



The Intentional Family: Establishing Holiday Traditions

Traditions are the things we do together and repeatedly over time. They tell a story and declare, “We are family. This is who we are.” The most important traditions are the ones that point our children to the heart of God and to a deeper understanding of His character. This holiday season, make a point to incorporate the truth of God’s Word into your activities and discussions. This tradition has lasting impact on future generations.

Traditions provide a source of identity.

Traditions teach family values.

Traditions create fun memories.



<i>Activity / Tradition</i>	<i>Description / Discussion</i>	<i>Scripture / Question</i>
Decorate Together	Talk about how we spend a lot of time preparing for a holiday, but it is important we also prepare our hearts to receive Christ. Discuss ways we can open our hearts to the miracle of Jesus.	<i>James 4:8</i> <i>Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.</i> How can we draw near to God in this season?
Collect Special Ornaments	Add a new ornament to the tree each year that commemorates a special trip or highlight from the year. As you decorate the tree, reflect on the stories each ornament represents. Praise God for His goodness in the special times you’ve had as a family.	<i>Psalm 145:4</i> <i>One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.</i> What mighty things has God done in our life this year?
Work a Puzzle	Set a 500-1000 piece puzzle out in a common area. Throughout the season, stop and work a few pieces together. Talk about how our lives are like a puzzle. We don’t always see how it fits together, but later, we see God’s handiwork.	<i>Romans 8:28</i> <i>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.</i> What things in our life have seemed difficult that we now see as part of His plan?



Scavenger Hunt	Create clues for children to find as they hunt for their gifts. Clues can be activities, puzzles, riddles, etc. Some clues point to another clue, and some may lead to a gift. It's a great way to stretch out the gift-opening and create fun memories.	<i>Jeremiah 29:13</i> <i>You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.</i> Do we seek God's will with the same tenacity as we are hunting for the next clue or gift?
Watch a Christmas Movie	Find a fun Christmas movie and watch it together. Make special snacks and drinks for the event. Challenge each person to identify something in the movie that reminds them of a spiritual truth. Use this time to enjoy conversation with your children and discuss their thoughts.	<i>Psalms 126:2</i> <i>Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."</i> What fills your mouth with laughter?
Serve Your Community	Serve together in a local shelter, food bank or even take a cup of coffee to the Salvation Army bell ringer. Have a discussion with your kids about giving to others to reflect the love of Jesus.	<i>Mark 10:45</i> <i>For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.</i> In what way does serving allow us to show God's love to people?
Go on a Light Tour	Pick a special evening and go on a Christmas light tour. Drive around town or through a city park that is lit. Enjoy the fantastic lights. Talk about how people are drawn to the lights and compare it to what the Bible says about Christ followers being the light of the world.	<i>Matthew 5:16</i> <i>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.</i> How can we let our light shine this season?



Hands on Nativity	Set out a nativity scene that isn't off limits to little hands. Let the kids play with the set and tell the story of Jesus' birth. Read the story in the Bible as they "act it out" with the nativity figures.	<i>Luke 2:7</i> <i>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.</i> Why is the birth of Jesus important to us today?
Show and Tell	Ask each family member to bring an object that represents something for which they are thankful. It can represent an event, person or accomplishment. Let each person guess what their object stands for. Discuss the importance of giving thanks.	<i>Psalm 7:17</i> <i>I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High.</i> For what are you most thankful?
Love Around	Take turns honoring a different family member for an evening meal. Go around the table and tell something you enjoyed about the person this year and offer words of blessing for a new year. (This is a great birthday tradition as well.)	<i>Proverbs 16:24</i> <i>Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.</i> How can our positive words strengthen and encourage other family members?
Hot Chocolate Bar	Gather several items to add to a cup of hot chocolate. (peppermint, marshmallows, peanut butter, cinnamon, etc.) Let each person make a special cup of hot chocolate using any of the ingredients they want. Talk about which combinations made the best drink. Discuss how we are like the cup of hot chocolate – what we put into our bodies and minds will "flavor" us.	<i>Luke 6:45</i> <i>A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.</i> What are the good things you're putting into your mind and how do they shape who you are?



