

TEACH YOUR
CHILDREN
ABOUT GOD



An Ambassador College Publication

TEACH YOUR
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This booklet is not to be sold. It is a free educational service in the public interest, published by Ambassador College.

Never before has the younger generation been in greater need of knowledge about God and His law. This booklet gives you concrete, usable guidelines for teaching your small children about God, about creation, about God's plan and about life.

What is God Like?

“MOMMIE, who is God? And what does He look like?”

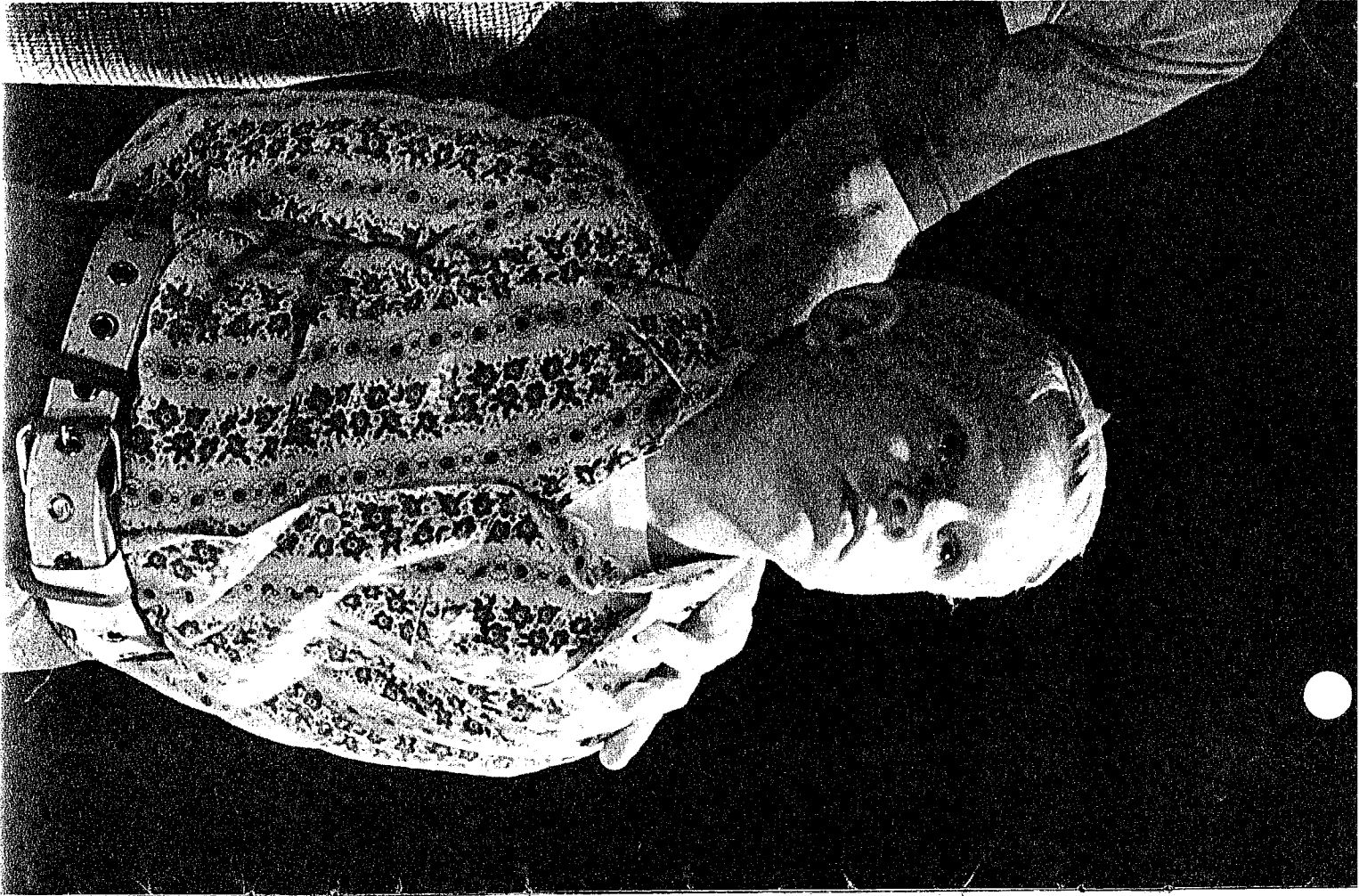
“He’s a magician.” “I dunno.” “A bad man.” “Clouds.” “He gives parties.” “Nobody.” “A ghost.” “There isn’t any God.” “A king.” “A millionaire.” “The greatest.” “The man in heaven I pray to.”

