

FAMILY DEVOTIONALS

◆ *for teens* ◆

HOLIDAY EDITION

including:

NEW YEAR'S DAY ◆ VALENTINES ◆ LENT ◆ EASTER
MOTHER'S DAY ◆ MEMORIAL DAY/ VETERANS DAY
FATHER'S DAY ◆ LABOR DAY ◆ THANKSGIVING
CHRISTMAS ◆ BIRTHDAY ◆ ANNIVERSARY



New Year's Day



Read

Joshua 4:21-24

He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their parents, "What do these stones mean?" tell them, "Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground." For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God."

Learn

In the Old Testament, God instructed His people to build altars. Some of the altars were created as memorials to remind the Lord's people of the amazing things He had done in their lives. They were created out of stones to last many years. Every time the Israelites saw the memorials, it gave them a chance to remember the past and look forward with hope. These special altars stood as a reminder to each generation of the importance of passing down stories to their children of the miraculous help God gave His people.

The story of Joshua setting the twelve stones in place after crossing the Jordan River suggests a different way we can celebrate New Year's Day. Some people make New Year's resolutions—goals they set to help improve their lives—like exercising more, eating healthier, or saving money. There's nothing wrong with making resolutions, but they usually are more focused on us instead of on God. Do you know what happens to most of the resolutions people make? People typically give up on them shortly after January ends. This year, why not try something different that will last? Set aside time to create your own memorial? Spend time remembering all of the ways God has shown your family His presence over the past year and joyfully look ahead to the coming year, knowing that His faithfulness in the past gives great hope to see Him at work in the future.





New Year's Day

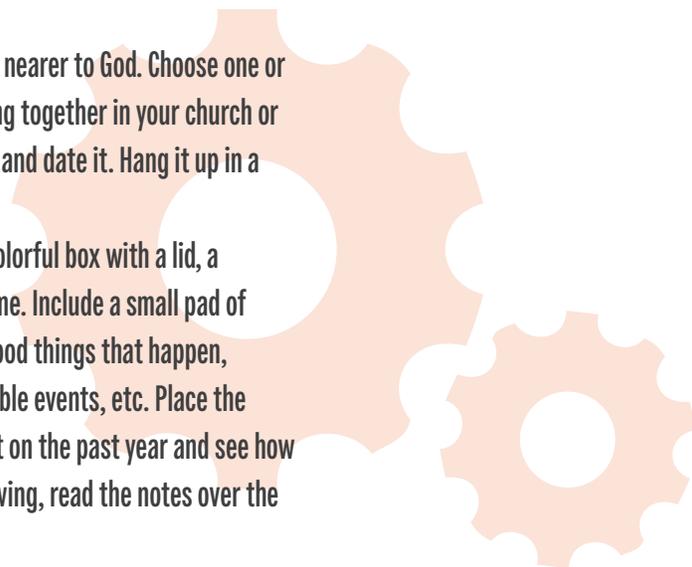


Discuss

- What are some of the ways you saw God do something amazing last year?
- How does remembering God's past faithfulness give us hope for the future?
- What are some things you feel God wants you to focus on as a family this year?

Activities

- Pick a family focus for the upcoming year that helps you worship and draw nearer to God. Choose one or two practical things you can do to grow in that area. A few ideas are serving together in your church or community, praying as a family, memorizing God's word, etc. Write it down and date it. Hang it up in a place where everyone can see it as a daily reminder.
- On New Year's Day, begin a new tradition. Choose a container (a large jar, colorful box with a lid, a decorative tin) that you can keep out all year in a common area of your home. Include a small pad of paper and a pen. Throughout the year, each family member can jot down good things that happen, something new they learned, an obstacle they overcame, funny or memorable events, etc. Place the notes in the container all year long. Read them on New Year's Eve to reflect on the past year and see how God has been present and working in your lives. If the container is overflowing, read the notes over the course of a few days.



Pray

Dear Lord,
Thank you for all of the ways you have shown us your faithfulness and amazing power. Help us to remember to talk about these things to remind ourselves of your presence in our lives. As we look ahead to a new year, please guide us as we grow in relationship with you.
Amen.

Valentine's Day

Read

Matthew 22:34-39

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

Learn

During His life on earth, many people followed Jesus and believed He was the Messiah. But one of the groups of religious and political leaders, called the Pharisees, saw Jesus as a troublemaker. The Pharisees were always upset with Him because He didn't follow the long list of rules they followed. Jesus often pointed out their mistaken beliefs. The Pharisees thought they were honoring God by carefully following lots of religious rules and regulations. By keeping track of who followed the laws and who didn't, they looked down on other people and judged them unfairly. This made the Pharisees feel more important and more righteous than others. However, Jesus spoke God's truth to them and pointed out following hundreds of rules could not earn them a place in heaven. Instead, He told them the two most important commandments—loving God and loving

others. When people think about Jesus' two commandments instead of a huge list of rules, it helps people focus on doing things to show God they love Him and show His love to others.

On Valentine's Day, we see and hear lots of things about love. Everything is decorated with pink and red hearts. Stores offer aisles of cards and gifts made especially for the holiday. Kids have Valentine's parties at school, exchanging cards with their friends. Husbands and wives give each other gifts, like flowers and heart-shaped candies, or they go out on a special date. Celebrating Valentine's Day can be even more fun when we remember Jesus said loving God with everything we have is the most important love we can give. When we understand how much God loves us, we can't help but love Him back! Then we can share not just our love but God's love with others, so they can see Jesus through our words and actions. Doing that can make Valentine's Day, and every day, even more special!

