

Parent to Parents

I am a dad! When I began writing of this, my daughter Sarah was a junior attending a Christian college in Springfield, Missouri. She attended and assisted with Sunday school in a local church. On an autumn Sunday, the young adult Sunday school class was discussing daily devotions. At one point in the discussion, my Sarah said, "I believe devotions should happen all day every day." Sarah has caught the devotional pattern of our home. We believe devotions must be an all day long adventure. Devotions don't have to hurt to be heavenly.

Beginning on the day of my conversion in 1975, I have had a desire to serve God with all of my heart. This desire has taken me to the back corners of many Christian book stores. I have discovered and read many devotional books. Darlene and I were married in June of 1975 and began our devotional journey as a married couple with a little devotional booklet given to us as a wedding gift.

In March of 1976 our first daughter, Sarah was born. My interest in devotions, especially "family devotions" immediately intensified.

Darlene and I have four children, Sarah, Aaron, Rachel, and Timothy. As each of them was born and publicly dedicated to the Lord, our quest for the perfect devotional booklet and time almost became an obsession. Now we are grandparents. With the births of our first grandchildren, Caleb and Asher, we are once again in search of the perfect family devotions book.

Should we read from Bill Coleman's book or listen to a Donut Man CD? Is reading from "More Little Talks With God," enough? Are devotions best digested with the evening meal or more effective when served with bacon and eggs at breakfast?

Then the deeper questions pry at my brain matter. How can

we be the proper model in the home if we have trouble remembering our own personal devotions? How can we make daily devotions something our children look forward to with anticipation?

We have done our best to raise Sarah, Aaron, Rachel, and Timothy in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Together we have read devotional books, the Chronicles of Narnia, and yes, even the Bible. With this in mind I must be honest with you. We have a hard time setting a specific appointment for devotions each day.

Devotions All Day Long

Because of this, Darlene and I made a decision. Our entire day would be one continuous devotional. Jesus would become the Master of our every minute. Then, when the devotion of daily life comes to an end, we close in prayer at bed time.

As our children grew, everyone had a different schedule. Sarah may leave at six in the morning. Aaron has jazz band tonight and Rachel is going to a friend's house. Timothy is chasing the dog or playing the drums. Darlene is reading a book or attending another baby shower. I may have a golf appointment or a church event. This pattern of busyness in our family may sound familiar to you.

Our family like yours is caught in the forward motion of our church and society. There are times when we stop the frenzy and have devotions. Darlene and I have endeavored to make devotions the central point of the frenzy.

Our dinner table has been the location of some deep, and not so deep, spiritual conversation. You could say it is one of our primary devotional places. The family van has also been a common scene for devotions. But then again, the family room has contained a great many devotional talks. And yes, we have

had devotions in the bathroom, bedrooms, garage, and even at the grocery store.

What I am trying to say is we have made devotions an integral part of family living. We have taken devotions from the once a day or week model and inserted them into every room, every activity, every hour, every day.

So I am finished with reading books on devotions that make me feel guilty. I don't set aside seven minutes forty-five seconds before breakfast every day to kneel with my wife and children at the family altar and pray in old English.

Am I against the discipline of a special daily time set apart for family devotions? Certainly not! The constant discipline of daily devotions is an important part of the Christian walk. Specific devotion times should be a reinforcement of devotions that are occurring everywhere all day long. Do I still take time each day for specific devotions? Yes!

What I submit to you is that devotions which begin in a specific time slot should grow into all of the time. A family that does not maintain a strict devotional schedule can relax and intentionally allow devotions to take over their entire schedule.

If you have a set time for devotions each day that works in your family, don't change it! Use the material in this work to supplement and add to your already good habit of daily devotions.

I say "add to" because this book is about you, as parents, making devotions as normal a part of every day living as breathing and hugging your kids. (Author's note: Your kids need good touches even when they grow taller than you. Give each of them a hug today.)

I grew up in Nebraska. In the summer time, mom would ship us, a few at a time, to her parents farm sixty-five miles west of Omaha. With nine Gruber children, I can only imagine how wonderful the break for her as she shared us with her parents. I

know first hand the wonder of spending time with my grandparents on "the farm." It was there that I learned about chickens, and hard work, and God.

My great grandfather stayed at "the farm" as well. He taught us to play chess, pound nails, and pace ourselves. Great Grandpa Doksansky brought his family to America from Czechoslovakia when his son, my grandpa was a preschooler. Great Grandpa was not a man large in stature, but he was immense in spirit and greatly influenced our young lives. Great grandpa took the time to teach us about chess and carpentry. He took the time to make each one of us feel special.

Sitting beside him one day on a bench behind the tool shed, I noticed a silver cross hanging on the elm tree.

