The One-Inch Bible Study

By Phil Downer

In my experience, two words in the English language that invoke guilt in Christian parents are "family devotions." Just mentioning the subject conjures up memories of good intentions then failure, or a sense of inadequacy. We idealize being organized and prepared daily to lead our families in interesting and motivating times around God's Word. But what about those days when we haven't had time to prepare and are fresh out of ideas? We're tempted to say, as I used to, "I'll do it tomorrow."

But soon I began to notice that those "tomorrows" stretched all too often into weeks or months. My waiting to be perfectly prepared was killing family devotions … until the day I realized something: if I could find time to eat and sleep every day, busy or not, then why couldn't I find a few minutes to lead family devotions every day? All I needed was a foolproof strategy that would work on even my worst of days.

That strategy is what I call *The One-Inch Bible Study*. Here's how it works. Hold your thumb and index finger about one inch apart and say out loud, *"What? What? What?"* and *"So what?"* That's it! Your basic tools: one inch and the four "whats!" They stand for, *"What does it say?", "What does it mean?", "What does it mean to me?"* and *"So what am I going to do about it?"*

When everyone gathers, hold your Bible up, and begin flipping through the pages until one of your children says, "Stop." (Depending on how adventurous you feel, you might want to aim for the New Testament!) Then, holding your fingers one inch apart, scroll down the chosen page until another child says "Stop." That inch of Scripture is your text for devotions. And let me tell you, if your children struggle with paying attention during family devotions, the drama of this will capture their attention.

Let's say that you wind up with 1 Timothy 2:11-12, as I once did. Start with your first "What?" Ask "OK kids, *what does it say*?" One of your children reads the passage: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. . . "

Now you could tell them *your* thoughts, of course. But the idea here is to get *them* to interact with the text, engage in discussion, and see how it applies to their lives.

Even when my six kids were all under the age of twelve, I remember being surprised by the insightful and practical comments they were soon making. So you say, "That's what it says. Now, *what does it mean?*"

"Well, grace is like when God is good or generous with us, and we don't deserve it," Matt says.

"Good, Matt. And what does it say that God's goodness or generosity does?"

"It brings salvation," answers Anna.

"Right. The next question is '*what does this mean to you?*' Is there anyone sitting here who has experienced salvation?"

"All of us but Susanna, and she's too little to understand," Josh replies.

"And to answer the next question, '*so what we are going to do about it,*' we can pray for her to come to Christ one day, right?"

"Yep, I pray for that a lot," Anna says, "just like you and Mom prayed for me when I was little. And I talk to her about heaven and Jesus, too."

"That's great, Anna. And, Lord willing, when she comes to Christ, God will have used *you* as a part of the miracle of your sister's salvation, right?"

"Yep."

"The next part says that this grace of God also trains us 'to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives…' To renounce something means to stop doing it. What does this part mean?"

"I think it means to stop living in a way that displeases the Lord, and to try to be self-controlled instead, and more like Christ," Abigail offers.

"Exactly right, Abigail. So what does that mean *to you*?"

"Well, sometimes I'm bossy when I am in charge of getting everybody to clean the house."

"So what are you going to do about that?"

"I need to let God help me control my attitude and what I say, even when I'm frustrated."

"That's really good. Paul?"

"Well, sometimes I lose my temper and punch Matt or Josh when they tease me, and that's for sure not godly. I need to learn self-control when I get mad."

"And as you kids know, I can get impatient with you all and sometimes Mom too, so I need self-control as well."

See how your family devotion time is off and running? Not only are the kids applying Scripture to their lives, but also learning how to be attentive, analyze ideas, and articulate their thoughts. And all this on a day when you were unprepared! I challenge you - give *The One-Inch Bible Study* a try and discover how our God, who is always prepared, wants to use us in our families even when we are not.

This article was adapted from the first session in Phil's Family Series seminars, available on CD or DVD from DNA Ministries.