

AT HOME WITH GOD: A Workshop for Use with Parents and Grandparents  
By MaryJane Pierce Norton

The following workshop can be used with a variety of audiences including Christian educators, clergy, Sunday school teachers, weekday school teachers. However, the primary audience is parents and grandparents.

It is suggested that you as workshop leader read prior to the workshop the following resources: *Family, The Forming Center* by Marjorie Thompson and *At Home with God: Family Devotions for the School Year*. While you will still be able to lead the workshop using the material provided here without having read both resources, you will be better prepared if you do take time for reading both before leading the workshop.

Time: Two Hours

Purpose: Through this workshop participants will

- Understand why faith formation in the home is important to the family.
- Feel confident about using *At Home with God* with their family.
- Explore ways they will commit to building faith in their own family.

Materials Needed: Bibles (one for each participant); Hymnals or song books used in your congregation; Newsprint, markers, tape; candle; cassette or CDs of Christian music; cassette or CD player; copies of *Family, the Forming Center* and *At Home with God: Family Devotions for the School Year*; white paper, crayons and/or markers; candle.

Room Set-up: This workshop could be taught in a room at the church or even in the home of one of the families who expect to use this resource. If you are using a room at the church, here is the suggested room set-up. Round tables and chairs for participants; newsprint on an easel placed where all can see; a worship center at the front of the room with a candle on the worship table.

## WORKSHOP DESIGN

Opening: (20-30 minutes)

- Introduce yourself to the group. Ask participants to introduce themselves by giving their name and completing the following sentence: “To me, the most important thing I want to pass on to my children about the Christian faith is.....” Record these responses on newsprint. Thank those gathered for taking the time to learn ways for making their home a place where faith is nurtured.
- Light the candle, saying, “We light this candle to signify the presence of Christ with us during this time of learning and growing.”
- Share with the group the purpose of the workshop and clarify any questions that participants may have regarding time, content to be covered, and resources they need.

### Setting the Stage: (10-15 minutes)

- Prepare a short (5-10 minute) talk to help parents understand what we can do in the home to help one another grow in faith. Use any examples of your own, but do include the following points.
- 1) Marjorie Thompson has written an important book for families: *Family, The Forming Center: A Vision of the Role of Family in Spiritual Formation*. This book helps us realize that family life forms us in many ways – physical, emotional as well as spiritual. She then looks at ways spiritual practices within the family support the health and growth of the family. Through Marjorie’s book, we affirm
    - The importance of prayer
    - The importance of creating sacred space in the home
    - The importance of celebrating God’s presence through our day to day interactions in the family
    - The importance of telling family stories and telling God’s story found in scripture
    - The importance being involved as family together in serving others.
  - 2) The Youth and Family Institute of Augsburg College has developed a four-point approach to nurturing faith in the home. Their points are based on research conducted ecumenically, which looked at the question, “What has happened in the life of people with mature faith that has nurtured their faith.” They suggest this four-fold strategy
    - Caring conversation in the home around faith issues
    - Opportunities for a wide variety of family worship and prayer
    - Developing family rituals and traditions for expressing faith
    - Reaching out to others through works of service and mission.
- Point out that there is overlap from these two sources and what we will be doing through the rest of the workshop will help us practice some of the points made here. Take any questions from the group.
  - Tell the group that in using *At Home with God*, their devotional time will be 15 minutes. There is little to no preparation needed day by day and where there is, it is noted in the opening sentence. Each time of devotion will include scripture reading, a story, sharing and praying.

### Practice: (40-50 minutes)

- Say to the group, “We are now going to create our worship space. In your own home, before you begin using *At Home with God*, you will need to set aside a space to gather and to worship together. This can be your dining table. It can be in your family room, using a side table or coffee table. It can

be in one of the bedrooms in your home, using a table space. Think about where you might create a worship space. Make a note to yourself now about where you might create this space.” Allow time for reflection. Answer any questions participants might have about creating space. Note that this is covered in *At Home with God* in the appendix section of the book.

Now, with the group, personalize the worship space in your workshop.

Invite participants to look around the room, check purses, backpacks, etc., use the crayons and paper on their table, and find or create something they would like to add to the worship table in the workshop. Allow a few minutes for people to identify what they would like to place on the table. Then invite participants to place on the table their elements. Play music as they do this, or sing together a short chorus such as, “Spirit of the Living God.”

