

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

As a parent, you want to invest your time in things that matter. Like having the right conversation with your child at the right time, with the right things to say at your fingertips. These conversation guides will help you navigate the critical issues you face at each phase, as you imagine the end for your child. They are based on research from **The Phase Project**, a collaborative, ongoing effort assembling classic and innovative research with practical application.



Preschool

# FAITH

## PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

... for great conversations with kids

**Faith.** It's only five letters, but it's a big word—especially for preschoolers. How we talk about faith at each phase of a person's life matters for 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're giving 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:

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Incite  
**WONDER**



So they will . . .  
**KNOW GOD'S LOVE  
& MEET GOD'S FAMILY**

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This guide is designed to help you meet your preschooler where they are now, giving you some words to say and not to say as you navigate the critical issue of faith. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal in mind for your kids:

**Authentic Faith: trusting Jesus in a way that transforms how I love God, myself, and the rest of the world.**

## WHAT TO SAY:

"God made you"

"God loves you"

"Jesus wants to be your friend forever"

"I'm sorry you feel that way. Let's talk to God about that."

"I'm glad you feel that way. Let's thank God for that."

"There's a true story in the Bible about that. Let's read it together."  
*(Use an age-appropriate storybook Bible to read stories that relate to what your child is experiencing.)*

"How can we share with our friends?" *(Sharing is the foundation for service. We start thinking about others when we share what we have to help them or make them feel included.)*

"You can always talk to me about anything you're wondering about God."

"Praying is when we talk to God. Even though we can't see Him, He tells us in the Bible that He can hear us. Would you like to pray together?"

Repeat simple Bible verses:

"Do not be afraid, for the LORD your God is with you" *(Joshua 1:9 NLT).*

"With God all things are possible" *(Matthew 19:26, NIV).*

You [God] made the world and everything that is in it *(Psalm 84:11, NIV).*

Sing simple songs about faith, like "Jesus Loves Me."

Use concrete examples to share a bottom line or a story. Focus the story in a way your preschooler can understand.

A storybook Bible written with preschoolers in mind is very helpful when introducing preschoolers to Biblical truths.

## WHAT NOT TO SAY:

"Don't be silly, Moses wasn't Isaac's father." *(Or whatever Biblical fact they mess up. You can correct them, but don't make them feel badly about it.)*

"Don't ask questions about . . ." *(Because preschoolers have an active imagination, they'll ask some off-the-wall questions about what they hear. Give them grace with these questions and help them realize that God is big enough to handle all of our questions.)*

"Don't say that when you pray." *(Encourage your child to share their honest thoughts and feelings with God.)*

Don't use too many words.

Don't over-explain Biblical concepts or include too many details about a story.

## 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, so encourage their questions about God and the world He made. Remember to embrace their physical needs as you talk about God. Pull them into your lap and give lots of hugs as you remind them that God made them, He loves them, and Jesus wants to be their friend forever.

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Elementary

# FAITH

## PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

. . . for great conversations with kids

**Faith.** It's only five letters, but it's a big word—especially for kids. How we talk about faith at each phase of a person's life matters for how they'll think about faith in the phases to come. Elementary kids 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 you to talk to you about their faith. Your role is to:

Provoke  
**DISCOVERY**



So they will . . .  
**TRUST GOD'S CHARACTER  
& EXPERIENCE GOD'S FAMILY**

This guide is designed to help you meet your elementary-age kid where they are now, giving you some words to say and not 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.**

## WHAT TO SAY:

"I don't know. Let's find out together." *(It's okay if you don't know everything. Use that as an opportunity to discover something new about God.)*

"Have you read anything in the Bible that means a lot to you?"

"Did you know there are 66 books in the Bible and they all connect to tell one story?"

"I wonder what God's Word says about that. Let's look together . . ."

"No question is too big or too small for God to handle."

"What's something you're struggling with that I can pray with you about?"

