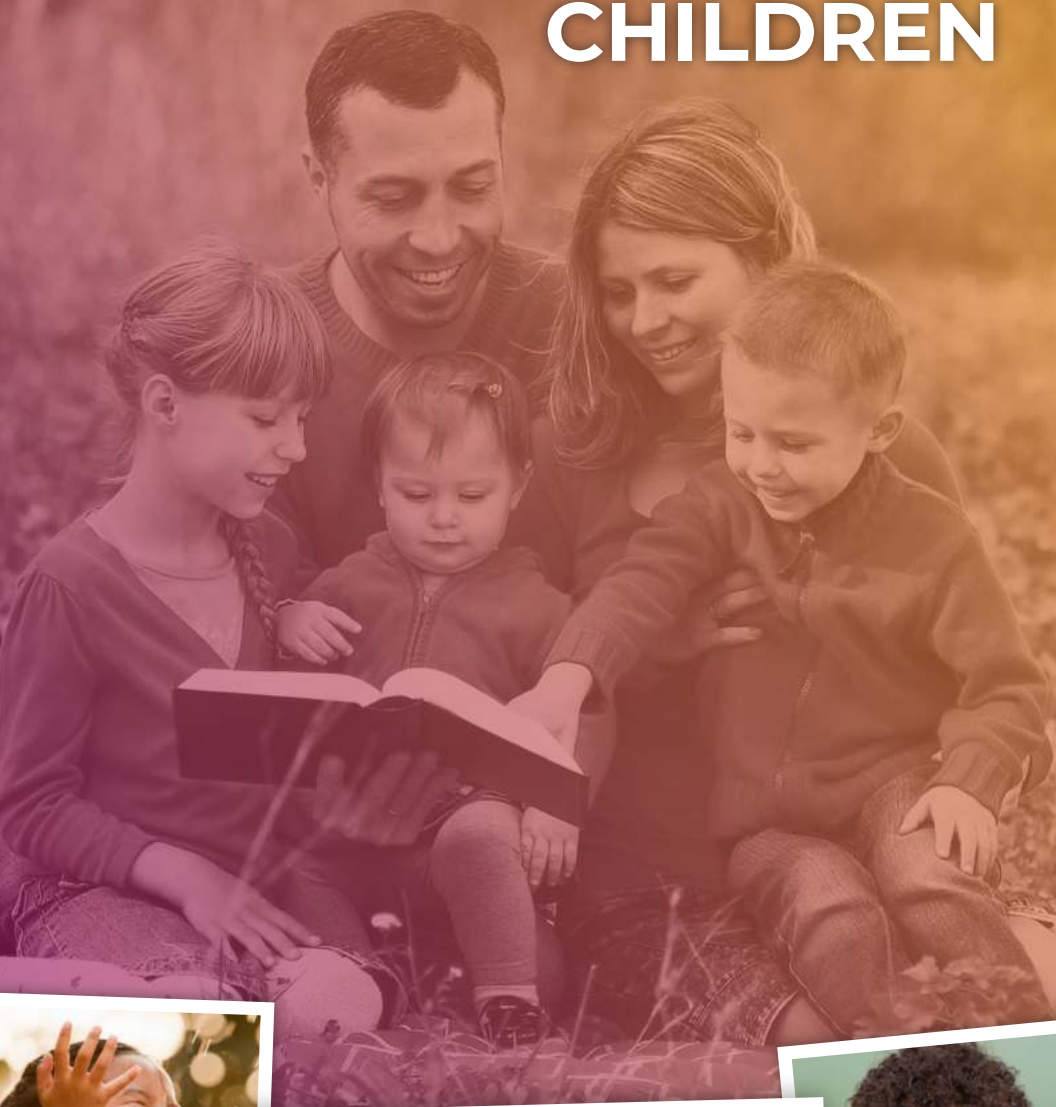


TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS TO

MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN





FOLLOW THE LEADER

Leadership is often described as influence. Children learn to follow the leader or be influenced at an early age. In leading a child to faith in Christ, pastors, children's teachers, and parents must understand that they have a powerful influence over the child. No matter what adults plan to do, or not to do, with children, they influence young believers either way from or toward Christ. This form-referent power is evident from the earliest moments of life with boys and girls, even for pastors who play an important role, according to Dallas Baptist University's childhood ministry research. In instances where pastoral leaders do not know the child's name or have a close relationship with the child; boys and girls are watching and wanting to please them. However, when it comes to leading a child to Christ, every adult, regardless of the role, must admit that they are not the ultimate leader, but rather another follower who has merely been on the journey a little longer.

