

Participant's Handbook



December 2018





Welcome to the Parenting for Faith course

God has placed you in the lives of your children for a great and joyful purpose, and this course is purely to empower you to release and coach your children in their heart-to-heart connections with God. It will give you tools, skills and models to use to encourage your children, whether aged 3 or 43, to step into a vibrant two-way relationship with God.

This booklet is for you to use as you would like. For each session, there is:

- a session outline summarising that week's teaching;
- a guide to that week's session, with spaces for you to take notes and your own personal reflections – or just to doodle in, if you wish;
- some suggested next steps for you to take throughout the week – pick and choose one or two that may encourage you to explore the topic deeper.

The course is based on the book *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith – Omnibus Edition* (BRF, 2018), but is not limited to it.

Our website – parentingforfaith.org – is full of stories, ideas and wisdom from lots of people who are passionate about parenting for faith. There's content from and for parents, grandparents, carers, church leaders, course leaders and those with a particular interest in parenting for faith and additional needs; in fact, all sorts of people who are committed to this journey of learning to spiritually parent our children.

There are several ways you can keep in touch with Parenting for Faith:

- **join our email newsletter** to stay up to date at parentingforfaith.org/email;
- **follow us on Facebook** at facebook.com/parentingforfaithBRF;
- **follow us on Twitter** at twitter.com/godconnected;
- **follow the Parenting for Faith podcast.**

May God bless you with clarity, hope and boldness as you go on this journey.

BRF's Parenting for Faith team

Parenting for Faith is part of The Bible Reading Fellowship.

The Bible Reading Fellowship is passionate about making a difference through the Christian faith. We want to see lives and communities transformed through our creative programmes and resources for individuals, churches and schools. Find out more at brf.org.uk.



Session 1: Positioned for Influence

You are perfectly placed to do this!

As parents, we are perfectly positioned and perfectly equipped to daily and easily show our child the reality of a day-to-day life with God – and God has shared with us in the Bible a simple plan for us to encourage our children into a vibrant, two-way relationship with God.

Video introduction

- God-smart or God-connected?
- Skipping rope spiritual parenting
- God's plan for God-connected kids
- How the course will help

- Creating windows into our relationship with God

- Inviting our children to connect with God alongside us instead of with us

Group discussion

In your groups, discuss some of the following questions:

- What is your experience of learning to have an individual, connected relationship with God? How did you learn this?

- How are you already travelling with your child on this journey of faith?

- Thinking about the ideas of creating windows and inviting children into your relationship with God, how might you do this with your child?

- What struck you from today's session?

- How might focusing on relationship with God rather than a discipline of Christianity impact your spiritual parenting?

Suggestions for exploring this topic further

- Look back at your individual reflection. Ask yourself ‘What is the next step for my child and how can I help them take it?’ Ask God what he is already doing in your children’s lives and how you can partner with it. Take some time to jot down some proactive steps you want to take to help your children move on in their journeys.
- If you have a partner, try discussing with him or her their spiritual journey as a child or how they were spiritually parented. It can be enlightening to hear their story, whether or not they are an active believer. For some of you this will be a great time to ‘get on the same page’, but don’t feel the need to totally agree. Each person’s journey with God is unique and it’s okay for your children to see different ways of doing it. You can feel empowered to display the reality of your relationship with God to your child, regardless of what your partner is doing.
- Have a go this week at trying to create windows into your relationship with God to enable your child to see the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of your relationship with God. Experiment and see how it feels, and begin to see how your children respond. You may also want to invite them into your experience as well.
- Think about the opportunities Deuteronomy 6 suggests – at home, walking along the road, at bedtime or in the morning, at mealtimes – how can we do regular home life with God in it?
- Flip through a gospel and look at the different ways Jesus displayed the reality of his life with the Father to his disciples. Can you identify times when he created windows and invited them to try it alongside him?
- Have a good chat with God about each of your children and who you want to be as a parent spiritually growing them. Ask him to equip you and give you any additional gifts you need to do this calling well. Just be quiet for a bit with him, letting him chat to you and give you what he wants to bless you with.

Acknowledgements

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Video main session 1

How to verbally frame, part 1 – explain everything!

