

FAITHLAUNCH

The logo for FAITHLAUNCH features the word "FAITHLAUNCH" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A stylized, grey arrow with a black tip is positioned behind the text, starting from the bottom left and pointing towards the top right, passing through the letters.





FAITH LAUNCH

*A Simple Plan to Ignite
Your Child's Love for Jesus*





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What could be more important—and exciting—than helping your child start a relationship with God? *FaithLaunch* shows you how to hide God’s Word in your child’s heart, leading to genuine heart change. Your whole family will grow closer to the Lord, and each other, when you plug these easy-to-use activities into your next 90 days.

—DR. GARY SMALLEY

Author of *Change Your Heart, Change Your Life*

Transferring a strong faith to our children’s hearts cannot be sub-contracted to the spiritual professionals at church or at our Christian schools. Parents must lead the charge. Now you can—with calm and confidence. *FaithLaunch* empowers parents to articulate a clear understanding of the Christian faith to their kids and makes it easy for them to make that faith their own.

—DR. TIM KIMMEL

Author of *Raising Kids for True Greatness*

Spiritually speaking, we’re in danger of losing the next generation. Parents are on the front line of that battle. Just in time, here comes *FaithLaunch*—a new way to introduce your kids to authentic faith. Instead of boring your family with lectures, use this book to bond through games and discussions and snacks. Your relationship will grow, and so will your opportunities to introduce your children to the Lord.

—JOSH D. MCDOWELL

Author and speaker

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PART I

**LAUNCHING
YOUR 
CHILD'S
FAITH**

by John Trent, Ph.D.

You've never been so nervous in your life.

The relentless Florida sun glints off the crystal of your wristwatch as you glance at it for the thousandth time. Didn't you see these numbers, 11:04 A.M., half an hour ago? History is crawling forward. Half of you wants it to speed up, but the other half wants the clock to stop entirely.

Your stomach grips again as you squint into the distance. For nearly four hours your son has been perched on top of the otherworldly object that towers like a white-and-rust castle against the sapphire sky.

You swallow, and wait. And wait.

Finally your watch tells you that, from now on, things are going to be happening quickly. You can't see most of them from where you are. If that's a blessing, it doesn't feel like one.

Then comes a voice from the PA system. "T minus 30," it says.

The voice sounds too calm. You know the countdown has just passed the point of no return.

Your breathing goes on hold. Numbness starts in your legs and rises like smoke.

"T minus 15," says the voice.

Thousands of gallons of water cascade under the launchpad to muffle the roar and shock waves of the main engines.

“T minus 10.”

Something resembling sparklers flashes to life. *Is this supposed to happen?* You feel your torso trembling.

“There go the igniters,” says one of the relatives on your left, a burly man from Alabama whose name you can’t remember. He doesn’t sound concerned. You would breathe a sigh of relief, if you could breathe at all.

“T minus 9 . . . 8 . . . 7 . . .”

You can’t remember your own name either now. Your mind is too full of your son’s face, the one in his third-grade school picture with the half-combed hair.

“We’re ready for main engine start!” says the voice from Mission Control.

At this point, there should be a roar and then a rush of flame that instantly turns the water into billowing steam.

But instead there’s . . . silence.

No liftoff. No reaching for the stars.

Nothing.

The astronauts have been dressed for the part. The space shuttle and booster rockets look great on the outside.

But no one loaded any fuel into the tanks, or linked the computers, or actually made any preparations to send your son into space.

Everyone had great intentions.

But it’s a failure to launch.



Unfortunately, in too many homes of parents who know and love Jesus, that picture closely resembles what happens when kids grow up and are ready to “launch out” on their own.

Depending on which study you want to quote, anywhere from 50

to 70 percent of children from evangelical Christian families won't embrace the faith as their own when they leave for college. That's tragic. When it comes to faith transference, we're losing the next generation.

Let me shoot straight: It's not the churches' fault. I think the level of ministry excellence in churches today—for the two hours or so that a family is in the building—has never been higher! The music and PowerPoint presentations and kids' and youth programs are *light years* ahead of where they've been in the past. Yet more and more young people are never getting off the launchpad when it comes to personally accepting Christ and growing in their faith.

Here's one reason why.

Recently I asked several hundred parents of younger children at a large church three questions.