These are answers collected by Edward S. and Elizabeth Fox in their book *Christ Is God’s Middle Name* (1971), after asking five- to seven-year-old children, “Who is God?”

Quite a variety of answers isn’t it? And remember, each one of these little children was *taught* his individual concept of God by *someone*. It may have been other children at school, parents, a brother or sister, “Aunt Gerie,” or someone else, but the point is, someone taught them!

What about your small children? Who has taught them what God is like? Ask your child a few simple questions about God — who He is, what He looks like, where He lives. You may be surprised at the answers!

God holds you responsible for teaching your children about His way. You personally will determine to a tremendous degree what type of individual your child will grow up to be. The Bible states: “Teach a child to choose the right path, and when he is older he will remain upon it” (Prov. 22:6, *The Living Bible*).



The great Creator God has granted you your children. He has given you Godlike powers over them — you have the power to *mold* and *shape* attitudes that will remain with them the rest of their lives.

What will your child's sense of values be when he is thirty years old? What about his concepts of God? Just what kind of person will he grow up to be? The answer depends a great deal on how you teach him — *now!*

Here are a few vital keys to help you teach your youngsters the proper concept of God. But first remember to be sure *you* have a realistic concept of God in your own mind, then you can properly portray God to your child. This can only come by your own personal biblical knowledge about God.

Get to know God by reading the Bible in an organized manner. Our free booklet *Read the Book* shows how. Send for your copy.

Family Relationship — Our Father

God reveals Himself as our *Father*. Here is an excellent way to picture God to your child in terms he will understand. You might explain to him that just as you are *his* father, God is also a Father — only He is much wiser and stronger.

Illustrate for him what a real father does. For example, you might tell him that a good father *loves* his children as much as himself; that a good father provides food, clothing, a home, toys to play with, a nice warm bed in which to sleep. All this just for his children. Let him know that you, as his father, want to make him happy. Then impress on his mind that God — our Father in heaven — also wants these things for us, only more so. Be sure to explain these concepts to your child in simple everyday terms he can easily grasp.

Remember this. Your greatest tool in teaching your child what the word "father" means is your *example* — your relationship as a father with your youngster.

What comes to mind when you think of the word "father"? Invariably, you see your physical father in your

mind's eye, don't you? If your father was very loving, kind and generous, you identify these qualities with the concept of "father." However, if he was overly harsh, demanding, uncompromising and showed little love and concern, the chances are you associate those traits with the term "father."

Now do you see the importance of being the right kind of father to your children? Their concept of you will greatly mold and influence their opinions of what God, their heavenly Father, is like. Your *example* is of primary importance!

A Friend

Jesus called His followers "friends" in John 15:13-14. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Here is another golden opportunity to describe God to your children in concrete, everyday terms they understand. Tell them what a good friend is like. Explain that friends help each other, share possessions, want to make each other happy, etc. Demonstrate to your child what a true friend is by *being* a real friend to your children. Take time to play with them. Read to them. Ask their opinion of various things and let them express their little ideas and amusing experiences.

Think of your own childhood. What experiences with Mom and Dad are the most vivid in your mind? Chances are they were *simple* pleasures — times when your mother or father did things with you. You and your father may have built a kite together and spent many happy hours watching its various antics as it jumped and floated in a gusty afternoon wind. Or, you might fondly remember those leisurely bicycle rides on Sunday afternoons with your parents, or the time your mother or father took time out from their work one evening to capture a few fireflies in a bottle for you.

Warm memories aren't they? Show your child what a friend is like by creating memories like these *now*. Then he will know what wonderful friends parents can be. He will

understand more fully what a faithful friend his spiritual Father is.

