

# What Parents Have Learned from Family Home Evening

**F**ostering successful family home evenings can be challenging for families of all sizes and ages. Although family home evenings are often focused on teaching children, adults can learn a great deal as well. In the following accounts, members share examples of how they have been blessed from family home evening.

## Daddy Time

Larry and Sherri Baxter of Mississippi have found two key ingredients to successful family home evenings. The first is to make the lessons age appropriate. When the Baxters initially began



holding consistent family home evenings, their girls were ages four and two. Sherri says that their “first family home evening was short and to the point, and the Spirit was very much in attendance. The girls were hooked. Thereafter, it was easy to remember to hold family home evening because our girls wanted to have it just about every night!” Five years and one more child later, holding age-appropriate lessons still works.

The second ingredient in successful family nights for the Baxters is “Daddy Time.” Larry has a job that requires him to travel from Tuesday to Friday each week. Because he is gone so much, Monday nights have become “Daddy Time.” Sherri explains: “Larry comes home from work early on Monday and spends the rest of the evening with the children. Along with the lessons, it’s a family home evening of fun. We even let the children stay up late that night so they have a little more time with their father. They clean together, play games together, wrestle or snuggle on the couch together, pick raspberries together. They’ve even planted sunflowers together. I’m still involved, but the focus is on spending time with Dad.”

#### **A Child’s Testimony**

Daniel Penrod of North Carolina learned during one family home evening that even little children can feel the Spirit. What set this evening apart from others was that Daniel offered a specific prayer “for our two-year-old son to feel the Holy Ghost.” During the lesson, Daniel taught from 3 Nephi 11. As he recalls, “The Holy Ghost came into the room so strongly that all of our hearts burned within us.” The two-year-old had a huge smile on his face, and Daniel knew that the Holy Ghost had touched his little son’s heart as well.

#### **Teaming Up**

Leander Clifford of Oregon discovered that young children can help teach lessons. He writes: “One week I asked my six-year-old nephew, Rick, to team up with me in presenting the lesson. The idea that Rick could help teach a lesson sparked his imagination. We went over the main points of our lesson and decided to use a flannel board. I gave him a pile of old magazines so that he could cut out pictures that he thought would emphasize an important point.

“Thursday evening we glued flannel to the back of the pictures Rick had selected. We also cut out large-letter words, formed them into phrases, and put them on flannel. Friday evening Rick gulped down dinner to have more time on our lesson preparation. That night we put everything in its proper sequence and decided which parts of the lesson each of us would present.

“We honed our presentation on Saturday, and on Sunday we invited my dad to our ‘dress rehearsal.’ Dad was not a member of the Church, but he loved family home evening. He was a perfect audience as he responded to the lesson questions Rick and I took turns asking him. On Monday, Rick ran all the way home after school to rehearse his role just one more time.

“The lesson was a big hit, and there was no question that Rick understood the details of the lesson. He glowed with justifiable satisfaction in what he had accomplished.”

#### **Teaching with *Preach My Gospel***

Tina Spencer of Delaware writes: “When my oldest daughter was coming up on her eighth birthday, I really wanted to help her prepare for baptism. As a returned missionary, I always thought it would be a great idea to teach my children the missionary discussions. So after the new *Preach My Gospel* manual replaced the old discussions, we purchased a copy to study. There is so much in it! Although the actual lessons are only a small portion of the book, every section has terrific topics that would make great family home evenings for all ages.

“One of the helpful things about *Preach My Gospel* is that each of the five official lessons can be taught in different time lengths. There are 3–5-minute lessons, 10–15-minute lessons, and 30–45-minute lessons, so you can really plan according to the ages of your children.



When I use the manual to teach my children, I sometimes incorporate visual aids to help keep their attention. For instance, to teach the first lesson about the Restoration, we built a model of Christ's Church using blocks of wood. Then we removed a corner block to show what would happen if you remove the foundation of the Church—the blocks fell down. Next, we rebuilt the model as we talked about Joseph Smith and the Restoration.

"I've learned that the *Preach My Gospel* manual can be a great resource for families. I know that when we teach the simple doctrines of the gospel in ways that our children can understand, we will succeed."

