



When Can a Child Believe?



When do we begin
to lead children to Christ?

**Before they
are born.**



When do we begin to lead children to Christ?

- By being growing believers ourselves
- By creating a loving & accepting environment
- By teaching about Jesus' love
- By teaching about Jesus as a Friend
- By teaching about Jesus as Savior
- By teaching about Jesus as Lord
- The journey is a process that continues through all of life



Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our
God, the Lord alone.

- And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.
- And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today.



Deuteronomy 6:4-7

- Repeat them again and again to your children.
- Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again.



Create a Faith-Friendly Environment in your Home

- Take your own obedience to Jesus seriously.
- Make your own faith central, not peripheral, in your own life.
Your children can tell which is which.
- Pray together as a family.
- Make faith-full connections in everyday experience.



There are 168 hours in a week.

- 56 hours are spent sleeping.
- 35 hours are spent in school.
- 6 hours (at the most) are spent in religious instruction.
- That leaves 71 waking hours for which parents have primary responsibility.



Our responsibility is awesome.

- But God is our Helper!
- And God's concern and love for our children is far beyond anything we'll understand in this life!
- Our children are ours only as stewards, anyway.



Children are not “lost” until this conviction becomes a reality in their OWN understanding.

Our anxiety over our young children’s spiritual condition is frequently much more, well, our anxiety, than it is an indication of something real.



God's purpose is to bring each child to full-term birth in his or her own time.

- Our efforts to accelerate this unique, individual process frequently lead to premature births that cause children to confuse their poorly understood responses to anxious adults as being the same thing as the New Life Jesus promised.
- We should not be surprised, then, that as youth or young adults, children “outgrow” this misconception and abandon faith, sometimes forever.



The Sequence of Faithing

- Identity Molding:
No Crisis/No Commitment
- Identity Foreclosure:
No Crisis/Commitment
- Identity Moratorium
Crisis/No Commitment
- Identity Achievement
Stable Commitment
even in Crisis



What's wrong with these statements?

- “My children have all been baptized.”
- “My children are all church members.”
- Baptism \neq Church Membership
 \neq Salvation.



Beyond this,

Becoming a Christian involves much more than giving “the right answer” to a few “yes” or “no” questions.



Any child who's been
to Vacation Bible School or
to occasional Sunday School
knows "the right answers,"
whether or not the answers
are understood.



What do these statements mean?

- "I love Jesus."
- "Jesus loves me."
- "I want to be baptized."
- "I want to go to heaven."
- "I want to join the church."
- "I want to take the Lord's Supper."

"I'm not sure what's going on here, but I don't want to be left out."



On Children's Questions

- Every question deserves an answer.
- Answer questions as soon as possible.
- Don't assume that you know what a child is thinking or asking.
- Don't give more answer than is wanted or needed.
- If you don't know, say you'll find out (and then do it).



When children ask about becoming Christians . . .

- Affirm their interest! Tell them how happy you are that they want to know more about what it means to be a Christian.
- Tell about your own conversion experience. Use simple, everyday language. Relate specific dates and places. Tell about the person who helped you understand what it means to be a Christian.



When children ask about becoming Christians . . .

- Don't be in a hurry. Let the child set the pace. Interest will often ebb and flow in response to specific events, such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, or a special service.
- Keep a written record of questions children ask and of conversations you have. This record will be a wonderful gift later in life that will enable children to see and remember the process they went through in making their commitment to Christ.



When children ask about becoming Christians . . .

- Emphasize the unconditional love of God as expressed through Jesus. At the same time, look for an age-appropriate awareness of sinfulness, evidence of repentance, and a desire to be forgiven. These must precede true conversion at any age.



When children ask about becoming Christians . . .

- Be alert for opportunities to talk casually about the difference Jesus makes in your own everyday life. Look for ways to help children connect belief and behavior.
- Pray. Ask God to bring children in the right way & in the right time to a place where they can make a commitment to Christ that will make a difference in how they live.



