

CELEBRATION

"The good news of Jesus, simultaneous to our sufferings, is penetrating the darkest darkness all over this world. There is no depth his love cannot reach and no power that can stay his hand. This is cause to rejoice. Therefore, to the degree that we refuse to celebrate and be glad, we show ourselves to be out of touch with God's triumph in this world."

— John Piper

What does celebration look like to you?

Life doesn't have to be perfect in order for us to celebrate. The Resurrection Day/Easter holiday doesn't happen every Sunday, but the celebration of resurrection power happens every time the sun comes up. We just need to be alert to the celebration possibilities and respond to what God brings to us.

In one classic book, when a character unexpectedly discovers that his friend is alive after all, he asks, "Is everything sad going to come untrue?" We can answer, "Yes!" when our children pose similar questions. The resurrection of Jesus proves that our God can restore anything, and in the meantime, he is with us. **Even in the middle of hard things, we have reason to celebrate**, as a way of life, because of who God is.

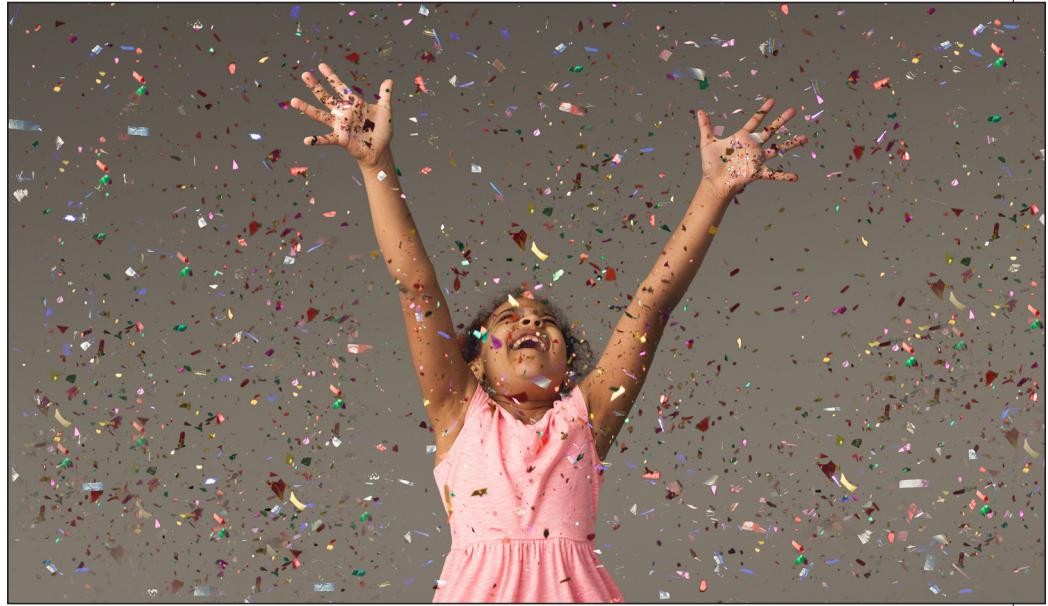
What a difference it will make if our children have the purposeful life practice of celebration woven into their stories. How wonderful for them to know that even though some things in our world are sad, we have so much to celebrate! If only we can help our children see that we have reminders every day that God is intervening in our world. Celebrating is a life-giving attitude and a life-giving activity. **Let's show our children that celebrating identifies us as the beloved children of a generous Heavenly Father.**

God invented the idea of celebration. Throughout Scripture, God invited — and even commanded — his people to celebrate. Festivals were a vital part of the rhythm of life, so that his people focused on his provision in the past and his promises for the future. Even creation celebrates: The morning stars sang when God established the cornerstone of the earth (Job 38:7), and Psalm 98 gives us the picture of the hills singing for joy.

Maybe it's time to find some new ways to celebrate. Borrow something from another culture. Make it work in your unique home environment. Maybe it's time to celebrate new things. Maybe it's time to celebrate the small things, the everyday things that we take for granted.

The party starts when leaders and parents ask God to give them a celebrating heart. Children will catch the spirit of celebration as it flows out of the lives of the adults who care for them. What is God inviting you to celebrate today?

Start the conversation with your child!



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INVITATIONS TO ENGAGE

EARLY CHILDHOOD (2-6 years old)

I've found one of the happiest verses in the Bible! *Your God is pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else.* (Hebrews 1:9)

Why does God pour out joy on us? He loves our laughter! He pours out joy so that he can hear us celebrate!

We are going to use this lotion like oil. I'll pour a little in your hand, and you pour a little in my hand. While we rub our hands together, we will say a celebration Bible verse over and over, *The joy of the Lord is my strength.* (Nehemiah 8:10)

That will be our secret signal to each other this week. Let's rub our hands together many times and remind each other of that verse.

ELEMENTARY AGE (5-10 years old)

When I say the word "Celebrate!" what do you think of? When I say the word "Joy!" what do you think of?

Read Nehemiah 8:10-12 to me and tell me what God thinks about joy and celebration.

God invented celebration! He loves to watch us celebrate! What are some of your favorite celebration actions — ways to celebrate and be joyful?

Pick one of those ways — clapping hands, dancing, singing Now, let's think of three times we can celebrate today. Those are the celebration moments when we will remind each other to celebrate by [insert the action chosen by the child] and saying Nehemiah 8:10 together. *The joy of the Lord is my strength!* Repeat!

PRETEEN/EARLY ADOLESCENT (10-14 years old)

Who do you think invented celebrating?

You'll see what I mean when we read Nehemiah 8:10-12 together. *And Nehemiah continued, "Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!" So the people went away to eat and drink at a festive meal, to share gifts of food, and to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God's words and understood them.*

Based on that verse, how important do you think it is to celebrate? What kind of celebration do you think God is inviting us to have this week? How can we have a special celebration to remind us that *"The joy of the Lord is our strength!"* (Nehemiah 8:10)?

Let's invent a new family holiday — National [family's favorite dessert or favorite game] Day. Or could we pretend that it's a Bible character's birthday and re-enact part of their life to celebrate how God made them and how he used them? Let's celebrate!

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

Spiritual Disciplines for Children,
by Vernie Schorr Love

(Chapter 12 "The Practice of Celebration: Have Joy and Delight")