

Marking Time

by Rebecca Laird and Michael Christensen

As Christians, we know that time is important. God created the world in six biblical days and then rested on the seventh. Likewise, we work during the week and set aside Sunday for worship and rest. (Well, OK, there was that one spring when we dashed from church services to our daughter's weekly lacrosse practice, but we learned from that disaster.) We follow the church year by pulling out the Advent calendar after Thanksgiving. (Yes, our kids like the one with chocolates tucked inside for each day preceding Christmas.)

We practice self-denial during Lent. (Annually our younger daughter happily reminds us of the time we cheated by going out for coffee one Sunday before remembering that we'd given up coffee! She simply wouldn't buy our theological argument that Sunday was a feast day, and we could drink just this one cup of Starbucks in good conscience.) We seek to order our lives around the priorities of our faith because we know that we encounter God in the course of daily life. It's now or never with God. "Someday" is an abstraction; only this day counts in God's calendar. *Carpe Diem*-seize the day. "Now is the day of salvation," Paul reminds us (2 Corinthians 6:2).

What are we doing as a family to seize the day and mark the time God has given us?

As parents, we are constantly reminded by outgrown clothes and changing musical tastes that our children are growing up quickly. (We are trying to encourage them to listen to contemporary Christian artists to counterbalance the mega dose of Britney Spears coming from the media and school.) But what are we doing as a family to seize the day and mark the time God has given us? We recently took a family inventory.

We eat together daily. That's good. Each morning we have breakfast together before rushing out. On most nights we all sit down together for dinner and share the everyday events that make up our lives. This is a value to us, not just because we like to eat, and we do, but because we know that Jesus spent considerable time eating and feasting with those He was training in the faith. If your family is rarely together, it may be time to reassess. We haven't always kept this regular meal pattern, but during our children's growing-up years, we've decided to set aside commitments that regularly keep us away from home in the evening. There may be other seasons of life when those activities make more sense.

We throw lots of parties, big and small, to celebrate the regular rhythms of our family's shared history. Each birthday we place a red plate atop the celebrant's placemat to mark the importance of this day. What would our lives be if this wonderful one had never been born? Each December, we have a Survivor's Day party for our younger daughter to commemorate each year of health that passes since her leukemia diagnosis. When her 26 months of chemotherapy treatments ended last February, we marked the time. After doling out 2,099 pills or spoonfuls of medicines, 17

spinal taps, 4 hospitalizations, and 3 bone marrow aspirations, we were ready to celebrate. We invited friends, neighbors, the Brownie troop, those who prayed and made meals for us, those who baby-sat and ran errands, those who directed the medical treatment, and those who made us laugh during the hard times. The kids stomped and destroyed dozens of empty medicine bottles to declare tangibly and noisily: The time of medicine and worry is past. The time for rejoicing and new life is now.

Marking time with moments that matter is both psychologically and spiritually beneficial.

Your family has its own hard time to commemorate, miracles to celebrate, and people to honor. Take a look at your calendar. Are you marking time with family rituals and routines that cement your commitment to God and to those with whom you live? Grab a pencil and look at the week and month ahead. Schedule an empty evening for your family. If you won't have time to cook, order a pizza and eat it by candlelight. Pull out the family photo album after dinner and ask each person to pick a favorite photo and share his or her memories from that special day or event.

Do the special things that make you mutually happy. Marking time with moments that matter is both psychologically and spiritually beneficial. If you don't seize the time and take charge of your calendar, someone or something else will. Time is God's precious gift to you so claim it. Do it now.

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