



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST® CHURCH  
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NNSW Children's Ministries

# The **DNA** of Spiritual Champions

**24/7** + **7**



# The **DNA** of Spiritual Champions

What does it take to once again raise a generation of Josephs, Daniels, Esthers and little maids who will stand for God no matter what? Today the world needs children and youth who will rise up and seize their destiny and mission and will not be turned. What will it take to raise up a generation of Spiritual Champions?

In the past, some have seen children's ministries in churches as merely a holding tank where our children are placed out the back and entertained or baby sat until they reach their youth and young adulthood. It is then that we suddenly take them seriously and endeavor to keep them in the church.

On the other hand many parents see the Church and Christian school as the spiritual guardians of their children and have opted out of their God-given role of being the primary spiritual disciplers of their children. As a result of these warped ideologies, many churches are experiencing losses of between 50 to 90% of their young people. Many are unfortunately "already gone" before they reach their teenage years (See Ken Ham, "Already Gone" 2009 and George Barna "Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions", 2003).

This tragic loss is one that needs addressing as a matter of urgency. We can reach the "lost" in the world but if in doing this we are losing our own children, then something is seriously wrong, especially as God has placed these little ones in our midst (Matthew 18) to be nurtured and strengthened in the faith.

The following describes the various elements that if in place can help our children to grow into spiritual champions. If as many as possible of these elements are practiced, these trends would be minimized and an important resource/asset in our churches would be maintained and enhanced.

Inspiring our children is a critical task and is something that we are called to do as we partner with parents to put in place strong spiritual practices both at home and in the church community to raise a generation of "Spiritual Champions." There are a number of spiritual building bricks that we can place into the lives of our children to inspire their spiritual formation.

# CHURCH

# HOMES



**24/7 + 7**

## **Champion the Church**

Parents need to place a priority on the church and advancing the Kingdom of God in their family routine. This routine is best established when the couple begin dating and marry but can of course be started anytime.

I grew up in a home where going to church was important. Mum and Dad were always involved in the Sabbath School, Dad was an elder and Mum was a deaconess. Church socials and events were always supported. Somewhere in the course of following along and being involved in Church life and events, it became important for me too.

The home needs to be the champion of the church.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Prioritise Church and Church attendance as a couple/family.
- Establish routines around church attendance (even the routines of going to church are formative).
- Be positive about Church and its programs.
- Make an effort to volunteer and be involved in church.
- If possible serve in church positions as a family and involve your children.

## **Faith Talk/Table Talk**

The table has traditionally been a place where the family has gathered for a meal at least once a day. Somewhere along the way in the midst of our ever busy fast food society and created by dual-income families struggling to buy the McMansion and meet the mortgage payments, the idea of a regular sit down family meal has become a rarity.

However countless studies have shown that if parents could do only one proactive and practical activity to promote family commitment, togetherness and positive communication, it would be to have a regular sit down meal around a common table with no distractions.

Studies have also shown that the more families eat together, the less likely the children will become involved in risky activities. The children will also feel more loved and do better at school (See for example the National Centre for Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University, 2010).

Spiritual well-being is also enhanced for families who focus on it by saying grace at each meal. This small ritual of gratitude speaks volumes about the values that families hold.

The magic that happens at family meals is not found in the menu but in the conversations that happen around the table. Amongst the laughter, discussion, affection, appreciation and even in the disagreements, faith and values are passed on.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Organise regular family meals during the week where everyone is special.
- Make the Friday night meal special.
- Make sure that all phones, modems and media are switched off for this hour.
- Create conversation starters.
- Prepare the meal together to extend the conversation and together time.



## **Bible Readings/Stories**

Not that long ago, many families had a huge family Bible that would be placed in a significant position in their living room. It was at the centre of their homes and hearts. In this Bible all the important family events such as births, deaths and marriages would be recorded. I can remember sitting down at the coffee table and leafing through this Bible and reading the family history along with many of the stories contained therein.

The question is, does the Bible still hold pride of place in our homes and our hearts or is it competing for our time and space in the consumerist society in which we live. When our children are immersed in the meta-narrative of the Bible they begin to understand God and His story and are better equipped to live a life of value and meaning.

It is important for children to have their Bible in a language that is age-appropriate. Right from a young age parents can read the stories to their children and as the children grow, listen to the children read the stories to them. Children watching their parents read the Bible, both in their personal devotions and as a family is important too.

