



5 2 F A M I L Y D E V O T I O N A L I D E A S

Many Christian parents really *do* want to have family devotional times with their children. Some just need help with some resources and encouragement. Some of these ideas work better with teens and some with younger children. We've tried to include ideas that are appropriate for all ages. Have fun!

Activities That Inspire

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

With so many great Christian children's videos available, we would be remiss not to use them. From *Veggie Tales* (with teenagers Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber), to *Adventures in Odyssey* and *The Story Keepers*, there are many quality video resources to use as a family. Be sure that you preview the video for its themes before showing it to your children so you're better prepared to guide a discussion afterward.

ATTEND A WORSHIP SERVICE

It is amazing how many families go to church together, but never worship together as a family. The adults go to "big church" and the kids attend Sunday School. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but make it a point to attend a worship service together as a family, even if it's a once-a-month tradition. After the service, take your kids out to lunch and talk about the service and what impact the experience had on each of you.

CAMERA, LIGHTS, ACTION!

It's one thing to read a Bible story together, but it's another thing to see that story come to life. The next time you're tempted to just read the story—don't! Assign your children to various characters in the "script" to and have them act out the story while you read it aloud. Depending on their ages, a little poetic license must be granted. Allow them to come up with their own dramatic interpretations of how the story would have been lived out. The results are sure to be both hilarious and insightful.

FAMILY TRUST WALK

Remember this youth ministry classic? Why not do it as a family? Pair off and blind fold one person in each pair. Have the other person lead them around the house using their voice—no touching—to guide them. After a tour of the house, have each person share about their experience and how it relates to their relationship with God and trusting Him.

HAVE A WORSHIP SERVICE IN YOUR HOME

For a change of pace, have a worship service in your home—complete with singing, Scripture reading and a devotional (preferably led by one of the kids). This will not only model the biblical truth that we are all ministers, but will also give your family a greater appreciation for one another and the gifts God has given them.

MEMORIZATION MADNESS

At the beginning of the year, find a handful of verses that you'd like to memorize as a family. Write them out on pieces of blank paper, note card or sections of poster board. Find a place to post the verses, preferably in a place where everyone will see them (e.g., the kitchen or dining room). Routinely introduce a new verse, as well as review past verses. You can make a game of it by initially posting them in "hidden" places for the family to try and find. You can also add incentives for memorizing the verse the fastest, knowing the most verses, etc.

ROAD TRIP

Why talk about a living truth in a sterile environment? Jesus took the disciples to places where they could see, taste and touch the truth. Instead of having a devotional at home, find an environment that will better help your family see, taste and touch the truth. If you are going to talk about life and death, go to a cemetery or a mortuary. If you are going to talk about the busyness of life, take them to a mall or an airport during the Christmas or any other holiday shopping season.

SHOOTOUT AT THE OK CORRAL

This devotional is best for the summertime or warmer climates. Arm each member of your family with squirt guns, water balloons, hoses, water canons, etc. Then let the gun slinging begin! At the end, gather together and talk about Jesus' statement that He is the *living water* that can satisfy our thirst. Explore this truth with questions. What is the role of water in our lives?

How does Jesus come to us as living water? Where are we thirsty and in need of His living water in our lives?

STAKING A CLAIM

As a family, go to your local hardware store and buy a wooden stake. Write out Joshua 24:15 on the stake and discuss what it means to claim that you and your family will serve the Lord. Family members can write what this verse means to them somewhere on the stake and then you can take the stake outside to your front lawn and drive it into the ground (letting everyone take turns pushing it down to set it firmly) to make the claim that your house is a place where God is exalted and will be served.

GOING DEEPER—GREAT DISCUSSION STARTERS

AFFIRMATION BOMBARDMENT

Read Hebrews 10:24-25 as a family. Give each member of the family one piece of paper for every other family member (e.g., if your family has four people, each person will receive three pieces of paper) and something to write with. Each person should write three words or phrases about another member of the family on each piece of paper. When everyone is finished, share what everyone has written and then give each family member the papers that affirm that person.

AFFIRMATION NOTES

Write notes of encouragement to the other people in your family, expressing what you appreciate about them. Attach any verses that come to mind as you think about each person and what he or she means to you.

ALPHABET OF THANKFULNESS

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18 as a family and then play a fun twist on the alphabet game. Starting with the letter A, think of one specific reason to be thankful and continue around the family until the entire alphabet has been used. Write each reason on a huge piece of butcher paper and hang it in a prominent place in your house where everyone can be reminded of what to be thankful for. This is especially good for those non-thankful days all smaller children have at one time or another.

