

PARENTING

Help for Family Devotions

JUL 18, 2023 — ZACH SPARKMAN



The evening is winding down and bedtime approaches. Each child joyfully picks up the toys and changes into their pajamas. Teeth are brushed without fighting and the family gathers peacefully on the couch. Dad reads the Bible story; everyone listens attentively. A lively discussion about the story follows. Each child contributes to the conversation, respectfully waiting their turn. The singing is enthusiastic, with some disappointment that there is time for only three songs. Each child prays in turn, expressing their gratitude to the Lord for another wonderful day.

If this sounds like an idyllic family devotional time to you, that's because it is. Idyllic—and totally unrealistic. You probably thought, “Ya right—this doesn't describe my family!” And, frankly, neither does it describe our family's devotional time either. Ours looks more like this:

The call to get ready for bed is met with a mixture of groans, complaints, and clandestine disobedience. Though the energy level in the house steadily declined after supper, all of a sudden every child has a ninth life and both

remember what dad just read. Bodily functions are louder than the singing, and no one wants to pray.

It takes only a couple of experiences like this to discourage parents. Many families attempt to practice family devotions but end up falling off the bandwagon for various reasons. If you've ever been discouraged about family devotions, here are five encouragements to help your family navigate the frustrations.

1. Remember its Purpose

Everyone is willing to push through obstacles to gain something worthwhile. If you remember the reasons behind family devotions, you will be more likely to stay on course and continue through discouragement. Consider these three purposes:

Family devotions center your home around the Lord ([Josh. 24:15](#)). If Jesus is the foundation of your family, you need regular times of returning your thoughts and hearts to Him. Children (and adults!) need habitual reminders that Christ is the center of their lives, and family devotions is one way to regather the family around Him.

Family devotions provide a specific time to instruct your children in the Lord. [Ephesians 6:4](#) commands fathers to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The spiritual discipline of family devotions provides regular times in the weekly schedule to open the Scriptures with your children and shepherd their hearts toward Christ.

Family devotions are a joyful opportunity to pass on your faith to your children. [Psalm 78](#) entrusts to parents the incredible responsibility of teaching the next generation the greatness of God. This is such an important (and neglected) opportunity. In our age of experts and specialties, it is easy to think that since pastors and Sunday School teachers are the Bible experts, I'll drop my kids off and let the church teach them about the Bible. Certainly, a healthy local church is vital for the spiritual growth of your family, but you cannot give up your responsibility as a parent to teach your child the Bible.

2. Have Appropriate Expectations

If we aren't careful, we can quickly place unreasonable expectations on this family devotional time. Expecting too much, whether that is of our kids or of

Don't strive for perfection. You aren't perfect, your kids aren't perfect, and so this time will not be perfect. That's not meant to discourage, but to remind us of reality. They won't behave perfectly, they won't want to do it, it will feel rushed, you may miss a time. OK—don't let the imperfections prevent you from getting back on the train.

Don't trust the form for godliness. We must avoid this legalistic thinking. Just because we practice family devotions does not automatically mean that our children will be godly or even be born again. The form simply gives you an opportunity to communicate the glory of Jesus and his love for your children.

3. Choose a Realistic Load of Material

Perhaps one reason things are so frustrating is that you are attempting to do too much. As Kristopher Schaal [pointed out in this earlier article](#), the essentials are Bible reading, singing and prayer. There's nothing wrong with adding Bible memorization or catechism questions, but instead of trying to do everything, focus first on the basics and adjust based on your season of life.

That leads to a related issue: don't hold your kids to a standard beyond their years. Your strategy of what to do will have to develop as they grow in age and maturity. The attention span of a two or three-year-old will not be the same as an eight-year-old. The content to work through for a kindergartener should not be the same as a high schooler.

4. Be Flexibly Structured

The phrase "flexibly structured" is a paradox. You need structure to have consistency. Choose a regular time and location. Settle on what you will do for Bible reading. And then stick with it! Don't sacrifice the best thing for good things.

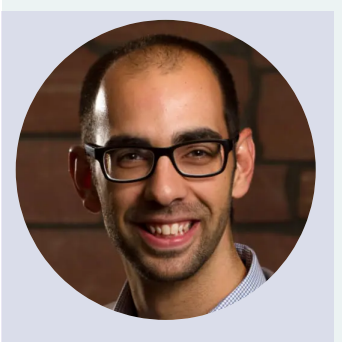
On the flip side, you need to be flexible. Children are not robots; be discerning enough to know when it is time to adjust the routine. There will be nights that you miss the time; other nights where an abbreviated time is best, and other nights where the whole experience is subpar. That's fine. It won't be perfect, but the grace of it is found in consistency, not perfection.

5. Aim for the Heart

hearts and show them how incredible Jesus is.

Our prayer is that we reach our boys with the gospel and glory of Jesus. Family devotions are a useful tool as we seek to show our precious children our wonderful Savior.

1. Also consider *Family Worship* by Don Whitney. ↩



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GROWING FATHERS TEAM

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