

Family Matters

Part 8

By Dale Payne

When A Child Responds To The Gospel, It Changes Everything!

*“If any (child) be in Christ, he is a new creature,
the old things passed away; new things have come.”
2 Corinthians 5:17*

Someone once asked me, “What did you do to get your kids to turn out so good?” What an opportunity to puff up my pride for “my secret” silver bullet to having a great family. I took a breath, and said, “Honestly, it’s only by the grace of God that my kids have become what they are. The gospel is what changed everything.” Yes, having a good, godly marriage, and striving to be obedient in the Biblical principles God revealed on parenting, have contributed to my kid’s reasonably good upbringing, but the truth is, only the gospel changes the heart and nature of a child for good! Our children’s greatest need is Jesus. Faith always rests on a person – Jesus Christ (Jn. 10:27,28; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 2:16). Faith is only as good as the object of one’s faith. The Bible is clear that once a person comes to genuine saving faith, it will produce the fruit of righteousness in those who believe. Real saving faith will inevitably produce a changed life and good works which follow both in children and adults (2 Cor. 5:17; 9:13; Rom. 6:18; 1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:9; 1 Jn. 2:3, 4, 19; 2 Tim. 2:19). A believer’s distinguishing trait is obedience (Jn. 14:15; Lk. 6:46). Obedience is so closely tied to faith, that many places in Scripture, it is used synonymously (Jn. 3:36; Acts 5:32; 6:7; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Pet. 4:17).

New Birth is the ultimate change of heart that every child needs. It is immediate, decisive, and effectual, and it solves many lesser parenting problems. When God truly saves, He alone causes in each individual a genuine faith which changes one’s very desires, attitudes, motives, words, thoughts, and actions. Once God saves our kids, our job as parents becomes a whole lot easier. He gives them the desire to honor and obey (Ezek. 36:27). He gives them the desire to read their Bible. He gives them the desire to be with God’s people on Sunday. He gives them the desire to serve, witness, give, and pursue holiness. He changes their hearts and renews their minds. His Spirit is what turns them from sin to

Himself, and He ultimately will get the glory for doing so. We ultimately can't change anyone's heart, especially our own children. Yes, as parents we still are part of the process - presenting the gospel, bringing God's Word into everyday conversation, consistently teaching obedience, diligently correcting our children in love, but the ground is so much more fertile when their new little hearts are soft toward spiritual things. The most important thing you can teach your kids, through every aspect of your parenting, is the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ. A parent's ultimate goal is redemptive. We are responsible to lead our children to Christ. Nothing else has life-giving power, other than the Spirit of God in regeneration (Jn. 3:6,7). The gospel is the only hope we have as parents for their lives to turn out right. Ted Tripp said, "A change in behavior that does not stem from a change in the heart is not commendable; it is condemnable." (Ted Tripp, Shepherding A Child's Heart, Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 1995, p.20)

If you don't personally know Christ as your Savior and Lord, you can't give away to your children what you personally don't possess. Responding personally to the gospel of grace and God changing your own heart, is the first place to begin (Deut. 4:9; 6:2-9). If you pursue Christ, I believe He will change the hearts of your children in His perfect timing. "Like father, like son."

"The statistics are overwhelmingly clear. If we don't lead our children intentionally, passionately, and fervently to know God and love Him while they are in our homes, the likelihood of them giving their lives to Christ later in life is slim. In fact, only 10% of all the Christians in the United States become believers after the age of 18" (Rob Rienow, God's Grand Vision For The Home. p.32). What are you doing daily to impress on your kid's hearts to know and love Jesus? It would be a travesty to try to evangelize the world and miss the mission field in our own home. It is also a great error to try to disciple other parent's kids, and neglect discipling our own children. Your family is your mission field from the day God blesses you with children, and your first priority. A godly home is the foundation for all spiritual leadership (1 Tim. 3; Ti. 1), and the platform for all other ministries.