God Is Creator

"Since earliest times men have seen the earth and the sky and all God made, and have known of His existence and great eternal power. So they have no excuse for saying there is no God" (Rom. 1:20, *The Living Bible*). The physical world and its laws that surround us are concrete, measurable evidence of God the Creator.

Teach your children that God designed and created the earth with all its natural grandeur — its majestic mountains, beautiful productive valleys, innumerable lakes and rivers, etc.

Give your child a simple concept of God's *strength* by pointing out certain parts of the creation that demonstrate His power. (Read Job 37-41, Isaiah 40, and many of the Psalms. These and many other scriptures describe God's power and authority through the physical creation.)

For instance, in pointing out a mountain to your child you might explain that God not only created the mountains, but also has the power to move and shake them as a person might shake out a blanket (Amos 4:13; Joel 3:16).

Even this bit of knowledge is too much of a "hunk" for my four-year-old, so I reduce it to terms he will understand. At his tender age, he really doesn't comprehend the problems of moving a mountain. But he is very familiar with the effort he must expend in picking up heavy (to him) rocks and moving them.

Therefore I tell him that God can not only move large mountains, but also very large rocks. As he musters all the strength in his little forty-pound body to pick up a ten- or fifteen-pound stone, I often point to a giant boulder weighing multiple tons and casually explain to him that God has the strength to move that boulder much more easily than he is moving his fifteen-pound monolith. At that point he is very impressed with God's power, to say the least!

Do you see now how important it is to explain things in terms your child will grasp?

Psalms 29:3-5 likens God's voice to thunder — another excellent physical phenomena conveying an aspect of God's awesome power.

Most of us at one time or another have experienced a thunderstorm so violent that we felt like crawling under the table. It is an awe-inspiring demonstration.

Just remember, while you're under that table, take time out to give Johnny or Janey a few reminders about God's power!

Study your Bible in relation to God's many marvelous characteristics. Reflect on ways you can teach these characteristics to your children. Then you will come up with many *more* ideas of how to teach them. For instance, God's appreciation of beauty and color can be demonstrated by flowers, trees, birds, insects, and other colorful inhabitants of nature.

Show your children a little about God's love and concern by pointing out how He gives different animals the tools and abilities they need to survive — animals have fur for warmth, etc. A good colorful book containing pictures of animals would certainly be a valuable tool to teach these things.

Camping and hiking trips also provide excellent opportunities for pointing out various aspects of God's creation.

God's Appearance

"Mommy, what does God look like?" This question puzzles many parents, but really shouldn't. God reveals in Genesis 1:26-27 that man resembles Him (God) in shape, form, and design. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

In other words, God has the same general form and shape that human beings do — a head, arms, hands, legs, feet, etc. Many scriptures throughout the Bible mention God's eyes, ears, hands, face, etc. (see Numbers 11:23; II Chronicles 16:9; Job 40:9; Psalm 104:29; Isaiah 59:1). There are dozens of other scriptures you can find through

just a little research. Invest in a Bible concordance. For just a few dollars, you can search out many such verses in a hurry.

God's Personality

What do you think God is like? Is He a dynamic individual with genuine emotions? Or is He sort of an immovable force or inanimate first cause? Perhaps you picture Him as a colorless personality who sits motionless and "keeps watch" on the world 24 hours a day. It is important to know; we all want to teach our children what God is *really* like.

II Timothy 1:7 typifies God's positive and concerned attitude toward us. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." God has a healthy, optimistic, confident outlook and approach to life. He leads a life full of joy. Jeremiah 32:41 mentions this aspect of His character in describing His future dealings with His people: "I will rejoice to do them good and will plant them in this land, with great joy" (*The Living Bible*). Luke 15:10-32 mentions that there is great joy in heaven when an individual truly repents and begins to live God's way of life.

In Deuteronomy 12:18 God commanded the Israelites to rejoice in everything they set their hand to do.

Did you know that God laughs? Check Psalm 37:13 and Psalm 59:8. God also feels deep compassion for people. The parable of the prodigal son shows God's *boundless compassion* toward the repentant sinner (Luke 15).