ANSWER THIS!

Have each person in your family create five open-ended questions on slips of paper; then fold the papers and put them in a hat. One at a time, have family members pull out a piece of paper and

answer the question. Keep going until all the questions have been answered. Here are some sample questions:

- The time I felt closest to God was. . .
- The time I felt the farthest from God was. . .
- I feel encouraged when. . .
- If I could ask God one question it would be. . .

CASE STUDIES

Often non-fiction stories portray great truths. A “case study” is a chunk of reality that makes for a great teachable moment. Find a real-life story that challenges the thinking and ethics of living. Make copies of the story and give each family member a copy. After reading the story together, discuss the implications it has in your lives as followers of Jesus. Ask questions to get the discussion started. How would you react in this situation? How should you respond to this issue as a believer and follower of Jesus?

GOD IS. . .

Have each family member come up with as many ways as they can to finish the sentence, “God is. . .” Have them write down their responses along with any Scriptures that might apply. Gather everyone’s responses and make a master list of the attributes of God. Post the list in a prominent place in your home.

GOD IS LIKE. . .

Have your family sit together in a room. Look around the room and find objects that represent a character or quality of God. Share it and any verses that may apply. For example: “God is like this chair, because I can fully put my trust in Him, knowing He will be able to support me no matter what I am going through.” Keep going from person to person until you run out of objects.

Jenna’s Non-Christian Date

Jenna has been raised in a Christian home all of her life. She thinks her parents are “some of the strictest parents in the world.” Now that she is 16 years old they are finally giving her the opportunity to date, but the last conversation with them really bugged her.

It all started when a very good-looking guy came to pick up Jenna to take her to a high school basketball game and then to the school dance afterwards. He was very polite to Jenna’s parents and got her home right on time. The next day Jenna’s mom asked her if her date was a Christian.

Jenna immediately got defensive and told her mom that it was none of her business—he might not be a Christian, but he was very nice and she liked him a lot.

That evening Jenna’s mom and dad sat down with her after dinner and said, “We want you to know we believe it is biblically correct for Christians to date only other Christians.” Jenna’s response was, “Mom, you married Dad before he was a Christian and then he became a believer. Isn’t that a double standard?”

- Do you think Jenna’s parents did a good job in this situation? If you were giving Jenna advice, what would you tell her?
- What do you think about the statement, “It is biblically correct for Christians to only date other Christians”? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- II Corinthians 6:14 reads, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” How does this verse apply to Jenna’s situation?

PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL BIRTH

Bring out your family’s birth certificates and baby pictures (Mom’s and Dad’s too!). If possible, make a phone call to your mom and dad and ask them to share the story of your birth with your kids.

After your kids hear the story of your birth, explain that you don’t remember being there for any of that story. Ask them that if your not remembering your birth means it didn’t happen, and explain that even though you don’t remember it, you are pretty sure that you really were born. Share the story of the birth of each child in the family and ask if any of them remembers being born and then read John 3: 1-12 aloud. Use the following statements for discussion:

- Just as physical birth is necessary for us to live in the world, spiritual birth is necessary for us to have a relationship with God (see John 3:3).
- We weren’t responsible for our physical birth and we’re not responsible for our spiritual birth—they are both acts of God (see John 3:6).
- Just as we have to depend on our parents’ stories of our physical birth, we have to rely on the words of Jesus for our spiritual birth (see John 3:11-13).

Discuss the events surrounding each family member’s spiritual birth. Say a prayer thanking God for the spiritual birth of each member of your family (by name).

ROCK OF REMEMBRANCE

Read Deuteronomy 32:4 and Psalm 18:2 as a family. What do they say about God? How does that truth apply to your life? In the Old Testament, when the people of Israel had an encounter with God they would build an altar of rocks to remember God's presence. Have each family member find a rock to symbolize a significant commitment to God, such as giving a specific fear or sin over to the Lord. As you share your commitments, assemble your "altar" in a visible place as a way of remembering this special time with God and the commitments made.

SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG

Ask each family member what his or her favorite worship song is and why. Have everyone think about a worship song that they once liked, but heard too much (trust us, they will have at *least* one.) Share Psalm 96:1-6, which begins, "Sing to the Lord a new song" and ask

- Why do you think it is important to "sing a new song?"
- Do you think there are any new reasons to praise God?

As individuals or as a family, write a new praise song to God (just lyrics are fine). Incorporate specifics from your lives or from Psalm 96:1-6. Explain that this doesn't mean we shouldn't sing the old songs too but that we should continually find new ways in which to express our gratitude to God for His awesome love for us!

