




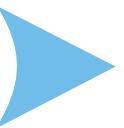




FAMILY LIFE CONFERENCE



Devotions in a Box
2024

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OVERVIEW

I remember first teaching my kids to play catch. Having played college baseball, I was eager to pass on my love for baseball. The teaching, the encouragement, and the process of learning to catch can be quite enjoyable. Pastoring a church with a school, I get to continue that process as a coach. Helping youth learn to receive a basketball or football with their hands open and extended continues to fill practices early on in the season.

This teaching and coaching carries over into our Christian vocation as parents. We teach our children the truths of the Christian faith centered on Christ Jesus and revealed through His Word. The Family Life Conference will focus on passing on the faith to those youngest disciples who are learning from you to follow Jesus Christ. We will teach you ways to “toss” the Word before your children, to model the Baptized life every day, and to hunger and thirst for the righteousness given to the faithful in the Lord’s Supper.

In this packet, you will find tools that will help you teach your children how to “catch”. Not baseballs, basketballs, or footballs, but the very Word of God that creates and strengthens faith (Rom 10:17). Receiving His instruction from you and from others nourishes the faith given to us at our Baptism and is expressed in every moment of our lives (1 Cor 4:14-16; 11:1; Phil 3:17-21; 1 Thes 1:6-7; 2 Thes 2:11-14a). These devotions can be used by the local church to provide care and instruction for families as their parents attend the Family Life Conference or by the Christian home that faithfully teaches the Word of God through family devotions.

Each of these devotions will take a slightly different approach to help families try different methods of family devotions (though we desire to encourage you there is no wrong way to teach His Word in truth) and provide various ideas for activities around the theme. Pick and choose what works for your family. Remove distractions, set a time, and play a little catch with the blessed gift of God’s Word and the faith it creates! Try new approaches that will help you grow and shift your family devotional time as your children grow through various stages while they mature (Lk 2:52; 1 Pt 2:2-3; Eph 4:13-14; Phil 3:12-17; Heb 6:1). Be encouraged by the life-changing powerful Word of God as you walk worthy of the calling that you have received in Christ Jesus (Rom 1:16; Heb 4:12; Eph 4:1; 1 Thes 2:12; Col 1:10; Phil 2:12-13).

READ, LISTEN, REPEAT (SHEMA)

Theme verse - *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Deuteronomy 6:4–5*

Devotion - Learning to catch is a skill that schools have been teaching for a long time. We have practiced catching footballs, baseballs, basketballs, and lots of other things. Once we start getting good at it, we can do it consistently. Then you can start doing other fun things, like catching behind your back or juggling (if anyone can juggle, they definitely should at this point).

We do this with faith as well. In our devotions, we are going to practice catching in different ways. In this devotion, we want to read some verses from the Bible and talk about them. Just like learning to catch, we need to focus on what we are going to do...keep our eyes on the ball. So, to fix our eyes on what we want to catch, let's turn to 2 Timothy chapter 3 in your Bibles. Together, read out loud 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

Talk about what these verses mean. Ask for and answer questions (meaning of words, and meaning of the message). Who teaches you the faith (take responses from the kids; parents/family, pastors/teachers, friends)? Who did you learn things about Jesus from? How can we continue learning those things?

As we read God's Word, we get to learn not just from other people but from Jesus Himself. This book is where we get to hear the voice of God. In this book, we get to learn of God's love for us... an everlasting love that will never go away. We learn that this love casts out fear and overcomes sin and death! In this book, we get to focus on Jesus and learn how to catch the truths of faith. This Word of God teaches us, corrects us, and trains us to do good works so that others see Jesus in us...so they can catch faith and learn from you!