"Great Grandpa," I asked. "Why is that cross hanging there?"

A smile crossed his aged lips as he spoke in his warm Czech accent, "Because this is my church, Richard. God is here."

That was my early childhood introduction to the concept that God is everywhere. Oh, I had heard, "God is watching you," often enough. It never occurred to me until that day that if God was watching my every move, He must also be everywhere. As devotions go, great grandpa didn't take long, but the message stuck. It didn't bore me or hurt my knees or confuse my young brain.

Jairus' Daughter

Devotions don't have to hurt to be heavenly. I think that is what Jesus was trying to tell us through the story of Jairus and his family. (This story is found in Mark 5 and Luke 8.)

Jairus, a leader in his community, fell in the street at the feet of Christ. He begged Jesus to come heal his daughter. Before the crowd would allow the divine in Jairus' life, a servant approached and told him the girl was dead. Jesus, with a

Savior's confidence said, "Don't be afraid, just believe." They arrived at the house where family and friends were mourning and wailing. Jesus took a few trusted followers and the parents into the little girl's room. Scripture says, "He took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat."

Who was instructed to feed the girl? The parents! He told them to give her something to eat. Throughout Scripture God is trying to get the message across to parents that it is our responsibility to feed His lambs. He wasn't just talking to Peter in John chapter 21 when He said, "Feed my lambs." He was talking to the whole church, beginning with the parents.

And he wasn't just talking to the Hebrews in the desert when he inspired Moses to pen Deuteronomy 6:5-9.

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 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. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates."(NIV)

God has given us His Word to impress upon our children. Let me give you an example. I was at a Sunday school class picnic one Memorial day. A father of some of our church kids told me that he turned a dying tree in their front yard into an object lesson. He taught his children that a Christian should continue to bear fruit in his life. Like the dying branches of the tree in their yard, those which do not bear fruit will be cut off. In his own way, this father had used a tree and impressed God's Word on his children.

In the *Full Life Study Bible*, Donald Stamps writes, "Teaching our children godly principals and precepts of God's Word is not optional."

Scripture is generally used to inflict guilt upon parents when family devotional life is studied. Don't worry. I've always had this sneaking suspicion that God gave His Word to lift and inspire us. By the way, if you do feel guilty about not having devotions, take it to the cross. Lay this guilt at Jesus feet, repent, and get on with a life of devotion.

Devotional Verses

Read the following verses. Let them speak to your heart... Allow them to direct you towards the cross and a more complete picture of your role as a Christian parent and devotional leader.

In Psalm 78:5 & 6 we find encouragement for parents. "...which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children."

The exhortation to parents is clear. We are to tell our children about the good things of God. We are to teach our children about God's love. If we do the job, then our children in turn will tell their children. A family that lives with a realization of God's presence all through the day will create generations of believers.

Matthew 19:14 reads, "Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

He didn't say, "Force them to sit and listen," or, "Drag them to me whether they like it or not." Jesus said **LET** them come!" In the Kings James Version of Scripture it says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Some have taken this literally and cause their children to suffer day by day, raising them in

boredom, bitterness, and the belief that the Bible is a book for grumpy grown-ups.

As Christians we must live lives of devotion. Family devotions are like a family menu. That menu needs to contain all that the children and adults need to grow strong and remain healthy. Peanut butter is my favorite food. But I cannot live on P. B. & J. alone. I must have a balanced diet on a regular basis.

People need to eat regularly. If we don't, these bodies starve to death. As Christians we need to feed on God's Word experiencing His presence every day. If we don't, our spirits will starve. Individuals must have a devotional life. As parents, God has given us an additional responsibility. The devotional lives of our children.

Is it necessary to have a set time and place for regular devotions? No, but it does help most of us. Just don't get hung up on the idea that without a specified time and place, devotions are not valid.

Look at Deuteronomy chapter six again. "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." This verse indicates that God planned for devotions to take place all day, every day. We should be so God-conscious that every part of our day is laced with devotional talk and living. Now the trip to the store becomes a devotional opportunity.

"Praise God kids! Look at all of the colors and shapes that God made when He created fruit."

"Thank God that He has provided so that we can buy you this table game."

"Aren't you glad God has given people creativity to design so many different styles of clothing to choose from?"

Our son Timothy came home from school one day when he was eight years old. He had experienced difficulty in music that

day. The teacher falsely accused him of disrupting the class. This incident became an opportunity to teach and pray with Tim. His misfortune in music became our devotional.

We talked about respecting and obeying God's authorities. We discussed forgiveness and led Tim in a prayer forgiving his teacher. Finally, we talked about a soft answer turning anger away. Tim had argued with his teacher, placing her in a position of defense. She was forced by this, to become the disciplinarian.

