

TEACHING CHILDREN TO CONNECT WITH GOD

Jesus Says There are Little Children Who Believe in Him

Young children have the ability to connect with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit through their human spirit regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Preschoolers have the ability to believe in Jesus. Jesus said it himself:

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.’” (Matt. 18:1-6)

The terminology of “little child” is a reference to a toddler or preschool age child. Jesus stated that toddler age children have the ability to believe Him. As with all of us, their faith connects them with the Father:

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:5-6)

There is no other name than Jesus by which we can be saved. Children must be taught who God is, just as adults need to be discipled. There is no age limit on knowing who God is. When children receive Christ, the Holy Spirit witnesses they are the children of God just as with adults. Preschoolers have the ability to worship the God who sent Jesus to bring us eternal life.

Recognizing a Child’s Mind

Parents and teachers must explain about who God is with an age appropriate or preschool vocabulary. Children, like adults, match the new things they learn to previously learned things. As they discover their world, we can use these natural things to show them who God is. We often only have one or two hours a week to show each child how much God loves her or him and that He desires to have a relationship with them. As parents, we must deliberately plan to make it count.

We demonstrate to children who God is with our actions and words. They learn by example and imitating us. We can teach them what it means to worship God and connect with Him in their spirit. Because worship involves the human spirit and the Holy Spirit, it is not limited by any worldly factors. Jesus told us,

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24)

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There is no age limit mentioned in Jesus' revelation of worshipers. The Spirit of Truth leads us into worship. We learn the truth about God and worship Him from our spirits. Parents leave impressions on children's hearts by speaking or acting as led by the Holy Spirit. We rely on the Holy Spirit to connect the new concepts with their earlier learned concepts, laying line upon line in the hearts of children. The apostle Paul relied on this as well with adults:

"You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God." (2 Cor. 3:2-4)

It is the Holy Spirit who writes on the hearts of children as well. Our connection with God is the result of learning to love Him, appreciate Him, and worship Him. We can teach about God to help children learn to appreciate Him, even love Him for His divine care of us. But worship stems from revelation by the Spirit to our human spirit.

Drawing Children into Worship

Let us ask ourselves four questions:

- What is Worship?
- How do you worship God?
- Why do you worship God?
- When do you worship God?

Let us begin with what is worship? The word "worship" translates into "God's worth". The act of worship first involves *focusing* on the Almighty God and Him alone. *It is not about us.*

The Hebrew word "shakhah" translated as worship means to prostrate oneself, to bow in homage, to do reverence. The unspoken assumption of most of modern Christendom is that worship services are for us, about us, to captivate us, and entertain us, while we judge the performance's ability to draw us in. It is not about us! It is about recognizing God's worth, His majesty and glory.

Worship is one-directional, focused on giving God all the glory. The Hebrew word "barak" translated as worship means to pay singular tribute to God alone. Worship adores, extols who God is. It is devotion, awe, and reverence directed toward God in our understanding of who He is, how He thinks, why He came, what He wants, and the fact that He exists- the understanding that He is everything, in everything, all things were created by Him and for Him.

This comes by revelation of the Holy Spirit opening our understanding of the Word of God:

"But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God,

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that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:10-14)

Jesus said God is looking for worshippers to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. The revelation of truth inspires worship. Singing is not worship unless the song is about God alone. No mention of me, I, or myself defines the worthiness of God.

Praise is not worship. Praise is our response to what God has *done* for us. Worship involves understanding *who* God is. Worship takes practice and discipline to eliminate any focus on ourselves; it needs to be explained, demonstrated, and taught to children (as well as adults). It requires focus on God alone.

How Do Children Learn to Worship God from the Heart/Spirit?

Almost all children have childhood heroes: singers, or athletes, scientists; firefighters, etc. We study them to learn all about them, and their latest and greatest achievements. Children watch programs or cartoons about them to learn about them. Adults read books about them. We elevate their worldly greatness in our children's minds by talking about them. They slowly gain revelation of the value of these heroes in our world. Because we elevate them, our children elevate them.

We need to study God with our children and reveal Him to them. It is not possible to worship God without knowing about God, and knowing God himself. To help children get to know Him make a list of His attributes, a list of His names, a list His mighty works, read to them about how He interacted with the saints of old. Through prayer, invite Him into your life to be your God as He was in days of old. Knowing *about God* is the first step to prepare for worship. However, we want to take the children to a place where they know God themselves.

