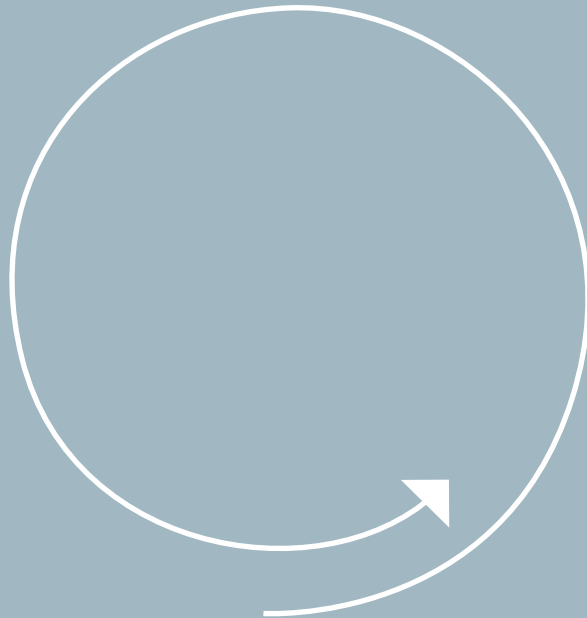


IN-REACH

Introducing our kids to Christ



By: Terran Williams

This book is dedicated to Eli, Fynn, Ivy, Charlie and Samuel.

Precious lives we get to shape, and who are continually shaping us in return.
Being your mom and dad is a true privilege.

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DEDICATING OUR KIDS TO JESUS

Julie and I have five kids. In this book we share with you how we're going about gently discipling them in the faith that was first just our own, but is slowly, beautifully becoming each of theirs too.

This book is not a comprehensive guide to parenting - we're still trying to figure that out, if you have one – send it our way! I write a parenting blog – www.thedaddude.com, and Julie writes to a growing movement of moms who converge in an online community. Together, we also serve in a church that we have been part of for the past two decades. It's where we met, fell in love, had our babies, and it's the community that helps to raise them (and us) still.

This book focuses on only one part of parenting, but certainly the most important part. It takes lazer aim at why and how Christ-following parents can best pass on a vibrant, lasting faith to their kids.

In our church, we give parents the opportunity to dedicate their kids to Christ before the community, who also pledge to support these efforts.

When Julie and I publicly dedicated each of our children, we read this promise over them, it's a promise we remind ourselves often...

Eli / Fynn / Ivy / Charlie / Sam...

As small as you are today, in time to come, you will be moving out of home. Our promise today is that before this happens we want to have given you four gifts to take with you, four gifts that we keep giving to you day after day, year after year:

- 1) Wonderful memories of adventure and fun.*
- 2) The opportunity to develop yourself on all fronts, with special attention given to the development of your character and talents.*
- 3) The kind of consistent love and affirmation that will anchor you for life.*
- 4) An attractive, accessible example of white-hot love for Christ that we pray will one day burn in you too.*

What a delight it is to you dedicate you to the One who – along with us – delights in you.

We are so grateful to God for you, and that we have been entrusted to be your parents. Raising you is one of the most important work we will ever do. We commit to do it whole-heartedly, with our heavenly Father's grace and for his glory alone.

This book is primarily about why and how we are going about the fourth promise of that pledge: providing an attractive, accessible example of white-hot love for Christ that we pray will burn in them too.

It's a book about why and how we are going about reaching and discipling our children. Our hope is that it will inspire and equip you to do the same.

PART 1:

REASONS TO DISCIPLE OUR KIDS

Let's be honest, being a parent is not for the faint-hearted. We're meant to love our kids, provide for them, consistently and lovingly correct their poor behaviour and attitudes, develop them physically, relationally, emotionally, mentally and so much more.

It's a massive undertaking, with dizzying complexity when you add multiple children to the mix - for every child is as unique as their fingerprint - requiring a nuanced, customised approach to all of the above!

Yet as important and dizzying as all of that is, it's not the main thing. Not for Christ-following parents at least.

Allow us to persuade you that the North Star priority of parenting is to help them find and follow Jesus...

1. The Great Commission necessitates it

Christian parenting is a subsection within the Great Commission.

The most important verse on parenting does not mention parent or child, but nonetheless radically impacts our parenting...

| |
|--|
| Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28 : 19 - 20) |
|--|

Like you no doubt wish for your kids, Julie and I would love to see our children happy, emotionally and physically healthy, with good character, obvious talents and an opportunity to use those talents to thrive as adults.

But this is not enough.

According to Jesus' commission, our primary job is to introduce them to a vibrant relationship with God, where they have come to know and do his will and ways.

Sure, we want them to be happy and healthy, but more than that, we want them to be holy.

Yes, we want them to shine in their chosen areas of passion, but more than that, we want them to shine on Judgment Day.

Of course, we want them to find their way in this world, but more than that, we pray they find and follow God's way.

We want them to thrive in the work they will do as teens and adults, but not as much as we want to see them to succeed in doing God's work in every season of their lives.

Undeniably, we want them to find lifelong friends, but more than that, we want them to find and fall in love with the church, the one community that they can immerse themselves in not only in this life, but for all eternity.

Yup, we hope that they have rich relationship with a future spouse (if they choose to marry), but even more than that, we want them to walk and talk with Christ as One who is the Blazing Light in the centre of their lives.

These desires are what the Great Commission calls us to.

2. Our family is our first mission field

If the early church is anything to go by, our relational network is our mission field.

One of the principles of evangelism that we learn from the early church is what is called 'the oikos' principle. Oikos, a Greek word used many times in the original language of the New Testament, refers to the relational network every individual had. In the first century Roman world, it was common for 8-15 people to be part of a household (i.e. oikos).

If the early church in the New Testament is something to go by, our relational network is our mission field.

What do a demon possessed man (Luke 8:39), a greedy swindler named Zacchaeus (Luke 19:9), a tax collector named Matthew (Mark 2:14-15), a Centurion named Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 24), a businesswoman named Lydia (Acts 16:13-15) and a recently unemployed Philippian jailor (Acts 16:34) have in common? Two things. Each of them came to Christ. Each of them were then instrumental in introducing their oikos, their household or family, to faith.

This pattern endures past the New Testament writings into the church of the second to fourth centuries in the faith-hostile Roman empire. Church historians estimate that the church grew during that time by a staggering 40% per decade for 300 years, despite heavy persecution.

How did this happen? Not through public evangelists. After the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in AD 70, we know of no public evangelists. It was so dangerous to be a Christian that church deacons sometimes doubled up as bouncers, refusing non-Christians to enter church gatherings for fear that they were informants.

Given this adverse climate, how did the church grow so much? The first reason is that their faith in the gospel brought about a quality of person that humanity had never seen before. The second reason is that people shared the gospel with their oikos, their close relational network. In his book *Cities of God*, sociologist Rodney Stark pinpoints the method by which the gospel spread into ancient Europe...

Social networks are the basic mechanism through which conversion takes place... Most conversions are not produced by professional missionaries conveying a new message, but by rank-and-file members who share their

faith with their friends and relatives... The principle that conversions spread through social networks is quite consistent with the fact that the earliest followers of Jesus shared many family ties and long-standing associations... Although the very first Christian converts in the West may have been by full-time missionaries, the conversion process soon became self-sustaining as new converts accepted the obligation to spread their faith and did so by missionizing their immediate circle of intimates. (Rodney Stark, Cities of God)

In my church, we challenge people to identify and list 8-10 people that they are living missionally towards. To make this idea more sticky, we associate these people with our fingers. Each finger is someone we love whom we want to introduce to the One who loves them most. In the same way that our fingers reach, and touch, and bring towards, so we live to reach, touch and bring in these people.

What's this got to do with parenting? In my case, 5 of my 10 fingers are my children! Half of my life's oikos-outreach is passing on my love for God to my children.

3. There's no better place for real discipleship to take place

The home is the ideal environment for the deep discipleship of a life.

As much as I'm sure we'd all like it to, no matter how stirring it may be, no church course or series or worship gathering will ever forge deep disciples of Jesus. That's because making disciples is not a mass-producible endeavour.

Look at Jesus' model for making disciples. He spends three years in close proximity to a few, in invested friendship, in the thick and the thuds of life. Each disciple of Jesus is handcrafted.

What better environment is there than the home to offer similar conditions! The senior disciples (still with a long way to go on their own discipleship journey) are invested in the shaping of young disciples in the rattles and the rhythms of everyday life.

In the context of the home, us parents get to mentor, coach, disciple and shepherd lives – in all things, but especially in the knowledge of God.

Perhaps the most common mistake Christian parents make is to miss this. They outsource the spiritual development of their children to the kids or youth ministry of the church. Just as they might outsource swimming lessons and soccer practice.

But ask any children or youth ministry leader in a church and they will tell you how little time they get to spend with your kids on any given year, and just how limited their influence therefore is on your kids. They might even present the numbers to you, like the kids ministers in my church have to us...

Every year, parents on average spend about 3,000 hours per year with their children, while these kids are in church or age-related ministries for only 50 or so hours.

Lament the lure of the current culture all we want, but remember that no one influences our children more than we do as parents.

Of course, we cannot control our children as they grow older, but we would be wise to do everything in our power to influence them intentionally and well in those precious 3,000 hours - to align their lives to the North Star of Christ.

4. Scripture places the discipling responsibility mainly on our shoulders

According to God's Word, the primary and foundational discipleship of our children cannot be outsourced.

Here is a sample of these imperatives from Scripture...

These words that I command you today are to be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. (Joel 1:3)

Parents, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

Theologian, revivalist, pastor and parent to eleven kids, Jonathan Edwards summed up the matter well:

Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual. If these are duly maintained, all the means of grace will be likely to prosper and be successful.

As Edwards so aptly points out, there are Christian influences outside the home that supplement the Christian influence within the home, but they can never fully substitute it.

5. The book of Proverbs stresses this aspect of parenting

The book of Proverbs is, amongst other things, an ancient parenting manual.

In the first and final chapters, the book is framed as a transfer of wisdom from parents to their young:

'Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.' (Prov 1:8)

The sayings of King Lemuel—an inspired utterance his mother taught him. Listen, my son! Listen, son of my womb! Listen, my son, the answer to my prayers! (Prov 31:1)

Then throughout the book, the parent-to-child transfer of wisdom is emphasized. For example...

Listen to your father and mother, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother. Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding. The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him. (Prov 23:22-24)

This 'wisdom' in the book of Proverbs is the formation of a certain kind of character and approach to life that is forged in one's relationship with God. The very first chapter makes this clear...

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction... they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me, since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD. (Prov 1:7,28,29)

'The fear of the Lord', mentioned here, is a shorthand term for a life that is lived in the light of who God is, and what God has said. It is a life where one's relationship with God impacts upon how one responds to every person and situation. All other influences – the voice of culture or their inner drives – give way to the central influence of God.

Notice how different the meaning of parenting is in Proverbs, compared to traditional and modern parenting...

| <i>Type of parenting</i> | <i>Traditional parenting</i> | <i>Modern parenting</i> | <i>Proverbs parenting</i> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Emphasis</i> | Controlling children's behaviour | Boosting self-esteem in children | Passing on wisdom to children |
| <i>Parent is</i> | Disciplinarian | Friend | Discipler |
| <i>Child is</i> | Subject | Equal | Disciple |

Your primary job as a parent is not to control your kids. It is not to be the disciplinarian of your subjects. On the other extreme, your primary job is not to boost your child's self-esteem. It is not to be a friend of equals. Not that these things are entirely wrong, but they are hopelessly inadequate. Your job as a parent is to pass spiritual wisdom onto your kids. You are to be a discipler of disciples.

6. The Bible offers no guarantees

We don't have a promise to lean back on that guarantees our kids will follow Christ.

I know too many parents who were lax in the modeling and intentional transfer of their faith to their kids because they held on to the mistaken idea that a godly home guarantees godly kids.

They got this idea from a misreading of Proverbs 22:6: *"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."*

'I'm a Christian. I have taken my kids to church. I read kids Bible's to them – they're in, so says Proverbs 22:6,' is what we mistakenly tell ourselves.

The problem with this reading is that Proverbs does not contain absolute promises. It contains proverbs, axioms. You can bank your life on a promise, but a proverb is more an observation or approximation of how life usually works. It tells us what quite likely will happen.

Yes, the Spirit of God inspired Proverbs, but a simple reading of the book reveals that these observations are not always true. Good people are not always exalted. Evil people sometimes prosper. Diligent people can fail, and lazy people can succeed.

The best we can do with Proverbs 22:6 is say that most children raised in a Christian home will continue in the faith. But not all will, and even those who do will not necessarily embrace a whole-hearted discipleship to Jesus.

The reason I share this point is that I am trying to motivate you to higher levels of spiritual alertness as you parent your child. As I said earlier, you don't have a promise that you can lean back into that can a lack of intentionality as you seek to shape your children spiritually.

7. Satan is intent on counter-discipling your kids.

Notice how much the devil seeks to counter the parent-to-child transfer of faith.

If you think that the transfer of faith is effortless, automatic and happens regardless of whether one is intentional or not, think again.

Let me provide a picture to make my point.

Discipling our children can be likened to the slow-motion passing of a baton.

How hard can that be?

Now consider this. This is not a baton-passing event happening on a nice track with 1000s cheering from the grand stands. This is a passing of the baton that is happening in the firing zone of a battle-blown field.

Whizzing sounds, bombs, fallen bodies are the context within which this is all happening.

The sniper of our souls has his vision first on us and second on our children.

If he can destroy us or distract us from a white-hot passion for Jesus, he succeeds – and the baton in our hands turns to dust. We have nothing meaningful to pass on. He seeks to cause us to conform to the sacrificial, yet maddeningly misdirected, efforts parents of our children's friends make to see their children excel in school, sports and socializing – with little or no regard for their spirituality. He desires that his deceptions would work so well on us that we would long more ardently that our child goes far in her career, than we do that she goes far in Christ's kingdom.

That said, the statistics verify that he may be even more effective at targeting the heart of our children. The sniper has his sights set on them too.

In my country I do not know what the stats are, but in America by current trends, 58% of children who grow up in Christian homes no longer attend church by the time they are 29!

The general assumption was that in high school and in the tertiary education years, children were losing their faith footing. What a surprise then when a recent survey of 20,000 adults who had grown up Christian but no longer believed the Bible to be true revealed when they had actually had their first doubts about Christianity:

- 11% in the tertiary education
- 49% in grades 9-12
- 40% in grades 5-8

Think what this means! Those who grow up in Christian homes may only leave church when they are older, but many have lost conviction much sooner.

