

Faith for Families

Activities and
ideas for faith
and worship in
the home



GROWING
DISCIPLES

Wider Younger Deeper

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Introduction

Here's a booklet that we hope will help you, giving you lots of things you can do in your home and with your family to explore the Christian faith and the Bible together. It doesn't matter what your family looks like, what ages people are, and how many people are in your family...sharing faith across generations is always important!

Recent research shows that one of the key factors in children finding faith and developing as disciples is the input they have at home. Yet many parents and carers struggle with how to worship as a family, how to highlight God in their day to day lives, and how to help children explore Biblical truths in a home setting. This booklet includes some Bible passages and encouragements around faith in the home, some suggested resources, an activity a day for any family to use throughout Advent, and 50 other short activities on a range of Bible stories and themes to do as a family. Please enjoy thinking through these principles and having a go at these suggestions.

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The Basic Principles (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

Moses said to Israel:

¹The LORD told me to give you these laws and teachings, so you can obey them in the land he is giving you. Soon you will cross the Jordan River and take that land.

²And if you and your descendants want to live a long time, you must always worship the LORD and obey his laws. ³Pay attention, Israel! Our ancestors worshiped the LORD, and he promised to give us this land that is rich with milk and honey. Be

*careful to obey him, and you will become a successful and powerful nation. ⁴Listen, Israel! The LORD our God is the only true God! ⁵So love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. ⁶**Memorize his laws** ⁷**and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you're at home or walking along the road or going to bed at night or getting up in the morning.***

⁸Write down copies and tie them to your wrists and foreheads to help you obey them.

⁹Write these laws on the door frames of your homes and on your town gates. (NIV)

We all have a responsibility to help our children grow up in the faith we share. This means we can't simply leave it to the church leader or those involved in children's work...everyone has a part to play in prayer and practical support.

Parents and Carers have a particular responsibility to pass on the messages and principles of faith. Of course, this doesn't mean that the child will necessarily choose to follow Christ when they are older, but they will have an important foundation to build on.

This is about us all learning! As adults we can easily slip into a mindset that suggests we have nothing to learn from the young, yet many of us will have been inspired and moved by the wisdom and insight of young children. Unless we are willing to learn across the generations we will not value children properly.

We all inherit some of our parents' values. As adults we may be aware that we have some of the habits and mannerisms of our parents. We picked those up as young children and we modelled ourselves on the adults around us. Children pick up

spiritual attitudes, doctrine and habits from the adults they have most contact with, and therefore good habits are really important.

Habit-forming and helping younger children (Proverbs 22:6). We know clearly from experience and scripture that children's attitudes, beliefs and practices are formed at a very young age, and so the work we do with the very youngest children as they grow and develop is of real importance.

We don't know the end of the story for our children. As parents and carers, we are called to share our faith and discipleship with our children. Once they are older and can make their own choices we want them to have the tools to decide, and they may not choose to be a Christian disciple at that point...we don't know. Our calling as parents and carers is to do the best we can to introduce them to our faith while we can and leave the rest to God.

No condemnation – we can only do our best. Children have to find their own way, with the right principles to help them. It is tough when they choose not to share the faith we may hold dearly, but God is sovereign and still loves them in their decision and loves us in our hopes and disappointments.

Issues of lifestyle and culture – a few questions to consider:

Family-Time Famine – What are your family's priorities in the way you use time?

Job-first Culture – Does the job, career, income, or the family come first?

Marriage Fragility – Are there pressures and cracks that children can sense and feel?

Inconsistent Lifestyle – Does the example we give help children, who learn by what they see and experience?

Children in Charge – Do the children in the home manipulate, and essentially control all the decisions?

Overworked Families – Does doing too much ‘church’ work encourage families to burn out?

Parents know Best – Do parents really know it all, or can we ask questions and learn together?

The role of parents – Is it a shared desire and commitment to see children grow as disciples?

The priority of faith - How strong is the faith of your family?

God in the home - What specific ways can you help your children see God's presence?

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

6Memorize his laws 7and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you're at home or walking along the road or going to bed at night or getting up in the morning.

How can you do this naturally and easily as a family, so that all are nourished, can grow as disciples, and share the same values and aims?

Basics for Christian community

Each family is a Christian community in itself, whatever shape and size it is. Churches should all have these characteristics, as should all Christian homes – but we know we are not perfect! However, these basic characteristics of how we, as people living and growing together, can help us think through the worship, prayer, rituals and habits that have formed our family ways. Then we will see what areas may need to change to get more in line with these Biblical principles.

