

HOLY FAMILY TIME

Free Daily Scripture and Prayer Resources for the Home

www.holyfamilytime.com

What is “Holy Family Time”?

HOLY FAMILY TIME is a free online resource produced by Sola Publishing which is intended to help parents and children develop the habit of spending time together praying, reading Scripture, and talking together. The resource is designed to be quickly and easily accessed on computers, tablets, and phones.

How do I access the resource?

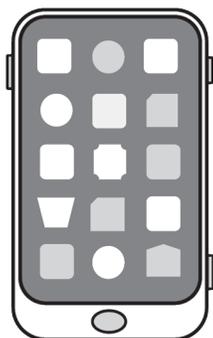
There is no registration, membership, or access code required. Simply visit the website at:

www.holyfamilytime.com

This website features a number of free online resources for families, but the “Holy Family Time” devotional will always be front and center on the main home page. Feel free to bookmark the site or mark it as a “favorite” so you can return to it easily!

Are you App happy?

For the convenience of those using hand-held devices, you can also access the *Holy Family Time* website through a link on the **Sola App**.



To Download the free Sola App to your phone or tablet:

Search for “Sola App” in Google Play or in the iTunes App Store.

The Sola App has many other features, including Scripture and the Small Catechism.

What Does This Mean?

“Daily Devotions”

When Christians speak of “daily devotions,” they are referring to a time set aside each day for Scripture reading and prayer. A “devotional” is a published resource often used for such a purpose. To “do our devotions” or “have our devotional time” are common ways people speak of engaging in this activity. Sometimes, you may also hear people refer to their family time of prayer as “the family altar.”

What is unique about the Holy Family Time Devotional?

There are many daily devotional resources available online and in print form. The *Holy Family Time* devotional was written with these key emphases in mind:



1. Solid Biblical Content
2. Child- and Family-Friendly Readings
3. Lutheran Theological Perspective
4. Questions Asked by the Children
5. Employing Luther’s Three-fold Approach to Scripture: Prayer, Study, and Struggle

Holy Family Time is part of the larger *Holy Families! Initiative*, produced by Sola Publishing and sponsored by the North American Lutheran Church through a generous grant from the Thrivent Foundation.

How Do We Get Started?

"Give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!" (1 Chronicles 16:8)

Gather the family together at a similar time each day to read from the Bible and pray together, following the online resource.

The Scripture lessons used in the *Holy Family Time* devotional series follow the general pattern of the Church seasons, allowing families to enter into the story at any point in the year. Each week of the year, the devotions focus on a biblical "story" text, with selected verses highlighted throughout the week.

The current day's devotion will appear as the top post on the website each day (previous days can be accessed by scrolling down). You will see the date and day of the week clearly printed at the top of each post.

Format of the Devotions

"Let my plea come before you; deliver me according to your Word." (Psalm 119:170)

To help children develop a sense of consistency in repetition, the same four-part format is used for each day's devotional:

Pray: *Call upon God to open our hearts and minds to hear his Word.*

Listen: *Listen carefully to the Word, in verse, narrative, rhyme, and catechism.*

Engage: *Let God's Word work on us through struggle with Scripture, with parents responding to their children's questions of faith.*

Affirm: *Pray that God would put his Word into action in our daily life and bless each other in faith.*

As an acronym, these four steps spell out the word P.L.E.A. As the Bible promises: *"The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer."* (Psalm 6:9)

What Does This Mean?

"The Sign of the Cross"

The "sign of the cross" is a physical movement of the hands made when speaking the name of the Trinity — the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This historical tradition is used in many churches as a reminder that God has laid claim to our lives through our Baptism into his name.

In worship, the sign of the cross is often placed upon the people by the pastor; at the same time, individuals may also trace the sign of the cross over their own heart.

A "Cross-Shaped" Motion

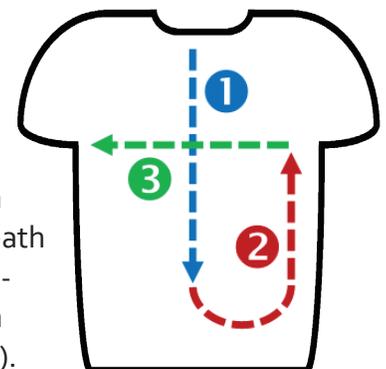
Each day's devotion begins with same opening words, as each family member makes the sign of the cross and calls upon God in prayer:

From God to us, from death to life, from me to you — in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This "cross-shaped" invocation not only calls upon the biblical Trinitarian name for God, but also foreshadows the general movement of each day's devotional. The motion itself can help serve as a reminder of how God's Word functions in our lives — not only highlighting both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith, but tying them together with the letter "J" (for Jesus), as the symbol of God's work in bringing us from death to life.

