

# What If We're Failing Kids at Faith Formation?

## (And How Not To)

(With a Short Origin Story of **Wonder Ink** Curriculum)



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# How We Got Here: A Short Origin Story of Wonder Ink

Dear Ministry Leader:

We know you care deeply about the ‘why’ behind your investment in resources for the kids, parents, and volunteers in your ministry. So today, we want you to know some important parts of the story behind Wonder Ink. It begins with this updated narrative about faith formation.

When we first published this narrative in 2019, we had not yet begun the process of developing Wonder Ink. But we saw the need to reimagine discipleship in the context of the children’s ministry experience. This need informed the heart and substance of the program we are now excited to share with churches like yours.

The following year, the Covid-19 pandemic greatly affected every aspect of our lives. The ongoing impact of the pandemic has expanded our vision for the opportunity to reach kids and families in person at church and online at home. This, along with empathy for various challenges in ministry today, informed the digital delivery of Wonder Ink.

Along the way, a community of ministry practitioners and discipleship thought leaders have contributed to the creation of Wonder Ink—and still do. We’re grateful for how God enabled us to collaborate with those leaders and build on the legacy of David C Cook curriculum in a fresh way. Our sincere desire is to use what God has entrusted to us—including boots-on-the-ground experience and biblical insight—to invite kids, parents, and volunteers into a wonderfilled journey of curiosity, belief, faith, and identity.

Through Ministry Spark, you are part of this community. We appreciate you and pray that God will continue to guide you as you engage families in and through your local expression of the body of Christ.

Serving with you,

The Wonder Ink Team

# Reality Check

Sunday afternoon, four o'clock. Double front doors of the red brick church building open into a small foyer with a clear line of sight into the original sanctuary. High ceiling. Pointed-arch windows.

Maybe you grew up in a church like this. Or your parents did. Or you've watched a movie that took you back to a time when Sunday school and church marked the weekly cadence of life and echoed through every sector of society—from business and education to holiday traditions and social gatherings.

Now, this sanctuary—just vintage enough to be hip—has become a meeting room. Instead of being lined with pews, it's set with rows of chairs—maybe in a horseshoe formation. College students, young couples, middle-aged men and women, and seniors find their seats. They make friendly—but sometimes awkward—eye contact across the empty middle.

Some have been part of a church, *some* church, since childhood. Others wandered away from faith and have come back. But they fill a fraction of the space where several generations of families used to worship—a visual reminder of what research tells us: **Many have left the faith and not returned.**

But this Sunday afternoon could be one small step toward a turnaround. A blank whiteboard waits at the front of the room. The pastor, with a blue marker in hand, opens the meeting with the same invitation he spoke during services that morning: *This is a time to bring your questions.*

He prays and begins with no frills.

## **What are you struggling to understand about God, the Bible, or Christianity? No question is off limits.**

Within five minutes, the whiteboard fills up with a list of topics—each one a shorthand telling of a personal struggle with doubt.

- There are different types of writing in the Bible, so you can't read everything literally. How do we know what the Bible means? And how do we know what's true?
- I have friends who are missionaries, and I'm uncomfortable with the way they present getting saved to go to heaven someday. Is that really what the gospel is about?
- I left the church for a while because I couldn't see how the Bible makes sense with science. I'm still not sure. How do I work through this?

These questions are hopeful and heartbreaking at the same time. We can't help but wonder if, in years gone by, the church failed these men and women. They are rare representations of second chances to be grateful for, for sure—because we know that a person's worldview is typically developed by thirteen years of age, with little movement likely after that point.<sup>1</sup>

## **But, as parents and grandparents, they cannot pass on that they do not possess.**

As a result, there's a widening gap in the faith formation of families, and that gap is part of what leaves us vulnerable to failing the children in our churches today.

There's good reason for urgent concern about this generation gap. It's not a mere blip that will leave us chuckling or feeling nostalgic twenty years from now. No. This gap started as a hairline fracture and now

threatens the foundation under our feet. Without structural repair, it will only grow wider and longer—and quickly, as cultural vibrations continue to rattle Christianity in America.

As evidence of the risk we face:

- Over the past decade, research has tracked the rise of ‘nones’ who claim no religious affiliation<sup>2</sup>, especially among Millennials and Generation X, who are parents of today’s children and teens.
- The percentage of teens in today’s Generation Z who identify as atheist is double that of the general population.<sup>3</sup>
- With help from the Internet and ever-present mobile phones, emerging generations find identity and community in a wide variety of ways outside the church—from fan fiction<sup>4</sup> to social media<sup>5</sup> to politics<sup>6</sup> and more.