"That reminds me of a time when I went through something similar. Here's what I learned . . ." *(Tell your own faith stories.)*

"Can I tell you about the first time I trusted Jesus?"

"Let's think of some ways we could serve someone else." *(Help kids live out their faith through service.)*

"Having faith may not always be easy, but we can trust God no matter what."

"I know it's hard to tell sometimes, but what do you think is the wise choice in this situation?"

"If you were in the same situation, how would you want to be treated?"

## WHAT NOT TO SAY:

"We don't ask questions like that."

"I don't struggle with trusting God." *(Everyone at some point struggles with their faith and doubt. Make it personal and be honest about your struggles and how you worked through them.)*

"If you really had faith, you wouldn't feel like this." *(Anxiety, hurt, sadness, etc.)*

"God wants you to read your Bible every single day." *(Reading your Bible regularly is an important faith skill, but don't set unrealistic expectations for elementary kids.)*

"Singing is the way we worship God." *(Singing is a way we worship God. Help kids understand they can worship God simply by how they live their life.)*

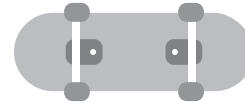
"If you really loved God, you would . . ."

## 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. Discovery happens when you ask questions. So encourage your child to ask all their questions—especially ones about their faith—but know that you don't have to have all the right answers. This is the perfect time to reinforce the idea that you're a safe person to talk to and you welcome and honor their curiosity.

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### Middle School

# FAITH

## PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

... for great conversations with kids

Middle school is a new and exciting time in the life of our kids that's accompanied by lots of change. And with all that change comes the opportunity for a lot of growth in key areas—including faith. As our kids make their way through the middle school years, they're transitioning from a time when 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:

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Provoke  
**DISCOVERY**



So they will . . .  
**TRUST GOD'S CHARACTER  
& EXPERIENCE GOD'S FAMILY**

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This guide is designed to help you meet your middle schooler where they are now, giving you some words to say and not to say as you navigate the critical issue of faith. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal in mind for your kids:

**Authentic Faith: trusting Jesus in a way that transforms how I love God, myself, and the rest of the world.**

## WHAT TO SAY:

"If you have doubts or questions, that doesn't mean you're doing faith wrong."

"Can you put words to some of your doubts or things you struggle with?"

"I'm glad you asked me."

"I'm not sure, but we can find out."

"Now is the time to begin creating good habits to grow your faith. Want to pick out a Bible or a devotional for you to use?"

"I've always known you had \_\_\_\_\_ in you, and I love to watch it grow as your relationship with God grows. I can't wait to see what else God is going to do in you and through you."

### **Ask questions to invite them into your own faith:**

"I feel like God has been bringing the idea of serving others (or another topic) to my mind a lot lately. Do you have any ideas of things I could do, or things we could do as a family?"

### **Ask questions that help them personalize their faith:**

"What do you think?"

"How is that true in your own life?"

"One of the best things you can do for your faith is to be surrounded by a small group of people who are on the same journey as you. What can we do to make it easier for you?"

At times the best thing to do is to say nothing. Let your student see you model what a "grown up" faith looks like. This will speak louder than any directive.

## WHAT NOT TO SAY:

"Have you had a quiet time today?" (In other words, don't treat time with God as an assignment.)

"Don't ask/say that. You just need to believe more."

"If you really had a relationship with God, you wouldn't do/say/think that."

"When you have a relationship with God, everything just works out. If it feels like it's not working out, just pray more."

## JUST REMEMBER

Every PHASE is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. The middle school years are discovery years where you'll want to affirm their personal journey. Support them in making time for a weekly small group or serving opportunities. When the time is right, share some of your own doubts and struggles and what you do with them. Remember that their journey may look different from yours, but no matter what, you want to continue to keep the lines of communication open.