The next time he was accused, rather than arguing his "side" of the story, Tim politely apologized. This is a practice that children do not regularly follow. I would like to have seen the expression of surprise on his music teacher's face.

It has been our practice since Sarah and Aaron were six and four years old to look at a tree or cloud or rock and say, "My Father made that!" We'll be driving at the end of a long day, and suddenly one of the kids will say, "My Father made that sunset."

I am so blessed when my kids do that.

I was stuck in traffic with Timothy on the way to our church day care. Timothy was five years old. He said, "Dad, I think we should pray." Timothy and I took turns praying. At one point he prayed, "Help all the Timothy's that are going to day care today. And Jesus, help us to get to day care today."

"Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."
(Deuteronomy 6:7niv)

I barbecued hamburgers one evening. Everyone ate their fill and there were three burgers left. I just looked at those three hamburgers and thought Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

So the cheese dip became the king and Jesus was a bun.
(Bread of life pun.) Dinner time was transformed into

devotional time.

The boys and I turned on a Promise Keepers CD one morning and when the music for the song, "Lord I Lift Your Name On High" began, we started jumping and dancing and praising God. Here was a seven year old, his seventeen year old brother and their thirty-eight year old dad going nuts for Jesus. I didn't have to preach or teach. We were enjoying God's presence. We were having devotions!

A WORD TO FATHERS

Devotions don't have to hurt to be heavenly. They don't have to frustrate children either.

Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

In Colossians 3:21, Paul writes, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

These verses again show us that embittering or exasperating our children is not the way to lead them to Jesus. But rather loving them and sharing Jesus' love through every day experiences brings them gently to our Lord.

If there is a dad in the home, he should lead in this walk of devotion. I know in our North American culture, that is not always the case, but children need to know that dad is an active, growing Christian. Dad, don't be a closet Christian. Come out of the closet and become the spiritual leader God intended you to be.

When talking about Abraham, God said, "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." (Genesis 18:19)

This is God's desire for every Christian father. We must take the God-given responsibility of raising our children in the Lord!

Like Abraham of old, God has called fathers to lead their families spiritually. DADS ARE CHOSEN. God said..."I have chosen him" God has chosen you, dad. Walk worthy of the calling wherewith you have been called.

It is difficult for a child to see the dad in the role of priest and leader, if that child never sees dad. For a few short years, your kids will be young and impressionable. Set time aside for them. Be with them so that they can see you are a Christian. It is not enough for them to see you in the car on the way to church each week. They need a daily dad who loves Jesus.

A WORD TO MOTHERS

I know that in some cases; divorce, death, or crazy work hours take the father away from his family. When this occurs, dad cannot be part of the devotional process. In some families dad has not made a commitment to Christ. In these cases father-led devotions are not possible. If dad is out of the picture, then mom must take the lead in devotions.

Mom's you can do it! God will make up the difference. He is a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows. The scriptural preference is that dad lead, but God doesn't limit himself to this preference. Mom, do not lose heart. Your life of devotion can do much to seal the salvation of your children.

The Bible talks about Timothy's mother and grandmother. These women had a profound influence in the life of this young preacher. Look at these verses.

"He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek." (Acts 16:1)

"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived

in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." (2 Timothy 1:5)

You can have a profound affect on the spiritual life and habits of your child. Do not be weary in well doing. God will help you with the blessing of daily devotions.

Memorial Places

Do you remember Joshua and the twelve stones? The people of Israel crossed the Jordan at flood time. Joshua was instructed of the Lord that twelve stones were to be set as a memorial of that crossing.

Scripture says, "tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down.

Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant had stood. (Joshua 4:7-9)

Parents, where is the memorial place at your house?

At our house one place of memorial is the refrigerator. We place all important papers there. At times a scripture has been learned as it hung on this "billboard" in our home.

Perhaps your memorial place is that table where you prayed for salvation, or the couch where you cried and led your daughter to Jesus. Maybe it is that trumpet that was an answer to your eight year old child's prayer.

I prayed with my Sarah at the age of four. We were kneeling next to her bed in a drafty old parsonage in Farmington,

Minnesota. Her bedroom in the second story of that house became a memorial place. Though we are far removed from that place and that time, whenever I say good night to her, I am reminded of that memorial place of devotion.

Our old white van was a place of memorial for me. I talked so much about Jesus with my children in that van. When I plant myself in the driver's seat of any vehicle, I am reminded of the prayers we've prayed while driving through blizzards or of the rainbow that Timothy and I shared one August evening while driving towards south Minneapolis. It was in that van that I answered questions about justification, salvation, and end time events.

