

PUMPKIN PARABLE

Best Use: As an activity tied to the **Fall/Halloween** season

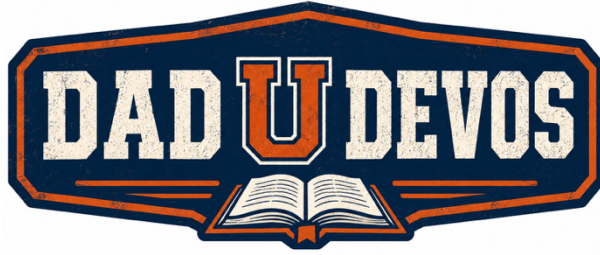
Nutritional Value: Uses a holiday that emphasizes darkness to shine the light of Christ

Advance Preparation: Make sure you have the following on hand...

- A large pumpkin and carving utensils
- A small candle and matches
- A Bible

Serve It Up: Follow these steps for a great experience...

1. Conduct a typical pumpkin carving activity, but use each step as part of the overall “pumpkin parable” by adding Bible reading and questions.
2. First, have the children help with the clean out portion of the carving – reaching their hand into the open pumpkin to pull out seeds and other “gunk” that will feel yucky to their hands.
3. Pause to read Matthew 23:25-28 and ask the children how the inside “gunk” is like our sin (yucky, smelly, etc.).
4. Once you have cleaned out the pumpkin, read Revelation 3:20 together and explain that confessing our sins enables God to take away the “yuck” of our sinful hearts.
5. Now draw and carve a happy face (not a scary face) on the pumpkin. Then read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and/or Ephesians 2:10 and explain that Jesus wants to make us into a “new creation” – just as the pumpkin filled with yuck became a jack-o-lantern with a joy-filled face.
6. Now read Matthew 5:14-16 while lighting and inserting a candle into the jack-o-lantern and turn down the lights to show how God wants to use us to shine His light, even on what is often celebrated as a dark and scary night.
7. Memorize the jingle – *“On a dark and scary night, we will shine Jesus’ light!”*



ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Best Use: As a **Thanksgiving** season family activity

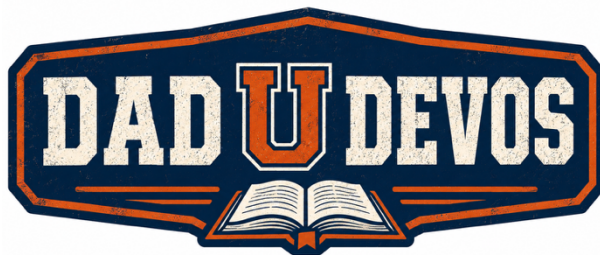
Nutritional Value: Learning to develop an attitude of gratitude

Advance Preparation: Make sure you have the following on hand...

- A glass of water
- Index cards
- Paper and crayons or markers
- A Bible

Serve It Up: Follow these steps for a great experience...

1. Fill a glass of water half-way and place it on the table in front of the children.
2. Give each child an index card with the phrase "The glass is half ____" written on it and ask them to complete the phrase.
3. Once they've completed the phrase, ask who wrote "full" and who wrote "empty" in the blank.
4. Now give each child a piece of drawing paper and crayons. Ask them to draw a large glass half full of water. Ask them to spell the name or draw pictures of good things they already have (toys, books, family, food, clothes, etc.) in the portion of the picture **with** water.
5. In the space **without** water, have them write or draw things they would like to have such as more money, a new toy, a vacation, a special kind of cereal, or whatever they can think of.
6. Read **1 Timothy 6:6-9** and **Philippians 4:11-12** and discuss why it is important that we "learn" to be content no matter what we do or don't have. Then read **Ephesians 5:20** and explain that the practice of expressing thanks is one way we make our life "half full" instead of "half empty" because it helps us focus on the blessings God has given rather than complain about the things we don't have.
7. Wrap up your time by giving the kids a stack of index cards and having them do a "Thanksgiving scavenger hunt" by running all over the house and identifying as many things for which they are thankful as they can in 10 minutes (or as long as you like). Let them write a word or draw a picture to represent each blessing.
8. Gather back together and have each person pray a brief prayer of thanks for each card.
9. Memorize the jingle – *"I'll be content with what God sent!"*



