



Children and Family Resources - Lectionary Series

Invitations & Intentions for Families of all Kinds

As a Lenten discipline this year, consider setting aside some time each day (or many/most days) together as a family to engage in the invitations, reflections, and activities suggested here. They're intended to be flexible for use in all kinds of times and settings – together at the table for breakfast or dinner, or sprawled in the living room for 15 minutes before bedtime. (You could even do them while driving in the car, if necessary, on days when time is tight!) They can be easily adapted for kids and grown-ups of all ages – for families of all kinds.

The season of Lent is 40 days long, which researchers tell us is about the time it takes to develop new habits. Perhaps this short, intentional time together could become habit for your family – a new ritual, if you will. In order to differentiate it from other times throughout your day, consider lighting a candle or finding some other “marker” to indicate to your minds and hearts that this is a time to pause, to take a breath, to really “see” one another.

Each week, you'll be presented with an invitation. You can choose to engage it simply by way of conversation together as a family, or in a more visual/hands-on manner (helpful for many people, but especially for small children!). If you opt for more hands-on, the only materials you'll need are 3 identical glass jars (think mason jars or spaghetti sauce jars)* and some pompoms.

** If you don't have glass jars handy, then any similarly-sized transparent container will do – drinking glasses, for example, or even Tupperware containers. If you don't have pompoms, then find something else you can use to fill these containers – dried beans, or dried macaroni noodles, or marbles.*

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Ash Wednesday

Invitation: Explore what it means to be “unfinished.”

Consider the term “unfinished.” What does it mean? In your mind, does it imply something good or bad? Or does it depend on the situation?

In what ways are you “unfinished” as a person? In what ways are the other members of your family “unfinished”? What “unfinished” things can you name about your family? Your home? Your communities?

As you move through the next few days, notice all the things out and about in the world that are “unfinished.” Gather as a family and name them, from the very obvious to the more hidden. Wonder together about the similarities and differences between all the “unfinished” examples you name.

(Optional/hands-on): For every “unfinished” example you think of to share during your time together, add a pompom to one of your glass jars. See how high you can fill it before Sunday!

Lent 1

Invitation: Identify and develop an awareness of your family values.

The term “family values” can be a loaded one, but every family has its own distinct values, and every family lives to varying degrees in accordance with them.

What kinds of things are really important in your family? What kinds of things ring true for you? What kinds of things remind you who you are? Make a list! (If your family includes children, consider inviting them to answer first, and don't try to edit/focus their responses. If a child responds that cheeseburgers are really important to your family, carry on! This may be the case because your family raises cattle, or grilling is an activity that brings neighbors together. Or it might simply be the case that you love tasty food, and you find cheeseburgers to be delicious.)

Once you have your list, talk about how the things you do as a family align with your values, and how other things might be out of alignment. (No judgment here – every family has things in both categories!)

Over the course of this next week, touch base on this question each day – list the things you've done that day and whether they were in or out of alignment with your family's values.

(Optional/ hands-on): Grab 2 glass jars and your set of pompoms. Each day, as you talk about these questions, put a pompom in one jar for each thing a member of your family does that falls in alignment with your values. Use the jar to track those that fall out of alignment. Set the goal each day of filling the jar representing alignment with your family's values to a higher level than the other one.

Lent 2

Invitation: Be curious!

We're called to openness and wonder. So often we're quick to assume we know things we don't know, or that we know the one right way, and that others are wrong. Sometimes we assume too quickly that we ourselves are wrong!

Maybe we've decided that wonder is best left to small children, and that grown-ups have outgrown it. But that's a lie! God calls us to wonder and imagination and creativity.

In your time together as a family each day, list all the ways during the day when you were curious – when you opened your imagination and asked wondering questions, either out loud to someone else or silently in your own head. Wonder is a muscle. Exercise it together this week!

(Optional/ hands-on): This week, get one jar and that same set of pompoms. Add a pompom to the jar for every moment of wonder or curiosity you name. See if you can fill it all the way up!

Lent 3

Invitation: Settle (relax, even!) into the unfinished.

We live in a market economy that works every day to convince us that we need more – more toys and the latest technology and a fancier kitchen backsplash and a higher-paying job and also curlier hair but maybe straight hair and then also that one pair of shoes. We're always chasing something "more," convinced that once we have it, our lives will be truly great.

But what if they're great already and we're missing it?

Even if some of those "upgrades" are still really desirable, what if we made a conscious effort to feel content this week with who we are and what we have already? What if we recognized our unfinishedness as a constant state of being that could run in the background rather than giving it center stage?

