

faith family



A Christian resource for families



What is Easter about, anyway?

Ask the average child what Easter is all about and you'll hear about chocolate eggs and bunnies. These are certainly part of our Easter tradition. But perhaps there can be more.

Jamie and Ellie are friends with their next door neighbours, the Allenbys. Miss Audra is 82, her sister Alice is 87 and they seldom get out of their home. At Easter, Jamie and Ellie made bookmarks with an Easter message on them. They took these to the Miss As. The women loved the visit and the gifts.

On Easter Monday, some families gathered for a picnic in the park. The children were having a great time playing outdoors. The adults chatted happily whilst they prepared the picnic lunch.

A scruffily dressed teenager wandered over and sat on a nearby bench. As usually happens, everyone ignored him.

When the call came to gather for lunch, the children ran over to the wonderful picnic spread out on the tables. 7-year-old Hannah piled some food on a plate. She started to walk away, and her mum asked where she was going. Hannah replied, 'I'm taking that guy some food. He looks lonely and hungry.'

Smiling, Hannah's mother went with Hannah, and watched while Hannah offered the food. The young man accepted it with a shy grin, said 'thanks, kid' and started to eat.

Hannah was no Easter bunny, but she was this young man's Easter present. Hannah's warm heart and compassion was a reflection of God's love for



us, as demonstrated by the events of Good Friday and Easter.

The Easter message is a message filled with love. It is a message of a God who so loved his creation, so loved all of us, so wanted to be with us that Jesus came to serve us, to love us to death and to rise again to bring us new life in relationship with God and others. What an Easter present that is!

When we live in God's love and forgiveness, our children will also know that love and see their part in caring for and serving others, just as Jamie, Ellie and Hannah do. We can encourage our children's love of serving others.

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Each of you has been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well.

(1 Peter 4:10 CEV)

Easter resources for your home

Happy Easter

Concordia Publishing House 2006

This small book introduces young children to the basic Bible teaching about the events of Easter

Ages 2-3,
cardboard, 12 pages
RRP \$8.95

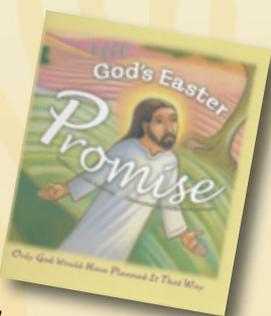


God's Easter Promise

by Todd Barsness

This story looks at the way we might have planned the events of Holy Week and contrasts it with the way God planned it.

Ages 3-8, hardcover,
30 pages
RRP \$17.95

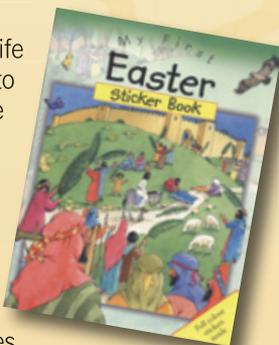


My First Easter (Sticker Book)

by Sally Ann Wright

Read about Jesus' life from Palm Sunday to Easter. Then choose stickers to complete the pictures. Appealing language makes the story accessible to kids.

Ages 5-9,
paperback, 16 pages
RRP \$10.95

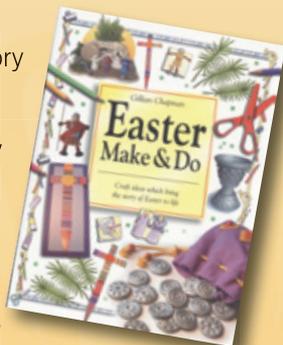


Easter Make & Do

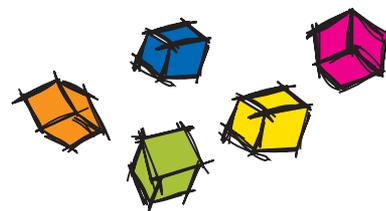
by Gillian Chapman

Bring the Easter story to life using imaginative craft ideas for each story from the entry to Jerusalem through Jesus' betrayal to the resurrection.

Adult/older primary,
paperback,
RRP \$17.95



Asset Building



Developmental Assets are like building blocks that children need for a positive start in life. The forty assets identified by Search Institute are grouped into eight categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, positive identity.

