



Helping Your Child Grow Through Faith Conversations

by Mary Oldfield

We have high hopes and dreams for our children's faith. We want them to have a healthy understanding of their own sin and the need for God's forgiveness. We want them to recognize the voice of God and obey Him. We want them to have an enduring faith that keeps them strong through life's troubles and protects them from harmful behaviors. In short, we want our children to have healthy, growing relationship with God.

We have such high hopes for our children's faith; we just don't always know what to do to help them get there. Because of this, it can be easy to fall into discouragement. I can relate. As a mother, grandmother, and former children's ministry director, I know firsthand the many struggles involved in parenting, especially when it comes to spiritually nurturing your child.

The demands of parenting can be overwhelming and exhausting. I've talked with many parents who feel worn down, frazzled, and frenzied, trying to keep up with the fast pace of life. I've prayed with many parents who know they are supposed to spiritually nurture their children, but don't have time to read all the Christian parenting books scattered around their house.

Some of us wind up feeling guilty for not nurturing our children in the Christian faith, but we just don't feel adequate or equipped enough to do anything about it.

If you are feeling this discouragement, let me share with you some refreshingly good news. New research from the Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) has revealed that there are three everyday household habits that can help nurture a spiritually vibrant home. What are these practical habits? The research tells us faith formation is more robust in households that do the following:

1. APPLY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES
2. EXTEND HOSPITALITY
3. ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

The task of spiritually nurturing your child becomes a little less difficult and overwhelming when you break it down into these three everyday habits. And the good news is the research also shows that these habits can be nurtured in *any* household.

So, whether you are parenting your own children or step-children, parenting your grandchildren, or living in a multi-generational household, keep reading. There is hope for anyone who wants to nurture their child's spiritual health by helping them have a relationship with God, have spiritual conversations, or extend hospitality.





Spiritual conversations keep God and His ways in the forefront of our children’s minds.

To help you nurture these habits with your own child, I have gathered together insightful passages from the Bible and practical ideas from my years of working with parents and children. The result is a practical guide for each of these habits. These three quick reads are designed to guide, encourage, and equip you to nurture the faith of the children in your household.

In *this* booklet, we will be looking at how you can nurture the third of these household habits: *engaging in spiritual conversations*. It really is possible to help your child have spiritual conversations. You can do this with God’s help.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

Deuteronomy 6:5-7

This Deuteronomy verse is a familiar parenting passage. Parents are to diligently teach the commands of the Lord to their children. And a primary method given is *talking*—sharing about spiritual things in everyday conversations.

Spiritual conversations with our children are important not only because they are an effective way to transfer the faith from one generation to the next, but because God tells us to have them. Spiritual conversations keep God and His ways in the forefront of our children’s minds. As God’s chosen and beloved people, we have been given an identity and purpose on this earth to love God and serve one another. You can have ongoing conversations that will help your child do just that.

Last year I asked my eldest daughter for Christmas gift ideas for my grandsons. Her reply was to “give them experiences.” I loved that idea and instead of buying presents they really didn’t need, both sets of grandchildren received an annual membership to our local zoo. My daughter’s suggestion caused me to think about the *spiritual* experiences I want for my grandchildren. I want them to experience the love of Christ and the hope, joy, peace, mercy, and grace that comes when we follow Jesus. Most all of us want that for our children and our grandchildren. Helping our child have spiritual conversations can help them experience all God has for them.

Jesus was masterful in the art of spiritual conversations. He used relevant and memorable stories, parables, and images, as He initiated and responded to everyday encounters with people. He often asked thought-provoking questions and responded to questions *with* questions in a way that demanded critical thinking and encouraged self-discovery.

We can look to Jesus and follow His example as we have spiritual conversations with our children in our everyday lives.

THE HOME AS A PRIMARY PLACE FOR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

“ ... You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” Deuteronomy 6:7

In this passage, three of the four occasions given to parents to talk about faith are in the home: when you sit, when you lie down, and when you rise.

Think of all the things we do in our homes. We eat, sleep, play, read, listen to music, watch TV and movies, celebrate holidays, and entertain. We do homework, housework, “work” work, hobbies, crafts, and science fair projects. And we do lots of talking.

