

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

True confession: I don't make New Year's resolutions. It's not that I don't think that self-assessment and reflection can be good or that resolutions can be helpful. It just has never been how I motivate myself. That being said, I think that continually wanting to improve is a worthwhile goal—and even a Christian one. In love for all that God has done for us, we certainly strive to live our lives for him and pray for his help to grow in faith and love. So whether it is December, January, or May, the parents who are writing this month have some great thoughts to share to help you remain focused on what's most important in life.

—Nicole Balza

## WHAT ARE YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS AS A PARENT?

“BE WHERE YOUR feet are. These are the days.”

I recently purchased a print with this quote. It's beautifully scripted in hand-lettering, wrapped in a golden yellow hue and surrounded by soft floral accents. Thoughtfully placed beside my bedroom door, it's the last thing I see before I leave to start my day.

And though it's simple, I like to believe that it's my reminder to embrace that day—to be present in the moments, both big and small.

**Raising young children, it's easy to get distracted.** There seem to be about a hundred things vying for my attention at any given moment. My toddler is demanding a cup of milk (but not that cup, Mom, because she wants the purple one, not the pink one). Meanwhile my preschooler is wondering where his lion toy, the one that is only about the size of his finger, could possibly be in our 2,000-square-foot home. The dog is stuck to me like Velcro, eagerly anticipating the moment I announce we can play fetch.

I reach for the purple cup as I notice the full dishwasher, which reminds me I need to meal plan and grocery shop. As I open my phone to Pinterest for some inspiration (trying to be creative in my pursuit of meals that require 20 minutes or less), I take a call from my child's doctor. It's time to schedule her physical. When asked what days work best, I think, *None of them*, but respond, “I'm flexible!”

Many of you can relate, I'm sure. The demands are endless. How can you possibly attend to each one? You can't. Perhaps this is not the answer you expected, nor the one you wanted. I wish I could say, “You can have it all!” with an Oprah Winfrey-like

confidence. But the truth is, you cannot have a clean home, homemade meals, quality family time, an excelling career, and a carefree schedule all at once. You can have aspects of these blended together, but they cannot simultaneously coexist in one singular moment.

**And this year, I want more of my moments to be where my feet are—to remember that *these are the days*.**

This year I want less hurried schedules and more hugs. I want less clean counters and more messy, freshly licked beaters. I want less clean floors and more muddy shoes. I want less perfectly made beds and more cozy morning cuddles.

When I look at 2025, I simply want less impossible-to-meet standards and more embracing the beautiful life God has given me—right at that very moment.



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YOU DID IT. You made it through the holidays, but now you may be dealing with the post-holiday lows. Your relationship with your spouse might have tension left over from traveling. Your kids are a little more disrespectful, detoxing from having Grandma and Grandpa give them anything and everything. Without a chance to catch your breath, you are thrown right back into the grinding routine of work, school, and practices.

Take this moment. Take a step back and resolve to focus on some goals to help get your marriage and family back on track.

Your life is in a better place when your priorities are in the correct order: God, spouse, kids, work, extended family, and friends (the last three are interchangeable). If God is number one, everyone else will benefit (Proverbs 3:33). If your marriage is healthy, it will be the best thing for your children (Proverbs 22:6). If God, marriage, and children are good, then your work, friendships, and family dynamic will be healthier and appropriate.

Make a New Year's resolution to get your priorities back in the correct order. Here are some ideas to help you do that.

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD:

1. Go to church *and* Bible study hour as a family. Make it a habit, no excuses.
2. Read from the Bible or a Bible story book to your children after breakfast or dinner.
3. Teach your children Luther's Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.
4. Read the Bible as a couple.

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH SPOUSE:

1. Go on a date in January. Before the date is over, schedule next month's date.
2. Do Sunday night stay-at-home dates after the kids go to bed.
3. Ask each other once a day, "What can I do for you?"
4. Figure out how to have lots of bedroom time, if you know what I mean. If you aren't, it starts with the husband to fix that. (Guys, if you need help, read *For Men Only* by Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn.)

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH KIDS:

1. Dad, play with your kids. If your kids ask you to play with them, always say yes.
2. Mom, give hugs. Hug your husband in front of your children. Hug your children all the time.
3. Discipline together. Never disagree about discipline in front of the kids. Talk in private. If you need guidance with discipline strategies, read *1-2-3 Magic* by Thomas Phelan.
4. Do less. The birthday party doesn't have to be that big. The kids don't have to be on every sports team.



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**DID YOU KNOW** that the second Friday of January is now referred to as Quitter's Day? It acquired this title because research has shown that this is the day most people abandon their New Year's resolutions.

How does all the excitement for the hopes and dreams of the new year fade so quickly? Part of the answer is motivation. Adopting a new habit takes a lot of motivation. Unless a resolution is truly meaningful to us, that motivation can quickly be drowned out by the demands of daily life. I mean, what's the harm of missing a workout or two or eating that dessert?

As Christian parents, however, the stakes are much higher than a slice of cheesecake. We are raising children in a world that is hostile to our values and truths. I can't think of a greater motivation to ensure our children are connected to God and his promises in a way that provides peace, comfort, and confidence as they face the challenges of this world.

So, as you contemplate your own New Year's resolutions, here are a few ideas on how to foster your family's relationship and connection with God.

1. **Pick a fruit**—Let the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) guide your family. Together, brainstorm intentional ways to practice and demonstrate these attributes in daily life. Have weekly family check-ins to see how these actions are impacting each of you and those around you.
2. **Prioritize God**—Don't wait for a break in your schedule to do daily devotions or read God's Word together as a family. Schedule intentional time each day to focus your hearts on God. Be specific (time, place, location) and find simple ways to make it special (have a particular spot, turn off all outside noise and distractions, play soft music, maybe share a treat). These little moments together with God will become a welcome refuge from the chaos of the day.
3. **Walk the walk**—Encourage family members to find ways to live their faith actively. Practice leaning into God's promises during difficult times. Look for opportunities to serve others. Share God's love and comfort in times of need. Talk with one another about your experiences and see how they spark new ideas and opportunities.

So, happy New Year! May this year be filled with blessings, joy, and peace as you and your family grow deeper in your connection with God.



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