HUNGRY HUNGRY THANK YOU'S

Best Use: As a Thanksgiving Day activity with the children

Nutritional Value: To satisfy our hunger for joy by giving thanks

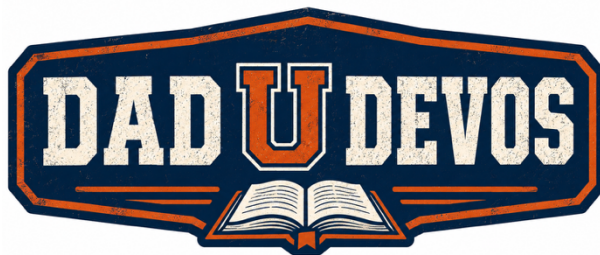
Advance Preparation: Make sure you have the following on hand...

- The game *Hungry Hungry Hippos* OR
- A bunch of marbles, a paper plate, and spoons
- A Bible

Serve It Up: Follow these steps for a great experience...

1. Gather everyone together before sitting down for the meal to enjoy a game designed to emphasize why we give thanks.
2. If you own the game *Hungry Hungry Hippos* get it ready. If not, create your own version by placing about 20-30 marbles on a large paper plate and giving each player a spoon with which they will pick up the marbles.
3. As the children anticipate starting the game, pause and invite your oldest child to read I Thessalonians 5:16-18... *"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*
4. Afterwards ask the following questions...

Q: What is God's will for us?	A: To give thanks
Q: Why do we give thanks?	A: To experience joy
5. Explain that one of the most important ways we fill our hunger for joy is to give thanks for the blessings God has given.
6. Now play several rounds of *Hungry Hungry Hippos* (or Marbles and Spoons) where the children try to gobble or pick-up as many as they can. The winner is the person who has the most balls or marbles at the end of the round.
7. Now, turn each child into a real "winner" by inviting them to share one thing for which they are thankful for each ball or marble they retrieved.
8. Emphasize that the more thanks we give the more our "joy tanks" fill up!
9. Play as many rounds as you can until the meal is served.
10. Memorize the jingle – *"Giving Thanks - Fills Our Tanks"*



TREE OF THANKFULNESS

Best Use: As a Thanksgiving family activity

Nutritional Value: Create a Thanksgiving tradition with immediate and/or extended family as a reminder of the many blessings the Lord gives us.

Advance Preparation: Make sure you have the following on hand...

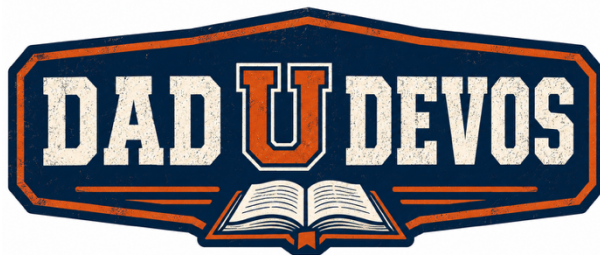
- Construction paper in fall colors
- Scissors, pencils/crayons
- Small plant or small tree branches in a vase
- Optional: old magazines/glue sticks

Serve It Up: Follow these steps for a great experience...

1. Place a small plant or arrangement as a centerpiece for your table.
2. Cut leaf shapes out of the construction paper or trace/cut everyone's hand to make a special leaf. Punch a hole in the paper and run ribbon through it. Place the papers in a basket with pencils/crayons.
3. As each family member arrives for your Thanksgiving mealtime together, ask them to write out what they are thankful for. Younger children can draw a picture or cut/paste something out of a magazine.
4. Before you begin eating, place each of the leaves on the centerpiece "tree."
5. During the meal, take turns allowing everyone to share what they wrote on their leaf.
6. Read 1 Chronicles 29:13 together: *"Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name."*
7. End your time together by asking the oldest person to thank God for His abundance and the many blessings He has given your family.

