



FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

Family Devotional

**FOR FAMILIES WITH BABIES
AND TODDLERS AGES 0-2**

**MATT AND NOEL
GUEVARA**





To

From

Date





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ROSE **KIDZ**[®]

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**ON THE GO: FAMILY DEVOTION
FIRST STEPS TOGETHER – FAMILY DEVOTIONAL**

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to our parents:
Bob and Cindy Denen
Michael and Susan Guevara

We are filled with gratitude for your incredible wisdom, patience, persistence, and love. But your greatest gifts have been to talk to us about Jesus every day and to follow God in front of us for a lifetime.

NICE WORDS ABOUT FIRST STEPS

"It seems like in life we get the least training for our most important missions in life. If you have ever felt overwhelmed when it comes to bringing Christ into the everyday life of your family, then this incredible book by Noel and Matt is your lifeline. You don't need to know it all at once, just use these devotionals one week at a time! You and your kids will be blessed."

- David Wakerley, *Hillsong Kids* Pastor
and Creative Director

"There are so many resources for parents of infants and toddlers ... but finally we have a resource that helps parents spiritually through this crucial stage. I can't think of anyone better than Matt and Noel to lead parents on that journey..." - Jeremy Lee, Founder, *ParentMinistry*

"Like tons of parents, I didn't start getting serious about my faith until I had kids. And it took a while. But if I had this wonderfully do-able devotional by Matt and Noel Guevara, I would have plugged into the power of God and His Word much sooner. Plus, it has parenting tips. Plus, ways to engage your children's faith. Plus, it's really funny!"

- Jay Payleitner, speaker and best selling author
of *52 Things Kids Need from a Dad*





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Introduction

The greatest journeys make for the greatest stories. Think of the classic childhood stories you enjoyed in your younger years. Goldilocks, on a personal journey, finds the home of the Three Bears in the trees. Peter Pan whisks Wendy, John, and Michael away to Neverland to battle Captain Hook. Max travels “in and out of weeks and through a year” to *Where the Wild Things Are*. In *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, four siblings named Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie are evacuated from London during World War II. A game of hide-and-seek leads Lucy through the wardrobe into the land of Narnia. We bought the complete *Chronicles of Narnia* as a gift before our first child was born. Over the years, we have read these journeys out loud to our four children and other children we have welcomed into our home.

While some journeys connect us to places, other journeys connect us to people – some who join us on our journey for a season, and some who come alongside as we embark on the journey of a lifetime. Our (Matt and Noel’s) paths first crossed in elementary school, and by middle school we had already decided that we were meant to walk hand in hand – literally and figuratively – for the rest of our lives. We navigated adolescence together and entered adulthood eager to start a family of our own. While our journey has had its ups and downs, moments of celebration and seasons of heartbreak, we have been intentional in partnering with each other as we follow Christ. That partnership is most evident as we parent our four children.

For better or worse, we hit the road each day, with varying degrees of success and failure. Good days go something like this: our daughters' small group leader at church pulls us aside to let us know that during worship, our girls (both tweens) often hold hands and raise their free hands to praise their heavenly Father. Bad days go something like this: we distribute Chinese take out and our son Zion, who is three years old, looks at us both and states, "I want a new mom and dad." So we send him to his room and ration his Orange Chicken. We are blessed to be on this journey together, and while we don't always agree on everything, we are intentional about sharing God's Story with our children. We create space to pass on our faith, because someday we pray that they will continue their spiritual journey, prepared to pass their faith on to the next generation.

Through the pages of this book, instead of walking through the wardrobe into the world of Narnia, we will walk into the story of Scripture by examining 52 different passages gathered around four themes. Over the next 52 weeks, we invite you to join us on the journey. We'll be transparent about our weaknesses, in hopes that you can relate to the struggles we all face as parents. We'll turn to God's Word, knowing that his strength is made perfect in our weakness. And we'll prompt you to share your faith with your child, believing that now is the best time to prepare them for the spiritual journey ahead. Here's what the journey ahead will entail...



SECTION ONE

TRAIL MAP:

Knowing God



We begin the journey by studying some of God's key attributes. Getting to know God's character is a lifelong journey, and it plots the course for our spiritual growth. As you learn more about who God is, you will grow in your own faith, and will construct a framework for spiritually parenting your children. The attributes we chose to write about are not all inclusive, or ranked in order of importance. We encourage you to continue your journey to know God, reading his Word each day with a heart eager to learn how he reveals himself throughout Scripture. Our God wants to be known by you, and as you seek to know him he will reveal himself to you through his Word and throughout his Story.

SECTION TWO

COMPASS:

Navigating God's Story



We continue the journey by investigating what God has done through the unified story in his Word. The Bible is not a collection of stories about people. It is one story about God, a complete narrative that includes people and places and things that help us understand who God is and what he has done. As you understand God and his unfolding plan, you can orient yourself to your place in his greater Story. This Story is meant to help you navigate your own child's story and faith development.