STRING OF AFFIRMATION

Hold onto one end of a ball of string and throw the ball to a family member while saying something encouraging about that person. That person then holds the string while throwing the ball to another family member and so on, creating a web of string from one family member to the next. Make sure that everyone gets to throw the ball to each family member at least once. Talk about the web of string and how it represents the bond you have in Christ and as a family.

THANK THERAPY

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18 together. Have each family member write 10 reasons why they are thankful on a piece of paper and then share those reasons aloud.

THE DICTIONARY GAME

To begin this game, have one person in your family randomly open a dictionary and pick the biggest word that appears on the page. He or she can either explain what the dictionary says about that word or make up a more creative definition. Each family member then votes whether or not they believe the definition given is true. Continue until everyone has a chance to define a word from the dictionary and then read John 9. Use the following questions to begin a discussion:

- How was pretending to know the definition of the word in our game similar to the way the Pharisees were acting? (They were pretending to know everything about God, but didn't.)
- Share a time in your life when God helped you.

After your discussion time, offer a prayer thanking the Lord that He not only heals physically blind people, but that He also gives sight to the spiritually blind.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Give each person in your family a piece of paper and something to write with. Everyone should write out a scenario that ends with the phrase, "What would you do?" These scenarios can go along with a theme for the devotional or they can stand alone as a way to teach the truth that our faith should holistically impact the choices we make and the way we live our lives. You can make up scenarios that best fit your unique family. Here are a few examples:

- Johnny has been approached by a stranger and the person asks him a lot of personal questions. What would you do?
- A teacher at school says she does not see how any thinking person could believe in God. What would you do?
- Friends ask you to go and see a Disney movie, but when you get there they want you to go with them to see a very sexual and violent movies with an *R* rating. What would you do?

Making it Tangible

ADVENT CALENDAR

Buy an Advent calendar or wreath for the next Christmas season and use it as a way to celebrate the coming of Christ into the world, as well as your home and hearts. In the Burns home, we have a tradition of praying around our Advent calendar for specific countries and missionaries we know during the 24 days of Advent.

BIBLE GAMES

Take a trip to your local Christian bookstore and visit the youth and children's departments. Most Christian bookstores have a great selection of Bible games for various ages, so check them out and find one that would interest your family. Playing games as a family has a way of bonding you together—and as a bonus, you can learn a little about the Bible while you're at it!

DIFFERENT GIFTS AND ABILITIES

Prepare a meal that is difficult to eat without the proper silverware (e.g., steak is hard to cut with a spoon; peas are hard to scoop with a fork). When everyone is seated at the dinner table, give each member one piece of silverware from the set (i.e., one person gets only a spoon, another gets only a fork). Ask someone to try to do something for which his or her silverware does not function best. When what you have asked is obviously harder to do without the correct silverware item, ask the person with that piece of silverware to take over and complete the task. Share 1 Corinthians 12: 14-18 and then discuss the following questions:

- Why is it important to recognize our places within the Body of God?
- What happens if we don't think our place is as important as someone else's?
- Are all the places equally important?

Ask each family member to identify something that another member does well, and how he or she could use that gift to bless others. Pray together as a family, asking God to use each person's giftedness for His glory.

FINDING GOD

When we watch the sun set or climb a mountain, Romans 1:20 is very clear. But we can find God and his awesomeness in *all* things. God is with us everyday. Read Romans 1:20 as a family; then send everyone on a search around the house or outside to find an object that shows one or more of God's invisible qualities. After 10 minutes, have everyone gather around the kitchen table and share how they can see God in that item. Designate these things as focal points in your home to be reminded of that and say a prayer asking God to help you see Him in your daily life and in all things.

GOD ART

Give each member of your family a piece of paper and have everyone divide their paper into four sections and then draw each of the following pictures in a section. Afterward, ask everyone to describe their pictures and share any Scripture that may go along with them.

- Draw a picture of God.
- Draw a picture of what it means to love God.
- Draw a picture of what it means to love others.
- Draw a picture of your own relationship with God.

IN THE HANDS OF THE POTTER

Give each person in your family a can of play dough and have everyone mold a sculpture representing what they want God to develop in his or her life. Ask someone to find Scripture passages that talk about God being the potter and His children being the clay and then ask each family member to share his or her thoughts and dreams while also sharing about the sculpture they've created.

