

Leading Your Child to Christ

Biblical Direction
for Sharing the Gospel

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I remember my dad explaining again to me how Jesus died on the cross for my sins and then rose again after three days. Then my dad helped me to pray, asking God to forgive me of my sins. As I have grown up and gone through children's ministry and now youth ministry, it is exciting to see God revealing himself to me in personal ways not only at those meetings but also in personal devotions and in those around me. — Ruth

When I was around the age of twelve, my family and I were at church. At the end of the message, the speaker was explaining the gospel, and for the first time, God moved me. I remember for the first time having the joy of the Lord in my heart, and I knew I was saved! — Justin

I always believed Jesus came to die on the cross to pay the penalty for the world's sin and that he rose from the dead and offered salvation to all who believed. In reality, all these facts were only in my head and not in my heart. I never thought of Jesus coming to die for me or that I had to surrender my life to him. I went to youth camp for the first time in the summer before eighth grade, and the first night's message about the younger prodigal son making a decision to go back home affected me. That night I fully surrendered my life to God. — Bethany

Reading these testimonies of God's work in the lives of children helps us to remember that God is mighty to save our kids. Leading our children to Christ is a walk of trust, a journey the Holy Spirit wants to join us on. He gives us directions from his Word to help us as we do our best to lead our children to Jesus. And yet, too often we fall out of faith into fear or complacency. Our fears can lead us to try to save our children ourselves,

instead of trusting that the Spirit of God is in charge of exactly when and how our children grow in faith. Fear can even lead us to claim our children are converted prematurely or have us give up when we don't see the changes we were hoping for. On the other hand, when we are complacent, we don't take seriously our calling as parents to share the good news of the gospel with our children, preferring to "let go and let God." As always the gospel of Jesus Christ opens up a better way—living the good news of forgiveness for sins in front of our children, actively sharing from God's Word how they can be saved, praying with and for our children, and putting all of our trust in the only One who can grow faith in their hearts (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Often when children make a profession of faith, you have to wait and see what the Spirit is doing in their life. For example, when my daughter Emma was five years old, she responded to a gospel invitation at the end of an evangelistic TV program while we were on vacation. But my wife Lois and I didn't start calling up relatives to announce our daughter's salvation. We knew that it would take time to know if Emma had really accepted Jesus or if that day's experience was one of several events God would use to draw her closer to himself. Still, I must admit, like many parents faced with evaluating a child's response to the gospel, I wrestled a bit and wondered if instead of waiting I should just "have more faith" and believe she was saved.

A couple of years later, at age seven, Emma again prayed in the quiet of her room and has since told us that she went to children's ministry the following Sunday "feeling cool" because she "prayed the prayer." But as the days wore on, and she thought about it more, she

realized that nothing in her life had really changed. She didn't enjoy reading the Bible or spending time with the Lord. It wasn't until six years later when she hit the teen years that Emma truly turned away from her sin, and trusted in Jesus. Looking back at her prayer as a seven-year-old, she would now say that she was not a Christian, and she can't even remember the evangelistic TV show she saw when she was five.

My daughter's story is not unique. God is often at work drawing our children to him multiple times prior to their conversion. Yet, parents and others who minister to our children are sometimes too quick to celebrate an early affirmation of the gospel as a full conversion to Christ before they see true change. Later this can cause confusion in the life of a teen who isn't living for God but thinks he is a Christian solely based on the fact that he raised his hand at the end of a meeting. That is what happened to Jay. The following is an excerpt from his story:

I grew up in a Christian home, went to church every Sunday, attempting to live the way I thought was right. At the age of seven, I prayed the sinner's prayer at a Vacation Bible School and pledged my life to Jesus. In the years that followed, I didn't really know what I was getting into, but I knew that it wasn't what I expected. I knew I wanted something, but I didn't know what it was or where to find it—but I knew it was out there.

It wasn't until seven years later, at my second year at youth camp, that I experienced God. The speaker talked about God's love in dying for our sins upon the cross, and how much we need it. I felt