

Preparing Your Child to Profess Faith in Jesus

New Life Presbyterian Church
Escondido, California

Preparing Your Child to Profess Faith in Jesus

Dear Dad and Mom,

As elders of New Life Presbyterian Church, we are delighted that your child has expressed a desire to express his or her faith in Jesus and to participate with others in our congregation as we partake of the Lord's Supper each month. We are encouraged that your spiritual nurture in the home and the teaching that your child has received through the church have been used by God's Holy Spirit to enable him or her to express faith in Christ as Savior and Lord; and we rejoice with you that you have seen in your child's daily behavior a tenderness to God's Word and a responsiveness to your authority as parents.

Jesus told his followers, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). In fact, he even humbled his grown-up disciples by telling them, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3-4). Because salvation is the gift of God alone by grace alone, and is received by faith alone in Christ alone, there is no minimum age or educational level that people must attain before they are encouraged to confess their trust in Jesus.

At the same time, as elders and shepherds, we are responsible before the Lord to promote our members' spiritual well-being and the honor of Christ's name. Included in this responsibility is our obligation to do what we can to ensure that each individual, including each child, who publicly professes faith and participates in the Lord's Supper *understands what it means* to believe in Christ. Our elders interview prospective members as teams of two, normally meeting with the prospective members in one of the pastors' offices during our Sunday school hour between the morning worship services. For younger children we encourage a parent to accompany them, to help them be at ease in their meeting with the elders. Sometimes, we realize, it is hard for young children to put what they believe into words, especially if they are nervous about meeting with men whom they may have seen only at a distance at New Life before the interview. Our elders will gently try to put your child at ease, and we believe that your presence will help him or her to relax and share with us what Jesus means to

him or her. At the same time, since our aim is to discern as much as possible where your child's heart and faith rest, we will mainly want to hear your child's responses to our simple questions (without coaching from you, unless the elders ask you to help your child to understand the question or to reassure your child). We are parents, too, and so we understand that it is easy to jump in and coach your child or even answer for him or her. But we respectfully ask you to resist that natural parental temptation!

As you know, on the first Sunday of every month we observe the Lord's Supper and, in most months, we also receive new "communicant" members by their profession or reaffirmation of faith. You have heard the questions that Pastor Ted asks each prospective member to affirm. These are:

1. Do you believe that the Bible is God's Word, and that in it he has told us the only way that we can enjoy his favor and be with him in heaven?
2. Do you believe that you have sinned by disobeying God in what you think, say, and do?
3. Do you believe that you cannot save yourself from God's judgment by trying to do or be good?
4. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man for our salvation?
5. Do you believe that Jesus lived the obedient life that you should have lived; that he died on the cross to suffer the punishment that your sin deserves; and that he rose from the dead?
6. Do you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, believing that only through him can your sins be forgiven and can you enjoy eternal life with God?
7. In gratitude for God's grace and reliance on God's Holy Spirit, will you try to please and honor your Lord and Savior by loving and serving him and other people, as he instructs us in the Bible?
8. Do you promise to worship regularly with the other members of this church, to love and pray for them, to serve them with the

abilities that the Lord gives you, and to make offerings to support the church's mission and ministries?

9. Do you promise to respect the elders, to submit to them as they care for you according to God's Word, to pray for them, and to do what you can to promote the purity and unity of Christ's church?

Over the years we have revised the membership questions suggested in the Presbyterian Church in America's *Book of Church Order*, in order to make their meaning clearer especially for younger covenant children who are spiritually ready to profess their faith and begin participating in the Lord's Supper. The resulting nine questions capture what we believe to be the heart of a sincere and informed profession of faith in Christ (questions 1-6) and a sincere and informed vow to put that faith into practice in obedience to God's commands and commitment to each other as members of Christ's church (questions 7-9).

