

God in our traditions

The word “tradition” is often looked upon with suspicion in our modern world. It conjures up in our mind a relic of the past which has absolutely no relevance to our lives. Such a viewpoint is unfortunate because whether we know it or not, we all practice traditions. It is not a matter of “if” we will practice traditions, but “how” we will practice them, and how we practice them will have a profound effect on those who enter the circle of our world.

What is a tradition? To begin to understand the truth of this it is important to understand what a tradition is. At its very basic level a tradition is something (information, beliefs, customs, a worldview) that is handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth and by regular repetition of example, ceremony or celebration. Traditions include both those things we may observe everyday, as well as those things we practice only on special occasions.

Whose idea is practicing traditions? At one level practicing traditions comes natural to humans. We all have a need for order, and structure, and meaning in our lives. Thus, we tend to practice or do things in the same way over and over again. But on a higher plane, the one we want to be most concerned about, practicing traditions is God’s idea. Just before God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, He established a tradition that He wanted the people to pass on to their children. It was the ordinance of Passover. By instituting this tradition God acknowledged that His people would observe various traditions, but God desired that they be infused with purpose and He made that purpose abundantly clear.

For what purpose are traditions? God anticipated the children asking their parents why they celebrated Passover. God wanted the parent’s response to direct their children’s attention to the glorious God who saved them. In other words, traditions are about celebrating God who is mighty and whose deeds are marvelous and wonderful. Noel Piper, in her book Treasuring God in our Traditions puts it this way: “Traditions are a vital way of displaying our greatest treasure, of showing what – Who – is most important to us.” Later God instituted other rites, ceremonies and festivals, giving parents numerous opportunities each day and throughout the year to point children to the most significant reality of their lives.

Infusing God in our traditions: If what we have just said is truly God’s intentions for our traditions, then we must ask ourselves “How well are we infusing God into our traditions?” Everyday we are involved in activities, many of which we repeat day after day. Have we consciously sought to exalt God in any of them? Adding daily traditions like family Bible reading and prayer is a great way to begin honoring God on a daily basis, but thought must be given on how God can be honored in each daily routine.

Additionally, we must consider those special celebrations like birthdays, graduations, weddings, as well as days related to our faith. In each of these occasions we will show children what is important to us. As parents who desire to see God exalted in our children’s lives we must consider what our focus is in each celebration. Again, as Noel Piper states: “The way we observe these occasions – the focus of our observation – has great potential to show our children what we think is most important and to help them value what we hold most dear”.

In light of our upcoming Easter celebration I offer the following suggestions, many of which are taken from Noel Piper’s book (which I heartily recommend):

Some ideas for honoring God in our Easter traditions:

- ◆ *Fasting* - During the 40 days leading up to Easter many Christians practice some form of fasting. Though fasting can be inappropriately used in a legalistic way as an attempt to merit God's favor, it can better be employed as a way of declaring to God "I love you more than any of these things that I now give up. I want you to know that I desire You more than any of these good things." Encourage family members to "fast" from something they desire for the Lenten season. If that is too long a time, try it during holy week or perhaps even just for Good Friday.
- ◆ *Lenten candles* – Light seven candles. Read a portion of the Easter story and then extinguish one of the candles. The next time you gather, read another portion of the story and extinguish the second candle. The goal is to extinguish the last candle on Good Friday to commemorate that dark day. Then on Resurrection Sunday relight all the candles as you read the resurrection account. Note: each of these reading can be done either the six Sundays before Good Friday, or the six days preceding Good Friday.
- ◆ *Resurrection Tree* – Take a branch broken off a tree and decorate it with items that remind you of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Then take time to talk about each item perhaps reading a related Scripture. As an alternative, first read a portion of the Easter story. Then ask your children with what object they would like to decorate the tree. Have fun as a family trying to create this object.
- ◆ *Resurrection Eggs* – As an alternative to the above activity, try placing small objects in twelve plastic eggs. These eggs can neatly be placed in an egg carton. The objects you place in each egg should correspond to something in the portion of the Easter story that you read with your children. Before reading the Scripture portion, have one of the children unveil the object. Then read the story asking the children to see if they can tell how that object relates to the story. As each day passes unveil a new object. For review allow the children to retell or re-enact the story behind each of the objects previously unveiled.
- ◆ *Easter services* –Make it a tradition to attend all the services our church provides. Starting with Palm Sunday, walking through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, culminating on Resurrection Sunday, allow the children to experience with their church family the greatest story ever told.
- ◆ *Resurrection Sunday Celebration* – Start off Resurrection Sunday with joyful music. The "Hallelujah Chorus" is a good start. Prepare a special meal complete with a "lamb" cake for dessert. Share prayers of thanks to God for His incredible love and mercy. Relate stories of God's resurrection power working through saints from the past and in the present. Be sure to shout out together: "The Lord is risen indeed!"

Easter can be a time dominated with the hustle and bustle of buying new clothes, eating lots of Easter candy, making preparations for the guests, or it can be a time permeated with activity that exalts the God who lovingly delivered us. May God help us all to consider our traditions realizing that we are communicating to our children what we deem most important through them. May God be highly exalted in all of our families this season!