The conversion of a child is not about pleasing or following any one human being. It is about following Jesus as Leader. Our influence must not be from the adults' good intentions or best wishes, but from the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of the leader who laid down His life for the world. As adult followers, it is our job to be like Christ so that the children will be like Him. The leaders must be a vehicle of His leading and abandon mechanical or superficial attempts to reach only numbers. When adults are truly willing to sacrifice for Christ both by their choices and lifestyles, they will be paving the road toward a life-long journey of faith. Horace Bushnell once said, that the only way a child will understand the sacrifice of Christ is to see his or her parents sacrifice daily for Christ.

The story of Jesus contained in scripture is the most powerful physical tool in guiding children to the Leader – Christ. Guiding children through the story of His birth, life, death, and resurrection will allow them to identify with the Savior in the moment, for life, and in eternity. The Great Commission commands more than merely a one-time influence; it calls for influence that leads the person to know, trust, follow, and serve for a lifetime. It is not enough to be led to the road, children need to be led to the Leader and encouraged to journey with us in following Him. Whether guiding the child to Christ at home, school, church, Vacation Bible School, camp, or a mission trip, the faith that is born in the moment must not be allowed to waste away from neglect. Adults must be willing to join in the journey with the child, even when boys and girls do not have parents of faith. Church leaders must become faith-parents to mentor, coach, and support the growing faith in these children. First impressions are lasting impressions, but they should not be the last impressions for children in following Christ.

So now, follow the Leader, so they can follow the Leader.






TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT JESUS & SALVATION

Pastors and other adult leaders in church have no greater privilege than to talk to children about Jesus and salvation. Taking some time to be prepared for the opportunity to talk to children about Jesus can maximize conversations and teaching times with children.

Some general suggestions:

- Stay on top of learning the names of as many children in your church as possible. Visit them regularly at church. Even if you don't think you are "good" with children – you can learn their names. Learning their names shows you value them.
- Get to know children in their area of church (Sunday School rooms, etc.), not just in the worship center. Make it a point to be visible and friendly on Sundays and Wednesdays.
- Intentionally involve children and plan for connection points with children in the worship service.
- Expect children to be interested in learning about Jesus and salvation.

A young boy with dark hair is sitting outdoors, looking off to the side. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The text is positioned on the right side of the image.

Church-connected kids – Some children are in church regularly. They may express an interest in salvation to their parents, teachers, or friends. When the chance comes to talk to them consider these suggestions:

- Meet with them in an informal setting – i.e. at their house with parents around – to minimize the intimidation factor being in the church office might have for them.
- Help parents recognize that for a child coming to faith may start with questions and conversations over a period of time, not just one conversation one time.
- Enjoy talking to kids and listen to them. Some of their insights are amazing.
- Answer a child's questions as factually as possible. Younger children may not connect with analogies as readily as adults.
- Don't be afraid to say that you don't know the answer to a question.
- Don't be intimidated to go into a Sunday School class one Sunday and have an open discussion where kids can ask any question they want. Many questions will be about Jesus and heaven.

Children who don't have much of a church background:

- Realize that teaching Bible stories will open doors for conversations with children.
- Don't let a child's behavior prevent you from valuing the child. If a child comes to church with limited knowledge about church, they may not know how to "behave" in church. See that as refreshing rather than an obstacle.
- Consider special and creative teaching times with children who have limited exposure to church and Scripture.
- Visiting the children at their home may open doors of conversation with parents.

Helping parents by supporting them:

- Parents often need validation from the pastor that what they are teaching their children is accurate.
- Encourage parents and express your support for them in the journey with children.
- Consider special classes and groups to help parents feel comfortable talking to children about Jesus and salvation.

A man and a young child are outdoors on a paved path. The man is leaning forward, smiling, and appears to be helping the child. The child is wearing a helmet and is riding a small bicycle. The background shows a clear sky and some distant hills. The entire image has a blue tint.

GUIDING A CHILD THROUGH **HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN**

**Detach and use in conversation with a child.*

Step 1: KNOW WHAT SIN IS

To become a Christian, you must first be aware of your sin.

What is Sin?

- When we break God's rules
- When we do things that are displeasing to God
- Choosing to do things our way instead of God's way

Have you ever sinned?

- Romans 3:23 says that everyone has sinned

Because of sin:

- We are separated from God
- We are unhappy
- Romans 6:23 says we deserve to be punished because of our sin



YOU

GOD

Step 2: KNOW WHO JESUS IS

God's Answer for Sin

- God's only Son
- Never sinned
- Died on the cross for our sins
- Is the only way to God

John 3:16 says God loved us so much that He sent Jesus so that we wouldn't have to pay for our sins.



JESUS

YOU

GOD



Step 3: KNOW WHAT TO DO

If you want to become a Christian

Know that God is asking you to do something about your sin right now.

Revelation 3:20 says that Jesus will “knock on our door” and should be ready to answer the door when He does. We don’t hear a knocking sound. We just know that He is asking us to make a choice about who to follow.

