

# 7 Ways Your Kids Can Connect With God

BY CHRISTIE THOMAS



One day in the spring, as I drove my car, I told my 4-year-old son, “The grass was dead all winter, but now it’s coming back to life. Do you know someone who was dead but came back to life?” His answer, of course, was Jesus! We then had an interesting conversation about the resurrection and power of God—all because of green grass.

I wish this type of conversation would happen more often with my children. I tried starting a similar conversation with an older son, but had less success. One reason is that my kids have different spiritual temperaments, just as they have different bodies, personalities, interests and emotional dispositions. Their spiritual temperaments often affect how they learn about God.

Pastor and author Gary Thomas refers to these temperaments

as “sacred pathways.” Thomas notes that Christians all have different and acceptable ways of demonstrating their love for God. “Our temperaments will cause us to be more comfortable in some of these expressions than others—and that is perfectly acceptable to God,” Thomas writes in his book *Sacred Pathways*. “In fact, by worshiping God according to the way He made us, we are affirming His work as Creator.”

Some people find it easier to connect with God through their surroundings or routines, while others may prefer service or using their intellect. A child’s dominant spiritual pathway provides more potential points of connection with God. Although your child may have a combination of these seven temperaments, you’ll find that one or two of them may stand out a bit more than the others.

## The Traditionalist

Most children begin life with a need for routine. Traditionalists not only thrive in this environment, but as they grow, they continue needing structure in their faith. Consistent worship times, structured prayers and reliable and meaningful celebrations benefit these young children.

As traditionalists grow older, they may lean more toward another temperament, while still relying on the basic faith structure they’ve grown up with. Others will become more defined in their traditionalist temperament. They may create their own daily rituals or homework routines; these children thrive on consistency.

To incorporate faith-routines into their lives, create special celebrations for Advent, Lent and Pentecost—celebrations that may feel restrictive to non-traditionalists, but will bring life to someone of this temperament. These children also thrive when they pray at certain times of day or when their prayer times are based on external cues, such as a school bell.

### **Bible characters to check out:**

Abraham (built a lot of altars)

Esther (built up her courage to break a rule to save the Jews)

### **Bible passages to read together:** Colossians 3:16,

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

## The Naturalist

Some children may be wired to connect with God through nature. Just like some adults feel closest to God when on the top of a mountain or while fishing, many children feel closest to God while

enjoying His creation. They may understand spiritual metaphors better when they are related to the natural world. God uses nature—weeds, gardens, pets, clouds and people—to draw these children closer to Him.

In the case of the naturalist child, a parent will need to help him approach creation mindfully and with an ear bent toward the Creator. If your children are young, you can and should take the lead in pointing out how God’s creation draws us toward Him, similar to the conversation I had with my son. Eventually it will be a natural way for your child to connect with God. Otherwise, they may have a tendency to give nature credit for itself. Talking about nature as a creation of God is key to drawing the naturalist’s eyes to the Creator.

**Bible characters to check out:**

Elijah (a prophet who moved around a lot)

Deborah (judged Israel under a date palm tree rather than from a tent)

**Bible passage to read together:** Psalm 19:1-6

## The Sensate

Children, by nature, are incredibly responsive to sensory input. Some, however, are truly moved by it. In a similar way to the naturalist being moved to worship by natural surroundings, the sensate is moved to worship through the tickling of the senses: art, music, delicious food, intoxicating smells, new textures and dance. This may seem foreign in our culture of bare-walled churches, but heaven itself is often described as a beautiful, exuberant multitude of voices praising in every language (Revelation 15:4; 19:6-7).

To help sensory children connect in a meaningful way with God, proactively point out the aesthetic and tactile beauty of things that God made to arrive at teachable moments. You can ask her, “How does that smell/taste/music make you feel?” or “What does that reflect about faith/God?” If you don’t help them understand that God gave the world its aesthetic beauty through the arts, the culture may convince sensory children that beauty for the sake of beauty is important. Therefore, your short, teachable moments are key for the sensate.

**Bible characters to check out:**

David (and his many psalms)

Mary (sister to Lazarus)

**Bible passage to read together:** Ezekiel 1-3:15

## The Caregiver

I have a son who follows me around when we’re at home. He loves swishing toilets, making beds and baking, and is constantly looking for little ways to help. In fact, when he is told he can’t help with a certain task, he becomes upset. I have a suspicion that he will find it easier to develop a relationship with God while serving others. Not every child will enjoy serving food to the homeless. To a child like mine, it may feel like pure joy.

The temptation of a caregiver is the same struggle felt by Martha: She was so busy serving Jesus that she forgot to use that service as a way to get to know her Savior. It is fairly simple to expose a child to Christian service. It is another thing altogether to show him how to let his service draw him closer to Christ. When you talk about the child’s acts of service, have him consider which were done with a pure motive to bless others in Jesus’ name and which were done out of pride or feelings of righteousness. Finding the right motivation is key for this child.

