



DINNER
Table
DEVOTIONS

40 DAYS OF SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT FOR YOUR FAMILY

NANCY GUTHRIE

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Dinner Table Devotions: 40 Days of Spiritual Nourishment for Your Family

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INTRODUCTION



Most modern Christian families live with a nagging sense of guilt that they don't have any kind of consistent family devotions. Or maybe I should say *my husband and I* have lived with a nagging sense of guilt that we have not had any kind of consistent family devotions! But I don't think we're alone in this.

Getting the kids to turn off the TV and computer and gather to read the Bible, to have a meaningful discussion everybody participates in, and to pray over anything other than a meal seems like too much of a daily hurdle for most families. Besides, most of us don't feel like we are authorities on the Bible, so we hardly know where to start. But we want to do something. And we want more than a daily chore that our children dread and can't wait to be done with. We're looking for something that won't be resisted or rejected as "totally lame." We want a meaningful and personal discussion about things that really matter, something everyone takes part in.

That's why I originally wrote *One Year of Dinner Table*

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Devotions and Discussion Starters, and that is why we've adapted it into this convenient forty-day version. *Dinner Table Devotions* helps families start in a natural gathering place—around the dinner table. As the meal comes to a close, family members can take turns reading the dinner table devotion. Each devotion includes readings on a specific theme from two or three Scripture passages out of the accessible New Living Translation, a brief devotional thought, and three discussion-starter questions—all designed to be done together as a family in ten to fifteen minutes (before everybody helps with the kitchen cleanup!). You'll also find space to make notes. Your family can use this space in a number of ways, including to record your kids' comments and questions, matters for prayer for each other, things you want to thank and praise God for, and new discoveries you've made about Christ and the Christian life.

It is written for families with children in all stages—from elementary school to high school—who long for a way to have spiritual input in their children's lives and who want Scripture to be naturally woven into their family life and conversations.

WHAT MAKES DINNER TABLE DEVOTIONS DIFFERENT?

Whereas most family devotionals focus on Bible stories or on practical moral lessons, *Dinner Table Devotions* focuses on biblical themes, concepts, and words—in ways that are

understandable to children without talking down to adults or teens. It will help your family take a step back to look at the big picture of what God is doing in the world and his purposes and plans in creating and redeeming the world. Once you and your family have worked your way through this book, you will have discussed many different attributes of God and explored what it really means to be joined to Jesus Christ by faith. This is not dry theology for theology's sake, but living theology that makes a huge difference in how we do battle against temptation, deal with disappointment, and determine our futures.

Over the course of the next forty days, your family will go deeper into developing an understanding of who God is, what he is like, what he expects, and what he is doing. Together you can embark on a journey of understanding who we are, why we need a Savior, and what it means to place our faith solely in Jesus. Holy living flows out of that.

The format of a short devotion followed by three discussion questions is designed to turn the devotional time into a family-wide discussion rather than a one-person lecture or reading. This is not a continuation of the school day or Sunday school but an opportunity to apply biblical truths to the most important areas of life.

HOW TO USE *DINNER TABLE DEVOTIONS*

If you've rarely read and discussed God's Word together as a family, it can be awkward at first. But that initial awkwardness

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fades as conversations are sparked and understanding deepens. We have a treasure to pass on to our children—the Bible, which contains God’s message to us and the answers to life’s greatest questions. Because it is so important to us, we want to talk about it.

The goal of these devotions is to create an opportunity for dialogue and conversation. You as a parent set the tone as you allow yourself to be a learner and a seeker rather than a teacher or an authority. You do this as you are willing to say, “I don’t think I really understand that completely” or “That is something I’d like to work on in my life to be more like Jesus.” You do this as you affirm the input of every family member and maintain an atmosphere of acceptance and open participation.

Perhaps the most important way to encourage your dinner table devotions and discussions is something that happens away from the table. You want to make sure any confession of struggle or weakness expressed in your discussions is treated with respect and confidentiality. Nothing puts the lid on authentic sharing more quickly than when people’s words are used against them. The best way to encourage vulnerability and openness is by creating a safe environment for sharing.

Each devotion is designed for everyone around the table to share and interact with it. You might choose to have different family members read the various verses, and you can encourage conversations by discussing the questions at the end of each devotion. The first question is answerable

for family members of all ages, elementary and up. It is designed to draw family members in and to get everyone talking about their own thoughts and experiences. The next two questions are more thought provoking and in some cases more personal.