These trends compel us—especially kidmin leaders, pastors, and curriculum publishers—to do some immediate and serious soul-searching and to take *action*.

All of us passionately give ourselves to the most important work in the world: Helping people of all ages come to know, love, and follow Jesus. But what are we doing—or not doing—that causes us to miss the opportunity for discipleship that develops faith to last a lifetime?

## **This much is certain: We can’t count on an easy path through culture for kids growing up as Christians today.**

A blog post by Natasha Crain frames her concern as a parent and church influencer. Her title alone is enough to send shudders through the ranks of ministry leaders: “How Sunday Schools Are Raising the Next Generation of Secular Humanists.”<sup>7</sup>

Natasha contrasts the culture of yesteryear that was shaped by Christianity—like the glory days of the red brick church building—with the culture of today that attempts neutrality through secularism. **But there’s no such thing as a neutral worldview.**

She writes: “Belief in the supernatural—that anything beyond the natural world exists—can no longer lean on society’s acceptance for its plausibility. Culture now shapes our kids’ gut-level reaction to God in a *negative* way.”<sup>8</sup>

In other words, Christianity is counter-cultural in America. The wind is no longer at our backs. But that’s not necessarily a bad thing. If we have been lulled by fair weather, our faith can become stronger as we adapt to the changes in our cultural environment.

Considering this change, it’s wise to ask ourselves: Are we resourcing and running children’s ministry, church services, small groups, and other ministries in essentially the same way we did twenty years ago? Are we passing on traditions and programs, only to have lost a clear focus on the very faith they are meant to foster?

To address these questions, and to avoid their implicit dangers, we must pay attention. We must go forward with a confident prayer, as James wrote:

*“Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5)*

Yes, we definitely need wisdom.

# Begin with the End in Mind

Back in the day when maps were printed on paper, the route of a summer road trip would be marked with a highlighter or traced with a finger along interstate highways and local roadways from point A to point B.

Every curve, corner, and sign along the way would be confirmed in reference to point B. Getting off course due to a wrong turn could require pulling over to the side of the road for a closer look at the map. You'd have to figure out where on earth you were so you could get reoriented to where you were going.

Satellite navigation systems have changed all that. It's now easier to map your way anywhere: to a doctor's appointment, a friend's wedding, or a camping trip. Just type in the address, and you never have to look farther than a three-inch blue line straight ahead on your screen. If you get off-route, the system will reroute you within a few seconds—no need to even think about it. You know where you're supposed to be going, but you don't really need to pay attention to point B until you're there.

As ministry leaders, we've become accustomed to following a program and trusting that we're showing kids the way to Jesus. Great curriculum and programs make it easy. We have our eyes on a three-inch blue line straight ahead. If we have lost focus on the greater journey of faith formation, our desire for the convenience of packaged programs may be partly to blame.

Of course, nobody would advocate inconvenience per se as the remedy. But, somehow, we need a clear picture and constant reminder of point B. **And “we” includes at least four key influencers in a child's faith formation: the church as a whole, children's ministry, parents, and publishers.**

To help with the faith formation of our kids, we use songs, lessons, videos, and activities—but *they* are not point B. A vibrant identity in Jesus is.

**The real Jesus. The scandalous, law-breaking, love-abiding Jesus. The counter-cultural Jesus who modeled and taught a way of following God that broke from the conventions of His time and place in the world—and ours.**

The Jesus who advocates paying taxes to Caesar and makes a point to hang out with mafia-like tax collectors (Matt. 17:27; Luke 19:1–10).

Who goes on a rampage and literally turns the temple tables to expose greedy vendors preying on loyal worshippers (Matt. 21:12–13).

Who writes in the dirt to scare off would-be stone-throwers eager to impose capital punishment on a woman who had committed adultery (John 8:1–11).

Who tells a rich young ruler—a man who had checked all the boxes of righteous behavior—to sell all his earthly goods and give to the poor (Mark 10:17–27).

Who loves Peter through the heart-detour from disciple to traitor and back again by complementing his three denials with three directives to “Feed my sheep” (John 18:1–26; 21:15–19).

**This Jesus.**

Do we love and follow this Jesus—the Christ, the Son of God? And all the more desire our children to do the same?