Valentine's Day

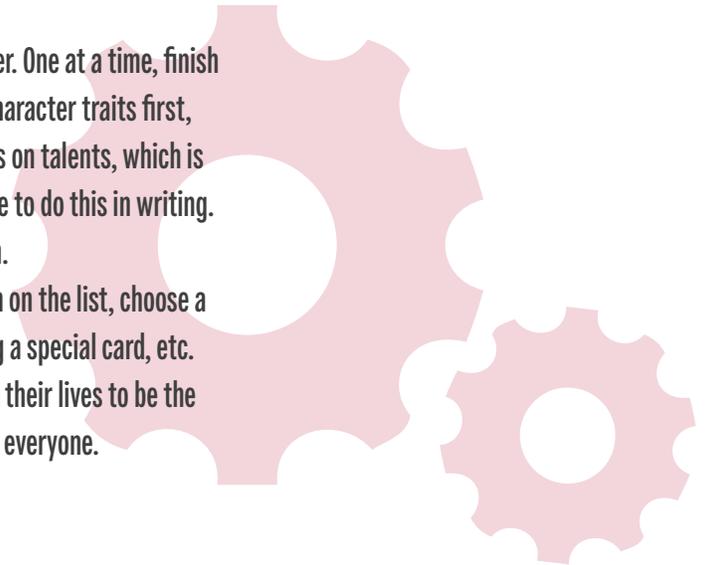


Discuss

- How does God show us how much He loves us?
- What does it look like to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds?
- Think of some neighbors God wants you to love. Neighbors aren't just people who live in a house near ours, but everyone we come into contact with throughout the day or week.

Activities

- Pick a place to gather inside or outside, and sit so you can all see each other. One at a time, finish this sentence about each other—"I love you because_____." Focus on character traits first, which is something about who the person is. If you'd like to repeat it, focus on talents, which is something about what the person does really well. Another option would be to do this in writing. You can each write a note to the other family members and exchange them.
- Make a list of people your family can love in a specific way. For each person on the list, choose a tangible way to show your love—delivering a meal, shoveling snow, sending a special card, etc. Consider some people who may not be as easy to love but need someone in their lives to be the hands and feet of Jesus as an example of the unconditional love He has for everyone.



Pray

Dear God,
Thank you for your love that is bigger than the biggest thing we can imagine. Help us show our love for you with everything within us. Teach us how to love our neighbors and show them your love.
Amen.

Lent

Read

Acts 3:19-21

So turn away from your sins. Turn to God. Then your sins will be wiped away. The time will come when the Lord will make everything new. He will send the Messiah. Jesus has been appointed as the Messiah for you. Heaven must receive him until the time when God makes everything new. He promised this long ago through his holy prophets.

Learn

Even though Lent isn't mentioned in the Bible as one of the holidays God told His people to honor, many churches and people do in preparation for Easter. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the day before Easter. It gives us time to really think about the separation that sin causes between people and God, along with all of the pain and sadness that are part of our world because of sin. Lent reminds us about our need for Savior and the forgiveness only He can offer. We also think about Jesus' sacrifice in taking everyone's sins on Himself and paying the price of sin, which is death, in our place. Lent helps us prepare our hearts for the joyous Easter celebration of Jesus' resurrection when God fulfilled His promise to rescue us and give us the opportunity to be made new through His Son.

One thing people choose to do during Lent is to give up something they really, really like. This is called fasting, and the purpose is to remind us of Jesus' sacrifice and our need to surrender everything when we choose to follow Him. Fasting is typically thought of as

giving up certain foods or meals for 40 days, but it can also be spending less time (or no time) playing on our devices or watching TV. Sometimes people choose to give up things that aren't good for them to help break a bad habit. But fasting, for this reason, is self-focused instead of God-focused and isn't the purpose of observing this part of Lent. A true fast is giving something up and replacing it with God-honoring activities like prayer, Bible reading, and serving others. It helps us turn our focus from ourselves to God and others. If your family has never observed Lent, why not give it a try?

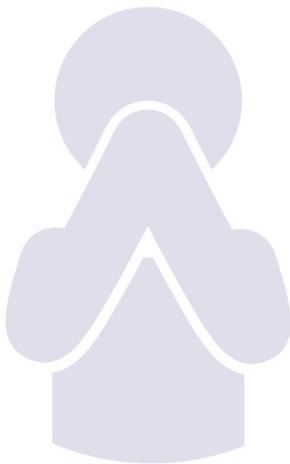
Lent

Discuss

- What is repentance, and why should it be part of our walk with God?
- Why is it important for us to not just look forward to celebrating Jesus' resurrection but also to spend time thinking about everything leading up to Easter?
- How could observing the season of Lent help you draw closer to God?

Activities

- Each day for 40 days, select a gently used item such as clothing, shoes, books, household items, etc., to put in a donation bag. At the end of the time, donate the items to a charitable organization in your community. Consider also giving up things like dining out, going to a movie, or other non-essentials and use that money to bless someone in need. Local churches and other community groups can assist in passing along your gifts if you would like to remain anonymous.
- Try a reverse fast! Instead of giving something up for Lent, consider doing something extra. It can be the same thing each day or something different each day. You could do this as a family unit or each individually. Here are some ideas to get you started: Take time to send cards with personal notes to brighten someone's day. Call a person who needs to hear a friendly voice. Serve a single parent by offering to spend time with their kids so they can enjoy some personal time. Offer to assist an elderly couple or person who is homebound with tasks like yard work or house cleaning, or simply spend time with them.



Pray

Dear Jesus,
Thank you for giving up your place in heaven to live with people on earth and die on the cross. We know your sacrifice made way for anyone who asks to be forgiven and become part of God's family forever. Help us to honor you and grow in our relationship with you during this time leading up to Easter.
Amen.

Easter

Read

1 Peter 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Learn

Of all the amazing and miraculous things we read in the Bible, Easter is the very best! After Adam and Eve chose to listen to the voice of the enemy in the garden instead of obeying God, sin entered the world. God told them they couldn't live in Eden anymore. He explained there would be many difficult and sad things that would happen to all people as a consequence of sin. Their relationship with God would be completely different. Not only did Adam and Eve's sin separate them from their Creator, but it also separated all people from God. After He punished Adam and Eve for their sin, God did not leave them without hope. He told about someone who would come one day to defeat the enemy forever.

