

## Podcast 244 Honoring One Another in the Family

“Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.” (Romans 12:10 NLT)

Let’s pray. Thank you, Father, for that verse. Probably all kinds of images come to our mind when we read these words, “Take delight in honoring each other.” I pray that you’ll help me to have delight in honoring my wife and my children and my grandchildren and my daughters-in-law. Help me to take delight in this process of “loving each other with genuine affection and taking delight in honoring each other.” Amen.

As families we pass down traditions. When I was a child, birthdays were a special day and you looked forward to them for a long time. Christmas and my birthday were the two high points of the year. Between Sandi’s family traditions and my family traditions we adopted what we had experienced and came up with our own unique ways of celebrating special events. We did not have a plan in mind, we simply figured it out as we grew as a couple and as a family.

When someone had a birthday, they got to pick what they were going to eat for dinner. This was their chance to choose their favorite meal. Isaac was a precocious little six-year-old, and he read through Betty Crocker’s cookbook, and chose steak with a bleu cheese garnish. He always had expensive taste. To this day, when we take him out for his birthday, we normally go to a steak restaurant so he can have a really nice meal.

Our second son Ethan wanted a sub, or hoagie, with potato chips. When the third boy, Joseph first had this opportunity he asked, “Can I have cereal?” We had to talk to him. We said, “You know, Joseph, this is dinner. This is your opportunity to really do something special.” I think he chose hot dogs.

I do remember one special time because we have this in our family videos, that we ate like cowboys. Joseph was not feeling well and we had all planned on going to Texas Roadhouse where you order your food then eat peanuts and through the shells on the floor. My creative wife that Sandi, figured out how to reenacted this experience in our basement. We all dressed up like cowboys, and she had a bunch of peanuts, and we threw the shells on the floor. At one end of the table the older boys and my dad and I played poker with Monopoly money at the end of the table. We tried to do whatever it took to make each boy’s birthday a special day.

Of course, they got cards and presents after dinner along with a cake and ice cream, again, of their choosing. Then we would move to the living room, and watch these things called slides. These were pictures taken with a 35-millimeter camera, and instead of printing them out on paper, you ask for slides that fit into trays, that you view with a slide projector. Sandi would carefully go through our collections of

childhood pictures and pick out all the slides of whosever birthday it was. We would gather in the living room and watch these images from birth. We saw them coming home from the hospital, through their childhood, up until the present time, and it was a wonderful event.

One year, I happened to be gone for one of my children's birthdays on a weekend, probably speaking somewhere. The whole family was sitting in the living room, and they put up the slides, and Ethan imitated me. You can imagine after years of watching the same slides, I would pretty much have the same responses. I wish I could have been there to hear it, or they had videotaped it. I have been told that very time a slide came up, Ethan would respond how I would respond if I had been there. And according to my wife, it was hilarious and everyone was in tears because he's a really good imitator. It's a little scary sometimes.

Over the years we developed another family tradition and it was based on the categories game, which is a parlor game. It's the kind of a game where you sit around and drink tea and everybody gets a 3 by 5 card, and the hostess will say, "Springtime," as an example. Then all the ladies will write on their cards words and expressions that come to their mind and that fit with this theme. Perhaps they will write: "flowers" or "new growth" or "green." After all have had a minute or so, they'll go around the room read each of their cards.

Sandi had the idea, "What if we played categories for whosever birthday we were celebrating?" I think we first did this for one of our sons when he was graduating from high school, but then we merged in into yearly events like birthdays since these are two situations where we would really set out to honor the person.

When Joseph he turned 18, his family was there along with extended family. Joseph's close friends at church were present as well as other friends that he had in the community. This room full of people that were sitting around our living room in a circle with a pen and a 3x5 card in their hand, were the most significant people in Joseph's life.

We each had one minute to write down a characteristic about Joseph that we appreciated and admired. After the time was up we went around the room, and the first person read their list slowly: "responsible." If anybody else in the circle had that word, "responsibly" or "responsible" or some derivative, they would say, "I have that one, too." And the person that was reading it and the person that raised their hand would both cross it off their list.

Then they would read the next time on their list: "diligent." And as they went through each of the characteristics, anybody that had one on their card would holler out whether they had it on their list or not.

Then the next person read through their list, and by the time you had gone around the room, everybody had had a chance to read their card with only the ones on their card that had not been crossed off. At the end of the game, whoever has the most unique characteristics that haven't been crossed out would win the prize.

Imagine what it would be like to be the person that was being honored. Think about the impact on an 18-year-old who is mostly aware of what is wrong with him and now you have these important people telling you what is right about you.

