



# LEGACY

PARENTING WITH ETERNITY IN MIND

————— BREAKOUT SESSION —————

## MORE THAN A PRAYER: LEADING YOUR CHILD TO CHRIST

LED BY MICHELLE MAYFIELD

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Leading Your Child To Christ

Led by Michelle Mayfield

**LEGACY : PARENTING WITH ETERNITY IN MIND**



# Leading Your Child to Christ

As parents, learning how to help your child on his or her spiritual journey is the most important skill you can develop.

Why?

Because becoming a Christian and following Christ is the most important decision your child will ever make!

Knowing how and when to talk with your child about becoming a Christian, and knowing verses to use as you explain what the Bible teaches, are skills that will have you equipped and prepared when your child begins to ask questions.

But it all starts before then! As a parent, from the moment your child is born, you are gifted with the amazing task of instilling the love, wonder, and awe of God into them.

It's more than just a prayer - it's a life-long journey.

# Introducing Your Child to Christ

## Early Childhood (birth-4 years:) Respect

Instill respect for God with these truths:

God is strong. He can do anything.

God always keeps His promises.

God gives us rules that we must obey.

Even if Mom and Dad can't see what you're doing,

God sees it.

God disciplines us because He loves us.

## Early Elementary (ages 5-8): Wisdom

Help your child use God's word to find wisdom for life's situations.

**Who is God?** Is God what you make Him to be, or is He righteous, powerful, and loving—the Creator found in the Bible.

**What is Truth?** Kids see so much from social media, television, friends, etc. If you don't teach them that truth and wisdom come from the Bible, as they become older, they will struggle with faith challenges later.

**Who is man?** Our culture treats man as basically good. This is why children often struggle with accepting that the Bible teaches that man is sinful. Your child will not appreciate the need for a Savior until they see themselves and others as sinners.

**Who is Jesus?** Your child is growing up in a society that professes to value tolerance, and that will challenge your child's faith. They may be called "intolerant" or "hateful" for claiming that Jesus is the only way to God. To withstand this pressure, your child needs a secure knowledge of who Jesus is and why He is the only Way.

### **Late Elementary (ages 8-11): Grace**

The majority of people who trust Christ as Savior, do so before they are teens. Make certain that your child fully understands the Gospel. Ask God for wisdom in discerning the authenticity of their decision.

### **Ask open-ended questions, not "yes" or "no" questions:**

- What have you heard that makes you want to become a Christian?
- Can you explain why Jesus died on the Cross?
- What does someone have to do to go to heaven?
- What do you think the Bible teachers that someone must understand and do before he gets baptized?
- Do you think you are a Christian? Why?

Beyond accepting God's grace, your child also needs to learn how to give grace to others. "That's not fair!" may be the most common complaint a parent hears. This age group is especially concerned with getting their fair share. But grace is the best way to be like Jesus.

## **Middle School Years (ages 12-14): Trust**

Young adolescents are beginning to wonder what their lives will hold. These years are a prime time for discussing the importance of trusting God with their future.

Take Proverbs 3:5-6

**What does it mean to 'trust the Lord'?**

**'With all your heart'?**

**Why is God's understanding so much better than yours?**

**What does it mean, 'He will make your paths straight'?**

God can use your middle schoolers' commitment to Him to guide your child through the coming years.

## **High School Years (ages 15-18): Perspective**

Answers to difficult questions can send your high schooler's faith tumbling.

**Why is there evil in the world?**

**Why is my teacher so unfair?**

**Why did God let my best friend die in a car accident?**

Provide the perspective that God is sovereign in all things. Tell them stories about the times when God worked difficult things out for good. They need to see you trust in God. Always stay open to your teens' questions, even if they are hard to hear. If you don't have an answer, admit it—then find the answer together.

**As your children grow, take note of the life stage and adjust your spiritual training accordingly.**

# God's Big Story

While today's culture is telling our children that life is "all about me," we can teach them to recognize that life is really "all about God." We are all a part of it. We can help our children glimpse the wonder of this bigger story, which has been gradually unfolding for thousands of years. And we can help them recognize that God has chosen a part for each of us to play.

## **Teach the Chronology**

Customarily, we teach Scripture through fragmented stories, in ways that aren't linear. Many children who know the stories can't tell you whether Abraham was born before David or if baby Jesus was alive when baby Moses was.