1. "Do you think it's important to pass down your faith to your children?" As you might expect, more than 90 percent said, "Yes! It's very important!"

2. "Do you think your child will have a strong faith when he or she gets out of college?" Again, 90 percent of those responding said, "You bet!"

3. "Outside of going to church, what are you doing intentionally to introduce and build a growing faith in your child?" Fewer than 30 percent were doing *anything* purposefully to meet that goal during the 166 hours a week their children were at home.

Think about that. These wonderful, godly, well-intentioned parents strongly believed they should be involved in their children's faith development. They also were highly confident that their children would embrace the faith by the time they were on their own. But when it came to actually preparing their kids, they were just dressing them up and dropping them off at church—and setting themselves up for a failure to launch.

But that doesn't have to be true in your home.

Now is the time for you to realize the incredible impact you can have on your child, helping him or her come to Christ and grow in that relationship. You can do it!

It's not rocket science to help your child reach God's best for his or her life. It's small things, like the fun and incredibly helpful activities you'll learn in this book. They'll go a long way toward filling up those boosters that lift your son or daughter into a lifelong faith.

THE LAUNCH WINDOW IS NOW

Maybe you've heard the statistics. Researchers agree that most people who receive Christ as Savior do so when they're children. One study claimed that 85 percent of born-again Americans launched their faith between the ages of 4 and 14; another survey put the number at 83 percent.¹ The Barna Group's findings in 2004 weren't quite so extreme, with 43 percent becoming Christians before age 13 and 64 percent before age 18.²

No matter which numbers are correct, the message to parents has seemed clear enough: Now's the time for you to invest in your child coming to faith. And the best place for that to happen is right in your home. In fact, the same Barna survey found that half of those who received Christ by age 12 did so at the prompting of their parents, with an added 20 percent following the lead of another relative or friend.

No matter how wonderful your church may be, most successful launches happen at or near home. That doesn't have to scare you, even if you're a first-generation Christian like me. I didn't grow up in a Christian home, so I never saw anyone model faith transference. My wife, Cindy, didn't see an active, growing faith displayed in her home, either.

Yet both our children know and love the Lord today, as one finishes graduate school and the other gets ready for college. We truly

believe it's because we did—without knowing how or why—many of the things you'll find in this book.

I only wish Cindy and I'd had *FaithLaunch* when we were raising our two precious daughters! We stumbled into many of the things you'll learn in the pages that follow. You don't have to stumble; these resources are tremendous!

Cindy and I didn't "launch" our relationship with Christ when we were children. Our own stories prove that children can accept the Lord when they're at voting age or older. So if your older child doesn't respond to God's invitation before adulthood, the story may be far from over.

Still, the benefits of following Jesus begin in this life. Since you want the best for your child, you want him or her to start receiving those benefits as soon as possible. Children face more challenges today than ever, and at a younger age; introducing them to Christ now, while they're young, is the most important gift you can give them.

It will be an incredible blessing to you as well. The aging apostle John said this about his spiritual children: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 4). That's true for any parent of older or grown children who sees them making good decisions and living a life of faith and love for Christ.

WE ALL NEED A LIFTOFF

When it comes to launching your child's faith, strong-arming isn't an option. But neither is sitting on the sidelines, hoping your child will somehow sort it all out alone. So what do you do if you're new to the faith—or, like Cindy and me, have no spiritual road maps from your past to follow?

You could just hope for the best. Like Larry.

Larry didn't know where he was going. He and his passengers were

supposed to end up at a restaurant called the Stagecoach Inn, but he didn't know how to get there.

Fortunately, Larry's new car had GPS—the Global Positioning System. By punching a button on the dashboard and speaking the name of his destination, he could display directions on the miniature screen. He'd get there in no time, and impress his passengers to boot.

“Stagecoach Inn,” Larry commanded. The others leaned forward, peering at the screen.

Sure enough, a message appeared. It was the name of a local radio station, which proceeded to play some annoying music.

Frowning, Larry tried again. “Stagecoach Inn,” he repeated.

This time the GPS came up with an actual destination. Unfortunately, it was a movie theater. In a different town.

After a few more tries, Larry gave up. He found the restaurant the old-fashioned way—by driving until he saw a sign that said STAGECOACH INN.