Stories give primary children the scaffolding upon which they will build their faith in later stages. Faith formation and transference occurs at the intersection between the story of God and the story of our culture. We need to teach children to identify both of



these stories. Helping our children to identify the story that culture is constantly bombarding them with, will help them to allow God's story to shape and inspire. Stories help us to understand the "dragons" of the society and culture that surrounds us that threatens to choke out the story of God in our children's lives. Our children want to live in a story. The question is what story do we want them to live in? A story of dry bones, or a story of unimaginable transformational power.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Find a large family Bible that can have pride of place in your home.
- Purchase age-appropriate Bibles for your children from the time they are born.
- Read stories to your children out of the Bible and from good Bible storybooks.
- Encourage your children to read the Bible themselves.
- Discuss the Bible stories with your Children.



## **Mentoring Moments**

Helping Parents to identify and seize the mentoring moments in their children's lives is of crucial importance. These never-ending teachable moments parents have with children, form the informal but usually more powerful 'sticky gospel' curriculum. Faith is generally caught, not taught. When it comes to character and faith, our children are watching us 24/7. With this in mind, we as parents can show them what it is like to have a relationship with God. What it is like to love our spouse and how God works for them in the hard and sticky situations that life throws at us. These teachable moments are far more powerful when it comes to faith formation than anything that is taught at Church.

As we rub shoulders with our children and together face the obstacles in the life of the family and the child and as families do things together, moments will occur that can be seized upon to plant "Faith time capsules" in the lives of our children. A teachable moment can happen almost anywhere; chances are, many of the valuable lessons you learned as a child were not consciously taught at all. Rather, they were learned in the midst of casual moments of "real life" - shopping in the supermarket, walking through a shopping centre, setting the table for dinner, strolling outdoors, or driving to the store. These moments are what Deuteronomy 6:4-12 are talking about and is what it means to live our Christianity 24/7.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Make sure that the faith and spiritual disciplines you want your child to have are ones you have.
- Spend time with your child.
- Seize routine family moments for conversation with your child for example driving in the car, shopping or gardening.
- Spend time outdoors with your child.
- Always be on the watch for situations/moments where you can debrief with your child and talk about what it means.





## Champion the Home

One of the best ways that the church can have a lasting impact on children is to come to the realisation that the family is the primary method created by God to pass on faith to their children. Once the church comes to this realisation, they must begin to think about how their programs and methods are supporting this. When the church begins to champion the home and put its resources behind this, parents will begin to feel supported and equipped.

The church needs to equip parents in the art of spiritual parenting. In order to achieve this, the church needs to move from a program driven church building, to a discipleship driven home and community impacting church. There is nothing more important for the church than to help bring faith and faithful living into the centre of every home. It is only when faith is grounded in the home that faith will begin to stick and find its way into the hearts of our children.

The church also needs to equip parents to have strong marriages as well. In a world where marriages are falling apart, one important thing we can do for children is to ensure that our marriages get off to a good start and stay strong and enriched. When the child sees parents who love each other and demonstrate this before the child, the child begins to understand God and His Grace and love too. Good marriages create a security blanket around our children.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Champion the home from the pulpit.
- Champion healthy marriages from the pulpit.
- Run regular spiritual parenting seminars.
- Set up date nights where the church looks after the kids and sends parents on intentional dates.
- Hold regular family social events that encourage families to spend time together.





# Synchronise Church and Home

Many churches operate under the solo model of ministry. The result is a myriad of departments and ministries all passionate about their causes competing for the same clientele. The result is turf wars, competing agendas, disillusionment and a fragmented strategy.

One thing that the Church can do to impact the home is to make sure that the Church and the home is on the same page. When a strategy is developed that makes sure that leaders and parents are partners in ministry, families and children are the winners. Churches need to look at how various departments can work together to impact the home rather than working in silos and a scattered approach. So often families fray at the seams because they are pulled apart by great programs, but with different targets and missions. Something awesome will happen when we are all aiming for the same target.

In an ideal setting what is taught to each age level is the same, with a slightly different age appropriate emphasis. What is taught in church needs to be practical and also needs to be reinforced at home. Take-home discussion work sheets and devotionals can be prepared to go home to allow that weeks teaching and preaching into home discussion and into outward action.

When Churches and homes develop synergy, effective faith transference will begin to occur. Churches will feel that they are reaching their goals and homes will feel like they are being supported.



## ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Develop an integrated strategy across all departments with family as the focus.
- Keep it simple; come up with some common goals.
- Promote these goals regularly across all departments.
- Ensure that all you do keeps churches and families on the same page with the same goals in mind.
- Make sure that curriculum and teaching has a home component attached to it.





