

A SIMPLE WAY TO START FAMILY DEVOTIONS

BY TIM SHOEMAKER JUNE 14, 2019



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Simple, practical and fun ways to start—or start again—family devotions that the entire family will connect with.

Stop and start. Those three words described my attempts at teaching our kids spiritual truth. Sure, my wife and I took our boys to church, but they needed family devotions at home as well. And I was failing miserably.

Not that I hadn't tried. I had a stack of lightly used devotional books on my shelf. Each had shown promise, but not for long. One by one I abandoned the books — and family devotions — after noticing my sons' bored stares.

I'd done fine while the boys were in the Bible picture storybook stage. Unfortunately, after books stopped holding their attention, I began floundering. I had a nagging sense of guilt that I wasn't doing my job as spiritual protector — and I was stuck in a stop-and-start cycle.

Strangely enough, God used a simple coin trick to turn things around for me, *and* my family. After entertaining the boys by doing a little illusion I'd learned with a handful of change, I tied in a brief spiritual application along with a Scripture verse. My boys grasped the point instantly — and definitely weren't bored.

That led to a crazy and fun journey of leading object lesson and activity-based family devotions. Blowing up eggs in the microwave, electrocuting pickles, converting leaf-blowers to shoot toilet paper and countless other to-dos that were quick and simple — each activity taught a nugget of truth in ways my boys haven't forgotten.

Age-appropriate devotional times

If you are also caught in the stop-and-start challenge of engaging your children with family devotions, consider trying these age-appropriate options.

Ages 2 to 3

Stick with Bible picture storybooks until they stop holding their attention. What can I say — they work at this age. And likely your kids will want to hear the same story over and over.

When you read a Bible story to your kids, start out by telling them this is a *true* story that it really happened. At a young age, we want them to know that Bible stories are true happenings. Also be sure the illustrated story you read is accurate. Sometimes Bible picture storybooks sugarcoat the truth — and when kids get older, they learn the kid-version you read them wasn't quite honest. That doesn't make it easy to convince them that the Bible is completely true.

Ages 4 to 6

Though Bible picture storybooks may still work, your days with them are numbered. When the kids get antsy and bored with the books, move into more active family devotions.

Rob Currie, professor of psychology at Judson University, puts it this way: “Kids this age have lots of energy and want to move. Parents should incorporate movement in any way they can. They [kids] have vivid imaginations, so after the Bible story, have them act out part of the story. They'll love being baby Moses hiding from Pharaoh or David battling Goliath. If your kids have artistic talent, have them draw a scene from the Bible story.”

Another idea is to use nature to teach kids about our great God and Creator. Simply taking a walk outside and asking questions is a good start. “Do you know who made this tree?” “Can you guess who made the sun?” Simple object lessons are effective at this stage as well. Whole books of these types are available, and you can adapt them to teach age-appropriate spiritual truths.

Ages 6 to 12

Object lessons, activities and visuals work great. Start family devotions with something active to hold the kids' attention. When you follow that with a nugget of spiritual truth and Scripture, the activity and truth become etched together in their minds.

Three tips to help you succeed

Set a reasonable goal

Once a week do something active to teach a spiritual truth. The kids will have fun — and their enthusiasm will fuel you to keep going.

Keep the tie-in time short

Great family devotions get one nugget of truth across after the activity. *One*. This shouldn't take more than five minutes. Your kids won't have time to get bored — and will remember the application. This will fire you up to prepare the next lesson.

With multiple age groups, focus on the older kids

If you bring the level of your devotions down to your youngest, your oldest will think family devotions are only for younger kids. They'll check out, and you may not get them back for the balance of that devotion — or for future ones. Remember, you've got less years to impact your older kids, and likely they're closer to the bigger dangers. As long as you keep the older kids actively engaged, you'll find leading family devotions makes a difference, even with your younger kids, and you won't be tempted to quit.

Surprising benefits

It wasn't just my boys who were impacted by the truth of the family devotions. Leading them changed *me*. As I taught the boys a lesson, the Holy Spirit often used it to refine me. In time, even I could see I was different from how I would have been, had I not been "teaching my boys."

Because I was more actively living out my faith — and working on being the man I should be — the boys noticed. This turned out to be a huge benefit. They didn't lose respect for me, which allowed me to keep speaking into their lives during those critical teenage years. It's more difficult to rebel against someone you respect.

And the stop-and-start guilt that had plagued me for years was gone, too.

What's stopping you from starting family devotions — or starting again? Pick a simple object lesson, add a nugget-of-truth application and have fun with it. If you're having fun, the kids will, too, and it will be a lot less likely that you'll ever stop.

Tim Shoemaker is the author of [The Very Best, Hands-on, Kinda Dangerous Family Devotions](#).