

# Faithful Families

## Practical Ideas for Living Out Our Faith at Home

*Faith formation is a lifelong journey that begins at home.* It is through our earliest relationships within the family structure that we first come to know and understand something of God.

Becoming a family that actively and intentionally lives out its faith together doesn't have to be daunting or overwhelming. Begin by simply building on things your family already does. Choose one practice to implement. Don't try to take on more than one new faith practice at a time. Below are some suggestions to help you get started!

### Be an Example

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ," Paul told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11:1). It is good advice and often happens naturally in families where faith is important and valued. Your child looks to you to be an example and a role model for the kind of adult that they hope to become. It is by watching and imitating you that youth will learn and decide what is of value to them. Youth who acknowledge that faith is an important part of their lives generally have parents for whom faith also plays a central role in their day-to-day living. Find time in your own schedule to focus on your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Go to worship and Sunday school. Pray. Read scripture. Practice yourself the disciplines that you would like to instill in your youth.

### Meaningful Conversation

Make time to share meaningful conversation. Whether it's in the car on the way to school or to soccer practice, around the dinner table or just before bed, talk to your child about their day and their experiences. Ask questions. What are they excited about? What are they looking forward to? Concerned about? Wish they could avoid? For what are they thankful? Share a high point and a low point from your day or week. Share stories from your own faith journey.

From time to time, yes, you may be met with the dreaded one-word answer. Don't be discouraged. Ask another question or wait for another opportunity. Sometimes your youth won't want to talk. That's okay. But they will always appreciate knowing that you care.

## Eat Together

Again and again, Jesus shares meals with those He encounters. It is one of the most important things you can do as a family. Research has shown that children who regularly sit down to eat meals with their family are more emotionally stable, less stressed, more confident, do better in school and report fewer experiences with drugs and alcohol than their peers who do not regularly eat meals with their family. Sharing meals together offers an opportunity to slow down. It increases a family's sense of connectedness and allows time for deeper sharing and intimacy. Gathering around the table also provides an opportunity for you to share other faith practices (having meaningful conversation, praying, reading scripture, etc.) together.

## Pray Together

Before meals. On the way to school. Because it's a bad day. When you hear the siren of an ambulance or police car. After a fight. When you get good news. Before bed. Just because. There is never a wrong time or a wrong way to pray. Prayers can be as short and simple as, "Thank you!" Or as long as they need to be to express your thoughts and feelings to God. Always remember that it's a conversation! Teach your child prayers or blessings you learned at their age. Take turns praying aloud. Covenant to pray for each other every day. The more you pray together the more comfortable you will become and the more connected you'll feel with God and each other.

## Volunteer Together

Serving others can be an experience that significantly shapes and forms faith. Serving others allows you and your youth to put your faith into action. It allows you to live out your calling as a Christian. Whether it is a one-time activity or something you do regularly, carve out the time to serve those in need in your community. Be sure to debrief the experience afterward by asking about what they saw and felt. Share your experiences too. Look for ways that God was present in what you saw and experienced.

## Daily Devotions

Purchase a daily devotional book or choose a book of the Bible and begin reading. Read a story or paragraph at a time. Afterward, talk about what you heard. What do you resonate with in the reading? What don't you understand? Consider what message God has for each of you in the story or passage. Look for ways that that message intersects with things that are happening in your life, at school or at work.

## Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Grace

These are key theological concepts that we often learn the most about from our experiences of fighting with our family. Ultimately, how we know and experience God's forgiveness and grace is wrapped up in how we experience those things in our relationships at home. Sometimes being a family can be tough. You will disagree and you will fight. Sometimes you, or they, will say things you regret. Always be willing to say that you are sorry. And always be willing to forgive. After a fight, take time to talk about what happened. Was there a simple misunderstanding or is there a deeper issue that needs to be discussed?

## Milestones

Acknowledge milestones in life through your lens of faith. Celebrate your baptism annually as you would your birthday. Acknowledge the "firsts." Say a special prayer of blessing over your teenager who just received their driver's license.

## Develop Rituals

A ritual is a recurring practice that holds significant meaning to those that participate in it. Rituals help to establish purpose, identity and connectedness. Many of the practices named can become rituals for your family as they become more familiar and take on meaning simply by being present in your daily routine.

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