

# FAITH IN OUR FAMILIES

How do parents nurture their children's faith at home?

What does the Church do to support and equip them in this?

**A RESEARCH REPORT**

**H O P E**

*in our villages, towns & cities*





# A letter from HOPE

“But where have all the children gone?” Visitors to the imaginary kingdom of Vulgaria in the classic film *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* are horrified to realise there is not a single child in sight. Children have been banished and are either in captivity or hiding underground – there are simply none to be seen.

Some of us are asking the same question in our churches. Where have all the children, the teenagers, the young adults, gone?

The ‘Talking Jesus’ research conducted by Barna on behalf of HOPE, the Church of England and Evangelical Alliance in 2015 gave us some key insights into evangelism in England. One finding from that research was that 42% of practising Christians attribute their faith to growing up in a Christian home. And yet it’s estimated that only 50% of the children of Christian parents grow up with a personal faith of their own as adults.

If we are to see children and young people continuing in faith in our churches, we need to enable Christian parents to nurture their children’s spirituality. Parents are their children’s biggest influencers – but many feel ill equipped or simply don’t know where to start when it comes to growing their children’s faith.

The research commissioned by Care for the Family and outlined here has sought to build on earlier findings to answer some key questions about how parents and churches are focusing on faith in the home. It raises some important challenges for the Church today. I hope it will inform you and help you take action. The faith of our children – and the future of the Church – is at stake.

**ROY CROWNE**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HOPE

*“Parents are their children’s biggest influencers, but many don’t know where to start.”*



*in our villages, towns & cities*

# Introduction

Meet Sam and James, sitting in the back row of the small rural church they attend every Sunday. They are both eight. They both have Christian parents. They are both part of a lively church youth group in the next village. They both know a handful of Bible verses and secretly quite enjoy singing at church. They both pray when asked to in Sunday school.

Fast forward 15 years. Sam and James are now 23. Sam is still sitting in the back row of church, waiting for the right moment to take the youth out for the Sunday school lesson he has prepared. He volunteers as a Christian summer camp leader and has been thinking this morning about how to chat to his friend Tom about the gospel.

James is not at church. He hasn't been there for 13 years now. Sam wonders at what point James decided the Christian faith wasn't worth following.

*“Please take a moment to visualise a photograph of your kids and their Christian friends. Now imagine holding a red pen and drawing an X through almost 50 per cent of their faces, because that many will fall away from the faith as young adults.”<sup>1</sup>*



Young people like Sam and James are found all over the country. Studies show that the overwhelming majority of people who come to faith do so before the age of 19.<sup>2</sup> Yet only 50% of children brought up in Christian homes will choose to follow the faith when they are adults.<sup>3</sup> However successful our evangelistic efforts with people who were not born into Christian homes, there is likely to be a serious decline in the UK church unless we can find a way to help parents to nurture their children's faith.

Above all, we know that the grace of God and his power at work is essential for our children to come to know him. But what, humanly, makes the difference between the stories of young people like Sam and James? How do parents and churches feel about this? And what are they doing to strengthen their children's faith?

With support from the Douglas Trust, we decided to find out. This report contains the summary of our findings.



# What do we already know?

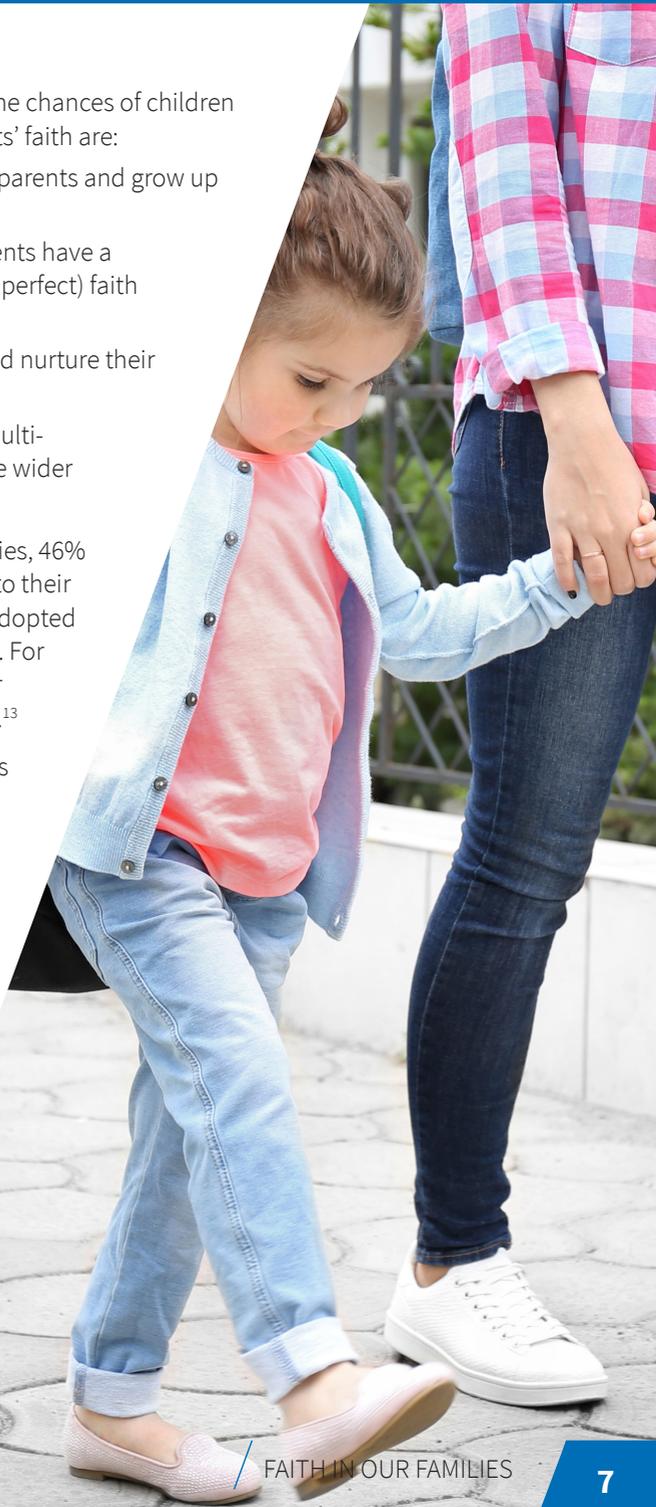
We are grateful for the research and insight provided by other organisations and individuals on this issue, notably the Fuller Youth Institute, Vern L. Bengtson, and Theos.

