

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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ASV, American Standard Version, 1901

KJV, King James Version, 1611

B I G R O C K S

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

My wife and I defined a good day as one where we spent time in God's Word, and for academics studied language arts, and did math. Everything else we accomplished was gravy. The kids were reading all the time anyway. And when they weren't reading they had unit studies and all the different activities we did as a family. But our daily Bible time was one of our big rocks.

This book is devoted to what we did to teach our children God's Word during our regular family worship time in our home.

If you are interested in learning about the other ingredients of family discipleship, I have addressed living out or modeling your faith in two talks "Being a Disciple and Training Disciples," and "Our Father Who Art in Heaven," which you may access on the web site www.thefamilythatstaystogether.org.

I believe reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word is of paramount importance. Sandi and I read many good books aloud to our kids, but for our family devotion time we chose to read just scripture.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35 ASV).

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11 ESV).

We can't assume that our children are going to receive a knowledge of God's inspired Word anywhere else. It is up to parents to teach and train their children. Others may come alongside for a time to support us as we do, but they can never supplant us. I may have studied foreign languages and even been trained to speak in public, but I didn't need any of that training to lead family devotions. No special training is needed to read the Bible. God wrote the Bible to be read by all of His people. “For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21 NASB)

God chose to reveal His character, His nature, in His written word. “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Romans 1:20 ESV).

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 beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14 NASB).

Jesus was and is absolutely consistent, His walk and His talk identical. He was the living word. While it is worthwhile to study how Jesus modeled His message, this book is focusing on how to teach our children the words of God.

I will be sharing what we did in our home to give you some ideas and stimulate your thoughts. 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 section in the book will provide glimpses into other homes and how they have conducted family worship. If you want to share what your family does, please send them to me.

It doesn't say anywhere in scripture when you should teach your kids, or how you should teach your kids, or what time of the day you should teach your kids. 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 or when is not mentioned in scripture.

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7 ESV).

Our Recipe for
F A M I L Y W O R S H I P
What Worked for Us

Ingredient 1: God’s Design for His Teaching Team

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

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’ . . . So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.’ For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh”
(Genesis 2:18, 21 -24 NASB).

“Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord”
(Ephesians 5:21 -22 NASB).

I believe the husband is the head of the home. I also believe the God designed the husband and wife 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.

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 one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he

has enough to complete it? (Luke 14:28 NASB).

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

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 is the best time to do them, remember that she is probably the one that's going to spend most of the time with 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?" "Well, I'm sorry

honey, but that's when we're teaching our unit study". Be considerate. Communicate. Pray. You can always tweak the time and place depending on how it is going.

5. Where will begin our reading?
6. How much will we read each day?
7. Who will read – parents or children or both?
8. Do we need the same translation? (Either buy some Bibles or print out a chapter on your computer and try different translations before purchasing).
9. What will we do for singing?

If you go to www.thefamilythatstaystogether.org and look under resources I have some hymns you can download as pdfs to print and also piano accompaniment as an mp3.

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. What would be some good answers to prayer to share?

Planning Helps the Whole Family

It's important to the kids, as well as to you, that they know when to expect devotions and how long it will go. You may have compliant kids who just take life in stride. But I got an email from a mom recently, and she said, "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 instituted a structure similar to what we did in our home, and it worked well for their family. The kids came to

life and participated. 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 would've wished had 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? I think we all have. It's motivation. I'm sure there are exceptions but not as many as you think.

Ingredient 2: 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 might be saved." If you're focusing on salvation, read John. "But these are written so 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 ESV).

But 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 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 ESV).