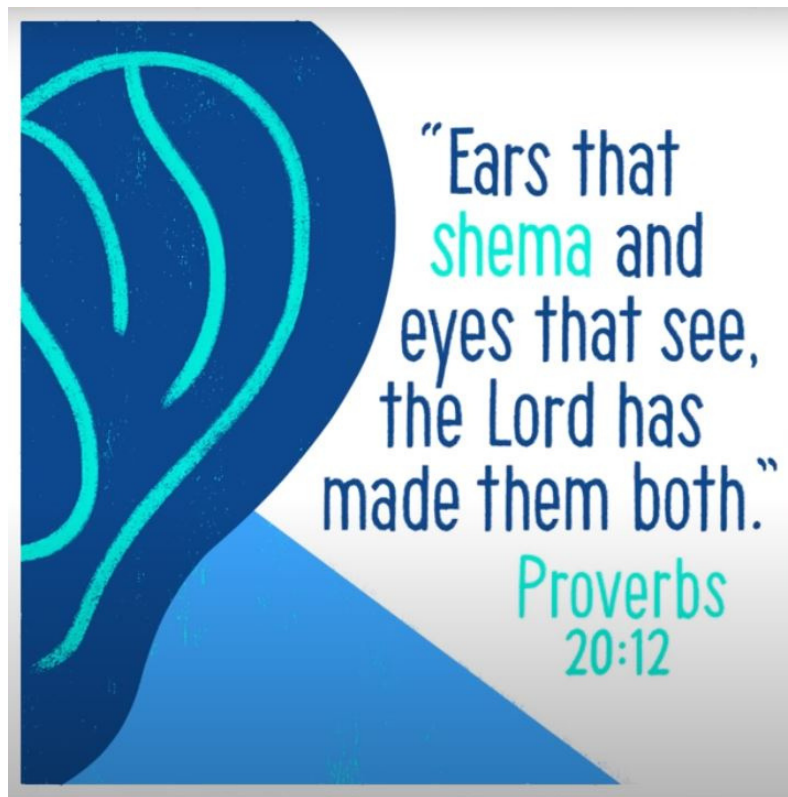
Activity -

- Play catch with one another (soft squishy ball from the kit)
- Play telephone with lots of distractions (music, everyone talking, TV, people running around)
- Talk about how distractions make things more difficult to focus. How can we limit distractions when focusing on God's Word?
- Blindfold a student and have them find one specific student while no one is talking, and then with all the kids talking (like the Marco Polo pool game).
- Revisit the theme verse and work on memorizing it.

Video (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/shema-listen/>) - Watch the video and discuss the importance of listening.

Discussion -

- How can listening lead to obedience?
- How can you focus on hearing and doing what Jesus tells you to?
- Most importantly, how can you hear what He has done for you?
- What things distract you (in Sunday School, church, and the like)?



A Note - This devotion invites families to read scripture together and discuss God's Word. This approach might fit your family, but takes a little preparation to determine what you are going to read through and anticipate how to answer questions. Please remember, that you can always respond, "I am not sure how to answer that, why don't we ask the pastor?!" Modeling the Christian life isn't having the answers, it is going to His Word in faith!

THE LORD'S LOVE AND BLESSING (YHWH)

Theme verse - *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."* Deuteronomy 6:4-5



Devotion - When you sneeze, and someone says, "God bless you!" Is that a good thing? Do you think that a blessing is a good thing?

A blessing is a good thing. It is a gift. Let me show you. (Distribute blank cards.) Now, I just gave you a gift. Do you feel blessed? (Hopefully will say "no.") Why not? (Allow for answers) But, you could use this as a bookmark. (Take hymnal or bible and demonstrate.) Okay, maybe this will help. (Distribute pencils or crayons). Now do you feel more blessed? (will hopefully be more appreciative).

That's because a blessing isn't just any old gift, it is a good gift that is meant to be helpful, useful or encouraging. How could you use these gifts now? It's fun to get gifts, isn't it. It's even better when the gift is something that we can use or appreciate. When we receive that kind of a gift it is a "blessing." Who do we give blessings to? (allow for responses)

Did you know that God also blesses you? He loves you. That's a blessing in itself. Can you think of some other ways that God blesses you? (see what they say) He cares for us. He forgives us. Are these helpful gifts? Now, do you think that these gifts are meant for us to keep to ourselves? Don't you think it might be fun to bless others too, when you love them and when you forgive them if they hurt you? Let's take the gifts that you've been given and bless someone else. Let's draw a smiley on our cards. Now, let's think of someone that we can give it to. Now, let's pray and thank God for our blessings and pray for a blessing for others as well. (Say a short prayer together). You've been blessed to be a blessing. Go give your blessing to someone else. (Encourage the children to give away their cards with the smiley on them.)

