

THE



Volume 3

VERY BEST,



HANDS-ON,

KINDA DANGEROUS

FAMILY

52

ACTIVITIES YOUR
KIDS WILL NEVER
FORGET

DEVOTIONS



TIM SHOEMAKER

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Dedicated to my dad, Vaughn Richard Shoemaker.
The thing I remember most about family devotions was his dedication to keeping at it—even though he probably wasn't seeing results at the time. He had enough faith to know it was important . . . believing that somehow it would make a difference.

It did.

Dad demonstrated that a man who loves the Lord does many things for his family, and teaching his kids about God is one of them.
My dad massively influenced my life . . . and his legacy lives on.



**Call to me and I will answer you and tell you
great and unsearchable things you do not know.**

Jeremiah 33:3

**Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds;
tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them
on your foreheads. Teach them to your children,
talking about them when you sit at home and when
you walk along the road, when you lie down and
when you get up.**

Deuteronomy 11:18-19

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THEME: Being a good example to others, even when we don't think others are watching.

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THEME: Forgiving, especially those in our own family, instead of keeping a list of wrongs.

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THEME: Loving God and loving others are like two rails that help keep us on track in this Christian life.

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51. Boating or Floating 271

THEME: Compromising the values and principles God has given us will eventually sink us.

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52. Sooner or Later 276

THEME: Delayed gratification can bring big rewards.

Kids don't like to wait for anything, but here they'll learn that exercising patience can be worth the wait.

A Quick Key for Parents



Activities with this symbol are a little more on the dangerous side and will require some extra caution on your part. Additional safety tips and reminders are also included in these lessons.

THIS ISN'T AS HARD AS YOU THINK

I'm so happy you've picked up this book. Before we get started, here's four quick things that will make leading family devotions even easier.

1. **There is no particular order you need to stay in here.** Scan the table of contents. Find a devotional that looks like it will work for your family this week and go for it. Just jot the date in the margin so you'll know you've done it before. And make the first one you choose to do with your family short and fun.

2. **Keep the teaching time short.** Often five minutes is all you need after the activity or object lesson is done. If you don't abuse the time factor, the kids won't dread family devotions.

3. **Don't try to memorize the lesson for the week.** It will only frustrate you because it will be too hard to prepare for the lesson—and then you'll start skipping weeks. It's okay to have the book in front of you when you're teaching the lesson. I always have notes when I'm teaching kids. But my advice? Mark the pages up a bit. Highlight things you want to cover. Make a note in the margin here or there. Cross out things you don't think apply. The kids will see you took the time to study the lesson in advance, and that tells them you think it's really important.

4. Have fun with these. Sure, learning about God is serious business, but there's nothing wrong with the kids thinking that learning about God can be fun. If they are messing around, just roll with it. Relax. Enjoy the time. If you're having fun, the kids will find that family devotions are fun for them too. Keep this up, and you'll see how God uses his truth in your family in wonderful ways.

And for what it's worth? I'm proud of you. Keep going . . . and know that I'm cheering you on!

Tim

LEADING FAMILY DEVOTIONS WILL BE DIFFERENT THIS TIME

Our kids need spiritual training, reinforcement, and modeling at home, but sometimes dads struggle with that. Why? Often it boils down to one or more of a handful of reasons.

1. Men fear their kids won't really listen. Some guys have sat in too many boring devotionals themselves. They imagine the kids will be messing around or bored—and they'll have no way to maintain control. That's downright embarrassing to a man.

2. Men fear they're not qualified in some way. Some guys feel inadequate—like they should know the Bible better. What if they're asked a question they can't answer?

3. Men fear they've disqualified themselves somehow. Maybe the enemy reminds some guys of their sin and failures in the past. *Who am I to teach the kids?* they think. *I'd be a hypocrite. I know what I've done . . . or am still doing.*

4. Men fear they'll fail at having any kind of meaningful family devotions time with the kids. Some guys are sure the kids won't listen, and that this will end with a massive loss on the Dad scoreboard. They may figure that they can't lose if they don't play.

Men often feel like responsibility for family devotions is being dumped on them. Consequently, they feel it's easier not to start than to begin and fail—which is exactly what they believe will happen. This is why pushing and prodding men rarely works. Not for long, anyway.

Let me give you three reasons to be encouraged that *this* time it will be different.

1. Men are wired to protect their kids. Once we realize family devotions are all about protecting our kids from the enemy of our souls, we're more open to the idea of family devotions. Sure, the enemy may tell a dad he's disqualified himself, but that's pretty much trash talk designed to keep a dad from protecting his kids. Once a man gets that, it will be easier for him to get in the ring and fight . . . and to keep going.