### **Bridging the Long-Distance Gap**

While ideally the entire family is together for family home evening, sometimes life makes that impossible. Alan Smith of California realized that his frequent business trips didn't mean his family had to skip family home evening or even hold it without him. He writes: "One week I found myself away from home for a week-long business trip. Monday night I called my family on the phone and asked that we gather for family home evening. Over speakerphone, we spent a good portion of an hour having our usual family home evening in a very unusual way. We sang 'I Am a Child of God' to open, our youngest son said the opening prayer, and then I gave a lesson from the New Testament on the parable of the talents.

"We read from the New Testament and the Doctrine and Covenants and spent time discussing the talents of each family member and how we can use our talents to build the kingdom of God. Our three-year-old daughter said the closing prayer while her father, thousands of miles away, helped her when she struggled.

"Was it ideal? No. Did we feel the Spirit? Yes. Will we do it again? Absolutely."

### **A Musical Approach**

Family home evening can be a time to develop and use our talents. Tera Duncan from Utah writes that musical activity in her family's home evenings is not confined to singing hymns. "Each member of the family plays a variety of instruments that we like to rotate from song to song. Dad plays drums, guitar, or harmonica. Mom plays piano, violin, or guitar. The children switch off between violin, piano, trumpet, flute, tambourine, or mandolin. We try to make sure at least one of us is playing some kind of harmony along with the melody. The style can be fiddle, Celtic, classical, Christmas, Broadway, or even patriotic music.

Songfests can fill the whole family with a sense of unity and cooperation.

"Though it isn't easy to play together when the children are all different ages and abilities, it has become one of the highlights of family home evening. Over the years, we've grown to appreciate the improvement in musical ability, and sometimes we catch the kids practicing without being asked. We believe that even some foot stompin', leg slappin'

music can be answered 'with a blessing upon [our] heads' (D&C 25:12) because it brings our family closer together."

### **Fun with Grandchildren**

Sharlene T. Barber of Tennessee is lucky enough to have three adult daughters and their families living nearby. Sharlene and her husband, Russ, wanted to share family home evening with their grandchildren but also recognized the need for their daughters to build unity within their individual families. They came up with an interesting solution.



## LESSONS LEARNED IN FAMILY HOME EVENING



*"I begin with family home evening. We cannot afford to neglect this heaven-inspired program.*

*It can bring spiritual growth to each member of the family, helping him or her to withstand the temptations which are everywhere. The lessons learned in the home are those that last the longest."*

**President Thomas S. Monson, "Constant Truths for Changing Times," Ensign, May 2005, 19.**

Sharlene writes: "One Monday night each month, my husband and I host our three daughters and their families at our home for family home evening. As with our regular family home evenings, we have a prayer, a song, refreshments, and a lesson. However, most of our 12 grandchildren who come are under eight years of age. To keep everyone interested, we keep the lessons simple and use a flannel board, puppets, story telling, or hands-on cutting and coloring. Singing is always a big hit too.

"Our grandchildren's favorite activity is a treasure hunt that reinforces the lesson. We have little squares of carpet that display each child's name so they have their own spot to sit on while their parents sit behind them on the couch and chairs. Right before the children go home, we let each grandchild take turns fishing in Grammy and Grandpa's 'fish pond.' The fish pond is stocked with such items as pencils, notebooks, crayons, and scissors. They each go home with a prize

and a memory of an evening of learning gospel principles together with their cousins, uncles and aunts, and Grandpa and Grammy."

### Engaging Youth of Disparate Ages

Holding a family home evening that engages children of a variety of ages can be especially challenging. Lisa Hackwell of Utah and her husband, Burke, know this well; they have three teenagers and three younger children. Yet they have found a way to make it work. Lisa writes: "We hold gospel

discussions rather than give lectures. For example, after I give a short lesson, I let the children ask questions. This prompts a discussion. I feel the children learn well with this format because they are involved and receive answers to the things that are on their minds.

"Our successful family home evenings also work best when we try to focus on doing things that bring us closer as a family and closer to the Lord." ■