Studies have shown:

1. The majority of people who come to faith do so before the age of 19.<sup>4</sup> A recent study suggested that only 2% of Anglicans in England and Wales are converts from non-Christian families, with very similar figures for Methodists and Baptists.<sup>5</sup>
2. However, only around 50% of children brought up in Christian homes still follow the faith as adults.<sup>6</sup>
3. Among Anglicans who say that religion is very important in their lives, only 36% listed religious faith as an especially important quality that children can be encouraged to learn at home, compared to good manners (94%) or tolerance and respect (83%).<sup>7</sup>
4. 28% of church-attending Christians report that they do not mind whether or not their children share their beliefs.<sup>8</sup>
5. Despite 85% of parents believing that they are primarily responsible for their child's spiritual development, they also genuinely believe that the Church is better placed than they are to actually do it.<sup>9</sup>
6. A child who does not go to playgroup or nursery school will probably spend at least 21,900 working hours within the home. It could take the average church group more than 421 years to spend the same amount of time with this child.<sup>10</sup>
7. Parents have the biggest influence on the faith of young children, followed by church leaders, Christian friends, church youth leaders, then Sunday school leaders.<sup>11</sup>

8. The key factors that increase the chances of children choosing to follow their parents' faith are:
  - a. Children feel close to their parents and grow up in a warm family.
  - b. Children see that their parents have a developing, authentic (not perfect) faith themselves.
  - c. Parents seek to develop and nurture their children's faith.
  - d. Children receive positive multi-generational input from the wider family and church.<sup>12</sup>
9. In evangelical Protestant families, 46% of children who feel not close to their fathers report that they have adopted the same faith as their parents. For children who feel close to their fathers that rate jumps to 71%.<sup>13</sup>

As we have said, it is through God's grace alone that we can come to know him, but we also recognise that he has called us to be his hands and feet on earth in bringing this about. With this in mind, we decided to conduct some further research among UK-based parents, to discover how churches and Christian parents feel about nurturing their children's faith and what parents are doing about this in the home.



# Methodology

With the help of 9dot-research, we carried out both quantitative and qualitative research to explore the big picture statistically and to hear people's experiences first-hand. Respondents for a quantitative web-based survey were recruited through Care for the Family's database and via Facebook and comprised 983 parents, 175 church leaders, and 479 children's workers. The parents who took the survey described themselves as practising Christians, had at least one child aged 3 to 11, and felt it was important to nurture faith in the home. 75% attended church weekly. Throughout this booklet, when we refer to parents we acknowledge and include all carers of children in that description.

From this group, qualitative research was carried out online using a dedicated research platform with 21 parents and 6 children's workers. These were chosen from a variety of church backgrounds and had a range of reported confidence levels in nurturing their children's faith. They kept a diary of anything that related to faith with their children over the course of a week and responded to a number of open questions. A focus group was also held in Northern Ireland.

It's important to note that the survey results in this report are from respondents who were interested enough in the topic of nurturing their children's faith to complete a comprehensive survey on the subject. It is a snapshot of the more motivated and engaged parents and churches. In the wider church community there will be many parents who have never seriously considered building their children's spirituality or who lack the confidence to start. It is hoped that these findings can begin to change that.

We are so grateful to all those who gave up their time to provide us with their viewpoints and insights.



# The headlines

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- 95% of parents responding acknowledged that it was largely their responsibility to teach their children about the Christian faith, and 78% of church leaders agreed with this.
  - However, 92% of parents felt they should be doing more.
  - 94% of church leaders felt that churches should be doing more to help, as did 85% of children's workers.
  - The vast majority of church leaders reported that they provided some activities to nurture children's faith (93%), but supporting parents to nurture faith in the home was much less common (61%). Only 12% said they did 'a lot' to support parents in this way.
  - 70% of church leaders and 69% of children's workers said they would appreciate ideas to help parents see the importance of nurturing faith at home.
  - 36% of parents surveyed felt very confident in nurturing their child's faith, whereas 26% felt less confident. How confident a parent felt had a significant relationship to their views on nurturing faith and what they currently do at home.
  - 64% of more confident parents often or always look for opportunities to nurture their children's faith compared to just 9% of the less confident group.
  - Less than three-quarters of parents say they ever share Bible stories with their children.
  - The main barrier to nurturing faith was felt to be that family time was devoted to other activities, or not having enough time with the child. This was followed by needing help with knowing what to do.
  - Parents were keen to receive practical ideas for praying as a family and talking about faith at home.
  - Parents also felt that it was important to have their own faith nurtured, to have fellowship with other parents, and for resources to be aimed at the whole family.