## Reactivate the Family

Somewhere along the way in doing church and running programs we lost sight of the family. Families came to think of churches as the “fount of all knowledge” when it came to talking about things of faith. After all, if families want to teach their kids gymnastics or sport or some other worthy pursuit they take them to a professional to teach their child. Only the best will do. Churches and Christian Schools have also (often with little thought) assumed the role of being the professional, offering excellence in programming, Bible study and specialised groups for the children. Whilst there is nothing wrong with excellent church programs and good Christian schools, these two entities are ineffective if nothing is happening at home to pass on the faith to our children

Reactivating the family means helping parents actively participate in the spiritual formation of their children. We have to see ourselves as the catalyst to help parents to do their job better. If we don’t, then we’ll continue to lose the youngest generation to apathy, cynicism and resentment. One of the important things the church can do is to help families build simple faith routines into their daily rhythms of life. This could be at meal times, on the way to work, bed times and leisure time.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Encourage your parents to make one step to bring a God moment into the rhythm of their homes and lives.
- Provide workshops teaching parents how to pass on the faith to their children.
- Back off as a church and don’t do the things that parents are meant to do. Trust them!
- Provide groups where parents can get together and encourage each other.
- Create opportunities for families to worship and learn together on a frequent basis at home, church and at special events.



## Milestone Celebrations

One way that the church can create synergy between the church and the home is to create milestone events and teaching in the lives of their congregations and families. What this means is that the church is intentional about seeing families equipped and children placed at the centre of the congregation at each life stage. Some of these important events include the birth of a baby, dedication, first Bible, going to school, faith commitment, finishing primary school, baptism etc.

Each event would be celebrated in a special way at church and at home. The parents would also receive teaching at each stage to help them to be effective with their children at each life stage. Acknowledgment before the church at each of these stages is also an important way of helping the child to feel that they are an important part of the church, and would make sure that churches and homes are on the discipleship journey with each child.

Special mementos and certificates could be presented at each life stage, which could then be kept in a special tin by their parents and presented to the child as a spiritual legacy when they leave home. I firmly believe that if milestones are celebrated, the child will not just leave home with a bunch of mementos and memories but also with a firmly entrenched faith.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Develop church and home Milestone celebrations for significant life events.
- Provide relevant teaching to parents at each stage.
- Give the child/parents certificates and mementos for each life stage.
- Celebrate milestones corporately with the children at the centre.
- Provide a special celebration for when the child leaves home and keep in touch with the adolescent and provide support and regular communication at this time of transition.





## The Power of Play

Since the mid 1950's, children's free play has been declining because adults have exerted increasing control over children's activities. Studies prove that unstructured play provides a testing ground for life. It provides critical life experiences without which children cannot develop into competent and confident adults resulting in anxiety and depression.

Play is the natural language of the child and it is through the use of objects and actions that they tell us about their realities. Play therapists are witness to the profound nature of children's spirituality through the symbols and accompanying verbal explanations that emerge during their play. Whether exposed to a formal religion or not, children often put forth symbols of God, angels, heaven, and magical and/or mystical items for which they provide profound explanations. What some children cannot say in language, they are able to show in discrete play and art-making activities. Children gain strength, hope and direction from their spiritual selves and are ultimately able to reprocess and recover from matters that have interrupted their day-to-day lives.

Families can enhance the faith of their children by encouraging children to get outdoors or turn off the electronics and engage in free range, unstructured play.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Don't control your child's free time. Encourage children to have plenty of unstructured play time
- Turn off the T.V, internet and other electronics that get in the way of play.
- Give your child toys that don't require batteries and require some assembly or puzzle.
- Bring play into your worship/Bible story time as a way of allowing the child to express their own unique understanding of the story.
- Play with your child. Play is good for adults too.



## Family Worship

Studies have shown that families who regularly practice family worship together are more likely to pass on the faith to their children. It is important to find a time regularly when all the family can assemble together for family worship. Family worship sets the priorities of the family and brings a spiritual focus. Family worship is the first church and

is where children learn to sing, sit still, listen, pray and share together. It also instills family togetherness and a family focus.

Family worship is the powerhouse of the home and the church and it is from here that true revival begins. The key to effective family worship is to keep it short, simple and focused. Stories, singing, praying and sharing are all important elements along with giving each family member a turn to lead out in family worship.

Often in the morning there might be time for a quick prayer huddle. Other times there might be time for a devotional or reading. The main thing is to build a worship experience into your family routine, somewhere that works and brings the family together.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Keep it simple. Don't make family worship a burden on your children.
- Keep it varied and interesting.
- Encourage different children to lead out in worship.
- Don't feel guilty if you don't do worship every day due to family busyness but do it as often as you can.
- If there is no time for anything else, at least pray together.



## **Drive Time**

In today's fast paced world, time in the car can be an important time for family conversation and prayer. Often families are busy rushing from one appointment to another but car time means captive audience time.

Families can use this time to remove headphones and turn off the radio and connect in conversation to debrief the day, or as a coaching time to prepare children for the day ahead. It is also a good time to pray together or listen to sacred music together.