When children ask about becoming Christians . . .

- Call for reinforcements! Make sure other teachers are aware of what is going on so they can support you and pray for the child or the children.

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Six Essential Concepts

1. Trying to understand “accountability” is far more important than trying to determine a specific age at which a child may be considered to be “lost.”
2. The age at which any one child reaches accountability may vary rather widely from the age at which another child reaches accountability.



Six Essential Concepts

3. Watering down Bible teachings about conversion so that any child can respond affirmatively to an invitation to accept Christ is a dangerous business.
4. Respect for the work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the individual requires one to abandon mechanical approaches to helping children become Christians.

Eugene Chamberlain,
When Can a Child Believe?
(Nashville: Broadman Press,
1973), p. 36.



Six Essential Concepts

5. In dealing with a child, one must respect his or her capacities, neither overrating nor underrating them.
6. While one cannot expect a child to express her or his inner life in adult language or in terms of adult experiences, there is a point beyond which basic truths cannot be simplified and reduced just to make the “evangelist” feel good about a child’s apparent decision.



Some Basic Principles

- Rely on the Holy Spirit!
- Every child deserves personal counsel.
- Encourage the child to express ideas in his or her own words.
- Give time for reflection. Silence is okay.
- Avoid creating peer-pressure situations.



Some Basic Principles

Thomas Sanders, *Children & Conversion:
Guiding Children along the Journey of Faith* (LifeWay)

- Ask open-ended and follow-up questions.
- Speak in clear, concrete language.
- Don't jump to conclusions.
- Try not to give more information than a child needs or asks for.
- Involve parents.
- Remain conversational. Relax.



Some Basic Principles

- Make a distinction between becoming a Christian and baptism.
- Point out that becoming a Christian comes first, and then baptism.
- Make a distinction between becoming a Christian and “joining the church.”
- Point out the connection between joining the church and the Lord’s Supper.



Other considerations

- Children want to please adults, and this is always a factor to be considered.
- Children need to know that being saved does not mean that they will never sin again, and they need to know how to handle the sin that continues to come into their lives.



Other considerations

- Children need to understand that being “born again” involves the commitment to follow Jesus’ commands for the rest of their lives.
- One of the problems with early confessions of faith is the inability to conceptualize, much less make, any such commitment.
- A time of recommitment in adolescence or young adulthood is frequently very important.



Other considerations

- It's okay for children to come for counsel without making a decision.
- Some come because they are just beginning to sense the tugging of God's Spirit.
- Always leave the door open for further conversation.
- Relax. Conversion is a miracle, and only God can do a miracle!

Daryl Heath, *Counseling Children About Christian Conversion & Church Membership*



When can
a child
believe?



A child can really believe when . . .

- The Holy Spirit moves in his or her heart and mind just as the Holy Spirit moves in the heart and mind of all whom the Spirit brings to repentance and faith.
- His or her motives for professing faith in Christ are free from external pressures such as the desires of parents or the adventures of friends.



A child can really believe when . . .

- He is able to relate his actions to God.
- She can accept for herself the basic truths of the Gospel.
- His or her attitude toward the claims of Christ results in a genuine desire to live in a way to please God from this day forward.

Eugene Chamberlain,
When Can a Child Believe?
(Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), p. 80.



What does a child need to understand ?

- Who is Jesus?
- Why did Jesus come?
- What did Jesus do?
- Why should I become a Christian?
- How can I accept Jesus as my Savior?



With groups of children:

- Make the presentation appropriate for the age group.
- Use a Bible version with simple language.
- Make the presentation sequential.
- Use a response card or other mechanism that reduces peer pressure.
- Have a follow-up plan.
- Involve parents.



Beginning the discussion

- Try to determine the child's true intent.
 - Why did you come forward?
 - What do you want to do?
 - How long have you been thinking about becoming a Christian?
 - When did you first start thinking about becoming a Christian?