The soul of our child is the first thing to be considered. The chief end of his or her life is the salvation of their souls. In everything you do, you must ask, "How will this affect their soul?" This world is passing away, but their souls will never pass away. Where they will spend eternity is of utmost importance. The greatest need our children have is to be born again. The goal of parenting is not just to cause our kids to be good morally, it is new birth. New birth produces biblical morality. We acknowledge that only God can save, and that we as parents cannot

convert our child's heart. However, we must train our children for heaven. We believe the Word of God is what transforms the heart, not a certain prepackaged formula (silver bullet) that guarantees our children will believe. Romans 10:17 says, "*Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.*" We need to train up our children in a knowledge of all the Scriptures. Let the Bible be the main vehicle to a child's mind and heart. Train them to be mighty in the Scriptures. Let the word of God dwell in them richly (Col. 3:16). Give them a real Bible once they can read. My mother wrote in my first Bible, "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book." Her comments remain with me today. She put many Bible passages to music which I can still remember today. Our children need to have all the Bible read to them regularly so that they know it, revere it, and obey it. 2 Timothy 3:14, 15 says, "Continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them. And that *from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Paul David Tripp said, "If my heart is the source of my sin problem, then lasting change must always travel through the pathway of my heart. It is not enough to alter my behavior or to change my circumstances. Christ transforms people by radically changing their hearts. If the heart doesn't change, the person's words and behavior may change temporarily because of an external pressure or incentive (the pain of discipline or the momentary joy of a reward), but when the pressure or incentive is removed, the changes will disappear." (Paul David Tripp, Instruments In The Redeemer's Hand, Phillipsburg, NJ: R&R Publishing, 2002, p.62)

Every aspect of family living is an opportunity for the gospel (Deut. 6:7-9). The gospel of grace only makes sense against the backdrop of law and sin, and believe me, every family is full of sinners. Just look in the mirror. Children can understand the truths of the gospel message and respond in genuine repentance and faith. God does save children – even young children (Samuel – 1 Sam. 3:7,19; Josiah – 2 Chron. 34:1-3). Many people will claim that they came to Christ in their early years. I first professed Christ when I was 7 years old. I remember a conversation with my parents regarding impending punishment. They clearly explained about God, sin, hell, judgment, forgiveness, mercy and grace, and what Jesus did on the cross for me to remove my sin. I knew I was guilty and that was the reason I was about to be spanked. I remember especially being fearful of hell and I knew I had done wrong and should be punished. If my earthly father was angry with me, and I had a heavenly Father who knew everything I just did, and

He was angry, I was in real trouble. I understood I needed God's forgiveness, because I needed my parent's forgiveness. I had done wrong and my conscience was not silent. Now, whether I fully understood the gospel in its complete form at that moment, only God knows. I did commit my life to Christ later in my teen years. Whatever, I know now where I stand before God and fully embrace Christ as my Savior and Lord. Most people who have a childhood conversion cannot point to an exact time and place of their conversion, but God knows when He fully justifies a lost sinner because of a penitent heart and belief in Christ as Savior and Lord (Mk. 1:15). Our faith should be similar to a "child-like" faith (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 18:17). We come to Christ completely dependent on His mercy and grace, just like a child would come with nothing to offer.

"One must first understand a crucial mistake many parents make. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that rules, restrictions, guidelines, rewards, correction, training, and teaching are *only for the purpose of producing a particular kind of behavior in a child*. It is certainly true that all these tools are necessary in parenting, and it is important that children behave correctly. Obedience maintains order in the home. Like God's law, parental 'laws' have a horizontal benefit. Many of the general standards parents require their children to obey are direct admonitions from Scripture, and other 'house rules' flow from general ethical principles found in Scripture. When children obey their parents, there is not only less turmoil in the home, but society at large benefits as children develop into responsible adults." (Parenting For Life, Grace Community Church, 1998)