They're going through the motions of church and kids/teen ministry while they wait out their time to finally dial out.

Friends, the battle is fierce. And it's raging in your home – right now.

Parents who are not on their knees for the spiritual well-being of their children are blind to the slow-motion horror that slowly unfolds in so many Christian homes. We may bring up our kids to thrive in society, but as a collective, we are failing to bring up our kids into whole-hearted discipleship to Jesus.

I share this not to discourage you with the enemy's tireless efforts, but to awaken you out of a spiritual slumber. As cosy as your home might be, as safe and pleasant as your child's school may be, as sweet as your little one may be, don't be deceived into thinking it's peace time. The war has been waged – whether you choose to acknowledge it or not. The heart of the battle is the battle for the heart – a battle for your own heart, and a battle for your children's.

8. Jesus commanded it

Jesus is passionate about the spiritual well-being of kids.

While reading through Matthew's Gospel, I started to notice just how many times Jesus spoke about and ministered to 'little ones' (Greek: mikron). As I scanned over these occurrences, I noticed that Jesus charged the entire church in general, but parents in particular, to 1) welcome kids 2) serve kids 3) reach kids and 4) disciple kids.

Jesus said we should welcome kids.

'At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them' (Matthew 18:1-2).

He called a little child to him. He placed the child into the middle of the first church: an honoured member in the family of God. Just in case any one there wondered if this was a once-off event, Jesus repeats this practice in the very next chapter...

Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there (Matt 19:13-14).

Jesus may not have had his own kids, but there's no doubt about the kind of dad he would have been. He had all the time in the world for little lives. He had a way of making each of them feel like a million bucks. They wanted to be with him. And he was very eager to see his people perpetuate the same treatment of kids, even motivating it with a profound insight...

'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me' (Matt 18:5).

Mother Teresa used to tell her sister-nuns that each time they minister to a bedraggled person on the streets, they are ministering to Jesus. Jesus said something similar about kids – everytime we knuckle-punch or high-five a little life, we're greeting Jesus.

Jesus said we should serve kids.

Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." (Matt 10:41-42)

Did you get that? You might have the honour of hosting a travelling Christian leader of some sort in your home - Jesus said that the way we host them will accrue heavenly reward. But then – and it boggles my mind – he says the same about how we treat little kids. They may not seem as honoured or

important as prophets and righteous leaders, but they are just as worthy of consistent honour. Serving these little ones - even helping them out with something as mundane as sorting out their sippy cups - will be commended and rewarded in heaven one day. It might not feel rewarding pouring our lives out for the personal well-being of our kids, but it *will* be rewarded - so says Jesus.

How wonderful to know that God has no grandchildren. Each regenerated person, whether they are 5 or 50, sits at the same table and calls God 'Father'. The Holy Spirit is one-size-fits-all. There's no mini-Holy Spirit for mini-me's. We all get saved to the same degree!

Jesus said we should reach kids.

God is far more likely to reach unsophisticated people than fancy-pants ones. Jesus lamented how unresponsive many educated adults were, and yet rejoiced that little kids were ready to trust in him...

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. (Matt 11:25-26)

Many statistics bear out that three quarters of all the Christians in the world became Christians between the age of 4 and 14! Missiologists wanting to leverage the limited capacities of the church on mission, sometimes speak of the 10-40 priority window - referring to the many countries between 10 and 40 degrees North of the equator that have yet to be reached for Christ. Well, there's definitely a 4-14 window too - miss your chance to reach people in this stage of their lives, and you will find it much harder to reach them later.

Just like Jesus then to stress to the church the 4-14 window before the church even came into being...

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. "If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. (Matt 18:10-14)

Go after the young, says Jesus. Seek to snatch them back from the precipice and the wolf. They need more than a family, they need a spiritual family. They need more than an education, they need salvation. They need more than remedial help, they need redemption. When your child comes to Christ, celebrate with all heaven.

Jesus said we should disciple kids.

At least part of our discipleship of our children is helping them steer clear or get out of the danger zone of evil...

If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!
(Matt 18:6-7)

Just yesterday I was talking to some parents of teens. They were telling me that they had always assumed that they would be able to draw on their own experience of once being a teenager to disciple their teens. Shaking his head, the dad said, "The only problem is that the world was a little messed up when I was a teen, but now it's gone completely nuts."

The mom agreed, "The best book in the Bible to help us think about discipling our kids is the book of Daniel. Daniel and his three friends got dropped into an utterly godless pagan world and somehow, against all odds, managed to stay faithful to God, free of idolatry and missionally impacting of a culture. They were in the culture, but they were not taken captive by the culture. Rather they were salt and light."

Sometimes I wish we could bring up our kids on an island somewhere without the Internet. But God has greater plans for the lives of our children than isolation. He plans to send them out to infiltrate culture, while maintaining intimacy with God and purity of life. This means that we bring up our kids right on the devil's doorstep. We run the danger of them getting drawn to the dark side, but we trust God, and find a way in him, to raise up freedom fighters who will liberate others from darkness.

One more thing on this idea of discipling our kids. Jesus highlighted that God will not only use us to shape their walk with God, but will also use them to shape ours...

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter / experience the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 18:3-4)

I doubt we can learn much from our little kids about maturity. Rather, we should let their sense of wonder, their readiness to trust, their hunger for adventure, and their openness to learn rub off on us – these childlike qualities are indeed meshed into Christlikeness. Christ is, after all, the Child who has been given to us (Isaiah 9:6).

So, there you have it – eight reasons to keep the main thing of Christian parenting the main thing: we need to work around the clock to welcome our kids into a bigger family - God's family, to serve them in the name of Jesus, to reach them with the saving work of the Heavenly Shepherd, and to disciple them into faithful, kingdom-advancing disciples.

I don't know about you, but even as I write this, I am determined to do what I can to keep my heart ablaze for Christ, and to pass that flaming baton on to my kids.

We don't have total control, of course, but what opportunity and influence we do have, we must use for good – intentionally, perseveringly, prayerfully and thoughtfully.

So that, with John, we can agree, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth"* (3 John 4).

PART 2: TEN WAYS TO DISCIPLE OUR KIDS

We hope you're super-motivated to disciple your children. But how? Here are some of the most important things to keep in mind...

1. GET TO KNOW GOD AS FATHER

Disciple your kids by impressing the love of God the Father upon them through your style of parenting.

It's likely our kids will forget most of what we say, but they'll never forget how we make them feel.

It's as we get to know God as our Father, that there comes upon our mothering and fathering a special glow of God's goodness, an echo of God's fatherly heartbeat.

I think our primary role as parents is to parent them in such a way that one day as they get to know God as Father, they have the least possible emotional difficulty with that concept. Children who grew up with abusive, absent, aloof or inconsistent parents tend to struggle the most to receive the Father's love and their identity as God's child.

Our relationship to God as our Fathers starts through our faith in Jesus, the Son of God.

"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son... to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons..." (Gal 4:4).

The Son of God became like us sons and daughters of Adam (minus the sin), so that us sons and daughters of Adam could become sons and daughters of God. The fact that fallen people like us can have a relationship with God as our Father, where he loves us as much as he loves his Son (John 17:23) is an electrifying truth!

"See how great a love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called the children" (1 John 3:1).

Being a parent to our child is more than being just a flesh-and-blood parent. I think of the TV series, "The Story of Us" where a son can say to his biological father, "You were never a father to me. You might be my own flesh and blood, but it takes more than that to be a father. You were never there for me. You were never really my father."

Those are the words that every parent should dread. We want to be there for our children. But what will this look like? I propose we reflect on how God the Father parents us. Though the New Testament, especially the teaching of Jesus, gives us great insight into God as Father, allow me to explore the insights of God's fatherliness from Psalm 103:

Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
²Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
³who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
⁴who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
⁵who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
⁶The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed...
⁸The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
⁹He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
¹⁰he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
¹²as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
¹³As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
¹⁴for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

Psalm 103:1-14

a. Like our Father, make your children feel loved.

'For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him' (v11).

Here is a Father who loves us like the ultimate parent. Knowing the love of our heavenly parent ourselves, we aim at loving our kids in a way where they can feel our love for them.

Based on the well-known idea of Five-Love languages, we love our kids in all of these five ways, but especially heap up onto each respective child the one or two that they most resonate with:

- *We speak words of affirmation*, by speaking warmly and affirmatively to another, especially the words, 'I love you.'
- *We give affectionate touch*, by gently holding, hugging, patting, kissing or tickling another.
- *We spend quality time*, by spending undistracted time with someone, maybe doing something together, enjoying each other's presence.
- *We give special gifts*, by making, finding or buying thoughtful gifts for the person, often with the element of surprise thrown in.
- *We do acts of service*, by doing stuff for or helping them with something practical.

To these five, I'd add three other ways we show our children that we love them:

- *We listen*, by truly hearing the words they speak, and the feelings with which they say them.
- *We celebrate their lives* – their uniqueness, their moments of joy or achievement.
- *We empathize with their pain*, by sitting with them in the darkness, acknowledging how much this experience sucks, without trying to fix it.

b. Like our Father, be grace-based not performance-orientated.

Though we fail morally (v10,12) and are weak and therefore inconsistent (v14), yet we're assured that 'from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with' us (v14). God loves us permanently in spite of our sins and flaws because he's our Father. In the same way, we must communicate an unconditional love to our children.

We are not our children's boss. In a boss-employee relationship, you can enjoy a good relationship with the boss as long as you perform well. A failure to perform threatens the very relationship itself. Instead, we are our children's parent. Regardless of how they perform/succeed/fail - they must know we love them.

I have a friend who says to his kids, "I really want you to do your best. Be the best person you can be. Be the best sportsperson you can be. Do your best at school. I want you to be motivated to do this. But I must remind you that one motivation you cannot use is my love. You already have that, and no amount of good behavior or great sports or test result is going to make me love you more. No amount of bad decisions or sport results will make me love you less either."

In fact, I dare say, the more our children fail, the more engaged we become, the more intentionally we show them our love. It might pain us, and our Father too, but nothing must deter our love for our kids.

c. Like our Father, be intimate with (not aloof from) your kids.

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on us" (v13). The Father seeks out an emotional connection with us. The gospel invites us to know the God who knows us.

We must seek intimacy with our kids. When they are very little, and we have to rock them, feed them, or care for them when they're sick, it's very intimate. There's a lot of skin contact. But as they grow, we need to find other avenues to express our love for them, to connect with them.

We should evaluate our intimacy-levels with God. Romans 8:15 says that, through the Spirit, we can both sense the Father whispering his affection over us, as well as cry out, 'Abba Father'. The Father assures us of his being there for us. He assures us that he longs to open up his heart to us. This should break the sense of formality and distance that marks much of our prayer. It also shapes how we relate to our kids.

d. Like our Father, provide discipline, not 'pay back'

"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities" (v8-10).

Jesus on the cross has turned away God's wrath. The eternal punishment that our sins deserve has fallen upon Another. In Christ, God is no longer angry with us. His anger is aimed at the things in our life that hurt us. He loves us so much that he has accepted us as we are. But he loves us too much to leave us as we are. This means that he sets out to discipline us. Not in anger nor in frustration but always in love. He does not pay us back, since Jesus has already paid for the offence of our sin. His discipline is all restorative love.

Theologian Michael Eaton articulates God's fatherly discipline toward us:

"The Father disciplines his children. We might not think this is a great privilege, but it is something that will be characteristic of every good father. If a child is slow to obey and learn the right path a good father will do something to speed up the process of obedience. A good father puts on a bit of pressure to ensure that his child learns. It will

not always be gentle, but it will always come out of a heart of love. So our heavenly Father is determined to bring us into paths of holiness. This too is part of his love."

As Father-like parents we too must love our kids enough to confront the flaws in their character. A failure to do so is a failure to love them. But, like our Heavenly Father, we must discipline them in a way that is firm, but not harsh. We never ever vent anger at our kids or frustration with them as we discipline them. Godly discipline is not us as frustrated parents against our frustrating kids. Rather it is us as concerned parents, standing side by side with our concerning kids, together with them standing against the flaws in their lives.

I have a friend who, as a result of the unhelpful way he was disciplined by his parents, says that he feels like God is annoyed with him most of the time. Leaning into the wisdom God gives us, we need to correct our kids without condemning them, confronting what's unacceptable even while we cast no shadow on our deep acceptance of them.

e. Like our Father, be attentive to your kids' real needs

We do not always give our kids what they want, but we are attentive to what they really need – and we seek to meet those needs.

As children of God, we have a Father who is ever-available to us, seeking to give us what we really need. That's why we can pray with the writer of Psalm 103, "Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed"(v2-6).

This doesn't mean God does not let us face trouble. But it does mean that we can go to him in our trouble and he will show himself to be good to us. Have we done something stupid? We have a Father who takes us as we are "forgiving all our sins" (v3). Are we stuck in a hole? We have a Father who "redeems our lives from the pit" (v4). Do we sting with the pain of being overlooked or dishonoured by others? We have a Father who "crowns us with love and compassion" (v5). Are we broken tired, the wind gone from our sails? We have a Father who is able to renew our youth like that of the eagle's (v5). Do we struggle to shake off the bitterness of being unfairly treated? We have a Father working righteousness and justice on our behalf (v6).

Obviously we do not play the role of God in our children's lives, but where it is within our power to meet the real needs of our children, we do so.

f. Like our Father, be prepared to make sacrifices

Our Heavenly Father's love cost him dearly. In the words of Michael Eaton again:

"God himself suffered something when his Son went to the cross. If there were no sacrifice, no pain, it would not have been love. But the Father spared not his own Son. It is not that we started loving God. He started first and sent his Son on the greatest rescue mission of all time, the rescue of sinners to be his sons and daughters."

I have a friend who, with tears in his eyes, tells of a season of his childhood where the kids would eat dinner while his financially struggling dad lived on leftovers. I have another friend who tells, also with tears in his eyes, of a father who quit a high-status job that was taking him away from his kids too many hours a day, so that he could spend more time with him and his sister.

The more we know the Father, receiving his love, grace, presence, help and sacrifice, the more we become the kind of parents who better reflect the Father in heaven to them.

Let me give a word of relief to those of you who, far from being inspired by this point, feel condemned. The best parents I know don't come close to the standard of parenting set by our Father above. We all need God's grace; we all have a way to go. When our kids are small, the best we can be to them is a stop-gap until they are old enough to know God as their perfect Father.

As our kids get older we can help them think about ways that we as parents do a good job of reflecting their Father in heaven. But we can also talk openly about our failures, where they must be clear that, at best, we are a pale reflection of the perfect Parent they will have access to for the rest of their lives. As much as we would like to, we will not always be able to be there for them. But there is One who can and will.

