

Podcast 243 Splendor in the Ordinary

Let's pray and then we'll jump in.

Father, thank You for another day. Thank You that all of our children are safely accounted for, and thank You for the opportunity to draw near to You and consider ways that we can build our families and do things, do life together, and find Your presence in the midst. In Jesus' name, Amen.

We've talked about reading books aloud, we've talked about doing activities together, looking at the stars together. This past weekend, Johnny and I were hanging around the house, and I said to John, I said, "Do you want to go for a walk?" And he said, "Okay!" As we were heading to the car I said, "You know, this place we're going to walk has a disc golf course. Do you want to play?" He responded enthusiastically, "Oh, yeah!" So we went back in the house and got our discs - discs are different than frisbees - and we played disc golf.

Disc golf was one of our favorite family activities. This experience illustrates what I call finding splendor in everyday life, just the stuff that we do on a regular basis. I didn't always have this appreciation for splendor in the ordinary. Let me explain that a little bit.

When God began to work in my heart and make me see the importance of family, I wanted to have a great family. I think most of us do. But I didn't know what a great family looked like. The best image I had of a family, was from the movie, "The Sound of Music." Looking back I realize our generation several examples of functional wholesome families. We watched "Leave it to Beaver" and "Father Knows Best."

However the Sound of Music to me, reverberated as an ideal family. They loved each other. If you have seen the movie, you know that it took a while for the husband to get on board. Maria and the children were in tune with the idea of being close to their dad, but Captain Von Trapp was oblivious. I think of him when I think of God turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. Maria was the instrument God used to wake him up. She was a catalyst to make that happen. She confronted him and said, "You need to spend time with your kids."

Eventually he got the message, and by the end of the show, they were singing together and escaping over the mountains as a tight knit family. Somehow I had in my mind that that singing together was a key factor in creating this special family dynamic. This idea was reinforced by early homeschool events in the 1980s and 1990s.

When Sandi and I began attending these events, they usually had everyone meet in the sanctuary. After introductions we would all say the Pledge of Allegiance. Then they would bring up a large family to lead us in singing, with perhaps 8 children, arranged in steps from the tallest to the smallest. Oftentimes they were dressed in the

same kind of clothes, and they would play musical instruments. It was a beautiful sight and touched your heart. It was wonderful! It was edifying.

After seeing this delightful and edifying display I finally gave in and thought, "We're going to try this." So I bought six recorders I took them home, thinking in my mind, "We're going to be the von Demme family recorder players!" And I gave them to all the kids, my wife and I had one, and within two weeks, my inspiration was shelved. I have lots of good ideas, but my ability to follow-through was not as prevalent then as it is today.

I digressed into a state of semi-condemnation because I thought, "Oh, we're never going to be able to be like The Sound of Music! We're never going to be like these families that go to the front of the auditorium, and who sing and pray together, and wear the same clothes, and raise goats and chickens."

Many years later, I asked my kids "What ever happened to those recorders?" And they said, "I think we made swords out of them." That's what happens when you have a family full of boys; you fight and you have conflict! Anyway, I gave up on the recorders, but as I look back, I realize that we did a whole bunch of stuff as a family just because we did life together. Which is what I think Deuteronomy 6:7 is saying when it says you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise up - it just means do life together.

One afternoon I had to take some things to the dump, and a couple of my boys jumped in the car, and we were on our way. As we drove we were listening to a conservative talk show host, and he mentioned something called Reagan-omics. They asked me: "Papa, what does that mean?" So I turned the radio off, and we had a wonderful discussion about supply side economics.

That special conversation wouldn't have happened if we hadn't been doing life together. Another regular family activity that was fun was buying groceries all together. When I was a schoolteacher, I received one paycheck per month. I would go home and write out the deposit slip, then write a tithe check and set aside a certain portion for our grocery budget. Sandi had the boys all ready to go, and we piled in the car and drove about twenty miles, to find a Kroeger's. There was also a bread outlet nearby. Sandi and I divided up the shopping list, and I would take a boy or two with me and we all participated in the shopping experience. We enjoyed our Kroeger's expeditions once a month.

