

Positive Parenting
July 2008
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TREASURED TRADITIONS

This month, for the thirtieth year, three generations of Sharpes will make our annual pilgrimage to Isle O' Dreams Lodge on Bad Axe Lake. No, it is not a suburb of Lake Wobegon, a figment of Garrison Keillor's fertile imagination, but a very real place, a wonderful resort on a pristine lake near Park Rapids, MN.

We are together, with no screens or cell phones or work or other distractions. We tell our stories at the campfire. We play games and talk about important things late into the night. We eat the fish caught by Papa and Hayden. We connect with friends who have become Isle O'Dreams family over the years. We spend time on and in the water. We listen to the sounds of loons calling and to one another. We look with awe at this beautiful piece of God's creation and at one another.

This is holy ground. This is Sabbath. We are truly present with one another and with the God who created us and is present in our family.

When I began working with The Youth & Family Institute, I learned that this embodied one of the Four Key practices for nurturing faith: Rituals and Traditions are those treasured experiences that we repeat over and over again. They give our families identity. They are the ways in which we are known by others. They make life predictable and joyous.

So, what are some other examples of family rituals or traditions? Growing up, every Sunday night during fall, winter, and spring, my family spread out a blanket in front of the fireplace, roasted hot dogs, served with potato chips and red fruit jello, and made s'mores, while we watched "I Love Lassie." We had other favorite experiences: fancy birthday cakes, summer swimming and picnicking on a friend's beach on the St. Croix River, a new outfit the first day of school, holidays gathered with grandparents and extended family, Christmas Eve service together at church, practicing class presentations for the whole family after dinner in the kitchen.

In the family that I have raised, some of our favorite traditions are Christmas Eve at church and with extended family, Christmas Day in our pajamas all day (including our fanciest dinner of the year) until all depart for home at 10pm, visiting grandparents' graves after Easter worship, selecting a birthday menu that doesn't have to be balanced or nutritious, Advent devotions by the light of the Christmas tree and candles on two yule logs, grace before meals, eating by candlelight every night to claim the presence of Jesus, Christmas cookies from a Swedish grandmother's recipe, homemade croutons, saying "I love you" before ending a phone call, and making the sign of the cross on beloved grandchildren's foreheads when they are tucked into bed.

All of us have rituals and traditions. So, what are your favorites? How can they become God-bearing, reminding us of the love of God we know in Jesus Christ? Are there some that you no longer enjoy or that drain you of time and energy? Let them go. Wish you had a new one? This is the truth: if you do something once and a child loves it, it is your new family tradition, “the way we always do it.”

God’s blessings on all of your rituals and traditions!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Ask your family, “What are the things we do over and over again as a family that you really cherish?” Make a list.
2. Plan to do one of those cherished family traditions each week for the rest of the summer. (Okay, so the snow fort will need to wait a few months, we hope!)
3. Take very informal photos to capture the experience. (It doesn’t matter how your hair looks or if the outfits look harmonious.) Look, really look, at how happy and relaxed you are. This is joy! This is Sabbath! This is your holy ground.
4. Make a poster of each tradition, featuring photos, words, other pictures cut out of magazines. Post your collages where friends are likely to ask, “What is this?” Then, tell them.
5. Brainstorm one thing you wish your family did ... and do it! (No, not that trip to Europe, but the walk around the lakes, the outdoor concert, fireworks, a picnic inside when it is raining, desert for breakfast on someone’s birthday, the sign of the cross on a beloved forehead before bed or as the day begins.)