



THE CHRISTIAN HOME AND

FAMILY

WORSHIP

Steve Demme

This book is dedicated to my ever supportive, always faithful, loving wife and my patient, forgiving, teachable sons who learned along with me.

May it bless the hearts of those men and women whose hearts God has touched to teach their children the Word of God.



The Christian Home and Family Worship

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B I G R O C K S

From an address given at a time management workshop

It was a packed house, and the noisy audience fell silent as the speaker walked to the platform carrying a two-gallon glass jar and plunked it down heavily on the lectern. From beneath the lectern he pulled out a pail filled with big rocks. Placing several of the large rocks in the glass jar until the last one was level with the top of the jar, he leaned into the microphone for the first time and in a booming voice asked, “Can anyone tell me if this jar is full?”

A voice near the front quickly replied, “If it won’t hold any more rocks then it is full.” The speaker responded, “Is it?” as he pulled out another pail from beneath the lectern that contained gravel. Pouring the gravel into the jar and shaking it into place around the big rocks, he once again asked, “Is the jar full now?”

Thinking they might have been the victims of a setup, the audience’s only reply this time was a few chuckles and a general murmur of speculation.

“Aha, you’re not so sure now, are you?” asked the speaker. “Well, how about now? Is it finally full?” he asked as he once again pulled out another pail and poured sand into the remaining space in the glass jar.

This time the audience was quick to toss out several affirmative retorts.

“Well now,” said the speaker, “let’s just check.” This time he took out a pail of water and poured it into the glass jar. “Is it full now?” he asked one final time.

This time there was no doubt, and the audience was united in its proclamation that the jar was indeed full.

“Well, you are quite right,” said the speaker. “The jar is, in fact, completely 100 percent full. Now, can anyone tell me what the moral of this story is?”

From the center of the room a woman stood and, in a strong and confident voice, said, “If you were organized and planned well, you could always fit more activities into your day or week no matter how busy your schedule was.” Now the audience was abuzz with general agreement when the speaker brought them back to reality by saying, “While that might be a very noble possibility, it is not the moral of this story. Does anyone else have any ideas?”

Following a few moments of relative silence, the speaker scanned the audience and said, “My dear friends, the moral of this story is this: if you don’t get the big rocks in first, you won’t get them in at all.” He continued by saying, “In each of our lives we only have so much time. My challenge to you today is this: identify the big rocks in your life and make sure that you get them into the jar first each and every day.”

For my wife Sandi and me, our big rock was to raise our children to live forever. Eternity is a long time. Perhaps a better word than raising our children is discipling our children. Discipleship has several components: prayer, modeling, and teaching. Only God can work in the heart of a child, but we believe it is our responsibility as parents to do our part and work with God by praying for their personal salvation,

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living out our faith in front of them, and teaching them the eternal Word of God.

For the Demme family, our daily Bible time was one of our big rocks. If you are interested in learning about the other ingredients of family discipleship, I have addressed living out or modeling your faith in several talks, which you may access on the web site www.buildingfaithfamilies.org.

I believe reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word is of paramount importance. Over the years, Sandi and I read many good books aloud to our children, but in our family devotion time we chose to read only Scripture.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." Matthew 24:35

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17

We can't assume that our children are going to receive a knowledge of God's inspired Word anywhere else. It is up to us as parents to teach and train our children. Others may come alongside for a time to support us, but they can never supplant us. No special training is needed to read the Bible. God wrote the Bible to be read by all of His people.

"For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it." Deuteronomy 30:11, 14

Jesus was the Word made flesh. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1, 14

In this short book I will be sharing what we did in our home to teach our children God’s Word during our regular family worship time. I hope that by sharing what we did in our family, you will receive some ideas for your family. As I progress through the different components, I will explain why we chose this particular method. While God’s Word is eternal and His principles universal, how they are fleshed out will be different in every home since God has created each person and each family to be unique.

The last few sections in the book will provide glimpses into other homes and how they have conducted family worship.

It doesn’t say anywhere in Scripture when you should teach, or how you should teach, or at what time of the day you should teach. I want to free you up as much as possible from any kind of condemnation you might feel because you don’t do it like someone else. We are commanded to teach our children, but how, when, or what time, is not mentioned in Scripture.

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Ingredient 1: Love God and His Word

Deuteronomy 6:7 is probably one of the most quoted Scripture references when speaking of teaching the Bible to your children. “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

I thought of this verse many, many times as we raised our four sons, who are now all young men. I often pondered how to teach my sons as I sit, walk, lie down, and rise. Did this mean having regular family worship times? Did it mean memorizing Scripture and plastering our walls with Scripture?

In looking back, these are all worthwhile activities, and this kind of thinking is correct, but I missed the order in which the Holy Spirit has orchestrated His Word. There is a reason verses 5 and 6 precede verse 7. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Before I can expect to teach my children the Word of God, I must be in a heart relationship with God myself. For the past year and a half I have been asking God to help me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

I didn’t know how He would answer this prayer, but since it is clearly according to His will, I knew He

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would. I expected that I would wake up one morning and experience some sort of quickening in my heart and find my affections being drawn heavenward.

However the opposite happened. Instead of my feelings towards God changing, I have been increasingly aware of His affection for me.

Through a series of experiences and Scriptures, God has been teaching, revealing, and conveying to my heart how much He cares for me. Through these providences He has been communicating to me how much He loves and even likes me.

As I pondered this, I realized this is consistent with how our heavenly Father operates. We read in 1 John 4:19 that “we love because he first loved us.” As I have been shown how much God loves me, I am finding that I love God more than ever.

My newfound appreciation for my Savior is in direct proportion to the revelation of His love for me. God has taken the initiative and made me know that I am His and He is mine.

I never doubted that God loved me because this truth is taught plainly in Scripture. However the verse that the Holy Spirit used to make me know how much He loved, and liked me, was John 15:9: “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved You. Abide in My love.” I can see how much God the Father loves Jesus, and to think that Jesus loves me as much as His Father loves Him is incredible.

Deuteronomy 6:6 goes on to say, “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” I also need to ask God to enable me to love the Word

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of God and have it “on my heart.” Deuteronomy 6:5–7 makes so much sense. When I love God and have His Word on my heart, then I am equipped to teach the Word to my family. Because God and His Word are the desire of my heart, talking about God and His words will flow, when I rise up, walk by the way, lie down, and sit in my house.

I see with new eyes that the best thing I can do for my family is fall in love with God and His Word. A heart relationship with my heavenly Father is what prepares and equips me to teach my children.

This summer a friend sent me an email describing what God has been teaching him and his wife about home-based discipleship. With his permission I am sharing a few paragraphs with you:

“We are in a time of real soul-searching and transition of heart and mind from external-based, legalistic forms of ‘family discipleship’ to which we’d been exposed and thought, Well, that’s how the so-called experts seem to be doing it. Our new goal is heart-based, humility-powered ‘just loving each other.’

‘Just loving each other’ doesn’t sound nearly as noble and high-minded as ‘family discipleship,’ but honestly it’s what we need to do. We are desperate to see something of Jesus in our home these days.”

Discipling our children is not a formula but a relationship. This relationship begins with our hearts as parents turning toward God and then toward home. May God save us from the external forms and appearances and do a deep work in our hearts that will

birth relationships with God and each other that will last for eternity.

Ingredient 2: God's Design for His Team

There are several ingredients for a positive experience with family worship. The first one is to recognize that we are each a part of a team.

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Genesis 2:18, 21–24

“Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” Ephesians 5:21–22

I believe the husband is the head of the home. I also believe that God designed the husband and wife to be one flesh and function as a team to submit one to another as they instruct their children. The ideal home will have the dad and mom on the same page in this important arena of passing along truth to their kids. Much of this book is directed to the man, but I am thinking of both as I put pencil to paper.

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Planning for the Parents

Here are some questions your “team” might consider before having your first worship experience at home. Planning will improve your experience. I would also suggest that you take some time to discuss ways to tweak and improve your family worship times after you have met for a few days. This process is ongoing as children mature and your family dynamic changes from year to year.

“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?” Luke 14:28

Here are some questions that would be beneficial for the “team” to discuss as they consider instituting regular family worship in their home.

1. When is the best time in the day to meet?
2. How many days per week will we be meeting?
3. Where is the best place to gather: the living room, kitchen, or dining room?
4. Who will lead the worship time if Dad is away from home?

For example, we aimed for as soon after breakfast as possible, after the dishes were done and before our academic studies had commenced. Each weekday was our goal, and we met in the living room. Sandi led devotions when I was gone.

As you discuss with your wife when the best time for devotions would be, remember that she is probably the one that’s going to spend most of the time with

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your kids, and she knows what works best with the regular family schedule already in place. It's not really fair for the husband to all of a sudden decide, "Hey, I heard this seminar about family devotions. I think this is something God wants me to do. How about tomorrow at 8:30 AM?" Be considerate. Communicate. Pray. You can always tweak the time and place depending on how it is going.

5. Where will we begin our reading: Genesis, Matthew, or the Psalms?
6. How much will we read each day: one verse or one chapter?
7. Who will read: parents, children, or everyone?
8. Do we need the same translation? (Either buy new Bibles or read a chapter on your computer and try different translations before purchasing).
9. What will we do for singing? In the section on Singing, Ingredient 11, I have listed some resources for families.
10. Do we want to memorize some psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs?
11. How will we manage the toddlers? Do we have some quiet toys, or paper, crayons, or markers for drawing?
12. When will we teach about forgiveness, conviction, and condemnation?
13. When would be the best time to pray and share answers to prayer?