Group activity

In a small group, have a go at framing one or more of the following:

- Explain why we sing to God at church.
- Talk about a change your family has had to make and where God was in that.
- Explain why some people are really poor.
- Tell the story of the last big decision you made and the part God played in it.

Video main session 2

How to verbally frame, part 2 – help them see the relationship between God and Bible stories

Group activity

In your small groups, have a go at answering some of the following questions using the four tools:

- How many ears does God have?
- Will my friend who is a Muslim go to heaven?
- Were there dinosaurs on the ark?
- Why does God let bad things happen?
- Is there McDonalds in heaven?

Group discussion

In your groups, discuss some of the following questions:

- Can you think of something you have framed for your child – for example, moving house or starting school?
- How could you bring the reality of God into your everyday conversations with your child?
- What frameworks might you need to start building for your child to prepare them for something coming up? What stories from the Bible might help with this?
- Does your child ask questions about God and life? If not, what is a question you could ask them to get them thinking about how God sees a situation and what he's doing?

Suggestions for exploring this topic further

- Revisit some famous Bible stories and reread them, asking yourself at each stage, 'What is God doing or feeling?'
- If you have an older child, while you are bored in the car or walking ask them to tell you a Bible story with God as the main character. Ask them what he was thinking or feeling as they tell it. Just enjoy the experience. Wonder together.
- When you find a question that's difficult to answer – Why hasn't God healed Uncle Paul? Why didn't he stop the earthquake? How can God hear everyone at the same time? – try exploring it using the four questions above. Engage the whole family if you can!
- Find other wise people and ask them to explain something that you don't fully understand in front of your child. Reflect together.

Session 3: Unwinding Wrong Views

Helping our children build a healthy understanding of God

We can be so keen to help our children connect with God that we forget that they have to want to connect with him. No matter how equipped they are to connect, many choose not to because they find him unlikeable or unappealing. There are five common views of God that children can create in their heads which cause a disconnect. In this session, we'll think about how we can accidentally contribute to these views and how we can proactively unwind them.

Video introduction

The God disconnect – how wrong views of God are shaped

Individual reflection

We have all been on a journey of how we see God. What has been your journey of how you view him?

Video main session 1

Five common views of God and how to unwind them:

1. Distant, busy God – Busy on his cloud far, far away, distant God is active and preoccupied running the universe.
2. Jolly, optimistic God – A Santa-like figure who sits on his throne enjoying the worship of his people. He wants his people to please him and bring him joy. He doesn't want any sadness or sin around him, only happy, perfect people who can please him.
3. Angry God – Waiting and watching for any little infraction, this version of God is ready to squash and punish lightning quick. He pleasures in seeing people fail, and varies between annoyed and angry as he watches our lives in judgement and rage.
4. Mysterious, eccentric God – This version of God is an unexplainable and barely understandable being that demands and commits random acts.
5. Buddy Jesus or overindulgent father God – This version of God is my sidekick and vending machine, existing to love me, give me gifts, make me feel great and tell me I'm awesome.

Group activity: Identifying our bias

Video main session 2

Journeying to a healthy view of God

Group discussion

In your groups, discuss some of the following questions:

- What ideas of God might you want to unwind for your child? What might be the difficulties in doing this?
- Are there any areas of God's character that you would like to share with your child? What are the next steps for you as a parent in this area?
- Have you noticed any changes in your child's attitude to God recently? How might you explore this with them?
- For parents of younger children: how could you help them understand that God's love is constant and not dependent on what we do?

- How might thinking about all the everyday bits of Jesus' life that we don't read about in the Bible help children or teens understand God better?
- For parents of older children and teens: how might the following truthful, but incomplete, statements contribute to a wrong view of God?
 - 'God has a plan'
 - 'That was a lovely prayer'
 - 'You need to forgive your sister!'
- Which Bible stories or passages do you or your child enjoy the most? Do they give a balanced view of God? Are there any stories or passages you could explore to broaden that view?