Children need positive values

New research* has shown that four out of five young people in Australia do less than an hour a month of community service. 'That is of great concern for Australian society', says one of the researchers, Associate Professor Ruth Webber.

Schools throughout the country recognize this concern and are implementing proactive programs in which children are encouraged to find ways to serve in their communities.

How do we as parents and carers help children learn tolerance and desire to make their community a better place? According to the research, children who put into practice their spiritual and religious beliefs were likely to donate more money, participate more in their communities and be more concerned about their society than their non-religious counterparts. We can reinforce this at home.

Family values caring (Asset #26)

Children watch and learn from the adults around them. If our kids observe us treating others in kind and caring ways, it becomes part of what they see as normal behaviour. Help your child feel cared for: let them know that you care about their feelings, make time to listen to them and spend time with them. If your child watches the TV news and is concerned about a report, talk about it with them; help them share their feelings.

Give children opportunities to help others. This can be simple tasks around the home like tidying their room or taking out a neighbour's rubbish bin. Affirm children when you catch them doing something to help others. Encourage the sharing of good news stories. If your child tells you about an incident at school where one child was helping another, talk about how appropriate that action was. If they relate stories of children with problems, talk about the possible reasons for the difficulty and what they might do to help.

Family values equality and social justice (Asset #27)

Children have a strong opinion about what is fair and what is not. Ask them to tell you why they think a particular situation isn't fair and invite them to consider options for improving the situation.

Help kids to see that we need to respect those who have different ways of doing things, whose values and beliefs are not the same as ours at home. Talk about what it means in practical terms to 'respect' someone and to be respected.

Encourage your child to donate some of their pocket money to a charity. If you attend church talk about why you give your offering in the worship service and how this helps others.

Giving children positive values about participating in community and caring for others, about their ability to serve the community and about their power to make positive changes will help build stronger young people. It will also develop healthier communities.

* The research was presented at the International Conference on Children's Spirituality at the Australian Catholic University Ballarat in 2008, and forms part of a book, *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia*.

For a complete list of the 40 Developmental Assets and more information on how everyone can build assets: go to www.search-institute.org/assets

See your local Christian book shop for these and other great resources for your home.

In their book *The Five Love Languages of Children*, Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell suggest that people — children and adults — express their love and receive expressions of love from others in five distinct ways: through words, gifts, service, time and touch.

Do you know that I love you?

It was the night before Jack would begin high school. Jack and his dad, Phil sat covering school books and putting labels 'on everything!'

Both Jack and Phil seemed to recognize that this was an important moment. Phil began to recall stories of Jack's childhood.

Jack had heard all these stories before but never stopped his dad from sharing them. 'You were born when Australia was playing for the Ashes in England. You wouldn't settle those first few weeks, and I sat up with you and watched the matches late into the night!'

Phil went on for a while. Then he hesitated, took a deep breath and asked, 'Jack, do you know that I love you?'

'Sure, I know you love me,' Jack answered. He thought for a minute and then added, 'You've always done stuff for me, like helping me with my homework. You must have covered a gazillion school books for me!'

Phil felt some relief to hear this response. But Jack went on with great honesty, 'Remember that time when you didn't help me fix the puncture on my bike tyre, and I couldn't ride my bike for six months? I began to wonder then.'

Phil said sorry and added, 'Well, I do love you, and I am going to be there for you especially as you start high school.'

Jack's love language is obviously **Acts of Service**. When Phil 'spoke

the love language of service' into Jack's life, Jack felt loved and special. When Phil stopped 'speaking service' (not fixing the puncture) Jack was left doubting that he was loved.

In *The Five Love Languages of Children* Chapman and Campbell point out that parenting is a vocation of service that can be physically and emotionally demanding. They suggest that parents need to find an appropriate balance between 'doing things for our children' and helping them 'to do for themselves'.

Acts of service performed by a parent to a child become a model for the development of a child's service to, and responsibility for, other people in their family and the wider community.

When families participate in acts of service together, children observe, experience and learn the values of caring, equality and social justice, integrity and responsibility. Shared acts of service can lead to better communication and more understanding, supportive relationships.

