



How To Make Sure Your Child Knows God

by Sheri Schofield

"Mommy, what is faith?" Drew asked. We were on our way to the farmer's market in Oklahoma. Drew was two-and-a-half years old. We had just driven past the Praying Hands statue at Oral Roberts' University and the hospital that Roberts had built, called "City of Faith". Drew knew what a city was, but faith? Hm. He was curious about that.

"Faith means we believe God," I answered. That satisfied him . . . for the moment. A few days later he asked, "Mommy, if Jesus is God, how come he prayed to God?"

Oh, wow! How was I ever going to explain the Holy Trinity to a toddler! I sent up a quick S. O. S. to God. I'm not sure my answer was the best - it's hard to tell with toddlers - but I said, "It's like this. You know how you and Daddy and I are a family. We all have the same last name - Schofield. Drew Schofield, Tim Schofield and Sheri Schofield. Well, God and Jesus are Father and Son, but they are both God, and so is the Holy Spirit. They are so close that they cannot be separated. There's God the Father, God the Son (that's Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit. They are so close that they all have the same *first* name: God! So when Jesus was praying to God, he was talking with his Daddy, and he was very close to his Daddy and they loved each other very much."

That was my spur of the moment explanation, and it is about as clear as one can get with a toddler, for they do not understand abstracts yet. They are concrete learners until they are about age 8 or 9, as a group. They are learning about actual objects and happenings in their world. They do understand family relationships. So I kept it simple, comparing the Trinity to something he understood. It was enough for Drew. It satisfactorily answered his question.

(In my book *The Prince And The Plan*, I answer this question for children ages 4 through 8. They are able to understand more at that age.)

Most children do not ask questions about the Trinity until they are about six years old, or older. So how is it that a toddler could even *think* of something like that? **He was asking those types of questions because of the plan I was following.** It was all about the spiritual relationship developing between Drew and God.

Teaching The Plan of Salvation - Birth Through Age Three

There is a great difference between organized religion and a personal relationship with Jesus. Organized religion is a system, a form that people follow to enhance their belief in a Supreme Being. A relationship with Jesus, however, is a free-flowing communication with him, full of love and light, that connects our souls with God the Father and the Holy Spirit as well. What I would like to share with you is how to develop that personal relationship between your child and Jesus at a very young age.

In Psalm 22:9, the psalmist wrote, ***"You brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast."*** (NIV)

Moses spoke with the Israelites about how to raise their children to know, love and obey God. He said, ***"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds . . . Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, and when you lie down and when you get up . . ."***
Deuteronomy 11:18 & 20 (NIV)

These two key verses influenced me in how I approached my responsibility to help my children enter into a personal relationship with Jesus. Also, I could clearly remember my grandmother rocking me to sleep as she sang old hymns of the faith to me. It was a very special memory that stayed with me. I wanted to create the same type of memory for my children. With that in mind, I began teaching Drew about God the day I brought him home from the hospital. Here's how:

In the morning and in the evening when I nursed my baby, I would tell him a short, simple Bible story, sing some quiet Christian praise and worship songs to him, then pray for God to work in his heart and mind. I also did this with my daughter, Christy. This is how we as believers consecrate our children to God. "Consecrate" means to dedicate -- or set apart -- our children for Jesus.

The moment we begin telling our child about God and pray over him, we give the Holy Spirit permission to start working in his heart. And he does! He honors our commitment and our devotion as we do this day after day, year after year. It is a short, simple and effective way to start our children on the right path, the path that leads to eternal life in Jesus.

A side benefit is that we as parents also become consecrated to God as we obey him. He does a work in our hearts that builds godly wisdom in raising our children. For me, God set me apart not only for my own children, but also for the children of hundreds of others who would bring their little ones to my classes.

The Results

I honestly didn't expect to see significant results in my children until they were about 4 or 5 years old. I figured it would take that long for them to start understanding their need for a Savior. Boy, was I surprised!

To help Drew connect with Jesus, I bought a print of Jesus knocking on a door. It was a famous picture and is available on Amazon.



I put this picture on the wall at the foot of Drew's bed so that he would see it each night before he fell asleep. He wanted to know about the picture. I told him, "Jesus knocks on the door of our hearts and asks if he can come in. When we invite Jesus to come into our hearts, he does! Revelation 3:20 says, 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in' (NIV)

"I *like* that!" Drew said, his eyes bright and excited. "Can I learn it?"

I was a little surprised. **He wanted to start memorizing Bible verses that he liked when he was two-and-a-half**, about the time he was asking me questions about the Trinity. But those other verses had been short. Now he wanted to learn a long verse. So he plunged right in and learned that verse.

Every night before he went to sleep, Drew wanted to say his memory verses then we would pray together. **One night after he had said Revelation 3:20, he squeezed his eyes shut, folded his little hands together and said, "Dear Jesus, I love you so much! Will you please come into my heart?"** His eyes popped open. He looked at my astonished face and asked, "Does Jesus live in my heart now?"