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Planning Helps the Whole Family

It's important to the children, as well as to you, to know what to expect in the daily devotions and how long they will go. You may have compliant kids who just take life in stride. But I received an email from a mom that offered some keen insight. She wrote, "My teenagers really struggled with family devotions. They didn't know when we were going to have them, and they didn't know how long they were going to go, because some days Dad got on a roll or one of his favorite subjects and went for 40 minutes. And other days we just met for five minutes. It was disconcerting to the kids since they didn't know what to expect. They didn't know if they were going to be called on to share or just listen."

They decided to institute a structure similar to what we did in our home, and it worked well for their family. The kids came to life and participated because there were no surprises and they knew what to expect. Find your own flavor, because what works for you might not work for me and vice versa.

Planning for Toddlers

Now when the kids were younger, I didn't mind if they played quietly while I was reading to them, as long as they weren't disruptive. There is a difference between semi-quiet playing and significant distraction. Remember the Golden Rule: do unto your children as you wish it would have been done unto you. I had trouble sitting still as a young boy. During church my mom would lean over as my knee bounced

feverishly up and down and say, “You are shaking the whole pew!”

Children that are more than just a little antsy and need to learn how to sit quietly are deposited in my lap. It’s a lot easier to teach a child how to sit still when they’re six than when they’re sixteen. We’ve learned that kids can learn to sit through a family worship time and eventually for a whole worship service at church. You might say, “Well, you’ve never seen my boy.” I would ask if you have ever seen that same child stare at a video screen for an hour without moving? It’s a question of motivation. I’m sure there are exceptions, but not as many as you may think.

Ingredient 3: Begin in the Beginning

You may be wondering, Where should we begin? Genesis? Matthew? Proverbs? John? These are all great places. You could make a case for almost any of them. John was written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31 If you’re focusing on salvation, read John.

I think you could make a pretty good case for starting with Genesis, since it’s the first book. It’s the beginning of THE Book. Isn’t it funny that we have to discuss this? Who’s ever read a book by starting in the middle? Books were made to be read from the beginning.

I would like to make a case for the under-read and less-appreciated First Covenant, or Old Testament. I

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receive more personal applications reading the Old Testament than the New. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is talking about the children of Israel.

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. “1 Corinthians 10:1-2, 11

God chose these factual accounts (they are not fictional stories) with us in mind. The Holy Spirit moved Moses and other writers to illustrate the truth for our generation.

How much do we know about Peter? He was brash and outspoken. He was a fisherman, and he was married, since Jesus cured his mother-in-law. We know a little more about Paul, a zealous Pharisee. We know much more about Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. I feel like I know David, as I have read his prayer journal and watched him grow up as a youth, flee Saul, become king, and finally pass on as an old man who couldn't keep warm. God has used the life and person of David many times in my life.

Even though Saul is not a favorite persona, I identify with him. He was tall (as am I), and he fell because he feared the people. I share that temptation. Saul compromised; Saul lost the kingdom. I am convicted every year when I read about Saul.

What about Solomon? He was the wisest man in the kingdom. As a king in Israel, he was given three

commandments: “Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.” Deuteronomy 17:16–17

If you read through 1 Kings 10–11, you’ll discover that he went down to Egypt for horses; silver and gold were like stones; and he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Then it says, “and his heart was turned away.” He was given three specific instructions, and he failed to obey each of them.

Maybe he felt he was so wise and mature that these instructions did not apply to him. Maybe he got lazy and didn’t feel the need to keep reading Deuteronomy over and over. This speaks to me. I hope that if you come visit me in a nursing home someday, I’ll have these big, thick glasses, and I’ll be reading through my large–print Bible every day. I am dead serious. I will never stop being a dependent child of God. I hope that God will help me to mature in Christ, but I am never going to stop being His son. I will never become so smart that I don’t need to read my Bible.

Another reason I like to start at the beginning is because of a video that I saw called *Ee-taow: The Mouk Story* which is put out by New Tribes Mission (NTM). I first heard about them through Answers in Genesis. There are links on my website to both of these fine organizations, or you can access them at www.ntm.org and www.AnswersInGenesis.org.

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Ee-taow: The Mouk Story, is the account of a missionary who went to Papua New Guinea. He was going to reach the people for Christ, and NTM decided to use a new method. Instead of learning the language and then teaching about sin and salvation through Christ, they began a daily Bible study in Genesis and taught chronologically through the Old Testament for several months before mentioning Jesus.

During one class, the missionary, who had already taught about Abraham being the obedient friend of God and about God's blessing through Isaac, read about Isaac being bound on the sticks, with Abraham's knife poised. Then he said, "We'll pick this up tomorrow," and he stopped the class. What a great teaching technique! That evening, four different men in this Biblically-illiterate culture came to the missionary independently and said, "God will provide a way of escape." The next day they learned that God indeed provided a way of escape in the ram caught in the thicket. Several weeks later, when their study progressed to the death of Jesus, they understood that Jesus was their ram in the thicket.

This was another confirmation to me that we should begin at the beginning, but pray together as a team and ask God to direct you where to begin.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable." 2 Timothy 3:16

Ingredient 4: From Childhood

I'm a little bit of a zealot. When Isaac, my firstborn, was just a baby, I set aside time before church on

Sunday mornings, sat on my bed with Isaac on my lap, and read the entire Book of Deuteronomy aloud. It took several Sundays, but I did it. I don't know what effect it had. I'm sure it didn't hurt him. From birthing classes, I'd heard about mothers talking to their babies in the womb and how babies in the womb can understand music and voices, so I thought, "I'm going to read him the Bible."

Jesus directs Peter to "Feed my lambs." John 21:15

Apparently Paul knew Timothy's family well because he says: "For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well." 2 Timothy 1:5

Later, in the third chapter he comments on how old Timothy was when he began to learn the Scriptures: "From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:15

Children are astute. They hear things and believe what they hear.

Fat

Isaac was four, Ethan was two, and we had just finished eating dinner. My wife and I got up and were walking around when we overheard the boys having a discussion with some intensity. We peeked around the corner so they wouldn't know we were watching. Ethan was innocently looking at Isaac and asking, "Why?", and Isaac said, "Don't eat that," referring to

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the gravy and meat on Ethan's plate. Ethan looked up with his innocent blue eyes and said, "Why not?" Isaac responded authoritatively, "The fat belongs to Jehovah!"

I'm not going to take personal responsibility for this story. I don't recall ever teaching that as doctrine, but somewhere along the line, sitting in a worship service or hearing somebody read the Bible, Isaac had heard that verse that the fat belongs to God. He not only believed it; he was applying it!

Harlots

We have another friend who thought that harlots were musical instruments, since Israel was always "playing the harlot!"

Since kids are so bright and impressionable, it is good to read them the Word of God when they are young. God chose to reveal Himself in the written word. He didn't create movies on DVDs. He didn't choose Charlton Heston, although it is hard to read Exodus without seeing Charlton Heston standing with outstretched arms as the Red Sea parts. God didn't choose these visual means. He chose to write the words. They're meant to be read.

Before our sons were able to read the Bible themselves, we read Scripture to them. In those early years, we liked to read from the *The Bible Story*, by Arthur S. Maxwell (Uncle Arthur). There are ten volumes with pictures. I found them remarkably accurate, although I disagree with some of the theology in the

last volume. They are pricey new, but we found ours used and affordable.

When we did read Scripture to them, we used discernment and read what we thought was appropriate for their age. We avoided gruesome parts like the concubine being carved up into pieces and sent throughout the twelve tribes at the end of Judges. Use your best judgment in what to read when.

Ingredient 5: Invite Jesus to Teach

The first thing we do after we are gathered together is pray. Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” Matthew 18:20 I like to invite Jesus to be present by His Spirit. There are a lot of Scriptures about asking.

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” Luke 11:9

For a season, we had the boys begin our meetings with prayers from Scripture. We chose portions of Psalm 119 for them to read:

“Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” Psalm 119:18

“Make me understand the way of Your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works.” Psalm 119:27

“Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will keep it to the end.” Psalm 119:33

Those are good prayers, and there are plenty more of them in Psalm 119. Have your children find some themselves. It’s helpful to employ Scripture when you

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pray, and this is a good opportunity to teach children this principle.

Ingredient 6: See Jesus

When you pray, consider asking God's Spirit to reveal Jesus. Jesus is the central character in Scripture. I like the request of certain Greeks to Philip in John 12:21: "Sir, we would see Jesus."

If I could go to Whit's End in *Odyssey* (Adventures in *Odyssey* is an original audio series produced by Focus on the Family), I would go into the time machine and ask to be a witness to one of the greatest Bible studies of all time. It took place on the road to Emmaus, after the crucifixion of our Savior. Chloe and a friend were walking along the road, commiserating about the events of the past few days, when Jesus joined them and began to walk with them. He then began to teach them from the Scriptures.

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Luke 24:27

Recently I was reading in my personal devotions the first chapter of Leviticus. I do not look forward to reading this book as much as others, but I know that it is inspired and profitable, so I read it annually, as well as the rest of the Bible. Before I began, I asked the Holy Spirit if He would help me see Jesus in the reading for the day.

"If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be

accepted before the LORD. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” Leviticus 1:3–4

I knew Jesus was the male without defect, but what I saw for the first time was the instruction to “lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering.” Immediately I thought of Jesus directing the hand of Thomas to lay his hand on Him. Tears welled up in my eyes as I thought of Jesus in this new light.