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

God's Design for a King: "When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' Deuteronomy 17:14, ESV

God's Design #1: 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.' Deuteronomy 17:16, ESV

Solomon's Disobedience: And Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt and Kue, and the king's traders received them from Kue at a price. 1 Kings 10:28, ESV

God's Design #2: And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, Deuteronomy 17: 17, ESV

Solomon's Disobedience: Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the

LORD had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. ³ He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. 1 Kings 11:1, ESV

God’s Design #3: nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. Deuteronomy 17:17b

Solomon’s Disobedience: Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold, . . . All King Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. None were of silver; silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon. 1 Kings 10:14 & 21, ESV

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. I first heard about them through Answers in Genesis. There are links on my Web site to both of these fine organizations or you can access them at www.ntm.org/ and www.answersingenesis.org/.

"Ee-taow" 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 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." Then several months later, when they came to the death of Jesus, they understood that He is our ram in the thicket.

This was another confirmation to me that we should begin at the beginning.

Ingredient 3: From Childhood

I'm a little bit of a zealot. When Isaac, my firstborn, was born, I sat down on the bed, laid the little baby 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. I'd heard about mothers talking to their babies in the womb, and I've been to enough of those birthing classes for Lamaze and le Pa's. I thought, I'm going to read him the Bible. Jesus directs Peter to "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15 ASV).

Apparently Paul knew Timothy's family 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 ESV). Later on in the third chapter he comments on how old Timothy was when he began to learn the scriptures. "And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15 NASB).

Children are astute. They hear things and believe what they are taught. I'm not going to take personal responsibility for this next story. 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

this little discussion going on with some intensity. We peeked around the corner so they wouldn't know we were watching. Ethan was innocently looking at Isaac and saying, "Why?" and Isaac said, "Don't eat that," referring to the gravy and meat on Ethan's plate. Ethan looked up with his big blue eyes and said, "Why not?" Isaac responded authoritatively, "The fat belongs to Jehovah!"

As I said, I'm not taking credit for that one. I don't teach that as doctrine. But somewhere along the line, sitting in some service somewhere, or hearing somebody read the Bible, he heard that verse read. Since kids are so bright and receptive 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 choose 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.

When my children were younger, we read the Bible to them. We didn't read certain parts like the concubine

being carved up into pieces and sent throughout the twelve tribes at the end of Judges. Be wise and discerning in what you read and when you read it. In those early years, we read from the Uncle Arthur Bible Storybooks. There are ten volumes with pictures. I found them remarkably accurate, although I disagree with the theology in the last volume. They are pricey new, but we found ours used and affordable.

Ingredient 4: Invite Jesus to teach

The first thing we do after we are gathered is pray. I know Jesus said, “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst” (Matthew 18:20 NASB). But I want to make sure that He is asked. There is a lot in the Scripture about asking. “ ‘And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened’ ” (Luke 11:9 NLT).

For a little 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 NASB).

“Make me to understand the way of Your precepts, so shall I meditate on Thy wondrous works” (Psalm 119:27 NASB).

“Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, and I shall observe it to the end” (Psalm 119:33 NASB).

Those are good prayers, and there are plenty more of them in Psalm 119. Have your children find some themselves. It's helpful to use scripture when you're praying.

As you pray, consider asking God's Spirit to reveal Jesus. If I could go to Wit's End in Odyssey 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 with all the prophets,

He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:27 NASB).

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 it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.” (Leviticus 1:3-4 NASB).

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 as I thought of Jesus in this new light.

“Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing.” (John 20:27 NASB).

Ingredient 5: Read

After we pray, we take turns reading aloud around the room. Once they were able to read for themselves, I purchased large–print Bibles, in the same version, so we could all read from the same translation. After they 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 or five verses at a time, but everybody was asleep when it came round to 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 there are six people, then each person read two and half verses. My wife would roll her eyes so we stopped that adventure. But the boys 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.

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 ESV).
“Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3 RSV).

Reading as well as hearing makes learning more effective. And even when we didn't comprehend with our

minds all that we were reading our spirits were still being cleansed and nurtured. “You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3 RSV). “That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (Ephesians 5:26).

We did try to read intelligently. And 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 in public.