Activity -

For this visual lesson, you need a deep tray or shallow basin plus many clear cups and glasses of varying sizes. Have a pitcher of clear water nearby for this demonstration. Tell the kids that blessings from God can vary, some of His blessings are long life, or peace because we know that “all things work together for the good of those who love God.” Sometimes the Lord will bless us with abundance in different areas of our lives too. Pour the water into the cups until they overflow.

Since God blesses us, how do you think we can bless others? (take answers from children)

Group blessing - Have students make a circle and everyone sit down. Ask children to hold their hands out in front of them as if they are ready to receive something. Then ask them to close their eyes while you say the following blessing over them:

Jesus, bless their feet; may they bring good news
Bless their legs; may they carry on in times of suffering
Bless their backs; may they be strong enough to bear the burden of others
Bless their arms; may they hold the lonely; and their hands to do good work
Bless their necks; may they turn their head toward the poor
Bless their ears to discern truth; their eyes to see beauty, and their mouths to speak encouragement
Bless their minds; may they grow wise
And finally, bless their hearts; may they grow to love you - and all that you have made - in the right order.
AMEN.

Video (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/yhwh-lord/>) - Watch the video and discuss the role the Lord plays in our lives.

Discussion -

- What are some ways that God blesses everyone?
- What are some ways that God has blessed you specifically?
- What are some ways that we can use our blessings to bless others?



JESUS FILLED HEARTS (AHAVAH)

Theme verse - “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Devotion - What do you know about Moses? (He led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land; God gave him the 10 Commandments, God’s rules so that we can live together in peace here on earth).

God also gave Moses a message for the Israelites because they had a very hard time remembering and trusting God while they were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years on their way to the land God promised to them. God’s message to the Israelites was this: “There is only one God, and we are part of God’s family! Love God with everything you say, think, and do!” This message applies to me and you as well. Many times we refer to it as the Greatest Commandment (Mt 22:36-40). That means it's VERY important!



What do you think it means to love God with everything you think, say and do? (allow for answers)

- *On a large whiteboard, draw a big heart. Explain to students that the heart represents our heart.*

The Bible says that we should love God most – with ALL of our heart. It’s okay to love other things, and God has given us a lot of fun things to love in the world, but He wants us to love Him first and Him the most. Let’s see what happens if we don’t love God first. Start naming some different things that you love. (allow for responses and write them inside the heart)

Once the heart is full, or students run out of responses, say, “How are we going to love God the most with such a little space? Is there enough room left to love Him with all our heart? I am going to erase all of these things, and we are going to love God first AND the most. Erase all of the words and write as big as you can G O D across the heart.

See how big God is in our hearts? Now we can put in the other things that we love, just smaller, but we can still love them too.

- *Rewrite the things previously mentioned around the word GOD in the heart.*

Back to Moses. The Israelites were thankful for the new land, the Promised Land, God was giving them. But they worried about how they would remember God in this new home. What if they forgot about God? Moses shared with them more of God’s command. He said, “Teach your children about God. Talk about God at home, when you go places, at bedtime, and in the morning.

