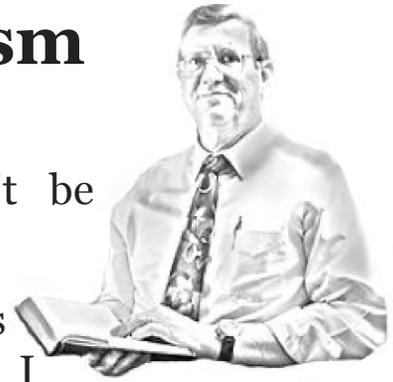


# Careful Child Evangelism

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Unless young people are saved, they can't be disciplined.

This is a frightful fact in light of the shallowness of evangelism in so many churches. The church I grew up in probably didn't have even one saved young person, though we all knew the right things to say. We *"talked the talk,"* but we didn't *"walk the walk,"* and the reason was that we prayed a sinner's prayer and made a "profession of faith" and entered the waters of baptism, but we didn't know the Lord by life-changing conversion experience.

## Suggestions for dealing with children about salvation

### 1. Fill their minds with God's Word (Second Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 19:7; 119:130).

*Of one of his daughters, Pastor Kerry Allen says, "I began a program of memorizing salvation Scriptures with her, and rewarding her for her efforts. In less than one month, with numbers of these same Scriptures at work in her heart, she fell under deep conviction of sin. ... Don't wait until they are teens, you will have lost them by then! ... start memorizing with them as soon as they are able to speak, surely not later than three to four years old. ... begin reading the verses to your child as soon as they are born. They will hear each verse dozens of times before you even begin memorizing, and that is a great way to begin the process from the very earliest days. Sow the Seed of the Word of God faithfully and consistently every day, and wondrous things will occur!" (Allen, *How Can I Except Some Man Guide Me?*).*

Pastor Allen has published 150 salvation verses that can be used for a Scripture memorization program for children and has posted it on the web for free download. [Here is the pdf](#). We deal more with filling the home with God's Word later in this course.

### 2. Teach them the gospel.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The gospel is described in a nutshell in First Corinthians 15:1-4.

It must be explained (Acts 8:30-31). Many people grow up in Bible-believing homes and churches and cannot give a clear definition of the gospel.

Missionary Jeremy Johnson says of his children ages one to eight, *"We talk with them about salvation when different topics come up. At the dinner table, in casual conversation, etc. We do not push them, but when the conversation arises, we talk about it: Where a person goes when he dies, why people don't go to heaven, what is sin, what did Jesus do for us, does everyone go to heaven, can I get saved by praying a prayer, etc. When they have false ideas or beliefs about salvation or where they would go, we do not overlook it or ignore it, we speak against it and correct it. We continually try to bring them to an understanding of the truth, yet not pushing them to a decision."*

Practical teaching on the gospel can be found in the first few lessons of the [\*One Year Discipleship Course\*](#).

### **3. Deal with repentance (Luke. 17:3; Acts 17:30; 20:21).**

Though I made a profession of faith at age 10-11, the missing element in my life was repentance toward God, and this is what is missing in the lives and hearts of many young people. I "believed in Jesus," but so do the devils (James 2:19). In fact, the devils tremble, which is far more than the average "Christian" young person does! I knew about Jesus and believed in Him, but I did not surrender to God's authority. That is the essence of repentance. The sinner has rebelled against God and broken His law, and he must repent of this. Repentance is not a change of life; it is a surrender to Go and change of direction *in the heart*.

Repentance is not a complicated thing. It simply means to come to Jesus, but when you turn to Jesus you have your back to the old life. It is like a man and marriage. He receives one woman as his spouse, and he has his back to all other women. Jesus taught that it is impossible to have two masters (Matthew 6:24).

Two great biblical examples of repentance are the Prodigal Son (Luke. 15:17-19) and the idolators at Thessalonica (First Thessalonians 1:9).

We deal with how to teach repentance in the evangelistic course [\*Sowing and Reaping\*](#), which is available from Way of Life Literature.

#### **4. Don't pressure them.**

The parent/teacher must be careful not to pressure the children. Children are so easily manipulated, and pressure can happen even when the adult thinks he is avoiding it. One grandfather told me how he keeps a record of his grandchildren's professions of faith in Christ in a notebook, and he shows it to the other grandchildren and asks, *"When will I be able to add your name to my book?"* This could be a great pressure in a child's mind, because he or she wants to please granddad and wants to go to Heaven.

Invitations given in Sunday Schools and youth meetings can put undue pressure on children. I responded to an invitation at a Vacation Bible School because other kids were responding. Unwise, manipulative invitations have caused a world of harm and confusion. At the very least, children should be asked to stay behind so they show that they are serious. One missionary says, *"In dealing with children in an invitation, we often ask them to stay behind if they want to talk to someone. Children will easily raise a hand for many reasons. But a child who is willing to stay behind or make some kind of an effort to speak to someone is much more serious."*

It is better for parents and teachers to leave this important matter in the Lord's capable hands as they pray earnestly for Him to perform the work of salvation in the children's hearts. The Lord can and will reveal himself to each child as He did to Samuel (First Samuel 3).