Jesus conveyed His deep concern when He looked upon Jerusalem and exclaimed how He had desired to gather her inhabitants to Him even as a protective mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Matt. 23:37). God "feels" for us!

Give your children the *true* picture of God's character and personality. Relate these qualities and others you find as you search through the Scriptures. Let them know that God is a real, live, dynamic, positive individual with genuine emotions and true concern for us. Teach your children who the *real, living* God is.

About the Bible

GIVE your child a quick quiz. How many of these questions can your three-year-old answer?

How did the first man and woman come to be?

Who built an ark, and why?

Who is God's son?

What does God look like?

Where does God live?

Granted, young children vary a great deal in their ability to learn. But as soon as they can put words together to make sentences, they should be able to comprehend these things.

We must all realize that God holds us as parents personally responsible for teaching our children His way! Hear God's charge: "And you must think constantly about these commandments I am giving you today. You must teach them to your children and talk about them when you are at home or out for a walk; at bedtime and the first thing in the morning" (Deut. 6:6-7, *The Living Bible*).

Here are a few *basic* guidelines to follow as you teach your children some of the most precious and vital knowledge they will ever learn.

Portray God's Word Accurately

Before you attempt to teach your boy or girl a lesson or relate a particular biblical incident, be sure you portray it just as God's Word tells it. In other words — "Tell it like it is!"

To do this, you must study God's Word daily yourself

— know what is in “the Book.” Then you will have ready answers to your child’s questions.

Beware of letting subtle errors or misconceptions creep into your teaching. Don’t rely on books *about* the Bible. Many “Bible story” books for children are saturated with unscriptural concepts, or vie for the child’s interest with exciting and violent fiction like cheap novels or comic books. Biblical incidents are often taken out of context. Their real connection with the very purpose of life is ignored.

And even *pictures* are misleading — biblical characters usually appear in various supposedly “spiritual” positions, generally with arms outstretched toward a rock, tree or cloud, with far-off, contemplative expressions on their faces. But in reality biblical persons were DYNAMIC, ACTIVE, FORCEFUL! And that is what you should convey to your children.

Use an Approach Appropriate for Their Ages

Your children will love to hear “stories” from the Bible such as the story of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and events in the life of Jesus. For example, my four-year-old particularly enjoys hearing about Jesus’ childhood — how He grew up in a small mountain town, was able to enjoy swimming in a nearby lake, and hiking in the surrounding hills. One thing for all to beware of, of course, is excessive fictionalizing. I use this opportunity to point out Jesus’ perfect character — how He shared His possessions with others, was obedient to His parents, etc.

As your child grows older — say when he’s eight or ten — teach him how the Proverbs relate to his everyday life. This will take considerable forethought on your part in some cases. But take just one proverb at a time — such as Proverbs 15:18 in *The Living Bible*: “A quick-tempered man starts fights; a cool-tempered man tries to stop them.”

Before attempting to teach your eight or ten-year-old this lesson, sit down with pencil and paper and think of all

the various applications this proverb may have in his relationship with other children, with his teachers at school, with you — in other words, with any and everyone he normally comes in contact with.

Think of WHY and HOW your child will benefit by inculcating the principle of this proverb into his life. Write these points down and you will have a very effective Bible study.

Another way to teach the Proverbs is to create hypothetical situations, then ask your child to explain the correct course of action based upon just one proverb. This method *stimulates* your child to make God’s laws an actual part of his *thinking*.

Remember this. Your child can know the various Bible characters and stories, but without understanding the *lessons* involved, he is missing the real value. Strive to teach your children this vital, overall principle: Obedience to God and His laws produces happiness and blessings. Disobedience and rebellion bring unhappiness and punishment!

Emphasize over and over in different ways how beneficial and wonderful it is to obey God’s commandments. Stress to your child how good they are for him. Always stress the positive — the good life that obedience produces. Remember, you are molding your child’s concept of God and His way.

