

DISCIPLESHIP | MATTERS

Spiritual Practice and Children

While we often think of the spiritual disciplines as the domain of adults, children are spiritual beings in their own right. They need to be equipped early on for the challenges of living in this complicated and noisy world. Teaching spiritual disciplines can occur quite naturally as part of daily life, and time in shared spiritual practice will enhance your relationship.

- During the transition from evening activities to bedtime, be still together for a few moments, thinking about the day. Imagine placing any negative experiences or feelings into Jesus' gentle hands.
- Take a walk outside, listening to, looking for and even smelling the changes that accompany the transition from winter to spring as reminders of our Creator.
- Practice fasting or simplicity by inviting children to choose something to give up. Link the fast to an act of service. Accept their ideas, even if they seem silly to you, so it becomes *their* spiritual practice. If they are perplexed, you can make suggestions, such as donating the surrendered favorite treat to a food bank or using time not spent on video games to make an Easter basket for a shut-in.
- When young children are tasked with clean up, suggest that they imagine returning items to their proper homes. Doing chores this way provides practice in kindness and in being present in daily activities.

But he [Jesus] would withdraw to deserted places and pray. — Luke 5:16



But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.'"

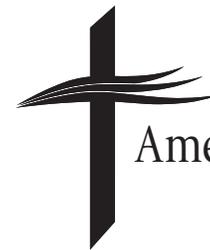
— Matthew 19:14

A free children's page for Palm Sunday can be downloaded at abhms.org > Publications & Resources > Discipleship Matters. At judsonpress.com > E-Books, Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday versions of Rachel Gilmore's "Church Programs & Celebrations for All Generations" can be downloaded for \$3 each.



"Do not ask that your children live up to your expectations. Let them be who they are, and your expectations will be in breathless pursuit." — Robert Brault

The focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus comes fairly quickly after Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of the Christ child. This shift can be confusing or even frightening for children, so it is important to review highlights of Jesus' life during the weeks leading up to Easter. It is not age-appropriate for younger children to think about his execution. Older children can be introduced to his arrest and death, without emphasizing the brutality. Because children tend to feel responsible when something bad happens, a good approach is to talk about how Jesus' message of loving the outcast and challenging the powerful was threatening those in power, leading to his fate. As they mature, you can discuss sin and atonement, which are advanced theological concepts. Including children in planning special services will help them feel the hope and promise of the resurrection while considering Jesus' sacrifice.



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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.