Faith
Conversation Guide
for Parents of Prechoolers

Faith. How we talk about faith at each phase of a person's life matters in how they'll think about faith in the phases to come. Preschoolers use their five senses to experience the world around them. In this phase, you can help them develop authentic faith by inciting wonder. You will give them the foundations for their faith in the way you respond with concrete examples and by letting them explore God's creation. As they grow and mature into adolescents you'll be able to unpack abstract concepts more deeply. For now, be as simple as possible, and remember that your role in the preschool phase is to . . .

Incite Wonder → So they will KNOW GOD'S LOVE AND MEET GOD'S FAMILY.

This guide is designed to help you connect with your child in the phase they are in, by giving you some words to say to introduce them to faith. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal in mind for your kid:

Trusting Jesus in a way that transforms how I love God, myself, and the rest of the world.

In the new baby phase, say things like . . .

"God, thank You for this healthy baby." (Pray aloud while you are with your baby.)
"Jesus loves me." (Sing songs while you hold your baby.)
"We are going to church." (Connect with a faith community.)

In the following preschool years, say things like . . .

"God made you. God loves you. Jesus wants to be your friend forever."
"God, thank you for . . ."
"God, please help us . . ."
"Let's read about how God made the world."
"Are you scared? Let's talk to God about it."
"How did the Samaritan take care of his neighbor?" (Talk about what your preschooler learns at church.)
"Can you let your friend have a turn?" (Prompt them to share.)
"Isn't that wonderful? Let's thank God for it."
"Do not be afraid, for the Lord your God is with you." Joshua 1:9 (Repeat simple Bible verses.)

It's Just A Phase . . . So Don't Miss It!

Just Remember . . . Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. The preschool years are the wonder years. You can incite their wonder by exploring the world side-by-side with your child. Your child listens to your words, so this phase is the perfect time to begin talking, singing, and reading out loud with your toddler about faith. And as they get older—three, four, five—and have questions about so many things, including faith questions, answer as simply as possible.

To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try:

Print photos of family members and friends and place them in an inexpensive album. Let your preschooler flip through the book while you lead them in praying for the people they see in the pictures.

Create a playlist of your child's favorite praise and worship songs. Demonstrate connecting with God through song by dancing and singing with your preschooler on a regular basis. Don't know where to find great, kid-friendly music? Check out ParentCueStore.org or Orange Kids Music in iTunes.

Pray consistently with your preschooler. Demonstrate that prayer is having a conversation with God by using a pretend telephone during your prayer time. Take turns "dialing" (starting the prayer) and "hanging up" (ending the prayer). Let your preschooler use their own words and language, but feel free to prompt them if they get distracted or stall out.

Tell your child simple Bible stories and repeat favorite memory verses. (Use the Parent Cue App for help!) Explain simply that stories from the Bible are true, and show us how to live.

This guide is based on research from The Phase Project, a collaborative, ongoing effort, assembling classic and innovative research with practical application.

To discover more ways to understand your child's phase, check out the Parenting Your . . . book series at parentcuestore.org.

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Faith
Conversation Guide
for Parents of Elementary Schoolers

Faith. In the elementary school years, kids become equipped with the skills they need to discover more about faith, and they have an active imagination that leads them to ask questions about their world and what they experience. As they learn new stories from the Bible, you'll be amazed at the questions they start to consider. The best thing to remember is to treat each question with care. How you respond to your kids each time they have questions about faith will determine if they continue to talk to you about their faith. Your role is to...

Provoke Discovery → So they will TRUST GOD'S CHARACTER AND EXPERIENCE GOD'S FAMILY.

This guide is designed to help you connect with your elementary-age kid where they are now, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of faith. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal for your kid:

Authentic Faith

Trusting Jesus in a way that transforms how I love God, myself, and the rest of the world.

To elementary schoolers (K-3rd), say things like . . .

"Can I pray about that with you?"
"You can trust God no matter what."
"You need to make the wise choice."
"You should treat others the way you want to be treated."
"I'm not sure where that passage is. Let's look it up together." (Teach them to use a concordance and digital reference book.)
"Don't ever get tired of doing the right thing." 2 Thessalonians 3:13 (Repeat and memorize simple Bible verses together.)
"When I first trusted Jesus . . ." (Share your own faith story.)
"I'm sorry your friend's mom is sick. What could we do to help?" (Make service personal. Encourage them to serve people who matter to them.)