“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” John 20:27

Ingredient 7: Read

After we pray, we take turns reading aloud around the room. Once our boys were able to read for themselves, I purchased large print Bibles, in the same version, so we could all read from the same translation. This was our practice for several years, but we go through seasons. After the boys went to Bible school and college, we would have several different versions being read as we proceeded around the room.

We focused on one chapter per day. We have six people in our family: Sandi and I, Isaac, Ethan, Joseph, and John. When we first got started we experimented with how many verses each person would read. One verse per turn didn’t work for our family because it was moving too quickly from reader to reader, and it was difficult to listen since you wanted to make sure you didn’t miss your turn when it was coming back around the circle. We tried reading as many as four

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or five verses at a time, but some fell asleep waiting for their turn. Two or three verses worked well for our home.

We did go through the math phase for a while. If there were fifteen verses and six people, then each person read two and half verses. My wife would roll her eyes, so we stopped that adventure, but the boys and I got a kick out of it.

For a while I timed our reading and found it took about 8.3 minutes to read a chapter of Scripture. It doesn't take long, unless you are reading Psalm 119.

My reasoning for reading aloud is found in two places in Scripture:

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” 1 Timothy 4:13

“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” Revelation 1:3

Reading, as well as hearing, makes learning more effective. We found that even when we didn't comprehend every verse we read with our minds, our spirits were still being cleansed and nurtured.

“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” John 15:3

“That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word.” Ephesians 5:26

While we were reading, we encouraged each other to pause at commas and enunciate *Ts* and *Ds* at the ends of words. This is a good opportunity to practice reading clearly and accurately.

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Everyone had a turn, even those who have difficulty reading. Our fourth son has Down syndrome and can only read a limited number of words, but he wants to have his turn like everyone else, and we quickly learned not to skip him or we would hear about it. He keeps his Bible open and when it his turn will “read”. He always knows when it’s his turn. He frequently reminds his older brother, who will remain nameless, when it is time to read. Have fun in your reading and include everyone who wants to participate. This is your family; enjoy them.

We attempted to read the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation together. There are a few minor prophets we didn’t finish. Maybe some day we will accomplish this on one of our family vacations or when we are gathered all together for a holiday.

If we just read our favorite portions, we won’t be getting a balanced diet. We might gravitate to Galatians, but we know that we need Deuteronomy as well.

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4

Some may ask which method of Bible study we used: inductive or deductive. We used the “read” method. Even though I am aware of different techniques for digging deeper into the Word of God, and all have merit, I wanted my sons to at least have read the book before they examined it in greater detail.

“The sum of Thy Word is truth, and every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting.” Psalms 119:160 NASB

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Many students I attended seminary with had never read the Bible from cover to cover. At that point in my life, neither had I, yet I was taking classes in theology. I didn't know enough Scripture to know if what I was being taught was true or not. I didn't even know what questions to ask because I was biblically illiterate.

I do think that there is a point where it is helpful to dig deeper and do word studies and consider doctrines such as the deity of Christ, the trinity, and justification by faith, but only after a broad groundwork of Scripture has been laid. I didn't want to teach a form of theology and fit the Scriptures into that framework. I sought to promote a broad base of biblical knowledge and then examine theology in light of the Word.

“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Acts 17:11

One year I taught fifth and sixth graders in a Christian school. We had morning Bible times, and we decided to read the New Testament as a class, one chapter per day. By including weekends and holidays, we read the 261 chapters during the school year. Early on in our reading, students began to tell me they didn't know what several of the words meant. Our school was using the NIV translation at the time. I chose this opportunity to teach vocabulary and spelling and chose one word per chapter for them to look up. They would write the definition in cursive and use it in a sentence using manuscript. This way we incorporated

spelling, vocabulary, and penmanship, and we were developing a better understanding of Scripture.

I was surprised to learn that many modern dictionaries do not have definitions that reflected the meaning of Scripture. If you decide to encourage your children to look up words that they don't understand, may I suggest you consider the *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* as a resource. Here are examples of the definitions for the word righteousness, one from www.dictionary.com and the other from the online version of the *Webster's 1828 Dictionary*. I think you will see the difference. You can purchase the *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* as a hard bound book or get it in electronic form in several places online.

Righteousness, n. riichusness. <http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/word/righteousness>

1. Purity of heart and rectitude of life; conformity of heart and life to the divine law. Righteousness, as used in Scripture and theology, in which it is chiefly used, is nearly equivalent to holiness, comprehending holy principles and affections of heart, and conformity of life to the divine law. It includes all we call justice, honesty and virtue, with holy affections; in short, it is true religion.
2. Applied to God, the perfection or holiness of his nature; exact rectitude; faithfulness.
3. The active and passive obedience of Christ, by which the law of God is fulfilled. Daniel 9.

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4. Justice; equity between man and man. Luke 1.
5. The cause of our justification. The Lord our righteousness. Jer. 23.

right·eous·ness [rah-y-chuhs-nis] -n. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/righteousness?s=t>

1. the quality or state of being righteous.
2. righteous conduct.
3. the quality or state of being just or rightful:
They came to realize the righteousness of her position on the matter.

Ingredient 8: God's Responsibility

When we gather our family together and invite God to teach us and meet with us, He does. As we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. He is the Good Shepherd, and He faithfully feeds His sheep. It is my responsibility to gather the sheep, but it is God's responsibility to feed them.

I learned this lesson while serving as a young pastor. I used to experience a good deal of stress on Saturday nights because I was serving a congregation that knew God a lot better than I did and for a lot longer than I had. I was young, fresh out of seminary, and I didn't feel like I really had that much to share with them. My conviction is that I don't like to talk about something unless I've applied it in my life, and I had a pretty limited experience file up to that point.

Finally an older man took me aside and said, "Steve, look. God will feed His sheep. Do your homework and

be diligent; ultimately He is the great Shepherd of those sheep, and He will feed them.”

“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” John 10:2-4

Ingredient 9: Grace and Truth

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John 1:17

“Loving kindness and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Psalm 85:10 NASB

Jesus was the perfect blend of truth given with grace and grace mixed with truth. As I teach, read God’s Word, and share insights in our devotion time, I try to remember to share the good news of grace and forgiveness with myself and my family. We all need grace along with truth. God’s forgiveness and grace are not only for salvation when we first believe but also throughout our lives. We are saved by grace, and we live by grace.

After hearing me present this message on family worship at a conference, a lady came to the front and introduced herself by saying she worked in a drug rehabilitation center. She told me that many of the people in the center were children of fundamentalist Christian parents. I asked her what she thought the connection was. She believed that these adults had

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never been taught how to process guilt when they were children. They didn't know how to receive forgiveness. She explained that drugs and alcohol were a form of self-inflicted punishment, or a kind of slow suicide. They knew that they were guilty and were punishing themselves.

As children hear the truth, they will experience conviction, which can lead to guilt since they have a tender conscience. This is a critical time to explain the forgiveness that only Jesus can extend since He died to take away our sins on the cross. He had no sins of His own, and so He could take ours upon Himself.

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

When we confess our sins, He forgives them and takes them away.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12

If we've offended another person, we need to ask their forgiveness as well.

“Then Peter came up and said to him, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.’” Matthew 18:21–22

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If one of the family members struggles with God's grace and forgiveness, this may be a good time to introduce them to Psalm 51, which is David's prayer after his heinous sin with Bathsheba.

This is also a wonderful opportunity to teach your children the difference between conviction and condemnation. These are big words, but they are the difference between life and death. Conviction, or godly sorrow, as described in 2 Corinthians, leads to repentance, which leads to life. Worldly grief, or condemnation, leads to death.

"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." 2 Corinthians 7:10

Peter was convicted (godly grief) when he denied Jesus.

"And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly." Matthew 26:75

Peter was helped to get his eyes back onto Jesus, received forgiveness, and became a pillar of the early church. I would like to have heard Peter preach a sermon of forgiveness of sin. I doubt if he ever did so without remembering how Jesus had extended grace and reconciliation to him.

On the other hand, Judas was condemned (worldly grief) when faced with his sin, which led to despair, and he went out and hanged himself.

"Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests

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and the elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself." Matthew 27:3-5

Children have tender consciences, and they believe what they hear. Look at family devotions from their perspective. As parents, you are taking time out of your schedule and devoting it to studying God's Word. As they read and hear the Word of God, they believe the truth and earnestly seek to apply it. Even if you are reading the New Testament, what is being taught can come across as law. These encounters with truth that produce conviction are opportunities to come to Jesus.

"So that the law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Galatians 3:24

A wise pastor once commented that all sermons should end at the cross. Come to Jesus for forgiveness regularly. He always extends grace and forgiveness.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

I recently spoke about family discipleship at a church in Ohio. On Sunday morning, the lady that organized it came up to me and said, "Steve, I have a story to tell you. This morning my oldest daughter, about nine, came to me with tears in her eyes and said, 'Mama, sometimes I call you names in my head.'"

She was convicted because she'd heard me talk about this subject the day before. She asked her mother to forgive her, and they had a wonderful time of going to the cross together. When I saw the girl in church, she was glowing because she'd been forgiven and relieved of her burden. If this dear girl hadn't been sitting in the meetings with her family, she would still be carrying this load of guilt. Children listen and understand.

Ingredient 10: Reminisce

Share your experiences with your family. Don't assume they know all that God has done in your life. Tell your kids how you got saved and how you met your wife. Share answers to prayer. One Saturday night after a conference, I had dinner with one of the vendors. With four boys and one daughter, I asked mom and dad to tell me how they came to Christ and met each other.

