

The Cozy Seasons: Spring at Home

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Devotions, Stories, Activities, and Recipes for Simple Family Moments

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 — A Season of Renewal	5
Chapter 2 — Bringing the Outdoors In	25
Chapter 3 — Spring Comfort Foods	44
Chapter 4 — Celebrating Easter and Resurrection Hope ...	69
Chapter 5 — Family Fun Outdoors	87
Chapter 6 — Hospitality in Bloom	105
Chapter 7 — Simple Spring Cleaning	124
Chapter 8 — Caring for the Soul in the Busy Season	143
Chapter 9 — Finding Joy in Creation	161
Chapter 10 — Looking Toward Summer	182

Chapter 1 — A Season of Renewal

Scripture:

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

— *Isaiah 43:19 (NIV)*

Devotional Reflection

There's something about spring that makes us breathe a little deeper. After months of cooler days, shorter nights, and cozy hibernation, the first signs of green pushing through the soil whisper, *"It's time for something new."* Windows open, curtains flutter, and suddenly the whole house feels lighter. It's not just the weather changing—it's our hearts, too.

God designed seasons with purpose. Just as the earth rests in winter and bursts to life in spring, our lives often follow that same rhythm. Some seasons feel still and quiet, where growth seems hidden. Others are full of bloom, movement, and fresh beginnings. Spring reminds us that no matter how barren the past season may have looked, God is always at work beneath the surface.

Think of a bulb buried deep in the cold ground. All winter long, nothing appears to be happening. Yet, in the darkness, roots grow stronger, pushing downward, preparing for the day when sunlight will call it upward. That's renewal—it doesn't always start with something you can see. Sometimes God is renewing us in the hidden places of our hearts, so that when the time comes, we will be ready to rise.

Renewal doesn't mean pretending the past never happened. It means allowing God to breathe fresh life into the old places. Maybe last season was marked by weariness, discouragement, or struggle. Maybe your faith felt dry, or your home didn't feel like the joyful place you wanted it to be. Renewal is God's gentle invitation: "*Let's begin again.*"

When we open the windows and clean out the corners of our homes, we're not just chasing dust—we're making room. The same is true for our souls. Spring is a time to declutter not only closets and pantries but also thoughts, habits, and attitudes that weigh us down. Maybe it's letting go of guilt you've carried, or fear that has kept you small. Renewal looks like releasing the old and making space for the new.

God's Word assures us that He is continually doing a "new thing." We don't have to live stuck in yesterday's mistakes, or in the patterns that no longer serve us. Renewal is not about striving harder—it's about surrendering deeper. When we release control and open ourselves to His Spirit, He creates streams in places we thought were deserts.

For mothers, spring renewal can also mean shifting the way we view our home. Instead of seeing endless chores, we can begin to see opportunity—each load of laundry a fresh start, each meal cooked a chance to nourish, each walk outdoors a reminder of His creation. Renewal doesn't mean everything is suddenly easy. But it does mean we look at life through the lens of hope.

And hope is contagious. When children see their mother embracing a fresh season with joy, they feel it too. They learn that God gives us do-overs, that change is possible, and that every day is a new mercy. That kind

of atmosphere in the home is more powerful than any perfect routine or spotless floor.

This spring, ask God to show you where He wants to bring renewal. Is it in your heart? Your relationships? Your home? Your outlook on the season you're in? Don't be afraid to ask Him for fresh perspective. Renewal doesn't always mean changing everything. Sometimes it simply means noticing the small ways He is already at work.

A new season doesn't erase the past one—it builds on it. Winter prepared the ground. Spring calls forth the growth. And summer will bring the harvest. Trust God's timing in your own life, and don't rush the process. Renewal is not a one-day event. It's a slow unfolding, a daily invitation to walk with Him into what's new.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in your life do you feel God calling you to experience renewal this spring?
2. What attitudes or habits do you sense it's time to release in order to make space for something new?
3. How can you create an atmosphere of hope and fresh beginnings in your home for your family?

4. Think of one area in your home (a room, a drawer, a routine) that feels cluttered or heavy. How could clearing it out represent a spiritual reset as well?

