

Honoring God

WITH OUR

*Traditions*



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# What is a tradition?

A tradition is a “planned habit with significance”

Family traditions require energy, time, and commitment. And they are not created equal. We as Christian women need wisdom to come alongside our husbands in choosing spiritually-impacting traditions for our unique families.

# What does the Bible say about traditions?

- Deuteronomy 6 instructs parents to hide God’s Words in their own hearts and teach them diligently to their children. They are instructed to “talk of them [God’s Words] when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up [Deut. 6:6-9].” This implies repeated observances (traditions).
- Joshua 4:4-10 tells about how Israel set up memorial stones after crossing the Jordan for the specific purpose of instructing their children about the miracle of the Jordan River crossing.
- Psalm 78:5-8 speaks about how parents should teach God’s laws and testify to their children about God’s works so that the children will also hope in God and not forget God’s works or neglect to keep God’s commandments.
- Ephesians 6:2-6 instructs parents to “bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”
- Other Scriptures include Deut. 4:9-10 and 32:46.

A Christian parent must ask questions such as “Are there traditions that we can establish and practice in our home that will enhance our understanding of and obedience to God’s Word?”

Traditions can serve as a vehicle for truth to be passed on from generation to generation—by word of mouth, written instruction, or observances that represent truth.

## Biblical examples of traditions

- Passover (Exodus 12:23-28)  
God intended the symbolism of the Passover to spawn conversations about what God did for the Israelites when He delivered them from Egypt. God intended that His people celebrate the Passover every year.
- The Lord’s Table (I Corinthians 11)  
New Testament believers are to systematically observe the Lord’s Table to remember the Lord’s death. The symbolic elements testify to the salvation that is ours through Christ’s broken body and shed blood.

# Other Reasons for Family Traditions

- “Love glue”  
Traditions can give a sense of belonging, love, and security within a family unit.
- Provide joyful times and memories
- Connect the past, present, and future

## Vital Questions

- Is this tradition in any way unbiblical?
- Does this tradition provide spiritual benefit?
- Could this tradition be modified in any way to be more spiritually profitable?
- Could this tradition be modified in any way to be more useful to reaching out to the lost and needy?

Tradition	History of this Tradition	How is this tradition useful?	What does this tradition cost me (time and resources)?	How long is this tradition sustainable?

# Sunday Traditions

- Set apart your children's best clothes and shoes for Sunday wear.
- Try to plan to be at church early. Not having to rush around will help everyone be in the right spirit for worship.
- Sing on the way to church to brighten everyone's spirit and pray for the Spirit to work in hearts.
- Give each of your children a notebook and have each child write something down from the sermon to discuss with the family later. Young children just learning how to write can work on copying a verse from the sermon text.
- Plan a special lunch or a dessert. Treating the day as special will go a long way towards helping your children delight in the day. You may also want to reserve special toys or books for Sunday use only.
- During lunch, encourage your family members to discuss the things they have learned in the service and in Sunday school.
- After the evening service, you may want to let your children listen to a Christian audiobook or watch a Christian video to unwind.

“Mother had ways and means for making that day [the Lord’s Day] different from all others and much to be desired. The nicest toys and picture books belonged to Sunday as well as the prettiest frocks and a cozy fire in the drawing room because the piano was there. Mother’s sweet voice made hymn singing a delight. No talks were like her talks over the Bible, not to speak of *Pilgrim’s Progress* and other books that only appeared that day. Then she always had a basket of fruit for her little people in the afternoon. And just to see her looking so sweet and restful as she shared their enjoyment was not the least part of the happiness of the day.”

