



Faith at home with under 5s

I feel very under qualified to write about this subject. My own experience is limited to that of being a father to a young man who is now in his twenties! The one thing I would say looking back is that I wish that my wife and I had done more and started earlier.

It is never too early to introduce routines and practices that shape a life of faith at home. Children like to imitate and copy what they see others doing, it is a large part of how they learn. If children see and hear us praying, reading faith stories and singing hymns and songs, they will find it very natural to join in when they can. There are lots of behaviours and attitudes that we all want to pass on to our children, using cutlery, saying “please” and “thank you” for example. If our desire is to see children grow in their own formation of faith, then it follows that demonstrating what that looks like in our daily words and actions will be vital. Setting in place some simple family rituals that enable frequent repetition of faith forming acts such as prayers at the start and end of each day, reading and asking open-ended questions about Bible stories that have been read and learning to appreciate and to acknowledge the good gifts that God brings into each other’s lives each and every day.

Those within our household have the privilege of seeing the best and the worst of us. None of us are perfect and we are not going to get it right all the time. How we demonstrate forgiveness and kindness to one another even in our most difficult moments will have a huge impact.

I know that at times my wife and I both struggled with confidence to know what to do or say. It might be that the best we can offer is to repeat prayers of blessing found in the Bible, maybe starting in the Psalms. We can say these words aloud over our children, this is a practice that can be achieved even while a child is in the womb and carried on throughout their lives. A popular option is the Aaronic blessing found in the book of Numbers 6:22-26.

While Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have prevented church buildings from opening for gathered worship, many congregations have shared online resources for use at home, the best of these recognising the need for an intergenerational approach for families at home. One such resource is weekly the Families on Faith Adventures @ Home resource created by some of our team. Maybe you have been inspired to share in faith activities during this time perhaps in a way that you hadn’t before? I pray that you might be encouraged to continue in this shared experience beyond the end of the pandemic.

Ali Campbell¹ of The Resource also points out that in one of the most famous and often quoted passages the Sermon on the Mount contain these words. *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they set it on a lamp-stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven”* (Matthew 5.14-16). In the passage there are two pictures: one is a city on a hill, the other, often overlooked, is of the lamp-stand giving light to everyone in the “house”. What an encouragement if we needed it, that our everyday lives in our homes are where we are called to shine, that our good deeds will bring Glory to God. The Apostle Paul also seems to recognise the influence in the early years of Timothy’s life “from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

In scripture you will struggle to find any reference to anyone specifically chosen, called out or appointed to the task of raising faith in the younger generations. Instead what we see is an integrated approach where children are included in the life, the festivals and the rituals of the wider faith community in which they belong. Sometimes the adults are told specifically to be ready to answer their questions such as “What do they mean?” in Deut. 6:20.



D. Csinos suggests that it was the responsibility of the children to initiate conversation and storytellingⁱⁱ within the context of the faith community.

There are many resources available to help inspire and encourage us in this area and I have listed a few.

GodVenture.

<https://godventure.co.uk/news/hands-on-faith-with-under-fives/>

Roots resources for young children

<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2020/106-march-april-2020-a/easter-3/open-the-word/for-very-young-children>

ParentingforFaith.org and search “under 5’s”

<https://parentingforfaith.org/search?keywords=under+5%27s>

The *Revd Pat Prestney* wrote a series of articles to help new parents think about how to nurture their young children in the Christian faith. These short, practical articles could be used in parish newsletters or magazines, or made available at toddler groups.

http://www.going4growth.com/growth_in_faith_and_worship/early_years/0_5s

These resources from Mothers Union help families explore their faith together in different and creative ways

<https://www.mothersunion.org/faith-family-resources>

Diddy Disciples offers worship and storytelling resources for babies, toddlers and young children.

<https://www.diddydisciples.org/>

<https://parentingforfaith.org/resource/it-takes-church-raise-parent-book>

“What I hope to do in this book is to give you the values and skills you need in order to pioneer in your context; to help you think about the parents you serve; and to give you the foundations you need to be ready to inspire, encourage, equip and walk alongside your parents. The principles in this book have been refined through a lot of experience, tons of mistakes, gracious partnerships, and much trial and error. All stories in this book are real stories of real parents, churches and leaders.”

<https://kitchentable.org.uk/>

“The campaign aims to raise awareness of just how important parents are in building our children’s faith. We can’t just rely on the great children’s work that happens in our churches to teach our children about God. However important that may be, it’s not a substitute for the amazing opportunity we have at home with our children.”



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<https://parentingforfaith.org/>

“The Parenting for Faith course - Based on the book Parenting Children for a Life of Faith, the Parenting for Faith course is a free video-based resource for communities. It's normally run in a church or home group, but can be used by individuals as well. The goal of the course is to help parents discover that they are perfectly positioned to show their children the reality of a life with God and to empower them to have their own vibrant two-way relationship with him.”

<https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-action/faith-home>

“Faith at Home is a national campaign (from the Church of England) that builds on the work of Growing Faith and Everyday Faith to support the faith development and pastoral care of children and young people.”

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/children-youth-family-ministry/family-ministry-supporting-faith-at-home/>

“Family ministry - supporting faith at home. This area of the website is for families (in all shapes and sizes) and aims to support faith and discipleship in the home.”

<https://urc.org.uk/resources-for-children-and-youth>

The CYDO+ team have been working throughout this time of physical restrictions to produce a weekly on-line resource for parents, carers and Primary School aged children to engage in faith forming activities together. Families on Faith Adventures @ Home resources are available to download from the Children and Youth pages of the website.

A FREE URC conference for all those engaging with under-fives in faith settings running over three consecutive evenings.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/faith-with-under-5s-a-conference-sponsored-by-urc-children-and-roots-tickets-105512934026>

ⁱ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/8-may/comment/opinion/faith-in-the-home-is-not-just-for-the-pandemic>

ⁱⁱ D Csinos 'Welcoming Children'