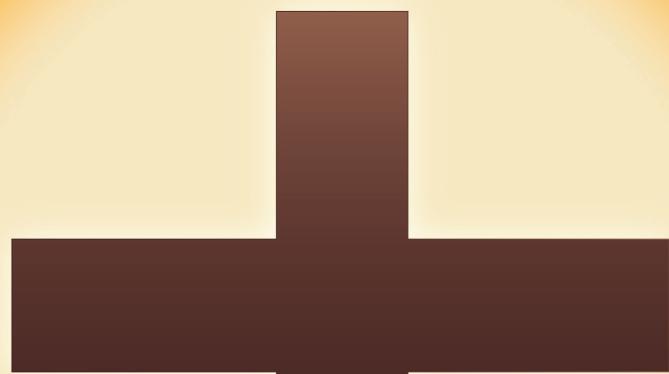


THE CROSS



FIRST CHURCH
OPEN BIBLE
Family Life Resources



We understand the challenges of busy schedules at home, which is why we offer resources that support you and your family which are easy to use, relevant, and most importantly honor God. We pray these resources for your home along with the classes and services at First Church make an eternal difference in the lives of families like yours.

Blessings,
First Church Open Bible

Colossians 2:6,7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

MOST BIBLE VERSES IN THIS BOOKLET ARE QUOTED FROM THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

The Cross

INTRODUCTION

Cross Sunday is a time to reflect on what the cross means to us. In this resource, we review the work of the cross and reflect on how Jesus took the punishment for our sins.

We also encourage each family to talk about faith at home, in the car, at bedtime or at breakfast. Take time to share stories, verses, and prayers with them.

May the Lord bless each family as we walk by faith through this new year!

LESSON 1

The Work of Christ on the Cross

Bible Reading: John 1:1-18

Key Verse: John 1:14

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The gospel of John does not begin with the story of the nativity. Instead, John takes us back to the beginning of time itself. He describes Jesus at creation.

Jesus was the plan of God from the beginning of time. At His baptism, John the Baptizer, said:

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29b

To understand the end of the verse, the cross must come first. In the gospels, Jesus describes his life this way:

"The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many."
Matthew 20:28.

The Jewish people were looking for a king to rule over them. What Jesus offered was **reconciliation** through the cross.

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

To fulfill all righteousness, Jesus Christ became our atoning sacrifice on the cross. Our sins were covered once and for all by His sacrifice. Jesus, who did not sin, died in our place so that His death could cover our sin for all time.

This is the great work of grace that Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:1-2

IN SUMMARY

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:6-8

A Good Brother

Long ago, two brothers were born to a king. They were close in age and grew strong in the kingdom. Their parents taught them right from wrong and the townspeople were very proud of the two brothers.

There was to be a great tournament in a neighboring Kingdom, and the brothers were chosen to represent their kingdom in the contests. They began training for the competitions.

When the time came for the tournament, they packed their satchels and headed off to represent their kingdom.

The contests started off well, but things took a bad turn when the younger brother got into a fight with another contestant. The fight grew very intense and the brother injured his opponent badly. He was arrested and thrown into prison.

The older brother went to visit his younger brother in prison, where the officials told him they intended to keep his brother locked up for many years.

He begged to see his brother. At last, they allowed him a few moments alone with him.

During this time, the older brother convinced his younger brother to trade clothes with him and walk out in his place.

They were very close in size and appearance. The younger brother accepted this gift of freedom, put on his older brother's royal garments and walked out a free man..

The younger brother took the long way home. When he greeted his parents, they asked him where his brother was. In tears, he told them the whole story, and explained his brother's willingness to take his place and receive his punishment.

[After reading this story, help your children understand that this is what Jesus did for us. He took our punishment on Himself.]