Optional: When the meal is over, take the thankful leaves and record the items of thanks that were written down in a Thankful Journal to update each Thanksgiving and review the prior years' blessings together.

Optional: When you are finished, have any children draw on a poster a tree trunk, grass, flowers, etc. Take the leaves and attach them. Hang the poster during the next couple of weeks to remind you of the things you are thankful for.



“A CHRISTMAS CAROL” MOVIE NIGHT

Best Use: As a Christmas season family movie night chat

Nutritional Value: Focusing on the meaning of repentance

Advance Preparation

- Buy/rent your favorite version of *A Christmas Carol*
- Pop some popcorn and have the discussion guide ready

Serve It Up: Be up front with your kids by explaining that you want to watch a movie to discuss its themes from a Christian perspective. Don't use this as an occasion to teach, but to enter into good dialogue. You probably won't agree on everything, which is fine. Just discussing the themes can strengthen your relationship and stretch critical thinking skills.

Story Synopsis: There is more message in this holiday classic than we often realize. It is not just about a guy who didn't like Christmas. It is a tale of repentance and redemption. Ebenezer Scrooge is a powerful symbol of the choice each of us must make in life – either to follow our selfish, sinful nature or submit to God and reflect His image in our attitudes and actions.

Discuss Together:

1. Was Scrooge made in the image of God?

Answer: All human beings, including Scrooge, are made in the image of God. But when we abandon God's life-giving joy, like Scrooge, we darken the picture God intends our lives to be.

2. In what ways did Scrooge show he had a sinful heart?

Answer: Scrooge was selfish, stingy, mean, etc. - all of which show the dark side of people.

3. After he realized he was wrong, what did Scrooge do?

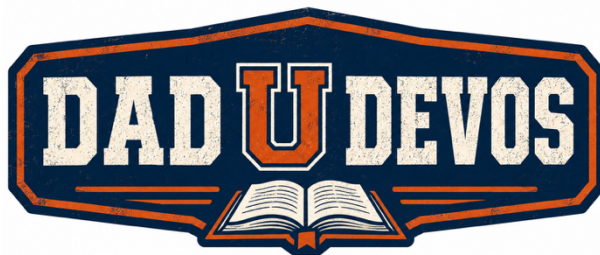
Answer: He turned away from the wrong toward what is right. In other words, he repented – which means to turn around.

4. During his dream Scrooge felt badly about the consequences of his past actions and regretted his self-centered lifestyle. Is that the same thing as repentance?

Answer: Not really. Feeling badly is not the same thing as turning around and heading in the right direction.

5. How does the story of Scrooge echo the good news of the gospel?

Answer: We all make sinful choices that hurt ourselves and others. But God gives us the grace to repent and turn around, allowing us to experience God's fellowship and joy rather than the dark isolation of selfish living.



GIFTS FROM THE HEART

Best Use: As a Christmas family activity

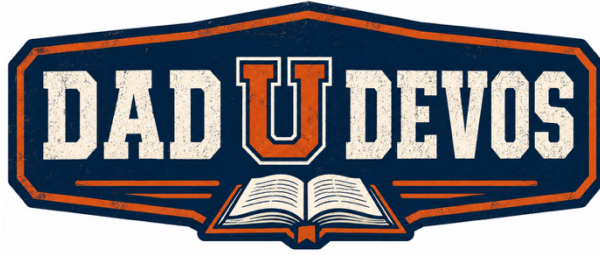
Nutritional Value: Focusing on the true meaning of Christmas as you celebrate Christ's birth and find ways to give gifts that money cannot buy.

Advance Preparation: Make sure you have the following on hand...

