How can we make God's Word so real for us that it becomes part of our daily life?

There is really nothing mystical about it. We get to know God by reading the Bible as a whole and observing how he relates to his people and by hearing how he encourages people to relate to him.

God's action in God's Word

I still remember the first time I read through the books of 1 & 2 Kings. These books are history books, but they taught me more about the faithfulness and mercy of God than any number of verses extolling his faithfulness could possibly do. They encouraged me to 'hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful' (Hebrews 10:23).

As I began to read 1 Kings, I was confronted with the sinfulness of humankind. The history starts on a high, with the succession of Solomon to Israel's throne after David's death: good King Solomon! But gradually a negative side of Solomon's rule appears. For example, in 1 Kings 7 we gain a glimpse into Solomon's humanity and sinfulness as it becomes clear that he took seven years to build God's house but thirteen years to build his own! But this doesn't stop with Solomon; it passes onto his son, whose arrogance causes a split in the kingdom. Reading through the history of king after king of Judah and Israel, I recognised a steady refrain running throughout the narrative, as, one after the other, with a few exceptions, they 'did evil in the eyes of the Lord'. But 'the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants for ever' (2 Kings 8:18–19). The contrast is clear: although king after king fails to meet God's standard, God remains true to his promise to David, a fact that is made even clearer in the Gospels and in their constant note of the fulfilment of God's promise in Jesus (e.g. Matthew 1; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 1–2). We are told that he is a God of faithfulness, and his actions firmly support that claim. God can be trusted. And it is because God is a God of proven faithfulness that we can hold unswervingly to the hope we profess in Christ, as the writer of Hebrews instructs. No matter what happens, no matter what we have done, God is faithful and our hope is secure. Such assurance is only discovered through a diet of holistic Bible reading rather than selective Bible 'snacking'. Such reading can help reveal the 'love language' of God and encourage us in our relationship with him.

But once we know what the Bible says about God, how can we apply what we learn in everyday life?

Using the Bible in everyday life

The secret to 'using the Bible in everyday life' is inherent in the statement: it must be reflected on every day. This is not so much a legal prescription as an encouragement to reflect on what the Bible says, wherever we are. It is about using the teaching and the thought of the Bible the way the writer of Deuteronomy instructed the Israelites to use God's Word (Deuteronomy

11:18–21). God's Word must become so ingrained in our being that it is as if it is tattooed on our hands and our foreheads, as if it is carved at every entrance and exit of our house. It is a guard against forgetting what God has done and what God has promised. To do this, it is not enough to treat the Bible as a snack box of quotable quotes. We must see its big picture. We must learn to understand the quotes in light of the character of God.

So how can we begin to do this? Here are some quick ideas:

- ▶ Use every tool available to keep God's Word at the forefront of your mind. Try listening to scriptural truths set to music, memorising key verses and listening to recordings of good sermons.
- ▶ Plan to make time to read a chunk of the Bible at least 3 times a week. This doesn't mean you can't read it more than that, it just means that if it is Friday and you haven't read it since Sunday, plan to read it over the next 3 days. This tends to take the guilt out of Bible reading. (Skipping a day does not mean 'Go directly to Hell, do not pass Go'!)
- ▶ Plan to read the Bible in a way that complements the books being preached on at church or in your Bible Study group.
- ▶ Start journaling key ideas from your reading.
- ▶ Meet with a friend and read a book of the Bible aloud to each other.
- ▶ Try to understand how the Bible fits together – it helps to use a good Bible overview.

- ▶ Use down-time waiting in queues, sitting on the train, or walking to work to think through issues raised by your Bible reading.
- ▶ Have a friend with whom you can talk and pray regularly about what you are learning.
- ▶ When thinking through issues ask first 'what does the Bible say about this?' and grab a concordance (such as the one at the back of many Study Bibles), a Bible Dictionary or commentary to find out God's Word on the matter. This will help the Bible to shape your thoughts.
- ▶ Enrol in a course that will stretch your understanding of the Bible (perhaps with a friend, so that you can learn together).

Above all, the only way to begin using the Bible in everyday life is to follow its own advice: make God's Word central to your life.