Because true faith in this Jesus is about far more the “moralistic therapeutic deism”<sup>1</sup> that some would argue has become a false faith these days, with beliefs like these:

1. “A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.”
2. “God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.”
3. “The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about one’s self.”
4. “God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.”
5. “Good people go to heaven when they die.”<sup>2</sup>

True faith is also about more than going to church. It’s about more than getting people to stay in church and believe what they were taught.<sup>3</sup> More than communion and baptism, small groups and Bible studies—even though these are significant and valuable.

“If faith is union with Christ, and means union with the story of Christ, we need to understand the story of Christ to know what faith and faith formation is,” writes New Testament scholar Scot McKnight in a review of Andrew Root’s *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*.<sup>4</sup>

Both authors advocate for the power of faith formation that comes through mobilizing ministry to others, following the example of Jesus described in Philippians 2:6–11.

**We are formed as we enter the story of Christ, who, being in very nature God, didn’t take a position of divine privilege; rather, He humbled Himself as a servant.**

Imagine the difference in our faith, and our children’s, if the end goal followed this pattern: “*Because he was X he did not do Y but instead did Z...* not to do what we can because of our privilege but instead to do what is redemptive for the other.”<sup>5</sup>

This God-made-flesh Jesus showed us how *knowing who we are in Him* leads to self-emptying humility and others-centered service. But if good behavior is accepted as the goal of faith formation, we have missed point B. **We have accepted good behavior as a stand-in for identity in Jesus rather than an outflow from it.**

Promoting good behavior for its own sake is an old trick. When the Pharisees tested Jesus with a question about the greatest commandment in the law they so carefully upheld, He said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands” (Matt. 22:34–40).

What does this all-encompassing love look like when it comes to the daily practice of forming our children’s identity—and in that identity, a lifelong faith—so that being a Christian is first and foremost about who they are, *not* how they behave? To find out, we must lift our eyes from the three-inch blue line on the navigation system we may have been trusting too much to get us where we really want to go.

The exploration ahead is a step toward addressing four key sources of faith influence—all of which must work together:

- The church as a whole
- Children’s ministry



- Parents
- Publishers and resource providers

The concerns we are uncovering are not about blaming or shaming anyone who has been doing their best to instill faith in the tender hearts and minds entrusted to our care. We love our children dearly and would never seek to harm them or shortchange them. God knows we are not trying to turn them into the next generation of secular humanists. That's why we're soul searching to find out where we might be failing at faith formation—and how not to.

# The Role of the Church as a Whole

Pastors and ministry leaders, you know there's nothing like the church—and no two are the same. We are committed, all of us, to helping the people around us come to know, love, and follow Jesus. But part of our challenge in kids' faith formation may go back to the very first invitation extended to them.

“Well-meaning Christians sometimes try to seal the deal of a gospel presentation with the following phrase: “*Now, all you have to do to become a Christian is ...*” writes Aaron Wilson, an associate editor for Lifeway communications.<sup>1</sup>

It's safe to say, many adults in our churches today grew up with that approach. At a young age, they “became Christians” and staked their spiritual identity on praying a prayer, walking the aisle, or signing a card. Unfortunately for some, this experience fell short of nurturing the soul's sense of awe and wonder that sparks desire for life in and with God.

Wilson goes on:

*The problem is, Jesus never talked like this. Salvation is a free gift of grace that is not given on the merit of works. However, Christ often challenged people who brought a casual attitude to discipleship (Matt. 8:18–22). Jesus encouraged people to count the cost before they decided to follow Him ...<sup>2</sup>*

How many adults in the church today—or distanced from it—still don't grasp what it means to identify and live as a follower of Jesus? Sure, they attend church on Christmas and Easter, or maybe a time or two a month. But desire for God seems to be so easily overshadowed by other pursuits.

“Flip back to New Testament days,” writes Carey Nieuwhof, a pastor and church leadership advocate.

**“You didn't *attend* Jesus. You *followed* Him.”<sup>3</sup>  
There's a big difference.**

Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard draws the difference this way:

*The admirer never makes any true sacrifices. He always plays it safe. Though in words, phrases, songs, he is inexhaustible about how highly he prizes Christ, he renounces nothing, will not reconstruct his life, and will not let his life express what it is he supposedly admires. Not so for the follower. No, no. The follower aspires with all his strength to be what he admires.<sup>4</sup>*

This is why faith formation needs to happen holistically through the church and not be compartmentalized in kids' ministry. Even as adults, we are all at various stages on the spiritual journey of learning to live in *followership*. The casual fellowship of church attendance may be more comfortable, but it's so much less than what Jesus invites us to.

