

Mercy Challenge

Just be with your family



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

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Please Pray That

- Parents will live according to the Ten Commandments, especially within the home.
- Families will challenge themselves to respect others by respecting their property.
- Families will foster an attitude of gratitude and contentment to combat the materialism of our culture.
- Parents will have the strength to selfless generosity in a culture of selfishness.
- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Families will cultivate a sense of awe and wonder for the gifts of life and family.
- Our children will find support inside the family and out to practice self-control and balance.

Waste Time With Your Kids

On October 27th, Pope Francis sent out a challenge to parents across the globe. His simple and direct tweet said: Parents, can you “waste time” with your children? It is one of the most important things you can do each day. In less than 140 characters, the Holy Father threw down the gauntlet didn't he?

When I read this tweet, a story came to mind that a parent told me years ago. This father shared with me that he had made plans to attend a Badger football game one Saturday with a group of his buddies. But, his wife took ill early Friday morning which meant that he had to cancel his plans to take care of his 4 year old son. Obviously disappointed with the change, the father said that he decided to spend that Saturday sulking. He was going to sit and waste time rather than do anything productive.

And that is what he did. He sat in his P.J.s until 10. He read the newspaper. When the game started, he watched it on T.V. During this entire time, his son zoomed around from one toy to another.

Occasionally, the son would invite his Dad to play. Still sullen, the Dad agreed “to play” by half-entering into his son's fantasy world of digging trenches with a dump truck and unearthing dinosaurs that were buried under pillows. As the little boy created endless stories, the Dad paid just enough attention to convince his son that he was interested in him and not the game.

Out of the blue, the tiny child crawled into the dad's lap giving him a bear hug. His son exclaimed, “Dad this is the best day ever! I love you!” With that, he was back on the floor hoping to conquer another adventure. The dad was startled by both the gesture of love and the comment.

The Father's heart was transformed at that moment. He had no idea that his presence – just being there – would have such a profound effect on his son. He was overwhelmed that his son found so much comfort and security in his sitting on the couch, wasting his time.

Isn't it amazing that the father was clueless about the importance of presence but the child was not? This boy's awareness was crystal clear. He intuited that downtime from the hectic and busyness of life was reassuring. Having no agenda or goal that day gave him permission to play freely and dream expansively. And, he showed his dad that simply “hanging out” had filled him with so much hope that he just had to proclaim his joy with a gesture of love!

This example illustrates the challenge from Pope Francis. He is asking parents across the world to share idle time with their kids. He asks us to sit down, relax and allow life to unfold



around us. He believes that we can put the outside world on hold and watch our children giggle and play, imagine and question, zoom and rest. He dares us to just be with them and let them just *be* with us.

Why Waste Time? What's the Point?

Wasting time is something that our culture frowns upon. In fact, any quick Google search on wasting time results in articles and resources offering you expert advice on how to become more productive and less idle. I remember meeting a Mom who felt she wasn't doing enough so she took some of her "googled" lesson to heart. She said that she began each day by asking herself three daily questions; why sit if you could stand; why stand if you can walk; why walk if you can run? She said that her goal was to maximize every moment of every day. When I asked her what her family thought about this philosophy she responded, "they just had to roll with it because their life was busy. There was so much to do." I walked away and wondered how does over busyness impact a family's happiness and fulfillment. Does "doing more" really connect us more to each other as a family?

If you take Pope Francis' tweet to heart, you know that he thinks there is a better choice. His viewpoint is based on something he refers to as a close link between the hope of a people and the harmony among generations. In a recent message the Pope said, "The joy of children causes the parents' hearts to beat and reopens the future. Children are the joy of the family and of society... Children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable; and at the same time unmistakably linked to his/her roots. In fact, according to God's plan, being son and daughter means to carry within oneself the memory and hope of a love which was fulfilled in the very kindling of the life of another..."

Harmony and Hope. That's the reason that we waste time together. Harmony—the ability to be in sync and be at peace. Hope – the confidence that the world is going to be o.k. and that we are going to find joy in who we are. Both of these elements grow when we spend time with our kids doing nothing more than just being. Hope flourishes when we stop racing around and catch our collective family breath. Harmony expands when we allow ourselves unhurried time to unwrap the gift of our children and when they get to sneak a peek at the gifts that are hiding within us. Together, hope and harmony make family joy flourish.

Here is your Mercy Challenge

Take a look at your calendar for the next two months. As you do so, ask yourself the following questions.

1. What percentage of my non-working hours is available to my spouse and to my children?
2. Does this time allow me to just be with my family?
3. What behaviors do I have that prevent me from truly being present to my family? (Examples might include spending excess time on my phone, tablet, computer; watching television; going out with buddies; volunteering.)
4. Is there a hobby or activity that we can do as a family that allows us to just be together? What might that be?
5. How can I take the routine times of my day and be more intentional about opening them up to be with my family (Examples might include; driving to and from activities, cooking meals, eating together, tucking kids into bed.)

The end game is to find time each day to be together as a family. Even 10 minutes here or there can make the difference and meet the challenge given by Pope Francis. That's doable, right?

This article tells about just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the [Teaching the Way of Love](#) program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the [Teaching the Way of Love](#) home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.