We talk on the phone, talk about school, work, activities, schedules, and about what needs to be done. But are we making time to talk about God and our faith? As I look back, I think of missed opportunities to talk about God with my daughters because sometimes life just took over. Maybe you’re in a similar place in your life now. The good news is that it is never too late (or too early) to learn how to be more intentional in having spiritual conversations right in your home.

“Home is where you find your heart.” This is the wording on the frame I have around a picture of our family. In the background are three wall hangings, each with a Bible verse with one of the words: faith, hope, and love. I’ve walked by this picture for years and never paid much attention to the words on the frame or the words visible in the background until recently. But it’s true. *Home is where our children find their heart for God. Home is where our child’s journey of faith begins. Home is where biblical hope and love can be nurtured.*

THE SPECIAL IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS IN TODAY’S WORLD

Spiritual conversations are especially important in our present culture. We are living in a time when Christianity is no longer the predominant or favored religion. No longer are Christian beliefs necessarily reinforced by our surrounding culture.

Children without a firm foundation in God’s truth could get lost in the ways of *any* culture, but especially in our present culture. Spiritual conversations can help ground our children in God’s truth, so they have more than their feelings to guide them when confronted with ideas that are opposed to God’s ways. Some parents are tempted to give in to despair over the culture. However, our situation is no surprise to God. God determines the times and exact places we live in (see Acts 17:26). Whether we are living in a time when Christianity is in favor or out of favor, God calls parents to teach their children diligently. He wants parents to help their children see the world around them through His eyes and from His perspective, so they can live a life pleasing to Him.

God sent Jesus to show us how we can do this. We can approach spiritual conversations like Jesus did by doing two things: 1) using Jesus’ method for spiritual conversations, and 2) covering the topics Jesus covered in spiritual conversations.



Home is where our children find their heart for God.



Spiritual conversations can help ground our children in God’s truth ...



Vibrant Households

ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

1. USE JESUS' METHOD

2. COVER JESUS' TOPICS



Jesus asked thought-provoking questions that targeted the heart.



In the 1990s, the phrase “What Would Jesus Do?” became a popular expression to remind Christians to act in a way that reflected the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. As parents, we can ask these two similar questions: “How would Jesus have spiritual conversations?” and “What would Jesus bring up in spiritual conversations?” Let’s start with that first question.

USE JESUS’ METHOD FOR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

Jesus was a master communicator; He was the “Word become flesh” (John 1:14a). Here are five methods Jesus used when having conversations. As you read them, consider ways you can incorporate some of these same methods when having spiritual conversations with your child.

1. *Jesus asked thought-provoking questions and answered questions in ways that led to self-discovery*

Jesus asked thought-provoking questions that targeted the heart:

- To His disciples, Jesus asked, “*Who do the crowds say that I am?*” and “*But who do you say that I am?*” Luke 9:18b, 20b
- To a great crowd of His disciples and others, Jesus said, “*Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?*” Luke 6:46
- To a great multitude, Jesus said, “*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*” Luke 6:41

In each of these encounters, Jesus invited His hearers to reflect on their own hearts, on what was going on inside them. We can use questions to do the same with our children.

Jesus also responded to questions in ways that led to self-discovery:

- When Jesus ate with tax collectors, the Pharisees and the scribes asked, “*Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*” Jesus answered them, “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*” Luke 5:30b-32
- When at the home of Martha and Mary, Martha asked, “*Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?*” Jesus answered, “*Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.*” Luke 10:40b-42

In these and other instances, Jesus didn’t answer with a simple yes or no. He used the questions as an opportunity to go deeper and invited people to reflect on their lives. We can do the same with our children.

This is especially important in a time when children can find immediate answers to their questions by searching the internet. Research from Barna’s book, *Gen Z*, describes how detrimental quick searches can be to the learning process. “This so-called google culture of learning—finding answers to any question within seconds—continues to challenge the way Generation Z youth concentrate, write and reflect ... Their capacity for linear thinking has been replaced by a new mode of thinking, in which they need to take in and dish out information in a fast, disjointed, overlapping manner.”

Following the example of Jesus, parents can ask open-ended questions to determine the heart attitude and encourage thinking and self-discovery. These kinds of questions help children begin to learn the process of critical thinking instead of relying on feelings alone to determine what they believe. Young children can be asked *what* and *who* questions, but as children get older, they start asking *why*, *when*, and *how* questions. When they do, allow silence. Our tendency may be to jump in and quickly answer our child's question; instead, we can try Jesus' way of handling and using questions.

