**Inspiring faith in the next generation**

**Intro:**

**SLIDE: Family**

* Family was God’s idea. When he created Adam & Eve, he said it was not good to be alone. He created us to grow up and develop within a family – whatever that may look like! And it is so important – it’s where we learn to give and receive love. It’s where our character is shaped and it is where we learn our values.
* It doesn’t matter what our families look like – many of us will have good relationships with our parents and nuclear family, others will be facing challenges or relationship breakdowns. We may be parenting alone, or have children with additional needs. Life will look different for every one of us – yet as parents, we are the keepers of the atmosphere in our homes and can create a place that is safe and secure and where our children are loved.
* It won’t be perfect, and it’s not always easy, but we do all want to love our children and help them to grow up to be great adults!

**Because we love our children, we also want to see them grow up to love Jesus right?**

* God handpicked us to parent these kids, to love them – to raise adults, and to disciple them.

**SLIDE: No guarantees**

* Proverbs 22:6 says:

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”

Sounds great! But it is more of a principle than a guarantee; ultimately our adult children will make their own choice at some stage in life.

* We will all be at different stages here, maybe our children are following God, perhaps not. It is not all down to us. Sometimes we don’t understand the full picture, or see where God is at work in our children’s lives.
* There’s a great quote from Rob Parsons: “Adam & Eve had the perfect father, in the perfect environment and yet they still made the choice to walk away from him.”
* It’s important to remember that God loves our children even more than we do. We can do our best as parents and God will play his part – but our children are free to make their own choices.

**SLIDE: An amazing opportunity**

* As parents, this shouldn’t feel like a burden, but rather a great opportunity for us while our children are at home – especially when they are young – but it never really stops!
* Our kids take in what we say and do, even when we don’t think they are – and it can be easy to forget that we have so many simple opportunities through the day to show them our faith.
* Moses recognised this. In Deuteronomy 6, while speaking to the Israelites for the final time, he reminds them of all God has done, and that they are to love him above all else. Then he says this:

**SLIDE:**

“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

* Look at the places that Moses says that scripture is to be taught … at home, walking to places, bedtime and first thing in the morning. There is not normally a children’s worker around at these times! This is where *parents* are.

Sometimes it’s easy to think that it’s the churches responsibility to teach our children about faith. It makes sense in the culture we live in. If we want our child to learn ballet then we send them to ballet lessons; to play the piano then piano lessons. Lots of us can swim but we send our kids to swimming lessons. So it can follow that for our children to learn about God we send them to church. And it is a really important part of our children’s faith development to learn with their peers – but we can undervalue the role of us as parents. Looking at what Moses says – God’s design was for us as PARENTS to teach our children. And to teach them in the everyday moments of life.

**SLIDE: Parents are the biggest influencers**

As parents we have so many opportunities to share faith values with our children. We have approximately 21,900 daytime hours with our child by the time they are 10! It would take 421 years for church to have same amount of time with our kids as we do as parents.

*[If you’d like to illustrate how much time parents have with their kids, you can show this short 2 minute video that asks families how much time they spend doing different things, and how much time they spend together.*

[*https://youtu.be/kUfCWqsgZdI*](https://youtu.be/kUfCWqsgZdI) *]*

* Family is where we have the deepest levels of trust and security – especially as children, we *believe* our parents.
* It is interesting thinking about influence – I think instinctively we know that as parents we are the biggest influence, but if your children anything like mine it feels like they listen better for everyone else and not me. Maybe you have teenagers and you just get a grunt – you struggle to get them to do anything as they try to assert their independence.
* There was some great research that Youth for Christ did on Generation Z (today’s under 18s) that shows how much this influence continues – even into the teenage years.

**SLIDE: GEN Z: Rethinking Culture**

**Youth for Christ surveyed 1001 young people aged 11 – 18. (32% believed in God)**

* The research showed the top four results for the biggest influence on faith and religion were:

a)Family 73%
b)Teachers 36%
c)Friends 36%
d)TV & the media 23%

Family was still the biggest influence on their faith – by far.

* When asked who had the biggest positive influence**,** 59% said that family were the number one thing that made them feel good about themselves - **92%** put family in their top three!

So this is good news for us! Or it can feel a little scary, daunting and challenging.

**SLIDE: Hurdles parents face**

So it’s all great in theory that parents are the main influence on our children growing in faith, but there are definitely barriers that get in the way. Care for the Family’s ‘Faith in our Families’ research showed there were four key barriers that commonly stopped parents from helping to disciple their children at home.

1.Time: Life being too busy and not having the time to sit down and spend talking to the children about God.

2. Confidence: not knowing where to start or what to do

3. Inadequacy: Not feeling like a good enough example for their children to follow or concerned about putting their children off

4. Unqualified: Not feeling like they know enough to be able to teach their kids, and not having the answers to difficult questions.

These are all really normal feelings! And rather than barriers, we like to frame them as hurdles that can be overcome.

**SLIDE: You are qualified**

* Sometimes I can barely keep it together enough to pack their lunches and get them to school on time, get to work, pick them up, clean the house, cook dinner, get them to bed, do homework, and then make it to the small group at church in the evening.
* But there is good news – Moses instructed the Israelites to share everday moments, not super spiritual hour long devotionals! He highlighted the everyday activities – things that are already part of life and our routines – and we can see them as opportunities to bring God into those simple moments. It’s not about adding more to the to-do list.
* You really don’t have to be expert: whether you have been a Christian for 20 years or five minutes, God has positioned you as a parent to share God’s love with your child.
* You are qualified: you get to partner with God in helping your children discover what it is to put their faith in him.
* So what can we do? And what works? The Kitchen Table Project from Care for the Family have researched a lot about what makes a difference in children’s discipleship and have come up with four key elements that help to build faith:

**SLIDE: Home**

The warmth of relationships in the home are important! When our kids feel loved, secure and accepted that helps create a strong foundation for faith to grow.

