

Intro

As parents, our deepest desire is to see our children believe in Christ. As a church, we are right there with you! Mariners Kids ministry exists to inspire kids to follow Jesus, and we believe the primary way children come to faith is through the spiritual influence of a parent or guardian.

This guide is a resource meant to empower you as a parent, as you spiritually lead your child. As you shape your child's faith, we hope these ideas equip, excite, and embolden you in this monumental task.

Life is busy. Many of us grew up lacking solid spiritual mentors. Maybe you grew up in an unbelieving family, so you have no blueprint for what spiritual leadership in the home looks like. Maybe you've tried replicating spiritual habits or family devotions you grew up with, but they feel fruitless and discouraging with your own children.

No matter where you're coming from, we pray there's at least one practical tool you can implement from this introductory guide. Here are some of key topics we'll discuss:

- The importance of your own spiritual health as a parent
- How to develop regular spiritual rhythms in your home
- Strategies to help kids connect with God

Parents, Spiritual Health Starts With You

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We know this, but how often do we apply this knowledge to spiritual habits? Do your kids see you reading your Bible? Do they have a front row seat to your devotional life? Do they overhear you talking with a spouse, friends, or neighbors about your faith in Christ? If these things are peripheral in your own life, they will be in your child's life also.

Take inventory of your personal habits, often called spiritual disciplines (prayer, reading or memorizing scripture, fasting, worshipful singing). Without these regular rhythms of abiding and connecting with God, spiritually leading our kids will be ineffective. We can't give to our children what we aren't cultivating first in our own lives.

If you need support, encouragement, resources, or accountability in your own spiritual growth, reach out to a Mariners Kids staff member. We have plenty of resources and are here to help you grow!

How To Develop Spiritual Rhythms In **Your Home**

When it comes to having regular family devotions, there are a lot of challenges. Let's name some of them:

- Packed family schedule
- Fluctuating schedules make regular devotion times difficult
- Kids don't seem interested
- Not sure how to explain Christianity or the Bible
- So many resources that you feel overwhelmed
- Sickness and homework consume extra time
- The church does a good enough job spiritually teaching your kids

Which challenge do you relate to the most? What would you add to this list?



There will always be obstacles and distractions when it comes to leading children spiritually, but it's a task worth our best efforts. Children are in their most formative stage of life - what they learn (or don't learn) now will likely impact their future significantly.



If you've considered implementing family devotions, or 1-on-1 devotions with your child, the time to start is now! Maybe you've already implemented some spiritual rhythms with your child, but things feel stagnant or ineffective. No matter where you're coming from, here's a few ideas for how to develop spiritual rhythms in your home:



Start somewhere! If you're a perfectionist, it's easy to criticize your own spiritual leadership. Sometimes family devotions look more like controlled chaos than a well-crafted church service, and that's ok! Children absorb far more than they're able to articulate, so keep at it and trust God to produce the fruit in them over time.



Set realistic expectations. Every January, droves of people buy gym memberships, only to stop going a few weeks in. Likewise, it's easy to get excited about family devotions, ramp things up, and burn everyone out. If this happens, it's ok! Regroup, then set goals for your family devotions that are manageable (and enjoyable) for everyone.



Examples:

- **Weekdays.** If you read a Bible story every night before bed to your child, maybe take the weekends off. Weekends tend to be busier and harder to predict. And with church on Saturday or Sunday, your child will benefit from Sunday school, which you can discuss after.
 - **Weekends.** Alternatively, maybe weekends are a great time to do devotions for your family! Crave out time to make breakfast together, build a fort with blankets and pillows, camp out in the backyard, picnic in the park, or eat at a favorite restaurant. Having spiritual conversations in a fun place is a meaningful way to instill in children the joy of God's Word.
 - **Steward your daily margins.** There is no substitute for planned, intentional sit-down devotions with your child. However, it's also helpful to use the in-between moments of the day to have spiritual conversations. You might memorize or sing a Bible verse together in the car, at a meal, walking the dog, waiting for a sports practice, etc.
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Seek support. As a parent, do you have a friend or family member who regularly supports your efforts to spiritually raise your child? You can't do it alone, and if you feel alone, our church is here to support you. Find a person to check in with monthly, who will help hold you accountable. Tell them your goals: "I plan to read a Bible story to my kid 3 weekdays, and do a special devotion the third Saturday a month." Together, brainstorm how you can creatively engage your child with Scripture. Be adaptable, always open to new ideas that will keep things interesting. Ask this person to pray over you - that you will speak God's word clearly and that your child's heart will receive it.

