

SHEPHERDING KIDS IN CHALLENGING TIMES:

I have watched many colleagues scramble to try to find a way to provide services for their kids in the midst of this season of social distancing. But not only do only a few of us have the resources to do this, I firmly believe this is an opportunity to equip the sheep to be the shepherds.

We have 3 groups to consider in this current climate of discipling kids:

1. The kids (the lambs)
2. The parents (the sheep)
3. The church (the shepherds)

The truth matters as we navigate tricky conversations, but so does good editing. Meaning, how we tell the truth matters differently for each group.

KIDS:

- Kids will take their cues from parents.
 - If parents are anxious or exhibiting fear, kids will either adopt that anxiety or take it on as something to fix. Neither of these outcomes are healthy for families.
 - If parents are frustrated or not heeding warnings, or critical of systems or government, this becomes the foundation of social engagement for their kids.
- Kids are listening to the noise in the background that you have the wisdom to filter. Shut down the noise.
- Kids have thoughts and feelings about what is happening that need a place to be heard.

PARENTS:

- As the grownups, we are navigating far more than just school closures and social isolation. And while we would all love to make the best of this situation, some of our families are navigating incredibly extenuating circumstances.
 - While we can make it fun in the midst this weird situation for a little while, many of our parents are now working from home. Navigating the balance between being productive and managing kids that don't usually come to work with us is a stress-making challenge.
 - Parents have relied on the church to equip them, and their kids, in discipleship. Parents are now going to have to get what they need in order to create church experiences at home. How they prioritize this will be a very personal decision.

CHURCH:

- Not all churches are equipped to move things online, and many of you are a staff team of 1 or 2 and the burden feels heavy and real right now.
 - If we can equip parents to disciple their kids during this period of social distancing and isolation, we can disciple 2 generations at a time. Families will be doing everything together for a while. What does it look like to embrace family

discipleship and teaching over age-based learning? What do you need to be able to equip families in this way?

- This is an incredible opportunity to put parents in the driver's seat of discipleship by equipping them well for these tough conversations. We will lose relationship collateral in this isolation. Parents can gain that equity and invest where they have maybe felt ill-equipped, exhausted, uncertain. Put excellent resources in their hands and encourage them to step into the role of primary disciple-maker of their kids.

A FEW PRACTICAL TOOLS TO BUILD THE FAMILY TOOLBOX:

- 1.** Kids need a place to be honest, and if kids know God, they know He is listening and interested in their thoughts.

SAY ANYTHING CARDS

- Create a prayer station in your house where each family member can meet with Jesus to share their thoughts, concerns, worries—a place to cast all our cares on Him, because He cares for us.
- What you need:
 - i. Cue cards or 1/4 pieces of paper. Make it colourful paper if you have the resources to do so. This doesn't have to be somber!
 - ii. Place a jar of different writing utensils with the cards. Have you ever noticed how people have preferences about what they write with? Delight your family with markers, crayons, pencils, pens. Whether family members can spell yet or need to draw their thoughts, allow this space to be creative.
 - iii. Make a little sign that says "Say Anything" and choose a verse for inspiration.
 - iv. Invite family members to say anything to God. Ask any question. Share thoughts, fears, frustrations. None of this is a surprise to Him and He is near.
- Sometimes kids will feel more comfortable saying to God things that they aren't sure they should say to a grownup. This is a safe place for them to be honest, tell the truth, unburden their hearts and minds of the things they are hearing, feeling, thinking about.

- i. Here's what's true: *some of your kids' prayer cards are for you to answer, not God.* There will be questions you can answer, and God will use you to answer them. Pray through the prayer cards as a family and discuss any of the questions that we have answers for as grownups.



2. Kids will need more of us during uncertainty. They need reassurance and redirection when the days get long. They need our presence. However, parents need to work.
 - Parents: Carve out a home office space and set some ground rules when you're in it. Invite your kids to make a sign for your space, even if it doesn't have a door. This will help them remember the rules, but also participate in affirming this space for you. They are more likely to be able to follow the guidelines that will enable you to work if they have a hand in creating them.
 - Kids: This is tricky, but honouring mom and dad in how we share space as a family will allow them to do what they need to do in order to be fully present when work time is done. Rewards, sticker charts, positive affirmation will go a long way when the days grow quiet and boring.

