



GOSPEL CONVERSATION GUIDE

A Framework for Discussing the Biggest Decision
Your Kid Will Ever Make





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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Purpose of This Guide

As parents, we desire for our kids to follow Jesus as Lord. If we are honest though, sometimes it is hard to have conversations about the gospel with our kids. We wonder when we should have these conversations, what they should look like, and often, stress about whether we are doing it the right way. We also stress about what it looks like for our child to make a commitment to place faith in Jesus, and we wonder if they are ready or not.

My hope is that through this guide you will be better equipped to have ongoing conversations with your kids about Jesus, and you will feel more prepared to walk your kids through a faith decision. God has called you to disciple your kids in learning that the best life lived is a life lived for Jesus (Psalm 78:1-7; 127; Matthew 28:18-20). Not only has he called you, but he has equipped you through his word and his Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2 Peter 1:19-21). I hope that this tool will be valuable to you by helping you have great conversations with your kids about the gospel.

If you have any questions about using this guide, feel free to reach out to Mercy Hill Church by going to mercyhillgso.com.

Brant Gordon

Mercy Hill Church Kids Director



How to Use This Guide

The first section of this guide is geared towards helping you have conversations with your child about the gospel on a regular basis. It is vital that we don't reduce conversations about the gospel to one moment when a child wants to make a commitment. We must make conversations about the gospel a regular occurrence and live out the gospel in front of our kids.

Discipleship is word taught and life caught. It happens when we talk with our kids about the word of God and live that out in front of them. This section will walk you through some insights into what ongoing gospel conversations can look like at different stages of your child's development.

The second section of this guide is a step-by-step guide to walking your child through a faith decision. The goal of this guide is to help you discern two key factors in a child's faith: comprehension and belief. Through the questions in this guide, the goal is that you will learn if a child understands the gospel (comprehension), and has, or is ready to place, faith in Jesus as Lord (belief). There is also information about some next steps for your family when a child has made a decision to place faith in Jesus and information on helping your child to understand what is commonly referred to as eternal security.

This step-by-step guide offers questions that you may want to talk with your kids about on a regular basis, but the guide itself is meant to be walked through with your child when they seem to be moving towards making a decision to place faith in Jesus. This could take the form of, but is not limited to, them asking the following questions:

"What does it mean to be a Christian?"

"Can I get baptized?"

"Who is Jesus?"

"What does it mean to be saved?"

"How do I ask Jesus into my heart?"



In Section 2, there are three steps to go through with your child: celebrate, explore, and pray. Based on the answers your child gives, guide your child through the process.

If it is clear your child doesn't understand a concept or isn't ready to place faith in Jesus, simply pray with them and thank them for talking to you about this. It's important to remember not to force your child through this process. Continue to share the gospel with them regularly and live it out in front of them. When moments come up to have these conversations, realize that the conversation in itself is a win, even if your child is not ready to make a decision.





SECTION 1
ONGOING GOSPEL
CONVERSATIONS

TODDLER CONVERSATIONS

What We're Thinking

“When will I ever get to sleep again?!” In the toddler stage of life, kids are full of energy and are learning what it looks like to be a part of a family. This can be very overwhelming for us because they are learning (and almost always pushing) the limits. Often in this stage, we realize that our kids are no doubt sinners, but sometimes we miss that God is not only using us as parents but growing us as people. Don't miss that parenting is one of the most sanctifying things we will ever do, and take moments to think through what God is teaching you as you teach your kids.

What They're Thinking

For toddlers, the real question is, “What are they not thinking about?” From snacks to toys, from climbing steps to talking, and from flushing a toilet to drinking out of it, your toddler is learning what life looks like. They want to push every limit and know what part of the world is theirs. This is why you begin to hear the words, “no,” “mine,” and my son's favorite, “not even ever!” on a regular basis. For most parents, at this point, we realize that our kids are “Me-monsters” because, in their mind, the world is all about them.

Toddlers understand in concrete terms and can struggle with illustrations. At this age, we are teaching them basic statements about God, Jesus, the Bible, and life. We are also teaching them to memorize the Bible—though I would recommend simplifying the verses for them. Be careful not to go over a toddler's head when talking about the Bible. Keep it simple with statements such as: “The Bible is true,” and “Jesus is God's Son.”



