

Joy in the Family

When we think back on our experiences in our families growing up, the memories that usually remain fresh in our minds are often those times when our parents were willing to let go of the seriousness of getting through the week to just enjoy life with us. We fondly remember when our mother laid in bed with us to read a book or just talk, and when it came to playing catch in the yard, no other partner was near as much fun as dad. Vacations and Sunday afternoons were golden times for this reason, and we lived for those times.



Now, as we try to raise our own families in today's world, we are busier than we have ever been, and it is easier to escape into electronic distractions whenever we have a free moment. The majority of the day is usually not spent together, and even when we are together it seems most of that time is spent "working" on our family - resolving conflicts between the children, correcting behavior, or practicing sports or some other

activity. And when we do end up sitting still together, we're too often locked into one or more screens or in the car on our way to our next obligation.



When was the last time our family members heard us really laugh? How often do we communicate something other than a correction or direction about what needs to happen next? Do we let go of the seriousness of work and allow ourselves to be silly for more than just a minute or so?

Many families have surrendered to the idea that joy and silliness are the privilege of retired grandparents, free as they are from so many of the day to day responsibilities. But what is this saying to our children about the goodness of life in this world that God gave us? Is not life and family more than just nose-to-the-grindstone? We might find it revealing to ask our children today, "What would you say makes mom or dad happy? What do you think brings us Joy?" Ask without a "right"

answer in mind, letting them know you really want to know what they think. We might even find it helpful to ask our spouses the same question. Their answer may surprise us.



Instead of waiting until the perfect opportunity arises, like vacations (which are rarely as perfect and carefree as we always hope they will be), our family members need to see that the type of joy and happiness we look forward to *each day* is the joy of really entering into the gift of our relationship with them, the gift of our yard, the gift of a sunny day, the gift of a good meal or conversation, the gift of our sense of humor, and especially the gift of vulnerability in our silliness. If we can really cultivate this, we will naturally find ourselves making more time to just be together with nothing pressing and nothing that needs to change right this moment. God wants to cultivate this *rest* in our families. If we ask for this grace in prayer and cultivate it

in our families we can *and will* find true joy, even in the midst of the varied demands and sufferings natural to being in a family. And, this joy is much more fulfilling for us and our children than anything else we are in the habit of turning to instead.

Here are some concrete steps that will make moving in this direction much easier for us:

- As soon as you get home from work, put the phone on the dresser, change into some play-clothes, and get the kids outside with you. You'll see a major change in the dynamic of your home almost immediately!
- Cut down on Sunday activities, and plan down time to just be together. Make it a tech-free day, too; otherwise, this down time will be pretty fruitless.
- Be aware of how often you are giving directives to your children versus any other type of conversation. Then, make it a point to have enjoyable conversations with them at least once every day, and tell them why you love them!