I use car time regularly to 'date' my children or to at least take them to school regularly. The child is excited about what is going to happen at the end of the journey but I enjoy taking the long route and finding out where the child is at spiritually. If the child is reading a book I will talk with them about the story and draw out spiritual lessons. Sometimes the child will simply want to talk about what is on their hearts and this is Ok too. Sometimes things happening on the road or around the car outside are good opportunities to have a mentoring moment with your child.



The main point here is to not let this time go by without seizing it as a God moment for faith transference. It is often in these unstructured together moments that faith transference really occurs.



#### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Turn off headphones and the car radio/cd player.
- Encourage your child to talk.
- Pray together.
- Use moments to talk about the things of God.
- 'Date' your children as regularly as you can. Parent/Child days can be fun.



## **Prayer**

Praying for and with your child is a powerful spiritual growth motivator. Through prayer we are communicating with each other and with God in a powerful connection. Families can build prayer into their daily routines for example on the way to school, in the car, at mealtimes, morning time and bed time.

There is a powerful spiritual lesson to be learned when families pray together and then witness the answer to that prayer. Children can learn this concept from a very young age and take their turn at praying with and for their families.



#### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Pray for your child and encourage them to pray as soon as they are able.
- Vary prayer and build it into your daily routine.
- Keep a family prayer journal and celebrate the answers to prayer.
- Let your children see and hear you praying for them.
- Encourage family members to pray for each other.



## **Media/Technology Balance**

We live in a culture of incessant noise and activity. Everyone is either too busy or too tired. This busyness and noise needs to be silenced to allow Christ to dwell in us. The technological age is full of beeps, prompts and apps. Technology has thrust upon us iTunes, iPhones, iPads, iPods and androids. In the effort to provide connectedness, our families are becoming more disconnected than ever. Without mentioning the detrimental effects of violent video games, readily available pornography and sexting or the detrimental health effects that the current generation of primary school aged children are experiencing, one wonders how a connection with God can be found or maintained in this myriad of noises and distractions.

Where homes used to be havens from the outside world, the world is now at our fingertips through screens and mobile devices. Parents and mentors need to help children to “be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10, NIV)

Powers (2010) in his book “Hamlets Blackberry” promotes the idea of an Internet/media Sabbath. Based on the idea of the traditional notion of the weekend as a time apart and the Sabbath as a time when “ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day ” (Exodus 19). Powers recommends turning off the modem on a Friday evening and leaving it off until Monday morning. Powers states that the external stimuli had turned his family into something that was not really them and so in putting in place the internet Sabbath, allowed them to find the sense of family that had been lost. Powers says that an added advantage was that the family spent more time together, more time outside in nature and more time connecting with family and friends than ever before.

Finding God in the silence and somewhere away from the “noise” is a step that will inspire our children to connect with each other, their families and to find God in a whole new way.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Turn off the modem, media and phones during family together times, e.g. worship and meals.
- Don't allow the media to invade your child's bedroom and sleep time.
- Make sure you know what your child is watching and surfing on the internet and put boundaries in place.
- Set an example about balancing your media consumption.
- Watch TV/Surf and then talk with your child so that you can ameliorate any detrimental viewing.



## Less Programming.

One of the best things that that church can do for the family is to program less so that the family can do more. Churches can sometimes be guilty of dividing families and keeping them busy so that there is no real time for families to be together.

The family has often been busy all week in this fast paced society that we live in, that often the family has little together time. They often arrive at the end of the week exhausted and then the church fills their lives with busy programming on the weekend. If churches really do champion the family, then they will prioritise their programming with this in mind.

If we truly want families to be together and to have moments to allow faith transference then we need to be the first to set the example of how we see that happening. Churches can create programs that allow families to be together rather than to pull them apart. Family social activities that encourage families to play together is possibly one of the most important programs the church can run.



### *Five Practical Suggestions*

- Create family social events.
- Delete programs that are not pro-family.
- Create programs that bring families together.
- Publish a list of ideas that families can do together during their free time.
- Encourage a number of families to do fun family things together to encourage each other.



## Supportive Mentors

Mentors inspire our children and are able to say the same things and love the same values that parents do but in a different way. Children need to spend time with adults who are further along in their spiritual journey. Their presence is important and the more adult mentors who seek out the child and help the child apply faith to daily life the better.

Mark Kelly (2010) in research by LifeWay discovered that children who had at least one adult from church make a significant time investment in their lives were twenty eight percent more likely to keep attending church. The figure jumps to forty six percent if

the same child has five or more adults who spend time with the child and was there for them personally and spiritually.

Kara Powell and Chap Clarke (Sticky Faith, 2011) calls this mentoring the 5:1 ratio. He says many children's ministries' say they want to have a 1:5 ratio of adults to kids for their class or small group. Clark believes that this needs to be reversed so that we have five adults caring for one child. These adults invest in the child's life in little, medium and big ways and so a sticky web of relationships is developed around the children which develops sticky faith.