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 do not skip him or you will hear about it. He wants his turn. He’ll have his Bible open and he will take a turn and he will recite. Sometimes he is the only one who 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 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 gathered all together for Christmas.

If you just read your favorite portions; you won't be getting a balanced diet. You might like Galatians but you need some Deuteronomy. Don't spend all your time in Revelation, read a little Genesis.

“But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” ’ ” (Matthew 4:4 NASB). “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 competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17 ESV).

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 we 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).

Many students I attended seminary with had never read the Bible from cover to cover. At that point in my life, neither had I. And 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 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 were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11 NASB)

If you encourage your children to look up words that they don't understand, consider the "Webster's 1828 Dictionary" as a resource. Here are examples of the definitions for the word righteousness, one from dictionary.com and the other from the online version of the 1828 Webster's. You can purchase this as a hard bound book or get it in electronic form.

RIGHTEOUSNESS, n. ri'chusness. <<http://www.1828-dictionary.com/>>

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

right·eous·ness [rahy-chuhs-nis] -n. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/>>

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 6: God's Responsibility

When we gather our family together and open our mouth wide, God meets us. As we do our part He will do His part. I learned this lesson as a young pastor. I used to suffer on Saturday nights because I had 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. 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. But ultimately, He is the great Shepherd of those sheep, and He will feed them. He will find ways to feed the sheep. "For a shepherd enters through the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice". (John 10:2-4 NLT)

Here's when I put on my Nike hat. What's the Nike motto? "Just do it." And here's the scripture for Nike: "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it" (Psalm 81:10).

Somebody has to sit down and gather the family together and open their mouth wide because it's not going

to happen unless you do it.

Ingredient 7: Grace and Truth

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

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

As you teach, as you read God’s Word, as you share insights, make sure that you give the gospel to your listeners. We need grace along with truth.

After listening to this message at a seminar one day, 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 kids had never been taught how to process guilt. They didn’t know how to receive forgiveness. She explained that drugs and alcohol were self-punishment, a slow form of suicide.

They knew that they deserved to be punished and they 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. “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (John 1:29 ESV). “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT).

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

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 ESV).

If you need more help on this particular subject I recommend 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. Big words, but they are the difference between death and life. Conviction, or as it says in 2 Corinthians, godly sorrow, leads to repentance, which leads to life. “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10 ESV).

Peter was convicted when he denied Jesus. “And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75 ASV). Peter received forgiveness

and became the head of the Church.

Judas was condemned when faced with his sin, which led to despair, and he went out and hanged himself. “Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ But they said, ‘What is that to us? See to that yourself!’ And he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:3-5 NASB).

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 it, they believe the truth and earnestly seek to apply it. But even if you are reading the New Testament, what is being taught comes across as law. “So that the law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24 ESV).

Make sure that there is grace mixed with the truth. A

wise pastor once commented that all sermons should end at the cross. Come to Jesus for forgiveness regularly and often. 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 ESV).

I spoke about family discipleship last winter at a church in Ohio. 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 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 woman’s daughter hadn’t been sitting in the meetings with her family, she would still be carrying

this load of guilt. Children listen and understand.

Ingredient 8: Reminiscing

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. They were enjoying the story! They were eating it up and reminding them, "Hey, don't forget that point, Mom! Hey, Dad, tell them about when you" It was a beautiful picture.

"One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4 NASB).

One of my life experiences happened when I prayed for a pair of boots. I was reading powerful biographies by Hudson Taylor and George Mueller and Jim Elliott, who prayed for things and didn't ask people, and miraculously God would answer their prayers. I was impressed and wondered if God would answer me.

During my college and seminary years I painted houses throughout each summer. So 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 needed a new pair almost every year, so one year I began to pray for them.

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 and 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, for all those blessed 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.)

And 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 and wonder if they were really saved.

My wife is making scrapbooks for each of her 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 special.

