

HomeWord

Vol. 4, No. 9 A newsletter dedicated to household harmony & family faith

In This Issue

In this issue we explore family change and rites of passage. As humans, we naturally resist change because it upsets the balance of our routine. Yet when we gather two, three, four, or more people under one roof, change and transition become a regular part of life. The best way to deal with the changes of our life is to acknowledge them, reflect on them, even ritualize them. The articles in this *HomeWord* issue will give you some direction and ideas for doing just that.

We welcome Delphine Boswell as a new *HomeWord* author. We hope you enjoy her article, "To Everything There Is a Season and a Reason."

A Rite of Passage

by Leif Kehrwald

When I finally passed the ordeal of the written exam and driving test, I was elated to have my driver's license. The ultimate symbol of independence! Even though I didn't have my own car, I at least didn't need my parents to drive me around anymore.

That evening our family celebrated my accomplishment. Although nothing special had been planned, the atmosphere around the dinner table was charged with excitement and anticipation. My mother, usually somewhat reserved, kept joking about all the errands I could now run for her. Taking my little sisters to and from swimming lessons and Brownies was not my top priority as a new driver.

My father, who had given me driving lessons, kept going over to the phone and pretending to call the radio stations about making a public service announcement; he wanted to warn the good citizens of our town to clear the streets because he could no longer guarantee them to be safe now that I was driving.

My older brother was the only family member who showed little interest in my accomplishment. Perhaps he had not received the same attention eighteen months earlier when he got his license. Because he was the first, my parents were probably too nervous to joke about his driving the way they joked about mine.

By the end of the evening, both of my parents, by ways of a knowing look and a warm hand on my shoulder, showed their pride and confidence in me. The next morning when my mother asked me to pick up a gallon of milk after dropping my sister at swim class, my whole family realized I was now a driver.

My life changed the day I got my driver's license, and that night my family initiated me into my new role. Without anyone acknowledging it, they celebrated an important rite of passage with me. They made it okay for me to be different than I was

before, even though I was still the same person. I didn't know it then, but I know now how important it was to celebrate the change.

Here's another example. A teenage girl has been asked out on her first date. While Mother is excited for her, Dad is reluctant. "She's still too young to be dating," he says. When the young man arrives at the door, Dad lets him in and proceeds with the age-old ordeal of interrogation while waiting for his daughter to emerge. Finally, after the two have departed, Dad says with a long sigh, "My little girl isn't so little anymore."

(continued on page 2)

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To Everything There Is a Season and a Reason

by Delphine Boswell

Have you ever tried to pull up tulip bulbs in the fall only to find them tangled among the thick roots of your prospering mum plants? Some things don't respond well to change. Many people and families are the same.

How do I know this? My family and I have moved eight times in eleven years. Although most of the moves were mutual decisions, some were not. Like those tulip bulbs, we tried our hardest to stay put; we had become attached to the home in which we lived, the friends we had made, and the schools our children liked.

Yet, one day while doing my gardening, I thought about why I tugged on those stubborn tulip bulbs. Didn't I do it so that they could be divided, replanted, and energized to grow more abundantly the next spring?



(continued on page 2)

A few suggestions for ritualizing rites of passage

- If celebrating ritual moments is new to your family, start small. Choose an event or occasion that marks a real turning point in your life as a family (first job, getting a learner's permit, etc.) and mark it with a simple but festive meal. Include a prayer or reading, a reflection or storytelling, and a short blessing.
- Involve all family members in planning and celebrating the ritual event. Though the ritual may focus on an event of particular significance for one family member, the celebration should remind everyone of the interconnectedness of family life.
- Celebrate according to your family's personality and stage in life. Pee wee families will do it differently than adolescent families, and loud families will certainly be different than quiet ones. Incorporate music, food, readings, stories, and so on, that speak to your family.
- Involve relatives and family friends in your ritual sharing. Invite key members of your extended family and your special friends to take part. Hospitality is a treasured trait in healthy families.
- Keep the sharing and ritual simple and straightforward. If the events you celebrate are central to your life as a family, God's presence should not be too hard to identify.
- Do not force participation. Schedule the celebration for a time that is convenient for all family members. If a family member declines the invitation, celebrate anyway.

("A Rite of Passage," continued from page 1)

This brief, uncomfortable ritual helped Dad overcome his reluctance to embrace his daughter's maturity. Rites of passage are significant and powerful in helping families deal with change and growth. They serve as key growth steps toward maturity for both the individual and the family, and they cry out to be acknowledged and celebrated. Changes will occur regardless, but if we want to benefit from all they have to offer, we must pause to reflect on and ritualize them.

What core change is occurring in your family? Perhaps the crawler is becoming a toddler; time to childproof the house! Perhaps you've recently moved into a new home; you might want to have your house blessed. Perhaps someone is graduating and moving out, or another person got a new job, or maybe a family member died recently.

All these experiences of change, along with so many others, cry out to be ritualized. Take a risk and give it a try. (See the sidebar article for a few practical tips.)



("To Everything There Is a Season and a Reason," continued from page 1)

Change for families is very similar. We must endure pain, discomfort, and vulnerability in order to grow into the persons God calls us to be. Whether we have children who don't relish the thought of new things to come and who prefer to vegetate in the stability of sameness (myself, included!) or children who are adventurous and seek new environments to explore, change will challenge the whole family to make adjustments.

The changes we face may be as simple as adjusting to a new schedule of classes each semester, or changing our vacation plans because of a booked flight. No matter how trivial the changes may seem, our outlook on them is important. Because change is a constant in family living, occurring more frequently today than at any other time in history, it challenges us to turn to God to show us the positive side, the opportunities it provides.

Certainly, change was nothing new to the characters of the Bible. Joseph, Moses, and Abram, for example, faced moves and changes, but the Bible doesn't tell us what was in their minds and hearts as they began their rites of passage. Would their thoughts and feelings during a time of change have been much different from our thoughts and feelings today?

We all probably ask ourselves similar questions when our family faces a major change: Is this the right move, the best location, the most promising opportunity? Will it work out for our family? Will we be better off for having made the change? Will we adjust to a new beginning? What will others think of us when they learn we are off again to new horizons?

For me, the light that guides the way, the gentle nudge that pushes me along, and the soft whisper that gives me advice comes from my ability to trust in God. It is at times like this, when change is about to affect our life, that we can be drawn to a deeper, more personal relationship with God. Knowing that God is with us even in the quietest and most uncertain times in our life, we can feel comfortable and secure facing the unknown.

In much the same way that the tulip bulbs were torn from the soil, ripped apart, and replanted, it is God's hope that with each change we face, we will also arise restored and renewed, and find ourselves blessed even more abundantly for having placed our trust in the Lord.

When confronted with change, we must remember:

- Our outlook on the process is what counts.
- We are not alone. Change affects every person's life in one way or another.
- We can look to God to find the positive reason for the change.
- We must let the change draw us into a closer, deeper relationship with God.
- God is always with us, reminding us not to worry or be afraid.
- We must turn everything over to God and let go.



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Dear Colleague in Ministry,

I am pleased to bring you the latest issue of *HomeWord*.

In this issue we explore family change and rites of passage. As humans, we naturally resist change because it upsets the balance of our routine. Yet when we gather two, three, four, or more people under one roof, change and transition become a regular part of life. The best way to deal with the changes of our life is to acknowledge them, reflect on them, even ritualize them. The articles in this *HomeWord* issue will give you some direction and ideas for doing just that.

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Sincerely,

Leif Kehrwald
HomeWord Editor



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