SECTION THREE



ASCENT:

Responding to the Holy Spirit

We continue moving along the journey by focusing on the work of the Holy Spirit, and our practical response. This part of the journey offers unique challenges, as it requires us to take careful and deliberate steps to listen to the Spirit's direction and respond. When we as parents learn to respond to the Holy Spirit, we are better able to partner with him in raising our children, coming alongside of the work he is doing in their hearts. By depending on the Holy Spirit throughout our parenting journey, we join with God in the hard work of parenting and growth.



SECTION FOUR



BREAK TRAIL:

Charting Spiritual Disciplines

We end this part of the journey by outlining key spiritual disciplines that we as parents must model for our children. Our children will respond naturally to God, but as beginners on their spiritual journey, we make the uncharted path easier to travel by going ahead, leaving footsteps for them to walk in. As we create these rhythms, they will establish foundations for a lifetime.



Throughout each devotional you will develop a rhythm for growing in your own faith and then passing on your faith to your child. Each of the 52 devotionals, intended to be completed one week at a time over the course of a year, will provide an opportunity for you to spiritually parent your child in a simple but meaningful way. There are four elements to each weekly devotional:



MEDITATE

Passage of Scripture to read and respond to. This will include a key passage of one or two verses, as well as a suggested extended passage for further study. Take time to not only read this passage each week, but also meditate on it, so its words will take root in your heart.



ANTICIPATE

Reflection questions to help set the tone for the journey. These simple questions will prepare your heart and focus your thoughts so can prepare to fully engage with God and your child. Take a few moments to reflect on these questions, examining your heart and answering transparently.



RELATE

Honest stories from our parenting experiences, good and bad. These stories will remind you that we are all on this journey together. Oftentimes we compare ourselves with other parents at their best moment and feel ill equipped for the journey ahead. Other times we witness setbacks and families who have lost their way and we worry that we don't stand a chance on such a narrow road. By sharing each other's stories and viewing them in the light of God's Word, we can find encouragement that we are not alone on the journey, and that together we can spur each other along the way.



TOUCH POINT ACTIVITY

An engaging application of the week's study for you to do with your child. There are twelve unique types of activities, designed to engage a variety of learning styles and interests. These activities are integrated throughout the year and provide an opportunity for you to bond with your child as you introduce them to faith.

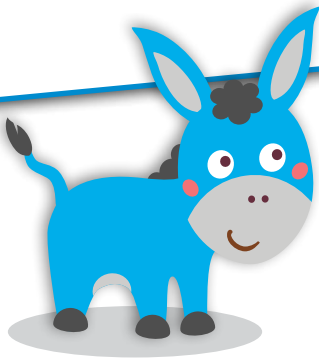
They offer a simple but tangible way for you to bring your child along with you on your spiritual journey.



BABY *Steps* and TODDLER *Steps*

These unique touch point activities called Baby Steps and Toddler Steps offer a unique response to each passage designed just for their developmental level. You will grow to find that passing on your faith can and should be seamlessly woven into your daily rhythms and routines.

The greatest journeys make for the greatest stories. We invite you now to begin moving toward knowing God deeply, responding to his Spirit intimately, and leading your children confidently. What might God accomplish in your life over the next 52 weeks?





God is Present



MEDITATE

"LORD, even before I speak a word, you know all about it. You are all around me, behind me and in front of me. You hold me, in your safe hand." - Psalm 139:4-5

Extended passage: Psalms 139



ANTICIPATE

- How does your child request (or demand!) your presence?

- When or where have you needed God's presence this week?



RELATE



My firstborn had the hardest time transitioning from womb to world. I spent hours rocking and holding Isabel, afraid to move as she dozed off with her head resting on my shoulder. As she grew, those hours were spent sitting next to her crib, because she would only fall asleep if she knew I was there. She loved to hold onto my finger, so I spent hours contorted in the car or walking next to her in the stroller with my arm awkwardly stretched out to reach her chubby toddler hands. I wanted Isabel to know I was with her. Only sometimes I couldn't be, and those times were hard on my brand new mama heart. Eventually I had to let her sleep in her room alone, leave her in the church nursery, drop her off with a babysitter while I went to work.

LETTING GO

Our babies spend nine months with their mothers all around them. And then from the moment they enter the world, we begin readying them to head out on their own without us. It's a huge undertaking, preparing these sweet little ones to become everything God created them to be. And oftentimes this responsibility is overwhelming. But we can take comfort in knowing that at all times and in all things, God is all around us. He is behind us, in the preparing us for this moment. He is in front of us, in the working of all things for our good (and maybe even smoothing out our mistakes). And he holds us in his power, with even greater care and comfort than we hold our own little ones.

NEVER ALONE

The even better news is that we can root our children in this reality. Even when we cannot be with them, our children are never alone. Before they ever speak a word, God knows all about it. God is all around them - behind and in front of them - holding them close so they are always in his presence. Take comfort in God's presence today, and begin teaching your little one to do the same.