Sometimes on weekends we would go to a farmer's market. We piled everybody into the station wagon and purchase produce and special items. For a meal, we would buy some yogurt and other tasty food from the farm stands. Then we put down the tailgate and had a little picnic in the parking lot. This too became an event.

When we moved to Pennsylvania, we bought an unfinished house. It needed sheetrock, flooring, painting, decks, and several retaining walls and vinyl fences. The house had a big basement with a concrete floor. When the boys would ride their skates on it or any kind of a toy with wheels, it would make dust. Painting did not help much as it did not adhere to the dry concrete, so we purchased inexpensive one-foot by one-foot vinyl flooring pieces at an Amish flooring store for fifty cents apiece. Great deal! But they were hard, so what you had to do was you had to put them on the oven to soften them so you could stick them to the uneven floor. However our oven was upstairs and the floor was downstairs!

We came up with a plan. Sandi was in charge of putting them in and out of the oven, the boys were in charge of running them up and down the steps, and I was in charge of gluing them to the floor and cutting them to fit the corners. What a family project that was! But we pulled it off, and that vinyl floor was beautiful, well maybe functional.

We also needed flooring for the rest of the house, and had allergy issues so we were hoping for wood flooring. During this season of our life, we couldn't afford to pay somebody to come in and put in hardwood flooring or ceramic flooring, and we didn't know what to do, but God wonderfully provided. We discovered a children's furniture manufacturing company who make furniture, desks, and shelves for schools out of maple. Each piece of maple wood needs to be free of knots or imperfections. As a result they had a good bit of wood that was not usable and they were selling skids of the pieces that were cut off at the ends or that had knots in them, and these skids were going for a few dollars a pallet. But we had to load them and unload them from our old conversion van.

We would fill the van by hand. My boys and I created an assembly line until that van was sitting on the rocker panels and I had to drive home real slowly. And then, we'd go back and get another load. It was a 40 minute drive each way and we made about eight trips. We figured out how to use it and covered several thousand square feet of our home with real hardwood maple. What a project! And we saved ourselves thousands of dollars. It was and is a beautiful unique floor.

One of my sons told me that growing up doing all the different projects together gave him the confidence that he could do almost anything by asking questions and praying. This was many years before YouTube videos! This was when you had to go to the hardware store or Home Depot and say, "Well, how do you put down flooring?"

We did life as a family, and we found that there was splendor in the ordinary just by doing life together. As far as animals, we had chickens. We wanted the eggs, and we wanted the meat, so we started raising chickens, and we had wonderful success. I found out that one of the unexpected blessings of having chickens was

nature preparing my sons to learn about the facts of life. Isaac was talking to Ethan about roosters because we wanted to have one rooster and eleven hens. When the chicks matured we had several roosters. One of them was taken out by my toddler with a stick. Joseph just went in there, he was not even five years old, with a stick, and he hit that chicken until he killed it. He was a little wrecking ball, I can still see him in his little Mickey Mouse underwear and his muscle shirt. He just wanted to play with the chickens, and the next thing you know, we see this dead chicken.

Back to the roosters. I overheard Isaac explaining to Ethan, "We have to get a rooster that's masculine enough to fertilize the eggs but also won't attack us!" As they watched the chickens that saw reproduction in action. This is what chickens do, and this is what animals do to reproduce.

We also purchased milking goats in an attempt to have a wholesome, small farmette. We even tried to breed dogs, but that didn't do so well. I discovered I'm not a farmer, but we had lots of experiences, lots of fun events, and we still talk about the chickens and the goats and our adventures. It was our life, and we did it together.

The Demmes were never good enough to be on the front stage of an auditorium, or play our recorders, or show off our chickens and goats at the 4H or the farm show, but we had a fun time being the Demmes. We tried stuff, and if it didn't work, we tried something else.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for life that we can do together as families. Thank You for all the learning experiences that we do, and help us to find Your presence and Your blessing in our everyday, ordinary lives of just doing things together. In Jesus' name, amen.