MEMORY LANE

Pull out your old yearbooks from junior high or high school (yes, the ones with *that hair!*). Let your kids find your picture and read what people wrote in your yearbook (with caution if necessary). Use the time to explain that the issues your kids face are the same ones you faced at their age—but they are facing these issues in completely different cultural context. After all, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Allow your kids to share their thoughts and struggles and make sure to share some of the issues you currently struggle with as well (making sure, of course, that what you share is appropriate for your child's age level).

NOW THAT MAKES SENSE!

Sight, sound, taste, touch, smell—God created us to experience the world around us! It's no surprise, then, that humans learn best when we experience a truth by using the senses God has given us. Instead of just talking about a particular Biblical truth, find an object, food or even sound that represents it. Then incorporate that object into your family's devotional time.

OUR ROCK

For this devotional, you'll need your Bible, a rock (small enough to hold in your hands but big enough for everyone to write on), permanent markers, and (optional) glue and glitter.

Gather your family in a circle and pass the rock around to each person. As each person holds the rock, ask him or her to describe it. When the rock gets back to you, share the story of when David had to hide from Saul to save his own life. Just as the cave became David's protection, the Lord is our protection. (Read 1 Samuel 19-20 beforehand, so you can paraphrase the story.) You might also take a moment to reflect upon the hardest times your family has gone through and how the Lord was your Rock during those times. Then ask someone to read Psalm 18:1-3 and discuss the following questions:

- When has the Lord been your strength, shield or salvation?
- Do you trust God to protect you?
- When have you felt God's protection the most?
- Has the Lord ever used someone here on earth as your helper?

Have each family member write their answers on the rock using the markers and glue sprinkled with glitter. The rock can be displayed in your home or given to a family or church member who is going through a difficult time.

SCRIPTURE ART

As a family, select a verse that is particularly meaningful to you. Design a piece of art using items in your house or garage that represents the verse you've chosen. Make sure that everyone in the family contributes to the artistic design. You may want to find a place in the house to show off your piece of art. If you do this on a regular basis—perhaps yearly—you'll have designed an art gallery depicting your family's spiritual journey.

STONES OF REMEMBRANCE

In the Old Testament, God's people commemorated the acts God did in their midst by building stone altars. Joshua 4 retells the story of the Israelites crossing the Jordan River. When the Lord dried up the river His people were crossing, Joshua commanded the Israelites to take stones from

the middle of the river. They then built a memorial pile with the rocks to remind them of the great and mighty God who dried up the Jordan before them.

As a family, find or purchase some large rocks and build a family memorial pile. Have each family member draw or write on a few stones representing a time when he or she felt God move in the midst of your family. Over time, keep adding stones to the pile. As you look at the stones, the drawings and the words, you'll be reminded of all that God has done in your family.

THE VON TRAPP FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

If you have someone in your family who is musically inclined, spend some time together as a family singing songs of praise. You can center your family worship time on a theme or choose songs that are particularly meaningful to the family. If your troop isn't musically inclined, find other creative ways to worship God together.

WRITE YOUR OWN PSALM

Read through a few Psalms together as a family. Individually or as a family, write a Psalm expressing your heart of thanks, your heart of disappointment or your passion for God. You may want to write these on something large enough to post in a prominent place in your home.

Prayer Time

CONFESSION OF SIN

According to 1 John 1:9, when we confess our sins God forgives us and absolutely cleanses us from that sin. Gather your family outside and have everyone take a quiet moment to write out on a piece of paper (privately) any personal sins that come to mind. After everyone is done writing, they can fold their papers several times and give them to you. Without looking at them, place the folded papers in a container suitable for burning paper (e.g., a tin can or your barbecue) and then burn the papers to signify that God forgives our sins and wipes our slate clean. Afterward, have family members pray and thank God for forgiving their sins.

DECK OF PRAYER

Shuffle a deck of cards and place it in the middle of a table. Starting with one person and going in a circle (go around the circle at least a few times), turn over a card and offer a sentence prayer using the following pattern:

- Heart—A prayer of thankfulness
- Spade—A prayer confessing sin, or concerning an area of needed growth
- Diamond—A prayer about a wish, a dream or a goal for the future
- Club—A prayer for your family (an area of need or a desire for the future)

FAMILY PRAYER CALENDAR

Fill in each day of your calendar for this month with people and issues for your family to pray over. Make sure that each person in the family contributes to what goes on the calendar and then hang the calendar in a prominent place in your home. Schedule a time that you can pray daily or weekly together for the people and issues on the calendar—the key to making this idea work is finding time to pray together regularly. Praying regularly will keep you accountable for praying for what is written on the calendar and will also help you form a habit of praying together as a family.