And then there was the time Joseph and I were going to buy some apples in Ipswich. We were talking and 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. And we prayed together in the car, going to this orchard. He began processing what had transpired and asked, “When I jump on the trampoline, will he go up and down too?” He knew that Jesus had come into his heart and was picturing Jesus in his heart bouncing when he bounced!

It was real to him that Jesus had come to live in his heart. They are all blessed experiences and it helps me to recall them as I write, but we need to keep these times 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.” And 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. 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 her to relate her dream in church. Later she wrote it up for the church publication. Two years later, I had two of her kids 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 kids 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 the proper priorities.

“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 9: 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? 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. And if you have had some training and experience as a teacher, use those insights and any and all fun games that you played.

Here's one that most of you know: 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 to quickly begin searching for that scripture. The first one to find it stands and reads it aloud. Then all sheath their 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 (and we won't be condemned if we don't read every day, God still loves us), it might take us a month and a half to read through this book. But while we're in John, this is a neat

way to reinforce what we are reading. During the first week, when we are in the first four to five 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 chapters. As the adrenaline kicks in, you are listening intently for key words, you are scanning scripture, and in the process becoming more familiar with God's Word.

We made 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, then we announced that you could start anywhere on the page that you wanted. To encourage the younger kids, we said you can't win twice until everybody gets a chance to win once. Do whatever works for your home. Bottom line, teach like you would have liked to be taught.

Ingredient 10: Make a Joyful Noise

“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve

the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing” (Psalm 100:1–2 KJV).

If we had time in the morning, we might sing. 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 Bill Gothard seminar where he encouraged believers to memorize hymns. I also recalled Elisabeth Elliot sharing how it was hymns she had learned in her youth that the Holy Spirit used 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!

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 just looked up the following words with my concordance: praise—210, joy—173, joyful—26, sing—126, song—82, worship—103, rejoice—179, gladness—46, give thanks—58. That comes to 921 references.

Scripture and praise go together. In the recent history of the church, we have Billy Graham and George Beverly Shea. Before them we had D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey, P. P. Bliss and R. A. Torrey. Worship and the word complement each other. “Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand” (Psalm 149:6 NASB).

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 and God seems distant, I cannot trust my emotions. It is then that theology kicks 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 and not what I feel.

Elisabeth Elliot's family (the Howards) would go through a hymn book in a year. Number 1, January 1. Number 2, January 2. But they had a pianist in the home. I contracted 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.

And for a season we decided to memorize hymns. Children learn verses in a heartbeat. When you sing it through two or three times with the music, they'll pick it up. Parents are the ones that struggle, but we do have the advantage of having heard these hymns many times. We committed several hymns to memory. We have boys, and boys are more visual, so we used to pass out a piece of paper, markers, and crayons and encourage them to draw a picture of a verse. 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 can sing several hymns now. If I’m ever in prison, I can contribute; I’ve got nine hymns under my belt.

On my web site I have made available many hymns and piano accompaniment for your perusal. I hope these resources will enhance your family meetings.

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

Ingredient 11: Exhort One Another

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

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?” And 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 people’s testimony. Everyone has something to offer. “From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16 NASB).

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. His role may be a speaker but it may also be a facilitator who creates an atmosphere where each person is free to share.

This is a wonderful opportunity to encourage children to articulate what they have learned so they can edify others. A godly man once remarked that 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 subsequently is 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 ESV).

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 in the words of our testimony.

“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death” (Revelation 12:11 NASB).

Ingredient 12: Your Family History

Remember, or a form of remember such as remembrance, is found in over 200 verses in scripture. Here are a few examples.

“During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.” (Esther 6:1 NASB).

“And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.” (Deuteronomy 8:2 NASB).

“And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’” (Luke 22:19 NASB).

“Remember the days of old, Consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, Your elders, and they will tell you.” (Deuteronomy 32:7 NASB).