After generations and generations had waited many long years for God's promised rescuer, Jesus left His place with God and became a baby who was born here with us. When He grew up, Jesus spent three years inviting people to follow Him and teaching them about Himself and His father. Jesus showed people that He had power over nature, power to heal, and power to provide what people needed through His miracles. He even raised people from the dead! Then

something unexpected happened. Jesus was arrested and put on a cross to die even though He had done nothing wrong. His body was placed in a tomb, and the tomb was sealed shut with a large stone. His followers didn't know what to think; the man they believed was the Messiah was gone. But three days later, God did something unbelievable. He brought Jesus back to life!

Jesus was the perfect, sinless sacrifice who was able to take the punishment we all deserve and die in our place. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, our sins can be forgiven. We can receive new life in Him and become part of God's family forever. When we admit that we have sinned, believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins, and choose to follow Him; He wipes away our sins, gives us a fresh start as a follower of God, and makes us part of His family that will live with Him forever!



Easter

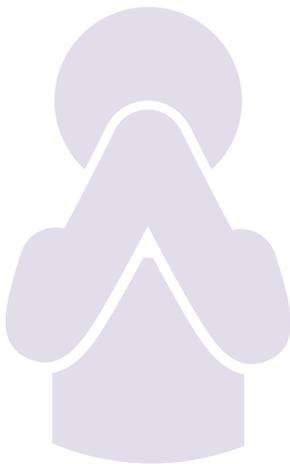


Discuss

- Why was Jesus' sacrifice the only way for us to be forgiven and become part of God's family forever?
- What do people need to do to receive the gift of salvation?
- How can we share the incredible story of Easter with others?

Activities

- Learn about Passover and the traditional Seder meal Jews have observed for centuries. The customs and rituals associated with this annual Jewish holiday can help Christians gain a deeper understanding of the history of God's chosen people, the cycle of persecution Jews have endured from Bible times to the present day, the first rescue from captivity in Egypt, and Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the perfect sacrificial lamb. If you know a Jewish family (especially Messianic Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God) that celebrates Passover, ask if you can learn about it from them. If not, ask a pastor or church leader to recommend books or online resources.
- Before Easter, add an interactive piece to your decorations. You'll need a basket and some plastic eggs. Decide on a set number of days before Easter that you'd like to use this activity, and get eggs for each day. Prior to your start date, divide the eggs. Each family member will choose a personally meaningful Bible verse related to redemption, new life, forgiveness, or sacrifice. Write the scripture reference on a slip of paper, and place it inside an egg. When all the eggs have been filled, put them in the basket. Each day, select an egg to open and read the verse together. Do not put the eggs back in the basket. On Easter morning, when you read the last verse, the basket will be empty to signify the empty tomb and the forgiveness that wipes away the debt of sin.



Pray

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for taking the punishment we deserved for our sin. We are awed that your death and resurrection offer everyone an indescribable gift—an invitation to receive forgiveness, to have our sins wiped away, and to become part of God's family forever. We praise and celebrate you today.

Amen.

Mother's Day

Read

Luke 2:17-19

After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over.

Learn

When a woman finds out she's going to be a mother, love fills her heart, overflowing with excitement. It bubbles up because she can't wait to share the incredible news! In the New Testament, we read about the angel, Gabriel, delivering amazing news to Mary; she was going to give birth to Jesus! Mary sang a song to God, expressing her joy. After Jesus was born, the shepherds came to meet Him. Mary and Joseph heard about the angels filling the sky with light and music to announce their son's birth. Mary watched and listened to all that was happening, and she did something mothers do when their babies are born and as they grow up. Mary tucked it all into a very special place in her heart so she could think about the wonderful memories over and over again.

Moms show love and care for their children by feeding them, giving them baths, tucking them into bed, singing songs, giving hugs and kisses, and teaching them all kinds of things. Even when kids grow up, moms continue to take care of their children, just in more grown-up ways. We wouldn't be able to list all of the things moms do out of

their love for us!

Moms demonstrate part of the huge love God has for us. He created your mom to show His love to you! We can express thanks all year long, but on Mother's Day, we can set aside time to honor our moms in a very special way, showing and telling them how important and loved they are. Some kids do not have a mom in their daily lives, but there are other special women God gives to love them as a mother would. It might be a grandma, an aunt, a family friend, or a teacher. In addition to celebrating moms, we can also honor the other women in our lives who love us.

☀️ Mother's Day ☀️

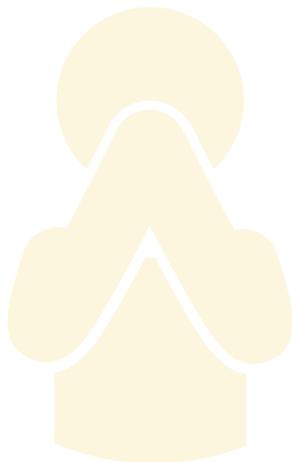
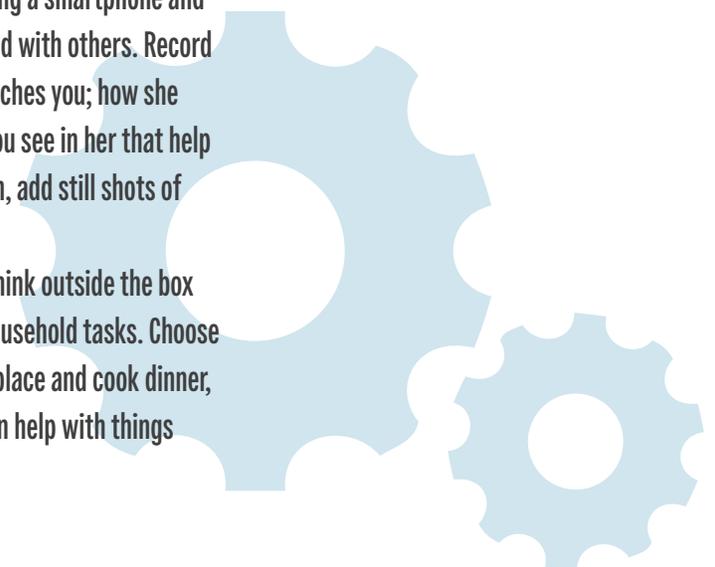


Discuss

- Why do you think God created moms for us?
- What do you like most about your mom?
- What is your favorite thing to do with her?

