

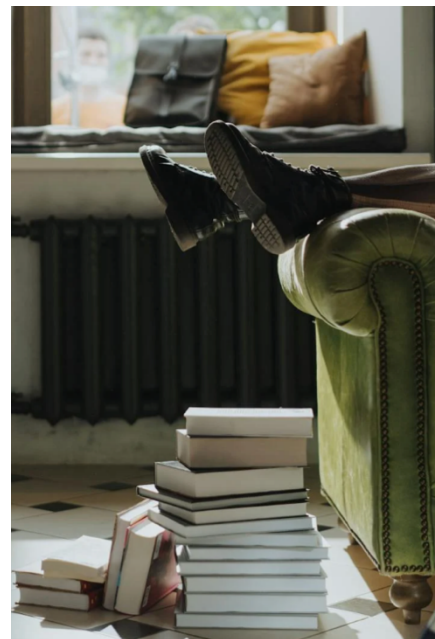
# *How to Slay Your Dragons*

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We can enhance mental, emotional, and spiritual health by how we think. From biographies of people modeling bold faith to fiction portraying children victoriously battling great odds, we can train our brains to continually grow and move forward. As G. K. Chesterton explained, “Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.”

Daily, it’s vital to read and meditate on the Bible—to learn to live: ***Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path*** (Psalm 119:105, NIV)—and strengthen our faith: ***So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*** (Romans 10:17, ESV).

Each stage of psychosocial development listed below is underlined, with a mental health goal cited in brackets. For each developmental stage, some book ideas are listed. Have fun exploring additional books on your own!



BIRTH to 2 [hope/confidence]: ***Today and Always, This is True, God Loves You***. Nonfiction, by Holly Gerth. This board book overflows with encouragement for infants and parents alike.

TODDLERHOOD (2 to 3) [will]: Moody Publishers offers Ella K. Lindvall’s ***Read Aloud Bible Stories*** in five volumes, with simple application questions included at the end of each vividly illustrated story. Everyone with grandchildren or great-grandchildren living far away can bring them close by reading aloud on Facetime or Zoom. Buy one book for you and one to send your grandchildren—and be on the same page.

***Where’d My Giggle Go?*** Fiction. Max Lucado helps children find happy alternatives to life’s inevitable grumpies.

***What Happens When I Talk to God? The Power of Prayer for Boys and Girls***. Nonfiction by Stormie Omartian.

EARLY SCHOOL AGE (4 to 6) [self-control/purpose/direction]: Fiction/Fantasy: ***The Chronicles of Narnia*** by C. S. Lewis—Aslan, a lion representing God and His sacrificial love, is portrayed in this beloved story of four children who learn to trust as they fight bigger-than-life battles. From preschool, these books are perfect to read aloud and discuss as a family. *Narnia*’s seven action-packed stories of adventure and hope can be read again and again throughout life: *The Magician’s Nephew*; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; *The Horse and His Boy*; *Prince Caspian*; *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; *The Silver Chair*; and *The Last Battle*.

For ages 4 and up: ***The Jesus Storybook Bible*** by Sally Lloyd-Jones. Helps children discover Jesus in stories of how God loves His children.

***The Easter Storybook: 40 Bible Stories Showing Who Jesus Is***: nonfiction by Laura Richie, portrays God’s love—and how He came to earth as our Rescuer, Redeemer, and Friend. Great for Easter and all year, too!

***God’s Wisdom for Little Girls***; ***God’s Wisdom for Little Boys***; and ***God Loves His Precious Children Safe in the Arms of the Good Shepherd***, featuring exquisite paintings by Judy Luenebrink. Nonfiction by Elizabeth George.

***The Treasure Tree***. Fiction, by John and Cindy Trent and Gary and Norma Smalley. A story of four best friends—a lion, an otter, a golden retriever, and a beaver—to help kids understand their unique personalities.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (6 to 12) [Competence]: Fiction: ***The Wingfeather Saga***: four fantasy novels by Andrew Peterson: “Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to write stories [and] thrill to an imagination on fire.”

