

PRESCHOOL FAITH



CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR SGLs

... for intentional conversations with kids

Faith may look like a small word on the outside, but it means a big thing—trusting and having confidence in God even though we can't see Him. And even preschoolers can achieve an understanding of faith and learn to walk in it. After all, preschoolers are experts at using their imaginations, and they aren't nearly as impeded by what they can't see as grown ups. They see castles in the clouds and believe you when you say the moon is made of cheese. In this phase, you can help them develop an authentic faith by inciting wonder. You are giving them the foundations for their faith in the way you respond with concrete examples and by letting them explore God's creation.

As they grow and mature into adolescents, they'll be able to understand abstract concepts more deeply. But for now, be as simple as possible. Here's a few words to say and a few not to say.

Remember, your goal with your preschoolers are to...

INCITE THEIR WONDER
so they will know God's love and meet God's family.

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WHAT TO SAY:

- "Jesus wants to be your friend forever."
- "God made you."
- "God loves you so much."
- "We can't see God, but we can know he's always with us."
- "I'm sorry you feel that way. Let's talk to God about that."
Or "I'm glad you feel that way. Let's thank God for that."
- "There's a true story in the Bible about that. Let's read it together."
(Use an age-appropriate storybook Bible to read stories that relate to what your preschooler is experiencing.)
- "How can we share with our friends?" *(Sharing is the foundation for service. We start thinking about others when we share what we have to help them or make them feel included.)*
- Repeat simple Bible verses: "Do not be afraid, for the Lord your God is with you."
- "The Bible is a book that tells us about God."
- Sing simple songs about faith like, "Jesus Loves Me."

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

- "Don't be silly, Moses wasn't Isaac's father." *(Or whatever the biblical fact they mess up. You can correct them, but don't make them feel bad about it.)*
- "Don't ask questions about..." *(Because preschoolers have an active imagination, they will ask some off-the-wall questions about what they hear. Give them grace with these questions and help them realize that God is big enough to handle all of our questions no matter how crazy they may seem.)*
- "Details. Details. More Details." *(Don't over explain Biblical concepts or include too many details about a story. Use highlights to share the concept or story in a way your preschooler can understand.)*
- "Verses. Verses. More Verses." *(We want preschoolers to know stories from the Bible. But even the simplest Bible translation is too much for young kids. Use a storybook Bible written with preschoolers in mind to introduce them to Scripture.)*

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ELEMENTARY FAITH



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Faith is one of those words that looks small on the outside but is actually really big on the inside. Fortunately, it's still a perfect sized word to talk through with kids who are themselves small on the outside and very big on the inside. How we talk about faith at each phase of a person's life matters, and hugely impacts how he or she will think about faith in the phases to come. How you respond to their questions about faith will determine if they continue to talk to you about their faith. You get to encourage kids as they begin a life long journey of faith, and that is the best job in the world. Here's a few words to say and a few not to say. Remember, through this phase, your goal is to...

PROVOKE THEIR DISCOVERY
so they will trust God's character and experience God's family.

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WHAT TO SAY:

- "I don't know. Let's find out together." *(It's okay if you don't know everything. Use that as an opportunity to discover something new about God.)*
- "Why do you guys think God asks us to be honest/kind/patient, etc.?"
- "Did you know there are 66 Books in the Bible and they all connect to tell one story?"
- "I wonder what God's Word says about that, let's look together..."
- "No question is too big or too small for God to handle."
- "We might not be able to see God, but we can know he's there by looking all around us! What are some other things we can't see but we know are there?" *(Examples might be the wind, the sun at nighttime, gravity, etc.)*
- "That reminds me of a time when I went through something similar, and here's what I learned..." *(Tell your own faith stories)*
- "Can I tell you about the first time I trusted Jesus?"
- "You are so good at *(singing, making things, making people feel welcome, etc.)* How do you think you could serve someone else using your gifts?" *(Help kids live out their faith through service.)*
- "Having faith may not always be easy, but we can trust God no matter what."
- "I know it's hard to tell sometimes, but what do you think is the wise choice in this situation?"
- "If you were in the same situation, how would you want to be treated?"

