

Walking with God...as a Family

~ a guide for beginning family and spouse devotionals ~

But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. - Joshua 24:15 (ESV)

ERIK REED

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~ Why Does this Matter? ~
Chapter One

This is not going to be one of those books or pamphlets you pick up where you receive pie-in-the-sky advice about how to do x, y, or z. Let me first start by telling you that I'm a fellow struggler in this area of my life. I am neither the expert nor most polished when it comes to leading family or spouse devotions. I want to get much better at leading my family through Scripture, prayer, and the ways of the Lord. It is safe to say that I'm writing this because I want to work through the ideas and concepts for myself so that I too can be more effective at them.

I'm also writing this because the biblical mandate for families to be totally committed to the Lord is still in effect. Even though I have my own struggles with the subject at hand, it doesn't negate my responsibility to 1. get better at it and 2. inform those I lead as to what God expects of us as families and couples. **What will follow in the pages ahead will be my own attempt, with the Holy Spirit as my guide and His grace as my strength, to help families and couples to establish a meaningful and consistent time together discussing the ways of God, praying together, and opening His Word in order to draw closer to Him and to each other.**

Why is this subject important for us in this day in age? We live in a culture that is constantly bombarding our minds with thoughts, images, ideas, and beliefs about the world. TV shows, movies, magazines, and websites all fight for our attention, and all work hard to push forward their ideas for us to adopt. How do we combat or discern which of these ideas, if any, should be accepted or believed? The answer is simple: we go to the Bible and we see and learn what God would have us believe and how God demands we live, which contrasts and combats the secular worldview we encounter daily.

In addition to combatting a secular worldview, we also need to be spending time as a family and as couples together because it is good for our relationships with each other. As

families and couples, we face many stressful and trying times together. We go through the struggles and battles of sickness, bills that need to be paid, appliances and vehicles that are breaking down, and many many other day-to-day situations that we run into. We spend a good amount of time trying to simply make it through the week or month. This is why we need the time consistently refueling and connecting to each other at a much deeper level. If all we ever do is put out fires and taxi the kids from place to place, we will discover quickly that eventually that lifestyle leaves us feeling something is missing and often times leads to families turning against one another.

We have to realize our deep need for a relationship with God that we share together. I know that we live in a very individualistic society where everyone is focused on how to make sure they are happy, taken care of, and satisfied. This often translates into our relationship with God, in which we simply view it as a journey with just me and God. But if you are married and have children, it is not just “you and God,” the expectation from God is that all of you together as one are walking with Him. I think this assessment is fair for many reasons, reasons I will lay in full in the pages ahead. Does this mean that our individual walk with God goes out the window? No. But it does mean this: if you don’t have a walk with God as a family, then your individual walk with God is not what it should be, and it is not what you think it is. If our enemy, the Devil, can keep us from engaging as a family in a relationship with God, then he can prevent us from experiencing the joy that can come from it, he can keep us from the issues that become easier to deal with because of it, and he can keep making us feel guilty for not being obedient in this area of our lives. I say we shut the mouth of Satan up and ask God to move in our families to bring us close to Him and to each other, and in doing so, bringing glory to His name.

My prayer for you as a couple and as a family as you read the following pages and begin moving toward a walk with God as a family are the same as Paul's words to the church in Ephesus. There he says,

“16I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:16-21 NIV)

May God have His way in our families and relationships so that we can know the blessings that come from walking with him as a family.

~ The Elephant in the Room ~ Chapter Two

Have you ever been in a situation where everyone in a room knew there was some underlining issue going on but nobody was addressing it? An example would be if two people

who knew each other have had a big falling out due to some type of argument or circumstantial event, and in some situation they were in the same room together for a dinner party or something like that. This would be one of those situations where you could say everyone knows “the elephant in the room,” meaning, the situation that everyone knows exists but says nothing about it.

I wish what I’m about to write was not the case, but I’m afraid it is: the lack of family and couples devotion is the big giant elephant in the room in our Christian lives. We all know that we “should” be praying together as husband and wife and we “need” to be sitting down with our kids and teaching them about the Bible and about Jesus, but we don’t. We know we don’t do what we “should” and “need” to do, but we don’t talk about it. It doesn’t surface in our conversations, not even at church. We don’t want people to know that we struggle and suffer in this area so we don’t discuss it, yet, we are not alone, because the majority of Christian families are failing miserably in this area. But here’s the truth of the matter: we will never talk to other families about this if we are not even willing to admit our shortcomings in this area to each other as husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend.