Love (John 13:34-35)

Honour (Romans 12:10)

Live in harmony with (Romans 15:15)

Accept (Romans 15:7)

Build up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Greet (Romans 16:16)

Serve (Galatians 5:13)

Carry burdens (Galatians 6:2)

Be kind to (Ephesians 4:32)

Be patient with (Ephesians 4:2)

Submit to (Ephesians 5:21)

Forgive (Colossians 3:13)

Confess sins to (James 5:16)

Encourage (Hebrews 3:13)

Family Time with God

Living as 24/7 Christians as carers and parents will set an example and a model that children will follow. They will sense the Christian love in the home and share in the way of relating with care and forgiveness. This is enhanced by making time to do things as a family that focus on God, be that a short time of worship, a craft activity based on a Biblical theme, or a short time to stop and pray about something. If you plan to do 'family time', here are a few considerations that may help:

Make it a regular time

If this is going to work, it needs the commitment of everyone in the family. Everything else should be put to one side or turned off, the diary is cleared, and this planned in for everyone.

Creative and fun

This should be a special time to enjoy being family, explore things by having fun and sharing, considering tough issues and encouraging laughter!

KISS Principle

Keep it short and simple! There is nothing worse than ploughing through an activity or discussion that is obviously not working or following a set programme until the bitter end!

Relevance

Make sure that Bible passages, activities and discussion relate to family life and are grounded in children's experience. This gets more challenging if you have a wider age range, but with careful planning you can explore a wide range of themes and Bible passages.

Prepared

There are plenty of resources available to support faith in the home, and it is sensible to use some of them. But whatever you use, it is always necessary to give a bit of time for preparation, and delegate or share preparation and leadership.

Prayer

This can sometimes feel forced, but there are ways you can work to make prayer seem natural. Activity, movement and physical contact are important to keep prayer vibrant.

Advent Activities

These family activities start on Advent Sunday, providing something for a family to do in the home or outside every day during Advent.

Preparation - Family map

You will need a large sheet of paper (A3 or roll of plain wallpaper) and some pens. Draw a line from left to right, writing 'now' at the left and 'Jesus is born' at the right. Then talk about all that is happening during Advent and each person write or draw along the line events, performances and activities that are coming up. Finish by remembering that Christmas Day isn't just about having fun and presents – it is the day we remember that Jesus is born.

Advent Sunday – Advent prayer

Write a prayer in your family to say each day during Advent, using the following as a template, and allowing everyone to suggest a word or phrase for each:

Living and loving God, you are

Thank you for Advent, as we look forward to

We're excited by

Help us to remember that we are getting ready for Jesus. Amen

Advent Sunday Extra – The Patriarchs

On this Sunday of Advent many churches remember the 'patriarchs' – the key leaders who were the foundations of the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Here are a few things to remember and talk about for some of them:

Abraham – married to Sarah, whose son Isaac was born to them when they were very old. God promised that Abraham would be the foundation for a very many people who would follow God.

Isaac – Abraham and Sarah's son, also a great leader. Sarah laughed when she was told she would have a child when old, and so the name Isaac means 'he will laugh'.

Jacob – he was a great leader whose 12 sons formed 12 families and tribes. His son Joseph was famous for his coloured coat and rise to power in Egypt.

David – he was a king who was called by God when he was young, and despite failing sometimes he became a great leader of the people. Bethlehem was known as ‘David’s city’, and Joseph was a descendent of David.

The patriarchs received promises from God, which gave them hope. Spend a short time thinking about what you hope for this Advent.

Names of Jesus

The words ‘Christ’ and ‘Messiah’ mean anointed or chosen one. Immanuel means ‘God with us’. All of those names are given to Jesus, and the names have real meaning and power. Try to find out what the names of those in your family mean and talk about how we are all special and different, made by God.

Getting ready

You will need a small candle or tealight. Talk as a family about what you have to do to get ready for a day at work or school, or to get ready for a holiday away. Think about what we now need to do to get ready for Jesus again, including times of quiet, thinking about Jesus and remembering him. Then sit really quietly for five minutes, share any ideas and thoughts, and light a candle if that helps people to focus.

Drawing the story

Work together, drawing and colouring up to eight pictures that go together to tell the story up to the birth of Jesus. These may include:

Mary and Joseph...the happy young couple!

The angel that visited Mary

Mary’s surprise!