Suggestions for exploring this topic further

- As a family, discuss what you know of God and see what picture that creates. See if you can identify any characteristics that are constant.
- Take the next week to explore your child's view of God, without them knowing. Ask questions with no right answers, invite their opinion of what you should do, notice their responses to church and prayer, and start 'I wonder' conversations. Give yourself time and space to engage with how they have shaped these views and what is reinforcing them in their lives. Don't feel the pressure to fix it immediately; just take time to grow in your understanding of your child's faith.
- Spend some time reflecting on your own view of God and how it has been shaped. Think about how you respond to him, and whether you see any of the five common views in your own. Ask God to show you any views you are hanging onto that are not an accurate reflection of him. Let him direct your thoughts and memories, and have a conversation with him about the truth of who he is.
- Pick one or two things from this week's discussion that you think you do that contributes to your child's view of God, and shift it slightly. You don't have to change loads of things all at once; just one at a time will do!
- As you pray for your child, ask the Holy Spirit to guide them into the truth about God. John 16:13 tells us that that is one of the Holy Spirit's prime jobs. Invite the Spirit to renew your child's mind and align their view with the truth of God's character.
- Tell a story to your child of when you really believed something about God until you discovered that you were wrong and that God wasn't like that. Share with them how you aligned your view of him closer to the truth, why and how that came about, and the fruit it has grown in your life. Kids need to know that it's a life journey to understand God better and to get a more accurate view of him.



Session 4: Conversational Prayer – Chat

Helping our children develop a heart-to-heart connection with God

We can all struggle with prayer – and so can our children. Over the next two sessions we will be looking at releasing our children into a two-way conversation of sharing life with God and him sharing back. ‘Chat’ is the first stage of that conversation and this session will equip you to introduce your child to chat.

Video introduction

- Focusing on relationship rather than formula

- Chat – a natural, free-flowing, two-way conversation

Individual reflection

- What is your pattern of connecting to God as you go through your day?

General questions

- Do you notice the ‘high priest’ tendency in yourself, or in your upbringing? How did it affect you?
- Are there any views of God you may need to unwind to help your child feel free to chat to God?
- Children like communicating in different ways – some like talking while doing something, others like to talk while walking or cuddled up in bed, some like drawing or journalling. In what ways can you create opportunities for your child to chat to God in a way or place that fits them best?
- How do you know if your child is connecting to God?

Suggestions for exploring this topic further

- Read John 17 in The Message (that version better conveys the ‘chat’). Jesus is praying in the garden right before he is arrested and he is absolutely going for it, chatting to the Father. Have a look at the different emotions and things on his heart and mind that he just dumps out to Father God before he starts his final task. Reflect on your journey of chatting with God in the light of what you have just read.
- Try chatting out loud to God when no one is around, while doing the dishes or driving in the car. The more comfortable you are in doing it alone, the more comfortable you will be when you choose to create a window for your family to experience that tip of the iceberg.
- Try introducing ‘chat’ to your kids at bedtime. Ask them questions about prayer and tell them a bit about the idea of just chatting to God. If they are open, lead a ‘chat’ session. After a few days of doing that, encourage them to do it on their own instead of you suggesting things and see how that goes. Remember to not listen in!



Session 5: Conversational Prayer - Catch

Being ready to hear from God with our whole body and mind

Helping our child to hear God's voice is one of the most precious gifts we can give them. Jesus' death and resurrection not only bought us the ability to talk to God personally, but also bought us the ability to hear his voice clearly and confidently. 'Catch' is just a way of showing children how to be prepared and expectant with their whole bodies to receive God's communication.

Video main session 1

- God loves speaking to his people and has created us to be able to hear him

- Samuel and Eli

Individual reflection

- How do you access God's voice in your life?

- When was the first time you became aware of it and what does it mean for you? If you are still on the journey of discovering God's voice, how do you feel about it?

- What difference does it make to you?

Video main session 2

- Developing a language – ‘catch’

- How does God speak to us?
 - With our skin

 - With our minds

 - In our dreams

 - With our hearts

 - With our emotions

 - With our eyes and ears

- Helping your child to catch

- What is your experience of hearing from God? What aspects of that might be helpful in coaching your children in this?
- How can you model catch for your child?
- Is there any framework you may need to put in place to introduce this to your child well?