2. Pray for your kids.

Disciple your kids by praying for them. Here's how we do this in our home.

We pray for our kids for two reasons. The first is that we want for our kids what only God can do in and for them. For starters, only God can save a human being. And then only God has access to the deepest interior of a life, where desires and decisions are born. As we pray, we humbly acknowledge the limitation of our influence over our children.

The second reason we pray is because we believe in the power of God. Prayer is only powerful because God is powerful.

The 19th Century preacher and author A. B. Simpson gives a wonderful example of the power of persevering, accumulative prayer. In the city of Rangoon resided the largest and finest bell in the East. It was the pride of the great Buddhist Temple, Shwedagon. During a battle, the bell sank to the bottom of a river. Over the years, various engineers tried but failed to raise it. At last, a clever priest asked permission to try, but only if the bell was given to his temple. The priest had his assistants gather an immense number of bamboo rods. One by one the rods were fastened to the bell at the bottom of the river. After thousands of them had been fastened, the bell began to move. When the last bamboo rod was attached, the buoyancy of the accumulated rods lifted the bronze bell from the mire of the river bottom to the stream's surface. A. B. Simpson writes: 'Every whisper of believing prayer is like one of the little bamboo rods. For a time they seem to be in vain, but there comes a last breath of believing prayer, and the walls of Jericho fall, the mountain becomes a plain, and the giants are defeated.' Each time we pray for our children according to God's Word, it is as though we attach one more bamboo rod to their life.

What to pray for your kids...

Prayer is most powerful when we pray in alignment with the declared will of God in his Word. Let me give you a sample of prayers to pray for your children...

a. Pray salvation prayers

JC Ryle in the 1800s wrote a devotional commentary on Matthew's Gospel. Reflecting on the genealogy in chapter 1, he wrote:

"Learn from this list of names, the sinfulness and corruption of human nature. Observe how many godly parents in this catalogue had wicked and ungodly sons. The names of Rehoboam, and Joram, and Amon, and Jehoniah, should teach us humbling lessons. They had all pious fathers. But they were all wicked men. Grace does not run in families. It needs something more than good examples and good advice to make us children of God. Those who are born again are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, (John 1:13.) Praying parents should pray night and day, that their children may be born of the Spirit." Ryle, J. C.. J. C. Ryle's Expository

b. Pray for what Paul prayed for his 'children'

The apostle Paul tended to see the people in the churches he started as his spiritual children (Galatians 4:19). We tend to pray for an improvement of our children's circumstances: 'God, help him with that test.' 'Jesus, provide her with new friends.' 'Father, make this hard time stop'. But the Apostle Paul, who in about 40 places in the New Testament wrote down his prayers for people, prayed instead for much more lasting and important things.

A study of these prayers reveals 9 recurring prayer topics, as seen in the prayer sample below. I have changed some of the words so that this can serve as a resource to help you pray biblically for your children...

Pray for your child's salvation. "My heart's desire and my prayer is for Eli's salvation. (Rom 10:1) Short time or long, I pray that you would save Eli (Acts 26:29)." Once Eli was saved we pray, "Praise you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for you have blessed Eli with every spiritual blessing in Christ, in love predestining his adoption as your child (Eph 1:3-5)".

Pray for grace and peace. "May Fynn regularly access and enjoy grace and peace from you, God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:3). I pray that Fynn will consistently approach your throne of grace with confidence, receiving mercy and finding grace to help him in times of need (Heb 4:16). As the Lord of peace, give Fynn peace at all times in every way (2 Thes 3:16)."

Pray for wisdom. "I pray that you, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give Ivy the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation so as to know you better (Eph1:17). May Ivy be filled with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9). Open her eyes to see the wonderful things in your Word (Ps 119:18)."

Pray for power. "According to the riches of your glory, strengthen Charlie with power through your Spirit in his inner being. (Eph 3:16) Father, I pray Charlie may experience the immeasurable greatness of your power, your great might that you exerted in Christ when you raised him from the dead and seated him at your right hand (Eph 1:18-19)."

Pray for Christlikeness. "May Sam approve what is excellent, and be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to your glory (Phil 1:9-11). May Sam walk in a manner worthy of you, fully pleasing you in every way, bearing fruit in every work (Col 1:10) May you sanctify Sam completely – his whole spirit and soul and body kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes 5:23)."

Pray for hope. "Enlighten the eyes of Eli's heart that he may know the hope to which you have called him, and the riches of your glorious inheritance (Eph 1:18). God of hope, fill Eli with all joy and peace as he trusts in you, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit Eli may overflow with hope (Rom 15:13). May you,

our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, who loved Eli and by your grace gave him eternal comfort and good hope, encourage his heart (2 Thes 2:16)."

Pray that they grow closer to Christ. "May you direct Fynn's heart into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ (2 Thes 3:5). May he have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that he may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph 3:18-19)."

Pray that they be rooted in loving community. "May you cause Ivy to increase and overflow in love for fellow-believers, and for all people (1 Thes 3:12). As the God of endurance and encouragement, grant that she lives in such harmony with brothers and sisters in Christ, in accordance with Christ Jesus, that together they may glorify you with one voice (Rom 15:5-6)."

Pray that they would minister to others potently. "In Sam's ministry to the church, I pray you use him to supply what is lacking in the faith of others (1 Thes 3:9-10). Use him to impart spiritual gifts to others, establishing those people (Rom 1:9-11). In Sam's ministry to people far from God, I pray that he be active in sharing his faith, so that he will have a greater understanding of every good thing that is his in Jesus (Philemon 6). I pray words may be given him so that he will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel (Eph 6:19)."

There are other prayers Julie and I pray for our children regularly, that go beyond Paul's prayer themes. Based on what we pray, perhaps you want to...

Pray for their future spouse. "Father, assuming my child one day marries, we pray that you prepare him now to be a whole, godly and competent husband and father. I pray that you prepare a suitable and wholesome spouse for him who will share his commitment to Christ, the church and God's work in the world."

Pray for their friends. "Jesus Christ, I pray that you will gift my child with godly friends – people with whom she can grow with, adventure with and follow Jesus alongside, people who will bring the best out of each other. Equip Ivy to be more of an influence for Christ and godliness than any of her friends influence him to the contrary."

Pray for their protection. "Holy Spirit, protect my child from all harm. Let your hand draw him from darkness and shield him from the arrows of Satan. Protect him from physical harm – sicknesses and accidents. Protect him from predators. Bring into the light the strategies of darkness. Grant us discernment and wisdom."

Pray for the flourishing of their gifts. "Creator God, thank you for the gifts and personality that you have scattered upon my child's life. Bring them to fruition for your glory, her flourishing and the blessing of many people – both inside and beyond the church. Guide us as parents as we point her in the direction of discovering, developing and deploying these gifts."

Pray for their hunger for God and his Word. "God, put a ravenous appetite for your Word in my child. Open his eyes so that he can see the wonderful things

in your Word. Help him to not only be a hearer of your word but a doer also. Empower him to articulate and apply the truths of your Word to his generation."

c. We can pray previously received prophetic words over our children.

'God is in the habit of sharing prophetic promises over individual lives (Amos 3:7). He then watches over his word to, in his own time and way, to fulfil them (Jeremiah 1:12). Each time we receive a prophetic promise from God over a child – either one we discerned or one someone else shared with us – we write it down. From time to time Julie and I will open up this list (it exists as a Word doc in the cloud) and pray those words over our children.

We can also pray as the Spirit leads. Each time we pray for our children, we might start with praying according to the Scriptures, but then the Holy Spirit will guide us – prompting us to pray specific things.

When to pray for our kids...

There is no set answer other than, 'regularly.' I know of Christian moms who will weekly meet with other Christian moms to pray for their families and children. Julie's parents pray every single morning for their kids and grandkids. Julie and I tend to pray more spontaneously – but regularly (at least a few times a week).

One great way to disciple our kids is to pray for them in front of them. Often at bedtime, I will put my hand on the heart of one of my children and pray for them the kinds of prayers suggested above. Not only does God hear my prayer, but now my child hears my prayers for them. In these times I will usually pray that God's presence will touch my child too, even while I pray for them – I might even ask my child afterwards if they felt God's closeness.

We have found that one of the best times to pray for our kids is in the car on the way to school. After speaking about what's coming up in the day ahead, we can pray for them as the Spirit and their daily activities lead.

3. Read God's Word with your kids.

a. Read God's Word in front of them.

Our kids know that mommy and daddy love each other because they see us talking with each other. If we live past each other as we parent our kids, we unwittingly create insecure kids who don't see any evidence of a vital connection between their parents. I once read a parenting book which advised that the best way to create secure kids is to schedule a daily time, usually straight after work, where mom and dad just sit on the couch and talk, and don't allow any interruptions. To be honest, Julie and I have not succeeded in forming that daily habit, but I use it as an analogy.

Other than going to church, or serving in church, what is the obvious sign to your kids that you love God? I suggest it is them seeing you reading the Bible everyday.

I have friends who grew up in Christian homes and remember seeing a parent read the Bible everyday. That simple visual impacted them. It was the evidence in their memory that their mom or dad truly loved God.

I am at a disadvantage on this front because I read my Bible on my phone and computer screens, so my kids might think I'm working instead of connecting with God. To blance this out, when I'm on the Bible app, I often tell my kids, "Daddy is reading the Bible." I want them to see that I prioritize time with God. I also may mention in conversation something that I got out of my Bible reading earlier in the day.

b. Read God's Word with them.

Explain to your kids that a disciple of Jesus is, first and foremost, someone who listens to Jesus. The way to do this is to, most days in our lives, make time, if even only for a few minutes, to read and reflect on his Word. We sometimes use biblical analogies to explain why we are so passionate about the Bible in this house. We might say:

"God's Word is like honey – it's feeds our soul with joy and energy."

"God's Word is like a sword – we can fight the devil and darkness with it."

"God's Word is like a mirror – we learn who we are in God through it."

"God's Word is light for our path – it shows us how we should live our lives."

"God's Word is the sap that flows through the branch – it is what causes us to bear the fruit of a changed life."

Read with them not to them. Model an enthusiasm about hearing what God has to say to us today through his Word.

Find the time in the day that works for you. When is the best time to teach Scripture to our kids? Every family needs to work that out for themselves, and the answer will vary as seasons change. For example, in my house, bed-times have served as the best time to read an age-appropriate version of Scripture to kids. But there have also been times where I have used breakfast time to teach my kids a memory verse. And for the last 6 months, Julie and I read the

Bible with our older kids for the first 15 minutes of the day. I know of other families who use a dinner time for this – some of them every dinner, and some of them once a week.

Recognize that Satan will try resist this simple habit. The devil knows that if we as a family, and if our kids, do not live in range of God's voice, that we will be spiritually blunt. The values of our culture will be shaping us more than the values in God's Word.

Julie and I have found that if we wait until we all feel like it, or if we wait till the time seems right, most nights or mornings we simply won't get to the Bible with our kids. Faith-motivated decisiveness and determination are needed to cultivate this habit. Satan will not make it easy for us, but we must draw out battle line on this habit and stand our ground.

The last week, I have had to drag myself out of bed to get this Bible reading going, and each time I thought of numerous reasons why we don't have to do this everyday. I am so glad I have been sticking to it, because one of my kids told me that he loves the way we start the day listening to Jesus.

Last year, after a few months of not reading the Bible consistently to Ivy (aged 5 at the time), we started reading the Jesus Storybook Bible to her every night. Each time she would beg us to do a second chapter. We were struck by her real appetite for God's Word. She then provided commentary on her appetite, "Mom and dad, I didn't like the Bible before because I think I liked the devil too much. But now, the more I read the Bible the more I love the Bible." It's cute (and a little scary) I know, yet it reminds us that a 5-year-old needs to be awakened to the reality of God through Scripture intake every much as a person 8 times her age!

c. Bring a light mood to Bible reading.

Spiritual warfare dynamics aside, we want to communicate to our children that reading the Bible is not something we have to do, but rather get to do. We don't want children to equate it with eating their veggies or brushing their teeth. As parents we must model enthusiasm not obligation. Since God's Word is like honey, we need to communicate that getting into God's Word is closer to eating dessert than say eating spinach.

d. Create a life-giving habit to last their lifetime.

As we all know, more is caught than can be taught. Consider how much daily reading we all do anyway – scanning through mountains of information and scrolling endlessly through social media... It is so important that we're making time to be fed by the Living Word, not just empty words that flood our devices and worlds. It's up to each of us to give your kids a vision and example of what a life lived in the Word looks like. Through your own life and through all your collective time together in the Word, you're training your kids to one day continue in the Word alone. Our goal is to form a life-long habit in our children of daily reading and reflecting on God's Word – not legalistically, but life-givingly.

There's some research to show that the habits we introduce our kids to – whether good ones or bad ones – are the ones they take with them into adulthood. I don't know of a single better habit to pass on than this one.

e. What to read with them.

Here are some of the various kids Bibles and resources Julie and I have read with our children...

Some of these books will cost money, but that fades into insignificance when you consider how important this job is (to be a parent-discipler) and also how much we spend on other aspects of our kids' activities, education and hobbies. While text books feed their mind, and food feeds their body, these books will feed something even deeper.

Here's a chart of what I recommend you read to your children.

| Title | Best for ages | Comment |
|---|---------------|---|
| <p>My first Bible stories / The Rhyme Bible</p>  | 2-4 | There are hundreds of beautifully illustrated Bibles for small kids. Here's two options. |
| <p>Bible App for Kids</p>  | 3-6 | Though screens are not great to show kids before bedtimes, this app is a brilliant, interactive introduction to Bible stories. I don't generally like my kids on Tablets, but I make an exception for this App. |
| <p>Jesus Storybook Bible</p>  | 3-6 | This is our favourite kids Bible. Beautifully written and illustrated. It centres every story on Jesus. |
| <p>30 Memory Verses for Kids</p> | 5-12 | I created this booklet. It consists of 30 object lessons built around easy-to-remember memory verses, covering 30 key topics. It is an appendix to this book. |
| <p>The Action Bible</p>  | 6-10 | The Bible as comic book. I have heard great reports though haven't purchased it yet. |
| <p>The Gospel Story Bible</p>  | 6-10 | Beautifully illustrated but not as beautifully written, it however covers a lot more biblical ground than Jesus Storybook Bible. |
| <p>Family Bible Adventure</p> | 8-12 | I created this appended resource for myself – it consists of 210 daily Bible encounters, in which we either read about 15 specified verses of Scripture and sometimes watch a free online video too. |
| <p>Give them their own Bible</p> | 12 | Discuss Bible reading plans with them. |

f. Embark on a Family Bible Adventure

See Appendix 1.

