



4 Tips for Family Night

BY DEANN STARKEY

We made family home evening the best night of the week.

Several years ago we began to seriously consider how effective our family home evenings were. There were many times we wondered if we were really getting through to our young children. They seemed to do well if we were playing board games, but they struggled to listen and behave during gospel discussions.

As parents, we cherished the time together with our children, but more important, we knew how vital it was that we teach the gospel to them. Yes, they would learn gospel principles at church, but would they understand the importance of living these principles if we didn't also teach them in our home? This question has crossed my mind many times as my husband and I have tried different ways to teach the gospel to our children on Monday night.

Through trial and error, we have found four principles that help make family home evening a time not only of having fun together but also of learning concepts that strengthen our testimonies of the gospel.



Participation

1 Even the youngest of our four children seemed to want a “job” for family home evening. We made a chart that allowed for each family member to be in charge of something each week and hung it in our dining room. At the end of family home evening, we rotated each name to a new responsibility. This way, we all knew ahead of time what we needed to do to be ready the next week. This increased participation, provided structure for the evening, and created a more reverent atmosphere.

For example, not long after our youngest son, Hunter, turned five, he was assigned to share a scripture. As he and I talked about what kind of scripture he wanted to give, he became excited and ran from the room to get his copy of the children’s reader *Book of Mormon Stories*. He turned to the picture of Lehi holding the Liahona and then announced that he wanted his scripture to be about how Lehi received the Liahona. We decided that rather than have me read a scripture for him to repeat, he would tell the story to the family.

The following week it was Hunter’s turn to give the lesson. He again chose to talk about the Liahona. However, this time he also talked about how following the example of Jesus and making good choices keep us close to Heavenly Father. Although I helped him organize his thoughts, he chose which gospel principles he wanted to share. How sweet it was for us, his parents, to witness Hunter developing a testimony of the restored gospel.

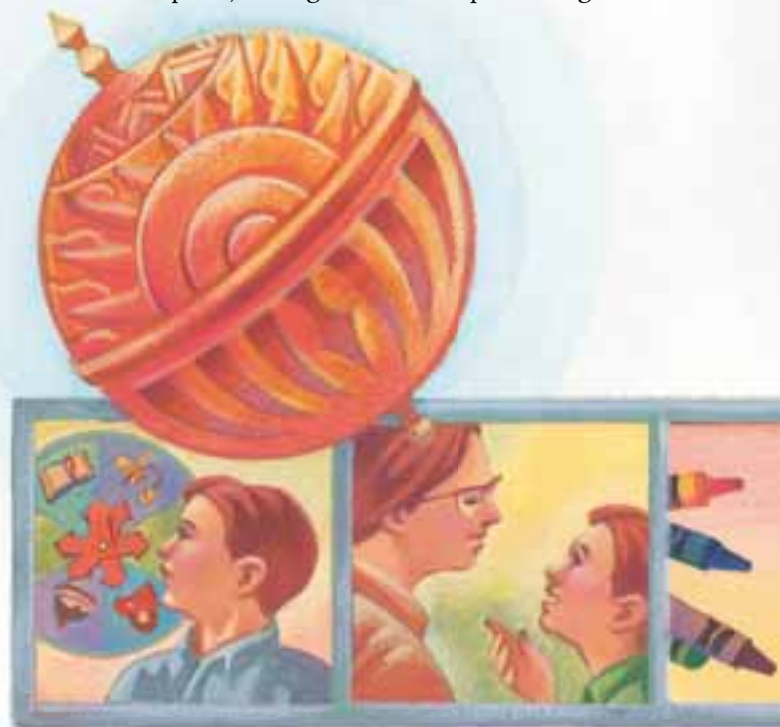
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Preparation

We place the family home evening chart in a place where everyone can see it throughout the week. Because of this, it provides a constant reminder of what each family member needs to do to prepare for Monday night. After our family scripture study on Monday morning, I ask the children if they need anything special for their part for family home evening. Generally, the responses include help with the treat or lesson, but occasionally someone asks for a picture to go along with a scripture or the words to a song.

We decided we wanted to provide our two youngest children opportunities to teach the lesson. In order to help them, I have made several short, simple lessons they can give. This helps our family in more than one way. Our children enjoy being able to pick their own topics, and their father and I like the fact that using and delivering these lessons also helps them prepare to give Primary talks.

For example, when our oldest son, Easton, was preparing for his baptism, he taught us about baptism using one



of these lessons. Several months after his baptism, he was assigned to give a talk about the same subject for the Primary sacrament meeting program. Many of the things he included in his talk came from his family home evening lesson. He felt confident as he gave his talk, and he was able to bear a sweet testimony about baptism and its importance.

3 **Simplicity**
Even as our older children are becoming teenagers, we have found that keeping the lessons short, simple, and focused on areas of interest has been a key ingredient to having effective family home evenings. We often incorporate simple object lessons to illustrate our lessons. For example, once we turned off all the lights and gave each family member a flashlight. Then we danced to songs about sharing the light of the gospel with others. Simple object lessons like this have created memorable nights and reinforced gospel principles.

4

Flexibility

Despite our best efforts to keep Monday nights clear of other activities, sometimes things come up that are unavoidable. When we know in advance that this is going to be the case, we reschedule family home evening for another night or, if possible, we attend the event as a family and go out for ice cream or have a treat at home afterward. We have found that being flexible while still making family time a priority has increased our unity and love for each other.

Blessings from Holding Family Home Evening

Family home evening has proven useful in gauging where my husband and I need to focus our attentions for our family. It has given us great insight into our children's understanding of gospel principles and has given us the opportunity to answer their questions. There is no greater feeling than to see our children touched by the Holy Ghost as they gain a testimony of our Savior and His gospel.

It is within our home that we perform our greatest work in teaching our children to live the gospel and to make righteous decisions. Our example and love for family home evening has truly made it the best night of the week. ■