The church is the best community to provide these types of safe mentors and this is probably one of the most important things the church can do; that is to come alongside parents, equip them and help them to mentor their children. More than any program or event, what made kids most likely to feel a significant part of their local church was when adults made the effort to get to know them. We always need to remember that the commands given in Deuteronomy 6 were to the whole of the Israelite community, not just to parents. The old saying, "it takes a village to raise a child" is most applicable when it comes to surrounding our children with a "cloud of witnesses" to the faith, who are there to know our primary children by name, support them and mentor them along the spiritual pathway. Kinnaman, (You lost me, 2011) found that there is a disciple-making gap in relationships between church members and its younger generations. He said that it is crucial that churches do all that they can to rediscover the intergenerational power of the assembly of the saints.

Powell and Clark (2011) found that what matters more than looking like we are living a faithful Christian life is choosing to live a certain way because Christ has compelled us. How we interacted with a homeless person, for instance, will probably make a more indelible impression on our kids' faith than the size of the cheque we wrote to our church that week.



#### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Be intentional about mentoring programs and working with parents to mentor their children.
- Intentionally match mentors with parents.
- Provide opportunities for mentors and children to interact together in a safe environment.
- Put in place an adopt a grandparent strategy in your church.
- Train mentors in their role and regularly celebrate with them and thank them.





## Equip Parents

Parenting is not an easy task, especially in this busy lifestyle that many families find themselves thrust into. One of the most strategic things that a church can do for parents is to provide them with the skills they need to effectively parent their children. Parents receive more instruction about how to drive a car than how to parent a child. It is very easy to become a parent but it is much harder to become an effective parent. The reality is that how parents live their faith may have a greater impact on children's lives than anything else. The most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents or in other words when it comes to faith, parents get what they are.

The church is one of the best institutions to provide effective parenting instruction to the next generation. When the church prioritises families and equips parents with the parenting skills they need, bad family patterns can be broken, parents feel supported, marriages and families stay together, children feel secure and faith is passed on.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Match new parents with older effective parents.
- Run regular parenting classes.
- Set up a welcome baby program in your church.
- Set up a mums group and a playgroup in your church.
- Set up a support hotline that parents can call for advice during their frantic moments.



## Gracelink Sabbath School

The Church can assist parents by running an effective Sabbath School. Gracelink is not just about teaching the facts but is about connecting children with Jesus through the broad themes of Grace, community, worship and service. The most important thing about curriculum is that children find a loving, Grace filled, forgiving God.

Age based learning accommodates the unique educational needs of children. It allows leaders to target multiple intelligences in their teaching and provides systematic age appropriate Bible instruction. A time of age segregated learning ensures that we as a

church do not miss this prime time when children's moral and spiritual compasses are developing and ensures that a Biblical worldview is being put in place. Age-based learning celebrates primary aged children's maturing spiritual capacities and helps them become consistent in daily private worship times.

However we need to always remember that the aim of age based curriculum is not simply to teach Bible knowledge. Too often church education programs tell us a great deal about God without bringing us into relationship with him.

We need to make sure that head knowledge is matched by heart knowledge and that this knowledge is then tested by practical application through acts of service and justice in the church and local community. As the child grows through the age based curriculum they will also grow into the Bible Story and find their place in that story and in the church congregation.

The greatest need however, is for trained, equipped and passionate teachers and helpers who are committed to the long haul of inspiring these children into the faith. All too often our age segregation children's ministries fall down because churches appoint leaders merely to fill holes or to gain experience in these division before they graduate to the 'more important' youth or adult divisions. The church needs to adopt the practice of Jesus and turn the kingdom upside down to create a church where children are seen as the most important individually in the Kingdom of Heaven and the church on earth. It is then that age-segregated children's divisions become an inspirational brick in the scaffold of our children's lives.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Teach and model the Gracelink Curriculum.
- Choose the Sabbath School Teachers before choosing any other leaders in the church.
- Provide adequate training for teachers.
- Encourage parents to be involved with their children.
- Provide take home resources for parents to share with their children to reinforce your message.



## Leverage Influence

We can teach children about Jesus and what it means to be a Christian but one of the key ingredients for churches is to transfer the head knowledge to the hands and heart. If our children grow up merely observing from the sidelines and never get involved in the life of the church, they will eventually grow out of the church and their faith. Children and youth need to serve alongside the adults and own the ministry. Helping them serve in various roles creates ownership and commitment.

