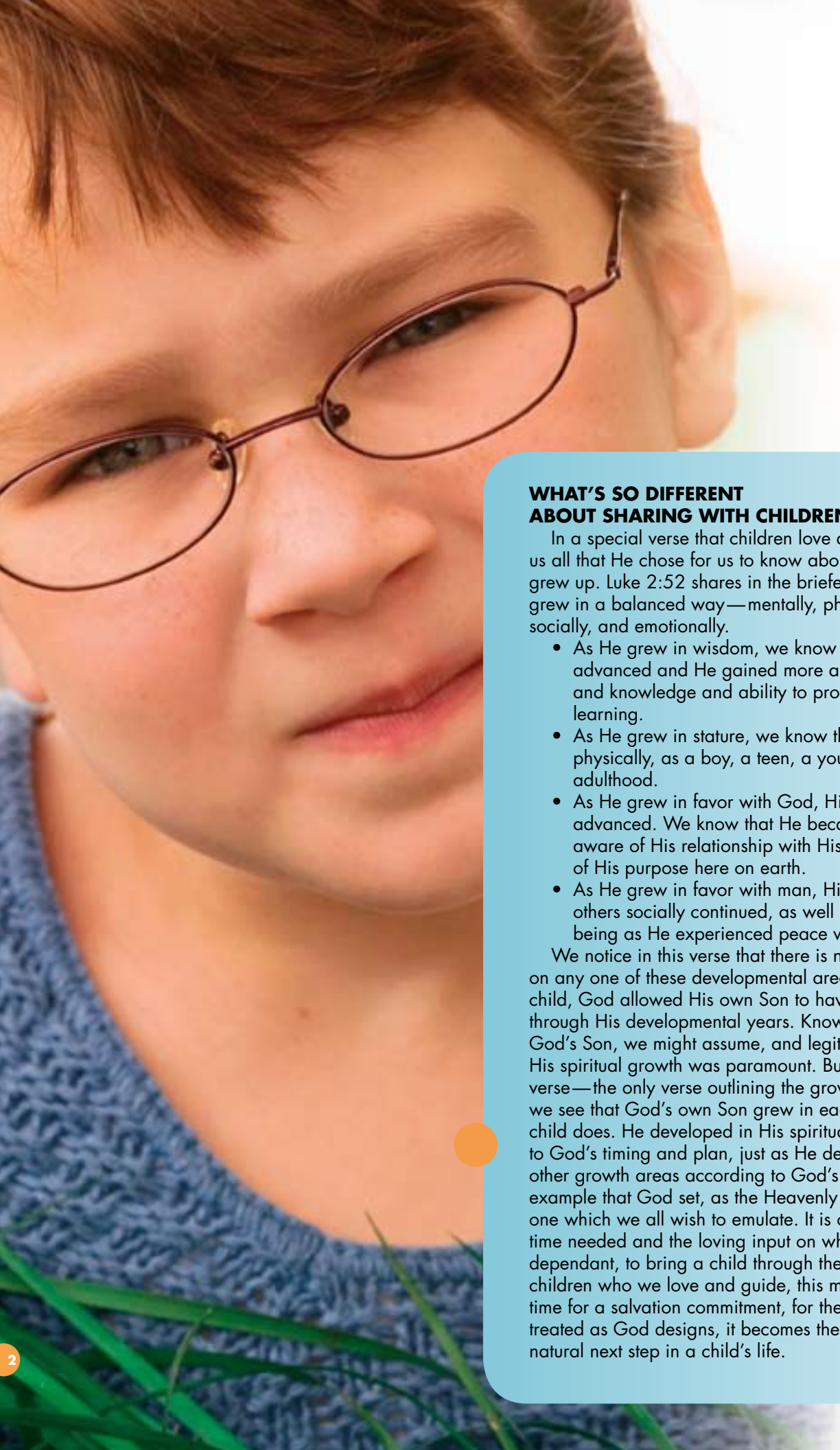




& CHILDREN SALVATION

A child's decision for salvation is, as with every person, the most important decision that child will ever make. It is also most often the result of someone who cares about that child taking time to guide him or her through the process.