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### **Bible characters to check out:**

- Lydia (a seller of purple cloth who showed hospitality to Paul)
- Stephen (supervised the care of widows and orphans in the early church)

**Bible passage to read together:** Matthew 25:31-46

## The Activist

Have you ever met a child who became incredibly upset over injustice? We've probably all seen news stories of children who latch onto a particular cause, dedicating their young lives to it. We may be tempted to shield our children from the evil in the world, to keep them in their safe bubble of family and school, but if we choose to ignore the world beyond us, an activist child will become completely overwhelmed by it when she discovers what is happening.

As a parent, your job is to allow your child to witness the ills of the world, in manageable and age-appropriate chunks, to help her develop God's passion for the downtrodden. Most activists won't need to be told to stand up for a cause. You will more likely need to hold her back to help her find balance, once she's recognized God's heartbeat. However, the temptation of any activist is to become proud in her stand against evil, forgetting her relationship with God. The role of the parent will be to help her seek God's will, wisdom and humility in her work, using her activism to draw closer to God's love and truth.

### **Bible characters to check out:**

- John the Baptist (prepared the way for Jesus)
- Shiphrah (one of the midwives who saved Israelite babies from Egyptians)

**Bible passage to read together:** Isaiah 58



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## The Intellectual

When I was a teenager, one of the first things I bought from the Christian bookstore was a concordance. My friend thought I was strange, but I had a deep need to understand God's Word better. Some children share my deep curiosity and find it easy to dive deep into topics that interest them. The topics may not appear to be "intellectual" as an adult sees them, though. In fact, it may look more like an obsession with dinosaurs or bacteria, but children who love to learn often connect with God in the same way.

As a parent, your job is to feed your child's intellectual fire with challenging material. It may be books that make him think deeper about faith, Bible studies that you do together or even buying him a concordance for his birthday. Many intellectuals also make excellent teachers because they love to share what they have learned. The temptation here is to become arrogant in knowledge and prideful in the treatment of others, exchanging the Tree of Life for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as Adam and Eve did. Parents can help children balance their growing body of knowledge by encouraging them to live out what they've learned in their relationship with God and toward others. If the intellectual pathway rings true for your child, consider partnering with him to teach a Sunday school class for younger children or allow him to teach younger siblings.

### **Bible characters to check out:**

- Ethiopian eunuch (accepted Jesus after Philip ran alongside his chariot)
- Priscilla (who opened her home to Paul and learned about Jesus from him)

**Bible passage to read together:** Acts 8:27-38

## The Enthusiast

As a child in the tabernacle, Samuel clearly heard the voice of God. He spent his life following direct orders from God and prophesying to the Israelites. His life was filled with the mystery of nighttime voices, direct revelation from God and even calling down thunderstorms in the name of God. To many, this sounds terrifying and impossible, but to our children with the enthusiast temperament, this type of relationship with God sounds incredible.

You may have a child who is enthusiastic about discerning God's voice and seeking His will. Parents with an enthusiast child will need to learn how to welcome their child's connection with God and help develop her discernment skills through biblical knowledge and understanding. Reinforce the truth that God will never contradict His Word. If your child believes she's sensing the prompting of the Holy Spirit, help her to search through the Bible to find a scriptural foundation that affirms God's perspective.

### **Bible characters to check out:**

- Samuel (the prophet)
- Anna (a prophetess)

**Bible passage to read together:** Ephesians 5:15-20



## All members of one body

Most Christian parents assume that our way of connecting with God is the way our children will or should connect with Him. But there is no one size fits all approach to faith. “God wants to know the real you, not a caricature of what somebody else wants you to be,” Gary Thomas notes. “He created you with a certain personality and a certain spiritual temperament. God wants your worship, according to the way He made you.”

An intellectual parent will tend toward deep Bible study with her children, while a caregiver will focus on finding family service projects and a naturalist will spend a lot of time out in nature with his children. If I am an extremely extroverted enthusiast, it might look odd to me if my introverted child would rather sit in quietness and contemplate God’s love or ponder a section of Scripture. I may feel that my child lacks faith, but the truth may be that my child connects with God in a different way than I do.

God, who delights in our differences, desires to draw each of us to Him. I can, and should, look for teachable moments, but these may look different for each child. As parents we should also consider helping our children find mentors who connect with God in the same way that they do, particularly if their spiritual temperament is the complete opposite of ours.

So what is our role as parents in our children’s personal connection to God? Our role is to open our eyes to the unique way God is communicating with our children. Then we can respond by finding ways to partner with Him to encourage their relationship with Jesus.

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