Things worked out okay for Larry, other than failing to impress his passengers. But not knowing where you're going when you're launching a rocket—or a child's faith—isn't a wise strategy. It's an invitation to leave your child's faith on the launching pad.

So where do you begin?

First, keep in mind that we're not just talking about getting your child to say some words that he or she doesn't understand or fully believe. For example, Marilyn's parents seemed satisfied when they coached her to pray the “sinner's prayer” at age five. Her mother hugged her, calling it a “great moment” in the girl's life—and it certainly seemed like it was! She'd said the “right” words, after all.

Marilyn's parents must have felt their primary duty was done. From there it was just a matter of sending their daughter to Christian school and church camp and making sure she got on her church's Bible quiz team.

But Marilyn's heart wasn't in this journey. Her interest in Christianity had begun and ended with that prayer. By the time she was a teenager, she hated her life. Today she's turned her back on the "fundamentalism" of her childhood, vowing to spend the rest of her days learning to "be herself."³

As Marilyn's story demonstrates, the goal of faith-launching is to cultivate an eternal, personal relationship with God. It's not just to get our child to say words that make us relax or feel better.

That's not to say that "praying the prayer" or having a specific "launch day" isn't important. The act of believing in Jesus, wanting forgiveness for sins, and saying so is an indispensable beginning.

But ignoring the rest of the flight plan can lead to shortcuts that endanger your "astronaut." Parents who aim only to hear the "right words" from a very young child may be tempted to "get this out of the way" as if it were an awkward talk about the birds and the bees. They may fail to supply their kids with enough information as they grow up to make a real, lasting choice. To use a more biblical word picture, they may build a house on sand, not rock.

LAUNCHPAD JITTERS

"Hey," you might say. "Aren't you supposed to be *encouraging* me? I'm already nervous about this faith-launching stuff, and you're just telling me all the things that can go wrong."

Sorry. If you're anxious about helping your child become a Christian, it's understandable. You may think it's all up to you. You may think that if you "fail," the launch window will slam shut and no one will ever be able to reach your child.

Or perhaps you're more worried about how this process might affect your relationship with your son or daughter. What if your child rejects you for acting "weird" when you try to bring up "spiritual

things”? What if he or she won’t “go along” when you ask for a decision about following Jesus? Will things get awkward—or worse?

Let’s look at seven common faith-launching worries parents face—and why you don’t have to feel overwhelmed by them.

1. *I’m not an expert on Christianity.* Good! That means you’ll be able to talk with your child in plain English, not theological jargon. If you don’t quite grasp concepts like the Trinity and original sin, relax. *FaithLaunch* describes them as simply as possible so that you can do the same for your child.

2. *My own relationship with God isn’t going too well.* If you believe the basics—that we can receive forgiveness by placing our faith in Christ—you’re qualified to address the subject with your child. It’s important to deal with your doubts, disappointments, and temptations with the help of a pastor or other mature believer, but waiting for perfection isn’t necessary. In fact, you might even find *FaithLaunch* to be a faith-builder for you.

3. *My kid has the attention span of a Chihuahua on caffeine.* Are you afraid of boring your child? Whether the cause is ADHD or just too many video games, a short attention span doesn’t have to torpedo your takeoff. *FaithLaunch* features a wide variety of brief activities, not a bunch of lectures. You can take things at your child’s pace, and in bite-sized pieces.

4. *I’m no teacher.* Fortunately, *FaithLaunch* isn’t a class. It’s a series of Family Times—kind of a cross between game night, a devotional, and baking cookies together. You’re the leader, but there’s no standing at a chalkboard and delivering a memorized lesson. It’s as natural as spending time with your child to play with the cat, listen to a song on the radio, or work together on a model plane.

5. *I have to do this alone.* If you’re a single parent, or if you’re married but your spouse is reluctant to help, you may need to lead *FaithLaunch* as a team of one. No, make that two: God knows all about your

situation. The Family Times have been prepared with you in mind; you won't be required to do anything a mom *or* dad can't do. If you really need flesh-and-blood support, though, you might consider inviting a friend and his or her child to join you for Family Times.

