

AN EVENT FOR EXPECTING PARENTS

GOAL: *Before a baby arrives, is a great time to meet with prospective parents and discuss how they can prepare to pass on faith, before the tiredness and busyness of the first few months with a baby takes over.*

Preparation:

- Pictures of your parent, grandparents or children.
- Organise slides or ways to display the key points.
- Prepare a prayer card for the Inspire section ‘Imagine 18 years from now...’ or ‘Our prayer for our baby...’
- Print out copies of the resources to take home: prayer and blessing posters and faith formation charts.

Explain it: *what do we want to achieve today?*

You may like to put the following key points, questions and verses on slides to display.

Begin by showing a picture of your parents and/or grandparents. Ask the parents to guess who you most look like. Then share who you most act like. If you have children, you could share a baby photo of one of your children and mention that even at that early age we are already passing things on to our children.

Ask, “What is one thing you hope to pass on to your child?” “What do you not want to pass on to your child?” (Participants could share answers as a group or in pairs).

Explain that in the book of Deuteronomy God gave some very specific instructions about raising children. The word Deuteronomy means repetition of the law. Throughout Deuteronomy Moses is repeating the basic will and commands of God to the Israelites. If you were to read the entire book it would sound like a broken record.

Why do you think Moses recorded the information this way?

One answer comes through in Deut. 6:2 “So that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you.”

Moses’ intent was that God’s people would know what is right and wrong and live with a proper respect for what is right and wrong.

Another answer is from Deuteronomy 6:2: “So that you may enjoy long life.”
Is there anything more you could want for you and your child?

What does the Bible say that will allow us to enjoy long life? Look at Deut. 6:4-25:

1. Love the Lord (4-7)
2. Don't forget the Lord (10-12)
3. Follow and serve the Lord, not other gods (13-19)
4. Obey the Lord (20-25).

In Deut. 6:6 what does the Bible say is the key to making this happen in your home? This commitment has to be on your heart. If you want your child to love the Lord, follow the Lord, make godly decisions and obey the Lord, then **you** need to love the Lord, follow the Lord and obey the Lord.

Discuss: If you came from a Christian home, how did your parents pass their faith on to you? If your parents didn't follow Jesus, how did they teach you right from wrong?

From the discussion, hopefully you will be able to pick up that quite a few things came about through observing what parents did, not just listening to them.

Deuteronomy 6:7 says that faith needs to be lived out at home. It doesn't say, “Bring your kids to church and let the church impress it on their hearts.” That doesn't work. Faith is caught as much as it is taught.

The Significant Religious Influences Survey (Search Institute) states that over 250,000 Christian teens who had a strong faith were asked what were the things that influenced them to have the life impacting faith they have. The answers were quite revealing: Number 1 reason, Mum. Number 2 reason, Dad.

Mum and Dad are two to three times more influential than any church programme.

What then is the role of the church?

To equip and resource you, the parents, to pass on faith to your children.

To re-establish the home as the primary place where faith is nurtured.

To be a lifelong partner for you and your family.

Thanks for the opportunity to partner with you!

Inspire them: *why is this topic so important?*

Once your baby is born you may find there is a period of time when you are frankly exhausted. It is wonderful that you are taking this time now to prepare yourselves spiritually for parenthood. It is the most important job you will ever do!

Please take a few moments to jot down some of the values that are important to you that you would like to pass on to your child.

Now imagine your child is 18 and about to leave home for university or a job. What are some of the things you would like to be able to say about them and their character as they prepare to leave? Write these down as a prayer. (You might like to give out a sheet or card with the words... 'Imagine 18 years from now...' or 'Our prayer for our baby'.)

Hold onto this goal through the sleepless nights and nappies! You are partnering with God and your church to develop a young adult who will have a Godly character and make a valuable contribution to God's kingdom and our society.

Once your baby is born, it would be our privilege as a church to host a baby dedication for you and your whānau to celebrate your child and to support you as a parent in your commitment to raise them to have a relationship with Jesus. As part of this dedication service, you could share some of things you have written on your 'Imagine, 18 years from now...' prayer card.

In some faith traditions people also choose godparents who may act as spiritual mentors, accountability partners and another spiritual voice and example for you and your family. Who would you choose to be a God parent for your child? This is something you can discuss and think about in the months ahead.

Model it: *provide some ideas and examples*

As we mentioned before, when your baby arrives you will be tired! Nurturing our children spiritually, in order to achieve the goals and dreams we have talked about, is not intended to be hard or another task to add to an already exhausting life. Be reassured, that simply by loving your baby, you are reflecting to them the love of God. As you hold them, feed them, talk and sing to them, you are nurturing them spiritually!

There are some very simple things you can do to include God in your day. These include, talking to your baby about God, singing to them, praying over him/her, and finishing your day with a blessing.

Before your child is born, you can begin with several important faith practices, which can be continued while they are young babies as well. See:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/1%E2%80%99m-pregnant-and-would-like-to-sing-to-my-unborn-baby.aspx>

Research tells us that from 27-29 weeks a baby can hear the sounds of their parent's voices so you can pray for them, read to them and sing to them if you like.

Praying a blessing over your baby at bedtime, both before and after they are born is a wonderful start. You may like to add other specific prayers for their character.

Practice it: *create an opportunity to have a go at a faith practice*

Here is a prayer taken from <https://www.compassionuk.org/prayers/prayers-for-children/>

Babies are such a precious gift. Thank God that He is the author and giver of life! "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." Psalm 139:13

Let's pray this together for our babies:

Prayer: *Lord God, we thank you for the gift of new life. We pray for this precious baby's safe arrival into our world. We pray this baby would sleep peacefully and be kept from harm. We pray you would bless this child as they grow. Keep them safe and strong in the weeks, months and years ahead. Give us grace and strength through the highs and lows of caring for a newborn baby. In Jesus' name. Amen*

It is also important to pray for yourselves as parents. You might like to lead the first few points as prayers together for all the parents or they may like to pray them together as a couple.

As you mature in the discipline of prayer, the Holy Spirit will show you which prayers are most important for you and your children. Here are a few prayers I've found essential to my own parenting:

- Lord, You know I want to be a godly, consistent parent, but I can't do it without You. Help me live in such a way that my children know my love for them and see Your qualities in me.
- I commit myself to daily Bible reading and prayer. Lead me, guide me and change me.
- Remind me often that my greatest gift to my children is to help them know You. Help me prepare the soil for them to grow deep and strong and receive Your salvation.
- Father, our family needs fun times together. Help us do those simple, everyday things out of which healthy bonding grows.
- Help me, Lord, to make time for good talks with my kids. Help me recognize and respond to teachable moments – those earth-stands-still moments when my child asks something he or she really wants to know.
- Lord, wherever I am, whatever I'm doing, remind me when a child of mine needs extra prayer. Tell me what I should ask.

(Written by Lois Walfrid Johnson, copyright Focus on the Family 2007)

<https://www.focusonthefamily.ca/content/how-to-pray-for-our-children>

Hand out copies of Numbers 6:24-26.

This is a great blessing to pray over your baby each night. Here is a copy of that blessing you may like to frame and put above your baby's cot (or alternatively, give parents a framed copy to take home.) Let's begin by praying it over each other now.

Take it Home:

Give out copies of prayers and blessings for parents to take home.

<https://www.baptistcfm.org.nz/blessings-images>

Some other resources you may like to give to parents:

The Kitchen Table Project: Building Faith in your 0-1 Year Old.

Baptist Faith Formation Posters: 5 Things that Shape the Faith of 0-4 Year Olds.

(<https://www.baptistcfm.org.nz/faith-formation-posters>)