Making It Stick

Word Taught. When teaching your toddler the Bible, there are basically two rules: keep it simple and have fun. When reciting a Bible verse, do motions to act it out. When reading a Bible story, get into acting out the characters. Even at this young age, begin the pattern of always pointing them to Jesus.

Life Caught. The way you live out the gospel in front of your kids will likely have the greatest impact on their own relationship with Jesus. No pressure, right?! A few ways that you can live out the gospel in front of your child are regularly reading the Bible, praying with them, and practicing discipline in a way that always points them to Jesus. During this time-frame in a child's life, they are learning patterns and habits that will last throughout their childhood. At an early age, help them to learn a pattern of reading the Bible and praying to God.

This age is also the time in which you, as a parent, begin to set the standard for discipline. Moments of discipline are hard but are some of the greatest moments for gospel conversations we will have. This means that instead of just teaching kids to change their behavior, we need to acknowledge that sin is the real issue and help them to see that Jesus has obeyed perfectly in their place. While we do hope their behavior improves, the goal of discipline should always be that our kids see Christ more clearly.



PRE-K CONVERSATIONS

What We're Thinking

“Will they ever stop asking so many questions?” From “Will I sleep in heaven?” to “Where do chickens come from?,” this stage of life is full of some of the most random yet important questions. It’s a transition time for them between toddler and student. One moment they may have the most grown up conversation with you, only to pee their pants in the next! Don’t get frustrated in their transition, but celebrate it! Your child is learning so much, and every question they ask is an opportunity to disciple them.

What They're Thinking

Kids in this stage of life do very well with concrete facts and are beginning to understand abstract things like metaphors. Don’t be surprised if they focus on one aspect of something you say or do, as this is how they are learning that specific fact. Preschoolers are beginning to understand what it means to fear, and this presents a great opportunity for you to pray with them, encourage them, and empathize with them. Sharing that you have fears too helps you to point them to Jesus as the answer to their fears.

What They Can Understand

Preschoolers love stories. Stories should be your best friend, as they keep your child’s interest and can help them relate to the truth you are teaching. This age is a great time for you to begin to share your story of faith with them. At this age, kids’ attention spans aren’t very long (honestly, ours aren’t either!), so keep Bible story time short. A good rule is to read a story to them that is equal in time to their age plus one (ex. Bible time with a four-year-old would be five minutes). Another thing to consider is your child’s focus. Some things they will focus on are fear of



punishment, their desire for good things to happen, and their desire to please their parents. This is why it's so important to not allow their knowledge of the Bible to overshadow their heart for God. Many kids at this age have the comprehension of the facts of the gospel but do not yet understand what it means for them to believe in Jesus for themselves. While we should focus on teaching them the Bible, we should always focus on change in their heart and continue to point them to the gospel.

A few kids this age may be ready to make a decision of faith. If you think your child may be ready, use the second portion of this guide. Remember not to push a child towards a decision they are not ready for. Let them bring this up to you, then pray and use this guide to walk through this decision with them.

Making It Stick

Word Taught. Story is key to helping preschoolers connect to what they're learning. It would be a good idea to pick up a good storybook Bible for your child to call their own. We recommend *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, *The Big Picture Interactive Storybook*, and *The Gospel Story Bible*. Walking your kids through these storybooks to learn the big picture of the Bible is so important. This will help to ground them in the truth that, instead of many little stories, all of the Bible is telling one story: the story of Jesus. It's also important to help them begin to differentiate the Bible from other stories. Unlike Disney stories, the stories in the Bible happened, the people were real, and the whole Bible is true.

Life Caught. It's good to ask questions to your preschoolers so that you can discern what they are understanding. Questions help them to think about the topic of conversation in a more personal way. Also at this age, you will probably begin to see your kids begin to mimic you. Ask them to begin to pray out loud with you and even sing along with you. This is a good season for you to begin to focus on Scripture memorization. Work with your kids on their memory verses from church, and help them memorize other verses as well!