-*The Growth of a Soul: Hudson Taylor in Early Years* (p. 64)

# Family Worship Traditions

- Find ways to give freshness and intrigue to family worship. Let family members sing, lead, or read Scripture
- Prayer: Some families have found it helpful to put missionary prayer cards in a photo album and pray for a page every day. Other families systematically pray through all the missionaries in a specific country or region. You might also want to use a prayer journal or calendar.
- One family has found it helpful to have each family member recount a specific blessing from the day before prayer time.
- Memorize Scripture as a family. You might want to start with the [Armory of Victory passages](#) or memorize a passage that relates to a sermon series.
- Working through the [catechisms](#) systematically is especially helpful for families with children at home.
- You may also want to consider reading books together in your family worship time. Here are some recommended titles:
  - [Books on Prayer](#) (for teens and adults)
  - [Christian Heroes Then and Now series](#) (for children and teens)
  - [Trailblazer series](#) (for children and teens)
  - *Pilgrim's Progress* (resources available [on the church website](#))
  - *Holy War* (resources available [on the church website](#))
  - (See online version on the church website to access links)

# Celebrating Spiritual Decisions/ Milestones

- Baptism: Send invitations or personally invite friends and neighbors to the baptism
- Celebrate a spiritual milestone with a special gift that has spiritual significance (new Bible, personalized journals, devotional book or missionary biography, etc.)
- You might also want to consider taking a trip to a spiritually significant historical site. For example, after their son’s high school graduation, one of our missionary families took their son to Palm Beach in Ecuador where Jim Elliot and other missionaries were martyred.
- Some families choose to give their teen daughters a special piece of jewelry to signify her promise to keep herself pure until marriage.

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# Christmas Traditions

## Advent/Jesse Tree

An Advent tree is like an Advent calendar, but with spiritual significance. Some people call it a Jesse Tree, taken from Is. 11:1, "there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."

Here is a way that one family uses it: "We find a branch that is small enough to fit into a vase and sit on a table, but has a lot of little branches coming off of it, like a small tree, to hang ornaments on. I used a set of small gift tags, and on each I wrote a Scripture reference on one side and numbered 1-25 on the other side. Each day from Dec. 1-25 we read and talk about the



verse on that day's tag, then hang it on a tree. We often make it part of all of our Family Worship for that evening. The verses (beginning with Isa 11:1) go through many of the prophecies about the first coming of Christ, up to His birth. It has been a great tradition for us to help our kids get to know better the thread of promises of the Messiah through the Old Testament and keep that spiritual focus throughout the season. We have also more recently added a Christmas carol to the daily "calendar." We sing a different one each night. "

For additional information on making a Jesse tree see <https://www.faithward.org/jesse-tree/> or <https://www.faithward.org/how-to-make-a-jesse-tree/>

# Christmas Traditions Continued

- One family has special tree ornaments. Each one shows a different attribute of God (like lamb of God, Lion of Judah etc.). There is a special Christmas devotional story that goes with it. They hang one ornament a day for 12 days before Christmas. The kids love taking turns hanging them, and the ones who know how to read get to read their ornament to the family.
- Some families like to use the rhyme, "Something you want, something you need, something to wear and something to read" as the basis for Christmas gifts for the kids. The kids get to give the parents a list of some of the items in those categories, and they each get 4 gifts, one in each category (though sometimes it varies with certain needs in a particular year--like if a child is needing a more expensive item that year). Some families have found this system to be a huge help with planning, shopping and budgeting.
- Some families prefer to separate gift-exchanges and Christmas by having their gift exchanges on a different day and using Christmas Day to focus on celebrating the Incarnation through the reading of Scripture, singing, feasting, and other family activities.
- Advent calendars can be profitable if accompanied by the daily reading of the OT prophecies followed by the NT accounts of Christ's birth. "Advent" is the Latin word "coming." We meditate as families on Christ's coming as the sacrifice for our sin and we anticipate his second coming to claim His own. Families can add to this the discussions of truths found in the Christmas carols
- One family tries to minimize gifts to each other. Instead, everyone tries to do something special for another member of the family. Kids do extra chores to earn spending money for gifts they want to buy.