I propose that the most 'substantial' discipling of your children can happen when they are around 8, at which time I suggest you have all or some of your personal devotion with them based on a pre-selected Scripture reading or video.

My own habit is, Monday to Friday, first thing in the morning, Julie, myself and my kids who are 8 and over read the Bible together. Younger kids are welcome to join in, but are not expected to participate.

Mornings may not work for you, and maybe 5 times a week is too many for you, but find a time and shoot for a minimum of 3 of these daily devotions per week.

As a lifelong student of Scripture, I reflected on what I believed were the most foundation portions of the Bible (from Genesis to Revelation) to introduce my children to. Leaning on others who have reflected similarly, I generated a list of over 150 of them. I then supplemented my list with what must be the most exciting tool to assist the understanding of the Bible - the video introductions to each book of the Bible created by www.bible-project.com. This grew my list of encounters with God's Word to 210.

I enthusiastically offer this to you. You might want to shrink or expand my list, but I guess my list will be a good starting point for you to work on.

After much experimenting with what to read, I decided to alternate from Old Testament book to one New Testament book. I also soon realized that, given the concentration span of kids and the unworkability of taking too long, 10-20 verses is the ideal length.

What does this daily Bible encounter look like?

- 1) **I gather everyone** with the words, "Bible adventure time." In summer, we go to the lounge. In winter, we group under a blanket in someone's bed.
- 2) **I call for alert listening.** Before reading the text or watching the video, I say, "Okay guys – let's see what God wants to teach each of us today. As you listen/watch look out for just one thing that interests you most."
- 3) **I read or click play.** We read the allocated verses from a hard copy or digital version of the Bible, or watch the video on a screen.
- 4) **Everyone shares.** I then say, "Okay, going in a circle, what sticks out to you?" Each person shares what sticks out to them, and if they want to, explains why. Sometimes they need to look at the text or screen to remember or decide, but as they do this often, they learn to quickly settle upon something as they hear it.
- 5) **We each briefly pray about what we learnt.** I then say, "Let's pray, and remember God has just spoken to each of us, so it makes sense to talk back to him about what he just said." I encourage people to pray, but don't pressure them to. I say, 'Nice!' to everything they say (as a means to encourage their contribution but also as a means of not over-dominating the conversation.)

- 6) **Sometimes I encourage them to reflect on what they learnt.** I say, "Guys, today, if at any time you want to draw close to God one way you can do that is to think more about what he showed you today. As we keep on filling our head with God's Word, we also keep on filling our heart with God's Presence."
- 7) **Sometimes one of us asks God for help.** If there are any pressing challenges any of us have in the day ahead, one of us quickly asks God to help us with that.

I could add extra steps in here. I could do a little teaching for example. I could ask a discussion question related to the reading's topic. I could really press people to say more about what they learnt and why it's so important and the difference it can make in their life. But I don't, because I want to keep it tight and simple.

This practice is proving so powerful for nine reasons:

- 1) As wonderful as reading the Bible on my own is, there's something special about reading and discussing it with others. In fact before followers of Jesus managed to own their own copies of the Bible, after the printing revolution a few centuries ago, they always encountered Scripture together. As I hear what others see in the Word, I see it too.
- 2) Almost all of what God wants to teach us is in his Word. I am teaching (and am learning more deeply myself) the importance of Bible literacy. It's concepts and characters are storyline is slowly but surely getting etched into each of our minds and hearts.
- 3) The spouse who is stronger in personal devotions is able to bring along the spouse who is weaker in it. In the same way it is easier to develop the habit of running when you have a running partner, so by turning everyone in the household over the age of 8 into a daily Bible reader, we are all able to forge this habit together.
- 4) The videos created by www.bible-project.com are amazing – they visually help us get a big picture view of books of the Bible, and also create the sense that we are part of a worldwide community of people reading the Bible everyday, even if there are just 2 or 4 of us doing so in our house.
- 5) By alternating between Old Testament and New Testament books, it is amazing how we all start to notice connections between the parts of the Bible before Jesus came the parts after he came.
- 6) I am giving my children a tool that they can use as adults, and that they can use with their kids one day.
- 7) My hope is that between the ages of 8 and 12 each of my kids will go through these 210 encounters twice! So doing, they learn that each time we come to a text, even if we have read it many times before, God will want to show us something we missed before.
- 8) I am keeping my family in range of God's voice everyday – straight out of the Bible not books about the Bible, as wonderful as they may be. Is there a better gift I could have given them?
- 9) In this practice I am not the expert or teacher of the Bible, as much as I am sitting under God's Word *alongside* them. I am modelling a passion for, a curiosity about, and a receptivity to God's Word. They are learning that God might want to say one thing to me, but another to them.

g. Give them their own Bible.

Julie and I plan on purchasing a hard copy Bible for each of our kids when they turn 12. About a week or two after their birthday party, we'll invite many of the Christian people, both adults in our extended family as well as one or two of their Christian friends, to an informal Bible-receiving ceremony. At this ceremony we will ask a few people to come ready to read their favourite verse (which will be highlighted in the Bible) as well as what this book has meant to them in their life and faith. We will then gift our child the Bible, and together pray God's blessing over their lifetime adventure in God's Word.

Shortly after that, I'll take some time one-on-one to discuss with our child what form their daily devotions will take. Do they want to continue reading the Bible with us like we did the last few years? Do they want to start reading on their own?

If they opt to read on their own we will:

- clarify when and how often they plan on reading God's Word.
- discuss what Bible reading tracks they want to use.
- introduce them to www.bible.com which offers 1000s of devotional tracks through the Bible.
- find out how best we can encourage them in their Bible reading – do they want us to check in on them? If so, how often?
- ask them if they would mind if, from time to time, we all share what God is highlighting to each of us in our Bible reading.

4. Teach your kids select memory verses.

See Appendix 2 which relates to this.

We memorize Scripture because God tells us to. "Guard my words as your most precious possession. Write them down and also keep them deep within your heart." (Proverbs 7:2 TLB)

In brief, memorizing verses enable:

- 1) us to feed on God's word any time any where,*
- 2) us to withstand temptation better*
- 3) God to speak to us in guidance and through us in ministry far more easily by bringing Scripture to our mind.*

Over the years I developed a resource in my efforts to disciple my own kids just a little bit every day.

The purpose of this resource is to deeply implant 30 carefully chosen Scriptures into my kids that they will carry with them every day and for the rest of their lives. My hope is that these 30 verses will form my family's shared language of faith.

As a parent I have also been struck by how these simple verses and lessons are driven deeper into my own life each time I share them with my kids. Expression of God's Word to others really does deepen the impression of God's Word in our own lives.

What's unique about this resource?

- Each lesson should take no more than 3 minutes.
- It introduces children to 30 of the most important ideas of the Christian faith. It contains what I believe to be the irreducible minimum of what our children must know and believe to thrive as a follower of Jesus.
- Each of these ideas has a memory verse that uses picture language, rather than those verses that are more abstract in nature. This way the child can visualize aspects of each verse.
- Each memory verse and lesson is based on an everyday object, therefore increasing their interest as well as their retention. This follows on the heels of Jesus who told parables, where he associated everyday objects with eternal meanings.
- These 30 lessons and verses are meant to be repeated again and again, driving them more deeply into your child's memory and consciousness. When it comes to what our kids will be likely remember forever, the fact is that less is more and repetition makes it stick.

When to do this lesson.

Find a moment in the day. For me it's just before eating breakfast, or sometimes in the car on the way to school. But maybe dinner time or bed time could work too. Find what works for you and use that.

The shape of each lesson

1. I hold up the object and ask them what it is.
2. I explain the object in a way that leads into...
3. The Scripture that we're memorizing today.
4. I make the connection between the object and the Scripture.
5. If I have time, I ask them a question.
6. We repeat the verse together five times aloud, and then each child tries to say it alone.

Preparing for each lesson.

You need to find the required object. Usually it will be something in your home, but it may be an Internet image. You might be tempted to merely read the lessons as I have written them, but I think it will be more powerful if you say it in your own words. It is best to have read through and thought about the lesson beforehand, as well as memorized the verse. By making it your words, you convey 'life' not just 'information'.

Ideas to take the lesson and verse further.

- The following day, just before teaching them the next verse, recap the previous day's verse.
- Say, 'In the next 24 hours see how many times you can spot this object and, each time you see it, quote the Scripture to yourself.' After 24 hours share what happened with each other.
- The very next time you pray for or with your kids, quote the Scripture in prayer back to God, showing kids how to use that verse to deepen their relationship with God.
- After a few months, pile up all the related objects, and ask them to say the related verse. Perhaps give them a prize if they can quote all 30, with the objects.
- Each time the 30 verses and lessons are repeated, feel free to say a little bit more about the respective topic. This way, these topics become 'buckets' in which you can store things you are learning and wish to share with your children.
- Perhaps you want to create some of your own lessons based on visual verses and add them to the 30.

The 4 categories of verses.

- There are 10 Gospel verses that explain aspects of the Gospel.
- There are 10 Growth verses that help children to grow in their walk with God.
- There are 5 Promises to hold onto.
- There are 5 Proverbs to guide their daily life.

Here are the 30 verses by topic. For the full object lesson related to each verse, see Appendix: 30 Memory Verses.

10 GOSPEL VERSES

1. God is good.
Psalms 86:5 – God, you are forgiving and good, overflowing in love.
2. God made it all.
Psalms 146:6 – Who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and everything in them?
3. We are God's masterpiece.
Psalms 139:14 – I praise you God for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
4. We have sinful hearts.
Isaiah 53:6 – We all like sheep have gone astray.
5. Look to Jesus.
Hebrews 12:2 – Fix your eyes on Jesus.
6. Jesus died for our sins.
1 Peter 2:24 – By Jesus' wounds you have been healed.
7. Jesus is great.
Philippians 2:17 – Jesus has the name that is above every other name
8. Jesus is God's Gift.
John 3:16 – God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son; whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.
9. We're children of the Father.
Galatians 4:4 – You are no longer a slave, but a child of God
10. We are the home of the Spirit.
1 Corinthians 6:19 – Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?

10 GROWTH VERSES

11. Say 'Jesus is Lord'.
Rom 10:9 – If you say with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe with your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
12. Get involved in a church.
Matt 16:19 – Jesus said, 'I will build my church'
13. Use your gifts to serve others.
1 Peter 4:10 – Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.
14. Read the Bible.
Ephesians 6:17 – Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.
15. Love one another.
John 13:34 – A new command I give you, 'Love one another as I have loved you.'
16. Be humble.
1 Peter 5:5 – Clothe yourself with humility toward one another
17. Bear the fruit of Christlikeness.
Gal 5:22 – The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace.
18. Pray.
Jeremiah 33:3 – Call on me, and I will answer and tell you wonderful things.
19. Persevere.
Hebrews 12:1 – Run with perseverance the race set before you.
20. Keep learning.
Luke 2:46 – Jesus listened to the Bible teachers and asked them questions.

5 PROMISES

21. You will soar.
Isa 40:31 – Those who hope in the Lord will soar on wings like eagles.
22. I forgive you.
Ps 103:12 – As far as the East is from the West, that is how far you have taken our sin from us.
23. Do not fear.
Ps 23:4 – Though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil for you are with me
24. I will never let you go.
John 10:28 – I give them eternal life, no one can snatch them from my hand.
25. I will guide you.
Psalms 119:105 – Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

5 PROVERBS

26. Choose wise friends.
Proverbs 13:20 – He who walks with the wise grows wise.
27. Speak gentle words.
Proverbs 15:1 – A gentle answer turns away wrath.
28. Stand up for victims.
Proverbs 31:9 – Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.
29. Work hard.
Proverbs 6:6 – Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!
30. Listen to your parents.
Proverbs 13:1 – Wise children listen to their parents.

5. Partner with others.

The first thing is to realize that you are not enough. It takes a village to raise a child. The same can be said for raising a child spiritually.

Partner with your spouse.

If you're married and your spouse also follows Jesus, you have a head start. Team with your spouse. Get into agreement with each other that discipling your children is your highest parenting goal.

The best way to really align at a heart level is to pray together for your children's spiritual well-being. In the same way a team of pastors would talk together about the spiritual well-being of a church, keep talking to each other about any spiritual concerns you have about your kids as well as spiritual conversations you've had with any of your kids.

Read this ebook together and then agree on your joint-strategy for discipling your kids. Give each other permission to hold each other accountable to this priority, so that if one of you wane in your enthusiasm and efforts to help your children spiritually you can call each other on it.

If your co-parent is not a believer.

Co-parenting is hard enough, but co-parenting with a person who doesn't share the same worldview is particularly tricky.

The first and most important thing to do is to pray, and pray rightly.

You will be tempted to centre your prayers around their salvation, and the kids not being tainted by their beliefs. Though those are important prayers to pray, they should not be the only prayers you pray.

For example, you can pray that God will grant you mercy to your spouse for they know not what they do. That's better than potentially vindictive praying.

You can pray that in all the situations that you don't have influence over your children that God will work in their lives regardless – preserving them and drawing them to himself. That's better than anxious prayer, where your praying is not really an expression of trust in God, but of panic in your own heart.

You can pray that, as far as it depends on you, that this family will be immersed in God's love and reality. That's better than praying against your partner's influence.

You can thank God for what influence you do have over your kids, rather than focusing on what influence you don't have. That's better than complaining in prayer.

Praying the right prayers will keep you Christlike. Praying the wrong prayers will result in you being less spiritually attractive, not only to your spouse but to your kids.

Over and above praying, you can ask God to give you wisdom in speaking to your partner about your wishes to introduce the kids to your faith – through Bible reading and church participation, for example. Instead of announcing to them that you plan on doing this regardless of what they think, you can ask them for their ownership in this. By asking this of them, instead of forcing them to comply, you run a much higher chance of them co-operating with you.

One other thing to do, assuming your kids come to faith, is find a time to skillfully speak to them about what you pray for their other parent – if your prayers are evidently loving and honouring towards their parent, you might just win them to join you in the same manner of praying. Now, they're on mission with you for the salvation of their other parent.

Partner with your church.

As parents, we may be the primary disciplers, but God does not mean us to be the only disciplers. The faith-family is a discipling entity. By rooting ourselves, our kids and our entire family in a spiritual community, we give our kids the best chance of catching a passion for Christ.

Join a church that has a commitment to attracting and discipling kids and teenagers, and (if possible) is having some success in doing this. In selecting a church, don't only consider it's helpfulness to your spiritual journey, but also to that of your children.

