



Featuring Rob Parsons, OBE
and Katharine Hill,
Care for the Family

Getting Your Kids Through Church



Session Notes



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A personal note from Rob ...



Getting Your Kids Through Church started as a prayer, turned into a book and then became a tour which has taken Care for the Family's team and myself around the country talking to parents, church leaders, youth workers and church members.

I have been reminded time and time again that as we pray for our children, asking God to protect them from the dozens of pitfalls that await them in life, we must also pray about another danger – the thing that destroys the seed of faith in millions of young people. We must pray that our children may come through their early experience of Christianity without losing their faith in God.

In this small group resource we will explore together some of the vital issues that affect every Christian home and church community. We have created this course because we are passionate about the role of the local church, and we are so grateful to every church leader, youth and children's worker, volunteer, friend and family member who invests in young lives. We want to come alongside you – all who share the responsibility for nurturing the faith and well-being of the next generation. We hope that we will be encouraged and challenged as we explore these vital questions together. We also hope that we will perhaps discover some of the things that might make a real difference to the seeds of faith growing in the young lives around us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Parsons". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style and is underlined.

Rob Parsons, OBE

Founder and Chairman
Care for the Family

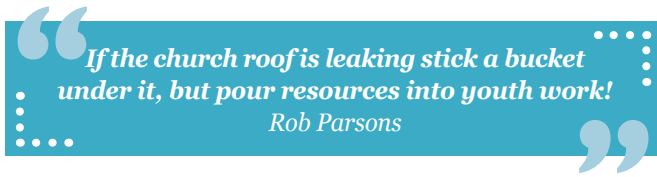
Session 1:

The four stages of faith

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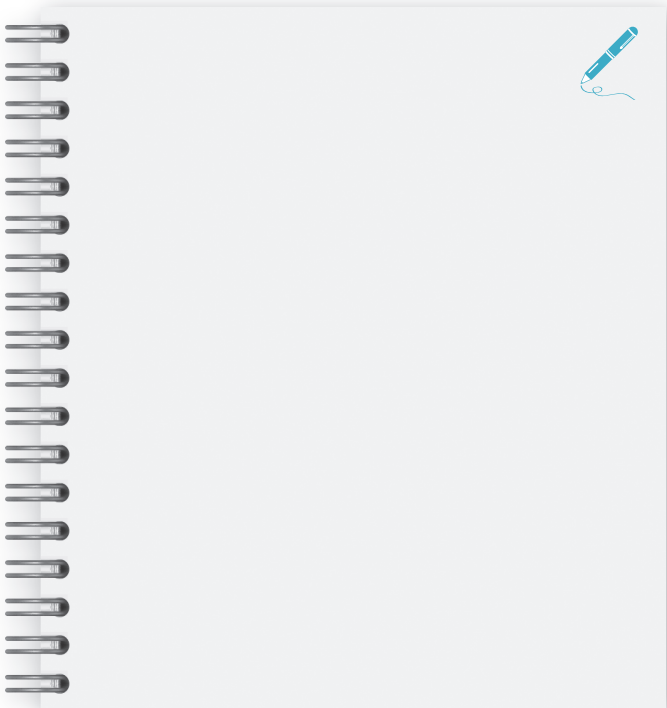
The big picture

God has no grandchildren! Everyone who enters a relationship with him must do so directly as a son or daughter. So if our children are to have a real faith, they must receive and experience it for themselves. As parents, youth workers and church leaders we can't bear total responsibility for their spiritual journey, but we can – and must – do things, pass on values, and demonstrate attitudes that will make it easier for our children to develop a relationship with God. In this first session we begin with an introduction to *Getting Your Kids Through Church* from Rob Parsons and Katharine Hill, and then go on to look at how we can best help our young people as they navigate their journey with God.



Setting the scene

1. What particularly stood out to you from the introductory video?
2. What are your hopes for this course?





The Super Regular Kid

1. Thinking about your own life, are there any elements of The Super Regular Kid's experiences you could relate to?
2. Was it easy or hard for you to develop your own faith as you grew up? Why was that?
3. Do you think it is easier or harder for children and young people today? What pressures or opportunities do they have that previous generations did not experience?



