

StrongFamilies.com
John Trent, Ph.D.

Here's some ideas for starting a "Faith@Home" Family time!

Thanks for visiting StrongFamilies.com or responding from having heard Dr. Trent talk about doing "faith@home!" Here's a "PDF" on one way to start doing family nights that I pray can help you build fun and intentionality into your role as the spiritual trainer in your home! Remember, it's as easy as squeezing a toothpaste tube – and in the process you get the help your child gain a "picture" of the God who loves them and His Son who lived and died for them!

Thanks again for carving out precious time to be at the conference, and let us know how we can be of help to you here at StrongFamilies.com! We're always looking for people to join with us in helping strengthen families, so call or email if we can help in training or equipping you, your church, ministry or family!

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(P.S. If you do one of these "Family Nights" that really goes great, send me an email and let me know how it went! Or, if when doing your Family Night, and you come up with an even better way of doing one of the examples listed, let us know as well. I've love to get your improvements so that we can make these even better for other families!

Finally, if you're the creative type, and you come up with own "Family Night" experience like these below that YOU TRY AT HOME AND IT WORKS! (NOT JUST AN IDEA, BUT AN IDEA YOU DID AT HOME AND YOUR KIDS LOVED IT AND GOT A LOT OUT OF IT) then I'd love to be able to post and share YOUR FAMILY NIGHT with others as well! If you do one and share it with me,

please give me you your permission to share your family night with others. And, if you share an idea, please include a family digital snapshot! We'll give your family credit for coming up with a great Family Night idea, with your picture and a heading like, "The Smith's Family from Plano, Texas, shares a Great Family Night idea on how doing an egg relay race with your kids can teach them about walking wisely with the Lord!" (My email is jtrent@strongfamilies.com).

Faith@Home "2 Degree Difference" Ideas for doing a fun Family Night at home!

FIRST, WHAT'S A FAMILY NIGHT AGAIN – AND WHY DO WE NEED TO BE DOING SOMETHING LIKE THIS IN OUR HOME?

If you heard me speaking at a conference, I most likely talked about how small 2 DEGREE CHANGES can begin to change everything. That's absolutely true when it comes to taking faith home. Remember, the two hours you're at church each week is great. Churches are doing better then even in making the time we're there on campus an outstanding experience. BUT IN CLINICAL STUDIES TWO THINGS MARK KIDS WHO STAY STRONG IN THEIR FAITH THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL AND ON INTO COLLEGE. First, is there was some kind of "intentionality" in their home – meaning mom and dad really tried to "drip feed" faith lessons into their kids life. (Rather than just dropping their kids off at church and hoping they pick up something there). Church is great – and biblically vital to our faith. But we (parents) are to be the spiritual trainers in our home (Deut. 6) as well. The second "sticky" factor is "service" as a family! In short, kids stay stronger in their faith when they see faith@home and when they go out with their family to help others! (From passing out bread at the soup kitchen together, to taking cookies to the firemen, to the whole family working together in a Sunday School classroom, to visiting a nursing

home and having the kids “read” to the older people (Who love kids).

So with that background, there's some idea on being “intentional” at home to pass down your faith. **YOU CAN DO THIS!** Even if you're a first-generation Christian like my wife and me, you can be the spiritual trainer in your home by helping your kids “get the picture” about the God who loves them!

What's below are just a few example. Obviously, there are entire books (Like the awesome Heritage Builder series) that list dozens of faith@home night activities. And, feel free to plug your kid into AWANA's or just do a bible study with them. But here's examples like those I shared at the conference...

Below, you'll find a list of the Family Nights I mentioned I'd send you at the conference. (Including details on the three I often do as a demonstration in my talk.). Lord willing, we'll be adding more ideas from families like yours in the days to come!

Remember, **YOU CAN DO THIS!** If you can squeeze a toothpaste tube or blow up a balloon, you can be the spiritual trainer in your home!

