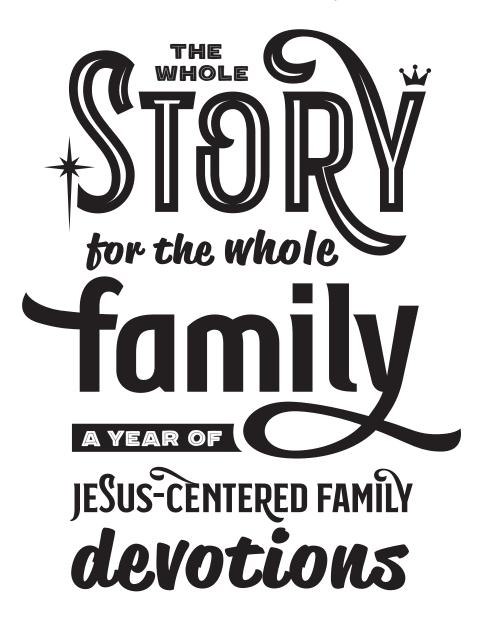


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To Joshua, Andi, and Christian

This book really came from you guys. Thank you for showing up for breakfast on time.

Acknowledgments

I remain so thankful for a partner in ministry at Broadman & Holman Publishing. Thank you, Devin Maddox and Taylor Combs, for helping me flesh out this idea, polishing out a scope and sequence, and then ultimately reading through a ton of object lessons. It means the world to me that you continue to believe in me as a writer and as a friend.

I also am indebted to so many families with whom we have had the joy to walk in this parenting journey. We are all different, and yet we are all the same. I have learned so much from you in what it means to be a dad and to invest in all aspects of the lives of our children.

I would also like to acknowledge the fact that the work on this book took place primarily in 2020, the year when our churches were physically closed for a significant period of time. As such, parents all over the world have had to take a greater degree of initiative to try and help their children read, know, and understand God's Word. These have been difficult days, but even the most difficult days are to be redeemed. And by God's grace, perhaps one of the ways this time will be redeemed is that moms and dads everywhere will continue that pattern of spiritual investment.

Introduction

Deuteronomy 6 contains the text of the *shema*. That word literally means "hear," and it's the beginning of the greatest command:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:4–5 NIV)

This is the oldest fixed prayer in Judaism, and even today is recited at least twice a day by observant Jews. This is also the answer that Jesus gave when an expert in the law asked Him what the greatest command was:

> "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command." (Matt. 22:37–38)

This—loving God with all of our being—frames everything else. In fact, you might rightly say that if we get this right, everything else will fall into place because the love of God forms the framework for every other action, attitude, and decision we make. The text in Deuteronomy goes on to emphasize just how important this is, and it's in this emphasis that we also find a command for us as parents:

"These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates." (Deut. 6:6–9)

There is no doubt that we, as parents, should be the primary spiritual influence on our children. This responsibility cannot and should not—be delegated to a church program, though we should work in concert with the church for the overall growth of our kids in Christ. One of the simplest ways we do that is through a devoted, regular, set-aside time to read and study the Bible together.

I've known that to be true, and yet I haven't always been a family devotion guy.

It's not because I didn't want or aspire to be; I did. But we went a long time as a family before pulling the trigger and trying to integrate this practice into the regular rhythm of our family life.

There are a lot of reasons, I think, for my delay. Part of it was convenience; I wasn't ready to alter our schedule to accommodate that fifteen or twenty minutes. Part of it was nervousness; I wasn't sure if I could do this well. But the biggest part of the reason for my procrastination was really about having a clear direction to get started.

By God's grace, we've been doing morning devotions together for almost ten years now—long enough for this practice to be ingrained in our regular routine. It's a long road, as are most things, especially with young children. Though revival doesn't break out every morning over eggs and toast, our continued hope and prayer is that times like these build into the love and discipline our children will have in the future when it comes to God's Word.

