



Biblical & Theological Conversations with Children

At its most basic meaning, theology is simply conversation about the intersection of God, humanity, and creation. When we think about, talk about, wrestle with who God is, who we are, and the significance of God's relationship to the universe and all that is within it, we are doing theology. People of faith are inherently theologians. Some are professional with theological degrees from seminaries and universities. Some are parents with children in the backseats of cars asking questions that may not have entered our consciousness. Some are the very children whose eyes light up with the wonder of all that is around them. All are faithful disciples wondering, as the Psalmist does in 8:3-4, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are humans that you are mindful of them, [humans] that you care for them?"

So, how do we engage in theological conversation with children, whether we are the driver of the car, the bedtime prayer partner, or the leader of a church gathering with young disciples? We begin with the acknowledgement that no one has all the answers. This is God we are talking about - the Infinite One who is beyond the finite limitations of human constructs. However, definitive answers are not necessarily the goal of fostering theological conversations with children.

It is the conversation itself that matters most –

- creating space for children to wonder and ask questions about God,
- encouraging their innate curiosity about the Divine,
- nurturing their awareness of God's presence all around them,
- integrating "faith talk" into everyday conversations so that connections are made naturally,
- embodying a commitment to partner with them as together we explore what the Bible, our tradition, our minds, and experience say about the questions posed, and
- cultivating reliable and trustworthy relationships with pastors, educators, and wise faithful disciples from our community of faith.

When talking with children about Biblical and theological concepts, the key is making it relevant and relatable to their lives. In teaching, presenting, or explaining ideas, use examples from children's own experience that helps them connect. Break down complex Biblical and theological concepts into smaller pieces and build from one aspect to another. Use vocabulary that is age-appropriate, clear, and "gettable." We do not have to use big, fancy, words to talk faith.

However, building and expanding the language of faith for children is important. Words like grace, love, mercy, justice, joy, disciples, and faithful are foundational to life-long discipleship. Employ questions. Some may be rhetorical and others make space for answers. When asking questions, take each child's answer as seriously as they give it. Some children will give silly answers to get a quick laugh. Respect the children without encouraging that behavior and redirect the conversation. Be aware of time limitations and if there are more hands raised than time allows, invite them to tell you their answer or comment at a specified later time. Honoring their thoughts and contributions to the conversation builds trust and confidence.

As we create space and walk with children through deeper understanding, it is vital that we keep in mind two prime directives (think Star Trek's Prime Directive "to go where no one has gone before") for interpreting texts (Biblical or theological) and discerning meaning: The Rule of Love and the Rule of Faith. The Rule of Love means our explanation must be consistent with Jesus's command to love God and love neighbor. Any definition or message that does not demonstrate these two priorities, is inconsistent with the very essence of who God is. The Rule of Faith asks the question, Does this interpretation align with our/your tradition's teachings and beliefs? These two simple "Rules" can serve as a guide and a source of confidence as we engage children in Biblical and theological conversations. Having a resource like Donald McKim's *Presbyterian Beliefs: A Brief Introduction*, revised edition, [ISBN# 978-0664263270,] or a similar one consistent with your own tradition, will be an invaluable partner. Just remember to translate it into language that is accessible and understandable for children.