(Are you the kind of person who wants an entire book on doing Family Nights? There's Faith Launch, by Dr. Trent that's in our online bookstore that's got several great ideas on being the spiritual trainer in your home. And, there is a wonderful series called Family Night Tool Chest by Kurt Bruner, Jim Weidmann, and Del Van Essen – available from Focus on the Family) that will give you 60+ different family night ideas, if you get the whole set).

Let's start with some specifics for every time you do a family night!

Step One: Pick your own Family Time Theme Song! (Something you're going to play every time it's time for faith@home!)

Every time you do one of these faith@home family times, have an older kid (or a parent) play your theme song! (Yes, this is important – music makes a difference in getting everyone in a positive frame of mind for family night!) Our song started out as “Hamster Dance” and it never failed that our girls would come running out of their room just to see Dad doing the hamster dance. Thankfully, we went to the Superman Theme, which didn't involve quite as much poor dancing. Having the kids – and even mom and dad -- jumping around to whatever song is blaring is a good thing when you start your family time! You're getting together as a family! This is a fun and big deal!

Step Two: After everyone is there, stop the music and open in prayer (Here's an example of a prayer – Dad or Mom or an older (or verbal) kid can pray. Just a short prayer is great.)

“Everyone grab hands. Let's pray as we begin. Lord Jesus, thank you so much for pulling us together as a family. Teach us something fun and cool about You in the next few minutes, and help us to always remember that You love us, what you did for us causes our lives to shine for others, and that you're always there for us. Amen!”

Step Three: Read that week's Scripture: Tell them that you're all going to get a “picture” of something important in God's word.

Step Four: It's time for your activity!

Step Five: Close in prayer and enjoy a Family Time Snack! (Food is always a good thing for Family Time!)

That's it! How easy is that?

There' no specific order to the Family Night Examples that follow. Just read through them and pick the one that sounds

like, "I bet that'll work with my family!" All are "family tested" so have fun – and don't forget to let us know how to make them even better (your own wrinkle or recipe for a snack that goes with a Family Night) or share your own family night with us!!!

Family Night #1 – How an Old Penny can Teach Your Child about Spiritual Transformation!

(You'll need some preparation ahead of time for this one:

On the kitchen (or an outside) table, have a small, clear glass and a lemon (already sliced and put back together) for each person in the family.

Ahead of time, you'll need to dig in your change drawer or purse and get a number of pennies out. THE DIRTIER THE BETTER! You should get six or seven really dirty pennies for each person. Be sure and COVER THE GLASSES, LEMONS AND PENNIES WITH A SHEET OR TOWEL SO THEY CAN'T SEE WHAT'S AT THE TABLE WHEN THEY GET THERE.)

Step One! Time for your Family Theme Song!

Hamster Dance time!

Step Two: Open in prayer when everyone gather's around.

Step Three: Your Family Activity! (Part 1)

Tell the kids you're going to be doing a cool experiment. Now take off the sheet or towel and show them the glasses, lemons and pennies. Tell them that everyone needs to squeeze their own lemon into their own glass. (Obviously, you may need to help the younger ones squeeze out all the lemon juice from their lemon into their glass). You'll need one sliced lemon per person. USE STRAIGHT, NON-DELUDED LEMON JUICE.

Now set aside the lemons and have them pick out several "dirty pennies." (Get a digital camera and have them old up

their “dirty pennies” so that you can have a record of what they looked like dirty). Now have them drop their pennies into the glass with lemon juice on the bottom.

It's going to take 5 to 10 minutes for the lemon juice to really do a good job, so, that's when you...

Family Activity (Part 2). Tell them that you're going to COVER UP THE EXPERIMENT (PUT THE TOWEL BACK OVER THE GLASSES) and then go do something fun as a family. By “fun” you pick something that's fun to do that doesn't take a ton of time (You can take more than ten minutes... just do something for at least 10 minutes or the “experiment” won't work well). For example, go on a quick bike ride. If you live near a park, head over there for a little while. Take the dog for a walk. Pick out a favorite family game that doesn't take too long to play. It doesn't have to be a big deal. A lap or two around the block with the dog will thrill Rover and set up what's next.

