

Family Devotional Ideas

By Jim Burns, Ph.D.

All of us have experienced at least once in our lives, that feeling and desire to do something devotionally that will bring Christ into the picture for our families. That desire always seems to lead us to the same place, asking the same question. “So what do we do?” Before we allow that burning desire to turn into a heaping pile of ashes... here are some ideas that just might get those creative juices flowing!

- 1. **Instead of just reading a Bible story, act it out.** It’s one thing to read a Bible story together, but it’s another thing to see it come to life. Next time you’re tempted to just read the story, don’t! Assign out various characters to your children and have them act out the story while you read it aloud. Allow them to come up with their own “dramatic interpretations” of how the story would have been lived out. The results will be insightful, if not hilarious.*
- 2. **Buy or rent a Christian video to use.** With so many great Christian children’s videos available, we would be remiss if we didn’t use them. From VeggieTales, to Adventures in Odyssey, to The Story Keepers – there are excellent video resources to use as a family. Be sure that you preview the video before showing it to your children so you have an idea of the themes, as well as direction for a discussion afterwards.*
- 3. **Do a service project together.** We haven’t seen any studies done on this, but one thing is certain – the families that find creative ways to serve together have a richer spiritual connection as a family unit. Find opportunities for your family to serve together. It may be serving at a rescue mission or a homeless shelter during the holidays, or any other time during the year. It could be a service project of mission experience through your church. For a quick and easy way to find service*

- opportunities talk with a local missions pastor, either at your church or another church in the area.*
4. ***Serve together at your church.*** *Find avenues to be engaged in serving together at your church. It could be in the area of children’s ministry or at an all-church event. Serving is a unique way of bonding together as a family, as well as seeing the power of the influence your family can have as a unit.*
 5. ***“Answer This!”*** *Have each person in your family create five open-ended questions. Place a bunch of open-ended questions, written on pieces of paper in a hat. Starting with one person and them moving throughout the family, pull out a slip of paper and answer the question. Keep going until all the questions are gone. Some questions might include:*
 - “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...”*
 6. ***Memorize a verse together as a family.*** *Find a handful of verses at the beginning of the year that you’d like to memorize as a family. Write them out on pieces of blank paper. Find a place to post the verses, preferably in a place where everyone will see them, like the kitchen or dining room. Routinely introduce a new verse for people to learn, 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 add “incentives” for memorizing the verse the fastest, or knowing the most verses, etc.*
 7. ***“Family Prayer Calendar.”*** *Create a “Family Prayer Calendar” filled with 31 people and issues for your family to pray over each month. Make sure that each person in the family has input into what goes on the calendar. Post the calendar in a prominent place in your home. Find a time that you can either pray daily or weekly together. The key to making this idea work is to find that time to pray together regularly. It not only will give you accountability with the calendar, but you’ll be forming a habit of praying together as a family.*

8. **Attend worship services together as a family.** *It is amazing how many families go to church together, but never worship together as a family. Maybe it's an every week event, maybe a once a month event, but make sure that you find a time to attend worship service together. Go out to lunch afterward and talk about the service and what impacted you about the experience.*
9. **Have a worship service in your home.** *For a change of venue, try having a worship service in your home complete with singing, Scripture reading, and a devotional (preferably by one of the kids). This will not only model the Biblical truth that we are all ministers, it will also give your family a greater appreciation for one another and the gifts God has given them.*
10. **“God Art.”** *Have everyone in the family take a piece of paper, divide it into four sections, and draw the following four pictures. Have each person describe their picture and any Scripture that may go along with it.*

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

11. **“Scripture Art.”** *As a family select a verse that is particularly meaningful for 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 has input into 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've now designed an art gallery exploring the spiritual journey of your family.*
12. **Write your own Psalm.** *Read through a few Psalms together as a family. Either 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 spot in your house.*
13. **“God is Like...”** *Have your family sit together in a room. Look around the room and find objects that can represent a character or quality of God. Share it and any verses that may apply. Here's an example – “God is like this chair, because I can fully put my trust in him, knowing He will be able*

- to support me through whatever I am going through.” Keep going from person to person until you run out of objects.*
14. **Affirmation Notes.** *Write notes of encouragement to the other people in your family, expressing what you appreciate about them. Be sure to attach any verses that come to mind as you think about that person and what he or she means to you.*
15. **“String of Affirmation.”** *Get a ball of string. Hold on to one end of the string. While throwing the ball of string to another family member, say something encouraging about that person. Make sure that everyone gets to throw the ball to everyone else in the family at least once. Talk about the “web” that is created and how that represents the bond you have in Christ and as a family.*
16. **Alphabet Thankfulness.** *Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18 together as a family. As a family, try and think of one specific reason to be thankful for each letter of the alphabet... A through Z. Write these down on a continuous 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” smaller children all seem to have.*
17. **“Deck of Prayer”.** *Get a deck of cards, shuffle them, and place it in the middle of your dinner table. Starting with one person and going in a circle, turn over a card and offer a sentence prayer following this pattern (go around the circle at least a few times or more):*
- Heart = A prayer of thankfulness.*
- Spade = A prayer confessing sin, or concerning an area of your life you need to grow in.*
- 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.*
18. **“Random Acts of Kindness.”** *Create a list of things you can do in the next month that would be a “random act of kindness” to someone in your world. Schedule a time to do those “random acts” without letting the people know that you are doing it for them.*

