Planting Seeds of Faith in Preschoolers
Adapted from Manna Issue 33 Article

After I had my second child, older mothers (sometimes complete strangers) often came up to me and volunteered their advice, as if I somehow had a sign on my forehead that read: "Help! I don't know what I'm doing!" They would tell me how to keep the baby's legs straight, what to do about rashes, where to live to get into the best school district, and so on. Thankfully, I often gained useful information and sometimes even profound insight from these interactions.

Most parents are very concerned about the physical, educational, and emotional aspects of their children's lives. But as I become more comfortable with meeting these needs for my young children, I am becoming more concerned about the nonphysical aspects of their development: in particular, their spiritual well-being. It is important that parents of young children, particularly preschool children, do all they can to help with their children's spiritual lives.

An acquaintance who is the father of two teenagers deeply impressed me with his conviction to raise God-fearing children. He said that he would feel that he had done his job as a parent if his children remained faithful to the Lord all of their lives.

God had commanded His people, the Israelites, to teach His laws to their children so that they would seek God and prosper (Deut 6:7-8, 20-25). In addition, we can attribute the success of a number of biblical characters to their unwavering faith, even in their youth.

God has given us the natural instinct to love our children, and we want to give them the best things in life. And there is nothing better than having God Himself as one's personal Friend, Protector, and Savior (Jn 15:15; Ps 71:6; 84:11; Acts 4:12).

Planting The Seeds

With what I have gathered from various sources, I would like to suggest some principles that I believe are helpful in building seeds of faith in preschoolers ages five and under. While I will recommend some practices as reference, please keep in mind that individuals respond differently to the same event, so flexibility and creativity are necessary for this important task.
Prenatal

In addition to prenatal care and vitamins, I consider prayer to be the most essential element for an unborn child. Every adult is the product of both nature and nurture. Normally, parents are responsible for nurturing their children and providing them with the best environment possible. However, parents have absolutely no control over the nature of their children—temperament, intelligence, health, or physical characteristics. Therefore, in order to increase the probability of a "good seed," it is wise for parents-to-be to pray to the Creator of all life (Neh 9:6; Ps 100:3; 139:15; Jer 1:5).

We believe that as long as God is with our children, everything else will be so much easier to handle. After all, our children are God’s property who are under our temporary care (Ps 127:3; 1 Pet 4:10). It is helpful for us to have this understanding even before the arrival of our children.

Infants to Toddlers

Although they appear to do little, they can actually absorb much information at this stage. While at home, include your infant in as many daily activities as possible so that they will learn that God is in every part of our lives. For example, say a short prayer before each feeding, sing easy Bible songs throughout the day, and pray as a family before bedtime. All of these physical activities may mean nothing to your infant for a while, but before long, they will inherit the good habits that you have established for them.

Through extended exposure to religious services, they will soon learn to be quiet in the service area, because their parents speak in soft voices and everyone else is quiet. They will also be more comfortable with group prayer if it has been a regular experience for them. With increased mobility and ability to communicate, they begin to take on a much more active role in their daily lives. Parents may battle between wanting to shelter their new walkers from the many hazards out there, and wanting to let them test their wings.

At church
Parents seem to need some extra patience, endurance, and perhaps an extra pair of arms and legs during this period. You may have childproofed your home, but the church may have places that pose potential hazards to your curious toddler. Therefore, you may find yourself always running behind your toddler during service.

At Home
Continue all the practices you were doing when your child was younger, but slowly let your toddler become a part of them. For example, you may begin by letting your child say “amen” each time you say grace. Make a “standard conclusion” for your short prayer so that your toddler learns to say “amen” when he hears the cue word (I always end my prayers with “kamsamida”—“thank you” in Korean. My daughter knows that immediately after this phrase, she can say “amen”). Gradually, you can ask your toddler to repeat simple prayers after you.

Let your toddler have a tiny taste of what family altar is like by setting aside a time when the entire family prays together.
Preschoolers

As your toddler slowly emerges into childhood, you will find him or her more cooperative and eager to please, in addition to having better-controlled large and small motor skills. This is the age that many parents begin to send their children to preschool.

Your child now has a wider vocabulary, and you should expect your preschooler to understand as you explain some of the biblical principles. You can now use Bible stories to apply to daily life. For example, after telling the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, you can say, "This is why we want to obey God--because He gives us what is best. And when good kids obey and do what their parents tell them, their parents give them what is best." Although God may still be a vague concept to some, they are gradually being able to relate to Jesus. They may be intrigued by the miraculous powers He possesses--that is why children at this age are crazy about super-heroes.

If your church does provide RE classes, you may feel that you can enjoy the Sabbath worship now that your child is old enough to join the class. However, remember that the responsibility of the child’s faith and spirituality (or manners) lies not only in RE teachers or the church, but also the parents.

Set An Example

Children learn about God from the Bible stories you tell them, but they learn even more from observing your own relationship with the Lord and Savior. In keeping your ties with your Father, do your best to keep your daily devotions, namely Bible reading and prayers, no matter how crazy things may get. When you take time to refocus on God, you will be surprised at the refreshing sense of energy and peace of mind you feel, even amidst a household of chaos. However, you may need a bit of creativity and sacrifice to achieve your goal. When you feel you just can’t squeeze another fifteen minutes out of the day to read your Bible, try listening to the Bible on tape while working or driving.

Finally, have patience. Until your child learns to be independent from you, your desire to worship God uninterrupted may not be possible. But know for certain that those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy (Ps 126:5-6)!

Dear Readers,

You have been reading our eleventh issue of encouragement email passages and activities for our RE Teachers. We would like to dedicate this issue to all who have helped to make this work possible. Thank God we are reaching the end of this project. Hope you have enjoyed!
What was the ethnic background of your grandmother on your father's side?

What was the ethnic background of your grandmother on your mother's side?

What was the ethnic background of your grandfather on your mother's side?

What was the ethnic background of your grandfather on your father's side?

What was the ethnic background of your father?

What was the ethnic background of your mother?

Based on your previous answers, what's your ethnic background?