

FamilyLife Today[®] Radio Transcript

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Let's Walk Through the Bible

Guest: Phil Vischer
From the series: What's in the Bible? (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: At the height of his success, as one of the co-creators of *VeggieTales*, Phil Vischer says he was not in a particularly good place, spiritually.

Phil: I had become miserable. It was affecting my health. It was affecting my family. I remember reading the fruit of the Spirit one night, sitting in bed with my wife, reading the fruit of the Spirit: peace, joy, love—all these wonderful things. I didn't have those things. I was like, "What am I missing?" I finally turned to my wife and said, "I don't think I'm a Christian." God finally showed me what I had done. He showed me that I had made the work I was doing *for Him* more important than my relationship *with Him*.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today* for Tuesday, September 11th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife[®], Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. Phil Vischer joins us today to talk about some of the lessons God has taught him, along the way, and his passion for passing those same lessons on to children today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. Remember back when you were in Sunday school and you'd go through those lessons from the Bible—like from Leviticus and Numbers. Do you remember that?

Dennis: I've tried to forget it.

Bob: Did you actually go through Leviticus in your Sunday school?

Dennis: I'm sure somewhere, along the line, someone read from it or taught from it; and it is why I would characterize a good bit of that as boring.

Bob: Have you ever heard a sermon from Leviticus? Now think about it—a grown-up sermon from the book of Leviticus—anything that comes to mind?

Dennis: I don't think I have. What about you?

Bob: Well, I've preached one from the book of Leviticus.

Dennis: Oh, that's what you want to talk about! [Laughter]

Bob: No, I wasn't talking about that. What I was thinking about is, "If you're going to teach kids the whole Bible, you're going to have to deal with Leviticus, and Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon."

Dennis: And most parents don't even go anywhere near there because they don't know what's in them. They're afraid to touch them.

Bob: We'll stay on safe ground like Daniel and his three friends in the fiery furnace.

Dennis: Exactly; and yet, if you're looking for help, and you're looking for some tools that will help you, as a parent, pass on the truth about who God is—

Bob: Turn to the tomato. That's what I say. Turn to the tomato! [Laughter]

Dennis: Do we have a tomato in the studio?

Phil: That's the weirdest altar call I've ever heard. [Laughter] Are you ready to give your life to the tomato?

Bob: Turn to the tomato. [Laughter]

Dennis: That is the voice of Phil Vischer. Do we have the voice of the tomato?

Phil: [In Bob, the Tomato's, voice] Hi, kids! I'm Bob, the Tomato. If you'd like to come forward now, you only need \$10.

Dennis: Do you have to put a price on it?

Bob: Bring your ketchup.

Dennis: Your ketchup?

Phil: Oh, yes.

Dennis: Phil Vischer is the creator of *VeggieTales*. He has now created a brand-new 13-DVD series called *Buck Denver asks™... "What's in the Bible?"* It's all about equipping parents to pass on the reality about who God is and how to experience Him on a day-to-day basis.

Bob: Including Leviticus, and Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon?

Phil: Even the messy parts.

Bob: In fact—

Phil: *Especially* the messy parts.

Dennis: In fact, ask him the question you asked before we came in here.

Bob: I was asking you for a highlight from *What's in the Bible?*

Phil: Yes.

Bob: If you were going to show something to folks, just to whet their appetite, what sprang to mind for you?

Phil: The cycle of apostasy from the book of Judges. Have you ever—have you ever—

Dennis: This is two days, in a row, we're in Judges.

Phil: Oh, yes. You can't get enough of Judges. That's some good stuff!

Bob: So the cycle of apostasy—and I think, as a matter of fact, we have that song cued up. Here it is.

[Audio Clip]

Buck Denver: By the end of the book of Judges, the Israelites have broken their covenant with God in every way imaginable. Some of the tribes of Israel were even killing each other. They were making idols; and some of the Levites, God's priests in Israel, were helping the other tribes worship the idols instead of God! The cycle of apostasy went down, and down, and down.

[Studio]

Bob: Kind of a peppy tune.

Phil: Even the messy bits can be peppy.

[Audio Clip]

Captain Pete's Song: [Song Summary: Singing about the cycle of Israel's apostasy—encouraging children to not follow that cycle.]

Buck Denver: Well, that was just super-awesome, Captain Pete.

Captain Pete: Thank you very much.

[Studio]

Dennis: Captain who?

Phil: Captain Pete. That was Captain Pete. [Captain Pete's voice] He's a pirate. Aye! Arrghh.