The four stages of faith

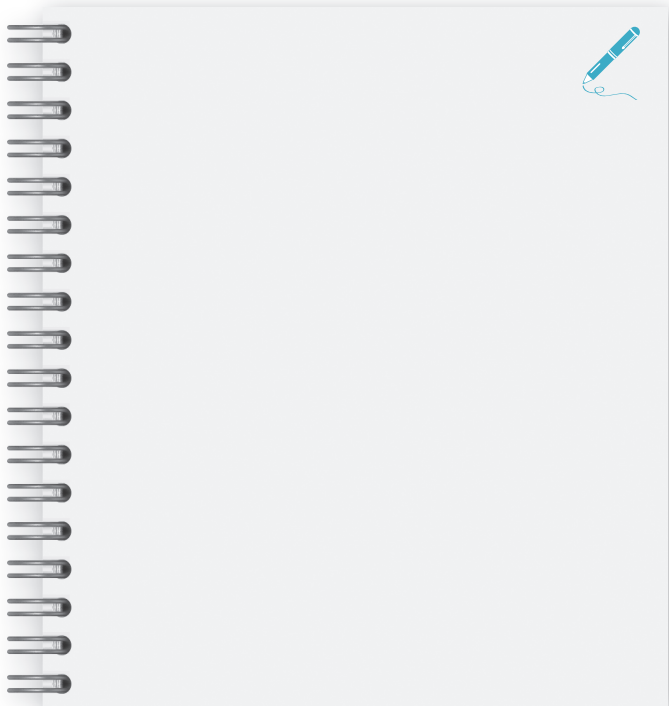
1. Experienced faith
2. Affiliative faith
3. Searching faith
4. Owned faith



The four stages of faith

1. What do you think about the idea that faith is a four-stage spiritual journey?
2. Think about the children or young people you are bringing up or for whom you are particularly responsible. What stage of faith would you say they are at, and why?
3. How does it make us feel when children or adults share doubts or questions about their faith or if they don't seem to be as certain as we would like them to be?
4. How can you show unconditional love to your young people and build an atmosphere of trust and acceptance while encouraging their faith in a positive way?

5. What are some of the positive and creative things you can do at church or home to make the most of the particular stage of faith your children are at and to encourage them on their journey?



*God has no grandchildren – it has to be
their decision, their choice, their experience.*

Rob Parsons



Personal challenge



The one thing I'll aim to do differently ...



Prayer

Pray that the young people and children represented by the group and in church will flourish at whatever stage of faith they are at, and that they will ultimately own that faith for themselves.



Session 2: Overfamiliarity

The big picture

There are many blessings in being brought up in a home where the parents know Christ – where his stories are told, where Bibles are strewn about the house, and where children are taken to the place where people gather to worship him every Sunday. But an ever-present danger is that those who enjoy such treasures get used to them – and to him: “It’s just Jesus.”



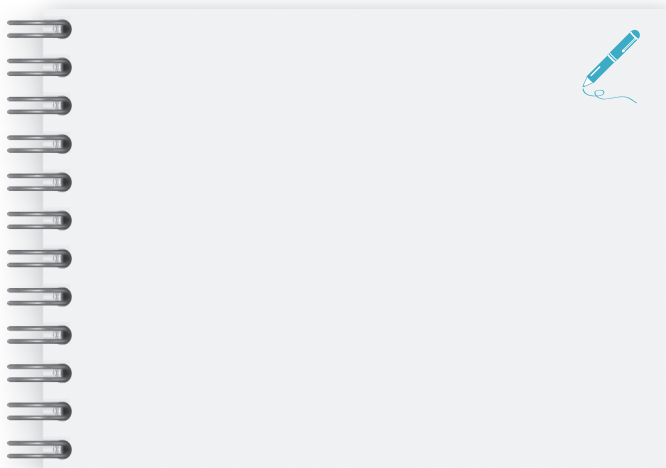
Familiarity can so often lead to ingratitude, so let's re-grasp gratitude and pass that culture onto our kids.

Rob Parsons



Overfamiliarity

1. Christians living in the UK are free of persecution and have many churches, festivals and books available to them. In such circumstances, what dangers, and what opportunities, do we have? Are they the same for our young people?
2. Have we ever 'got used to Jesus' or become overfamiliar with him? How does this affect us – for example, our level of faith or gratitude?
3. How do we counteract this in our homes and churches?
4. Read Matthew 13:44–46. As Rob suggested, imagine this great treasure gone from your life. What would that look or feel like for you?