So why do we struggle so badly with something that 1. we want to do as a family and couple and 2. we know we are not currently doing well? It seems like it would be easy to just realize, “hey, we want to be closer to God and each other and we know we haven’t been doing it, what do we need to do to start doing this?” But that is not what we do is it? What we do is not talk about it. It serves as the constant elephant in the room. If it is ever brought up at church that we men should be the leaders of their home or parents should be training their kids in the way of the Lord, we immediately feel the elephant standing next to us, almost staring at us. It doesn’t have to be this way. But why is it?

The reasons we don't have more families and couples walking with God together as a family are many. For most, it was never something modeled for us or something we witnessed first hand from our own families. If you never were a part of a family where you did Bible devotions together or witnessed your father and mother praying together, then you probably didn't just naturally make that a part of the normal routines of your family or relationship either. Does this excuse us from doing it? Absolutely not, but it helps us to see one reason why it is difficult for us.

Another reason we don't do this is because of insecurity. We feel very insecure about 1. our knowledge of God, 2. our knowledge of the Bible, and 3. praying in front of each other. We feel insecure about our knowledge of God which keeps us from speaking out to our children or to each other. We fear saying something wrong so we say nothing at all. We feel insecure about our knowledge of the Bible so we rarely ever open it to read it together because we fear not understanding it or being able to navigate through the different books and ideas we may encounter. Because of our insecurity of how little we know of the Bible, we often opt for not reading it together.

Our insecurity about praying in front of each other is one of the most enemy's most used weapons against us. We feel insecure about praying together because 1. we fear praying something stupid or wrong and 2. we know we are praying with somebody who knows all of our flaws and weak spots. This recognition that our spouse and/or children know our shortcomings often makes us feel hypocritical when we pray together. Rather than feeling hypocritical, it should help us to recognize how amazing grace is.

The truth of the matter is that we are sinners who mess up, who lose our tempers, who fail to do something we said, and who will continue to mess up, but this doesn't somehow

neglect or diffuse the power of our prayers. Rather, it should fuel the power of our prayers. We go to our God and Father who is just and faithful and will forgive us of our sins as we confess them (1 John 1:9). We plead to the mediator and advocate Jesus Christ to be our sacrificial substitute and help us (1 John 2:1-2). We recognize that by the power of the Holy Spirit working within us, we can be helped and lead to live more faithfully and selflessly as a husband, wife, father, or mother (John 14:26).

We all know that we should pray together regularly as a married couple and as an entire family, but we don't. This serves as the greatest elephant in the room that there is. This does not have to be the way it is. We can overcome insecurity, fear, and bad habits by prayerfully asking God to give us strength as we seek to change our habits and renew our minds and focus as a family and couple (Romans 12:1-2). We have a God who desires to be sought after. He is not elusive and is not hiding from us. He wants entire families to be devoted to Him, not just as individuals who have their own private time with Him, but as entire families and as couples too. He wants fully devoted families. He wants families that together are seeking God's presence, learning to see through God's perspective, and living to serve His purposes.

If our children lived in a home where this is what their experience was, how much more advantageous would it be to their lives and future marriages and families? If as married couples we were willing to fight through the initial awkwardness when we attempt to pray together and for each other, how much more enjoyable and strong would our marriages be? I believe deeply in the power of God to move us past this elephant in the room that now exists in the majority of Christian families. May we be the people who begin to break this trend as we commit to walking together, even through the initial difficulty, with God as our guide.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Discuss with your spouse openly your fears and insecurities about praying together and reading the Bible together.
2. How many times have you attempted to have a regular family or couple prayer time/devotional time? What do you think led to it stopping?
3. What was your experience growing up? Did you have family devotionals or see your parents praying together? Does your answer best reflect your current experience with your family too?
4. Which of the fears discussed above best represent your fears of having devotionals together (knowledge of God, knowledge of Bible, insecurity in praying aloud together)?