I am a minister today because the head elder in my church got me involved in ministry early. At the age of 12 I was helping teach the Bible study to the adults and at 13 I was taking my turn on the preaching roster. Because I grew up in a small church, everyone took their turn and we served together. Churches need to leverage the influence of involving children and youth in serving. Involvement helps children not just to know about faith but to live the faith and own the faith and find their part in God's story.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Involve children and youth in all aspects of the church.
- Make sure your weekly curriculum includes opportunities to serve.
- Encourage families to serve together.
- Praise and encourage students for their acts of service.
- Help each child to discover their own unique gift and be intentional handing over ownership.





## Sabbath School Lesson

If families do one thing at home that reinforces what is taught at church, that is a powerful spiritual growth motivator. Churches can provide families with a take-home sheet that helps build the days teaching into the weekly rhythms of the home. Sitting down with your child and going over their lesson with them, discussing it with them and answering their questions reinforces the teaching of the lesson, provides a mentoring moment, gives you an opportunity to express your faith and encourages children to express theirs.

Make an effort as a parent to know what is being taught to your child and then find ways to creatively build on the story and provide practical expression and debriefing of the story at home. This will help help knowledge to reach the heart and put meaning and heart knowledge right next to the head knowledge of your child.



### *Five Practical Suggestions*

- Know what your child is learning each week.
- Involve yourself in their Sabbath School.
- Think up positive ways to reinforce what is being taught during the week.
- Share your faith story where possible.
- Discuss what the child has learnt and work on answers to their questions together



## Nature Nurture

Time spent in nature with primary children is never wasted. It restores our souls and helps our children to grasp the spiritual benefits that a connection to the Creator through nature brings.

In his book, “Last Child in the Woods”, Richard Louv (2005) points to the proliferation of technology; cable TV, video games, home computers and the Internet have all cut into the time children could have spent outdoors. Louv also notes the detrimental effects that Nature Deficit Disorder is having on our society. Louv writes that our society has developed such an outsized faith in technology that we have yet to fully realise or even adequately study how human capacities are enhanced through the power of nature. Louv says that tapping into the restorative powers of the natural world can boost mental acuity and creativity; promote health and wellness. Louv’s research has found that contact with nature is a source of wonder and inspiration for children, essential to



their healthy development and sense of spirituality. In fact, research studies show that contact with nature increases youth creativity, reduces stress, and helps kids who suffer from attention-deficit disorder.

Louv believes that, “Healing the broken bond between our young and nature is in everyone’s self-interest, not only because aesthetics or justice demand it, but also because our mental, physical and spiritual health depend upon it.” The inspiration that nature provides to our children is often overlooked, the more young people discover their connection to land and place, the more they are awed by it. It is important for individuals to explore the natural world around their community so that they can become its stewards. Childhood experiences in nature can later inform ethical positions about land use and stewardship of creation.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Take a walk/drive with your children into the bush.
- Help your child to grow a vegetable garden.
- Go bird watching with your child.
- Take your child fishing.
- Visit the Zoo or Aquarium together



## **Bed Time Rituals**

Bedtime is a prime time to help your child grow spiritually. The “twilight” time just before your child goes to sleep is a great time to review the events of the day and debrief with your child. Talking over the events helps to calm the child and discuss strategies for dealing with their issues. It also lets your child know that you are interested in them and what is happening in their life.

Bedtime is also a great time to pray with your child and encourage them to pray a short prayer as well. If the child does not want to pray, then hugging them close as you pray helps them to understand and experience a God of love and Grace.

Bedtime is a great time to read a Bible story to your child. This is a good time to also tell stories from your child hood and church experiences to your child as well. As children hear the Bible story and your story along with the stories of their church, they will find their place in God’s story.

Finally bedtime also allows you to bless and prophecy over your child. My Mother would always tell me that God placed me on this planet for a reason and to never forget

that God has an awesome job for me to do. That blessing spoke volumes into my life and put me on a course to find my part in God's story.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Find time to spend with your child at bedtime.
- Debrief the day with your child and listen to their concerns.
- Pray with your child, bless them and encourage them to pray.
- Read a story with your child.
- Tell your faith story to your child.



## **Service Activities**

Research by the Search Institute (2003) has found that family service activities inspire our children to grow spiritually. Powell and Clark (Sticky Faith, 2011) state that as we think about our role in creating space for our children to experience sticky service, one theme emerges and that is that justice will be stickier when it hits children close to home. It needs to be in their home literally, as we as parents exemplify, encourage, and actually participate with our children in righting wrongs around them. It needs to hit close to home thematically, as we help our kids understand how particular injustices relate to their lives. It needs to hit home personally, as we expose our children to actual people who have been oppressed, thereby giving injustice a face and a name"

Our family always collected for Missions, Red Cross and the Red Shield appeal from the same territory. We got to know the people we collected from and we created family rituals around the service project such as meals together and debriefing the experience. By serving with my family I realised that service to and for others really does make a difference.



