

Do this one thing to change your life

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So many news articles online have the kind of clickbait title that I gave this blog post. You know the ones: *do these seven things to lose body fat; number 4 will surprise you!* You also get that kind of promise in all kinds of Christian books, that if you follow these 6 rules, you will improve your relationships... faith... wealth... church. You should be suspicious about these things. What I am calling for you to consider is simple, not particularly novel, yet it will certainly change your life.

You should read the Bible and pray with your family.

There, that wasn't so surprising, right? Sometimes I think we want something new and different, some kind of super-spiritual task that we must perform to improve our lives. I have read books that recommend meditation, mindfulness, or waking up at 5am in order to change your life. This recommendation, however, has been tested by millions over time and is a fundamental building block of the Christian life.

Yet it seems that for so many, family devotions have become something that no longer happens. The church I serve had an anonymous questionnaire for our members at a recent congregational meeting. The aim was to find out what the personal devotional practices were for our people, to see if recent initiatives had stimulated more personal and family Bible reading and prayer. While it did seem that most people had a regular pattern of Bible reading and prayer for themselves, few had such a habit when it came to their families. In fact, 70% of those who responded admitted that this was not a regular thing that they did. There were many families with children represented in these figures.

Now, a questionnaire is a blunt instrument. There could be all kinds of reasons why family devotions don't happen. Some people live alone or don't have Christian housemates, so they won't be having family devotions. Yet, however

you slice it, many people didn't get around to reading the Bible and praying with their families. It can be through busyness, or through a lack of interest or motivation, or perhaps it is just a habit that never caught on.

The truth is that, especially for the young children in our church (and many others, I suspect), the only Biblical input they get each week is on Sundays and maybe youth group if they are old enough. That's not enough to build a decent Biblical worldview. Bible teaching then is then thought of as something other people do for me rather than something I am personally engaged in.

Regular Bible reading and prayer, especially with children if you have them, is the foundation of a Christian understanding of the world. It means that you engage and discuss issues that matter the most. It shows where your priorities lie; God comes ahead of work or Netflix or homework.

If you are the kind of person who makes New Year resolutions, or even if you are just reflecting on your life this time of year, consider making one small change. Read the Bible and pray with your family regularly. You will be surprised at the impact, not just in knowledge, but in placing God in your thoughts and in the centre of what you do.

It doesn't need to be complicated. After dinner, read a few verses from the Bible and talk about them, then pray. Use a devotional book if that helps you. Work through a Bible book over time. It might only take you 5 minutes. Our family has had great discussions because of this in recent times. As we have worked through James, we have discussed poverty and riches, faith and works, prayer and much more. It has been a highlight for us, and something the adults and kids can participate in.

Don't feel guilty; God doesn't mark you on your personal devotions. Yet if you love Jesus, you should want to know more about God and his plans for the world. Devotions are something we have the privilege of doing, not something we have to do. Make this one small change, stick with it, and you will notice the impact on your life.