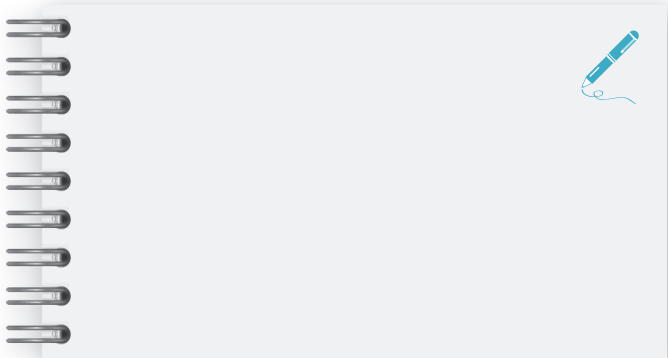


Pour into your children while they're young. Have fun, be available and signpost them to Jesus at every opportunity.
Gavin Calver



Keeping it fresh

1. Gavin discussed the problem of 'Hollywood testimonies'. How can we encourage our children and young people to see their own story with God as exciting?
2. If it's true that children and young people model what they see in others, what about our own testimonies? Do you see your journey with God as exciting? Why/ why not? How do others see it?
3. Rachael mentioned that she encouraged her children to use their gifts for God. How can we intentionally disciple our children and young people in a way that makes them feel valuable to God's plans?
4. In this session we were reminded of the importance of investing in children while they are still young. How could you make Christianity more engaging, real and relevant to the young people in your care?





The whole church needs to stay on fire for Jesus, because that's how you create a dangerous Christianity that never becomes familiar – it's then impossible to be boring!

Gavin Calver



Personal challenge

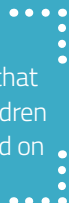


The one thing I'll aim to do differently ...



Prayer

Write down the names of children or young people that you will commit to pray for and encourage (either children represented in the group or others whom God has laid on your heart). How can you do this more intentionally?



Session 3:

Don't sweat the small stuff

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The big picture

Do we sometimes want our children to conform to standards that we are actually struggling to meet ourselves? And do we put pressure on them to fit a particular type of mould?

There's hardly a parent, youth worker or children's worker on the face of the earth who wouldn't be tempted at one time or another to get a one-size-fits-all 'Perfect Christian Child' mould for the young people in their care. But what is it that we really want for our children?



*We have sometimes described as
'spirituality' what is actually 'personality'.*

Rob Parsons



Don't sweat the small stuff

1. Do we ever frown on young people for not fitting the 'Perfect Christian Child' jelly-mould? What unrealistic expectations or unwise judgements might we easily make about them?
2. In what ways do we sometimes confuse personality and spirituality?
3. Read Matthew 25:34–40. What are some of the values and attitudes shown by young people that indicate they are attuned to God? Share some examples.
4. How can we better encourage young people who display these godly characteristics?



“It’s a tragedy when a young person walks away from God because they don’t want to be like Jesus, but it’s a scandal when, although they love him, they walk away because try as they might, they just can’t be like us.”

Rob Parsons



Church life and culture

1. What aspects of our church culture could restrain or squash faith in young people? Are our churches grey or full of colour?
2. Andy and Cath reminded us that it’s not just us that shape young people – young people can also have the ability to influence us. In what ways might we be able to learn from them?
3. How open are you and your church to young people taking more of a lead in church activities? How might this be appropriately encouraged?
4. In what ways can we encourage ‘spiritual aunties and uncles’ to take an active role in the lives of our young people?





*I'd encourage every person to adopt
a young person. Pray for them regularly and
look for opportunities to help them
blossom in their faith.*

Andy Frost



Personal challenge



The one thing I'll aim to do differently ...



Prayer

1 Samuel 16:7: "People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Pray that we learn not to judge young people on their outward appearance but to look beneath the surface.