You may have observed that members of the older generation frequently hearken back to their past. They speak and reminisce about the good old days. There are two reasons for this inclination. First they have a long significant past in comparison to young people. Secondly,

old men dream while young men envision.

“And it will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions.” (Joel 2:28 NASB).

Keeping a record of your progress and 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. Please look at the glass of water as half full and not half empty. 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 is twelve more than last year!

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

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

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 thought back through the previous seven days of what we were grateful to God for. Our written record is a series of spiral bound notebooks that is now a small stack.

We often reminded ourselves that, “Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.” (James 1:17 NASB)

And we tried to practice giving thanks for all things and not just the “blessings”.

“In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NASB).

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.

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

Ingredient 13: Close in Prayer

Wrap up the meeting by committing all that has been read, said, and sung to God in prayer. And that is what I am going to do now.

Father, thank You for Your Word, which is alive. It's living and it's practical and You wrote it to be read in our homes. Thank You for choosing the accounts in scripture that make up the Old Testament so that we may learn and profit from our forefathers' experiences, mistakes, and successes. And thank You for sending Jesus to be the living Word in our midst. Thank You that He's praying for us right now. Enable us to be hearers and doers of the Word and teachers of it. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ingredient 14: Start

We will examine all of the potential obstacles I can think of in the next section, but the bottom line is suck it up and do it.

When I first began leading our family worship times I

was probably inspired. But inspiration fades. 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 Medes and Persians. Under my shaky leadership our worship times were not regular and we would do well for several weeks, then have none for a while. Something would happen, someone would get sick, work would pile up, and I was discouraged again. But 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, “A righteous man falls seven times and rises up again” (ASV).

By God’s grace I kept getting up and trying again. Eventually family devotions became a habit in our home. But it did take years. A friend of mine once observed that every time someone gets back on their feet after being knocked down, it is a mini resurrection. And we know that Jesus did not raise Himself from the dead. “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell

in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” (Romans 8:11 KJV).

For Your Encouragement

Around 1989 or 1990, my wife was teaching the KONOS curriculum to our sons. She was lying on the couch because she didn't have the energy to sit up at a table. In 1987 our fourth son was born with Down syndrome. Through the stress of several hospitalizations for our son's open heart surgery, intestinal surgery, and other health issues, Sandi had developed chronic fatigue, Epstein-Barr, and candida, and lost 60 pounds. But she was still teaching our boys, who were seven, five, and three. When you use KONOS, you read through the particular volume, gather ideas, and put together your lesson and then go to the library for books. There are hands-on illustrations to start off the unit. The topic was something to do with reproduction. But my wife didn't have the energy to take the kids through a special activity.

Just thinking of her lying on the gray couch, I am reminded of Mark 14:8, where Jesus was speaking of the women who anointed Him with expensive ointment. “She has done what she could.” Sandi was doing what she could with the strength that she had. She was laying her life down for her kids, and passing out the books and assignments for the day. This was Monday morning. On Tuesday morning, our two male gerbils, Jim Thorpe and Georgie Russell, had a litter. We changed Jim’s name to Jemima. It’s a true story. I saw more than gerbils, I saw our heavenly Father looking down from heaven. And He said, “That woman needs an illustration.” Woomp! Gerbils appear. Maybe it was a miracle or perhaps we didn’t do a good job at the pet store. All I know is, I have “gerbils” written in my Bible next to Isaiah 54:13: “All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children” (ESV).

God is alive. The Almighty, All-Loving God wants to see your kids around the throne more than you do. And God wants to teach your kids, and is capable of teaching

your kids. Now He will use you, because He designed you to be doing it. You are His earthly representative. But He's not sitting back with His arms folded. He is intimately involved in the upbringing of your children.

And He loves you. And He loves your kids. And He loves what you're doing. And he's backing you up, and His Son is praying for you right now, at the right hand of the Father.