- A basket or gift box
- Pieces of craft or notebook paper, pencils or crayons, ribbon or premade paper ornaments
- Birthday cake or cupcake
- Optional: Small Christmas tree

Serve It Up: Follow these steps for a great experience...

1. During the first week of December, call the family together to talk about the meaning of Christmas as you make paper ornaments together with construction paper and ribbon. Place them in a basket or gift box.
2. Ask each person to share why we celebrate Christmas. Afterwards, read the Christmas story aloud from Luke 2. Explain that the greatest gift we could ever receive was given that first Christmas.
3. After discussing the birth of Jesus and what Christ did for us, let the family know that during the rest of the month you will be giving "gifts from the heart" – which are gifts money can't buy such as Dad getting the newspaper for a sick neighbor, daughter helping little brother pick up his room, brother telling mom how much he loves her with a big hug.
4. Each time that you catch someone giving a *gift from the heart*, write down what they did on a paper ornament and hang it on a Christmas tree.
5. On Christmas Eve, take all of the ornaments and wrap them. Put a label reading: *To-Jesus, Love-* and insert your names.
6. Before you begin unwrapping your gifts, take time to give these *gifts from the heart* to Jesus in celebration of his birthday. Open the gift to Jesus and take time to pull out each ornament and read it aloud.
7. You can have a birthday cake, donut or cupcake with a candle to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus.
8. When you finish reading through your *gifts from the heart*, take time to share what you love about Jesus.
9. Close your time in prayer, thanking God for giving the best *gift from the heart* on that first Christmas.



THE GREATEST GIFT

Best Use: As a Christmas family activity

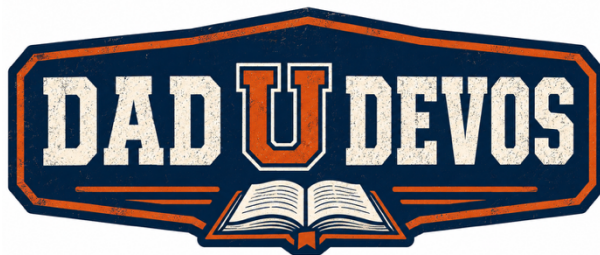
Nutritional Value: Helping children connect the dots between the birth of baby Jesus and the reason He came.

Advance Preparation: Make sure you have the following on hand...

- A large piece of cardboard, scissors and tape
- A red marker or crayon
- A stack of index cards and pencils
- A Bible

Serve It Up: Follow these steps for a great experience...

1. Before opening gifts have the children help you create a large cardboard cross. You can also use wooden boards to nail together if the children are old enough.
2. Give each person a stack of index cards and a marker and invite them to write a word or draw a picture that represents something they do wrong that the Bible calls "sin." Younger children might draw a mean face to represent temper tantrums or the word "NO" to represent disobedience.
3. Ask the oldest child to read aloud Romans 3:23... *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Explain that sin means "to disobey God." Ask the children how many of us sin according to this verse.
4. Then have a child read Romans 6:23 aloud... *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Explain that "wages" means punishment. Then explain that the most important "gift" of Christmas is that Jesus came to pay the "wages" for our sin!
5. Invite each person to tape or nail their index card "sins" to the cross while mom or dad reads John 3:16... *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*
6. Now use a big red marker or crayon to write the word "Jesus" across each image and word on your cardboard cross, explaining that God no longer sees our sin. He only sees what Jesus did for us!
7. Pray a prayer of thanks to God for the gift of Jesus and then memorize Romans 6:23 together.



“It’s A Wonderful Life” MOVIE NIGHT

Best Use: As a Christmas season family movie night chat

Nutritional Value: Focusing on the value of life and the power of serving others

Advance Preparation

- Buy/rent a copy of *It’s A Wonderful Life*
- Pop some popcorn and have the discussion guide on the reverse side ready.