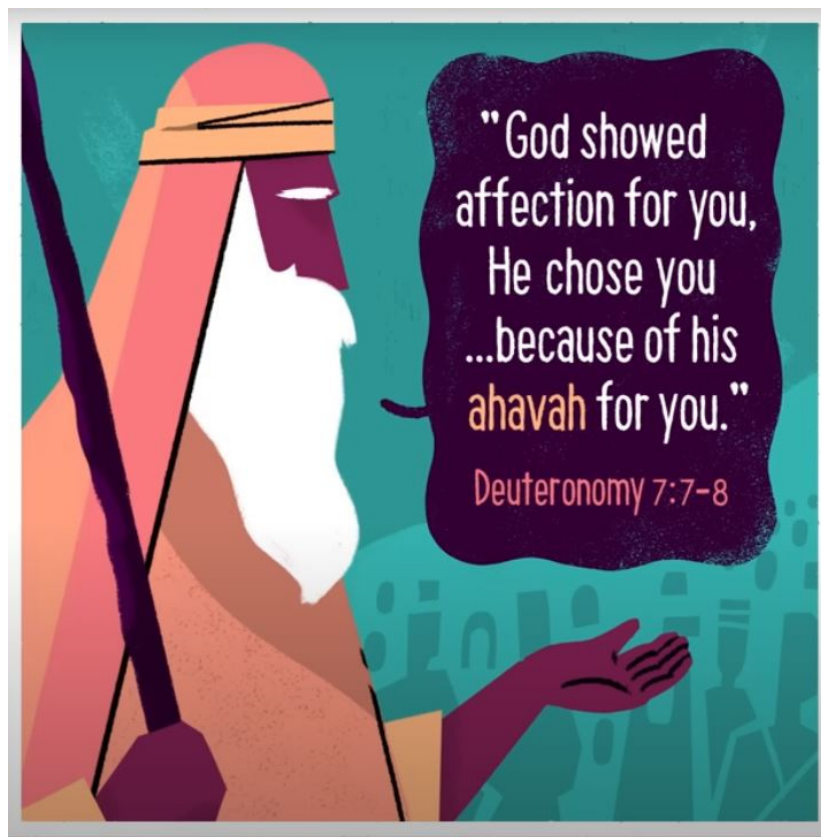
Those directions that Moses shared from God to the Israelites apply to us as well. It is the responsibility of your parents to talk with you all the time about God. To remember Him in everything you think, do, and say. So if it's the responsibility of your parents to continually talk with you about God, then it’s your responsibility to listen to what they teach you and keep it in your heart so that you love God the most, with everything you think, say, and do.

Activity -

Pass the Pepper - Have students sit in a circle. One student gets to hold a pepper shaker or some other small object. Students are only able to talk when holding the pepper shaker. When they do have the pepper shaker, they have to talk, and they have to answer a question. The activity begins when the student holding the object asks a question like, "What's your favorite movie?" or "What's the one food you would eat for every meal of the day?" Encourage them to be creative with their questions. Once the first question is asked by the student with the object, he/she will answer and then pass the object to someone else in the circle. The process continues until everyone has had an opportunity to answer the question. The last person to answer the question then asks a new one and the process begins again.

Rose/Thorn - Students sit in a circle. The leader chooses one person to begin by sharing a "rose" for the day and a "thorn" for the day. A 'rose' is something positive or good, and a 'thorn' is something negative or bad.

Video (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ahavah-love/>) - Watch the video and discuss God's great love.



Discussion -

- What things do you have in your room/house that make you think about God? Show it to someone and tell them why it helps you remember God.
- How would you describe God to someone? What special words could you use?
- What do you think God looks like? (We don't know exactly what God looks like. 1 John 4:12 says "no one has ever seen God." But we can look around the world and see creation, which reflects the glory of God and reminds us that He created animals, plants, the earth, the skies, people, and more!)

GOD'S WORD IN YOUR HEART (LEV)

Theme verse - *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."* Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Devotion – Start with the video (linked on the next page) as an introduction to what we mean by "heart" in this verse. Show a valentine (Cut a big heart out of paper and write on it if you don't have one.) What is this? What do we do with valentines? We give them to people we love. Some valentines say "I love you with all my heart". What does that mean? It means all of our feelings and our actions that come from them, are directed towards that person, right?