To become a Christian, you simply have to follow three steps, known as the ABCs.





THE **ABCs** OF **BECOMING A CHRISTIAN**

ADMIT

Romans 3:23

Romans 6:23

Admit that you are a sinner.

This means that you also repent of your sins –
that you will try not to repeat your sin.

You walk away from your sin
and go in the other direction.

BELIEVE

John 3:16
Romans 5:8

To believe means that you know Jesus is God's Only Son and He died for us on the cross.

It means that you trust Him to save you from your sins.

CONFESS

Romans 10:9
Romans 10:13

Confess Jesus as your Savior and Lord.
Ask Him to be in charge of your life and be your boss.

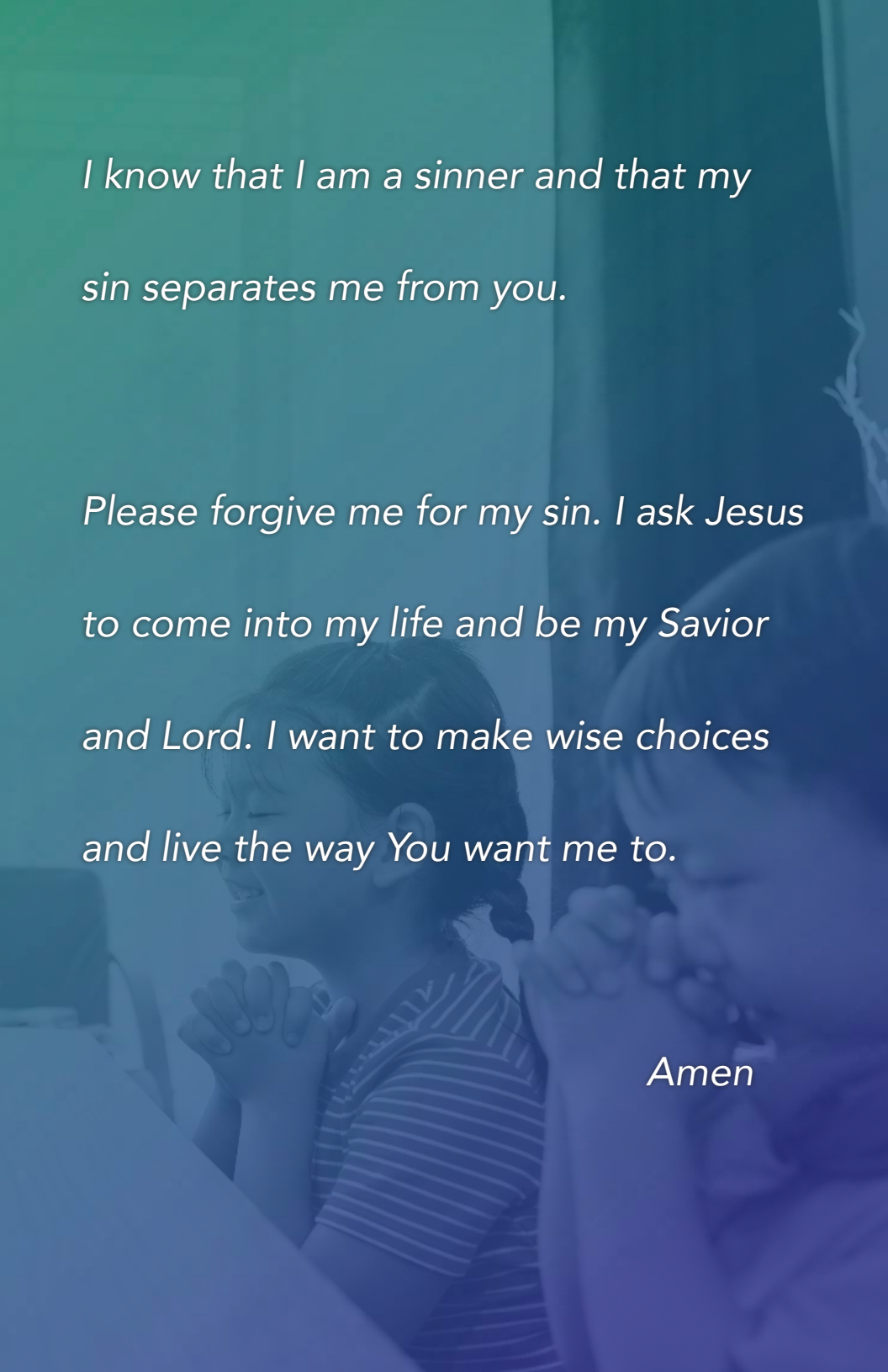
When you make decisions, you will look for what God wants you to do.