Most church-based kids and parents ministries these days have come to understand that if they don't partner with parents to disciple the kids, they will likely fail. In other words, you can expect that they are already interested in teaming with you.

Meet with the kids or teen ministry leader and find out: 1) whether they can keep you posted about what they are teaching your kids so that you can pick up on that in your own discipling of them, 2) how you can strengthen their ministry, 3) any other insights based on their dealing with your child that could help you better parent and disciple your kid.

Be sure to infect your child with a love for the church. If you have gripes with your church, never say them in front of your kids. As far as your kids should know, following Jesus, and doing so in partnership with a church, is about the most exciting thing in your life.

Don't be a fair-weather church attender and participant. In the same way that whole-hearted discipleship to Jesus is contagious, so half-hearted faith in Jesus catches. Just yesterday I said to my kids, 'There are times we don't go to church, but it never has anything to do with the weather!'

One particular study found that when both parents were faithful and active in the church, 93 percent of their children remained faithful. When just one

parent was faithful, 73 percent of their children remained faithful. When neither parent was particularly active in church, only 53 percent of their children stayed faithful. In those instances where neither parent was active at all and only attended church now and then, the percentage dropped to a mere 6 percent.

If you are unhappy with your church, deal with it well. Meet with a leader in the church and share in the most helpful way you can your concerns. But also do the needed self-work to keep your attitude in check. It is very easy to take offence or to assume the worst. Praying for your church and the leaders is the best way to keep your heart tender towards both.

One of my favourite things is when my kids get to join us in the adult meeting. I want to expose them to adults enjoying God in singing and prayer. There, more than anywhere else, our kids can be impressed by the reality of God as experienced by a people. I sometimes will whisper in their ear commentary on what is happening ...

'These people are enjoying God.' "Wow, these people have been walking with God all week long, and now they are thanking him for how good he has been to them." "Some of these people have had a really hard time this last while, but look they are still trusting God." "I just love this. I have been doing it for years. Meeting with God on Sundays, singing to him, listening to his word. God is the best part of my life!"

Partner them with other Christian families.

Spend time with other Christian families socially. Have brief, informal times of prayer with these families. At meal times be sure to pray a hearty prayer that shows that God is not just a religious add-on to our lives, but the very centre of them. If having a short 'share-and-prayer' as families comes naturally enough, do them. Look for other natural moments to pray – when parting at the end of a weekend away for example, or praying for someone, child or adult, who is at a special juncture in their life.

Let your kids sit in or overhear spiritual conversations between the adults. If we never talk about spiritual things informally with other adults, our kids might conclude that faith is a compartment of our lives that is contained within church programs.

Ask other Christian adults to make an effort to connect with your child, and also to show interest in their spiritual development.

Support your child's friendship with other Christian kids. My prayer for my kids is that by the time they become teenagers they have several Christian friends, preferably in our church. As I write this, I carry a concern. One of my children doesn't have strong Christian friends. Especially when he becomes a teenager, and his inclination will be to pull away from his family identity towards his social identity, he is going to feel very alone in his faith. So I am thinking and praying about that. Julie and I are scheming connecting with a specific family, in the hope that my son will connect more meaningfully with their son (my son has told me he has some chemistry with them).

6. Disciple them towards a great kingdom destiny.

Have a greater vision for your child's commitment to Christ than mere church attendance, consistent devotions and godly behaviour.

Psalm 127 reminds us that our children are arrows in our hands. In their formative years we get to aim them in a direction. They will eventually go their own way, but we get to aim them, pull back that string and release. So what great things are you hoping their lives will achieve?

Discern their kingdom destiny in prayer. Especially in your praying for your kids, ask God for a vision of their life's kingdom impact. Release them to God's will in prayer. Sometimes Julie and I pray, 'God, part of us would like our kids to live a safe life near to us. But we ask that you would bear great fruit in their lives. And whatever it takes, whether it means they enter into some dangerous parts of the world, or they tackle some of the giants of the world, or if they head off to other countries, so be it.'

Record words from God and others. Over the years there have been times when Julie and I were praying for a child and we caught a glimpse or received some Scripture or sense that gives a clue of their future greatness in God. Additionally, other people have shared them same for each of our kids. We write these down. We pray these over our children. When the time is appropriate we share them with our kids.

Pitch to your kids an exciting vision for your lives. Tell them that they should become a kingdom-advancing, sacrificial, courageous, all-in, others-serving arrow for God. Tell them that they should take the high path in life, that they should refuse to live in comfort zones for too long, that they should seek to serve the poorest of the poor, and to reach those furthest from God. Tell them to lend their strengths to what the church is becoming.

Counter the culture's influence in the exact opposite direction. Our culture is also pitching to them a vision for their lives, one filled with daily entertainment, where self-expression is more important than service, where comfort is more important than sacrifice, where they are to pursue fame and wealth as a matter of priority.

Expose your kids to role models. Share stories of people as well as actual people who are, in their own way, living all-out to see God's kingdom come. Preachers will often share these stories on Sunday – be sure to share them with your kids. Read books with your kids about people who have done great things for God – whether in the way they serve the poor, or work for justice, or plant churches, or lead friends to Christ, or integrate their faith with their work to be agents of salt and light in society.

Share your sense of excitement with your kids. Tell them, 'I wonder what it is God wants to do with your life. I am not sure, but I feel a sense of excitement about it. Like Moses, you are 'no ordinary child'. Like David, you are destined 'to fulfil God's purpose for your generation'. Like the disciples, God wants to bear much fruit through you, fruit that will last forever. Like the Israelites, God has plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.'

Help your kids see all hardships as God's training. When your child is going through a hard time, say, 'God works all things for your good and his purpose. He plans on teaching you things, and making you into a kind of person that he can use powerfully one day.' When you are giving your kids a hard time because you are trying to correct a poor behaviour or wrong attitude in them say, 'God has given me a glimpse of the greatness you will achieve one day, my job is to partner with him in forgiving greatness in you. People with a high calling cannot settle for low living.'

Leave it to your kids what they will do with their lives. Having said all of the above, never tell your child what it is exactly the way God will use them. Perhaps God has told you something specific, it is best not to tell them that. For the simple reason that you could be wrong, or that you could have wrongly interpreted the word. You might imagine your child will make a difference as a preacher one day, but God knows that they might be put in a place of massive influence in the market place.

Speak of their future role of spousing and parenting as part of their life's greatness. The institution of marriage is waning. Having kids for most people is an afterthought. Tell them otherwise. Tell them that in all likelihood, unless God calls you to singleness, which itself is a wonderful calling, that one day they will need to care for and love someone, and raise children. Tell them that their life in this family is already their preparation for that.

Teach your kids a missional lifestyle. When the kids ministry they are part of does a drive for kids to invite their friends, sit with your kids and ask them to write down who they want to invite. Then chat with them how they will do that. We have several families in our church who came because one of our kids invited their kids to church. The kid then pestered mom and dad to take them, and the whole family ended up joining the church.

7. Teach your kids to pray.

Your example is a good starting point. So when you pray, pray aloud. And tell your kids when you prayed. As they see you praying, they come to see it as natural. Let kids see you praying throughout the day for a variety of needs.

Tell them that prayer is just talking to God. No need to use fancy words. As soon as your kid can say a few words, you can invite them to pray. Teach them to talk to God about things that obvious matter to your child – school, friends, family – but then slowly lift their gaze to pray for other things that matter to disciples of Jesus. Assure them that God cares about all the little things, not just the big things.

Don't let prayer be intimidating to your child. Keep prayers short and simple and everyday language. The younger they are, the shorter and simpler.

Create a fun prayer ritual. A few times a year, my kids and I will be walking on a specific patch of coast in my city. We each grab 3 shells, then go sit on a rock (which we call Williams Rock). Then I guide them, 'Let's take turns. We will each pray 3 prayers in total. As we throw the first shell in the sea, we will praise God for something we like about him. The second shell we will thank him for some good thing in our lives. The third shell we will ask him for help in some way.'

Another fun prayer ritual is the five-fingers prayers. Here is one variation:

- *Thumb:* this points upwards – so praise God for something you like about him.
- *Pointer-finger:* this points forward and reminds us of life on mission – so ask God to make himself known to someone who doesn't yet know him.
- *Middle-finger:* this is the longest finger – so pray for a loved one or a Christian friend outside the home, perhaps even far away.
- *Ring-finger:* this reminds us of marriage and family – so pray for someone you live with inside the home.
- *Pinkie:* this is the smallest finger – so take any of your little worries to God and leave them in his care.

Teach your kids to pray back to God about something we/they have just read in his Word. After we read or discuss something in the Bible I will sometimes say to my kids, 'The Bible is God's way of talking to us. Prayer is our way of talking back to God. So, after hearing what God has just said to us, what do you want to say to him?' This is the best way to keep your kids' prayers fresh each time.

Teach them to pray for a person aloud. I sometimes ask my children to pray for me. I tell them I have a problem or need courage for something. By doing this, I model that we are a family where we can ask for and receive prayer from each other. When one of the kids is facing a challenge, the family can gather around them and pray for them.

Get your kids to voice message their prayers to people. If they pray for someone not in the room, and you think it will be appropriate for that person to know, say, 'Why don't we voice message that person and you can pray that prayer for them again – they will be so encouraged.'

Pray at dinner time. You can pray set prayers or spontaneous prayers as a family. Let kids take turns to lead in set prayers as well as to pray their own spontaneous prayers.

Perhaps teach them the Lord's prayer. This can be the first portion of Scripture they memorize. Pray it in rote, but each time you do, explain one more line in the prayer.

Encourage them to talk to God on their own. Sometimes I say to my kids, 'When you are at school or just hanging out at home, talk to God in your own words. Maybe tell him you love him. Or ask him for help. Or thank him for stuff.' Every now and then I will ask my kids if they have prayed any of their own prayers lately. If they say no, I again gently nudge them to look for the gaps. If they say yes, I ask them what they prayed. They usually tell me they prayed for God's help in doing or facing something. I commend them, and then say, 'That's great – now next time things are going well, you can pray about that too, thanking and praising him.'

Introduce them to praise and worship. Singing with God's people is a form a prayer. The church we're part of invites us all to sing to God, but as a parent I want to especially encourage singing to God. In the mornings, as everyone gets ready for school, I listen to popular upbeat praise songs (I search for them on Spotify). In the car, we can listen to worship too. When they join the adults in worship, I make a special effort to model an enjoyment of God in my singing.

8. Using Gospel resources, major on the heart.

Christianity is not moralistic. It is not primarily about holding to a tight code of conduct that articulates how we should behave in all situations. Certainly it strongly emphasized godliness, and of course there are absolute values like love, mercy and honesty, but I like the word godliness because it speaks about a quality of life that is impossible without a vibrant relationship with God.

Doing good is not enough. Doing good because this is the outflow of a life that walks closely to a good God is what it's all about.

Instead of a moral-centered Christianity, we should pursue a Gospel-centered one. The Gospel emphasizes the greatness and goodness of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not just the diving board into the Christian faith, but the swimming pool in which we swim – yes it saves the sinner, but it also continues to renew and revive the believer.

Moralism can disguise itself as the real thing in Christian homes. Just because our kids don't swear, and we all go to church and read the Bible does not mean we're living the God-pleasing life. It might be that we are merely utilizing behaviour control mechanisms and we have compliant children. It may be that our children have a greater desire to please us than the Lord, or that we like the feeling of getting life right. The problem is that, when we go about doing the right things, but lose touch with the transformative power of the Gospel, we have slipped into a moralism.

Moral living might be impressive, but a moralistic heart is not. It tends to become the soil in which some ugly weeds grow – things like feelings of entitlement, a sense of one's superiority to others, shame when we fail, being close-minded, unchallenged materialism and consumerism, being aloof and quitting easily when doing God's will becomes hard.

Consider briefly how keeping in touch with the whole Gospel tends to make us do good from a transformed heart:

- *As we understand God as Creator, we become more grateful and less entitled.*
- *As we realize our sinfulness, we become more humble and less judgmental.*
- *As we find our identity in Christ, we become more confident and less shame-orientated.*
- *As we ponder Jesus' incarnation, we become more accessible to outsiders and less of a holy huddle.*
- *As we grasp God's grace, we become more wonder-filled and less close-minded.*
- *As we delve into Jesus' self-sacrifice, we become more servant-hearted and less consumeristic*
- *As we are rooted in God's love, we become warmer and less aloof.*
- *As we live before the Audience of One, we become more integrity-filled and less fearful of what people think.*

- *As we experience God's relentless pursuit, we become more tenacious in our doing God's will, and less inclined to give up.*
- *As we seek first God's kingdom, we become more stable and less shaken by the circumstances of of life.*

The Gospel does more than fortify a good heart under good deeds, it also becomes the best way to overcome bad deeds. Our nasty words, our authority-defying attitudes, our selfish behaviour – all of this is symptomatic of a deeper issue. Jesus teaches us to connect bad fruit with bad roots, or wrong behaviour with sinful hearts:

Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.' (Matt 12:33-35)

If our kids profess to know Christ, then we would be crazy to not address deeper issues in their heart, and point them to the resources they can tap into with the Gospel. This has to be done very skilfully and gently of course. Especially as we ourselves are able to receive this kind of loving, hope-filled correction from others, we become more adept in giving the same to our children. Yes, we gently mention some concerning behaviour to our kids, but then we say, 'You are not alone. All of us – especially me – sometimes has bad fruit coming out in my life. When this happens, I ask myself, 'What part of the Gospel am I missing?' Sure I say sorry for the sinful behaviour, but more importantly, I ask God to do a work in my heart, because that's where the real problem is – and I ask God to show me his goodness, his greatness, his love, or whatever it is I am missing. Well, I want to suggest you try the same.'

On this point, nothing will so empower your kids to own up to their wrong behaviours without defensiveness, when we do the same. At least once a month I think Christian parents should say to their kids, 'You know daddy desires to please Christ in how I live, but I have a long way to go. Anyway this morning I was very short with mommy and I want to say it was wrong, and I am asking God to help me and I am going back to the mercy, patience and kindness of God to help me. Please forgive me.'

9. Be on the lookout for spiritual conversations.

If Jesus' discipling of his disciples is a window into what it would look like for Christian parents to disciple their kids, then one major insight is this:

Let an interesting situation or a specific question become a moment to talk about that aspect of Truth that this calls for.

This is the art of spiritual conversations.

There are a million possible entry points for these conversations. As diverse as the body of Christian truth is, so diverse are the openings to talk about each of them.