2. These devotions will work. They're not Bible studies. Our goal is to simply get one nugget of truth to the kids per lesson. And with active, object lesson openers to each devotional, the kids will stay engaged, not get bored. Every time we'll have an activity right up front, followed by a short nugget of truth. The activity—along with the biblical truth behind it—becomes etched in the minds of our kids.

3. Dad doesn't have to do this alone. Sometimes the best way to do family devotions is for both parents to be involved. Perhaps Dad runs the activity, and then Mom ties in the nugget of truth—or vice versa. This way each parent can work well within their comfort zone. And what do the kids see? Dad and Mom working together to teach spiritual truth. There's nothing wrong with that. The whole responsibility doesn't rest on Dad's shoulders alone.

So, give this a shot. This time it will work—and it will keep working. And let me say something really, really important: have fun with this! Loosen up. Lighten up. Your objective is to have a good time

with the activity and tie a simple nugget of truth in at the end. Do this and you'll enjoy the devotionals, and the kids will too. And most importantly, they'll remember the nuggets of truth too, which are all about helping and protecting them spiritually.

You can do this!



Smashed Tomatoes

THEME: Low self-esteem / anxiety / hopelessness / realizing God can make much good come from messed-up lives.

THINGS YOU'LL NEED

- Tomatoes . . . nice big ripe ones, one for each member of the family
- Resealable plastic bags, gallon size, one or two bags per member of the family
- Rubber mallet (optional)

Advance Prep

There's no real prep needed, other than to pick up the supplies and decide if you're going to do this indoors or outdoors. Also, this lesson can be even more effective if you choose a meal for the family

today that contains smashed tomatoes in the ingredients. Spaghetti. Lasagna. Chili. Pizza. Or any food your kids might like where they'd add ketchup or salsa. Adding the meal is optional, but it may help reinforce the truth of this lesson.

And let me say one more thing: you've picked a great devotional here. The nugget of truth your kids will get? Absolutely essential. Google "teenage girls and suicide." It will break your heart. But you'll also see why this lesson is so important. Sometimes kids do desperate things when they feel like junk. They become anxious. Fearful. Hopeless. That is where you can help them tremendously by sharing the truth of this lesson. When our sons or daughters feel like junk, they need to remember how God makes great things out of messed-up lives. And you're going to help them remember that truth—by smashing tomatoes.

Running the Activity

Give each of the kids a big, juicy tomato, and tell them you'd like them to smash it. You may want them to throw the tomatoes in the air so that they splat on the driveway. Or you may want to put each tomato in a resealable plastic bag. With this method, the kids can use a rubber mallet to pummel that tomato or use their fists to give it a good pounding.

When the tomato is nicely smashed, you're ready to move on. If you smashed the tomatoes on the driveway, pick up the biggest chunks and drop them in a clear plastic bag so you can hold it up easily. If you smashed the tomatoes inside plastic bags to begin with, you're all set.

Teaching the Lesson

Hold up a plastic bag filled with smashed tomatoes and ask these questions:

What do we do with smashed tomatoes?
Do we throw them out?
Are they junk?

Some kids may think the tomatoes are junk, others may realize they're not. Either answer works; just move on.

These smashed tomatoes may *look* like junk, but in the hands of a chef or cook, they're just the beginning of many things you really like. Can anybody name some? (For example: pizza, spaghetti, lasagna, salsa, chili, ketchup.)

There are times in life when we will feel like junk. Maybe we feel we're not the prettiest or most handsome or we're not exactly popular, talented, athletic, smart, or whatever. And sometimes we can feel like junk when we really mess up in some way.

Do you know what I want you to remember when you feel like junk? God is like a heavenly chef who makes great things from messed-up lives.

Remember the story of Moses? *If your kids know it, just hit the main points of the account starting in Exodus 2.*

- Moses was in a position to help his people, but he messed up and killed an Egyptian.
- What do you think Moses felt like when he was on the run in the desert? I'd guess he felt like junk. Like a smashed tomato. He probably thought he'd never get another chance to help his people.
- But God didn't want Moses to use his position simply to help his people. God had a much bigger plan. He wanted Moses to set his people free.
- God turned that smashed tomato of a man into one of the greatest leaders of all time.

Summing It Up

Just like we need to smash tomatoes to make some of our favorite meals, sometimes we need to go through hard things so that we learn to trust God . . . so that we become the person he wants us to be.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10)

God has a plan for us, and he's there to help us get there.

Remember, there will be many, many times you'll feel like junk. That is part of life. When that happens, it may feel like your world has ended. But I want you to remember the point of this smashed tomato lesson: God is like a heavenly chef. He makes great things out of messed-up lives. Bring your mess or your concern to him and ask him to make something of it. Ask him to make you into the person he desires, so that you can do the things he's prepared for you to do. God loves prayers like that. When you feel like junk, give it to God and trust him to work things out in great ways!

