

The Spiritual Growth of Preschoolers

When working with preschoolers, keep these characteristics of young children in mind:

Pre-school children age level characteristics (3-5 years old) include but are not limited to the ability to:

- Pray, worship and trust God.
- Know that the Bible is a special book about the story of God's people and Jesus.
- Enjoy the stories about Jesus and like to hear stories over and over again.
- Ask many questions: What is this? Who made this? Where did you get this? Who made God? Why is God invisible?
- Have many spontaneous and intense responses.
- Remember words and events that are associated with touching, smelling, hearing and emotions both pleasant and fearful)
- Be part of a group but may not interact much because they see themselves first.
- Have a sensitivity towards frightening experiences or stories, but will find nurture in stories that offer love, hope and wonder of creation.
- Blend together fragments of stories, images and fantasies.
- Create and imagine.
- Want everything to be fair – this is where the temper tantrum may come in.

Pre-school children can relate to God and the church by:

- Learning simple prayers.
- Being encouraged to give their own offering to God and the church.
- Developing a sense of belonging to the church.
- Having accepting adults who are willing to hear their many questions.
- Experiencing the awe and wonder of God's world.

Pre-school children can relate faith to daily living by:

- Holding/seeing a Bible as others read from it.
- Singing, moving to, and saying Bible verses especially from the Psalms and Gospels.
- Hearing simple, clear stories from the Bible, especially stories that emphasize the goodness of God, the love of Jesus for children, and Jesus as friend and helper.
- Saying simple prayers and hearing teachers and parents pray about thankfulness and about people in need.
- Participating and seeing others involved in loving service by sharing food and money, and buying things for others.
- Expressing love and other feelings for family, friends and Jesus.

*No other religion's sacred literature surpasses God's high view of children.
Children are precious. They are a gift to us. Let's enjoy, nurture and pray for them!*

Children also learn by:

- **Playing.** Zech: 8:5, Job 21:11, Matt 11:16-17 and Luke 7:31-32 are verses that show that children learn by skipping and pretending to be adults. Through play they develop their mind and bodies and try new things.
- **Working with objects.** Children need concrete objects, not just pictures of objects or words about them.
- **Experimenting.** When it is appropriate and safe, let children be the “scientist” and explore on their own.
- **Being curious.** They will ask never ending questions. We need to help them explore God’s world and be free to ask questions even when we don’t know the answers.
- **Experiencing love and trust** from their parents or other significant adults and will then begin to understand God’s love. They learn that parents obey God; then they learn what it means to obey God themselves.
- **Meeting new people.** Parents can help by introducing children to new people, especially people from other ethnic groups or other countries or people with physical challenges, etc.
- **Imitating and repeating.** If a child imitates what a parent does and then gets disapproval or disciplined from other adults, it will be difficult to learn right from wrong. Consistency is one of the most important qualities in a family for moral and spiritual development.
- **Guiding and instruction.** This does not mean long lectures, but short talks, answers to questions, and explanations as situations occur. Stories help capture the interest of the child and can help develop a sense of wonder and awe.
- **Feeling confident.** They learn the self-discipline needed to make good decisions when they are permitted to participate in the family, make decisions, and remain secure in their parents’ love during and after mistakes. It is important that children sense that their parents’ guide them and then trust them affirm children as they make good decisions.

Here is simple acronym that will help remember some of these principles:

R: Really listen to children.

E: Engage them in two-sided conversations.

S: Say what you mean in simple language. Use short sentences

P: Posture is important. Get on their level!

E: Eye contact is important. Look children in the eye.

C: Care is demonstrated clearly through your actions.

T: Take time to get to know the children and show them how God loves them.

As you communicate with young children, ask yourself this one question: "Do the words I speak and the actions I choose, reflect God's love and welcome children into the arms of the Lord?" Your answer is vital to the spiritual growth of preschoolers.