Scripture speaks clearly of the salvation experience. The Bible never deviates from the simple message that God loves each person and gave Jesus as His assurance of that love. Jesus' life was an example and a sacrifice for each person. As we trust Jesus in our own life, we also have the choice to trust Him in the life of each person, child or adult, with whom we share!



WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT ABOUT SHARING WITH CHILDREN?

In a special verse that children love and know, God tells us all that He chose for us to know about how His Son, Jesus, grew up. Luke 2:52 shares in the briefest of terms that Jesus grew in a balanced way—mentally, physically, spiritually, socially, and emotionally.

- As He grew in wisdom, we know that His learning advanced and He gained more and more information and knowledge and ability to process what He was learning.
- As He grew in stature, we know that He matured physically, as a boy, a teen, a young man, and into adulthood.
- As He grew in favor with God, His spiritual growth advanced. We know that He became more and more aware of His relationship with His Heavenly Father and of His purpose here on earth.
- As He grew in favor with man, His ability to relate to others socially continued, as well as His emotional well-being as He experienced peace within Himself.

We notice in this verse that there is no singular emphasis on any one of these developmental areas. As with every child, God allowed His own Son to have balanced growth through His developmental years. Knowing that Jesus was God's Son, we might assume, and legitimately so, that His spiritual growth was paramount. But, according to this verse—the only verse outlining the growing years of Jesus, we see that God's own Son grew in each area as every child does. He developed in His spiritual growth according to God's timing and plan, just as He developed in His other growth areas according to God's plan. We follow the example that God set, as the Heavenly Parent with Jesus, one which we all wish to emulate. It is one of allowing the time needed and the loving input on which each child is dependant, to bring a child through the growth process. For children who we love and guide, this means that when it is time for a salvation commitment, for the child who has been treated as God designs, it becomes the most normal and natural next step in a child's life.



HOW CAN WE HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND BEST?

Because of the nature of the faith experience, which involves the use of spiritual concepts and abstract terminology, it is easy to forget, as adults, how difficult some of our words are for children to truly understand. Often, when we discuss our commitment to Jesus, we use familiar faith terms; that is, terms with meanings that are familiar to us adults! However, children were created to think in very concrete, logical terms, not those of the symbolic, abstract nature. This means that our spiritual terminology is often misunderstood and even miscommunicated. As they grow, studies show us that usually by mid to later childhood (pre-teen years; nine to twelve years of age), a child will begin the emerging ability to consider things in a more abstract way and understand symbolism better. Much of the faith experience is described in words of an abstract, symbolic nature, so adults work hard to be sure that they are honoring this most valuable message by stating it in words that can truly be understood. We also value children by speaking to them about spiritual things in ways that they can better understand the correct meaning. It is interesting to note that the one glimpse we have of Jesus' childhood years which also shares His awareness of Who He is (the verse already referenced – Luke 2:52) occurred during His twelfth year. That year is significant in that by this age, many children have begun to be able to consider spiritual matters with more understanding.

This does not mean that preschoolers and young children cannot learn about God and His love. It does mean that as we teach and model this love, we do so as Jesus, Himself, would. He created children so He knows best how to teach them. His best example of guiding children was as He gathered them around Him and welcomed their presence (Matthew 19:14). He did His teaching through relationship building. Children depend on those who will build a relationship with them to mentor them as they grow in learning and loving Jesus.



WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME?

The Bible does not give us a specific set time or age for a person to make a salvation commitment. Because God created each person individually and each one grows in every developmental area based on God's timing, the time for a faith commitment is also individual. Preparation for salvation begins from the time a child enters the world. Through the loving care of involved parents and the interaction of a supportive faith community, a child learns about trusting someone else. As a child grows, being able to build a trust relationship with others is the basis for knowing it is positive to build a trust relationship with God! As they begin to learn about God's love for them, His forgiveness to them, and His desires for their lives, they begin to see the need and begin to desire a relationship with Him. As this begins to occur, the "right time" for each child begins to emerge.