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

- "We don't ask questions like that."
- "I don't struggle with trusting God." *(Everyone at some point struggles with their faith and doubt. Make it personal and be honest about your struggles and how you worked through them.)*
- "If you trust in God, everything in your life will work out how you want!"
- "If you really had faith, you wouldn't feel like this." *(Anxiety, hurt, sad, etc.)*
- "God wants you to read your Bible every single day." *(Reading your Bible regularly is an important Faith Skill, but don't set unrealistic expectations for elementary kids.)*
- "Singing is THE way we worship God." *(Singing is A way we worship God. Help kids understand they can worship God simply by how they live their life.)*
- "If you really loved God, you would..."

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MIDDLE SCHOOL FAITH



CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR SGLs

... for intentional conversations with students

It might not seem like your middle school small group will ever focus enough to really talk about faith although they could probably talk about You Tube videos and who-likes-who all day. Don't worry. There will be moment where you talk about faith that you might think they didn't pick up on, but they are listening. And how you talk about faith with your group matters! Your group is going through a lot of changes, and growing in their faith is one of them. Middle schoolers are transitioning from a time where their faith has been a byproduct of their parent's faith. But these are the years when they take initiative and create a faith of their own. The best thing you can do is be a coach, not a teacher. Cheer for them from the sidelines, and affirm them in the personal faith journey. As you have this ongoing conversation about faith with your few, here are a few words to say and not to say. Remember, your goal is to...

PROVOKE THEIR **DISCOVERY**

so they will own their own faith and value a faith community.

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WHAT TO SAY:

- "If you have doubt or questions, that doesn't mean you are doing faith wrong. It's actually good! Because that means you're making this your own."
- "I'm glad you asked me."
- "I don't know the answer to that. Let's work together to see what we can figure out."
- "Now is the time to begin creating good habits to grow your faith. Want to pick out a Bible or a devotional together?"
- "I can see how God has given you this ability/talent/characteristic and you are going to do amazing things with it."
- "What do you think?" "How is that true in your own life?"
(Ask open-ended questions that help them personalize their faith.)
- "One of the best things you can do for your faith is to come to small group and be connected to other people working through their faith, too. I'm so glad you're here."
- At times, the best thing is to say nothing. Let your student see you model what a "grown up" faith looks like. That will speak louder than any directive.

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

- "Have you had a quiet time yet today?" *(In other words, don't treat time with God as an assignment.)*
- "Don't ask/say that. You just need to believe more."
- "If you really had a relationship with God, you wouldn't do/say/think that."
- "When you have a relationship with God, everything just works out. If it feels like it's not working out, just pray more."

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HIGH SCHOOL FAITH



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You know the phrase “fake it ‘til you make it?” This might be the motto of the post-high school season for a student. As a small group leader, you might think your job is done! You’ve gotten them past the tumultuous last years of traditional schooling, and now you’re ready to relax and finally remove yourself from the constant barrage of group texts. But pause for just a second before you hit that button! This might be the transition when your students need you most. This is a whole new world they’re entering—one that may or may not include graduating high school, going to college, or going straight into a full-time job. This is your chance to help a student not feel abandoned by the church. They might not be at your same church—or even in your same state—but you’re in a unique place to help a student transition to what’s next at a pivotal point in their lives. We want to help you by giving you some words to say, and some words not to say. Remember, your goal during this phase is to:

FUEL THEIR PASSION
so they will keep pursuing authentic faith
and discover a personal mission.

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WHAT TO SAY:

- “Trusting in God doesn’t mean there are no bad days. But those days can deepen our faith in a God who can help us get through our biggest challenges. Talk to Him about it.”
- “You will never have everything figured out. If we ever think we’ve figured God out, we’ve made Him smaller than He should be.”
- “I love watching God grow you into someone who loves Him and loves others. Right now, I can see ____.”
- “A growing faith doesn’t mean a perfect life. You are going to mess up, and that’s okay. God always has grace, and so do I.”
- “One of the best things you can do for your faith is to come to small group and be connected to other people working through their faith, too. I’m so glad you’re here.”
- “Doubt isn’t bad. Let’s talk about it.”
- “You’re great at _____. What is a way you might be able to use that gift to help others?”
- “What you’re going through reminds me of a verse that means a lot to me: Can I send it to you?”
- “I’ve heard one of the best experiences to grow your faith is to go on a mission trip. Are you interested in something like that?”
- “How can I pray for you as you start making decisions about what’s next in your life?”
- At times, the best thing is to say nothing. Modeling what a “grown up” faith looks like will speak louder than any directive.

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

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(Build them up to move forward, but don’t overwhelm them.)
- “You need to talk to me about this stuff!”

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