



# FAMILY NIGHT

A Home Resource for Families

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*Family Night* 2018  
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# INTRODUCTION

*The primary lesson for life must be implanted in the soul from the earliest age. The primary lesson for children is to know the eternal God, the One Who gives everlasting life.*

—St. Clement

*Something was wrong with the way I was measuring success. We had succeeded in leading her (a teenager named Jenny) to become a mature Christian teenager, but somehow we failed to place her on the track toward mature Christian adult-hood.*

Mark DeVries,  
*Family-Based Youth Ministry*<sup>1</sup>

For decades we, the parents, have been telling ourselves a lie. The lie is that the church is taking care of our children's spiritual education. While the church does play a vital role, it does not replace the parents' responsibility in the spiritual education of children, nor can it ever replace the amount of time available to us as parents. Kevin Huggins, author of *Parenting Adolescents*, says it this way.

*In the vast majority of cases parents remain the single most important influence in the development of an adolescent's personality.*<sup>2</sup>

What causes a child to become a mature adult Christian? Why do some leave the faith while others grow? More and more studies show that the amount of time a family spends together directly correlates to the child's faith.

Our goal, in this resource, is to help families have quality time together at least one night a week. Glenn and Nelsen have been telling us for decades that even 30 minutes a month together will make a difference with older children<sup>3</sup>. At the same time we realize that many parents, even the ones involved in the making of this resource, could use some outside guidance. That is why this resource has been created.

We have also found this to be a great resource for homeschooling families. While we encourage this activity to take place when everyone is home (which is rare during the day), you may find some valuable information in here to help with homeschooling.

This resource has been designed to help parents who want help. These guidelines are not required and can be modified or ignored as a parent so chooses. Here is an outline of what you can expect to find in this resource.

### **Part 1: FAMILY MEAL**

Some of us need some help getting back to basics. Here are tips for a family meal and how to make the chatter fun and engaging.

### **Part 2: DISCUSSION STARTER**

If you're going to talk, what will you talk about? Find suggestions here.

### **Part 3: FAMILY DISCUSSION**

Few of us are born discussion leaders. Check out these techniques to facilitate the family discussion.

### **Part 4: FAMILY PRAYER**

Prayer is always a key piece in family life. We have provided the prayer of St. Ephraim, a copy of evening prayers to help you get started, and some other helpful information.

### **Part 5: FUN TIME!**

Family night should finish with fun. What does fun look like in your family?

We recommend selecting one night, such as every Tuesday night, but it can be a different night every week if necessary. Also, try to select an evening that everyone will be home.

This resource was made to help you have positive family interaction, but don't hesitate to make some changes. After a while you may not even need this resource, or you might come up with a better idea on your own!

It is easy to think while reading through this resource, "This all looks great, but I don't have the time." What if we asked this instead, "Will I look back on this moment and regret not making time with my children?"

For a scriptural basis on the importance of Christian parenting, let us look to St. Paul's letter to Ephesus: "Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Now is the

time to implement this instruction from St. Paul. In this verse, God is speaking to the parents, not to the priest.

As parents, we might feel clunky and inexperienced in the beginning, but stay connected to why we are doing this. Our children will sense our desire to connect. It is easy for them to overlook mistakes when they know our good intentions. Move forward with good intentions.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this. We pray that this resource will be a blessing upon your family.

**Reflection Time:**

What do you anticipate being your biggest obstacle?

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Why are you implementing family night?

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# PART 1

## FAMILY MEAL

*“After eating they are to stand up with their wives  
and children and sing hymns together.  
The whole proceedings are to conclude with a prayer.”  
St. John Chrysostom on the Family Meal*

*“We need to reclaim the practice of celebrating the great festivals  
of the Church year in our home around the family table. This is  
how they become real and indelible to our children.”  
Fr. Anthony M. Coniaris  
Making God Real In The Orthodox Christian Home <sup>4</sup>*

The family meal is a critical piece of family night and cannot be avoided. On a related topic, what if we all set a goal of having five sit-down meals a week with our family? It may seem impossible, but how will we reach that goal if we do not set it? We will not reach the goal by accident.