"Problems arise for many parents who remain satisfied if they have taught their children *how* to behave... Parents are prone to think they have accomplished their job. Some parents even falsely think their child is regenerate just because he behaves well... But parental discipline and teaching is NOT merely for the purpose of conforming a child's behavior to certain external standards (morality)... Parents' rules, correction, and teaching DO help a child behave properly, but they are designed to serve a much grander purpose. Just as the Old Testament law was meant to be a tutor to lead people to recognize their need for a Savior, so is every aspect of our parenting." (Parenting For Life, Grace Community Church, 1998)

"The parent's role of an evangelist is his most important role... evangelizing your child means more than explaining the facts of the gospel. Even if he is obedient, there is still the issue of **heart motivation**. Why is he obeying? A tremendous privilege you have as a parent is being used by God to drive home to

your child an awareness of his depravity and of his need for forgiveness. Never forget the vertical implications of your parenting. YOU ARE TO USE YOUR CHILD'S INABILITY TO LIVE A LIFE OF PERFECT HEART OBEDIENCE TO EXPLAIN HIS NEED FOR A SAVIOR, AND HIS NEED FOR DIVINE GRACE, AND POWER TO LIVE A HOLY LIFE. In this way you reach your goal which is being a faithful instrument in God's hands to raise your children according to Biblical truth, with the constant prayer that God will be gracious to awaken them to saving faith and to regeneration." (Parenting For Life, Grace Community Church, 1998, p. 109,110, Appendix IV, Carey Hardy)

Because children tend to want to please adults, especially their parents, they may have made a public confession of faith. However, parents must not check that specific child off their wish list until they see the visible fruit of regeneration in their lives. Too many parents want to believe their kids are saved from the first mention of "Jesus" that crosses their child's lips. Parents will check the box for that child, and then move on to their next child because of something their child experienced in VBS, or Children's Sunday School, or AWANA, or at camp, or even at home. Now understand, children are fully capable to understand the gospel and respond genuinely to Christ, but we also know that there is a chance of a child having a false profession of faith and not fully understanding their sin and what Christ has done on their behalf. Don't tell your child they are saved until they demonstrate they are truly changed in their actions, attitudes, desires, thoughts, and words. 2 Corinthians 5:17 is clear, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature, the old things passed away, behold new things have come." James 2 states, "faith without works is dead." A child can express simple faith, but let's not be satisfied with a statement from a child that does not reflect a clear gospel understanding and a changed life. I have heard too many stories in ministry over the years that have really concerned me of children not being able to clearly articulate even a simple gospel message, but parents claimed they were saved. Even if after they claim to have had a "religious" experience and they seem to have done something (raise a hand, walk forward, shake their head in affirmative), but they still seem not to have any real understanding or heart change (no difference) to confirm they are truly saved (Acts 8:12,13; Heb. 6:4-6), don't believe it until you see it. I specifically remember a parent reading their daughter's testimony at her baptism (because the child refused to read it) that professed the child came to Christ in the shower. Maybe... but probably not. Only God knows. I would be extremely careful of telling a child they are saved, if they cannot clearly explain their understanding of their sin, their need for Christ's forgiveness, and the essentials of the gospel message.

An example of this is with my wife and I, rather than tell our kids they were saved from their first mention of belief, we waited for them to confirm that reality clearly later when they could clearly communicate the gospel message, acknowledge their sin and their personal need for Jesus, through repentance and faith, and then demonstrate that understanding in how they live. God saves us from the inside out. If God saved our child, He will keep our child, as we wait for visible and verbal confirmation. We chose not allow them to take Communion until they were willing to profess Christ before the church body in baptism. If they were unwilling, they were not ready to move forward. We did not let them get baptized until they could clearly explain the gospel of why they needed Jesus, what assurance they now had, and were willing to publicly profess Christ personally before our church family. Matthew 10:32 says, "Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven."