Inside, I was protesting, "He's way too young to understand this!" He was two-years-nine-months old! But **I recognized the work of the Holy Spirit** and said, "Yes, Drew, Jesus lives in your heart now!" I prayed with him, then went in to tell Tim. "You're not going to believe this . . . !" I began. His face slowly lit up as I told him of Drew's spontaneous prayer.

In the days and years that followed, I have watched Drew grow into a godly man, now a husband and father. He lives for Jesus. I saw similar results with Christy. She was three when she asked Jesus to come live in her heart.

Our job as parents is to nurture that relationship between our children and God by following the directions given in Psalm 22 and Deuteronomy 11. It is God's job to bring the results in his own time.

The Plan - Ages 4-8

According to the most recent Barna study, nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus as their Savior do so before age 13. By age 13, a child's view of God is usually set. It is important to help your child establish a personal relationship with Jesus



as soon as possible. In my work with children, I have found that the majority of children are most responsive to Jesus between the ages of 4 and 8. They have collected enough information about life to begin to understand the plan of salvation, provided that it is explained in words they and ideas to which they can relate.

Most children in this age group do not yet understand similes, metaphors and abstract ideas. They still see things in a very literal way. That is why schools do not introduce similes and metaphors until grade three. Abstracts are usually left until children are about twelve years old, for effective teaching.

Parables, for instance, are similes. "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ." and then a story is introduced. Jesus told parables to adults, not children. Even adults often had a hard time understanding parables! So I prefer to save parables until a child is starting to understand similes. There are plenty of other stories about Jesus that are straightforward and simple, stories which they will understand.

Salvation is not a formula. It is a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should focus on telling children stories about how Jesus interacted with people, his miracles, how he prayed, and the things he taught that children can understand.

A good child's Bible storybook is very helpful. *The Story Travelers Bible* by Tracey Mader is a good book for ages 4-8. It gives a brief overview of the Bible and tells where the stories can be found. If you read a Bible story in the morning and in the evening and pray with your children, the Holy Spirit will work in your little one's heart to help him/her understand. You are not in this alone, for Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to teach us what we need to know. He will guide you and instruct your children.

Here are some concepts children struggle with, and explanations to help them understand:

Q: "Why can't I see God?"

A: God is so bright! He is brighter than the sun, so our eyes cannot look at him. God made us so that our eyes cannot see him so they won't get hurt. But we can talk to him!

Q: "Does God have a phone?"

A: No. God does not have a phone. He doesn't need one! He can hear you even when you whisper. When you are afraid, you can ask God to help you, and he will. He will give your courage. When you ask God to show you what to do, he will put his ideas in your mind. When something is wrong or somebody you love is sick, you can tell God about it and ask for his help. He will always hear you and will answer in the way that is best.

Q: "Where does God live?"

A: God lives in a beautiful place called "Heaven". God is the great King of the universe. Heaven does not have a sun, because God is the Light. The Bible tells us that the streets of Heaven are pure gold! Angels fly around Heaven and around God's throne and cry, "Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord God Almighty!" Nothing bad can ever be in Heaven. It is a safe place, with beautiful trees and tame animals. Did you know that there are special rooms in Heaven for everyone who believes in Jesus? Yes! And if you believe in Jesus and give him your heart, you will have your own very special room, too! Jesus told us that he is preparing a place for all who believe in Him.

Q: "How do I get my heart out of me to give it to Jesus?"

A: When God created people, he gave them something that none of the animals have. He gave us two hearts! The first heart is our body heart. Animals have this kind of heart, too. It's the thing in our chest that goes thump-thump-thump. It pumps our blood through our body. But our second heart, the special one that only people have, is our soul-heart. It is the invisible part of us that makes us who we are. When we are very happy, sometimes we feel butterflies in our stomach. That is our soul-heart making us feel that way. If we are sad, sometimes we feel sick. That is our soul-heart. When say, "I love you with all my heart," that is our soul-heart. We talk to God and he talks to us with our soul-heart.

Children are very literal thinkers. Spiritual concepts often confuse them unless we explain what they mean in terms children can understand.

Modeling Christ



The most important thing a father and mother can give their children is to love and respect each other. This gives children a solid sense of security, both emotionally and spiritually. If you are a single parent, avoid speaking poorly of your child's other parent in front of them. This shows respect, and your child will feel more secure because of it.

Tim and I made a choice to discuss our disagreements in private, not in front of our children. We did not agree on everything! It is said that if two people always think alike, one of them is not thinking. True! But by discussing things in private, we helped our children feel secure. This security helped them grow stronger spiritually as well as emotionally. It created a safe growing and learning environment.

