



# Developing Your Child's Devotional Life through Family Devotions

Spiritual habits are 'caught' rather than 'taught'. Hence it isn't enough for your kids simply to attend a great children's programme in church. For lasting impact, they need to see the Word of God honoured and obeyed in the home.

God's Word is clear. When it comes to the spiritual education of children, parents are in the driver's seat:

*"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; **and you shall teach them diligently to your sons** and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."*  
- Deuteronomy 6:4-7

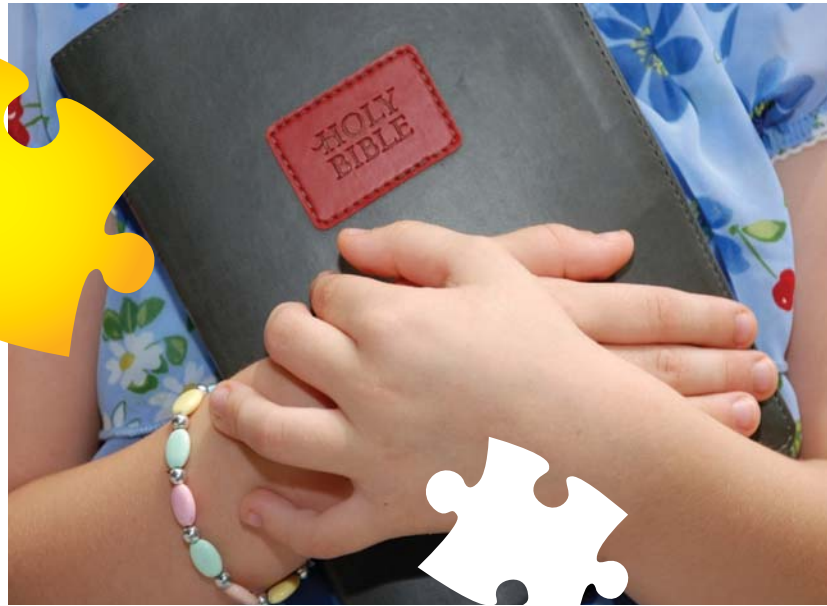


*"And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but **bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**" - Ephesians 6:4*

While we can teach our children about God by seizing teachable moments throughout the day, it is important to have a regular time focused on God's Word and prayer. This spiritual habit is called the family devotion.

When done in the right spirit, family devotions have a way of making the Word real and alive in your home. It allows children to see their parents in prayer, and develops a lifestyle of discipleship in the home. In this issue, we provide tips and ideas for establishing this godly tradition in your family.

# Family Devotions Made Do-able!



With our fast-paced lifestyles, the thought of having regular family devotions can seem daunting for parents. Here are some tips for making family devotions do-able.

## Take baby steps

If you are just starting out in family devotions, make your time together fun – not draggy! Be age-appropriate. Don't expect young children to sit through a lengthy sermon. Five minutes on a Bible verse, followed by a short prayer, is likely to be the max for the attention span of preschoolers.

The duration will depend upon the ages of your children. Here is a rough guide:

- ⇒ Young Children – 5-10 minutes
- ⇒ Pre-teens/Teens – 10-20 minutes

Select two or three days a week, and then add more days as you go along. It is inevitable that you may miss it on some days, due to events or tiredness or when the children are sick or particularly restless. Don't fret or be legalistic about it.

## Choose a regular time and place

Choose the best time of day for your family. Every family is different and has unique schedules. Set a regular time slot, without disrupting the children's regular activities, which might lead to resentment. Some families find evenings ideal, and make it part of their bedtime routine. Some families come together in the morning.

Some families use mealtimes, right before, after or during the meal. Find out what works for you.

The chosen place should be free from distractions, with your needed resources kept close at hand.

## Keep it simple

Make your family devotion as short, simple and straightforward as possible – Just read, discuss and pray. Read the passage or devotion out loud, talk it through, and pray together. If your children are young, ask factual questions during the story to keep them focused, eg. "Why did Zacchaeus climb up the tree?"

## Leverage on available tools

To keep things simple and do-able, especially at the beginning, use a Children's Bible or devotional. There are many resources available out there to support your efforts.

## Give your children opportunities to contribute and lead

You don't have to be leading all the time. Invite the children (especially the older ones) to shape the outcome, such as suggesting a song to sing (and leading in that song), or taking the lead in prayer. Older children can be encouraged to lead the devotion.