# Who responded?

**FEMALE: 84%**

**MALE: 16%**



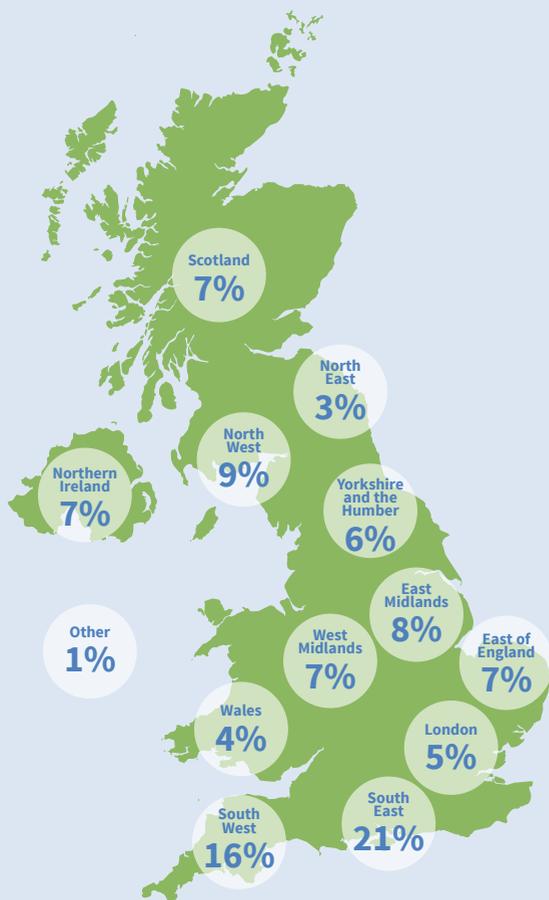
**AGE RANGE:**

**26-34 YRS**

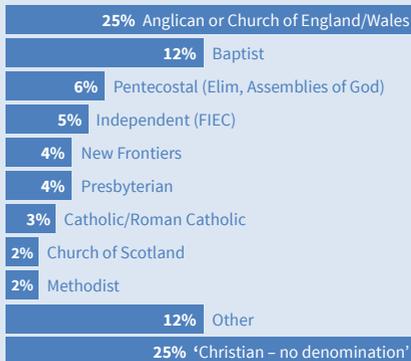
**35-44 YRS**

**45-54 YRS**

**GEOGRAPHIC REGION:**



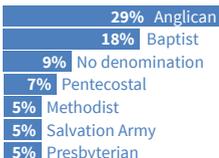
**CHURCH DENOMINATION:**



**CHURCH LEADERS**



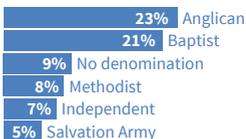
**UP TO 44 YRS**   **45-54 YRS**   **OVER 55 YEARS**



**CHILDREN'S WORKERS**



**UP TO 44 YRS**   **45-54 YRS**   **OVER 55 YEARS**



# How representative?

Recruiting survey respondents via Care for the Family's database of supporters enabled us to find a large sample of people in a cost-effective way who fitted the criteria (that is, active Christians who were parents of children aged 3 to 11 and who were interested in the topic of nurturing their children's faith). This was supplemented by finding respondents via general Facebook recruitment, which enabled us to check whether or not the Care for the Family group was broadly representative of Christians more widely. While recognising that Christians on Facebook will not necessarily mirror the characteristics of all Christians in the UK, we felt this was a valid comparative group for our particular interest group – those with young children who are younger than many other churchgoers and more likely to be active online.

The Facebook respondents had a higher proportion of younger parents, more from traditional churches and fewer Anglicans. Those in the Facebook sample were more likely to feel it was their responsibility to help nurture their children's faith and to feel that they should be doing more. However in terms of understanding parents' confidence, priorities, concerns, barriers and interests, the results from the two groups of parents were broadly in line with each other, with only small changes of emphasis.

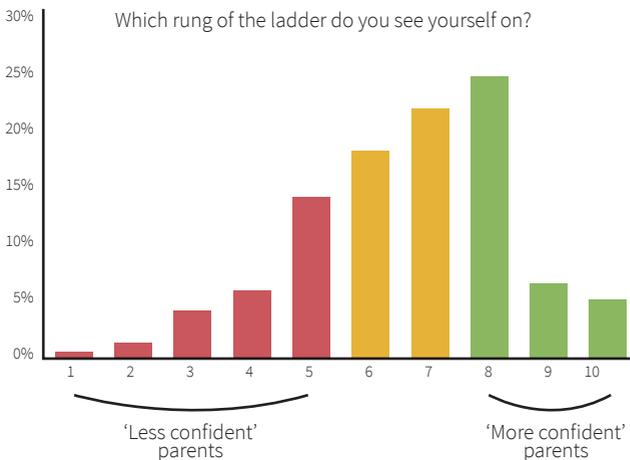
The survey respondents were from a range of denominations, which largely mirrored the number of churchgoers in the country in general, apart from having only a small number of Catholics. We had a moderately higher proportion of Anglicans than in the country as a whole, while Methodists were under-represented. The respondents were younger than average for all churchgoers as would be expected given that they were all parents of young children.

In terms of ethnicity, we had a slightly smaller proportion of respondents from an ethnic minority than in the UK population as a whole. Unfortunately we did not have enough responses from black majority churches to be able to confidently assess whether or not their feedback varied from the entire sample. We aim to seek further feedback from such churches to inform the project's development going forward.

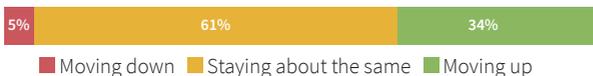
# What we discovered

We asked the parents in our survey to imagine a ladder with ten rungs on it. The bottom rung of the ladder (number one) represents a parent who is not doing anything at home to nurture their child’s faith, and the top rung of the ladder (number ten) represents someone who is making every effort to do so. We asked parents to say where they would put themselves on the ladder, and whether they felt they were moving up, down or staying about the same.

