

Passing the Spiritual Torch

by Carolyn Burwell

When I visualize “passing the torch” with preschoolers, I have to smile. Those who spend time with preschoolers know they are never still, and running is how they move from one place to another. I can almost see the adult trying to catch up with the child, saying, “Slow down! I need to hand you this torch.” When the child takes it, the adult has to stop to catch his breath. The preschooler keeps moving, wondering what in the world he is supposed to do with the torch.

While the description is humorous, I’m afraid there is much truth in it. Before the spiritual torch can be passed, there are several questions that need to be asked and answered:

What does the torch represent?

The torch represents the spiritual truths which we believe. While a preschooler cannot understand all of the tenets of faith, they need to learn concepts about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Bible, church, giving, prayer, healing, others, etc.

Why is it being passed?

The answer seems simple.

Each generation must ensure the next generation knows God. However, information about God is not enough. The next generation needs more than knowledge; they need to know God through experience.



Who passes the torch?

Parents are the number-one choice. But there are many people in a preschooler’s life who should pass the torch. Preschoolers learn best by repetition and imitation, so parents, relatives, teachers, friends, and

church teachers can all pass the torch.

How do you “pass the torch”?

It appears that “passing the torch” is a deliberate, planned activity. That thought actually makes it easy for church and home activities. Curious preschoolers love learning through their senses. A good curriculum for church use always contains age-appropriate activities. Many books are available (Christian bookstore, regular bookstore, library, school supply) for parents. Having a planned devotional with preschoolers is a great activity for parents. The habit can carry over through all the child’s years at home.

While passing the torch is a planned activity, the leaders who are with preschoolers should always take advantage of every moment they are with them. Many unplanned moments are the best teaching times. Riding in the car, a storm at night, meal times, a squabble with a sibling, an ill friend or relative, making cookies, and a quiet moment reading a book are all opportunities to share spiritual truths with children.

What does a preschooler do with the torch?

A preschool child uses it as the foundation for his life. The first five years in the life of a child are the most valuable. Preschoolers are becoming the persons they will be forever. It appears that only the Holy Spirit can change a person after his values are learned. George Barna's book, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, gives facts to support that children change little after they enter their teens. Most of the values and attitudes were

learned in the first five years of life.

When are preschoolers ready to pass the torch to someone else?

Every time they are taught a new spiritual truth. A preschooler passes the torch when he shares with someone and when he treats others correctly. The preschooler passes the torch when he prays for someone who is sick. He passes it when he repeats a Bible story or sings a song about Jesus. He passes it when he says he "loves to go to church."

The tradition of passing the torch was an annual, one-time event. I do not believe we can pass the torch one time and think a generation will be ready to pass it to the next. Passing a spiritual torch must be a continuous, conscious endeavor that allows children to experience and love the God that created them and who made a way for them to spend eternity with Him. If not, the torch flame will be extinguished and the next generation will be lost.

Questions for Further Study—

1. List several practical ways preschoolers can learn concepts about God.
2. How can you encourage your preschoolers to not only learn about God but to experience Him?
3. If most of the values and attitudes in children are learned in the first five years of life, how does that affect the decisions we make concerning our children's ministry?