In membership interviews, the elders' main concern is to discern whether individuals (whether children or adults) have a basic understanding of the seriousness of sin and their need of a Savior, the identity of Christ, the saving work of Christ as our substitute, and the importance of relying on Jesus by faith rather than depending on our own good deeds for assurance of God's favor. We also see the interview as an opportunity to explain that the grace that we receive through partaking of the Lord's Supper is the same grace that we receive through the preaching of the Word, and that we receive it in the same way: by trusting in the promises of God (not merely by ingesting the bread and wine/juice). We try to frame our questions in a way that is appropriate to the age and level of understanding for the person we are interviewing. We don't expect a younger child in early elementary school grades to show as much comprehension or ability to express convictions as we anticipate observing in older children, adolescents, and adults. If your child is in the younger age group, please do not let the guidelines below intimidate you, or him or her! As elders we are listening simply for a believable profession of faith in Jesus for *salvation*—one that displays a sense of sorrow for sin, a fundamental grasp of who Jesus is and what he has done to save us, and a

personal trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

It will be helpful to your child if you talk through each of these questions with him or her before his or her interview with the two elders. You know your child best and will no doubt be able to find concrete examples from your daily life as a family to illustrate the meaning and importance of each of the issues raised in these questions. As resources for your conversation(s) with your child, we have included some Scripture passages, summaries of the Bible's teaching from the *First Catechism*¹ (FC) and the *Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English*² (WSC), and some sample "talking points." Presbyterian churches and those in other Christian traditions have historically encouraged the use of catechisms (combining memorization and explanation) to provide a balanced and thorough exposure to the central truths revealed in the Bible; but we are *not* expecting you to "drill" your child on the wording of these catechism answers in preparation for his or her interview. We think it is better to hear responses in your child's own words rather than "canned" catechism answers. So please approach the catechisms *simply as resources* that you may find helpful in discussing the gospel and its implications with your child.

1 *First Catechism: Teaching Children Bible Truths* (based on the *Catechism for Young Children: An Introduction to the Shorter Catechism*) (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 2003).

2 Douglas Kelly and Philip Rollinson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English* (revised from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 1646) (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1986).

1. Do you believe that the Bible is God's Word, and that in it he has told us the only way that we can enjoy his favor and be with him in heaven?

The first question focuses on your child's relationship to the Bible. Does he or she believe that it is the Word of God, who created us and owns us as his creatures, so he always has the right to command what we think, say, and do? Does he or she recognize that in the Bible, God is speaking as the Lord who is true and who always speaks truth, so he always has the right for us to believe what he reveals in the Bible about himself and his universe; about ourselves; about the past, the present, and the future; and about the only way that we can enjoy his favor and be with him in heaven?

Resources

Scriptures: 2 Timothy 3:14-16; Psalm 119:9-11

FC 14 Where do you learn how to love and obey God? *In the Bible alone.*

15 Who wrote the Bible? *Chosen men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit.*

WSC 2 What authority from God directs us how to glorify and enjoy him? *The only authority for glorifying and enjoying Him is the Bible, which is the word of God and is made up of the Old and New Testaments.*

3 What does the Bible primarily teach? *The Bible primarily teaches what man must believe about God and what God requires of man.*

Talking Points

- How do you know that Mommy and Daddy love you?
- How do you know that God loves you?
- How do you know what Mommy and Daddy want you to do, or not to do?
- How do you know what God wants you to do, or not to do?

do?

- If someone were to tell you that the Bible has mistakes in it, would you believe that person?

2. Do you believe that you have sinned by disobeying God in what you think, say, and do?

This question invites your child to admit his or her need of a savior from sin. In order to understand what it means to trust in Jesus to save us, we must understand, at least at some depth, that we need to be saved, and what we need to be saved from. That means that your child must recognize that he or she has broken God’s commands and deserves God’s disapproval and punishment. He or she needs to know that “sin” is not just a matter of outward actions and words—of doing and saying the wrong thing. Even more seriously, “sin” concerns matters of the heart—of loving and wanting and thinking about the wrong things. Throughout our lives we will discover deeper and deeper “layers” of sin and unbelief in our hearts, like peeling an onion, and as we realize more fully how much we need Christ’s grace we will find out even more of how amazing that grace really is. As you “shepherd your child’s heart”³ on a daily basis, you will want to help him or her to learn that we need Jesus to cleanse our consciences from wrong thoughts, wrong words, and wrong actions. Young children think in very concrete terms, so in your “talking points” you will want to help them recall and recognize specific situations in which they have sinned—and not only in outward actions or words, but also in attitude.

Resources

Scriptures: Exodus 20:1-17 (the Ten Commandments); 1 John 3:4; John 14:23-24

FC 29 What is sin? *Sin is any lack of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God.*

30 What is meant by lack of conformity? *Not being or doing what God requires.*

31 What is meant by transgression? *Doing what God forbids.*

³ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* (Shepherd Press, 1995). The elders recommend this book for parents who are looking for resources to help them with raising children generally.

