

How I Pastor My Family

via [TheResurgence](#) by Justin Hyde on 4/13/10

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Many people ask me, "What do 'family devotions' look like at your house?" or, "How do you pastor your family?" or even more simply, "Do you pray or read the Bible with your wife and children?" Here is one attempt to answer those questions.

1. Routine

Our family works best with a routine. My wife and I, and our children, have a reasonably regular weekly schedule. Our "family devotions" fit into the larger rhythm and routines of our household (e.g. dinner, bedtime, etc.). Additionally, it is important to note that there are **explicit** and **implicit** aspects to our daily spiritual devotion. The bulk of the explicit aspects happen at night between when I get home from work and when I go to bed.

2. Intentional Evenings

I get home from work between 5:30PM and 5:45PM each night. But I have to prepare myself before 5:30PM so that I can hit the ground running when I walk in the door. Though I am invariably tired from my day's work, I have to remind myself that the most important part of my vocation happens after 5:30PM, not before. I am tempted to mentally "clock out" on my drive home, which would be easy. Yet I have to consciously prepare myself to give more energy, more attention, and more dedicated focus as soon as I walk through the door and am

greeted by my 5 year old son, 3 year old daughter, newborn son, and wife than I have all day. This takes prayer, practice, and intentionality. It's easy to fail.

Husbands/dads, don't clock-out on your way home; be ready to be present and engaged; don't let your kids or wife expect to hear your formulaic: "I'm tired;" turn your phone off (I recently read something like this: "If you touched your wife as much as you touch your iPhone your marriage would be in a much better spot."); cancel your cable TV; repent of your addiction to new projects, hobbies, and distractions.

Wives, be gracious; be forgiving; learn and grow with your husband; make your home inviting and pleasing; manage the stress level (for you and the kids) before dad gets home (i.e. don't let the water boil all day so that it's boiling over the top right when dad's car pulls up).

3. Time To Play

We eat dinner at 6:00PM. So I walk in the door and devote myself to the kids for 20-30 minutes. Rarely do I take 5 steps into the house before having a 5 year old around my left leg and a 3 year old around my right leg (and now, often, a baby in my arms). Dads, your kids are ready to see you. Ready to punch you. Ready to kiss you. Ready to play. Ready to build. Ready to read. And of course your wife needs this from you too if she's making dinner or just needing a break after her long day. Husbands, remind yourself daily that your wife is likely more exhausted than you are by 5:30PM. Serve her well. This is also a good time to teach the kids about setting the table, helping to pick up the living room, honoring mom, serving a younger sibling, etc. But mainly this is a good time to play.

4. Mealtime

We always eat dinner together around the dinner table. My wife is hospitable, creative, thoughtful, carefree, and eager to worship through a shared meal. Our table is often decorated with candles, and sometimes flowers. We drink wine. We celebrate. We laugh. We joke. We make silly faces. We eat great food. We often, almost without fail, enjoy a dessert. We hold hands to pray. We take our time. Our children are watching and learning and savoring all of this.

5. Cleanup

After dinner we usually clean up (sometimes we wait until the kids are asleep). The children help with dishes, help put things away, help clean up. It doesn't take long and the payoff in relaxation and focus is often worth the price of clearing the table and loading the dishwasher. Yet regardless of whether we clean up now or later, our attention is devoted to the children from 5:30PM to 7:30PM. After

dinner, we play. We read. We build towers. We go on adventures. We explore. We tickle.

6. Bible Time

At 7:15PM we all start winding down and I tell the kids: "15 more minutes of _____, and then it's 7:30PM." My kids know exactly what I mean. At 7:30PM it's Bible time. We all gather in the living room (if we're not there already); we get the Bible; and the kids pile on my lap. For the longest time we read the [ESV Illustrated Family Bible](#). This Bible uses the actual [ESV](#) text but the stories are selective and the images are great and colorful.

Recently, we began using [The Early Readers Bible](#) only because Jonas received it as a Christmas gift. This is a great Bible too, but it's not the actual ESV text, which I prefer. It's a Bible written for young readers. Our 5 year old can blast through this easily, and sometimes I'll let him read during our devotional time, though rarely. At this stage I think it's important for me to lead this time and shepherd them as I read aloud. The great thing about [The Early Readers Bible](#) is the questions after each section. Very helpful.

Dads, it's important for you to call the family together. Don't force mom to keep looking at her watch, to always be waiting for you, to nag you to get started. Call the family together. Get the Bible. Know where/what you're reading. Lead your family. Wives, this may be new or unfamiliar for many dads. Go easy on him. Encourage him. Honor his leadership. Don't undermine. Don't criticize. Model respect and love for your children to see. And remember, the kids are watching.

7. Questions & Answers

After we read a section of Scripture I ask questions. I ask questions about the story, about the characters, about the doctrines or themes within the story, about applying the text to the real life of 5- and 3-year-olds. In addition to asking questions about the text itself, our children also memorize the [Small Children's Catechism](#) by Chris Schlect. I cannot overstate the importance of catechism in the home. Someone has said, "Preaching without catechism is like building a house without pouring a foundation." So true. Other helpful resources are [The Big Book of Questions and Answers](#) (Sinclair Ferguson), [My 1st Book of Questions and Answers](#) (Carine Mackenzie), and [Big Truths for Young Hearts](#) (Bruce Ware).

**MODEL RESPECT AND LOVE
FOR YOUR CHILDREN TO SEE.**

8. Family Prayer

Then we all pray. We take prayer requests (this is important because the kids need to see dad asking mom how he can pray for her). And each of us pray. Sometimes I ask the kids to pray for certain things. Sometimes I ask the older to pray for the younger. Sometimes they want to say the Lord's Prayer (which means you need to help them memorize it when they're two or three). Sometime it's random.

Moms and dads, you need to guard this time so that the children don't grow to despise it. This needs to be an encouraging, graceful, loving, fun, sometimes silly, patient, and fruitful time. Be honest with one another. Teach your kids how to care, how to be sensitive to others' needs, how to articulate what they're feeling. Make disciples.

9. Bedtime

Now it's bedtime. Love those kids. Hug and kiss and tickle and snuggle like crazy.

10. Explicit vs. Implicit

Most of the above routine is explicit training and devotion. Yet each of those elements fit into the larger mosaic of what it means to be a part of our family. These explicit elements would only go so far (but not far enough) if not paired with the implicit aspects of the daily spiritual development that are more subtle and mundane.

The implicit aspects are the constant opportunities to listen to your kids, to talk to them, to tell them about Jesus, to tell them about something you read in Scripture, something you've wondered about God, to connect the dots between dinner and worship, to live a life of celebration and sacrifice.

The legitimacy of your "devotion time" is only as solid as the legitimacy of your devotional life. In other words, I reap the rich spiritual benefits at 7:30PM each night because I tilled the soil that morning, during the day, at dinner, and so on. Quality time doesn't replace quantity. In fact, you can only enjoy the quality because you've invested in the quantity. The implicit is the foundation that sustains the rest, only most people don't see the foundation so it's easy to ignore.

Please know, I fail often. I need much grace. God has given me a forgiving wife and patient kids. Husbands/dads, this is the most important work you'll ever do, and it will have more impact than anything you could imagine. Wives/moms, encourage your man to lead; create conditions in which he can succeed.

Couples, be patient and forgiving. Don't be short-sighted. Love well. And savor your time together.

May God help us pastor our families well.