Looking for ways to liven the mood during the meal? Here are some ideas for dinner conversation.

- Take turns sharing the worst and best part of the day. If your children struggle to find something, it is okay to help them out.
- Ask for failures! For one of our authors, failure means the family member tried something new. Encourage

the children to try something new and share the failure.

- Share a humbling moment when forgiveness or reconciliation was needed. Our children learn forgiveness, mercy, and compassion from us. Share a mistake you have made, or a false judgement, and how you have resolved it.
- Did something new happen to anybody?
- Did anyone make a new friend?
- Discuss an upcoming event, such as a band concert or field trip.
- Some parents enjoy discussing politics with their children while others avoid it at all cost. Talk with your spouse privately to make a unified decision and then explain how your family will handle politics. Not sure how to proceed? Maybe your priest can help you find a mature Christian approach?
- If you are looking for ways to encourage family discussion during the meal, try this website:  
<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org>

The goal of the family meal is time together as a family. Do not feel pressured to prepare an agenda of topics to discuss. During this time, you should focus on getting caught up with each other and finding out what is going on in everyone's life.



# PART 2

## DISCUSSION STARTER

*“Of all holy works,  
the education of children is the most holy.”  
St. Theophan the Recluse*

*“The generation that knows only itself is  
destined to remain adolescent forever.”  
Sign in The University of Colorado Library*

For some children this will be their favorite part of the evening. Maybe mom or dad will read from the Bible? Maybe you have a new movie to watch? No matter what, make sure you are selecting a discussion starter that is age appropriate (movie, article, Bible passage, lives of the Saints, etc.). Also, make sure you are selecting a discussion starter which can be used for spiritual education. For children 9 and up, we recommend starting with the first American Orthodox movie, *Becoming Truly Human*.

### **Discussion Starter Ideas**

*Becoming Truly Human* Movie: 9-11 year olds will need help with comprehension. 12 and older will need help applying what they are learning to themselves. Watch the movie in 10-15 minute segments, preferably 10 minutes. The film is 85 minutes, which means you have 8 weeks' worth of

material. The movie can be rented or purchased on iTunes, Amazon, and Google Play, or a physical DVD/Blu-Ray can be ordered from [www.ancientfaith.com](http://www.ancientfaith.com).

*Gospel/Epistle:* Most of us (including the adults) need some help understanding the Gospel and Epistle reading of each Sunday. We recommend presenting either the Gospel or Epistle. Also, choose a routine which discusses either the previous Sunday or the upcoming Sunday. Some will prefer to present the readings from the previous Sunday and integrate discussions about the homily. Others might prefer to discuss the readings from the upcoming Sunday and be better prepared to receive the words of the homilist.

*The Prologue from Ochrid:* For each day of the year there is a story of a saint, a hymn of praise, a short reflection/wisdom, and then a homily. It takes about 10-15 minutes to read through one day.

*Iconology:* Do a short teaching on an icon, by discussing the theology found within it. Maybe start with icons in your home, then move to each Saint of a family member, then the icon of your parish Saint, and so on. Here is a good website to help you read icons: <https://iconreader.wordpress.com/>

*Bible Stories:* There are several good children's Bibles on the market. Here is one we recommend which is available on Amazon: *The Children's Bible Hardcover* (Golden Press, 1972) by Samuel Terrien, and David H. Wice Joseph A. Grispino (Editor). It uses actual text from the Old Testament instead of watering down the stories and does so in a way that is palatable. It appears to be the most compatible with the Orthodox Study Bible.

*Frank Capra Movies:* Frank Capra was the director of *It's A Wonderful Life* and many other great films which can teach our youth some important life lessons.

*The Little Prince (2015 Film):* Based on the novella by the same name and pays homage to the original classic on “taming” and creating important relationships.

*To Kill A Mockingbird* (J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1960) by Harper Lee: Helpful to teach the problems of racism and bigotry, but also contains adult content on rape.