* It’s not about being perfect – just looking after them, feeding them, hugging them when they are sad, giving them safe boundaries – it all helps to build them as human beings, and to develop their capacity for love and relationship.
* We can speak words of life, build them up and help them to feel loved. Explore what their love language is (how they most feel and receive love).
* Building our children’s self-esteem is such a huge issue – speaking truth into their lives when culture pulls them in so many different directions is so important. As we navigate technology with them and keep healthy conversation going about what they’re seeing on social media, we can recognise the influences they are being exposed to and remind them of their identity in God.
* All these things might not seem like they are related to faith, but they form the foundations for building faith and are essential for our kids to understand the correlation between our earthly parents and God our heavenly father. It helps our kids see that a loving relationship with God is even better than that modelled on earth.

**SLIDE: Be real**

This is a challenge,but our kids can see through everything. We’ve all heard that ‘actions speak louder than words’ but this really is so true. We can model to our children what it looks like to love God and follow him – but we need to be honest and authentic.

* We can show our children that we have our own relationship with God. Often this is quite hidden because we pray or read the Bible in private, but if we make it more visible by reading the Bible in front of them, praying aloud or thanking God for a beautiful day, they see that God really is part of our lives.
* And we don’t just want them to see the good bits too – we want to be realistic and genuine so our children know it’s ok to mess up and make mistakes too. God doesn’t expect us to be perfect, and that’s something we need to let our children know! We can ask for forgiveness when we get things wrong and react badly, we can say sorry to our children too – displaying a model of grace. We can talk through our feelings, explaining that we feel cross and angry sometimes and how God helps us deal with that.
* It’s also good to remember that we all connect with God differently, and our children engaging with God might look different to how we ourselves do. How do you connect with God? Intellectual? Creation? Creativity? Silence? Serving?

*[This is a good spot to include a story about different ways of connecting with God. For example, I got excited one Sunday when I saw my son seemingly worshiping God – singing all the words to the songs. After church I said how lovely it was to see that, and he replied with: “ I really wanted to play Mario Kart when we get home so I thought I should!” I was focused on his outward behaviour, rather than recognising that he’s more likely to connect with God intellectually reading the Bible, than singing songs in church. ]*

* We don’t want our kids just to know ABOUT God. We want them to KNOW God. So part of being authentic in our faith is allowing our children to work out what works for them, even if it isn’t what we expect.
* And then there are the difficult questions – from “are there dinosaurs in the Bible?” to “how do you know God is real?” It can be really hard to have these conversations! But we don’t have to have the answers. It can be good to explain that we don’t know and maybe you can explore the topics together, looking in the Bible or talking to a church leader to see what they think.

And this leads us on to being intentional:

**SLIDE: Being Intentional**

* I want to make the most of the everday opportunities that Moses talks about and that we looked at earlier. We can seize opportune moments, but we can also intentionally take time to invest in our children’s faith journey.
* You could share answers to prayer, read a Bible story at bedtime or find ways to pray together at good times during the day. Could you pray for the day as you walk to school? Or if someone is ill could you make them a card and deliver it?
* We can bring God into everyday opportunities – like meal times. Something simple like asking each other about one good thing, one hard thing, and one time you talked to God during the day.
* We will all be at different stages of the journey. For some of us, just saying a prayer at bedtime will be enough of a challenge, and a great place to start. For others, that may already be part of your routine, and you want to look for different opportunities to share the amazing things God has done for you.
* We’re all different – find what works for your family and your individual child …

All our families will look different, and we will have different challenges that mean our circumstances vary greatly. I think that’s one of the things I love about the church.

**SLIDE: BELONG**

* The church is designed as one big support system – Moses was talking to ALL the Israelites in that passage from Deuteronomy, not just the parents. He was talking to the WHOLE family – the church has a role to play.
* We’re not raising our children on our own, we are part of the wider family of God and your children’s peers and other adults make up their faith community.
* Church helps grow a sense of belonging – of being part of something bigger. We can help children feel like they have a place in the church by encouraging them to get involved, to help and serve in some ways and to value them as part of the church community.

*[you could include some examples of opportunities for children to serve in your church here]*

* Church can feel like hard work sometimes with children – it might be a challenge for them to sit still, or maybe your kids find it boring or don’t want to go … but it really is worth it.
* Developing key relationships with others – older children, teenagers and other trustworthy adults - is really helpful for having people your children can turn to when they reach an age where they don’t come to you as readily to talk.
* We can also learn from our children. Their childlike faith and understanding can challenge our faith in different ways. It’s important that we listen to them and value their understanding as well.

**SLIDE: Prayer**

And most importantly – we can’t do anything without God’s help – we need to be praying for and with our children – teaching them to talk to him in every situation.

* Pray specifically for our children, think about their future and what you want for their lives. Some parents pop into their children’s room at night and pray blessings over them, both when they’re asleep and awake.
* Let them see and hear you praying out loud – and give them opportunities to listen to God, and chat to him without you as well.

SLIDE: Psalm 78:4

So parents, you are perfectly positioned by God to help teach your children about him, and to help them come to know Jesus for themselves. Be encouraged that by living out your faith in the everyday things of life, you are laying a great foundation for your child’s faith to grow and grow.

Let’s “tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.”

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If you’d like more information and resources to help you on this journey, do check out the Kitchen Table Project – a Care for the Family initiative aiming to equip parents and carers to inspire a faith that lasts in their children. [www.kitchentable.org.uk](http://www.kitchentable.org.uk)