

Faith in the home

Last year I wrote in News for the Pews on the theme of 'Kids in worship'. This is a follow up to that article, where we look at 'Faith in the home'. It especially has in mind families with kids living at home, but there are things here applicable to people in all circumstance and stages of life.

When I talk to older Christian people, one of the things I really enjoy is hearing of the different devotional practices they experienced in childhood. For some it was rather informal with discussion of Bible stories and free prayer around the kitchen table. For others Luther's orders of morning and evening prayer set the rhythm. For others music and hymn singing were central. One lady's mother encouraged a short prayer every time an ambulance could be heard to pass by. Some had very little devotional life in the home at all. I wonder what your memories are?

When I was in Queensland a study was done among young adults which aimed to discover the biggest influences on their faith formation, and the reasons why they were, or were not, going to church and practicing their faith. One of the key findings in that study was a surprise to some people. They found that, humanly speaking, one of the biggest factors had to do with devotions in the home. In short, those who had regular devotions in their home as they grew up were far more likely to be practicing the faith themselves as they became adults.

This shouldn't surprise us. The Bible and the whole Christian tradition emphasise the need for the faith to be passed on by parents in the home. Consider Deuteronomy 6:4-9,

*"Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷**Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.** ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

This passage was influential for Luther as he sought to encourage everyday people in home life to develop the habit of daily devotions. I once heard it said that people mistakenly think Luther wanted to get rid of the monastic life, whereas he really wanted to transform every home into a little monastery. Praying and hearing God's word in communal life wasn't only to be for monks, nuns and theological students, but for every household.

But of course, this is not easy. In every age there have been challenges and pressures on family and home life, as there is in ours. Perhaps even as you read this it is a source of burden or guilt due to past or present failures in this area. I know in my own life and family we have always struggled in developing and sustaining our habits of devotional life, and I certainly don't claim to be an expert. But I have also received some practical and wise counsel that some of you may find helpful, especially if you have children or grandchildren with whom you are currently passing on the faith.

One simple thing that can very helpful is embedding devotions in our daily or weekly routines. If you wait for it to happen when you have 'spare time', it probably won't happen. But if it's connected with preparing for bed, eating a meal, going on your daily walk, or just about anything regular, it's far more likely to happen. What works for your household will depend on circumstances, but we all have routines into which simple devotional practices can be embedded.

Another piece of advice that's helped me has been to start where you are, and to keep it simple. If for example a husband and wife has no prayer life together at the moment, it might be best just to start with grace at meals. If meal time prayers are happening, then try introducing a short Bible reading and/or prayer afterward. Don't try to do too much too soon, especially if you've got little kids. You're in it for the long haul so little bits regularly are better than devotional 'binges' which burn out quickly.

Another key for family devotional life where kids are involved is not only talking to them, but asking questions and engaging them in conversation. And perhaps even more than this, not only talking, but *doing*. So for example, something as simple as getting older kids to light a candle, and younger ones to blow it out, can have a great effect. I'm yet to meet a little kid who isn't engaged by a flame. If it was good enough for God and Moses...

May I encourage you in your practices of faith in the home. God is with you as you gather in Jesus' name. He has shared with you his prayer, the Lord's prayer, to learn the habits of faith together with him. He also gives you his Holy Spirit to lead, guide and empower your devotional life. He forgives you for any past, present or future failures, and wants to encourage you to press on.

If you'd ever like to talk more about passing on the faith in the home, please don't hesitate to catch up with one of the pastors. Congregations and families are always working together to pass on the faith to the next generation.

"One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts." Psalm 145:4

Yours in Christ, Joshua Pfeiffer
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