5 Things You Need to Start a Family Devotion

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I haven't always been a family devotion guy. It's not because I didn't want or aspire to be; I did. But we went a long time as a family before pulling the trigger and trying to integrate this practice into the regular rhythm of our family life.

We've been doing morning devotions together for over 10 years now – long enough that our kids expect that we will. It's a long road, as are most things with young children I'm finding out. Though revival doesn't break out every morning over eggs and toast, our continued hope and prayer is that times like these builds into the love and discipline our children will have in the future when it comes to God's Word.

And through those 10 years, we've tried different things, failed at a bunch, and maybe learned some things about starting and continuing in this pattern. I hope some of these things will be encouraging to you to kick this off or affirming to you if you've found yourself in the middle of it. In my opinion, then, here are 6 things you must have to start a family devotion:

1. Consistency.

There's a pattern to everything, a routine for most every part of life. And any time you disrupt that routine, even for the noblest of reasons, there is going to be backlash. So before you get started, you've got to commit to consistency. Decide on the time of day. And keep it at that time. For us, it's 6:45 am at breakfast. That still might change in the coming years, but if you don't pick a consistent time then it's doubly difficult to keep the practice going.

What's more, in our experience, the days that feel like discipline to do this far outweigh the days where you feel like the kids are actually engaged and learning something. But then again, isn't that often the case in our own lives with our own spiritual growth and development? And yet we keep going because we believe in the power of God and the power of His Word.

2. Variety.

For us, we try to change things up once a week. Monday through Thursday, we do a Bible study and prayer (probably around 15 minutes), but Friday is different. On

Friday, everyone shares one specific thing they are thankful for that week, and one prayer request. For a while, those prayer requests were pretty predictable – that I would have a good day, that I would do well on a test, that I would be kind to friends… that kind of thing. In recent days, we're tried to bring more variety into those prayer requests as well, asking the kids to share a prayer not for themselves but for someone else, or to share something they're thankful for that's not about an activity they get to do that weekend.

3. A Sense of Humor.

One of the great things having a family devotion time does for me, as a dad, is helps me not to take myself too seriously. Every once in a while, we will be talking through some great truth from the Bible, I'll be making an incredibly insightful and valuable point in a truly beautiful way… and someone will burp.

Game over. But such is life with kids. And in truth, that's okay. I can't help but think it was a pretty undignified scene when the kids were crawling all over each other to try and get into Jesus' lap, and yet He let them come. Snotty noses and all. Keeping a sense of humor while trying to instill this discipline, in the end, is a helpful reminder that we, as parents, are really stewards of these children. We do the best we can in faith, but ultimately it is only God who convicts of sin and brings our children – any children – to an understanding of the gospel.

So, we laugh, and then we go at it again.

4. Preparation.

I don't mean preparation in the sense that you have spent 2 hours studying the devotion you are going to walk through the next morning (though that's a fine practice if you can manage it). I mean "preparation" more in the sense of creating the environment. In order to make sure we have time before school for devotions, Jana and I have to get up earlier than we used to. We have to be completely ready for the day with breakfast ready by 6:45.

While it often means that I read through the devotion the night before, it also to a greater extent means doing anything we can do to make the morning run more smoothly. This would be things like making sure lunches are already packed, clothes are laid out, and you haven't left any lingering homework assignments to be done over the eggs and toast.

5. Faith.

There are spiritual moments with your children that are paper thin, and they don't seem to happen that often. It's those times when you really sense they are understanding the nature of sin and our great need for forgiveness, and then they're thinking about Pokémon again. Paper thin moments, but they're there. I remember several years ago when we were in the book of Joshua talking through the story of Rahab. If you're unfamiliar with the story, it's an incredible gospel-laced account of a woman of questionable reputation who was saved from destruction. And how was she saved? Because she put a red rope on her door, marking her house to be spared. And the lights came on for the kids:

> "Do you guys remember any other people that put something red on their doors?"
>
> "Yeah. Like when that angel killed people."
>
> "Correct. It was the Passover. And why was that called the Passover?"
>
> "Because the angel passed over their houses."
>
> "And what did the Israelite army do to Rahab's house?"
>
> "They passed over it."

And so on it went, eventually to remind us that the wrath of God passes over us because our lives are marked with something red – the blood of Jesus. The kids thought this was genuinely exciting, and they felt genuinely smart because they saw how it all fit together.

Every morning isn't a home run. Sometimes it's a sacrifice bunt that you believe that God will somehow use in the story of their lives. So we choose, by faith, not to be discouraged, but instead to believe in a God who is drawing our kids' hearts to Himself.