

Valentine's Day at our house

THE HISTORY BEHIND OUR observance of Valentine's Day is ambiguous, to say the least. One popular theory identifies Valentine as a Roman Christian who was martyred on February 14, A.D. 269. While in prison, Valentine is said to have fallen in love with the jailer's daughter. Before his death, he wrote her a letter and signed it, "from your Valentine." However the tradition arose, Valentine's Day is observed throughout the world as an occasion to express our affection to those we love.

A Tradition that Promotes Love

For the last 15 years, my family and I have observed a special Valentine's Day tradition. In the beginning, it was quite a formal affair. I wore a coat and tie. Ree and the girls wore dresses. I bought corsages. We ate at our favorite Italian restaurant. Toward the end of our meal, I gave each of our girls a box of chocolates. I gave Ree a larger box of chocolates—one of the few perks of motherhood.

Before we left the restaurant, I gave everyone a Valentine's Day card with a handwritten note. In my note to Ree, I told her how I loved her, respected her, admired her, and appreciated her as a friend, wife, and mother. I expressed my love to the girls in a similar way, telling each one I was grateful be her father, proud of her accomplishments, eager to watch her future unfold, and committed to helping her realize her potential.

Even though our girls are older and busier now, we still observe our Valentine's Day tradition—with a few modifications. Our dinner attire is casual. We celebrate as near the holiday as possible, arranging dinner around school and work schedules. But we still get together. I still give chocolates. I still write personal notes in Valentine's Day cards.

From our first celebration to the present, our Valentine's Day tradition has allowed me to express my love for my family in a practical way. It gives me opportunity to reaffirm my love and commitment to Ree, and to underscore my desire to follow Paul's admonition: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). It gives me occasion to restate my love and commitment to my daughters, to point them to the perfect love of their heavenly Father, and to reaffirm my commitment to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

A Prayer that Seeks Love

In my early years as a husband and father I used to pray, "Lord, help me to glorify you by loving my wife and daughters like no man on earth has ever loved his family." It was a well-intentioned prayer, but I've chosen to pray differently today.

I no longer think about becoming "the world's best family man." (Ree still has to remind me from time to time that not everything in life is a competition!) Now I simply focus on living up to my potential. Now I pray, "Lord, help me to glorify you by being the best Christian husband and father I am capable of being."

A Life that Demonstrates Love

It's a great tradition. But my love for my family doesn't begin and end with Valentine's Day. I'm committed to loving my wife and daughters—in visible and practical ways—every day of my life.

I want them to see my love:

- in the patience I demonstrate.
- in the way I forgive an offense.
- in the way I control my temper.
- in the way I choose my words.
- in the way I respond to their questions.
- in the way I listen.
- in the joy I display.
- in the time I devote to them.
- in the tenderness and affection I show.
- in the leadership I exercise.
- in the humility I display.
- in the way I respect their opinions.
- in my willingness to trust them.
- in the context of my love for God.

I know it won't be long before my daughter's celebrate Valentine's Day with men other than their father. When that time comes, I plan to step aside as graciously as I know how and pass that privilege on to another. I only pray—as I have prayed daily since before they were born—that my daughters will one day celebrate this holiday with men who love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength—men who will love my girls as Jesus Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Thinking back on this tradition and what it has meant to our family, Ree and I may feel a touch of sadness when we find ourselves celebrating Valentine's Day without our girls. But I'm looking on the bright side. When that day comes, I'll be able to buy Ree an even larger box of chocolates! ■



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