Serve It Up: Be up front with your kids by explaining that you want to watch the film to discuss its themes from a Christian perspective. Don’t use this as an occasion to teach, but to enter into good dialogue. You probably won’t agree on everything, which is fine. Just discussing the themes can strengthen your relationship and stretch critical thinking skills.

Story Synopsis: This wonderful 1946 classic has become a Christmas season tradition for many families. Take a few moments after watching to discuss the implicit message of George Bailey’s life experience. After a lifetime of sacrificing his own dreams and ambitions for the sake of others, George encounters a crisis which pushes him to the end of himself. Wishing he had never been born, the angel Clarence gives him what he asks for by showing George what life for others would have been like if not for him. In the end, George realizes just how wonderful life is – all thanks to a little perspective.

Discuss Together:

1. **Why did George wish he had never been born?**

Answer: Because he was focused on his troubles and on all the things he didn’t get to do.

2. **What was so wonderful about George Bailey’s life?**

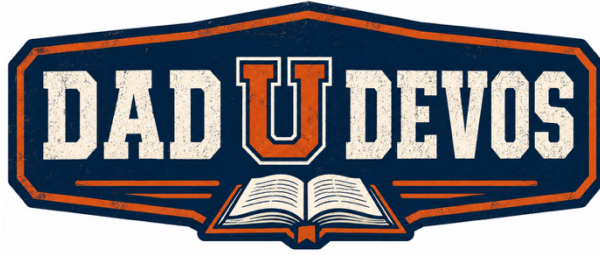
Answer: His life became rich by serving and helping other people rather than chasing his own dream.

3. **What is the message of this movie?**

Answer: That we have great worth, even if life doesn’t turn out like we expect.

4. **What Bible passage does the life of George Bailey model?**

Answer: James 1:27 says “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”



THE LOVE MIRROR

Best Use: As a **Valentines Day** celebration activity

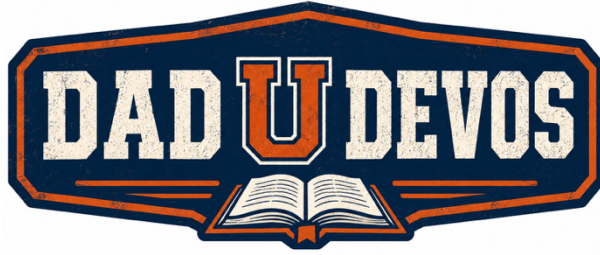
Nutritional Value: Understanding that real love is unselfish

Advance Preparation: Make sure you have the following on hand...

- A snack or dessert that can be fed to someone else with a fork or spoon (ice cream, pie, etc.)
- Craft paper, markers and scissors
- A Bible

Serve It Up: Follow these steps for a great experience...

1. First, invite the child to sit about 3 feet directly across from another family member so the two are facing each other in a mirror image manner.
2. Appoint one of them the “looking in the mirror” role – meaning they will decide what movements to make – such as scratching their head, sticking a finger in their ear, making a silly face, etc.
3. Appoint the other the “mirror on the wall” role – instructing them to act like a mirror by mimicking every move of the other. (You may want to demonstrate first – but make it fun as you do.)
4. Keep track of how often the “mirror” successfully reflects the actions of his or her partner – then switch roles. This will show both how challenging it can be to remain focused on the actions and expectations of others.
5. Read **I Corinthians 13:4-8** together describing the characteristics of true love. Discuss how remaining sensitive to and responding well to the needs and expectations of others is one way we “mirror” the love of Christ to others.
6. Now serve dessert, but make a rule that no one can eat their dessert by themselves. They must feed one another in an unselfish fashion. Whoever becomes selfish by feeding themselves loses their dessert. You may want to emphasize this point by having mom or dad cheat – causing them to get their dessert taken away.
7. Finish up by having the children create a homemade Valentines card for a grandparent, uncle, friend or someone to whom they want to share their love.
8. Memorize this jingle – *“Unselfish love is from above.”*



