

Leading a Child to Jesus: The Most Important Job in the World

Let the little children come to me, and stop keeping them away, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these."
Matthew 19:14 ISVⁱ

The Importance of Winning Children

For years most of our evangelism budget has been focused on winning adults. But recent research has helped us to realise that 70-90% of adult Christians first accepted Jesus as their Saviour before the age of 13! So, it's up to 10 times easier to lead a child to Christ than an adult. This means that one of the most important jobs in the world is helping children make their decision to follow Christ. See www.barnaresearch.org.

Our job is to work hand in hand with the Holy Spirit to make sure that nothing in our power is stopping the children from coming to Jesus and accepting His gift of salvation. Then, once they have accepted Jesus, we need to continue working with the Holy Spirit to affirm their decision and nurture their simple trust into a strong and mature faithⁱⁱ.

We mustn't be afraid of inviting children to accept Jesus, just because we think they can't understand everything, or because we feel they are too young to be baptised. God is always delighted when children choose to follow Jesus!

When is a child ready to accept Jesus?

It's very important for you to pray for the children in your sphere of influence and to be open to the Holy Spirit guiding you to the best time to invite them to follow Him.

But there are also some very simple signs that a child may be ready to accept Jesus as their Saviour.

The child:

- knows that God loves him or her in a very special way
- loves Jesus and longs to learn about Him and follow Him
- prays to God and looks for answers
- chooses to do the right thing even when it is hard
- understands when they have done something wrong and when they need to ask God's forgiveness
- wants to help others and be kind to them

A Child's Steps to Jesus

When you feel prompted by the Holy Spirit these are the main steps for leading a child to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour. Each step is supported with Bible verses; ideas to help you personalize your faith story; and ways you can help the child to understand and apply the steps to his or her life.

1. God loves everybody (1 John 4:8; Jeremiah 31:3).
I know that God loves me because... (tell the child how you know God loves you.) How do you know God loves you? (Help the child to find some evidence that God loves them.)
2. Because God loves us He has given us some good rules so we don't hurt Him or each other (Exodus 20:1-17). We often call them The Ten Commandments.
Can you help me make a list of some of these good rules? (Work with the child to make a list of commandments). Shall we check if we're right and find out what the rest of them are?
3. When we break these good rules it's called sin, and sin hurts God, other people and ourselves (1 John 3:4).
Last week I sinned by (tell the child about a simple and specific way that you sinned) and it hurt God, me and someone else. Can you think of a time when you did something wrong and it hurt you or someone else? (Wait for child to respond.) Did you know that God was hurt too?
4. Everyone has broken some of these rules and is a sinner (Romans 3:23) and sadly, when we sin, we have to die forever. That's quite a scary thought...
5. ...But God loves us and He doesn't want us to die forever! So He sent Jesus to die instead of us (John 3:16).
Isn't that amazing? I'm so glad that Jesus has died in my place because (share one of your reasons). Jesus would have come and died if you were the only person in the world who had ever broken God's good rules, because He loves you so much! That's incredible!
6. When Jesus died in our place, He had never sinned! So God brought Him back to life to save us (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).
Now we don't have to die forever, either! One day we can live in heaven with God instead! That's the best gift I can ever imagine!
What do you think about what Jesus has done for you?
7. So, when we believe in Jesus and accept that He died in *our* place for *our* sins, we are *completely* forgiven (1 John 2:1-2)! We just have

to pray 'I am so sorry God for hurting You by breaking Your good rule. Please forgive me because Jesus has already died for me. Amen.'

8. Each of us has to make our own choice to accept Jesus dying for our sins and to become His child (John 1:12). Would you like to accept Jesus as your Saviour today?
9. When you invite Jesus into your life He'll help you to become like a new person! You won't *want* to do any more wrong things because you love Jesus and Jesus loves you (John 3:3-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17). But we still go on making mistakes, and God will always be ready to forgive us again.
10. Jesus wants to help you become more like Him. Once you've accepted Jesus you can grow more like Him by exploring the Bible, praying, worshipping Him, and helping other people (Luke 2:52). What would you like to do to make sure you keep learning about Jesus?

Sample child's prayer for accepting Jesus:

Dear Father God,
Thank You for loving me so much! I love You too!
I am very sorry that I have broken Your good rules and sinned.
And I am sorry that my mistakes have hurt You, and hurt me and hurt other people too.
I want to accept Jesus as my Saviour, because I believe He died to save me from my sins.
Thank you for loving me so much that You made a way for me to be forgiven.
Thank you that I can now live with You forever.
Please help me to obey Your good rules and always follow Your plans for my life. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

A Child's Affirmation of Faith Service

- When a young child makes the decision to follow Jesus it's important to find a public way to acknowledge and mark this special moment, even though the child may not be ready for baptism.
- Our Church provides special resources for affirming a young child's faith.
- See the Children's Ministries pages of the BUC website at www.adventist.org.uk for a sample Affirmation service and printable, full-colour, affirmation certificates.
- After the child's decision to follow Jesus has been affirmed, it's

important to nurture their faith with an age-appropriate Bible study or baptismal class. The child also needs to discover his or her spiritual gifts and to find enjoyable ways minister to others and share their faith. This is best done with the help and support of their family.

- The *Kids in Discipleship* ministry provides family-orientated, lively and interactive ways to help children grow in faith and learn to help others.

Helpful Resources

To learn more about leading your children to Jesus visit the Children's Ministries page of the BUC website, www.adventist.org.uk and discover how *Kids in Discipleship* can change your lives and your church!

Visit the Children's Ministry pages of the BUC website to download:

- 'Tell a Child Tell the World' - BUC Children's Evangelism Manual
- Printable 'Child's Affirmation of Faith' certificates

Contact your Adventist Book Centre to buy:

- Children's 'Steps to Christ' Series, Linda Porter Carlyle, Pacific Press

ⁱ International Standard Version, 2008.

ⁱⁱ See leaflet 'Nurturing a Child's Faith', available from the BUC CM Department)