6. *My kid doesn't seem interested in God.* If you haven't talked with your child much about faith before, suddenly immersing yourselves in the subject may seem jarring. You may assume your child isn't interested, yet it's likely he or she has questions but hasn't raised them. Rather than leaping headlong into *FaithLaunch*, you might prepare your child for a couple of weeks beforehand by occasionally asking questions of your own ("Who do you think gave that caterpillar all those legs?") and mentioning your own faith ("I'll be sure to pray about your spelling test tomorrow").

7. *I'm afraid I'll do it wrong and I'll never have another chance.* The good news is that there are a million ways to do it right. Blend *FaithLaunch* with your personality, your child's interests, your family's schedule, your home's layout, your favorite snacks. Share the truths in your own words, and let your child respond without insisting on the "right" answer. Count on the all-powerful God to use your less-than-perfect efforts—in His own time. When it comes to launch windows, He's able to open a lot more than doors.

ONE WAY, MANY FLIGHT PLANS

A space shuttle launch is no haphazard affair. Firing the main engines, for example, doesn't take place "shortly" before liftoff. It happens at *precisely* T minus 6.6 seconds.⁴

Fortunately for us parents, the faith-launching process isn't run by NASA. Introducing your child to Christ isn't bound by stopwatch, formula, technique, or checklist. The only way to God is through faith in Jesus (John 14:6), but there are many ways to launch that faith.

Authors Craig and Janet Parshall recall the varying paths to belief that their children took:

Looking back at our own children, we're thrilled to remember how they invited Jesus Christ into their hearts in different ways and at different times. Most were at home; one was on a family vacation. Our two daughters responded directly to our own presentations of how to begin a relationship with God; our oldest son was led to the Lord by his sister.

Our youngest son, Joseph, had still another story. He seemed very interested in the gospel and listened carefully as the plan of salvation was explained to him at bedtime one night. Looking down into his big, brown eyes, we told him about God's unconditional love.

How we wanted this little one to know and experience God! We knew that what he was hearing could change his life forever, and his choice would have eternal ramifications. Pretty big stuff for a seven-year-old!

His response: "I want to think it over."

For us, it was an anguished moment. Somehow we resisted the temptation to coerce a confession of faith from this precious person, and respected his need to make an authentic decision for Christ.

The next morning our son walked into the kitchen—and promptly announced that he was ready to invite Jesus into his heart! God heard our silent hallelujahs, even if our son couldn't.⁵

As the Parshalls point out, "Each of our children's decisions for Christ was preceded by slow, consistent teaching about Jesus that

occurred in a variety of settings—during car trips, at the dinner table, in Sunday school, at bedtime, and on nature hikes. We found that all of life is an opportunity to share the love of Christ with our children.”⁶

In other words, faith-launching takes many forms. The question is: Which forms are right for you?

SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT VS. STRUCTURE

Michael and Cheri are putting all their eggs in one basket when it comes to helping their five-year-old son, Cooper, launch his faith. The basket is their church; they're counting on Sunday school and Vacation Bible School to do the job. One of these days, they hope, they'll get a call from one of Cooper's teachers, saying he prayed to receive Jesus when an invitation was given.

Alberto and Consuela, meanwhile, have heard a lot about “teachable moments.” They can see the value of seizing spontaneous opportunities to tell their eight-year-old daughter, Elena, more about God. Just the other day, for instance, Consuela found Elena watching a cartoon that featured a pair of wisecracking angels. Consuela sat down and watched, too. Afterward, mother and daughter talked about what angels were really like—and why the Bible is a better source of information on the subject than Saturday morning TV is. Alberto and Consuela are hoping for enough teachable moments to tell Elena everything she needs to know to accept Christ.

Patti and Dontrell prefer to plan ahead. At least three nights a week they talk about a Bible verse at the dinner table with their kids, Tyrell and LaTricia. A few months ago Patti and Dontrell decided to invite Tyrell, 6, to receive Jesus as Savior. They even rehearsed the conversation they'd have with him. They breathed a sigh of relief when he said yes. Already they're planning a similar talk with LaTricia, 4—and are praying that she'll be ready.

So which couple is taking the “right” course?

Michael and Cheri aren't wrong to think that one of Cooper's teachers might lead their boy to Christ. But it's hardly a sure thing. And the 120 hours a week they spend with him provide far more opportunities than the 2 hours he spends in Sunday school and children's church. At the very least, they're an important part of Cooper's “launch team.”