- Tell participants that scripture and conversation will be a part of every devotional time. Ask them to turn in *At Home with God* to January 4. This reflection is on the Ten Commandments. To practice conversation together, invite the group to turn in their Bibles to Exodus 20:7-17. Ask for a volunteer to read the entire selection to the group. On newsprint, outline the scripture as follows: Exodus 20:7; 20:8-11; 12;13;14;15;16;17. Ask each person to choose one of the verses or the group of verses 8-11. Think about what this says and what it means to you. Invite them at their table groups to share with one another. Remind them that just as in their family, this is not a time to make judgements about right or wrong answers. It is a time for them to practice reflecting on and talking about their faith.
- Sometimes the reflection and conversation included in *At Home with God* is not just talking. There will be suggestions for art activities as well. The devotional for March 31 has an art suggestion. Before reading the scripture, ask each one to draw a beach scene using the paper and crayons provided. Remind them that in their families they won't be doing this for the purpose of judging art, but as a way to think about the scripture. In table groups, invite the participants to show their pictures and talk about important times for them at the beach or near water. Then as a total group, listen to the scripture reading found in John 21:1-14. Ask them to turn back to their table groups and talk about one thing they feel is important from the scripture.
- Prayer is an important part of every devotional time. In groups around the tables, invite participants to respond to the following: 1) Times they pray in their home; 2) Memorized prayers that are important to their family; 3) Questions they may have about prayer. Ask the group to note any questions and share these with the total group. Answer those questions that have surfaced by sharing from your own experience and inviting others in the group to give guidance as well. Ask participants to turn in *At Home with God* to February 21. Here is an example of an “echo” prayer. Explain that when using this prayer, whoever is leading will say one line and the rest of the family will repeat that line. Lead the group in this prayer.

- Service is also an important part of growing in faith. While daily service suggestions are not a part of this study, there will be times when the family will want to do acts of kindness and service for others. Explain that the kind of service that nurtures faith doesn't have to be as dramatic as a mission trip. It can be some of the things families already do – such as recycling, taking food to neighbors when they are ill, sending cards to people in need, etc. Lead the group in creating a list of things families might do to serve others. Then invite those gathered to participate in a time of service together. Distribute a list of those in need in your community. These could be people in prison, in the hospital, homebound, struggling with an issue such as loss of a job. Using the crayons, markers and paper provided, ask each person to create a card for one on the list. Allow 5-10 minutes for this activity then collect the cards. Do assure the participants that you will be mailing or distributing these on their behalf. Lead the group in praying for these individuals.

Final Words: (15-20 minutes)

- Say, to the group, “I’m sure as we have participated in these activities, some questions have occurred to you. We’re going to now have a time for questions and answers. I want you to ask anything that you think could possibly prevent you from using *At Home with God*. And to start us off, I have three frequently asked questions that I would like to raise.”
- Introduce and answer the following questions:
  - 1) “What if we can’t do this every day?” Talk with the group about the importance of routine, but recognize that sometimes when we can’t do the routine we quit trying. Brainstorm ways together that would help a family keep a schedule of devotions.
  - 2) “How do we include our older or younger family members?” If there are young children in the family, you may want to use more art expressions, more acting out of the scripture and less talk. For teens in the family, you may want to do more journaling where they can list their private thoughts, as well as involve them more in taking the lead during your time of devotions. Tell of strategies that have helped. Call attention to the appendix section in *At Home with God* that addresses ways to involve younger children.
  - 3) “What do we do in the summer?” *At Home with God* only goes through the school year. Families can use *Pockets* magazine in the summer, taking the suggestions from “Pocketsful of Scripture” to guide their devotions. The Youth and Family Institute of Augsburg College (1-877-239-2492) has a

game called *Faith Talk with Children*. This is a set of cards with conversation starters about a variety of issues in the family and faith. They can be used while traveling, during times of devotions, or as family game time.

For monthly litanies for families and for monthly family devotional calendars see [pockets.org](http://pockets.org) and click on Pockets for Adults.

- Answer other questions that arise from the group.

Closing: (5-10 minutes)

- Invite participants to stand and join hands. Pray for the families represented and their commitment to faith. Close with a familiar hymn or chorus such as “God Be with You.”

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### For More Information:

- Children ages 8–12 will love Pockets Online  [www.pockets.org](http://www.pockets.org), a great place for teaching stories and activities about God’s love.

- [CLICK HERE](http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/description.asp?item_id=12530) or type [http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/description.asp?item\\_id=12530](http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/description.asp?item_id=12530) in your browser for more information about *At Home with God*.

- [CLICK HERE](http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/description.asp?item_id=79654) or type [http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/description.asp?item\\_id=79654](http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/description.asp?item_id=79654) in your browser for more information about *Family, the Forming Center*.