

## The Magic of Eating Together

Parents and children who sit down together around the table for an evening meal five times a week are “least likely to be on drugs, to be depressed, or to be in trouble with the law. They were also more likely to be doing well in school and to be surrounded by a supportive circle of friends.” These facts were discovered by Dr. Blake Bowden of the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Center following his survey of 527 teenagers. Dr. Catherine Snow, professor of Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education studied “sixty-five families over an eight-year period. She found that dinnertime was of more value to child development than playtime, school, and story time.” Dr. James Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys*, p. 92.

Why is eating together so valuable? Well, it binds families together. It is tragic, but true, “that only one-third of U.S. families eat dinner together most nights.” *Ibid.* The magic is not just sitting together around a table, it is the *pleasant* interaction between parents and children that counts. Laughing, talking, and sharing binds us together. Teens develop a loyalty to family and family ideals. And this is of great value.

Jesus shared some of His most sublime truths sitting at a table with His disciples. “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘this is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me’” (Luke 22:19, NIV). The early Christian church developed a powerful bond by eating together. “All the believers were together and had everything in common. . . . Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:44-46, NIV).

As you visit together over a meal, often share your faith journey. The *Value Genesis Study of SDA Youth* discovered some valuable lessons. It was found that youth whose parents share stories of their faith journey tended to remain in the church. So, often tell stories about your childhood. My mother did this. She grew up on a farm and was full of stories — some of them funny — about her life with the animals and some of the lessons she learned as a teenager. Some of the stories were about answers to prayer when she was growing up.

During the day think about some interesting things you can talk about around the table. Discuss issues in society. (But be careful not to use the dining hour as a time to preach. Stay off your pulpit!) Humor around the table tends to bind families together. Children who grow up with happy home memories develop a loyalty to family values. Show an interest in their sporting events and their social relationships. Eating together

provides a pleasant occasion for family interaction. Research shows that family relationships are extremely important to adolescence. Keep dinner conversation up-beat. Avoid conversations at meal time about financial or discipline problems. A cardinal law for dinner time is: No TV or telephone interruptions. (Turn off the telephone ringer. You deserve 30 minutes with your family without interruption.)

Family traditions often center around a table. Thanksgiving dinners at our home were special. My mother always set a beautiful table with her best china and candles. There was fruit salad made with whipped cream, dates stuffed with walnuts and rolled in powdered sugar and pumpkin pie with real whipped cream. Saturday night was a happy time. There was popcorn, hot chocolate, and apples. Traditions are powerful in binding families together. They provide memories that remain for a lifetime.

The family mealtime provides a great opportunity for a discussion of Bible truths. Talk about the reasons for your faith, your belief in the Sabbath, Creation, and the Second coming. Sabbath dinner is a good time to review what was learned in Sabbath School and church. Sabbath meals are times to be thankful. “Johnnie, tell us two things that you are thankful for?” Then read a scripture like: James 1:17, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” Ask your children to say grace as you join hands around the table.

Parents, take time daily to visit with each of your children. “Well, Jerry, how did your day go? How is your volleyball team doing?” Then listen with your ears, your eyes, your whole body. You can’t watch football with one eye and interact with your children. Fathers, if you have a preteen or an earliten daughter, spend lots of time visiting with her and above all things, listen to her. Take what she says seriously. Share stories of your social relationships when you were growing up. If you truly listen to your children, they will listen to you.

“Mealtime should be a season for social intercourse and refreshment. Everything that can burden or irritate should be banished. Let trust and kindness and gratitude to the Giver of all good be cherished, and the conversation will be cheerful, a pleasant flow of thought that will uplift without wearying. . . . The whole family should eat with gladness, with gratitude, remembering that those who love and obey God will partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb in the kingdom of God, and Jesus Himself will serve them.” *Child Guidance*, p. 387.