What we sometimes miss when reading individual Bible stories is that there's an underlying thread that reveals God's Word as a giant love story — a story of the Creator pursuing His created ones and desiring a personal relationship with each one of them. When reading or telling a Bible story, we can help our children place it into the larger continuum, reviewing when and where that story took place. We can keep visual outlines handy so they can see the sequence of events, and how what they are reading fits into God's long plan to save humanity. They can see what has happened so far and what is still to come.

By putting each story in context of the grand story, we help our kids recognize Jesus the Redeemer and God our Father as the main characters, even when it appears that someone else is.



## **Recognize the Ultimate Hero**

Kids love heroes. And when all is said and done, God — through His Son, Jesus — is the ultimate hero! In the big story, good and evil war with each other, evil seems to overtake the world, but then Jesus shows up and conquers sin and death, and those of us who recognize Him as Lord and Savior are saved. Ultimately, He will make everything right.

Often, kids only see pieces of this heroic tale. We all love the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels — in those accounts, Jesus loves us and shows us how to love others. He helps us understand who the Father is and how our relationship with Him should be. But we need to make sure that we portray a fuller picture of who Jesus is. He is both Shepherd and King. He is both gentle and powerful. He is both humble and victorious! Yes, Jesus humbly gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins, but He also conquered death. This is what makes Jesus the kind of hero worth living for. Knowing that He is the ultimate victor gives each one of us the courage to walk with Him even when life is hard.

## **Tell Your Story**

Take a moment to think about your own story. Think about your family of origin. How did God use the circumstances in your life to bring you to Himself? When did you realize that there was more to life than living for yourself? How did that affect your decisions? This is all the essence of who you are — it is a story your kids need to hear.

## **Your Kids in God's Story**

The main goal in teaching our kids all of these things is to help them recognize the epic story that they are uniquely part of.

Look for lessons from stories in the Bible to join God's ongoing narrative in your every day life. Sometimes we're just not looking. When we are awakened to what God is doing all around us, we accept the gift and the responsibility to become part of the greatest story ever told.

## **Talk About Faith**

When is the best time to discuss your faith your child?

The answer - ANY TIME! Yes, you're busy, but keep in mind that time is that you make of it.

### **Car time**

Turn off the radio and ask your child what highs and lows they had during the day. Pray for the even you're headed to next.

### **Sick time**

Watch videos or listen to music together. Choose videos that will naturally lead to talking about issues of faith and life.

### **Bedtime**

Share the highs and lows from the day and take time to pray for each other.

With teens, you can ask "What's on your schedule for tomorrow that I can pray for? Do any of your friends need prayer for anything?"

### **Mealtime**

Taking a moment to give God thanks and praise before eating establishes a ritual that remains with children into adulthood.

### **Vacation time**

Listen to contemporary Christian songs and take some time to give thanks for the time you've spent together. Take turns sharing one thing that you were thankful for on the trip and one thing you look forward to when you get home.

### **One-on-one time**

One of the best things that you can do as a parent is to establish the ritual of one-on-one time with each of your children. It can be weekly or monthly, but it needs to be built into your life rhythm. A failure to establish this time will leave you saying later in life, "I should have done that." Spend a weekend alone with each of your children, or establish a monthly date night when you see a movie or have dinner together. The particular activity is far less important than your commitment to spend time together.

# 7 Ways Your Kids Can Connect With God

## **The Traditionalist**

The traditionalist needs structure and routine. Consistent worship times, structured prayers, and reliable and meaningful celebrations benefit these children.

As traditionalists grow older, they may lean more toward another temperament, while still relying on the basic faith structure they've grown up with. Others will become more defined in their traditionalist temperament. They may create their own daily rituals or homework routines; these children thrive on consistency.

To incorporate faith-routines into their lives, create special celebrations for Advent, Lent and Pentecost — celebrations that may feel restrictive to non-traditionalists, but will bring life to someone of this temperament. These children also thrive when they pray at certain times of day or when their prayer times are based on external cues, such as a school bell.

## **The Naturalist**

Some children may be wired to connect with God through nature. Just like some adults feel closest to God when on the top of a mountain or while fishing, many children feel closest to God while enjoying His creation. They may understand spiritual metaphors better when they are related to the natural world. God uses nature — weeds, gardens, pets, clouds and people — to draw these children closer to Him. In the case of the naturalist child, a parent will need to help him approach creation mindfully and with an ear bent toward the Creator. If your children are young, you can and should take the lead in pointing out how God's creation draws us toward Him. Eventually it will be a natural way

for your child to connect with God. Otherwise, they may have a tendency to give nature credit for itself. Talking about nature as a creation of God is key to drawing the naturalist's eyes to the Creator.