 5. How can you slow down enough this season to notice the "new things" God is already doing in your life?
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A Season of Renewal

The morning light filtered through the lace curtains in Mariah's kitchen, scattering golden patterns across the wooden table. She wrapped her hands around her favorite mug, the one her children had given her last Mother's Day with smudged handprints stamped in fading paint. The steam rose gently from her tea, and she breathed it in slowly, letting the warmth fill her.

It had been a long winter. The kind that seemed to weigh down the spirit with cloudy days and endless lists of inside tasks. Her family had moved through it with the usual rhythm—schooling at the table, cooking hearty meals, keeping the house as cheerful as she could—but Mariah knew her heart had been tired. Somewhere between laundry piles and the late-night grocery runs, she had felt a heaviness she couldn't shake.

But this morning was different. Something about the crisp spring air coming through the cracked window whispered hope. She glanced outside. Her daffodils were pushing through the soil, yellow tips beginning to show. The children's bikes leaned haphazardly against the fence, a reminder that outdoor play had returned.

Mariah set her mug down and pulled a fresh notebook from the drawer. She opened to the first page, determined to write something—not a grocery list, not a schedule, but a prayer.

"Lord," she wrote slowly, "I want this to be a season of renewal. For my heart. For my home. For my family. Please help me see the new things You are doing." She smiled at the page. It wasn't fancy, but it felt like a fresh beginning.

Just then, the sound of small feet pattering down the hallway broke the stillness. Her youngest, six-year-old Eli, burst into the kitchen. His hair stuck up in tufts, and his voice was still groggy with sleep.

“Mom, are we making pancakes today?” he asked hopefully.

“Pancakes it is,” Mariah said, standing to tie on her apron.

Soon the other children trickled in—some sleepy, some chattering loudly about their plans for the day. The skillet sizzled with butter, and the smell of vanilla filled the room as Mariah poured out circles of batter. She found herself humming an old hymn.

“Mom, you’re singing again,” her daughter Anna teased, smiling.

Mariah laughed. “Maybe spring brought my song back.” They ate together, syrup dripping across plates, giggles filling the room. When the last bite was gone, the children scattered to their chores, and Mariah loaded dishes into the sink. She opened the window wider, letting the cool air in. The sound of birds drifted through—the kind of ordinary music she hadn’t noticed in months.

After breakfast, school began. Books piled on the table, pencils rolling across the floor, a steady hum of questions and answers. Mariah leaned over to help Jacob with his math. He furrowed his brow, erasing hard, but when he finally solved the problem, his face lit up.

“You did it,” she whispered, ruffling his hair.

These moments felt like renewal too—the slow, steady progress that sometimes only shows itself when you pause to see it.

By lunchtime, the sun was shining brightly. Mariah announced they'd be spending the afternoon outdoors. The children cheered, running to pull on sneakers and find gloves. She gathered rakes, buckets, and a trowel, and together they walked into the backyard.

The garden beds were a mess of dried leaves and tangled stems from last year. But underneath, new life was stirring.

"Look!" Eli shouted, pointing to a green shoot poking through. "It's already growing!" Mariah crouched down, brushing soil gently with her fingers. "You're right. Even when we can't see it, God's always working."

The children dug and raked while Mariah clipped back dead growth. Dirt smudged their cheeks, and laughter filled the air. For hours they worked, and when they carried the last bucket of leaves to the compost, Mariah felt a deep contentment settle in her chest.

Inside, she filled a vase with the first small blooms and placed it in the center of the dining table. Not perfect, not arranged by a florist, but alive. A reminder that her family's everyday table was worthy of beauty.

Later, while the younger children played outside, Mariah took a basket of laundry to the porch. She pinned sheets to the line, watching them billow in the breeze. There was something about clean laundry in the sunshine that felt healing. She closed her eyes and whispered, "*Thank You, Lord, for this ordinary goodness.*"

As the afternoon slowed, a knock came at the door. Her neighbor, Mrs. Ruth, stood there holding a small basket. "Some fresh rolls for you," the older woman smiled. "Thought you might enjoy them with supper."

Mariah's heart swelled. Hospitality didn't have to be grand—just a simple loaf of bread passed from one hand to another. Renewal, she realized, also came through connection.

That evening, Mariah's family gathered around the table for supper. The rolls from Mrs. Ruth sat beside the roasted chicken she had prepared, along with fresh carrots and a bowl of mashed potatoes. As the family bowed their heads to pray, Mariah noticed how content she felt—not because everything was perfect, but because her heart was being renewed.