Dennis: So we don't have cucumbers.

Bob: Irish pirate.

Captain Pete: Irish, aye. Most of them were Irish; weren't they? Uhh. I don't remember. [Laughter]

Dennis: We don't have cucumbers and tomatoes.

Captain Pete: No vegetables. Vegetables are yesterday.

Bob: You have puppets today.

Phil: We have puppets because puppets are the future.

Bob: Let's talk about puppets [Laughter] because there are some people who—they hear about a video series with puppets and they go—

Phil: Yes, and it takes them back to a bad church basement experience in 1972.

Bob: Flannel graphs.

Phil: We're trying to redeem that. I've had so many people write me, that are in children's ministry and say, "Thank you for redeeming the puppet," because they feel like it could be cool again. We've described the series as "The Muppets go to seminary." You can see the Muppets doing really—they can teach science. They can do really advanced stuff. Because they're Muppets, you think, "Oh, they'll make it fun." That's what we're trying to do here.

Bob: Were you a Muppet lover when they were—

Phil: I was. In fifth grade, we had the assignment to write an essay about your dream job. My dream job was working for Jim Henson on *The Muppet Show*.

Dennis: Well, it started back when you were nine years old and you got into film.

Phil: Yes. Yes.

Dennis: Tell us about that.

Phil: I started with puppets, first, when I was like six. I got a puppet—my grandpa bought me a puppet. I started playing with that and thought, “That’s fun.” Then, I found out you can make your own animated films, which was a completely wild thought. So, when I was eight or nine, I started making animated films, and animating GI Joes, and Legos, and all sorts of stuff. It’s a mix of puppetry and animation that has been fueling the last thirty years.

Dennis: And your parents became wealthy off of those original films.

Phil: Not so much. It depends on how you define wealth.

Bob: That’s right, Dennis.

Dennis: Spiritual wealth; right?

Phil: Yes.

Dennis: That’s exactly right.

Bob: Here you are, trying to take kids from Genesis all the way through. How far along are you in the development, right now?

Phil: I’m actually—we just finished shooting the Old Testament.

Bob: And you included taking kids through Ecclesiastes?

Phil: Yes and the Song of Solomon.

Bob: How do you do that?

Phil: Yes. Well, you have to be careful. [Laughter] You have to be thoughtful. What we’re looking at—we don’t want kids to be surprised, learning later, that there’s a part of the Bible no one ever told them about—like we’re hiding things because it will be bad. Like Song of Solomon—kids don’t really need to read Song of Solomon. There’s no real benefit for a child to read the Song of Solomon, but they should know it exists. We wanted to explain it in a way that they’d say, “Oh, okay. I vaguely know what that’s about,” but not to entice them to actually go read it.

Dennis: And you did that with what characters?

Phil: We did that with Clive and Ian, who are our two British archaeologist brothers.

Clive: Hello, I’m Clive.

Ian: I'm Ian, and we're going through the Bible.

Phil: They fly their biplane around, and they look for interesting things to talk about. Sunday School Lady—our 72-year-old Southern Baptist Sunday school teacher, who kind of holds down the fort—who is based on my grandmother, by the way, in case you were wondering. She starts out saying:

Sunday School Lady: Okay the next book in the Bible is a little bit—different.
[Laughter]

Phil: And everyone gets very curious.

Ian: Well, what do you mean, Sunday School Lady?

Sunday School Lady: Well, it's a book of love songs written between a man and a woman who were engaged to be married. It starts out—the second verse says, "He kisses me with the kisses of his mouth."

Phil: And Ian says—

Ian: Wait. There's mushy in the Bible? [Laughter]

Phil: And that's really all kids need to know about Song of Solomon—is there's mushy in the Bible.

Bob: There is mushy in the Bible.

Dennis: Yes.

Phil: "I don't want to read that," but at least you have an inkling of what it is so you're not surprised.

Dennis: You kind of skip over—

Phil: Basically we want to teach kids, "What is this book about? Why is it in the Bible?" That's more important—"Why is it in the Bible?" We answer that question; and then, "Does it play a role in the story of God's great rescue plan?" because the whole Bible is about God's great rescue plan. The first 11 chapters of Genesis set up everything you need to know to understand life, which is, "It wasn't supposed to be the way it is today."

Bob: You've already hinted at the fact that there was a transition for you from *VeggieTales* to *What's in the Bible?* It was more than just a professional transition.

Phil: It was.