Be consistent. When it comes to leading your child spiritually, the key is perseverance. Just keep at it! Sometimes family devotions derail, sickness intervenes, or an idea flops. Remember that God is glorified through your efforts, and your child is absorbing more than you know!

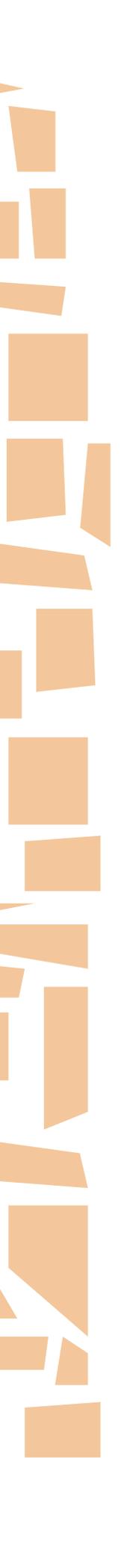


Strategies to Help Kids Connect With God

Every child learns differently. If you have multiple kids, you know how true this is! Knowing how your child is wired is important as you plan spiritual activities and devotions.

An excellent article by Focus On the Family outlines 7 ways kids can connect with God. These seven strategies will help you lead your child in a way that makes sense to their head, and also engages their heart. Here's a summary:

- **The Traditionalist:** Traditionalists rely a lot on routine and predictability makes them feel safe. If your child is a traditionalist (most are especially at younger ages), schedule prayer and Bible stories at the same time each day. Give them a heads up about when, where, and how these devotion times will happen.

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- **The Naturalist:** Naturalists connect to God through nature, so it's helpful to have spiritual conversations during a walk, hike, or trip to the park. Jesus himself taught using agricultural and outdoor imagery - weeds, soil, roots, trees, birds, etc. If your child is a naturalist, remind them that God is Creator and the whole world exists to glorify him.
 - **The Sensate:** Sensates connect to God through their senses. They love to touch new textures, smell and taste food, dance, and examine things firsthand. If your child is a sensate, consider using props as you teach them the Bible. For example, you could blindfold them when teaching about Jesus healing the man born blind in John 9, then remove the blindfold when the man in the story is given sight! Get creative, find ways to engage all your child's senses as they learn about God.
 - **The Caregiver:** Caregivers connect to God through doing. If your child is a caregiver, they want to help out with everything imaginable - carrying groceries, mowing the lawn, cooking, etc. Creating opportunities for your child to serve others (like helping a neighbor rake leaves or serving food at a homeless shelter) will be highly impactful.
 - **The Activist:** Activists connect to God through defending and helping those in need. While related to the caregiver, the activist temperament focuses more on injustice and wanting to make things right. If your child is an activist, empower them to help those in need through raising money or awareness (have them brainstorm fundraising ideas like baking cookies to sell, or a lemonade stand).
 - **The Intellectual:** Intellectuals connect to God through learning. Children often display this temperament by obsessing over a specific topic like cats or dinosaurs. If your child is an intellectual, challenge them with new books or activities that will draw them deeper into God's Word. Ask them questions that make them think deeply.
 - **The Enthusiast:** Enthusiasts are feelers. They are driven by emotion, and will long to encounter God experientially. If your child is an enthusiast, find ways to anchor them in the truth of God's Word, in ways that engage their emotions. You might ask them how a particular Bible character might have felt in the story, or help them pray their feelings out loud to God.