*“Sometimes it feels like I’m being proactive in sharing faith with my children, and at other times it’s way down the list after the practical day-to-day stuff. It changes by the hour depending on tiredness levels, children’s behaviour etc.” – Parent*



Do you feel you’re currently moving up the ladder, moving down or staying about the same?



Even among this sample of parents who felt it was important to nurture faith in the home, the majority felt they could be doing it better.

How confident a parent feels in nurturing their child's faith will have significant repercussions for how best to support them. More confident parents may be looking for new ideas to add to what they already do, whereas less confident parents may need encouragement to even get started. It is important to meet families where they are at.

*“Not a day goes by that I don't thank God for his blessings. I would like my children to be able to see how God is at work in our lives, but I don't know where to start with them.”*

– Parent

Imagine two parents ... **Annie** has been a Christian for quite some time and feels strong in her faith. A lot of her wider family and close friends are Christians. She actively looks for ways to nurture faith in her son, such as praying together, chatting about God during car journeys, spending time together as a family, and attending Christian festivals. She would appreciate more resources and ideas, but overall feels that she has some of the tools she needs to nurture her son's faith.

**Helen** is a relatively young Christian and sometimes feels worried about her own doubts and questions. She spends time praying with her children but hasn't thought much about how to nurture their faith; she is afraid she will get it wrong and put them off. Her family all lead busy lives, so she's not sure where to start or how to fit it all in. She doesn't feel confident in nurturing her children's faith and would appreciate lots of input from the church and from other resources.



Thinking about the parents you meet, do they seem more or less confident in nurturing their children's faith? What impact might that have on how you support them?



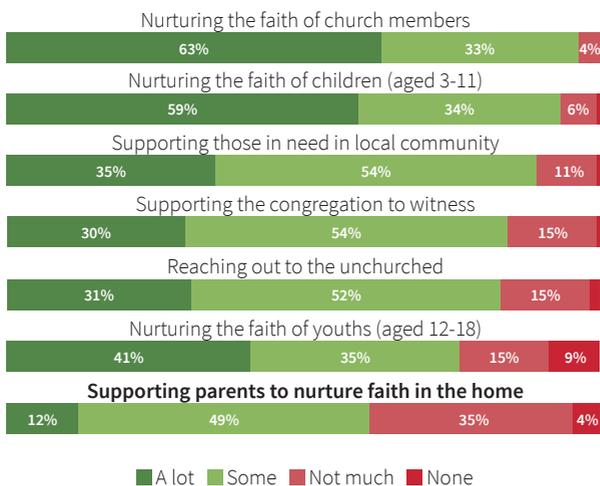
# Importance and responsibility

We wanted to find out if parents felt it was important for children to learn about faith at home and where they thought responsibility lay.

95% agreed it was largely their responsibility to teach their children, and 78% of church leaders agreed with this. 92% of parents agreed they should be doing more, while 61% of church leaders felt that parents did not understand their responsibility in this area. 94% of church leaders agreed that churches should be doing more to help, as did 85% of children's workers.

We asked church leaders and children's workers how much effort they felt their churches were currently putting into supporting parents in this area compared with other aspects of church life. Church leaders' responses are shown below, with the responses from children's workers being very similar.

How much effort does your church put into each of the following?



The vast majority of leaders reported that they provided at least some activities to nurture children's faith directly (93%), but supporting parents to nurture faith in the home was less common (61%), with only 12% saying they do a lot in this area – much less than any other issue we asked about.

Most children spend only an hour or so a week in church compared to probably 30 hours with their parents – and that creates a challenge when we consider the balance of resources going into nurturing children in church compared to helping parents nurture their children's faith at home. Both parents and church leaders feel that faith should be nurtured at home, but they agree that there is still a lot of work to be done in this area. There are significant opportunities for families and churches to work together in this.

*“Statistically parents have so much more time with their children – so we should be training them to bring their kids up in the faith.”* – Church leader

*“To encourage parents to nurture their children's faith within the home is a new concept and our churches need help to understand why this is necessary and why it is their responsibility.”* – Children's worker

*“I suspect the parents I deal with are on the bottom half of the ladder ... we don't really talk about our faith at home when I see them in the context of a Sunday morning.”*

– Children's worker



What role do you feel your church has in helping families to teach their children about faith?

# Motivations

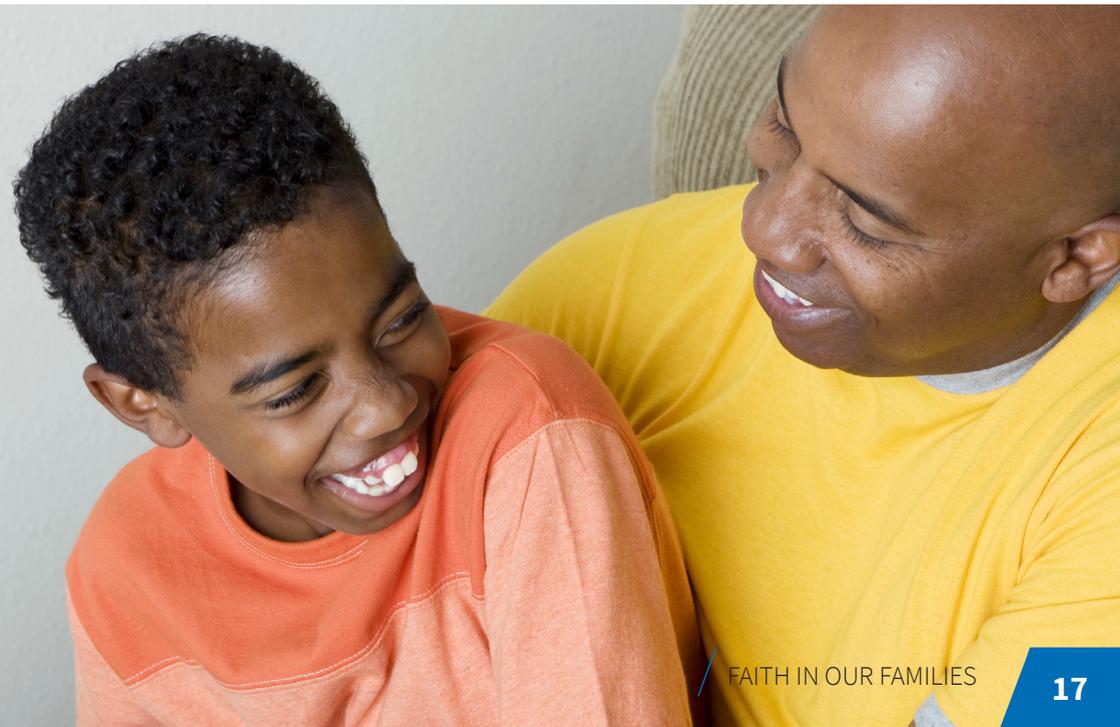
So if parents and leaders agree that it's important for the Christian faith to be taught at home, *why* do they want children to develop their own faith? A number of reasons were suggested, and we asked parents which one they felt was the most important.