Mary visiting Elizabeth

Mary and Joseph travelling

Bethlehem

A stable or cave

Angels in the sky
Shepherds on the hillside

Once they are completed, stick them around the house in different places as a reminder of the Advent season and the things that led up to the birth of Jesus.

The vine and grapes

You will need a bunch of grapes. Together, count out the number of grapes needed to have one each day from now until Christmas Day. Then look at the stalks and stem left behind – we are called to be like the grapes – good fruit growing on what Jesus tells and shows us. Pray a simple prayer asking that, this Advent, we would all be good fruit. Then eat the grapes!

Carols and Christ

You will need a hymn or carols book. Choose a verse from a favourite Christmas carol, read it out or sing it a few times, and talk about what it says and what it means for us. Is it true to the Gospels? Is it something we can all learn from? What does it tell us about Jesus?

Collecting cones

You will need access to pine cones and spray paint. If possible, make a little time today to go out and collect pine cones in a wooded area or forest. Once they are collected, try to count how many scales a cone has, and talk about how God knows all those scales, all the people in the world, and even all the hairs on our heads! Thank God that he sent Jesus for all people. Then you could spray the cones with silver or gold paint and use them as Christmas decorations.

Sunday – Avoid the rush

Make a promise to yourselves as a family that you will not do any shopping today, or on the other Sundays of Advent. Instead, take the time to cook a meal together, preparing food as a family to share. This time together is really important as a positive reminder that getting ready for Christmas is not all about buying things!

Sunday Extra – The Prophets

On this Sunday of Advent many churches remember prophets, and the writings hundreds of years before that predicted the birth of Jesus. There are over 40 references to the Messiah or saviour in the Old Testament. God showed his love for all people by promising to send Jesus, the saviour. Remembering God's love, tell someone else in your family that you love them.

Think and talk about how hard it is to look forward and know what is going to happen. Pray, thanking God that he has a huge plan for all people and for all time.

Look ahead

Look at the family calendar for this week, and each person choose one event or activity that they are concerned or worried about. Pray this simple prayer for each person, asking God to be with them and help them, and don't forget to find out how it went afterwards.

Loving God, give your love to Help him/her as she, and show him/her that you are there helping and loving. Amen

Words to share

You will need pens and paper. The prophets spoke words of joy and hope for the people, promising that the Saviour was coming. Write a list of good, positive words that would encourage and help others. Each person should then choose a word that they will use that day to say to other people to build them up and give them joy.

Angels

You will need some costume items, white material, and so on. Dress a member of the family as an angel and take a photo! Then talk about what an angel might really look like, and where angels are in the story leading up to the birth of Jesus:

Visiting Mary and telling her she would have a child

Visiting Joseph in a dream and assuring him that God is in control

Visiting the shepherds on the hillside

Advent Acrostic

You will need pens and paper. Write an acrostic poem to the word ADVENT, with each line beginning with the next letter of the word. Try to work on a mix of spiritual things and other things that point to Christmas.

Fast quickly!

Plan a day of simple and easy food for breakfast and evening meal, and (for those who are able) try to fast. Use the time saved being quiet and reading stories from the Bible about the coming of Jesus, particularly Luke 1 and Luke 2 up to verse 15.

Finding the story

You will need pictures of key elements of the Christmas story – manger, baby, sheep, shepherds, star, Mary and Joseph, and so on. Hide them around the home and (if appropriate and the weather is good) the garden. Ask everyone to search out as many pictures as they can in 5 minutes. Once time is up put all the pictures together in the right order, and then briefly tell the story through the pictures.

Sunday – A rough day

Talk about what it would have been like for Mary and Joseph as they arrived in Bethlehem and ended up in a room, cave or stable that was rough and unpleasant. Spend some of the day without some of the usual comforts, so have a light and plain meal, turn the heating down, sit on the floor instead of comfortable settees, and so on. Finish by praying, thanking God that Mary and Joseph were willing to put up with rough times for all of us.

Sunday Extra – John the Baptist

On this Sunday of Advent many churches remember John the Baptist. He was a cousin of Jesus and went ahead preparing the way for Jesus and calling people to be baptised. John lived a wild, rough life to serve God and do what he had been called to do. Have a talk together about how comfortable life can be, and what it may mean to be called by God like John was. Remember that Jesus came to bring joy to the world, and we can find joy in each-other. Ask each person – who makes you feel joyful?