LESSON 2

Forgiveness

Parent's Passage: Psalm 51

Family Reading: Matthew 18:15-17

Key Verse: Matthew 6:14-15

"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

This may be difficult to hear, but our key verse is clear: as God's children, we are called to forgive. You might be thinking, "If you only knew what happened! If you met this person, you would understand! They've been given chance after chance! What they did is unforgivable"

God understands your grief, and He wants to help you through it. (Psalm 34:18). For now, the next step is learning how to forgive, even while you are still hurting.

First of all, spend some time with God and in the Bible. He has so much to say about forgiveness that this lesson cannot do it justice. While spending that time, it's important to understand why you're hurting. **What is it that you need to forgive?**

This isn't a question you answer quickly. Pray that God will guide you and give you clarity. Here are some questions to ask yourself (and get ready, because these might hurt a little):

- Am I angry because they didn't value the same things I valued? Perhaps you feel disrespected; however, it may be that they just don't share the same "ideals" you do.

- Am I upset because they didn't behave or respond the way I expected? Perhaps this is not a matter of forgiveness, but an opportunity to extend a little patience and grace. That person may still be a wonderful person, but they have their own struggles and challenges they are dealing with.

Here are some other things to keep in mind as you pray about forgiveness. Here is what forgiveness is not:

FORGIVENESS IS NOT JUSTICE. JUSTICE HAS ITS PLACE.

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

But as James 4:12 tells us, there is only one Lawgiver and Judge. Forgiveness is your responsibility and justice is God's. God's command to forgive is not conditional upon whether we see immediate justice or on waiting for God to make things right in the future. We are called to forgive now, even if justice has not yet been done.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT RECONCILIATION.

(Bigger word that means, “All better! We are now the best of friends!”)

Matthew 18:15-17 gives us steps to seek reconciliation; however, even in these verses, if the one you're forgiving will not listen or show a willingness to change, God instructs us to set different boundaries. ***“Treat them like a pagan”*** or a ***tax collector*** – in other words, they are no longer part of that inner circle of “safe” people. This passage can be interpreted in different ways, but some describe it as, “Run!” You still forgive, but sometimes forgiveness must be extended from a distance.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF CONFLICT.

The act of forgiveness happens even in the presence of conflict. In John 13, Jesus demonstrated this when He taught about communion

and washing his disciples' feet. He didn't offer this only to His friends; but included His enemy, as well.

Jesus knew full well that Judas would betray Him, yet He still chose to forgive him.

FORGIVENESS IS OBEDIENCE AND WORSHIP

When we forgive, we obey God's command. Forgiveness becomes an act of worship because we honor the Lord who has already fully forgiven us.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace"

Ephesians 1:7

FORGIVENESS FULFILLS THE GOSPEL

"God made known to us the mystery of His will . . . to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ."

Ephesians 1:9-10

When we forgive, we demonstrate the gospel – showing that God loves all people and desires that no one should perish but be restored to a right relationship with Him. Forgiveness is often the first step in drawing the forgiven back to Christ, though they still have their own steps to take.

As forgiven people, we still have a responsibility. Repentance involves recognizing your sin, choosing to turn away from it, and intentionally turning back to Jesus so that our relationship with Him can be restored.

The same is true for those we forgive. We forgive with the hope of drawing them back to Christ—and if we fail, we forgive them again.

LESSON 3

Why Family Time Matters

Recently reported on **FIRST ON FOX** News, a study by **Communio** and **Harvard** revealed that regular childhood conversations about faith are strong predictors of adult religious practice. (Find details at Communio.org)

A new study suggests a person's connection to faith may start at home, not at church. **Communio**, a nonprofit that uses data – driven ministry and practical tools to strengthen families, partnered with Harvard to study how childhood faith experiences shape Christians later in life.

In 2024, the **Pew Research Center** reported that 28% of U.S. adults were religiously unaffiliated. Communio sought to identify the key factors behind generational faith and how parents can pass their faith to their children. The survey found that simply talking about faith in childhood can shape how children live it out as adults.

