



# Babies and Toddlers

## Nurturing your child's spiritual life

parenting for faith®



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*Author of Parenting Children for a Life of Faith*

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# 1 Introduction

Once we become parents, **our lives are forever opened up** to new experiences and opportunities, for ourselves as well as for our children. One type of experience we can bring to our babies and toddlers is the simple understanding of the **God who made them and loves them.**

This book is about how we as parents or carers can nurture and encourage the spiritual side of our young children, simply and naturally. Growing this spiritual side is as much a part of parenting as caring for our children's mental, physical and emotional development. As we help our children grow spiritually, we are enabling them to build a foundation of strength for now as well as for their future. We are offering our children a connection to something that will support and sustain them, that will encourage and ground them and that will help them have a sense of being part of something bigger than themselves and of being loved, wanted and valued.

Helping our children spiritually flourish isn't about forcing them into a set of beliefs or about making our children religious. **It's about nurturing the spiritual part of them that is already there and helping them find their own path on their journey of connecting with God.**

Encouraging our children's spiritual growth can be naturally integrated into our current parenting. It's not another activity to cram in or task to perform. Since God is already woven into our daily lives, we can use little everyday moments to encourage our children's spiritual development.

## **8 BABIES AND TODDLERS**

If we are part of a church community, we can feel that it's their role to provide spiritual input for our child. Even though the church *is* a great place to connect with others, receive support and have precious spiritual experiences of God and faith, the very best church service or toddler group session cannot nurture our children's spiritual growth as much as we can, even on our most exhausted and ordinary day. Here are three reasons why:

- 1 Our children like us better.** We are the most important people in their lives; what we do and say is much more important to our children than what the church says. Our children feel connected to us; they love us and feel loved by us. Research has shown us that connection between a parent or carer and their child is a vital part of how children pick up faith.
- 2 Our children spend more time with us.** If we took our children to church every Sunday for a year, they would only get around 100 hours with the church. In contrast, our children spend between 2,000 and 3,000 hours a year with us. That is, our children have 20 to 30 times more hours with us every year than they do with the church. We have the greater opportunity to spiritually influence their lives.

**3 Our children live their everyday lives with us.** If we want our children to experience all the benefits of faith and to find their own connection to God, we can begin with the ordinary, mundane bits of life. The Bible tells us that some of the best times to help our children find God are when we are walking down the road, doing bedtime or getting dressed in the morning. These moments of nurturing and encouragement don't take lots of time or effort. They can be woven into everyday life, just like God is.

There are no guarantees when it comes to spiritual parenting. This book isn't 'Ten steps to make your kid a Christian for life'. The goal of helping your baby or toddler's spiritual life grow is to give them one of the greatest gifts you can: the gift of connection to God, who loves them, who listens to them, who can help them and who promises never to leave or abandon them. **You can give them the best opportunities to find their own journey, in their own unique way.**





This book is a combination of encouragements and tools for you to use as you help your child start their journey of life with God. The chapters are short because reading a whole book while parenting a small person can feel overwhelming. Feel free to dip into a section and chew it over for a while. **Come back any time. Go at your own pace.**



I pray that you get **lots of sleep** and discover **little minutes here and there of joy, rest and reflection** as you take on one of the most important jobs in the world: parenting your little one.



## 10 Bedtimes

Bedtime is a special time of day. It's a time when we begin to teach our children how to finish well, how to take the ups and downs of our days and put them aside and how to find **a sense of safety and contentment until we fall asleep**. For many of us, part of that process includes a spiritual moment, and we can start adding that to our children's bedtime routines when they are very young. These moments may add an extra minute to your process or they can take as long as you want.

I would suggest that these spiritual moments can be very significant for your children in helping them find that sense of safety, peace and contentment as they fall asleep. Let's look at the three main areas.

## Connecting to you

You, as we know, are an essential part of your child's spiritual journey. The organisation Care for the Family released some research ('Faith in our families', [careforthefamily.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Faith-in-our-Families-Research-booklet-Mar-2018-FINAL.pdf](https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Faith-in-our-Families-Research-booklet-Mar-2018-FINAL.pdf)) that showed that a child's connection to a parent is one of the most significant factors in that child's spiritual life. **Connection. It's that sense of loving, safe acceptance that a child feels from a parent.** That sense of being valued, heard and loved. When your child feels that connection, their spiritual side is nurtured, and they begin to value what you value, including faith.

So take that extra time to cuddle or to go back to them for one more kiss before you shut the bedroom door. Know that if you have a clingy baby, all that time you are trapped holding them is actually building a great connection

between you that will pay off later on. If you have a talkative toddler, know that those questions you ask, like ‘What was hard today? What was fun today?’, build a child who feels known and loved, and also helps them to remember and process a hard day. However long or short you want this time to be, I would encourage you to make sure each child gets some connection moments with you.

## **Connecting to God**

If we want bedtime to become a time of peace and safety, creating time for our children to connect with God is a helpful step as well. Throughout their lives, they will learn that as they are wrestling with their days, remembering mistakes and processing worries about tomorrow, God is always with them and ready to listen to them and to talk with them about it.

This opportunity to find a moment for God-connection can start now. Some families take the time to read a Bible story, pray over their children or help their child chat to God. Some put on peaceful songs that sing about God. Other families give their child a huge kiss and say, **‘I love you. God loves**

**you. Let's have one big hug with you and me and God!** Thank you, God. Good night!' Other families have a Bible verse on the wall they read to remind them that God is there with them, such as 'I go to bed and sleep in peace, because, Lord, only you keep me safe' (Psalm 4:8). However you want to do it, **give your children chances to connect with God before they go to sleep.**

## Next steps

As our children grow, we want them to know that their connection with God is unique and personal, and that they can stay connected with him on their own. As you leave, remind them of their next steps: 'You and God have a great time together,' or 'Have a great adventure with God tonight,' or 'I'm going to leave now so you can rest well with God.' If your child has a little more time in bed, you can remind them of these next steps: 'Feel free to chat and play with God as much as you want before you go to sleep,' or 'You have your Bible in bed if you want to look at the pictures.' Letting our children know they always have a next step they can take with God helps them build confidence in connecting with him on their own and in using their own words to do it.



However your bedtimes look with your children, long or short, chaotic or strictly patterned, **weave in moments to connect to each other**, to connect to God and to remind them of their next steps.



*Enabling all ages to grow in faith*



Anna Chaplaincy  
Living Faith  
Messy Church  
Parenting for Faith

**The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF)** is a Christian charity that resources individuals and churches. Our vision is to enable people of all ages to grow in faith and understanding of the Bible and to see more people equipped to exercise their gifts in leadership and ministry.

To find out more about our ministries, visit

**[brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk)**

Our children's early years are incredibly significant in shaping their mental, emotional and spiritual lives for the future, but how do we sow seeds of faith when they are so tiny?

In this book, Rachel Turner suggests simple, everyday approaches to help our children connect with the God who knows them. Wherever you are on your faith journey, you can help your child meet and know God, and however young your child is, God loves them and has promises for them.



Rachel Turner is an author, a speaker and BRF's Parenting for Faith pioneer. She presents the Parenting for Faith course, a video-based resource for church groups and individuals.



'This is a lovely book and it's written very simply to enable parents and carers to know how to introduce their little ones to the love of God.'

Rachel Waddilove, author of *The Baby Book*

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