ELEMENTARY CONVERSATIONS

What We're Thinking

“Are other people going to ruin my kids?” As parents, sometimes we struggle with this new transition as we are no longer the only influencers of our kids. While this is a huge step, our kids have a few years before college, so don't start packing their boxes yet! A good mindset for us all is to move from protection to preparation. This is not to say we don't protect our kids but that we begin to focus more on preparing them to be a disciple of Jesus in the real world. The truth is our kids will have people other than us that influence them. Our goal should be to prepare them to look to the Bible as a lens through which they view every influence around them. Not only that, if we invest well in our kids, they will influence others around them for the kingdom of God.

What They're Thinking

Elementary students go through rapid growth and development over this period. They are learning that there are other people that view the world very differently than they do, and they are beginning the process of deciding for themselves how the world works. They are becoming very clear about what is real and what is story, and the question often comes up about the story of Santa and, soon after, the reality of Jesus. They will want to know the difference. They are also asking the question, “Where do I fit in this world?” It is important in this life stage to help them answer this question through the lens of the gospel.

What They Can Understand

Kids in this stage can understand almost everything, just in simpler forms than adults. Kids will be thinking through their beliefs more critically and learning to solidify what they believe.



Some of this is them moving from, “My parents told me this,” to “I believe this for myself.” This is the age frame when many kids are at a comprehension level of getting the facts of the gospel and at a level of deciding if they believe it for themselves. The second section of this guide is great to use when your child comes to you wanting to talk about making a decision to place faith in Jesus.

Making It Stick

Word Taught. As parents, a common fallacy we often fear is that we don’t know enough. We cringe when we think that a child is going to ask a question that we don’t know. The truth is that they are going to ask a bunch of questions that we probably don’t know the answer to. The good news is that we don’t have to have all the answers, but we should be willing to admit it when we don’t. Instead of fumbling for an answer, simply tell them “That’s a good question,” and offer to help them look in the Bible to find the answer. If you are not sure where it could be, you could ask your child if you could do some research and discuss it with them again. Then, ask someone you trust for help. This is why community is so important for believers. We are not in this parenting thing alone!

This is a great time to buy them their own Bible. We currently use the CSB Bible on a weekly basis, but there are other good versions out, including: NLT, ESV, and NIV. A Bible we would recommend is the *Big Picture Interactive Bible*.

We recommend doing regular devotion time with your family, including Bible reading, prayer, and even singing. Make this time into a big deal, and make sure it’s fun for your kids. We have recommended resources on our Family Resource Center online (mercyhillgso.com/familyresourcecenter) to help you lead your family in devotion time.

This is a great season for your child to begin studying the Bible for themselves. Resources like *Exploring the Bible*, by David Murray, offer prompts for your child to read the Bible and interact



with it for themselves. They also offer opportunities for you to discuss with your child what they are learning. Your child may like a journal to begin writing down their thoughts or prayers. We also recommend talking regularly about the gospel with your kids. Moments in the car or at the dinner table could be great opportunities for this. Each week on our Family Resource Center there is a Kids Guide with discussion questions for you to be able to have conversations with your kids about what they are learning and what God is teaching you.

Life Caught. As a general rule across all of these ages, anything you want your kids to do, you need to do first. If you want your kids to serve others, serve others. If you want your kids to love the Bible, love the Bible. If you want your kids to pray and share Jesus, pray and share Jesus. We must lead the way not only in word but in action for our kids to follow. At this age, share your faith story with your kids and share it often! Let them learn how God has worked and is working in your life. Share with them what God is teaching you, and ask them what he is teaching them. Ask them what questions they have about the Bible, and help them search to find the answers.

Throughout all of these life stages, it is clear that discipleship takes time and effort. While this can feel overwhelming, we must remember two things. First, it's totally worth it! God has sent us on mission to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20), and the home is our primary location for doing this. We have a special role in God's plan in the discipleship of our kids. Second, remember that you are not alone! Jesus says he is with us always, and we have the power of the Holy Spirit working through us (Acts 1:8). We also have our Community Groups and Kids Ministry to partner with us in the important task. Together, we can see kids learn that the best life lived is the life lived for Jesus!