If you plan to have pizza, spaghetti, lasagna, or another tomato-based meal with the kids, this would be a great time to tie that in too.

2

Target Practice

THEME: Becoming the kind of person God wants us to be requires aiming on our part.



THINGS YOU'LL NEED

- Any type of toy gun for shooting: squirt gun, Nerf gun, Airsoft gun, BB gun. *Note: If using any form of toy gun is out of your comfort zone, you can do this activity with a bucket and a couple of bean bags to toss into it.*
- Target—it could be an actual printed target you tape up, like the type you get at a sporting goods store, or it could just be a bull's-eye you draw on a piece of paper. *Note: If you choose a squirt gun, it may be more fun to use a lit candle for the target. If you choose a BB gun, you may want to choose a plastic milk carton filled with water for the target. The BB will cause it to spring a leak, which just makes it that much more fun to hit.*
- Safety glasses for each of the kids—and for every adult present. These are essential if you are shooting any type of gun.
- Blindfold—a scarf works fine for this.

Advance Prep

Picking up the toy gun is the big task for prep. If you're using some form of Airsoft or BB gun, I'm assuming you'll find a safe place to do this outside. I hope I don't need to say this, but be sure to place the target where there's no risk of a stray shot hurting property or people, okay?

If you're using the bean bag and bucket method, this activity can easily be done indoors.

Running the Activity

Have each of the kids take a turn hitting the target. Either they're shooting at the target or they're tossing the bean bags into the bucket if you preferred to keep toy guns out of this. To keep things simpler, from this point on, I'm going to assume you've chosen to have the kids shoot some form of toy gun.

After each has had their turn, you're going to go through the lineup again. But this time, you'll put a blindfold on your shooter. Make sure they can't see—not even a little bit. Now, you're not actually going to let them shoot while they're blindfolded. All they'll do is point the gun where they think the target is. They'll hold the unloaded gun—but keep the safety on. We also don't want the gun cocked or their finger on the trigger, just to be safe.

Turn them several times to disorient them a bit. And here's a sneaky tip: you'll want to move slightly yourself, at a slower speed, so that when you stop turning them you're in a different spot as well. If they orient their aim based on the location of your voice and don't realize you were moving as well, their aim will definitely be off, which is what you want.

Once you stop spinning them, ask them to keep their finger off the trigger and point the gun where they think the target is. (In the case

of the bucket and beanbag method, you can go ahead and let them toss the bean bag). Unless they're peeking somehow, their aim will almost certainly be off—which is exactly what you want.

Now, tell them to freeze in that position, and remove their blindfold so they can see how they did. Likely they aren't nearly as close to the target as they were the first time when they weren't wearing the blindfold. Perfect! You're ready to transition to a spiritual truth.

Teaching the Lesson

The key to hitting a target is what?

- Aiming. Keeping the target in our sights.
- Unless we keep our eyes on the target, we likely won't hit it.

The same principle applies to life. There are some “targets” God would like us to hit. Hitting those targets will take some careful aiming—just like hitting a paper target with the toy gun.

What types of targets does God want us to hit?

Doesn't he want us to aim to be more like Jesus? What might that look like?

- Loving others and caring for them like Jesus does.
- Forgiving others like Jesus does.
- Helping others like Jesus does.
- Being honest, dependable, and trustworthy like Jesus is.
- Being humble like Jesus is.

We could add plenty to that list. But if we don't aim—if we don't keep our eyes on Jesus—we won't hit the target. Our aim will be off. We won't become the person God desires us to be.

Summing It Up

Here's some Bible verses to consider.

How can a young person stay on the path of purity?
By living according to your word.
I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands. (Ps. 119:9–10)

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. (Heb. 3:1)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (12:1–3)

The key isn't simply reading the verses. We need to put them into practice. If we want to hit a target, we actually need to pull the trigger and do what God's Word tells us to do. That is the whole point of what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7:24–27:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

One last thought. We all want to become the person God desires us to be—with his help—don't we? There's a story in 2 Chronicles that tells about King Rehoboam (Ray-ha-BOW-um), who was King Solomon's son. Check out this verse:

He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the LORD.
(2 Chron. 12:14)

King Rehoboam didn't set his aim, didn't direct his heart to seek the Lord. And because he didn't, he messed up. Keeping our eyes on Jesus isn't just about physically aiming, right? It's about setting our hearts in the right direction. Having a heart—a desire—to become the person God intends each of us to be. Unless we take aim at that, we'll miss the mark. And even more tragic? We'll likely do bad things—evil things—if we aren't careful to aim at being the person God wants us to be. King Rehoboam learned that the hard way.

Thankfully, God included Rehoboam's story in the Bible. We can learn from that king's mistake . . . so we never have to make the same one ourselves!