

ALLIANCE BIBLE CHURCH

The Value of Family Devotions

Helping families develop a
regular practice of coming
before God

By Mitch A. Schultz

The topic of family devotions is one that is deeply close to my heart. For families to come together before God, as a regular pattern, is vital and significant to both the health of the church and to society. Charles Colson has often said that the *family is the fabric that holds society together*. So when the family is weakened, society is weakened. Another way to say this is that society is as strong as the family.

If that is true, what is it that makes the family strong? I believe one of the great factors that makes a family strong is when the **family makes it a regular practice to come before God together**.

How can this become a regular practice in your home? I offer two simple ways that families can begin a new tradition in the home. First, by understanding why family devotions are so important. And secondly, by looking at how the family can establish their own tradition of family worship.

WHY ARE FAMILY DEVOTIONS SO IMPORTANT?

1. Family Devotions bring the family together before God. There certainly are not many other times in the family experience where this happens. It certainly does not seem to happen naturally. For the family to experience God together, there must exist a time set apart where this can be experienced. The home I grew up in was one where the regular practice of coming before God through family devotions was rarely missed. While to us (the children) it seemed

at times dull and overly repetitive, there were moments where the value was felt. One time that stands strong in my mind was when our family returned to the village where my parents served as missionaries, only to find that government soldiers had taken over the house and removed everything that we needed to survive. They had taken our food, clothing, and many other essentials. Having developed a pattern of coming together before God, our first instinct was to come and appeal to Him for help. The moment my father uttered *amen*, there was a knock at the door, and there stood one of the soldiers with the majority of our belongings. God had intervened and the value of coming to Him was deepened.

In **Joshua 24:15**, the family man, Joshua, made this commitment: *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord...* And in **Joshua 1:8** we find how he did that. *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.*

2. Family Devotions model to kids a pattern that will be important in their own devotional life and walk with Jesus. I have a theory that is untested, but I believe it is true. It is this: The child who has lived in a home where coming before God in family devotions was a regular pattern, is more likely to have a regular pattern of Bible reading and prayer for their own life. You know the proverb: *Train a child in the way he shall go and what will happen? He will not depart from it.* Literally this verse says, *Train a child in the*

*way he should go and **it will not depart from him*** (Proverbs 22:6). When our children are accustomed to coming to God, and reading the Bible and prayer has become a regular pattern to them, they are more likely to continue this pattern for their own life.

3. Family Devotions promote an atmosphere where spiritual things are talked about. Be honest! How often do you talk about spiritual things in your home? How easy do you find talking about Jesus, and his will and things related to the Christian life? Speaking about Jesus, his work for us, his character and nature ought to be a regular part of our conversation. The best way to introduce that into your home is through family devotions. The structured time set aside to talk about God will in time spill over into our regular routines.

Beginning family devotions for us, some years back, was not easy. At first it seemed mechanical and stiff. I found that by being committed to it, in time, it became a regular part of our evening meal. I am convinced that the discussions I have with my kids about Jesus could not come as easily as it does had we not established this pattern. In that famous *Shema* passage in Deuteronomy 6:7, Moses instructed Israel how to discuss God's law in the home. *Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

So that is why family devotions are so important. But what does it take? How do you see it happen?

HOW TO HAVE FAMILY DEVOTIONS!

1. Desire it! You have to want to do it before you will ever see it happen. You will need to believe it is important, which is why I spent time on the why! What does Psalm 42:1 say? *As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you O God.* It will never happen until you want it to happen.

2. Find a time that works for your family! Because we live in such a fast paced world, it is hard to find time to be together. It is hard just to find time to eat together, let alone to have family devotions. For some families, once a week is the best way to go. For others, it might involve after the evening meal, or at breakfast, or before bed. What is important, though, is that you own a time and declare it as sacred. Our family is so accustomed to having devotions after supper, that sometimes one of the kids will automatically go to the microwave and grab the devotional book we use off the top. This has become our sacred family time, and while there are challenges against it, we seek to keep it sacred.

3. Find a resource that works for your family! There is an abundance of resources the family can use for family devotions. I would suggest to you that your selection is guided by one rule. Whatever you choose, keep it as close to scripture as you can. In other words, whatever you use make sure it brings you to the Bible. Amy Carmichael tells us to *drink from the well, not from streams that run from the well.* While there are many good books out there, not all take you to the deep well of the scriptures.

4. Be Creative! In our family, sometimes

my wife will act out the Bible story for that evening. The children love this. While that is the extent of our creativity, I have heard of families using crafts, drama, nature walks, and other forms of reinforcing the topics.

Since we feel prayer for missionaries is a good way to plant a love for missions in our children, we pray regularly for missionaries. After we read, we have a missionary prayer album that we use and we pray that day for that missionary. All it takes is a small photo album that can hold dozens of missionary prayer cards.

5. Use what you do to be an example to other families. If you have people over, or your kids invite someone for a meal, keep to your routine. It will model something very important to your guests and visitor.

6. Try to be consistent, but don't beat yourself up if you are not. We find that the summers and soccer seasons take a real toll on our devotional pattern. As our children get older, it will not get any easier. As long as the desire and value is there, you will find ways to keep it central in your family.

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