Alberto and Consuela are wise to act on the biblical direction to “impress [these commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). Making the most of teachable moments is natural and effective. Still, few of us would rely only on “serendipity” to teach our kids about tying shoes or using a fire extinguisher. Will enough of those moments arise for Elena?

Patti and Dontrell know the value of planning. They aren't afraid to set aside time for discussing spiritual issues, to make sure those aren't lost in the shuffle. They want to turn their priorities into practices. They've read the words of Jesus: “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4). They need to watch and listen to Tyrell and LaTricia to make sure that helpful structure doesn't become a controlling cage. But so far unconditional love has kept rules from ruining the relationship.

When it comes to faith-launching, what's the best mix of spontaneity and scheduling? That depends on your family. If you prefer the former, you may need less preparation—but enough to think on your feet, responding to the moment. You won't have to interrupt family routine, which helps your child understand that spiritual things are a natural part of life.

If you're more comfortable with structure, you won't have to wait for teachable moments only. You can ensure covering the most crucial points; you can pick times and methods that fit you and your child;

you can ask for a specific response to the Good News of Jesus, even if the question doesn't "just happen" to come up.

How do you strike a balance between improvisation and intentionality? That's where *FaithLaunch* comes in.

THE FAITHLAUNCH ADVANTAGE

FaithLaunch isn't the only way to introduce your child to Jesus, of course. But it's a good way to do it without pressuring your child, exhausting yourself, or upending your family's schedule. Each of the 13 "Family Times" takes about 30 to 45 minutes; that's 30 to 45 minutes of togetherness, not tedium. You might use one Family Time each week for 90 days—or bits and pieces over a longer period. You get to decide, because *FaithLaunch* is flexible.

The goal is to prepare your child to begin a relationship with God. You'll explore questions like these:

- Who is God, and how does He feel about me?
- Who am I, and why am I here?
- Why do we need forgiveness?
- What's the Bible for?
- Who is Jesus, and what did He do for me?
- How can I join God's family?
- What's heaven like?
- What does God want me to do now?

Since so many children receive Christ as Savior when they're 4 to 7 years old, each Family Time is written with that age group in mind. But shifting gears for kids ages 8 to 12 is easy; just use the optional activities.

FaithLaunch gives you plenty of fun ways to learn, including three *Adventures in Odyssey* episodes to listen to. You'll sculpt with clay, stage a treasure hunt, even tell a story with the help of your child's action

figures or dolls. If you need an excuse to play with your child, here it is! And if you need permission to talk about what's important, that's here, too.

The plan for each Family Time is easy to follow. Your goal is clear, and the items you'll need are listed—right down to snacks you might enjoy. To boost your confidence, things you might say are spelled out in bold type—with answers to questions in parentheses. And you're *always* free to adapt the plan to fit you and your child.

There's a bonus, too—another confidence booster. In Part III of the book you'll find answers to questions your child might ask about God, the Bible, Jesus, joining God's family, and more. So there's no need to panic if your child wants to know something that isn't on the tip of your tongue.

THE BIG QUESTION

But what about the big question—the one you may long to ask your child, the one about being ready to receive Jesus? How does that fit into *FaithLaunch*?

If your child already is part of God's family, *FaithLaunch* is a way to affirm that relationship and cover essential concepts that Sunday school might skip. If your child hasn't prayed to receive Jesus yet, the Family Times provide several opportunities to do so. There's no do-or-die confrontation, but a series of low-key invitations to accept God's loving offer of forgiveness and friendship.

Parents get nervous about extending that invitation, fearing they'll word it clumsily or that their kids will R.S.V.P. with a no. But as Mindy Stoms, a director for the children's ministry at Willow Creek Community Church, points out, "One simple phrase causes a child to fill with joy: You're Invited!"

