



– *being the church
in unusual times*

For *now* – encouraging families with younger children

Just now: It takes a village.

Being a parent can be hard work sometimes. Add to that a global pandemic and there are so many more challenges that get thrown into the mix of family life. One is that many of the usual church programmes that supplement the role of parents as primary disciplers of their children have fallen foul of restrictions on church life. That shouldn't mean that the crucial role of the church in supporting and encouraging families with younger children can be set aside. Rather, it just needs to look different for now. Just as the African proverb says, 'it takes a village to raise a child', it also takes a family of faith supporting parents to raise children to follow Jesus - and never more so than at this time.

Wednesday, 03 March

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Watch a short introduction to this session by clicking [here](#) or read its transcript below.

For now, just about everything about church life is difficult, due to the restrictions arising from Covid-19. We face the challenge of having to think differently and wondering what we can do. One of the questions we have found ourselves asking is about how we can encourage families with younger children around our church. I wonder what you've found challenging around that?

Deuteronomy 6 is a key passage in the Bible about passing on the faith to the next generation. At this time, it is difficult to retain connection with families – children and parents – because most of our usual programs have stopped. It reminds us of the importance of supporting and encouraging parents to share their faith in the everyday round of family life. As simple as that sounds, it's not easy or without its ups and downs. Now is an important moment to think about things, like:

- how can we facilitate families with young children in our services of worship?
- how can we encourage parents in their own walk with God, when that can be so easily squeezed out by additional burdens caused by disruption of normal family life patterns?
- what simple things could our congregation do to equip parents to talk about God and His place in their children's lives, especially at this time?
- how could you have a conversation with a family and in the family that might be just the lift they need as they try to follow Jesus together in these days?

For now, it's so important to focus on simple things and find one thing we can use to engage and encourage families with younger children in this next season of church life.

Ruth Bromley, Children's Development Officer

Pray

Thursday, 04 March

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Think about *being the village*.

These verses are a go-to passage in thinking about what discipleship in the family looks and feels like. They give an outline that helps us to consider both God's method and key moments in sharing faith with our kids. It is less programme and more personal. Less rules and roadmap, more regular relationship.

1. These verses are addressed to Israel as a community of all ages seeking to follow God together (v.4). Children are a part of that, to be both included and considered in the life of God's people as a whole (v.7). As our congregation struggles to come to terms with restrictions on gathering (arising from the Covid-19 pandemic), how does our response display an attempt to facilitate families with young children in how we worship and seek to support one another?

2. A primary aspect of effectively passing on faith in these verses is the importance of strong parental faith and devotion, built on basic practices which enable a growing love for the Lord with heart, soul and strength, and a desire to live in His ways (vv.5-6). In this time when everyday life is more stressful and family life more demanding, what practical ways could our church encourage parents to ensure they take time to develop their own walk with God?

Pray

Friday, 05 March

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Think about *being the village*.

3. The passage goes on to give a simple framework for sharing faith in the everyday rhythms and routines of home and family life – talking about faith when sitting or walking together, at bedtime and first thing in the morning (v.7). This has become even more important with the onset of Covid-19 as so much congregational children's ministry has stopped. What might this everyday faith-sharing look like for the ordinary family? In what ways can our church encourage parents in this task of sharing faith in everyday conversation?

4. Verses 8 and 9 go on to suggest that it is not enough to just talk about faith with our children, but that there is a visual element to teaching and illustrating it. In Old Testament Israel, that involved tying symbols to hands and foreheads, writing on doorposts and gates. In what ways can our congregation equip parents with simple tools that encourage talking about faith in the family and showing it to be a real part of the present experience of children living through the upheavals of the pandemic period?

Pray

Saturday, 06 March

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Consider *things we can do as a congregation to encourage families with younger children.*

- **Understand** – seek to understand the specific challenges experienced by families with young children arising from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Include** – as you make decisions and plan your congregation’s response to Covid-19 restrictions, make arrangements for worship in-person or digitally and prioritise other possible activities. Include children and the needs of their parents in your thinking.
- **Devotional** – encourage parents in their spiritual walk by signposting resources like the [Tides Daily Devotional](#) on the PCI website.
- **Equip** – create simple resource packs to be dropped off with families containing books and resources which encourage family discipleship.
- **Pray** – make sure families with young children and their particular needs are included in prayer in church services, prayer times and sharing of prayer requests.
- **Connect** – have the minister, an elder or children’s ministry leader organise a time to call a family on Zoom and take time to chat to everyone in the family together, then pray with them.

Pray

Sunday, 07 March

Pray with us from 7-8 pm, on Zoom if you are able.

Monday, 08 March

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Try *creating conversations with and in families.*

- **Coffee** – set up a Zoom coffee time after church where members can catch up with families and children can connect and chat. Breakout rooms could also be used to connect families together or to have members pray for individual families.
- **Walk** – walking is an outdoor activity that, with appropriate social distancing, is both possible and popular. Encourage families to be aware of God’s world around them and to ponder questions about Him as they are out and about.
- **Questions** – encourage families to share the meal table together and to use that time to ask each other questions like, “What was good about your day?”, “What was challenging?”, and “Where did you see God in your day?”
- **Morning** – encourage time in the morning, while brushing teeth, tying shoelaces or getting in the car, to simply pray, handing the day and all it holds over to God.
- **Bedtime** – encourage taking time at the end of the day to read the Bible and thank God for our day as a simple and important routine.

Pray through these suggestions and commit to trying one in the coming week.

Tuesday, 09 March

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Follow up?

To find out more about faith in the family and to signpost parents for more ideas, visit the [PCI Family Ministry Facebook page](#) and the [Kitchen Table Project website](#).

Pray about what God is leading your congregations to do for now to encourage families with younger children.