Adults who are growing in identity and faith as followers of Jesus will invest with more passion in kids' lives, both in parenting and ministry roles. We will embody a church culture of disciples making more disciples, which is exactly how Jesus promised the church would multiply (Matt. 28:16–20).

## Ideas to Make Kids' Faith Formation a Whole-Church Priority

**Showcase the importance of personal Bible reading to connect with God and experience the wonder of who He is.** Doing so benefits everyone, including parents, volunteers, staff, and other adults who are investing in children's lives outside of kids' ministry.

Research indicates that people who engage with the Bible even a handful of times a year (let's start where they are) say they experience spiritual growth in:

- Greater awareness of their need for God.
- A stronger connection to God.
- More curiosity to know God better.<sup>5</sup>

They also grow relationally in more loving behavior toward others and more generous giving of their time, energy, and money. **In other words, engaging with God through Scripture is life changing.** Altogether, six in ten Americans believe the Bible has transformed their lives.<sup>6</sup> Find who they are in your church and celebrate their stories.

Consider tools like a reading plan or Bible app to help your church grow in reading God's Word—not as a legalistic standard but as a source of discovery and wonder.

**Beyond teaching what is in the Bible, also teach *about* the Bible.** Churches cannot assume that adult attenders—even key volunteers—know why we value Scripture as a source of divine truth. Even if they do know, they need to be reminded and equipped to talk about questions<sup>7</sup> such as:

- How were the books of the Bible selected, and why were some books left out?
- How do we know the Bible's human authors are credible? And how do we know the Bible we have today says what they originally wrote?
- How do we handle what seem to be contradictions in the Bible?
- What tools can help us understand different kinds of writing in the Bible, such as historical narrative, poetry, or parables?

**Make room for wonderfilled experiences.** Alongside developing knowledge of the Bible, invite families to dwell in the profound truth of it. As an example, you can take advantage of the free [Wonderfilled Journey Guide](#) and related resources for a church gathering, special event, or family engagement tool. In preparation, you can also receive a week of awe-inspiring mini-devotionals delivered daily in short text messages.

**Invite open dialogue about doubts and questions.** Skeptics and new believers will have questions, for sure. So will regular church attenders and even key volunteers. And what about us as leaders? Do we have safe places to explore what we're wrestling with? Let's not be afraid to take an honest look at hard questions about God, the Bible, and faith.

Nieuwhof cautions that in many churches, legitimate doubt is prohibited. But it shouldn't be. He writes:

*It is very difficult to have an honest conversation in many churches today. In many conservative churches, legitimate questions get dismissed with pat—and often trite—answers. In many liberal churches, there is often so much ambiguity that questions that actually can be answered are left unresolved—as if leaders were taking people nowhere. Church leaders today simply have to get better with handling the tension that comes with questions.<sup>8</sup>*

We need to remember that the struggle with doubt is real, and sometimes getting it wrong is actually a sign of growth. If you see no struggle, be afraid.

**Apathy is the slow death of faith.  
And, if adults aren't bringing their questions  
out of the shadows, kids won't either.**

# The Role of Children's Ministry

Within the context of a healthy, whole-church approach to faith formation, children's ministry plays an undeniably crucial role.

In 2005, David Kinnaman, now president of Barna Group, summed up why: "Young people are spiritual sponges whose most impressionable years are too important to pass up."<sup>1</sup> His statement remains as true as ever.

The Barna study conducted at that time showed warning signs for ministry to children and youth, including a diminishing pastoral emphasis on Sunday school and a declining trend in offering age-group classes for junior high and high school students.<sup>2</sup>

Today, those students are members of the demographic cohorts that have seen the rise of "nones" and atheists. Some of them are now becoming parents and, if they have held onto Christian faith or the desire for moral teaching, are bringing their kids to church. Maybe.

Let's be careful not to imply that one study explains the spiritual slip of a generation. But let's also be clear that we cannot take our eyes off the ball. **If you are a kidmin leader or volunteer today, make no mistake: Your ministry matters.** You are on the front lines with kids and families as they learn to follow Jesus.