When our oldest, Drew, was in fifth grade, we lived in a home with a wetland behind it. Drew caught four harmless water snakes one day and brought them to the house. I did not want those creatures inside! But Tim felt it was okay. It would be educational. I dragged him aside and hissed, "What if they get loose? I won't have

snakes crawling around our house!" He assured me that the terrarium/aquarium had a good lid and the snakes couldn't escape. "They'd better not!" I whispered. "Remember, we are trying to sell this house!"

I didn't argue with Tim in front of the kids. A few days later, a portly woman came by to look at the house. I ushered her into the house and showed her the way to the bedrooms. Crawling toward us down the hall came one of those snakes.

"What's THAT?" she screeched.

"It's only a harmless . . ."

"SNAKE!" she screamed, jumping about five feet into the air. She came down with a crash, turned and raced back out of the house. She jumped into her car and took off. I never saw her again.

When Tim came home that night, I calmly told him what had happened. No need to say, "I told you so!" That was the end of the snakes. Sometimes we just have to let our mates find out for themselves that we know what we're talking about. The fewer words we use to make our point the better.

Letting God Shape Us

We live in an age where everyone wants authenticity. We're supposed to just be who we are. But God tells us that if we belong to Christ, we are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and become more like him. I find in myself great depths of self-centered thoughts and emotions. If I were to act on those, I would not be like Jesus. I'd hurt others and make others think poorly of Christ, who lives in me.

So where does authenticity fit in? Authenticity means we do not pretend to be someone we are not. It means admitting to our close friends and family that we have struggles. But it also means that when we love and obey Jesus, and we are transparent about the good things God is doing in us, too.

The basic principle of reading our Bible and praying daily has been tested by time for centuries and has been found to be vital to our spiritual growth. I recommend buying a modern version of the Bible. *The New Living Translation* is very good. It brings the Bible and its teachings to life and helps us understand truth.

Attending church regularly with our family is important. It brings each of us to a place where we can learn about God's Word. It provides us with Christian friends to help us face life's difficult situations. It lets our children know that being together with other believers is important. It provides our children with peers who share their values.

A small group Bible study, either as a couple or as individuals, will help us become more like Jesus. My closest friends and supporters are people with whom I have spent countless hours reading and discussing the Bible. These friends are always there for me!

Handling Conflicts

It has been said that if two people always think alike, one of them is not thinking! In any healthy marriage, there will be disagreements. How you handle those conflicts is important. It is best to go into a different room from the children, close the door, and discuss your disagreement quietly. When you have reached a conclusion about how to handle the conflict, wait until you are calm before going back to your children. If your disagreement is particularly emotional, ask the Holy Spirit to give you peace and self-control. If you need to seek outside help, try to find a pastor or Christian counselor who will advise you and help you work things out. Arguing in front of one's children creates a sense of uncertainty and fear in them.

When discussing conflicts with one's spouse, be sure to "fight fair". Don't bring up things that you know will hurt each other! Stick to the point with the purpose of reaching resolution.

Allowing the Holy Spirit to shape our hearts to become more like Jesus will help us raise children who will follow in our footsteps. The Apostle Paul said, "**Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.**" (I Corinthians 11:1, NIV) We should be able to say the same thing to our children.

Discipline

"Discipline" means to train your child to live responsibly and in accordance with the rules of your household and the law. King Solomon's book of Proverbs tells us, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6, NIV)

Dr. James Dobson has said that there are two things your child needs to know before he reaches the age of five: 1) That you love him and God loves him. 2) He must obey both you and God. I have found that to be very good advice.

The only thing I punished my children for was deliberate defiance. I used age-appropriate discipline when they were defiant. I recommend James Dobson's book, *The New Strong-Willed Child*. We raised our kids using the earlier version of the book and found it to be most helpful. Becky Danielson and Lori Wildenberg have written an excellent book on how to train your child to obey and to make good choices: *Empowered Parents*. Their approach to discipline and training is excellent.

If your child learns to obey you and listen to your instruction as a child, you will have a much easier task in training him in the things of God as he/she grows older. The respect they have for you will establish you as an authority as they grow up.

This will also give him/her a healthy respect for the law and help him/her become a good influence in this world.

Spending Time Together

My husband, Tim, was a military physician when the children were young. His hours were often long, so I had to handle much of the work at home, and I was the one who spent most of the time with the children. But Tim spent every spare minute with us! Our first priority was each other and our kids.



(Family berry-picking adventure)

When our family is our first priority, there will not be nearly as many conflicts as there would be if we each insisted on going our own way with our own friends and our own interests.

Tim was very interested in natural science. Most of our family activities involved exploring nature. Our son, Drew, is now grown with a family of his own. When I them recently, I found that Drew is following in his dad's steps. He likes to take the kids on nature walks and catch toads and lizards and snakes, just like he used to do as a child with Tim.

Doing things together goes a long way toward building a strong spiritual connection with our children. When we have adventures together, it gives us opportunities to demonstrate godly living. Our children will follow our example as they grow up.

We have to use more than mere words to teach our children about God: We must live the Christian life together.