For example:

- When my kids saw some people being baptized, they wanted to know about baptism.
- When one kid chatted to his Jehovah's Witness friend, he wanted to know why we believe Jesus is God and whether heaven and hell is real.
- When my gran died, my kids wanted to talk about death and what the Bible teaches about death for a few weeks.
- When my preschool kids noticed why their one friend has two dads, they wanted to know about God's plan for marriage and the difference between a mom and a dad.
- When I asked my kids what they wanted to do one day, they ended up asking about how I discovered God's will for my life.
- When my kid was beating up on himself for struggling at sport and to be accepted, it was a chance to speak about our identity in Christ.
- When my kid wonders if God is real, but maybe Jesus isn't, it's time to talk about how God has chosen to reveal himself in Jesus.
- When my kid asks how my Christian friend is leaving his wife, it's time to talk about how much we need God to love each other, as well as the reality of inconsistency in so many Christians, ourselves included.

Many of these conversations happen on the run, in cars or while walking along.

Many of them happen at bedtime when we are reading the Bible, or when we snuggle next to them and they finally find the gap to share what's on their mind.

Some of them happen when ask them specifically about their faith. For example, I write from a coffee shop. I just chatted to a Christian mom who is having coffee with her teenage daughter, who is really struggling in the faith-hostile school environment.

She tells her mom how she is respectful of people of other faiths and no faith, but that somehow she is not offered the same respect. Her teachers and friends openly blaspheme using the name of her Saviour. It's just getting too much for her. At the same time, she is not sure how her faith connects with her love for dancing – especially letting her hair down in a night-club.

Then there's the matter of church, and whether the church she goes to feels right to her.

The posture we should take to all these conversations is alertness and reliance on the Spirit. First, as the question comes or the situation is experienced, something should ping on our spiritual radar ("Spiritual conversation alert!"), and we should immediately and under our breath ask the Holy Spirit to direct the conversation. One other important thing is to not speak beyond our knowledge. If a child asks us something we have not looked into ourselves, it's better to say, 'I don't know. Let me think about it and we can talk about that more later, but it's a very good question.'

10. Disciple them differently in adolescence.

Though none of my kids are teenagers yet, I already prepare for that stage of their life. Staying in touch with culture, and reflecting on my experience of working with teenagers in youth ministry for over a decade, leads me to some insights.

The ages 12-20 will be some of the most testing years for my kids' walk with God. On one hand, I will need to be giving them more space to make more of their own decisions, make their own mistakes, and choose the set of convictions by which they will live their lives.

One common mistake Christian parents make when their kids are teenagers is to back off. This is a mistake because the intensity of their questions about what they believe, and the person they want to be, requires the help of a caring adult. Left to process these questions only with their friends, they are cut off from the wisdom of the generations. The mistake on the other end of the spectrum is trying to control their behaviour and beliefs tightly – which will most likely serve to drive them further away from the faith you hope they embrace.

Though I will afford them this space, and the more of it they seem to cope with the more of it I will give, I do not plan on disengaging my kids. They will not need less conversation with me. They will need more – though I will not always be able to initiate these conversations, but will rather have to wait for them.

I have a friend who leads a church and travelled a fair amount when his kids were in primary school. Though he had previously imagined that he would be able to be away from home more once his kids become that much more independent as teenagers, as adolescence came upon his kids, he realized the opposite was true.

He made a life-season choice to travel less than he did when they were younger. So doing, he was able to be present when his kids would need him, or when they would want to talk. His understanding is right: the more present you are to a teen, the more they are likely to present to you their struggles and questions.

Parenting teenagers is not a time for the mini-sermons that you gave them when they were younger. It's a time to ask them questions, and to share to the degree that they ask you to share. They need to feel you accept them even as they struggle with their identity, their friends and their faith.

Adolescence is a time when they must choose for themselves whether they will embrace the faith of their family. The need to upgrade from an inherited faith to a freely chosen faith. This transition necessitates that they kick the tyres of the Christian faith.

As parents we should welcome this phase in their faith. If we are threatened by their questions, we run the risk of them not opening up to us their struggles. We may be able to answer their struggles, but even more important than that, they need a feeling of safety and connection with us.

They are far more likely to hold on to their faith if they have a safe place to process their doubts.

There's been much research about why most Christian children leave the church once they leave home, a recent trend in America. I find the research helps me to help them in advance of their leaving home...

Many teens feel the church is overprotective, sealing them off from people who have very different values. I don't want my 21 year old child to one day reflect on Julie and my faith and concludes, 'My parents lived in a Christian bubble, and never exposed me to all the wonderful people outside of that bubble. In fact my parents caused me to look down on those people – people of no faith or other faiths, people of various sexual and gender identity preferences – but now that I have met many of them, some of them turn out to be fantastic people. I don't want a faith like that.' My job is to, like Jesus did, relationally engage with people very different to me in front of my kids. My job is to affirm what truth, beauty and goodness even in people who don't trust in Jesus. This would more readily equip them to have a world-engaging faith, which is one that they will find more attractive than a secluded faith.

Many teens feel that the church is shallow, lacking transcendence and the presence of God. The research suggests that many teenagers feel, in our efforts to make God accessible, we sometimes lose some of the Godness of God in the way we do church. We end up taming Jesus, emphasizing his love over against his Lordship for example, his goodness over against his majesty. A teenager who comes from an evangelical church that has, in their view, domesticated Jesus may be likely to walk away from church when they get the chance.

Many teenagers perceive the church as being antiscience or anti-intellectual. Especially if they get a tertiary education, they may feel they have to choose between intelligence and faith. Additionally, their increased exposure to the many intellectual objections to the Christian faith by skeptics, will cause them to doubt the truthfulness of the faith of their childhood. We cannot merely entertain our teenagers in churches; we must educate them in the field of apologetics. Tim Keller says that by systematically introducing our kids to common objections to Christian faith, we immunize them. A person who goes to university and is exposed in a period of months to 15 apparent weaknesses in their Christian worldview is likely to be overcome by the virus of doubt. I have a friend whose goal it is to make sure that the first place they hear the arguments of the skeptics is in the university not the lecture hall. As a parent, I am determined to pass on to my kids not only what I believe, but why I believe what I believe, as well as how I have grappled with the common attacks on Christian faith.

Many teenagers feel like the church is repressive sexually. In our attempts to keep our kids from premarital sex, we could potentially overstate our arguments. For example, we tell them how destructive premarital sex is. But when they then meet people who are sexually active and seem to not be getting hurt by this, our arguments don't hold. As a parent, I am determined to talk openly about sex and sexuality with my children – and to put God's guidance on the matter in the most positive, truthful and least fear-mongering way. The reason that Christians don't have sex before marriage is

that they hold such a high view of sex, as a great gift that God has given us. And even though a premarital sexual relationship with someone may or may not be emotionally destructive, the highest motivation for sexual purity is the worthiness of our Lord and Saviour. As fantastic as sex is, our Saviour is better.

Many teenagers feel like their faith is exclusive. I am intent on emphasizing the inclusiveness of Christian faith. When Jesus died on that cross, his arms were stretched outwards to take in the whole world. There is space for everyone – regardless of their self-proclaimed gender identity or culture or creed – to come into the kingdom. Church really is a place where you are welcome to belong before you believe, and you should not be expected to behave Christianly outside of a relationship with Christ. Jesus did not come to make bad people good, but dead people live. Our goal is not to reform the sexual values of the people around us, but point them to a relationship with a tender, transcendent Saviour who has the power and goodness to transform our values from the inside out.

Many teenagers feel the church is too doubtless. They have questions, concerns and doubts about Christianity and the way we do church. I want my kids to know that doubts are not the opposite of faith. The Bible says that we should be merciful to those who doubt (Jude 22). Doubts, when processed well, become like the weights that are needed to build our faith. I have had lots of doubts about Christianity myself, and – at the right time – will share these with my kids, thereby freeing them to share the same with me. In my own grappling with the truthfulness of Christianity, I have found it really helpful to separate peripheral and central issues. The central issue is Jesus as the unique Son of God who, through his life, death and resurrection, does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, thereby bringing us into a forever life-changing, grace-based relationship with himself. I might not have totally satisfying answers to questions about suffering and hell for example, but when I fix my gaze on what clarity I have about Jesus, those other unanswered questions become less of an issue.

Many teenagers feel the church is irrelevant, all talk but little action. To an idealistic generation that wants desperately to deal with the problems of excluded marginalized people, inequality and materialistic greed, the suffering of the poor, ecological collapse – if they see Christians and churches only emphasizing privatized religion in the home, they are likely to conclude that all this religious fervency is misdirected. I am determined to expose my children to the real suffering and real points of pain in the world, and finding ways as a family to show the love of Christ. This kind of faith is not only more attractive to God (James 2:17), but to our kids too.

On this final point, as I surveyed Christians parents who have the privilege of seeing their now-adult kids serving God too, many of them said the same thing:

"Keep a look out for opportunities where the whole family can serve real needs, first in the church, but then also in the world."

They tell me how, at church they would sign up as a family to be parking attendants, or the team that washed up cups, or served in a vacation Bible club for smaller kids.

They tell me of mission trips they did together. They tell me how their now-adult kids continue in this servant-hearted kind of faith – one that brings even more joy to the givers of such ministry than even the recipients of it.

They echo the joy that Paul's heart knew in 3 John 4:

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

May we share in that joy in the decades to come. And may future generations arise to call us blessed, because of the work we did to ensure our faith was not only our own, but passed on with great care and great passion.

APPENDIX 1:
FAMILY BIBLE ADVENTURE – 210 STOPS

GENESIS: Day 1-7

Video: Bible Project Genesis part 1

1:1-23 – Creation, day 1-5

1:24-31 – Creation, day 6-7

2:7-25 – Humanity created

3:1-18 – Humanity fallen

6:9-21; 7:5-7 – Noah

11:1-9 – Tower of Babel

MATTHEW: Day 8-28

Video: Bible project Matthew

1:18-2:12 – Birth and Magi

3:13-4:11 – Baptism and temptation

5:1-16 – Blessings and influence

5:17-26 – Word and reconciliation

5:38-6:4 – Mercy and giving

6:5-18 – Prayer and fasting

6:19-34 – Money and kingdom

7:1-12 – Judging and prayer

7:13-29 – Gates, fruit, foundations

11:1-19 – Jesus and John

12:12-37 – Satan and words

13:1-9, 18-23 – Soils

14:13-32 – 5000 and water-walking

16:13-28 – The church and self-denial

17:1-13 – Transfiguration

21:1-17 – Entry and temple

22:34-46 – Love and footstools

26:17-35 – Communion and betrayal

26:36-46 – Gethsemane

27:27-54 – Mocked and killed

28 – Alive

GENESIS CONT'D: Day 29-39

Video: Bible Project Genesis part 2

12:1-9 – The call of Abraham

15 – Abraham, call confirmed

22:1-18 – Sacrifice

28:10-17 – Jacob dreams

32:22-31 – Jacob wrestles

37:1-11 – Joseph dreams

37:12-36 – Joseph betrayed

39:11-23 – Joseph imprisoned

41:41-57 – Joseph exalted

MARK: Day 40-44

Video: Bible project Mark

1:14-39 – Calling, power and prayer

2:1-17 – The paralytic and the party

9:14-32 – The boy with the spirit
10:35-45 – Humble and serving

EXODUS: Day 45-57

Video: Bible Project Exodus part 1

1:6-2:10 – The birth of Moses

3:1-14 – The call of Moses

4:1-15 – Moses' excuses

11:1, 12:3-8, 29-31 – Exodus

14:5-31 – The Red Sea

16:1-18 – Manna

18:13-23 – Getting help

Video: Bible Project Genesis part 2 – 19-40

19:20 – 20:17 – Ten commands

32:1-9 – Golden calf

33:7-23 – God's Presence

40:1-16, 34-38 – Tabernacle

LUKE: Day 58-68

Video: Bible project Luke

2:41-52 – The boy Jesus

3:14-30 – Jesus rejected

8:19-25; 9:1-9 – Family, storm, mission

10:25-42 – Activism and stillness

15:1-10 – Found sheep and coin

15:11-32 – Found son

18:1-14 – Persistent and humble prayer

18:15-30 – The weak and the strong

23:26-46 – Crucified

24:13-32 – Burning hearts

LEVITICUS: Day 69-71

Video: Bible project Leviticus

16:2-17 – Day of Atonement

23:4-16; 22-26, 33-38 – Jewish Festivals

NUMBERS: Day 72-75

Video: Bible project Numbers

10:15-23 – The Cloud

13:1-3, 17-20, 26-33 – The explorers

14:1-12, 20-24 – Rebellion

DEUTERONOMY: Day 76-78

Video: Bible project Deuteronomy

6:1-12 – Family faith

28:1-19 – Blessings and curses

JOHN: Day 79-87

Video: Bible project part 1

1:1-18 – Word becomes flesh

2:1-16 – Party-maker and -ruiner

3:1-16 – Born again

4:1-26 – Thirsty

6:60-7:9 – Desertion and delay
8:1-11 – No condemnation
10:1-18 – Good shepherd
11:17-44 – Lazarus and sisters