I want my child to become an adult Christian so that they will ...

	Parents	Church leaders	Children's workers
Be in relationship with God	54%	68%	65%
Know that they are loved by God	16%	21%	18%
Have a place in Heaven	15%	6%	8%

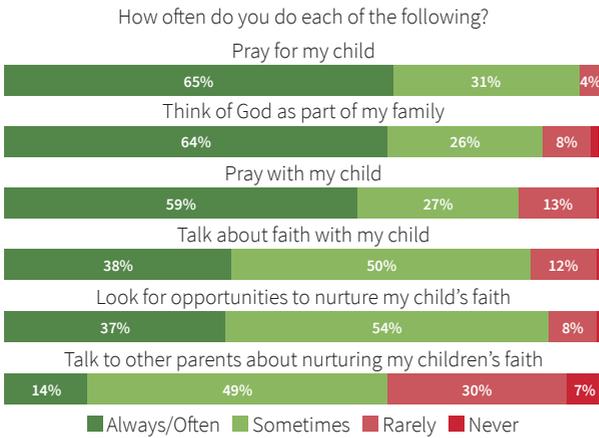
76% of parents agreed that their child already had their own relationship with God.

*“I want my children to desire God for themselves and pursue him with their own energy and strength. I want them to understand how good God is and really grasp his heart for them.”* – Parent



# What are parents already doing?

Encouragingly, a lot of parents who responded do try to bring faith into their family life.



However, there are significant differences between what the more confident and less confident parents do. 64% of the more confident parents often or always look for opportunities to nurture their children's faith compared to just 9% of the less confident group.

How often do you do each of the following?

	Less confident parents	More confident parents
Pray for my child	47%	81%
Think of God as part of my family	42%	81%
Pray with my child	32%	78%
Involve God in family decision-making	17%	57%
Talk about faith with my child	12%	63%
<b>Look for opportunities to nurture my child's faith</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>64%</b>
Talk to other parents about nurturing children's faith	6%	23%
Feel you set a good example of being a Christian	5%	34%

Virtually all of these parents pray for their children, 65% of these doing so often. However, only 47% of the less confident parents reported praying with their child often or always compared with 81% at the top of the ladder. Similarly, 63% of the more confident parents talked about faith with their children often or always compared to 12% of those lower on the ladder.

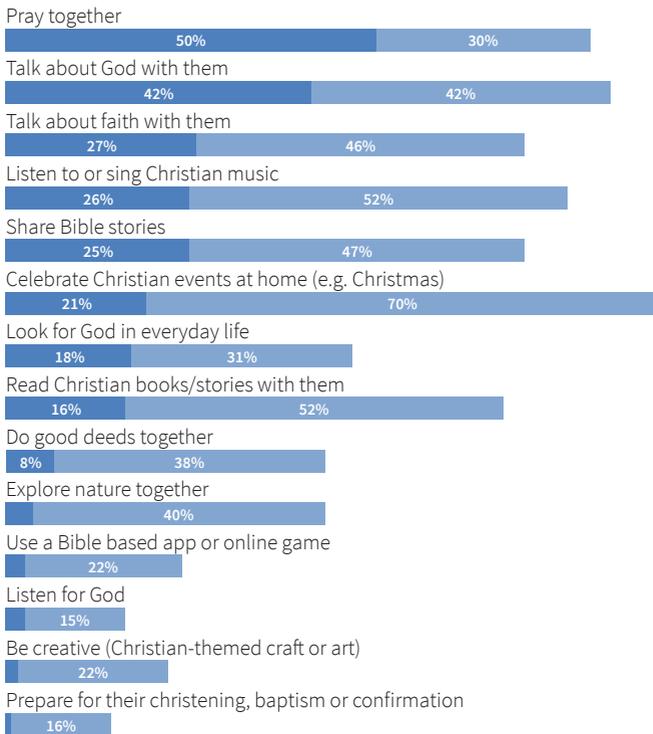
*“We try to do thank you prayers throughout the day for what we see, have and enjoy to put God at the centre of things.”*

– Parent

Talking about nurturing faith with other parents was a much less common occurrence across the board (37% stated it happened rarely or never), and this was especially true of the men who responded.

So what kind of things do parents do at home to nurture faith, and what do they find particularly helpful?

Which of these do you do with your child to help nurture their faith?



■ Do and find particularly helpful ■ Do

Even among these more motivated and engaged parents, less than three-quarters were sharing Bible stories with their children, and only half said they were looking for God in everyday life with their children. Of those parents who placed themselves lower on the ladder (the less confident parents), just 54% were sharing Bible stories.