The goal of this resource, then, is to put forth that simple, clear direction for other parents who, like me, find themselves struggling to get started or to remain consistent. Each daily devotion is meant to be simple and achievable, with five components:

- **Show:** Each day begins with a simple object lesson or game designed to introduce the text. It's an easy way to capture attention and generate conversation.
- **Read:** Then there is a specific text of Scripture given. These texts are organized chronologically so kids can see that though there are many stories in the Bible, it's really just one big story that has Jesus as the main character.
- **Explain:** Next comes a brief explanation of the text. This is meant to help a parent not just read the text with their children, but then offer a little background and easy-to-understand commentary to help kids see not only what the text means, but where it fits in the overall story of the Bible.
- **Reflect:** There are three reflection questions each day that are easy to answer, and will hopefully solidify the story for the kids and also help them see how that text applies to their daily lives.
- **Pray:** Finally, there is a brief prayer to close out the devotion.

You'll also notice that there are only four devotions per week. This is intentional so that on Friday, or another day of the week, you can take a brief break and spend your devotion time praying for one another and expressing gratitude for what God is doing in and through you.

Simple, repeatable, and achievable. And, by God's grace, also foundational—not only foundational in providing a good sketch of the Bible for kids, but foundational in pushing down the daily habit of getting in God's Word and being nourished by it. Going back to Deuteronomy 6:

"These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates." (Deut. 6:6–9)

Repeat the Word of God. Talk about His commands when you're coming and going, when you wake up and when you go to bed. They should be as ready in our minds as if we had them written on our hands and foreheads. In other words, talk of God and His Word should be the constant backdrop to every conversation.

But before you get started, can I share with you one warning about this pattern of family devotion?

The potential impact and power of that family devotion will no doubt be minimized if the *only* time you talk about the things of God is in that single environment.

If the only time our family prays, or talks about Jesus, or points each other to the truth of God is during that fifteen minutes,

then we are subtly emphasizing to our kids that the Bible is for spiritual times. But the rest of the day, we just have to live our lives. This is not a Deuteronomy 6 kind of devotion. In fact, if we do this, we are treating the family devotion time like a magic formula—something we check off on our list as parents that we think will ensure our kids will love and follow Jesus.

Don't think of your family devotion as the destination; think of it as the launching pad for all the other moments you have during the day. Come back to the Word again and again. That doesn't mean you have to have multiple, set-aside times for the reading and study of God's Word. That, too, seems to violate the spirit of Deuteronomy 6.

Instead, you want to have a family culture that is rooted in God's Word so that it indeed is the constant background of everything else you do. You want it to be the most natural thing in the world when a child is discouraged, or when a family decision has to be made, or when you are simply processing what's happening in the world together to bring up what God says about this situation in His book.

Yes, parents, read the Bible together. Yes, parents, set aside a time to do so. But also move toward not just a moment, but a "when you" kind of philosophy so that the Word of God might be deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of your family.



Everything from Nothing

Show

Distribute pen and paper, Legos, Play-Dough, or some other material to each family member. Explain that they will have two minutes to create something brand-new. It could be a new building, a new animal, a new food—anything new. Start the timer and allow the family to work. Once the work is done, allow each family member to explain what they made, commending each one for their creativity. Then explain that even though you all created new kinds of things, you all used materials to create them. You didn't create the Legos, the paper, or the Play-Dough. Even though you made something, you didn't make something from nothing. But that's what God did when He created.

Read

Genesis 1:1-5

Explain

The Bible tells us that in the beginning, there was God, and God alone. He has always been, and He will always be. When He created, God didn't use material that was already present; instead, He created all things just by speaking them into existence. Everywhere we look we can see evidences of God's power, His creativity, and His love. There is no one and nothing like God

who has the power to bring things into existence by His power. Every time we see a tree, a cloud, or a mountain, it's a chance to remember the powerful God who spoke it all into existence. As the story continues, we will see that we need a powerful God to do what we could never do for ourselves.