*12 Angry Men* (Penguin Classics, 2006) by Reginald Rose: Teaches the danger of assumptions and false judgments.

*The Trench Series:* Available on [ancientfaith.com](http://ancientfaith.com) for free.

*Be The Bee Series:* Available on [ancientfaith.com](http://ancientfaith.com) and YouTube.

*Lucia, Saint of Light Video:* A visual run through of the book with talented voice over. Available at <http://store.ancientfaith.com/lucia-saint-of-light-video/>

# PART 3

## FAMILY DISCUSSION

*“Greetings also to the church  
that meets in their house.”*

*St. Paul to the Romans 16:5*

*“Adolescence has become a waiting period of  
enforced leisure with few responsibilities and  
little or no meaningful contact with adults.”*

*Adolescent Rolelessness In Modern Society  
A REPORT OF THE CARNEGIE COUNCIL  
ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT*

We offer two discussion options: simple and complex.  
Choose the option which best fits you and your family.

With both options, make sure to have fun. There will be plenty of moments to engage in a serious discussion, so when the opportunity presents itself to have fun, take advantage of that opportunity. Laughter may be exactly what your family needs after a serious discussion. Our end goal is for all of us to be edified, even the parents.

The parents are the discussion leaders. Even if you have older children, such as 16 and 17, consider them as participants, not as leaders. Here are some tips for the family discussion before we move on to the discussion technique.

- Younger children will have a shorter attention span during the family discussion than older children. Be ready for attention span problems. It's okay to end the discussion early.
- Refrain from answering every question.
- Both parents are responsible for:
  - Encouraging children to speak.
  - Setting an example for listening.
  - Discouraging negativity such as criticizing, judging, or correcting.
  - Maintaining a safe and loving environment.
  - Transforming arguments back into discussion.
  - Growing. If you are not willing to change and grow as a person, how can you expect your children to grow? There is a good chance you will learn some beautiful life lessons from your children. Be prepared to be humble.
- If your children are having a hard time opening up, then consider using an ice breaker. The only rule for icebreakers is that no one must be forced to participate.

## **Simple Option**

Ask these questions as they apply:

- Who is the most important character (MIC) and why?
- Why did the MIC act/do/think/say what he/she did?
- Did the MIC do the right thing? Why or why not?
- What would you do differently?

## Complex Option

When your child asks a question or makes a statement which you believe deserves a response, ask at least five questions before answering the question. Our goal is to understand what the child is asking or saying before we respond. It is difficult to reach five questions, but it helps us understand what is truly being asked. As some would say, “drilling down helps us find the question behind the question or statement.”

For example, if a child says, “I hate God,” then it is important for us to find out why before we respond. Maybe a friend told a scary story about the friend’s understanding of God, and this has caused your child to “think” this way. Drilling down to find out why helps us have an appropriate response. Here are some possible questions.

- Why do you hate God?
- Who is God?
- How do your friends feel about God?
- What kind of a God would you love?
- How long have you hated God?

It is also helpful to answer questions with stories. Here are some story options:

- Parables
- Lives of the saints
- Bible stories
- Our own stories

# PART 4

## FAMILY PRAYERS

*"Who are the two or three gathered in the name of Christ in whose midst the Lord is (Matt. 18:20)? Does He not by the "three" mean husband, wife, and child?"*  
*St. Clement*

*All is summed up in the prayer which a young female human is said to have uttered recently: 'O god, make me a normal twentieth century girl!' Thanks to our labors, this will mean increasingly, Make me a minx, a moron, and a parasite.*  
*C.S. Lewis, Screwtape in *The Screwtape Letters* <sup>5</sup>*

We recommend trying to pray together at least five times per week. Create a space in the house for prayer, such as a prayer corner or icon wall. Singing is encouraged but not required. This can be a great time for children to learn how to sing on their own. Also, little children *love* prostrations, so we recommend saying the Prayer of St. Ephraim throughout the entire year. Don't worry about giggles from small children—these are natural expressions of their joyful prayer.

## **The 2 Minute Family Prayer Rule**

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Thee, our God, glory to Thee.

