

# GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

## CHILDREN OF GOD IN A FRACTURED WORLD: LENT 2018



Dear Reservoir Families,

We hope this guide encourages you to experience the 40 Days of Faith together – grown-ups and kids. This year’s theme is **Children of God in a Fractured World** and the Bible Guide is about **the book of Revelation**. You’ll find Revelation a bit of a wild ride, full of strange language and images. It also contains some intriguing symbols that capture the imagination about the kind of savior Jesus is and the kind of kingdom he promises.

### **Gathering your family**

This guide is an invitation to gather your family one night a week during the 6 weeks of Lent. There is tons of research and anecdotal evidence about how gathering around the family dinner table encourages children, teens and adults to actually talk to one another, strengthens relationships and family harmony, and grows children’s confidence to express their feelings and thoughts. Here’s some encouragement from Wendy Mogel from her book, *The Blessing of the Skinned Knee*:

*One traditional Jewish expression for home is the same as the word for house of worship: mikdash me’at, or “little holy place.” Our dining table with our children is an altar. It has the potential to be the holiest spot on the planet.*

### **Here’s the plan, and an overview of what’s in this guide:**

During the 6 weeks of Lent, try and gather your family one night a week around the dinner table. After the meal, use as much or as little from this guide as you like. For each week, you’ll find a short prayer and a blessing, a little background about the week’s symbol from Revelation, a few wondering questions, and a spiritual practice to try together.

**Candle Lighting**— Lighting a candle is a simple ritual that reminds you to invite Jesus as the Light of the World to be with you.

Candlelight can be mesmerizing and hold the attention of kids and grown ups. Candles also signal that a special time is about to begin.

**Opening Prayer & Blessing** — This prayer is something you can say together to invite the Holy Spirit to be with you and the blessing is a way for parents to bless children (or children to bless parents if you reverse roles one night). This can be powerful, especially if your day has been fraught.

**Symbols from Revelation** — Each week you'll explore a symbol taken from the book of Revelation. If you're following the daily Bible Guide, you may hear Steve say something about these symbols too. There are the Greek letters alpha and omega, the four creatures with lots of eyes and wings, a lamb, a rider on a white horse, a new heaven and new earth, and a tree of life.

**Wondering Questions** — Your children will be familiar with wondering questions if they've ever come to Kids Church here at Reservoir where we use them every week. Wondering questions are, by design, open-ended. There are no right answers. Use the wondering questions as conversation starters and invitations to let God speak through your imaginations and your children's imaginations.

**Spiritual Practice** — Each week there's a simple version of the spiritual practice from the Bible Guide. These practices are designed to help you connect with Jesus. Give them a try and see what happens.

You may also try these two practices as a family during Lent: praying for your six and fasting.

**Praying for your six** involves choosing 6 people whom you see fairly frequently and praying that they experience something from God this season. You could even ask them what they'd like prayer for. Our children enjoyed praying for their friends this way. At dinner time, we'd each pray for one of our six.

**Fasting** is a practice traditionally undertaken during Lent. Fasting invites you to put aside something for a period of time

in order to make more space for God to speak. The idea is to eliminate some of our habitual distractions so that we'll have more clarity for hearing from God. You'll find more about fasting in Steve's 40 Days of Faith User's Guide.

### **Mark your calendars**

Finally, here's a date to put on your calendar. On Thursday, March 29, 6-7:30 PM, we'll host a simple potluck for families. The evening will be a great time to share stories about your family's 40 Days experience. Dan Archibald will tell the story of how Jesus' washed his disciples' feet before they shared their last meal together and the children will lead the way in washing one another's feet.

Blessings to you as you experience these 40 Days of Faith together.

Yours,

Kim

NOTE: I'm grateful to Caroline Park at The River NYC for letting me borrow her thoughts and ideas and words for sections of this guide.

# FAMILY DINNER 1

**Candle Lighting** (Light a candle, one or as many as you like.)

**Opening Prayer & Blessing** (You could hold hands as you pray.)

*God, we make room for you.*

*Come and fill us with your Holy Spirit.*

(This blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26 is worth memorizing. A grown-up can say the blessing as she/he looks into everyone's eyes. Or everyone can recite it together for each other.)

*“The Lord bless you and keep you;*

*The Lord make his face shine on you*

*And be gracious to you;*

*The Lord turn his face toward you*

*And give you peace.”*

## **Symbol from Revelation--Alpha and Omega**

In Revelation Jesus is called “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come” (Revelation 1:8 and 22:13). Much of the writings in the Bible about Jesus were originally written for people who spoke Greek. Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet. Omega is the last letter. So you could say that Jesus is the A and the Z, the first and the last, the start and the finish.

## **Wondering Questions**

I wonder how Jesus is the beginning?

I wonder how Jesus is the ending?

I wonder what comes in between the beginning and the ending?

wonder if there's a question you want to ask?