SECTION 2

WALKING YOUR CHILD
THROUGH A
FAITH DECISION

STEP 1: CELEBRATE

Say: *I'm happy to answer questions you have about (fill in the blank). Why don't we see what the Bible says?*

Here, we want to celebrate a child's desire to ask questions about the Bible. If the conversation moves towards them making a decision to place faith in Jesus, ask them if you can ask them a few questions from this book to help them along in the process.

If the child doesn't want to talk about placing faith in Jesus, simply answer the questions they do have, and let them know you are always available to talk. If you do not know the answer, be honest about it, and let them know you will be glad to find the answer and talk with them more later.



STEP 2: EXPLORE

Use the following questions to investigate a child's understanding of the gospel. **Note:* Kids may not have perfect wording on their answers. What you are looking for is an understanding of the concepts you are discussing.

If a child is struggling to understand the concepts you're discussing, the child probably isn't ready to make Jesus their Lord. In that case, thank them for talking to you. Encourage them to learn more about Jesus by listening at church, reading their Bible, and talking to their parents. Tell them that you would love to continue to talk with them about a relationship with Jesus, and pray with them. Remember, the conversation itself is a win!

Who made the world and us? God did and is in control of it (Colossians 1:16-17).

What is sin? Sin is when we choose what we want over what God says is best (Romans 6:23).

Who is guilty of sin? Are you guilty of sin? All people are guilty of sin (Romans 3:23).

What is the punishment for sin? The payment of sin is death. This is not only physical, but it means we can't have a relationship with God both now and forever (Romans 6:23).

Who is Jesus? God's perfect Son (John 3:16).

Why did God send Jesus to earth? To rescue us from our sin (John 3:16)!

Did Jesus ever sin? Not even once! He was perfect in our place (1 Peter 2:22)!

Why did Jesus choose to die? To pay for our sins so that we could have eternal life (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18)!

What happened after Jesus died on the cross? He rose from the grave (Acts 1:3, 11)!

A lot of people think if they do good things it will earn them forgiveness for their sins and a relationship with God.



What are some good things people try to do to earn a relationship with God? Kids' answers could be anything dealing with being good enough or working hard enough.

Can we do enough good things to earn a relationship with God? Why or why not? No, because as good as we could be, we would still be sinners and not be perfect (Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; James 2:10).

Do you believe that Jesus has done all the work needed for your salvation? If not, why? Don't force them into an answer. If they say no, simply explain to them that this is a gift from God and not of works. Any other way but Jesus includes works and can't be enough (John 14:6; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Do you know what the word "Lord" means? What does it mean for Jesus to be Lord? Lord simply means boss. It means that Jesus is in charge! When we confess him as Lord, we let him have control of our life (Romans 10:9-10).

Do you want Jesus to be Lord of your life? If they are still uncertain, they are probably not ready. Remember to thank them, encourage them, pray with them, and then talk about this again when they bring it back up.

What is your favorite part of the gospel? This should help your child to recap something from what you just went over.

What has God been teaching you in your life? There is not a right/wrong answer to this, just a recognition that God is working in their life.

Say: *It seems like you have a good grasp of what the gospel is. Can I share with you a little more about it? In the book of Romans it uses the words "repent" and "believe." Repent means to turn away from sin and turn to Jesus. It means I admit that I am a sinner, I am sorry for my sin, and I choose Jesus over my sin. You enter into a relationship with God by repenting (turning) and believing (trusting) in Jesus for your salvation. Is this something you want to do? Why?*

The key in the answer to "why" should be in their personal desire for a relationship with Jesus and forgiveness for sin, NOT because someone else did it, it will make someone else happy, etc.

STEP 3: PRAY

Say: *It's so great that you have made the decision to trust in Jesus for your salvation and confess him as Lord of your life. I want to lead you in a prayer to thank God for this. I will lead you in the prayer, and you can repeat the words after me. Does that work for you?*

Feel free to show the child the prayer below, and either allow them to pray it for themselves or lead them through it.

If a child does not desire to pray, ask them why. If they are nervous, try to calm their nerves. Explain to them that because of Jesus we can talk to God without being scared or nervous (Hebrews 4:14-16). If they still do not want to pray, they may not be ready to make this decision. Let them know it is okay if they want time to think about this decision and talk about it again later.