Every reference to baptism in the book of Acts (Acts 10:47; 11:14,17,18; 16:15,33,34; 18:8) and other references in the New Testament (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15; Jn. 4:53) all demonstrate the truth that people who were genuinely saved and got baptized, heard the gospel, understood their need for God's forgiveness, responded in repentance and faith, professed Christ and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47, 48), as they were baptized by immersion as a public declaration, and as they were being added to the church. The household passages described in Acts of those who believed, all understood mentally the message of the gospel and responded appropriately. Too many Christians struggle with doubt because, even though they claim to have had a "childhood conversion." Many cannot remember any details as to what happened, or what they believed at the time of their "decision." Lack of assurance follows those who did not have a clear understanding and even though some had a "religious" experience, it possibly was not true regeneration (conversion). Many who did have doubts, later admitted that they were probably not saved earlier in their lives, and it wasn't until later that the truths of the gospel became clear and personal. Remember, only God knows the specific time He declares us right before Him, because of our faith in Jesus. We remember a process.

I believe we as parents can cause our children confusion in the future by assuring them that they were saved in the past because they did something as a child (like being baptized as an infant or walking forward at VBS), when the child is clearly exhibiting behavior foreign to Christ or the child doesn't really remember any specific details. What is the rush to say they are saved? If Christ truly has saved them, He will keep them (1 Pet. 1:5), and it will be evident to all (James

2:14-26). The last thing we want to do is give our kids false assurance when they are not truly saved. Doing so will be disastrous! Another major mistake is to think that because our kids are compliant or obedient, they are saved. The Pharisees were good at keeping up the outside image, but the inside was wretched (Matt. 23:5, 25-28). Jay Adams in How To Help People Change said, “When a parent attempts to change a child’s behavior without first seeking change in his relationship with God, the result is merely outward, pharisaical behavior, just as displeasing to God as the original selfish behavior.” Parents need to trust God and His word when He says the gospel changes the nature of an individual – including children. Ezekiel 36:26,27 says God will give an individual a new heart and new Spirit which will then move them to follow Him in obedience. No child can come to Christ unless the Father “enables” him (Jn. 6:44,65). The gospel will change everything (Eph. 4:22-24). Salvation is a pre-requisite to sanctification. No ultimate effect will happen until God gets a hold of a child’s heart. If there is no real heart or visible change, regeneration probably has not taken place, so continue to faithfully present the gospel to your kids and pray like crazy that God will clearly save them, and they would display clear, evident good fruit (Ja. 2:14-26). Don’t settle for anything less. Heaven and hell are in the balance.

Childhood Conversion

How many of you came to Christ at an early age? Have you experienced any doubt or uncertainty in your faith later in life? What problems can come because of childhood conversions?

There are certain challenges that may come from someone who supposedly made a “profession” of faith as a small child. Children may respond to an invitation without really understanding the gospel message. A child may desire to please an adult by raising their hand, or staying after to talk, but they cannot clearly articulate the gospel or show any evidence of a sorrowful heart. Many adults have personal doubt of assurance later in life because they have a limited memory of the specifics that happened years ago, or remember what they actually did at that event, or they may not even have a point of reference which causes them insecurity. They may not remember what they truly believed at the time that inspired them to respond, but what they do remember is they did something religious. Many youth and adults do not have visible evidence of spiritual fruit of life change, but continue in their sinful lifestyles they practiced prior to coming forward or “professing” Christ. I understand Charles Finney who inspired the alter call in the 1800’s later admitted he did not even believe in the deity of Christ. That is a problem. Coming forward will not save anyone who

doesn't have a Biblically correct understanding of Christ. Those who focus on works-based righteousness or church attendance, but still demonstrate bad language, evil thoughts, sinful attitudes, or behavior that doesn't reflect Christ as Lord, SHOULD have doubt to their conversion, because they probably are not saved. Those who were labeled as "Christian" when they were young because of some action they took, but they never really came to know Christ or follow Christ, SHOULD feel a sense of disorientation as to what it means to be a Christian. They are not saved! Those who were baptized as infants and were included in the "covenant community," will have confusion about salvation, because they are still outside the true family of believers. Unbelievers are not part of the church and will never have eternal security or peace with God, because they have no real desire for obedience, and their own hearts condemn them (Matthew 7:21-23; 1 John 1:6; 2:4; 3:9, 20, 21; Jude 4; Luke 6:46; James 2:14-28; Mark 7:6; Titus 1:16; Hebrews 6:4-6).