Step Four: Read the key passage

All these family night ideas center around a key passage in scripture. SO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE YOUR BIBLE NEARBY (A KIDS VERSION IS OK, AS LONG AS IT GETS THE SAME POINT ACROSS AS THE BIBLE). Get everyone back to the table and then tell them,

“Before we look at our experiment, I want us to read a verse, “2 Corinthians 5:17,”

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.” (Feel free to pick your own favorite Bible translation).

Ask them if they'd like to “see” something that pictures what that verse is about? And NOW IT'S TIME TO TAKE OFF THE TOWEL AND LOOK AT YOUR PENNIES!

**** NOTE: You may need an old rag to scrub them a little, but most of them (unless they're before 1938) should really shine up in the lemon juice! We had an old toothbrush that we used to finish “scrubbing” them which helped a lot).

Get a picture of everyone with their new penny – and holding a penny that didn't get cleaned! It's a pretty significant difference in most cases! Be sure and “connect the dots” by saying to them, “Kids, that's what Jesus does when He comes into our lives. All those crummy feelings, or hurtful things we've said or done... Jesus makes all things new. His love makes all things new.

BONUS QUESTION! If you've got an adventurous group, then ask them, “Do you guys want to do one more experiment? But only if you're brave!”

Most will say yes, and that's when you tell them that you're going to have a contest on who can take a lemon section, and bit into it, and leave it between their teeth the longest! (Please don't write me if you're a dentist – just don't do this with your kids! (<:) It shouldn't take too long for people to either not do this, or to spit out the lemon. (And have some water on hand so that people can rinse our their mouth).

When everyone has calmed down, now ask them, “Was that easy to do?” And they'll say, “No!” (Except for the one kid who likes lemons). Then tell them, “Biting into a lemon isn't easy or very fun. Talk for just a minute about the fact that Jesus loved us so much, that he did something really hard – he died on the cross for us. Sucking on the lemon was bitter! Going to the cross was bitter! But because of what Jesus did in dying on the cross we get to be new inside! We get to become “new” and become all God wants us to be. Just like that lemon juice made the penny “new,” Jesus loves us so much, He did the tough part in making all things new in our life – **just like a shiny penny.**

Close by reading the key verse again, 2 Cor. 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.” And then just...

Close in Prayer and Fun Snack to close! Close in prayer, saying something like, “Jesus, thank you so much that you make all things new in our life. Even when we do things wrong, or if our lives get dirty, you can clean us up from the inside out, so that we reflect Your love to our family and our friends and your world. Thank you again for loving us, and for doing the very hard thing of dying for us on the cross, and thank you, Lord, for _____ (use each child’s name each time), and for this time to be together as a family. And thanks for this snack we’re about to enjoy too!”

SNACK TIME!!! Then have lemonade and lemon bars for everyone!!!!

If you have someone who doesn’t like lemon anything, it’s OK to have something else for them. A fun snack is always a great way to end a Family Time!!!

Family Night # 2 - Bungie Bear Teaches Your Child That God’s Love is With Them – No Matter How Far Away they Go!

What you’ll need ahead of time:

Like you saw me do with the Beaver at the conference, you’ll need one long (or several shorter cords that make up a long) Bungie cord. If there’s an ACE hardware store near you, you can find Bungie cord that comes off of a spool! (I haven’t been able to find actual Bungie Cord for sale at Home Depot, but even with ACE, call and ask before you drive all over. It’s worth the drive to get eight or ten feet of thin Bungie cord that comes off a reel that they have to cut for you, If not, do what I

did at the seminar and link several shorter Bungie cords together).