I knew that they both spoke Spanish, but I didn't know where they were from. I found out they met in Miami, but she was from Ecuador, and he was from Colombia. It was a wonderful testimony, but what blessed me the most was how their kids kept interrupting, "Hey, don't forget that point, Mom! Hey, Dad, tell them about when you ..." They were enjoying the story! It was a beautiful picture.

"One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."
Psalm 145:4

One of my life experiences happened when I prayed for a pair of boots. I had been reading powerful

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biographies about Hudson Taylor, George Mueller, and Jim Elliott. These men prayed for their physical needs to be met without asking people to help them. When George Mueller needed food for his orphanage, he prayed instead of asking churches in the city. Over and over, God miraculously would answer their prayers. These books made a huge impression on me, and I wondered if God would answer my prayers and meet my needs as He had met their needs.

During my college and seminary years I painted houses during the summer. I'd buy a pair of work boots and wear them through the winter for the snow and slush; then in the summer I'd use them for painting. I went through a pair of boots every year, and since it was October I was in need of a new pair for the winter. Because I had been hearing about praying for my needs, I decided to pray for a pair of boots.

That fall my mom and dad came up to visit. We went shopping in Gloucester, Massachusetts. I wasn't very interested and was waiting by the door in one shop when I noticed a large wire mesh barrel, about three feet high, filled with footwear. I went over, found a pair of large work boots near the top, and checked the size. Size 13—they fit! The price was one dollar! I could hardly believe it. Those work boots meant more to me than all of George Mueller's bread that he prayed for the orphans in London, because God heard my little prayer for a pair of boots. I kept those boots for years. I even kept one on the mantel in our living room after I wore them out. (My wife and I still debate over who threw it away.)

Don't only share your own experiences; keep your children's experiences fresh as well. Many children in Christian homes come to Jesus at an early age. Help them keep this memory fresh. Over the years I've ministered to adults who think, "I don't remember what happened when I was young," and they are tempted to doubt if they were really saved.

My wife is making scrapbooks for each of our sons. She told them when they were young that she was planning on doing this, and they have gathered memorabilia for many years. I was at my second son's house the other night, reading through his scrapbook, and there was his testimony in pencil that he'd written when he was six or seven years old. He told how he came to Jesus and was baptized. Sandi had put together a picnic to commemorate this significant event. She chose a red tablecloth to represent the blood of Jesus and spread it out in the backyard. It was a special time.

Then there was the time Joseph and I were going to buy some apples in Ipswich. As we were talking, he made a comment about his being a Christian, and I thought, "Well, maybe this is the moment." I said, "Actually, Jose, none of us are born God's children. We all have to be adopted because we are all born sinners." I explained the gospel the best I could to a five-year-old and asked if he would like to receive Jesus. He did. We prayed together in the car, on the way to the orchard. On the way home, he began processing what had transpired and asked, "When I jump on the trampoline, will Jesus go up and down too?" He knew that Jesus had come into his heart, and

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he was picturing Jesus in his heart bouncing when he bounced!

It was real to him that Jesus had come to live in his heart. All of these experiences are blessed times, and it helps me to remember them as I write. I hope you will find blessing as you find ways to keep these sacred experiences alive for our family.

When I was working as a pastor, God began to convict me about giving my family the first fruits instead of the crumbs. This might not be a problem to you, but it was for me. One night I received a really good insight about Jesus, and my first thought was, "This will make a great sermon." Then the Holy Spirit whispered, "What about your family?" So for devotions the next day, I shared that insight. Later God led me to use it as a sermon, but I was learning that family comes first.

Share dreams! Debbie, a good friend of mine, had a dream of the Lord's return. In her dream, Jesus was coming back in the clouds. If you know Debbie, you know that she loves Jesus. She has a special relationship with her Savior. When she saw Him returning, she had to get to Him. She began to run, and the next thing she knew, she was in the clouds. Off to one side she saw her pastor coming at an angle from his side of town. Now, Debbie is five feet something, and her pastor is over six feet tall and used to run track in school. He was moving smoothly with big, long, loping strides, but she zoomed right past him.

It made such an impression on the whole congregation that she was asked to relate her dream

in church. Later she wrote it for inclusion in the church publication. Two years later, I had two of her children in Sunday School studying the second coming, and I asked them, “Do you remember that dream your mom had about the Lord’s return?” They said, “What dream?” Her own family had never heard it.

We have this tendency to share experiences in church and write them out for the church magazine instead of passing them along to our families. May God help us to have our priorities in the proper order.

Ingredient 11: Do Unto Others

See if you can recall what it was like to be school age. Do you remember your favorite teachers? What made them special? This exercise may help you to teach your students the way you liked being taught. I liked having fun at that age (still do). I enjoyed illustrations. Jesus called them parables. Perhaps you have had some training and experience as a Sunday School teacher, youth group leader, or Vacation Bible School instructor. Use the insights you have gained in teaching children, along with any fun games that you played.

Here’s one game that most of you know that I learned while working with young people: a sword drill. Since the Bible is the sword of the Spirit, everyone holds their Bible in the air while the leader calls out a reference. That is the signal for everyone quickly to begin searching for that Scripture. The first one to find it stands and reads it aloud. Then all “sheath their

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swords” and the leader picks another one (or you can have the winner choose the next verse).

I learned another edifying and fun activity from some friends. I’ll call it the Read-Along Game. Let’s say that in our family time we’re studying John, which has twenty-one chapters. If we read three or four times a week, it might take us a month and a half to read through this book. While we’re reading together in John, this is a neat way to reinforce what we are studying. During the first week, when we are in the first four chapters, I open to a passage and begin reading aloud. The first person to locate where I am reading and read along with me is the “victor.” Now it is their turn to read from one of these four chapters. As the adrenaline of competition kicks in, I find myself listening intently for key words while I am scanning Scripture and in the course of the game becoming more familiar with God’s Word.

We made up some new rules as we went along. When we first began a new section of Scripture, we had each person begin reading at the beginning of a chapter. When we got more familiar with this portion, we then announced that you could start anywhere in the chapters. To encourage the younger kids, we said you can’t win twice in a game until everybody gets a chance to win once. Do whatever works for your home. Bottom line, teach like you would have liked to have been taught. Learning can be fun.

Ingredient 12: Make a Joyful Noise

“Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!” Psalm 100:1-2

If we had time in the morning, we might sing after we had read from the Bible. There were several factors that went into what we chose to sing. I realized early on that our repertoire as a family was very limited. On one short errand we were all in the car, and I said, “Let’s sing all of the songs we know.” In a few minutes it was quiet. We knew “Only a Boy Named David,” “The Wise Man Built His House upon the Rock,” and a few first verses of hymns, but that was the extent of it.

About that time we attended a seminar where we were encouraged to memorize hymns. I also recalled Elisabeth Elliot sharing how the Holy Spirit used hymns she had learned in her youth to encourage her through the many valley experiences in her life. She mentioned that her parents would gather the family together before school each morning, sing one hymn, and read one chapter of Scripture. I also was influenced by the Book of Acts. If I were ever in prison with Paul and Silas, I wouldn’t be able to contribute much to the singing of hymns from memory!

One of my favorite books and movies is *Pollyanna*. She and her dad used to play the Glad Game after he searched the Scriptures one night and discovered over 800 “glad” verses. I looked up the following words with my concordance to see how many times they are mentioned in the Bible: praise—210, joy—173, joyful—26, sing—126, song—82, worship—103, rejoice—179,

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gladness—46, give thanks—58. That comes to 921 references.

Scripture and praise go together. In the recent history of the church, we have preachers of the gospel accompanied by song leaders. Billy Graham and George Beverly Shea ministered together. Before them we had D. L. Moody as the evangelist and Ira Sankey leading the worship. P. P. Bliss worked with R. A. Torrey. Worship and the Word complement each other.

“Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands.” Psalm 149:6

I am drawn to hymns that have stood the test of time, especially those that are rich in Scripture and theology. In my personal valleys, when life is tough, God seems distant, and I am tempted to feel bad, it is then that theology and what I know about God kick in. These are times when I am putting one foot in front of the other with little or no inspiration and I am governed by what I know. Singing and perhaps memorizing hymns help me through these dark days.

Elisabeth Elliot’s family (the Howards) would go through a hymn book in a year. Number 1, January 1. Number 2, January 2. However, they had a pianist in the home. In order for our family to sing in our home, I had to contract with a friend to record piano accompaniment on cassettes. We bought several hymnals, started with number 1 in January, and over a period of two years sang almost 200 songs. It was a rich experience.

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For a season we decided to memorize hymns. We found that our children learned verses much more quickly than we did. After singing a verse through two or three times, the kids were already on their way to picking it up. As parents, we are the ones that struggled, but we did have the advantage of having heard these hymns many times over the years. Since we have boys, and boys are more visual, we used to pass out a piece of paper, markers, and crayons and encourage them to draw a picture of the verse we were studying. We focused on one verse for a day or two until we all knew it by heart.

Sometimes we had hymns that were difficult to illustrate. In “Dare to Be a Daniel,” the first verse is “standing by a purpose firm, heeding God’s command.” How do you illustrate a purpose firm? Do you know what we did? A dead porpoise. After rigor mortis sets in, you have a “porpoise firm”; that’s all I could come up with. The boys loved it. “Oh, yeah dead fish!” My wife just rolled her eyes and smiled benignly upon her children—all five of them.

I’ve forgotten most of the props and the pictures, but I have memorized several hymns now. If I’m ever in prison, I can now contribute; I’ve got nine hymns under my belt.

For those of you who are interested in singing hymns in your home, I developed a resource called *Hymns for Family Worship*, with 62 hymns, three (3) CDs of piano accompaniment, along with the history of each hymn. I hope these hymns will enhance your family meetings. Go to <http://store.demmelearning.com>.