~ A Family Affair ~ Chapter Three

The idea of a relationship with God as a family is not a new concept. In fact, through Scripture, we see the examples of families devoting themselves to the Lord and serving Him as one. This does not mean that we are not supposed to have private times as individuals where we pray and read Scripture, but we see no examples in Scripture where family devotion and marital devotions are excused or pardoned. This is a big reason why Paul warns early Christians in the churches of Corinth not to be married with unbelievers. He says, “*14Do not be yoked together*

with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”(2 Corinthians 6:14 NIV) Why would Paul encourage believers not to be married to unbelievers? Is it because the unbelieving spouse would drag down the faith of the believing one? Yes, that could definitely be one reason for this counsel. Why else though would Paul write this? The most plausible reason for this instruction would be because it would negate the harmony in which the couple is supposed to be walking with God together. If there is an unbelieving spouse, then walking with God as a married couple would be nonexistent and impossible.

Marriage is a covenant. Covenants in the Bible are binding agreements that are made between groups of people or with individuals, but the most common covenant is the covenant God makes with people. God covenants with people and enters into agreement and promise with them. The greatest of these covenants is His covenant to take us as His children through the blood shed and death of Christ on the cross. Those who put faith in Christ as the atoning sacrifice for their sin, and lay down their lives to make him their treasure will enter into this covenant with God the Father. This covenant ensures that not only will our sins be forgiven, but that God will put His Spirit within us to lead and guide us throughout the course of our lives, and it also ensures that upon our deaths, we will continue to walk with God, as we await the final judgement and the resurrection of our bodies to live in heaven forever with Him. This is the most important and greatest of covenants that God establishes with man.

The covenant of marriage is the greatest covenant that God gave for humans to have with one another. The covenant of marriage is the closest thing on earth to the covenant that God makes with us as His children. In the marriage relationship we see husband and wife commit to love one another despite their flaws and sins. In the marriage relationship we see husband and

wife commit to love unconditionally and commit their entire lives to be with one another, through thick and thin. In the marriage relationship, we see the need for selflessness and sacrifice to exist in order for the relationship to be united stronger together.

Is this not an identical picture of what our relationship and covenant with God is? In relationship with God we find ourselves loved despite our flaws and sin. In relationship with God we find ourselves loved unconditionally and assured that God will walk with us forever, never to leave nor forsake us. In relationship with God we see the selflessness and sacrifice God was willing to give in order for the relationship to exist and to become stronger. These are the factors of what makes our relationship with God so special, and this is what makes the marriage covenant so unique, it is the visible expression of what true love is supposed to be.

The Bible describes God's forming and establishment of the covenant of marriage in Genesis 2 when God says, "*It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.*" (Genesis 2:18) Then we see the instructions that for this reason "*man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*" (Genesis 2:24) This is why Paul instructs that believers should not be married to unbelievers. How can an institution or covenant that is created by God and for His purposes (to reflect His Glory and Lordship) exist and be fulfilled by a couple in which one is not even a believer? It cannot. Both husband and wife need to be believers in the Lord and committed to Him alone as their God.

The last part of the passage where Genesis 2 describes husband and wife becoming one flesh can be understood to be referring to them being sexually intimate and united together, but I also believe we can understand it as a oneness of heart and belief as well. When we leave our fathers and mothers behind and get married, we are leaving a life lived for ourselves and on our terms and we are entering into a relationship in which we are establishing a new identity, an

identity in which we are no longer who we once were as a single person, but a person is part of a holy and binding covenant between another person and God Almighty.

The passage from Ecclesiastes 4:12 that says, “*12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken*” is great illustration of what the marriage relationship is supposed to be. One person on their own will be overpowered. Two people together are stronger but still susceptible to attack. But a cord of three is strong, and cannot be quickly broken. The cord of three in a marriage is husband, wife, and God, God is the center strand with husband and wife braided tightly around Him. This is why we must have devotions as a married couple or as a serious dating couple. A relationship that intends to be and fulfill what God designed the relationship to be must be one in which God is the center of all that happens. It must be a relationship in which the two are walking as one as they are walking in unison with Him.

The way we learn to walk in unison with God together as a couple is that we begin spending time together with God together as a couple. Does this include going to church together? Yes. But not ONLY going to church together. We need time together with God in order to grow in our relationship with God together. We must be engaging His Word together and discussing it. We must be taking our needs as a family to the Lord together in prayer. We must be seeking answers to problems and decisions facing through Scripture and prayer. How do we allow God to lead our family if as a family we are not spending any time with the Lord together? Unfortunately, I don't think we can say this. In the next chapter I will give some practical applications for how we can start putting these practices in place, but if we are not first convinced of the vital importance of this practice, no advice will be helpful.