Suggestions for exploring this topic further

- Go back and reread the story of Eli and Samuel in 1 Samuel 3. Reflect with God on what key lessons he wants to highlight for you.
- To broaden your knowledge of the variety of ways that God speaks, explore other biblical stories in which he does; for example, Moses and the burning bush, Gideon, David running from Saul, Jeremiah at the potter's house, the wise men visiting the infant Jesus.
- Copy out some of the promise verses about God's voice and re-read them every day to remind you and your family of God's faithfulness in speaking.
- Invite people over for a family dinner and ask them about their journey of hearing God and how they have felt about it.
- Try different ways of catching. If you are most comfortable conversing with God in your mind, try just laying down in silence listening to worship music and see if you can catch God's communication with your emotions or your skin. Or pick a random selection of objects and for each one ask God to highlight one thing to you and then ask him what he wants to say to you using that object.
- When you are ready, have a chat with your children about catching God's voice and how he speaks and answers back when we chat to him. If they are up for it, lead them in chatting and catching and then debrief them about their experience. Encourage them that you are all on the journey together and together you will each learn to recognise his voice in our lives, hearts, minds and bodies better and better each day as you chat and catch with Him.



Session 6: Surfing the Waves

Building on our children's connection with God

So far we've discussed some important principles about how to parent for faith, but as with any part of parenting it's a job for life! So how do we continue to disciple our child on this journey? In this session, we will learn about a simple six-stage model that will enable you to proactively disciple your child whether they are 4, 14 or 40, and how, as our children's spiritual lives come in waves, we can jump on board to disciple our children in any season of life.

Video main session 1

- Passing on our values – a fan for life!
 - Model
 - Frame
 - Equip
 - Create opportunities
 - Establish boundaries
 - Feedback

Video main session 2

- Surfing our child's waves
 - Not every wave – picking the right one
 - Timing – engaging at their pace
 - How long? Allowing the wave to end
- Learning to see their waves
 - Interest
 - Curiosity
 - Anger (holy discontent)
 - Stories they play out
 - Spontaneous ideas
 - Questions

Group discussion

In your groups, discuss some of the following questions:

- What waves are currently rising in your children's lives? What are they interested in? What are they curious about? What makes them angry (holy discontent)? What stories do they play out? What spontaneous ideas have you noticed? What questions do they ask?
- How can you paddle to get on board with these waves?
- How do you feel about the idea that waves peter out? Does this cause anxiety or fill you with relief?
- Which of the six types of waves mentioned in the session did you recognise, and which were a new idea for you?

Suggestions for exploring this topic further

- Reflect on the values your parents passed on to you – for example, a love of the theatre or the importance of thriftiness. What values are you passing on to your children?
- If there is something that you have been hoping your child would really pick up and own for themselves but hasn't yet, sketch out the six-stage circle. Investigate if there is any part of the circle you may be missing.
- Spend some time just watching your child, looking for what wave is happening in their lives.
- What wave is currently rising in your child's life? Using the six-stage model, consider how you would surf it with them.



Session 7: Prayer Ministry for Children

Helping our children connect when it's tough

Sometimes our children need a bit of help connecting with God. This could be because they are having a hard day or because they are struggling to connect. Sometimes they just need someone alongside them. On those days, we as parents can help our children meet with God face-to-face. In this session, we will be looking at a simple model of prayer ministry designed for use with children and teens to ensure we keep our high-priest hats off and our coach heads on, and we will be giving it a go ourselves.

Video main session

- Not praying for them, but helping them to pray

- A child and teen-friendly model

- Six steps

1. Understand – Ensure you fully understand both the problem and what is the heart cry behind it
2. Explain – Talk your child through what is going to happen next, what you are asking them to do, what you are going to do and, most importantly, what God is going to do
3. Pray – No more than three sentences! We are just positioning our child in front of God and helping their hearts connect.
4. Wait – Wait for God to talk to your child and give them what they need. Wait at least 30 seconds to allow them time to meet. If your child pops their eyes open, encourage them to wait a bit more on God. Sometimes God has already been talking and they may want to process with you, which is okay as well.
5. Check – After 30 seconds to two minutes, quietly ask an open-ended question. ‘How is it going?’, ‘What’s God been doing?’ or ‘How are you feeling?’
6. Offer – Give them a chance to decide what they want next. ‘Would you like to spend more time with God or are you all done?’ Accept whatever their answer is and remind them you are always there to help if they want it!