2. Jesus used images and word pictures

Jesus used memorable and common word pictures or images to teach us about Himself.

- *"I am the Light of the world."* John 8:12a
- *"I am the Good Shepherd."* John 10:11a
- *"I am the true Vine."* John 15:1a

In my years as a children's ministry director giving the children's message during worship services, the most impactful messages were those with an object lesson that taught a spiritual truth. To illustrate the lesson Jesus taught when He said He was the true vine, I brought grapes on the vine to show the connection between the grape, vine, and branches, and our relationship with Jesus. You could spark a similar conversation while shopping in the produce aisle at the grocery store with your child or when serving a cluster of grapes at home. The concept of light and dark can be understood by even the youngest child. You can turn off the lights to show how a flashlight lights the way in the dark like Jesus lights our way to His truth. Using cuddly stuffed lambs, you can talk about how we are like sheep who need a shepherd.

Jesus used memorable word pictures to teach us about God's Word:

- *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."* Matthew 4:4b
- *"Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."* Matthew 7:24

To start a conversation about the meaning of how we can't live on bread alone, bring your Bible into the kitchen while you're making a grocery list or enjoying a meal. Then ask your child what they think Jesus meant when He said the words in Matthew 4:4. Help your child understand that we need spiritual food from God's Word in the Bible every day to feed our hearts and minds God's truth. Similarly, building a sandcastle and washing it away can be a good time to talk about how obeying God is like building a house on the rock. It gives us a good foundation to face difficulties in life, but if we build on sand, it will wash away.

3. Jesus used memorable stories

Jesus used memorable parables to teach powerful lessons:

- In the parable of the sower (see Matthew 13:1-23), Jesus taught that when the "seed," God's Word, lands in good "soil," the one who hears and understands bears much fruit.
- In the parable of the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-32), Jesus taught that the Father rejoices when the lost are found.
- In the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin (see Luke 15:1-10), Jesus taught that there will be joy in heaven when one sinner repents.



... ask open-ended questions to determine the heart attitude and encourage thinking and self-discovery.





Talking about the parables of Jesus helps our children understand the heart of Jesus and gives them a better understanding of God's kingdom.



Time spent planting and tending a garden provides an excellent opportunity to talk about the parable of the sower. Searching for lost stuffed animals or lost pets can present opportunities to talk about the parable of the lost sheep or lost coin.

A parable is a story told to illustrate a spiritual truth about the kingdom of God. Talking about the parables of Jesus helps our children understand the heart of Jesus and gives them a better understanding of God's kingdom. These stories can be understood by people of every age and can be brought up in everyday situations.

4. *Jesus used everyday moments*

Jesus used everyday moments to spark spiritual conversations:

- When the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, Jesus said, *"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."* Mark 9:35b
- When Jesus saw a widow put two small copper coins in the treasury, He called the disciples over and said to them, *"Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing ... out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."* Mark 12:43b-44

An everyday moment for a conversation about being humble could come from overhearing your child boast about how much better they are at a sport than someone else. Giving your child their allowance could be a time to talk about the importance of giving back a tenth to God.

5. *Jesus talked about the kingdom of God*

Jesus said He was sent for the purpose of preaching the Good News of the kingdom of God:

"I must preach the Good News of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose." Luke 4:43b

We can follow Jesus' example of frequently talking about the kingdom of God with our children. After all, every time we pray the Lord's prayer with our children, we're talking about this kingdom:

"Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:9-10

When having conversations about the kingdom of God, tell your child we don't have to wait until we're in heaven to experience God's kingdom. God's kingdom comes to us when we receive the Holy Spirit, hear and believe God's Word, and then live accordingly in response to God's grace. Talk about what it might look like if God's kingdom came to your home, school, or neighborhood. How would people treat each other? What would be different? What would be the same? Talk about what could be done to bring more of God's kingdom into those places. You could end this conversation by praying for God's kingdom to come to certain people and places.

Teaching about the kingdom of God was a priority for Jesus. It came naturally to Him, and He wove it into many conversations. But it doesn't come as naturally to us. We aren't accustomed to talking about the kingdom of God in our conversations. When I served as children's ministry director, we named our children's ministry program "Kids of the Kingdom," to keep the vision of God's kingdom in the forefront of our minds.