GOOD FRIDAY

Best Use: As an **Easter Week** family activity

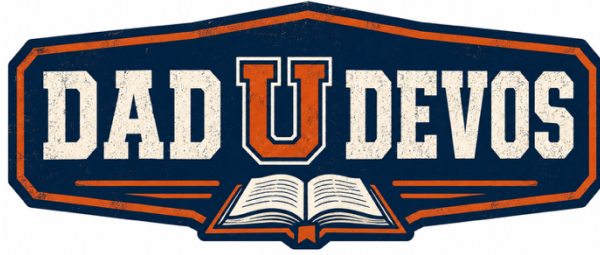
Nutritional Value: Understanding why Jesus died on a cross

Advance Preparation: Make sure you have the following on hand.

- A few long boards, nails and a hammer
- Pieces of craft or notebook paper and pencils or crayons
- A Bible

Serve It Up: Follow these steps for a great experience...

1. First, ask one of the children to help you create a cross using the boards, hammer and nails.
2. Next, call the family together and read Romans 3:23 from the Bible... *"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."*
3. Ask each person whether or not they have ever sinned. For younger kids, explain the concept of sin as "when we do something wrong that goes against the good that God wants for us."
4. After discussing the concept of sin, invite each person to take a piece of paper and write words that represent some of the sins they have committed – such as lying, hitting, stealing, saying bad words, etc. Younger children can just draw a picture of a mean face, hitting another person, etc.
5. Now invite an older child to read Romans 6:23 and John 3:16 aloud.
6. Invite each person to "nail their sins to the cross" to symbolize what happened when Jesus died for us.
7. Once the sin pages are nailed to the cross, ask everyone to lay their hands on the cross and pray a brief prayer of thanks to God for what Jesus did for us on Good Friday.
8. Memorize this jingle – *"Jesus took my sins away, on the cross that Good Friday."*



AFFIRMATION & CELEBRATION

Best Use: As an activity to celebrate someone's life (birthday, Mother's Day, Father's Day, graduation, etc.)

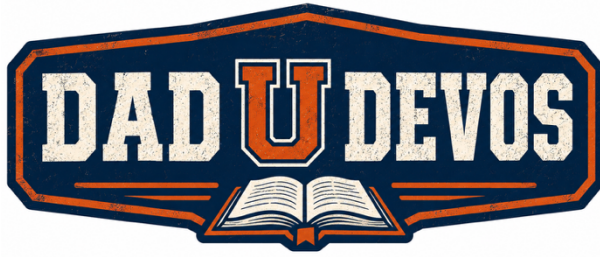
Nutritional Value: Helps turn special occasions into an opportunity for affirmation and encouragement.

Advance Preparation

- Give those you hope will say a word of encouragement advance notice so that they can think about what they would like to say.
- You might suggest they write down their thoughts in advance, making it less awkward for some and more specific for others.
- If you desire, bring a Bible or write down a specific verse to encourage the person.

During the Celebration: We often assume that others know how much we appreciate and/or love them. But we rarely tell them. So capture the moment during an upcoming celebration (birthday, graduation, mother's day, etc.) to affirm those God has placed in your life. This is an incredible time to build someone up by letting them hear how much they mean to you and others. Suggestions...

- Sometimes those receiving words of affirmation can be uncomfortable because they don't want all the fuss or attention. Nevertheless, they will cherish the things said for years to come. Encourage them to enjoy it, take it in and know they are loved!
- Have someone start by stating how much the group values the individual and that you would like to take some time to share how much they mean to each of you.
- Take turns affirming the individual you are celebrating. You can go in random order and can always go twice or three times. As others are sharing, you often are reminded of other things that you treasure about that person.
- **Optional:** Read **Ephesians 2:10** together as a reminder that God has a plan for each of us, especially the person being celebrated.
- Finish the time of affirmation by praying together for that person. Thank God for the person's life and the many ways they bless each one of you. Pray that He would bless them in the future.