## **Spiritual Practice of Paying Attention**

Try practicing the examen together. This is a spiritual exercise developed by Ignatius in the 16th century. The examen helps us pay attention to where God is showing up in our daily lives. Many families regularly share their daily highs and lows, or their rose, bud, and thorn

for the day. You could also try asking everyone at the table these questions:

What was your high for the day, or your favorite part of the day?

What was your low for the day, or your least favorite part of the day?

OR

When did you feel most full of life today?

When did you feel life draining out of you today?

OR

When did feel close to God today?

When did you feel far from God today?

## FAMILY DINNER 2

**Candle Lighting** (Light a candle, one or as many as you like.)

**Opening Prayer & Blessing** (You could hold hands as you pray.)

*God, we make room for you.*

*Come and fill us with your Holy Spirit.*

(This blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26 is worth memorizing. A grown-up can say the blessing as she/he looks into everyone's eyes. Or everyone can recite it together for each other.)

*"The Lord bless you and keep you;*

*The Lord make his face shine on you*

*And be gracious to you;*

*The Lord turn his face toward you*

*And give you peace."*

### **Symbols from Revelation--the four living beings**

The book of Revelation is full of strange visions that were revealed to Jesus' follower, John. Here's a description from Revelation of the four living beings who surround God's throne:

*In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. The first of these living beings had the form of a lion; the second looked like an ox; the third had a human face; and the*

*fourth had the form of an eagle with wings spread out as though in flight. Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty--the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come." (Revelation 4:6-8)*

In Madeleine L'Engle's young adult book, *A Wind in the Door* (the sequel to *A Wrinkle in Time*), there's a character like this—a cherub with lots of eyes and wings who is so fantastical that at first people think he is a collection of many dragons.

### **Wondering Questions**

I wonder if you could draw a picture of one of these creatures?  
I wonder what it would be like to meet one of these creatures?  
I wonder how having extra eyes would change how you see things?

### **Spiritual Practice of Immanuel Prayer**

Immanuel is one of the names for Jesus. It means "God with us." Jesus came to be God with us. Take turns sharing something about your day—something happy or hard. If you want, try to answer these questions: Were you aware of Jesus being with you during the happy or hard experience today? How would remembering that Jesus is with you help you to see the happy or hard thing differently? After each person shares, you might say this simple prayer together, or something like it:

*Jesus, thank you that you promise to be with us. Please give \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of person) eyes to see how you were with him/her today*

*and how you will be with him/her tomorrow too.*

## **FAMILY DINNER 3**

**Candle Lighting** (Light a candle, one or as many as you like.)

**Opening Prayer & Blessing** (You could hold hands as you pray.)

*God, we make room for you.  
Come and fill us with your Holy Spirit.*

(This blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26 is worth memorizing. A grown-up can say the blessing as she/he looks into everyone's eyes. Or everyone can recite it together for each other.)

*“The Lord bless you and keep you;  
The Lord make his face shine on you  
And be gracious to you;  
The Lord turn his face toward you  
And give you peace.”*

## **Symbols from Revelation--the Lamb**

Jesus is called the Lamb 35 times in the book of Revelation. Here's one example:

*For the Lamb who stands in front of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water. (Revelation 7:17)*

## **Wondering Questions**

I wonder what words you would use to describe a lamb?  
I wonder how you would explain to someone what a shepherd does?  
I wonder how Jesus can be both a Lamb and a Shepherd at the same time?

## **Spiritual Practice of Worship**

Those four creatures from last week, with all the wings and eyes, continually worship God, day and night, 24/7. Here's their worship song: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty--the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come." (Revelation 4:6-8) They worship God for who God is. Go around the circle and have each person name something about God or about Jesus. After each person's turn, everyone can join in and say the refrain together. Here's how it would go:

God is (or Jesus is) \_\_\_\_\_.

Refrain that everyone says together: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.*

# FAMILY DINNER 4

**Candle Lighting** (Light a candle, one or as many as you like.)

**Opening Prayer & Blessing** (You could hold hands as you pray.)

*God, we make room for you.*

*Come and fill us with your Holy Spirit.*

(This blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26 is worth memorizing. A grown-up can say the blessing as she/he looks into everyone's eyes. Or everyone can recite it together for each other.)

*"The Lord bless you and keep you;*

*The Lord make his face shine on you*

*And be gracious to you;*

*The Lord turn his face toward you*

*And give you peace."*

## **Symbols from Revelation--the rider on a white horse**

Here is a vision from Revelation of Jesus as a mighty warrior:

*Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. And the one sitting on the horse was named Faithful and True. For he judges fairly and then goes to war. His eyes were bright like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him, and only he knew what it meant. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword, and with it he struck down the nations. He ruled them with an iron rod, and he trod the winepress of the fierce wrath of almighty God. On his robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords. (Revelation 19:11-16)*

## **Wondering Questions**

I wonder if you could draw a picture of Jesus as a warrior, or a superhero? What would he be like?

