

## REDISCOVERING OUR FOCUS ON THE FAMILY:

Adapted from "How to Have Family Devotions"

For the past few months, we have encouraged on one Sunday of the month to engage in a Family Devotional. This works whether you have children or not, no matter how many people are in your family, and no matter how much time you have. Please read over the following suggestions, and as a family, we want you to follow our theme for the Church this year in Rediscovering Our Focus, specifically, on our families. After reading over this, set up a time each day, or each week to be able to follow through on these devotionals.

In an age of fractured families and hectic schedules, Christian families need to be deeply rooted in Christ. Church and Sunday school are essential. But equally important, Christianity must be lived in the home; Christ must be the center of our lives.

There is no magic formula for building a Christian home. But Christian families through the ages have found joy and strength and guidance through taking time daily to pray and read together from God's Word.

### **HOW TO BEGIN**

The first step toward effective family devotions is setting aside a regular time. Many families have devotions after breakfast or supper. These times naturally bring the family together and can lead conveniently into a devotional time. Other families find just before bedtime works well.

But whatever time you choose, be sure that the whole family can be together on a regular basis. Consistency is important because it shows that time with God is a high priority.

### **WHAT TO INCLUDE**

Devotions can include many activities, but it is important to include at least these three: 1) Reading from God's Word; 2) Discussion and Teaching; and 3) Prayer.

#### **Reading from God's Word**

The Bible is an exciting book! It is filled with the true stories of God's heroes, with down-to-earth advice, with spiritual insight, with the plan of salvation. It is the primary way by which God communicates to us today. It is essential, therefore, that we feed upon God's Word regularly.

There are many ways to approach daily Bible reading with your family. Here are a few:

**Read a chapter or a portion each day.** This is a simple plan used by many families. You can read consecutively through a book, taking a passage each day. Older children

can take turns reading too. Then, each person can share what most impressed him about the passage. This can help each person see how God's Word applies to him personally.

**Bible Reading Plans.** A similar approach is to follow a program designed to guide your family through the Bible in one or more years. A number of such plans are available from Christian publishers. One advantage of this approach is that your family will be exposed to the whole Bible in a systematic way.

**Devotional Guides.** A variety of excellent devotional guides are available from Christian publishers and at most churches. Devotional guides can be valuable aids to understanding and applying the Scriptures through the insights of godly commentators.

**Family Bible Study Programs.** Families with older children may want to try studying the Bible in depth together. Each family member can read and reflect on the daily portion beforehand. After re-reading the passage together, discussion can follow. Many good Bible study books are available at Christian bookstores to help guide family Bible study.

**Younger Children.** Children under six or seven probably won't be able to read the Bible themselves. But they can still learn much from Bible reading. Even the youngest child begins to see that God's Word is important. Explaining the passage in simple language, avoiding abstract ideas, will help keep the interest of young children. And many a parent has been amazed by the insights their little ones come up with!

Childhood is also an excellent time to memorize Bible verses, when minds are quick and eager to learn. And it is an excellent time to begin sharing the basic truths that are the foundation of salvation.

### **Discussion and Teaching**

Discussion and teaching about the Bible passage for the day is an integral part of Bible reading as mentioned already. A few additional suggestions may be helpful:

First, try to keep the discussion clear and concise. Often basic questions will help your family understand the passage: "What happened?" "What is being taught?" "How does this apply to our life?"

Second, it is important to maintain a good balance between leadership and participation. The whole family should be encouraged to participate actively and naturally. But the one leading family devotions should correct any erroneous observations, leading in a loving way toward the truth.

Third, it is important to be sensitive to the family's special needs. Some questions may seem "off the subject" but are good indicators of issues the children are facing. We can help them discover how God's Word relates to this specific need and circumstance.

With positive, prayerful leadership, a time of discussion and teaching can provide an opportunity to grow together in the Lord.

## **Prayer**

God's communication comes to us through His Word, but it is a one way conversation unless we lift up our hearts to Him in prayer. Our loving heavenly Father wants us to talk to Him. He delights in our praise, thanks and petitions, just like any loving father does. Thus, the family prayer time should include:

**Worship and Praise.** When we think of God's goodness and greatness, our hearts should well up in worship and praise--for the beauty of His creation, for the gift of life, for a loving family, for the fellowship of Christians--and above all for salvation through Christ's atoning death. There is no end to the list. Even the youngest child can add his own worship and praise. Perhaps each person could share at least one thing to praise God for each day.

**Confession.** As we lift our hearts up to the Lord, we should also recognize our own unworthiness and sinfulness. God has forgiven our sins once and for all. But in order to walk in fellowship with Him (and with others) we need to confess that we continue to fall short of God's perfect standard. As we confess in prayer, we are drawn closer to God and to each other, growing in grace and in the knowledge of God's forgiveness.

In making confession part of our prayer time, it may be helpful for the leader to suggest: "Let's remember in prayer those things which we need to confess to the Lord and each other, asking God's forgiveness both for things we have done and left undone."

**Personal Requests and Intercession.** Like a loving father, God desires to know our deepest concerns just as much as to receive our praise. We can open up our hearts to Him, knowing that He hears and answers our prayers, and that He will work all things together for good (Romans 8:28). And as we share needs with each other, we will be drawn closer together as a family.

Many families find it helpful to keep a prayer list or notebook. This might include special needs of the family, of neighbors, of missionaries, of government leaders. It can also provide a record of answers to prayer. Whatever the answer we know that God hears and responds according to His will.

Some families may wish to include other things such as singing a hymn or chorus, or acting out a Bible story, or doing a craft. These can be meaningful; but there is no need to begin with something elaborate. The important thing is to daily read and discuss God's Word and to pray together.

It is often said that "the family that prays together, stays together"--and the statistics show this is true. But this is not all. As we seek God daily, we renew our relationships with

each other and with God. He talks with us; and we talk with Him. He receives our praise, confession and petitions; and we know the joy of His presence.

If you have not already, won't you make family devotions part of your home, so that as a family you may "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).