The fact that 50% of Christian marriages end in divorce, which is the same divorce rate as non-Christian, implies that there is a problem. It is not that Christians are perfect, but if there is no noticeable difference, we should start asking some tough questions about what is really going on. My assertion is that what is going on is married couples are not walking with God together. We may have something that reflects a religious belief that we as a family agree to, but are we actively living out a real and vibrant faith as a couple together is the real question. If we don't believe and actively seek to change our practices as a family, my fear is that all of our marriages can very easily become a part of that sad statistic.

In addition to being married couples who read the Bible together and pray together, if we have kids, then we as parents are responsible for training them in the ways and teachings of the Lord. Proverbs 22:6 tells us "*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*" Does this mean that we will not ever have rebellious children or does it guarantee that every child trained in the ways of God will for sure be Christians? No. A proverb is a teaching that helps people understand the way the world works in general. A proverb is a word of wisdom and direction that will usually produce a particular result, but not always 100% of the time. Nevertheless, I would rather take my chances in training my children in the way they should go instead of hoping they stumble onto it themselves in the midst of a culture and society that is going to be leading them in the opposite direction of biblical wisdom.

Our children need and are looking for people who will help them to put the pieces of life in place. They are inquisitive and they want to know answers (which is why they ask so many questions). As parents we have an amazing responsibility, given by God, to train our children in his statutes and ways. Listen to the instructions given by God from Moses in Deuteronomy 11:18-20 (NIV) concerning this subject: "*8 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie*

them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20 Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates...” As parents, we should fix the Word of God on our hearts and minds. We should make reminders and make illustrations as reminders of His great love. We should teach them to our children as we sit at home, as we drive from place to place, and as we eat dinner together. We should have God-talks, read the Bible, and pray with them before at the bedside each night and when you get up in the mornings. The reminders of God’s goodness and grace should surround and define our home. This is the environment the Bible says our kids should grow up in if we truly desire that they not depart from the ways of God as they get older.

Are children are our responsibility to raise and train. I know we live in a day of daycare and church ministries specialized for kids, but let’s be honest, parents have the most influence and ability to teach and train their children. In a week there are 168 hours. If you go to church at least once per week, then your children are getting at a maximum 2 hours of instruction about God. As a parent, you have the ability to dictate and guide the rest of those hours. So how are you doing with the time you have with your children? We cannot blame or hold others responsible for the training of our children. We have been given that solemn duty, and we must do it faithfully.

One of the reasons we often neglect this responsibility is we don’t make the time. We are very good about signing our kids up for dance, ball, art, music, and many other activities, but we seem to make excuses when it comes to scheduling time to sit down and read God’s Word and pray with them. We can make excuses all day long, but the truth of the matter is that we know when we stand before God one day, all excuses will be very petty and hollow. Let us do as the

Scripture say, "*Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.*" (Deuteronomy 4:10 NIV) Let us be parents who let our children hear the words of God so that they may learn to revere Him and walk in His ways.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever viewed your relationship with your spouse as a parallel picture of what our relationship with God is supposed to be?
2. What parts of your relationship are missing that would allow for it to reflect the relationship we share with God?
3. How often are you and your spouse spending time in God's Word together? Pick One: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Regularly
4. How often are you and your spouse spending time praying with and for one another? Pick One: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Regularly
5. How does the time you spend doing extracurricular activities with your kid(s) compare to the time you spend training and teaching them the ways of the Lord?
6. What do you believe your biggest obstacle as a family is for spending time together in devotions to God?

~ Getting It Started & Keeping It Going ~
Chapter Four

So we come to the end of this book. By God's grace, hopefully you have arrived here having read and been challenged by the prior three chapters. It will be hard for you to jump right into the practical application if you have not first addressed why you have not been engaged in devotions up until this point and why it is so vitally important that you do. If you have read the prior chapters, then you realize that we must make the needed changes that would allow for us as families and couples to walk and serve the Lord together as one. This purpose of this chapter will be to help give some steps and direction for how you can do that.