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High School

# FAITH

## PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

... for great conversations with kids

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. Our responsibility to our kids at this stage is to:

Fuel  
**PASSION**



So they will . . .  
**KEEP PURSUING AUTHENTIC FAITH  
& DISCOVER A PERSONAL MISSION**

This guide is designed to help you meet your teen where they are now, giving you some words to say and not 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.**



## WHAT TO SAY:

"Trusting in God doesn't mean there are no bad days. But bad days can deepen our faith in a God who can help us get through our biggest challenges. Talk to Him about it."

"You will never have everything figured out. If we ever think we've figured God out, we've made Him smaller than He should be."

"I love watching God grow you into someone who loves Him and loves others. Nothing makes me more proud. Right now, I can see \_\_\_\_\_."

"A growing faith doesn't mean a perfect life. You are going to mess up, and that's okay. God always has grace for you, and so do I."

"One of the best things you can do for your faith is to be surrounded by a small group of people who are on the same journey you are. What can I do to make getting involved in a small group easier for you?"

"Would you like to consider going on a mission trip to help with something you're passionate about? We can explore some options together if you'd like to."

"I know I may not always be the person you want to talk to about your faith. Who are some people you feel comfortable talking with?"

"How can I pray for you?"

## WHAT NOT TO SAY:

"If you just trusted God more, you wouldn't have these questions."

"Everything will just work out." (*We know God can bring good even from hard things, but we need to be careful not to disregard the real feelings our kids have in the midst of things not working out.*)

"We have too much going on to make time for more activities." (*In regards to serving, small group, or time with a small group leader.*)



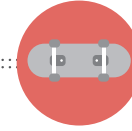
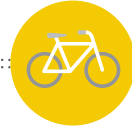
## JUST REMEMBER

Every PHASE is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. The high school years are the time to fuel their passion while mobilizing their potential. Support and encourage the opportunities they have to serve and to be in a small group. Welcome whatever questions they have in an environment of support and encouragement, taking the opportunity to demonstrate God's grace, love, and forgiveness even when you're surprised by their words or actions. You want to keep the lines of communication open during this time of growing maturity and independence, and continue to be a safe person for them to talk to.



# AUTHENTIC FAITH

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



Incite  
**WONDER**



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& MEET GOD'S FAMILY**

Provoke  
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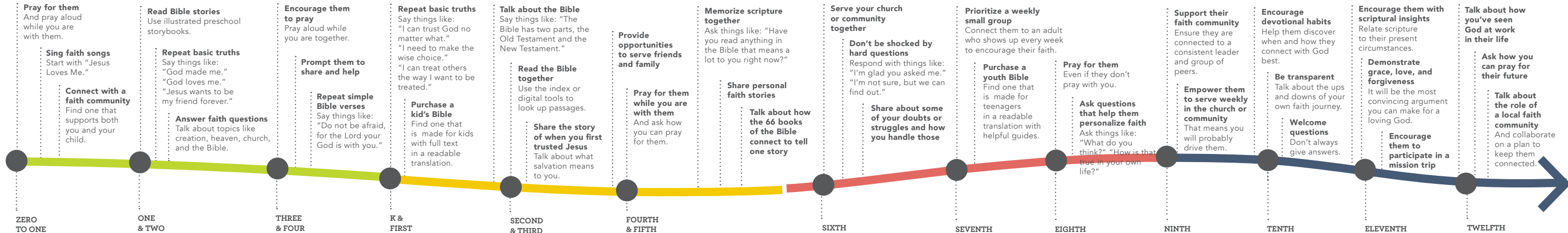


So they will . . .  
**OWN THEIR OWN FAITH  
& VALUE A FAITH COMMUNITY**

Fuel  
**PASSION**



So they will . . .  
**KEEP PURSUING AUTHENTIC FAITH  
& DISCOVER A PERSONAL MISSION**



**EMBRACE** their physical needs

**ENGAGE** their interests

**AFFIRM** their personal journey

**MOBILIZE** their potential