It's noteworthy that even where parents were doing the activities listed above, the majority were not finding most of them particularly helpful.

Prayer was considered the most helpful activity in nurturing a child's faith. It's also the activity church leaders reported that they encourage most.

42% of parents felt that talking about God was particularly helpful in nurturing faith, and they would welcome stimulus for discussion to try and make faith part of everyday life.

*"I would like God to be a bigger part of our everyday life. We don't talk a lot about God during the day, but I probably just need a bit more courage to seize the opportunities and not be afraid of not having the answers."* – Parent

There are many good Christian resources for young children, including books, DVDs, CDs and activity websites. There are not many resources aimed at supporting parents though, particularly those that combine biblical principles with practical suggestions. In addition, many parents didn't know where to look to find resources, or didn't feel confident to know which ones to choose.

### We asked parents about how they pray with their children

- Before meals
- Quick prayers in everyday life
- Praying at bedtime
- Thanking God for answered prayer
- Using a prayer book
- Praying on way to school
- Silent prayer time together
- Hot chocolate/family prayer time
- Using Bible verses in prayers
- Using STOP (Sorry, Thank you, Others, Please)
- Writing prayer topics on lollipop sticks
- Prayer songs
- Using prayer points from church or other organisations
- Saying the Lord's Prayer
- Having a photo board of people to pray for
- Drawing prayers
- Using a Lego brick prayer wall



What do you think are the most helpful activities that parents could be doing with their children at home to build faith? Which resources do you find helpful to recommend?

# Barriers

So what stops parents from nurturing their child’s faith? The less confident group of parents felt there were more barriers to overcome than those who felt more confident.

Here are a number of factors which may be barriers to nurturing children’s faith at home.  
Are any of these barriers for you?

	Less confident parents	More confident parents
Family time being devoted to other activities	40%	24%
Not enough time to spend with child	35%	25%
Needing help with knowing what to do	35%	15%
Not knowing where to start	33%	5%
Being worried about doing it wrong	30%	13%
Feeling I’m not a good enough example	28%	12%
Feeling own faith is too weak	22%	2%
Lacking self-confidence	21%	4%
Wanting to let them make their own decision	21%	8%
Lacking resources	18%	15%
Child’s other parent not being a Christian	18%	8%
Child not interested	17%	7%

Women were more likely than men to say that the barriers were lacking self-confidence, not knowing where to start, needing help with knowing what to do, being worried about doing it wrong, or that the other parent is not a Christian. Men were more likely than women to say that the barrier was not enough time with their child.

The main barrier overall for parents appeared to be that family time is devoted to other activities, and 47% of church leaders and 46% of children’s workers agreed.

*“In a word: BUSYNESS. Or another word: LAZINESS. Sometimes I blame busyness, but I find the time to check the Chelsea scores ... Sometimes I really do need to stop clearing the kitchen up while the kids are up (so I can watch TV when they are in bed) and spend time nurturing their faith while I can.” – Parent*

# What could be done to help?

The parents who took our survey had lots of ideas about what could help further.

They agreed that practical ideas for praying as a family, interactive or creative prayer, and guidance on what to expect from children would be helpful. They generally felt that they had little support for prayer in the home.

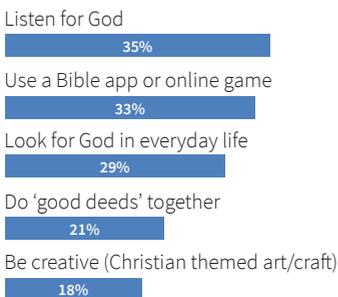
Parents were also keen for ideas on how to talk about faith at home. The ideal was to find ways to discuss faith openly and honestly in families, perhaps based around current events.

*“I love these spontaneous moments when I have her complete attention to talk about this kind of thing. That’s why I think sometimes it’s great to have a ‘tool’ that contributes to opening up the conversation.”*

– Parent

We listed some activities and asked parents which they might do, that they do not do at present.

Which of these would you consider doing in the future to help nurture your child’s faith?



*“It would be helpful to have some guidance/resources for praying together as a family, maybe in a more interactive way so that the children don’t feel they have to find particular words.”* – Parent

It was also clear, though, that parents felt it was not just about sharing new and varied ideas. Some parents, particularly those who were less confident, felt that their own faith needed to be nurtured before they could pass that on to their children. Those parents were much less likely to read the Bible at least once a week outside of church than the more confident parents. In our research parents sometimes voiced concerns about not knowing enough or having a strong enough faith, getting the balance right in how much they discuss faith, and displaying an authentic faith to their children.

*“Often I feel that my faith isn’t strong enough. I definitely worry about getting it wrong. As with all things to do with parenting, there is no text book and we have one chance with each child.”* – Parent

Parents highlighted the importance of nurturing the faith of the whole family, indicating that they would be interested in resources to use as stimulus to explore faith as a family (rather than resources solely focused on children), and events and activities for the whole family.

*“I would really like the opportunity to learn alongside my children.”* – Parent

Parents commented that they need fellowship with both similar parents and older parents with wisdom to share, so that they could ask for advice, share ideas, and be encouraged and supported. They felt that children also benefit from fellowship with other Christian children.

*“It would be great to have other parents to chat to and share experiences with, both for reassurance that we’re normal in our struggles and also to share ideas that have been helpful in encouraging our children.”* – Parent

We took all the information that parents had given us and summarised what they felt helps and hinders them in nurturing their child's faith.