Bob: It was a bumpy ride for you at the end of *VeggieTales*, wondering what you were going to do.

Phil: Yes.

Bob: Tell us more about what happened in that interim period.

Phil: Well, I almost worked myself to death with *VeggieTales*. I ended up in the hospital with pericarditis, at one point; and they thought I was having a heart attack. It was stress. I was working myself to death. What I was trying to do was—I wanted to build the Christian Disney.

I wanted to do as much as I could as fast as I could because those were the models I had growing up. Growing up in the church—were these missionaries who had done amazing things—guys like Bill Bright or R.G. Letourneau, if you know who he was—who did amazing things and either changed the world or donated millions of dollars for other people to change the world. I had to do that. This pressure drove me almost to death to try to do it.

Then, at the end, when it seemed to be going so well, God let it all fall apart. I lost the whole thing in bankruptcy due to a lawsuit with a former distributor. I was so confused how God could let that happen, “Didn’t You see how much good I was doing with these vegetables? You really need them; right?” God finally showed me what I had done. He showed me that I had made the work I was doing *for Him* more important than my relationship *with Him*.

It came out of bad theology that God loves me because of what I can do for Him, not just because He made me. I realized that I had become miserable. It was affecting my health. It was affecting my family. I remember reading the fruit of the Spirit one night, sitting in bed with my wife, reading the fruit of the Spirit: peace, joy, love—all these wonderful things. I didn’t have those things. I was like, “What am I missing?” I finally turned to my wife and said, “I don’t think I’m a Christian because, if I’m a Christian and the Spirit is in me, these things should be coming out of me. I’m stressed, I’m anxious, I’m worried; and none of those are on this list.” That led me on this search for, “Okay, what am I missing?”

I realized what God was teaching me was I was hanging on to my dreams until they became idols—my goals, my ambition—and that God wanted me to let it all go, give it to Him, take my ambition and nail it to the cross. Until I was happy doing nothing for Him, except just resting in my relationship with Him, I shouldn’t be doing anything for Him. He got me to that point when *VeggieTales* got dragged away, and it literally left me with nothing to do but read my Bible. At first, I’m thinking, “Okay, give me something else! I need my next big idea, my next big thing,” and God gave me nothing. After three months of just reading the Bible, suddenly I realized, “I don’t feel that need anymore. I

don't feel the need to be impressive, to be ambitious," because the needs I had were being met by the Scripture I was reading and the life of prayer I was developing.

That's when I started to turn, and look back, and say, "Okay, God. How can I share this with kids?" I went off, on a tear, to say, "Okay, this is fun. This is exciting. I want to share what I've learned. I can now walk in peace. I can still do fun things for God; but they are not idols, and they do not define me. I'm defined by my relationship with Him, and now let's see what I can do with Him, just walking with Him day to day." That led directly to this mission to walk kids all the way through the Bible.

Bob: So, you look back on *VeggieTales* today. Do you think, "I'm really glad I did that," or do you think—

Phil: I am glad I did that because of its primary message. The primary message of *VeggieTales*— which actually came from my mother, the children's ministry expert— was, "In every episode, remind kids how much God loves them and how special they are." See, that message, "God made you special and loves you very much," was supposed to be the first line of a conversation. This is where we start. If we can accept this, "There is a God who made us and loves us," what's next?

Unfortunately, *VeggieTales* became so successful that suddenly, rather than continuing that conversation, I was in meetings about *VeggieTales* garden gloves and *VeggieTales* sew-at-home fabrics, and *VeggieTales* toys. Now put that little message, "God made you special" on this line of underwear—it just got ridiculous. I never had time to continue the conversation. I realize, in a very real sense, God took that away so I could get back to what He called me to do, which is teach kids about Him.

Dennis: I think parents today are underselling their kids in terms of challenging them to the real authentic Christianity, to truly being a Christ-follower. Don't you agree?

Phil: Yes. Right; right. When we tell stories like Noah's ark and never mention God's judgment or His holiness, we're misrepresenting Scripture. When we tell the story of Israel and don't mention the Israelites getting swallowed up by the ground, or fire coming down from heaven and consuming half the camp of the Israelites—not the bad guys, the Israelites!—when we skip God's holiness, we do a disservice to our kids.

If they don't understand God's holiness, they have no idea why we need redemption—and we don't even need a Savior. That's so key—to walk them all the way through the story—a thousand years of Israel messing up to know that, "Kids, you can't do it on your own. Stop trying. You can't do it. The beginning of accepting Jesus is to actually give up—is to say, 'I can't do this on my own.'"