That's just what we're learning through our theme verse, to give all of our love only to God. When you love someone, how do you relate to them? Do you do kind things, think of them first, and come up with ways to do the things you know make them happy? When we love God, we are focused first and most importantly on obeying Him. How do we know what He wants us to do? We read His Word. That's what our theme verse is all about, putting His Word in our hearts. Psalm 119:105 says, **"I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You."** To love God with all our heart, we need to have His Word hidden there. How do we get His Word in our heart? We memorize it! That means we say it over and over and over again until it's so deep inside of us that no one can ever get it out. Another way to say that is to learn it by HEART! Just like anything that we hear over and over, once you've memorized something, you'll never forget it.

Who can tell me the order of the planets? The colors of the rainbow? Are there any commercials or songs you've heard so many times you're sure you'll be 85 and could still say them? That's what we need to do with God's Word. The Shema in our lesson was just that for God's people in the Old Testament. God told them to write this word on the doorposts of their houses and carry it around on their clothes. Everywhere they looked they saw God's Word. Can you think of any ways we could do something like this now? Maybe you could set a timer for every hour to remind you to say a Bible verse that you're memorizing. Maybe you could put some Bible verses up on your wall in frames or even on post-it notes that you just stick all over. If you're in confirmation class, you're probably memorizing things there. If you're in Sunday school, maybe your teacher has given you verses to learn by heart. We say the Apostles or Nicene Creed every week in church so that those truths are deep down in our hearts.

Let's think of some other ideas of how we can obey God's commandments to love Him with all of our heart. As we put His Word inside of us, as we learn it by heart, it will keep us from sin and help us to love God.

Activity -

- Use the Bible verse sticker to decorate hearts that you have the kids cut out so they can hang them up on their walls. They can color their hearts if they would like.
- Have some print outs of various common jingles and commercials and see if the kids can finish the lines to show them how much they already have in their hearts!
- Write out the theme verse above and have the kids say it together. Then take out a few words and have them say it while filling in the blanks. Progress through the verse slowly taking out more words so they have it memorized by the end.
- Pick a verse (maybe the theme verse?) and tell the kids you're going to help them memorize it. Say it together a few times and then have them spread out in the room (split up into small groups if there are a lot of kids). Throw a ball from person to person and every time you throw it say the next word of the verse. Then march in a circle saying the verse. Remind them how easy it is to learn God's Word by heart when we just say it over and over and over.

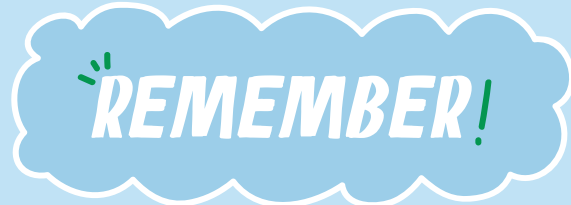
Video (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/lev-heart/>)

Discussion -

- Review what it means to love God with all your heart. What other things do we love?
- What do we need to do to make sure we are loving God more than the things of the world?
- What does it mean to hide God's Word in our hearts?
- What are some things that might keep us from doing that?
- How can you plan to deal with those things so you make sure to do what's most important?
- What would be good about having a lot of Bible verses memorized?
- How could God use that to be a blessing in your life and the lives of other people?

15 Bible Verses to Memorize

John 3:16	1 John 1:7
Ephesians 2:8-9	Matthew 4:4 (or 4:10)
Romans 3:23-24	Matthew 5:14
Joshua 1:9	Matthew 6:33
Romans 6:23	Matthew 11:28
1 Peter 5:8	Matthew 28:19-20
Romans 8:28	
1 John 4:7-8	



Commercial Jingles (for Lev devotion):

Just Do ____	"Just Do It" (Nike)
Melts in your mouth, not in your _____	"Melts in your mouth, not in your hands" (M&Ms)
The Breakfast of _____	"Breakfast of Champions" (Wheaties)
Betcha can't ____ just one	"Betcha can't eat just one" (Lay's)
I'm _____ it	"I'm Lovin' It" (McDonald's)
Silly rabbit! ____ are for kids!	"Silly rabbit! Trix are for kids!" (Trix)
Taste the _____	"Taste the rainbow" (Skittles)
____ gives you wings	"Red Bull gives you wings" (Red Bull)
__ you hear me now?	"Can you hear me now?" (Verizon)
Eat Mor _____	"Eat Mor Chikin" (Chck-fil-A)
You're in good _____	"You're in good hands" (Allstate)
Have a break. Have a _____	"Have a break. Have a KitKat" (KitKat)
Snap! _____! Pop!	"Snap! Crackle! Pop!" (Rice Krispies)
They're _____ Delicious!	"They're Magically Delicious!" (Lucky Charms)
You're not you when you're _____	"You're not you when you're hungry" (Snickers)