It's easy to grow weary or think that serving kids is somehow a lesser role than serving adults. Pastor Tim Challies asks, "How often are we like the disciples, subconsciously focused on babysitting the kids so that their parents and other older members of the church can meet with Jesus? How often do we spend our group time teaching them to do what's right, but never really introducing them to Jesus Himself?"<sup>3</sup>

## Children's ministry is a mirror of discipleship in the church as a whole—a reflection of the spiritual growth of adults who pour into the lives of kids.

Challies tells the story of a children's ministry leader who came to understand that the Bible is one big story of redemption through Jesus Christ. It changed the way she viewed her own faith and her ministry role:

When her personal faith became less about knowing the answers and more about knowing Christ, she was able to begin pointing the kids toward Him, too, and toward the beginning of a lifelong childlike faith. Kids' ministry was no longer about babysitting the kids, but about heart transformation for both child and leader.<sup>4</sup>

## Ideas to Make Kids' Faith Formation More Effective in Your Ministry

**Encourage adult engagement in the life of the church as a whole.** The ideas in the prior section are essential to shaping the mindset of volunteers and parents and equipping them to be influencers for faith formation. Any ministry-specific training you provide will have greater effect in the context of a church committed to cultivating passionate followers of Jesus.

**Keep the Bible a priority for kids and their families.** Again, echoing the prior section, join with the whole church in emphasizing Bible reading and in teaching kids *about* the trustworthiness of the Bible at an age-appropriate level.

Some churches give children their own Bibles—or create a special occasion for parents to do so—at the start of first grade. And, many churches have Bibles in their main worship gathering space; why not in children’s ministry spaces too?

It is imperative that we give kids a faith to grow into, not out of.

Reading the Bible with kids helps them learn how to read it on their own—something they’re excited to do with kid-friendly options such as *The Action Bible* or any number of youth-oriented study Bibles.

“When children read the Bible, they bring their thought systems, assumptions, presuppositions, and proclivities to the text . . .,” writes Melanie Lacy, an expert in youth discipleship.<sup>5</sup> So be prepared to reinforce Bible reading with theological insights and practical application to their lives. She writes:

This requires some understanding of the lives of the children entrusted to the care of the family and church. Take time to learn their joys and their sorrows, their peers and their parents, their play and their rest. Figure out what they are listening to and what is informing their understanding, and consider how theology interacts with or challenges those voices. We must be able to answer the ‘so what’ question every time we teach theology to children.<sup>6</sup>

**Equip families for conversations about faith.** But keep in mind the distinction between conversation topics that simply promote good behavior, versus topics that help families root their identity in Jesus. Parent newsletters can be a helpful tool, such as Wonder@Home, a take-home resource provided with [Wonder Ink curriculum](#).

Questions like these can bring wonder into any conversation:

- If you had to live with any person in the Bible, who would you pick?
- If you could ask God any question, what would it be?
- What are three words you would use to describe God? Jesus? The Holy Spirit?
- What is your favorite Bible story and why? How does that story point to Jesus?
- What is one thing you’re especially thankful God created?
- What is one thing you’d like to thank Jesus for today?
- What have you read in the Bible this week? What do you think about it?

Encourage conversations starting in early childhood and know that the value really hits home during teenage years. Leaders like J. Warner Wallace and Sean McDowell encourage fellow leaders and parents to encourage and anticipate faith questions. Kara Powell and Steve Argue, of Fuller Seminary, interact with parents nationwide and have found that family conversations tend to diminish as children get older:

Somehow, young people and their parents have lost the ability to speak of faith in real life. Like learning Mandarin as a young person then forgetting it as an adult, Christian adolescents and emerging adults often become less fluent in faith over time. But faith needs to be talked about and processed, and if these conversations diminish as our kids get older, we miss opportunities to help them remain fluent.<sup>7</sup>

Parents say they’re worried about saying the wrong thing, messing up, or revealing their ignorance. Powell and Argue offer some suggested conversation prompts for older kids that may require some courage but can help:

- When do you feel closest to God?
- What have you been reading in the Bible lately? And what do you think about it?

- What is something you don't believe that you think I still believe?
- What is something you believe that you don't think I believe?
- Tell me about the God you don't believe in anymore.
- When you see that contradiction, how does it make you want to live differently?
- Have you ever wondered why or how I found a connection with Jesus and his story?<sup>8</sup>

**Provide missional opportunities for kids to talk about their faith and serve others.** Here's a list of [42 service project ideas](#) you could use to provide children with a natural path for experiencing and acting on compassion in the real world.