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32 What does every sin deserve? *The wrath and curse of God.*

WSC 14 What is sin? *Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law in any way.*

82 Can anyone perfectly keep the commandments of God? *Since the fall no ordinary man can perfectly keep the commandments of God in this life but breaks them every day in thought, word, and action.*

Talking Points

- Can you think of a time when you did not obey God in something you did? Do you remember when you (hit your brother, didn't come when we called you, etc.) after we told you not to?
- Can you think of a time when you did not obey God in something you said? Do you remember when you (lied about X, called your sister Y when she would not share with you, etc.)?
- Can you think of a time when you did not obey God in something you thought? Do you remember when we said you could not (have ice cream, stay up late, keep the toy you grabbed from another child, etc.) and you (cried, yelled, sulked, stomped away, threw the toy, etc.)? What were you thinking and feeling then? As God always knows your heart, was he pleased with what you were thinking?

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3. Do you believe that you cannot save yourself from God's judgment by trying to do or be good?

This question makes clear that we cannot simply "fix" what we have broken when we break God's commandments by trying to offset the harm we have caused by doing good deeds, resolving to do better next time, or in any other way in which we may try to "save ourselves" through our own efforts, rather than shifting the weight of our trust and dependence from ourselves to Christ. In his sermon, "The Method of Grace," 18th-century evangelist George Whitefield observed that when Adam and Eve tried to cover their nakedness and shame with fig leaves, they were doing what we all instinctively try to do: to hide our guilt "by trying to do or be good." True repentance, which leads to salvation, is more than feeling sad that we have disobeyed God and hurt other people; it also means that we will try, as much as we can, to reverse or "undo" the harmful effects of our sin and that we will take effort to avoid repeating our sin. *But we cannot rely on our efforts to turn over a new leaf to save us.* Only Jesus can completely erase the record of our sin, give us his holy record of perfect obedience, and change our desires.

Resources

Scriptures: Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 7:7-8:4

FC 35 How did Adam and Eve change when they sinned? *Instead of being holy and happy, they became sinful and miserable.*

37 What effect did the sin of Adam have on you and all people? *We are all born guilty and sinful.*

38 How sinful are you by nature? *I am corrupt in every part of my being.*

40 Can anyone go to heaven with this sinful nature? *No. Our hearts must be changed before we can believe in Jesus and go to heaven.*

107 Can you keep the Ten Commandments perfectly? *No. Since the fall of Adam, the only One who has been*

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able to do this is Jesus.

108 Of what use are the Ten Commandments to you? *They teach me what is pleasing to God, and how much I need a Savior.*

WSC 82 Can anyone perfectly keep the commandments of God? *Since the fall no ordinary man can perfectly keep the commandments of God in this life but breaks them every day in thought, word, and action.*

Talking Points

- Imagine that you carelessly broke a glass vase, felt sorry about it and asked for forgiveness, promised to be careful in the future, and kept your promise so you never broke another vase. If you were able to do and be good (not breaking any more vases) from then on, would that “fix” the vase you had already broken? If you were ever able to stop breaking God’s commandments, would your good conduct in the future make your disobedience in the past just disappear?
- Have you ever promised never again to disobey us or God’s Word in a particular way (forgetting to put away toys, or getting angry at your sister, or playing with your food, etc.), but then later you disobeyed in the same way all over again? Why do you think we all (Mom and Dad too) have trouble keeping our promises to try to do and be better?

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4. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man for our salvation?

Since God is infinite and we are limited creatures, it is not surprising no human being can completely comprehend some of the mysteries revealed in God’s Word, such as the Trinity (the *one* true God is three Persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and the Person of Jesus Christ (who, since his conception in Mary’s womb and forever, is fully God and fully man). Although neither you nor your child (nor the wisest theologian) can explain how One God is three or how the man Jesus is also God Almighty, the Bible teaches these truths and they are essential to our salvation, so the church rightly confesses them. This question focuses on who Jesus is, and the next focuses on what he has done to provide for our salvation from sin and its punishment. In our time, when many spiritual movements deny or ignore the truth that God the Creator is distinct from all of his creatures (often alleging that there is a little spark of divinity in everyone), it is important that our children understand that Jesus is absolutely unique, one-of-a-kind: the only man who was or ever will be also God the Creator. This question also mentions the *purpose* for which the Son of God became man, echoing the Nicene Creed: “We believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God...who for us and *for our salvation* came down from heaven...and was made man; and was crucified *also for us* under Pontius Pilate....”