Pray: *"Father, thank you for making me. I know that I am a sinner and don't deserve a relationship with you. I believe you sent Jesus, your perfect Son, to live a perfect life and to die in my place on the cross. You raised him from the dead so that I can have a relationship with you. I trust in Jesus for my salvation and give all of my life to you. I confess Jesus as the Lord of my life. Thank you for this gift. Amen."*



WHAT'S NEXT?

Celebrate

Your child has just made the most important decision of their life! Celebrate together, and share with your child how important this is. Encourage your child to share what God has done in their life with their family and friends.

Communicate

Let our Kids Staff know your child has made this decision so we can celebrate with you! We would love to talk to you about your child being baptized, as this is the first step of obedience after we place faith in Jesus. We also have some resources that we would love to point you towards, including our Family Resource Center. You can check out our Family Resource Center online at mercyhillgso.com/familyresourcecenter.

Continue

Your child's relationship with God will grow and develop as the years go by, and you have the unique role of being their primary disciple maker. The most important thing you can do as a parent is to continue to practice ongoing gospel conversations with your child and live out the Christian life in front of them (Colossians 2:6). Discipleship is word taught and life caught, and your child needs to be invested in both of those areas on a consistent basis. The truth is we are always teaching our kids something. Let's be intentional about making sure that something is the gospel.

APPENDIX: CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION?

Kids often ask questions and wonder about the possibility that they can lose their relationship with God. The questions can take the form of, “Does God still love me?,” “Is God mad at me?,” and “Does God forgive me every time I sin?” When kids ask these types of questions, it is usually the Holy Spirit convicting them over their sin. In dealing with questions kids ask, including this one, parents should try to get to what’s going on in kids’ hearts and lean on Scripture as their guide.

The Heart of the Matter

As a parent, the first instinct is to answer the child’s question immediately. However, before simply sharing Scripture with a child, it’s important to understand why he or she is asking the question in the first place. Ask your child why they are asking this question. This helps them think through what’s going on in their heart and mind. It could be that they feel guilty for sin. It could just be curiosity. Either way, we don’t want to just offer them information; we want to find out what’s going on with the heart.

Scripture As Our Guide

Always point to Scripture as our guide. As parents, we are not the final authority. The Bible is the authority, and it has the power to change both us and our kids. If your child is asking about losing their salvation, open your Bible to John 10:22-30. Explain to your child that Jesus refers to people that have placed their trust in him as his sheep. He says that they hear him and follow him. So as Jesus’ sheep, we follow him. Feel free to ask your child how they follow Jesus (Ex. reading the Bible, praying, obeying



God's word, loving others, and telling others about Jesus). Read verse twenty-eight, and ask your child what Jesus says about the sheep. Explain to your child that if Jesus says something, he always keeps his word. He says that nothing can take us from him if we are his sheep. We are his sheep if we have placed our faith in him (Romans 10:9-10).

Next, turn to Ephesians 2:8-10. Explain to your child how we are saved by grace through faith. Grace is being given something we haven't earned. Faith is complete trust in something or someone. Share with them that because salvation is a gift of God and not something that we earned, we cannot lose it. Jesus did everything for our relationship with God and gave himself to us as a gift. Read verse ten, and share with them that, in this relationship, God has called us to do good works that glorify Jesus. We do these good works not to earn or keep this gift but because we are grateful for the gift God has given to us.

Lastly, turn to Ephesians 4:20-32. Explain to your child how God has called us to walk in a new way in our relationship with him. Share with them that this is something that we can do, even though it may be hard sometimes, because God has sent the Holy Spirit to us. The Holy Spirit works in us to show us when we sin and also point us to good works. The fact that your child is wondering about their relationship with Jesus may be the Holy Spirit helping your child grow by pointing out an area of their life that they can follow Jesus more closely.

Ask your child if this helped to answer their question, and offer to pray with them. If your child asks something and you are uncertain about where to look for the answer, ask your child if you can research some Bible verses that speak to this and talk with them more about it later. As a reference, some other verses on this subject are Romans 8:31-39, 11:29; John 6:35-40; and Hebrews 7:22-25. Also, feel free to contact your Community Group leader or a Kids Staff Member for additional direction. You can always utilize the resources on our Family Resource Center.



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