## Have variety

To avoid falling into a rut, once you have established a routine, you can include more creative activity. Who says that the devotion needs to be a 'sit-down' time? A very effective approach is to have children act out a story as you read it. This makes the narrative come alive, and helps them remember the passage.

## Keep the prayer time fresh

One-sentence prayers are fine. Of course, if your children want to pray for longer, let them! But make sure that your prayer time is always meaningful, not a time of "going through the motions." Better to keep it short and fresh, than for it to denigrate into a boring routine. The quickest route to ritualistic prayer is to pray the same thing every day. Don't let that happen.

## Model prayer

Instead of one person praying while the others listen in, pray in short phrases and have the children repeat after you. This makes it participative and enables them to pick up the language of prayer.

## Relax

Family devotions should not denigrate into a lecture. It should be a time of listening and learning from each other.

## Keep it positive

Your family devotion time should be a time of bonding. It should be the happiest time of the day! Keep the feel-good factor by ending with a round of hugs.

## Get creative!

With a little creativity, devotion can be an exciting time for families. Here are some ideas from Mike Calhoun, Senior Vice President of Word of Life Fellowship:

➤ Draw a picture of the key thought in the passage (for younger children).



➤ Role-play the passage or key thought.

➤ Make up a song to illustrate the passage.

➤ Sing a song that goes with the passage.



➤ Use a "game show" format for discussion.

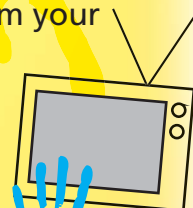
➤ Quiz each other about the passage.

➤ Print the verses on cards or poster paper, and put them on the wall.

➤ Write an encouraging card to someone, using a verse from the passage.

➤ Using a verse from the passage, send an encouraging text message to someone, and tell them the message is from your whole family.

➤ Watch a video together about the topic.



➤ Take a family walk and discuss the passage.



# How **important** is the family devotion?

What are the benefits of having one? These authors share their experiences and thoughts on the family devotion.

**Patrick Morley**

## **The importance of establishing spiritual habits**

Now that I have two grown, happily married children who are walking with the Lord, I can look back and see what set the stage for their spiritual walks. One VERY important activity was to set aside a time for a brief family devotion at the beginning of most days during the school year. It was not so much the activity itself as the “message” about how important Patsy and I deemed devotions, the discussions that it got our family into, and the spirit of prayer it fostered both then and now. “Routinise” daily devotions into your family life. Set realistic expectations. If you have a couple of false starts, don’t abandon the idea. Is it too bold to suggest that the spiritual health of your children may be at stake?

Establish them in this habit when they are young, and they will most likely stick with it when they grow up. The Bible puts it this way: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

[www.maninthemirror.org](http://www.maninthemirror.org)

**Brad Winsted**

## **Giving your children a rich spiritual inheritance**

If for about forty weeks of the year (taking time off for summer, vacations, and other unforeseen events) we have a brief family devotion, then in the 20-odd years that God places our children in our home and charge, we would have approximately 4,000 opportunities to open the Word of God, to sing God’s praises, and pray for their and other’s needs. But most important of all, our children would have an inheritance of daily communion with God and all the benefits that flow from it. They would have a family tradition that would come much easier than it did to me, who had no family tradition of growing up daily in the Scriptures and prayer.

**David Servant**

## **Making it real for yourself & your family**

There will be challenges you’ll face in having family devotions, but which will pay rich dividends in your life and the lives of your family. Your first challenge might occur when, after reading a clear command in Scripture, one of your children asks you, “Why didn’t you do that the other day at the grocery store when that lady ran her shopping cart into our shopping cart?” That is another positive benefit of family devotions – you’ll grow spiritually and your kids will have the benefit of watching God work in your life. No longer will they be exposed only to the apparent perfection of Sunday morning Christianity contrasted with rest-of-the-week application, which otherwise appears as hypocrisy to younger minds. They’ll learn what it means to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12, NASB) by observing you.

Curb your children’s silliness during your time together but don’t be too serious. Enjoy yourself. If you do, your kids are more likely to enjoy themselves too.

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## **Getting Started on Family Devotions**

- Discuss this article with your spouse and decide how you want to go about this.
- Ask your children for their input about how to make this idea work for them.
- There are no set rules for a family devotion. Apply these principles in a way that suits your particular situation and lifestyle.
- Now set your first family devotion – with 5-10 minutes as a guideline.
- Go for it!