After the meal, the children cleared the table and helped wash dishes, chattering about what they wanted to plant in the garden. Tomatoes, sunflowers, pumpkins—all dreams of future harvests.

When bedtime finally arrived, Mariah tucked each child in, lingering for prayers and whispered "I love yous." She walked down the quiet hallway, lamps glowing softly, and returned to her notebook.

She flipped back to the page she had begun that morning. Under her first prayer, she added, "Today, I saw You in the pancakes, the dirt under our nails, the sunshine on the laundry, the gift of rolls from a friend. Thank You for reminding me that renewal is everywhere when I look for it."

She closed her notebook and turned off the lamp. The daffodils outside her window swayed in the breeze, their yellow blooms opening a little wider.

And just like them, Mariah felt the first stirrings of new life rising in her soul.

Activities & Traditions for Renewal

1. A Family “Fresh Start” Walk

Choose a warm afternoon, gather everyone together, and head outside for a walk. As you stroll, encourage each family member to share one “new thing” they’re thankful for this spring—a change they’ve noticed in nature, a goal they’re excited about, or something God is renewing in their hearts. Write these down later as a keepsake.

2. Renewal Jar

Keep a glass jar on the counter or table. Whenever someone experiences something that feels refreshing—a kind word, a new flower in bloom, an answered prayer—write it on a slip of paper and drop it in. At the end of the season, read them together and remember how God brought renewal in small ways.

3. Spring Cleaning Together

Make it fun instead of overwhelming. Play cheerful music, open the windows, and give each child a simple task (like dusting baseboards or sorting toys). To make it special, set a timer and do “10-minute cleans” together, celebrating progress instead of perfection. End with a family treat like lemonade on the porch.

4. Plant Something New

Even if you don’t have a garden, plant a pot of herbs, flowers, or vegetables as a family project. Let the kids help water and watch it grow. This becomes a living reminder that God makes all things new.

5. Easter Sunrise Breakfast

On Easter morning, gather outside for a simple breakfast picnic—fruit, muffins, juice, and eggs. Read the resurrection story together and thank God for the ultimate renewal: new life in Christ.

6. Family Prayer Reset

Pick a new time of day to gather—even briefly—for prayer as a family. It could be right before breakfast or before bed. Keep it short and simple, but let it become a rhythm of renewal for your home.

7. Blessing a Neighbor

Bake something simple or share flowers from your yard with a neighbor. Renewal spreads when we pass along kindness. Involving your children in this teaches them that hospitality doesn't need to be fancy to make a difference.

Comfort Foods for Spring

Lemon Poppy Seed Muffins with Glaze

These are the kind of muffins that brighten up even a cloudy morning. They come out soft, tender, and bursting with lemon flavor. The glaze drizzled over the top is what makes them irresistible.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 2 tbsp poppy seeds
- ½ cup butter, melted
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup sour cream or Greek yogurt
- Zest and juice of 1 large lemon

Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tbsp lemon juice

Directions:

Whisk the dry ingredients in one bowl and the wet in another, then gently combine. Spoon into a muffin tin and bake at 350°F for 18–20 minutes until golden. Let them cool a little before drizzling the glaze over top. These are wonderful for breakfast or tucked into a spring picnic basket.

Creamy Chicken & Asparagus Skillet

This dish tastes like it belongs in a little café, but it's done in one pan right at home. The asparagus makes it feel fresh and springy.

Ingredients:

- 2 chicken breasts, cut into strips
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- Juice of ½ lemon
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Sear the chicken in olive oil until golden, then remove to a plate. Add garlic and asparagus to the skillet and sauté for just a few minutes. Pour in broth and cream, stirring until it thickens. Stir in Parmesan and lemon juice, then return the chicken to the pan. Serve it over buttered noodles or rice. It's light but still comforting.

Strawberry Spinach Salad with Candied Pecans

This salad is fresh enough to feel healthy but fancy enough for Easter dinner. The sweet strawberries and crunchy pecans are the best part.