Our Child's Greatest Need Is Regeneration!

God is concerned about your children's eternal destiny, even more than you are concerned as their parent. Children have no capacity to please or obey God without Christ. It is a matter of urgency that they hear, and we as parents must be faithful to bring the gospel into our everyday conversation. John 3:6,7 says, "You must be born again." Matthew 18:14 says, "It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones perish." Matthew 23:26 says, "First clean the inside of the cup... so that the outside may become clean also," referring to the fact that behavior flows from the heart and good behavior from a good heart (Matt. 12:33). A child whose heart comes to a genuine saving knowledge of Jesus will effect change in every aspect of their being. There is only one remedy for a child's inborn depravity: regeneration of the heart through faith in Jesus Christ. Parent's top priority is to lead their children to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16,17). New birth is known by its fruits, not by a decision (1 Jn. 3:9). God normally reaches children through their parents (the means). The key is for parents to be faithful and consistent in presenting the Gospel to their children. Salvation is a process. Justification is a point in time. Allow your child time to fully understand the essential truths of the gospel. Don't move forward until there is evidence of true faith (2 Cor. 5:17; 9:13; 13:5; Acts 26:20; Rom. 1:5,15; 10:13-18; 1 Cor. 3:6-8; Jn. 4:35-38; Lk. 3:8; 6:46; Heb. 6:9; Matt. 7:21-23). Haste makes waste. Trust God in the right timing and trust God for life-changing results. A parent's greatest joy is leading their children to Jesus Christ (3 John 4; 2 Tim. 1:2,5; 3:15; Ti. 1:4).

Children can understand the gospel (good news) at an early age. They can be taught basic Biblical concepts essential in the gospel message. They can come to understand God as their Heavenly Father (because they have a loving and good earthly father). They can comprehend sin, guilt, and conscience (because they intuitively know when they do what is wrong and feel badly for it). Even at an early age, they know what “NO” means. They can experience the reality of punishment personally (when they experience painful consequences for their disobedience almost every day). Justice can be explained (because they expect it when someone wrongs them) and mercy (when they are personally guilty and know a spanking is coming, they sorrowfully cry for mercy, or when they don’t get what they do deserve). They can learn the need for forgiveness (because even a child wants to be reconciled or brought back into peace and security). They can understand grace (when they get a gift they didn’t deserve). They can understand Jesus substitutional death, burial, and resurrection (when someone takes their place as a substitute). They may have simple understanding that doing something good does not fix one’s sin before God (because many broken things in life cannot be fixed and need to be made new). They can learn trust in an object or person (when they jump off a couch into their daddy’s safe arms, or when they ride their bike that doesn’t work right and they crash). They understand there are rules to games (just like God who makes rules that are right and delightful). These are all things that are natural life experiences. Remember, true regeneration only happens when the gospel is understood. Teach children the whole counsel of God found in Scripture. Use everyday events to teach gospel truths.

Children have an intense desire to please adults and are easily swayed. Proceed with caution (Matt. 18:6). Do not coerce, pressure, or manipulate your children to false faith. Only God can change your child’s heart through the Gospel. Our goal is to genuinely persuade our children for their need for Christ (2 Cor. 5:11,18-21). Don’t use “Christianized” clichés which have no real meaning or can be misunderstood by a child. When a child hears, “You need to ask Jesus to come into your heart”, they think you are talking about open heart surgery and cramming an adult into their insides which seems bad. When they hear “Jesus is knocking at your heart’s door”, they think of someone at their front door. By the way, that is not a salvation verse, Christ was petitioning a sinful church, not an individual (Rev. 3:20). When they hear, “your heart is black because of sin,” they associate the color black with evil. Be careful of wrong terms or associations which can be misunderstood. Children are immature in their thinking (1 Cor. 13:11; 14:20; Eph. 4:13-15). Young children take everything literally instead of being able to think abstractly. Ask them questions to understand what they are thinking, and clarify any misunderstanding they might have. Never assume. Use