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and mind...talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up... (Deuteronomy 11:18–21).

■ Heather is married to Andrew and has two adult sons. She works with students at RMIT as an AFES Senior Staffworker and is also studying at Ridley Theological College. She has a passion for ministry to both women and international students and loves to share coffee, chocolate, curry and conversation with friends. heather.reid@optusnet.com.au

A Bible Reading Toolkit

Recommendations from Heather Reid, Fran Boydell and Rosie Leslie

Bible Overview:

The Story of a Kingdom, by Jonathan Gibson. A guided Bible study overview, available at www.sok.org.uk/chapters.html

God's Big Picture, by Vaughan Roberts. IVP, Leicester, 2003

Bible Tour Guide:

Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality, by Peter Adam. Apollos/Inter-Varsity Press, reprinted 2004

How to Read the Bible Book by Book, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2002

Bible Reading Helps:

The Daily Reading Bible, Volumes 1-4, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2004

Daily Bible Reading Plans – a selection of Bible reading plans are available at www.heartlight.org/devotionals/reading_plans/

Scripture Union produce a huge range Bible resources including daily Bible reading guides for adults, parents and kids: www.scriptureunion.org.au/page.cfm/Resources_for_Ministry or try Scripture Union offices in your state.



Reading the Bible Aloud:

Paraphrases such as *The Message* by Eugene H Peterson, Nav Press. (New Testament only) This and many other versions of the Bible are available on-line at: www.biblegateway.com

The Art of Reading Aloud, by Clifford Warne (CD)

Knowing and defending biblical Christianity:

Know and Tell the Gospel, by John Chapman. Hodder & Stoughton, Sydney, 1981

Can Man Live Without God, by Ravi Zacharias. W Publishing Group, 2004. A defence of Christianity aimed at more highly educated readers.

A Guide to Mentoring

BY KIRSTEN DAVIES

One-To-One: A Discipleship Handbook by Sophie de Witt* (Authentic Lifestyle, 2003)

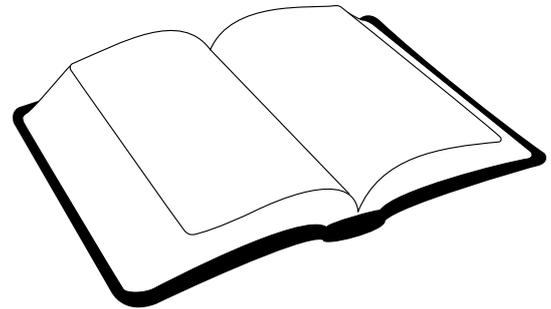
At long last, here is a book that is all about one ordinary person meeting up with another ordinary person to read the Bible together!

The Scriptures are a great treasure given to us by God – in them he has revealed all we need to know in order to grow in faith and maturity, and to honour him in all aspects of our everyday lives. God's words to us are the way to life (Psalm 1), the source of delight, sustenance, comfort, wisdom, insight, understanding, liberty and purity (Psalm 119), and are useful for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness and equipping for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

What a shame that this treasure is used so sparingly in the lives of many believers! I have long suspected that the reason for hesitation when it comes to reading or talking about the Bible with others is not so much lack of interest or desire, but rather a lack of understanding of what's involved and required. People feel ill-qualified for the mysterious yet significant task of encouraging someone else to learn from the Bible and apply its truth to their life, or ill-suited to what is assumed to be an inflexible model that must be followed.

Sophie de Witt has done us a great service in writing this book. Her aim in writing was to demystify discipleship and to motivate and equip believers to build relationships based on the Word, prayer and genuine concern. In this she has succeeded. In an easily readable style she shares not only from her own wisdom and experience, but that of countless others gathered through interviews and questionnaires. Many first-hand accounts from those who have engaged in 'one-to-one' discipleship demonstrate how simple, flexible and valuable the experience has been.