Star gazing

You will need some blankets. Take a short evening trip to a park, the countryside, or another dark area where streetlights don't pollute the sky. Lie on your backs on the blankets and look up to the lights in the sky, remembering that the God who made it all sent his son Jesus to us all. Say a few words of thanks for God's greatness.

Blessed

You will need paper and pens. Write the word 'Blessed' in big letters on the paper and put it on a table that you can all sit around. Remind everyone that we are looking forward to presents, but God blesses us all the time with really good things. Then ask everyone to write or draw some things they are really blessed by on the paper and put it on the wall as a reminder.

Sharing Jesus

You will need some small presents and wrapping paper. Wrap up some small presents (chocolate bars, Christmas tree ornaments, and the like) and take them around your neighbourhood, handing them out freely. As people ask why you're giving our presents, tell them that it is to remember that Jesus is coming...for everyone!

Shells

You will need some shells...scallop shells are ideal, water, and a towel. Traditionally scallop shells have been used in baptisms in different areas of the world. Talk about the story of John the Baptist, who baptised people with water to help them ask God for forgiveness, change their behaviour, and get ready for Jesus. Then get a little water and, each person in turn, gently pour water on the head of the person next to them as a sign of being washed clean by God and being prepared for the coming of Jesus.

King Jesus

You will need some cardboard or thick paper, scissors, and pens. Make a crown fit for a king! Then write on the crown words that each person suggests when you think of Jesus. Allow even the youngest to make suggestions – they may have surprising spiritual insight.

Good news

You will need a blank sheet of A3 paper, newspapers and scissors. At the end of a day talk about and share good things that have happened to each person. Then have a look at the good news stories and cut out the headlines as a reminder that good things happen, and the best good thing is Jesus, who we remember at Christmas.

Sunday – A Candle for Christmas

You will need a plain candle and permanent felt pens. Pass the candle around the family, asking each person to write a word and draw something about Jesus and Christmas. Look at each of the suggestions and light the candle as a reminder of the light of Jesus coming to the world.

Sunday Extra – Mary, Jesus' Mother

On this Sunday of Advent many churches remember The Virgin Mary, the young girl who was willing to obey God and have a child who would be the saviour of the world. She risked everything, and her life as a parent was not easy as she saw her son become loved and then hated by the people. Jesus came to bring peace, even though his life was not peaceful.

Parents and carers – ask your children to lay their hands gently on you, and if they are able, to pray for you that you would be good, caring and peaceful parents, however tough it can be.

Christmas Eve - The final hours

Try to pause for one minute each hour as a family during the main part of this busy day to think about the Christmas story as it unfolds. Here are some suggestions:

1. Joseph and Mary nearing the end of their journey
2. Sheep out in the fields grazing
3. The busy inns and streets of Bethlehem
4. The owner of the stable shutting in his animals for the night
5. The town of Bethlehem as the evening darkness draws in
6. The angels assembling in the sky to surprise the shepherds

Additional Activities

Some things to try

These activities provide a range of activities and discussion points that you may want to try or adapt to suit your own family context. They are in no particular order and follow a range of themes.

Bedtime Stories

This may seem obvious, but statistics suggest that 74% of parents do not regularly read to their children at bedtime. Use short and appropriate Bible stories from Bibles such as the Lion Children's Bible or other books of Bible stories and make it a regular part of the evening routine. Keep it going as your children get older, using the full version of the Bible in a straightforward translation (for example Good News or CEV).

Best bit, Bad bit

To give some focus to your family time to worship or over a meal, start off with everyone talking about their Best Bit of the day and the Bad Bit of the day. Make sure the adults are appropriately honest with this too, as it helps children and young people understand that life isn't always easy if their parents and carers show that they face tough times and challenges too.

God says....

Play a simple game of 'Simon says.', with everyone doing the action when 'Simon says...' but not doing it when 'Simon' doesn't say!

Then think about what God's word tells us to do – love one-another, share the Gospel, be kind, forgive each-other, help others, trust Him, and so on. It's no use just listening to the Bible or reading the words. God wants us to face up that reality - we have to do what he says too!

Finally ask someone to pray, asking God to help us face the challenge to both hear and act on his words.

Those most in need

You will need some pens and paper. During a day or over a few days everyone in the family should keep a look out for those who are in need and vulnerable in your church, workplace, school, nursery, community, and so on.

Put some time aside to sit down together in your family or group and talk about the people you've seen or learned about that are vulnerable and in need. Make a list of them on the paper, and then talk about and pray for each one, asking God to show all Christians and each one of us what to do to bring help, comfort and love.