Biblical terminology. Children can truly understand clear gospel principles. Do not be guilty of minimizing the gospel to simply “believing in Jesus” so that it will fit on a business card. Present the whole gospel and let it set. God’s Word is living, powerful (Heb. 4:12), and effectual and will accomplish what God intends.

As parents, we put false hope in the first hints of our children responding to the Gospel as though they are truly regenerated, when in fact they may just be beginning to understand God’s holiness, their sin, and their desperate need for Jesus. We tell them they are saved, when in fact they may not be. We have them baptized and allow them to take communion, even though they don’t understand the significance of what they are doing. They may not demonstrate any visible evidence of saving faith, yet we may assure them they are God’s child and part of the family. They may even be living in open rebellion to their parents, but we are unconcerned because they did something religious when they were young. We need to be careful we don’t create little Pharisees (clean on the outside/dirty on the inside) or create false assurance in the child who may think they are saved because they did some religious act. Give the Word of God (the Gospel) time to work in their heart.

I believe a major problem in Reformed Churches is how they approach infant baptism and children. MacArthur commented about infant baptism, “What it DOES DO is to create a misconception in the mind of parents that against all evidence, their child is somehow saved because of their infant baptism, and it surly hampers the child’s true understanding, giving them false security about their true condition.” Parents from this persuasion allow their children who were baptized as infants, to take communion and be given membership status in the church, believing the child now has the Holy Spirit, without any evidence of clear regeneration in the child. Except for the act which they have no real memory of what happened at the time of being sprinkled, they had no ability to declare their personal faith in Christ. I believe this creates a false hope in parents as well, that their teens are saved, or will be saved, even when those same teens are living in rebellion to Christ and their parents. Some here may feel the pressure is off because their kids will come around someday, because they are already in the community of believers and a child of God. The question is, “What does baptism DO for the child?” If there is no previous faith or repentance in the child, and the child who is baptized does not comprehend the gospel, or if it does nothing to save or bring the child into a right relationship with Christ, nor does it guarantee the child’s future salvation, THEN WHAT DO YOU HAVE other than CONFUSION of the state of the child? This is a serious error.

Ephesians 2:8,9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Acts 16:30-34 “What must I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.” “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all his house... and he was baptized, he and all his household... having believed in God.”

John 6:28,29 “What must we do to do the works God requires? The work of God is this: to believe in the one (Jesus) He has sent.”

Titus 3:5 “When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”

Romans 4:5 “The man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked his faith is credited as righteousness.”

1 Corinthians 1:17 “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” (Paul separated the gospel from baptism).

MacArthur also said, “As a consequence, the church is filled with teenagers and adults whose hearts are devoid of real love for Christ, but who think they are genuine Christians because of something they *did* as children.” “Do not assume your child’s first positive response is full-fledged saving faith.” “How can children exercise true saving faith before they are old enough to understand and affirm essential, objective elements of gospel truth? Saving faith is not blind faith. Real saving faith cannot be ignorant of essential gospel concepts.” “The specific age at which the child’s understanding is mature enough to grasp such concepts may differ for each child... but until the child demonstrates some degree of real understanding and some measure of spiritual fruit, parents should not be quick to regard the child’s regeneration as a settled matter.” “Parents should encourage every sign of faith in their children.” (John MacArthur, Successful Christian Parenting, Word Publishing, 1998, p.49,50). Simple child-like faith is not ignorant faith. Genuine faith includes repentance and a public profession of faith with a radical transformation of one’s heart. We become children of God at the point of faith, not baptism.

John 1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to them who believe in His name.”

Romans 10:9,10 “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation.”