P O T E N T I A L O B S T A C L E S

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 teach me the Bible either. The only times I saw a family worship time were when I visited my pastor and his family. I had served as a Sunday school teacher and had led Bible times as a camp counselor and youth group leader, but teaching the Bible was pretty much new territory for me.

We emulate our parents more than we know. When family worship has not been imprinted on our lives, it takes more energy to create it in your own

homes. One positive is that you will think it through and discern what is biblical and what is not, and not do something just because it is a “family tradition.”

2. Expertitis

We live in a culture governed by qualifications. You’re not an expert unless you have classes in something, or specific training, or a degree. My brother used to teach and inspect mechanical contractors. He was the expert in his state. When he moved to another state that required “credentials,” he was not able to be certified. He was the certifier in one place but out of work in another.

But let’s dispose of this myth of credentials right now. 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.” But I believe you are more qualified than you think, because God created and designed you to do this very thing. According to His inspired Word, parents are called to teach their children. And when God calls you to do something, He equips you to do it. That’s the way He operates. Just ask Moses.

There is so much potential in the Christian home because after you have taught the Word, you have the unique opportunity to show your students what it looks like in real life. Your Sunday school class lives with you. Your youth group goes with you in the car when you do errands. You are the first Christians your children have met. Your home is their first church.

Of course we know this is a two-edged sword because this arrangement stimulates us to be consistent in our walk with God. We have several pairs of eyes giving us accountability. It is such a great idea and an effective plan, it must have come from God. And no wonder home discipleship is under such attack from our enemies.

Dr. Lela Denmark is a legend in the Atlanta area and was our pediatrician. We went to see her when she was in her eighties and we were living in south Atlanta.

Dr. Denmark told me there was a time when doctors would come to your home and say, “Hey, Mom, what do you think we have here?” Because the doctor would recognize that no one knew that 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.

Dr. Denmark is 112 at the time of this printing.

Go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leila_Denmark to learn more about her. Sandi and I highly recommend her book “Every Child Should Have A Chance,” published in 1971 by Vantage Press in New York, and followed much of her advice.

I was in a training session for Sunday school superintendents, and they 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 said, “Is there any way we could make that available to the parents?” It got real quiet and the instructor went to the next step. Wouldn’t you like to have some help on learning how to recognize when your son or daughter is getting close to receiving Christ? I am not saying to not learn all you can, but I am observing a disturbing trend in our churches that leaves the parents out of the loop when instructing their own children.

When Joe was a young pup in Sunday school

class, his teacher recognized that he was particularly sensitive to the things of God one day. So instead of taking her packet out and leading him to Christ, she went to the parents and said, “I think Joe is close to the Kingdom.” So Joe’s parents went home, sat on the bed with their son in the middle, and explained the gospel to him. Soon the three were kneeling by the bed and Joe received Jesus as his personal savior. He’s been following Jesus ever since, has been a pastor for many years, and was 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 employ 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 that hopeless lifestyle. He hired moms in the community to open their homes one day a week, give them 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 kids; it was an outreach. It was to help these poor children who didn’t have the skills necessary to break free from poverty.¹

“For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should teach them to their

children, That the generation to come might know,
even the children yet to be born, That they may
arise and tell them to their children, That they
should put their confidence in God, And not forget
the works of God, But keep His commandments, “
(Psalms 78:5-7 NASB)

There is a one hour talk on “Youth Groups and
Sunday Schools” also on my web site at www.the-familythatstaystogether.org. I first read about him in
a book, *The 100 Most Important Events in Christian
History*, by A. Kenneth Curtis, Randy Petersen,
J. Stephen Lang, published in 1991 by Christian
History Institute. For more information on Robert
Raikes and the history of Sunday schools, go to:

[http://www.gracemagazine.org.uk/articles/historical/
raikes.htm](http://www.gracemagazine.org.uk/articles/historical/raikes.htm)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Raikes

[http://www.christianhistorytimeline.com/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/
glmps034.shtml](http://www.christianhistorytimeline.com/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/
glmps034.shtml)

4. My Plate Is Already Full

The biggest obstacle for me was the lack of energy to do one more thing. We had bought a big unfinished house. Only about half of the home had sheetrock on the walls and there was almost no flooring. Nor was there a heating system or any landscaping. This was our first home and what 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. And I thought to myself, "Now I need to add having family devotions." All I could think of was that this was one more thing on my plate.