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com/catalog/building-faith-families and find them in the Store.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Colossians 3:16

Ingredient 13: Exhort One Another

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11

If we have time after singing, we will go around the room and share insights from the morning reading. I might prime the pump by asking, “What did you hear today? What did you learn? What stood out to you in today’s Bible reading?” It’s always amazing to me how different people can read the same passage of Scripture and receive different insights. It’s edifying to hear other peoples’ testimonies. Everyone has something to offer.

“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” Ephesians 4:16

Children’s contributions are not just “cute”; often they have valuable observations. Esteem the wisdom of each member of the family. The leader of the meeting does not have to talk the most. It may also be as a facilitator who creates an atmosphere where each person is free to share what they have learned and what is on their heart.

This is a wonderful opportunity to encourage children to articulate what they have learned so they can edify others. A godly man once remarked, “Impression without expression can lead to depression.” He likened this to the Sea of Galilee, which is always giving. It nourishes the land of Israel with its fresh living water. The Salt Sea is always receiving and, as a result, becomes the Dead Sea.

“What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.” 1 Corinthians 14:26

As we bless the body of Christ, whether at home or in a larger assembly of believers, we benefit as well as the listeners when we declare the truth of our testimony.

“They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” Revelation 12:11

Ingredient 14: Your Family History

The word *remember*, or a form of it such as *remembrance*, is found in over 200 verses in Scripture. Here are a few examples.

“On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.” Esther 6:1

“And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to

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know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.” Deuteronomy 8:2

Keeping a record of your progress, what chapters you have read, and what days you did meet will be a source of encouragement for those days when you are tempted to be discouraged. Looking at the glass of water as half full and not half empty is much more encouraging. Instead of lamenting over the days you did not meet together, be grateful for the ones you did. If you have one devotion a month this year, that may be twelve more than last year!

Perhaps you could assign the task of chronicling your family’s progress to one of the children. His or her title could be Jehoshaphat. Or you could rotate the responsibility among all members of the family.

“Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder.”
1 Chronicles 18:15

Many years ago our family began recording what we were thankful for on a weekly basis. Each Friday we had what we called a “Thanks Service.” We went around the room, and each person had an opportunity to think back over the previous seven days of what they were grateful to God for. After over twenty years, this written record has grown into a small stack of spiral bound notebooks that has become a precious history of our home.

We reminded ourselves that, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” James 1:17

We practiced giving thanks for all things and not just the “blessings,” or the good things, as we perceived them.

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thess. 5:18

If I could have picked a family in Israel to be born into, it would have been the family of Asaph. What a great job, to continually look for ways to be thankful.

“On that day David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the LORD.” 1 Chronicles 16:7 NASB

Ingredient 15: Close with Prayer

I like to wrap up our meetings by thanking God for visiting and teaching us and then committing all that has been read, said, and sung to God in prayer.

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.” Psalms 37:5

“Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.” Proverbs 16:3

You may also want to take this time to ask if there are any needs for prayer.

“In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Philippians 4:6

Ingredient 16: Just Do It

We will examine all of the potential obstacles I can think of in the next section of the book, but here is when I put on my Nike hat and say “Just do it.” And here’s the Scripture for Nike:

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“Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.”
Psalm 81:10

When I first began leading our family worship times I was inspired and convicted, but my inspiration and conviction faded. I have trouble with discipline and follow through. My wife is the steady one on our team. She plans her work and works her plan. She has the calendar of the Persians and the Medes (whose laws could not be altered) that she faithfully follows. Under my shaky leadership our worship times were not regular; we would do well for several weeks, and then have none for a few weeks. Something would happen, or someone would get sick, or perhaps work would pile up. Realizing I had dropped the ball led to me being discouraged, then I would get my courage up and try it one more time. Even though I was not consistent, we kept at it. One of the most encouraging Scriptures to me as a dad is Proverbs 24:16, which says, “The righteous falls seven times and rises again”.

By God’s grace I kept getting up and trying again. Eventually, family devotions became a habit in our home, but it did take a few years. A friend of mine once observed that every time someone gets back on their feet after being down, it is a mini-resurrection. Even though I may not recognize His help, every time I get up it is God’s Spirit helping me to my feet.

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” Romans 8:11.

So how do we get started? We pray, consult with our teammate and spouse, and do it. Somebody has to sit down and gather the family together and “open their mouth wide,” and since God has called me to lead my family, that somebody is me. The only wrong way to have family worship is not to start. May God help us to begin and then continue to assist us when we are tempted to falter.

“The greatest gift a church can receive is to have a group of families who take their responsibilities with such Christian seriousness that they are willing to completely alter their lifestyle to raise up disciples for Jesus Christ.” Abraham Kuyper

Ingredient 17: God is on Your Team

“All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children”. Isaiah 54:13

This Scripture reveals that God is intimately involved in the upbringing of our children. God is alive. He wants to see our children gathered around the throne more than we do. He designed us to work with Him to pass on eternal truth to our children. We are His earthly representatives.

He loves us. He loves our kids. He loves what we’re doing, and His Son is praying for each of us right now, seated at the right hand of the Father. Amen.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES

Here are a few obstacles that I had to overcome, which might also be hurdles for you.

1. Not Modeled

When I speak to parents, I often begin by asking how many people in the room grew up in a family where their parents intentionally taught them the Word of God. I rarely get more than two or three out of 100 who raise their hands. My folks didn't intentionally teach me the Bible. The only times I saw families worshiping together were when I was visiting other families.

We emulate our parents more than we know. When family worship has not been imprinted on our lives, it takes more energy to begin making this a part of the fabric of our own homes. However, God is faithful, and I meet more and more people who are beginning to meet together as families and have seen the transformation in their homes. I have added a section later in this book of accounts of parents who have read this book and been encouraged to start afresh. I hope their stories will encourage you.

2. Expertitis

We live in a culture governed by qualifications. You're not an expert unless you have taken accredited classes, received specific training, or earned a degree. My brother used to teach and provide certification to

mechanical contractors. He was one of the experts in his state. When he moved to another state that required “credentials,” he was not able to be certified himself. He was the certifier in one state but not qualified in another.

Let’s dispose of this myth of credentials. How many of you have ever taught a Sunday School class? How many of you have ever led a youth group devotion? How about Vacation Bible School? A counselor at a summer camp? It seems to me that we’re all qualified to teach everybody else’s kids but not our own. I’ve asked audiences these questions, and the vast majority of hands indicate that most have participated in one or more of these activities.

This is a funny thing in our culture. We even go to training on how to become a Sunday School teacher, but when it comes to teaching our own children, we say, “Hey, I’m not qualified.” I believe we are more qualified than we think because God created and designed parents to do this very thing. According to His inspired Word, parents are called to teach their children, and when God calls us to do something, He equips us to do it. That’s the way He operates.

There is so much potential in the Christian home because after we have taught the Word, we have the unique opportunity to show our students how to live it out in real life. Think of it as having our Sunday School class living with us, or our youth group accompanying us in the car as we do errands. We are the first Christians our children see in action. Our home is their first church.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES

This arrangement of having our students with us 24/7 is a two-edged sword because we have several pairs of eyes giving us accountability. Not only do the students benefit, but the teacher does as well. We have the added incentive to be more consistent in our walk with God. This is part of the beauty of the Christian home. We stimulate one another to love and good works. We help each other to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. It is such a great idea and an effective model, it must have been designed by God Himself.

Mom the Expert

Dr. Leila Denmark is a legend in the Atlanta area and was our pediatrician for several years. She passed on at the age of 114 in 2012. She was in her eighties when we knew her. Sandi and I followed much of her advice and highly recommend her book ***Every Child Should Have A Chance***, published in 1971 by Vantage Press in New York.

Dr. Denmark told me there was a time when doctors would come to your home and say, “Mom, what do you think we have here?” The doctor recognized that no one knew the child better than the mom. Even though the doctor had some medical expertise and was keeping up-to-date with studies and the latest research, he knew that Mom was qualified as well. How times have changed!

Church and the Home

I was in a training session for Sunday School superintendents in our denomination when it was announced that a packet of material from Child Evangelism Fellowship on how to lead children to Christ was being made available to all the Sunday School teachers, so I raised my hand and asked, “Is there any way we could make these materials available to the parents?” It got really quiet, my question was not answered, and the instructor went to the next item on the meeting agenda.

We need to figure out a way for churches and homes to work together. I would like to have someone teach me how to recognize when my children are getting close to receiving Christ. I would welcome input on how to lead worship in my home.

Unfortunately, I am observing a disturbing trend in our churches that gives lip service to the role of parents but, in practice, replaces them. Instead of supporting Dad and Mom, they are supplanting them.

A Winning Combination

When Joe was a young pup in Sunday School class, his teacher recognized that he was particularly sensitive to the things of God that Sunday. Instead of taking her packet out and leading him to Christ after class, she went to his parents and said, “I think Joe is close to the Kingdom.” So Joe’s parents went home, sat him on the bed between them, and explained the gospel to him. Soon all three were kneeling by the bedside, and Joe received Jesus as his personal savior. He’s been

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following Jesus ever since, has been a pastor for many years, and served as my principal at a Christian school.

That is a neat working relationship between the church and the home. The Sunday School teacher recognizes that she is able to use her gifts as a teacher and employs those gifts to support the parents in helping them to do what God has called them to do.