You may want to have different family members read the questions each time so that everyone has an opportunity to be on the asking end and the answering end. Many of the questions are “What do you think?” questions that may or may not have a “right” answer. Some are “Why do you think?” questions meant to encourage deeper thinking. And many are “How?” or “In what ways?” questions meant to draw out practical application of the truths presented. There are no answers in the back of the book! When you come to a question that is challenging to everyone around the table, this presents the opportunity to acknowledge that God is a mystery to be probed and a treasure to be mined, and that the things of God are not always simple to figure out. But the rewards for pursuing them are great.

The most personal questions are those that ask participants to identify ways they need to change or ways they would like to change. This can be new territory for families, but it also presents a meaningful opportunity for family members to connect with each other and with God. As a parent, you can set the tone and example here in terms of a willingness to be humble and to show others in the family that you are still an “unfinished project” when it comes to becoming all God wants you to be.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, we read this instruction from God to the people of Israel: “You must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.” What better place to practice “when you are at home” than around the dinner table?

The people of Israel were expected to understand Scripture well enough to talk about it with their children. They were to discuss the words of Scripture during their family activities and apply them to everyday life situations.

Our desire for our kids is that they develop a faith that is real and personal—not something they grow out of or leave behind. When they are pressed by the world, we want them to have the foundation to piece together what their faith really means and what makes Jesus worth knowing and following. We want them to be able to make an argument for him and feel comfortable talking about him as someone who is real, someone who matters in every area of their lives.

Now is the time to begin that conversation so it becomes as natural as breathing. It’s by talking about him that we weave our understanding of God through all of life and through the life of our families. As we talk about him, he enters into not only our discussions around the dinner table

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but also our entertainment choices, our spending habits, our vacations, our time, and certainly our treatment of each other. By bringing him into our discussions around the dinner table, we saturate our lives with God. And isn't that what we really want?

Paul wrote, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). I'm praying for you as you seek to glorify God around your dinner table—that he will be pleased, and that your family will have some laughs, perhaps shed some tears, and grow together toward God.

Nancy Guthrie
Nashville, Tennessee

DAY 1

KNOWING GOD VERSUS KNOWING ABOUT GOD

Those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken!

JEREMIAH 9:24

This is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.

JOHN 17:3

Everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

PHILIPPIANS 3:8

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Do you know your mail carrier? How about your grandparents? How about the President of the United States? How about your best friend? There are different ways of “knowing” people, aren’t there? There are some people we know *about*, but we don’t really know them personally. And even among those we know personally, there are different levels of knowing—we know some more intimately than others.

The Bible says that we are made to know God. But a person can know a lot *about* God and not really *know* him. We can be interested in theology (which is a fascinating subject!) and know the books and stories of the Bible, and hardly know God at all. We can go to church and read lots of Christian books and be up on the latest teaching and yet not know God at all.

We get to know other people through personal interaction and involvement, by sharing life with them. We listen to what they say, observe how they interact with others, see what they value, find out what they enjoy. And it is similar with God. As we read and think about and talk about God as he is revealed in the Bible, we get to know him. God is so magnificent that it is worth spending the rest of our lives getting to know him better. As we do so, things that confused us before about what he does and how he works begin to make more sense to us. Knowing him better helps us trust him more.

DAY 2

THAT'S NOT FAIR!

When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

TITUS 3:4-5

Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.

PSALM 51:1

God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.

1 TIMOTHY 1:16

We live in a world that teaches us, “The early bird gets the worm,” “No pain, no gain,” “There is no such thing as a free lunch,” and “You get what you pay for.” We buy the idea that people get what they deserve, at least in theory. Whenever we experience hardship or difficulty, we quickly say, “I don’t deserve this!” Believing we have a right to fairness, we feel violated when we think we haven’t gotten what we deserve.

On the surface, a perfectly fair world appeals to us. But would we really want to live in such a world? In a completely fair world, there is no room for grace—receiving what you don’t deserve. There would be no room for mercy either—being spared from getting the punishment you do deserve. We deserve punishment but receive forgiveness; we deserve judgment but experience love; we deserve death but get showered with God’s mercy.