Rachel's saxophone is a memorial. She prayed that God would provide one. Her friend Katie saw it at a garage sale. She called and told Rachel about the great sax that she saw. Rachel knew we didn't have enough money to buy it. So we prayed that God would provide. About a week later, my dad gave Rachel the money and the family, which had not yet sold it, turned the instrument over to one happy girl. Every time she picks it up to play, we are reminded of God's provision.

It is difficult to escape or ignore a memorial. Every time you see it you are reminded. Set up some devotional memorials at your house. Make places of memorial so that you must be reminded of God's presence and workings in your lives.

I wonder what the parents of Israel saw and said and did as they passed those stones stacked at the Jordan. Evidently many were just too busy to remember. Their lives were too full for the devotion that went with the pile of rocks. In their busy lives, these parents forgot the Lord. Perhaps some even avoided walking by so that their children would not ask uncomfortable questions.

In Judges 2:10, scripture records this devotional and memorial failure. "After that whole generation had been

gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel."

You are a responsible Christian parent. You picked this writing up because you want to raise children who know the Lord and the works He can accomplish. Let us review what has been covered so far.

Review Time

Devotions are an all day-every day occurrence. Go ahead and set up regular times for devotions, but do not allow yourself to lock God into a once a day or week time slot. He walks with you and talks with you as you should with your children all day, every day.

Devotions do not have to frustrate children. Declare as parents that God is not boring! Let your devotional times be interesting and fun.

Devotions, when possible should be by or under dad's direction. If this is not possible, mom must take the leadership and depend on God.

Devotions become a natural part of every day living as the parents set aside and discuss memorial places and things with their children.

I have a friend named Rob Evans. He is better known as the Donut Man. Rob is a wonderful musician and minister. Most of all, Rob is a wonderful dad. Many of his children's songs are now common place in homes around the world. These songs began in family devotions at Rob's home. They began as a normal Christian daddy wanted to instill Godly principles in the lives of his own children. These songs came in the bedroom, and bathroom, and while driving in the rain. Rob gives us a shining example of what every Christian parent should practice. All day, every day devotions should rule the day.

If Rob can do it, and I can do it, then you can do it too. Like

me, you are a Christian parent. God desires a life of devotion for you and your children. Will it take the form of song? Probably not. Will your devotions be as wacky as they sometimes are at my home? I don't think so. What I do know is that God in His gracious mercy has given you one or more children. He will equip you with the talent and creativity necessary for your children to begin to see His workings in all of life.

The rest of this booklet contains devotional ideas that any parent can grab hold of and run with. These ideas are not meant to be read out loud. (You may do this at first.) These are designed to help you begin to see devotions in every room and activity in your life.

Remember, Jesus used every day items, situations, and stories to bring deep spiritual truths to His disciples. From grapes to governors, corn to creditors, Jesus made devotions an ongoing process. You can do this too!

I have chosen two rooms in my house remembering devotions that we have had in these. The following pages will give you simple object lessons or stories that have come to me or Darlene's minds as we have raised our children. Consider these to be starters and pray that God will use them to spark your creativity in family devotions. In all of this remember, Devotions don't have to hurt to be heavenly.

THE KITCHEN

The kitchen is a center of food preparation and fellowship. In our home, some of the most incredible conversations have begun around a grilled cheese sandwich or a plate of beef stew.

As a young children's pastor in Salem, Oregon, I had the privilege of working with Steve Emerson. Steve was our pastor of counseling. He had the most wonderful teenagers. These kids seemed well adjusted, friendly, and yes, even Christian. My Sarah and Aaron were only six and three years of age. Rachel and Timothy were not yet born. I approached Pastor Steve and asked him what the secret was to having such great kids.

He could not give me all of specifics. He and his wife had simply done all they could to raise their children in the Lord. One thing they did was establish the dinner table as a neutral zone. When sitting down for dinner, the children could bring any word, joke, or comment heard at school or on the street to this forum. Nobody gets in trouble. No angry or shocked parents. This is the neutral zone. This is a place where Steve and his wife could explain the rights and wrongs of any new information their children were acquiring.

I liked the idea and immediately established this policy in our home. My children have since shared the crude and the good. We have discussed each and given explanation. The evening dinner table is a neutral place of training. This policy has opened the doors for many family devotionals and countless hours of laughter.

Think of the times Jesus devotionalized with His

disciples over a good dinner. He ate with publicans and sinners teaching them about God's inexhaustible love and forgiveness. He instituted communion at His last supper. He taught them using corn, wheat, bread, and fish. Jesus treated every question and every side argument at His dinner table with dignity and patience. Can we, as parents, do any less?

The following are lessons from the kitchen. Our kitchen would be considered average by United States standards. We have all of the standard appliances associated with cooking; stove, refrigerator, sink, and most importantly a dishwasher. The cupboards rarely overflow with canned and boxed goods and on a typical day there are a few dirty dishes in the sink.