Confessing your faith means that you believe God will forgive you and will save you. For each of us, there is a time to do this. God will let you know if this is your time!

Once you understand these three steps, you can say a prayer like this one to accept God's call:

Dear God,

Thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross for me so my sin can be forgiven. Thank you that He rose from the dead and is alive.

A young girl and a young boy are shown from the chest up, facing each other with their hands clasped together in prayer. The girl, on the left, has dark hair in a braid and is wearing a striped shirt. The boy, on the right, has light hair and is wearing a light-colored shirt. They are both looking down with their eyes closed, appearing to be in a state of deep prayer or devotion. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

*I know that I am a sinner and that my
sin separates me from you.*

*Please forgive me for my sin. I ask Jesus
to come into my life and be my Savior
and Lord. I want to make wise choices
and live the way You want me to.*

Amen

A photograph of a family walking on a dirt path in a wooded area. A man in a dark jacket and white shirt is walking on the left, looking down at a young girl. A woman in a patterned top and dark pants is walking on the right, holding the girl. The girl is wearing a light-colored jacket and dark pants. The background is filled with trees and foliage. The entire image has a purple tint.

Step 4: WHAT NOW?

After you pray, confessing your faith, you are a Christian!

Jesus has come into your life and your sins are forgiven.

Now is the time for you to make a public profession of your faith — to tell others what happened to you.

Matthew 10:32 says that whoever acknowledges God before men will be acknowledged in Heaven before God.



WHAT ABOUT **BAPTISM?**



Baptism is a picture of the death and burial of Jesus.

Baptism is to show others what has happened to you when you asked Jesus to be your Savior and Lord.

It is an act of obedience because Jesus set the example for us and commanded us to follow it.

My Child Accepted Christ – NOW WHAT?

When a child prays (meaningfully) to accept Christ, it is not an end but the beginning of eternity. The decision the child made is an adult decision. He needs the Christian adults around him to help him understand the significance of his decision. Hopefully, parents will take the primary role but with great support from their pastor and church.

As always, God is so good in helping us with our children. Baptism is a dramatic picture of the meaning of salvation. But this meaning will only be available to the child if some loving adult or adults explaining the meaning. Romans 6:4 will help with this explanation.

"Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in a new way of life," Romans 6:4 (HSCB).

Many times we all need the reminder that Christ saves and not baptism. Help the child remember and verbalize what he did when he accepted Christ. Some kind of note in the child's own handwriting with the date they accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior will help.

A note to help me remember:

I accept Jesus as my Savior and
became a Christian

(write in today's date)

Check the things you plan to do
because you are now a Christian:

- ☐ Tell my parents
- ☐ Join the church
- ☐ Be baptized

(Sign)

Parents, grandparents, or other caring adults can encourage the keeping of these tangible reminders by helping the child with a scrapbook or a memory box. These reminders could include a note about accepting Christ, the Baptismal certificate (or a copy if the mother wants to keep and protect the original), pictures, etc.

Child-appropriate daily Bible reading guides for new Christians will provide opportunities for parents to have spiritually rich conversations with their new Christian.

"I'm a Christian Now" is a publication of LifeWay which includes daily Bible readings for new Christians. There are two versions of this guide, one for younger children (about grades 1-3 or ages 6-9) and another for older children (about grades 4-6 or ages 9-12). These workbooks are most effective when a parent and child study together, at a given time each day, for the four weeks it takes to complete the workbook.

The parent or a loving church member needs to be sure the child has a Bible of their own to use. The child needs to be encouraged to study the Bible daily. Verses or passages studied should include:

- What it means to be a Christian
- The meaning of baptism
- The meaning of the Lord's Supper
- What is a church & what does it mean to be a church member
- The Bible – with suggestions for ways to study and apply the Bible (this certainly should include prayer)



"Telling the Story of Jesus to Mississippi"

It is a privilege for the Discipleship/Sunday School Department to put this resource piece on "Telling the Story of Jesus to Mississippi" in your hands. As Children's Ministers, children's leaders, pastors, teachers, and parents there is no greater joy than the opportunity to talk to children about Jesus and helping them come to a saving knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

In this resource piece, you will find several tips to guide you in talking with children about this life-changing decision:

- 1) An introduction from Dr. Thomas Sanders, Professor of Christian Ministry at East Texas Baptist University in Marshall, Texas
- 2) Ideas for talking to children about Jesus and salvation
- 3) A separate insert on the ABCs of Becoming a Christian you may use as you talk with each child
- 4) Follow-up steps to use with children who make a profession of faith

It is our prayer that you will use this resource tool and share it with other children's leaders and parents in your church, so that they will be more comfortable in Telling the Story of Jesus with their own children and any other children who cross their paths.

This material is provided for you by the Discipleship/Sunday School Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

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