

Here are some examples of how to do devotions for various age groups:

EXAMPLE 1: Two young children, ages 6 and 3**Step One: Pray.**

In prayer, the father/husband asks God to reveal to him what the needs of his family members are. As he prays, he remembers that his oldest child is having trouble adjusting to his new school. As he continues to pray, God “plays the tape” of a recent event: the youngest child had a bad dream. Now she is afraid to go to bed at night. As he continues to pray, he also remembers that his wife is often exhausted, trying to balance her home and work responsibilities.

The next day, as he prays, he is seeking to discern which need is the most important one to address first. While all the needs are important, he senses that he can find practical ways to help his wife carry the load (he decides to do the laundry for one week), and he basically needs to listen to his oldest child as he adjusts to the new school and offer advice, as opportunities arise. The need of his youngest child may be the one that needs to be addressed by scripture.

Step Two: Search

Now, he gets help from his Bible tools. He has a concordance, a topical Bible and a study Bible. First, he searches his topical Bible for a story that might help. He looks up the word “fear.” He finds that he has two options: Fear of God and Cowardice. He decides to look up the word “courage” instead. Since he has such a small child, he decides to try to find a *story* that would help his child, so he looks at where it says, “Courage: Instances Of.” He sees many examples, but he decides to go with the story of David and Goliath, since Goliath must have looked really scary to most people.

Next, he decides to find a short verse that will help his child remember the story. He looks up the word “afraid” in his concordance. He finds that this word is used a lot in the Bible, so he goes to the Psalms to narrow his search quickly. There, he finds Psalm 56:3 “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.” He looks at a couple of other translations and decides to go with the NIV translation because it is a bit shorter: “When I am afraid, I will trust in You.”

Step Three: Plan

As he reads the story, he decides that he will retell it, emphasizing how big Goliath was, how scared the Israelite army was, how much courage David had, and the reason for his courage: he believed in God. Then, he would tell how David hit the giant with the stone and how the giant fell down dead. He decides to write the story down as follows:

Have you ever been afraid of something? Some people are afraid of the dark. Some people are afraid of other people, especially bigger people. Some kids are afraid of monsters, even if they know there is no such thing as a monster. There was a boy in the Bible who learned that he didn't have to be afraid, because he knew he could trust God, who is bigger than anything. The boy's name is David. When he was a boy, a very tall man named Goliath decided to scare God's people. He said, "I bet nobody will fight me, because I am soooo big." He was right. No one would fight him, because he was soooo big. But David had learned to trust God. He said, "I will go a fight Goliath because, even if he is bigger than me, God is bigger than anybody. I don't have to be afraid of him." So, he found a few small stones and took them with him. When he saw Goliath, he said, "I'm not afraid of you! God is bigger than anybody!" Then he put one of the small stones in his sling and threw the stone at Goliath. When the stone hit Goliath, he fell down, dead. All of God's people were so happy because Goliath was dead. He would never make anybody afraid again. But David knew why Goliath was dead. It was because God was with him, and God helped him. God can help us, too, when we are afraid of something. The Bible says, "When I am afraid, I will trust in You." You know, grownups can get afraid, too. When we do, we can remember what the Bible says, and so can everybody. Let's say it together: "When I am afraid, I will trust in You." O.K., good! Now, let's pray. Dear God, help us to remember that there is never anything too big for you. Help us to trust in You, like David did. Help us to remember that You are with us to help us. Amen.

Next, he decides to let his six-year-old draw a picture of the story while he is telling it.

Step Four: Execute

The father/husband brings his "cheat sheet," in case he forgets something in the story. He gets some crayons for his six-year-old, and opens his Bible to Psalm 56:3. He gives the crayons to his son and tells him that he will get to draw a picture of the story he is going to tell. He tells the story, as he has written it, looking occasionally at his notes. He then asks his son to show everyone his picture, and describe what is happening. Then, they all hold hands and pray together.

Follow Up

The father/husband knows that he needs to follow up at bedtime, as well. So, when he is going to put his child to bed, he reminds his child of the story and prays again with her.

EXAMPLE 2: Two older children, ages 9 and 7**Step One: Pray**

As the father/husband prays for his family, he remembers that his oldest son is being teased at school because he is not athletic. As he prays for his younger son, he immediately focuses on his rebellious tendencies, especially toward his mother. He senses that the main focus should be on his youngest son. He discerns that the basic need is for discipline.

Step Two: Search

He looks up the word “discipline” in his concordance and decides to narrow his search by focusing on the verses in Proverbs. He soon recognizes that several of these verses list the many benefits of discipline: life (6:23b: “Reproofs for discipline are the way of life.”), knowledge, (12:1a: “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge”) riches and honor (13:18: “Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline”), wisdom for the balance of one’s life (19:20: “Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days.”), and removal of foolishness (22:15: “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.”)