Depending on how big your back yard it, get a ten foot or longer Bungie cord! Also, be sure and **get permission** to use one of the kids stuffed animals, or pick one up at a garage sale that's specifically going to become Bungie Bear! (We learned the hard way that if you have a Golden Retriever child, you don't want to just use their stuffed bear without asking in advance!).

Time for your Family Night Theme Song!

Remember to have the kids take turns turning on the song – we learned that the hard way to let them take turns!

Open in Prayer:

Tell them you're all going to be learning a lesson in God always being there for us... not matter where we go or what goes on in our life. Then open in prayer.

Sample prayer: "Lord Jesus, thank you so much for pulling us together as a family. Teach us something fun and cool about You in the next few minutes, and help us to always remember that You love us, and that you're always there for us, no matter where we go in life! Amen!"

Read them the key scripture: It's actually two for this one, read (or if you have an older child, let them read) Matthew 28:20 (Jesus promises us), "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." And Hebrews 13:5b "For He Himself (Jesus) has said, "I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you." And tell them after reading those verses, that what they're saying (or asking them what they think they're saying) that no matter what, and no matter where they go, God's love will always be there for them!!!! Then say, "Let's do something fun that illustrates a little of what that verse is saying!"

Step Three: Family Activity – BRING OUT BUNGIE BEAR!

Just like you saw me do at the conference – take your stuffed bear and tie one end of the Bungee cord to your bear. Then get a “strong” volunteer to take the bear and just walk like two steps (Not enough to pull the cord tight). Then say, “OK, take two more steps! Then two more feet, until they’re at the end of the cord! Then remind them that no matter how far away we go, Jesus’ love is always there for us – it always brings us back to Him! And then tell them to “let go of Bungee Bear!” and BE CAREFUL! Unless you’re a professional baseball player, that Bear can come at you extremely FAST! If your kids are old enough, they can all try walking away, or trying to get out of the way of Bungee Bear – but again, the bear can come smoking fast at you, so don’t ruin a great family night by having little Billy get plastered in the face by a Bungee Bear!

Step Four: Review and Snack!

After everyone has had fun shooting Bungee Bear around, then have them sit down, serve the Family Time Snack (how about Pop Rocks or get a candle that shoot sparks and put it on a cupcake!). And then after you serve the snack, before they start digging in, remind them of the verse you read, and what they learned. God’s love, and His Son will never leave them or forsake them, then...

Close in Prayer and enjoy your snack and your second family time!

Family Time Example #3

(This is the one you did at the conference, or saw demonstrated at conference with the toothpaste tube!)

Preparation:

You'll need a tube of toothpaste (Dollar Stores have big ones for.... \$1) and a plate for each person. (Yes, a full tube per person – not the tiny travel size ones works best).

Play your Family Night Theme Song!

Family Activity!

Tell them that tonight, you're going to have a contest during Family Time! And pull out a new \$1 Bill from your pocket. Whoever finishes this contest will get a brand new \$1 bill! (So what if you love three dollars if you have three kids. They are going to remember a priceless truth from God's word for years after this. That's worth three bucks in my mind!) With kids, I usually do it as a context, but every "finisher" wins. Otherwise, the older ones will always gets the money, and the younger ones frustrated).

Now, with a paper plate near them, have them take off the cap and the winner is the one who can get the toothpaste out of the tube the fastest!

Don't tell them about "Part 2" yet, like you saw at the conference. Just say,

"OK, everyone who can get every bit of their toothpaste out wins, so ready, set, go!" And be sure that you've got a digital camera or a video camera going!

They're going to get messy, so have paper towels, and cheering is always encouraged!

Once they're done, and everyone has celebrated getting a \$1 bill, then tell them,

"OK, we're going to do another contest and this time – there is only going to be one winner who gets a \$20 bill! (That will motivate most kids and get their attention when you hold up a \$20 bill!).

"Whoever can get all the toothpaste back in the tube, without cutting the tube open, in the next five minutes, gets the \$20! Ready, set, Go! Get it all back in the tube!"