Reflect

1. What does God's creation show us about Him?

2. How should we respond to a God so powerful that He can create something from nothing?

3. What are some of your favorite things in the world that remind you of how powerful God is?

Pray

Thank You, God, that You are powerful. Help us today, as we walk through the world You made, to remember that You are the Creator of all things.



In His Image

Show

If you have them, gather together some family photo albums and spend a few minutes comparing the way different relatives tend to resemble each other. Compare fathers and mothers to sons and daughters, or go back several generations if possible. But beyond that, also point out that children often adopt the same mannerisms and sayings as their parents. Point out a few examples of this in your own home if you can. Then explain that children take on the characteristics of their parents. In a similar way, when God created human beings, He made them in a special and unique way. God made men and women in His image.

Read

Genesis 1:26-31

Explain

God created everything from nothing, but the way He created people was completely unique. Unlike the stars, the mountains, or the animals, God created men and women in His image. That means human beings share some characteristics with God. For example, we can love God and each other in a way that plants

and animals never could. We are meant to have a real relationship with the God of the universe—to love Him and love being with Him.

Because we are created in God's image, God also wants us to bring honor to Him in the way that we relate to the rest of His creation. We are to think, love, and act in the way God does. This is how we are meant to live, but as we'll soon find out, something happened that broke our ability to love this God who loves us so much.

Reflect

1. If every person is created in God's image, then how should we treat every person no matter who they are?

2. What are some ways we can all show we are created in God's image today?

3. Have you ever seen a person being treated like they weren't made in God's image?

Pray

Thank You, God, for making us in Your image. Help us to remember that our purpose is to love and glorify You in our lives.



Show

Explain to the family that you are going to play a game called "Quiet Statues." Whisper a kind of statue to each member of the family (snake, king, elephant, singer, etc.). At the count of three, every family member has to freeze into their statue, and remain in that position until someone moves. The person who moves first tries to identify what kind of statue each person is making. Explain that sometimes we think resting just means being still and quiet. But chances are, when they were making their statues, they didn't feel much like resting. Explain further that God wants us to rest, but to God, resting means something more than just being still and quiet.

Read

Genesis 2:1-3

Explain

After God made everything, He rested on the seventh day. But God didn't rest because He was tired from all His work; He rested because He was finished. He made everything He intended to make, in just the way He intended to make it. Everything was absolutely good in every way, so God rested because there was nothing left to do.

God also intends that we regularly rest, but resting for us is more than just taking a nap or being quiet. Resting for us means celebrating that God does everything in just the right way and at just the right time. When we rest each week, we are remembering that God always does what He intends to do. But while everything was perfect, a new character was about to enter the story. And what was perfect was about to be undone.

Reflect

1. What are some ways we can practice this kind of rest in our home, remembering who God is and what He has done?

2. Why is it sometimes hard for us to really take a break and rest?

3. What are some of the decisions we need to make in our home in order to make sure we are resting in the right way?

Pray

Thank You, God, that You do all things well. Help us to make choices that enable our family to rest in celebration of who You are and what You have done.

The Family Devotional to Help Kids Grow in their Faith

Parents are called to be the primary spiritual influence in the lives of their children. That means we, as parents, should help them know and understand the Bible so they can know, love, and understand God and His Son, Jesus. But so many parents feel overwhelmed and exhausted at the thought of discipling their children. Where to begin?

The Whole Story for the Whole Family is a step in the right direction. In an easy-to-use and simple format, this devotional guide will equip parents to start teaching their children the Bible. Rather than seeing the Bible as a mismatched collection of random stories about different characters in history, your kids can see the Bible as one story, woven throughout space and time, with one character standing at the center: Jesus. Through the use of an object lesson every day, digestible sections of Scripture, and simple discussion questions, *The Whole Story for the Whole Family* can help kids understand God's ongoing story and find their place in it.



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