In addition, he notices that 3:11-12 teaches that the source of discipline is God’s love. He seizes upon this as the main truth that needs to be taught, knowing that this is one of the main problems with his son: He does not understand that mother loves him, and that all her attempts to discipline come from a heart of love. He remembers also that one of the children in his son’s class is never disciplined by his parents and that, consequently, that child is spoiled and miserable.

Step Three: Plan

He decides to break up his study into seven sessions. In the first one, he will read the story of the prodigal son, focusing on the son’s refusal to accept discipline, how this led to his near ruin, and how coming back under the discipline of his father led to rejoicing and life once again. Not remembering exactly where this is in the Bible, he remembers that the story says that he eventually came to his senses, so he types in the phrase “came to his senses,” which calls up Luke 15:17. When he goes to that verse, he finds that, yes, there the whole story is, beginning in verse 11!

He decides that he will make sessions two through six into a game. He will print up (or photocopy) Proverbs, chapters 6, 12, 13, 19 and 22. He will put at the top of each page, “Bible Treasure Hunt.” Then he will tell them that finding truth in God’s word is just like a treasure hunt. The one who finds the treasures hidden there will have a peaceful, productive life. He will then ask them to write on their sheet of paper everything that that particular chapter has to say about discipline. Perhaps they will find other things that he has missed. He will ask his wife to make these treasure hunt pages look really cool by finding a good font and some good clip art to add to it.

On lesson seven, he will ask them to write down all the benefits of discipline that they have discovered. He will then remind them of how the prodigal son nearly lost his life when he left discipline, and how he gained his true life back when he came under the discipline of his father again. But this time, he will emphasize something he did not mention before: The love of the father. It was because of his *love* that the father had disciplined him, and it was his love that caused the father to welcome him back so quickly. Discipline comes from a heart of *love*. Then, he will read Proverbs 3:11-12: “My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.”

Once the ideas are in place, he shares them with his wife, and she helps him print up the scriptures and the worksheets.

Step Four: Execute

On day one, he tells everyone that they will read a story from the Bible called The Prodigal Son. He asks his oldest son to read the introductory verses of the passage, his wife to read the verses that talk about the boy being in want and deciding to return to his father, and then the youngest son to read the verses that talk about the boy returning to his father. He asks them what they think the boy needed the most, in order to keep him from leaving home and losing his fortune. They offer various ideas, and then the father/husband introduces the concept of discipline. He then shares that they will be talking about discipline for the next few sessions. Then he closes with a prayer that God would give each of them wisdom so that they could have a full and meaningful life.

On days two through six, he reminds the family of their topic, gives them their worksheets, and gives time for discussion after the worksheets are filled in. Then he closes with prayer.

On day seven, he passes out all the previous worksheets that have been filled in, then he asks them to make a list, drawn up from their worksheets, of all the benefits of discipline. After this is done, he tells them that he will put their final worksheet on the refrigerator, as a reminder of how happy their lives will be if they accept discipline. Then he reads the story of the prodigal son again, but he tells them that he is going to call the story “The Loving Father,” instead of “The Prodigal Son,” because the father’s love is the real point of the story. After he reads the story again, he reads Proverbs 3:11-12 and closes in prayer, then collects the final worksheet from each child and places them on the refrigerator.

EXAMPLE 3: Three older children, ages 12, 10 and 8**Step One: Pray.**

As the husband/father prays, he thinks of how his older two children (girls) are having trouble getting along. His youngest child, a boy, has always had a hard time making good grades in school, even though he tries very hard. His wife struggles with a couple of issues: low self-esteem and guilt. As he continues to pray, he seeks to discover what is the true root to all of these behaviors. He discerns that all of them, in their own way, is needing encouragement.

Step Two: Search

He goes to his topical Bible and looks up the word “encouragement.” It is not there, so he decides to look under “blessing.” That doesn’t help, either, so he looks up “strength.” Another dead end. He thinks and thinks. Perhaps faith is what is needed. So, he looks up “faith.” He decides to try “Faith: General References Concerning.” He looks at several verses until he finds Psalm 78:7, which says that the children of Israel “should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God.” So, he embarks on a project to help his family recall the works of God.

Step Three: Plan

He shares the idea with his wife. They decide together to make a list of all the times God intervened in their family, or in the life of any one of them, in particular. She remembers how God took care of them after she lost her job ten years before. People in the church gave them food, she was able to find a part-time job, and they budgeted carefully to get by on less for one year until she found another job in her field of expertise. He remembers how, when they were very discouraged one time, the pastor of their church shared a verse of scripture that was exactly what they needed. She recalls the time when their oldest daughter was at the point of death. After much prayer by the church, she was gradually healed. After thirty minutes, they have a list of fifteen instances when God clearly intervened. They decide to only share three of them at family devotions, just to get the others started. Then they will ask everyone to make their own list. Afterwards, they will print the list up and frame it. They will entitle it “The Awesome Works of an Awesome God.” The list will be hung out in the open, where everyone can see it. Anytime a family member gets discouraged, someone else simply points to the list and (in a nonjudgmental way!) remind them that God can be trusted.