Prayer surrounds us!

If it is possible, walk around the outside perimeter of your home, and every now and again stop and say together 'May God's love surround our home'. Do the same in every room, saying together 'May God's love be in this room'. Repeat this every few days so that it becomes a routine and 'natural' thing to do.

Bubble prayers

You will need bubble pots. Blow bubbles, remembering that bubbles are a bit like prayers that float to God and he hears and answers. As each of the bubbles go up try to focus on one or two and think about people you want God to be with, such as work colleagues, school or nursery friends, people from church, or people in the news. As you think of them and watch the bubbles ask God to be with them.

I spy God

Go for a walk or go outside and look at the environment. Play simple game of 'I spy...', focusing on the things that God has created that are beautiful but that we often take little notice of – the sky and clouds, stars, bushes, plants, grass, and so on.

Give Thanks / Grace

Research into why young people have stayed in the church suggests that the routines in their Christian home life prove very important. Saying 'grace' is one of those simple, little things that can make a real difference in naturally and briefly bringing God's love and generosity into the home.

Words

You will need pieces of paper, some sticky tape and pens. Our words are so important! They can make people feel great, but they can also make people feel sad. God wants us to use our words carefully and lovingly and think before we speak. Stick a piece of paper on each person's back and take it in turns to write or draw one thing you like about that person. It might be something about their character or something they are good at. Younger children may need a little help with this. When everyone has finished, take the paper off your own back and let the words sink in, and enjoy the power of kind words. If you want to, you could also read them aloud and let everyone hear the wonderful ways God has made each one of you!

Dice prayers

You will need a die or dice. Use an ordinary die (dice) or a larger foam one. Roll the die and once you have a number, ask each person to name people or situations that total that number. For example: '5...people we know at church'. Then pray silently for those people or situations. Themes could include:

- ...people who are sick or ill
- ...countries in the world
- ...things in the news
- ...friends at school or work
- ...decisions we need to make
- ...challenges or problems we face

Protection prayer plates

You will need paper plates, masking tape, and felt tips or paints. Use masking tape to create a pattern or initial letter of a name on the top of the paper plate. Paints or colour over the top of the plate and masking tape. Carefully remove the masking tape to reveal that fact that the paper plate beneath has been protected from the paint or pens. Talk about God as a protector, keeping us safe and pray for people who are scared or in danger.

The humble life

Jesus was humble - he washed his friends' feet and spent time with unpopular people. Take a moment today to think about some of the people in our lives who serve in humble ways and aren't often appreciated. Chat about some - maybe a bin man, a teacher, a road sweeper or local shop assistant near where you live. Thank God together for these people and pray a blessing on their day! Part of learning to be humble ourselves is developing a grateful heart for those who serve, so have fun today thinking of creative ways to bless those who serve us!

Painting with nature

You will need paper, paint, flowers, stones, pine cones, leaves and twigs. Encourage children to paint with the collection of natural objects rather than paintbrushes. Use the time they spend painting to talk to them about the things in creation that God has made. How do they feel when you use them? What do you like best about them?

Healing board

You will need plasters, a big piece of card or board, pens. Talk about the stories where Jesus heals people. Who do you know who is ill or needs healing? Write names or draw people on plasters and stick them to the board. Keep the board somewhere in the house and every time they hear of someone who is ill, encourage the children to put their name or picture onto a plaster and to stick it on the board.

Playing out the story

You will need Playmobil people or Lego/ Duplo characters, Lego, Duplo. Tell Bible stories and then recreate them with Lego, Duplo or Playmobil. This is a great activity for children and adults to do together and works really well if the adults take direction from the children in how they want the story acted out.

Obstacle challenge

Create a mini obstacle course in your living area (there's a lot of things when you look around - chairs/ sofa cushions/ pillows/ suitcases etc), or outside if that is easier. Challenge each person in your home to get through to the finish, where you

could even have a prize of treats. Help each other if needed, or at least cheer each other on, and celebrate when you get to the end!

Pray together as you stand around the obstacles. Thank God that he's with us on our journey of life and that he gives us people to help us. Ask Him to help us see what's important on the journey and to 'finish well.'

Choosing right

You need some fruit and some sweets. Have a bowl of small fruit berries (grapes/blueberries etc) and a bowl of sweets on the table. Sit around the table and ask everyone which they would choose if they could only choose one.

Sometimes, choosing well means that we have to choose something that might not be our first choice, but when we listen to God and to others in the Church we can figure out which is the best option for us.