To have these people in your life honoring you and affirming some special characteristic or attribute that is present in you while taking delight in honoring you with genuine affection is amazing and so valuable. Looking back, I believe this game is one of the closest things to fulfilling Romans 12:10. When everyone has completed their list, you take the cards and give them to the person. Now this blessed individual has 15 or 20 cards with all these positive character attributes on them. Whew! That can be a real encouragement.

Of course, the scariest part to me was on that day when we celebrated Joseph's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and he said, "I'm going to play." And I said, "Joseph, it's your birthday!" And he says, "No, I'm going to play." And he wrote down qualities like, "good looking," "easy to get along with," and he begins reading all these character qualities, and I said, "Well, that boy's got some self-confidence." He was our introvert, too, so to see him do that with a twinkle in his eye still blesses me because he's got something in him that is pretty special.

Many years went by and my daughter-in-law had her youngest brother move in with them, and he was celebrating one of his significant birthdays, like 18 or 21. He didn't have a lot of friends, but our family gathered around because we wanted to bless him. And Anna said, "Could we play the Demme game?" I'd never heard it called that before. I didn't know it was our game. But, you see, it had become part of the culture of our family, part of our family identity, you might say. I asked, "Which one is that?" And she said, "You know, with the 3 by 5 cards."

We assembled around their extended dining room table and honored her youngest brother. After the game we gave him the cards, and you could tell it was very meaningful to him. His face was always a little inscrutable. You couldn't read it as well, but you could tell it blessed him.

High School Graduation.

We homeschooled our sons and as such were responsible for celebrating their graduation. We set apart one day for just that young man, which made it so that all of my children were valedictorians. We began the day with a ceremony at church. It was a small congregation, and we were very close. Our church family was present, as well

as my mom and my dad who traveled from Pittsburgh. Siblings, church members, homeschool friends, and other friends from the community made up the audience.

The graduate was responsible for choosing a speaker. A bulletin was created with an order of the service, and not only did we have a speaker, but we had words of wisdom from Dad, the grandparents prayed and read Scripture, and siblings helped present special awards.

I especially enjoyed the awards, which acknowledged everything from serious to fun accomplishments. The graduate might be the “most inventive,” the “most curious,” or the “best reader.” They also might get the award for the “most fun” or the “best mustache.” Our whole family would go up to the platform to give him their rewards. This special day was our way of giving honor to the graduate.

Then we would open the service to include the members of the congregation. People would stand up and share a testimony or a positive memory about the graduate, and in doing so give honor to him. It was a blessed time.

After the service was completed we drove to our house for a picnic. My close friend and co-pastor referred to our home as the Demme Complex. Sandi and I had chosen to invest in our home. We concluded that if we wanted to have life revolve around our house, we needed to make it a fun place that people would want to frequent. We bought a trampoline (sorry, we didn't have all those safety nets around the edges). There was a field that we had recaptured from the wilderness below the garage and across a stream. Our home bordered woods where paintball wars occurred. An inground swimming pool was beside the house next to the chicken coop. It was so accommodating that often we had church celebrations at our house.

On graduation day Sandi would organize a lunch as well as dinner. One year we rented a dunking tank. We had pie throwing contests. One of our sons liked to carve his initials everywhere. When he graduated, we paid for a banner to be created with these letters and found a man who flew an ultralight aircraft to pull it over the field as the games and contests were being played. He dropped the graduation card and a bucket of candy on the waiting crowd.

I remember when that guy came over in his ultralight, I was standing with my brother and his wife. Their daughter was going to be graduating the next year, and she looked at her husband and said, “Wow, we're going to have to get the Blue Angels to come to our graduation!”

These events were fun, and convened with the spirit of giving honor to the graduate and delighting in doing so. I know that some of these ideas seem over the top but if you let your mind go and really think of some fun things, I think we can each pull off a really special event.

When Johnny turned 18, we had moved to a different house. We invited people from far and near to attend his celebration. He received a bunch of special presents. Sandi and I bought him his first set of golf clubs. Others gave him golf balls, and other accessories. He reveled in the attention and being the man of the hour.

On most of these occasions, my wife would get these really good ideas, and I just went with the flow and tried to keep it going throughout the day. She did a magnificent job pulling off these events, from assembling the slide trays to producing food and organizing the event.

Let's pray.

Father, thank You for giving us each other. We need each other. Thank You for family that we're born into and perhaps born again into or perhaps adopted into or fostered into, but whatever situation we find ourselves, I thank You for the group of people that love us and care for us and teach us ways creatively and inspired to fulfill that passage and "love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other." In Jesus' name, amen.