De Witt likens the Bible to a tennis racquet. In tennis a racquet is indispensable, yet there is great freedom and flexibility in how it is used. As any tennis player will pick up a racquet and use it in a unique way, with different types and combinations of shots, with varying strength and speed, different grips, different hands even, so we



can pick up the Bible with another individual and use it in a unique way to fit our different gifts, personalities and circumstances. Exploring the why, what, where, when and how of meeting one-to-one, the author offers practical advice and pointers for how to start, continue and finish such intentional relationships. At the core is a conviction that God's Word is the indispensable equipment needed to help people live and grow as Christians, and when this is combined with prayer and Christian love, the results are spectacularly fruitful.

Feelings of being ill-qualified or ill-suited to read the Bible 'one-to-one' are unlikely to last long after reading this book. I hope it will inspire and empower many more people to get up and go and find someone to read the Bible with.

* *One-To-One* was written and initially published under the author's maiden name, Sophie Peace. More recent editions are under her married name, Sophie de Witt.

■ *Kirsten's week includes a variety of activities, but regular highlights include meeting one-to-one with some of the young women who worship at St Jude's, Carlton.*

REVIEW



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We asked four women how they hear and use the Bible in everyday life. Here are their responses...

Using the Bible at Work

BY ROSIE LESLIE

'Any exciting news?' asked my receptionist one Tuesday.

'Well, I'm actually really excited that there were 16 women at our Monday Bible study. I think it is fantastic that these mums, most of them with babies and toddlers, make time to study the Bible.'

'Oh! Ohh kaaay,' came the reply.

To be honest, talking about the Bible at work is challenging. I find it's more likely to happen when I am reading the Bible through the week. I would like to suggest that deciding prayerfully to talk about something from a sermon or a Bible passage should be viewed as an exciting adventure. Even if the magic moment doesn't eventuate, the work-up is good for one's faith muscles and prayer-life (and adrenal glands)!

Let me give you an example. After the earthquakes in Pakistan, I planned to talk at work about Luke 13:4-5 when Jesus talks about the 18 people killed in Siloam. It was an ambitious plan for me. I am no storyteller. I dry up after three sentences! Well, the opportunity came when I was talking to Jill who I've worked with for

six years. The most I managed was, 'We shouldn't really be surprised – it's all biblical.' Jill said nothing, but knows I am a Christian, that I go to church, read and even study the Bible. I remember her many interruptions when I tried to explain the gospel five years ago, and my awkwardness. Jill has furthermore watched me in the workplace for six years, and has evidence to determine if I am an authentic Christian (see Ephesians 4:17-32).

Some weeks after this, Jill announced to me that she'd gone to church at the invitation of a girlfriend! She enjoyed the experience and plans to return. (She has always declined any invitations in the past). What an encouragement. Even so, it remains a challenge to faithfully pray and to keep making the effort to put God on the agenda at work. I often wish there were more encouragements along the way. Six years is a long time to wait.

Yet the reality remains that our gracious heavenly Father is active in giving us a heart for lost people. He enables us to say 'no' to our fearful old nature (Titus 2:11-14). The Holy Spirit fuels our

creativity, and enlivens our desire to make the Bible and biblical Christianity a topic in the workplace. With the help of the Spirit we can endure awkward verbal moments; we can practise, practise, practise and increase our expectancy that the gospel truth will go forth and not return empty (Isaiah 55:11).

I've worked for 18 years with many different staff. I don't regard myself as especially memorable, and yet I hope that when former workmates call me to mind, it is precisely because of the words I spoke at one time or other about the Lord Jesus.

■ *Rosie Leslie attends Bundoora Presbyterian and works as an audiologist.*

Reading the Bible as a Mum

BY MIRANDA STARKEY

Reading the Bible is one of those things that can be described as important but not urgent. As a result, it's often easy to do other things first rather than spend time listening to what God is telling us about himself and ourselves.

My husband and I have a 'quiet time' most weekday mornings. We set the alarm to wake before our two boys, giving us half an hour to read the Bible and pray together. Sometimes we're a bit rushed, or I'm feeding a baby, but we think hearing from our Saviour and sustainer is an important part of our day.

Having a small group that meets in our home means both of us can be involved. I enjoy discussing Bible passages with the group and working out what God is telling us. I find it harder to understand and apply the Bible when reading by myself so appreciate having other people to help and to keep me accountable. It's not easy to skip small group when it meets in your own lounge room!

