

“Spiritual Stepping Stones”

God has entrusted each parent with a special gift: a child. With that gift comes tremendous responsibility. A parent must take it upon himself to inspire, teach and nurture every aspect of his child's development, including their spiritual development. The spiritual growth and development of each child is progressive and unique. It is often marked by individual influences in the home, cognitive development, moral development, and personal experiences. Consequently, any spiritual teaching materials must reflect a basic assumption that parents can encourage their child to pursue a life of faith. How does a child's faith develop? How do children learn to love and follow Jesus Christ? Initially, faith is rooted in a child's early perception and attitude toward spiritual matters. As a child matures, his evolving perception and attitude will steer him toward a decision about his faith. Later in his development, this decision will lead him to a commitment. The secret to encouraging lifelong faith in a child is understanding the Spiritual Stepping Stones that mark his spiritual development.

1. Spiritual Stepping Stone #1: Infant (ages 0-2)

- a. During these early years, a child is very susceptible to spiritual influence and instruction.
 - i. As you care and provide for the needs of your child, he will develop a foundation of comfort, love and trust in you, which will later lead to his sense of trust in God.
 - ii. Children begin to form an association with the language of faith, spiritual images, and biblical characters, which build the inner foundation of moral knowledge.
- b. Spiritual Concepts:
 - i. “God created all things.”
 - ii. “God, the Father, cares and provides for me.”
 - iii. “Jesus, God's Son, loves me.”

2. Spiritual Stepping Stone #3: Toddler/pre-school (ages 3-6)

- a. During these formative years, a child experiences great spiritual growth, as he is beginning to understand the basic concepts of right and wrong, respect, compassion, and friendship.
 - i. As you instruct and model good behavior for your child, he will form an understanding of thoughts and actions that are acceptable in relationships with other people and with God.
 - ii. Seeds of faith that were sown during infancy will continue to grow with responsive parenting and continued spiritual influences, that are all focused on the Lord, such as songs, stories and prayer.
 - iii. Creative thinking and imagination begin to develop with a new understanding of faith in things unseen.
 - iv. More things are caught than taught. Modeling spiritual behavior, like Bible reading and prayer, becomes extremely important.
- b. Spiritual Concepts (ages 3-4):
 - i. “I can listen to Bible stories and learn Bible verses.”
 - ii. “I'm beginning to understand that the Bible is God's Word and it tells me about God and His Son, Jesus Christ.”
 - iii. “I know that Jesus feels sad when I do something wrong.”
 - iv. “I want to follow actions of others.”

c. Spiritual Concepts (ages 5-6)

- i. "Jesus came to the earth to save people from their sin."
- ii. "I know who God is and what He is like."
- iii. "I can talk to God whenever and wherever I want."
- iv. "I know people in biblical times loved God and served Him."
- v. "I know how I can love and serve God today."
- vi. "I am beginning to understand how God can be everywhere and in my heart at the same time."

3. Spiritual Stepping Stone #3: Child (ages 7-11)

a. During this season of life, a child begins to wrestle with more complex theological issues, and he is ready to begin making faith part of his daily life in a more conscious way.

- i. One of the ultimate goals of spiritual development in the life of your child is the display of biblical love toward God and others!
- ii. As you strive to emulate the character of God in your parenting, you will encourage your child toward spiritual maturity and growth, marked by an unwavering commitment to God, kindness, a sense of justice, and forgiveness.
- iii. As they begin to believe more deeply in their personal convictions, they experience an increased desire to discuss them.
- iv. As their knowledge and understanding grow, they begin to share their beliefs and faith with others.

b. Spiritual Concepts (ages 7-8)

- i. "The Bible defines right and wrong. I am responsible for choosing what is right."
- ii. "The Ten Commandments are hard to obey. I need Jesus' help."
- iii. "The world is a big place, but God is working in every part of it."
- iv. "I believe that the Bible stories are true, and I can begin to apply them to events that occur in my life."

c. Spiritual Concepts (ages 9-11)

- i. "The Bible is God's authoritative truth for my life."
- ii. "Salvation is for me and any one else who trusts in Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior."
- iii. "The Bible paints a big picture of God working with His people, and I am part of that picture."
- iv. "I now understand why Christ died for me. I realize how much He loves me and I want my friends to know Him too."

For more information on your child's spiritual growth and development, please visit: www.family.org, www.incm.org, and www.one2believe.com.