To elementary schoolers (4th-5th), say things like . . .

"How can I pray for you today/this week?"
"Having faith isn't always easy, but we can trust God no matter what."
"What do you think is the wisest choice in this situation?"
"Do not be afraid, for the Lord your God is with you." Joshua 1:9 (Repeat simple Bible verses.)
"If you were them, how do you think you would want to be treated?"
"Have you read anything in the Bible that means a lot to you right now?" (Talk about the Bible.)
"Did you know that the Bible was written as 66 different books, but they all tell one story?" (Connect the dots between the stories to give a bigger context.)
"I've been wanting to volunteer more. Is there somewhere we could serve together." (Consider serving at your church or a local ministry that appeals to your kid's interests.)

It's Just A Phase . . . So Don't Miss It!

Just Remember . . . Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. The elementary years are the discovery years. You can provoke their discovery by encouraging their imaginations, allowing them to investigate without filling in all the blanks, and simply making yourself available for the many, many questions that will come. As your child learns to read and gain more independence, it's a great time to encourage personal devotional time. But don't let their faith become private; continue having other faith conversations as you go about your days together.

To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try:

Create a "Joy Jar." Find a bin or bucket and label it the "Joy Jar." Place it in the middle of your dinner table along with a pen and index cards. Choose a period of time—30 days at the least—and write down all the answered prayers your family experiences and place them in the Joy Jar after dinner. (There will be some meals when you have nothing to write down—and that's okay.) At the end of the period of time, have your elementary schooler read through all the ways God was faithful to your family.

Make church part of your family's weekly routine. There's always a reason not to go, but demonstrating a positive interest in connecting with community and learning about God is an integral step in helping your child establish a faith of their own. Find somewhere you can attend consistently, so your elementary schooler can build relationships and trust with their church friends and leaders. Talk about why church is important in your family.

Share your own story of how you began a relationship with God with your 4th or 5th grader. Then share about how God has wired you, and how you connect with Him best. Share that it might be different than someone else's story. For example, you might feel most connected to God when you listen to worship music or journal; for others it may be when they are outside experiencing nature or beauty. Help your child see that we all connect with God in different ways, but there's a common thread of experiencing His love and forgiveness. Is there a particular way your child connects with God? Nurture it. If it's in nature, go for a hike. If it's journaling, take him or her shopping for a new journal. Music? Sign them up for a streaming music service so they can get all the latest worship songs.

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Faith
Conversation Guide
for Parents of Middle Schoolers

Faith. Middle School is a new and exciting time for kids, accompanied by lots of change. And with all that change comes the opportunity for a lot of growth in key areas, including faith. As kids make their way through the middle school years, they are transitioning from a time where their faith has primarily been a by-product of their parent's faith and mostly reactive, rather than proactive. But these are the years when they take initiative and create a faith of their own. The best thing you can do is be a coach, not a teacher. Encourage and affirm them in their personal faith journey. In this phase your role is to . . .

Provoke Discovery → So they will OWN THEIR OWN FAITH AND VALUE A FAITH COMMUNITY.

This guide is designed to help you connect with your middle school student in the phase they are in, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of faith. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal in mind:

Authentic Faith

Trusting Jesus in a way that transforms how I love God, myself, and the rest of the world.

To sixth graders, say things like . . .

"God will never stop loving you."
"Have you read anything in the Bible that means a lot to you right now?"
"I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Psalm 139:14 (Repeat simple Bible verses.)
"Can we pray about this together?"

To seventh graders, say things like . . .

"When you do you feel closest to God?"
"I have questions, too. What other things do you wonder about?"
"I don't know why . . . but I do know God is good. But that doesn't mean we'll understand everything."
"How can I pray for you today/this week?"
"What would be a fun way we could serve others together?"

To eighth graders, say things like . . .

"God made you, He knows you, and He loves you."
"That's a great question. I don't know the answer, but we can find out."
"The way you live can show others who Jesus is."
"When do you feel closest to God?"
"What's something new that you're learning about God?"

It's Just A Phase . . . So Don't Miss It!