Resources

Scriptures: John 1:1-14; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:14-15; Romans 5:6-8

FC 50 How could Christ suffer? *Christ, the Son of God, became a man so that he could obey and suffer in our place.*

WSC 21 Who is the redeemer of God’s chosen ones? *The only redeemer of God’s chosen ones is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who became man. He was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.*

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22 How did Christ, the Son of God, become man?
Christ, the Son of God, became man by assuming a real body and a reasoning soul. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to him; yet he was sinless.

Talking Points

- What are some ways that God is different from us human beings? (He knows everything past, present, and future; can do everything he chooses to do; is everywhere at the same time even though we don't see him; is so wise that he never makes a mistake; is so truthful that he never tells a lie; is so holy that he never does anything bad.)
- What are some ways that the Bible shows us that Jesus was and is God?
- What are some ways that the Bible shows us that Jesus was a human being like us? (He had a body, got hungry and thirsty and tired, could be hurt and killed, etc.)
- How was Jesus different from us? (our sin)
- Why did the Son of God, Jesus Christ, become a human being? How does this show you how much God loves you?

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5. **Do you believe that Jesus lived the obedient life that you should have lived; that he died on the cross to suffer the punishment that your sin deserves; and that he rose from the dead?**

Many presentations of the good news (gospel) concerning Jesus' saving work for us focus on his *sacrificial death* on the cross, and this is very appropriate. But the perfect, *obedient life* that Jesus lived on earth *before* his crucifixion and his *bodily resurrection* from the dead afterwards are also central to the gospel. It is important for your child to understand, at least at a simple level, all three of these aspects of Jesus' work to rescue us from our sin, its guilt, and its punishment. In his death, Jesus took upon himself the guilt of our sin, and so cleansed our consciences and erased our record of disobedience. And in his life, he also kept all of God's commands in our place, so that he could give us his perfect record of obedience pleasing to God the Father. His resurrection from the dead is the way that God showed that Jesus' obedience was perfect and pleasing, and that his death as our sacrifice was completely sufficient to remove our guilt and condemnation.

Resources

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Romans 4:23-25; 5:12-21

FC 48 How did Christ fulfill the covenant of grace? *Christ obeyed the whole law for his people, and then suffered the punishment due for their sins.*

49 Did Jesus ever sin? *No. He lived a sinless life.*

51 For whom did Christ obey and suffer? *For all whom God the Father gave to Christ.*

52 What kind of life did Christ live on earth? *A life of obedience, service, and suffering.*

53 What is meant by the atonement? *Christ satisfied God's justice by his suffering and death as a substitute for sinners.*

141 Did Christ remain in the grave after his crucifixion? *No. He rose bodily from the grave on the third day*

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after his death.

WSC 25 How is Christ a priest? *As a priest, Christ offered himself up once as a sacrifice for us to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God, and he continually intercedes for us.*

27 How was Christ humiliated? *Christ was humiliated by being born as a man, and born into a poor family; by being made subject to the law and suffering the miseries of this life, the anger of God, and the curse of death on the cross; and by being buried and remaining under the power of death for a time.*

28 How is Christ exalted? *Christ is exalted by his rising from the dead on the third day, his going up into heaven, his sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and his coming to judge the world at the last day.*

33 What is justification? *Justification is the act of God's free grace by which he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight. He does so only because he counts the righteousness of Christ as ours. Justification is received by faith alone.*

Talking Points

- Since we deserve God's anger and punishment by death for disobeying God's commands, why is it good news that Jesus died for us on the cross?
- If you threw a rock through your neighbor's window, but then your dad paid to have the window replaced, how is that like Jesus suffering in our place on the cross? Why is Jesus' taking your place and punishment so much greater than Dad paying for the neighbor's window?
- Why is it good news that Jesus kept God's commandments perfectly for us, and that God gives us credit for Jesus' perfect obedience?
- Think about the neighbor's broken window or your mom's

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broken glass vase: would it be better to try to glue the broken pieces back together, or to have someone give a whole new unbroken window or vase? How is Jesus' obeying God's commands like the gift of a new, unbroken window or vase?

