

20 Non-Negotiable Principles for Evangelizing Kids

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Based on his findings from a 2004 survey of the age at which most people accept Christ, [George Barna](#) wrote:

“Families, churches and parachurch ministries must recognize that primary window of opportunity for effectively reaching people with the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection is during the pre-teen years. It is during those years that people develop their frames of reference for the remainder of their life – especially theologically and morally. Consistently explaining and modeling truth principles for young people is the most critical factor in their spiritual development.”

Indeed, 9 out of 10 Christians accept Jesus as their savior before the age of 18. That means that evangelizing kids should be, and must be, of the utmost importance. So, what are some guiding principles that you can use in evangelizing kids. Let’s have a look at 20 of them which should guide your efforts in this most important of jobs. I have purposely structured this list such that the first 10 items are more abstract guiding principles and the last 10 items are more practical principles in terms of presenting the gospel to kids.

1. Pray.

Like everything that we do, prayer should be our default when it comes to evangelizing kids, and it seemed appropriate to include it first in any list of principles for evangelizing kids. We should ask God to give us the wisdom to speak His word into the lives of the kids under our influence. We should pray for guidance in choosing which kids will be receptive to His message. We should pray for open hearts and open minds that are ripe to be sown with the message of His exceeding grace. We should pray for specific kids who we have been talking to or who have shown an interest in His gospel message.

2. Remember that what you are doing is God’s work.

No matter how zealous you are or how good you think you are at leading kids to Christ, bringing kids into the Kingdom is ultimately the job of God. From our standpoint that means we should pray, prepare and share, but in the end you must be willing to allow yourself to be guided by the Holy Spirit. When you are praying to God about specific children or specific situations, take time to listen as well and be submissive to God's prompting. It is God's work to save kids, not ours. We can lay a foundation, but it is up to God to draw a child to Himself.

3. It's all about Christ

The Gospel is not about you and what God can do for you. It is not about the child you are talking to and what God can do for them. The Gospel is about the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross and His payment for our sins. The Gospel is about the resurrection and God's work in our lives after we accept him as Lord. When presenting the gospel to kids, or anyone for that matter, it is important to remember that it His Gospel, and it's all about Jesus.

4. Sin is necessary for salvation.

The gospel is good news. No, the gospel is great news! I told a group of kids this morning that it was the most awesome news they were ever going to hear in their entire lives, and I believe that from the depths of my soul. That said, the Gospel can only be Good News because there is bad news. We have all sinned and deserve to be punished by a Holy God. All too often when it comes to children, we shy away from the idea of sin and judgment for fear of manipulating them into a false profession of faith. While I understand those reservations, a child cannot understand the need for the Gospel, and their own personal need for Jesus, until they can comprehend and understand that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. Children need to understand that they are sinners and everyone they know is a sinner.

5. Some context is helpful – give an overview of God's plan and work in history

Speaking of sin, some context is helpful. Jumping right to Jesus died on the cross, now make Him Lord of your Life is not helpful. A brief explanation of the history of God's work in human history is helpful. Something like:

God is the only being that was not created. He has always been. He also made everything including you and me. He made humans to be in a relationship with Him. But, humans rebelled against God and did what they wanted to do rather than what God wanted them to do. That is called sin. We all sin, and because God is Holy (that means He is perfect and never sins), he can not tolerate sin. That means that we are separated eternally (that means forever) from God. That's pretty bad news since God loves us and always does what is best for us, but there is also Good News. Even though the people He created rebelled against Him, He sent His son Jesus Christ to come to Earth, lead a perfect life, die on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins and raise again three days later to conquer sin and death. The awesome news is that if we make Jesus the Lord of our Life and choose to follow him, His death on the cross pays the penalty for our sin too, and we can be reconciled to God (which means we can live with Him forever)."

6. Point to the Bible, not a feeling. Salvation is about the works of Jesus, not a feeling.

Salvation is not a feeling. While there may be feelings that accompany salvation (like happiness and joy), these should not be promised or interpreted as evidence of salvation. The Bible tells us that:

*The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;*

When you are evangelizing children, it is important to lead them through God's Word. Salvation is based on the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is not about a warm fuzzy feeling. For a child whose cognitive abilities are not fully developed, it is important not to rely on emotional appeals to bring a child to Christ.

7. It's about trusting Jesus with their lives and having a relationship with him, now just knowing him.

The Bible is clear that even the demons understand that Jesus is the Son of God. While it is critical that we give kids a firm foundation in doctrine and the Bible, a saving knowledge constitutes both head and heart knowledge of Jesus. Yes, we must transfer a certain amount of requisite knowledge to kids in order for them to understand God's story and His plan in human history, we must point them towards a heart knowledge of Jesus and encourage a relationship with Him.

8. It's about more than just being Jesus' friend.

I have to admit that I cringe a little bit when people tell kids that Jesus will be their "forever friend." Don't get me wrong. I think that is part of the story. Jesus does become someone we can turn to in times of trouble, a constant help in planning our lives, and someone we can share our deepest thoughts and concerns with. Those are attributes of a good friend, but Jesus is so much more than that. To reduce Jesus to just a "forever friend" ignores his power and glory. He did, after all, speak the world into existence, and he does sustain us every moment. When we make Him to Lord of our life, he does become a trusted friend, but He will always be infinitely more. In our efforts to help kids comprehend the incomprehensible nature of God, we must take care to not create too small an image of God in their heads.