What helps?	What hinders?
Having time, being relaxed	Busy family lives, lack of time, distractions
Having a secure faith themselves	Cultural influences
Being intentional	Not being intentional or giving faith any priority
Using everyday opportunities	Not being confident in their own faith
Having established routines	Not being sure how best to nurture faith
Loving relationships	Pressure from non-Christians
God being central in family life	Not getting the balance right
Fresh, inspiring resources	Lack of Christian fellowship
Supportive Christian fellowship	Lack of encouragement
Knowing how best to nurture faith	Difficult life circumstances
Being encouraged	Delegating responsibility
Family activities, events, festivals	



We asked church leaders what they already do in this area.

Which of the following does your church do to help parents nurture their children's faith in the home?

Give them confidence in their own faith

61%

Involve them in preparing for christening, baptism or confirmation of their children

55%

Promote Christian camps/festivals for parents and children

54%

Preach about it

48%

Help them understand the importance of nurturing faith at home

37%

Suggest training/workshops/conferences

35%

Run parenting courses

30%

Help them develop a support network with other parents

27%

Point them towards online resources

26%

Give them ideas to follow up the teaching their children receive at church

22%

Suggest books about nurturing faith in the home

21%

To enable discussions at home, ensure children's and adults' teaching follow the same topics

18%

Offer a guide or mentor

8%

Meet regularly with them to discuss faith at home

6%

None of the above

2%

The more common activities mentioned by church leaders (such as giving people confidence in their own faith) are those things that we would expect to happen naturally as part of the life of the church and are not particularly targeted at equipping parents.

More intentional activities, such as helping parents understand the importance of nurturing faith at home, providing parenting courses, or suggesting suitable resources are much less common.

However, 70% of church leaders did report that they encourage parents to pray at home with their children and 66% encourage them to share Bible stories. 65% of children's workers encourage parents to celebrate Christian events at home; as our survey took place in the run-up to Christmas, this may have been largely what they had in mind.

While some churches are already engaged in this area, 73% said they would welcome practical ideas for encouraging parents to talk about faith at home, and 70% of church leaders and 69% of children's workers would appreciate ideas for helping parents see the importance of nurturing faith at home.

48% of church leaders and children's workers said the most useful resource would be ideas for praying with children and listening for God at home, with 61% of church leaders indicating that resources online or via an app would be useful.

*“If we can teach people that [nurturing faith] can be a natural part of life – for instance, something that can happen over meals or while you are driving – it is more likely to be taken up rather than rejected.”*  
– Church leader

However, 50% of church leaders felt that the biggest barrier in the way of them developing this work was not having enough people to support the ministry.

*“It strikes me that there is no single occasion in the year where I as a church leader have the opportunity to speak to parents directly about their parenting – and yet it's such an important issue.”* – Church leader



Within the human and financial resources you have available, what could be done to help you or your church equip parents more?

# Opportunities

A number of key themes recurred throughout our research from parents, church leaders and children's workers:

- God being at the centre of everyday family life
- Children developing their own relationship with God
- Encouraging prayer in families
- Encouraging families to talk about God and faith
- Nurturing the faith of the whole family
- Giving parents confidence to nurture their child's faith

One of the most encouraging things we found during this research was that as soon as parents were prompted to think about the importance of nurturing their children in the faith it had an impact on their home life. This included making them more alert to spotting potential conversations and encouraging them to try out new resources. Of course this will not be the case for every family, but if churches can simply raise awareness of this issue with families (and demonstrate how much can be accomplished in the course of everyday life), this could in itself lead to significant changes.

*"This project has really helped me to think about how to do this as part of everyday life. The focus on our role in nurturing our kids' faith has helped me to see opportunities I hadn't realised were there before, and it has reminded me of the necessity of grasping every one."* – Parent

*"This project has made me realise that I need to make an active decision to nurture faith in the family; it won't happen by itself. I need to make time and opportunities for this nurturing and not let the opportunities that arise, from the kids themselves, go to waste. Seize the moment!"* – Parent

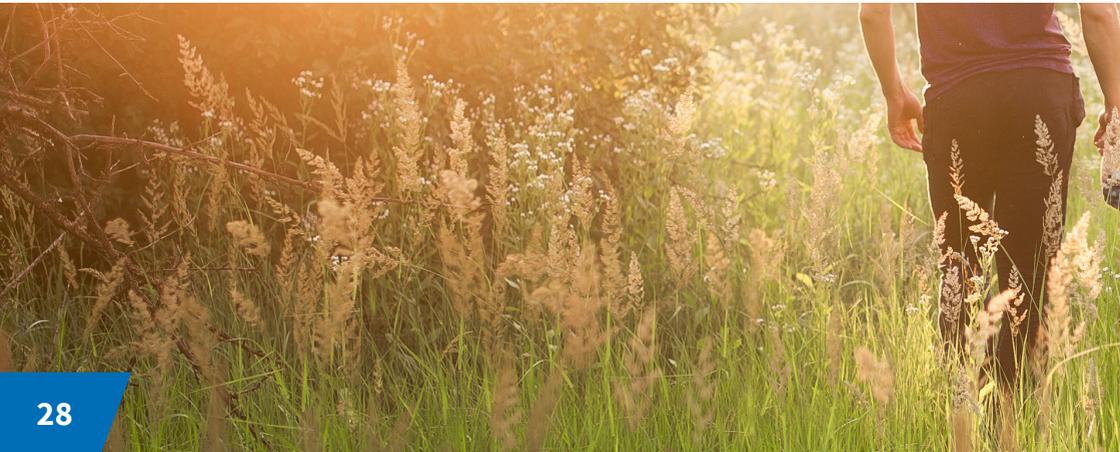
# What's next?

So what does this mean for the Church?

Of course we must continue to seek to bring people to God by reaching out to our communities. But are we ignoring the far more significant opportunity that is under our noses? Our success or failure in keeping the children of Christian parents in the faith will be by far the biggest factor affecting the health of the Church in 20 or 30 years' time, yet we acknowledge that so few of our churches are intentionally supporting parents in their role at home.

