

AN ASH WEDNESDAY CONVERSATION TO HAVE WITH KIDS AT HOME

In this season of being #togetherapart, consider gathering as a family to walk through this conversation on Ash Wednesday.

Begin by preparing a space, perhaps with a cloth, purple ribbon, and a candle.

As you light the candle, say:

LEADER: **Create in me a clean heart, O God.**

PEOPLE: **And renew a right spirit within me.**

Lent is a time of preparation for the celebration of Easter and Pentecost. It's a time to remember that we need Jesus.

We remember that God loves us SO MUCH.

We remember that he is perfect and we are not.

We remember that we can be honest with God and talk to him.

We remember that God's love is SO BIG he forgives us.

We remember that we can turn to God, trust in Jesus, and receive his loving forgiveness.

We remember that because of his love and kindness, God sends his Holy Spirit to comfort, guide, and help us.

We remember that God is with us and we are never alone.

I wonder what you know to be true about God?

[leave space for people to respond]

Have you ever heard the Bible referred to as a love story? It is! It's the story of God's love for you and me. Today we're going to read a story that is specifically about . . . Are you ready? . . . YOU!

Let's pray to get our hearts and minds ready to listen to all that God has to say to us through his good words to us.

***Come, Holy Spirit.
As we make space for you,
open our ears to hear.
Open our mind to understand.
Stir our heart.
Help us to know and love you more.
Amen.***

Read the story of Jesus and the children found in:

Mark 10:13-16 // Luke 18:15-17 // Matthew 19:13-15

"The Friend of Little Children" on pp. 256-263 in The Jesus Storybook Bible

"Jesus and the Children" on pp. 458-459 in The Complete Illustrated Children's Bible

After the reading, consider these "wondering questions" as a guide for your conversation:

***I wonder what Jesus means when he says that we are to be like little children?
I wonder why Jesus used kids as an example to grownups?
I wonder what you want grownups to learn about being a kid?***

Respond and explore together the thoughts that they have.

Here's a perspective from the writers of The Jesus Storybook Bible which may be helpful in your own thinking:

Children are vulnerable, dependent, and cannot do things for themselves. Also, children are not good at hiding their flaws and feelings. They trust and are not suspicious. Therefore, to receive the kingdom "as a little child" means to approach God with qualities such as dependency and trust. Thus we must come to God seeking his favor as a gift. We cannot merit his grace. Entrance to the kingdom is not on the basis of attainment and morality, but acknowledgment of helplessness and need. The people who enter the kingdom are not the "worthy" and

accomplished, but those who are willing to admit their helplessness and simply depend. Jesus rebukes the disciples, who still don't see that acknowledged weakness and dependence are the real qualifications for the kingdom.

Conclude with this truth: ***Jesus wants the disciples to love him and trust him and be dependent upon him just like children. He invites us to do the same.***

Pray together to seal your time.

To extend the conversation and explore further, try this hands-on activity.

Supplies needed:

- Bible
- full-sized sheet of paper
- full-sized sheet of paper cut into 1/4s or 1/8s
- scissors
- something to write and draw with
- metal container
- matches
- self-portrait printable

What are some things you love?

Write down the things said on a piece of paper.

Sometimes we love things that aren't very lovely. Sometimes we love being first in line and we push our way to the front. Sometimes we speak unkind things to others.

Each time you say one of these unlovely things, write it on a smaller piece of paper.

We all have these kinds of not so lovely things that we love. But, the Good News is that the God who loves us, as we heard in the story today, is the God who invites us to trust him to help us, because he paid the price by dying on the cross for those not so lovely things in us. His death on the cross forgives all those not so lovely things and we are forgiven when we trust in him.

While you say this, take the pieces of paper on which you wrote the unlovely things and light them with a match tossing them into the metal container to burn.

Today is Ash Wednesday. On Ash Wednesday, we often come to church to remember that we have those not so lovely things in each of us and to remember that our perfectly perfect Jesus paid a hefty price to save us. When we come to church on Ash Wednesday, we are marked with the sign of the cross with ashes. We do this to help us remember. All of Lent is a time of remembering . . . remembering that we sin, remembering that Jesus loves us, remembering that Jesus forgives us, remembering that Jesus sacrificed his life for us, remembering that Jesus is with us. Lent is a time of waiting and remembering our sin and Jesus' sacrifice. Do you know when Lent ends? Right! At Easter! Why does Lent end at Easter? Because Easter marks the remembering that Jesus died, but rose again - that he lives, even though he died!"

Tell them that because you cannot go to church today, that you can still prepare your hearts and minds for Lent.

Invite them to listen as you read portions of Psalm 51:1-17. Here's the text from the NIV Bible:

- 1 God, have mercy on me
according to your faithful love.
Because your love is so tender and kind,
wipe out my lawless acts.
- 2 Wash away all the evil things I've done.
Make me pure from my sin.
- 3 I know the lawless acts I've committed.
I can't forget my sin.
- 4 You are the one I've really sinned against.
I've done what is evil in your sight.
So you are right when you sentence me.
You are fair when you judge me.
- 5 I know I've been a sinner ever since I was born.
I've been a sinner ever since my mother became pregnant with me.
- 6 I know that you wanted faithfulness even when I was in my mother's body.
You taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- 7 Sprinkle me with hyssop, then I will be clean.
Wash me, then I will be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear you say, "Your sins are forgiven."
That will bring me joy and gladness.
Let the body you have broken be glad.
- 9 Take away all my sins.
Wipe away all the evil things I've done.
- 10 God, create a pure heart in me.

