

Dear Bethlehem family,

What is the family? It is the union of a man and a woman called together by God for his purpose. One of the first instructions for the first man and woman was to be fruitful and multiply - thus, the addition of children to the family. The family over the years has been impacted by many forces. Sometimes its structure is not complete, but God's instruction for the family stays the same.

It is a place that is designed to be a laboratory for the application of biblical truth in a relational setting. It is a training ground for the impartation of values, for the learning how to give and receive love, and for the development of relationships. As parents, we are responsible for the material needs, but also we are entrusted with the responsibility of shaping our children's character and guiding their spiritual, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and physical growth. This is not to be left by default to outside institutions. The primary spiritual and moral training of children should be in the home. Not in the church or school. (Ken Boa, Perspectives On Parenthood)

The spiritual family is of great importance. The power of that family is found in its ability to focus on the principles of God. As we focus on His principles, it draws us to worship Him. This book of devotions is presented to help our families to come together over the next seven months with a deliberate plan to worship God as a family. It is our desire that this process would draw every member of the family closer to each other and closer to God.

If you are single and do not have a biological family to connect with, or if your family is far away, or if it has been diminished by other circumstances, we encourage you to seek others in the body of Christ to share in this devotional journey. I also encourage some of our families to invite a single adult to share in your family devotional time.

Pursuing Him together,

Pastor Ken

GOALS FOR THE BETHLEHEM CHURCH FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

It has been our joy to grow in our understanding of all God has in store for families. As the creator of the concept of family, God intended it to be a source of blessing for each of us.

We may find ourselves in families large or small, young or old, happily connected, struggling with difficulty, or seemingly all alone. Yet God would have us take a broader view of our connectedness through Christ.

Our goal in creating the Bethlehem Church Family Devotional has been that we might bring families together to experience the blessings of worshipping Him. In doing so we have opportunities to serve one another with gladness and rejoice in time spent together as we:

- Come to know God better,
- Grow to love Him more,
- Become more like Jesus,
- Understand and enjoy each other's uniqueness,
- Develop stronger relationships,
- And be an encouragement to one another.

Our prayer is that you might enjoy the sweetness of fellowship with the Father as you study His word in ways that bring your family together.

PREFACE

In June 2004 the ministry staff and Deacon Board of Bethlehem Church began to pray about how they could assist families in their journey to be "Just Like Jesus." The result of much prayer, discussion, and study was the launching in the fall of 2005 of the "Bringing Families Together" initiative, an effort to help families strengthen their spiritual life.

The "Bringing Families Together" initiative consists of the following.

- A sermon series on the Biblical family presented by Pastor Ken.
- A Bible study conducted by the Women's Ministry of Bethlehem Church - "Women in the Family: Trusting God, Reflecting Him."
- An adult Sunday School Class - "How to Develop a Family Devotion."
- A discussion within the youth ministry concerning their role in the family.
- A devotional guide designed to help individuals and families come together to study the Bible.

The Bethlehem Church Family Devotions is one of the results of the "Bringing Families Together" initiative. This book has been written and edited by members of Bethlehem Church. As you will see, each devotion includes a "family activity" section, with suggestions for fun and interesting activities which all members of your family can do together. These often have ideas for involving younger children. Still, there is no reason that families with older children, "empty nesters," single parent families, couples without children, single adults, or even just a few people gathering together can't do these activities too! (If you are young at heart, you might even have fun doing a children's activity like coloring a picture!) Our goal has been to create devotions that *every* member of the Bethlehem Church family can use as a resource for learning more about the Sovereign God, who loves us, gave himself for us, and empowers us to live day by day.

We, the authors and editor, believe that it is essential for the spiritual health of our families to spend time together around God's Word. We believe that a family that prays, worships, and shares their spiritual lives together will be a family where every member will grow to full maturity in Christ. In a world where so much demands our attention, it is vital that we place a high priority on this most important task, the spiritual development of our family. In order to achieve the greatest benefit from the time spent together, we also believe it is important to be deliberate and consistent in the effort, having a regular day and time to meet

together. Of course, each family will have to establish a time that works best for its members. This may require some creative scheduling to accommodate the sometimes hectic schedule of today's family life. When and how you do the lesson is not nearly as important as simply doing it. Make a commitment to begin. Don't be discouraged if you miss a week; just continue on the following week. Stick with it! Consistency is the goal!

The underlying organization for the Bethlehem Church Family Devotions is the Church Calendar. Christians throughout history have used the Church Calendar as a tool to teach the complete account of Jesus. It also provides an outline for a comprehensive presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The calendar begins with the birth of Jesus and the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah to the entire world. It then progresses through the life and teachings of Jesus, His arrest, death, resurrection, and ascension. It concludes with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Church Calendar allows us to look at our own lives and challenges each of us to be "Just Like Jesus." If you would like to learn more about the Church Calendar, read the information on pages 69 - 71 in this book.

The Bethlehem Church Family Devotions has a devotion for each Sunday from Christ the King Sunday on November 20 to Pentecost Sunday on June 4. The devotion, which should take about 30 minutes, can be done any time during the week after the Sunday for which it is dated. There are several additional devotions provided during the week between Palm Sunday and Easter in order to highlight the importance of Holy Week. The language of each devotion is designed for adolescents and adults. Parents may need to adapt the language to make it more accessible to young children. Begin and end each devotional time with prayer. Use a prayer journal to keep track of how God answers your family's prayers. While parents should lead the devotions most of the time, it might be beneficial to have each family member, if they are able, take turns leading a devotion. The layout for each devotion is as follows:

Date

Title - This is an indication of what the devotion is about.

Central Truth - This is the key thought of the devotion.

Key Verse - Use this verse as a weekly memory verse

Bible Text - The Bible text for each devotion is included; however, we strongly recommend that you use your own Bible to read the text during your devotional time together.

Lesson Thought - Each author shares a Biblical truth from the text

Application - In order to make the Biblical truth practical and relevant, each lesson challenges you to answer two questions;

1) What does the lesson say to me today?

2) What will I do differently this week so that I can be more Like Jesus?

Family Activity - At the end of each devotion the authors suggest activities for families to do together. The activities are designed to reinforce the Biblical truth of the lesson. Occasionally the activity is specifically intended to be used before or after the devotion. Most of the time, your family can do the activity whenever is most convenient for you. Each activity is only a suggestion. Feel free to adjust or change the activity to fit the needs of your family; but do put the lessons into practice each week. Make it a habit!

Suggestions for further study - At the end of each devotion, the authors list additional scripture related to the lesson, which can serve as a basis for further devotional studies during the week.

The material in each devotion is offered as a guide. If you come upon a topic that interests you and your family, pursue that topic, perhaps using the additional scripture verses provided. You do not have to cover all the material in each devotion. Be flexible. Remember - the goal is to be deliberate and consistent in the study of God's Word with your family.

Each author brings his or her own unique experience to this book, and yet each one has the same earnest prayer and desire for you, which is that your use of this devotional guide will draw you and your family closer to Jesus and strengthen you and your family in your journey to be Just Like Jesus.

EDITOR'S NOTE: I had the great privilege of working with the authors of the Bethlehem Church Family Devotions as their editor. I know that you and your family will be greatly blessed as you faithfully use it. Reading through this year's worth of devotions in one sitting impressed me with the great diversity and great unity within Christ's church. All the different voices, all the different emphases, all the different perspectives, yet all one message - the great and awesome love that God has for each and every person in the world. My prayer for you and your family is that God will use this book to enlighten you "in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, his incomparably great power for us who believe. ... and to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." (Ephesians 1: 18, 19; 3: 18 NIV)