Let's start with how couples can begin a regular time of prayer and devotionals together. The first and most important thing that has to happen is the commitment by both of you to do it. It starts with both of you determining that you are going to do it, no matter what. That is the biggest battle. If you can start with the commitment, then the action will follow much easier. Once you have committed to doing it, the next thing you need to do is set a time. Just like individual time of prayer and Scripture reading, if we don't plan it, we won't do it. Its not that we don't have good intentions, we just have poor planning. I can promise you this: if you don't plan

the time to have prayer and devotions together, you won't just stumble into it. There will always be something else that can or demand your time.

Once you have made the commitment and have scheduled the time, now you have the painstaking task of actually doing it. I say that jokingly because I realize that this will be for most the hardest and most difficult part. Your insecurities will be soaring high and your excuses for not following through will be ready for deployment, but you must resist this temptation to flee. Here is my first piece of advice: start off slow. You don't have to read the entire Bible and pray for an hour in your first devotion together. Start with a prayer together. I know this is the most awkward part for many, but it is not as difficult as you may believe, and it is definitely liberating once you have done it. Start with a prayer like this: *"Father, thank you for the chance to pray together today. This is something we want to do more of, but we are not comfortable doing it. We ask for your help with both our devotions together and our confidence. We love you and praise you. In Jesus name, Amen."* This is but one example of how you can get started slowly, but nevertheless, get started.

Once you have started, make the commitment to be consistent and to slowly grow into more deeper prayer together. After getting over the initial hurdles of embarrassment and insecurity, your prayers will be more confident and you will feel more free to pray longer and for more issues. Another tool you can use in praying together is to make and keep a prayer list. Rather than going into prayer blindly and feeling the pressure of needing to fill the space, talk through what things you want to pray for before you begin praying. Examples of things you may pray for as a couple: each other's job, your children, your family and individual devotions, your friends, your church, your pastor ;-), your last argument, your friends or neighbors that don't go to church or are not Christians, your finances, missionaries who are experiencing persecution to

share Jesus, and many more issues. You obviously don't have to pray for everyone of those things on a daily basis, but create and make a prayer list that you can use to help guide your prayer time together.

Getting into a regular time of prayer is vital to your walk with God as a couple and to growing in your love for one another. Equally important to this endeavor is feeding your hearts and mind with the Word of God. Reading Scripture informs our beliefs about who God is, what He expects from our lives, and how we find the strength needed to obey. My advice for reading Scripture would be the same as for praying together. Make the commitment to do it. Set the time. Start off slow. Short-term victories lend themselves to more long-term success. Don't try to overwhelm yourselves with too much too soon. You will find yourselves getting frustrated and then quitting, only allowing for the guilt of not doing the prayer and devotions to start again.

Start your Bible reading off with easy reading. Start by systematically going through the book of Psalms by reading a few Psalms at a time. Read a Proverb per day out of the book of Proverbs together. By doing that you will have read the entire book of Proverbs in one month. I would also encourage you to read through one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) to familiarize yourselves more and more with Jesus, his teachings, and his death, burial, and resurrection. I would especially encourage you to read Luke or John's Gospel, as they are little easier to read and contain a lot of the words of Jesus. You can also read some books that are very practical in nature and short: James, 1 John, 1 Peter. Ultimately, the most important thing is, you have to start. You have to do something.

I'm often asked about devotion books that are out there. I do not discourage devotion books, but I would not recommend those over reading the actual words of God. Reading the Bible is the most crucial and necessary thing for a couple to do. If you are regularly reading the

Bible together, then and only then, would I also suggest picking up a devotion book. I have read and looked at many couples devotions. I have never been overly impressed with any of them, but that could simply be my personal preference or opinion surfacing. My advice would be to try one and if you don't like it, try another one. Just remember, Bible before devotion books.

What are some ways that you can ensure that you will continue forward in your prayer time and devotions together? First, I would say to make it a daily issue of prayer in your personal life. It will be hard to bring up in prayer to God that you want to do devotions with your wife, but never do them, and then keep praying about it. In other words, let God hold you accountable to it. Second, I would suggest that you invite another couple to hold you accountable to staying consistent. In this case, it would be nice if both couples were committed to this practice and could hold each other accountable to faithfulness to it. This could be something as simple as an email, phone call, text, or conversation at church together to see how you are doing. Third, this may seem foreign and strange to you, but create a contract together. Write out a contract together, with God as your witness, that says you will commit to regular prayer and devotions together as a couple and/or family. Then sign the contract and put it somewhere where it will be visible for you to see regularly. It will either serve as daily encouragement that you are following through or a painful reminder that you have quit. This too can be another accountability mechanism.