6. Do you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, believing that only through him can your sins be forgiven and can you enjoy eternal life with God?

This question builds on questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 by inviting your child to *express his or her response* to the biblical truths of our sin, our inability to save ourselves, the identity of Christ the savior, and the saving work that he completed for us. *Understanding* with our *minds* these truths, at least at a basic level, is a vital component of saving faith. But simply *understanding* truths is only part of real faith. Agreeing that a chair is strong enough to bear your weight is not the same as sitting in that chair, resting and relying on its strength to keep you from falling on the floor. As James pointed out, sometimes even evil spirits believe truths revealed in the Bible, but they do not respond to those truths as they should: “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (James 2:19). “Trusting” in Jesus means that: (a) we no longer imagine that we can make God smile on us through trying to behave better, to make up for our past disobedience; but instead (b) we rely on Jesus’ perfect obedience and sacrifice as the basis of God’s favor toward us; and so (c) we rest our hearts in God’s promise that he will love us forever because we are depending on his beloved Son Jesus.

Resources

Scriptures: Acts 16:30-34; Galatians 2:15-16; John 6:35-40 (Jesus compares believing in him to eating and drinking—consuming the food and liquids that our bodies depend on)

FC 58 What must you do to be saved? *I must repent of my sin and believe in Christ as my Savior.*

59 How do you repent of your sin? *I must be sorry for my sin, and hate and forsake it.*

61 What does it mean to believe in Christ? *To trust Christ alone for my salvation.*

62 Can you repent and believe in Christ by your own power? *No. I cannot repent and believe unless the Holy*

Spirit changes my heart.

63 How can you get the help of the Holy Spirit? *God has told us to pray for the Holy Spirit’s help.*

WSC 86 What is faith in Jesus Christ? *Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, by which we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.*

87 What is repentance unto life? *Repentance unto life is a saving grace, by which a sinner, being truly aware of his sinfulness, understands the mercy of God in Christ, grieves for and hates his sins, and turns from them to God, fully intending and striving for a new obedience.*

Talking Points

- When you disobey us and we discipline you, how do you feel?
- When you are really sorry for disobeying us, how can you show us that you are sorry?
- When we forgive you, how can you tell that we have forgiven you? How do you feel?
- When we have disobeyed God, what should we do to receive his forgiveness?
- How can we know that God has forgiven us and welcomed us as his children because of what Jesus has done for us?
- If you are trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, how will your friendship with Jesus affect what you think and say and do?

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7. In gratitude for God's grace and reliance on God's Holy Spirit, will you try to please and honor your Lord and Savior by loving and serving him and other people, as he instructs us in the Bible?

Because saving faith is not just agreeing with certain ideas but trusting in the Person of Jesus, real faith will also bring with it a response of thankfulness to Jesus for his sacrifice for us, love for him, and a desire to express our thanks and love by thinking, saying, and doing things that will please him. This question gives your child an opportunity to express that *desire to please God through obedience and service*—not trying to earn God's approval or forgiveness, but now *responding to* the forgiveness that *he has already given* to us by demonstrating love for our Savior by loving others in the ways he instructs us in the Bible. His commandments, which have shown us that we could not erase our sins by trying to do or be good, now offer us positive help as they guide our response of grateful obedience, showing us the sort of thoughts, words, and actions that bring delight to God our Father and Jesus our gracious Redeemer.

Resources

Scriptures: Ephesians 2:8-10 (though we are not saved *as a result of* our works, we are saved *for* good works which God has prepared for us to do); Galatians 5:13-26; 1 John 3:16-18; 4:7-12

FC 108 Of what use are the Ten Commandments to you? *They teach me what is pleasing to God, and how much I need a Savior.*

77 Why should we obey the Ten Commandments? *Because God is our Creator, Savior, and King.*

78 What do the first four commandments teach? *What it means to love and serve God.*

79 What do the last six commandments teach? *What it means to love and serve my neighbor.*

80 What do the Ten Commandments teach? *To love*

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God with all my heart, and my neighbor as myself.