If talking about the kingdom of God is new to your family, your child may react in a similar way to children I've had in VBS. After the first day, they asked, "Are we going to talk about God all day, every place we go?" But by the end of the week, these same children excitedly traveled from station to station in anticipation of what they would learn next about God. The same excitement for God's kingdom can be nurtured in our own children. We can help this process by not just using Jesus' method for approaching spiritual conversations, but by also bringing up the topics in spiritual conversations that Jesus Himself brought up.

COVER JESUS' TOPICS IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

I remember watching a television show about one of the royal families, and a future king was asked, "Don't you know what you've been born into?" The exciting news to share with your children is that those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior are adopted into a royal family! We become sons and daughters of God, the one true King.

We can groom our children in proper character and behavior, fitting for our status as God's chosen people under the rule of King Jesus. We do this by talking about the kingdom of God and what it means for our lives. This is what Jesus did. Let's consider five distinct kingdom topics that Jesus talked about.

1. Talk about kingdom identity

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." 2 Corinthians 5:17

Our identity is important. We identify ourselves in terms of race, gender, and nationality. We do this by clans, surnames, professions, family roles, abilities, and talents. Our most important identity, however, is our kingdom identity: who we are in Christ. But for many, what they believe about themselves is a distorted or mistaken identity shaped by the world rather than by God. Some have even had their identity stolen.

We're told in the secular world that identity theft puts us and our finances at risk, making it critical to protect ourselves. While this is a real threat, there's a less talked-about form of identity theft that also poses a real threat. It's an identity theft that occurs in many of our children: spiritual identity theft. All too often our children succumb to believing they are what others say about them rather than believing what God says about them. They wrongly believe that appearance, success, popularity, accomplishments, and circumstances define them. You can protect your child and reduce this risk by talking to your child about their kingdom identity: *who they are* and *whose they are in Jesus Christ*.

One crowded pool day when I was leisurely floating in a lazy river at our local water park, I couldn't help but overhear a conversation two teenage girls were having. One girl was telling the other about a girl at school who was much prettier than her. This prettier girl was getting the attention of a boy she liked, and she felt that he would never like her. My heart was broken for this young girl who thought that appearance was everything and who thought so little of herself. I wanted to turn around in my tube and tell her she was beautifully created by God with unique gifts and talents that made her special.



Vibrant Households

ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

1. USE JESUS' METHOD

2. COVER JESUS' TOPICS

The graphic features a red house silhouette at the top with the text "Vibrant Households" in yellow. Below it is a dark green box containing a white speech bubble icon and the text "ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS". To the right of the speech bubble are two numbered steps: "1. USE JESUS' METHOD" and "2. COVER JESUS' TOPICS".



Our most important identity, however, is our kingdom identity: who we are in Christ.



God equips each person with different personalities, skills, abilities, aptitudes, talents, and interests.



“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.”

1 Peter 4:10a

Children who know their kingdom identity and value as a child of God will be better prepared to face the difficulties, disappointments, and discouragements of life. They will be better prepared to resist peer pressure and to follow the Lord’s leading for their life. They will be less likely to have a distorted identity that is shaped by the culture.

Through God’s grace, children of King Jesus are **created by God in God’s image** (see Genesis 1:27), **deeply loved** (see Ephesians 3:19), **wonderfully made** (see Psalm 139:14), **God’s treasured possession** (see Deuteronomy 7:6), **chosen** (see Ephesians 1:4), **adopted** (see 1 John 3:1), **forgiven** (see Ephesians 1:7), and **are God’s temple** (see 1 Corinthians 3:16). And this is just a partial list!

Be creative in reinforcing with your child who they are in Christ. One year I placed kingdom identity statements in plastic Easter eggs for my granddaughter to find. She had fun hunting for the eggs again and trying to sound out the words, as she learned who she was in Christ. Ask God for creative ideas that will interest your child.

When children truly grasp that their kingdom identity, as well as deepest needs for security and significance, will be met by Jesus Christ and not by what the world offers, they will have learned a valuable thing.