Activities

- Enlist Dad's help, and create a special video for Mom. This can be done using a smartphone and free or inexpensive editing apps. Capture candid footage of mom alone and with others. Record your own thoughts about her and the special things she says, does, or teaches you; how she makes you laugh, makes you feel loved, etc. Be sure to include qualities you see in her that help shows you what God's love is like. You can sing or play a song, read a poem, add still shots of favorite family pictures. Present the video to her on Mother's Day.
- Instead of the traditional flowers, breakfast in bed, candy, etc., why not think outside the box and honor Mom beyond Mother's Day?. Ask her about her least favorite household tasks. Choose the one you will commit to helping her with as often as you can. Take her place and cook dinner, pack lunches, do the laundry, pick up groceries, etc., once a week. Dad can help with things teens can't do entirely on their own.



Pray

Dear Jesus,
Thank you so much for my mom. Thank you for creating her to love and care for me. Please show her how much she is loved by her family and by You. Help me to honor her and show her how much she means to me.
Amen.

★ *Memorial Day & Veterans Day* ★

**Use this devotional anytime your country honors fallen and living servicewomen and men such as Remembrance Day (Canada).*

Read

John 15:12-13

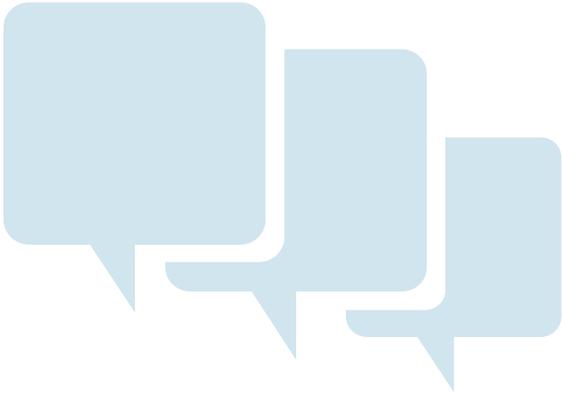
This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

Learn

Memorial Day and Veterans Day are two holidays observed in the United States. Some people believe these holidays are exactly alike. Even though they do have similarities, there are important differences, too. Memorial Day began after the Civil War as a way for people to pay tribute to the soldiers who lost their lives fighting in the war. Over the years, all soldiers who've died in the wars America has fought are included in this day of remembrance. Veterans Day also honors soldiers, but it's a day focused on living members of the military. It started as a celebration of the end of World War I. As the United States fought in more wars, this day became a time to honor military members who are currently serving and those who have retired.

When people make a commitment to serve their country, they understand it might mean being seriously injured or even dying while preserving freedoms, defending our nation, or helping people in dangerous areas of the world. Memorial Day and Veterans Day give us opportunities to think about the sacrifices members of the military have made for us and to express our gratitude and thanks. Remembering and honoring those who have died in battle as well as the brave men and women currently serving in or retired from the armed forces is a privilege and responsibility. Jesus says people who are willing to sacrifice their own lives for their friends demonstrate the greatest love one person can have for another. For this reason, members of the military should be recognized with respect and gratitude for their willingness to die in order to protect others.

★ *Memorial Day & Veterans Day* ★

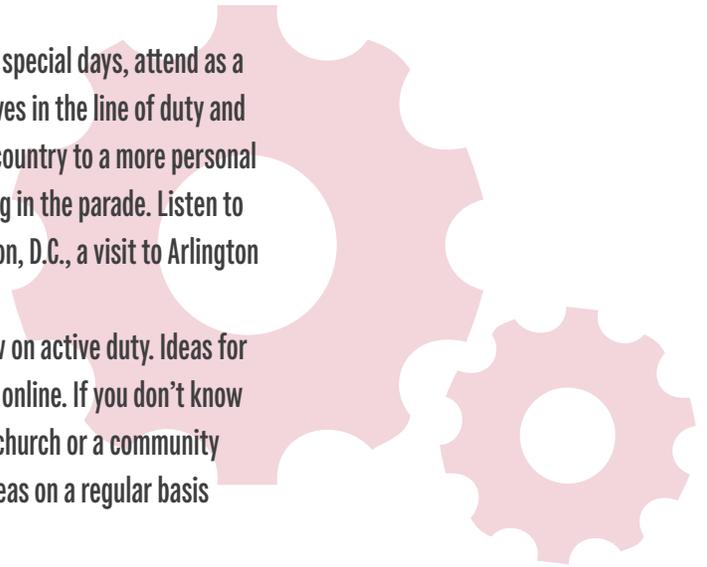


Discuss

- What things do you think soldiers give up in order to serve in the military?
- What does freedom look like?
- What things do we enjoy in our country because of the sacrifices soldiers have made?

Activities

- If your community holds a parade or ceremony at local memorials on these special days, attend as a family. Hearing and seeing the names of local people who have lost their lives in the line of duty and meeting those currently serving brings the meaning of sacrifice for one's country to a more personal level. Talk with people representing the Armed Forces who are participating in the parade. Listen to their stories. Express gratitude for their service. If you live near Washington, D.C., a visit to Arlington National Cemetery is deeply moving.
- Send a care package and/or personal notes of thanks to someone you know on active duty. Ideas for items to include based on where a person is stationed are widely available online. If you don't know any members of the military, find a service member to bless through your church or a community organization. Consider writing letters to service members stationed overseas on a regular basis throughout the year.