Why? Because it's personal. "They've been selected. They've been

included. Somebody wants them. They've heard about how amazing a party can be, and now the real person planning all this wonderful stuff has said, 'This includes you.' ”⁷

Mindy doesn't hesitate to invite children to enter a personal relationship with Jesus. “For many kids, this is a very natural step in their spiritual journey. When they hear that the same Jesus they have learned so much about now wants to be their forever friend, wants to take the punishment for the sin that they have, and wants to help them through all the things they face in their life, and wants to eventually live with them forever in heaven, it's no surprise that many say ‘YES!’ ”⁸

How should you present this invitation? Here's some good advice:

- When your children appear to understand the basics of what Jesus has done for them, simply ask something like, “Do you want to pray and ask God to forgive you and make you His child right now?” Using the phrase “right now” makes it easier for you to ask them later again if they aren't ready yet. . . .
- If you're concerned that your child has “prayed the prayer” without grasping all the theology, remember that children need only understand the main points. Being forgiven and becoming a Christian is not like a contract signing in which you must be careful to read all the fine print. It is the start of a loving relationship—a foundation on which your children can build throughout their lives.
- If your children don't accept Jesus in exactly the same way or setting as you might have envisioned, try not to worry or be disappointed. There is no single “correct” way to come to Jesus. It can happen with you, in church or Sunday school, with a friend, as children are thinking by themselves—anywhere. It might be emotional or matter-of-fact. God wants a unique relationship with each person, and each relationship starts in its own way.⁹

FAILURE TO LAUNCH?

But what if your child *doesn't* respond? Does that mean *FaithLaunch* has failed?

Not at all. You will have laid a foundation on which your later efforts—or another person—can build. If your child doesn't seem to accept the invitation, here are five things to keep in mind.

1. *Don't panic.* One child's response may be obvious, but another's may be hard to detect. Take the four-year-old identical twin boys who heard the Good News about Jesus from their dad one day as the three of them lay on a king-sized bed. Right away one of the boys prayed, asking Jesus to be his Savior. Months later, after hearing nothing on the subject from the other boy, the father asked him during a car trip whether he, too, wanted to pray such a prayer. "I already did," the boy said matter-of-factly, clearly considering it a private matter.

2. *Keep the door open.* You may feel disappointed or anxious if your child doesn't react as you'd wanted. But don't let that come between you. Keep having fun and loving your child without reservation. Don't withhold your approval in the hope of making him "come around." Reissue the invitation from time to time if you like, but don't let it turn into nagging. And remember that if your child thinks it's nagging, it is.

3. *Continue to teach and ask questions.* The more your child knows about God, Jesus, the Bible, and heaven, the more reasons he or she will have to accept the invitation. There's no need to postpone talking about spiritual things until "the big decision" has been made. Keep asking questions, too, about your child's view of God in order to gauge his or her progress on the pilgrim's path.

4. *Look and listen for signs of interest and growth.* "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:16). Is your child more willing to help around the house this year than last? Does he show concern when

a sibling is sick or hurt? Is she interested in befriending the lonely new kid at school, or hearing the story of David and Goliath, or putting a quarter in the offering plate, or waving a branch for the Messiah on Palm Sunday? Be thankful for actions that may flow from a developing faith, even if your child has yet to put that faith into words.

5. *Pray.* If that really were your child in the space shuttle, awaiting a launch that looked as if it might never come, isn't this exactly what you'd do? Your heavenly Father wants that relationship with your child, too. Ask Him to help your child understand and take hold of the love He offers. Don't give up. God didn't give up on you, did He?

THE COUNTDOWN BEGINS

The response is up to your child. First, though, you need to give him or her something to respond to. *FaithLaunch* is ready to help you do just that.

Remember where we started. It's simply not an option today to just dress up your children in "church clothes" and expect that they'll figure it all out while you stay busy elsewhere. Yes, it takes effort—but what an incredible privilege to be on your child's "launch team"!

The Lord is standing by with all the power you need. This book—and many other resources on instilling faith at home, available through Focus on the Family and from ministries like ours at www.strongfamilies.com—can help you every step of the way.

We believe in you, pray God's best for you, and are excited for you to dive into *FaithLaunch*. It's so much fun, and can do so much to fill those booster rockets with God's love and light for your child!

Enjoy the flight!

PART II

FAITH LAUNCH
FAMILY 
TIMES

by Jane Vogel

FAMILY TIME 1

ONE GOD, INVISIBLE



MISSION CONTROL:
Where You're Headed

You'll help your child discover that God is a spirit—the only God, the Creator and source of everything.