Relate Lessons to Their Everyday Life

When you describe how Adam and Eve disobeyed God, stress how they had to leave the garden and were very unhappy because of their disobedience. Then relate this to your child’s everyday life by explaining that obedience to God always brings good things! And disobedience produces bad things. You can do this in numerous facets of his daily life. This is a language he understands.

Another example you could use would be to show him that God created many nutritious foods to eat. Show him that by eating a well-balanced diet and developing a taste for many foods, his muscles and bones will grow bigger and

stronger — enabling him to throw a ball farther, run faster and jump higher. By this simple object lesson, you have proved in one small way to his little mind that obeying God is GOOD!

But remember to keep your explanations simple. Don't get technical or overly didactic.

Make Lessons Interesting, Colorful and Exciting

Read Ecclesiastes 12:10 in *The Living Bible*: "For the Preacher was not only a wise man, but a good teacher; he not only taught what he knew to the people, but taught them in an *interesting manner*."

How do you rate? How would you describe to your child the way David killed a lion, for example?

Here's how you might do it: "As David's sheep grazed peacefully one warm, sunny day, little did they realize the savage danger lurking behind the trees just 50 yards away.

"David looked intently toward the trees. He had seen a faint movement in that direction. As he moved closer — to within a stone's throw of the trees — suddenly the largest lion he had ever seen sprang upon a helpless bleating lamb!

"Before the tawny beast with its powerful jaws could kill or seriously harm the lamb, David was upon it — challenging this roaring, snarling creature, this bundle of destructive fury with flashing, rippling muscles and knife-like teeth!

"David quickly and silently asked God for strength.

"Suddenly the lion charged. The earth seemed to tremble under David's feet as he saw the yellow blur leaping toward him, paws outstretched, mouth wide open, ready to snap his neck in one crunching bite!

"David quickly sidestepped the frustrated animal and seized it from behind, killing it with the strength God gave him. Once again God had protected His faithful servant."

Picture stories in your own mind as you tell them and describe things in detail. Be ENTHUSIASTIC, and before you know it, you'll be enjoying your stories as much as your children.

Have Regular Bible Studies

Make a definite time for teaching your children about God and the Bible. And when possible, have the entire family take part. Also, help your children to look forward to these studies. Remember to keep them *short*, so the children won't get overly tired or begin to dread them.

Do you recall the serials you used to hear on the radio when you were a child? Each episode ran only a few minutes, and of course it always ended with a note of suspense to be continued next time. Do you remember how eager you were to come back next time to find out what happened? Use the same principle in teaching your children. When telling or reading a Bible story, interrupt it at a point of suspense — "to be continued next time!" Cut off Bible study (or "Bible-story time," as you might call it to three- or four-year-olds) *before* they begin to lose interest.

And remember to take other opportunities throughout the day to point out certain lessons or principles of God — especially to very young children. Here is God's instruction regarding this:

"So keep these commandments carefully in mind. Tie them to your hand to remind you to obey them, and tie them to your forehead between your eyes! Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting at home, when you are out walking, at bedtime, and before breakfast! Write them upon the doors of your houses and upon your gates, so that as long as there is sky above the earth, you and your children will enjoy the good life awaiting you in the land the Lord has promised you" (Deut. 11:18-21, *The Living Bible*).

This does not mean, of course, that you should make a fetish out of writing Bible verses all over your walls. It's a principle that is important — keep God's laws in mind all the time.