Pray

Dear God,

Thank you for the men and women who gave up their lives to protect and preserve the freedoms we enjoy in the United States. Thank you for those who are currently serving to protect Americans and to protect the lives of people in dangerous countries. Remind us to express our gratitude on these holidays and throughout the year.

Amen.

Father's Day

Read

Proverbs 14:26

Anyone who shows respect for the Lord has a strong tower. It will be a safe place for their children.

Learn

One of the reasons the Lord created fathers is to give us an earthly example of the way our Heavenly Father loves and takes care of us. He displays a bigger picture of His character by giving us both moms and dads. Dads help feed their kids, give lots of hugs and kisses, read bedtime stories, and teach their kids. Dads might give kids silly things to eat, like hot dogs for breakfast or ice cream for dinner. They wrestle with kids during playtime and throw kids up in the air and catch them to make them laugh. Dads encourage us to be brave and to try things that might be tough, like climbing a tree or jumping into the deep end of the pool. And even if the first or second or third try doesn't work, they are there to help us up, put bandaids on scrapes and give us the confidence to keep trying.

God made dads to have a special kind of courage and strength. They can be gentle and quiet, and at the same time, they can be brave and strong. Fathers share love by protecting and providing for their families. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon writes about what happens when a person shows respect toward God. He is a Father providing a strong tower as a safe place for children to those who honor Him. He is a Good Father. And Father's Day is a great reminder that we can celebrate our Heavenly Father and our earthly Fathers.



It's an important day to really celebrate what makes dads special.

For kids who do not have a dad as part of their daily lives, there are other special men God gives who love as a father would. It could be a grandpa, an uncle, a family friend, or a teacher who fills that role. In addition to celebrating dads, we can also honor the other men in our lives who love and take care of us.

Father's Day



Discuss

- Why do you think God created dads for us?
- What makes your dad special?
- What is your favorite thing to do with your dad?

Activities

- Instead of buying presents, give your dad the gift of your time. Think of activities your dad really enjoys as well as some activities you'd like to introduce him to. These can be things to do as an entire family and/or one-on-one. Write each activity on a separate piece of paper, designate who the activity is with, and put them all in a container. Get creative with your design and presentation. You can choose how often you do these events—weekly or monthly. Dad will draw one out of the container, schedule the activity on the family calendar, and enjoy meaningful time together.
- Create a scavenger hunt for dad. Choose where you'd like the hunt to take place—in your home or outdoors. If you'd like, you can also do this around your community by enlisting friends and family to be in designated areas as dad visits each spot. Write clues he has to figure out to get to the next destination for another clue. If you want to give him a number of small gifts, you can give these out at each stop. If you're giving him one gift, have it waiting for him in the last place. There are great examples of scavenger hunts you can look at online to get you started.



Pray

Dear Lord,

Thank you so much for my dad. Thank you for creating him to love and care for me in a unique way. Please show him how much he is loved by our family and by You. Help me to honor and respect him every day.

Amen.



Labor Day

Read

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

People should be happy and do good while they live. I know there's nothing better for them to do than that. Each of them should eat and drink. People should be satisfied with all their hard work. That is God's gift to them.

Colossians 3:23

Work at everything you do with all your heart. Work as if you were working for the Lord, not for human masters.

positive things in our country. God has given everyone special skills to do many different jobs to help others in some way. Farmers plant and harvest crops for people to eat. Doctors and nurses provide medical care to keep people healthy. Sanitation workers pick up trash. Carpenters construct furniture and all kinds of buildings. Scientists discover new things to help make our lives better. Law enforcement officers make sure people are kept safe and follow the rules in our country. If everyone could only do the same job, it would be very strange and extremely difficult to live our lives without everything we need. On Labor Day, let's remember God created people to work hard and wants everyone to do the best they can as if He was the boss. We can also give thanks to all workers who make our lives better.

Learn

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in His image to be helpers for each other and to take care of the things God made. He gave his very first people an important job. The Bible talks about work being a good thing. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes about the benefits of hard work. Jobs provide a way for people to get the things they need like shelter, food, and clothing. Working can also give people a sense of happiness through doing good things with the unique talents God gives each person. God's gift to us for hard work is the feeling of satisfaction in a job well done. Putting our all into everything we do, as if God is the person we're working for, brings Him glory.

Labor Day is a celebration of the hard work people do to contribute



Labor Day

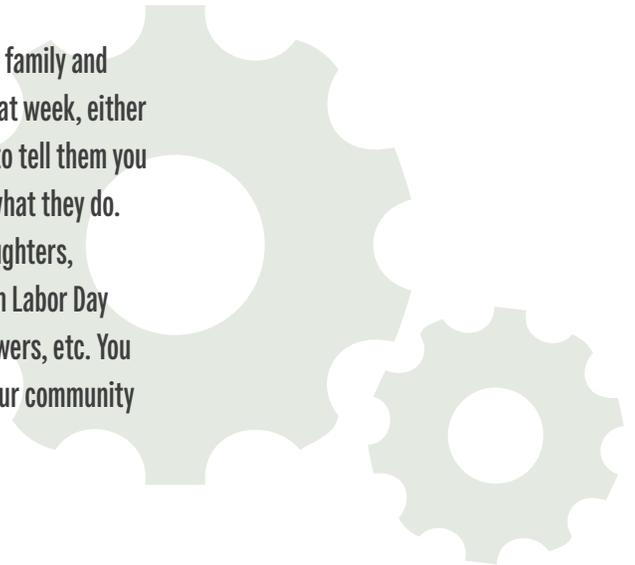


Discuss

- Why do you think God says it's good for us to work?
- How does it change the way we work if we do it as if the Lord is our boss?
- If people didn't work, what would happen to our lives and our world?

Activities

- Make a list of people in your family and the jobs they do. You can include extended family and close friends, too. As a family, choose one person each week to pray for. During that week, either write a note, call, or talk to them in person to thank them for the job they do and to tell them you prayed for them. You could also ask to visit them at work to find out more about what they do.
- There are many people who don't get the holiday off—such as police officers, firefighters, hospital employees, EMTs, etc. Their roles are vital to communities. Honor them on Labor Day by personally delivering handwritten letters of thanks, baked goods, balloons, flowers, etc. You could also create lawn signs or banners of thanks to put up so the workers and your community can see them.