Step Four: Execute

As they meet together, the husband/father says that it is easy for everyone to get discouraged from time to time, but if people are continually discouraged, the enemy is seeking to wear them down and make them ineffective for the Lord. He asks them to listen as he reads a passage of scripture that will help anyone who is continually discouraged. He reads the passage, then tells everyone that they will be making out a list of the mighty works of God, both in their own life, and in the experience of the family. He shares the three examples that he and his wife agreed to share. He then tells them to split up and meet again in ten minutes, with their lists complete. After they make their lists, they come back and share them with each other.

Afterwards, he recites a few more from the list he and his wife have made earlier. Then he asks the middle child, since she is savvy with the computer, to make all of their lists into one big list and print them up neatly with a catchy but readable font selection. He tells them that their mother will have the list framed and hung where everyone can see it so that, anytime anyone is discouraged, someone else can point to the list on the wall and remind them of their awesome God. Then he leads them all in a prayer of thanksgiving for all the awesome things God has done for them in their years together.

EXAMPLE 4: Four children, ages 19, 17, 14 and 12**Step One: Pray.**

The husband/father recognizes that his two oldest children have not really developed their walk with God. They have no noticeable desire to pray or to read their Bibles on their own. He also realizes that his youngest child is not relating well to his peers, either at church or at school.

Step Two: Search

For the sake of his two oldest children, he thinks it best that they go through the entire book of Psalms. The youngest could probably stand a good dose of Proverbs. So, he decides that he will go through both books over the next six months. Since he has an NIV Study Bible, he feels confident that he has good study notes to help him understand some of the more difficult passages.

Step Three: Plan

He counts the verses in each book and finds the Psalms has 2,467 verses, and Proverbs has 1,015. He divides both books into 183 days (half a year). On average, if he covers 13½ verses in Psalms and 5½ verses in Proverbs every day, he will finish both books in six months. He reads the introductory notes on both the book of Psalms and Proverbs. He decides that he will take a day each on introducing each book, then get started with the scriptures, themselves.

Step Four: Execute

In the first sessions, he tells the family that, given our culture, it is hard to keep our focus on God. In fact, many people have a hard time really knowing how to talk to God. So, it is wise for us to learn from the manual where we find more prayers than anywhere else in the Bible: The book of Psalms. This will make us thirsty for God. It will teach us how to talk with Him in all kinds of situations. So, we will take little bite-sized pieces of the Psalms over the next several months.

The husband/father shares what he has learned from the introductory notes on the book of Psalms in his study Bible, then leads in prayer.

The next day, the husband/father shares that we live in a society where people are really disconnected from one another. Knowing how to relate to other people is a skill that has become increasingly rare. He says that, if we will learn how to relate to one another, as well as to God, we will greatly increase our chances of being successful in life. He then shares what he has learned from the introduction to the book of Proverbs in his study Bible and leads in prayer.

Follow Up

As he proceeds through these books, he comes across a couple of passages that are not explained to his satisfaction in his study Bible. So, he goes online and finds some free commentaries that give him the help he needs to understand those passages.

Bible Study Tools**Bible Websites**

Bible.com (Free entire Bible is available in several translations. Type in verse reference, key word, phrase.)

Crosswalk.com (Same as Bible.com, but parallel option also available. Other tools must be purchased.)

Biblegateway.com (Same as crosswalk, but has a topical Bible option, as well. Two free commentaries and several free audio Bibles.)

Free Bible Software

Crosswire.org (downloadable Bible study tools)

Esword.com

Freebiblesoftware.com (software is available for suggested donation)

Bible Software at a Price

PC Study Bible, found at biblesoft.com. Starts at \$50.00 for 14 translations, 20 commentaries, much more.

Logos, found at logos.com. Prices start at \$150.00 for 11 translations, 2 commentaries and much more.

Bibleworks More advanced. Very helpful for serious Greek and Hebrew study. Starts at @ \$400.00.

Good Study Bibles

Life Application Bible (Practical helps for everyday living.)

NASB Study Bible (Thorough, but understandable notes. Very helpful with hard-to-understand passages.)

NIV Study Bible (Same notes as NASB Study Bible. Translation is easier to understand for many.)

Children's Bibles

Hands On Bible (Especially good for ages 7 and up. Has a special family devotion section.)

New International Readers Version (good introductory study Bible for older children)

Online Helps

Heritagebuilders.com

New-life.net

Familymanweb.com

Shepherdserve.org/family_devotions.htm

Two Final Reminders

Use humor! Sometimes, the Bible is funny all by itself. (The book of Esther is full of humor, if you look for it.)

Be real! Talk about your own experiences with Bible truths that you have learned (and are learning!). It will help everyone know that you are walking along with them, not standing over them.