

Resource Article

Faith Development Ages and Stages

We would not expect a small baby to physically care for himself like an adult would. In the same way, we cannot expect young children to act, think, learn, or grow spiritually as an adult would. Just as we grow physically and mentally throughout life, we also grow spiritually.

The following chart outlines some of the characteristics that can be seen at the different ages. These are only general ideas, as each child develops individually. So some younger children may have greater spiritual understanding than is common for their age. Others may be slower to understand certain truths. The most important thing to remember is that each child is created in the image of God and can grow in relationship with Him. Pray for God to help you understand the children you reach so that you can teach and guide them well.

Learning Trust and Love Ages Birth–5		
Physical, Mental, Emotional	Knowledge	Bible Skills
Begin to participate in activities to learn about God.	Introduced to words about God, the Bible, and faith.	Listen to simple Bible stories.
Feel loved by God and want to love Him in return.	The Bible is God’s holy book.	Begin to listen to and sing simple songs.
Build trust through rituals, repetition, routines, and predictability.	God made all things, including her.	Point to Bible pictures.
As a concrete thinker, learn through senses.	God loves and cares for her. He is good.	Look at Bible pictures and identify Bible characters.
Show love for God by singing, praying, giving.	Jesus can do anything.	Understand the Bible tells about a loving God and His Son, Jesus.
Desire to obey parents and teachers as a way to show love for God.	The church is where she can learn about God.	Begin to understand that the Bible is God’s Word.
Feel secure in knowing that God loves even if she does something wrong.		

Discovering Truth Ages 6–8

Physical, Mental, Emotional	Knowledge	Bible Skills
Understand cause and effect.	Learn how much Jesus loves everyone and why He came.	Listen to Bible stories and answer questions about them.
Can see another's point of view.	Understand who God is and that God keeps His promises.	Learn to retell events from Bible stories in sequence.
Want to make choices.	Know that he can talk to God whenever and wherever he wants.	Memorize Bible verses.
Desire to belong to a group.	Learn how Bible-time people loved and served God, and he can love and serve Him today.	Recognize that the Bible stories come from books in the Bible.
Want to obey parents and teachers.	Understand that he can be in relationship with God.	Learn about the organization of the Bible into Old and New Testaments.
Feel good about herself as part of God's creation which He loves.	Know that God is always good.	See Jesus as helper and friend.
Can pay attention longer.	Worship God expressing thanks for His love and care.	Have a simple understand of sin and the gospel.
Develop the habit of talking with Jesus often.	May recognize own sin and that God forgives her when she repents.	

Discovering Deeper Truth Ages 9–11

Physical, Mental, Emotional	Knowledge	Bible Skills
Desire to live for Christ at home, church, school.	Recognize that the Bible is God's truth.	Begin to understand the organization of the Bible.
Begin to have regular daily Bible readings and prayer times.	Grasp the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection.	Memorize the books of the Bible in order.
Make right choices and accept responsibility for her acts.	Understand God's laws, including the Ten Commandments.	Locate and read short passages.
Recognize that her abilities and knowledge can be used to serve God and others.	Gain a larger worldview through an emphasis on missionary work.	Memorize Bible verses.
Enjoy group activities.	Begin to see own need for a Savior.	Begin to ask deeper questions about passages.
Beginning to think abstractly.	Developing a personal value system.	

Exploring Justice Ages 12–14

Physical, Mental, Emotional	Knowledge	Bible Skills
Choose to follow God’s ways even when others do not.	Understand right and wrong from a Biblical perspective.	Transition from Bible story to Bible study.
Put faith into practice in daily life.	Understand how salvation relates to all people personally.	Gain experience in using basic Bible references.
Feel confident of God’s love and that He is dependable.	Understand the history of the Bible and get a sense of Bible chronology.	Read selected passages to discover facts and details.
Appreciate the wisdom and guidance of parents, teachers, and other adults.	Become familiar with Bible people, events, culture, and vocabulary.	Memorize Bible verses.
Look for opportunities to know God more deeply.		Learn to find cross-references for passages.

Building Relationship Ages 12–14

Physical, Mental, Emotional	Knowledge	Bible Skills
Feel confident that God loves her in spite of her failures and doubts.	Discover biblical principles that apply to Christian life and relationships.	Learn how to compare Scripture passages to better understand context of Scripture and how it relates to life.
Want a safe place to question and wrestle with faith.	Understand that God wants each person to develop a personal relationship with Him.	Learn basic inductive Bible study methods.
Develop strength to refuse to do wrong things and to encourage others to do right things.	Recognize the importance of baptism and communion.	Master skills in using Bible study tools such as Bible dictionaries and concordances.
Interact honestly with God through a regular pattern of Bible reading and prayer.	Discover how Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus.	Memorize Bible verses.
Desire sense of belonging and ownership of personal faith.	Learn to listen to the Holy Spirit and God's guidance through Scripture.	

Deepening Relationship Ages 15–17		
Physical, Mental, Emotional	Knowledge	Bible Skills
Gain confidence in God’s total direction for his life.	Deeper intimacy with God through prayer, study, fellowship.	Learn Scripture and deepen Bible study skills.
Appreciate the value of every life as created in God’s image.	Deepening of all that began at earlier ages.	Learn to approach the Bible as a unified whole.
Willing to stand against negative peer pressure and work actively to influence others against evil.	The more involved and personal the faith is, the more this young adult will stay in the faith.	Effectively use reference tools such as concordances and commentaries.
Find active ways to serve others.		Memorize Bible verses.
Lifelong Discipleship Adults		
Physical, Mental, Emotional	Knowledge	Bible Skills
Commitment to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and lifelong spiritual growth.	Comprehend the Bible’s major themes, personalities, and teachings.	Use historical background, word meaning, literary form, and other elements to interpret Bible passages.
Identify areas of personal ministry and become involved with serving others.	Discover and apply biblical principles to contemporary life.	Have confidence in reading and understanding the Bible.