- One family saves loose change throughout the year and donates it around Christmas to a missionary or other special ministry fund.
- A couple celebrates their many years of marriage with a “wedding tree” that is filled with silver bells, one for each year they have been married.
- One family has their children write letters to Jesus and put them in a special box. The children thank Him for the blessings of the past year and write what they would like to do for Him in the New Year.
- Most families take the time to read the Christmas story on Christmas, but if you have small children, your family might want to take the time to act it out. Dolls and stuffed animals make great props.
- Your family may profit from learning the history and meaning behind the Christmas carols in a systematic way during the Christmas season (resources below).
- Recommended Resources:
  - *Disciplines of a Godly Family* by Kent and Barbara Hughes
  - *Rejoicing in Christ the Newborn King – 25 Meditations for Family Worship During the Christmas Season* by Taigen Joos (Religious Affections, 2013).
  - *The First Songs of Christmas* by Nancy Demoss Wolgemuth
  - *The Carols of Christmas: Daily Advent Devotions on Classic Christmas Carols* by Alan Vermilye
  - *Joy to the World! The Stories Behind Your Favorite Christmas Carols* by Kenneth W. Osbeck
  - *The Stories Behind 40 Beloved Christmas Carols* by David McLaughlin

# Thanksgiving Traditions

- We have all our family members write out a Thanksgiving testimony that includes specific things that the Lord has done for us over the past year. When my daughters were too young to write, they enjoyed dictating their testimony to myself or my husband to be written down. We all share these testimonies during a special elongated family worship time after our big meal.
- One of my daughters enjoys making place cards for our dinner table every year. It's a great idea to include verses on those place cards that can be read at the beginning of the meal.
- We haven't done this consistently, but sometimes we have enjoyed making a gratitude tree in the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving (starting the beginning of November). You could also do a "gratitude pumpkin" by having a family member put in a slip of paper with a specific thanksgiving every day leading up to Thanksgiving.
- During our special family worship time, we intermingle testimonies with singing. We also try to quote Psalm 103.
- You may want to try to invite someone to join your celebration that doesn't have any family in the area to celebrate with.
- Get your children involved in the meal-making. It's a great opportunity to teach kitchen skills and share memories!



"[Gratitude Tree closeup](#)" by [VFW Kids](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

- Use your finest dishes during the meal so that it feels special.
- Create a Thanksgiving tablecloth (or a Thanksgiving quilt). Give out colored fabric markers (or permanent markers) to guests and have them write their name and something that they are thankful for on a fabric tablecloth or a fabric square.
- Resources:
  - ◆ *The First Thanksgiving* by Robert McKenzie--a very-accessible historian's account of the Puritans and what we can learn from them.
  - ◆ *Squanto and the Miracle of Thanksgiving* by Eric Metaxas--a great read-aloud for young children about how God provided for the early pilgrims.
  - ◆ *Thanksgiving, a Time to Remember* by Barbara Rainey

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# Birthday Traditions

- “Each member of our family has his or her favorite cake/dessert which I make for them on their birthday. We have a red plate on which the birthday person is served. We use this plate for all kinds of special events and record on the back with a Sharpie a short description of the event with the date. Eventually, you need multiple plates!”
- Have each sibling share something they appreciate about the birthday child and choose a verse to pray for them that year.
- Let the individual having the birthday choose the supper menu and a family activity that all do together happily.
- When someone in your family is having a milestone birthday, have friends and family write special letters of encouragement for the individual as they approach this milestone.
- Research your family heritage and implement some of the cultural traditions of the family God put you into. For example, if you have a Jewish cultural background, you may want to consider including some of the elements of the Jewish Bar Mitzvah. If you have a Mexican background, you may want to consider including aspects of a quinceañera (Mexico's 15th birthday for girls).
- Use birthdays as opportunities to spend extra one-on-one time with a child. Take him or her on a date and talk about whatever the child wants to talk about. In some families, the dad does this on the child's birthday and the mom does it on the child's half-birthday.
- See more ideas at <https://tinyurl.com/5btmz3mu>

# Other Holiday Traditions

## Valentine's Day

- Have the men & boys of the family prepare a home-cooked meal for the ladies! Even though they may "huff and puff" and roll their eyes as the day approaches, the guys usually have a blast, and we ladies enjoy sitting back and watching them. The food will get more and more delicious over the years!
- Make special arrangements for a fun meal like pizza for the children along with a special treat for dessert. Allow them to eat in a different room and watch a special movie while you and your husband make a date night meal and have a candlelit dinner .
- Have a special breakfast with a fun decorated table. Give each child the opportunity to give all the members of the family a valentine and share something they appreciate about that person. Mom and Dad may choose to give a small group gift to the kids such as a new Lamplighter Theater story.
- Dad may wish to buy valentines for your daughters and write each of them a special note.

