

APPENDIX XII

Sharing the Gospel With Children

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Overview

Our mission is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things so that the next generation may know and cherish Jesus Christ as the only One who saves and satisfies the desires of the heart.

—Children Desiring God Mission Statement

As teachers, our foremost desire for our students should be that they come to know, understand, embrace, and live out the Gospel as they trust and cherish Jesus Christ. Each curriculum within the Children Desiring God scope and sequence is designed with this aim in mind. However, the great majority of lessons in each study do not present the *entire* Gospel message. Rather, we have chosen at times to repeatedly (as the whole of Scripture does) present key Gospel truths in order to lay a solid foundation on which the saving work of Christ is clearly seen, explained, and demonstrated. For example, we present the perfect holiness of God as seen at the giving of the Old Testament law in order that students might recognize the desperate plight of sinners who cannot be accepted through their imperfect attempts at law-keeping. This foundational truth points to the need for Christ, God's holy and righteous Son, and His atoning work on the cross.

*In our minds, while every lesson must present **Gospel truth**, not every lesson must explicitly present the **entire Gospel**.*

The above philosophy—a slower, incremental and systematic approach to presenting the Gospel—may frustrate some who, understandably, want children to come to saving faith as soon as possible. But, while it is true that God can bring about true saving belief even in a young toddler, it is very important to note that saving faith does require a basic level of cognitive recognition of

key biblical truths. What are these key truths? In our booklet *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel*, we have put forward the following 10 truths as being essential for a foundational understanding of the Gospel:

1. **God is the sovereign Creator of all things** (Psalm 19:1; 22:28; 24:1; Isaiah 44:24).
2. **God created people for His glory** (Psalm 29:1-2; Isaiah 43:6-7; 1 Corinthians 10:31).
3. **God is holy and righteous** (Leviticus 19:2, 37; Deuteronomy 32:4; Romans 7:12).
4. **Man is sinful** (Romans 3:10-18, 20, 23).
5. **God is just and is right to punish sin** (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 1:18; 6:23a).
6. **God is merciful. He is kind to undeserving sinners** (Psalm 145:8; Ephesians 2:8-9).
7. **Jesus is God's holy and righteous Son** (John 1:1, 14; 1 Timothy 1:15).
8. **God put the punishment of sinners on Jesus** (Isaiah 53:5; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).
9. **God offers the free gift of salvation to those who repent and believe in Jesus** (Mark 1:15; John 3:16-17; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9).
10. **Those who trust in Jesus will live to please Him and will receive the promise of eternal life—enjoying God forever in heaven** (Luke 9:23; John 11:25; 1 John 2:15; Psalm 16:11).

Practical Implications for the Classroom

1. As you interact with your students, it is important to ask yourself, "Have the children in my classroom or small group been exposed to these key Gospel truths in a manner that is both biblically accurate and age-appropriate?"

Often, a child will demonstrate spiritual curiosity or even a desire to "trust in Jesus,"

devoid of an adequate understanding of the Gospel. For example, many children are drawn to the loving nature of Jesus without recognizing their own sin and need for repentance. It is a good thing to be drawn to the loving nature of Jesus. However, Jesus' love also serves to expose our sin and our need for a Savior. Jesus is not merely a loving figure; He is the righteous Son of God who alone has the power to forgive our sin and rescue us from God's just condemnation. Therefore, we need to be discerning when a child asks questions concerning salvation or expresses interest in faith in Jesus. If a child seems to show a sincere and tender heart toward trusting in Jesus, it may be helpful to briefly review the essential truths of the Gospel with him in order to better discern whether he understands the basic facts and implications of the Gospel.

Furthermore, we should be careful to use biblical language when presenting the Gospel. For example, using terminology such as "Would you like to invite Jesus into your heart?" may distort the Gospel's clear language that you must *believe in* (trust or have faith in) Jesus in order to be saved.

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2. We must also recognize our role as teachers and mentors: We are to support and assist believing parents¹ as they assume the primary responsibility for nurturing their child's faith.

God has given parents the primary role of biblical instruction and Gospel proclamation in their child's life (Deuteronomy 6:7; 2 Timothy 3:14-15). For a Christian parent, there is no greater joy than seeing children come to faith. As teachers, we should always seek a secondary role, especially as it relates to a child responding to the Gospel in faith. This does not mean that we should ignore a child who seems to be demonstrating a sincere desire to repent and believe the Gospel. However, we can use these God-appointed opportunities to encourage the child and involve his parents. For example, suppose the Holy Spirit has been at work in a child's heart in your small group. During an application discussion he expresses a very informed and sincere desire to repent of

his sin and put his trust in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. How could you both encourage him and also play a secondary role to his parents? One thing may be to consider praying with him in the following type of manner:

Dear heavenly Father, thank you that you have given Joey a heart that wants to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. I praise you that you are at work in his life. Please help Joey to truly know and understand who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. May Joey seek to love, trust, and obey Jesus with all his heart. And I pray that when Joey goes home today he will talk with his mom and dad about how you are working in his heart.

Then, this should be followed up by contacting his parents and talking to them about your conversation with their son.

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3. Be in fervent prayer and trust in God's sovereign grace.

As teachers, we do have a responsibility to articulate the Gospel and challenge our children to respond to it in faith. But ultimately, the salvation of the children in our classrooms depends on God. He alone is able to bring about regeneration and saving faith. Therefore, in our desire for saving faith to come about, we must not be intentionally (or even unintentionally) manipulative in our manner and try to bring about something devoid of the work of the Holy Spirit. Children tend to want to please adults, especially those adults they particularly admire. Pressuring a child to say a prayer or make a premature confession of faith does not serve to advance the Gospel or nurture the soul of the child. Rather, we must pray for God to act in the hearts of our children, and then trust in His good and sovereign grace. We must rest in this great truth from Romans 8:30:

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

1. See "Note about Children from Unbelieving Homes" in this Appendix.