Pray

Dear Lord,

Thank you for creating each of us with unique talents so we can help do all the many jobs needed in our communities, in our country, and in our world. Help us remember that working with all our hearts as if we're working for you is the very best way to do things.

Amen.



Thanksgiving



Read

Psalm 100:4-5

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

something great was going to happen, but it didn't end up working out, it's easy to let disappointment overshadow everything else. In those times, we make a choice to give thanks. God's Word reminds us we always have a reason to be thankful. Whether we are bubbling over with thanksgiving or trying hard to think of things, we can remind ourselves that the Lord is always good, always loving, and always faithful. He gives us wonderful reasons to praise and thank Him on Thanksgiving Day and every day of the year!

Learn

When you think about Thanksgiving, what comes to mind? Maybe it's all the yummy food you get to eat, watch a Thanksgiving Day parade on TV, or decorate the house with turkey crafts made at school. Perhaps you picture a big gathering with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins or a small table with a few special people around it. Thanksgiving is celebrated in all kinds of ways, but there are usually certain things your family does year after year after year. These are called traditions, and you can probably think of a few that your family has. Some traditions are just for fun, like playing tug-of-war with the wishbone or a game of football after the dishes are done. Then there are special traditions that focus on the most important meaning of the holiday—giving thanks!

It's so good for us to take time to think about the people and things we're thankful for and to talk about them with others. It helps us develop the habit of daily thankfulness. There are times it's easy to make a list of things you're grateful for, but sometimes it's harder to give thanks. If you've experienced the loss of someone you love, your sadness can make it difficult to feel like celebrating. If you thought





Thanksgiving

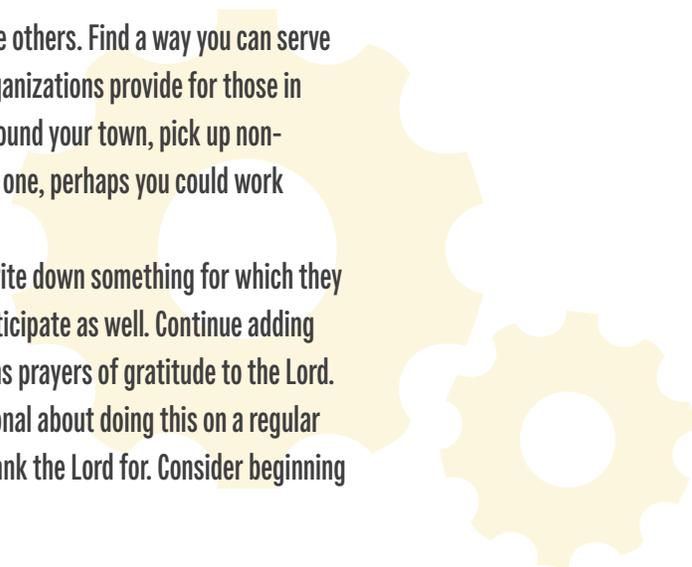


Discuss

- What do you enjoy the most about Thanksgiving Day?
- What are some traditions you have or would like to start in your family?
- When our circumstances make it more difficult to be thankful, where can we choose to focus?

Activities

- Volunteer together! One way to show gratitude for what we have is to serve others. Find a way you can serve together. Volunteer to help serve meals churches and other community organizations provide for those in need. Offer to help at a local food pantry. If there are mini food pantries around your town, pick up non-perishable items and restock one of them. If your community doesn't have one, perhaps you could work together with others to build one.
- On Thanksgiving Day, begin a family gratitude journal. Have each person write down something for which they are thankful. If extended family or friends join you for dinner, let them participate as well. Continue adding to the journal on a regular basis throughout the year. Write some of them as prayers of gratitude to the Lord. Look for the big things and the little things you are grateful for. Be intentional about doing this on a regular basis. By next Thanksgiving, you'll have so much to look back on and to thank the Lord for. Consider beginning a new journal each year.



Pray

Dear Heavenly Father,
Thank you for the opportunity we have to celebrate Thanksgiving with the people we love. Help us develop and demonstrate a heart of gratitude every day, no matter what is happening around us. Thank you for your goodness, your love, and your faithfulness.
Amen.



Christmas



Read

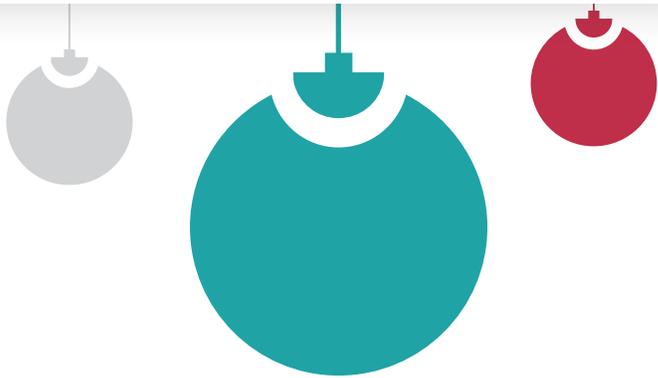
Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

Learn

Jesus' birth marks the beginning of God's promised rescue plan. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were immediately separated from God and the perfect relationship they shared with Him. Sin brought a lot of pain, darkness, and even death to the world. But God already knew how He would rescue people from the consequences of sin, and it had everything to do with Jesus. Since no one could put the relationship with God back together, a way for sins to be forgiven and become part of God's family forever had to be provided. Jesus was the way! In Old Testament prophecies, God gave hints about the coming of Jesus and His sacrifice. One of the things the Prophet Isaiah told the people was about a light that would shine into the darkness of sin. We know the light Isaiah was talking about is Jesus!