As you eat the sweets & fruit chat about: Who is the bravest person you know? What is it that makes them brave? Talk about what it means to be brave, and what it means to choose well as we follow Jesus.

Reflection bottles

You will need plastic water bottles with labels removed, water, food colouring, vegetable or baby oil, glitter, and water.

Bottle 1: fill the bottle with water and add a tablespoon of glitter. Securely attach or glue the bottle top in place.

Bottle 2: Fill the bottle half way with water and add some food colouring to colour it. Then fill the rest of the bottle with oil. Securely attach or glue the bottle top in place. These bottles have a real 'awe and wonder' quality and give children a focus when they are praying or thinking about God. You might like to pray and then shake the bottle when you say amen. Watch the glitter swirl and settle or the oil and water mix and separate.

Whiteboard

You need a whiteboard and pens. Have a whiteboard available in the kitchen or another busy shared space in the home. Invite everyone to write on it prayer needs or things that are worrying them. For children and young people to do this they will need the active example of adults! Then during a family time pray briefly for the things on the board, also remembering to share about answered prayers.

Making a difference

You need paper and pencils. Talk about how each one of the family can make a difference. What is it that you would like God to help you with?

Spend a few minutes writing or drawing a prayer about what you have been thinking. It may be a challenge at work, or someone in your class at school, or a worry about someone in your family and you would like to help them.

After five minutes share what you written or drawn and put them around your home so that everyone can pray for God to help you know what to do.

Going to the Cross

You will need a palm cross. Place the cross on the table or floor and sit around it. Briefly tell the 'Palm Sunday' story. Talk about how it must have felt for Jesus and his friends to have crowds cheering for them waving palm leaves, only a few days later to have to carry a cross up a hill and be put to death. Think about how the mood of the crowd changed during that week. Say this prayer together line-by-line:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you were willing to follow your journey to the cross.

As this cross reminds us of the palms, and that final week,

help us to always remember the gift of life you give us.

Amen

God's Characters

In your family group today have a chat about all the different personalities and characters in your family and church. Are there smiling ones, jokey ones, people who have time to listen, people who seem sad, people who tell good stories, and others that make a lot of lovely noise and laughter? Then chat about how all those different people help you follow and love of Jesus more.

Then thank God for all the people that he has made and are part of our lives.

Making the cross

You need twigs and wool or twine. Together as a family collect some clean stick or twigs and get some wool or twine. Then, using two twigs held crossing each-other, wind the wool around where the twigs meet to make a cross. While you do this, talk about why Jesus was hung on a cross and what the cross means to Christians.

One good thing....

In your family group decide on one good thing each person could do to help out today. It could be tidying up, making lunch, washing up, or making a drink. Then talk a little about examples from the Bible where people served others such as Martha, or Jesus washing feet.

Spend a bit of time kneeling down together, like Jesus would have knelt as he washed his friend's feet and pray that God would show you what good things you can do to help and serve others. Then make the most of the challenge to do at least one good thing today and telling each-other at the end of the day.

Question box

You need a box, paper and pencils. Have a small box such as a shoe box with a long hole cut in the top, and some slips of paper and pencils available in the living space of your home. Invite everyone in the family to write down any questions about life and faith on the paper and put them in the box. From time to time have a look at the questions, discuss them, remember that adults may not have all the answers, and thank God that he is the God who knows everything.

Thank you picture prayers

You will need magazines, catalogues and/ or clipart, glue, card, scissors, blu-tack, a notice board (and optional - a laminator). Sometimes younger children have difficulty knowing what to pray about or to thank God for. This activity provides them with lots of options to choose from!

With your child, cut out pictures of things they like from magazines and other media. For example, you might collect pictures of food, toys, family, nature, animals. Stick these pictures onto cards or laminate them for continued use. When you come to pray, invite children to choose pictures of things they'd like to thank God for that day. Say a thank your prayer as you stick the picture with blu-tack to the board.

The next step

Stand in a circle holding hands and make as much noise you can with your feet. You can stand, jump up and down or tap your feet on the floor. Our feet remind us that God leads us on our next steps.

Each person in the circle say what they are going to be doing in the next few days. Some will be going to church, to work, to school, to nursery, or to college. Then pray for each other that we would all be willing to go where God sends us.

Bible twice

You will need a children's story Bible. Ask everyone to listen really carefully as you read a short story from the Bible. Then ask them to listen again, this time pointing out when you make a mistake as you read it a second time with a few deliberate mistakes along the way. Then talk about how precious God's word is, and how we should always listen really carefully to what it says.

