

Sharing the Gospel With Cubbies



Preschoolers *can* trust Christ as Savior, and many of them do. Often, the ones who trust Him have heard consistent and frequent explanations of the gospel at home and church. However, young children are very eager to please adults, so adults must *never* pressure children to make this step. The child should take the initiative. Avoid directly asking a child if he or she wants to trust Christ as Savior, unless the child has been asking questions and showing clear signs of readiness to make this decision. It is also wise to avoid invitations where Cubbies must raise their hand or come to the front of the room to show their desire to trust Christ. Not only do children want to please adults; they are prone to copy the behavior of other children. Instead, simply tell children that if they want to trust Christ as Savior, they can talk to a leader after the lesson or during Handbook Time.

Overall, you should see your evangelistic role as a gospel seed planter. You are laying a foundation of biblical truth and repeating the gospel message clearly, consistently and frequently, so Cubbies will be prepared to understand and receive the gospel when they are ready. Children often need to hear the gospel message many times before they can understand and respond to it.

Clear Communication

Clearly communicating the gospel to children is vitally important. However, Awana® leaders and others often use confusing terminology when explaining the basics of the gospel. Salvation is a gift provided by grace through faith alone in Christ alone. Because salvation must be simply received, it is confusing to tell an unsaved child:

1. You must give your heart to Christ.

The Bible never tells anyone to give his or her heart to Christ. We are not saved by giving God anything, but by accepting His gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jeremiah 17:9a says: *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.* On the other hand, Romans 10:10a says that: *For with the heart one believes unto righteousness.* This verse communicates the idea of a nonbeliever making a decision of his or her will to trust Christ. Even so, this verse does not say that a nonbeliever must “give his or her heart to Christ.” A nonbeliever is incapable of giving his heart to God. This statement contains confusing and unbiblical terminology that does not clearly present the gospel.

2. You must confess your sins and ask the Lord to forgive you.

The confusion with this invitation results from a misunderstanding of the meaning of confession. The word *confess* simply means “to agree.” It doesn’t mean that we need to make a list of our sins and ask God to forgive us for each of them. Though nonbelievers must admit their sinfulness before God, they do not need to list their sins or promise to never sin again to be saved. Plus, it would be impossible to know and confess all of your sins. Instead, God forgives and cleanses us from sin when we accept Christ’s payment for our sins (Romans 3:24).

3. Right now, ask Jesus to come into your heart.

Children who hear this invitation are often confused and mistakenly think that Jesus literally comes into their hearts to live. This may be a scary idea to some of them. Also, the simplicity of trusting Christ becomes misunderstood. We are saved because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins on the cross (Ephesians 1:7). When we put our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit indwells us and our bodies become His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 4:6). Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, however, is a result of salvation, not the method by which we are saved (Ephesians 1:13-14). Those who use this invitation often base

it on Revelation 3:20. Unfortunately, they are using this passage out of context because it does not apply to salvation.

4. Repent of your sins and you will be saved.

First of all, the word *repent* is confusing enough to adults. It should not be used with preschoolers. Repentance means a “change of mind.” Genuine repentance is the result of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, which leads to sorrow because of sin and a realization that the only way to be saved from sin and its penalty is to trust Christ. Before accepting the gift of salvation, nonbelievers must realize their sinfulness (Romans 3:23, 6:23) and their need for a Savior, which is, of course, a huge change of mind. In salvation, repentance and trust are two sides of the same coin (Luke 24:47). Repentance alone is not salvation.

Here are simple statements that clearly explain the gospel to preschoolers:

1. To trust Christ as Savior means you believe He died on the cross for your sins.

Trusting (or accepting) Jesus Christ as Savior means that we personally put our trust in what He did for us on the cross. Each person must believe this truth: “Christ died for me!” Each person must personally trust Christ to save them from the penalty of their sin. *But as many as received Him ...* (John 1:12) is the open invitation for anyone to be saved. This is the heart of the gospel!

2. Christ died for your sins and came alive again. Anyone who believes in Him will be saved from the punishment for sin.

Though it is a hard concept, preschoolers who are ready to trust Christ must understand that the punishment for sin is death. Sin is serious! We all deserve death for our sin. But Christ died for our sins and demonstrated His victory over sin by His physical resurrection from the dead (Romans 4:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). When the Bible uses the word *believe*, it means an absolute trust

in something. When we personally place our trust in this gospel message, we are assured of eternal life in heaven. Jesus lives to assure us that He will complete our salvation (Philippians 1:6).

Involve the Parents!

Ideally, when you find that a Cubbie is asking questions about the gospel or showing sensitivity to spiritual matters, bring this to the attention of the child's parents right away. What greater joy could a Christian parent have than to lead his or her own child to Christ! The Spirit can also use a child's growing awareness of God to challenge an unsaved parent into evaluating his or her own spiritual standing. Leaders can use the opportunity afforded by the child's questioning to talk to unsaved parents and explain fully what the decision to trust Christ is all about.

A Simple Gospel Presentation

The gospel message is deeply integrated into the lessons in the Cubbies *AppleSeed* and *HoneyComb Teaching Plans*. Through your lessons, you will be repeating the gospel message to preschoolers frequently throughout the year.



Here is a step-by-step explanation of the gospel that you can share with individual Cubbies who are asking questions and expressing readiness to understand and respond to the gospel. This explanation is also on the back cover of the *Apple Acres* entrance booklet so parents can also discuss it with their child at home.

1. God loves you and wants you to be His friend forever.

For God so loved the world ... (John 3:16)

2. Because we are all sinners, we can't be friends with God.

Sin is anything we think, say or do that disobeys God (lying, hitting, disobeying parents, etc.). We were all born sinners (Romans 5:12-21). God is perfectly good, and He must punish sin. The punishment for sin is dying and being away from God forever.

For all have sinned ... (Romans 3:23)

(TIP: To help your child understand the concept of punishment, remind your child of a time he or she experienced consequences for disobedience.)

3. God helped us to be His friends.

He sent His Son, Jesus Christ (who never sinned), to be punished instead of us. Jesus died on the cross for our sins because He loved us so much. Then Jesus came alive again!

... Christ died for our sins ... He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

4. When you trust that the Lord Jesus died to save you from sin and rose again, you are God's friend forever.

All your sins are forgiven. God's Spirit comes to live in you (Ephesians 1:13), and someday, you will live with God in heaven.

... "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ..." (Acts 16:31)