"Past research has shown that the growth in religious non-affiliation is the result of generational succession – meaning each younger generation is, on average, less religious than the last. On a fundamental level, the so-called rise of the 'nones' is the result of older generations being less effective at sharing the Gospel with younger ones," JP De Gance, founder and president of Communio, and author of the Pastor's Guide said.

"A survey of more than 16,000 churchgoing adults found regular childhood conversations about faith to be one of the strongest predictors of practicing faith in adulthood.

Finding the Cross Family Activity

Churchgoers who had regular conversations about faith in childhood reported higher forgiveness towards those who hurt them and a greater sense of belonging to their church community, according to the survey.

This is a beautiful picture of what it means to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven!

FAMILY ACTIVITY **Finding the Cross**

Talk to your family about where to find the story of Jesus in your Bible. You can start by finding the Christmas story at the beginning of Matthew or Luke.

The four gospels tell the story of Jesus's life. Help your kids find the story of the cross and the resurrection at the end of each of the gospels:

MATTHEW 27
MARK 15
LUKE 23
JOHN 19

Now turn to **Isaiah 53**, and read a portion out loud as Isaiah prophesies about Christ's death on the cross hundreds of years before it occurred.

Help your family realize that this was God's divine plan from the beginning!

LESSON 4

Start Now

Key Verse:

2 Corinthians 6;1,2b

As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For He says, ... "now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation".

January is a great time to try something new. It might be something you have been thinking about, or reading about, or talking about. Let's make a plan to implement a fresh start.

Let's start a simple exercise plan to grow strong in our spiritual lives. Let's plan now to pass our faith on to the next generation.

We know what Jesus has done for us. Let's start sharing our faith with our family. In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy it says:

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Impress them on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Choose one of the family activities. Review the lesson, and ask God to help you. Gather your family (or at least one of your children), and talk together about Jesus and his wonderful work on the cross.

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Take it to the cross activity

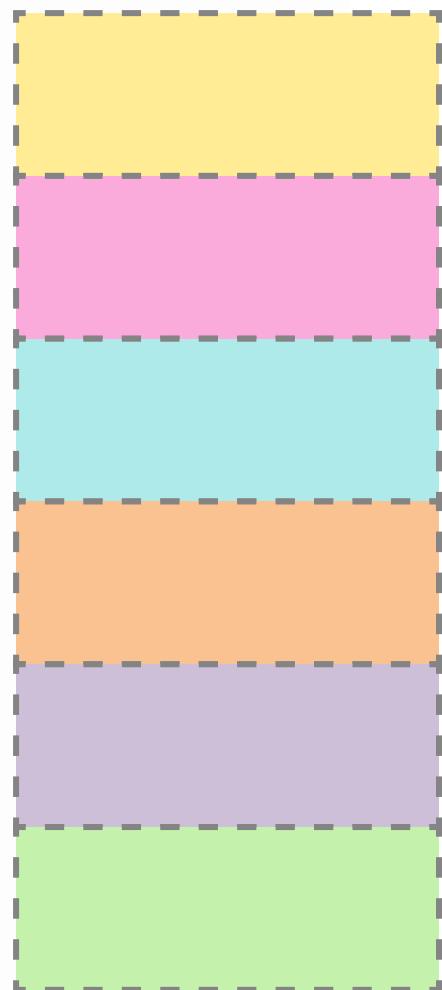
Scripture reading - Colossians 1:12-14 & 18-20

Find some time to come together as a family. Talk about family concerns.



Have family members share their concerns and write them on slips of paper. (Post-It Notes work great, or You can cut out and use the colored paper on the right.)

Cut out and glue your concerns to the cross. Then **pray together** and ask God to help you overcome each difficulty because of His work on the cross.





FIRST CHURCH OPEN BIBLE

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THEY ARE DESIGNED TO SUPPORT AND ENHANCE YOUR FAITH JOURNEY.
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