THE MOM AWARDS

Best Use: A special mealtime activity immediately before dessert on **Mothers Day**

Nutritional Value: Honor Mom and give her the appreciation she deserves.

Advance Preparation: Hold a "Mom Awards" as a way for your family to celebrate Mom and her love for your family. Included on this card are two ideas: one to be used with younger kids, and the other can be used for children of all ages (including grown children).

- Secretly interview your kids to determine award categories: What's your favorite thing you like to do with mom? What's your favorite thing that mom does for you? What is mom THE BEST at?
 - Turn their answers into 4-5 award categories ("Best cookie chef", "Best giver of hugs", "Prettiest", etc.)
 - Write each category on a separate note card & put them in separate envelopes.
 - Go shopping for simple (yet meaningful) "awards." Some ideas:
 - Write "Best Mommy in the Universe" on a long piece of paper to use as a sash for Mom to wear like a pageant winner. Young children could decorate the sash with their handprints or love notes.
 - Her favorite flowers, candy or bubble bath
 - Decorate a cardboard crown from Burger King
 - Have the kids create a special award certificate (or drawings)
 - Her favorite ice cream or dessert (perhaps pick-up from a restaurant)
- Hide everything so the award ceremony will be a surprise!

Serve It Up: After dinner, begin the awards by having each child read the name of the award, announcing "And the winner is..." (of course, mom wins in every category!), and presenting her with one of the prizes. With each award, the family responds with cheering, standing ovations, and thunderous applause. The final award will be her favorite ice cream or dessert, served to her as you would a queen.

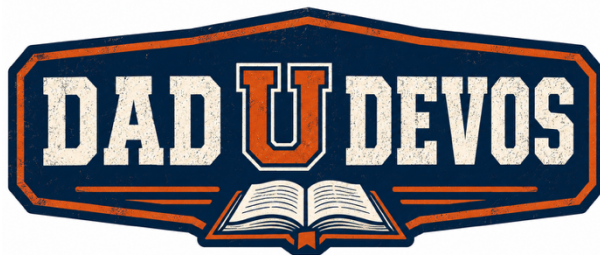
Prayer: Have each child touch Mom while leading them in this prayer, asking them to repeat after you one phrase at a time. *"Lord, thank you for mom. She is a wonderful gift from you to us. She works so hard for our family, and loves us so much. She is a great example of a person who loves you and follows you. Draw her even closer to yourself and bless her deeply. Help us as a family to honor her everyday. Amen."*

TO ADAPT FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Advance Preparation: Make plans for your family to take mom to her favorite restaurant. Encourage each child to write something to be shared at the table when you take mom out (handwritten notes are best). Ideas for topics: A lesson mom taught me that I will never forget, 25 things I love about mom, My favorite memory of time with mom, How God has used my mom to bless my life, etc.

Serve it Up: During the meal, take turns reading what each of you have written, making time in between readings for laughter, tears, and even comments from others that "echo" what each person shares. At the end of the meal, present mom with each note of appreciation for her to keep.

Prayer: Have someone close the time in prayer, thanking the Lord for blessing your lives through mom, and asking Him to continue to bless her life with a closer walk with Himself, good health, and a constant awareness of her children's love. Ask Him to help you to honor her everyday.



MOM KNOWS BEST!

Best Use: As a mealtime discussion activity celebrating mom's love

Nutritional Value: A fun way to show how much mom knows about the personality, likes and dislikes of each family member

Advance Preparation: Before the meal ask Mom to secretly complete the questionnaire about herself and every other member of the family. Seal her answers in a top-secret envelope to reveal at the end of the meal.

Serve It Up

- At the start of the meal give each person a copy of the preference choices to guess how Mom answered.
- During the meal have each person share how he/she would answer each question for themselves.
- Ask Mom to reveal her answers for each person to reveal how well she knows each person in the family.
- Then ask Mom to reveal her own answers so everyone else can score how well they know her.
- Award the grand prize to the highest scoring child: An all-expense paid trip to ice-cream with Mom!