What about starting family devotions and prayer time as a family? First, I think it is important that dad and mom have initiated their own time together first, before trying to start a family time. The reason for this is that it will be easier to call the family devotions enough and negate couple devotions if you haven't already started them. Once that is clear, I would start the same way we discussed doing the couples devotions. Start off with the commitment to doing it.

Then schedule a set time. I would recommend beginning with once a week as a good starting point. Start slow and try not to accomplish too much your first few times starting.

My recommended plan would be to start by opening in prayer together before reading a Bible story. Then I would read the Bible story and have family discussion on the topic. Try to think about how that story could be applied to your kid's lives and your life as a family. Help your kid(s) to connect that the Bible gives us help with our everyday lives. Once you have discussed the story and spoke about the different things related to it, make a family prayer list. Let your kid(s) make suggestions for prayer topics. Help teach your kids about what other things we should be praying for too. Then conclude your family devotion time with a prayer for the things you listed. Be sure to keep up with your prayer list so that you can show your kids answered prayers as they occur.

As you grow more comfortable doing the family devotions, and as they become more frequent, you may begin adding other elements into the time. You may begin singing a song together as a family. You may begin sharing stories of what God is doing and teaching you as individuals in your lives. I would even recommend memorizing Scripture verses together or going over a catechism together (I'll explain what that is in more detail in the next chapter). There is really no cap to what you can do in this time. The most important thing is to begin. Your children will absolutely grow to cherish this time together, and so will you.

A few more recommendations for finding opportunities to teach your kids the ways of the Lord. Take advantage of bedtime. When tucking your children into bed, pray with them, discuss their day with them, and find opportunities to connect the dots for them about how God fits into their everyday lives. I would also suggest have one-on-one times with your kid(s). As a dad, find time to have a "date-day" with your daughter and use that as a regular opportunity to teach her

about God and be involved in her life. If you are a dad with a son, have a “leader-day” and do the exact same thing. Find an opportunity to teach your son about what it means to be a man who loves God. I will recommend some resources in the next chapter that can be good for what you do in those times. Moms should do the same thing too. Moms should take out daughter and/or son for one-on-one time with mommy. The objective is the same: teach and train the child in the way that they should go. The context for how this is most effective is when we are loving them and caring for them at personal levels, and in family time, not just Sunday School.

Discussion Questions:

1. What time of the day would work best for you and your spouse to have a regular devotion and prayer time?
2. What couple could you ask to be an accountability couple in your journey toward regular devotion times?
3. What would stop you from making out a covenant or contract with each other to commit to this regular devotion time?
4. What night of the week would be the most ideal to begin a family devotion time?
5. What day/night of the week would be most conducive to a one-on-one time with your child with each parent individually?
6. What barriers currently stand in the way of your starting and maintaining these devotion times as a couple and family? What are you going to do about removing them?
7. Are you willing to make the needed changes and adjustments in schedules and commitments in order to put walking with God as a family as top priority?

~ Recommended Resources for Help ~
Chapter Five

Now that we have discussed the seriousness of the matter at hand, and the barriers that will exist as we try to initiate this new habit, I want to give some resources that can help make establishing this new practice more successful. The resources I'm going to mention are ones that I have personally had experience with. It is by no means the only resources, but ones that I feel comfortable recommending based on my having used them.

Bibles:

I would highly recommend that every couple purchase a study Bible. A study Bible can be tremendously helpful for couples devotions. As you read and encounter things you may have questions about, study bibles will often help give explanation to passages you don't understand. The best study bible on the market right now is the *ESV Study Bible* published by Crossway. You can pick this study bible up at any major bookstore or you can always find it on Amazon.

The best children's bible I would recommend is *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* by Sally Lloyd-Jones. This book is published by Zondervan. It can be found on Amazon. We have this Bible for our son and he absolutely loves it. I love it too. It has lots of pictures, but it still actually tells the story of the whole Bible. This would be the ideal Bible to do family devotions from, especially if your children are your thirteen. If your children are older, I would recommend using the study bible mentioned above or a youth study bible.

