



Where Is God When You REALLY Need Him?

by Linda K Sibley

Josh, a fourth grader in one of our Confident Kids Support Groups, was enjoying his first meeting - until his small group leader announced it was time to pray. At that, Josh loudly proclaimed, ***"I don't believe in God and I don't want to pray - and you can't make me!"*** and headed for the door. His facilitator called him back and told him he didn't have to pray but he did have to stay with the group during prayer time. Unhappy about that, Josh turned his chair with his back to the group and stuck his fingers in his ears so he couldn't hear the others pray. Later that night, the facilitator asked Josh why he didn't believe in God. "Because," Josh responded, "He lets you down when you need Him the most!"

Josh is not alone in his feelings about God!

When children go through painful experiences in their young lives, they often turn to God for help. In their innocence, they fully expect God to intervene and keep the divorce from happening, or make Dad stop drinking. When things don't turn out as they asked, they conclude that God could not be real - or at least cannot be trusted - if He won't even answer their most desperate of prayers.

You may be able to relate to Josh and kids like him - particularly if you struggled with your own relationship to God as a child! All of us who have children in our lives who are facing difficult life circumstances are concerned about how we can help them establish a healthy relationship to God in the midst of their struggles. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Read stories of people who struggled with their relationship to God and still experienced God's acceptance and power in their lives. The Bible is full of stories of real people who struggled, doubted, and made mistakes. Their stories can encourage us when we wonder where God is in our lives! Read about people like Joseph (*who suffered at the hands of his own brothers; faced many changes he did not want or ask for, was falsely accused—and more*), David (*who made many mistakes, had feelings of jealousy, fear, and revenge but was still called a man after God's own heart*), Peter (*who acted impulsively and denied Jesus, yet went on to lead thousands of people to Jesus*), Thomas (*who refused to believe Jesus had risen from the dead, but Jesus understood and came to reassure him—and us, too*).



2. Look for images of who God is and how he relates to us. Since God is beyond our human experience, the only way we can know Him is by forming images, or pictures in our mind of what He is like. The Bible is full of rich images of God that give us handles by which we can grasp hold of Him! Here are a few to share with your kids - but look for others!

The Good shepherd, who leaves the flock behind to search out the one small, lost lamb! Luke 15:3-7

A Loving Father who accepts His children with open arms. Luke 15:11-24

Immanuel, "God with us" who understands our suffering. Matthew 1:22-23; Hebrews 2:18

Jesus calling the children to come to Himself. Matthew 19:13-14

3. Teach children to personalize scripture. To build a personal relationship with God, we must come to see the Bible as more than God's message to the world at large - we must see it as His personal communication to *us*. We can help children embrace the Bible as God's Word to them personally by teaching them to add their own name to key scripture passages. Here are a few examples to get you started:

Romans 8:37-38: There is nothing that I (*or insert child's name*) could ever do, or nothing that could ever happen to me (*or child's name*), or anything, anywhere, at any time that could make God stop loving ME (*or child's name*)!

Joshua 1:9: I (*or child's name*) can be strong and courageous! I (*or child's name*) do not have to be scared or anxious about anything! Why? Because the Lord, my God, is with ME (*or child's name*) EVERYWHERE I (*or child's name*) go!

Psalms 139: Your turn ... what is God saying to YOU in these verses?

Matthew 6:25-34: Another great passage to personalize!

4. Provide models of the positive qualities of God. When children experience disappointment with God, they may need some help in trusting God again. Most often, this happens when they **experience people, or just one person, in their lives who is present, unconditionally accepting, attentive, affirming, offers clear guidance, and reliable - letting them know that these qualities are possible and thereby making it possible for them to believe that God could be all these things, too!** Of course, no one person can be all these things all the time, but we can pray earnestly for God to bring these kinds of relationships into our children's lives. On our part, we can look for other people (*Sunday School teachers, neighbors, teachers, coaches, family friends*) who can be this kind of role model for our kids and facilitate the establishment of these relationships.

5. Invite children to give their hearts to Jesus. **Knowing that Jesus has come to live in their hearts - and promises he will never leave them - is the greatest spiritual strength our kids can have.** But kids need to be given the opportunity to begin this important relationship with God. Try the activity below to help your kids understand how to begin a personal relationship with God for themselves!



ACTIVITY: Jesus Lives Inside of Me

You will need: a paper lunch bag for each person, 3"x5" cards, markers, a small red heart, a Bible with Psalm 139 and Revelation 3:20 marked.

1. Each of us has an inside and an outside life. Take a paper lunch bag and pretend it is you - it has an outside and an inside. Decorate the outside of the bag to make it like you by writing or drawing the things about you that everyone can see and knows- like what you look like; what you are good at; what you like/don't like; who your friends are; who is in your family.

Now take four or five 3x5 cards and write one thing that is part of your *inside* life on each card. You don't have to show these cards to anyone; they are private things about you that no one knows unless you choose to tell them - like your fears; secrets; things you think about a lot, your hopes and dreams. Put these cards on the inside of your bag where no one can see them.

2. Read (and personalize) Psalm 139. God knows not only the outside part of your life, but the inside as well. And no matter what He finds inside your heart, He cares about those things, too. Did you know that there is no living person who knows you as well as God, or loves you as much? Which verses in this Psalm tell you how much God loves you?

3. Jesus wants to live in the inside place of your life. Take the red heart and write "Jesus" on it. **Read (and personalize) Revelation 3:20.** Say: "Jesus wants to come to live in your inside life and be there with you forever. Remember, God already knows what is inside your heart and there is nothing He could find there that would ever stop Him from loving you (see *Romans 8:37-39*)! But, as much as Jesus wants to live in your heart, He will only do so when invited in (*Revelation 3:20*). You can ask Jesus to come into your heart right now - and He will live there and care for you forever! No matter what else happens in your life, having Jesus living in the inside place of your heart is the most important thing that can ever happen to you!"

Now place the heart in the bag and staple the bag shut to demonstrate to children that once Jesus is in their hearts, He will never leave them!

