

Faith Practices For At Home

Starting the school year faithfully in a season of new beginnings

While calendar makers start each new year on January 1, and the church year begins on the first Sunday in Advent; anyone whose life is ruled by the rhythms of school will tell you that those weeks from the end of August through Labor Day mark the fresh start of a new year. And so, with that in mind, what better time than the start of this new, post-pandemic year to begin (or renew) faith practices in your home?

While the idea of faith in the home may seem daunting, it is, in fact, simply bringing intention to the things that you already do. You don't need special supplies or curriculum; all you need is a willingness to open the routines of your daily life to acknowledge and celebrate the presence of God. God lives not in the sanctuary of our churches (as 2020 surely taught us!), but in our very being: so practicing faith in the home requires simply tuning in to that presence, wondering together as a family, and embracing the resulting conversations. It is our hope that the tools on this quicksheet will help develop that practice. Start by just trying one, and then maybe add another in a coming week.

Starting and sending: Blessings as the day begins

Create a ritual of offering or sharing in a blessing (such as a simple prayer and/or physical action) to send the members of your family to their various tasks for the day with a reminder of God's love. Be sure that, in addition to parents giving a blessing to a child, children, too, feel empowered to offer blessings to their parents or caregivers. Some possibilities include words from scripture or a simple affirmation of God's presence and care:

- ❖ May the Lord bless you and keep you (Numbers 6:24)
- ❖ May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace (Romans 15:13)
- ❖ Go with God's love, go with my love, and spread kindness today!
- ❖ God goes with you! Have a wonderful day!

For special milestones, including not only the first day of school, but also the FIRST first (for kindergarteners) and the LAST first (for seniors), perhaps choose a prayer acknowledging the specialness of the particular moment such as:

- ❖ God claimed you before you were born. God has great plans for you. Go into this day and the year ahead with the love of God around you, knowing that I (we) are full of love and hope and pride for all that you do and all that you are!
- ❖ As you begin the adventure of this new year, know that God's care surrounds you in all that you do! Let's ask God to bless you, your teachers, and your classmates as you begin a new year together.
- ❖ God is always doing something new--in this new year, may you also do a new thing; knowing that you are able to accomplish more than you imagine!

For parents and caregivers, consider carving out a brief time of sabbath (it can be less than 5 minutes!) for some prayer, centering time, or brief devotional in the moment between when your child(ren) leaves for school and the beginning of your work and tasks for the day.

- If you drive your child(ren) and are dropping them off by car, turn off the radio when they get out of the car. Take a deep breath before putting the car back into gear and spent a few moments in conversation

with God while continuing to your next destination. This could include a prayer for your day, for members of your family, for a situation that you are concerned about, or a “counting of your blessings” to take a moment of thanksgiving. This could also work using noise canceling headphones while on public transit.

- If you are at home, grab a warm beverage (such as coffee or tea) and hold it in your hands. Notice the warmth spreading through your hands and onto your face. Breathe deeply and clear your mind. Bring your attention to the thoughts that come to you, and welcome God’s presence with you as you consider the concerns, joys, stressors, and wonderings that come to mind.
- Try a prayer app. All of the apps below are available for download on the iTunes, Google Play, and Amazon app stores.
 - The D365 devotional app (<https://d365.org/>, Free) is organized around the ideas of “pause, listen, think, pray, go” and offers a special Back2School series in August and September. This app, made in partnership with, among others, the PC(USA) Youth and Triennium office, is a great option for teens and adults alike!
 - The ceaseless prayer app (<https://www.ceaselessprayer.com/>, Free) links with your phone’s contact list to provide you with three names per day to pray for, along with daily scripture readings. The app also includes a feature where you can text or email a message to those for whom you have prayed.
 - PC(USA) Daily Prayer app (\$2.99). This app combines daily prayer from ‘The Book of Common Worship’ with Bible readings and also has features to allow you to email or text those that you pray for, or to share content from the app on social media.