- God is a God of action
- Ask what it feels like
- Ask more questions
- If it doesn't work will it damage my child's belief in God?

Suggestions for exploring this topic further

- Practice a few times on a friend or spouse to get in the groove of it.
- Keep your spiritual eyes open for an opportunity during the week to try it with your child, and be bold when you feel it is right!
- If your child is keen, teach them a simplified version of the model:
 - Ask
 - Pray
 - Wait
 - Check
- Create opportunities for your child to pray for you using this model.



Session 8: Helping Children Connect with Church

Thriving, not just surviving!

For most Christians, getting our children to church and hoping they love it occupies a large part of our brains! But our kids don't always enjoy church and often don't want to be there, and we can feel powerless to help them engage. In this session we will look at how we can help our children grow in the biblical values of what church is and their place in it, so they feel connected, powerful and loved in their communities.

Video introduction

- Church – a wonderful gift to us

Individual reflection

- When my child leaves home, what do I want them to have in their hearts and minds about 'church'?

- Applying the six-stage circle – worship
 - Model

 - Frame

 - Equip

 - Create opportunities

 - Establish boundaries

 - Feedback

- Applying the six-stage circle – radical love
 - Model

 - Frame

 - Equip

 - Create opportunities

 - Establish boundaries

 - Feedback

- Doesn't the church need to change?

Group discussion

In your groups, discuss some of the following questions:

- Which of the five values of church resonates with you? Do any not?
- Which values does my child hold?
- Which values are you most passionate about?
- What are your main struggles, concerns and passions with your child regarding church?
- How can we as a church and as individuals instil these values in our children? What help might you need?

Suggestions for exploring this topic further

- Ask your child about their views of church, and how they feel in it. Have a chat about the values and ask them which one they would most like to experience, then work on it together with them.
- Often people in church can hurt us, and we can hang on to those hurts for quite a while. Have a think with God about whether you need to do any forgiving and whether there is any pain you need him to heal. God has freedom for you, so you can model and encourage your child to engage with the church family without it being an internal struggle of fear or hurt.
- Have a look at some of the scriptures that the five values came out of: Hebrews 10:19–24; 1 Corinthians 12:12–13:13; Acts 2:42–47. What challenges you about them? What do you long for more in your life and church? What is God highlighting to you?
- Take a step back and look at your church. Are the five values represented and functioning? If not, what can you do to help? How can you spur on the church to fullness?

What next?

We do hope that you have enjoyed being part of this course and that you are already seeing the fruits in you and your family's life. Of course, this is just a beginning, and we'd love to continue supporting you in this journey.

Visit the website

The Parenting for Faith website is packed with stories and resources for parents and churches to read, listen to and watch, covering a host of different topics – parentingforfaith.org/parents is a good place to start.

We're regularly adding new content, and we're working to develop what we offer over the coming months. Do keep in touch with us and help us shape what we offer.

Keep in touch

There are several ways you can keep in touch with Parenting for Faith:

- **Join our email newsletter** to stay up to date at parentingforfaith.org/email
- **Follow us on Facebook** at facebook.com/parentingforfaithBRF
- **Follow us on Twitter** at twitter.com/godconnected
- **Catch our podcasts** at parentingforfaith.org/podcast

Books and resources

The Parenting for Faith course is based on the book *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith – Omnibus Edition* (BRF, 2018), available in print and on Kindle.

Rachel Turner has also written *Comfort in the Darkness* (BRF, 2016), a collection of retellings of Bible stories exploring God's character and promises that helps parents grow peace, confidence and an understanding of who God is in their children.

You can find these and other useful books and resources at parentingforfaith.org/resources.

Connect with other families

You might want to connect with one or two other families who also attended the course, to intentionally support, encourage and learn from each other in the months ahead.

BRF's Parenting for Faith team

Parenting for Faith is part of The Bible Reading Fellowship. Find out more about the work they do to transform lives and communities transformed through the Christian faith at brf.org.uk.