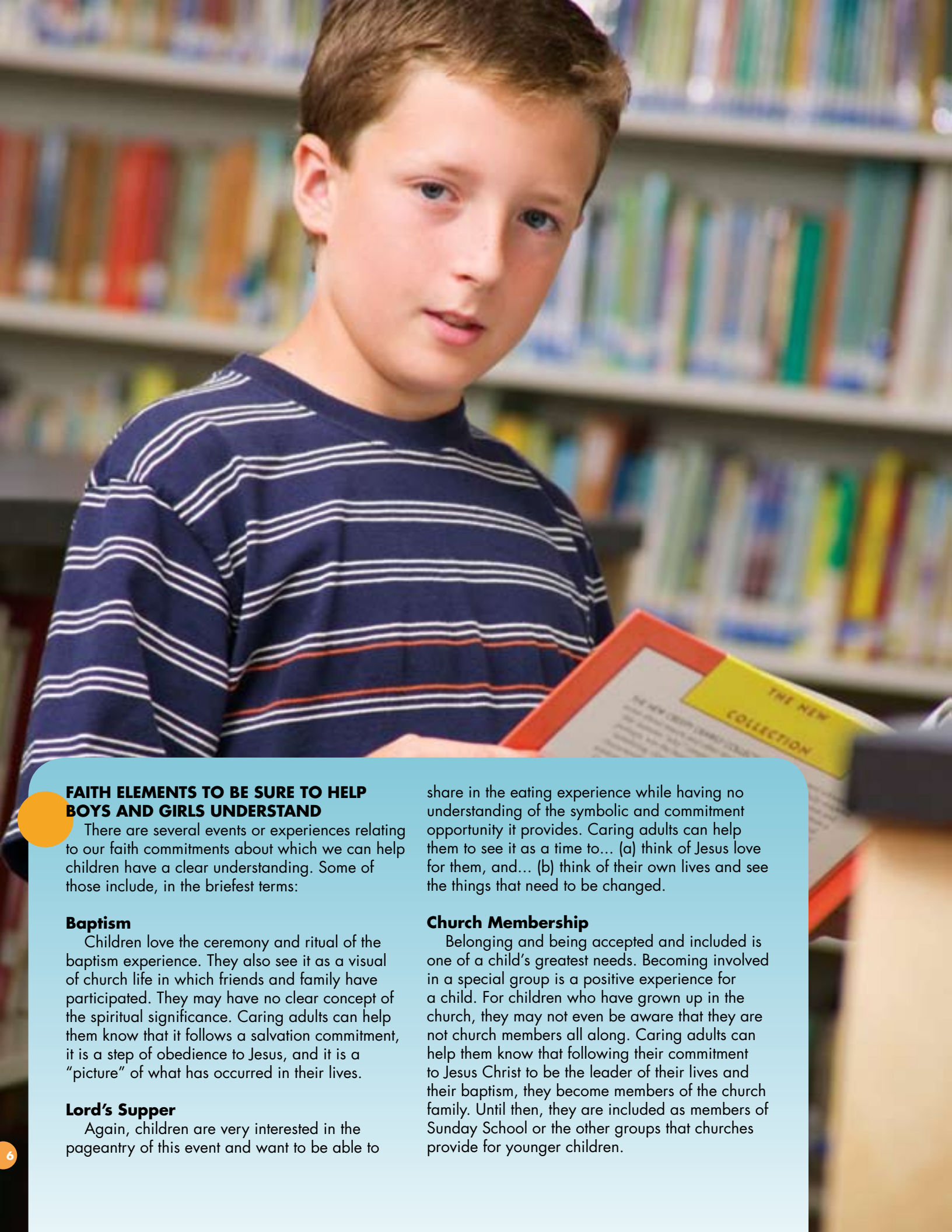
GUIDING A CHILD IN A SALVATION DISCUSSION

No one wants to make a mistake or wrong move in a child's most important decision of life. It becomes our responsibility to use caution and prayer as we approach this holy time. We can trust God's Holy Spirit to guide us as we consider a child's understanding and readiness.