3. Religious Instruction Is the Job of the Church

In 1780, Robert Raikes started the first Sunday school. As the social-minded editor of a newspaper, he was trying to fight poverty and improve the living conditions of the children in the UK who were working long shifts, six days a week, and had no way to get out of their hopeless lifestyle. He came up with the idea of hiring moms in the community to open their homes one day a week, give the children a meal, and teach them how to read, write, and do sums. He hoped that with an education they could break out of that cycle of despair.

What day of the week do you think they chose for the schools? Sunday. Hence the name “Sunday Schools.” Later, the church got involved and supported the effort, but it was never meant to be a discipleship experience for children in the church; it was an outreach for children who were not in the church. It was to help poor children receive the skills necessary to break free from poverty.

“He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might

know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.” Psalms 78:5-7

I first read about Robert Raikes in *The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History*, by A. Kenneth Curtis, Randy Petersen, and J. Stephen Lang, published in 1991 by Christian History Institute. For more information, there is a one hour talk I have presented concerning “Youth Groups and Sunday Schools” on my web site at www.buildingfaithfamilies.org.

4. My Plate Is Already Full

The biggest obstacle for me was the lack of energy to do one more thing. When the boys were all between 4 and 11 years old, we had bought a big unfinished house. Only about half of the home had drywall on the walls, there was almost no flooring, nor was there a heating system, or any landscaping. This was our first home and all that we could afford.

It took my boys and me six years to finish it, so I didn't have a lot of extra energy. Now maybe you're not in this particular circumstance, but according to recent data, the number of hours the average worker puts into a week has increased dramatically in recent years. At that time in my life, I thought to myself, “Now I need to add having family devotions.” All I could think of was that this was one more item on my plate that was already full.

I decided to go ahead and give it a shot anyway, fully expecting to watch more of my limited energy

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drain out of me, but, unexpectedly, I found life. This little unlooked-for spring of living water sprang up in our home. This is just what Jesus promised.

“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.” Luke 6:38

This experience reminded me of Samson when he took the jawbone of a donkey and slew a thousand Philistines in Judges 15. “And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the LORD and said, ‘You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?’ And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day.” Judges 15:18–19 *En-hakkore* means “the Spring of the One Who Cried Out.”

This precious gathering of our family became a sweet time when God met with us and fed us from His Word. I have read my Bible from Genesis to Revelation many times in my personal devotions, but where I am reading the Word of God with other believers and having Jesus teach us by His Spirit, I see new things, I hear new things, and I gain new insights that I never received in reading the Bible by myself. Our family worship times have not been debilitating and a drain on my energy reserves but an unexpected spring of living water.

5. Fear

Another obstacle might be the fear of speaking in public. According to pollsters, people would rather die than speak in public. Public speaking and fear of failure are usually listed as the number 1 and number 2 on the list of things that people are fearful of doing, in some of the research I have seen. Dying is listed as number 4 or 5 on the list. Do the math. I also think that what makes fear of failure right behind speaking in public is because you have the potential to fail in front of other people when you speak.

I don't believe God is calling us to deliver sermons. He is calling us to lead our families. He wants us to be faithful facilitators, not successful sermonizers. When two or three are gathered together in His name, He will show up. Do you think Jesus wants to teach your kids the Bible? Do you think He wants them to understand it? Absolutely! He is also on your team.

Have you ever spoken to your fellow church members after a service? Have you noticed that each individual seemed to learn something different than the others, even though they were in the same meeting listening to the same speaker? What does that tell you? God's Spirit was there, and He was able to take the Scripture and adapt it to the unique needs of everyone in the room. Remember the interaction Jesus and Peter had on the mountain:

"Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah! For flesh and blood has not

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revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 16:16–17

God knows how to teach people. He’s got great ideas. He knows everybody in the class and has invested His life to see that they spend eternity with Him. Gather the family together, ask God to join you, and sit back and watch God do wonderful things in your home.

6. Not Qualified

You don’t have to be the perfect teacher to read the Bible with your family. Children don’t expect parents to be perfect, but they do hope that they will be real. As parents, I hope we are willing to learn along with our children, ask for prayer when we need help, and share what God is teaching us as we learn from His Word. Our willingness to be disciplined along with the kids can be a huge encouragement to them as they also struggle to grow in the Lord. We have the advantage of having followed Jesus longer than they have. They have the benefit of learning the Word of God from their childhood. Allow me to illustrate how smart our children are.

“He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has he seen perverseness in Israel.” Numbers 23:21 KJV

Every time I read this verse I wondered how it could be so. After all, the Israelites were a sinful and rebellious people. I had just finished reading Exodus, Leviticus, and half of Numbers. I puzzled over that particular verse for over fifteen years. When I read Scripture and come to a passage that I don’t readily

understand, I file it away in my mind and figure that God is smarter than I am and hope that someday I will be able to understand it. Finally after all those years, as I was reading this passage, the light shone in my mind, and I finally comprehended how that Scripture could be true.

It so happened that we were about to read Numbers 23 as a family, and I looked forward to being able to explain this difficult Scripture. After we read the chapter I asked if anyone knew how the Holy Spirit through Balaam could make this statement about the children of Israel. Ethan raised his hand and said, “Well, they had been offering the sacrifices daily in the tabernacle.” My shoulders sagged inwardly as my bubble had been burst. He was correct. My seminary-trained mind had taken fifteen years to understand what this stripling grasped in one reading.

So we learn together and we learn from each other. It is how God designed families to operate.

7. Success

Men like to be successful. We like to win. I don't like to play a game unless I can be competitive. I fantasize that I can still play some basketball. In my mind, I still have game. When men set out to do a job, we want to do it well. We want, even need, to succeed. I don't think it is wrong for a man to want to do well and even be “number one.” When Jesus was speaking with His disciples, He found them arguing about who was the greatest. Instead of rebuking them for how they were wired, He redirected their ambition.

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“It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”
Matthew 20:26

God defines success differently than the world. In the divine economy, a faithful man is a successful man. We are called to be faithful.

“It is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” 1 Corinthians 4:2

If you are tempted to say, “I’m not a good speaker or even a good facilitator,” remember that the call of God to our hearts is to sow the seeds faithfully and trust Him to give the increase.

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”
1 Corinthians 3:6–7

8. Dad’s Involvement

The hardest question I am asked is what a mom should do if her husband is unwilling to participate in the biblical instruction of his children or is indifferent. I do not have a pat answer, but here are some thoughts. First pray that God would turn his heart toward his children. He is able.

“He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.” Malachi 4:6

If I were the dad in question, I would hope that Sandi could approach me one-on-one and express her desire to have devotions and communicate her burden to me. Even when we weren’t meeting as a family in our home, I knew deep down in my heart of hearts that

it was my responsibility to teach the Word of God to my kids. A godly appeal goes a long way.

What doesn't work is dripping, nagging, or criticizing.

"A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand." Proverbs 27:15-16

Comparing doesn't work either. Try to avoid, "Why can't you be like James Dobson?" Instead, consider this approach: "I have a burden that we teach our children the Bible. Could you pray with me about this?" If he still resists, ask if he would give his blessing for you to teach the kids.

If the husband is just plain overworked, perhaps the wife could read the Word during the day, and Dad could follow up with questions around the dinner table to support and reinforce what Mom taught in the morning.

The life of Timothy gives us hope even when the husband is not supportive. We don't know whether Timothy's father was a believer in Jesus, but he doesn't appear to be in Acts 16.

"Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek." Acts 16:1

We do know his mother and grandmother possessed a sincere faith and passed that on to Timothy. God's Word certainly gives hope to a believing mother.

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“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.”

2 Timothy 1:5

“To Timothy, my true child in the faith.”

1 Timothy 1:2

When the husband does take the lead, follow him willingly. Here is a picture of an ideal family situation.

“That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD!”

Judges 5:2

9. Moses

To wrap up this section on potential obstacles, think about Moses, who considered himself unqualified and unprepared. In Exodus 3 and 4, we have a detailed account of the conversation between God and Moses. Moses didn't feel able to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. He was frank about his perception of his inabilities. Moses' objections were, “Who am I?” They will not believe me. I am not eloquent.

As I reread this debate recently, I noticed that God was not displeased with the questions. He patiently answered each one with a reminder of who He was and what He would do for him. In this discussion Moses came away with a greater understanding of God's abilities and power than before. It is only when he says, “Let someone else do it” that God gets angry.

“Moses: ‘Oh, my Lord, please send someone else!’”

Exodus 4:13

“Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses.” Exodus 4:14

From our perspective, we know that Moses was uniquely qualified to do exactly what God had called him to do. His education in Egypt, coupled with a strong levitical heritage, seasoned by forty years in the wilderness, and enhanced by his experience as a shepherd, made for a peerless candidate who could and would lead the children of Israel out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land.

I believe God has uniquely equipped us to teach our children. You and I were created before the foundation of the world for this very work. This good work. The eternal work of training, teaching, shepherding, and raising our children to live forever with Jesus.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

WHAT OTHER FAMILIES HAVE DONE

1 – Draw a Picture

Friends from Massachusetts gave each of their children a 4" x 6" white note card to draw a picture of the chapter their dad was reading each day. Their work was displayed hanging from clothespins in their kitchen. I have seen hundreds of colorful "Scripture illustrations" hanging from cords on their ceiling.

2 – Act It Out

A family with expressive children came up with a different strategy. After the Bible reading, off go the kids to another room to plan a skit. They then entertain the parents with their homespun production.

3 – Liturgy and Structure

We have four children from 5 to 11. Although the form and length of devotions has changed a lot over the years, we have always tried to make it a time to model our faith, help them become familiar with components of Sunday worship (Apostles' Creed, Gloria Patri, hymns), and mentor them in prayer, worship, and Bible study.

