Passing on the faith

St Francis 30th Nov 2014 10am

# Introduction

Do you want your kids, or children you know, to grow up to have a faith? Do you want them to be practising Christians? How important is to you? The fact is we have a fight on our hands – not between ourselves and the children we know – but between ourselves and a culture which would seek to undermine fragile faith at any opportunity. Apparently in the US, where church attendance is very strong, 70% of young people drop out of church when they leave high school. In the UK they probably drop out at an earlier age than that. Quite a few churches have no or very few children. A friend of mine, who is a vicar not too far away, has a daughter who is 13. She refuses to go to church and says she no longer believes in God any more. More than that, my friend says he feels that he has nothing in common with his daughter. Choices we make in our teenage years set us up for life, although with God there is always hope.

Alice is now going to set out what we want to talk about to encourage you, in the next 15 minutes or so.

# Aims of the talk

* What do we want to see?
* Children and young people who are passionate about following Jesus in their lives today.
  + C+YP who pray because they want to see things change
  + C+YP who help others when they see a need
  + C+YP who love God
  + C+YP whose attitudes and actions make them different from their peers because they’re following Jesus
  + C+YP who are eager to share God with others
  + YP who when they leave home they don’t forget about God, but continue to follow Jesus in an active way.
* We’re going to talk about what we can do to see this happen. Peter.

# What can we learn from the Bible/research?

Deuteronomy teaches us a lot: the Israelites had just received the 10 commandments, and part of the instruction around that was to pass on their faith to their children.

V4 “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”

Use visual aids of things written on doorposts and tied to your arms. Let you be surrounded by the word! I am very pleased with the way our church, Emmanuel and others responded to Jemimah and her family last weekend. And apparently Jemimah told her boys: take note, and make sure you belong to a church when you are older! She impressed on them, take not, don’t forget the goodness of God.

When a child would ask an awkward question (v2), the Israelites were urged to tell the story of salvation. This is what God has done for us! He has rescued us from Pharaoh and brought us into the promised land! Let the children visualise and inhabit the story of God’s rescue. Do you talk about your experience of God and why you follow Him? (v21 – how God saved you, v22 – miracles you’ve seen, v23- what God has promised, v24-what God wants from us, v25 what God gives us)

But perhaps even more important than telling is *living it.*

The key finding from research is that teenage faith mirrors their parent’s faith. *We* need to *be* what *we* want them to *be*. The responsibility is on parents and the whole church to embody the faith we believe. We may say to children “do as I do and not as I say”, but children aren’t stupid – they are much more likely to copy the actions they see rather than the words. They need to see an active faith and talking about their faith to be normal.

Just one story. In another family I know *both* the parents died from cancer at the age of 58. I went to the funeral of the mum recently and it was amazing. The church was packed and the service was full of testimony to God. Her daughters, in their twenties, danced and sang. The daughters had incredibly strong faith themselves, because their mum and dad lived out the faith in such a dynamic, life – affirming, generous, and courageous way. In fact as one of the daughters danced, it was as if the presence of her mum was literally there in her, with all her energy, passion and love coming through.

I will now hand over to Alice to give us some practical suggestions as to what we can do to help our young people.

# What can we do?

**What can you do?**

* The first thing I want to say is that this isn’t just for parents. Part of the research said that young people who continued to follow Jesus into their early adult life felt like they belonged to a community of believers as a teenager. We all have a part to play, it is not just the job of the few (parents, Sunday school teachers). They are already watching and learning from you when we are all together in church. There was an adult in my church who had a big impact on me just by the way he led worship. It’s hard to describe, but I knew he loved God, and I wanted to love God like he did. I only knew him to say hello to but he inspired me.
* If we want C+YP to be passionate about faith and acting on their faith, we need to be passionate about our faith and acting on it too. It can be more important to share our passion for God than to teach about God. It can be more important to share our passion for the bible than to teach the bible. Then they will be more likely to read it for themselves. Then they will be more likely to be inspired to know God for themselves.
* If I had to give one piece of advice for building relationships with teenagers, it would be to Be real. Genuine. Don’t put on an act. Be yourself. Admit mistakes, problems, difficulties.
* Young people live in a different culture to the one I live in. We need to accept that teenagers may do things differently, we need to help them find a way they can relate to God in their culture. Information doesn’t translate well across the cultures, but relationship does. Talking about how Jesus changes your life inspires them to want Jesus in their lives too.
* It may be that your children aren’t interested in faith, they may talk about it being boring or that you’re embarrassing. This is normal. Try and share your faith as naturally as you can, they are watching and learning from you. If they don’t want to get involved, ask them what they would like, help them to find a way they can have a relationship with God. Don’t make it a battle ground, but keep the conversation open. Don’t make a list of they must do’s, focus on the why you do things. For example, if they don’t want to go to church, maybe sit down with them at some point and explain why you go to church, how it impacts your life, help them see that it could make a difference to their life too.
* Practically (4 ways)
  1. Say hello, get to know one or two of them, pray for them, they are watching.
  2. Do something that demonstrates faith in action. Actions can speak louder than words. This may be as small as giving a child a card telling them God loves them and that you’re praying for them, or as radical as buying a homeless person a drink and chatting to them whilst you’re with your child.
  3. Find a way to help your child relate to God. Each of us relates to God in a different way, and we need to help our C+YP find how they relate to God. Some people like to see things, so you could make something for their room that reminds them of God or light a candle whilst you pray. Some people like to do something, so they could draw or write, or create something. Some like to listen, so find some Christian music they like. Some like to be alone, others may want your support. It can be as simple as just finding and using a written prayer with them each day. This summer I gave each of the YP who were taking exams a written prayer that they could use. Eileen decided to use it to pray it with Chloe every day before she had an exam.
  4. Share your faith with them. Tell them how you became a Christian. Tell them when God excites you. Tell them when God answers prayer. Be passionate about your faith.

# Conclusion

Do we want our children and young people to grow in their faith? Of course we do. What are we prepared to do about it? Alice has given us some fantastic ideas to get us started – some of which you already do, I know. It’s all about investing time and energy in them and we will in time reap the rewards of whole, healthy, faith-filled young adults who will become leaders of this church in due course. Are we willing to put the effort in?

Amen