### ***Five practical suggestions***

- Do family service projects together.
- Allow the children to be just as involved in the projects as the parents.
- Debrief the projects and discuss the experience.
- Collect appeals from the same territory each year and get to know the people living there.
- Go on an overseas mission trip as a family.



## Intergenerational Worship.

Churches need to constantly ask themselves how they can encourage regular intergenerational interaction during church worship time. Powell and Clark (2011) describe their search for the silver bullet being that one element that would be significantly related to higher faith maturity. The closest they came to finding this element was the relationship between intergenerational worship and sticky faith. Worshipping together in a close and intimate setting reveals our inner spiritual lives to our children and theirs to us

The problem is we often run so many excellent programs and keep families busy and mostly segregated from the moment they arrive at church till the moment they meet back at the car to go home. Sometimes the best thing that church can do for families is to program less so that families spend more time together both at church and at home. The content of the various programs we run is not nearly as important as the opportunities for children to meet the people of faith in their community and to experience worship together.

Beckwith (2010) talks about the effect that families worshipping together has on Children. She points out the profound effect worship rituals have as children watch their parents stand to sing, kneel to pray and place their gift in the offering basket they sense the wonder and awe of a God of love and grace. Beckwith also points out that intergenerational experiences means that adults can learn a lot about worship from children too and in so doing we are putting into practice the commands of Jesus that “anyone who welcomes a child in the name of Jesus welcomes Him” (Matthew 18, NIV). Beckwith says that by prohibiting children from the worship of their faith community we are, in effect, prohibiting them from an important piece of their spiritual development and denying them the opportunity to learn how to worship God in the traditions and rituals of their church community.

The challenge is to provide a worship experience that is meaningful and relevant to each generation. It is the connections created with the children during the intergenerational worship that makes it meaningful for the children. This might take creative thinking and means that the style and content of our worship service will need adjusting but as Beckwith (2004) writes, when we start from the viewpoint that children have the same claim on worship space, ritual, style and content, something exciting happens as the congregation is formed spiritually together.



### ***Five Practical Suggestions***

- Have a regular time when the whole church is together for worship.
- Involve the children in the worship experience.
- Provide activities for the children to do during worship that is relevant to them.
- Encourage the generations to interact with and listen to each other during worship.
- Get to know the children by name and as a Pastor or leader welcome them by name.



## Fuel Passion.

Churches can fuel passion in the hearts of their children by helping them not just to experience the wonder and awe of the story but to be actively involved in it. Churches fuel Passion in the hearts of the children when they help them to experience the story through active learning and debriefing. Children don't just hear the story, but their heart for God and his people is fueled as they experience the story and then apply it into their lives.

Too many parents try to cloister their children from outside influences by shutting them up in a Christian ghetto to protect them from the big bad world. This type of thinking means that children never get to experience how faith really works for them in the real world.

Many children fall totally apart spiritually when they leave home because many of them spent years so cocooned in their faith that it was never tested. They were unprepared to enter the world, to get an education and a job.

Our children develop a passion for God and what he means to them when their faith is tried and tested in the crucible of life. Faith under pressure and in the face of reality fuels passion and commitment and a need to dig further into the things of God.



### *Five Practical Suggestions*

- Incite wonder and discovery.
- Ensure that all your teaching has an active learning component.
- Allow young people the time and space to wrestle with their faith.
- Allow children to experience faith in their community.
- Make sure that your children are equipped with tips and challenges to help them live faith 24/7.



## Memory Events.

Memory events provide markers upon which children and young adults can hang their faith. They provide positive memories, which connect children to their faith community. A memory event is an activity big enough to dominate an adolescent's horizon so that he/she is fully immersed in the event and will never forget it or its message.

Memory events pass on values and encourage relationships between adolescents and adults. These events promote a sense of belonging in the community and provide experiential learning.

The church is the best placed community to provide these memory events for children and their families. It might be on some of these days that children have some of the greatest memories of family togetherness both in terms of their immediate family and the larger church family. These

events include corporate camps, service activities, club events, holiday celebrations, traveling to other churches and running the day for them, and youth rallies.



#### *Five Practical Suggestions*

- Plan regular memory events around public holidays, for example Easter and Christmas.
- Provide church camps with memorable themes that families can be involved in.
- Provide a club where families can get involved in camping, hiking and other outdoor pursuits.
- Provide big service memory events such as a fly and build.
- Run a Vacation Bible School regularly for your church and community.



## **Family Evangelism/Service.**

The church is the ideal place to organise families to go out and serve the world around them and provide outreach opportunities for families to get involved in. Ivy Beckwith 2004 says that by being a community that models care and concern for the rest of the world and by involving our children in that care and concern, we can inspire our children to become people of faith. Acts of service help children see beyond their back yard and to the world around them. Peter Bensen (1997) writes that “for caring to become a lasting disposition the practice of it ought to be in the range of one a week throughout childhood and adolescence. Acts of caring and service simple or more demanding done in Jesus’ name can be formative for children, if parents make them a regular part of life.”

