

OUR FAMILY PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE

The pandemic has affected us all. This guide helps you to reflect together as a family on your experience of the pandemic. Maybe you can make time after a meal together. Use the questions and links to explore what has been going on for you all, and ensure each person has the chance to talk uninterrupted.

THANKSGIVING

What are you thankful for? Think about small daily things, such as food, as well as bigger, wider things, such as frontline workers. Encourage each family member to contribute at least three things.

Thanksgiving is becoming increasingly popular as a mental wellbeing tool with people being encouraged to make a daily gratitude list, even on the hardest days. The reports are that it proves very helpful. For Christians, thanksgiving is part of their regular practice. They believe that God is listening with delight as people give thanks for all the gifts he has given, just as a parent delights in watching a child enjoy food or toys or play or learning. 'Give thanks in all circumstances' (1Thessalonians 5.8).

PRACTICES

Keep a colourful gratitude list as a family. Write down three things that each person is grateful for each day. Encourage children to decorate it. Perhaps stick it on the fridge.

LAMENT

There is much over the last year to be sad about. To lament is to describe all that sadness. We might talk about it, make a piece of art about it (without it mattering if we're any 'good' at painting, or drawing etc...) We might sing sad songs or make scrapbooks or photobooks to remember people by. We might need to cry or walk or exercise or light a candle in memory. Lament is woven through the Christian tradition. Jesus made a point of caring for people who were sad, or in trouble, ignored or despairing. Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). Christians believe that however old or young, people can tell Jesus about sadness, anger and lament.

PRACTICES

- Read aloud these words from Matthew 11:28 or Psalm 42 and write, draw or speak your sadness to express your feelings.
- You might also want to write your own list or poem about how you feel and read that aloud too.

What are you missing, longing for? This may be people or things you have lost, or hopes that have been dashed.

LEARNING

What have you learned? What have you learned about your life, about what and who is important to you, about how you want to use your life well? What do you want to do differently as a result of the pandemic?

The Bible is full of people finding God helping them in the midst of the muddles and difficulties and challenges of life. Pain and suffering have always been part of life, and Christians, like everyone else, want to make sense of them. That's not always possible, but it can be possible to find God with us in the dark places of life. Jesus said 'I am the light of the world', and countless people around the world have found that to be true.

PRACTICES

- Either together, or individually, write or draw in a notebook several times a week about how things are going. With children, do it together. Suggest teens keep their own private journal.
- Try to give each person a chance to talk through experiences of the pandemic – good and bad – with someone they trust, who will listen carefully.

Many people pray – people of all faiths and none. In a crisis we long to know that there is someone bigger than us who can help us, so we cry out, hoping there is a God who is loving and who is listening. Christians believe that praying is not just for emergencies. We believe that the whole of life is meant to be a conversation with God. Jesus lived like that and his friends wanted to learn from him. So Jesus gave them what we call The Lord's Prayer (found in Matthew 6:9-13). If you've never prayed as a family before, it's a great starting place. You could read the prayer every day at teatime thinking about each bit. And then ask God for help for other things and other people. Children are often very happy to pray aloud.

PRACTICES

- At teatime/bedtime say the Lord's Prayer, or another simply prayer like the 'teaspoon' (TSP) prayer: **T**hank you, God, for... **S**orry God for... **P**lease help us, God, to...
- Maybe find or buy a Bible or download a Bible app. You can get the Bible online at biblegateway.com. You will find a modern translation of the Bible like the NIV, ESV or CEV version much easier to understand.

PRAYER

What would it be good to think about in your praying over the coming weeks?

People, situations, and concerns - local and global.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- For more ideas of fun activities to do as a family, take a look at the 'Messy Church Ideas for Home' website, or for free creative downloadable ideas try athomewithgod.org.
- For worship songs, and family times of worship, try the 'Worship for Everyone' YouTube channel.