At church my husband and I take turns caring for our children, allowing us to concentrate on the sermon about every second week. I find I learn better when I take notes but even so, I do drift off occasionally. I prefer sermon series that work through a book of the Bible so I get an understanding of the whole book and how the passages relate to each other.

I've enjoyed teaching our elder son memory verses and reading his children's Bible to him. I can almost keep up with his memory! We all know the memory verses on his Colin Buchanan CDs. It's great to have the Bible stuck in your head at various times of the day as a reminder of how God wants us to live for him in this world.

One of the things I miss is being able to spend lots of uninterrupted time studying the Bible in depth. Last year I attended a women's conference as well as our church conference. While I haven't been able to get the most from these occasions, due to the distraction of two children and tiredness, I plan to keep going to these events in order to get a big dose of Bible teaching when I can. If you're someone with less distractions, be glad of your opportunities and make the most of them. We are so blessed to have the words of the Creator of the universe readily available to us.

■ *Miranda is mum to Elliot (almost 3 years old) and Linton (6 months). She enjoys calisthenics and going shopping alone.*

Reading the Bible with Friends

BY ZOË HARDY

'If China had the Bible, it would be a different country.' Middle-aged, part-way through an English course at one of Cambridge's language schools, six months and thousands of miles away from her family, this woman was meeting Jesus for the first time in her life – because a Christian, Liz, took the time to read God's word with her one evening a week.

Several years ago, I began meeting with Alice* to encourage one another to grow in faith. We talk, act silly and eat chocolate together; in fact, she's quite like any other friend of mine. Yet it is also our goal to read God's Word together and pray about his proclamations. We discuss how his Word is changing us. We make an effort to reflect on heart-felt convictions prompted by God's Word, and how we go about responding to them. Obedience? Ignorance? Struggle? I thank God that by his Spirit, I am able to read his Word, and that I have a friend who wants me to listen to God more.

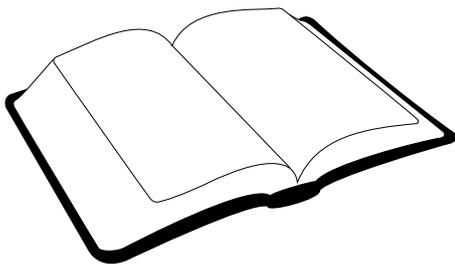
Several years ago, I began meeting with Bella* to encourage her to grow in faith. We talked a lot together, but it wasn't until we stumbled our way through Galatians that she realised she did not want to be a Christian. I was heart broken. God's Word was meant to free her from sin and fill her life with grace, yet reading the Bible seemed to push her away from him. What had I done? Nothing. God's Spirit was doing what it has been doing for thousands of years – penetrating my dear friend's heart – and she found that she couldn't accept his grace. Hearing from God helped her see where she and God stood. God worked through his Word.

It's not that hard to open the Bible by yourself. How hard is it to open the Bible with a friend – someone you care for? Maybe it's awkward to say: 'Instead of recounting episodes of *Desperate Housewives* each Tuesday lunch break, let's read through Esther together' (one of God's desperate housewives). But think of the blessing you can be to your friend by leading them by the hand into God's Word. The pain of potential rejection is nothing compared to the growth we may have with our Father, if we only take the time to read, discuss and pray.

What would Australia be like, if Christians had the Bible?

* Not real names (I always wanted to do that!)

■ Zoë works with international students at the Melbourne Uni Christian Union, and at other times enjoys playing with buttons, broken glass and eating cake. She and her 'sparky' husband attend a small suburban church.



Listening to God

BY FRAN BOYDELL

If God the maker and ruler of the universe has indeed spoken, how foolish would we be not to listen to and do what he says! Words are important to revelation. The Bible tells us that 'men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God' (2 Peter 2:21). However, in our earnestness to encourage people to know God's Word we need to be sure we are not asking more of them than he does.

If you are reading this article you probably find reading a satisfactory way of accessing words. It is, however, not the only way for many people in the world. Despite all the efforts in improving literacy levels, reading will be, even for some in the developed world, the least preferred learning option. For others it will be a condemnation to the incomprehensible and therefore not the best way to 'listen'. Listening to God is not synonymous with *reading* the Bible.