Who Knows Mom Best? Guess mom's preference for each set of options...

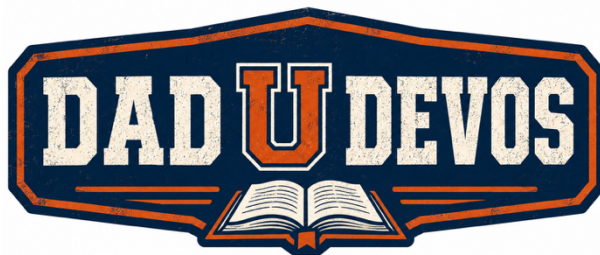
She Likes...

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| ☐ Chocolate | or | ☐ Vanilla |
| ☐ Board Game | or | ☐ Card Game |
| ☐ Mornings | or | ☐ Evenings |
| ☐ Cats | or | ☐ Dogs |
| ☐ Movie Out | or | ☐ Movie In |
| ☐ Lake | or | ☐ Pool |
| ☐ Popcorn | or | ☐ Candy |
| ☐ Spring | or | ☐ Fall |
| ☐ Juice | or | ☐ Milk |
| ☐ Ice Cream | or | ☐ Cookies |
| ☐ Pizza | or | ☐ Burger |

She Would Rather...

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| ☐ Read a book | or | ☐ Watch a movie |
| ☐ Live in the past | or | ☐ Live in the future |
| ☐ Go camping | or | ☐ Stay at a hotel |
| ☐ Be able to fly | or | ☐ Turn invisible |
| ☐ Meet Moses | or | ☐ Meet Paul |
| ☐ Cook together | or | ☐ Eat out together |

Tally everyone's score to find out who knows Mom the best!



WHAT DAD DOES

Best Use: As a **Father's Day** mealtime discussion activity celebrating Dad's role

Nutritional Value: A fun way to show how/what dad sacrifices for the family

Advance Preparation: Before the meal ask Dad to secretly complete the questionnaire about himself. Seal his answers in a top-secret envelope to reveal at the end of the meal.

Serve It Up

- At the start of the meal give each person a copy of the questions to guess your answers.
- During the meal have each person share his/her answers to each question.
- Ask Dad to reveal his responses. Each person earns a point for every matched answer.
- Celebrate the highest score by taking the family on an all-expense paid trip to get ice-cream (or cookies) with Dad!

What Dad Prefers (which would Dad prefer to do tomorrow?)

- | | | |
|--|----|---|
| ☐ Sleep in late | or | ☐ Wake up early |
| ☐ Play golf | or | ☐ Go to work |
| ☐ Drive a sports car | or | ☐ Drive a family car |
| ☐ Go fishing | or | ☐ Do yard work |
| ☐ Watch the game | or | ☐ Help with homework |
| ☐ Kiss Mom | or | ☐ Bathe the kids |
| ☐ Buy a motorcycle | or | ☐ Pay for kid's clothes |
| ☐ Watch an action movie | or | ☐ Watch a Chic Flick |
| ☐ Relax on his phone | or | ☐ Fix a broken appliance |

What Dad Does (which of the following does Dad do most often?)

- | | | |
|--|----|---|
| ☐ Sleep in late | or | ☐ Wake up early |
| ☐ Play golf | or | ☐ Go to work |
| ☐ Drive a sports car | or | ☐ Drive a family car |
| ☐ Go fishing | or | ☐ Do yard work |
| ☐ Watch the game | or | ☐ Help with homework |
| ☐ Kiss Mom | or | ☐ Bathe the kids |
| ☐ Buy a motorcycle | or | ☐ Pay for kid's clothes |
| ☐ Watch an action movie | or | ☐ Watch a Chic Flick |
| ☐ Relax on his phone | or | ☐ Fix a broken appliance |

See who best matched Dad's answers!