## Reformation Day (October 31st)

- Read books or watch a video about Martin Luther.
  - *Martin Luther: A Man Who Changed the World* by Paul Maier
  - [Torch lighters video on Martin Luther](https://www.christianbook.com/the-torchlighters-series-martin-luther/pd/016815?event=ESRCG) (https://www.christianbook.com/the-torchlighters-series-martin-luther/pd/016815?event=ESRCG)
- Your children may enjoy acting out the story of Martin Luther nailing the 95 Thesis to the door.

# Other Holiday Traditions Continued

## Patriotic Days (4th of July, Memorial Day)

- Make a big deal about the day! We celebrate the country that God has given us and the freedom to worship Him we still enjoy. Make it a fun day with patriotic music, picnics, sparklers and a special time of prayer for our nation and its leaders.
- Go on a field trip to a local historical site and read about the sacrifices made there to help us have our freedom.
- Put small flags along the entire roadside of your property and offer to do it for neighbors or veterans in our church or community.
- Do a "caroling" style patriotic concert at the home of friends that are veterans to show our appreciation for their sacrifice.
- Resources:
  - *Heroes of History* series: [https://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/easy\\_find?Ntt=heroes+of+history&N=0&Ntk=keywords&action=Search&Ne=0&event=ESRCG&nav\\_search=1&cms=1&ps\\_exit=RETURN%7Clegacy&ps\\_domain=www](https://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/easy_find?Ntt=heroes+of+history&N=0&Ntk=keywords&action=Search&Ne=0&event=ESRCG&nav_search=1&cms=1&ps_exit=RETURN%7Clegacy&ps_domain=www)

## Other Holidays

- Watch or listen to something that gives a little background on the holiday. Consider making a special meal for that particular day, one that has to do with its history or just something that can make the day special.

# Passover Traditions

- In the week(s) leading up to Passover, read Exodus 1-12 as family during your family worship time.
- Make a Passover Meal
  - Passover is celebrated around Easter. The meal is traditionally eaten after sundown on the 14th of Nissan on the Jewish calendar (April 5th , 2023). My family usually celebrates it the Thursday evening before Easter because of our belief that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday.
  - You may choose to do a traditional Seder meal. For an excellent explanation of the elements of a traditional Jewish seder meal, see chapter 6 of Craig Hartman’s book, *Through Jewish Eyes* or on his [website](https://shalomnyc.org/passover/) (https://shalomnyc.org/passover/). Note that some religious Jews (even some Messianic Jews) may be highly offended by a non-Jewish celebration of the Passover, so please be sensitive with Jewish friends and neighbors.
  - You can make a simple Passover meal that reflects the first Passover with roasted lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and grape juice.
    - [Recipe for unleavened bread](https://www.alyonascooking.com/unleavened-bread-matzah/) (https://www.alyonascooking.com/unleavened-bread-matzah/)
- While you are eating, discuss with your family the symbolism of what you are eating. Talk about how Jesus is referred to as the Lamb of God. Talk about the bitterness of sin. Talk about how Christ’s blood cleanses us from sin and rescues us from death.
- Young children especially may enjoy some of the more active traditions associated with Passover. (hiding of the matzah, eating with walking sticks in hand, etc. )

# Easter Traditions

## Make a Resurrection Garden:



Several weeks in advance you create a mini garden with dirt, rocks, pots, and grass seed. The grass should be lightly spritzed with water every day and the entire garden needs access to sunlight. We have ours on the kitchen table.



The day that marks the Crucifixion we put three crosses on the “ground” above the tomb. It is draped with a red piece of fabric to symbolize Christ’s shed blood. We also put a miniature wire crown of thorns on the cross as well. Those are left all day. Then that evening, we remove the crosses and put a wrapped figure into the tomb. We discuss with the kids at meal time what happened during these events.