2. *Talk about kingdom purpose*

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

God created each of us uniquely to have a special purpose in growing His kingdom. He gives each of us a special job to do. Talk with your child about how amazing it is that before they were even born, God had a purpose for them. Through conversations, you can help your child understand that God equips each person with different personalities, skills, abilities, aptitudes, talents, and interests.

I once gave a children’s message on Ephesians 2:10 and gave each child a nametag that said, “Useful to God.” The children excitedly put on these name tags, as I asked them to think about what special job God had for them and how they could be part of God’s plan for the world. God can use your child’s technology skills, artistic talent, voice, musical ability, sewing skills, or woodworking interest for His purposes. When we talk about this with our children, they will develop a habit of asking God how He wants to use them each day.

It’s exciting to know that God has a plan for your child and wants to use your child to grow His kingdom. Consider how God has uniquely given your child special abilities, aptitudes, talents, and interests to do His work in growing His kingdom. Talk to your child about what interests them. Take note of what they show interest in. I know a worship leader who said God gave him this interest as a child. He was given an opportunity as a young person to help lead worship, and it became his vocation. I’ve known elementary-aged children who already had an interest in becoming a missionary. A kingdom-minded parent would not try to dissuade this interest. Instead, the parent could provide opportunities to meet and interact with missionaries and help their child pursue this interest from God.

I know a mom who notices her elementary-aged son shows concern for friends who don’t believe the Bible. She said he wanted to do something about it and decided to invite one of his friends to church with him. God has given this young boy a heart for those who don’t believe.

I've noticed in my own grandchildren things that could be developed to serve the Lord. At a celebration at our church with pizza, pony rides, and a bubble bus, my five-year-old granddaughter was more interested in finding her former preschool teachers than participating in all the fun. Perhaps she will serve in a hospitality ministry. My six-year-old grandson's teacher commended him to my daughter for being kind to others and often asking if she needed any help. Possibly he will be involved in a helping ministry. My four-year-old grandson shows concern if anyone gets hurt. Maybe he'll be involved in a compassion ministry. I've observed children in VBS who help their crew leaders stay on schedule and who show the potential to serve God in leadership roles.

Perhaps you've noticed your child shows kindness to a younger sibling or classmate. If so, provide more opportunities for them to show kindness to neighbors or other family members. Or maybe your child always asks for jobs to help around the house; encourage this by giving them more tasks.

As you watch your child grow, look for these special abilities, aptitudes, and talents that are beginning to emerge in your child. Ask the Lord to help you identify and cultivate these abilities and talents in your child. Talk to your child about the importance of using their gifts to serve God. *"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another"* (1 Peter 4:10a). To keep a kingdom focus, ask your child what they think *God wants them to be* when they grow up rather than *what they want to be* when they grow up. You'll be preparing them to do the work God has planned for them.

3. Talk about kingdom character

"For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." Romans 8:29a

Your child's kingdom character is part of God's purpose for your child. God desires for His children to have a heart like His and become more like Jesus.

God created us to display His character. When God's character is reflected in us, we glorify God by showing the world what He is like. When we are **loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled**, we are exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22). This is only accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit working within us. Help your child understand the importance of staying close to Jesus through this verse and object lesson:

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."
John 15:4

Take your child outside and show them a tree and its branches. Talk about how we are connected to Jesus like that. Explain that we draw strength and purpose from Him like the branches and leaves do from the trunk and roots of the tree. Talk about how reading the Bible and praying to God are ways to abide in Him. Talk about how exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit is bearing kingdom fruit, and this is pleasing to God.

Talk about how incredible it is to have God's love in us and Christ in us to make us more like Him. I have talked about this amazing truth with an object lesson using red and blue Play-Doh. You can do this with your child. Roll out the red and blue Play-Doh separately. Cut out the shape of a person in both the red and blue Play-Doh. Tell your child the red Play-Doh represents Jesus and the blue Play-Doh represents us. Take the two shapes and start mixing them together. As



God desires for His children to have a heart like His and become more like Jesus.





God wants us to imitate Him ... and not people who go against His ways.

you continue to mix the two colors together, talk about how when we stay close to Jesus through prayer and Bible study, we begin to change. Point out how the red and blue colors are starting to become one color—purple. God is changing us, transforming us, to be more like Jesus. Now shape the purple Play-Doh into a heart shape. With God’s love in us and Christ in us, we are transformed and can be effective witnesses for Jesus to grow His kingdom.