Some helpful things to consider:

- Because God saves each person individually, each person, whether a child or not, deserves to be counseled individually. If that child is so valuable to God that He gave His own Son, Jesus, for that child's salvation, we honor that value by addressing each child's faith discussion one-on-one.
- It is also important to use questions that require an answer beyond "yes" or "no". Open-ended questions allow us to assess the child's understanding and readiness.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions. For instance, a child's statement that he wants to be baptized does not indicate that he is ready for a salvation decision. It could simply mean that a friend was baptized and he wants to be like his friend!
- Consider the use of questions such as:
 - > Tell me what you want to do? (allowing them to voice it in their own words)
 - > What does that mean? (whatever word they said they wanted to do)
 - > How long have you been thinking about this? (if they give one word or incomplete answers, say "tell me more")
- > Ask: What do you know about sin? What is it? Can you think of anything in your own life (something you have done or said) that you know God would say is "sin"?
- Involve the child's parents if they are believers. Because the scriptural responsibility for passing on the faith belongs to parents of faith and because the parents are the ones who will continue the training and legacy with their child, every attempt should be made to have them fully participate in any faith discussion with a child.
- Use the Bible as you talk. While there are many great books and tools, some very helpful, the only resource needed is God's Word. Use a translation that is easy for a child to understand. Don't assume that translations which we adults understand use words that children can understand. Wonderful faith verses such as 1 John 4:10 and 1:9; Romans 6:23, 3:23, and 5:8; Acts 16:31; John 3:16 and 15:14; and Matthew 10:32 are excellent to share.
- Pray throughout the entire experience. Partnering with God during this time is the most important thing that we can do.
- Make a clear distinction between becoming a Christian and being baptized. These two separate acts are often confused in a child's concept. Because we love children and value their decision, we make sure that they realize the difference and understand the meaning of each.





FAITH ELEMENTS TO BE SURE TO HELP BOYS AND GIRLS UNDERSTAND

There are several events or experiences relating to our faith commitments about which we can help children have a clear understanding. Some of those include, in the briefest terms:

Baptism

Children love the ceremony and ritual of the baptism experience. They also see it as a visual of church life in which friends and family have participated. They may have no clear concept of the spiritual significance. Caring adults can help them know that it follows a salvation commitment, it is a step of obedience to Jesus, and it is a “picture” of what has occurred in their lives.

Lord’s Supper

Again, children are very interested in the pageantry of this event and want to be able to

share in the eating experience while having no understanding of the symbolic and commitment opportunity it provides. Caring adults can help them to see it as a time to... (a) think of Jesus love for them, and... (b) think of their own lives and see the things that need to be changed.