#### **5. Discipline them.**

*"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:13-14).*

God's Word ties the proper discipline of a child directly together with the salvation of his or her soul. One reason for this is that proper discipline teaches the child a proper fear and respect of

authority, which in turn leads to the fear of God. Pastor Allen asks, "If children don't respect parent's authority, who stand as God ordained police in the home, how will they ever respect the God whom the parents represent?" Also proper discipline teaches the child about law and sin and punishment, which are fundamental principles of the gospel. Further, the parent's love and mercy in the midst of discipline instructs the child about God's love for sinners.

In this light, we can see more clearly why the Bible says that the parent who "spares the rod" and lets the child get away with disobedience and rebellion *hates* the child (Proverbs 13:24).

### **6. Pray, pray, pray (James 5:16).**

Nothing is more important in the evangelism of our children and grandchildren than effectual prayer. My maternal grandmother was a prayer warrior, and her prayers were doubtless instrumental in my conversion She taught me three "secrets" of answered prayer:

**Persistence** (Luke 18:1).

**Fasting** (Matthew 17:21). There is a study on fasting in *One Year Discipleship Course*.

**Prayer partners.** Paul taught the importance of this by his frequent, earnest requests for prayer (Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3; First Thessalonians 5:25; Second Thessalonians 3:1). Your first prayer partner should be your husband or wife; pray together for each of your children from the time before they are born; don't keep problems to yourself; that is often an act of pride, because we don't want others to know of our imperfections; ask Christian friends to pray for you; be faithful to prayer meeting and ask the church to pray for your situation.

### **7. Look for the convicting, drawing work of the Holy Spirit (John 12:32; 16:7-11).**

Salvation is a supernatural work of God. There is no salvation apart from a convicting, enlightening, drawing work of God. The sinner

must respond to the Spirit's wooing, but there is no salvation apart from the wooing. The soul winner's job is to look for the Spirit's work and help the sinner understand it and respond properly to it.

If the child shows a *persistent* desire to be saved (not a mere passing interest), explain how he can be saved and let him call on the Lord in his own way.

Missionary Jeremy Johnson describes his dealing with his oldest son: *"Our oldest boy had a lot of questions about salvation just after he turned five. When we were back to the States on a furlough, he claimed to make a decision for salvation after a church service, but there was no real change in his life. He quickly changed his mind about having made that decision and actually verbalized his refusal to be saved because he did not want to get baptized. (He was not confusing it as part of salvation, but he did know that if he got saved the next step in obeying Christ is to identify in baptism. Since he knew that obeying in one would lead to the other, he refused and would verbalize it in passing conversations.) Almost a year later, shortly after turning six, he put up his hand during a Sunday morning invitation. I did not call him out, planning to talk with him later. He came to me after the service and wanted to talk, and I said we would talk at home. It was a busy Sunday with a meal and fellowship time after the service, a busy afternoon, an evening service, and then I had to transport people home. When I arrived home late that evening, my wife said our oldest son wanted to talk with me. I went to his room, and he was waiting to talk to me about salvation. He was anxious about wanting to be saved, his rebellion against baptism was gone, and he wanted it settled. I told him that if he understood and wanted to be saved, salvation was between him and God and not me and he needed to talk to God. Without hesitation, in the middle of our conversation, he dropped his head and began to pray, asking God to forgive him, to save him, and to help him do right. After he prayed, we talked a little more. I actually tried to shake his belief with some questions. Are you saved now? Why are you saved? What if I don't think you are? The purpose was to see if he understood that salvation was not a decision of words (prayer) but a decision of heart. I explained that only he and God know whether he is saved, because God looks at his heart."*

Pastor Kerry Allen says of his fourth daughter after she memorized verses about salvation, *"She approached me in*

*tears, and after further questioning, she stated she was afraid of dying without Christ, and going to Hell. She then readily trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as her Saviour, and shows good evidence of it now" (Allen, How Can I Except Some Man Guide Me?). Note that she approached him. She showed evidence of conviction.*

**8. If a child does profess saving faith in Christ, encourage him or her to seek the Lord and His will (Second Timothy 2:19).**

Receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour is not the end of salvation, it is the beginning! (We don't mean to say that salvation is a process; we are simply saying that salvation is a life, not a mere ritual.) Salvation is a life of walking with and serving Jesus Christ. If a child gets saved, it is time for that child to grow and seek God's will.

**9. Look for scriptural evidence of salvation in the child's life.**

We would observe that tears are not necessarily an evidence of salvation. Tears can be a good thing, if the tears are evidence of godly sorrow and are shed over one's sin against God, but tears alone, particularly in a young, tenderhearted girl, do not necessarily stand as evidence of repentance and regeneration. Women weep at weddings and prisoners weep when they think of the trouble they have brought on themselves, but that in itself is not evidence of salvation.

Biblical evidence of salvation includes the following:

**a. A conversion experience that changes the life** (John 3:3; Matthew 18:3; Second Corinthians 5:17).

**b. Personal knowledge of the Lord; the essence of salvation is a personal walk with God in Christ** (John 17:3; Matthew 11:28-30; Galatians 4:6).