After dinner we gather in the living room. Each child is responsible for a part of the service: prayer, Bible reading, choosing a hymn, or reading a selection.

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A selection might be a Psalm, Proverb, the Lord's Prayer, Gloria Patri, or Apostles' Creed. These rotate each week.

Opening prayer

The family song

1st selection

1st hymn

Bible story taught by Dad

Intercessory prayer

2nd selection

2nd hymn

Closing prayer

Our times take anywhere from 30 to 50 minutes. Our kids generally enjoy devotions and protest if they are ever canceled. It's been a joy to see our kids grow. I especially love to hear them humming hymns as they are doing their schoolwork or playing.

4 – B-B-B-B-B

Bath, Brush (teeth), Bible, Bed, Blessings!

This family used the Bible time as an incentive to get their kiddos to bed in a timely fashion. No Bible until bath and brush were accomplished.

5 – Teaching in Texas

By God's grace, a godly man and mentor shared Psalm 78:1-8 with me many years ago and exhorted me to teach the Scriptures to my four sons every day. He said, "If we, as fathers, don't honor the Lord daily

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with our prayers and thanksgiving, and if we fail to teach the Scriptures, then we are silently telling our children that God is NOT a PART of our daily lives.” Because this is a commandment from God, I made this task a priority and tried my best to faithfully teach the Scriptures every morning to my wife and to my four sons.

I did use one little teaching help, *Teaching the Word of Truth* by Donald G. Barnhouse, but most of the time, I simply taught verse by verse, chapter by chapter through the Bible. I would skip around, an Old Testament book, then several New Testament books, but tried to teach an entire book before moving on.

We would spend about 15 to 20 minutes a day, opening with prayer first; then reading from the chapter at hand, explaining what God was telling us; and then discussing the text among the family. I tried to tie the text into object lessons that were going on in our family so the kids would see the Word of God was not just a collection of ancient writings but, as 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us, it is, “Given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” We would sing a hymn and a praise song and end in prayer.

I cannot tell you what a sense of accomplishment I feel today when I open my Bible in church on a Sunday morning and see the initials “FBS 7-11-88” next to a passage of Scripture. I jotted in the margin before every family Bible study we had “FBS” and the date we read the passage. I now carry to church, not only the inspired Word of God, but also a record and a history

of one less-than-perfect dad who tried in his own feeble way to honor the commandment to “Teach the wonders and works of God to the next generation!”

6 – Faithful Family in New Brunswick

Morning devotions are a bit more structured. I’m up long before the children with my own personal devotions, and as soon as they get up they come downstairs into the living room and sit on the hot air register if the heat is on or on the floor. I pull out my guitar, and we sing a song or two from memory or from the hymn book.

Then we take out Patrick Johnston’s book, *Operation World* and open it up to the appropriate day’s country. I then name the country, and the kids try to find it on a world map I have pasted on the doors which cover the TV (side note: the world map is pasted in front of TV as to provide conviction over the use of TV in light of a desperate lost and damned world that needs Christ). Once they find the country; I read them some details from the book and we compare it to Canada, or our province, to get some perspective, and then look at some of the spiritual needs.

After that, I take out my dry erase board and write out a Bible verse using pictures and words. This is usually not too planned out other than what verse I am to share and what I want to teach regarding that verse. After that we pray about our day and the people of the country we looked at, and then go have breakfast. The whole thing takes about 20–30 minutes.

WHAT OTHER FAMILIES HAVE DONE

7 - “Show Me” in Missouri

I prayed for God to show me how to be more of a spiritual leader with my kids. Since I didn't really have it modeled and the expectation of what I thought it looked like didn't seem to work every time I tried it, I grew frustrated. But I kept asking God what I could do and thought about what I would want my father to do. I decided interactive games and role-playing might be good.

We read one Bible story per night and then choose animals or dolls to act out the story. Usually I am the actor, but when the kids know the story really well I ask them if they want to play a part. It amazes me how much they remember and what great questions these “shows” raise. They beg for them each night. “Seeing” what Jesus went through for them on the cross was particularly impactful, and giving them the opportunity to take a stand, (for example when they are Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego facing the king and the furnace) was particularly encouraging.

8 - It's Never Too Late

In 1808, Noah Webster was 49. These two paragraphs are taken from a longer biography entitled *The Life and Testimony of Noah Webster*:

“He had now to decide not only for himself, but, to a certain extent, for others, whose spiritual interests were committed to his charge. Under a sense of this responsibility, he took up the study of the Bible with painful solicitude. As he advanced, the objections which he had formerly entertained against the humbling

WHAT OTHER FAMILIES HAVE DONE

doctrines of the gospel, were wholly removed. He felt their truth in his own experience. He felt that salvation must be wholly of grace. He felt constrained, as he afterward told a friend, to cast himself down before God, confess his sins, implore pardon through the merits of the Redeemer, and there make his vows of entire obedience to the commands and devotion to the service of his maker.

With his characteristic promptitude, he instantly made known to his family the feelings which he entertained. He called them together the next morning, and told them, with deep emotion, that, while he had aimed at the faithful discharge of all his duties as their parent and head, he had neglected one of the most important, that of family prayer. After reading from the Scriptures, he led them with deep solemnity to the throne of grace, and from that time continued the practice, with the liveliest interest, to the period of his death (35 years later)."

So wrote Chauncey A. Goodrich, Professor at Yale College, in August, 1847. This is quoted in *Teaching and Learning America's Christian History*, by Rosalie Slater in 1965, published by the Foundation for American Christian Education, San Francisco, CA.

FAMILY WORSHIP CONTEST

In 2011 Building Faith Families began a contest to reward families who had regular family worship times. Beginning in January and continuing for several months, families keep track of how many days each month they meet together to read God's Word. As of this writing, we are into our fourth year of rewarding families for consistency. Prizes are disbursed to all who participate, but the richest rewards are for those who are the most consistent. More information about these ongoing contests is available at www.buildingfaithfamilies.org. Last year I sent a questionnaire to these homes, asking for feedback. This is a sampling of their responses.

Truth Illustrated

Wow, what a rich time we have been having. We start the day by reading the Proverb for that day and the girls pick a verse they want to illustrate by drawing and coloring a picture. Then I reread the Proverb and we try to guess which verse they drew. They are putting them in one of those spiral notebooks that are blank on the top of the page for drawing and lined on the bottom of the page. I have them write out the verse at the bottom after we guess it. They take such delight and giggle themselves crazy while drawing and guessing.

Then at night as a family, Dave reads from the Bible and we take our time interrupting

him with many questions and comments. I love to see the “aha, light bulb” going off in their heads.

Priority

My husband took over my father’s business in the last year, and that has required a lot of overtime and late nights. We always thought we couldn’t fit Bible time in every night. I would just put the kids to bed myself and try to wait up to see my husband. Sometimes several days would go by where they never saw their Dad, as he left before they were awake and returned once they were in bed.

Making this priority to be in God’s Word every day has meant that I have had to budge on structure and schedule, letting the children stay up late on the few occasions Dad has been late. We are finding Dad’s leadership strengthened as we wait for him to instruct us each day, and I know that at least one time each day, we will all be going the same direction.

G-Rated

We are reading through the *One Year Bible* with the kids. It sure does make for some interesting conversations; as Genesis is not particularly G-rated! People have asked us what we’ve done to keep it interesting for the kids, but they have really liked it. I will confess to adding voices though. It’s pretty funny to read Jacob’s words with a thick Texan accent! In the past we’ve read them Bible stories, but now we read the actual Bible each day.

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Growing

Reading the Bible daily is the ONLY way to live! It is amazing how much more aware of my actions, decisions, and thoughts I am when I am daily in communication with God through reading and prayer! I felt like my growth was hindered a little last year over some theological issues we encountered at a new church, and through just continuing to read and pray, God has finally given me an answer to those subjects! Praise the Lord! He is so faithful, and so good to us, even when we are not!

Jesus Time

We have had a few occasions where we were not at home during our usual family Bible time; we were at a friends house, and it did NOT deter us. In fact, we got to share this beauty with another family in Christ! We simply had Jesus time with them. One time I got my daughter and the other family's daughter to lead our time together...it was priceless!

'Votions

Every evening we read stories directly out of the Bible, with everyone reading the part of a different character (Narrator, Jesus, Mary, etc.). Then one of us leads in prayer, then hugs and kisses, and on to bed.

Both of our girls love to play the parts (9 and 5 years old). The five-year-old can't read, but we choose a small part and coach her on what to say. Our five-year-old also loves to lead in prayer! It doesn't always make sense (she has quite the imagination), but it is fun hearing what she is thinking about! We have had

cousins (from a non-Christian family) stay the night, and they absolutely loved “votions” (as one of them called it).

When we started, it was very hit and miss, but our motto was try, try again. It also really helps when the kids get excited about it. They don’t let you slack! We have gotten home late from an event before, where we had to carry the kids in because they fell asleep in the car, and as we were laying them in bed, they stirred and said, “We haven’t had devotions yet!”

Not only does it add to the spiritual dynamics of the family, but it adds to the bonding of the family.

Steady

Our family is constant in our nightly devotions. We have devotions every single night. At the end of the day I am often a tired mama and might be tempted to just put everyone to bed, but my husband has always been the one to make sure it happens.