Session 4: Belonging

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The big picture

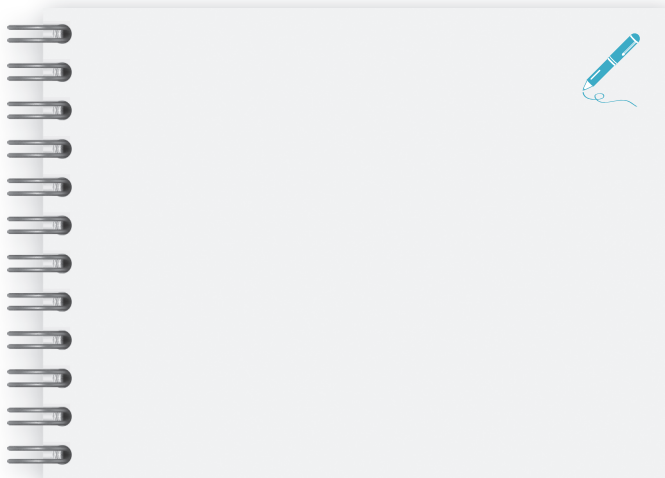
It is possible for a child to thrive in a youth group that has just five people, primitive facilities, and an annual treat consisting of a trip to the nearest town for fish and chips – so long as the leader really cares and the children know that they are special to him or her. It doesn't matter much whether the leader is twenty or fifty, is cool or dresses in tweed. The crucial thing is that the kids sense they are loved.

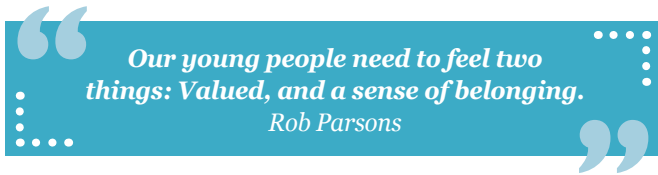
*“If people can’t be themselves in church,
where else can they be themselves?
Church should be the one place they feel secure,
accepted, loved and valued.”*
Cath Lyden



Belonging

1. Did you go to a church children’s or youth group when you were growing up? What are your memories of it and of your youth workers? If you went to a non-church youth group, what are your memories of this? Are there any contrasts or similarities between the two?
2. In what ways might we sometimes be guilty of holding youth leaders responsible for the spiritual lives of our young people? What are our responsibilities as families or church members?
3. What more could you do to support and encourage the children’s and youth work staff and volunteers?





A culture of love

1. Gary spoke about 'Belong, believe, behave'. Which of those three do we pay most attention to in respect of adults? Which do we pay most attention to in respect of young people? Why is that the case?
2. Gary discussed the value of taking young people to a thriving youth group and Christian festivals. Meg emphasised the importance of significant relationships over the size of the youth group. Is it a case of either/or? What do you think that young people need?
3. Rob, Gary and Meg all said that the key to any youth work is "to intentionally love young people". 1 Peter 4:8 says, "Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." What more could we do in our homes and churches to show unconditional love?





Being valued is the key; young people want to know that their needs matter and what they're worried about is important to somebody.

Meg Davies



Personal challenge



The one thing I'll aim to do differently ...



Prayer

In the introduction, Rob said: "We're not responsible for what we don't have, but God is asking us to use what we do have." Bible characters who used what they had to honour God include the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume and the boy who gave his loaves and fishes to Jesus. Pause for a moment and, if you're comfortable doing so, sit with your hands open. Ask God what he has placed in your hands that you could use to help build up the next generation.

Session 5: Over-busyness

The big picture

When we are pursued by constant busyness, there is no end to the things we feel must be done.

Most of us are juggling so many balls – church, work, family, leisure and relationships. Is it really possible to 'have it all, and have it all now' or are there choices that we need to make about what we do and don't do?



*In all our busyness we can often forget
our husbands, our wives, our kids, and even God.*

Rob Parsons



Over-busyness

1. Busyness seems to be a disease of epidemic proportions. Are we busier than our parents or grandparents? In what ways?
2. Think of an average day in your life, then draw a circle and divide it into segments representing where and how you spend the day. Are you happy with how your typical day looks? What changes would you like to make?
3. Rob reminded us that Jesus knew what to say yes to, and therefore what to say no to. Saying yes to some things means that we have to say no to others. How easy do you find it to do this? Why is that?