Since we live in a world where we don’t always get what we deserve and where we sometimes get what we don’t deserve, we will experience loss. But this also means we can receive mercy. Ultimately it is not “fairness” we want from God. If he gave us what is fair—what we really deserve—we would have to pay for our sins. What we really want from God is justice (doing what is right) and mercy (not giving us the punishment we’ve earned). And we can be confident that his abundant mercy will keep us from getting what we really deserve.

DAY 3

WE'RE ALL POOR

No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.

ROMANS 3:10-12

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

You say, "I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!" And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

REVELATION 3:17

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Is there something you really want? Something that you want so much that you are willing to work for it and save for it so you can buy it?

What if what you really want is to be in good standing with God? Can you save up enough good works, enough proper behavior, enough denying yourself to buy God's favor? Unfortunately not. God doesn't accept people who think they have some sort of spiritual currency or money to be able to buy his blessing. In fact, he says that the only people he accepts are those who recognize that they not only don't have enough to offer God, they have absolutely nothing to offer God. "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him," Jesus said (Matthew 5:3). He wasn't talking about people who are financially poor but people who are spiritually poor, people who are spiritually bankrupt.

Only when we see that we have nothing to offer God to gain his favor—no family connections, no self-sacrifice, not even any natural tendency to love him—only then are we in a position to receive what God wants to give to us. And then he gives us everything. Jesus is the one who receives all things from God the Father, and he shares all those good things with us. When we come to him with nothing to offer him except for our need, he welcomes us into his family and into the kind of blessing that only he can provide.

DAY 4

GOD'S TATTOO

Jerusalem says, “The LORD has deserted us; the Lord has forgotten us.”

“Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands. Always in my mind is a picture of Jerusalem’s walls in ruins.”

ISAIAH 49:14-16

They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads.

REVELATION 22:4

Have you ever seen someone with a person's name tattooed onto an arm or ankle? Some people tattoo the name of the person they love on their bodies as an expression of their devotion to the person, and as a constant reminder of this person who is precious to them.

When God's people complained to God that they thought he had abandoned them, God told them, "I have written your name on the palms of my hands." It's as if he held out his open hands to those who felt forgotten by him and said, "Look. You will see something—someone—too precious to me to ever forget."

If you could look at God's hands, you would see that he has tattooed your name there because he loves you. He wants to keep you in the center of his attention. He thinks about you all the time. He watches over you. When he sees your name there, your concerns become his concerns. He sees not only your name but every aspect of your life—every joy, every struggle, every need. You are never off his mind, out of his sight, or away from his loving care.



DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Do you think you would ever get a tattoo? Why or why not? Does your family have opinions or rules regarding tattoos?
- Have you ever felt like God forgot about you? What are some things you know about God that can give you confidence that he will never abandon you?

DAY 5

ALL EARS

You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.

JAMES 4:2

When you call, the LORD will answer. "Yes, I am here," he will quickly reply.

ISAIAH 58:9

In my distress I prayed to the LORD, and the LORD answered me and set me free.

PSALM 118:5

Have you ever tried to talk to someone who was distracted? Maybe the person was listening to music or reading something or deep in thought, and you felt like he or she was ignoring you.

What about God? Does he ever ignore us when we talk to him? When we pray, can we be confident God will listen and respond in some way, or does he sometimes ignore our prayers? We often wonder if prayer can really change anything. But the Bible promises us that God always listens and that our prayers have an impact on what we receive from God.

When James said, “You don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it,” he was implying that our failure to pray and ask God for what we need deprives us of what God would have given us if we’d asked. And when Jesus instructed us to “keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for” (Matthew 7:7), he was making a clear connection between asking God for things and receiving them from him. So evidently, when we ask God to work in our lives, he responds. That doesn’t mean he’s like a genie and will automatically give us whatever we want. But he does promise to hear us and respond—even if his response is not the response we were looking for. Even more, as we pray to him, telling him what we need and asking for him to work, sometimes he works to change what we want or to accept what he has given and what he is doing.

God is happy when we depend on him and talk to him. So he never ignores our heartfelt requests for his presence

and his power in our lives. In prayer, we take a step in his direction, and he comes close to us. We can be confident that even though other people may ignore us, God never will.



DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Have you ever tried to talk to someone only to have him or her ignore you? How did that feel?
- Have you ever felt like God was ignoring you? When you feel that way, is that really true?
- How have you experienced God's response to your prayers?
