

## Preschoolers and Faith

By: Sarah Bolme, MSW

*Teaching kids to count is fine, but teaching them what counts is best. --- Bob Talbot*

“Mommy, what does Jesus look like?” my three-year-old daughter asked from the backseat of our van. In our family, the tough questions are usually raised in the car. Questions like “Mommy are you dead yet?” and “Mommy can we go visit heaven?”

Some days I have quick clever answers, other days I struggle with how to respond. On this particular day, I thought I had an impressive answer. “Love,” I responded. “No Mommy, what does Jesus *look* like?” my daughter insisted. Her three-year-old mind needed a concrete answer.

By age four, children begin to have what I call ‘beginning and end questions.’ They want to know “Where did I (or do babies) come from?” and “Where do people (or animals) go when they die?” Children this age begin to grapple with the idea that there is something beyond this life. Often parents respond to a child’s questions about where the child came from with “mommy’s tummy” or “the hospital.” But these answers generally do not satisfy the preschool child who then wants to know “How did I get there?” To which an eventual response of “God made you,” frequently elicits another question; “Who made God?”

Interestingly, as parents, we do not have to teach our young children faith; we only have to teach them who or what to put their faith in. Small children have faith. They believe what adults tell them. Preschoolers understand that there is a power that is greater than us. I think that’s why Jesus said “anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Young children do not wrestle with questions like “Is there really a God?” This type of thinking only comes in later childhood when the brain is able to reason abstractly.

I encourage parents to teach their children about God from the cradle. It’s never too early to begin teaching your child about God. Stories of God can be taught right alongside words, shapes, letters, and numbers. Here are four easy ways you can introduce your young children to God:

1. Read simple Bible stories from age-appropriate books.
2. Sing children’s songs about God to your child. Good children’s songs about God include *Jesus Loves Me* and *God is so Good*.
3. Say simple prayers with your child before bed or meals. A short prayer like “Dear God, thank you for my food. Amen,” is easy for young children to hear and repeat.
4. With older preschoolers, watch movies with Bible stories in their theme. Movies like *VeggieTales™ Jonah* or *Esther* are fun and teach young children Bible stories and lessons.

It's okay if you do not have the answers to all of your child's questions about God. Tell your child what you do know. I ended up telling my daughter that we don't know what Jesus looked like because he lived before there were cameras, so no one has a picture of him.

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Sarah Bolme, MSW is an author and mother of two children. She and her husband, Edward, are the co-creators of *Baby Bible Board Books™ Collection #1: Stories of Jesus*; a set of four board books for infants and toddlers. © 2006