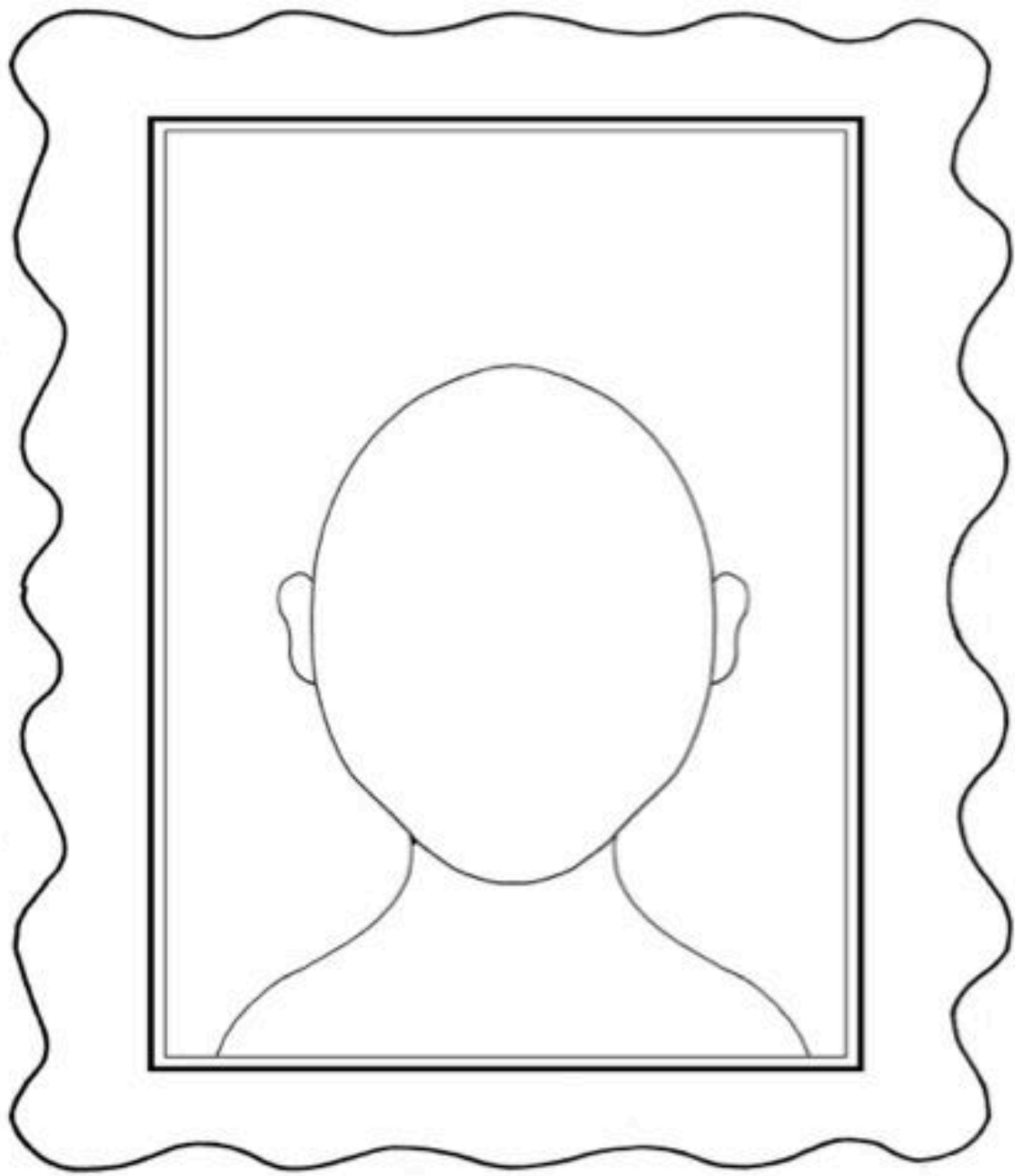
Give me a new spirit that is faithful to you.
11 Don't send me away from you.
Don't take your Holy Spirit away from me.
12 Give me back the joy that comes from being saved by you.
Give me a spirit that obeys you so that I will keep going.
13 Then I will teach your ways to those who commit lawless acts.
And sinners will turn back to you.
14 You are the God who saves me.
I have committed murder.
God, take away my guilt.
Then my tongue will sing about how right you are
no matter what you do.
15 Lord, open my lips so that I can speak.
Then my mouth will praise you.
16 You don't take delight in sacrifice.
If you did, I would bring it.
You don't take pleasure in burnt offerings.
17 The greatest sacrifice you want is a broken spirit.
God, you will gladly accept a heart
that is broken because of sadness over sin.

Create some quiet space for each of you to remember your own not so lovely things and to choose one or more to confess in your heart to Jesus. Model how to do this by suggesting they say something like this:

***Jesus, I am so sorry for [not loving others when I talk while they are talking].
Please forgive me.
Help me to [listen and love people well].***

Even though you are saying your confession out loud, encourage them to say theirs silently. Give everyone a small piece of paper to write that confession down and fold or crumple it up. Then put those confessions into the metal bucket.

When everyone has participated, light a match and burn those paper confessions. Use the ashes created from the burning and mix it with a drop or two of oil. Prepare a self-portrait from the printable below and then use your fingers to "paint" a cross on the self-portrait printable and hang it up for the duration of Lent. Close in prayer, thanking God for his love and forgiveness.



GOD KNOWS ME! Genesis 1:27 and Psalm 139:1-4, 13-14
HE'S CRAZY ABOUT ME! John 10:11
HE GOES WITH ME EVERYWHERE! Matthew 28:20