Carol Charades	Write down the names of Christmas carols on slips of paper. Play charades with the song titles. If the actor accidentally speaks during his turn, he must sing one verse of the song. Discuss how we never have to guess with God. He is always loving, always faithful always good.	<i>Hebrews 13:8</i> <i>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.</i> What characteristics of God are you most thankful for?
Christmas Cookies	Spend the afternoon baking sugar cookies and decorate them together. Discuss how God created us unique, just as each of the cookies are unique.	<i>Psalms 34:8</i> <i>Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!</i> How is the love of God a treat to our soul?
Stocking Goals	Have each family member consider a personal goal for the upcoming year. Write them on individual slips of paper. As you pack the stockings away, tuck the paper inside each person's stocking. The next year when you hang the stockings, discuss progress made.	<i>Philippians 4:13</i> <i>I can do all things through him who strengthens me.</i> How can God strengthen us to meet these goals? How does this accomplishment glorify God?
Anticipation	The anticipation builds with each package placed under the tree. Help children develop patience as they anxiously await the appointed time to open gifts. Teach your children about the importance of waiting on God in different seasons of life.	<i>Psalms 130:5</i> <i>I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.</i> How can we wait, with happy hearts, knowing He will provide for us?
Christmas Card Prayers	Collect all the cards you receive each year and put them in a box. Throughout the year, pull out one card and pray specifically for the person or family. Send them a text or give a phone call to encourage them and let them know they are being prayed for.	<i>Ephesians 6:18</i> <i>Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.</i> How have we seen God answer prayer this year?

<p>Prelude to Gifts</p>	<p>This is the season for giving and receiving gifts. Have you ever considered the gifts God gives each of us? Talk with your children about the spiritual gifts and abilities God has given to each of them. Discuss how you can honor God using those unique gifts.</p>	<p><i>John 3:16</i> <i>For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.</i></p> <p>Have we received the eternal life Jesus gives?</p>
<p>Give it Away</p>	<p>For children, this season can quickly become only about “getting.” As you strive to keep the focus on serving and loving others, take the opportunity to teach them about giving. If you don’t have financial margin, let them donate gently used coats and clothes, or take cookies to a neighbor. Teach children to be generous.</p>	<p><i>Philippians 2:3-4</i> <i>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.</i></p> <p>What do we have to give this year?</p>
<p>Attend Worship Together</p>	<p>It’s easy to get caught up in the activities of Christmas and forget the intent of the season. Attend a worship service together and reflect on the miracle of Jesus’ birth, and most importantly, the sacrifice he made to save us.</p>	<p><i>Psalms 95:6</i> <i>Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!</i></p> <p>How can we worship the Lord in our words and actions this season?</p>
<p>Read the Bible</p>	<p>Read the account of Jesus’ birth in the Bible. Compare Luke’s gospel with the story in Matthew. Discuss how each person may have felt? (Was Mary afraid? How do you think Joseph felt?) Talk about how God brought peace to each of them.</p>	<p><i>Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 1:18-2:23</i></p> <p>What does this story mean to you? How does it show God’s love for us?</p>





Fact or Fiction	Take the Christmas quiz. See how much you know about what the Bible really says regarding the story of Jesus' birth. You may be surprised to see what the Bible says and <i>doesn't</i> say. Download quiz here	<i>Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 1:18-2:23</i> <i>Psalm 25:5</i> <i>Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.</i> Do we always recognize fact and fiction? Why is it important to go to the Bible for truth?
Read a Book	Reading aloud with your children is an excellent way to spend time together. Read a book or share a devotional during the holiday season.	Consider these books Jotham's Journey series – Historical fiction for advent Jesse Tree – Advent devotionals for adults and children Unwrapping the Greatest Gift – Celebration of Christmas

I'd love to hear about your favorite holiday traditions!



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