

Talking With Children About Spiritual Matters

One of your most important roles as a church leader to elementary students will be to encourage and guide them in their spiritual journey. God has given parents the most important and influential role when it comes to influencing a child's path to salvation, and leaders at church have the responsibility to support and encourage this process.

Ideally, parents will be the ones to help their kids navigate a decision to follow Christ, but children's ministry leaders should be prepared and ready when needed. Kids will have questions about faith at random times, so it's important for everyone on your team to be trained about leading them to Christ and answering questions they may have. Sometimes kids respond to an invitation for salvation, but when you talk with them you can tell what they really need is assurance of salvation, help understanding how to fight temptations, or some other aspect of navigating their walk with Christ. See #4 below for help with those situations.

There are many methods that are effective, but the following provides general guidelines and principles with regard to leading a child to Christ.

Whenever a child responds, it's important to discern the reasons for the response and the readiness of the child.

- Ask the child why he responded today (came forward, raised his hand, went to the back of the room, etc.). Don't make the assumption the child is responding to a need for salvation. Sometimes kids just want to tell you about an injury or a pet that is sick. Be careful not to ask leading questions like, "Did you come to become a Christian?" Ask questions that allow the child to word his reason for responding.
- If the child provides enough feedback to show readiness for this important step of faith, proceed with the next steps. If you do not feel the child fully understands, listen to why she came and pray with her about her need, but do not proceed. Walking a child through that decision before she is ready can lead to much confusion and provide a false sense of security in salvation.

Here are some guidelines for talking with children about salvation:

1. We have a problem—we all sin and there's a penalty for sin.

- **What is sin?** Sin is anything we think, say, or do that goes against God's Word. Sin breaks our relationship with God.
- **Have you ever sinned?** Encourage the child to recognize he has sinned and use the Bible to show that all have sinned (*Romans 3:23*).
- **Do you know what punishment is?** Encourage response. **The Bible teaches us the punishment for sin means that at some point everyone will die and be separated from God. It's a punishment earned because of sin** (*Romans 6:23*).

2. God has a solution to the problem—Jesus took the punishment for sin and made a way to fix our relationship with God.

- **God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross to pay the price for our sins** (*Romans 5:8*).
- **God offers the free gift of salvation and all who choose that gift can live with Him forever** (*Romans 6:23b*).
- **God wants to be our friend and guide us every day!**

3. You have a choice to make—Will you receive the free gift being offered to you?

- **Nobody can make this choice for you. It's a personal decision to follow Jesus** (*Romans 10:9, John 3:16*).
- Discuss with the child what these verses mean and ask if she believes these things and wants to receive the gift of salvation. Pray with her, but encourage her to use her own words to tell God what she is feeling and wants to do.

Children are literal thinkers, so using phrases like, "ask Jesus into your heart," or "give your heart to Jesus" can be confusing to them. Be simple and clear when choosing your words.

4. The choice to become a Christian is just the beginning of an exciting journey with the Lord. He is ready to help His children grow and learn every day. Use these five-word promises from God's Word to encourage kids along their journey. Encourage them to use the fingers on one hand to be reminded of these truths.

- **God will always forgive me** (*1 John 1:9*).
Children need to be reminded that becoming a Christian doesn't mean they will never sin again. Some kids think they need to become a Christian all over again every time they sin.
- **God will never leave me** (*Hebrews 13:5b*).
Sometimes kids just need assurance of salvation and a reminder that God is with them even when they cannot physically see Him.
- **The Lord is my helper** (*Hebrews 13:6*).
It's not easy to fight sin nature and follow Christ. Children often get discouraged if they feel alone.
- **I can talk to God** (*Philippians 4:6, 1 Peter 5:7*).
Children need to be reminded that God cares about everything they are going through and they can talk to Him about anything.
- **The Bible is God's Word** (*Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16*).
Children need to know the Bible is not just a book about God or His teachings. It is actually God's Word to us and very useful for learning to follow Him every day.