81 Who is my neighbor? *Everybody is my neighbor.*

WSC 35 What is sanctification? *Sanctification is the work of God's free grace by which our whole person is made new in the image of God, and we are made more and more able to become dead to sin and alive to righteousness.*

42 What is the essence of the Ten Commandments? *The essence of the Ten Commandments is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and to love everyone else as we love ourselves.*

87 What is repentance unto life? *Repentance unto life is a saving grace, by which a sinner, being truly aware of his sinfulness, understands the mercy of God in Christ, grieves for and hates his sins, and turns from them to God, fully intending and striving for a new obedience.*

Talking Points

- When you give Mom or Dad a birthday present, is it because you hope that maybe we will let you stay in our house (and give you food and clothes) rather than locking you out on the sidewalk? No? If we already give you so many things in our love for you, why give us presents at all?
- Since God *has already given* us forgiveness and his approval because we are trusting in Jesus, what makes us want to love and obey and serve him?
- What does John 14:15 teach us about ways that we can show Jesus that we love him?
- What does Matthew 25:34-40 show us about ways that we can show Jesus that we love him?
- What are some ways that you have shown Jesus that you are thankful to him and love him in the last month?

8. Do you promise to worship regularly with the other members of this church, to love and pray for them, to serve them with the abilities that the Lord gives you, and to make offerings to support the church's mission and ministries?

Questions 8 and 9 help your child to understand that our trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior (question 6) and our commitment to express our grateful love to him in obedience (question 7) bring us into a larger family, a community of people who trust, love, and serve Christ and who love and serve one another: the church. Every member of Christ's church receives abilities from the Holy Spirit that can be used in love to help others grow in faith, to comfort and encourage others, and to help the church pursue the mission that Christ has given us together. At New Life, we sum up this mission as: "celebrating life in Christ" (worship), "cultivating growth in Christ" (teaching, counseling, encouraging, praying for each other), and "communicating Christ to the culture" (witness, missions, and other gospel outreach).

As you discuss with your child what we do in the worship service, you will want to explain that every Christian should actively worship God throughout the service, not only when we are singing or saying a creed or praying the Lord's Prayer or partaking of the Lord's Supper, but also as we listen to the prayers that our pastors, elders, and interns offer (and make those requests our own prayers to God), and as we listen to the sermon which explains and applies God's Word to us (and ask the Lord how he wants us to respond to his Word).

This is also an opportunity to explain that Jesus established two sacraments for us in the New Testament—baptism and the Lord's Supper—and what each sacrament means. Try to help your child to understand that *Jesus is really present* with us by his Holy Spirit as we participate in the Lord's Supper, but that the bread and the wine (grape juice) do not *become* Jesus' body and blood. Also explain that God gives us grace through the Lord's Supper by using the bread and the cup to strengthen *our faith* in Jesus, as we have heard about him and his saving work in the sermon. (It is not by chewing the bread and swallowing the wine that we receive God's blessing, but by believing in the Savior that the bread and the wine represent.) You might want to use your wedding ring as an illustration: the ring

is not Mommy's and Daddy's love for each other, and it is not the promises they made the day they got married. But the rings are what Dad gave to Mom, and Mom to Dad, to be a constant picture and reminder of their promises and love. It is also important for them to understand that when the pastor urges us to "examine ourselves" before we eat of the bread and drink of the cup, that does not mean that we need to be "good enough" in the week (or month) before in order to be worthy to partake of the Supper. Rather, we eat and drink because we know that we have sinned, but we trust in Jesus' death to provide God's forgiveness of our sins; and we want to receive more of his Holy Spirit's power to obey, so that we will not sin so much in the future. If we know that we have sinned, we should repent, ask for forgiveness from the Lord (and any people that we have hurt by our sin), and ask the Lord to help us not repeat that sin in the future... and then we should eat and drink in humble faith that Jesus' blood has taken away our guilt.

With respect to the privilege and responsibility that all believers have to serve one another in love, young children may not be able to discern the particular abilities/gifts to serve that the Holy Spirit has given them. Older children and youth can and should be shown ways that they can serve others in the church, as well as at home and school. For both children and adults, our spiritual gifts become evident as we get involved in serving and caring for others. In your family life your example will encourage your children to participate in worship, to pray for other members of the church, to serve as they are able, and to bring even small offerings to express their thanks for the Lord's provision.

Resources

Scriptures: Acts 2:38-39, 42-47; Romans 12:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-29; 12:4-26; Hebrews 10:23-25

FC 94 How should you keep the Lord's Day? *I should rest from my daily work and faithfully worship God.*

129 Why did Christ appoint the sacraments? *To distinguish his people from the world, and to comfort and*

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strengthen them.