Books:

I'm going to recommend just a few books that could be valuable resources to your training and instructing of your children, whether in family devotions or one-on-one time. The

first book I would recommend is *Big Truths for Young Hearts* by Bruce Ware. This book is published by Crossway. This book teaches children 5-18 years old about theology. This is a book that comprehensively teaches your children, and you, about the major biblical teachings of the Bible. They will learn about formulation of Scripture, revelation, the Trinity, sin, salvation, the church, and about the end of all things. This is an A to Z book instructing kids on the ways of God shown from the Bible. It is set up in short easy to understand chapters. The book can be found on Amazon and at many different book retailers.

A second book I would recommend is *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel* by Sally Michael, Jill Nelson, and Bud Burk. It is published by Desiring God Ministries. You can find the book at www.childrendesiringGOD.org. This is a short book designed to help parents lay out the gospel message in clear ways to their children at different stages in their maturation and development. It covers ten truths that it wants kids to understand about the gospel.

A third book I would recommend is *Raising a Modern-Day Knight* by Robert Lewis. It is published by Tyndale. This book is about fathers raising sons. This would be a great book for any father who desires to begin a “leader-day” with their son. This is not about a one-time event, but it teaches dads how to raise their boys to become men, and then pass the torch. This is a great book for fathers who’s children are in school (K-12th).

My final recommended reading and resource is not really a book, it is a catechism. Most people today are not familiar with catechisms. A catechism is simply a set of questions about God, the Bible, and theology, that have set answers to them, with Scripture that support the answer, that churches and families used to teach their children the ways of the Lord. This reminds us of some of the Scripture we read earlier where we are commanded to teach the commands and ways of the Lord to our kids, to tie their around their necks, to put them on the

door frames of our homes. A catechism is simply a systematic way of teaching your kids biblical theology. The idea is that you ask the question and your child has memorized the answer. This developed by repetition and commitment. Parents must be engaged regularly in this practice in order for it to be effective. Believe it or not, your children can remember and memorize more than you think or give them credit for.

Most think of catechisms as only a Catholic practice, but this could not be further from the truth. The early Baptist churches in England and America used catechisms for training and teaching their children. The term Sunday School came from the fact that most children worked in on farms and fields during the week and did not go to school. They would come to church and learn catechisms. That was their education. This education was not once per week at church though, these were things discussed in the home regularly. Pastors would often call the children of the church to the front and line them up, and then one-by-one who would ask them different parts of the catechism, in which they were expected to know the answer when asked. This put pressure on the parents to teach and work with their children, lest they be embarrassed by their child's lack of biblical training and understanding.

The tool has been ditched for other, and much less instructive, tools for teaching children, but I still think it can be very effective. It would serve many of our children for a lifetime if we taught them the principles found in a catechism. The catechism I would recommend is probably one of the most popular ones in history. Keach's Catechism was created by Benjamin Keach, a famous Baptist pastor of the 1600's in England. His catechism is one of the most widely used still to this day. You can find a copy of this catechism online simply by typing it into Google. You can print it off in full and staple it together, which is what I have done. It is a good size document, but don't let the size intimidate you. Look at this as a process of years and not days.

A quick example of how the catechism is laid out:

Q. 1. Who is the first and best of beings?

A. God is the first and best of beings. (Isaiah 44:6; Psalm 8:1; Psalm 97:9)

Q. 2. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. (1 Corinthians 10:31; Psalm 73:25-26)

These are the first two questions of the 118 question catechism. It is very informative and biblical and could serve to train your children for many years to come.

I pray that you would use the material mentioned above to help spark this family and couple devotions that we have talked about over the last several chapters. I pray that you would move beyond reading this to actually applying it. I pray that God would spark in every person who reads this a desire to walk with Him as a family, not for a day or a week, but for a lifetime. The riches and blessings that will flow from such a commitment and practice by a family would be something one would never trade in. I charge you to go forward with boldness as a couple and as a family to serve the Lord and Him alone. May the enemy be pushed back and shown that the power of the Lord prevails over the barriers who attempts to sit in front of us. And may each of us, declare this day and for the rest of our lives the words of Joshua, "*but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" Joshua 24:15