This week, practice settling into who you are now, what you have now, where you are now. See if it changes how you feel in your body. See if it changes how you show up for your life!

In your time together as a family, name the times and places each day where you generally focus more on what will be rather than on what is. Talk about how it feels to make a conscious decision to bring your focus back to what is, and to seek joy in that headspace.

(Optional/ hands-on): For each situation you name, add a pompom to one of your glass jars. Over the course of the week, as you watch it fill up, notice any differences in your body, your outlook, your general state of being as you make a conscious effort to relax into the unfinished.

Lent 4

Invitation: Slow down and notice where God might be at work.

Author Anne Lamott identifies three types of prayers: Help, Thanks, and Wow. Help includes all the prayers we lift to God asking for help on our own behalf or on behalf of others. Thanks includes all the prayers of gratitude we raise to God. And Wow includes all our prayers of marvel and awe.

These three prayers are so easy, and they're so profound. Also, they invite us to slow down and notice where God is at work in the world, or where we want God to pay more attention!

As you move throughout your week, notice all the times and situations that call for a Help/Thanks/ Wow prayer. When you gather as a family, name all the people, places, and things you'd lift to God in prayer, and include them in one of the three categories. As the week goes on, pay attention to whether this practice becomes more routine for you.

(Optional/ hands-on): Use all 3 of your glass jars – one for Help, one for Thanks, one for Wow. For every prayer a member of your family names, add a pompom to the corresponding jar. Pay attention to which kind(s) of prayers different family members favor over others, and whether you increase in how fast you fill the jars as the week goes on!

Lent 5

Invitation: Knock the wind out of your regrets.

Everyone of every age has regrets – the things we’ve done and the things we’ve left undone. But naming them aloud can lessen their power over us. It can allow us to move beyond what can no longer be changed, toward a future where we make different choices.

You can probably think of a few “big” regrets you have. But we all make mistakes, every day, that we wish we could go back and fix. Naming these with people we love and trust can help us to remember that we’re not alone, that we’re still worthy of love, and that making mistakes is simply part of being human.

Over the course of each day, pay attention to all the times when you make a mistake that you can’t fix. Pay attention to how your body reacts, and how your mind and heart react, too. When you gather as a family, share as many of these as you’re comfortable with. Notice how your body reacts to the sharing, and how your mind and heart react, too.

(Optional/hands-on): Using one glass jar, add a pompom for each regret named by someone in your family. Marvel at how many things – both small and large! – come up over the course of the day. Talk about what it means to be human, to make mistakes and to learn from them going forward.

***Important Note:** Be mindful of family members whose mistakes and regrets may involve other members of your family. Make space for genuine regret and remorse and take care not to move too quickly to assuming everything is fine. The goal here is to avoid shame, but not at the cost of the victim of wrongdoing.*

Palm/Passion Sunday

Invitation: Notice the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary.

Our sacraments involve the most ordinary of things – water, wine, bread. And yet God’s presence takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary.

Our day-to-day lives are often fast-paced; we hardly have time to take a deep breath. But God is there, in the midst of all of it, if we could only stop to notice.

This week, as you go through your day, pay attention to all the ordinary. Then take a minute to recognize what a miracle it is – that your car moves just from pushing a pedal, that someone wrote your favorite song, that peaches are so juicy!

As you gather with your family, name all the ordinary things you noticed during the day that are, as it turns out, actually quite extraordinary. Over the course of the week, see if this sense of wonder becomes more routine for you.

(Optional/hands-on): Use one of your glass jars and add a pompom for every ordinary/extraordinary thing someone in your family names. If one jar gets too full and overflows, move onto the next one, and the next one!

Easter Sunday

Invitation: Remember your baptism every chance you get!

Baptism is the way we're joined with Jesus in both death and resurrection. Many people were baptized as babies, but even those who were old enough to remember often forget about this extraordinary truth!

As you go through the week, pay attention to all the times when you encounter water – washing your hands, taking a bath, washing the dishes, hosing off the driveway, watering the plants, etc. Every time your hands encounter water, make the sign of the cross on your forehead and remember your baptism. Notice whether this becomes more routine as the week goes on.

When you gather with your family, name all the times when you encountered water during the day. Talk about which were the most surprising, and which ones felt like a natural or strange time to remember your baptism!

(Optional/hands-on): Use one of your glass jars and that same set of pompoms. Add a pompom for every time you came into contact with water and remembered your baptism. As you close your time together this week, get a small dish of water and make the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads, one person reminding the next of their baptism, and so on.