## **Children are not lesser Christians and must not be treated as such. They are forming identity and faith in Jesus as much as anyone—often with more open minds.**

Jesus said, “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt. 19:14). Their identity as disciples and disciple-makers will not happen automatically when they make a profession of faith or get baptized. Rather, it will take shape gradually and find expression through their words and actions.

Talking about their faith helps children find everyday language to describe who they are becoming. Non-churchy language is especially important in a culture that increasingly views Christianity with skepticism.

As children grow older, they will need more than simplistic faith responses when they encounter friends who question them on matters of science, equality, and morality. Simply saying “the Bible says so” is not going to cut it. They need to be prepared with a comprehensive understanding of Scripture and with tools to interpret and apply it to cultural concerns.

Serving others not only opens children's eyes to different kinds of people and their needs. It also gives them opportunity to practice compassion, humility, self-control, and other traits that reflect the character of Jesus and the fruit of the Spirit.

# The Role of Parents

**Hands down, parents are the greatest influencers of their children's faith formation.** If you're a Christian parent reading this, you feel the gravity of your responsibility. You know the joy and exasperation, the awe and challenge of the parenting journey, and you deeply desire to see your son or daughter become the person God made them to be.

Even though you spend more hours with your child than they spend in church, you still count on your church community to nurture the faith of your family. And, you should. Through partnership between church and home, we can work together toward what Scripture instructs us to do:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates. (Deut. 6:5–9)

All of us as Christian parents want to take these verses seriously. Yet we also go through seasons when it's hard to live our best intentions—especially when our kids don't show the faith response we hope for, or when we fear that their hearts will harden as they encounter skepticism in the world at large.

Our kids may rebel against Christianity to become apathetic about it. If we are afraid something in them will give way, we may be tempted to try and take control—to insist on how things *shall be*.

**But following Jesus is an invitation,  
not a decree—an act of faith, not force.**

“When we see our children as a gift, our need to control and micromanage subsides,” writes Cameron Cole, a director of children, youth, and family. “Certainly, we take responsibility for the gift, but nobody clutches and chokes a present to make it perfect.”<sup>1</sup>

So, how do we honor the gift of children entrusted to us, while also helping them discover the wonder of the God who made them and longs for a relationship with them? How can we create a family culture infused with values and experiences that point the way to Jesus?

## Ideas to Make Kids' Faith Formation Central to Your Family Culture

**Make togetherness a priority.** Doing ordinary things together can add up to a big difference in the faith life of your family. Recent research by Barna Group found a connection between fun, quality time, and meaningful spiritual experiences.<sup>2, 3</sup>

Quality time doesn't need to be fancy. Make a point to eat together as a family every day, whether it's cereal from a box, rotisserie chicken and instant mashed potatoes, a home-cooked meal, or supper at a restaurant. Take a walk in the park. Play Uno or toss a softball. Read books. Do yardwork. Hold a family meeting, or just take time to talk about how everyone is feeling.

Families that make togetherness a priority are more likely to engage in relational connections that support vibrant faith, including:

- Spiritual practices—praying every day or two and reading the Bible weekly all together.
- Spiritual conversations—talking about God and faith at least weekly all together.
- Hospitality—welcoming non-family guests regularly, or at least several times a month.<sup>4</sup>

**Talk to your kids about faith.** As your family enjoys togetherness, don't miss the opportunities to talk about faith. Sometimes a conversation will come up spontaneously. Any moment of curiosity is an opportunity to open the eyes to wonder and the heart to God.

Perhaps you noticed some of the questions noted in the prior section. They're good suggestions to get a conversation started. You might also create a spiritual topic jar and let kids put suggestions in it; then pull out a topic to talk about on a weekly basis. Or you may want to start a tradition of sharing the "lows" and "highs" of each day.

Remember, even awkward conversations are better than none.

**And if you aren't sure about something, don't feel like you need to know all the answers. Doubt isn't toxic to faith. Silence is.<sup>5</sup>**

**Live a faith worth imitating.** It doesn't take long for us to realize that our kids watch and imitate what we do. Things are no different when it comes to faith. **Our words matter, but our actions often speak louder.**

This is not a call for parents to model perfect faith. After all, there is no such thing. It's far more important to model *growing* faith. Yes, we will try and fail sometimes. We will need to extend and receive forgiveness. We will face doubt and grief and struggle along the way. But our commitment to an authentic journey with God is exactly what our children need to see.