Encourage your child when you see any of the fruits of the Spirit within them, such as when they show grateful, thankful, and forgiving hearts. Conformity to the world’s standards will not produce this Christ-like character. Tell your child that God doesn’t want us to be like the rest of the world. He wants us to have a mind like Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 2:16) and a transformed Christ-like character.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2

4. *Talk about kingdom behavior*

Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” John 14:15

Your child’s behavior matters to God and, like their character, is linked to God’s purpose for them. While we all want well-behaved, obedient children with “good” behavior, it’s important to consider behavior with a kingdom mindset. Kingdom behavior is rooted in Christ-like character and love. Jesus says it starts with love for Him.

Help your child understand what kind of behavior pleases the Lord (see Ephesians 5:10), and teach them to ask themselves: “Would this be pleasing to the Lord?” Encourage behavior that is God-pleasing, such as when your child shows kindness or love to someone or when they tell you the truth, even when it is difficult.

Behavior that honors the Lord and keeps His Commandments is a struggle for all of us, as we battle our own self-serving desires and our temptation to sin. Help your child identify sin in their lives and talk to them about the importance of acknowledging sin, confessing it, and asking for God’s forgiveness. Talk to your child about the sins you struggle with and how you also need to acknowledge and confess sin to God. Awareness of the depth of our own sin helps us love Jesus even more for the sacrifice He made to win our forgiveness. John says in 1 John 1:9 that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and forgives our sins. Help your child understand that God knows everything we do. Talk to your child about not trying to cover up their sin (see Psalm 32:5).

Outside influences can counter how we have taught our children to behave. At some point in every child’s life, parents notice some unpleasing behavior their child has picked up from being around other kids. Maybe it’s the unacceptable words they’re starting to use that they heard on the school bus. Or it might be the way they’re pairing up against another child they usually play with in the neighborhood. Talk to your child about how God wants us to imitate Him (see Ephesians 5:1) and not people who go against His ways. Tell them that we are to use wholesome words that build others up (see Ephesians 4:29).

5. Talk about kingdom stories

*I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory,
of Jesus and His love.
I love to tell the story
because I know 'tis true;
It satisfies my longings
as nothing else can do.
("I Love to Tell the Story")*

These are the lyrics to the old hymn, "I Love to Tell the Story." Telling the stories of Jesus reminds me of a book my grandmother gave me entitled, *ABC Stories of Jesus*. In a letter at the beginning of the book, the author writes, "On a long-ago day in Palestine parents took their children to Jesus, and He held them in His arms, and blessed them. Today we will not find Jesus by that dusty Palestinian road; our children cannot feel His arms about them as those other boys and girls did. But as they hear, over and over again, the stories of His loving-kindness, our children may come to know and love Jesus." Kingdom stories are important.

The author of Hebrews chapter 11 told kingdom stories of Old Testament heroes who lived by faith, not by what was seen. He recounts stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and others, all who believed in the promises of God. There are amazing stories of God doing miracles among His people to talk about with our children. You could tell the story of Noah and the flood when a rainbow arches across the sky. When you drive across mighty rivers, you could talk about what it must have been like for the Israelites when God parted the Red Sea so they could cross on dry ground. Beautiful stars in the sky can be reminders to tell of the star that led the shepherds to Bethlehem on that long-ago night.

Our own stories of faith are also important to tell. These are stories of all the good things God has done in our lives: stories of our struggles following Jesus, stories of how the Lord has changed us, guided us, comforted us, and shown love to us. We have stories of how Jesus has satisfied our longings and how we have experienced grace, mercy, and forgiveness in our lives. And then there are stories of answered prayer and prayers not answered as we'd hoped.

As you tell and retell kingdom stories, your children will indeed come to know and love Jesus more deeply.



**There are amazing stories
of God doing miracles
among His people ...**



CONSIDER WHERE AND WHEN TO HAVE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

Having looked at how we can use Jesus' methods and topics in our spiritual conversations, you may be asking a practical question: When and where are we supposed to have these conversations? This is an important question. Here are five helpful places you can start:

1. *Have spiritual conversations around the table*

Meals are good times to have spiritual conversations while “sitting in your house.” I had an important conversation with my six-year-old grandson while we were sitting around the table at a Mexican restaurant. I'm not sure how it all started, but somehow as we were finishing our cheese quesadillas, the conversation led to who goes to heaven. I was able to clear up some confusion and talk about what the Bible says regarding faith and eternal life. There's just something about sitting around the table enjoying a meal that provides a conducive atmosphere for important conversations.

