

# **Children need parents to listen carefully to their questions about God, experts advise\_30804**

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## **Children need parents to listen carefully to their questions about God, experts advise**

**By John Hall**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

Children can begin to understand God if parents and churches will help them grasp him, according to ministry leaders.

Children and preschoolers struggle to comprehend many abstract aspects of God-his ability to know all, do all and be everywhere at once-because their minds can understand only concrete characteristics they have experienced, according to Catherine Stonehouse, professor of Christian education at Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, Ky.

Parents and church leaders must actively try to make abstract concepts about God more concrete for children, Stonehouse said. For example, a

parent who cares for his child helps the young one begin to understand how God cares.

Caring can be modeled in congregations, as well, Stonehouse said. Children need to be included in the larger church family to model love.

“As a child grows and comes to understand God, the most important thing they know is God's unconditional love,” Stonehouse said. “Those that most easily understand that are those who experience love.”

Bible stories play an important role in helping maturing children understand God, agreed Stonehouse and Diane Lane, preschool/children's consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas Bible Study/Discipleship Center. Young children who are learning to read still do not understand abstract concepts but can comprehend ideas in stories.

However, children reading stories or hearing someone read them is not enough, Lane and Stonehouse said. Adults need to discuss the story with them to make sure children understand the lesson. Activities such as dressing up and acting out biblical stories also help children understand lessons, Lane said.

Discussion of the story helps children internalize biblical lessons and prevents them from misinterpreting Scripture, the specialists commented. Memorizing and rewriting verses can help children learn about God.

“If they never open (the Bible) up, they won't be able to see there are spiritual truths that they can apply to their lives,” Lane said.

Adults should expect children to ask questions, Stonehouse and Lane said. Children may be aware of a “great other” as early as 18 months, Stonehouse noted. They are curious about what God is like and how the world works.

Questions will range from asking where the wind comes from to what will happen when they die, Stonehouse said. Parents must be prepared to give biblical responses and honestly admit when they do not know an answer. Parents and children can find answers together.

Typically, children's questions are not as deep as they come across, Stonehouse cautioned. Listening carefully and knowing the child can help adults provide helpful information.

“We need to find out what the child is asking,” Stonehouse said. “Often we go off on some deep theological tangent.”

In addition to dealing with specific questions and needs, churches should intentionally recognize children's accomplishments, Lane encouraged. Small actions such as displaying children's artwork and letting young people keep their baptism video and first Lord's Supper cup show children the church values them.

Churches need to prepare parents to answer their children's questions, Lane and Stonehouse agreed. They recommended congregations encourage parents to form small groups where they can help each other when issues arise.

“I think it's important for parents to realize they're not alone,” Stonehouse said. “If they desire to be a spiritually nurturing parent, God will work with them in beautiful ways.”

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