

Using the Bible as a Family

The Bible is one of the best ways for us to know God and for us to teach our children about God. Some of us can get a bit intimidated by the Bible, perhaps because we were not taught much about it or how to use it. It's never too late to start! The Bible is the top-selling book of all time. Despite what some of us may have seen in our families growing up, the Bible is meant to be *used*, not just sit on a shelf and collect dust.

Goals

- ◁ Regularly read the Bible as a family and as individuals.
- ◁ For all members of the family to fall in love with the Bible, which is the inspired word of God.

Barriers

- ◁ Catholics do not commonly read the Bible: 57% of U.S. Catholics say their frequency of reading the Bible outside religious service is "seldom/never." Only 21% read the Bible at least weekly. (Pew Research, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*).
- ◁ Many Catholic parents are not well-educated about the Bible. They are sometimes also embarrassed about this and may not want to admit it. They may also feel inadequate if their children ask them questions they can't answer.
- ◁ The bible can be difficult to read.

Objectives

- ◁ Regular use of the Bible in the home.
- ◁ Find the right Bible.
 - Have two kinds of Bibles in your home: one full Bible (make sure it's a Catholic one so you have all the books) and one story Bible (in children's language).
- ◁ Learn Bible basics.
 - How to find a passage.
 - What languages the Bible was written in.
 - What a Gospel and Testament are.
 - Who wrote the Bible and when.
- ◁ Perhaps use Scripture for bedtime stories.
- ◁ Use Scripture for prayer.
 - Learn about and utilize Lectio Divina.
- ◁ Find Mass readings in the Bible and pre-read them before attending Mass.
- ◁ Participate in Bible studies.
 - Join an adult Bible study group at church or with friends.
 - Do a family Bible study at home.
- ◁ Try doing the Bible in a Year podcast by Ascension Presents (with Father Mike Schmitz).

Praying as a Family

It is important for every child to learn to pray. Even though you may not think you are qualified to be an authority, as parent or guardian, you are your child's primary teacher. Children mainly learn to pray by watching and copying their parents, siblings, relatives, others in church and elsewhere.

Goals

- ◁ Regularly pray together as a family.
- ◁ Cultivate self-motivation to pray.

Barriers

- ◁ Many families seldom pray together. 37% of U.S. Catholic families *never* pray together. (Pew Research, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*).
- ◁ Many parents seldom pray. 58% of Catholics in the U.S. pray daily. (Pew Research, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*).
- ◁ Many Catholics are intimidated by prayer. They may not remember the words to formal prayers. They may not know where to start in offering spontaneous prayer or making prayer important or engaging for their children.

Objectives

- ◁ Encourage regular prayer.
- ◁ Begin praying at mealtime and bedtime.
- ◁ Engage in seasonal prayer practices: Advent wreaths, Jesse Tree crafts, Lenten prayer books, etc.
- ◁ Make prayer a special activity. The child picks who/what they pray for and record it in their prayer journal.
- ◁ Pray for others. Make a list of those for whom you're prayer and place it on the refrigerator. An erasable white board style magnet works great when you need to add or remove prayer intentions.
- ◁ Pray at special occasions like the first day of school. Give your child a blessing every day they leave for school.
- ◁ Be a model for your child. Don't ask your child to do something which you aren't doing yourself. Telling your child about your own prayer will be a bigger encouragement to them than just telling them to pray.
- ◁ The Bible tells us to prayer without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17). Try praying before meals, in times of crisis, at bedtime, in the car, with the Bible or after a good thing happens. Let your children see that praying can be natural and informal – it doesn't have to be intimidating and they don't have to worry about doing it "the right way."
- ◁ There is no wrong way to pray. As Catholics we focus a lot of memorized or traditional prayers. The focus isn't so much "saying our prayers" as it is "talking with Jesus." So beyond memorizing prayers, let your child know that they can speak to Jesus as a friend. Let them know they can tell him anything: silly things that happened that day, things they are scared of, what they hope for, people they are worried about, etc.

Having Dinner as a Family

For many of us, having supper at home is a lost art. We sometimes have a hard time coming together as families or using mealtime as a way to connect with each other.

Goals

- ◁ Families sharing meals together.
- ◁ Families using their mealtimes to spend time together, work together and connect with each other.
- ◁ For families to have an ingrained experience of an intimate meal so they can relate to our Eucharistic meal-centered faith.

Barriers

- ◁ U.S. families are eating dinner together much less often. Only 51% of families eat dinner together daily. Many only do so a few times a week.
- ◁ U.S. families are having shorter and shorter mealtimes.
- ◁ Families are more and more distracted by televisions and always-on electronic devices.

Objectives

- ◁ Manage your time. Turn off your TV, phones and other electronic devices. Plan a time when everyone can be at the table at the same time. This might mean you say no to some things to make time for a family meal.
- ◁ Make mealtimes meaningful.
- ◁ Remove distractions (e.g., put all cell phones in a basket in another room).
- ◁ Make it a little special (with flowers or a candle), but keep it simple.
- ◁ Talk! Discuss the events of the day. What happened at school or at work? Everyone can share a “highlight” and “lowlight” of their day.
- ◁ Set up AND clean up together. Make this a household expectation. Give everyone a small job and do it at the same time. Someone sets the plates and napkins, someone else sets the glasses and silverware, etc.

Faith Sharing as a Family

Sharing faith within your household may be a foreign idea for many of us, but it is a really wonderful way to help those with whom you live - and yourself - grow in faith. The trick is to insert this into your "already scheduled" household life. Watch for opportunities to try the following ideas in your daily life.

Goals

- ◁ Families sharing caring, faith-based conversation.
- ◁ Families connecting their daily life experience with their faith and perhaps Sunday liturgy.

Barriers

- ◁ On average, a child spends three minutes per day in non-directive communication with his or her parents.
- ◁ Families are so distracted with activities that it's hard for them to be present to each other (or God).
- ◁ Families can be intimidated in having faith-based conversations.

Objectives

- ◁ Insert faith sharing into your "already scheduled" household life: dinner, after particular events, etc.
- ◁ Do "reflective talk" after an event such as sports practice or dance rehearsal. Simply ask questions of each other about the day and what's happening. This kind of daily talking IS faith sharing. It's an ancient practice and through it, believe it or not, the Holy Spirit touches you.
 - Children can be drawn into a discussion through this Examen. Ask questions such as: What memories do you have about this event? What really struck you in this? What did you learn from this?
 - At first such reflective may seem foreign to you and your children, but gradually everyone will become more conscious and aware – and what a great gift you're giving to your spouse and kids! They'll have this gift for the rest of their lives.
- ◁ Use a "Question of the Week" to reflect on as a family.
 - Draw from the Gospel for Sunday Mass as an option.
 - Post it on the fridge.
 - Bring it up at dinner.
- ◁ Reduce Screen Time – Reduce the overall amount of time spent using phones, tablets, computers and TVs. This goes for everyone: children AND parents.
 - You can't do this all at once (these can be actual addictions!), but over time, limit the use of outside media.
 - For example, begin by having the TV and phones off whenever you eat as a family.
 - Screen time is almost all "private time," but what makes a household click is having "shared time."