I wonder what battles you would like Jesus to fight for you?

If you were a superhero what would be your superpower?

## **Spiritual Practice of Spiritual Warfare**

Prayer can be a way of participating in Jesus' battle against evil and injustice in the world--against things like disease, war, poverty, homelessness, corruption, bullying, etc. You could try a simple prayer like the one below. If your family is engaged in the battle in very personal or practical ways, please consider sharing your story so that we can encourage you and perhaps participate with you as well. Your example may encourage others to join the battle through acts of service.

*Jesus, we pray that you would stamp out cancer.*

*Jesus, we pray that you would do battle against \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Jesus, we pray that you would stamp out \_\_\_\_\_. (you get the idea)*

*King Jesus, we're waiting for you to come and put all things right.*

*Come, Lord Jesus!*

## **FAMILY DINNER 5**

**Candle Lighting** (Light a candle, one or as many as you like.)

**Opening Prayer & Blessing** (You could hold hands as you pray.)

*God, we make room for you.*

*Come and fill us with your Holy Spirit.*

(This blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26 is worth memorizing. A grown-up can say the blessing as she/he looks into everyone's eyes. Or everyone can recite it together for each other.)

*"The Lord bless you and keep you;*

*The Lord make his face shine on you*

*And be gracious to you;*

*The Lord turn his face toward you*

*And give you peace."*

## **Symbols from Revelation--New Heaven and New Earth and the new city of God**

In the last two chapters of Revelation there is a description of a new heaven and a new earth and a new city of God. You could read chapter

21 and try to imagine what it all looks like. The author seems to struggle to find words that can describe how beautiful and glorious it will be. Here's a short excerpt::

*No temple could be seen in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations of the earth will walk in its light, and the rulers of the world will come and bring their glory to it. . . . Nothing evil will be allowed to enter.  
(Revelation 21:22-27)*

## **Wondering Questions**

I wonder how you think the New Heaven and the New Earth will be different than the world you know now?

I wonder what you want to see in the New Heaven and the New Earth?

I wonder what you hope won't be there?

## **Spiritual Practice of Repentance & Confession**

Repentance is a fancy word that means to turn around. Sometimes God shines a light that helps us see something about us, about our behavior, or about our culture that needs to be turned around. When we repent, we admit we've been going in the wrong direction and that we want to turn around and head in the right direction. We need God's help with this. You can think about this in terms of your own life or in terms of things in your experience that the culture pushes but that maybe you need to walk out of. You can go as deep as you want with this. You might try this prayer together, each taking turns:

*God, I'm sorry about\_\_\_\_\_.*

*Please help me turn it around (or turn away from it.)*

You could even add some serious silliness and pray with your whole body. Say the I'm sorry part while you walk in one direction and then do a dance move turn around as you ask for God's help and begin dancing in the new direction.

NOTE: It's important to hear God's unconditional forgiveness after you've confessed something because above all God wants your healing and wholeness. Please speak these words after a family member's "I'm

sorry” prayer, no matter how trivial the matter:

*Through the cross of Jesus, God has mercy on you, pardons you and sets you free.*

*Know that you are forgiven, and be at peace.*

## FAMILY DINNER 5

**Candle Lighting** (Light a candle, one or as many as you like.)

**Opening Prayer & Blessing** (You could hold hands as you pray.)

*God, we make room for you.*

*Come and fill us with your Holy Spirit.*

(This blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26 is worth memorizing. A grown-up can say the blessing as she/he looks into everyone’s eyes. Or everyone can recite it together for each other.)

*“The Lord bless you and keep you;  
The Lord make his face shine on you  
And be gracious to you;  
The Lord turn his face toward you  
And give you peace.”*

(This is the last week of Lent, which means Easter is coming! We changed this part a little to remember Jesus as we wait for Easter morning.)

*Jesus is the Great Light  
That shines in the darkness. (Isaiah 9:2)  
When He is lifted up from the earth,  
He will draw all people to Himself. (John 12:32)*

### **Symbols from Revelation--Tree of Life**

In the New Heaven and the New Earth, there is a river and “*On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.*” (Revelation 22:1-2)

## **Wondering Questions**

I wonder if you could draw a picture of this scene?

I wonder what kind of fruit would grow on your tree? What color would it be? What shape? What would it taste like?

I wonder if you can think of other trees mentioned in the Bible stories you know?

## **Spiritual Practice of Envisioning Hope**

For this exercise, you could draw a picture of a tree and write your hopes and prayers on its branches and leaves and fruit. Or, write your hopes and prayers on post-it notes and stick them on the tree or on the fridge. If you want, use these questions to prompt your prayers.

What are you hoping for this season?

Or, where would you like to see God bring new Life?

What places or people could use God's medicine for healing?