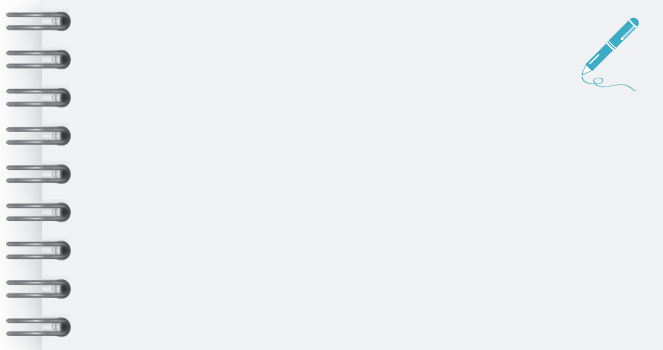
The reason Jesus achieved so much in three short years was because he did what the Father told him to do – and that gave him the incredible freedom to say no.

Rob Parsons



Managing our time

1. Ecclesiastes 4:4 says that “All toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another.” Do we ever feel we have to be busy and have to achieve? Do we feel we have to keep getting more responsibilities as a badge of honour? Why are we so busy?
2. Are church activities for young people as important as swimming lessons? Should a date night take priority over a prayer night? What would you say are your priorities as an individual or as a family? How do we make sure that our lives reflect those priorities?
3. How does what we model to young people help them to negotiate a busy culture?
4. What more could we do to help young people to manage their time well?





*Talk about your priorities as a family,
and how you can be more intentional
about what's important.*

Cathy Madavan



Personal challenge

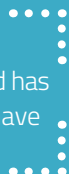


The one thing I'll aim to do differently ...



Prayer

Take a few minutes to consider the priorities that God has given you. Are there some things that God would have you say yes or no to? Pray about these things.



Session 6: Killers of faith

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The big picture

In our homes and churches attitudes such as cynicism, hypocrisy and judgementalism are potent in their ability to destroy the seeds of faith in the hearts of children and young people. They are thorns that can choke children's ability to believe, to see God at work, and to experience the reality of his love and presence. While none of us is perfect, we can all keep our eyes open and make sure that we are keeping the thorns under control.

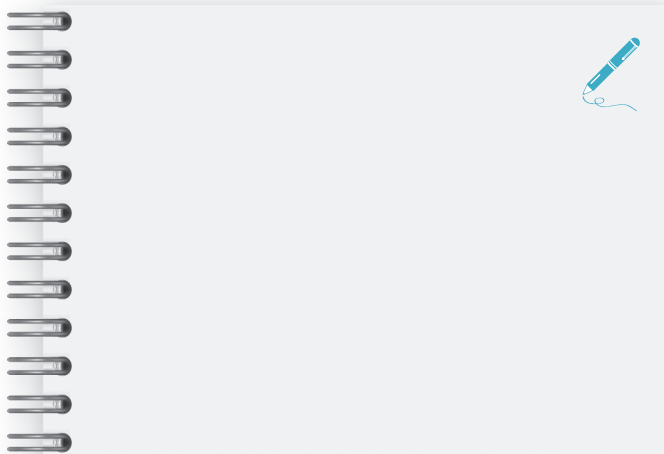
The problem is not that our kids see us fail, but that we pretend to be perfect when we're not – that's when hypocrisy becomes a true killer of faith.