Service to others really does matter in the lives of those who are being served and in the lives of those doing acts of service. Parents and church leaders can build it into the lives of their children by building compassionate practices into the family and churches’ way of living. It matters because it does make a difference in the spiritual life of the child as they reach out to the world around them and are drawn into God’s story of radical service and discipleship.

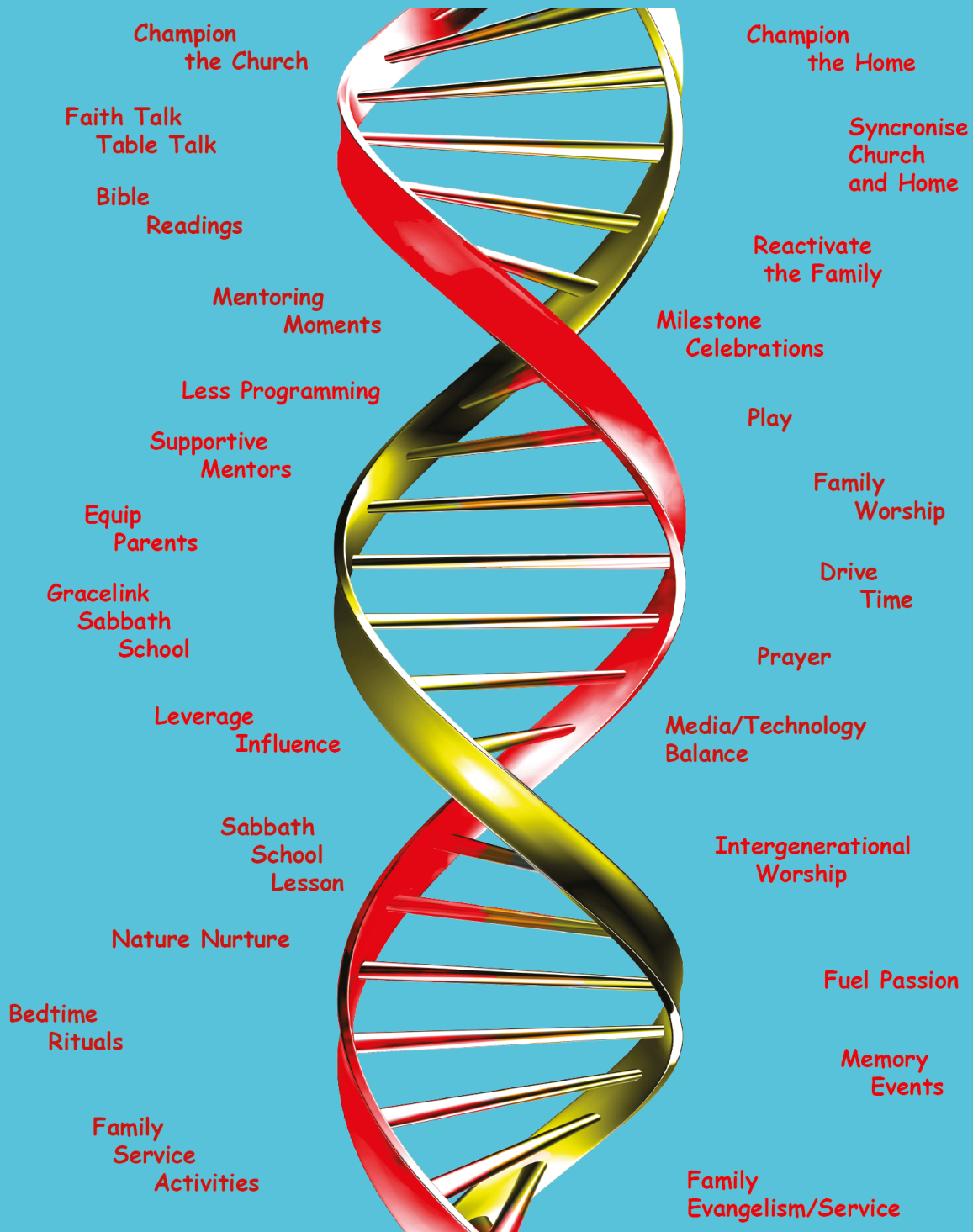


#### *Five Practical Suggestions*

- Visit a hospital/retirement home as a group
- Plan an outreach project together
- Do a tin can drive for unfortunate families
- Visit an orphanage
- Plan a backyard blitz for elderly community members

# 24/7 + 7

## 24/7 HOMES CHURCH



## The DNA of Spiritual Champions