JOSHUA: Day 88-92

Video: Bible project Joshua

1:1-10 – Joshua leads

3:9-16; 4:19-24 – Israel enters

5:13-6:5 – Jericho

24:1-7, 18-25 – Choose this day

JUDGES: Day 93-96

Video: Bible project Judges

2:6-23 – Cycle of defeat

4:1-10, 18-22 – Deborah and Jael win

6:1-6, 11-16 – Gideon

JOHN CONT'D: Day 97-106

Video: Bible project part 2

13:1-17 – Footwashing

14:15-31 – The coming Spirit

15:1-16 – Remain in Jesus

17:1-19 – Jesus prays for us

18:28-40 – Jesus and Pilate

19:16-18, 25-30 – Crucified

20:19-31 – Alive and Thomas

21:1-14 – The great catch

21:15-25 – Peter restored

RUTH: Day 107-108

Video: Bible project Ruth

3:1-4, 9-11; 4:13-16 —The marriage of Boaz and Ruth

1 SAMUEL: Day 109-115

Video: Bible project Samuel part 1

3:1-10 – God speaks

13:1-14 – Saul fails

16:1-13 – David is chosen

17:20-26, 32-40 – David and Goliath

17:48-51, 57-58; 18:1-9 – Jonathan and Saul

24:1-22 – David spares Saul

ACTS: Day 116-124

Video: Bible project Acts

1:1-11 – Final training

2:1-13 – Outpouring

2:14-36 – Gospel preaching

2:37-47 – Conversion and church-life

3:1-16 – Peter and the beggar

4:23-37 – Radical prayer and giving

6:1-15; 7:54-60 – Steven

8:1-17 – Philip's revival

2 SAMUEL: Day 125-129

Video: Bible project Samuel part 2

5:6-10; 17-21 – New capital Jerusalem

7:1-17 – The Davidic Covenant

11:1-12:7 – David takes and kills

23:8-23 – Mighty warriors

ACTS CONT'D: Day 130-139

9:1-19 – Saul's conversion

10:22-48 – Cornelius conversion

11:19-29 – Church plant

13:1-12; 14:21-28 – First missionary trip

15:1-21 – The First Council

16:6-26 – Second missionary trip

17:16-34 – Engaging culture

20:17-38 – Church leadership

27:1-26 – Sailing into the storm

27:27-28:6 – The shipreck and viper

1 KINGS: Day 140-147

Video: Bible project Kings part 1

2:1-4; 3:5-12 – Solomon

8:1,14-27 – The temple

11:42-12:17 – Divided kingdom

12—The divided kingdom of Israel

17:1-24 – Elijah part 1

18:20-46 – Elijah part 2

19:1-18 – Elia part 3

ROMANS: Day 148-154

Video: Bible project Romans part 1

1:18-32 – God's judgment

3:9-31 – Sin and justification

5:1-8 – Peace and joy

8:1-13 – sinful nature and the Spirit

8:14-27 – sonship and glory

8:28-39 – more than conquerors

2 KINGS: Day 155-157

Video: Bible project Kings part 2

17:5-18 – The North Kingdom ends

25:1-12 – The South Kingdom ends

ROMANS CONT'D: Day 158-160

Video: Bible project Romans part 2

12:1-8 – Renewed mind, gifted service

12:9-13:1 – Love and submission

EZRA: Day 160-161

Video: Bible project Ezra

1:1-6; 7:6-10 – Return of exiles

NEHEMIAH: Day 162-164

Video: Bible project Nehemiah

2:11-20 – Nehemiah plans to rebuild

4:1-15 – The wall is rebuilt

1 CORINTHIANS: Day 165-172

Video: Bible project 1 Corinthians

3 – Honouring the church

9:19-27 – Serving and self-discipline

11:17-32 – Lord's supper

12:1-13 – Miraculous gifts

13 – Love, faith and hope

15:1-11 – Jesus resurrected

15:42-58 – Us resurrected

ESTHER: Day 173-174

Video: Bible project Esther

3:8-9; 4:12-5:6 – Esther saves the Jews

2 CORINTHIANS: Day 175-180

Video: Bible project 1 Corinthians

1:1-11 – Finding God in trials

3:13-4:12 – Treasure in clay jars

5:11-6:2 – Ambassadors for Christ

9:6-15 – Sowing and reaping

12:1-10 – Third heaven and a thorn

JOB: Day 181-182

Video: Bible project Job

1:8-22 – Job is tested

GALATIANS: Day 183-184

Video: Bible project Galatians

5:16-6:10 – Fruit of the Spirit

PSALMS: Day 185-199

Video: Bible project Psalms

1 – A tree planted

2 – A king installed

16 – A heart secure

19 – creation and Word

22:1-22 – crucifixion foretold

23 – The good shepherd

24 – A great king

27 – Be strong

32 – Forgiven and guided

37:1-9 – Trust in the Lord

42 – Downcast

51 – David restored

63 – Seeking God

73 – Slipping feet

EPHESIANS: Day 100-104

Video: Bible project Ephesians

2:1-10 – Salvation

3:14-21 – Extravagant love

4:17-32 – Children of light

6:10-20 – Spiritual warfare

PSALMS CONT'D: Day 105-116

84 – God's presence

89:1-6, 35-37 – God's promise

90 – A short life

91 – God delivers

96 – Sing to the Lord

100 – Shout for joy

103 – Forget not his benefits

110 – A promise to Jesus

119:1-16, 103-105 – God's Word

136 – His love endures

139:1-18, 23-24 – Search me

150 – Praise the Lord

PHILIPPIANS: Day 117-119

Video: Bible project Philippians

2:1-11 – Jesus' humility

4:4-13 – Joy and contentment

PROVERBS: Day 120-129

Video: Bible project Proverbs

1:1-19 – Warnings

2 – Accept my words

16:1-16 – Plans

16:17-33 – A patient man

17:1-14 – Peaceful relationships

17:15-28 – Hold your tongue

18:1-12 – Humility

18:13-24 – Friendship

31:10-31 – A noble wife

COLOSSIANS: Day 130-131

Video: Bible project Colossians

1:9-20 – Christ supreme

ECCLESIASTES: Day 132-134

Video: Bible project Ecclesiastes

1:12 - 2:11 – Meaningless

3:1-14 – A time for everything

12:1-14 – Remember your Creator

SONG OF SONGS: Day 135-136

Video: Bible project Song of Songs

1 – The gift of romantic love

1 THESSALONIANS: Day 137-138
Video: Bible project 1 Thessalonians
4:13-5:11 – Coming of Lord

ISAIAH: Day 139-150
Video: Bible project Isaiah part 1
6:1-8 – Encounter
9:1-7 – Jesus the coming king
32:1-8 – A noble man
Video: Bible project Isaiah part 2
40:1-11 – Good tidings
40:12-15,25-31 – God's strength
43 – For God's glory
49:1-6, 14-16, 21-26 – Engraved
53 – Jesus' suffering
61:1-7 – The coming king
66:17-25 – The new creation

1 TIMOTHY: Day 151-152
Video: Bible project 1 Timothy
6:3-19 – Money and godliness

JEREMIAH: Day 153-156
Video: Bible project Jeremiah
1 – God calls
12:7-18 – A fire in the bones
31:23-40 – Renewed

2 TIMOTHY: Day 157-160
Video: Bible project 1 Timothy
Video: Bible project 2 Timothy
2:1-15 – Endure
3:10-4:5 – Scripture

LAMENTATIONS: Day 161-162
Video: Bible project Lamentations
3:19-32 – God's mercies

HEBREWS: Day 163-168
Video: Bible project Hebrews
1 – The superior Son
10:19-25 – Confident to enter
11:1-16 Faith part 1
11:17-39 – Faith part 2
12:1-13 – Loving discipline

EZEKIEL: Day 169-175
Video: Bible project Ezekiel part 1
1:1-22 – A vision in Babylon
10 – God's glory departs
28:12-19 – Pride then the fall
Video: Bible project Ezekiel part 2
37:1-14 – Dry bones

47:1-12 – River of life

JAMES: Day 176-178

Video: Bible project James

1:15-18 – Trials and temptation

1:26-2:17 – Active compassion

DANIEL: Day 179-181

Video: Bible project Daniel

1 – A light in the dark

6:1-12, 15-23 – Lion's den

1 PETER: Day 182-183

Video: Bible project 1 Peter

5:1-11 – Humility and faith

HOSEA: Day 184-185

Video: Bible project Hosea

1:1-3; 3:1-3; 14:1-7 – God's grace

2 PETER: Day 186-188

Video: Bible project 2 Peter

1 – Godliness and Scripture

3 – Day of the Lord

JOEL: Day 189-190

Video: Bible project Joel

2:1-13, 28-29 – Locusts and the Spirit

JONAH: Day 191-193

Video: Bible project Jonah

1 – Reluctant prophet

3:1-5; 4:1-11 – Ninevah and Jonah

1 JOHN: Day 194-197

Video: Bible project 1-3 John

1:1-2:2 – Walk in the light

4 – Discernment and love

5 – Life in the Son

MALACHI: Day 198-199

Video: Bible project Malachi

3:6-4:6 – Giving and healing

REVELATION: Day 200-210

Video: Bible project Revelation part 1

1:4-18 – The Brilliant One

1:19-2:11 – Dear church

4 – Heavenly throne

5 – Lion and Lamb

Video: Bible project Revelation part 2

12 – The woman and the dragon

19 – The wedding and the war

21 – New Jerusalem

22 – New creation

Video: Bible project Heaven and Earth

APPENDIX 2:
30 OBJECT LESSONS WITH MEMORY VERSES

10 GOSPEL VERSES

The Christian Life starts with an understanding of the Gospel. However, it is not just the ABC of faith. It is the A to Z. Over the years, we need to understand the Gospel more and more deeply, believing it with every fibre in our being.

1. God is good.

Object – tap / picture of a fountain

What's this? That's right – it's a fountain / tap. It overflows with water. The water flows and flows. So much of it. You know why it reminds me of God? Because there is a verse that says...

Psalm 86:5 – God, you are forgiving and good, overflowing in love.

See the word 'overflowing'. Like a fountain that never runs dry, so God never runs out of forgiveness. He is ready to pour out mercy on our failures. He flows over with goodness. There's nothing bad in him. He is a fountainhead of love. We can trust him. He alone can satisfy the deep thirst in our hearts. We can be like a bucket, coming to him to fill our hearts up again and again, with his never-ending-always-and-forever-love. What part of God do you like the best right now – that he forgives? That he is good? Or that he loves?

2. God made it all.

Object – a handful of earth / a picture of the earth from space

What's this? That's right. It's sand, but can also be called some 'earth'. It's a tiny part of something much bigger – the earth we live on, a planet teeming with life, a planet with lots of water, and a big sky or heavens above. There is a verse that asks...

Ps 146:6 – Who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and everything in them?

Do you know the answer? God. He made everything. Absolutely everything that is wonderful in this world. The moon. Mountains. Trees. Clouds. Squirrels. Waves. Sand. Other cultures. Even this handful of 'earth' which is part of the great earth we live on. We must never forget that a good Creator made all the good creation we live in. What part of his good creation are you most grateful for today?

3. We are God's masterpiece.

Object – mirror

What's this? That's right – a mirror. What do you see in a mirror? That's right – you see you. I wonder what God thinks when he sees you? There's a verse that tells us...

Psalm 139:14 – I praise you God for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Each of us is specially and uniquely made by God, and treasured by him. Who cares what anyone else may say about us? Look in the mirror and ask God to show you what he sees when he looks at you - you are his one of a kind masterpiece. Oh by the way, the dumbest thing we can do is comparing the way we look with others? God made us the way he likes us. Imagine if everyone was very tall or had crystal blue eyes – how boring! What part of your body are you most grateful for?

4. We have hearts that stray.

Object – something woollen / picture of a sheep

What's this? It's wool, which comes from a sheep. Did you know there is a verse in the Bible that compares us humans with a sheep...

Isa 53:6 – We all like sheep have gone astray.

Sheep can be quite silly or stubborn, or silly and stubborn. They are lousy at listening to their shepherds. And they easily wonder off into dangerous places. Well, the Bible says that we are like sheep. God is our shepherd and he has a path for us, but because of something called 'sinful hearts' we tend to be silly or stubborn, or maybe silly and stubborn. Loved as we are, there's something wrong with us, which is why we need someone to come rescue us. Can you think of a time you did something you knew that was wrong, but you did it anyway?

5. Look to Jesus.

Object – magnifying glass

What's this? That's right a magnifying glass. What does it help us do? It helps us focus our eyes on something and see all the detail that's there. Do you know what the Bible says we should focus our eyes on?

Heb 12:2 – Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Jesus is the most amazing person; he made the whole world with his father billions of years ago. Then he came to this world 2000 years ago, the most loving, brave, kind, wise, good person to ever live. He loved people no-one else did. He did miracles. He taught amazing things. Right now he is in heaven, in fact he is right here. We can read all about him in the Bible, and think about him every day. Every problem we have, we can fix our hearts on him. (By the way, the rest of the verse tells us that he is the 'pioneer (starter) and completer (finisher) of our faith!') Isn't that amazing? What do you most like about Jesus?

6. Jesus died for our sins.

Object – a nail (in Jesus' hands)

What's this? It's a nail. You get big nig nails. One of the saddest day in history is when people crucified Jesus. They stuck massive nails in his wrists and ankles and pinned him to the cross. But what these people did not realize is that God was doing something wonderful...

1 Pet 2:24 – By Jesus' wounds you have been healed.

Our sins deserve to be punished. But somehow God put all the punishment we deserve on him. Now we can be healed of our sin – instantly forgiven, and in fact as we trust in Jesus he gradually frees us from the power of sin. It's like the spiritual disease we have called 'sin' gets cured by faith in Jesus. Isn't that amazing? What do you feel about Jesus dying on the cross?

7. Jesus is great.

Object – list of names (Jesus at the top of the list)

What's this? That's right. It's a list of names. Although God loves all people the same, some people are honoured more highly by God. Guess whose name is right at the top? That's right – Jesus! In fact the Bible tells us that ...

Phil 2:17 – Jesus has the name that is above every other name.

The greatest person who has ever lived is Jesus. He lived a perfect life and paid the price for our sin. But he didn't stop there. He then rose from the dead alive! And he ascended into heaven. As the greatest One ever, he nows rules the whole universe as a King. In fact we call him 'Lord' Jesus because the name 'Lord' means 'King'. He is our King, worthy of our praise and trust and obedience. Isn't that amazing? Can you think of anyone who is greater than Jesus?

8. Jesus is God's Gift.

Object – a ball.

What's this? That's right – a ball. We can kick a ball, but did you know that you are standing on a huge ball right now? That's right – planet earth, the world that God made, filled with billions of people. What does God feel about all these people? The Bible tells us...

John 3:16 – God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son; whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

We believe in One God, who is Father, the one and only Son and the Holy Spirit. Well, the Father sent his one and only Son to this world 2000 years ago, giving him to us as the greatest gift. And Jesus gave himself up for us on a cross. As we trust in him we begin a relationship with him, and we never need to fear about being apart from him ever again. We will be with him forever. What love – he'd rather die than live without us! Isn't that amazing? Have you trusted in Jesus yet?

9. We're children of the Father.

Object – dad / a pic of dad

Who's this? That's right – your dad. Well, did you know that God is not just our Creator. Even more important, he is our ... any guesses? That's right – father. The Bible says...

Gal 4:4 – You are no longer a slave, but a child of God.

When we trust in Jesus, God adopts us into his family. Earthly dads are sometimes not such great dads, but God the Father never makes a mistake. Of course, earthly dads are sometimes great, well God is always better, and always great. He is a Father who cares for us, loves us, wants us to be close to him, guides us, protects us and provides for us. Isn't that amazing? What do you feel about God being your Father?

10. We are the home of the Spirit.

Object – house keys

What's this? That's right – keys. Keys to what? That's right – to this house. When we live in a house, we also have the keys to that house. Well did you know that you are like a house for God. The Bible says...