Christmas is a wonderful time of celebration filled with so many things we love. Decorating trees, baking cookies, giving and receiving gifts, going caroling, and looking at all of the beautiful outdoor decorations are just a few of the things we look forward to every year. All of these (and more) are really fun, but none of them compare to the best part of Christmas! God gave us a gift better than the most awesome present anyone else could ever give us. Because we can't make sin go away on our own, Jesus is the gift who came to our world to provide the light that would chase away the darkness of sin through His death and resurrection.





Christmas

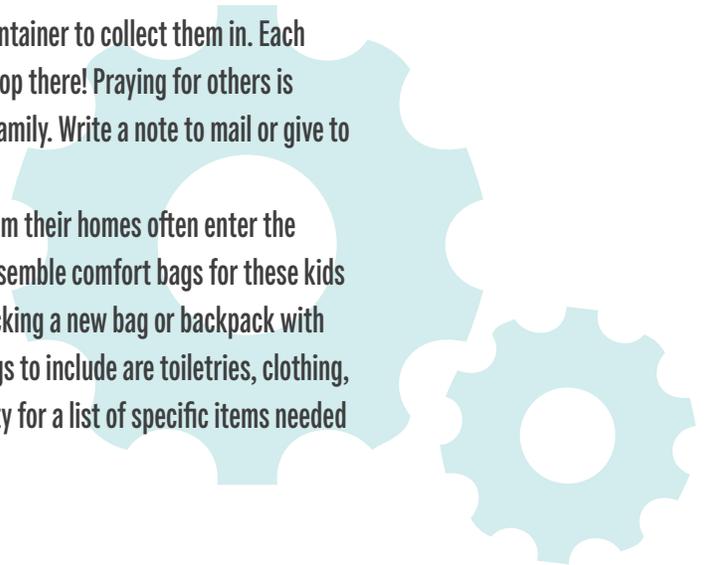


Discuss

- Why do you think God wanted to give us the gift of Jesus?
- What is something your family does to celebrate the birth of Jesus?
- What can you do to share the love of God and the gift he gave us with other people?

Activities

- As you receive Christmas cards, find a place to either hang them up or a container to collect them in. Each day, select one of the cards and pray for that person or family. But don't stop there! Praying for others is something wonderful to include every time you pray individually and as a family. Write a note to mail or give to people to let them know they were included in your prayers.
- Christmas isn't always a joy-filled time for some. Kids who are removed from their homes often enter the foster care system without many (or any) personal belongings. You can assemble comfort bags for these kids to donate to a local foster care agency. Help bless a child of any age by packing a new bag or backpack with practical and thoughtful items to make their transition a little easier. Things to include are toiletries, clothing, toys, books, art supplies, etc. You can contact an agency in your community for a list of specific items needed or search online for checklists for each age group of kids.



Pray

Dear God,

Thank you for giving us the very best gift in the world! Thank you, Jesus, for coming into our world to provide a way for our sins to be forgiven and to become part of God's family forever. Help us to honor you in our Christmas celebrations and to share the news of your gift with others. Amen.

Birthday

Read

Psalm 139:13-16

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Not only does God make us uniquely different, He knows each part of us, inside and out. In Psalm 139, David writes about the intricate way the Lord works from the very beginning of each life. He knows who we are before He creates us. He puts us together very carefully and miraculously while we are growing inside of our moms. Before our parents even found out we were going to be born, God already knew every single thing about us, even the days of our lives before they happen. Because of the amazing way we are created by our Heavenly Father, having a birthday isn't just about being another year older. It's celebrating the way He designed each part of us in a very special way for a very special reason.

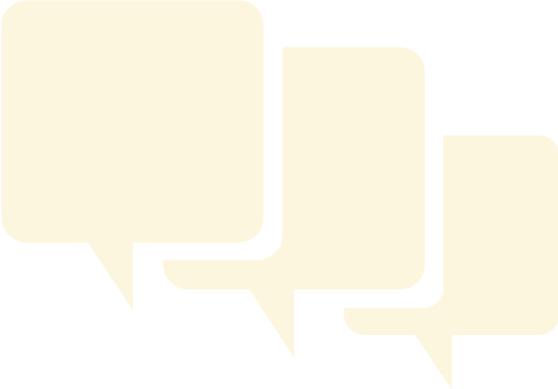
Learn

Did you know there is no other person in the world exactly like you? People can't create anything without eventually running out of ideas, but God's designs are never-ending! Even though parents and siblings might look and act in similar ways, God gives each person unique personalities, talents, and natural abilities. Think about how strange it would be if everyone was exactly the same. What if the world was filled with people who could only play the piano? We would never get to enjoy the beautiful music created when different kinds of instruments play together. What if every person was only able to throw a baseball? No one would ever get to play a baseball game because there wouldn't be players to hit or catch the ball. Thankfully, God creates each person in a very special way to be and to do only what that person can.





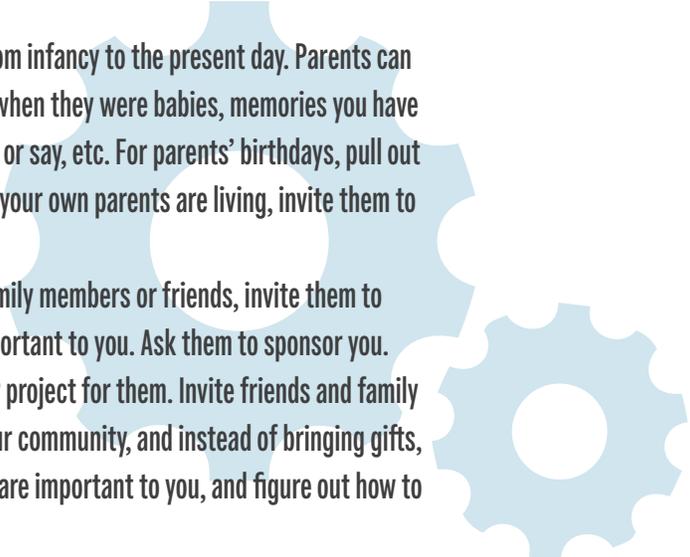
Birthday

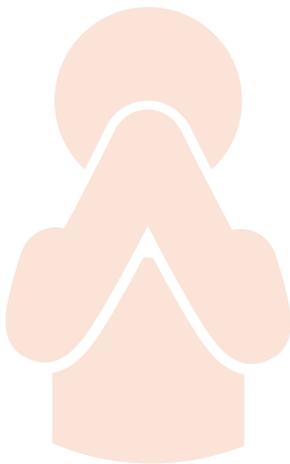


Discuss

- Why do you think God makes each person different from any other person in the world?
- What are some special things that make you different from any other person in your family?
- What is something you are looking forward to now that you are ____ years old?