Lesson One: Vine & Branches

I picture Jesus walking past a local vineyard. He nods for permission from the farmer and plucks a bunch of fat juicy grapes. Holding it up for all to see, His disciples gather close. Each one wonders what deep lesson the Master is about to deliver. He smiles, picks off a couple of grapes and pops them in His mouth.

The disciples, anticipating the lesson, smirk as a bit of juice runs from the corner of the teacher's mouth. Jesus passes out grapes and says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." The disciples nod with understanding the sweet juice of the grape still fresh on their lips.

It is snack time! Go to your kitchen and pull out the grapes. Hand each person a small bunch of grapes. Start eating some grapes. Quote John 15:5, "I am the vine; you

are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

We are branches and every branch has the unique opportunity to produce sweet fruit. Each one of us, as Christians is a branch connected to the true vine, Jesus. As long as we are drinking from the true vine, we can bear sweet fruit in our lives. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches.

Each grape is a little package of goodness from God. We call them candy made by God. The kind of fruit that Jesus wants us to grow comes in packages like love, gentleness, and self control. Since He is the true vine, he will help us each and every day to grow this fruit.

Jesus loves each one of us so much that he trusted us with the honor of producing fruit that will change this world. As you children live for Him, bearing fruit of righteousness, Jesus will bless you causing your branch to grow and grow. Remember, kids, these grapes we are eating would never have been juicy and sweet without the branches. The branches never could have produced this fruit without the vine.

Lesson Two: Drop The Matter!

When I was young I just naturally played with my food. Cheerios became tires at the tire factory. Shredded Wheat was hay and I was a horse or cow or even an elk devouring all of the hay in a field. (At this point, you may be wondering what kind of child I was. That's an entirely different story.)

Then there was the hot cereal. We used to call it mush. Oatmeal or corn meal or wheat meal cooked with boiling water. It was always thick and pasty and hot. At one point

in my childhood I used to palm half a bowl or more and feed it to our horse on the way out to school.

Hot cereal is perfect for object lessons. You can build Jericho with it and knock down the walls or you can create the island of Malta where Paul was shipwrecked. Personally I gravitate towards the dormant volcanic island with milk lake in the now cold crater concept.

Prepare enough hot cereal for everyone. Dish out portions into each bowl. We use butter and sugar and milk on our cereal. Use your spoon to create a crater in the middle of your mush. Fill this with melted butter or milk. Sprinkle the desired portion of sugar on top. Surround the mush mountain with milk. You now have the perfect little model of the lake in the middle of the dormant volcanic island.

Now everyone take a spoon and create a crack in the side of your mush. Watch how the milk begins to leak out. That crack can sometimes be called a breach or break. When people build huge dams they test for cracks every day. One little crack or breach in the dam can grow and create a catastrophe.

The Bible says, "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out." Proverbs 17:14 Arguing with your brother or sister is like creating a breach in a dam. No one would do this on purpose and anyone with any smarts would do all they could to repair the little breaches before they become enormous cracks.

The writer of proverbs was trying to warn all of us. Fighting and quarreling in a family is damaging. It can damage spirits and feelings. Long after the quarrel is over, those spirits and feelings can feel the hurt. That hurt can grow and grow until the damage to relationships cannot be

repaired.

So do what the Bible says. "Drop the matter before a dispute, or really big fight breaks out." Every time you eat mush I want you to remember, "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out." Proverbs 17:14

This is a verse that is required in my home. If the children or parents begin to quarrel, one of the other family members just has to say, "What is the verse," or "say the verse." Then the parties involved in the quarrel quote the verse together and that is the end of whatever they were quarreling over.

Lesson Three: Salt Of The Earth

What would Jesus have done with a bag of potato chips? He might have taught about being broken before God. Or maybe He would have discussed freshening up the stale Christian experience. In our house potato chips are synonymous with the salt of the earth.

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth." Mat 5:13a Each one of us is called to be the salt of the earth. Smaller children have trouble figuring out Scriptures like this one. The question commonly comes to mind, "Does Jesus want us to sit in someone's food?" The obvious answer to adults is, "NO!"

You are the salt that will make other people thirsty for Jesus. Give each person four or five potato chips. Eat the chips. When I eat chips or French fries or popcorn, I often get thirsty. It is the salt on the chips that makes me thirsty. That salt makes my mouth cry for a drink of water.

Pour a drink out for each one. Drink the water. The salt from the chips made you thirsty for water. The water

quenches your thirst.

