

5 Reasons We Fail at Family Devotions

I have written about family devotions a number of times (most recently in *How We Do Family Devotions*), and it always leads to a response. Whenever I write about the subject, I immediately receive emails and messages from people who have tried and failed, or who are still trying and are convinced they are failing.

I compiled some of that feedback and came up with a list of reasons we fail at family devotions.

1. We make it too hard. I think the main reason we fail is that we make it too hard. Family devotions are the simplest thing in the world. We just need to get the family together, and then read the Bible and pray. Anything beyond that is gravy. Sing a song if you like. Engage in discussion if you like. Memorize a catechism if you like. Don't feel like you need to begin with more than the basics. Don't feel like you have failed if you do not get beyond the very basics. Read a few verses and pray. Then, the next day, read and pray. And the day after that. And the one after that. Take Sunday off (Hey, you've been to church, right?) but then pick it right up again on Monday. And just keep going.

I am convinced a lot of people fail because we feel that Word and prayer are not enough. We read books and blogs by people who do so much more and feel that we do not measure up. We finish, see that only five minutes have elapsed, and feel like that can't possibly be enough. It is easier to not do devotions at all than to do them simply. Don't fall into that trap. Word and prayer are enough. Word and prayer are awesome. Make the fact that you do them more important than how you do them.

2. We measure too short. Another reason we fail at family devotions is that we give up too quickly. We measure short instead of long. We do it for a few weeks or a few months and don't see any significant results. Our kids still look bored. Our spouse still doesn't really buy into it. We ourselves find any excuse to take a day off. And we begin to wonder if this is really worth it, if this is really making a difference.

But we need to measure long, not short. We need to think more about 18 or 20 years of exposure to the Bible than 18 days or 18 weeks. We need to think about our own lives and how we need to hear things a hundred times, not one or two times, before we respond to that conviction. We need to remember and believe that God works through these simple means, but that he does so at his own pace. We need to believe that God honors the means he provides.

3. We do it out of guilt, not conviction. Here is a third reason we fail: We do family devotions out of guilt, not conviction. We hear a sermon illustration about family devotions or get challenged by a book we read. We decide that it is time to finally do this thing, to finally begin this habit. But we are doing so out of guilt rather than real conviction. Our motives are all wrong.

Guilt can motivate for a while, but not for long. When times get difficult or when the guilt begins to fade, it is only conviction that will keep us going. Make sure that you are doing family devotions out of true conviction. Know in your own mind that this is a valuable habit and that God calls you, as the parent, to lead your family in this way. Go to the Word of God and allow God to challenge you with the importance of reading his Word and praying to him.

4. Our spouse won't do it. This may be the most difficult scenario: We do not do family devotions because our spouse will not participate. Sometimes dad wants to do family devotions but mom will not agree. Far more commonly, though,

mom is desperate to see dad lead family devotions but he is just not interested. I can't even tell you all the times I have seen or heard of this very scenario.

Each one of these situations needs to be approached differently and carefully. Husband, speak to your wife and appeal to her to participate. If she will not, then consider going ahead and doing devotions with your children. Wife, appeal to your husband to take the lead in devotions and full-out support him, affirming his every move. If he will not take the lead, perhaps consider leading devotions on your own. In either case, remember that the local church is your ally here, both through other members who may be able to offer counsel and through pastors or elders.

5. We get proud. *Finally, we also fail because we get proud. Here's what I mean: We try family devotions. It goes well for a week. Then we forget all about it. A couple of months later we try again, feeling a little sheepish this time. We explain to the family, "It's my fault, but I really want us to commit to this and to make it work." This time we do it for a couple of weeks, but then stop again. The third time around we feel even more embarrassed about telling our family that yes, we are doing this again and that yes, it's dad's fault again. Pride rears its ugly head and it seems easier to just succumb to the failure than to rise to the challenge. We get proud and allow pride to withhold a blessing from our family.*

Look, family devotions are a sweet and simple habit, a sweet and simple discipline. They are called family devotions not only because they gather the family, but because they are meant to be by and for your family. Make sure you allow your family devotions to reflect the uniqueness of your family. Make them your own, and do them for the good of your family and the glory of God. Mostly, just do them.

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