

Anxiously Engaged

Supplemental Lesson

Becoming One Through Establishing Your Own Traditions

Thanks to Kaitlin Montgomery for her original work on this lesson

Picture this: It's the beginning of October, your first Thanksgiving as a married couple is next month and you have several people competing for your time on the big day: Your parents want you to join them and the extended family at your grandparents' house. Your spouse's parents want you to come with them to their favorite Thanksgiving restaurant. Your friends want you to join them for a Friendsgiving. Your neighbors have invited you to go on a Thanksgiving camping trip. And the two of you have also thought about trying out your culinary skills and hosting Thanksgiving at your apartment. What to do??

Holidays and their accompanying traditions fill our lives with meaning. However, when two people from two different families marry each other, they often have conflicting ideas about how holidays (or even Saturday mornings!) should be celebrated. In addition, there can be pressure from extended family members to continue doing the family traditions of your youth--"But you have to, we do this every year, it's tradition!" While family members and friends mean well, this can cause stress on your marriage as you may feel pulled in multiple directions. Therefore, it can be helpful to intentionally discuss and dream together about the traditions you want to continue, the traditions you want to discontinue and the new traditions you want to create for your own family. Working together to answer these questions can help you intentionally create the family culture you want and can help you on your journey to becoming one.

Realistic Expectations

As you think through how you spend holidays, it is important to set realistic expectations. For example, visiting both families every year may not be practical or possible. Recognize that you can't do everything, and it's okay to let go of the way you've "always done things."

Activity #1: Communicate what is important to you

As you consider holiday plans, discuss these questions:

- How often do we plan to visit extended family for the holidays? Which holidays?
- How will we balance visiting both sides of the family?
- What extended family traditions are important to me? Which ones can I give up?

Discussing these questions can help each of you have a clearer idea of your own expectations as well as your spouse's expectations. This can help you as you work together to intentionally choose what traditions are important to you as a couple.

Unity in Decision Making

It's possible that your parent and siblings may disagree with the holiday and tradition decisions you make together. This can be particularly true if you are one of the first in your family to get married and your family isn't used to "sharing" time. Nevertheless, the scriptures teach us: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."¹ Though it may initially hurt your family's feelings, it is important to (kindly and gently) establish the precedent that your marriage relationship comes first.

Activity #2: Unity in decision making

Discuss or practice the following:

- How can we make decisions together about holidays and traditions? What is best for our marriage relationship?
- As we communicate with family members, it is important that our language reflects our unity. With that in mind, practice communicating holiday plans to your family members using "we" instead of "me." For example: "We decided..." or "we feel that..." or "we are planning to..."

Discussing these questions and being on the same page can help you be prepared to handle conflicts with each other (and extended family) when and if they arise.

Intentionally Create Family Traditions

In general conference, Elder L. Tom Perry taught that traditions aren't just about the holidays.

*"[T]he practice of having traditions to keep us close to the great heritage which is ours to enjoy should be something every family should try to keep alive . . . Daily we should kneel in family prayer and study the scriptures together. Weekly we should observe the Sabbath day by attending our meetings, especially sacrament meeting, and behave appropriate to the activities that are proper for the Lord's day. We should also gather our families together in weekly family home evenings. Perhaps it would also be appropriate to have a date with our [spouses] each week, to remind us of the great blessing they are in our lives. Monthly we should fast and pay our tithes and offerings to the Lord. Semiannually, we should make listening to the messages delivered at general conferences a family tradition. We should organize, annually, family reunions to keep alive our great gospel heritage. . . If we will build righteous traditions in our families, the light of the gospel can grow ever brighter in the lives of our children from generation to generation."*²

The Church's Handbook for Families also teaches this important principle:

*"Family traditions are like spiritual and emotional cement in the foundation of a happy home. They create fond memories, and these memories bond us together as nothing else can . . . Like habits, traditions are formed intentionally. They are not automatic, but require preparation, planning, and a combined effort."*³

The two of you are creating a new family and your traditions together can be your own. You may choose to adopt some of the traditions you had growing up or create completely new ones. Whatever you choose, decide together.

Activity #3: Making Your Own Traditions

Dream together about the traditions you want to create for your family:

- What daily and weekly traditions and patterns do we want to create for our family?
- What about monthly and yearly traditions?
- What holiday traditions do we want to create for our family?
- How will we make these traditions intentional?
- How will these traditions bless our current and future family?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Discussing and making decisions as equal partners about traditions and patterns in your family can help you intentionally work toward creating the kind of family you want.

¹ Genesis 2:24, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/gen/2?lang=eng>

² L. Tom Perry, Family traditions, General Conference, April 1990

³ [Handbook for families: Traditions worth keeping](#)