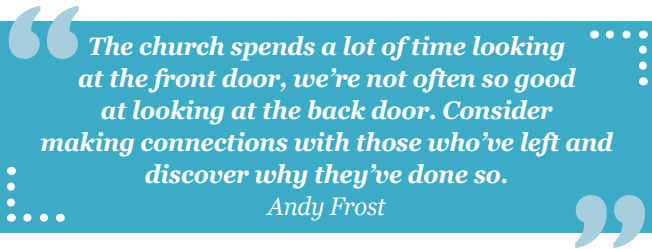
Rob Parsons



Killers of faith

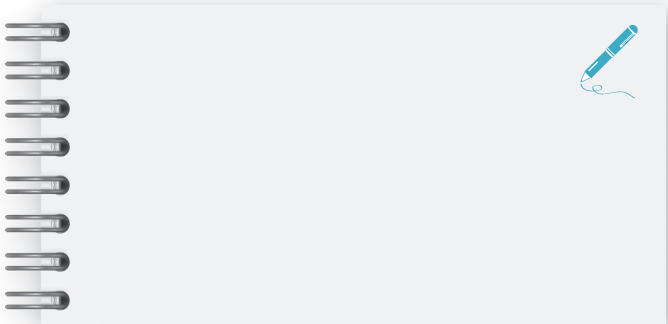
1. Read James 3:9–12. Why is it so easy for us to be negative or cynical about church or about people in the church? What is the antidote to this kind of thinking?
2. How do we encourage ourselves and our young people to express our opinions and concerns in a way that does not lead to cynicism or judgementalism?
3. Having established that none of us is perfect, can we admit to ever falling into the trap of being one thing in public and another thing in private? How can we be more honest with other people, including our children and young people, about our weaknesses and failings? How can we learn from them?





Watching the back door

1. Andy stated four reasons why people leave the church: having no personal experience of God, experiencing difficulties with the church, having unanswered intellectual questions, and the problem of suffering. Which of these would you say has the greatest impact on people's faith? How can we address them?
2. Andy and Lucy talked about having a 'doubters club' in churches. Where are the safe places for us to explore the big questions (for example sexuality, science, identity, reliability of scripture, cultural pressures etc.)? Where are the safe places for our young people? Do we need more?
3. Andy reminded us that every church has a back door. Do we know the reasons why people have left our churches? What lessons could we learn from this?





*Tell them that whatever they do,
they can always come home.*

Rob Parsons



Personal challenge



The one thing I'll aim to do differently ...



Prayer

Pray that our young people would have everything
they need to nourish their growth, and that the things
that might choke their faith would be cut back.

Session 7: Disappointments

The big picture

When we are very young, we believe. We believe in others, we believe the future is bright, we believe that we are special, and we easily believe in a caring God. But there are times when all of us will face disappointment – in others, in ourselves, and even in God. This session explores whether we can prepare our young people and ourselves for the disappointments that will, at some point, come into the lives of every follower of Jesus.



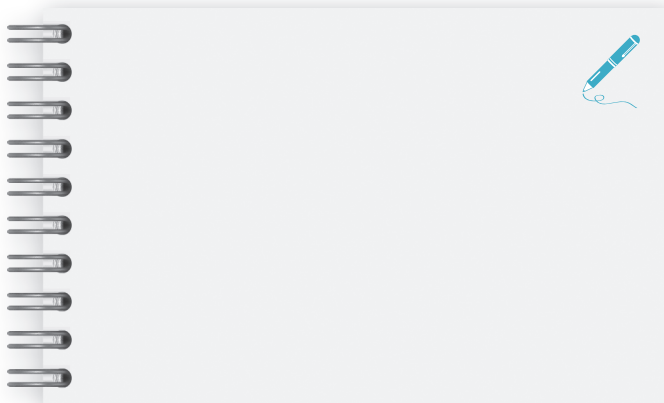
“Teach them to honour their heroes of the faith – but remind them, “Don’t put your faith in them; keep your faith in God.” So when those people fail them they can say, “It’s true they’ve hurt me, but they’re not Jesus.”

Rob Parsons



Disappointment with others and ourselves

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you were disappointed by or let down by somebody you really respected? Have you experienced this with a Christian leader?
2. How does it impact our children and teenagers when they witness adults behaving in a disappointing way or disagreeing with each other in an unpleasant manner?
3. Look at biblical characters who have not lived up to their values – for example, David and Moses. What are the challenges in helping young people deal with their own failures, and how can the Bible help us?