### **The Sensate**

Children, by nature, are incredibly responsive to sensory input. Some, however, are truly moved by it. In a similar way to the naturalist being moved to worship by natural surroundings, the sensate is moved to worship through the tickling of the senses: art, music, delicious food, intoxicating smells, new textures and dance. This may seem foreign in our culture of bare-walled churches, but heaven itself is often described as a beautiful, exuberant multitude of voices praising in every language (Revelation 15:4; 19:6-7).

To help sensory children connect in a meaningful way with God, proactively point out the aesthetic and tactile beauty of things that God made to arrive at teachable moments. You can ask her, "How does that smell/taste/music make you feel?" or "What does that reflect about faith/God?" If you don't help them understand that God gave the world its aesthetic beauty through the arts, the culture may convince sensory children that beauty for the sake of beauty is important. Therefore, your short, teachable moments are key for the sensate.

### **The Caregiver**

The caregiver will find it easier to develop a relationship with God while serving others. Not every child will enjoy serving food to the homeless. To a caregiver, it may feel like pure joy.

The temptation of a caregiver is the same struggle felt by Martha: She was so busy serving Jesus that she forgot to use that service as a way to get to know her Savior. It is fairly simple to expose a child to Christian service. It is another thing altogether to show him how to let his service draw him closer to Christ. When you talk about the child's acts of service, have him consider which were done with a pure motive to bless others in Jesus' name and which were done out of pride or feelings of righteousness. Finding the right motivation is key for this child.

### **The Activist**

Have you ever met a child who became incredibly upset over injustice? We've probably all seen news stories of children who latch onto a particular cause, dedicating their young lives to it. We may be tempted to shield our children from the evil in the world, to keep them in their safe bubble of family and school, but if we choose to ignore the world beyond us, an activist child will become completely overwhelmed by it when she discovers what is happening.

As a parent, your job is to allow your child to witness the ills of the world, in manageable and age-appropriate chunks, to help her develop God's passion for the downtrodden. Most activists won't need to be told to stand up for a cause. You will more likely need to hold her back to help her find balance, once she's recognized God's heartbeat. However, the temptation of any activist is to become proud in her stand against evil, forgetting her relationship with God. The role of the parent will be to help her seek God's will, wisdom and humility in her work, using her activism to draw closer to God's love and truth.

## **The Intellectual**

Some children have curiosity and find it easy to dive deep into topics that interest them. The topics may not appear to be “intellectual” as an adult sees them, though. In fact, it may look more like an obsession with dinosaurs or bacteria, but children who love to learn often connect with God in the same way.

As a parent, your job is to feed your child’s intellectual fire with challenging material. It may be books that make him think deeper about faith, Bible studies that you do together or even buying him a concordance for his birthday. Many intellectuals also make excellent teachers because they love to share what they have learned. The temptation here is to become arrogant in knowledge and prideful in the treatment of others, exchanging the Tree of Life for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as Adam and Eve did. Parents can help children balance their growing body of knowledge by encouraging them to live out what they’ve learned in their relationship with God and toward others. If the intellectual pathway rings true for your child, consider partnering with him to teach a Sunday school class for younger children or allow him to teach younger siblings.

## **The Enthusiast**

As a child in the tabernacle, Samuel clearly heard the voice of God. He spent his life following direct orders from God and prophesying to the Israelites. His life was filled with the mystery of nighttime voices, direct revelation from God and even calling down thunderstorms in the name of God. To many, this sounds terrifying and impossible, but to our children with the enthusiast temperament, this type of relationship with God sounds incredible.



You may have a child who is enthusiastic about discerning God's voice and seeking His will. Parents with an enthusiastic child will need to learn how to welcome their child's connection with God and help develop her discernment skills through biblical knowledge and understanding. Reinforce the truth that God will never contradict His Word. If your child believes she's sensing the prompting of the Holy Spirit, help her to search through the Bible to find a scriptural foundation that affirms God's perspective.