19. **“Immediate Random Act of Kindness.”** For a more adventuresome version of #18, come up with a list of immediate things you can do to bless someone. Chose one from the list and do it immediately. This will not only show your children that there are those in need all around them, but how easy it is to bless someone with an act of kindness.
20. **Case Studies.** Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. Sometimes stories carry the greatest truths of all. Find some real life stories that challenge the thinking and ethics of living. Make some copies of the story and pass them out to your family members. After an opportunity to read the story, discuss the implications it has for our lives as followers of Jesus. How would we react? What would we do? How should we respond to this issue as believers and followers of Jesus?
21. **Bible Games.** Take a trip to your local Christian bookstore and visit the children’s’ department. Most Christian bookstores have a good selection of Bible games for various ages of children. Find one that would interest your family. The art of game playing as a family is an art that bonds families together. And besides, you can learn a little while you’re at it!
22. **Object Lesson Devotionals:** Nothing teaches truth better than a metaphor or an object. The best learning takes place when we can taste and touch a truth in experience. Instead of just talking about a particular Biblical truth, find an object that can represent the truth. Share the object as a part of the devotional time with your family.
23. **“What Would You Do?”** Give each person in your family a piece of paper and a pen. Have them write scenarios that all end with the phrase, “so, what would you do?” These scenarios can go along with a theme for the devotional, or can stand alone as a way to teach the truth that our faith should holistically impact the choices we make and the way in which we live our lives.
24. **Worship.** If you have someone in your family that is musically inclined, spend some time together as a family in worship. You can center your family worship time around a theme, or just worship with songs that are particularly meaningful to the family.

25. **“God is...”** As an exercise to remember who God is, have each family member come up with as many as to finish the sentence, “God is...”. Have them write down their responses along with any Scriptures that might apply. Gather together and make a master list of attributes of God. You may want to post them in a prominent place in your home.
26. **Stones of Remembrance.** In the Old Testament, God’s people marked the acts of God in their midst by building stone altars. Joshua 4 retells the story of the Israelites crossing the Jordan River and Joshua’s command to take stones from the middle of the river that was parted on behalf of the Israelites who were crossing. They were to build 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, purchase some large rocks and build a family memorial pile. Have each family member take a few stones and draw on them, or write a few words that represent a time when they 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 have a family legacy of all that God did in the midst of your family.
27. **“Staking a Claim”** As a family, go to the store and buy a stake. On it in a prominent place write the Scripture reference Joshua 24:15. Read the reference together as a family and discuss what it means to say, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” You may want to have each member of your family write on the stake what Joshua 24:15 means to them. Take the stake out to the front of your house and drive it in the ground, claiming your house as a place where God is exalted and will be served.
28. **Advent Calendar.** Buy an advent calendar or an advent wreath for the next Christmas season. Use it as a way to celebrate the coming of Christ into the world, as well as your home and hearts.
29. **Make homemade gifts for the holidays.** Instead of buying elaborate gifts for others, as a family decide to make homemade gifts for those outside your family. For our family, it’s pumpkin bread and BBQ sauce (not together though!) Put your gifts in a box and drive them to the recipients. Spend a few moments with each family or person. Pray for them.

30. **“You are Special Today”** On each person’s birthday in your family, make a special day devoted just to them. Buy a “You are Special Today” red plate that they eat off of for all their meals that day, make a “how well do you know _____” game to be played by the family, spend time in affirmation of that person, share Scriptures that remind you of them, etc.
31. **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, homeless areas, rescue missions, crisis pregnancy centers. If possible, finish your prayer tour by finding a location in which you can view the entire city. Spend some extended time in prayer over the city, asking that God move and change hearts.
32. **Prayer Tour of Your Home.** The prayer tour mentioned above can also be done in your home. Visit each room, making that room symbolic of the person that lives there, or a metaphor for the Christian life. Spend time in personal, as well as corporate prayer in each room before moving on to the next room. You may want to read *My Heart, Christ’s Home* as a way to gain more ideas for your prayer time.
33. **Family Trust Walk.** Remember this classic in youth ministry? 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 via voice, without touch 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.
34. **“In the Hands of the Potter”** Give each person in your family a can of play dough. Have each person take a few moments and mold a sculpture of what they want to see God develop in their lives. Read some passages about God being the potter and we being the clay. Have each person share their thoughts and dreams as they share their sculpture.
35. **“Shoot Out at the O. K. Corral”** During the summer time, arm each member of your family with a squirt gun of some form. Spend a few minutes starting a water war. For added effect you can use water balloons, hoses, water cannons, etc. At the end gather together and talk about Jesus’ statement that He was “the living water” that would satisfy our thirst. What does that mean? 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 “the living water” in our lives?

36. **“Back Talk”** Pull out your old yearbooks from junior high or high school. Share them with your children. Let them read what people wrote and find pictures of you at that age. Use the time as a rich teaching moment on the issues that your children are facing are the same ones you faced. The difference being that they have to face those issues in a completely different cultural context. Allow your children to share their thoughts and struggles as well. We’d also encourage you to make the lesson contemporary by sharing some of your current thoughts and struggles too.
37. **“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. Why not do those exact same things with your children? Instead of having a devotional at home, consider where you might have the exact same devotional that might 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 business of life, take them to a mall during the Christmas season, or an airport.