We must become translators. As parents, we must translate what we know about God, into specific language that children can understand, in small snap shots of God's glory. Specific instances will fascinate children, whether it is object lessons from nature or guests with testimony of God's healing. We must translate *what we know about God* into a format that they can understand. Revelation is receiving understanding that engages the hearts children.

When we offer a revelation of who God is to children (or adults) it demands that we offer an opportunity to worship God for the revelation that the Holy Spirit has brought us. Our relationship with God determines the limitations of how deep we can take the children in their relationship with God. We need to press in ourselves.

Why do we worship God and give our hearts to him?

We are moved to worship when we choose to receive and believe the revelation of who God is. Genuine gratitude and heartfelt adoration rise from our spirit prompting us to worship Him.

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The Pathway to Worship and Connecting with God

- Focus on teaching the things that bring understanding of how much God loves us.
- Pray for the understanding to become revelation from the Holy Spirit.
- Choose to receive and believe the revelation.
- Let gratitude and adoration rise to God from our spirit.

This is connecting with God. This is true intimacy. This is dwelling in the secret place with God—a place of intimate discovery involving Spirit to speaking to spirit. This is Spirit-led worship.

Intimate Connection with God is What Leaves a Lasting Impression That Cannot Be Forgotten

This connection is goal. We do not want our children to forget God or forsake God.

Our human emotions and our devotion were intended to be fully engaged in our worship of God. Worship is focus on God and it redirects our attention away from the trials of daily living, it restores us, heals us, gives us peace and strengthens our faith. This is because we see God. Jesus promised us, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”

When do you worship God?

We should worship with deliberate effort on a daily basis in response to what we already know, in response to the depth of our present relationship, and in response to new revelation in our daily quiet times in the Word of God.

We should worship at any moment the Holy Spirit speaks to us. His presence is intended to connect us with the heart of God. Do not take His presence for granted; it is holy. True worship is a form of prayer; it is communication with God.

Directing Children Into Worship

We must learn the language level of each of our children, in their stages of development. Prepare ahead of time how to define concepts such as salvation, new birth, born again, sin, etc. to preschoolers in language they can understand.

We can reveal God by talking about names of God in the Old Testament. We can reveal God by talking Jesus in the New Testament; speak of the attributes of God in their language skills and level. Take a moment of prayer and worship when you share a new concept about God to demonstrate to them that learning truths about God should lead to worship.

Engage the Different Learning Styles with Different Methods.

Repeat the same message in different ways, activities and styles throughout the week. Moses related how to live with daily activities reflecting your worship of God:

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“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”
(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Teach them to think about and meditate on this one revelation of God by repeating it verbally after different activities that day. Direct their focus to God by asking questions. “What kind of clouds did God make today?” “Did you know God has numbered the hairs on your head?”

This is where Christian object lesson books may be valuable to you because they take everyday objects and use them to relate a spiritual truth to children. It is a parable of an object to make a spiritual point.

We must prepare and be deliberate about worshiping God in our every day lives. After your teaching, say, “Now we are going to worship God.” Deliberately use the word, “worship” so that the children associate the word with the focus on God alone.

Put the Plan in Motion

Worship with children’s songs focused on God, or short prayers focused on how strong God is, or let children hang pictures of nature that remind them of God and share what it tells them about God.

Any activity that allows the children to focus on the greatness and glory of God and express can be a time of worship in your family. Have age-appropriate expectations of the length of worship moments. For young children, their attention span is about one minute per year. And that is okay. We all learn through repetition throughout lives. Worship moments should come after teaching and focused activity times that highlight who God is

Depend on God to Reveal Himself Through the Holy Spirit.

You do not and cannot connect children with God in your own strength. Ask for His help and relax. He wants to connect with you. He will give you revelation, creativity and direction by His Spirit. God wants your children to be blessed in the Kingdom of God.

“As for Me,” says the LORD, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants,” says the LORD, “from this time and forevermore.” (Isaiah 59:21)

God is watching over all our generations. Let us make every effort to glorify Him.

For more information about leaving a spiritual legacy in your family, see the encouragement titled, *Living Legacies: A Parents Guide to Discipling Their Families*.