While you’re apart: Lunchbox notes, texts, and daily encouragement

Many parents tuck a note of encouragement into the packed lunches of elementary school aged children. Why not bring a bit of faith into that? For older children, a similar message can be sent via text or email to arrive on their device at lunchtime. Some ideas include: a favorite Bible verse, a line from a hymn, a simple prayer or word of encouragement, a line from a favorite dinnertime grace, or something unique to your family. A search on pinterest or google images will turn up many different ideas. Below are a few to get you started:

- Give us this day, our daily bread--Have a great lunch! (Matthew 6:11)
- You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength! (Philippians 4:13)
- God has done marvelous things--Praise God with a new song! (Hymn “Earth and All Stars”)
- I’ll be saying a prayer for your (*test/try-out/presentation*). I have confidence you’ll do your best!

Back at home: Connecting and Debriefing

Studies have shown that eating meals together as a family has social, emotional, physical, and academic benefits. In addition, there are spiritual benefits of breaking bread together. Mealtimes are one of the most natural opportunities to pray as a family, but beyond that, a wonderful time to connect faith and life. As a parent, you have likely learned that, “how was your day?” isn’t always a very effective opener. Consider the following:

- Share YOUR day. Model sharing your daily tasks with your children. Share funny things colleagues said, tasks that you accomplished with pride, challenges that arose, insights or ideas that solidified during your day, and more. When you share, your children learn about the ‘mystery’ of what happens when they are not with you, and also can relate aspects of their day to yours.
- Have some conversation prompts in your back pocket that you can use instead of “how was your day?”. Some ideas that encourage storytelling rather than just a yes or no answer include:
 - What was a moment of kindness that you offered or received today?
 - If you had a magic wand to redo part of the day, what part of today would you use it on?
 - What gave you the biggest laugh/smile/eyeroll/groan of the day?
- Listen more; solve less. While parents are often called on to ‘fix’ things, sometimes, the most important thing we can do for our children is to listen with our whole selves. This may mean biting your tongue when your first instinct is to offer suggestions, solutions or even admonitions. As your child shares a

dilemma, consider asking, “do you need to vent, or are you looking for help coming up with a solution?” At the conclusion of the conversation, whether you have listened or strategized together, tell your child that you will keep their concerns in your prayers, and perhaps even have a short prayer together.

Finishing the day: Bedtime

If you have a children’s story Bible (such as *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*) and it is your usual practice to read together before bed, include a story from the children’s Bible on a daily or weekly basis. There are also a wide variety of children’s books on faith themes--if your church has a library, consider borrowing some books to add into your regular bedtime story rotation. Encourage your children to find connections from their own lives to the stories you share. Bedtime is also a natural time to pray. In addition to the opportunity to share in more traditional spoken prayers of intercession and thanksgiving, it can be a recap of the day:

- Where did you see God in action today?
- What is something that happened today for which you are thankful?
- Where do you need God’s help?
- Who are other people that you want to remember in prayer this evening?

Resources:

- [Faith Practices Toolkits](#) - the Office of Christian Formation has produced a number of toolkits on different sabbath practices (including prayer, storytelling, retreat, hospitality and service). Full of practical ideas, these toolkits are a great resource for church and individuals alike, especially, the [Sabbath Practices Ministry Kit for Households](#) .
- Author, parent and Presbyterian pastor Traci Smith has a wonderful website (<https://traci-smith.com/>) full of ideas and resources for families and churches. Sign up to receive her “Treasure Box Tuesday” email newsletter on the website.
- Looking for an ‘out of the box’ gift for teachers? Try a gift from the [Presbyterian Giving Catalog](#), which offers a variety of gifts including gifts of animals in developing parts of the world, emergency/disaster relief options, and many education-related choices such as scholarships, training, and supplies.
- Our partners at the Christian Reformed Church have a wonderful page of faith formation resources that can be found here: <https://network.crcna.org/church-libraries/ultimate-collection-family-faith-formation-resources-every-church>
- The “Faith5” program from Faith inkubators has a good model for home use. The five steps are:
 - STEP 1: SHARE your highs and lows
 - STEP 2: READ a Bible verse or story
 - STEP 3: TALK about how the Bible reading might relate to your highs and lows
 - STEP 4: PRAY for one another’s highs and lows
 - STEP 5: BLESS one anotherLearn more here: <https://faithink.com/about-faith5>
- Additional resources for celebrating Christian Formation Week can be found at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/theology-formation-and-evangelism/office-of-christian-formation/christian-formation-week/>

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