Salvation is not a reformation or a new religion. It is to know the Lord personally, to walk and talk with Him as Lord and Saviour, Father and Friend. It is to cry, "*Abba, Father.*"

When people express doubt about their salvation, I ask them if they know the Lord and when and how it was that they came to know Him.

Many young church people are like Samuel who knew about the Lord but did not know the Lord in a personal way (First Samuel 3:7).

Jesus warned about those who profess Him as Lord, but He says to them, "*I never knew you*" (Matthew 7:21-23).

**c. Love for and obedience to God's Word** (John 8:47).

A person's attitude toward the Bible is one of the clearest evidences of his spiritual condition. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:26-30).

After I professed faith in Christ at age 10-11, I had no more interest in the Bible than I had before. I never read it. I had no interest in preaching and teaching. I was at church because my parents took me, not because I had an interest in spiritual things. That is not the condition of a saved person.

**d. Love of righteousness** (First John 2:3-4).

Consider the testimony of David Sorenson, a pastor's son. He made a profession of faith at age five in an evangelistic meeting. He was coached to tell others that he was saved, and he did that for fifteen years. But he says, "*I had no interest in the things of God. I only went to church because my dad was the pastor, and I had to go. I could not have cared less about the Bible.*" At age twenty he was saved in Bible College and his life changed radically because he began to love the things he used to hate and to hate the things he used to love.

One thing that will always change is the individual's attitude toward authority. If a child is saved, he will change in his attitude toward the authority of his parents and teachers and church leaders.

**e. Divine chastisement** (Hebrews 12:6-8).

A child of God can and does sin, but there is an indwelling, loving Disciplinarian who chastens him. There is even a sin unto death (First John 5:16-17).

The saved person will have a sensitivity to sin and a conviction about sin. I think of a child who got saved and afterwards became concerned about sins she had committed and "*gotten away with.*" Before salvation, if her parents were not watching, she would do things behind their backs. For example, she took her father's socks and stuffed them down a hole in the back hallway. The disappearance of the socks was a unsolved mystery in the home, but after she got saved she came weeping to her mother and confessed that sin, though no one had ever caught her. That is an evidence that something real was happening in her life. She stopped being "*sneaky.*" She starting being trustworthy to obey even if no one was watching. Those are simple, but profound, evidences of a spiritually-converted life in a child.

When looking for evidence, we aren't looking for sinless perfection. We must be careful that we not think that the saved individual will suddenly become perfect. When "*testing*" others, the child of God must not forget how imperfect *he* is! We are simply looking for a regenerated heart and a changed direction in life.

Children will be children, but there will always be a change in thinking and attitude if an individual is saved, whether he be young or old. We must believe the Bible when it says that *profession* is not *possession* (Titus 1:16).

So many children in Christian homes and churches make a profession of faith in Christ but they do not show a change in their lives, and they eventually depart to the world. In many cases, the parents and the church leaders still say they are saved.

"George" (named changed) was my best buddy growing up. We went through school together, graduated together, went to Vietnam in the Army about the same time, and came back to America and became drug-using "hippies" together. I came to Christ at age twenty-three, but George never did. He mocked my faith in Christ and refused to listen to me when I tried to talk to him from the Bible.

Eventually he got involved in "Native America" spirituality, which is demonism. He died a few years ago at about age sixty-one, and I visited his mother. His mother and father were faithful church goers, and the mom had been a Baptist Sunday School teacher. She told me that she had hope of George's salvation because he went to church when he was a boy, but there was zero evidence that he was saved.

**10. Let God confirm to the children that they are saved (Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6).**

Don't tell them they are saved. Don't give them a "spiritual birth certificate" like some churches do.

Don't remind them of when they professed Christ when they were little. One grandfather told me how that he writes down the date of his grandchildren's professions of faith and reminds them of it each year. He says, "Each year, I phone them on their salvation date to ask them if they know what important date this is, and then I ask them about their progress in their walk with the Lord since the last year." It is wonderful for a parent/grandparent to inquire about a child's walk with the Lord and to encourage the child in his spiritual life, but it is dangerous for a parent or grandparent to tell a child he is saved or "remind" him that he is saved. That is the Lord's work.

Missionary Jeremy Johnson says: "I do not claim to know for certain that either of my older sons are saved. I believe that Scripture clearly teaches that children can be saved and that God wants them to be. We have seen changes in their lives, a desire and concern for others to be saved, and a brokenness over sin. We do not ever tell them they are saved. When asking them about salvation, we do not point to a time or place. We look for what they remember. Both of them, although they cannot remember the exact day (month/day/year), will immediately go to the circumstances and events happening on that day, reminding us of when and where they made that choice. We do not go over this often trying to get them to memorize it. Children are not saved because of their parents' memory or their parents' leading; they are saved when they make a choice in their hearts, and if they do they will remember it on their own. If they ever come to me with doubts, I will try to prayerfully help them examine why, but I will not tell them I know they are saved. Only God knows their hearts."

**11. If the child later expresses doubt about salvation, encourage him to settle it.**

A great many young people who grow up in Christian homes make two professions of faith in Christ, one when they are young and another when they reach maturity.





