

Leading Your Child to Christ

Only God has a direct gateway into the human heart. He has created us with the capacity and desire to relate to Him. God is able to bypass our senses and go directly to the spirit. But He is the only one who can. It is the job of a parent to understand this dynamic, recognize it when it occurs, and reinforce the unseen connection of the spiritual life. We can encourage our children to pray, listen to their question about God, and recognize that they may be ready to hear about and understand spiritual matters sooner than we think.

- J. Otis Ledebetter and Kurt Bruner

I. Is the Child Ready?

1. Have you talked with the child about praying to receive Jesus as Savior? If so, what happened?
2. Try to imagine how the child might answer the following questions, based on what you've observed.
 - a) Who is God?
 - b) Who is Jesus?
 - c) How do you think God feels about you?
 - d) Have you ever done anything wrong?
 - e) How do you think God feels about that?
 - f) How do you feel about that?
 - g) Is there anything we can do about that?
3. Based on your answers to the above, how would you rate the child's readiness to put his or her trust in Christ?
 He or she doesn't seem quite capable of understanding these concepts yet.
 He or she could understand, but needs more information.
 He or she knows the basics, but hasn't taken this step on his or her own as far as I know.
 He or she knows the basics but resists taking this step.
4. Based on your answer to (3), which of the following does the child seem to need at this point?
 Time to develop the ability to understand.
 More information about God, Jesus, right and wrong, and how to start a relationship with God.
 Gentle encouragement to act on what he or she knows.
 Prayer that God will communicate with him or her in ways that I haven't been able to.
5. Based on your answer to (4), what do you think you need to do next? Will you do it?

II. Are You Ready?

1. If your child (or another child, if you want to extend your heritage) asks questions that could lead to a discussion of how to receive Jesus as Savior, what will you say? To help you prepare, read the following Bible passages. Then paraphrase each

passage in words that you think the child could understand and that you would be comfortable saying.

Romans 3:23

Your paraphrase:

I John 1:9

Your paraphrase:

John 3:16

Your paraphrase:

Acts 16:31

Your paraphrase:

2. Realize that God is more concerned about your child's eternal destiny and happiness than you are. "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise...He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" 2 Peter 3:9 NIV.
3. Pray specifically beforehand that God will give you insights and wisdom in dealing with each child on his or her maturity level.
4. Use terms your child will relate to such as "ask for forgiveness from doing wrong," "being a child of God," "obeying God," and "accepting the gift to live forever in heaven." Avoid terms like "take Jesus into your heart," "dying and going to hell," and "accepting Christ as your personal Savior." Children can be either too literal ("How does Jesus breathe in my heart?") or may miss the meaning of the cliches we use.
5. Deal with each child alone, and don't be in a hurry. Make sure he or she understands. Discuss. Take your time.
6. Look at God's character – He is love! He is not dangling your child's soul over hell. Many parents worry that Jesus will return the day before they are going to speak to their child about salvation. Wait on God's timing. Pray with faith, believing. Be concerned, but don't push.

III. The Plan

1. *God loves you.* Recite John 3:16 with your child's name in place of "the world."
2. *Show the child his or her need of a Savior.*
 - a) Deal with sin carefully. There is one thing that cannot enter heaven – sin.
 - b) Be sure your child knows what sin is. Ask him or her to name some (things common to children – lying, sassing, disobeying, etc.). Sin is doing or thinking anything wrong according to God's Word. It is breaking God's Law.
 - c) Ask the question "Have you sinned?" If the answer is no, do not continue. Urge him to talk to you again when he does feel he has sinned.
 - d) If the answer is yes, continue. He may even give you a personal illustration of some sin he has done recently or one that has bothered him.

e) Tell him what God says about sin: We've all sinned (Romans 3:23). Because of sin, we can't get to God (Romans 6:23). So He had to come to us (Romans 6:23).

f) Relate God's gift of salvation to Christmas gifts – we don't earn them or pay for them; we just accept them and are thankful for them.

3. *Bring this child to a definite decision.*

a) Christ must be received if salvation is to be possessed.

b) Remember, do not force a decision.

c) Ask the child to pray out loud in her own words. Give her some things she could say if she seems unsure.* (It is best to avoid having the child repeat a memorized prayer after you. Make it personal.)

d) After salvation has occurred, pray for her out loud. This is a good way to pronounce a blessing on her.

4. *Lead your child to assurance.*

Show him that he will have to keep his relationship open with God through repentance and forgiveness (just like with his family or friends), but that God will always love him (Hebrews 13:5).

*If you wish to guide your child through the prayer, here is some suggested language:

“Dear God, I know that I am a sinner. I know that Jesus died on the cross to pay for all my sins. I ask you to forgive me of my sins. I believe that Jesus died for me and rose from the dead, and I accept Him as my Savior. Thank you for loving me. In Jesus' name, Amen.”