THE SINGING SOUL (NEPHESH)

Theme verse - *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Devotion - Watch the video linked on the next page. What stands out to you about the word “Nephesh”? While it is translated as “soul”, we also see it used for the throat or to make a melody with one’s throat. The people of God love to sing His praises. We sing in worship. We sing in the car. We sing in the bathtub! Take some time to share some of your favorite Christian songs, camp songs, VBS songs, or hymns (make a big list on the board or a sheet of paper).

Pick one of your favorite songs and sing it (have someone play the song as the kids sing along or you may need to pull up a video). I love to sing camp songs that have actions! I love to sing hymns in worship and listen to Christian music because it focuses my mind, heart, and soul on Jesus! The book of Psalms is filled with reasons we sing His praise! We sing of His steadfast love, a new song, of His wonderful works, of His creation, His goodness, to bless His name, because of His ways, for the glory of His name, and all the earth sings these praises!

If everyone sings His praises, then we too should join in that great song! Yet, there are still times when I don’t want to sing. What are the reasons you don’t always want to sing (take responses: don’t like the song, don’t sing well, isn’t cool, or some other reason)?

In your Baptism, you were given God’s Holy Spirit. You have all of your sins forgiven and the benefit of Jesus’ death and resurrection are yours! You are clothed with Jesus’ righteousness, His perfect obedience and holiness are now yours! You have been given help to sing and make a joyful noise to the Lord as you live the Christian faith in your daily life! You have been given a place in heaven that Jesus will come back and take you to! You have been given this faith and hope because of His love! So we sing to praise His great name!



Activity -

- Grab some old VBS songs, and sing! Start up a dance party with songs of the church (songs that help you remember books of the Bible, Bible verses, or songs for worship).

Video <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/nephesh-soul/>



Discussion -

- What is your baptismal birthday?
- Look at your baptismal gifts (robe, white cloth, candle, certificate, banner; whatever you have). How do they help you remember the gifts God has given you at Baptism?
- Talk about what your room in heaven might look like. Then read 1 Corinthians 2:9 and Ephesians 3:20-21.
- Talk about why you like the songs you do? (With older children, talk about the messages in the songs that they like and how they relate to their faith. How can they use discernment to guard the faith?)

A Note - This devotion invites families to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs together! Focus on each song's message and how we can appropriately understand it based on God's Word. Prepare to be silly as a family and keep that singing soul going at worship!

GOD IS YOUR STRENGTH (MEOD)

Theme verse - *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Devotion - What does it mean to be strong? Who do you know that is strong? Are babies strong? Are football players strong? Strength and might are similar words that have to do with being able to do something that is hard - lifting something heavy, pushing something that is big, knocking over something that is fixed. If we say someone has strength, or might, we mean that they can do these hard things. How do you get strong? Does anyone start out strong? In order to be strong, we have to build up our muscles. Our muscles in our body enable us to be strong, but they start out very weak. Babies can't even lift up their heads. The older you get the stronger your muscles are but if you really want to have strong muscles you have to work at it. And do you know how you do that? One little step at a time. When someone wants to be able to lift heavy things, they start with light things, maybe soup cans. Then when they get used to that, they can lift bags of flour. After that, big heavy weights. We slowly build up our ability to do the hard things by doing easy things and then working our way up.



So, in our Christian faith, why do we need strength? The Bible tells us our enemy, the devil, is prowling about like a lion trying to devour people (1 Pt 5:8). We know as Christians that there's a battle going on around us and we need to fight in it with the armor of God (Eph 6:10-20). 1 Corinthians 16:3 tells us to “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.” We need strength to fight the devil and stay steadfast in our faith. So how do we get that?