You are the salt that makes friends and neighbors thirsty for Jesus. He is the living water that will quench their thirst. Your actions and attitudes can be like salty chips making them more and more thirsty. Finally they will cry out for Jesus and trust Him as Savior and Lord. Jesus wants each one of us to share His great love with those around us. We are the salt of the earth.

Every time you eat potato chips, I want you to think and talk about being the salt of the earth. Then as those chips are digesting, go out and do something about it. You can be the salt that makes others thirsty for Jesus!

Lesson Four: A New Creation

Eggs are fun. People use them in all kinds of cooking. From omelets to cakes, eggs are a common kitchen item. I think every child has dropped or broken an egg. Most have exclaimed the grossness of cleaning up the yolk and white, but I think kids like that part.

Take an egg, a glass bowl with water in it and a safety pin, and teach your family about God's great plan of forgiveness and restoration. Dip the egg in water showing your children that the egg is surrounded by water. Before a person is saved, God is all around him, but does not yet dwell in the person's heart or life. Many people believe there is a God but never put their faith and trust in Him.

With the pin, carefully punch out small holes in either end of your egg. Blow out the egg. All of the yoke and white should be blown into an empty cup. Take the blown out egg and submerge it in the water. It will fill with water. Now the water, representing God's spirit is all around and in the egg. When you place your life in Jesus' hands, he

saves you from sin and He comes to dwell in your heart and life. The Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" -- 2 Cor 5:17

The old yolk of sin has been cleaned out and replaced with the newness of life in Christ. This is egg-actly what happens spiritually when a person gives his life to Jesus.

Lesson Five: Spread the Good News

Making sandwiches is a daily activity in our home. Everything from peanut butter and cheese, to egg salad, to Roast beef can be used to remind your child of scriptural truths. for the sake of this lesson, we will use the American standard, P.B. & J. sandwich. You will need two slices of bread, your favorite peanut butter, and some jelly.

(Make the sandwich. As you are spreading the PB & J, talk to your child about this verse, "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child..." -- Luke 2:17 This sandwich will be so good. Before I spread the peanut butter and jelly, all I have are two plain pieces of bread. Two plain pieces of bread are ok but they are nothing like a good P.B. & J. sandwich. This will be so good when I've spread that good peanut butter and jelly on these slices. "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child..." The shepherds saw Jesus and remembered what had been told them by the angel that night and they had to spread the Good News to everyone who would listen.

How good is this sandwich when I spread the peanut butter and jelly? How good is it when boys and girls spread the good news about Jesus? People around you are like

plain bread waiting for someone to spread the good news on them. You can be that person spreading God's love to everyone you see.

Every time we make a P.B. & J. sandwich, I want you to remember that you can be like the shepherds spreading God's Good News to everyone.

Lesson Six: Taste and See...

I am what my mother calls, a picky eater. I don't like onions or celery anywhere near my plate. Don't hide them in my soup. Don't slip them on my hamburger. I can't stand them. Every once and a while I taste them and come up with the same conclusion. "I don't like onions or celery!"

Now this kind of picky palate has been transferred to my children. My Darlene works at getting them to move beyond the comfort zone established by you know who and taste new concoctions. As a father, I really do try to taste and see that these things are good. Once in a while I am surprised to find that I like a new food. So it was when I tasted and discovered that I liked broccoli in cheese sauce.

You may not use broccoli in cheese sauce, but whatever new food you are trying on the kids be ready to teach this lesson. It is a good idea to have a back-up plan in case they taste and spit out the food. It would hardly be a good lesson if the child despises the food and in doing so concludes that he wouldn't like Jesus.

Kids do not often like to try new types of food. When you get a bit tired of macaroni and cheese, hot dogs, and spaghetti, it is taste and see time! So whether it is broccoli and cheese sauce or some other exotic treat, use this opportunity to teach Psalms 34:8, "Taste and see that the

LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."

Some Last Kitchen Concepts

Bible stories in the kitchen can be a blast. Kids get tired of hearing the same old Bible stories told with flannel figures or colored cut outs. So here are some ideas to keep in mind as you move into the Bible story telling mode in your kitchen.

- Bible stories can and should be told with any kitchen items which come in sets large enough for the specific story. Make up some paper cut out eyes, attach these to any potatoes, plastic cups, canned goods, or fruit and you have a group of Bible characters.
- Edible is better. We try to make our Bible characters edible so that at the end of the story family members can devour them. This is more fun than just putting them away and is a great way to work devotions into your snack times.
- Know the Bible story. There is nothing worse than your child correcting you half way through a story because you have mixed it up with another story. If you need to, make notes on several stories that you would like your child to know. Keep these notes on the refrigerator. When you are ready to tell a story with carrot sticks pull out the cards and allow your child to pick one. Doing this involves the child as a leader rather than a spectator.
- Involve your child. Let him move the characters

around. Give him a part in the story. You may have to feed your child his lines. Kids will repeat after you as they move that can of beans or potato man around on the table or counter.