Mark 1:15 Jesus said, “Repent and believe the good news.”

Acts 20:21 “I have declared ...that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

Galatians 3:26 “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

How Should We Lead A Child To Christ?

What are the essential truths of the gospel? When you bake, you don't try to minimize the ingredients list, but you want to include exactly what is necessary for success. Regeneration will not take place unless the gospel is complete and understood. A partial gospel results in a partial salvation, which is no salvation at all (Acts 8:12-24; Heb. 6:4-6). We don't want to oversimplify where we miss the essentials of the gospel (like speaking the clear truth about the holiness of God, the Law of God, the reality of hell, the fact of our sin, our helplessness to save ourselves through good works, the righteousness of Christ, repentance, faith, and the Lordship of Christ). Many minimalist gospel presentations reduced down the points of salvation to minimal points a child should hear, but many times it is incomplete, and neuters the gospel of its power. But we also don't want present the gospel in a way that is too complicated so that a child cannot understand the simplicity of repentance, faith, and forgiveness found in Christ as Savior and Lord (Matt. 18:3,4; 21:16). The key is being faithful, patient, consistent, thorough, clear, and persistent in our gospel presentation. We are in it for the long haul, until the Lord saves. So... what must a child know, feel, and do to be saved? What are the essentials? What is appropriate for a small child to hear and understand? How should I present the gospel to my child?

Presenting The Gospel To Children:

These points are important for a complete understanding of the gospel, and will need time to be explained for a child to truly comprehend and respond.

Begin with God:

- All-powerful, All-knowing, Everywhere present, Eternal, Unchangeable, Truth, Invisible, Sovereign (in control of all things)
- Holy (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:15,16; Ps. 1:5; 5:4; 7:11; 24:3,4; Lev. 11:44,45)
- Creator (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 19:1-4; 8:3,4; Rom. 1:19,20; Job 26:14)
- Lawgiver (What does God expect of us?)
 - The Law of Conscience (Romans 2:15)
 - The written Law reveals sin and points to Christ.
10 Commandments (Ex. 20; Deut. 5)
(Rom. 2:2; 3:19,20; 7:7,8,13; Gal. 3:24; Rom. 8:3,4)
- Just and Righteous Judge (Rom. 2:2,5-9)
Justice/Accountability/Punishment (Rom. 3:19,20)

Heaven/Hell (Jn. 3:16; Heb. 10:26,27; Rev. 21:8,27; 22:15)

- Grace and Mercy (Lk. 18:13,14; Ti. 3:3-7; 1 Tim. 1:15,16; Rom. 11:5,6; Eph. 2:3,5,8,9; 2 Tim. 1:9,10; Heb. 4:14-16)

Speak About Our Sinful Hearts (Matt. 15:18,19; Jer. 17:9; Ps. 51:5; 58:3)

- Man was created with a body and soul (spirit) to know & glorify God.
- Sin separates us from God and each other (Is. 59:2; Rom. 8:7,8)
- Sin is breaking God's law. (Gen. 3; Ex. 20; Ps. 51:3,4; 1 Jn. 5:17; 3:4; Ja. 4:17; Eph. 2:1-3) (Behavior is heart-driven)
- We are all sinners (Rom. 3:10-12,23; Jer. 13:23; Is. 64:6; 1 Jn. 1:8,10)
- We are unable to save ourselves (Ja. 2:10; Rom. 5:12,19; 8:7,8)
- Good works can't change our sinfulness (Rom. 3:10-12; 10:2-4)
- We all eventually die because of sin (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:20; Ja. 1:15)
- Heaven or hell is dependent on what we do with Jesus. (Matt. 10:28; 25:41, 46; Dan. 12:1,2; Lk. 23:43,46; Rev. 20:15; 21:8, 27; 22:15; Ps. 5:4,5; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:1-8)