'The benefits of including children as providers of "acts of service" extend beyond the day. In a very real sense, when we involve children in acts of service we are preparing our young people to become active, responsible caring citizens.' (Ellis, Weisbord and Noyes, *Children as Volunteers, Preparing for Community Service*, 1991)



Cool ideas for Easter serving

- Read the story of the first Easter from a favourite children's Bible. Older children can serve by reading the story with younger children.
- Check www.yacmu.com.au for Easter ideas for families.
- Introduce the value of community service by having children do simple tasks at home. Reinforce these acts with appropriate thanks.
- Make a game of watching for opportunities to say 'do you need a hand' and offering small acts of service to other people.
- Search the news for examples of people who serve others. Look also for people you might serve in some way.



• The movie *Pay It Forward* (M) shows one young person changing the world by paying helpful deeds forward rather than repaying them. See ideas for *Pay It Forward* Day, April 14 on www.payitforwardday.com/

• The movie *Evan Almighty* (G) inspired a movement for **Acts of Random Kindness**. Launch your own family ARK or just watch the *Evan Almighty* clips. www.arkalmighty.com/kindness/

• Zach Hunter, 15-year-old author of *Be the Change* is mobilizing students to end slavery in their generation. Find his inspiring story at www.theamazingchange.com/cach.html





Children grow physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. So, too, they develop spiritually in recognisable ways. Here, we look at . . .

Growing a heart for service

At Easter we celebrate the new life which Jesus gives us and reflect on what that new life means for us. Jesus calls his followers to serve one another in the same spirit of love that he showed us. To do this well takes a lifetime of practice.

As we grow we learn about service by being served by people who love and care for us — our parents and other family members, teachers and members of our communities. We also learn through stories of people like Fred Hollows or Mother Teresa who have served others. Think of the people in your own life experience who have helped you understand what it means to have a heart for service.

From an early age children can be formed for service.

Very young children are naturally self-centred and mostly unaware of the needs of others. But loving parents can encourage them to share a toy, make space on the couch for someone else, say 'please' and 'thank you' and to be gentle with pets. In such simple ways parents can begin to shape serving hearts in children.

By the time children begin school they can be encouraged to help parents with simple tasks around the home and garden. They also can become aware of the ways parents and others help them and can respond to that.

Lower to middle primary-aged children depend on parents' example and also on parents' encouragement. They can begin thinking and talking about other people's feelings. Parents can raise

questions like: How would you feel if that happened to you? What could someone do that would make you feel better? Can you do something to help them feel better? How did you feel when you helped them?

In the middle to upper primary years children can be encouraged to participate in supervised group service activities beyond the home: for example, recycling projects, working bees and collecting goods for charities. Parents can lead by example in these activities.

Adolescents can undertake more independent service activities in the community. Parents can affirm these and make them a focus of family discussion where the connections with Jesus' life of service can be made. Idealistic adolescents may be ready to change the world in ways that surprise older people. Parents can encourage them to dream their big dreams and look for practical, achievable steps towards achieving them.

At all ages the serving heart is nurtured and nourished in the family. Each act of practical service can lead to service through prayer — talking with God about the needs of one another, the needs of the people we serve, and the needs of the wider community and world.

Families where loving service is fostered can form young people who make the serving, risen Christ present to all they meet.

But, Mum...

Jordan wanted to go to the mall. Mum was happy to take him, but said: 'First we have to take Mr Roberts to the Senior Citizens Club'.

'But, Mum,' complained Jordan, 'that's in the wrong direction.'

'Jordan, it's really important to me to give Mr Roberts a hand. He's alone, his eyesight is failing and he's lost his licence.'

'But, Mum, couldn't somebody else do it? I need to get to the Mall!'

'Some of us have a roster to drive Mr Roberts and some other people to do their shopping and attend appointments. It's the least we can do.'

They pulled up in front of Mr Roberts house. Jordan watched Mum greet Mr Roberts, give him a hug and help him into the car.

'G'day, lad, nice of you to come along and help out an old bloke.'

'But Mum's the one doing the helping', muttered Jordan, thinking 'Mum is actually pretty cool. I wouldn't mind being like that.'

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is produced by the Australian Child in our Hands partners:

Anglican Ministry Centre, Diocese of Adelaide

Children, Youth and Family Ministry, Lutheran Church SA/NT District

Family and Parish Based Catechesis, Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide

Resource Centre for Children's and Family Ministry, Uniting Church in Australia, South Australia

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