CULTIVATE

BABY *Steps*

Babies love to listen to their parents' voices, picking up on inflections and eventually simple words and phrases; they are able to comprehend much more than they can speak. Take time this week to give your child the gift of your presence. Put away your phone and other distractions. Sit with your little one in a peaceful place and let them know with words and actions that you enjoy being with them. As you impress on their hearts that you enjoy being present with them, you are tilling the soil to grow the truth that God loves to be present with them always. Read Psalm 139:4-5 aloud. Ask: who is always with you? And answer: God is always with you! Repeat this question and answer throughout the week whenever you have to leave your child - at bedtime, when you drop them off at a sitters, or when you head out to run errands. Pray that they will find peace and comfort in God's loving presence.

BABY *Bite*

We can take comfort in knowing that at all times and in all things, God is all around us.





TODDLER *Tips*

Take comfort in God's presence today, and begin teaching your little one to do the same.

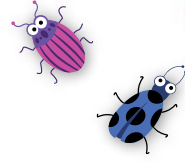
TODDLER *Steps*

Toddlers learn new words and phrases by repeating what they've heard, and they love spending time with their parents. Take time this week to give your child the gift of your presence, free from all distractions. Sit with your little toddler in a peaceful place and spend time doing something he or she enjoys - rock them a little longer, tell them one more story, or sing an extra lullaby. As you impress on their hearts that you enjoy being present with them, you are tilling the soil to grow the truth that God loves to be present with them always.

Read Psalm 139:4-5 aloud. Ask: who is always with you? And have your toddler repeat after you: God! Repeat the question and answer a few times until your toddler catches on. Continue asking this question throughout the week, and soon they'll be able to answer on their own.



God is Love



MEDITATE

"Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Anyone who loves has become a child of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."

- 1 John 4:7-8

Extended passage: 1 John 4:7-12



ANTICIPATE

● How would you describe the love your dad had for you as a child?

● How would you describe God's love for you?



RELATE

Ask most dads - we all remember the first time we laid eyes on our newborn child. I will never forget the moment when our firstborn Isabel was placed in my arms. A tumultuous twenty-hour delivery ended in my wife being taken for emergency surgery. Doctors and nurses filled the delivery room while I nervously pulled scrubs over my clothes. In the operating room, I had no idea what to expect as I gripped my wife's hand. Moments later, I was handed a tiny person wrapped in a hospital blanket and for the first time I saw her face, touched her skin, heard her cries. From that moment I knew: this child was mine. And my heart was filled with love. I was so enraptured in her beauty that when the nurse asked me for my baby's name, I told her the wrong one! Don't worry, I fixed it before my wife found out.

GOD IS LOVE

Many times I look down on love, thinking that love is too emotional, too wishy-washy and touchy-feely. The "loving" parent should be my wife Noel and as a dad, I should embody something different for my children. Endurance. Persistence. Work Ethic. MacGuyver. Rocky Balboa. A Superhero. You know, man stuff. But then I began to think about 1 John 4:8 and noticed two things. First, the word "love" is not a verb. Did you catch that? The word "love" does not describe what God does, it is a noun defining who God is. God IS love (emphasis mine).

BE AN EXAMPLE

Second, the word love is applied to God himself. If the same God who was called the Lion of Judah, who formed the cosmos with the sound of his voice, and crafted man and woman by hand out of the dirt IS love. I can follow his example of love for my kids, especially in their early years. As a parent, you embody love for your child just as your heavenly Father embodies love for you. As a mom or dad, you set the framework for how your children understand and know love, especially as babies and toddlers.





CONSECRATE

BABY *Steps*

Babies need love and affection as much as they need food, warmth, and shelter. This week, take time to demonstrate love to your child as you practice the biblical concept of consecration. While not part of our modern day rhythms, times of consecration were initiated in Bible times to create holy moments, set apart as sacred, dedicated to a divine purpose. Meet your baby's need for love and affection in tangible ways with eye contact, words of affirmation and a strong hug.

Hold them close and whisper this prayer of consecration: Little child in my arms, I am your dad/mom. I love you. My love for you cannot be broken - not by what you say or how you act. My love for you is strong. May you know my deep, resounding love over you all the days of your life, especially in the times I fail to demonstrate it for you. And may the love of your heavenly Father be your strength. Amen.

BABY *Bite*

The word "love" does not describe what God does, it is a noun defining who God is. God IS love.





TODDLER *Tips*

As a mom or dad, you set the framework for how your children understand and know love, especially as babies and toddlers.

TODDLER *Steps*

Toddlers continue to need love and affection and are also beginning to respond in kind. Take time this week to demonstrate love to your child as you lead them in a prayer of consecration - time initiated to create a holy moment, sacred and dedicated to God.

As you hold them close, look them in the eyes and invite them to snuggle in and pray with you: My child, I want you to know something that will never, ever change. I am your father/mother and I love you. Just like I am holding you up in my arms, my love will hold you up every day of your life. You can always know that I love you. But God's strong love for you is even greater. Your heavenly Father God loves you more than you could ever imagine. I pray you will know this love each day. Amen.