Until you see what happened to Israel when they tried to do it on their own, it's hard to get to that point, when you're a kid. If you're 50 years old and you're an alcoholic, you're much more likely to say, "I can't do this on my own;" but when you're a kid, the

only way is to hear stories about others—to hear stories from the past. That’s why we have the Old Testament, which we tend to skip, except for the cute little stories with animals.

Dennis: You’re getting ready to do the New Testament.

Phil: It’s time for the New Testament.

Dennis: I’ve got to ask you. What is going to be the message of the New Testament? If that’s the message of the Old—

Phil: The key of the New Testament—

Dennis: Where are you heading?

Phil: The Old Testament is a story without an ending. That’s the Old Testament. It is a story that has no ending. The New Testament fulfills every promise of God that we find in the Old Testament. That’s why we spent so much time in the Old Testament, to lay down, “Okay, what did God promise to Abraham? What did He promise to David?” We teach kids what the Davidic covenant is. Ian, the puppet, thinks *Davidic* is the funniest word he’s ever heard; and he keeps making other people’s names into words like that.

Ian: I’m Ian-ic and you’re Clyde-ic.

Phil: And that’s the way you make things sticky. That is a funny word—Septuagint. Every time Captain Pete says that, his parrot thinks he’s sneezing. He says, “Bless you.” He says, [Captain Pete’s voice] “I did not sneeze. I said ‘Septuagint.’” [Laughter]

We can make it fun to actually learn this stuff and then answer really tough questions—the kind of questions that knock our kids’ faith out from under them in high school and college—questions like, “What’s with all the weird rules in Leviticus? It says, ‘Be kind,’ ‘Share with others,’ ‘Don’t kill,’ and then it says, ‘Don’t trim your beard. Don’t wear clothes out of two different kinds of fabrics. Don’t eat bacon.’”

The obvious question is, “Why do we have to obey these rules, but not these rules?” — which becomes critical when they get to high school and something comes up, like homosexuality. They say, “Yes, sure, the Bible says homosexuality is wrong; but it also says it’s wrong to eat bacon.” If you can’t stand up and say, “Here’s why these rules are not still followed in the New Testament and these rules are,” —if you can’t explain that, you’re helpless.

Bob: You’re in trouble.

Phil: You are in trouble today. Questions like, “Why was it okay for the Israelites to kill all those Canaanites? Why was that okay?” Have you ever heard that addressed in

Sunday school? Of course not, because you'd be crazy to try to get a volunteer Sunday school teacher to walk kids through that.

Bob: Here's my question. It seems like it's one of those questions where there's an obvious answer. Of course, the answer should be, "Yes;" but is there a market for this? [Laughter] Seriously, you look around at what is going on in church and in families—do parents today want a systematic approach to taking their kids through the whole Bible?

Phil: They should. Many do.

Bob: I guess you're trying to find out; aren't you?

Phil: Yes. We're trying to find out. It's a mixed bag. We've had people just flat out say, "You know—we like vegetables better. We're going to stick with *VeggieTales*." I'm like, "Did you even watch it? Did you see how deep we're going?" We have discovered, for a lot of people, they want to know how to keep their kids off drugs; they want to know how to keep their kids from having sex. If you say, "I'm going to walk your kids through the Bible," they don't quite make the connection between those things.

Dennis: They don't?

Bob: They want the moral behavior, but the theological foundation doesn't seem to be relevant to them.

Phil: Yes.

Dennis: Well, what it is—it's really a commentary on how they view their own relationship with God and how they connect the Scriptures to their lives, practically, day in and day out—

Phil: Right; right.

Dennis: —because what the series does—if your kids go through this—it's going to get sticky in their lives, and they're going to develop a Christian worldview. They're going to look at life through the eyes of the God who created them—

Phil: Right.

Dennis: —and the God who became flesh, and dwelt among us, and died on a cross, and rose again on the third day. They're going to begin to view life through the redemption story and begin to live it out in their own lives.

Phil: Yes. I think the best way to prepare kids for the hard questions they're going to find in life later on is to introduce those questions much earlier on. When we avoid the

hard questions and then let our kids go out—off to high school, go off to college—having never faced these hard questions, they're doomed. They're absolutely doomed.

Some people say, "Yes; but if I introduce them when they're young, what if they start doubting?" At some point, they have to start doubting because you'll never own your faith if you've never doubted your faith. It never becomes personal if you've never doubted it. Introducing these questions in a safe environment of a Sunday school class or your living room with your parents is a wonderful place to say, "Why was it okay for the Israelites to kill all those Canaanites? That seems like a terrible thing to do."