God loves you and has a great plan for your life.

- “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).
- “Tell me something that is special about the way God made you.”
- “Why does a person need to become a Christian?”

God's Purpose



We have all sinned.

- “For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23).
- The principle of accountability means that a child must be able to understand personal responsibility for wrongdoing.
- *A child cannot be “saved” until he or she understands the separation of being “lost” in an age-appropriate way.*

Our Problem



We have all sinned.

- “What is sin?”
- “Have you ever sinned?”
- “How does sin affect your relationship with other people?”
- “How does sin affect your relationship with God?”

Our Problem



God's Provision

- “For the **wages** of sin is death, but the free **gift** of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (**Romans 6:23**).
- “How do you think God feels when we sin?”
- Even though we all choose to sin, God still loves us and offers to forgive us.



Jesus died for us.

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that **everyone** who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- “What do you know about Jesus?”
- “Why did Jesus die?”
- “What happened after Jesus died?”

God's Provision



Our Decision

- “For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved**” (Romans 10:9).
- “I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me **have** eternal life. They **will never** be condemned for their sins, but they **have already** passed from death into life” (John 5:24).



Our Decision

- “Do you know how to become a Christian?”
- **A**DMIT that you are a sinner.
- **B**ELIEVE that Jesus is God’s Son and that he died for you.
- **C**ONFESS Jesus as your Savior and Lord.



Our Decision

- “**Anyone** who calls on the name of the Lord **will be saved**” (Romans 10:13).
- “Those who become Christians **become new persons**. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).



So here's the Deal:

God's Purpose

Our Problem

God's Provision

Our Decision



Anchor the Memory

- Take photos.
- Save bulletins & certificates.
- Create a memory box.
- Receive letters from family and friends.
- **Have a party!**



The Chronicles of Narnia

Nurturing
Transcendent
Awareness in Children





Morton Kelsey, discussion with the Psychology of Religion Colloquium of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, October 8, 1986.

- Morton Kelsey has suggested that parents' most important task in nurturing the spirituality of their pre-teen children is to affirm the reality of the "other world," and to help them experience it, not to understand it. Parental use of formational stories such as Narnia can provide a foundational predisposition for theological thinking and Christian world-view. Jesus called it "having eyes that see and ears that hear" (Matthew 13:16).



- There will be times later when, in responding to a question about some relationship or event, parents can say, “Do you remember when Jill and Eustace were in Underland and were longing for the Overworld, hardly daring to believe that it was real? This is like that.”



Walter Hooper, Introduction to K. A. Lindscoog, *The Lion of Judah in Never-Never Land: The Theology of C. S. Lewis Expressed In His Fantasies for Children* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 13.

- “By degrees which are often unnoticed by even the most cautious atheist, we progress from a love of Narnia, to a greater love of Aslan himself, to a sharp regret that there is no Aslan in this world, to a sudden recognition which makes the heart sing that there *is* an Aslan in this world—and then, if my own experience is any guide—Narnia and this world interlock and Aslan and Christ are seen as one.”



- A young woman, seeing a professor carrying several of the *Chronicles*, commented, “I love Lewis. I once read the Narnia books as quickly as my little sister let me have them! There has to be a place like Narnia somewhere. Someday I'll find it.”

J. E. Zuck, Religion and Fantasy, *Religious Education*, 70 (1975), 604.



“Dearest,” said Aslan very gently, “you and your brother will never come back to Narnia.”

“Oh, Aslan!” said Edmund and Lucy both together in despairing voices.

“You are too old, children,” said Aslan, “and you must begin to come close to your own world now.”

“It isn't Narnia, you know,” sobbed Lucy. “It's *you*. We shan't meet *you* there. And how can we live, never meeting you?”

“But you shall meet me, dear one,” said Aslan.

“Are—are you there too, Sir?” said Edmund.

“I am,” said Aslan, “But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”

May it be so, O Lord.
Amen.