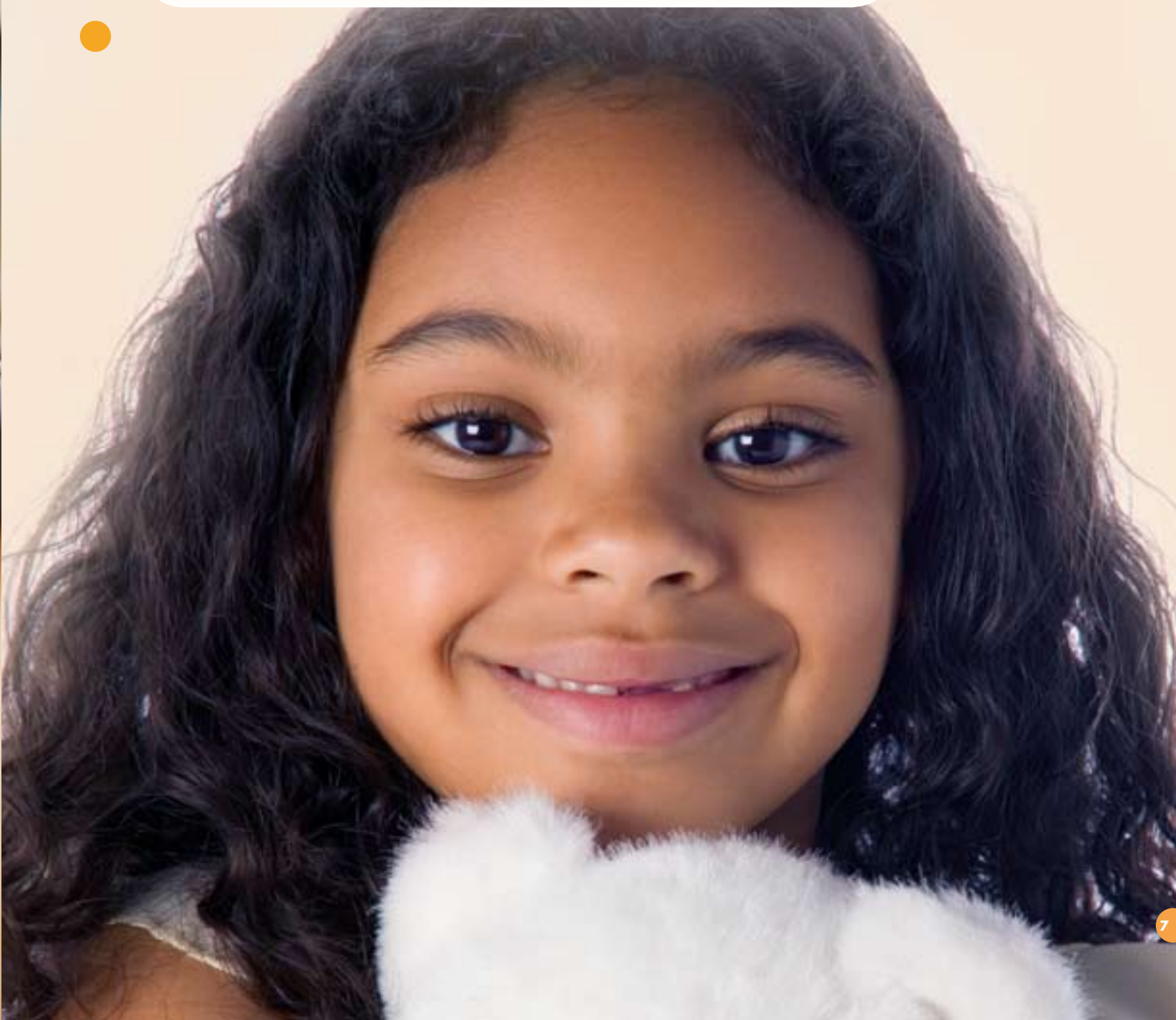
Church Membership

Belonging and being accepted and included is one of a child’s greatest needs. Becoming involved in a special group is a positive experience for a child. For children who have grown up in the church, they may not even be aware that they are not church members all along. Caring adults can help them know that following their commitment to Jesus Christ to be the leader of their lives and their baptism, they become members of the church family. Until then, they are included as members of Sunday School or the other groups that churches provide for younger children.

PASSING ON FAITH TO CHILDREN

Of all of the many things that we wish to do for boys and girls, the most pure desire is that of sharing our love for and faith in Jesus Christ. We love children and want them to have a wonderful relationship with our Lord. We want them to know that Heaven is their eternal home. We want them to experience the joy of participating in a community of faith. We want them to partner with God in sharing their faith with others.

Because of these things, we must handle this special time in a child’s life with the care and prayer that it deserves. Our goals are for each child to truly know Jesus. We know that in eternity, God will hold us accountable for the way in which we imparted His most treasured truth – that of Jesus’ love and sacrifice for each person. And we are privileged that He allows us to partner with Him in passing on faith to boys and girls!



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