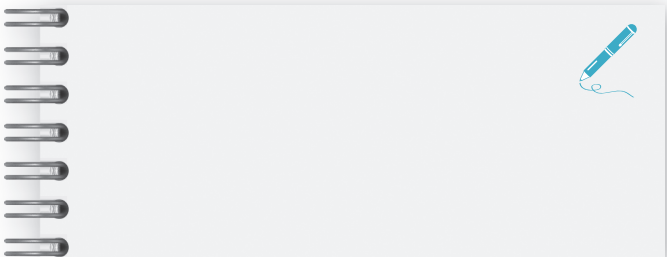
“ *Could it be that unwittingly we are living our lives with the unspoken belief that we have a secret ‘deal’ with God? It goes something like this: ‘God, I will follow you, serve and love you, but in return you will look after me. A little pain, some persecution that doesn’t get too nasty, and minor family traumas are all accepted as part of my sanctification. But that’s it. No failing marriages, children who turn their backs on church, illnesses that kill the ones I love, or redundancies that don’t ultimately lead to a more fulfilling job.’* ”

• Extract from *Getting Your Kids Through Church Without Them Ending Up Hating God* by Rob Parsons



Disappointment with God

1. Read the above quote. How true do you think this is in general and for yourself?
2. When we feel really disappointed with life, how does it affect our relationship with God? Why is this?
3. How do we help children and young people to navigate the reality of disappointments in life?
4. Read Habakkuk 3:17–18. In what ways can we learn to love God *anyway*? In what ways can we learn to rejoice in God anyway?





I had to decide whether or not to hold onto a God who sometimes took you through things, and not around them.

Averil Neilly



Personal challenge



The one thing I'll aim to do differently ...



Prayer

Pray about some of the things that have been shared in this session. Ask God to help us to trust him, even when we do not understand.



Session 8:

Getting them ready for the world

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The big picture

Perhaps the hardest thing about raising young people is knowing how to let them go. All we want to do is to protect them, but fear should not be our driving force. It is, of course, right for us to protect, educate and love our young people, but this alone is not enough. We must also equip, encourage and give them a vision as they engage with the world around them.



When we cocoon our kids we don't really help them – they'll suddenly get to the real world and be totally hit for six!

Rob Parsons



Getting them ready for the world

1. Read Matthew 6:25–27. We often worry about those we care about most. But do we sometimes worry too much? What in these verses will help us?
2. Rob talked about the pitfalls of living in a Christian ghetto. How wise is it for us to protect our children from potentially harmful or tempting situations?
3. How can we help young people to develop their strengths and let them know that we believe in them?





*Help them discover their strengths, and
give them confidence in their own abilities.*

Rob Parsons



Nurturing a vision

1. How can we model all areas of church life to our young people and include them in it in meaningful ways?
2. How much of what we say to young people communicates what they should not do, rather than what they could do? Can we learn from what Mike said about painting a more positive picture?
3. Proverbs 29:18 (King James Version) says: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Do we have a compelling vision to pass on to our young people? What would it look like to have a big vision of God's kingdom and our role in it? Are we ready for an adventure that would be impossible without God's intervention?





Make the vision so big that it's beyond their capacity to do it without God's intervention. That's how we're going to raise up men and women of God who will change the world for the rest of their lives.

Mike Pilavachi



Personal challenge



The one thing I'll aim to do differently ...



Prayer

Imagine how you and the young people you know could transform the world with God's help. Pray about these ideas and believe that through him all things are possible.

Conclusion

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The big picture

It's our desire that *Getting Your Kids Through Church* will help the next generation reach their God-given potential. We hope that together we can release our young people into being the church of today and not just the church of the future. We're all in this together.

“Go for it! Trust them with a big vision –
and don't worry about them messing it up!
They need to be inspired. They want to go for the
adventure. This is about walking with Jesus
and changing the world.”
Mike Pilavachi

About Care for the Family

We hope you enjoyed *GYKTC* and we'd love to know what you thought about the course. You can let us know by completing a 5-minute survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/GYKTC-course. This will help us to make sure *GYKTC* remains a useful resource for churches.

If you found this course helpful, you may want to explore some of the other resources that Care for the Family has available for churches, parents, couples and those who have been bereaved. These include books, events, DVDs, befriending projects, articles and newsletters. You can also purchase the book *Getting Your Kids Through Church Without Them Ending Up Hating God* by Rob Parsons from the Care for the Family shop.

To find out more visit www.careforthefamily.org.uk.

Care for the Family is a registered charity and has been working to strengthen family life since 1988. Our aim is to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties. Working throughout the UK and the Isle of Man, we provide parenting, relationship and bereavement support through our events, courses, training and volunteer network and other resources. Our work is motivated by Christian compassion and our resources and support are available to anyone, of any faith or none.



www.careforthefamily.org.uk
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