

5. Welcome hard questions

It's okay to not have answers to big questions, to say, "I don't know – let's try to find the answer together," and then turn to a pastor, resources, or friends to help you unpack challenging topics. After all, parents are on a spiritual journey of growth, too, and it's great for kids to see you learning alongside them. For preschoolers, answer questions with one in return: "What do you think?" This will encourage them to lean on their spirituality and prior learning to draw conclusions, discover other topics they wonder about, and generate further conversation.

6. Offer a blessing

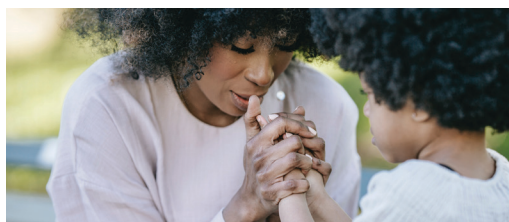
Saying a blessing over your child at a key point in the day, such as before preschool or at bedtime, can help them connect deeply with you and with God. Hold or make eye contact with your child to create a special moment. Cummings shares this with her baby: "I bless you as you grow, I bless you as you go, I bless you as you play, I bless you today." Pittenger shares this with her school-age children: "God bless my children and help them to grow bigger and stronger and wiser and more in love with God and all people every day."

7. Help others

Engaging in community service can be an excellent way to bond as a family, and it provides an opportunity to talk about loving our neighbors, being a Jesus follower, and living out our faith.

8. Find connection

Being active in a faith community helps children see their role in the body of Christ. Including young children in worship services broadens their understanding of church and what it means to praise God. It's also important that kids know they can trust and learn from adults other than their parents, whether they be Sunday School teachers, grandparents, or family friends. As an added bonus, the community provides parents with a support system as you seek ideas and resources from pastors, church staff, and other families who are in a similar life situation.



Encouragements for parents

"[Parents] may not be the expert on all things theological, but they are the expert on their kids. We don't have to have all the right words or all the right answers," says Rev. Pittenger.

Rev. Cummings shares, "Parents, give yourself grace. You are loving and nurturing the faith of your child in the middle of a season that's really difficult and challenging, especially for young families. Anything that is intentional about sharing the love of God, about sharing the story of God, or even just sharing."



"It's time to head back to church, and as we connect with each other, let's invite someone to join us on the life-changing journey of discipleship and ministry."

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The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York area and the world. For more news and stories visit:

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Get excited as you return to church

The end of summer brings new opportunities to grow in our faith and reignites our passion for serving others. It's time to head back to church, and as we connect with each other, let's invite someone to join us on the life-changing journey of discipleship and ministry.

Scan this QR code to watch a video that will inspire you to bring church back into your routine.



Back to church also means back to school



Blessings of the backpacks is a traditional part of many churches' fall programming. Scan this QR code to learn more.



Digital devices have replaced books and cameras and have become a familiar tool of daily life. Elizabeth Drescher shares a video blessing for our tablets, phones and computers. Scan this QR code to view it.



Looking to ease your children's transition back into the school year? Try this back-to-school prayer, created by Discipleship Ministries:

Learning is a gift from God.

As we begin this new school year, we give thanks that God has given us the ability to learn many things in many ways.

Loving God, sometimes a new school year seems exciting or scary or both.

Help us remember to show our thanks for your gifts of learning by doing our best every day.

We ask that you bless our schools, teachers, classmates, and friends.

We ask that you bless those who prepare our lunches, those who drive us to school, and those who keep our schools clean and safe.

We ask God's blessing on this new school year, that it may be a time when we appreciate and fully use God's gift of learning.

Amen.

Nurturing Faith in Young Children

Speaking of children, it's never too early to begin sharing faith practices with them. And now, with the start of a new school year, is a good time to explore faith practices together. "Helping kids to know God's love and to know that God loves them is a really foundational concept that little ones, even from diapers, can be taught," says the Rev. Kathy Pittenger, Children's Initiatives Coordinator for the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The Rev. Joanna Cummings, pastor with Children and Families at East End United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, agrees, "I believe that children are spiritual beings and I believe that they have a lot to show us about who God is."

Here are a few things you can do to help your children explore faith practices:

1. Evaluate your daily rhythms

Identify transitions and pauses where you can add prayer, discussion, and scripture to your routines. For example:

- Write or print prayers and hang them above the changing table as a reminder to pray in those moments together.
- Keep a stack of conversation starters in the car. Ask questions that have no "correct" answers, such as, "I wonder what it would have been like to see Jesus walk on the water?"
- Use meals, naptime, and bedtime as opportunities for reading Bible stories and sharing prayers.

2. Pray in different ways

Explore a variety of prayer practices to find options that your child most enjoys. As they grow, try new ones to meet their changing needs:

- The Lord's Prayer and the Doxology: Repetition is helpful for children. Saying the same prayer over and over is fine; in fact, it can bring familiarity and comfort.
- Body prayer: Use movement to express a prayer.
- Take a walk: Head outside to marvel at God's creativity and give thanks for it.
- Artistic prayer: Ask your child to draw what they'd like to say to God.

3. Read, play and learn

Reading a story Bible, such as the *Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook*, brings scripture to life through illustrations and approachable vocabulary.

4. Model your faith

Our kids learn from us by watching us. As you lead the way in prayer, Bible study, engaging in worship, talking about God, serving others, being part of a faith community, and exploring spiritual practices, children will want to join you. They'll come to expect these components of your routine and they will begin to incorporate them into theirs as well. Kids might even remind you to complete a forgotten activity or suggest a new one.

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