



**ARTICLE**

# **How the Exodus narrative can help us disciple kids through COVID-19**

**BY JARED KENNEDY**

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Now that schools, churches, and businesses have closed due to COVID-19, most parents and caregivers have their children at home. In the first few days of closures, I saw the online jokes: "the whole nation is learning what it means to homeschool." Then, I received some frantic texts from parents. But as the number of cases climbs, the sadness and trouble beneath the surface is beginning to set in. Some of the griefs seem relatively minor: kids missing the end of the school year, perhaps the last year of their middle or high school

experience. Some of the griefs will be felt for years: a girl who is immunocompromised living in constant fear or a grandson grieving the loss of his grandmother.

I'm thankful for all of the articles that have come out in recent days encouraging an emphasis on family discipleship in the midst of the pandemic. The articles I've read have cited the classic family discipleship passages: God's command to impress his commands on the hearts of our children (Deut. 6:4-9); Asaph's beautiful song about celebrating God's praiseworthy deeds before the next generation (Ps. 78:1-10); Solomon's psalm about building your house on a foundation of faith (Ps. 127); and the new covenant command to bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

But, today, I want to invite you to look a little further back in biblical history—to the priorities God revealed and instructions he gave to his oppressed people just before the Exodus. Let's journey back to a time when believing families huddled together, isolated in their homes while trouble and death reigned around them.

Now there are big differences between what is happening in our time and what occurred in Egypt. As Christians, we believe COVID-19—and every great evil—is a result of the fall, but we must avoid thinking this pandemic has come as a judgment against some particular evil in our world; Jesus was absolutely clear about this when he warned those who felt self-righteous when the tower of Siloam fell (Luke 13:1-5). The plagues—which were given as specific judgments against Pharaoh's hard-hearted oppression—were unique events in redemptive

history. It is inappropriate to say COVID-19 is a judgement from God. But having clearly stated that, there are some lessons we can learn from the time of locusts and lambs—encouragements that will serve our households today.

What can Christian parents learn from God’s instructions to the Israelites under Pharaoh? Consider these four truths:

**1. In the midst of the pandemic, we have a story to tell (Ex. 10:1–2).** Exodus chapter 10 introduces the eighth plague: the plague of locusts. The chapter begins with these words: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren . . . and that you may know that I am the LORD.’” Throughout the Exodus narrative, in the midst of oppression—through every plague and disaster—God had a plan. God was giving a story to tell for generations.

Even though we don’t know what God’s doing right now, we can tell our children the great story of what he has done for us in the past. Each time you pick up a Bible storybook or download and work through one of those free Sunday School lessons the Christian publishers are giving away, you’re reminding your kids that we have a God who made us, who loved us by sending the Savior, and who will one day return to heal this broken world. When preaching on Exodus 10, pastor Marty Machowski once remarked (<http://www.wausaualliance.org/sermons/our-kids-gods-plan-and-a-plague-of-locusts/>), “Isn’t it kind of God that he would allow us to tell his story?” It certainly is! The great story reminds us that our troubles and sufferings are

taking us somewhere. Just as God had a purpose for the children of Israel when they were under oppression, we get to remind our kids that he has a purpose for us too.

**2. In the midst of the pandemic, we wage spiritual war (Ex. 10:8–9).** After the plague of locusts, Pharaoh nearly gave into Moses and Aaron’s pleas to let God’s people go. He called them into his throne room and said, “Go, worship the LORD your God . . . but tell me, who will be going with you?” The first eight plagues made enough of an impression with the hard-hearted king that he was willing to let the men of the nation take a sabbatical from forced labor. But when Israel’s leaders informed the king that all of the people—young and old, sons and daughters, flocks and herds—would go and worship the LORD, he balked: “The LORD be with you—if I let you go, along with your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil!” Pharaoh received God’s call for his people’s wholehearted devotion as a declaration of war.

It was. In the midst of COVID-19, we have an enemy too. He wants to divide our children’s hearts so that they turn away from our good God. I loved Megan Hill’s article (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/never-better-family-prayer/>) recently at The Gospel Coalition about family prayer. She wrote, “The invisibility of a virus (at least to those of us without scientific instruments at our disposal) is a reminder to Christians that we have concerns beyond the visible world.” There is a whole world beyond what our eyes can see—a real battle raging in the spiritual realm for the souls of our children. When we bow our heads to pray and lift our children’s griefs and fears to God, we’re appealing

to him to do invisible work in their hearts. When we pray that he would protect their bodies and also protect them from Satan and his schemes, we're waging war.

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**3. In the midst of pandemic, we need the household of faith (Ex. 12:1–2, 24–28).** When the last plague came, God gave Israel the Passover ceremony. Each family and perhaps a few neighbors—enough to eat one roasted lamb—gathered together for a family meal. Those family meals should remind us of the importance of the household in God's economy, and they should also point us forward to the reality that the primary household in the New Covenant era is the household of God (Matt. 19:29; Eph. 2:19). I love what Andy Crouch has written (<https://journal.praxislabs.org/love-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-26aaeb0396e3>) about this recently: “In the history of the church, over and over it has been local ‘households’ extended-family-size outposts of the Kingdom of God, that have been able to most effectively mobilize care of the vulnerable in their midst, and to reach out and care for the vulnerable around them.”

In other words, your family needs your church community. So, gather your kids around the television on Sunday morning for that livestream worship service. But don't stop there. Connect with your church community personally. Dial into that small group video chat, or FaceTime with your accountability partners. Set up video chats for your kids as well. Help them to see that even when we're secluded, we need the household of faith.

#### **4. Finally, in the midst of pandemic, we must hope in Jesus (Ex. 12:21–28).**

When God gave the Passover ceremony, he anticipated the fact that kids would ask questions. In Exodus 12:26–28, we find these words: “When your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’” God made kids with a sense of wonder. He knew they would ask questions.

Often they ask simply because they’re curious. In a time of crisis, they’ll also ask questions because they’re afraid. When the kids asked, God wanted Israelite parents to be prepared to give a reason for their hope. So, he gave them that little script in verses 26–28 to put to memory; it was one that connected the kids’ active faith to his redemptive plan. In season and out of season, we must be ready to give our kids an answer about our hope as well. Parents, I’d encourage you to write out a simple one-sentence reason for why you have hope in Jesus so that you can tell that personal testimony to your kids. If that’s difficult for you, you might consider adopting question one of the Heidelberg catechism as your answer: “What is your only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

When God sent his angel throughout Egypt, what kept their firstborn sons safe from death was the blood of the lamb over their doors. God hasn’t promised that he will keep us safe from sickness and death in the same way, but the Passover lamb does point us to the One who will keep us safe through death—to our Savior, Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). As your kids’ griefs and questions about COVID-19 come, remember the

Israelites before the Exodus: Tell the story; wage war on your knees; connect with the household of faith; and, most importantly, model hope in our faithful Savior who holds us through the storm.

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