Deep God

You will need a pebble. Our Immeasurable God is deeper than we can understand. He knows more, understands more, and rules everything. We can never fully understand God and how deep he is.

Take the pebble. Pass it around for each person to held in their hand for a few seconds. Now close your eyes and imagine the pebble being dropped into a deep pool or well of water. Then think about how deep it may go and sit quietly thinking about how deep and amazing our God is.

Web of Prayer

You will need a ball of wool. Stand in a circle. Throw one ball of wool around the circle so that everyone has hold of the wool and throws it to the next person. Continue until there's a web of connections. Look at the web across the family and thank God that you are all connected and that is how God wants you to be!

Duplo tower prayers - Build a prayer tower!

You will need duplo or lego blocks. Take it in turns to pray with your child and other family members. Each person thanks God for someone or something or asks God for something, when then say Amen, the person praying can add a duplo block to a tower or structure.

Protection prayer plates

You will need paper plates, masking tape, felt tips or paints. Use masking tape to create a pattern or initial letter of a name on the top of the paper plate. Paints or colour over the top of the plate and masking tape. Carefully remove the masking tape to reveal that fact that the paper plate beneath has been protected from the paint or pens. Talk about God as a protector, keeping us safe and pray for people who are scared or in danger.

Wide love

You will need an elastic band. Our God's love is wider than anything we can know. We are reminded of the love of God through Jesus as he opened his arms on the cross.

Take the elastic band. Pass it around. Each person should stretch it wide, being careful not to go too wide or let it spring back...that can hurt! As you stretch it think of God's wide love, that is always way beyond anything we can do. Then pray:
Thank you, Immeasurable God, that you are wider than we can imagine. Thank you for your love, that stretches out wide for us. Amen

God shapes us

You will need a pipe cleaner. Pass the pipe cleaner around the family group. Each person can make whatever shape they like, and then explain it to the others if they

want to. The next person should shape it differently, and so on. Think about how God made us and shapes us and pray that God would continue to work with us however young or old we are.

God of the world

You will need a piece of map. Our God's love and care for the world goes on endlessly. There's no-where in the world that God doesn't care about, and there's no end to how much he cares.

Take the piece of map and pass it around. As each person looks at it, think of places they have been to, and places that are special to them. Think of the bedroom, school, nursery, where relatives live, favourite days out, and holiday destinations. Ask God to go with you as you go to these places.

Seeing clearly

You will need a glass pebble. Pass the glass pebble around and try to look through it. Once everyone has had a go talk about how things look when looked at through the pebble. Does it feel a bit irritating or frustrating not to be able to see clearly? Think about things that we have heard or thought about God and the Bible that we may not fully understand. Then say this prayer line-by-line:

Holy Spirit, you are our helper.

Please be with us and help us to understand more about God.

Help us to see more clearly what God wants us to know.

Amen

Jesus' baptism

You will need a paper cup and water. Put some water in the paper cup, place it on the table or floor, and sit around it. Think about what baptism means, and then, remembering the Bible story, talk about how it must have felt for John the Baptist to baptise Jesus. As he was baptised, Jesus was seen as God's son and began his amazing work on earth. His baptism set us all an example and showed that he was willing to do anything to help all people. What do you think the crowd who were watching would have thought?

All called

You will need pieces of paper to make a paper chain. Give each person a piece of paper chain, and each (with help if needed) should write or draw on the back of it something about themselves. Think and talk about how God made us and shapes us all to be different.

Then put the chain together to show how God calls us all uses us all to serve him, and say this prayer together line-by-line:

God, you made us, and you love us.

Help us as we learn about you today.

Help us to and think about you more.

Help us to use our different gifts for you. Amen

The power

You will need some nice sweets! Hand out the sweets so most people have one. Discuss what you think is in the sweets. The sweets have sugar, which is energy. Eat a sweet each and talk about the energy that God gives. Think about how the Holy Spirit gives us hope and energy to face every day now and in the future.

Dance Party

You will need access to music. Don't forget that God is fun, and God made our bodies for us to move in! Put on your favourite songs and be super silly together. Kitchens are great for dancing - use wooden spoons for microphones and rugs for your stage! Or try turning off the lights and using torches to help your dance party get under way. Every time we use our bodies to do something fun, we glorify God.

