Day 1 - Pass it On
Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Deuteronomy 6:1-9
This Sunday morning we are gathering for a Family Service. What an opportunity to reflect on the importance of family, the privilege and responsibility, the anguish and the joy. If your experience of a family is less than you hoped, consider that this points to a desire, an ideal that can only be met by God, our heavenly parent. Even this image is sometimes misinterpreted or distorted. But the Bible has much to say about the desire of God for intimate and lasting relationship with each of us.

Family relationships can be complex. No two look alike, yet none of us are exempt, no matter our circumstances. Perhaps this is why the Bible returns again and again to this theme; it’s one we may only poorly understand, but one we relate to and one we crave.

In his final address to the Israelites, Moses impresses upon them the importance of loving God and following in his ways. But more than this, there is the responsibility to pass on this way of life to your children. “Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, and when you lie down and when you get up.” In other words, don’t relegate learning about God to a Sunday School teacher, a Youth Group leader or just Sunday input. Just as God is concerned with all of our life, he should be part of our daily conversation and our daily interactions. This is the responsibility – and privilege – of parenting. Parents! Lead the way in demonstrating the central place God has in your life, for so much is learnt through simple observation. But don’t assume learning is automatic; be intentional in the things that matter most.

Questions to Consider
When so much of our fundamental learning happens in families, why is it so easy to leave the important subject of relating to God to so called experts? Reflect on who were the parental figures who taught you to love and honour God?

Prayer
Loving Father, this week help me reflect on the incredible importance of family relationships, the responsibility and privilege. Thank you for all those who became “family” for me, providing guidance and example and ultimately pointing me to you, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 2 - The God Who Roars

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Hosea 11
If our image of God as a Father is one of an aloft autocrat or strict disciplinarian this passage should blow that out of the water. The whole story of Hosea is a picture of God’s relentless, passionate love for his people. Sometimes unrequited, sometimes timidly accepted only to be rebuffed, it portrays a Father’s heart bent towards his wayward children with indefatigable determination. God shows himself to be a good parent, guiding and teaching his children, offering comfort and healing even when they were seemingly unaware of it. One of the most tender passages in all of the Old Testament, God becomes the one who stoops to teach Ephraim (symbolic of the northern kingdom) to walk. In fact, the images are those usually typified by a mother’s actions. “I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.” We must marvel at a God who accommodates himself to such a degree to his creatures.

In the middle of the passage there is discipline (v5). Israel’s choices will result in exile. It is their doing, not God’s will. However, in the next section (v8) the tone turns again to God’s excruciating compassion and concern for his children. He will not see Israel destroyed. Instead God becomes a lion jealous for the wellbeing of his family. His final word is restoration and a return to home.

The early church believed that God could not suffer. While God was love, it was unemotional and painless. “More than anyone else it was the sainted Rabbi Abraham Heschel who challenged this image of a passionless divinity. The theologian Jurgen Moltmann took up the same theme in his work. And what they said was that God is an idea. God as a philosophical theory, God as God may in principle be incapable of suffering. But as soon as God creates humanity and enters into a relationship with us, God becomes not a theory, not God in the abstract, not God in principle, but God becomes a lover. And you can’t love without becoming vulnerable to both joy and to pain” D Synder.

Prayer
Father God, help me to re-examine my concepts of who you are and how you work. Thank you for revealing true parenthood which is both strong and tender, commanding and infinitely compassionate, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 3 - Be Loved

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 3:13-17
At the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry he is baptised by John in the Jordan. As he comes up out of the water his Father speaks audibly from heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” God reveals himself as a Father; a description that only makes sense as we see him as a God who relates, who knows and desires intimacy.

We need to pause and ask, why was God well pleased? Jesus had not yet begun his preaching ministry, nor had he performed any miraculous signs. The Father did not love the Son because of anything he had done. He did not love him because Jesus loved the Father. The Father is simply delighted and pleased to love his Son, because he is his Son. It is God’s initiative, his prerogative, his pleasure. As each of us come to God, repent of living in isolation and self-sufficiency, we accept the invitation to become sons and daughters of a loving Father. And our Father delights in us.