LET YOUR CHILDREN PRAY

Yep, encourage your kids pray—for anything, anywhere, anytime! In the Burns family, we often pray for the family in need when an ambulance or fire truck drives by. Pray for missionaries you or your church supports. Place pictures of friends and family on the refrigerator or on the bathroom mirror as reminders to lift those people up in prayer.

PRAYER TOUR IN THE CITY

Pile into the family vehicle and drive around the city in which you live. Pray for different aspects of the city—schools, law enforcement, fire and medical personnel, homeless areas, rescue missions, crisis pregnancy centers, etc. If possible, finish your prayer tour at a location where you can view the entire city. Spend some extended time in prayer over the city, asking God to move throughout the city and change the heart of those who don't know Him.

PRAYER TOUR OF YOUR HOME

The prayer tour mentioned above can also be done in your home. Visit each room, covering the family member who typically inhabits that room. You can also view each room as symbolic of the Christian life (check out *My Heart, Christ's Home*¹ to gain more ideas for this approach). Spend time in personal and group prayer in each room before moving on to the next room.

Note

1. Robert Boyd Munger, *My Heart—Christ's Home* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

Serving as a Team

SERVICE PROJECT

One thing is certain, families that find creative ways to serve together have a richer spiritual connection as a family unit. Don't let your family miss out on this incredible experience! Perhaps you could serve at a rescue mission or a homeless shelter during the holidays—or any other time of the year. Or maybe your family can get involved in a mission experience through your church. Short on ideas? Just ask a pastor what opportunities are available. There is never a shortage of venues in which to serve others!

SERVE TOGETHER AT YOUR CHURCH

It's important for children to understand the value of the Body of Christ. Serving together at your church will help your children feel a greater bond with the congregation and allow them to taste the joy of serving other members. Your family could volunteer for an all-church workday, or maybe the children's ministry needs extra help. Serving is a unique way to bond together as a family, and allows each member to see the influence your family can have as a unit.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Have each family member create a list of random act of kindness he or she could do in the next month for someone in his or her daily life. Encourage everyone to schedule a time to do those random acts without letting the recipients know what is being done for them.

IMMEDIATE RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS

For a more adventuresome version of Random Acts of Kindness, come up with a list of *immediate* things you can do to bless someone. Chose one act from the list and do it immediately. This will not only show your kids that there are those in need all around them but also how easy it can be to bless someone with a simple act of kindness.

HOMEMADE GIFTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Instead of buying elaborate gifts for others, make homemade gifts as a family for extended family and friends. The Burns family specialty is pumpkin bread and homemade barbecue sauce (not together, though!). For that personal holiday touch, put your gifts in a box and take them to the recipients as a family. Spend a few moments with each recipient praying God's blessings over them.

SPONSOR A COMPASSION CHILD

If you haven't done so already, consider making a sponsored child part of your family. Sponsoring a child can be an integral teaching tool and heartwarming experience. You can take time in your family devotionals on a regular basis to write and pray for your sponsored child. (For more information on sponsoring a child through Compassion International, visit www.compassion.com.)

THE ENCOURAGEMENT PROJECT

As a family, choose someone who needs a little encouragement. This person can be an extended family member, a neighbor, someone from your church or anyone else who needs a little boost. Brainstorm together and come up with an idea to bring joy that person's life and then spend your family devotional time carrying out that idea. We (Jim) decided to write notes of encouragement to a woman who had lost her husband a year earlier.

YOU ARE SPECIAL TODAY

On each family member's birthday, devote the day especially to him or her. You could take part of the day to do that person's favorite activity, spend time affirming him or her or share Scriptures that remind you of that special person. One family bought a plate that had "You are Special Today" written on it, and the honoree got to eat all their meals on it that day. (This activity doesn't have to be limited to birthdays. You can even pick a new family member to honor each month.)

THE CHECKBOOK

Get out your checkbook and write a check for a million dollars, leaving the name blank. (This will no doubt leave little in your checking account!) Pass the check around and have each family member share what he or she would do with one million dollars. When everyone has shared, take a vote to choose the top five ideas and discuss what affect those five things would have on other people for eternity.

Ask someone to read John 11:57-12:11 aloud and then discuss the following questions:

- How did the money Mary used to buy the perfume she put on Jesus' feet make a difference? (It became a lesson for everyone who reads the Bible. She honored her Savior and many others.)
- Did the 30 pieces of silver that Judas received for turning Jesus in do him any good?

Pray that God would use your family and finances to make an eternal difference. Ask Him to show your family a ministry that they can take ownership in, where they can serve together. You could support a child in a foreign country, serve at a local soup kitchen or work together on a project at your church.

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