

101 FAMILY MEAL-TIME DEVOTIONS

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gotandem.

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* Devotions children read to parents

READ THIS FIRST

We all know that time is a nonrenewable resource. Once it's gone, we can't retrieve it. Though it may seem like time nearly stops with small children, it actually goes way too fast. Before you know it, they're teenagers, and soon. . .they're off to college.

What time gives your family is a series of "moments." Five minutes here, ten minutes there. Then when you're fortunate enough to get a day or week together, your family can really start to form a bond that will last a lifetime. Our enemy, of course, is the busy lifestyle we throw ourselves into. We plan things we think are good, but they don't really serve to teach needed lessons or form relational bonds; sometimes they actually end up separating us from each other.

Raising my boys, I was aware that time slipped away at a dizzying pace. I knew that before I blinked they'd be off living their own adventure called life.

And so it has come to be.

Amid our own busyness, I confess I wasn't very good at getting everyone together for family devotions. I tried to blame it on our hectic schedule and the fact that a family time around the Bible or even a brief discussion of Christian values was never modeled for me. But even with these built-in excuses, I still knew I should have been doing something.

For some reason, no family devotional books or Bibles ever caught my eye. *What I need*, I thought, *is something quick I can do during the dinner hour a few nights a week that will get us talking.* So I wrote these 101 "what if" situations.

Since I was usually the first to finish eating, I'd read a chapter while everyone else was taking their last bites. I sometimes even used these short readings in the morning before school or later in the evening around bedtime. We usually read about three or four a week.

What I wanted most was a way to redeem the time. I was always fairly good at spotting teachable moments, and during those all-important grade school years, I was a pretty consistent model. But doing something intentionally spiritual, especially while the boys were in grade school, was difficult. This book was a good tool. It allowed my children to use their imaginations. As you go through this book with your family, I think it will help your children use theirs as well.

This book will work best if you adjust the names and genders as you read. That way, you'll be able to personalize the devotionals for your family.

- Do you have all boys (like me)? Then alter the story while you read it so it fits them.
- Do you have all girls? Then do the same.
- Do you have one or more of each? Well, then you have your choice: target the situation to the child to whom it best applies, or add the necessary pronouns so you're reading for both boys and girls.
- Do you have older kids who will be at the table? Then include them when it's time to debrief the situation. Use their words and experience to help teach your grade-schooler.
- If you have younger children, allow the words spoken to soak into their young minds. After the lesson, let them ask questions if they still don't follow what's going on.

Your goal is to read each “what if” situation in such a way that grade-schoolers really believe it's about them. Honest responses are the key, so their answers should never be judged or criticized. Let the questions help them to think. . .and then let the scripture passages seal the point. Above all, avoid “preaching.” The grade school years are a good time to convince your children you can *listen to and accept* what they say. (This skill will *definitely* come in handy later on.)

About every fifth reading is “for the parent,” and it will be *your* turn to answer the “what if” situation. If one doesn't exactly apply, don't let that stop you from using *your* imagination. Oh yes, *let your grade-schoolers read the “what if” situation to you.* They'll have fun, it'll break up the routine, and it will give you a great chance to model honesty for them!

The Questions

I've tried to keep them simple, but each child is different. If your child can't clue in to the question, rephrase it or go on to the next. Remember, the goal isn't just to get the right answer; it's to get an *honest* answer.

The Bible Passages

As you'll notice, each lesson finishes with Bible verses that relate to the “what if” situation. I have deliberately left off any questions to add to the discussion. Does that mean you shouldn't ask any? No, not at all. If you have extra time and can ask questions about the verses that your children can answer, go ahead and dig a little deeper.

One last thing: find a bookmark to use so you don't lose your place. Have fun!

1. THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

WHAT IF. . .

Three doors down from our house a new family moves in. As they unload the big yellow moving truck, you see them haul a swing set into their backyard and a boy's bike into the garage. *What does that mean?*

That's right, they have a kid—probably one your age.

Though you already have neighborhood friends to play with—and it's not easy making friends with new people—you decide to give it a try. *How do you feel about doing that?*

On Saturday, you get up at your normal nine thirty, ask Dad if he'll make pancakes (with chocolate chips, of course), then walk down to the new house. *How are you feeling as you approach the door?*

You knock, and the new kid answers the door. After you introduce yourselves, he asks you to come in and see his video game library. As he walks down the hallway, you notice he limps. Plus, his left foot is a little curved in.

Though the kid seems normal in every other way, his walk obviously isn't.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

- What are you thinking?
- What are you going to tell your friends about him?
- Will you play with him at school?
- What would be the good parts or bad parts about being his friend?

WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY?

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

HEBREWS 13:2

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 PETER 4:9

2. BURIED TREASURE

WHAT IF . . .

Recess is your favorite time of day, and today you can't wait to get out and run around.

While playing on the big sawdust field, you spot something glistening in the sun. You walk over, look down, and what do you know, *it's* . . .

No, it's not a quarter—it's a fifty-cent piece! Wow, you don't see many of them these days. You're sure it must be part of some kid's lunch money.

Your friends gather around you, call you "lucky," and then go back to playing. No one mentions turning it in to the office. They all expect you to keep it.

You put it in your pocket, but while you're playing, several thoughts go through your head: *Is some kid going to have to skip lunch today? What if it was from a week ago? What would I want someone to do if it was my money?*

As recess ends and you head back inside, that fifty-cent piece feels pretty good in your pocket.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

- What's your first reaction about what you should do with the money?
- What would you want someone else to do if you were the one who lost the money?
- Is this a test or a gift? Did God give the money to you, or did He allow you to find it so you'd wonder what's right to do?
- What do you think the reward would be for turning it in? (*After your child says "money," say, "Besides money."*)

WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY?

"You shall not steal."

EXODUS 20:15

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer.

EPHESIANS 4:28

3. PHONE PHRUSTRATIONS

FOR THE PARENT. . .

WHAT IF. . .

You just walked in the door from work. You had a tough day, plus it took you almost an hour to get home because of an accident that clogged traffic. You're bushed. All you want to do is eat dinner and take it easy the rest of the night.

You change your clothes and sit down for dinner. During the prayer, the phone rings. You finish praying, then quickly get up to answer it.

It's a phone solicitor saying he's going to be in the neighborhood the next day and asking if you'd like a special deal on cleaning two rooms and a hallway—plus an estimate on the rest of the house. *What would you say?*

After getting off the phone, you go back to the table and start digging in. Two minutes later, the phone rings again. This time it's an insurance salesperson. She asks if you'd like a free comparison of her company's rates with your own. *Now what would you say?*

Back at the table, you continue to eat your slightly lukewarm meal. The phone rings. By now you've had it! You say, "Let it ring." After the twelfth ring, you get up and walk quickly to the noisy beast. "Hello!" you say.

This time it's a real estate salesperson asking if you're looking to sell your house. . .or know anyone who is. By this time you're really frustrated!

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

- What would you say?
- Would you be tempted to lie? (Be honest.)
- How well do you think you handle frustrating situations when you're tired?
- Is fatigue a good reason to quit acting like a Christian?

WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY?

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

GALATIANS 5:22–23

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

EPHESIANS 4:29