The challenge may seem great, but the good news is that there are things we can do which will make a difference. Research has shown that the following key foundations will help:

- A warm, affirming style of parenting where children feel close to their parents, secure and supported.
- Parents who give priority to faith, such that children see they have an authentic belief in God themselves.
- Parents who are intentional about taking opportunities to develop their children's faith in natural and everyday ways.
- Giving children a sense of belonging at church – both in terms of being able to participate and serve and in having strong relationships with people of all ages.



Here are some suggestions for how we might respond in our churches.

- Provide a parenting course to help mums and dads build positive bonds with their children. The *Parentalk* resources from Care for the Family are ready-to-run courses complete with DVD material and a leaders' guide. Many other courses are also available.
- Suggest to parents that they link up with each other and with older parents for mutual encouragement and support. This could be in person or through a Facebook group.
- Consider whether there are ways in which you could use dedications, christenings or confirmations to help parents and the wider congregation think about how they intentionally nurture their children's faith.
- Recognise that simply raising awareness and pointing parents towards useful resources could really help parents think about how they focus on faith at home. Inspire parents to be aware of how much influence they do have with their children. Encourage them that they don't have to have all the answers and that there are simple things they can do which will make a difference.
- Consider how children could be more involved in ways of serving at church and even in decision-making. Could they hand out notice sheets, help with audio-visual elements, say a prayer, produce a PowerPoint, count the collection, choose a hymn?
- Think about making opportunities and proactively encouraging the building of intergenerational relationships at church.



# A new initiative

In September 2017 Care for the Family will be launching a new initiative focusing on equipping parents to share their faith with their children. Over the next few years we aim to produce materials specifically for parents, and resources that churches can use to raise awareness among their congregations. We also want to run a campaign to help parents become more aware of the influence they can have on their children.

We would love to hear your views and discover ways we might be able to partner with you in this. Please do email us at [mail@cff.org.uk](mailto:mail@cff.org.uk) or you can call on **029 2081 0800**. You can also visit [www.faithinthefamily.org.uk/children-and-faith](http://www.faithinthefamily.org.uk/children-and-faith) to find out more and sign up to receive future updates.

It is our prayer that by working with churches to give families encouragement, ideas and resources, we will see a significant increase in the number of children from Christian families who grow up to have a vibrant relationship with God as adults.

*“For me this conversation has made me think about it properly. To actually sit down and think it through is very helpful because it gets your mind working on it. I’ll be doing more now with parents!”*

– Church leader



# Endnotes

- 1 Powell, K.E., 2014. *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family*, Zondervan, p.18.
- 2 72% of UK Christians surveyed said they came to faith before the age of 19 (Christian Research, 2010, *Faith Journeys*). Only 12% came to faith after the age of 25 (Evangelical Alliance/Christian Research, 2011. *21st Century Evangelicals*. London: Evangelical Alliance). In addition the British Social Attitudes Survey 2008 found that 92% of adult churchgoers had attended church at least occasionally as children (Walker, J., 2011. *Discipleship, children and the non-churched: our Last Chance Saloon?* [online] Church Growth Resourcing Mission Bulletin. Available at <[http://www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing\\_Mission\\_Bulletin/Jan\\_2011/John\\_Walker\\_Discipleship\\_children\\_and\\_the\\_non\\_churched\\_January\\_2011.pdf](http://www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/Jan_2011/John_Walker_Discipleship_children_and_the_non_churched_January_2011.pdf)> [accessed 3 January 2017].
- 3 Voas, D. and Watt, L. February 2014. *The Church Growth Research Programme Report on Strands 1 and 2. Numerical change in church attendance: National, local and individual factors.* [online] <[http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/Report\\_Strands\\_1\\_2\\_rev2.pdf](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/Report_Strands_1_2_rev2.pdf)> [accessed 3 January 2017].
- 4 See note 2 above.
- 5 Church Times, 2016. Church contains hardly any converts, report suggests, [online] 27 May 2016. Available at <<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/27-may/news/uk/church-contains-hardly-any-converts-report-suggests>> [Accessed 3 January 2017].
- 6 Voas and Watt, *The Church Growth Research Programme Report*.
- 7 European Values Study, quoted in Voas and Watt, *The Church Growth Research Programme Report*.
- 8 Mark, O., 2016. *Passing on Faith*. Theos and Canterbury Christ Church University.
- 9 A Barna study quoted in Alexander, L., 2012, *Children, Families & God: Drawing the Generations Together to Change the World*, Evangelista Media.
- 10 General Synod Board of Education, 1989. *Children in the way: New directions for the Church's children*. London: The National Society/Church House Publishing.
- 11 Christian Research, 2010. *Faith Journeys*.
- 12 Based on the findings in Powell, K.E. and Clark, C. 2011, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, Zondervan and Bengtson, V.L., 2013, *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations*, OUP USA.
- 13 Bengtson, V.L., 2013, *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations*, OUP USA.



## Care for the Family

Care for the Family is a national charity which aims to strengthen family life and help those who face family difficulties. Working throughout the UK and the Isle of Man, we provide parenting, relationship and bereavement support through events, courses, training, a volunteer network and other resources.

[www.careforthefamily.org.uk](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk)

## HOPE

Hope brings churches together in mission – doing more, doing it together, and doing it in words and action. The goal is to see individuals and communities in villages, towns and cities throughout the UK transformed by Jesus' love.

[www.hopetogether.org.uk](http://www.hopetogether.org.uk)



Care for the Family  
Garth House  
Leon Avenue  
Cardiff  
CF15 7RG

 029 2081 0800

 [mail@cff.org.uk](mailto:mail@cff.org.uk)

 [www.careforthefamily.org.uk](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk)

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