Encourage them to try and push it in with their fingers or to put it in their mouth and spit it in! Really funny when you watch the pictures later.

Obviously, it's impossible to get the toothpaste back in the tube. Now calm people down, and clean them up, and then tell them it's time for their snack.

Sharing the key verse and point of the competition:

After they're all cleaned up and as you get ready to serve the snack, read them this passage from Scripture.

James 3:5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

And, these verses from Proverbs

Prov. 16:24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb,
Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Prov. 16:27 A worthless man digs up evil,
While his words are like scorching fire.

Then tell them, "Kids, everyone look at the tongue of the person next to you!" (Pretty funny when they stick out their tongue, particularly if they're in the middle of eating their snack and it's blue!!!). Now say, "What does James mean by the tongue being small, but being like a small fire in the forest?" And then ask them, "We can say good words like honey, or bad words that burn like fire. But once we say something,

**** We can't get back what we say to others – good or bad.***

"Once the toothpaste is out of the tube, you can't it back in either. That's why it's so important that for us as a family, we don't say something mean or angry or "burning" to our brother

or sister or mom or dad. Because once you say something, you can't get those bad words back.

That's it!

Time for Closing Prayer and Snack!

Family Time #4

Preparation: You'll need a balloon ahead of time for each child (Please WATCH CLOSELY YOUNGER KIDS AROUND BALLOONS. They can be a choking hazard).

Time for your Family Night Theme Song!

Crank up the music!!! It's Family Night time!

Family Activity:

Tell you're kids you're going to do something to help answer a really important question this week. That question is, ***"Is God real even if you can't see him?"***

Of course, we know as Believers that the answer is true – but there are 80 years olds who are still asking that question! (And if we're honest, maybe we've asked ourselves a time or two!). What a great thing to give your kids an answer to this question – before a godless friend or teacher gives them a different answer than what's true!

Anyway, ask your kids, "If God real, even if you can't see Him?" And then ask,

"OK, Are there some other things besides God that are real, even though you can't see them?"

(OK with little ones, you might have to do some coaching here – but you're looking for things like electricity, or that water from the faucet in our house come from somewhere -- but we can't where it comes from unless theirs a pipe that breaks outside!)

Tell them that you're going to help answer that question, "Is God real even if we can't see Him" right now, and pass out a balloon to everyone! Everyone gets to blow up their balloon and hold it. (Help the little ones or anyone who simply can't do balloons well like me). When everyone has their balloon blown up, and are holding the end tight so that no air escapes, talk about "air." Air is real, even if you can't see it. It has "strength" to push the balloon bigger and bigger – and it has "power" that can move things around. And to prove that something you can't see has strength and power – now have everyone at the count of three let go of their balloons! Again, your three year old might not be able to articulate all that's going on with balloons flying around – but he or she is going to know it has something to do with God – and it's fun – and I love being with my family!

Time for Snack and Scripture Verse:

After doing the balloon blowing up as long as you have breath to do so, then sit them down and tell them the "end of the story."

Read them a verse, Colossians 1:15, which says,
(Depending on your version)

"He (Jesus) is the visible expression of the invisible God."

In other words – Jesus helps us see what God looks like, because He is God. And then read them one other verse quickly. Let them know that there was a guy named Thomas (one of the Disciples) who loved Jesus – but didn't really believe that He was God. That is until Jesus came back from the dead and spoke with him. Then read the verses,

John 20:29 Jesus *said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

Close your time by saying, "Jesus says that we are blessed when we believe in Him, even if we can't see him."

So always remember kids – God is there – just like air.
And then it's time for closing prayer and snack!

Close in Prayer and have your Family Night Snack!

Family Night #6

**How baking a Cake can help you have
a stronger faith and family!**

Goal and what you'll need ahead of time! You're going to do two things that take ingredients so read closely please:

First, you're going to bake two small cakes. For that you'll need to buy a box of cake mix, **but split it in half**. That's because in a minute you're going to see that you're going to "follow the directions" on baking one cake – but not on the other – and the difference is going to be pretty eye opening for your kids!

