

A Guide on How To Use "The Story" Family Devotionals with Your Family

Every family is different. We are made up of different people, of different ages, with different schedules, different interests and different abilities. This guide will help you adapt the family devotionals to best serve your individual needs.

What is in each devotional?

Each week the devotional will contain three sets of questions, an activities/extra credit section and a "question without an easy answer". Depending on your family situation or your schedule a particular week, you can do more or less of the week's devotional without getting behind or missing something.

Three sets of questions: These questions relate to that week's reading. Read either the chapter out of the book "The Story" or the verses to be covered that week out of the Bible before answering the question. Then, during your family devotional time, read the questions and discuss your answers. There are very few questions with right or wrong answers, so use them as conversation launchers that your family can use to get greater meaning from the passage.

Activities/extra credit: These are activities to help us practice what we are learning or to deepen our relationship with God. Since there are only three days of discussion questions, it may be good to come together as a family on the other days and discuss or participate in these activities. Two of these activities during the week should be easy for any family to do. Any additional activities are considered "extra credit" because they require more time, work, or money.

Questions without an easy answer: This is for those who want to dig deeper or research more on their own. Often times, these are questions highly debated among theologians or different groups

in our culture. The idea is not to find the "correct" answer, but to understand the question better and see different points of view.

How do I adapt the questions to my particular family?

We have many different kinds of families at TLC and trying to write a "one size fits all" devotional guide is difficult. So here are some guidelines to help you adapt these devotions to fit the needs of your family.

Families with newborn-2 year olds: There are two valuable ways your family can include this age group. The first is to find a good children's Bible and read them the stories we are covering out of it. Any children's Bible with simple text and colorful pictures will do, but *The Beginner's Bible* published by Zonderkids and Mission City Press is a particularly good one. The other valuable way to include them is to try to have them in the same room while your family has the discussion. Not only are you modeling to them that learning the Bible is important, but they are also hearing words and stories that, though they may not understand now, will seem more familiar to them when they hear them again later.

Families with 2-6 year olds: These children learn through make believe and playing pretend. Though their attention span may be short, incorporating these elements into your family devotion time may keep them more occupied. Have them close their eyes and picture what is going on in the story as you read it to them. Try acting out part of the story. Also, give them a chance to try and answer the discussion questions. You may need to simplify the questions for them to understand and you may need to help them think of answers to some questions (such as questions that say, "Think of a time when...", you may need to help them remember a time). You may want to have crayons and paper for them to draw pictures of the story while older family members discuss the questions and then give them an opportunity to share about what they drew with the family.

Families with 7-12 year olds: These children should be able to participate in the discussion and activities, though they may

struggle with some of the more abstract ideas discussed. Children of this age crave learning facts and memorizing things, so help them focus on the historical details of stories (time lines and Bible character family trees are great!) and from time to time, find a verse that they particularly like and encourage them to memorize it. Children of this age group may also begin asking lots of questions about the less tangible aspects of religion, such as "if God is so powerful, why did He let the serpent be in the garden?" Don't be afraid to answer the question the best you can or even to say, "I don't know, let's find out together". It is important to model to children of this age that you don't have to understand everything about God in order to follow Him.

Families with 13-18 year olds: This age group is marked by the development of abstract thinking and a move toward independence. Encourage them to think deeper about their answers and allow them their own well thought out opinions, even if they disagree with yours. It is more important to keep a safe environment where they are free to open up than it is to make sure they agree with you on a particular subject. Treat their life issues with as much respect as you would your own. Though two girls being mean to them in class may not seem like a big deal, in their world it is huge. If you find this age group not wanting to open up, try sharing a little about your own struggles and problems and by seeing a little of your vulnerability, they may feel safe to show their own.

Families with no children or singles: You have a few options. You could just discuss these things with your spouse or, if you are single, with another single in the church. You could invite a non-believer who is interested in the Bible to study with you and you could meet weekly to talk about what you're learning. You could keep a journal where you answer the questions and then get together with others periodically to discuss things that came up in your journaling. Work on creating a stronger extended family by encouraging aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. to join you in your discussions. Get creative and use the time to build your relationship with God and build your sense of community.

Some suggestions for your family devotion time:

1. Find a regular time to do your devotion questions and make that time a priority. It may be hard at first, but researchers say it only takes 21 days to form a habit, so hang with it and soon it will be part of your normal routine. You may choose to do this at the family dinner table, after dinner or maybe a half hour before bedtime. Whatever time you choose, let it be one you can keep consistently and that you will make a priority. If you can make soccer practice, boy scouts or girl scouts, music lessons, etc. a priority, you can make family time about Jesus a priority as well. If you want more information on how to incorporate family dinnertime into your schedule, the book, The Hour that Matters Most by Les and Leslie Parrott, has many good ideas.
2. Keep your family devotional time a safe time. As best you can, keep an environment that is open, respectful and loving. Try to avoid put downs, people who monopolize conversations, or dragging outside things into the group (problems at work, bad moods, etc.). If there are bad feelings between family members, it may be helpful to talk them through before you begin. Another idea is to open the time with prayer and pray for each other as you learn together.
3. Keep everything confidential. Some questions will require you to open up and share personal situations and feelings. Remind everyone that whatever is shared during that time is to stay amongst the family members.
4. Minimize distractions. Turn off the TV. Turn all cell phones to vibrate and put them in the other room. No ipods, hand held video games or anything else that would keep you from being completely engaged in the moment.
5. It is more important to keep your devotional time and only do a small piece of it than to run yourself ragged trying to do it all. Some weeks you will have more time than others. Don't let yourself get defeated! Persevere!!!