130 What sign is used in baptism? *Washing with water.*

131 What does this washing with water represent? *That we are united to Christ and cleansed from sin by his blood.*

132 Into whose name are we baptize? *Into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

133 Who are to be baptized? *Believers and their children.*

134 Why are we baptized even as little infants? *Because God includes the children of believers in his covenant and marks them in baptism.*

136 What does baptism call you to be? *A true follower of Christ.*

137 What sign is used in the Lord's Supper? *Eating bread and drinking wine to remember the suffering and death of Jesus.*

138 What does the bread represent? *Christ's body sacrificed for our sins.*

139 What does the wine represent? *Christ's blood shed for our sins.*

140 Who may rightly partake of the Lord's Supper? *Those who repent of their sins, trust in Christ, live a godly life, and profess their faith before the Church.*

WSC 88 What are the ordinary, external ways Christ uses to bring us the benefits of redemption? *The ordinary, external ways Christ uses to bring us the benefits of redemption are his regulations, particularly the word, sacraments, and prayer, all of which are made effective for the salvation of his chosen ones.*

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89 What makes the word effective for salvation?

The Spirit of God causes the reading and especially the preaching of the word to convince and convert sinners and to build them up in holiness and comfort through faith to salvation.

90 How is the word to be read and heard in order to become effective for salvation? *For the word to become effective for salvation, we must pay careful attention to it, prepare ourselves, and pray for understanding. We must also receive it with faith and love, treasure it in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.*

91 How do the sacraments become effective means of salvation? *The sacraments become effective means of salvation, not because of any special power in them or in the people who administer them, but rather by the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit in those who receive them by faith.*

94 What is baptism? *The sacrament of baptism is a washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which is a sign and seal that we are joined to Christ, that we receive the benefits of the covenant of grace, and that we are engaged to be the Lord's.*

95 Who should be baptized? *Those who are not members of churches should not be baptized until they have publicly stated that they believe in Christ and will obey him, but the infant children of church members should be baptized.*

96 What is the Lord's Supper? *The Lord's Supper is a sacrament in which bread and wine are given and received as Christ directed to proclaim his death. Those who receive the Lord's Supper in the right way share in his body and blood with all his benefits, not merely physically but by faith, and become spiritually stronger and grow in grace.*

97 What is the right way to receive the Lord's Supper?
The right way to receive the Lord's Supper is to examine whether we discern the Lord's body, whether our faith feeds on him, and whether we have repentance, love, and a new obedience—so that we may not come in the wrong way and eat and drink judgment on ourselves.

Talking Points

- What kinds of things do we all do together in the morning worship service? Which parts of the service do you like best, and why?
- When we sing songs in worship, who are we singing to? (to the Lord, but also we are encouraging each other, Ephesians 5:18-20)
- When the elders lead us in prayer and the pastors preach, what should we be doing?
- Why does the pastor ask us to stand when he reads the Bible? The pastor is the reader, but who is the real Speaker when the Bible is read aloud to us?
- How will you prepare your heart to receive the Lord's Supper with other believers in Jesus?
- How do you show love to the children in your Sunday school class, or to the grown-ups when we are at church?
- (If you give your child an allowance or other "spending money") Do you gladly bring some of your money as an offering to help our church tell more people about Jesus?

9. Do you promise to respect the elders, to submit to them as they care for you according to God's Word, to pray for them, and to do what you can to promote the purity and unity of Christ's church?

You have taught your child that the Lord commands him or her (in the fifth of the Ten Commandments and elsewhere in the Bible) to obey and honor you as the parents whom the Lord has provided to direct, protect, and provide for him or her. The same principle of trust in and humble submission to human authorities appointed by God that applies to the family also applies to God's church. So the final question invites your child to acknowledge the elders of our congregation as those who have oversight over his or her spiritual wellbeing, partnering with you parents in promoting your child's trust in Christ and glad obedience to him. In our interviews with children, we emphasize that the church's elders are not in competition with their parents but are partners with Dad and Mom to help children grow more like Jesus. In our interviews we elders also stress that we ourselves always seek to be subject to the Bible in how we guide our members, and that before the Lord we are accountable to each other and to the wider circle of elders and pastors in our denomination, at the regional (presbytery) level and the national (general assembly) level. The Catechisms that we have been citing have little to say specifically about the leaders that Jesus has appointed for his church. Our Presbyterian Church in America Book of Church Order sums up the responsibilities of elders (including pastors) in this way:

8-3. It belongs to those in the office of elder, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to his charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto. They should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the Church. They should set a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize the unconverted and make

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disciples. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock.