2. *Have spiritual conversations in front of screens or books*

It's not uncommon to be in front of screens or books “when you sit in your house.” With the advance of technology, multiple screens are common in every household right alongside the books that have always accompanied children through childhood. All this media can be fodder for spiritual conversations. I had an unexpected opportunity to talk about forgiveness while reading to my granddaughter. We talked about forgiving others after we read that Dumbo forgave those who were mean to him. Reading *Peter Rabbit*, we talked about forgiveness when Peter's mom forgave him for being naughty and disobeying her.

3. *Have spiritual conversations on the road*

“When you walk by the way” can be considered all those occasions when you take a walk, or traveling in a car, bus, train, or plane. These transit moments can also be conducive to important spiritual conversations. When I picked my granddaughter up from preschool, I tuned into Christian radio with the hope it would spark a conversation, and sometimes it did.

4. *Have spiritual conversations in the moment*

“And when you lie down and when you rise.” Spiritual conversation times often occur when you are tucking your child in at night after prayers or in the morning when getting ready for the day. While these are common times, moments for conversations times can occur at any time of the day and are opportunities to redirect your child to focus on Jesus, giving them God's perspective on the situation.

5. *Have spiritual conversations seasonally*

I love the change of seasons we experience living in the Midwest. With each season, I change the wreath at the front door, the decor in the entryway, and the centerpiece on the dining room table. And within each season are holidays that naturally spark spiritual discussions. Just as mums, apple cider, and pumpkin spice bring in the autumn season, holidays can prompt informative spiritual conversations. These can range from talking about New Year's (reflecting on the previous year), Ash Wednesday (explaining the ashes), Thanksgiving (and what we are thankful for) to the special holidays of Easter and Christmas.



These transit moments can also be conducive to important spiritual conversations.



GROWING MORE SPIRITUALLY VIBRANT

If the preceding pages have given you ideas for some next steps to try out with your own child, I encourage you to persevere. Begin with prayer and a plan to get started. Start small. Start somewhere. Start by initiating something you have learned. God will do the rest! I love the picture painted in Isaiah's prophecy:

"All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children." Isaiah 54:13

If nurturing your child's faith makes you feel inadequate to the task, just remember this verse. Our children will be "taught by the Lord." He is working inside them. You aren't parenting alone, you can parent with God, partnering with Him as He invites your child to have a living relationship with Him.

It's parenting with God that allows us to nurture the high hopes we have for our children. It's good that we have high hopes and dreams for our children's faith. It is right that we want them to have a healthy understanding of their own sin and the need for God's forgiveness. It's good that we want them to recognize the voice of God and obey Him. It's natural that we want them to have an enduring faith that keeps them strong through life's troubles and protects them from harmful behaviors.

Yes, let us have high hopes for our children's faith. And let us parent with God, as we help our children grow through spiritual conversations. As you, yourself, take your next steps to help your child relate with God, my prayer for you is derived from Hebrews 13:20a, 21:

Now may the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you, that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

MORE RESOURCES

For the full research report from Barna/LHM, you can read:

Households of Faith: The Rituals and Relationships That Turn a Home into a Sacred Space

You may also be interested in:

The Spiritually Vibrant Home: The Power of Messy Prayers, Loud Tables, and Open Doors



Begin with prayer and a plan to get started.

Vibrant Households

- APPLY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**
Helping Your Child Make a Relationship with God
- EXTEND HOSPITALITY**
Helping Your Child Welcome Others
- ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS**
Helping Your Child Grow Through Faith Conversations

PROJECT CONNECT

Mary Oldfield lives in St. Louis with her husband, Robin, of 38 years. They have two married daughters and five grandchildren. She delights in trusting God to help her prepare a place for God to work in the lives of her grandchildren. Mary is a retired children's ministry director who spent 20 years equipping and supporting parents as they responded to the call to be the primary spiritual nurturers of their children.



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