THE FAMILY ROOM

Ours is a typical American family room. It has a couch, entertainment center, several book shelves, and a piano. There are usually some toys scattered on the floor and on occasion laundry waiting to be folded on the couch.

In this room we listen to music, read books, and watch television and use the computer.

Our family room has also been a great place to read aloud. Parent, read to your child. The act of sitting close to your child and reading a good book will do much for your relationship. The closeness established in this will give you more credibility in the devotional and the discipline times. There are wonderful Christian and non-Christian books that can be read with your child. We have read through the Chronicles Of Narnia, Bill Peet's writings, Hank the Cow Dog books, and the Little House On the Prairie books.

We are like most families when it comes to television viewing. We catch our share of reruns, classic films, and cartoons. We often mute the TV during commercials. This gives us an opportunity to visit with our children, discuss what we've just viewed, make phone calls, or pray.

Our entertainment center has a CD player and a DVD player. There are times when we put on a praise CD or slip a Christian DVD, crank up the volume and go nuts for Jesus. If your family is conservative, I highly recommend this exercise. We dance and jump and sing along with the music. We have praised God and line danced and tried to

imitate each other. Like I said, "we go nuts for Jesus." There is nothing better for a child than to see mom or dad having a riotous Christian experience.

Many times in our culture, the family room is relegated to becoming a TV room. The only activity is that of changing the remote control or getting another bag of popcorn or can of cola. The name family room implies that family closeness or activity can take place in that place. Let these ideas assist you in making your family room a center of continuing Christian training.

It can be a place where family members learn how to handle winning and losing. Card and table games are played and good attitudes displayed. Many table games teach younger children how to add, subtract, and count while others teach reading and spelling. (I.E.: Monopoly, Uno, Connect Four, Boggle, and Scrabble) We have had some great times playing games with our children. Although there are some fun Christian versions of popular games, a game does not have to be Bible-centered to teach children biblical principles. These are caught as parents interact with children during the play experience.

Here are a few lessons from the family room. I remind you once again to use these as a diving board into a vast pool of family devotion.

Lesson Seven: Who will choose?

If your family is like ours, the TV remote control is a symbol of authority. Whoever controls the remote, controls what we watch and thus controls the family. Because of this, we have a standing rule at our house. It says, "The oldest person in the room is in charge of the remote." In this way, we demonstrate an authority structure that

respects age and hopefully the wisdom that accompanies it. God has a wonderful plan unfolding in family life as well as in the church. Young people learn from elders. They learn about life and choices. The remote control reminds us to choose this day, this hour, this minute whom we will serve. Joshua's challenge found in Joshua 24:15 states, "But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve..."

Life is full of good and bad choices. Let us be the kind of people that choose wisely. Let us remember that Jesus is sitting next to us in the recliner. Ask yourself the question, "Would Jesus watch this show?" or, "would our Lord keep the TV on this channel during this particular commercial?"

My son Tim and I have often found ourselves closing our eye and hitting the remote so that we would not allow any vile image to enter our minds.

Children must learn to make godly choices with the remote while parents are in the room. Then when the child is alone with the TV, he will be more likely to make his own godly choice in what and what not to view. Imagine your child learning to make life choices as he sits next to you on TV night.

Lesson Eight: Redemption

God is in the redemption business. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This is redemption.

Most family rooms are decorated in a more casual manner than other formal rooms in a house. In our case, we have a sofa that looks better when covered with a blanket, a jury-rigged TV stand/entertainment center, a

couple of pieces from some old church pews reworked into theater-style seats, and miss matched end tables. One is actually an old school desk and the other a plastic chest of drawers. Sounds fancy doesn't it?

I have often thought about how nice it would be to throw it all out and buy new leather seats with matching solid oak end and coffee tables.

I suppose if I did that, I could teach my children 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" But I prefer the redemption aspect of my decorating. We have taken perfectly good furniture, that others discarded and given it purpose. Isn't that what Jesus has done for each of us? He takes the discarded sinners of planet earth and gives them purpose. He saves boys and girls and moms and dads so that they can become better in Him. In Christ, we are new creations.

So throw a blanket on that couch and use it for another six months. Teach your children using the very furniture they are sitting on.

Lesson Nine: Videos, DVDs, and God's Character

We probably have more videos and DVDs than the average family. I once stopped counting once at 250. I have used our collection to talk about the fabulous variety that God has demonstrated in His creation. We have video footage of national parks and wonders of nature. These kinds of videos show children how amazing God is.