Explain Who Jesus Christ Is & What He Has Done

- Jesus is God in a human body (Christmas - Lk. 2) (fully God – fully man) (John 1:1,14,18; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-17; 2:9; Heb. 2:14,17)
- Jesus was punished for our sin on the Cross (Easter) (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 8:1-4; 1 Pet. 2:24; Is. 53:6,12; Col. 1:21,22; 2:13,14; Is. 53:6,9-12)
God's just wrath was satisfied in Christ's payment on the cross.
- Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life that we are unable to do and has promised to give us His righteousness when we believe in Him. (Phil. 3:9; Rom. 1:16,17; 5:1; 8:1; 3:21-4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22,24; 3:18)
- Jesus forgives us and brings us (reconciles) back to the Father (Col. 1:13,14,21,22; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 2:14-19; Rom. 5:8-11; 5:1; 8:1,33)
- Jesus rose from the dead (Empty Tomb) (1 Cor. 15:3-8; Rom. 10:9; Acts 17:30,31; John 11:25)

Explain What A Child Must Do To Be Saved?

- **Repent** (*Gk. "metanoia"*) (Acts 3:19; 21:20; 26:20; Is. 55:6,7; Ps. 32:5; Ezek. 18:30-32)
Conviction (sorrow) of one's sin is a prerequisite to genuine repentance. Repentance is a change of thinking, a change of heart, and change of the will, which leads to a change in one's behavior. True repentance is willing to do whatever it takes to make things right (2 Cor. 7:9-11). It

is more than regret, remorse, or sorrow (Matt. 27:3). True repentance drives a person to the cross.

- **Confess** (*Gk. "homologeō"*) (Rom. 10:9,10; 2 Cor. 7:9,10; Prov. 28:13; 1 Jn. 1:9)
Confession means "to say the same thing" or "to be in agreement" with God about one's guilt (plead guilty as charged) and condemnation.
- **Believe** (Acts 16:30,31; Jn. 3:16,36; 5:24; 6:28,29)
 - Christ paid for our sin on the cross
(Is. 53:6,11,12; 1 Jn. 1:7; 2:2; 4:10; 1 Pet. 2:24; Rom. 5:8,9)
 - Jesus Christ is God (Jn. 1:1,14)
 - Jesus Christ rose from the dead (Rom. 10:9,10)
 - Belief is the act by which one person, a sinner, commits himself to another person, a Savior.
- **Receive** Christ's gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:17; Jn. 1:12; Col. 2:6)
- **Obey** (Lk. 6:46; 3:8 Acts 26:20; Rom. 1:5,15; 2 Cor. 9:13; Col. 1:9,10)
 - Desire to turn from sin to God in obedience
 - Children, obey your parents! (Ex. 20:12; Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1-4)
 - Obedience and faith are sometimes used synonymously (Jn. 3:36; Acts 5:32; 6:7; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:2; 4:17)
 - Obedience always follows true faith.
- One Verse Outlines: John 3:16,36; 5:24; Romans 5:8; 6:23; Acts 20:21

As parents, since we must proclaim the gospel to our children, but we have no real power to cause in them faith, we must pray daily for our child's future faith (Job 1:5; Col. 4:2-5,12; Eph. 6:19; Ja. 5:16; Gal. 4:19). We can also teach our children to approach God in prayer, for one day, Lord willing, God will draw their hearts to Himself (Lk. 18:13), and they will speak to God directly. Gospel centered parents trust in the gospel. Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for *it* is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." Parents, remember to preach the gospel to yourselves daily. May God one day answer our prayers for our children's salvation.

As I look back on my own family, I see God's grace in saving my kids. I see clearly that it was God who saved them, and yet for some reason He used our faithfulness as parents in the process, as He effectually causes heart change in them. God, in His timing, moves them to obedience to be what He calls them to be. Yes, children can come to Christ separate from their parent's involvement, but God has chosen the family setting to be the most natural fertile soil where the gospel is first planted and many children come to saving faith. There is a direct connection between the faith of the parents and the faith of the child. How this all works out, only God knows. I am just glad we can enjoy the end result!