Imagine drawing this on a T-shirt you are wearing:

Using the right hand, the first movement is down, from head to stomach (God to us). The second movement traces a "J" down and up to the heart (death to life). The third movement goes across from left to right (me to you).



Luther's Approach to the Word

"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." (Colossians 1:28-29)

Many daily devotionals tend to be written in a similar pattern, beginning with a Bible verse, an author's reflection, and a closing prayer. The *Holy Family Time* resource takes a slightly different format. Using a three-fold approach to Scripture that was taught by Martin Luther, the structure of the *Holy Family Time* devotions seeks to focus our attention on what God actually does *to us* and *in us* through his Word.

Luther used three Latin terms to speak of the necessary parts to our devotional reading of Holy Scripture:

1. *Oratio* (Prayer) = asking for God's Holy Spirit to speak to us through his Word.
2. *Meditatio* (Meditation) = listening carefully to what God is saying to us through his Word.
3. *Tentatio* (Struggle) = wrestling with the ways God's Word is calling us to faith and shaping our lives according to his will.

Exemplified in the downward stroke of the cross, notice how the direction of action is from God to us through the means of his Word. We believe that the Holy Spirit is actively at work in our study of God's Word, and this is precisely what we pray would happen among us.

We don't need to remember the Latin words, but it is always important to remember the direction of action when it comes to faith!

From Luther's Small Catechism:

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and live a godly life, now and to eternity.

Pattern for the Week

"From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:15)

In the *Holy Family Time* daily devotions, Scripture texts are repeated in different forms throughout the week to reinforce children's remembrance of the story. The thematic pattern of verses over the course of each week follows a Law-Gospel progression:

Monday: Understanding

Monday's devotional always contains the full text of a Bible story, from the Contemporary English Version (CEV) Bible. This version uses a limited vocabulary and simple style suitable for children to read and understand.

Tuesday: Struggle

Tuesday focuses on a shorter quote from the same story, showing how God's Word shows us our weakness and limitations.

Wednesday: Mercy

The verses for Wednesday highlight the promise of the story, and how God bestows on us his grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

Thursday: Compassion

Thursday presents the story again in the form of a children's rhyme, helping us to look to the needs of others around us.

Friday: Trust

Friday focuses on God's gift of faith as seen in the story, and how the Holy Spirit is at work to engender trust in Jesus within us.

Saturday: Generosity

Saturday features a quote from the Small Catechism, reflecting the theme for the week and how it leads us to action in daily life.

Sunday: Worship

Sunday uses a related passage from the Psalms to give praise to God.

Letting Children Ask Questions

"When in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.'" (Exodus 13:14)

In the ancient Hebrew tradition, parents had the opportunity to pass on the faith through questions God put in the mouth of their children. In the same way, throughout the Small Catechism Martin Luther uses the question *"What does this mean?"* — as an opportunity for the young to ask their parents basic questions of faith.



The *Holy Family Time* devotional uses a similar technique to prompt faith conversations between parents and children. As part of each day's devotion, discussion starters are provided in the form of two questions intended to be asked by the children.

It may not always seem like it, but children really do want to know what their parents think about matters of importance. Do not underestimate the importance of your witness in shaping your children's understanding of faith.

What Does This Mean?

"Bearing Witness"

Jesus said: "You are witnesses" (Luke 24:48). In biblical terms, "witnessing" or "bearing witness" refers to sharing our faith with others by speaking about what God has done in our lives — specifically, telling others what it means for you, yourself, to trust and belong to Jesus Christ.

Genuine witnessing does not take a confrontational approach. It is not an argument to be won, or a lecture about what someone else should do. It is also not a "sales pitch" where you try to "sell" listeners on faith and close the deal. Witnessing is a matter of simply telling your own experience — how you have felt, heard, and seen God at work in your life and in the world around you.

A Word of Encouragement

"Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Matthew 10:19-20)

It may seem intimidating at first to open yourself up to your children's questions — especially questions about faith and the Bible. But this kind of conversation is essential! It is your opportunity to bear witness to the promise of God in your life.

Some encouragement to keep in mind:

1. The questions provided in the devotional are intentionally written to allow parents to speak from their own life experience. (They are not academic questions requiring obscure biblical knowledge.)
2. If you are looking for an "answer key" — take your cues from the Bible verses and the prayers included in the devotional. These were intentionally written to point parents in the right direction.
3. When speaking to your children about your experience in faith, be honest about your own faith and doubts. A real life of faith is one that has both joys and struggles. Tell your kids how life really is, but also let them know that God is with us in whatever we face.
4. Don't be afraid to admit when you are unsure about something. If there is a question you don't know how to answer, tell your kids that you will try to find out. In this way, you model genuine curiosity and study. You may even suggest that you can ask the pastor together on Sunday!