COUNTDOWN:
Getting Ready

What could be more exciting than launching and guiding your child in a relationship with God? But if you're like most of us, you find the prospect a little daunting, too. Where do you start? What do you say? How do you introduce your child to Someone you can't even see?

In Family Time 1, we start where the Bible starts: with the account of Creation. What better truth to give your child a sense of God's power and grandeur—and to instill delight in God's

handiwork! And we use a picture Jesus Himself gave us to help us understand God as spirit—the wind that moves but can't be seen (John 3:5-8).

Prepare for your time with your child by reading through the plan, and especially praying for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.



1. **BLAST OFF:** **Getting Started**

What you need:

- *an inflated balloon*
- *masking tape (optional)*

Sit at your kitchen table, facing your child. Play a game by blowing an inflated balloon across the tabletop to your child. Let him or her blow the balloon back to you. See how many times you can pass the balloon back and forth.

If you like, mark a “goal line” with masking tape and keep track of “touchdowns.” You can play this game with as many family members as are available by blowing the balloon around the table.

Ask: **What made the balloon** (or cotton balls as described in Alternate Flight Plan) **move?** (Your breath.)

Could you see your breath? (Younger kids may say they could see their breath, because they don't necessarily distinguish between their breath and the action it caused. Help them see the difference by asking questions like, “What color is your breath? How big is it? Can you see it, or is it invisible?”)

If you can't see your breath, how do you know it's real? (You know it's real because you can see what it does—it moves the balloon/cotton balls.)



ALTERNATE FLIGHT PLAN: Options for Ages 8-12

What you need:

- *cotton balls*
- *masking tape*
- *timer*

Older kids will enjoy a faster-paced, more competitive game. Make a dividing line down the center of the table with masking tape and put a handful of cotton balls on each side of the line. Set a timer for two minutes. The goal is to blow your cotton balls to the other person's side of the table. Whoever has fewer cotton balls on his or her side when the timer rings, wins. If more than two family members are playing, you can form teams—or divide the table into thirds, quarters, and so on.



2. EXPLORATION: Discovering Truth

What you need:

- *a Bible*
- *an instrumental (no words) music CD or tape*

Tell your child that together you're going to learn about Someone who's invisible, but who's still definitely real.

Read aloud John 4:24a, pointing out the words to your child if he or she is able to read. Explain that "God is spirit" means that God doesn't have a body, and we can't see Him. But we still can know that God is real, because we see what He does—just as your child

could see what his or her breath did when he or she blew on the balloon or cotton balls.

Ask your child if he or she knows anything that God has done. You don't need to prompt any answers; just use the question as a way to find out what your child already knows about God. Then open your Bible to Genesis 1 and read aloud verse 1.

Start playing an instrumental music CD. Explain that you're going to have some fun moving to the music and acting out a true story. You'll give instructions; your child should be ready to "freeze" in position when you give the direction. If your child wants you to move along with him or her, feel free!

Using the following as a guide, paraphrase Genesis 1:1–2:2 and provide instructions. Don't worry about using these exact words; your own will be just fine.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth didn't have any shape. It was empty. It was dark. Close your eyes and move slowly. Imagine how it would be if everything were very, very dark!

On day 1, God said, "Let there be light." And there was light! Open your eyes and freeze! What a difference it makes when there's light! God saw that the light was good. God called the light "day." He called the darkness "night." You can move again now!

On day 2, God said, "Let there be a huge space." And that's exactly what happened! Make yourself as big as possible, and move with the hugest movements you can! God called the huge space "sky." Stretch up high toward the sky, and freeze! Now unfreeze!

On day 3, God said, "Let dry ground appear." And that's exactly what happened! God called the dry ground "land." He called the waters "oceans." Imagine you're a wave in the ocean. How would you move? Be a wave . . . now freeze! God saw that the land and the oceans were good. You can move again! Then

God said, “Let the land produce plants—trees and flowers and all kinds of plants.” And that’s exactly what happened! Pretend you’re a plant growing up from the ground. How tall will you grow? Grow, and grow, and grow, and . . . freeze! God saw that it was good. Now unfreeze!

On day 4, God said, “Let there be lights in the huge space of the sky.” And that’s exactly what happened! God made the sun, and the moon, and the stars. Move as if you’re a star twinkling in the sky! Now freeze! God saw that it was good. You can move now!