Isaiah 41:10 God says, ***“I will strengthen you.”*** Psalm 73:26 says ***“God is the strength of our hearts.”*** Philippians 4:19 says ***“we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.”*** 2 Thessalonians 3:3 says ***“the Lord is faithful and He will strengthen us.”***

Strength comes from God. He builds it in us one little bit at a time, just like we can build muscles in our body. He does this through His Word and His Sacraments - Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Every time we read or hear His Word, we get stronger. From the day we are Baptized, God starts building us up in His strength. Your parents work hard to help you gain strength by taking you to church and Sunday school, reading the Bible to you, and all those sorts of things. And then how do we love God with that strength? By giving that gift back to Him, just like we do with all our offerings. When we use that strength to resist temptation, to help and build up other people, to pray, to worship - we are loving God with the strength He gives us.

Activity -

- Take the kids through a series of exercises to “test their strength”. How many push-ups can they do? Sit ups? Jumping jacks? Remind them that if their muscles are weak, they can work overtime to build them! Strength comes bit by bit.
- Bring in objects of various sizes and weights and have the kids try to line them up in the order of what they think is the lightest to the heaviest. Then let them pick them up and see if they were correct.
- Use toothpicks and gumdrops to build structures and see if they can hold up the weight of a cotton ball. Did anyone make one strong enough to hold up a ping-pong ball? A tennis ball? The stronger the structure the better it is, just like the more we are built up in our faith the stronger we are.
- Hand the kids a popsicle stick and see if they can break it in two. It should snap easily. Then take 20 sticks in one pile and see if anyone can break them all at once. How strong would you have to be to do that? If you want to be able to be strong you have to work up to that slowly. How about people who can break a board in half? They’ve worked to get there!

Video (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/meod-strength/>) - This video has to do with the word we translate as strength which really means everything that’s in us, all we have. We can talk about how everything God has given us is to be given back to Him as an offering.



Discussion-

- How can we love God with ALL of ourselves?
- Where does our strength come from?
- What could we do today to get stronger in the Lord?
- What could we do to love God with that strength?

Dear Parents,

Greetings in Jesus' name! We pray that your time today at the Family Life Conference - Passing on the Faith, is blessed with many opportunities to learn, share, and grow in your God-given task of being an instrument by which future generations hear about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Take advantage of the many opportunities you'll have today to hear excellent speakers and reflect on the role into which you have been placed to be a witness to your children, grandchildren, and others who look to you for guidance.

As you learn and grow, your children will also be enjoying a fun and fruitful time of learning today. While your task is to grow in your role as one who passes on the faith, today's mission for your children is to begin to understand their role as receivers of the faith. One day too, they will walk in your shoes as the ones passing on the faith, but to come to that day they must first learn to receive the faith. No doubt, they have already developed many of these skills through the things you do in your home and their connection to your congregation, but putting a name and emphasis on these things will help them to better receive the faith we all desire to be passed on.

Just as any good game of catch has a passer and a receiver, so it is with our faith. Ultimately the Holy Spirit is the one who gifts that faith, nurtures it, and causes it to grow, but we all become His agents as we accept our responsibilities for the faith of our children. We hope that today your children will learn to Listen and Love the Lord with Heart, Soul, and Strength as we focus on the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 which say, ***"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."***

This is going to be a great day for both you and your children, and our fervent prayer is that you will all go home today with renewed energy and resolve to boldly carry out the tasks to which God has called you. Be sure to share with them some of the things you learn today. Make sure to ask them about all they did today as they learned to be receivers of the faith that you desire to pass along to them. May God richly bless your family's interactions as you together grow in your love of the Lord and desire to serve Him.

In Christ,

Family Life Conference Team

Supplies Provided by the District with Life Conference Registration:

- Squishy ball (maybe with a phrase of faith on it)
- Bible verse sticker sheets
- Toothpicks
- Gummy candy (ie. gum drops)