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**God, who delights in our differences, desires to draw each of us to Him. We can, and should, look for teachable moments, but these may look different for each child. As parents we should also consider helping our children find mentors who connect with God in the same way that they do, particularly if their spiritual temperament is the complete opposite of ours.**

**So what is our role as parents in our children's personal connection to God? Our role is to open our eyes to the unique way God is communicating with our children. Then we can respond by finding ways to partner with Him to encourage their relationship with Jesus.**

# Levels of Biblical Learning

**Babies:** develop a sense of trust as needs are met consistently; sense attitudes and expressions of love; may point to the Bible and pictures of Jesus

**Ones:** grow in trust of adults; begin to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior; begin to recognize simple pictures of Jesus

**Twos:** can sing simple songs about God and Jesus; can say “thank you” to God; can listen to Bible stories

**Threes:** can identify some Bible characters and stories; understand that God, Jesus, and church are special; begin to develop a conscience and are sensitive to feelings of shame and guilt

**Fours:** like to retell Bible stories; recognize that God and Jesus love people and help people in special ways; exhibit a conscience; express love for God and Jesus

**Fives:** remember and like to tell Bible stories; use the Bible and like to find Bible phrases/verses; begin to ask questions about God; can make life application of Bible verses

**Sixes:** see Jesus as a friend and helper; like learning from the Bible and know many basic Bible stories; may make conclusions about God; may begin to have simple understanding of sin; may begin to have simple understanding of the gospel; know the right answers but may not understand application

**Sevens:** may be interested in finding out more about God and Jesus; may ask why God would let Jesus die for the wrong things that everyone else does; may recognize consequences for their sin; may understand that people become Christians by accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord

**Eights:** ask serious questions about religion; are developing values; can be truthful and honest; often have difficulty making decisions

**Nines:** are often beginning to feel the need for a Savior; are growing conscious of themselves and of sin; want to do things the right way and think in terms of right and wrong more than good and evil

**Tens:** are developing concepts of love and trust; are developing a conscience and a value system

**Elevens:** have formed concepts of personal worth; are ready for spiritual answers and directions; can make many choices, but may not follow through on long-term commitments

**Twelves:** feel deeply about own experiences; beginning to adopt a religious belief system of their own

**Middle Schoolers:** continuing to develop core beliefs and values during these years; beginning to think critically about their worldview and the worldviews of others; dealing with issues surrounding identity and self-image; asking questions about God's will for their lives; learning the social and cultural norms in relationships; developing a strong ability to connect biblical truths to life situations; being taught the importance of having boundaries in all spheres of life; learning to consistently practice spiritual disciplines

**High Schoolers:** comfortable in articulating their beliefs and values to those around them; conscientiously aware and socially active regarding the cultural issues surrounding them; asking how their faith is consistent or contradictory with other beliefs; continuing to develop ideas pertaining to personal identity and self-image; learning to navigate social and cultural norms in relationships; exercising more independence and looking forward to life after high school; learning fiscal responsibility through work and stewardship; capable of exercising more leadership responsibilities within the church

# Leading a Child to Christ

**A - Acknowledge** what the Bible teaches about children and becoming a Christian.

Psalm 127:3

Proverbs 22:6

Matthew 19:14

Mark 10:16

2 Samuel 12:23

1 Samuel 3:7

Matthew 18:14

Romans 14:12

**B - Be sure** that “you know that you know” Jesus as your personal Savior.

**C - Commit** to being prepared to share the gospel with children in age-appropriate ways. God’s design for a child’s spiritual growth begins at birth.

From birth, children can begin to learn about Jesus as their friend.

As they grow in understanding, they learn about Jesus as Savior and Lord. The process is “bits and pieces” and a “big event.”

To help children reach a point of accountability, they should learn and be able to talk about...

**Who is Jesus?**

**What did Jesus do?**

**Why did Jesus come to earth?**

**What is sin?**

**Why should I become a Christian?**

**How can I accept Jesus as my Savior?**

# Tips on talking with your child about becoming a Christian

1. Ask open-ended questions when talking with your child about salvation.
2. Avoid giving more information than your child asks for or needs.
3. Remain conversational, not confrontational.
4. Don't jump to conclusions.
5. Never assume that your child understands your "church talk" about becoming a Christian.
6. Avoid symbolic language.
7. Make the distinction between becoming a Christian, baptism, and taking the Lord's Supper.
8. Encourage your child to express his or her own ideas. Give time for your child to reflect and answer without giving him or her the answer. If your child can't answer within a reasonable time, consider rephrasing the question.
9. Use a Bible translation that children are familiar with and that uses language they will understand.

## God's Plan For Me

\* God Rules. (Colossians 1:16-17)

\* We Sinned. (Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23)

\* God Provided. (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9)

\* Jesus Gives. (Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 3:18)

\* We Respond.

**A** - Admit to God that you are a sinner. (Romans 3:23)

Repent and turn away from you sin. (Acts 3:19)

**B** - Believe that Jesus is God's Son and accept God's gift of forgiveness from sin (Romans 5:8); believe that only Jesus can save you. (John 14:6; Ephesians 2:8-9)

**C** - Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. (Romans 10:9-10,13)

## **Resources cited**

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