

Christmas story to the family this Christmas Eve, like my dad did! From there, perhaps it means taking the time to do a little extra spiritual exercise once a week as a family. Perhaps reading Holy Scripture and doing *Lectio Divina* once a week (*Grab one of the CD's I'm giving out as Christmas presents after Mass for help in that!*). And/or praying the Rosary or one of the other devotions found in the wonderful book that is the other option for my Christmas present to you. By reaching out to God in an authentically Catholic way, even for 10-20 minutes a week, *while setting the tone that spiritual things are not a punishment*, it opens the door to radical transformation of your family into one of deeper intimacy, love and joy!

And that is what Christmas is all about - it is about the joy of God entering into our family - yes the human family, but particularly into a family: the Holy Family. And entering into that particular family means that Jesus can enter into each of our particular families to be the infinite and unbreakable principle of love. We need only ask him to come by practices of prayer together. No family is perfect, but when God is invited in by prayer and prioritizing His Will, God can make up for any lack.

As head of this parish family, I pray that I may be half the man my father is and always invite God's Most Holy Will into every aspect of our parish life, so that we may always live in the Joy of Jesus Christ.

I wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas!

*In Mary's Immaculate Heart,*  
Father Tuckerman



Christmas Eve when I was about 11 or 12 was a distinct turning point in my childhood.

Before this point, my dad had been an important part of my life, but really I hadn't seen much of him. He left for work before I got up and we often had a late dinner around 7 p.m. because he got home so late. Then after dinner it was often time for me to do homework and he would do work that he brought home, so there wasn't a lot of interaction between us before bed. On the weekends he would often be doing a project around the property and did not always come with my mother and brothers to church.

But I remember that Christmas Eve my dad gathered us all together in the living room. I thought it was a family meeting in order to discuss something that had gone wrong - the usual reason we came together unexpectedly like this. However, instead my dad told us he was going to start with us an important tradition from his childhood. Something his father, my grandfather, used to do with the whole family.

He was holding a Bible. That was something which I don't think I had ever seen him hold before - that's probably why he seemed a little awkward and nervous. He opened it and began to read to us the first two chapters of the Gospel of Saint Luke - the Christmas Story.

I have to admit, I was annoyed at first. Not only was that my normal reaction to things as a pre-teen, but it was weird for me because my dad had not really been a part of church or my faith life. Mom had always been the one to pray with my brothers and me before going to sleep. Also, I was convinced I knew this story inside and out, I thought, "I've heard this a million times, I didn't need to hear it again."

But as my dad persevered in the reading, despite his own nervousness (and the impatient, annoyed looks of his teenage and preteen boys), something changed. I began to feel safe. I felt connected in a new and deeper way with my family and with God. This began a tradition in our family that I really looked forward to every year (not that I let my anticipation and enjoyment ever show).

And for our family, it really was the beginning of a new life. My dad,

starting from this small act, started investing more, little by little, in our family and in his faith. To me it eventually communicated that he was no longer simply taking care of the family, but that he was interested in being an intimate part of the family. He wanted to live in the heart of the family, together with us in the inner spiritual life. Nothing else has ever brought us so close together!

That small moment of change led to other small changes. My dad started attending church every Sunday with us. In fact, he became the one who told us we were going instead of mom, who had previously done that alone most of the time. He would lead prayers at home. He eventually began going to Bible studies at church and was more actively involved in church groups. He even started reading and memorizing scripture!

But what allowed all these practices to make an impression on me was the **fruits** of all of this spiritual change: He started prioritizing his family. He started spending time with us, sharing everyday things while also talking more about the most important things in life. I remember calling him at work for even trivial things and he would always pick up, even leaving meetings just to talk on the phone to me. I would apologize for interrupting and he would simply say, "You are more important." He eventually even changed jobs to one that allowed him more freedom to be with the family.

These changes in my dad and in our family were only possible because my dad started asking God to have His Holy Will in his life and the life of our family. It is so important for fathers to be the spiritual head of their families and to invite God in through prayer. No one can replace the role of a father in a family in this regard - that is why God chose St Joseph to be the head of the Holy Family! He certainly wasn't needed to be the natural father of Jesus and God could have provided other means to take care of Mary and Jesus - but the role of the father in a family is super important!

Christmas is a time of great grace being poured out, particularly in families. All that extra help of grace makes Christmas a perfect time for families to begin traditions of prayer. Particularly ones led by the natural head of the family - the father. It doesn't have to start big, it can start simply by reading the