This is a challenging list of responsibilities, and your child will *not* be “quizzed” on all the duties that the elders are supposed to fulfill. The important thing is that you help your child to understand that he or she will keep the promise expressed in this question by being respectful, receptive, and obedient to your parental leadership in the home; by participating with you in praying regularly for our pastors and elders; by respecting Sunday school teachers and showing love and honor to other children and adults at church; and by listening and submitting to the elders as we teach, guide, and counsel them.

Resources

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18; Hebrews 13:17; Ephesians 6:19-20; Acts 20:28-31

FC 96 What does the fifth commandment teach you? *To love and obey my parents and all others that God appoints over me.*

WSC 64 What does the fifth commandment require? *The fifth commandment requires us to respect and treat others, whether above, below, or equal to us, as their position or our relationship to them demands.*

65 What does the fifth commandment forbid? *The fifth commandment forbids being disrespectful or not treating others as their position or relationship to us demands.*

Talking Points

- Who are some of our elders and pastors? Do you know any of their names? (If not) Can you describe what they look like, or whose dad or grandpa they are?

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- Why does God give us elders and pastors in the church?
- How can you pray for our elders and pastors? What kind of help do they need God to give them so that they can be good shepherds to us and the other members of our church?
- Are there any children (or grown-ups) at New Life that you are not getting along with? Can Mom or Dad, or a Sunday school teacher, or one of our pastors and elders help you become better friends with that person?

We are looking forward to talking with your child about the most important subject in the universe, and we are eager to hear him or her express faith in Jesus and a desire to live for his glory! Our church secretary will be glad to schedule your child’s interview with two of our elders, so please let her know when you believe that the time is right.

SELECTED RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

New Life Presbyterian Church Library
July 2010

Teaching:

- First Catechism: Teaching Children Bible Truths* — 238.6 FIR
Catechism for Young Children with Cartoons — 238.6 LOC
How to Teach the Catechism to Children, Joyce Horton — 238.6 HOR
Rediscovering Catechism: The Art of Equipping Covenant Children, Donald VanDyken — 268.432 VAN
Big Truths for Little Kids: Teaching Your Children to Live for God, Susan Hunt — 248.845 HUN
Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism, Starr Mead — 242.62 MEA
Westminster Shorter Catechism for Study Classes, G.I. Williamson — 238.53 WIL
Big Truths for Young Hearts: Teaching and Learning the Greatness of God, Bruce Ware — 268.432 WAR
Instructing a Child's Heart, Tedd & Margy Tripp — 248.845 TRI
Big Book of Questions and Answers: A Family Guide to the Christian Faith, Sinclair Ferguson — J 230 FER
Big Book of Questions and Answers about Jesus, Sinclair Ferguson — J 232 FER

Parenting:

- Shepherding a Child's Heart* — Tedd Tripp — 248.845 TRI (book + DVD series)
Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens — Tedd Tripp — 248.845 TRI (book + CD set)
Building Strong Families — Dennis Rainey, ed. — 248.845 BUI
Disciplines of a Godly Family — Kent & Barbara Hughes — 248.845 HUG
Don't Make Me Count to Three: A Mom's Look at Heart-Oriented Discipline — Ginger Plowman — 248.845 PLO
Focus on the Family Parents Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children, John Trent, ed. — 248.845 FOC

- Gospel-Centered Parenting* (CD), C.J. Mahaney — 248.845 MAH CD
Helping Children to be Dazzled by God (CD), Tedd Tripp — 248.845 TRI CD
Parenting Today's Adolescents, Dennis Rainey — 248.845 RAI
Peacemaking for Families, Ken Sande — 248.845 SAN
Successful Christian Parenting, John MacArthur — 248.845 MAC
Teach Them Diligently: How to Use the Scriptures in Child Training — Lou Priolo, 248.845 PRI
Your Home: A Place of Grace, Susan Hunt — 248.843 HUN



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