O Heavenly King, O Comforter, the Spirit of truth, Who art in all places and fillest all things; Treasury of good things and Giver of life: Come and dwell in us and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us.  
*(Thrice)*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our iniquities. Holy God, visit



and heal our infirmities for Thy Name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. (*Thrice*)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy  
kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in  
heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us  
our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against  
us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from  
evil. Amen.

O Lord, our God, in Thy goodness and love for men  
forgive me all the sins I have committed today in word,  
deed or thought. Grant me peaceful and undisturbed  
sleep. Send Thy Guardian Angel to guard and protect me  
from all evil. Raise me up again in proper time that I may  
glorify Thee; for Thou art blessed to the ages of ages.  
Amen.

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos. Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, for thou hast borne the Savior of our souls.

Most glorious ever-Virgin, Mother of Christ our God, bring our prayer to thy Son and our God, that He may for thy sake save our souls.

My hope is the Father; my refuge is the Son; my shelter is the Holy Spirit: O Holy Trinity, glory to Thee!

O Lord, our God, have mercy upon all our family and loved ones, especially (*here the members of the family are each named*). Guide and help us in all things. Grant us all health, peace, salvation, visitation, forgiveness, patience and wisdom; that we may love one another, forgive one another and those who have offended us, and do Thy will, and glorify Thy most honorable and majestic Name: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and

ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.

### **Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian** (optional, good for little kids)

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, meddling, lust of power and idle talk. (*prostration*)

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant. (*prostration*)

Yea O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen. (*prostration*)

*Here you may add private devotions and intercessions. For example, you could ask your children to pray for one person and be grateful for one thing (quietly in their head) and have them tell you when they are done. When you have finished, conclude with this prayer:*

Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy upon us and save us. Amen.

*As you lie down to sleep, say:*

Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my soul and my body.  
Do Thou Thyself bless me, have mercy upon me, and grant  
me life eternal. Amen.

# PART 5

## FUN TIME!

*“Give your children a solid spiritual foundation, and they will be content with whatever they have. Deprive them of a life in Christ, and they will be miserable even in the midst of great wealth.”*

*His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH*

*“Beloved Christians, you and your children shall appear at that Judgment of Christ, and you shall give account for them to the just Judge. He will not ask you whether you have taught your children the arts or whether you have taught them to speak French, or German, or Italian, but whether you have taught them to live as Christians.”*

*St. Tikhon of Zadonsk*

End the evening with a fun event, such as a board game, basketball, or sledding. Watching TV or a movie is discouraged for closure on FAMILY NIGHT as these activities are very passive and do not facilitate interaction or strong bonding between family members. The goal is for positive family interaction.

Here are some FUN TIME ideas.

- Sports: frisbee, playing catch, kickball, basketball, soccer, whiffle ball
- Nature walk
- Sledding
- Board games
- Card games
- Makeovers
- Improvisational games
- Art or craft activity
- Riddles
- Scavenger Hunt
- Collect fireflies/lightening bugs
- 3-legged race
- Stargazing
- Paper airplanes & flight test
- Talent show
- Learn a dance together
- Hopscotch
- Egg/water balloon toss
- Puppet shows
- Fly a kite
- Learn sign language
- Charades
- Blind taste test with food and drinks
- Make a time capsule

# FOR MORE INFORMATION

## **Version, Release**

Version 2.4, Release Date November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018

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# NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Devries, Mark, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVaristy Press, 2004), p. 24

<sup>2</sup>Kevin Huggins, *Parenting Adolescents* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989), p. 143

<sup>3</sup>H. Stephen Glenn and Jane Nelsen, *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World* (Roseville, Calif.: Prima, 1989), pp. 103-4.

<sup>4</sup>Coniaris, Anthony, *Making God Real In The Orthodox Christian Home* (Minneapolis, MN.: Light & Life Publishing, 1977), p. unknown

<sup>5</sup>Lewis, C.S., *The Screwtape Letters & Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (New York City, NY.: Scribner, 1996), p. 292