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SUMMER STORYTELLING FOR HAPPIER FAMILIES

... we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders he has done.

Psalm 78:4

How interesting that in the 21st century we needed research to tell us that kids who know their family story are stronger, more resilient, more self-confident, happier, and emotionally healthier, because they know they belong to something bigger than themselves.

Bruce Feiler has written a book, *The Secrets of Happy Families*, based on this research finding. His first “secret” is to tell family stories, and not just the stories of achievement and success, but all of the stories. He points out that there are three ways to tell those stories:

- Ascending stories tell about beginning in poverty or challenges, walking uphill five miles both to and from school, getting an education, getting ahead, and ending with a triumphal arrival at position and wealth and status.
- Descending stories tell about once having had everything, but having lost it all and descending, in despair, to a position of having nothing, with no hope for the future.
- Oscillating stories tell of a family that has had its ups and downs, but stuck together, loved one another, and endured. This is the story that is best for building strong, healthy kids.

And isn't this the way we read the story of God's family in the Bible, for storytelling has been God's big idea all along. It has certainly been an oscillating story, filled with the ups and downs of God's family, the ups and downs of human faithfulness, undergirded by the deep and abiding faithfulness of this God, who will not let us go. Now this is really belonging

to something bigger than ourselves and our family! This is belonging to God's family, now and throughout all of human history, from creation until Jesus comes to reclaim all of that creation, including us!

How do we begin to tell the stories of our family?

BEGIN WITH YOUR CHILD'S STORY

Tell the story of the day your child entered your family, by birth, adoption, foster care, or marriage. Tell that story annually to celebrate the birthday, "gotcha day," or day you became a family. Do it as you tuck your child into bed or at the dinner table or by phone or skype. Have a special meal. Get out photos. Celebrate.

Tell favorite stories about your child, ones like their baptism, that they might have been too young to remember. Retell the stories of your child being brave while having stitches, separated from you at the zoo, or scared by a big storm. Share stories about your child's kindness, honesty, and sharing. Tell stories about how tearful and frightened your child was the first day of school and how they battled that fear, transforming it to welcome the new kid at school.

TELL YOUR FAMILY STORY

Look at the photos on your wall or bookshelf. Tell about the adventures you had, the moments of pride and honor, the milestones in your journey as a family. Tell, too, the stories of the times that were sad and painful and hard, remarking on what it took for your family to weather those storms and emerge a close and loving and forgiving unit.

INTRODUCE KIDS TO THE PEOPLE WHO CAME BEFORE THEM

Do you have treasures, passed down to your family by the early immigrants who came to this country. Tell their stories. Perhaps you or your child bear the name of a long ago relative. Share why the name is an honor to remember a person who shaped your family.

A researcher in the 1990's created a list of "Do you know ...?" questions to determine whether or not kids knew their family story. They are simple, but not always the things we think to share.

- Do you know where your grandparents grew up?
- Do you know how your parents met?
- Do you know about an illness or something really terrible that happened in your family?

- Do you know the story of your birth?

GOD HAS AN EVEN BIGGER FAMILY STORY

Worship together and discuss the scripture lessons and how your family fits into God's story. It's time to get out a Bible (and ones with pictures count!) and read more about God's people, the times they shone and the times they were disobedient. Let your kids know that Jesus is the one who came to show them how much they are loved, no matter what. Remind your child that in baptism, God names and claims them, now and forever, as God's beloved and forgiven child. Ask how we can live that identity together and share the Good News that God offers that love and forgiveness to everyone!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. In the car, on vacation, at a family gathering, ask "Do you know ... ?" questions.
2. As a family, tell stories, lots of them. Share the ups and downs, the "oscillating story" of your family's life.
3. Decide which traditions are your family favorites. Tell stories about them.
4. Tell each child the story of their birth or gottcha or baptism day.
5. Read a Bible story and name how your family is in God's story.