Just Remember . . . Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. In this phase, your middle schooler may be asking some hard questions. Don't be shocked (at least not visibly). Doubt isn't toxic to your middle schooler's faith; it's part of the process of personalizing what they believe. Make your home a safe place for them to ask questions, and show interest in what they are learning. .

To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try:

Serve. Few things grow a person's maturity or faith better that serving others. If your middle schooler has a cause or passion that they've expressed interest in, research ways your entire family can get involved. Or, empower your middle schooler to figure out how they can get connected to a cause themselves. You may have to provide consistent encouragement, but let them take the first step to engaging with a charity, ministry, or organization.

Get connected. Get your middle schooler connected in a student ministry or youth group they can attend regularly. But don't just drop them off and pick them up, engage in what they're learning as much as you can. Connect with their small group leader right away and often, but only as a means to offer support and help. What your student discusses with their small group leader should remain private unless the leader initiates a conversation with you. Read the ministry's emails, newsletters, or website. Volunteer on the Host Team or Food Team so you're familiar with the environment and its leaders, but still give your student space to create their own spiritual community.

Help your middle schooler discover the way they're uniquely wired to connect with God. For example, is it when they see something beautiful, when they listen to worship music, read their Bible, or when they are serving others? Encourage them to pursue worship and connect with Him in a way that feels meaningful and comfortable for them—even if it's a different style than your own.

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Faith
Conversation Guide
for Parents of High Schoolers

Faith. Your teen is in a phase when the complexities of the world, and their life in particular, are becoming more obvious than ever before. The answers that seemed simple in their childlike faith aren't cutting it, and the black and white certainties that once seemed rock solid feel a little crumbly and gray. And that's okay. As their way of viewing the world matures and grows, the way they understand faith should grow, too. Allowing them to ask questions and evaluate their faith will help them make it their own. In the high school phase, your role is to . . .

Fuel Passion → So they will KEEP PURSUING AUTHENTIC FAITH AND DISCOVER A PERSONAL MISSION.

This guide is designed to help you connect with your high school, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of faith. You're becoming more of a coach now than an active advisor, but your teenager still needs you to guide them along the way. Some of these conversation starters will overlap or need to be repeated at different ages. But as the conversation progresses, always keep the end goal in mind:

Authentic Faith

Trusting Jesus in a way that transforms how I love God, myself, and the rest of the world.

To high schoolers, say things like . . .

"How can I pray for you today/this week?"
"I don't know." (Be honest if your child asks a question you don't have the answer to.)
"When do you feel closest to God?"
"What do you like about church/youth group?" (Talk about the value of a faith community.)
"Are there ways you would want to serve in our church or community?"
"That's a good question. I'm not sure I will ever know the full answer, but I believe . . ." (Let them know it's okay to talk about hard questions.)
"What's something you feel like God is teaching you right now?"
"Lately, I'm finding I connect best with God when I'm . . ."
"There's nothing you will ever do that could make God stop loving you."
"When you told me about . . . it made me think of a verse in Proverbs." (Share Bible verses that relate to their present circumstances.)

It's Just A Phase . . . So Don't Miss It!

Just Remember . . . Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. Look for ways to prioritize church connection, and stay engaged in their faith journey by having conversations at home. Also, a faith community can help them find significance by giving them opportunities to give, serve, and love others. Your high schooler will never get over seeing how God can work through them in meaningful ways.

To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try:

Normalize conversations about God and faith. Share what you read in your devotional or ask how you can pray for them during the week. Don't be afraid to text the occasional quote or Scripture reference and ask your teenager what they think about it. Make it so faith isn't something reserved for Sunday mornings, but a part of your everyday rhythm.

Share your faith story with your high schooler. And not just the highlight reel, either! If you haven't already, it's important your student hear the struggles, obstacles, and doubts you've dealt with on your faith journey. Be transparent about past mistakes. Share appropriately but transparently. Make this conversation intentional by taking them on a hike or to a quiet coffee house to share how God has shown up in your life.

Practice what you preach. Your high schooler is a skeptic. That's normal. But that means if you're not practicing what you're preaching, they probably won't take you very seriously. You don't have to make a huge production out of it, but consistently modeling healthy spiritual disciplines is one of the most important things you can do to encourage your high schooler to build a faith of their own.

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