

Genuine Joy-Builders to Transform Your Holiday Home

“Hi, baby Jesus, I brought you gold, frankincense and worms!” That was my favorite line this past weekend, as my grandkids put on a play to act out the Christmas story in their “cousins production.” What a joy-filled weekend we had as a family!

As we head into the thick of the holiday season, and as events begin to pile up, it’s easy to lose sight of joy in our families. How do we keep our homes filled with joy during one of the most hectic times of the year?

I once did quite a bit of research on joy. I discovered that joy is primarily relational and that our brains have a joy center. I know, right? Isn’t that amazing?

The “joy center exists in the right orbital prefrontal cortex of the brain. It has executive control over the entire emotional system.” It develops in infancy. Neurologists and psychologists teach us that when infants see delight in the eyes of their parents, the joy center of their brain is strengthened. In other words, when babies see their parents’ eyes sparkle and light up in response to them, they know they are loved, and their joy center develops. “If the joy center develops correctly, an individual can find the path back to joy, in spite of the most difficult trauma.” (*Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You*, p. 12).

Even if your joy center didn’t develop properly in childhood, that part of your brain can be regenerated. In other words, not only can you as a parent develop your child’s joy center, you can strengthen your own joy muscle.

Strengthening your joy muscle begins when you internalize the truth that *you* are the sparkle in your heavenly Father’s eye. Friend, God, your heavenly Father, is madly and categorically

in love with you! His Word teaches that He take great delight in you. He even sings and dances over you (see Zeph. 3:17). His eyes sparkle and light up when you come to spend time with Him. It's possible that you've never felt like anyone was particularly glad to see you. That's not true of God. You are the sparkle in God's eye. As you internalize that truth, you are more able to pass the sparkle on to your kids, your spouse, your friends, and your neighbors.

How do you go about cultivating joy and passing it on to your kids especially during the holidays? I have a few suggestions.

Spend a few moments praising God each day. As you lift your focus to the sparkle in His eye, your cares won't feel nearly as burdensome, and you'll feel His love more deeply. Listen to Christmas music that is focused on praising Jesus Christ. As you listen, remind yourself that God's eyes sparkle when He gets to spend time with you!

Smile. Smiling sends the message that you're happy to see someone. When your kids wake up in the morning or come home from school, allow them to see the sparkle in your eye. Communicate that you're glad to see them and you're happy to be with them.

Sing when you're stressed. When you feel stressed-out or tense, start singing or turn on some music. Music often lightens our mood and helps us to enjoy God's presence. Even if you can't carry a tune, your efforts will release some of the stress.

Speak affirming words. Let your kids know you're proud of them and that you praise God for them. It's easy to criticize when you're stressed over busy schedules or tight finances. But scolding doesn't strengthen anyone's joy center. Let it go and choose to affirm.

Friend, I think we need more joy in our world, don't you? As you look at the holiday season with all its demands, why not

make it your goal to cultivate joy? Praise God that He is the joy-giver and that you are the sparkle in His eye. Seek to strengthen your joy center and your child's. Make it your goal to pass along the sparkle this Christmas, and I think you'll find your home a much happier place. {eo}

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