It is easy to focus on the bad stuff in our lives that we need to give up; harmful behaviours, selfishness, etc. But something we might overlook is being willing to give up the right to define our own worth. Am I willing to give up saying and thinking things about myself that God does not say and think about me? We need to be able to hear the Father say of us, “This is my son or daughter. I love you and I am pleased to be your Father; you bring me joy and delight simply because I get to be your Father!” This is the good news, this is the gospel, and we need to preach it to ourselves every day.

Questions to Consider
Do I feel my acceptance is based on my behaviour?
Look up Zephaniah 3:17 (its right after Habakkuk). Read it slowly, read it again, read it aloud, write it out and carry it with you today. Your job is to be loved!

Prayer
Loving Father, let these words from the Bible sink deep into my Spirit. Help me accept your word about my worth and reject any untruth that tries to separate me from you. Thank you that you love me today, simply because you choose to love me, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 4 – Believe

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Mark 9:14-27
This is one of my favourite characters in the New Testament. A parent brings his afflicted son to Jesus desperate for help. He has probably tried anything and everything going to see his son healed. As in several gospel stories we are touched by the plight of an anguished parent. NT Wright notes, “Are we supposed, perhaps, to see in these stories a reflection of the grieving love of the Father for his Child, Israel? For his image-bearing daughters and sons throughout the world? For his unique son, Jesus himself, as he goes obediently, mute before his captors, to a certain death?”

“If you can do anything...” the father asks Jesus. You can imagine Jesus’ eyebrows going up, “If you can?” This may be the smallest amount of faith recorded in the gospel stories, but it is enough when directed to Jesus. Jesus does not rebuke the man but challenges him to believe. I wonder how many of us have prayed this prayer along with this desperate father, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!” However hopeless this man may feel, he has done something essential. He has brought his son to Jesus, he has placed the little faith he can muster in the right place, and he has asked for help. Jesus does not demand a mighty faith before he will act; only that trust is placed in God. “There is within every believer tension between faith and unfaith, and that faith can only continue to exist by dint of divine aid” C.D. Marshall. This Father does not trust in his own abilities but comes in humble trust showing that he “expects everything from God and nothing from his own piety or power” Eduard Schweizer.

Questions to Consider
How often do I not act or ask because I worry about not having enough faith?
Do I sometimes direct my faith to myself or others instead of to God?
Faith is a gift. Is it something I seek?

Prayer
Loving Father, forgive me for times I have relied on myself or others instead of coming to you in humble trust. I acknowledge my struggle with doubt, but choose to exercise my faith in you, and ask that you increase my faith as I stay focused on you, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 5 – Parents and Children - Blessed

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Luke 18:15-17
As parents, mentors and leaders we feel the responsibility to teach and lead. Jesus seems to suggest that the so called wise and mature have much to learn from children. What necessary virtues might Jesus have been pointing his disciples to? Simplicity, humility, wonder, trust, eagerness, delight, being present in the moment? Pause and ask God what “childlike” quality he is seeking from you right now.

Blessed are the parents who make their peace with spilled milk and mud, for such is the kingdom of childhood.
Blessed is the parent who engages not in the comparison of his child with others, for precious unto each is the rhythm of his own growth.
Blessed are the fathers and mothers who have learned laughter, for it is the music of the child's world.
Blessed and wise are those parents who understand the goodness of time, for they make it not a sword that kills growth, but a shield to protect.
Blessed and mature are they who without anger can say no, for comforting to the child is the security of firm decisions.
Blessed is the gift of consistency, for it is heart's ease in childhood.
Blessed are they who accept the awkwardness of growth, for they are aware of the constant perilous choice between marred furnishings and damaged personalities.
Blessed are the teachable, for knowledge brings understanding, and understanding brings love.
Blessed are the men and women who, in the midst of the unpromising world, give love, for they bestow the greatest of all gifts to each other, to their children, and in an ever widening circle to their fellow men.

Anonymous

Prayer
My loving Father, today I give thanks for all the parent figures in my life; those who raised me, those who taught me, those who gave me boundaries, those who taught me to love you. With your help may I become a wise and loving parent to the children you have entrusted me and those who choose to walk alongside me, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Saturday/Sunday
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