***The Princess and the Goblin***. Fiction. Children’s fantasy by George MacDonald.

EARLY ADOLESCENCE (12 to 18) [Fidelity to Others]: Fiction/fantasy: A series of six books: ***The Archives of Anthropos***; ***Gaal the Conqueror***; ***The Tower of Geburah***; ***The Iron Scepter***; ***Quest for the King***; and ***The Dark***

**Lord's Demise** by John White. When four children are drawn into the mythical land of Anthropos, each learns to face individual hang-ups and trust in Gaal (the series' Christ figure) while facing adversity.

**Wormwood Abbey**, Book 1 of *The Secrets of Ormdale*, by Christina Baehr. While this engaging gothic novel explores the mystery of Wormwood Abbey, the book's characters learn faithfulness and how to work together.

LATER ADOLESCENCE (18 to 24) [Fidelity to values]: Fiction/fantasy: **The Lord of the Rings** [published in three volumes: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*] by J. R. R. Tolkien. **The Silmarillion**. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. Mythological tales of the beginnings of Middle-earth (and the tales of the High Elves and the First Ages) which Tolkien worked on and rewrote over more than 50 years.

EARLY ADULTHOOD (24 to 34) [Love]: **The Shepherd's Castle, The Baronet's Song, The Fisherman's Lady, and The Peasant Girl's Dream, etc.** Fiction. Novels by George MacDonald (a contemporary of Charles Dickens), edited by Michael R. Phillips. Classic MacDonald retold for today's reader.

**Secrets Behind the Door** and sequel **Sound of Light**, fiction by Marti Wibbels offering compassion for survivors of sexual trauma and understanding for those who know them. When Molly's childhood abuse causes havoc in her life and relationships, she gradually discovers God's love—after a nearly impossible struggle to believe.

MIDDLE ADULTHOOD (34 TO 60) [CARE]: Nonfiction. **Discovering Our Spiritual Identity Practices for God's Beloved**, by South African pastor Trevor Hudson, who teaches how to welcome the crucified and risen Christ where we are, opening our lives to His aid.

**A Chance to Die**, by Elisabeth Elliot. Nonfiction. In this compelling biography of Amy Carmichael, you'll see how one person yielded to God made a life-saving difference in the lives of thousands in India and around the world.

LATER ADULTHOOD (60 to 75) [Wisdom]: Nonfiction. **The Deepest Place: Suffering and the Formation of Hope**, by Curt Thompson, MD. The author, a psychiatrist, writes, "We are storytellers, and we tell stories about our future based on our past. Suffering is, in no small part, due to the story we are telling..." He shows us how to heal from attachment wounds and challenge expectations that still contribute to our suffering.

**Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants** by Paul Brand, MD, and Philip Yancey. From medical and human perspectives, the co-authors sensitively tackle the topic of human suffering, explaining why "Life without pain could really hurt you." Brand and Yancey reveal how pain can transform rather than destroy a person's life.

VERY OLD AGE (75 until death) [Confidence]: Keep discovering fiction (see page 1) as well as Nonfiction: **My Utmost for His Highest**, by Oswald Chambers. This devotional classic is great for adults of all ages.

**Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers**, by Dane Ortlund. Practical application of Jesus's words, *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28).

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**Throughout every stage of life, at every age, we can continue learning and growing.** New discoveries regarding the brain's neuroplasticity show us why it's important to keep "feeding" our brains with fresh information. Just as physical exercise can improve cardiovascular function, reading good books can improve brain function. Through reading, we can travel the world—replacing negative thoughts with positive ones and finding new ideas to help us build healthy lives. Biographies of people whose choices offer transformative ideas can help us see new possibilities. Stories of missionaries and teachers, parents, doctors or pioneers can expand our imaginations, offering ideas and opportunities for authentic growth. Instead of "numbing" our brains by binge-watching TV or movies, we can expand our brains with great fiction by a variety of creative authors. Why not make a goal to read one book every month?

The **best book** to read daily is God's Word, the Bible! Why not make another goal: to read through the Bible during the next twelve months?