It is important to assist children in processing what is said on such videos. From time to time the evolution theory is presented as fact, the earth is reported to be

billions of years old, and the unique nature of man is side-stepped with animalistic comparisons.

Do not panic! When a show or video presents a non-biblical view on any subject, you have a wonderful opportunity to open discussion with your children on God's view.

Many of today's kid-vids include violence, magic, witchcraft, immoral characters, or heroes that disobey God's laws. The cartoon favorite, "Little Mermaid," is a prime example of this. The lead character covets a lifestyle that she cannot obtain. She makes a deal with a witch, nearly kills all family and friends, and in the end gets what she desires. She faces no real consequence for her actions.

As God's authority, the parent can step in, turn off a video that is inappropriate and help the child understand concepts such as discernment, holiness, and justice. I called this segment, "Lesson Nine," but there are so many lessons to be shared through your viewing habits and video collection. Here are some simple concepts to consider when choosing a video to watch with your children.

- Do not accept "G" or "PG" rated videos at face value.
- Check themes, story lines, and language before allowing your child to watch.
- Are there any segments in the movie which may impress children in a negative way causing nightmares or ungodly behavior?
- Are there any themes presented which lend themselves to teaching positive biblical principles for living?
- Would you watch this video if your pastor were in the room?

Lesson Ten: Coffee Table Cereal Stories

One Saturday morning when our son Aaron was just eight years old, I awakened to the sound of his voice. He was out in the kitchen telling a Bible story. I crept down the hall and observed he and his little sister, Rachel kneeling on chairs at our kitchen table. They had a pile of cereal in the middle of the table. Around it were three smaller piles. He was telling the story of Gideon. When the Midianites were destroyed, the kids ate the cereal.

I loved the concept, spread it throughout the home, and even began using it at church. The coffee table in our family room is the perfect height for telling these cereal stories. Clear off the table, gather your family around it, and act out a story with cereal. Take turns eating characters as they leave the story.

Do not limit your storytelling to cereal. Begin using other foods, action figures, or household items. I have drawn and taped eyes to canned goods, fruit, and chess pieces in order to share Bible stories with my children. These items become our every day puppets. Each time the child sees that object he or she will remember the story told.

Lesson Eleven: Remember the Sabbath

I am a devout Sunday afternoon sports fan. Not so much because I like them as much as most sports put me to sleep. Many a Sunday afternoon, my children have witnessed daddy falling asleep on the couch while golfers swing or football player's face each other on the field of pigskin combat. Oftentimes, they follow my lead and the

whole family can be seen slumbering peacefully while the Vikings score another field goal.

With so many families so busily running here for lessons or there for team try-outs there ought to be a place of rest in your home. Our family room is such a place. Yes, there are times when the TV is blaring, I'm singing while hot gluing puppet parts together, the kids are talking, and Darlene is on the phone. But there are other times when we just turn it all down or off and take a nap.

It is important that children learn early to balance their lives. Throughout Jesus' ministry we find him going off to quiet places to pray. He is found resting in a boat or lounging at a table with friends. Boys and girls do a lot of running even when there is no special event or game to play. Occasional rest breaks are not only good physically for children, but are encouraged Scripturally.

When the children were young, we preached at a kid's camp in Texas. The camp director, Don Kester had established a rest time each afternoon in his camp schedule. It was called, "Horizontal Time." We adopted that name in our home as a designation for any all-family rest break.

Unlike "nap time," horizontal time does not require a child to sleep. It simply means he must be horizontal. The kids can read a book, fold paper, or sleep. Oftentimes we turn off all video media and play soft Christian music. Set a time of 30 to 60 minutes for this. If the child falls asleep and rests longer do not wake him up.

The family room is a great place for horizontal time. Being together is not as scary or nap-like as being sent your room for this. Now that my children are mostly grown up, I still practice horizontal time. In fact, I look forward to assisting my grand children in balancing their lives with this concept.

Final Thoughts on Family Devotions

Here are some simple guidelines to keep in mind when diving into devotions with your children.

- Make it fun! Devotions don't have to hurt to be heavenly. Children should grow up enjoying the things of God.
- Active involvement is imperative. Allowing the children to participate physically will help to hold their interest.
- Keep it simple saint. The less complicated you can make your devotional time, the better. As children get older you can add more challenging devotional time.
- Expect God to be there. Scripture says that wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, He is in their midst. Prayer and praise should be part of your devotional habit.
- Remember Jesus in every day happenings. Every activity in every room can be a starting point for devotions.

I hope you enjoyed this little booklet. I trust that you will use it as a beginning point for your all day-every day devotions. I know that you can inject devotional actions, talk, and attitudes in every life situation. By practicing His presence with your children, you will enjoy the rich rewards of Christian Parenting.