After everyone is “jammied up,” we sit in the living room and Daddy leads us in devotions. These range from a Bible story, hymn study from the *Hymns for Family Worship* book, hero of the faith stories, to stories to go with the season (such as Thanksgiving). We’ve also done some of the shorter catechisms. We always end in prayer and have our specific needs we remember nightly, such as certain missionaries we support or someone that has an ongoing need (we’ve had several women that were carrying a baby that we’ve prayed for every night through an entire pregnancy). We occasionally play a game that the kids love in

FAMILY WORSHIP CONTEST

which we make a statement and everyone has to guess “Who are you?” We say “I was born in Bethlehem,” etc. Occasionally we have snacks or just sing or maybe even have a time of prayer, but these are not the norm. BTW, our kids are aged 9, 7, 6, 4, and 1.

Three years ago while studying and memorizing the Ten Commandments, my two oldest were saved. Last month after our time of prayer at the end of our devotion time, our four-year-old was broken and full of tears. We finally realized he wanted to ask the Lord into his heart. With laughter and joy he sat on his daddy’s lap, accepted Jesus in his heart, then promptly told Mama to write it down on her chalkboard. Did devotions make a difference? I think so.

1. I think they should be Daddy-led! It makes it seem more important to them.
2. Both parents should be there, if at all possible.
3. Constancy is HUGE—they never ask if we are doing devotions because that is a silly question.

We are often dead tired by the time we get to devotions, but they go on. Our biggest struggle is “WHO GETS TO SIT BY DADDY???” There are things we could do better, but beating ourselves up over it doesn’t help anything. We are committed to doing devotions!

Comfortable

We meet in the morning, after breakfast, before we start school, Monday through Friday. We also pray together at night as the children go to bed.

We gather in the lounge/family room. The smaller children can sit on their big exercise balls, or they can bring their coloring crayons (often the books we use have a coloring section for smaller children) or LEGOs. With many boys, this helps them to keep focused.

We do different things. I ask the Holy Spirit to show us what to do next when the book we are currently reading comes to an end. In the past, we have read through a sequential Bible, so that the children get some sense of the timeline of biblical events, though we do dip in and out of a conventional Bible if we want to research a particular event. We have also chosen specific books of the Bible and read through them, with each child taking the next verse to read, so we all read and everyone stays together. Once the passage is read, we go through it verse by verse, explaining difficult words or concepts. At the end, I summarize, and we talk it through, seeing where we can apply it.

When we are done, we talk about what needs prayer—what we have read that day, a specific event, a particular person, or a specific need. Then we pray out loud, from the youngest up to the oldest. Along the way, I have taught them on prayer: how to pray, starting with praise, thanksgiving, saying sorry, asking for our needs, ending with praise. We keep revisiting prayer as a topic on an ad hoc basis. Then it is on with the day!

FAMILY WORSHIP CONTEST

Some of the children also go through phases of struggling with Bible time, usually when they are struggling in themselves or feeling especially rebellious. We do not allow them to opt out, but we are mindful of them and explain that just as we need to eat vegetables each day, whether we like them or not, so the Word is our soul's nourishment. We often pray for that child too, lovingly.

I would say to someone just starting out that, in my experience, if I do not do it as the first thing in my day, it does not happen. I have found that I cannot put it on hold and expect to do it later. It just does not happen! So, set it as one of the anchors in your day so that the other activities of the day work around that, not the other way around.

If you miss a day, or a week, or whatever period of time, understand that sometimes you are in a season when it becomes difficult. Don't let this put you off or make you feel so condemned that you skip it altogether. Just pick it back up again, when you can. Keep it very short if need be, like a prayer with perhaps just one verse of Scripture to get back on track, but do get back on track. It is more than worth it. Set your face like flint and do it rain or shine, visitors or just family; just do it!

Adapting

At first we were very regimented about everyone gathering around and Dad reading from the Bible, but our family devotion time has evolved as our children are growing older. Most of the time Dad will read

from the Bible, *Our Daily Bread*, or *Jesus Calling*. Sometimes one of the older children will share a verse or passage that they are studying, and we discuss it, or Mom will share something that God has impressed upon her.

We read a psalm and then do lots of prayers for family and friends. My youngest will read a verse from his children's Bible to all of us and pray for us. We sing lots of hymns and songs. Some days we work on memorizing a verse or passage together.

Trying

We clearly are not role models, but we are trying. What we do is to have devotionals at dinner or shortly thereafter, about 6 days a week. We either talk at the table or in the living room. We take turns leading.

I still take the lead on getting it started and keeping it focused, but each of us gets to pick the topic and ask the questions, and my son really likes having his turn.

I have been doing lessons on one commandment at a time, reading from Scripture and some good commentaries.

My wife usually reads from her Bible Study Fellowship lesson, which is on the Gospel of Matthew this year.

My son uses his *Adventures in Odyssey* devotional book, which is designed to be done during a meal. Letting children have an active role is important.

FAMILY WORSHIP CONTEST

Praying

After praying, we take turns reading the Bible. Dad reads the Bible, and Mom reads the Bible. Then we talk about it, sing a hymn, act out what we read, and draw pictures of a key verse, etc.

Music helps us gather and settle back from the activities of the day. We all sing two or three hymns, usually using hymnals and sometimes accompanied. We have been reading from a devotional on the names of Jesus, so one of our children reads from that each evening. I usually pray, and then we read a section of Scripture taking turns from evening to evening.

We close in prayer either with everyone praying out loud or sometimes with me praying for us all. We believe children learning to pray out loud in a safe environment is important. It also helps us understand what they are concerned about, and sometimes we are surprised by their depth of understanding and sensitivity in the prayers they offer up to God.

MEN'S TESTOSTERONE CHALLENGE

During the conference season I like to challenge dads to read this book within 30 days. If they do, they can keep the book for free. If not, they send a check to Building Faith Families for \$25.00. Thirty days after the conference, I send out an email to each of the dads who signed up for the challenge. I ask them whether they have read the book in the allotted time frame, if they had tried having a family worship time, and what were their chief takeaways from the book. I have included a sampling of testimonials I received to date. I hope you will be as edified by their responses as I was.

Dad #1

As soon as I finished the Big Rocks section (twice) and was halfway through the Family Worship chapters, my wife and I started our family worship with our son.

I learned that teaching him about God and His laws is my responsibility (not the church or Sunday School teacher). Your book is very helpful on how to conduct family worship, and it is much easier and simpler than I thought.

Dad #2

This summer we have started, memorizing 1 Corinthians 13 complete with Dad's corny hand

MEN'S TESTOSTERONE CHALLENGE

motions. Overall, the book and your talks at the conference reminded me to be intentional with my wife and the kids.

Dad #3

My chief takeaways from the book were:

- 1 – It is never too late to start.
- 2 – Let the kids know of the “scheduled” time for family worship. This helps to manage their expectations.
- 3 – Let the kids participate at their level. (I can get impatient with slow readers.)

We have been doing family worship. It is not on the same day. It is once a week. We are planning on increasing to twice a week in July.

I did not grow up in a Christian household. Family worship still feels like a forced event. I believe the level of my personal worship time will enhance the level of my family worship time.

Dad #4

Since reading this book, I have changed our “schedule” and mixed it up a little bit. I still do it at night at times, but I choose something that will not require them to sit for too long. I have also just out of the blue had Bible time on the trampoline, under the tree in the backyard or right after dinner (which seems to be the best time when I am home).

I have realized that I need to RELAX. I have been letting the kids be more wiggly and even have a quiet toy during our time. I have found that my kids love to

MEN'S TESTOSTERONE CHALLENGE

act out the story we just read and get real animated with it, so this has also been a good addition to our time. Letting go of my expectations has been huge for me and has really lifted a burden off of my back.

Dad #5

I liked the part on “just do it” and not to get discouraged. Another thing is the need to be a servant leader. I can get demanding, thereby provoking my children to anger. I want to be able to fulfill my duty, but do it with love and care.

Dad #6

I appreciated the allowance you made for differing family dynamics. We have had family worship since the conference. I learned the importance of being aware of the passages you are reading and the ages of your children. I made the mistake of getting into a passage in 1 Samuel and learned that lesson firsthand.

Dad #7

I did read the book, and I enjoyed it. Since having read it, my family has started doing after-dinner Bible reading and worship. Though we are not able to do this every night, we are trying to make a conscious effort to do so.

My chief takeaway from the book was the different ways in which we can disciple our children. I already knew how important it is, but I really like to hear how others are making it work for their families.

MEN'S TESTOSTERONE CHALLENGE

Dad #8

There were many parts that really stuck with me, but one that hit me the most was sharing my personal experiences with my kids. I felt bad that I haven't. I do have many stories where God has touched my life.

Dad #9

My favorite part was the several live examples at the end of how it fleshes out in the different families.

Dad #10

My chief takeaway from the book was that I need to let others have input concerning our devotion time.

I have a strong "take charge" mindset, and of course I thought I knew what everyone needed. Sometimes my wife may be dealing with different issues, needing something different on a given day than what I "think" she needs.

I ultimately lead the worship time, but having input and conversations with my wife and her daily observance as to what the children may be dealing with has opened up a more interactive worship time with the family.

Dad #11

I very much appreciated the end of the book where you described different ways to practice family devotions/worship. I truly love your biblically-faithful, yet open-minded approach to home worship.

Dad #12

It was a pleasure to read, but you are right: I probably would have let it slide without the \$25 challenge (which resulted in several concerned inquiries from my kids).

I think the chief takeaway was that I should have my kids participate more in the Bible time rather than just have them listen to me read.

Dad #13

Another dad had me write a short sentence in the flyleaf of the book, then he wrote numbers down the page. He was going to read the book, sign his name by #1, and then pass it along to other men in his church and ask them to sign their names when they have finished the book.