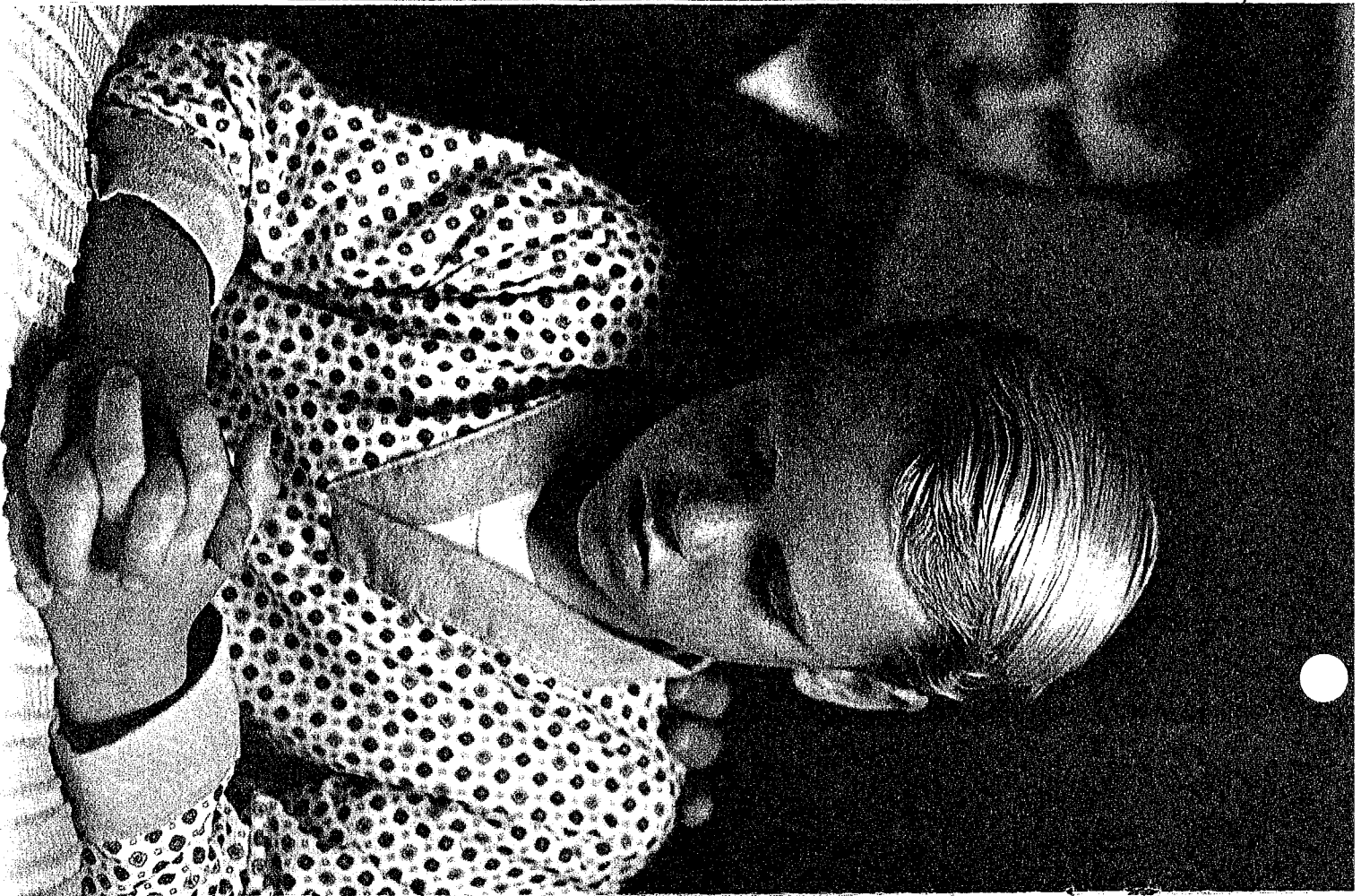
How to Pray

REMEMBER the poetic little child's prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep"? You may have had this or another prayer imprinted on a plaque which hung above your bed when you were a child. As a youngster, I remember customarily repeating this prayer on my knees before jumping into bed at night.

While memorized prayers may serve as a daily reminder of God, we must remember that Christ *cautioned* His disciples against memorization or repetition of prayers in Matthew 6:7. Teach your children to *think* when praying — to say what's on his or her mind. Let them know what prayer is — talking to God as we would respectfully talk to our physical father.

Why Pray?

A very elementary point, but one which you should explain to your child. We talk to God to *thank* Him, to *acknowledge* Him, and give Him *credit* for the many blessings and needs He supplies. David demonstrated his gratitude to God abundantly in the Psalms. We also pray to God to ask for various *needs* — whether they be others' needs or our own. (Incidentally, it is always a good idea to teach your boy or girl to pray for *other* people regularly — perhaps for friends and relatives. Otherwise prayer can become totally *self-oriented*.) In explaining this to your child be sure to use the comparison of him or her asking you as a parent for various things. Also, remember to teach your children to ask God to heal when either they or



you are ill. This will train them to trust God and look to Him as their Healer.