Before the advent of the printing press,

over a thousand years into the history of the church, only a few had access to the Scriptures and most Christians relied on others to read and explain the Bible to them. Many faithful Christians lived with this dependent access to the Word of God. They understood that we need each other as we learn to live for God. Personal faith is vital but individualism is not.

Those of us who read well can share with those who struggle, remembering that their insights are a gift they share with us. We take our public Bible reading seriously when we realise that it might be the only bit of Bible some people at church really 'hear' well. If we are explaining the Bible we need to work at ways of making it memorable with good illustrations.

And we can all encourage imaginative ways to literally 'hear' God's word. If reading quietly on one's own is unhelpful, suggest finding a 'reading partner' or join

or form a group where the Bible is read aloud. Using a tape recorder or iPod to listen to God's Word read and preached whilst driving, ironing, or exercising might be the contemporary answer to daily Bible reading! Computer software makes it possible to have Bible text you have selected read to you. Talking to someone about what one is hearing might help in remembering better and is as simple as a regular phone call.

Above all we need to remind ourselves that being a good student of literature is not a prerequisite to being or growing as a Christian. Rather, it is listening to and obeying God's Word.

■ Fran Boydell is a teacher who works with students who have difficulty reading. She attends St Jude's Anglican Church, Carlton.



write of reply

ishah welcomes reader responses to topics dealt with in previous issues. These should be no more than 200 words long and can be emailed to ishahmag@hotmail.com or posted to *ishah*, c/-56 Collier Cres, Brunswick West, Vic, 3056.

Starting Point is a regular column that aims to encourage readers to engage with a contemporary issue in the media.

Harry Potter AND THE TRUSTWORTHY TEXT



STARTING POINT

The Harry Potter books have created controversy in the Christian community over the last few years. Many heartfelt concerns have been raised by Christian parents, teachers and readers, the most obvious being that the stories centre around young witches and wizards being trained in magic at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Christians, quite understandably, appeal to the Biblical prohibitions against witchcraft and occult practices. The question is whether these Biblical principles can be applied to fiction.

Personally, I read the books as fantasy stories. Fairy tales I grew up reading, such as 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Cinderella', have both good and bad characters with magical abilities, as do the Chronicles of Narnia and The Lord of the Rings. I see a great distinction between witchcraft in a fantasy context and in the real world.

Other Christians may legitimately believe that all stories containing witchcraft and magic are unacceptable reading material. A common concern is that though children know the stories are not true, they might develop an unhealthy interest in the supernatural and be drawn into real-life occult practices.

The Harry Potter question is just the tip of the iceberg. Are we as concerned about school English texts containing swearing, ungodly expressions of sexuality, drug use or violence? Which television shows and movies do our families watch? Which video games do we play? Which internet sites do we visit?

Regardless of where our consciences lead us in these matters, the bigger issue is not what we will permit, but who our kids will learn to follow. Will they learn to follow the trends of our culture? Will their lives imitate what they read, or watch on TV, or hear from their friends? Or will they learn to follow someone who is unchanging and pure, great and merciful? Will they stand out, reading and believing a text that is old and true, trustworthy and powerful?

It's relatively easy to keep children sheltered. Simple to confiscate a book, unplug the TV and lock out the world. But much harder to teach them discernment and good judgment. When we can no longer shield them from every potential harm, will they be equipped to choose between right and wrong? Will they allow themselves to be led by what they absorb from culture, or will their characters be molded by God's words in the Bible?

Recommended Reading:

What's A Christian To Do With Harry Potter? by Connie Neal, WaterBrook Press, Colorado Springs, 2001.

Hogwarts or Hogwash? The Harry Potter Phenomenon and Your Child, by Peter Furst and Craig Heilmann, Lime Grove House Publishing, Rozelle, 2001.

■ Rachel Lotherington is married to Jereth and they have one 'son', Tonic, an Abyssinian kitty. Her mother has always encouraged her to read the Bible, and recently introduced her to What's a Christian to do with Harry Potter?