I decided to go ahead anyway, fully expecting to watch more of my limited energy drain out of me. But as I was prepared to die, I found life. This little unlooked-for spring of living water sprang

up in our home. This is just what Jesus promised. “Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it” (Luke 17:33 ESV). “If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over” (Luke 6:38 NLT).

This experience reminded me of Samson when he took the jawbone of an ass and slew a bunch of Philistines in Judges 15. “Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the LORD and said, ‘Thou hast given this great deliverance by the hand of Thy servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?’ But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore, he named it En-hakkore” (Judges 15:18-19 NASB).

En-hakkore means “the Spring of the One Who Cried Out.” That was my experience. Many times

in church during a testimonial service, I would say, “Well, this week during our Bible time I received this insight.” I have read my Bible many times in my personal devotions. I know where things are on the page. I know what’s coming up. I’ve been reading it for a long time. But reading the Word of God with other believers and Jesus teaching 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 but have been an unlooked-for and unexpected spring of living water.

5. Fear

Another obstacle might be that you’re afraid of speaking in public. According to the polls, people would rather die than speak in public. Public speaking and fear of failure are usually number 1 and number 2 in some of the research I have seen, and dying is number 4 or 5 on the list. Do the math.

I think fear of failure is related to speaking in public because you have the potential to fail in front of other people.

I don't believe God is calling us to deliver sermons. He is calling us to lead our families. He wants us to be facilitators. When two or three are gathered together 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 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 revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven’ ”

(Matthew 16:16-17 ESV).

God knows how to teach people, and He is not limited. He doesn’t get tired. He’s got great ideas. He knows everybody in the class and has invested His life to see that they spend eternity with Him.

6. Not Qualified

You don’t have to be the ideal teacher to read the Bible with your family. Children don’t expect parents to be perfect, but they do hope that you will be real. Learn along with them, ask for prayer, and share what God is teaching you as you learn from His word. Your willingness to be disciplined along with them can be a huge encouragement to them as they also struggle to grow in the Lord. You may 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. I had not been able to comprehend a certain passage in Numbers for over fifteen years. “He has not observed misfortune in Jacob; Nor has He seen trouble in Israel; The LORD his God is with him, And the shout of a king is among them.” (Numbers 23:21 NASB). Every time I read this verse I wondered how it could be so. After all, the Israelites were a sinful and rebellious people. When I come to a passage that I don’t readily understand I kind of file it away in my mind and figure that God is smarter than me and someday I will get it. But one year the light shone in my mind and I knew how that scripture could be true.

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

have 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.

The sacrifices in the tabernacle in the wilderness worked, but Jesus’ sacrifice was so much better. (Leviticus 1:3, Hebrews 9:13–14)

7. Success

Men like to be successful. They 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 we 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, and instead of rebuking them for how they were wired, He

redirected their ambition. “It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:26 ESV).

God defines success differently than the world. In the divine economy, a faithful man is a successful man. We are called to be faithful. “Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:1–2 ASV).

If we are tempted to argue, “I’m not a good speaker or even a good facilitator,” remember that the call of God to our hearts is to faithfully sow the seeds and trust Him to give the increase. “I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6–7 ASV).

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. "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6 KJV).

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 criticising. "A nagging wife is as annoying as the

constant dripping on a rainy day. Trying to stop her complaints is like trying to stop the wind or hold something with greased hands” (Proverbs 27:15-16 NLT).