Activities

- 
- On each family member's birthday, go through pictures together of them from infancy to the present day. Parents can share their teen's story—when you found out you were expecting him/her, when they were babies, memories you have of special days, milestones through the years, funny things they used to do or say, etc. For parents' birthdays, pull out photos of yourselves and tell your kids about your memories growing up. If your own parents are living, invite them to share your story with your family.
 - Celebrate a birthday in reverse. Instead of receiving gifts from extended family members or friends, invite them to help you pay it forward. Maybe there's a walk for an organization that's important to you. Ask them to sponsor you. Perhaps you'd like to bless a family in need by doing a household or outdoor project for them. Invite friends and family to join you. Organize a toy, book, or clothing drive to help kids in need in your community, and instead of bringing gifts, have them bring an item for the drive. Think about causes or charities that are important to you, and figure out how to incorporate them into your birthday celebration.



Pray

Dear Lord,
Thank you for (insert birthday person's name). We love his/her (list character qualities) and are so grateful you created him/her to be part of our family. May he/she continue to grow in relationship with and understanding of you more this next year.
Amen.

Parent's Anniversary

Read

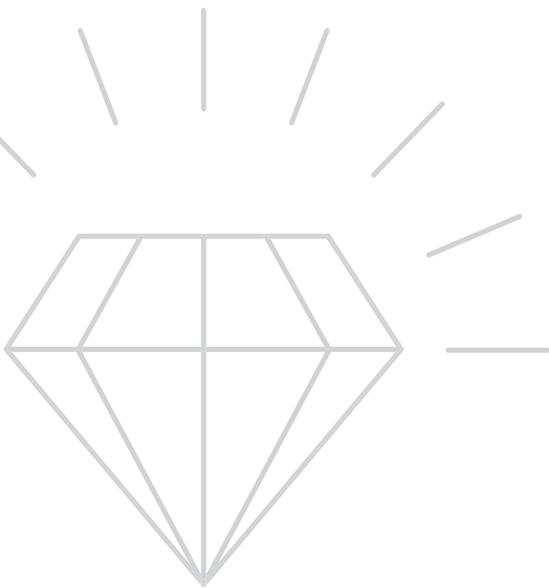
Romans 12:9-10

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Learn

Governments around the world make laws about marriage, but the most important and special law is God's. He created marriage in the very beginning when he made Adam and Eve. God created Adam first and saw he needed a helper that was just right for him. God created Eve to walk beside Adam in a special partnership as husband and wife for the rest of their lives. We see God's wonderful and perfect plan for marriage when He created Adam and Eve to complement each other. Complement means putting two people's unique qualities and character traits so they can be more complete together.

Celebrating a wedding anniversary when God is the most important part of the marriage is wonderful because it follows His perfect plan. When a man and a woman who love God make a wedding promise to each other, it's called a covenant. A covenant means they've made a spiritual promise in front of God to love and honor one another for their whole lives. One of the Ten Commandments God gave to us is about marriage, and it says a husband and wife should keep their marriage promise to love one another only. Marriage is so important to the Lord because it's a picture of Jesus' love for all of His people, too. One of the ways the Bible describes Jesus is like a marriage celebration. It says Jesus is the groom, we are the bride, and His kingdom is a big wedding celebration! Every time an anniversary is celebrated, remember it's an extra special day for husbands and wives and for God, too.



Parent's Anniversary

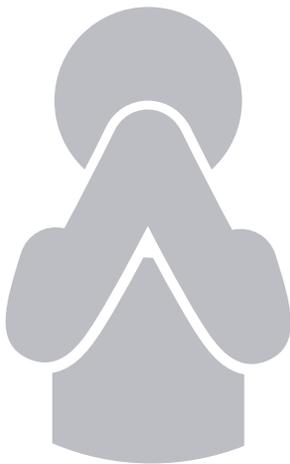


Discuss

- Why is marriage such an important thing to God?
- What qualities should another person have to be a good wife or husband?
- For mom and dad: How did you meet, and how did you know you wanted to marry each other?

Activities

- Using index cards or small pieces of paper, each family member should write down character traits/qualities they think are important in a spouse—one idea per card. Put all the cards in a container, and draw one at a time to discuss. This can be done in one sitting or over the course of days...whatever works for your family. Mom and Dad will be able to share with their teens from their own experience, and teens will have an opportunity to not only gain wisdom from their parents but also to express their own ideas of what they would look for in a future spouse and why.
- Take some time as a family to watch your wedding video and/or look through pictures. Parents, share your story as a couple—how you met, when you started dating, what drew you to each other, etc. Include wonderful things you've experienced together and challenges you've faced in your relationship. Talk about the differences between real-life relationships and those portrayed on TV or in movies. This will help shape your kids' understanding of marriage as a partnership in which both spouses continually seek to honor the Lord as individuals and as a couple in order to change, grow, and deepen their sacred relationship.



Pray

Dear Lord,

Thank you for creating marriage to be an example of Jesus' covenant love toward us. Help us to always remember that a marriage between a man and a woman who love and honor each other and you is your very best plan. Thank you that anniversary celebrations are very special because they remind us of our family's beginning and our family's future.

Amen.