Exactly How to Teach Them

Teach by *example*. Let your children hear you pray simple prayers either upon arising in the morning, before meals, or before retiring at night. You may find mealtime brings the most practical opportunity to train them to pray.

You may first find it helpful to merely teach your little "yearling" to merely bow his or her head when you pray. Then, gradually begin teaching your child to pray as soon as he or she can speak in short sentences or phrases. Simply have him bow his head and repeat a simple one-, two-, or three-sentence prayer after you. Here is a very elementary prayer: "Father in heaven, thank you for the food. Please bless it. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Of course, this is just a start. As the weeks and months fly by and your child's mind continues to develop, he will gradually be able to pray in more detail, usually repeating after you. A little more advanced prayer might be: "Father in heaven, thank you for Mommy and Daddy. Thank you for my meat, my peas, and my milk. Please bless them. In Jesus' name, Amen."

As your child progresses, you will find he can repeat these prayers by himself and even add thoughts of his own from time to time. Be sure to always praise and encourage him liberally for his efforts.

As he prays simple prayers "on his own," you will find he gets "stuck" or runs out of thoughts. When this happens be sure to help him — we've all been at a loss for words at one time or another.

Continue training your children to pray — don't let down! Give them *several* opportunities a week to ask God's blessing at mealtime after you pray. You'll probably find that your children become increasingly eager to pray and usually enthusiastically volunteer to do so at even three and four years of age.

Use the same principles and approach in teaching them to pray before they go to bed. As your children reach

school age, take advantage of occasional short *family* prayer times. They will benefit from hearing father and mother pray, as well as the opportunity to participate themselves.

Of course, as your children mature they will understand to a greater degree *whom* they are praying to and *what* they are saying. But the foundation has been laid at a very early age — and that is what is important. They will know *how* to talk to God as a result of your patient, thoughtful training and your consistent example. If prayer is a part of your life, it will come much more naturally to your children as they mature.

Pitfalls to Avoid

Here are a few practical "do's and don'ts" which, if unheeded, can actually cause your child to dread and deplore prayer — thus *negating* your teaching efforts.

1. Never *embarrass* him while he is praying. As he learns to pray, he will undoubtedly express himself in funny phrases or words, or make humorous requests. Don't laugh at him or allow anyone else to "make fun" or snicker at his efforts. Give your boy or girl the same loving support and loyalty God gives you. Be encouraging and *respect* his or her efforts — God certainly does.

2. Keep prayer times *short* and enjoyable. Avoid *forcing* your child to pray for long periods of time. A young child's prayers may consist of only a half dozen short sentences: a five- or six-year-old's a few more. But never shut a child in a room and force him to pray a certain number of minutes — don't make prayer a burden or task. Make it a delight!

3. Remember that children vary in growth rates and ability to express themselves. Don't expect your three-year-old to pray on exactly the same level as other three-year-olds. Avoid comparing children. Some can begin praying at two years of age while others might begin at three or four. Teach them based on their ability to learn, *not* according to their ages.

4. Be sure your children approach prayer *respectfully*. Don't allow them to make a game of it. If you find them

praying in a “sing-song” voice or intentionally saying silly things, simply stop them with the reminder that God does not want us to talk that way to Him. Then allow them to continue praying — respectfully.

5. Use wisdom and balance in teaching. Avoid going to extremes. Always be fair, understanding, and above all, *patient*. God allows us approximately seventy years to learn His ways and the lessons of life (Ps. 90:10). Let's work with our children patiently as God does with us. And remember, when you have questions, doubts, or problems about teaching this vital subject, *you* pray about them. Ask God for the answers. He'll give you the guidance and wisdom you need.

Also, if you happen to be in contact with the Ambassador College representative (an ordained minister of the Worldwide Church of God) in your area, he will be happy to help.

