

# Sharing the Gospel with Your Children

by [Thom Schultz](#)

Many Christian parents face a paradox: How can some children hear the good news of the Bible and believe, while others hear the same message and remain unaffected? While the process of faith may be miraculous, it is not entirely mysterious. Jesus explained it in His parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23). Teaching received without understanding kills the yield. Faith with shallow roots withers and dies. Distractions, worries and desires for other things choke the Word. But one who hears the Word and understands it bears fruit.

How can we help our children receive the Word and bear fruit? Jesus' parable inspires several practical planting tips.

**Focus on understanding.** Many parents and teachers attempt to impart faith primarily through the transfer of Bible facts. Those seeds will not likely take root unless kids truly understand the meaning of the facts. Sunday school worksheets often use fill-in-the-blanks and word puzzles to drill children on their factual knowledge. But unscrambling the word forgiveness in a puzzle is far less important than understanding the meaning of forgiveness. Hearing is not enough. Reading is not enough. Memorizing is not enough — unless your goal is to produce a Bible "Jeopardy" champion. Concentrate your time on helping kids really understand God's Word, its relevance today and how you apply it.

**Let them experience the message.** People remember and are affected by vivid experiences. When Jesus wanted His disciples to learn about servanthood, He got down on His knees and washed their feet. You can be sure those disciples never forgot that faith lesson! You can do the same with your children. For example, to help them experience the concept of grace, involve your family in giving to others without expecting anything in return. Or to encourage kind words as mentioned in Ephesians 4:29, invite family members to write or draw a kind note to one another. (For more ideas on teaching through experiences, visit [Heritage Builders](#).)

**Use teachable moments.** Typically, when your kids are enveloped in emotion-packed situations, they are the most ready to grow. When circumstances provoke feelings of fear, sadness, anger, exhilaration, awe or wonder, be prepared to help them see how God is working. When Johnny is scared may be the opportune time to teach about God's presence. Jesus took advantage of teachable moments often, such as during the storm on the lake and with those who threatened to stone the adulterous woman.

**Reinforce for long-term retention.** Some information we quickly forget. Other things we remember a lifetime. We can help move more of God's message into long-term memory through "interval reinforcement," review or use of the message repeatedly over

time. If the brain registers information just once, less than 10 percent of the message is likely to be remembered after 30 days. But if there are six exposures to the information over 30 days, 90 percent of the message is likely to be retained. If you want your kids to understand God as Creator, repeat the message frequently — when you drive through the mountains, when you witness a sunset, when you visit the zoo and when you marvel at the intricacy of the human body.

**Avoid bribes.** Many well-intentioned parents and teachers attempt to grow their kids' faith through the enticement of rewards. "Learn this verse and get a ribbon." "Go to Sunday school and get a cookie." It may seem harmless, but bribing kids actually sets up a distraction. The "do this and get that" approach causes kids to focus more on the "that" than the "this." Jesus never said, "If you do unto others what you want them to do to you, you get a lollipop," or "If you feed My sheep, you get a Twinkie."

**Employ delight.** Your kids will learn more when they enjoy the process. Make learning about God fun! Some parents and teachers wince at this suggestion. Few people gain a love for anything that is marinated in drudgery. No one ever accused Jesus of being dull or boring. In fact, consider His first miracle: turning water into wine for the wedding at Cana. And remember how He told Peter to find cash for the temple tax — go catch a fish and pull a coin from its mouth. Delightful! So, make faith learning delightful.

Jesus concludes His parable: "The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matthew 13:23). What crop are you plotting with your kids?