Dennis: I would say to a parent or a grandparent who is listening right now, who is wanting to feel more competent in passing on the real relationship with Jesus Christ, that a DVD series like this is going to give you tons of opportunities to begin to connect with your children around weighty issues of life, around the Bible—talk with them, interact with them.

Back to your question, Bob, "Is there a market for this?" I think there is because I think parents go on trips. I think there are all kinds of video machines now, in cars and minivans—that parents are always looking for something better than what the world offers. This series is going to be played, I think, like we used to play *The Chronicles of Narnia* on our cassette tape, back when our kids were little.

Phil: We've had a lot of parents write us and say, "You know what? I'm learning alongside my kids. I don't necessarily want to admit that to my kids, but I'm learning alongside my kids," to the point where we've had a few adult small groups start going through the series, just with grown-ups, because it's such a good introduction to the faith.

Bob: Well, you toss out a question like, "Why was it okay for those Israelites to kill all those Canaanites?" I'm guessing most of the people listening are going, "That is a good question. I don't know that I have an answer for that," and there is an answer—

Phil: Right. Let's dive into it.

Bob: —in First and Second Kings and Chronicles—if you buy the *What's in the Bible?* series.

Dennis: Phil, I really appreciate you persevering and going through a difficult valley in your own personal life. You're a gifted man, a godly man, and you haven't retreated. God has you alive for a purpose.

Phil: I'm having so much more fun now. God doesn't call us to impact; He calls us to obedience. How much impact I have is none of my business. I was so worried about, "Am I reaching enough kids? Am I doing enough? Am I going fast enough?" That's God's business. My business is, "What has He called me to do today?" and, "Am I

doing it?” —which has as much to do with how I treat the girl who’s bagging my groceries—

Dennis: Yes, yes.

Phil: —at the grocery store, as it does with my big world-changing ministry. We lose our witness when we’re so wrapped up in our ministries that we aren’t God to the people we live next to.

Dennis: I hope you’ll come back and join us next time, in a little less than 14 years, because neither Bob nor I will be there.

Bob: Fourteen years from now? [Laughter] We do want to encourage our listeners to find out more about the *What’s in the Bible?* DVD series. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com for more information about what Phil is producing, and you can order some of the episodes from us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com; or call, toll-free, if you’d like more information about *What’s in the Bible?*, the DVD series from Phil Vischer. Call 1-800-358-6329; that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY”.

Our mission, here at FamilyLife, is to effectively develop godly families—the kind of families that change the world one home at a time. It’s our conviction that every home ought to be a godly home; and we want to press biblical principles into the lives of moms and dads, husbands and wives, so that every home becomes a godly home. Obviously, that’s a work of the Spirit in people’s lives to make that happen; but we hope that we can be a part of what God’s Spirit is doing in your life, in your marriage, and in your family.

I know, for some of you, this program has been used by God in some significant ways. I know that because you’ve gotten in touch with us, and shared your stories, and talked about the impact of *FamilyLife Today*. We always love hearing from our listeners; and I know it because some of you have taken the step to include a donation when you get in touch with us—to go online or give us a call and help support the ministry.

We are listener-supported. It’s your donations that make it possible for us to produce and syndicate this daily radio program. We appreciate your partnership with us. In fact, this month, we’d like to send you, as a thank-you gift, a CD of a message that I had an opportunity to give to a group of women a number of years ago. The message was called “What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew about Men”.

It was interesting. I saw a lot of heads nodding, a little bit of laughter, as we talked about marriage from a man’s perspective. We’d love to send you a copy of this CD, again, when you make a donation to help support the ministry. All you have to do is go online at FamilyLifeToday.com, click the button that says, “I CARE”, and then make an online donation. We’ll send you the CD automatically; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. When

you make your donation over the phone, ask for a copy of the CD called "What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew about Men". Again, we're happy to send it to you as a way of saying how much we appreciate your support of the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*.

And we hope you can join us back here again tomorrow when our guest is going to be Lou Priolo. We're going to talk about how you recover from a break-up, whether it's a marriage break-up or a dating relationship that ends. How do you deal with the hurt, or the anger, the bitterness? How do you deal with forgiveness issues? How do you deal with the emotional stuff that's left over when a relationship ends? We'll talk about that tomorrow. Hope you can join us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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