

Book Review by Catherine Smith, 2011
Treasuring God in our Traditions by Noël Piper.
Crossway 2003

Noël Piper, wife of John Piper, mother of five and grandmother of 12, has written this helpful little book about developing godly traditions in our homes. She writes as an older woman to a younger woman, with warmth and practical examples, and you can almost smell the home-baked goodness exuding from the pages. As a former missionary who had to move home every 3 years, and straddle two continents, some of the traditions felt a little too American, too middle-class, too reliant on a huge attic and an extended family living close by. However, there are treasures in this little book that I wish I'd unearthed when my children were young. As our communities are becoming increasingly separated, where young mums go to one church, and older women go to another, and families no longer live near each other, this is a helpful tool for many young mothers.

The overall message is one of determination to put the gospel at the heart of family life, so that our children and all who come within our circle will see God as our greatest treasure. Noël writes, "Traditions are a vital way of displaying our greatest treasure, of showing what-Who-is most important to us... When our traditions are displaying the Treasure of our lives, He is there to be seen by everyone who comes within our circle."(p18)

Noël emphasizes how traditions are important ways to teach our children and then their children great truths about God. "We are always teaching our children, whether we mean it or not. Our children come to believe that what is repeated regularly has significance." (p34) This is the teaching of Deut 11:19. She outlines ways of teaching our children about God through Bible stories, and prayer, and teaching them about their place in the world, through decision-making and hospitality. She sprinkles her lessons with Bible quotes, songs, hand-written psalms and prayers and personal anecdotes. I found her style engaging and easy to read.

However two things jarred as I read the book. One is her belief that children aren't regarded as being part of God's family until they have made a personal confession of faith. "We only become God's children through *our* faith, not through our *parents'* faith....We cannot bequeath God to our children, we can help them know him and understand him in ways that *prepare* them to believe in his name." (p18) So instead of teaching our children godly patterns of life because it is fitting for them as *already* being part of God's family, she sees these traditions as a witness to draw them in so that they will *someday* make it their own. This strikes hard at my own covenantal theology, where God delights in whole families coming to Him; His promises are for us and our children, and we are to train up our children in the training and instruction of the Lord, *because* they are His *already*.

My other misgiving is her view of the Sunday morning gathering as the place to "worship" God, where children should be urged to sit quietly through the adult "worship" service so they can "catch the spirit of their parents meeting with the living God" (p109). She insists that children absorb, almost by osmosis, valuable lessons, even if they say they are bored. From my experience, children learn more how *not* to listen, how *not* to engage with God's word, when it is pitched at a level far beyond them. Children need to be nurtured and taught in age-appropriate ways and it is as their parents 'worship' God in their daily lives, making sacrificial choices, and costly decisions, where children will catch the spirit. I was disappointed with this appendix, because it seemed to contradict the main message of the book, which was how to make God central in our whole lives, in all the little habits and customs and traditions that we follow in our daily lives, not just on Sunday.

Given those two reservations, I would recommend this book to anyone with small children, as a springboard to thinking about how they can establish God-centred traditions in their own home, which will bring glory to God, not just in the now, but in generations to come.