

Families Called to Love -- Family Devotional Times

by Susan Hay and Mary Alice Gran

When planning family devotional times, consider:

- **What is the purpose?** Clarify this jointly with others in your family. Examples: "to relate to God as a family," "to practice faith habits as a family," "To share in forming family memories."
- **When is the appropriate time for our family?** Possibilities include at every meal or time our family is together; at a weekly set-aside time when all members of the family are generally present; at a special time once a month for an extended time. Additional special times might include school vacations, times of celebration, or times of distress.

Activity Possibilities

Make a Love Chain. Use strips of construction paper to make a chain of links. On each link write a short Bible verse about love, the name of a person you love and who loves you, or an action to do to share God's love. Decorate your table with the chain as a reminder of God's ongoing and everlasting love for each of us.

Memory Meal. Share special memories of times when you shared love with someone else. Tell stories about how you felt love as a child. Let each family member describe a memory.

Family Night. Set aside a regular time for sharing activities of family fun together. You could do the same activity each time (play board games, cook special treats, volunteer as a family in service to others, learn about people who lead different lives from yours). Or each Family Night could be planned by a different family member, with the activity based on agreed-upon criteria.

Hymn of the Month. Select a hymn to learn as a family. Sing it at each meal, before bed, while driving to school, or at other times. If there are children in the family, keep the youngest child in mind as you consider the hymn's content and length.

Prayer of the Month. Take time to think about and write down your thoughts for a prayer about love to be prayed at mealtime. Be sure to include people who are less fortunate, people you are thankful to know, ways to show love, and a reminder of how much God loves each one in your family. Family members could write the prayer together or take turns writing a "Family Prayer for this month."

Thanksgiving Prayer. Offer a thanksgiving prayer at mealtime in which you insert family members' names; for example, "Dear God, I thank you for my Grandmother, Rose."

Refrigerator Reminders. Post on the refrigerator a Scripture passage, line from a hymn, inspirational thought, or brief prayer. Change the passage each Saturday. Reserve this place on the refrigerator near the door handle (at eye level).

Scripture/Prayer/Thought for the Day Cards. Buy a spiral notebook of index cards; write a favorite Scripture verse, short prayer, or thought for the day on each card. Each day, turn over one of the cards to reveal a Scripture verse, short prayer, or thought for the day about love to read aloud. Illustrate each card.

Idea Starters for Conversations Around the Table or at Any Time:

- What did Jesus mean in saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself"?
- Name a kindness you would describe as an act of love. What other kindness could be described as an act of love?
- Talk about an experience when you realized that God loves you.
- Which "random act of kindness" expresses for you a good example of expressing God's love: Feeding a stray animal, sitting by someone you do not really like and having a conversation, taking out the trash when not asked to do it. Why is this a good example?
- Talk about a time when you did not feel loved.
- What is one of your first memories of being loved?
- What are some loving experiences you have had at church -- in Sunday school, worship, on retreat, during a special program, and so on?
- Complete one of these sentences (and create your own):
 - God is with me when . . .
 - A person I know who shares God's love is . . .
 - My favorite story about love in the Bible is . . .
 - I would like to tell stories about Jesus to . . .
 - A favorite memory about church is . . .
 - The best church retreat ever was when . . .
 - If I preached a sermon, it would be about . . .
 - I like to be with my family when we . . .
- Make up your own conversation starters.

Establish a **Family Covenant for Love**. This covenant can be renewed every three months; however, the basic elements of the covenant stay intact. The promise of love, forgiveness, acceptance, truthfulness, growth and witness is the basis of the covenant. This leads to peaceful living in the family.

Susan Hay is a director of youth ministries for the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) and Mary Alice Gran is a director of children's ministries for GBOD.

Families Called to Love -- Family Covenant for Love to be completed by all members of the family and reviewed at least every three months.

This covenant will be in effect from _____ (beginning date) to _____ (ending date).

In order that our family may be one that promotes love for one another, we promise one another to:

1. Seek God's presence through regular Bible study, reflection, and prayer together.
2. Love one another unconditionally -- loving each person, even while naming behaviors that might need to be changed.
3. Seek ways to praise and lift up actions of others in the family when they have shared God's love and shown love for others.
4. Learn about those places in our community that support families, such as: programs addressing abuse in the family; food pantries or home-building projects that show love to those who are without; hospitals and hospices that provide for families when loved ones are ill. As a family, we will decide on a way to offer service to one of these places.
5. Share at least one family meal per week. For those in our family who are not in the same location, we will decide on a common day for a meal each week and as we dine separately, pray for one another or call one another and pray together by phone.
6. Seek out stories of love at church, in the newspaper, on the internet, at school, at work, at home, and tell these stories to one another.

Signed by: _____
(All family members sign the covenant.)

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Many of you already have these in place but in case you are looking for something new or maybe a reminder here are some "beat the winter doldrums" ideas.

- play a board game with the family
- tell one another stories of ancestors
- have a star-gazing night
- pick a favorite Bible story and act it out.