

Parents-Go First into the Home

by Kay L. Meyer

How do we begin the process of spiritual nurture in the home for our children? How can we help them learn to love the Lord and grow in faith? What are family activities and devotions that we can do with them to help them know and love Jesus? And why should we go ‘first’ into the home (Matthew 28:18-19)? Family Faith Time (FFT) should be interactive, relevant to the child’s age and ability, and proclaim the law and gospel that are age appropriate.

When I teach parenting class we stress the importance of Family Faith Time in the home and model activities that help parents share their faith and love for the Lord. Martin Luther said, “Father and mother are apostles, bishop, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel.”

Listen to God’s Word

“And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk to them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:6-8).

Teach your children about the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. Talk to them when you sit at home, drive them to swim class, piano lessons, take a walk, and as you lie down and rise up!

Recognize the Home is a Difficult Place to Live Our Faith

So confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16). Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:31, 32).

What Obstacles Do Families Face?

Families face numerous obstacles as they establish family devotions and faith discussions in the home.

Time can be an obstacle. Encourage parents with young children to have devotion that are 3-5 minutes. Great resources exist. Concordia Publishing House has Arch Books and Children’s Bibles. Your congregation has professional and lay leaders that can recommend resources and share advice.

Ages of children can be an obstacle. My husband and I had three children. When they were growing up sometimes our devotion was appropriate for our 3-year-old son. At other times it was appropriate for our 8-year-old daughter or 11-year-old son. We encouraged our older children to help with the devotions for the youngest child. Start FFT when they are young. Learn from your

mistakes and try again! Laugh together. Enjoy each other's company. Caring conversations nurture a child's faith!

Another obstacle is law, but no gospel. "You have to do this." "You must be good." When we require perfection from our children or ourselves, we fail. We are all sinners. God loved us enough to send His one and only Son to suffer and die for ALL our sins. When we fail parents should learn to say, "I'm sorry, will you forgive me?" They will. They will also learn to say the same thing to you. Perfection is impossible! It is because we are sinners that Jesus came, suffered, and died for each of us! The Lord offers us forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift (Eph. 2:8, 9, Titus 3:6-7, Romans 3:20)!

As sinners it is easy to make excuses. "We just can't find time to talk about our faith." "We don't know how to talk to our children about our faith." Yes, we are forgiven when we make excuses, but we should strive to share our faith in the Savior with our children often.

Family Faith Time Should Be Relevant, Age Appropriate, and Use Interactive Learning

Strive to keep family faith time short and age appropriate, and relevant to your child's age and abilities. Use interactive learning by asking questions, playing Bible games, using concrete items or do something together as you talk about the Lord. Mentoring and role-playing help parents learn and grow.

An ABC Walk. Take a walk together. Ask your five-year-old to find something that begins with "A". If they are too young to know the sound, give them hints. "I see a tiny bug on the sidewalk. What is it?" "Yes, it's an ant! Ant begins with "A." "Now let's find something that begins with B." Continue through the alphabet or say, "Let's stop now and continue this ABC walk tomorrow. Then connect the ABC walk to the Lord by saying, "Didn't the Lord create a beautiful world for us?" Talk about God's creation.

Playdough Devotions. I loved to make homemade playdough with my children when they were young. We often created animals. A snake is easy for young children to make. You could also create a turtle, a cross, or a tomb. Talk about animals God created or the cross that Jesus suffered on for us. Keep it simple. Enjoy the time together.

Thumbprint Art. Once I got a book from the library about Thumbprint Art. We created pictures using our thumbprints. Then I said, "God made you unique and special. Did you know no one else in the world has your thumbprint?" We hung up the pictures so we would be reminded of how unique and special we are to the Lord and to each other.

Faith Formation in Children

Doing Bible activities and talking about our faith help our children grow in faith. We call this faith formation. How do we begin nurturing our children's faith in the home?

Take Your Child to Be Baptized. In baptism God gives our children faith.

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. *The promise is for you and your children* and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:38—39).

Teach Children to Pray

Our grandchildren have used a construction paper prayer cube for mealtime prayers. The cube has a prayer written on each side. The child and parents write the prayers on it. Then the child is invited to throw it on the kitchen table before a meal. Whatever prayer points upward is the one the family prays together.

Our granddaughter, Elizabeth, was 4 years old. She came home from preschool and rushed off to play with her doll. Minutes later we found her with her doll. She was teaching it a new prayer she'd learned at school. From then on, we also used that prayer at mealtime.

Allow members of the family to take turns leading the prayer periodically and pray together as a family at meals and bedtime.

Make a family prayer chain and wrap your home in prayer. After a meal, allow each person to write a prayer on a piece of paper that is 2 inches by 6 inches. Help young children write it or write it for them. Then pray for each request. After you have prayed, connect the slips of paper by stapling them together into a prayer chain. Continue to add prayer links to your chain. Soon you will have a chain of prayers to wrap your family room in prayer. Don't forget to review the prayers and see how God has answered them.

Help them grow spiritually. Read a Bible story when they get ready for bed. As they learn to read, buy a devotional book that they can read by themselves. Some congregations give children a Children's Bible or book through the Milestones and Stepping-Stone ministry. A great way to partner with the home. Other activities include:

- Play Bible Charades. Our family played this activity often when they were growing up. We used it for family devotions, on family campouts, with family and friends and in Sunday school. Acting out Bible stories helps make God's Word come alive for children and adults.
- Bible Tick-Tack-Toe can involve young and old alike.
<https://familyshieldministries.com/witnessing-articles/fun-family-devotioins/>.

When children are young, make the questions easy. We might put a cross in a square and ask them what it is or use photos from Sunday school. If the children are older, ask more difficult questions.

Devotions and faith affirming activities encourage children and parents to grow in faith, understand God's Word and the gospel. It helps us understand we are saved by faith alone in Jesus (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Demonstrate love through words and actions. Words are important. Tell your child you love them and are proud of them. Do a service project with your family. Help a neighbor rake leaves or shovel snow. Volunteer at a special event at your congregation. Serve food on Thanksgiving at a homeless shelter or go Christmas caroling with a church group and collect donations.

Take children to church and Sunday school. Help your child memorize the liturgy, The Lord's Prayer, and memorize Bible verses. Why not ask you pastor or church secretary what songs and Bible verses will be read the following week and include them in the bulletin? Then select a song or read a portion of the Bible verse with your child at home each week.

How will you share your faith in the home? Prayerfully consider talking with your children and youth about their faith and try some of these suggestions.

Most importantly: Keep your focus on Jesus, the Savior of the world (John 3:16). He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)!

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