3. What has been on the shelf for the family? Many of us had heavily scheduled evenings, full of extracurriculars until this week. With those activities now on the shelf, what did you put on the shelf in order to accommodate extracurriculars? What did you often say “Maybe on the weekend” or “We don’t have time for that” about? Make a list. Start pulling those ideas off the shelf!
 - As we navigate the disappointment of isolation from friends, hockey seasons coming to an abrupt end, music lessons happening over FaceTime, we have, for better or worse, freed up our evenings. What has been on the shelf for your family? Now that everything else is on the shelf, what can you take off in order to be intentionally present with each other?
 - I have a feeling there is an opportunity within this season that we will need to cling to as it lingers. Don’t miss it. Don’t miss the gift of slowing pace, long walks, baking, movie nights, dance parties, PJ days, whatever would bring joy, today. Take this one day at a time and do one thing to delight each other.
4. Parents and kids today have no shortage of tools to connect their kids to each other, their friends and family.
 - Monitor online activity
 - Check what the text streams are talking about
 - Navigate untruth with truth—friends will share false information out of fear and we can shut it down simply by having healthy online habits as a family.
 - i. The Internet is a dark place when left wide open. Create dialogue that allows kids to share what they are seeing and invite you to watch with them. They don’t know how to navigate the online world without your guidance. Do not let the world be their teacher.
 - As a result, parents don’t need your help connecting, they are more likely to want help finding decent stuff to connect their kids with.
 - i. As you find links or websites that are an asset, share those broadly. This saves parents time and worry because they trust you.
 - ii. Create a kids page on social media for parents, and share videos for kids there. Make it easy for families right now. They will crowd-source for materials. Be part of their crowd.
5. **HOPE:**

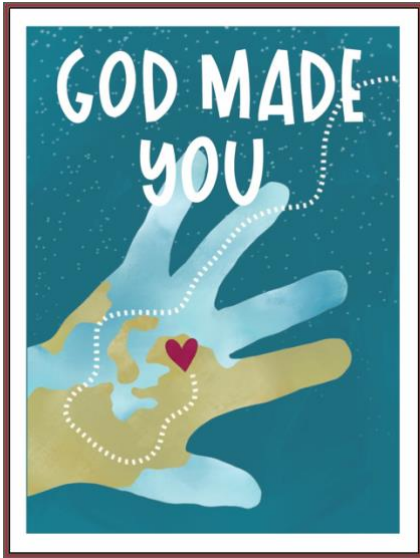
This word is bouncing around a lot right now on social media. But we know something about the word Hope that the world doesn’t. Hope has a name. Hebrews is a great place to establish our hope, where we are reminded that “faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.” Hebrews 11:1 CSB.

 - If we aren’t careful, kids hear hope and think “wish”. Hoping is not the same as wishing. Hope is a firm foundation, not dandelion fluff. The more we talk about hope as the person of Jesus, the more he has a chance to inform our thoughts and stifle our fears.

6. **GOSPEL FLUENCY:**

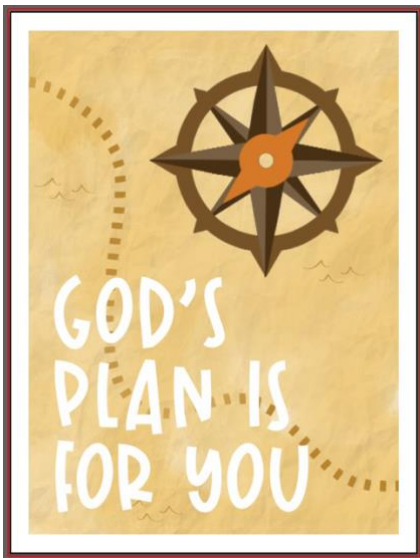
If ever we needed Jesus, it's now. I believe it has become easy to be complacent with the Gospel, simply because life has been comfortable or had a predictable rhythm. We see it over and over, that people are more willing or able to turn to Jesus in crisis than in times of joy. In the words of Margaret Feinberg, "You can cling to the crisis or you can cling to the cross, but you do not have arms wide enough for both."

- What if the only thing we did as the Church in these days was to equip each other to lead kids and families to Christ?
- If we believe that our Hope is actually Jesus, how do we lead families to that hope in a time that many find hopeless?
- Using the tool (below), families can help each other unpack the truth about who they are, Whose they are, and who is in control.
- When we claim our Identity in Jesus Christ, the Hope of the World, it changes what we believe is possible. It changes how we wait out these long days and engage with the same people each day. It changes how we see others, know they too are image-bearers.



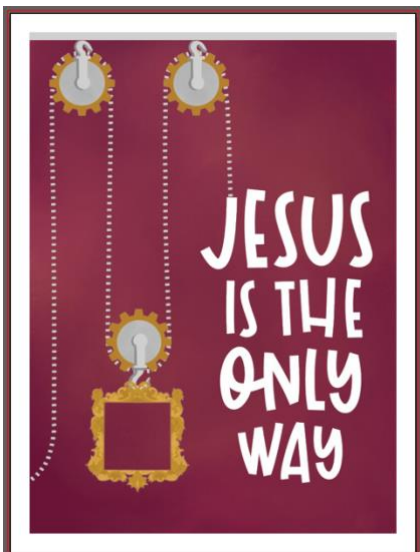
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...for a purpose, on purpose with good purpose.



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...not against you, custom-fit, with you in mind.



...even when
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***...to know who you are, why God made you and His plan for you.
Your identity is in Jesus. Nothing else. Nothing less.***