The next day we surround the tomb with guards. At meal time we talk about why the guards were put there by the Pharisees.

On Resurrection Sunday, before the kids are out of bed (or the night before when they are in bed) we take the soldiers and knock them over on their faces. Then we take the wrapped figure out of the tomb, put the wrapping back in and set a figure on the removed stone. While the kids are eating breakfast or at lunch we discuss the tomb being empty and why.

## Easter Snack Ideas:

- “Crown of Thorn” Cookies:  
<https://dennasideas.wordpress.com/tag/crown-of-thorns/>
- Resurrection Rolls:  
<https://littlecooksreadingbooks.com/resurrection-rolls/>
- Empty Tomb treats:  
<https://heavenlysavings.net/?s=empty+tomb+treats>
- Sheep Snacks:  
<https://everydaydishes.com/holiday/how-to-make-cheerios-sheep-snacks-for-your-next-party/>

## Easter Resources:

- Easter Paper Dolls:  
<https://rb.gy/gvalyd>
- Easter Peg Dolls:  
<https://rb.gy/5n4api>
- Easter Reading Plan for kids:  
<https://rb.gy/brmzh6>
- Resurrection Eggs:  
<https://rb.gy/u1rvya>
- Easter Window Stickers:  
<https://rb.gy/dw38dq>

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# Hospitality Traditions

- Give attention and care to elderly friends and relatives. (Regular calls and assistance can be given as needed.)
- Invite neighbors and acquaintances to church and church related activities.
- Provide meals and/or lodging for missionaries. Making regular contacts with missionaries
- Invite church visitors and less-known people in the church to meals and family activities.
- Invite teen girls over to your home or take them out to lunch. Share with them your testimony or some evidences of the Lord's working in your life.
- Teach your daughters about hospitality by inviting playmates over for tea parties.

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# Vacation Traditions



- Choose a spiritual theme for your time away and focus your family worship times on that theme
- Create mementos (like a photo book, custom t-shirt, etc.) to help solidify memories into the minds of your family members.
- Think through your travel time before you leave and plan out blocks of time for breaks and meals. If you have little ones, you may want to plan to stop at a park or other place to play awhile.
- Teach your children to serve those you visit. For example, when visiting grandparents, have your children wash the dishes after meals, help with landscaping tasks, or clean difficult-to-reach areas.
- Take some pre-made thank-you notes with you. Even a child's drawing with the words "Thank You!" will bring joy to the people you are visiting.
- Offer to buy a meal for the people you are visiting (pizza, subs, etc. to help lessen the financial burden of feeding your family.
- Invite your hosts to join in your family worship time.
- Try to make long car rides profitable by using the time to listen to Christian audiobooks, good Christian music, or by practicing catechisms. Or you can take along a hymnbook and sing together as a family or listen to a sermon using the Ministry Compass App ([tinyurl.com/3wp439e2](https://tinyurl.com/3wp439e2))
  - Resource to find good books for your children to read: [tinyurl.com/2bsch3n4](https://tinyurl.com/2bsch3n4)
  - Resource for fun car games: [tinyurl.com/bdcp27kv](https://tinyurl.com/bdcp27kv). Some of these could be modified to be more spiritually profitable.

## Vacation Traditions Continued

- If you have a long summer vacation, consider going through Tim Berry's book, *Reading the Bible in 40 Days*. This kind of plan can make vacations spiritually invigorating (instead of the opposite). Reading through the entire Bible in a few weeks' time works best during vacation, or some other down-time in your daily routine, when you know you will have more time to read because your schedule is more under your control.
- Consider taking trips to spiritually significant locations. (Researched and discussed before and after the trip.) Dr. Patterson, Pastor Minnick may have information for sites in Savannah, Georgia and New England.
- Consider planning a family mission trip when your children are old enough to assist and understand the significance of the family ministry.
- Apple picking in the fall is a firmly held tradition for many families. Day trips and/or vacations to the same places over the years become a fun family bonding time.
- Before you travel, research churches near your destination to find one you can attend on the Lord's Day.



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