Second, while the cakes are baking (the main point of the Family Night time) you're going to be making some "homemade" Play Dough that your kids can play with while you're waiting for the cake to bake.

Keep reading to find out the "hows" and "whys."

Start the Music! It's "Faith@Home Family Time!"

Open in Prayer

Family Activity:

Now share what you'll be doing that night. You're going to bake a cake as a family! In fact, you're going to make two cakes!

Tell them that when you're doing making both cakes – you're going to have a “taste test” and see which one is the best cake ever!

Start off with “CAKE #1” and let them know that with this cake, you're going to follow all the directions to the “T.” Let them help all you can in doing all the mixing, breaking eggs, any way you can involve them.

When that batch of ingredients is ready, **set it aside for a minute, and tell then it's time to make the mix for Cake #2!**

Only, this time you're not going to follow the directions on the box! In fact, you're going to “leave out” several things or even add some things that aren't on the directions! (i.e., Like put in “half” the water, no vegetable oil, no eggs, and add instead dirt or leaves or something in the kitchen that isn't normally in the cake). Dirt and leaves, mixed in with the mix, really do help make the point! (And yes, a dirt and leave cake will bake in the oven!).

Go ahead and pre-heat the oven and put the “cakes” in to bake when you've got them both done. Now go on to phase two while you're waiting for the cake to bake!

You're going to now make non-bake play dough as a family to have a fun time while you cakes bake! Here's a recipe for this: (Or please feel free to use your own recipe or find another one on Google like I did that's a better way to make home made play dough)

2 c. flour
2 tbsp. cream of tartar (Or you can use Alum)
1/2 c. salt
3 tbsp. salad oil
2 or 3 drops of their favorite Food coloring
Mix all this together and then carefully add 1 cup of boiling water to the dry ingredients and stir until blended. This will make a "moldable" dough.

After you've made this first "workable" batch with all the right ingredients, then make another batch and add extra flour, or cut the water in half (or both). And feel free to add in dirt and leaves if you want to the "not going to be a good thing" batch!

When you're done, give each person a chance to make something with the first "working" batch – and then they get to try to make something with the second batch (where you didn't follow the directions). When you follow the directions, things turn out better and you can actually make something fun. When you don't follow directions – IT MIGHT BE OR SEEM LIKE FUN ADDING STICKS AND LEAVES – but it's not going to work the way it was supposed to work!

Play with the play dough until it's time for your cakes to come out! (Cleaning up ahead of time might be a good thing so you're ready to ice and eat the good cake).

Get ready for Snack and Scripture Time

- A) Tell them that the cakes will be coming out soon (or already has), and that each person (when the cake cools down) will get to put their own icing and sprinkles on their piece of the cake.
- B) Ask them what happens when you "leave out" certain important ingredients (or put in bad ones) with play dough? Ask them what they think might happen to the two cakes you made? (One following directions, one not).

C) Read 1 Corinthians 13:4 – 8. That's a good list of "ingredients" that make up a loving home. Tell them that you have decided that "As for me and my house" you will serve the Lord, and put good ingredients in our home – not bad ones.

D) Now it's time to look at the two cakes (Yuk for the second one if you're done it right!) and to decorate their piece of the good cake! (By the way, you can still put icing on the bad cake. And if you have a boy or girls who's silly, let them take a bit of that second cake. Even the icing won't make the cake good to eat, or good for you to eat. And that's a good thing to share

Close in Prayer and you've done another Family Night!

It's easy to add bad things to a recipe and have it not turn out well. But when we follow God's plan and word and promises, we get to enjoy the best life has to offer – like the cake!

That's it for now! Look for more Faith@Home activities under the "Other Family Night Examples" on the website, www.strongfamilies.com -- click on the button you did to download this and look for that link!

Lord Bless,

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