One quiet moment

The life of a family home is busy - often there will be some activity going on - talking, playing, music, coming and going, cooking, etc. Take one moment together where you nothing is required: no action and no words and no creativity and no planning. Stand or sit together, maybe before eating or sleeping, and hold silence and stillness with each other. Listen to your family members breathing. Sense God in your midst as you rest, even for a minute.

Fridge magnet messages

Buy some packs of fridge magnet letters and ask everyone in the family to put up a word or words each day that say how they are feeling or what they are worried about. Help younger children do this, and encourage older ones including teenagers to take part. Look at the words, talk them and pray them through briefly.

A Basket

This is an imaginative exercise, a gentle way to guide a young child to sleep. Ask her to imagine Jesus, greeting her with a big smiling happy face. In his arms is an enormous basket - it seems as if it could carry the world in that basket. Jesus asks her, in her imagination, "Can I hold anything for you, while you sleep? I promise to take good care of it." Your little one might fill Jesus' basket up - some things she may share with you, and others she may keep private. Both are okay. As a parent, this is a way to help bring Jesus into the very reality of our daily routine.

Movie making

This is a version of the 'St. Ignatius' Examen', a review of the day. In their beds, tucked in with the lights off, invite your children to enter their imaginations. In that place, they pretend that they and Jesus are sitting on the sofa, with popcorn, watching a movie. But this isn't any movie! This is a movie of the day they've just had. They silently watch their day with Jesus. Sometimes they'll need a little prod about what happened next. At points, they comment about an activity, something they loved, something they felt uncomfortable about. It's all in the movie, and it's all welcome. As they go into their sleep at the end of the movie, it's as if they carry a small backpack. The best part of their day goes in, like a present from Jesus for them to keep and carry into dreamland.

Keep a record

You will need crayons and paper. As soon as someone can hold a crayon, a child (or grown up!) can do a scribble to remember the day that has just passed. Consider giving your children, maybe as young as three, a small journal and a pencil before bedtime, as a way to encourage them to process their day's happenings with God who loves them. This could be a family activity, too. Rarely do children pick to recall the moments we as parents thought were most significant. This journal provides for a

child freedom (anything can be written or drawn), a practice of spiritual reflection, and a wonderful record for them to look back on.

Prayer beads

You will need beads and string. Beads have been used as a prayer tool for centuries. They are special because of their tangible nature - such a good idea for anyone who tends to fidget! String five beads onto a string, or tie five knots. Use as a way for a family member to thank God for five different things each day, and to touch each bead or knot as they pray.

Remember the special times

Our daily life is holy! One way to remind ourselves of this awesome truth is to engage with God as God shows up to remind us of the sacraments - our baptism, and the eucharist, or communion. As a family, as you go about your day and use water, remind yourself and the family members around you of your baptism - that through water, God claimed you through Christ as His own. You might do this when you're doing dishes, pouring a drink, or bathing your children.

Door frames

Notice the sacredness of the "comings and goings" of your house by simply touching the door frame as you go in and out. Let this moment for your family be one that reminds them all that God has been present with you in your home, and that God goes with you as you leave your home. As Psalm 139:3 reminds us, "You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways." (NIV)

Additional website resources:

<http://www.faithinhomes.org.uk/>

This website has an archive of creative, simple and accessible ideas for helping families do things and talk naturally about God.

<https://parentingforfaith.org/>

The developing Parenting for Faith project from BRF is aiming to equip parents to help children grow as young disciples. The website has links to on-line resources, blogs and an increasing range of training ideas.

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

This new initiative has links with Care for the Family, and resources families to sit around 'the kitchen table', do activities, and discuss faith

<http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>

Mina Munns has won an award for this creative website, resourcing parents and all who work with young children to be creative in their art and craft while keeping faith talk in the middle of the activities

<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/resources/families>

The Messy Church team has some ideas and resources to help families explore Bible themes creatively.

http://www.going4growth.com/growth_in_faith_and_worship/faith-in-the-home

This Church of England website has a section highlighting a huge range of websites, books and resources aimed at helping churches and families explore faith in the home more.

Recent research shows that one of the key factors in children finding faith and developing as disciples is the input they have at home. These ideas and suggestion can help any family encounter God and faith in their home setting and learn from each-other.

Bishop Paul writes:

It is an amazing privilege and joy to see young lives touched by the love of God. I hope these ideas to guide families as they explore faith together will be helpful, as we seek to value our youngest disciples and their families.

Find details of the **YoungLIFE** initiative for discipleship with children
www.growingdisciples.co.uk/younglife

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