The world is watching too. A headline in USA Today raised the question: "Has the sun set on Sunday school?" The article reported a generational decline in attendance—one of the signs that faith plays a lesser role in American family life.

"Sunday has become just another day for over-scheduled kids to be chauffeured from sports practice to music lessons or SAT tutoring," the article says. "It doesn't help that parents themselves, so overwhelmed by life, are skipping church."<sup>6</sup>

We know you don't *attend* Jesus; you *follow* Him. But if Sunday school and church attendance trends are the canary in the coal mine, we would do well as parents to examine what following Jesus looks like in our lives.

- What kind of culture do we want in our homes and churches?
- What space are we creating for our children to flourish?
- How are we rooting our families in God's Word?
- How are we modeling prayer and repentance?
- What does faithfulness look like in our homes?<sup>7</sup>

Consider these questions with a spirit of curiosity that makes room for wonder as you continue to find your place in God's story.



# The Role of Publishers and Resource Providers

The fourth and final group of influencers in our examination of faith formation is us, your publishers and resource providers. Here at David C Cook—and no doubt at other respected organizations that produce church curriculum and ministry resources—we took a close and careful look at our place in the story.

When we first published this narrative in 2019, we acknowledged self-examination as part of our responsibility. We've been publishing curriculum since 1875 to equip the church; our mission and calling has not changed but the world certainly has. We want to be good stewards of both our legacy and our opportunity.

While it is a worthy goal for us to give you trusted, easy-to-use resources for your programs, we may be part of the reason it has been so convenient to follow the three-inch blue line. Of course, we make sure our resources are grounded in God's Word and headed in the right direction. But could we be a stronger advocate for the church keeping its focus on point B—a vibrant identity in Jesus?

Are we doing all we can to develop followers, not admirers?

We came across a blog post by an organization that serves pastors and churches, which gave a sobering checklist of what parents are looking for in children's ministry. Most of the items on the list were related to facilities and logistics. Seriously.

This particular post reinforced how many 'must-haves' can leapfrog the line, demand our attention, and distract us from point B. And the points on the blog list are well-intended.

At David C Cook, we have quality standards because we want our products to work for you. **But that's not the measure of success in the kingdom of God.** So, with Wonder Ink curriculum, our aim has been to reset our sights on point B and on how we can better equip you for ministry in today's world.

For us, this has required evaluating the intersection of our mission and market. As one of the largest and most denominationally diverse Christian publishers worldwide, we don't take our position lightly.

## To whom much is given, much is required.

With all this in mind, the process of creating Wonder Ink curriculum involved asking questions like these:

- How might we retool or update our curriculum lines to make them even stronger in helping kids and families develop their identity in Jesus?
- How might we better serve you to meet your need to train and equip adult volunteers at various stages on their discipleship journey?
- How might we develop new tools to teach about the Bible and its trustworthiness, or to support safe spaces for doubters to wrestle with their questions about Christianity?
- How might we offer additional family-friendly resources that help your church come alongside parents to encourage faith formation at home?

Wonder Ink represents the collective God-given wisdom of our ministry community in response to these questions. While all of us consider the challenges and opportunities ahead, **we can take heart in the words of Jesus: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it"** (Matt. 16:18).

Jesus also said, “where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them” (Matt. 18:20). Your gathering place may be an old stone church, a converted strip mall, a newly constructed building, a school auditorium, somebody’s living room, or a vintage-hip sanctuary set with rows of chairs in a horseshoe formation. Wherever you are, He is there.

Press on in the important work of helping people in your community come to know, love, and follow Jesus. We are grateful for you and honored by the opportunity to provide Christ-centered resources to your local church.

**We’re in this together. Let’s go forward, stay faithful, and be wonderfilled!**

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## You’re Invited to Explore Wonder Ink

We’re too close to a generation of kids walking away from Jesus because they’re confused by mixed messages from today’s culture. Let’s empower kids to discover the fullness of their identity in God’s Big Story.

Wonder Ink is a new digital discipleship curriculum that empowers kids, parents, and volunteers for their journey of curiosity, belief, faith, and identity.

See how it works today at [WonderInk.org](https://WonderInk.org).

View the content, try a lesson, and navigate the platform.

A stylized illustration of a telescope on a three-legged tripod, positioned on a light blue rectangular pedestal. The background is a dark blue night sky with a large white moon in the upper right, several small white stars, and a light blue wavy line at the bottom representing a horizon or water.

# Wonder Ink™

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