God's Plan

WHAT is the primary purpose of a chicken's life? Obviously, to produce eggs and meat for human consumption. What use do milk cows serve? Again, the answer should be very obvious. What about other animals such as horses, sheep, goats, dogs, etc.? Each of these animals has a specific use and purpose for being — whether that purpose be supplying energy or “horse-power” to accomplish a task, furnishing food for human consumption, or merely giving humans pleasure or limited companionship.

Then what is *our* purpose in life? Why did God create humankind? To put it in a nutshell, God's purpose is for us to eventually be like Him — literally! (1 John 3:1, 2.) We are created in His physical form and shape. He gives us limited Godlike powers and fantastic resources and faculties for a *purpose* — to control, channel, and use them in developing Godlike character — the character to make consistently *right* choices which produce happiness. This is the way we meet God's standards and *qualify* for His free *gift* of eternal life in His family. Do you see what a fantastic purpose and future we have?

If this is your first glimpse of this marvelous truth, you may need more information. If so, our attractively printed booklet *Why Were You Born?* makes plain and understandable the transcendent purpose and meaning of human existence. Write for your free copy.

What about your children? Do they understand why they were born? They should! Parents ought to teach them the answer to the most basic question in life.

Children *deserve* to know. And it's simple to explain.

Here's how!

Use similar questions as those mentioned at the beginning of this chapter — about God's purpose for various animals. You could ask your child some very easy questions you are sure he can answer and grasp easily — such as, "Why did God make chickens?" If your youngster doesn't know, simply explain that God made chickens basically to give us meat and eggs to eat. Emphasize that this is the basic *reason* for chickens' existence.

In like manner, you can point out that cows give us milk and meat, sheep give us wool and meat, horses are for pleasure and work, etc. Remember to show that each animal has a specific *purpose*.

Then you might ask your child, "Why did God make people? Why did He make you?" Of course, your child will falter here — he won't know. This is your opportunity to simply explain to him that God made us to someday be like *Him*. (Do you see the importance of teaching children what the real God is like as mentioned in Chapter One?)

Obviously, your child will not *really* grasp the meaning of being like God. It is best not to go beyond a very simple explanation.

Here is the key. Plant in your child's mind the progression of going from *child* to *adult* to *God*. Impress on his mind the necessity to *obey* God's laws and live His way of life that produces happiness in order to qualify to be God. Thus, you are applying God's plan of salvation in your child's daily life.

When teaching these principles, avoid long "preachy" lectures which will only bore your youngsters. Make use of various experiences and situations *throughout* the day to mention various aspects of God's purpose.

It's Up to You

Erwin Ross, Ph.D., recently wrote in an article titled "How Your Child Sees You":

"Look at that man or woman — your husband or wife — sitting across the room from you. What do you see? Another human being — different from you, of course, but

different in ways you can at least dimly understand.

"Is this what your small child sees? Not at all.

"To your child, you parents are beings totally alien to his own nature. You are, in every sense of the word, *gods* [emphasis mine]. Your motives are mysterious, your methods incomprehensible. You are to be loved and feared more than anybody or anything else" (*Family Circle*, August 1972, p. 28).

Think about that. You possess awesome authority over your child — you hold his future in your hands, to a great extent. You as a parent are the potter — your young boy or girl is a piece of very malleable clay. God will judge each one of us according to how well we mold and teach those little minds.

In Proverbs 10:1 God inspired Solomon to write: "... A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." We all want children we can be well pleased with as the years go by and we see them become young men and women before our eyes. Let's teach our children about God when they are young. Get them headed in the right direction from the start.

You will also reap benefits for *yourself* as Proverbs 23:24-25 shows. "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice."

And even more important, you will help your son or daughter to walk with God so he or she will receive the *good things* of life that God promises. "The man who knows right from wrong and has good judgment and common sense is happier than the man who is immensely rich! For such wisdom is far more valuable than precious jewels. Nothing else compares with it. Wisdom gives: a long good life, riches, honor, pleasure, peace" (Prov. 3:13-17, *The Living Bible*).

What greater gift could you bestow upon your children than to diligently teach them about God — to be close to their Creator so they can receive these truly *good things* of life?