On day 5, God said, “Let the oceans be filled with living things.” And that’s exactly what happened! Pretend you’re a fish. Now an octopus! [Add any sea creatures your child knows.] Now freeze! Okay, unfreeze! God said, “Let birds fly above the earth across the huge space of the sky.” And that’s exactly what happened! Pretend you’re a baby bird just learning to fly. Now you’re getting



ALTERNATE FLIGHT PLAN:

Options for Ages 8-12

What you need:

- *Bibles*
- *slips of paper numbered 1 through 7*

Older kids can enjoy exploring the creation account through movement, too, but they probably won’t want to move to music with you. Instead, play a version of charades. Take turns drawing a numbered slip of paper and reading silently from the Bible about what God created on that day. While the actor performs the charade, the guesser(s) can look in Genesis 1 for clues as to what day is being represented.

stronger. Now pretend you're a beautiful, strong bird that can fly fast! Now freeze! God saw that it was good. You can move again!

On day 6, God said, "Let the land produce all kinds of animals." And that's exactly what happened! Imagine you're an elephant. How about a monkey? [Add animals your child knows and enjoys.] Now freeze! Last of all, God said, "Let us make people." So He created a man and a woman and He said, "Have babies and take care of this world that I've made." Pretend you're taking care of your favorite animal. Now freeze! God saw everything He had made. And it was very good. Unfreeze!

By day 7, God had finished the work He'd been doing. So on the seventh day He rested. You can take a rest, too!



3. REENTRY: **Bringing the Truth Home**

Repeat the main point you want your child to grasp: **God is spirit**, so we can't see Him. But we can know He's real because we can see what He's made.

Take turns naming things that God has made. If weather permits, go outside—or at least look out a window. With young children, reinforce the point by saying each time, **God made ____**. With older children, you can turn this into a game of "I Spy," or take turns naming some of the things you like best in God's creation.



4. SPLASHDOWN: **Applying What You've Learned**

Remind your child that on day 6 of creation, God gave people the job of taking care of all that He'd made. Together, choose a way that you and your child can show special care for part of God's creation.

What you choose will depend on your child's age and your living situation. Young children will do best with a single action they can take right away. Here are some examples:

- grooming or checking the food and water for a family pet
- watering a houseplant or an outdoor plant
- scattering birdseed or pieces of bread for birds.

Older kids probably have heard enough about ecology to come up with ways to serve as stewards of God's creation. Some examples:

- setting up or maintaining a family recycling project
- picking a way to reduce energy consumption as a family (lower-wattage lightbulbs, adjusting the thermostat, turning off a CD player when leaving a room)
- picking up litter in a section of park, forest preserve, or roadway.



SPACE SNACK

What you need:

- “Creation” food (see below)

Want to wrap up with refreshments? Try a snack that reminds your child of God's creation—like animal crackers, a “solar system” made of fruit “planets” (an orange, a grape, a cherry, a peach, etc.), or “gummy” versions of some of God's creatures (fish, worms, bugs, and bears).

NOTES

Part I

1. Statistics attributed to Nazarene Church Growth Research and the International Bible Society, cited at <http://home.snu.edu/~HCULBERT/ages.htm>.
2. “Evangelism Is Most Effective Among Kids,” October 11, 2004, found at www.barna.org.
3. From the “Walk Away” Web site sponsored by the Institute for First Amendment Studies (gemini.berkshire.net/~ifas/wa/stories.html).
4. National Aeronautics and Space Administration, found at <http://www.nasa.gov/returntoflight/launch/countdown101.html>, p. 3.
5. Craig and Janet Parshall, *Traveling a Pilgrim's Path* (Wheaton, Ill.: Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), p. 11.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
7. Mindy Stoms, “Making It Personal: Jesus Loves Me!” July 13, 2007. Found at TodaysChildrensMinistry.com, p. 1.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
9. *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner, eds. (Wheaton, Ill.: Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishers, 2000), pp. 301-302.

Part III

1. Adapted from Rick Osborne, K. Christie Bowler, and John Duckworth, *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children* (Wheaton, Ill.: Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishers, 2000), pp. 277-384.

Note: Listing of Web sites does not constitute endorsement or agreement by Focus on the Family with information or resources offered at or through those sites.