9. Lay a foundation and don't get discouraged.

God doesn't always work on our timetable. Sometimes things happen so much quicker than we ever imagined they could, and other times it seems as if God has forgotten our prayers (something He never does). Much of what we do in working with kids is planting seeds – hopefully planting them deep in fertile soil. Part of the nature of working with kids (especially younger kids) is that we may never get to see the fruit from those seeds. Nonetheless, we must persevere with patience and determination. Continue to plant the seeds of the gospel and pray that God would use them at some point in that child's life to blossom into a beautiful tree that will bear fruit for Christ. Never get discouraged that you are not seeing immediate results. God sees the work that you are doing, and you can rest assured that it is part of His grand plan.

10. It doesn't end at the profession of faith.

A decision to follow Christ is a special moment. There is no denying that. If you have ever been privileged enough to be there when a child chooses to make Jesus the Lord of their life, you know the overwhelming sense of joy and hope that it brings. The moment should be celebrated. It is the most important decision a child, or anyone else, can make in their lives, and it is cause for celebration. Remember though, that a profession of faith is only the beginning of a child's spiritual journey. It marks the beginning of a lifetime of learning, discipleship and building a relationship with their Lord and Savior. Make sure that you do not "forget" about a child just because you have gotten them to a point of profession of faith. Ensure that a system is in place that will continue to disciple them and lead them in their spiritual journey.

11. Be ready at all times.

1 Peter 3:15 tells us:

...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [1 Peter 3:15]

We are commanded to be ready at all times to share our faith, and that is never more important than with kids. You never know when the subject of God and Christ will come up, and you must be prepared ahead of time. That means knowing basic doctrine and the basic tenants of the gospel. It also means giving some thought to how you present those things to kids in age appropriate ways.

12. Be clear and avoid abstract language

Children tend to be concrete thinkers. If you tell them Jesus lives in their hearts, many will picture a two or three inch tall Jesus sipping an iced tea somewhere near their aorta. When you are sharing the gospel with kids, use concrete language and language that they are familiar with. Find ways to express biblical truths in ways that kids can understand.

13. Be age-appropriate. Understand how kids develop.

Part of knowing how to present the gospel to children is understanding how children think. There are similarities between kids in terms of what they are capable of learning at different ages. Get online and search for child development. Become a student of how kids think and learn. This knowledge will help you more effectively present the gospel to them in an age appropriate fashion.

14. There is no formula. Every kid is different.

No matter how much you read up on how kids develop similarly, always remember that each child is unique. There is no substitute for personal first-hand knowledge of a child. When you know the details of a child's life, you will be in a much better position to make the gospel personal to them.

15. Keep it short.

Let's face it, kids don't have the longest attention span in the world (nor do many adults). Don't sacrifice the depth of the gospel by trying to cram it into 30 seconds. On the other hand, be concise and get to the point. When you're sharing the gospel with a child, it's probably not the right time for a discussion of the church fathers' views on the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.

16. Never give a child false assurance. Salvation is about more than a prayer.

Unfortunately, much evangelism (with kids and adults) is geared primarily towards getting someone to say a prayer. Salvation is about a whole lot more than prayer. Salvation comes with a choice to make Jesus the Lord of our lives and choosing to follow Him. Never assure a child that he is "saved" merely because he or she said a prayer. You do not know what it is in that child's heart.

17. Never use guilt, manipulation or high pressure techniques.

The Gospel of our Lord is not about guilt, manipulation or pressuring people into accepting it. Children are particularly susceptible to these types of techniques. Now, most people will not set out to employ guilt or to manipulate or engage in high pressure tactics trying to bring kids to Christ. However, there are more subtle forms of these techniques which are employed and must be guarded against. Kids are very conscious of what their friends and classmates are doing. Singling out kids who have not chosen to follow Christ in front of their friends who have and then presenting the gospel to them is a type of high pressure technique that employs peer pressure to achieve the desired result. Playing on a child's need to please their parents utilize their guilt and fear of failing their parents – not to mention that it is inherently unbiblical.

18. Encourage questions.

Sharing the gospel should be much more of a conversation than a presentation. Encourage kids to ask questions as you present the gospel. This will allow you to not only gauge how well they are getting what you are trying to present, it will also allow them to clarify any portions that they don't understand. Encourage questions by asking questions yourself and by using rhetorical questions as you are speaking.

19. Involve parents wherever possible.

The days that my kids came to Christ rank as some of the most memorable and joyous days of my life. While the miracle of their physical births is etched forever on my mind, the eternal impact of their second births will forever be some of the greatest days of my life here on Earth. For that reason alone, if it is possible, you should try to involve the parents if you know their child has made a decision to follow Christ. While this is preferable, it is not always feasible, and I would never suggest that a child wait an inordinate amount of time just so their parents can be there.

20. It's all about relationships.

The Gospel is about relationships. It is about our relationship with God because He chose to save us from our sins by His grace and not through any work on our part. He also chose to use other people as the vessel for sharing His good news. While there may be an occasion for you to present the gospel message to a child that you do not have a personal relationship with, most children will come to faith through someone they are close to. It is important to build relationships with these kids in order to speak into their lives. It will also be important in continuing the discipleship process following the moment of salvation.

The gospel is rich and deep. Something so profound as God's Good News has to be. There are more principles when it comes to presenting the gospel, and while practice will not make perfect in this case, I would encourage you to get as much practice as you can. Start putting these twenty principles into practice today. Let us know in the comments section below what principles you would add to the list!

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