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 you could read the word during the day and he could follow up with questions around the dinner table.

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.

“And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,” (Acts 16:1 NASB)

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.

“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 NASB) “to Timothy, my true child in the faith:” (1 Timothy 1:2 NASB)

9. Final Objections from Moses

To wrap up this section on potential obstacles, consider unqualified and unprepared Moses. In Exodus 3 and 4, we have a detailed account of the conversation between God and Moses. Moses didn't feel qualified to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. He was frank about his perception of his abilities. 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.

God's Command: "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Exodus 3:10, ESV

Moses' Question: But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" Exodus 3:11, ESV

God's Response and Resources: He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." Exodus 3:12, ESV

Moses' Question: Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”

Exodus 3:13, ESV

God's Response and Resources: God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” Exodus 3:14, ESV

Moses' Question: Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’ ” Exodus 4:1, ESV

God's Response and Resources: The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail” — so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in

his hand — “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” Exodus 4:2-6, ESV

Moses’ Question: But Moses said to the LORD, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” Exodus 4:10, ESV

God’s Response and Resources: Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” Exodus 4:11-12, ESV

Moses’ Mistake: But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” Exodus 4:13, ESV

God’s Rebuke: Then the anger of the LORD was

kindled against Moses. Exodus 4:14, ESV

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.

Guess what? God has uniquely equipped you to teach your children. You were created before the foundation of the world for this very work. This good work. The eternal work of training, teaching, shepherding, and raising your kids 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 NASB).

WHAT OTHER FAMILIES HAVE DONE

1 – Draw a Picture

Friends from Massachusetts gave each of their children a 4” by 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 the 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. A selection might be a Psalm, Proverb, the Lord's Prayer, Gloria Patri, or Apostles' Creed. These rotate each week.

Opening prayer

All sing the family song

1st selection

1st Hymn

Bible story followed by Dad giving an explanation
of the text.

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 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, and so on, 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, 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 them 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 days 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: 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. Again, usually not too planned out other than what verse I am to share and what I wanted to teach regarding that verse. After that we pray about our day, the people of the country we looked at, and then go have breakfast. The whole thing takes about 20–30 minutes.

That's pretty much the way things go at the Niensens (in New Brunswick). Dad leads the devotions as mom does the home schooling.

7 – Singing in Ohio

We have 5 children — 8, 6, 4, 2 (all girls) and infant (boy). You

asked for ideas for family devotions so I thought I'd let you know some of ours. I have tried to come up with different ideas as a theme each year that will involve all of our children in some way. Some of our activities have included:

Story night: Dad tells a Bible story and everyone draws a picture of it.

Memorization: We memorized Romans 3 as a family last year. A little deep for kids but they still haven't forgotten it. It teaches them the skill. This year I am memorizing Philippians with my 8 year old.

Keys for Kids: A great devotional that they keep reading on their own time.

Singing: Our goal is to learn 365 songs and keep a list. Our almost two-year-old knows approximately 50 songs. We are on target to reach our goal and have learned a lot of hymns, choruses, scripture

songs, and kids songs. We sometimes sing with CD's to learn the songs.

8 – Starting in New Hampshire

My family devotions are going slowly. I'm trying to go through the Bible front to back and am still in Genesis, but I do detour when it seems appropriate. I washed the two older girls' feet in the tub last night as an illustration through Jesus' direction to serve each other (instead of the little girl bickering that often rules the day). But overall, I am slow starting still.

9 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 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 it 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.

10 – 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 only, 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 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).

So wrote Chauncey A. Goodrich, Professor in 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, in the appendix on pages 295–296.

Share your story.

Go to www.thefamilythatstaystogether.org and click on a picture for the book. Check back for a growing number of written and recorded testimonies of other families.

“Since we are surrounded by so many examples of faith, we must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially sin that distracts us. We must run the race that lies ahead of us and never give up.” Hebrews 12:1, GWT

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