1 Cor 6:19 – Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?

Remember I told you that there is only one God, but that he is Father, the Son and the Spirit all at the same time! One God in three persons. Anyway, when Jesus went back to heaven, he sent down his Spirit as his replacement on earth. Well, when we trust in the Son, the Holy Spirit is given the keys to our lives. He comes and lives inside of us. We're his temple. We're his home. Isn't that amazing? What do you feel about the Holy Spirit living in you?

10 GROWTH VERSES

Once we trust we hear the Gospel and trust in Jesus, we become followers of Jesus. Though becoming a Christian happened instantly, growing as one takes every day for the rest of our lives. There are certain things we must do to grow...

11. Say 'Jesus is Lord'.

Object – the word 'abracadabra' on paper

Do you know what the magic words are? Nope, I am not talking about 'thank you' and 'please' here. Magicians often say them when doing a trick ... Abracadabra. Well did you know the most important words that you can are? The Bible tells us...

Rom 10:9 – If you say with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe with your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

When it says 'you will be saved' it means that God will take us into his family and into his kingdom. But is there something we must do to be saved? This verse says, 1) we must believe in our hearts that Jesus is alive – he rose again, and 2) we must say the words, 'Jesus is Lord' – those are the truly magic words! They mean, 'Jesus is alive and well, large and in charge'. This is how we become a Christian. It's also how we grow as a Christian – once saved, we learn to let him be alive and in charge of our whole lives. Why not let's say the magic words now?

12. Get involved in a church.

Object – hammer / drill

What's this? That's right – it's a tool! A tool used by a craftsman to build things. Did you know that Jesus has been building something for 1000s of years, even this very moment?

Matt 16:19 – Jesus said, 'I will build my church'

Since Jesus returned to heaven, he has been getting churches started and helping them grow stronger. Did you know there are millions of churches now

- I am not talking about buildings, but the people. Jesus is like a craftsman, and each of us is like the stones or bricks he is putting in place. He connects us to each other, where we can love and serve each other. That's why it's so important for every Christian to be part of a church. It's why we as a family prioritize church every week. How can we better prioritize church as a family?

13. Use your gifts to serve others.

Object - a wrapped gift

What's this? It's a gift! (To be honest there's nothing in it.) But, did you know that God has given you gifts? The Bible says...

1 Peter 4:10 - Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.

God has given each of us talents and skills to make the church strong. Not just the pastor or music leader! All of us. Some of these gifts will be very visible. Others more behind the scenes. But our job is to find out what they are. The more we serve, the closer we get to finding out. Once we do, we should then to try develop them and use them to serve others in your church, and in the world. In what ways do you think you could start serving in church?

14. Read the Bible.

Object - a sharp knife

What's this? That's right - it's a knife. But let's pretend it's a sword! Did you know that every follower of Jesus needs to take up their sword and use it every day. One verse says...

Ephesians 6:17 - Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

God's Word is like our spiritual weapon. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, he overcame the devil by quoting Bible verses that he memorized. When you read and understand the Bible, it makes you spiritually sharp, rather than blunt and defenceless against the devil's lies and temptations. That's why we learn a Bible verse every day - I want us to go into the day ready for battle. How can we as a family, or maybe you on your own, read the Bible more than we do?

15. Love one another.

Object – picture / drawing of a heart

What's this? That's right – a heart. What does it stand for? That's right – love! The night before Jesus died on the cross he told his followers these words...

John 13:34 – A new command I give you, 'Love one another as I have loved you.'

Such powerful words. A heart reminds us of love. Well, Jesus loves us. On the cross he shows us how much. He gives everything for us, even though we don't deserve it. He loves us so much that he has patience with us, forgiveness for us, and chooses to see the best in us. But look, as we receive his love, we are able to love others too. We too can learn to be patient with each other, and forgive each other, and choose to see the best in each other. Who can you better show Jesus love to today?

16. Be humble.

Object – clothes

What's this? That's right – clothes. Every morning we are meant to put clothes on. But did you know there are some invisible clothes we are meant to put on everyday too. The Bible says...

1 Peter 5:5 – Clothe yourself with humility toward one another

Disciples of Jesus are meant to wear the invisible clothing of humility.. Humility is the opposite of selfishness and pride. Pride thinks, 'How can I make everybody look at me and see how wonderful I am?' But humility thinks, 'How can I learn to look at others and see what's so wonderful about them?' Pride says, 'Everybody, serve me!' Humility says, 'How can I serve you?' I love those superheroes that like to hide their superpowers with ordinary clothing – no matter what great gifts you have, don't show them off. Can you think of a humble superhero?

17. Bear the fruit of Christlikeness.

Object – fruit

What's this? That's right – it's fruit. Where does fruit come from? A branch draws life-giving sap from the trunk. Then it produces fruit. Did you know that the Bible says that when we draw close to Jesus everyday, like a branch drawing on the trunk, we start to bear some fruit?

Gal 5:22 – The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace.

When we rely on the Holy Spirit, he makes us, little by little, more and more like Jesus. People around us begin to taste the 'fruit' of his character. We're more loving. We're more joyful. We're more peaceful. I am not saying that we're perfectly loving, joyful and peaceful, but we can learn to walk closer and closer to Jesus, and we can become more and more fruitful. By the way, the verse goes on to mention six other fruits: 'patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.'

18. Pray.

Object – cell phone

What's this? That's right – a phone. What is a phone mainly for? That's right – to call people. Anyway, did you know that everyone has an invisible cell phone that is on speed dial to one number? The number is 333, or Jeremiah 33:3...

Jeremiah 33:3 – Call on me, and I will answer and tell you wonderful things.

The same way I can call a friend anytime, so prayer is how I speak to God anytime. He loves to hear from us. We can tell him we love him and trust him. We can say sorry for stuff and ask for forgiveness. We can ask him to help us or others. We can ask him to open our eyes so we can understand the Bible. There's just so much to talk to him about and keep talking to him about. Why don't we all pray to him now?

19. Persevere.

Object – running / sporting shoes.

What's this? That's right – running shoes! We need running shoes to run. Now do you think following Jesus is more like a short sprint or a long marathon? The Bible tells us...

Hebrews 12:1 – Run with perseverance the race set before you.

Sprints don't need perseverance. Only marathons do. Following Jesus is more like a marathon. Some patches of the marathon are downhill – fun and exciting. But sometimes following Jesus is uphill. Maybe we are tempted to quit, or trusting in him doesn't seem to make our lives easier. Maybe it doesn't seem our prayers are being heard. But don't give up trusting in Jesus! Jesus has a plan and a path for your life. It's not always easy, but it's so worth it! Has it ever been hard for you to follow Jesus?

20. Keep learning.

Object – Drawing of a question mark

What's this? That's right – a question mark. It means that a question is being asked. When we ask a question it means we are curious and want to understand more. Did you know that questions are so good, that even Jesus asked them...

Luke 2:46 – Jesus listened to the Bible teachers and asked them questions.

This verse describes Jesus as a young boy. Here we see him asking lots and lots of questions people who knew the Bible. He wanted to learn everything he could. In the same way, we should ask questions of people – parents, Sunday kids ministry teachers and whoever. If you don't understand, ask them to explain. Don't ever stop learning what God wants to teach you. In fact, the word Jesus used to describe a Christian is a 'disciple', which means a 'learner'. What question(s) about God do you want answers to?

5 PROMISE VERSES

The Gospel is who Jesus is, and what Jesus has done for us. As we believe it we are saved and become children of God. We grow as Christians as we do the things disciples of Jesus who learn to do the things disciples are meant to do – like pray, read the Word, and serve. But God does not leave us to do this on our own. He gives us wonderful promises to hold onto.

21. You will soar.

Object – party wings / picture of an eagle

What's this? That's right – it's wings / an eagle. You know what makes eagles different to seagulls? When the storm comes, the seagulls get blown this way and that. They skwawk and panic. But eagles have a secret. They stretch out their wings and catch the warm upward draft in front of the storm. Then glide right over the storm, calm and confident. Did you know that God wants us to be like the eagles?

Isa 40:31 – Those who hope in the Lord will soar on wings like eagles.

When tough times come, you can panic like the seagull. Or you can hope in the Lord, trusting in his love and his power. Trusting him is like stretching out your wings over his goodness and promises. When you do that, he can put calm and confidence, peace and strength in your heart. (By the way, the rest of the verse says, '... and run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint.') Are you more like a seagull or an eagle lately?

22. I forgive you.

Object – magnet

What's this? That's right – a magnet. A magnet has a North pole and a South pole. What else has a North pole and a South pole? That's right – our planet. In fact you can fly from the North pole to the South pole. Now here is a trick question: can you fly from the East pole to the West pole? No! Because East carries on forever and ever, as does West. The Bible says...

Ps 103:12 – As far as the East is from the West, that is how far you have taken our sin from us.

How far is the East from the West? It's from forever to forever! Well, when we have done something wrong, we can come to Jesus and say sorry. And guess what – he takes our sin away from us forever and ever away. I am not saying all your problems are gone with people you hurt. I mean, if you steal something, you have to pay that person back. But you don't have to pay God back anything to forgive you. Is there anything you want to ask God to forgive you for?

23. Do not fear.

Object – cloth over eyes / lights out

What's that? It's darkness! The Bible says that sometimes life turns dark. It gets scary. We might feel alone or worried or even terrified. We just don't know what is going to happen. Thank goodness, God gives us a fantastic promise in those times...

Ps 23:4 – Though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

There's a story of a little kid who was very scared one night. The lights were out. He thought he was all alone in the house, and he screamed out for his parents. What a surprise he got when a voice came back from right next to him – his mom was sleeping on the bed next to him. In the same way, we sometimes feel like we're all alone when we have a problem, but it's not true. God is right there with us! Do you ever feel scared or alone?

24. I will never let you go.

Object – shake hands and give a nice squeeze

When a child and a mom hold hands, there are two main kinds of grip. There's when the child grips the mom's hand and pulls them towards the ice-cream. Then there's when the mom grips the child's hand (or better yet wrist) and

pulls them away from the busy road. Which grip is stronger? The mom's right? Well, how strong do you think God's grip is?

John 10:28 - I give them eternal life, no one can snatch them from my hand.

Being a Christian is not so much about us holding onto Jesus – that's a weak grip. It's more about Jesus holding onto you – that's a stronger grip. That's reassuring because our grip is faulty. Our faith goes up and down. But he will never let us go. Once he takes us as his own, he will never give up on us – not today, not tomorrow, not ever. That's eternal life. Do you think Jesus might ever let go of you?

25. I will guide you.

Object – cell phone torchlight

When you are out in the wild in the pitch dark, trying to follow a path, you need some light. A little torchlight like this shows you the way you should go. In life, we have to make lots of big decisions – who our friends are going to be, what school to go to, what to do when you have a big problem. You just don't know what way to go? Guess what, God gives us some help...

Psalm 119:105 – Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

This is a promise that God will guide us. It doesn't mean we don't make choices, but that God will guide our choices if we ask him to. We should ask him, and he will show us the way. As we read the Bible God makes us wiser (as we will see in the next few days). As we pray, he may guide our thoughts and you just know what to do. He may give us some wise people who love him who can give us advice. How cool that God guides us. Has he ever guided you?

5 PROVERBS

The promise we looked at yesterday says that God's word will be like a light for our path, showing us the way. Just as well, because life is very tricky. A lot of people think they know how to live life, but do they really? The book of Proverbs gives us very important tips for living life right. Let's look at five ways he guides us...

26. Choose wise friends.

Object – A friend (show a picture or ask them to list)

Who are your friends? Of those, who are your closest friends? Friends are one of God's great blessings towards us. But the Bible says we must choose our friends wisely, because they influence the way we live our lives...

Proverbs 13:20 – He who walks with the wise grows wise.

See, the choice of your friends shape the quality and direction of your life. They shape the kind of person you become. If you hang out with mainly with rude friends, you become more rude. If you hang out with kind friends, you become more kind. If your closest friends don't love God, you might find yourself not loving God as much as you used to. So choose friends who do the right thing, and who treat you and others well. Also, be that kind of friend to others. (By the way, the rest of the verse is, 'but a friend of fools suffers harm.')

Is there a new friend you can make?

27. Speak gentle words

Object – oil and glass of water

I am not going to actually do it because we might catch fire, but imagine there was a fire in a pan. What would happen if I threw oil on it? That's right, it would get much fiercer and spread. And if I doused water on it? That's right, it would get much smaller and even go out. Now, what do you do when a friend or someone you live with starts to freak out at you and speak harshly? The Bible guides us...

Proverbs 15:1 – A gentle answer turns away wrath.

When someone is harsh or angry or frustrated with you, imagine that they are on fire. Now you might feel like being harsh back to them. But don't, because that would be like throwing oil on them. The situation will only get worse! Rather be calm. Be kind. That's like taming the flame! As you keep cool even though they lose their head, you might be able to cool them down too. (By the way, the rest of the verse is 'but a harsh word stirs up anger.')

28. Stand up for victims

Object – a picture of poor children

What do you think God feels for people who are hurting and suffering? That's right – he cares about them a lot. He cares about the bullied and beaten people in the world – and he is angered by those who do the bullying and the beating. What should we do when we find out about this?

Proverbs 31:9 – Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

All over the world, people who are stronger than others are tempted to use the weaker people. Sometimes adults hurt or neglect children. Often rich people use or neglect poor people, or leaders of the country bully and abuse their own people. Or us humans kill off plant and animal life. This must stop! Can you think of some people or animals we know of who cannot speak up for themselves? What can we do?

29. Work hard.

Object – an ant / youtube video of ants working hard

Do you know what ants are famous for according to the Bible? That's right – they work hard. Now I am not saying that there is never a time to relax and play. But there is also a time for us to work hard and carry our share of the tasks in our home or school. Look how God inspires us...

Prov 6:6 – Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!

A sluggard is someone who is lazy. They avoid tasks and chores at home or school, as well as cleaning up after themselves. If you need inspiration to work hard, to do your best, and to help out at home and school, go to the ants. Those little creatures know how to work their hardest, all the time. Inspired by these ants, what task might you start doing more of?

30. Listen to your parents.

Object – ears

What's this? That's right – an ear! And what are ears for? Yes – listening! Now we know that the Bible tells us that we need to listen to God. But do you know who else the Bible says we need to listen to, especially when we are young? Here goes...

Prov 13:1 – Wise children listen to their parents.

God has given you parents not to ruin your life, but to make your life even better, so listen to us. Not just our advice, but also our instructions. If ever you feel we're being unfair let us know, we do make mistakes, and are happy to apologize if need be. (By the way, the rest of the verse is 'but foolish children do their own thing'.) Can you think of one way your life and our home works better if you listen to mom and dad?

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