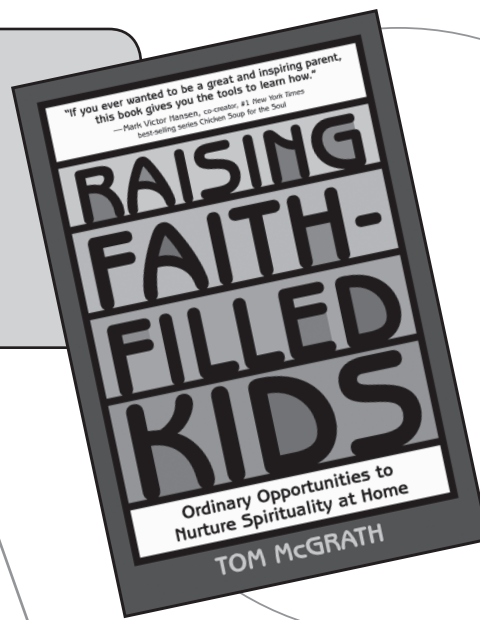


How to Build on the Rituals You Already Have



Give each child a great send-off each day. Make it a family habit to bless your children in their comings and goings. A quick tracing of the sign of the cross on the forehead as your child leaves for school or for play conveys your deepest hopes that he or she will remain safely in the sight of God all day. And there's evidence that such greetings serve to increase family closeness and satisfaction. Make the effort, and the rituals of your life will shape you, change you, elevate you. And they will shape your children as well.

Make more out of Advent. Get an Advent wreath, light the candles in order, and sing a hymn at dinner every night. Get an Advent calendar so that your children can focus on the preparation for Jesus' coming during the days before Christmas. The opening of one door a day builds anticipation and the sense that life is a search for mystery. Put your children in charge of the manger scene.

You can take similar steps for other seasons, such as Lent, Easter, and Thanksgiving, enriching the whole year and reinforcing the sense that faith makes more of our days.

Eat dinner with your children. There's perhaps no more powerful ritual in the development of your children's spiritual capacity than the family meal. Commit to sit down and eat a meal together at least five times a week. There may be days when schedules conflict, but what can be more important in your children's lives than arming them with the sense that they have a place in this world?

Say goodnight to your sweet prince and princess. Bedtime rituals are of the utmost importance in maintaining a healthy relationship with your children. Saying "I love you" before bedtime, tucking the young child in, or spending just a moment in contact with the older child—all are powerful rituals that make an enormous difference in the child's sense of well-being. Use your imagination and your knowledge of each particular child to arrive at a bedtime routine that is reassuring and connecting.