Ingredients:

- 6 cups fresh baby spinach
- 2 cups strawberries, sliced
- ½ cup candied pecans (or make your own by toasting with sugar and butter)
- ½ cup crumbled feta

Dressing:

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard

Directions:

Toss spinach, berries, nuts, and cheese in a large bowl. Whisk together dressing ingredients and drizzle over just before serving. It looks beautiful and tastes like spring in a bowl.

Carrot Cake Loaf with Pineapple & Coconut

This loaf is moist, spiced, and has just enough sweetness to feel indulgent but not heavy.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- 2 cups grated carrots
- ½ cup crushed pineapple (drained)
- ½ cup shredded coconut
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup oil
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

Glaze:

- 4 oz cream cheese
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 2 tbsp milk

Directions:

Mix dry ingredients, then stir in carrots, pineapple, and coconut. In another bowl, whisk eggs, oil, sugar, and vanilla. Combine, pour into a greased loaf pan, and bake at 350°F for 45–50 minutes. Drizzle glaze on top while still slightly warm. A perfect spring tea-time treat.

Ham & Swiss Sliders with Honey Mustard Glaze

The best way to use up leftover Easter ham—gooey little sliders that vanish the moment you set them down.

Ingredients:

- 12 slider rolls or Hawaiian rolls
- 12 slices ham
- 12 slices Swiss cheese
- ¼ cup butter, melted
- 2 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tsp poppy seeds

Directions:

Slice rolls in half (keeping bottoms together). Layer ham and cheese inside, then top with the roll tops. Mix butter, mustard, honey, and poppy seeds and brush over the tops. Bake at 350°F for 15–20 minutes until melty. These make a cozy spring supper with a salad on the side.

Creamy Pea Soup with Fresh Herbs

This isn't the heavy split pea soup of winter—it's bright and silky, almost like eating spring in a bowl.

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 onion, diced
- 3 cups fresh or frozen peas
- 3 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- ½ cup cream
- 2 tbsp fresh dill or mint
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Cook onion in butter until soft. Add peas and broth, simmer for 10 minutes. Blend until smooth, then stir in cream and herbs. Serve warm with crusty bread.

Fresh Berry Trifle Cups

Pretty little layered desserts that feel like a celebration but are so easy to put together.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound cake or angel food cake, cubed
- 2 cups fresh berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries)
- 2 cups whipped cream or whipped topping
- Lemon zest for garnish

Directions:

In clear glasses, layer cake, berries, and whipped cream. Repeat until full. Top with more whipped cream and a sprinkle of lemon zest. These look fancy but take minutes—and kids love helping assemble them.

Sheet Pan Salmon with Lemon & Spring Veggies

Dinner on one pan means less fuss, and this one is fresh, healthy, and flavorful.

Ingredients:

- 4 salmon fillets
- 1 lb baby potatoes, halved
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed
- 1 lemon, sliced
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp paprika
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Toss potatoes with half the oil and seasonings, roast at 400°F for 15 minutes. Add asparagus and salmon to the pan, drizzle with the rest of the oil, and lay lemon slices on top. Roast another 15 minutes until salmon flakes easily. It feels like a restaurant meal but comes straight out of your oven.

Closing Thoughts

Spring reminds us that God doesn't leave anything in winter forever. What looks dead and barren can suddenly burst with life again, not because of anything we've done, but because He brings the growth. Renewal isn't something we have to strive toward; it's something we receive.

When you open your windows and let in the breeze, when you dig in the soil and see those green shoots appear, when you bake something fresh and gather your family around the table—you are living out renewal in the most ordinary, holy ways.

Sometimes we wait for “big” changes to make us feel new, but most often, it's the little rhythms that shift our hearts. A fresh prayer whispered over dishes. A new family habit of evening walks. A vase of flowers on the table. These small choices invite God's Spirit to keep shaping us.

As you step into this spring, remember that He is making all things new—including you. You don't have to have it all figured out. Just keep showing up in faith, keep opening the windows of your heart, and trust that His renewal will come in ways you can see and in ways you can't.

Reflection Questions

- What part of your life right now feels like “springtime”—new, hopeful, or growing?

- Where do you feel God nudging you to begin again?
 - What small, daily rhythm could you add to your home that would bring a sense of renewal?
 - How can you invite your family to notice and celebrate the little signs of God's goodness this season?
 - If you wrote a prayer of renewal in a journal today, what would it say?
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Chapter 2 — Bringing the Outdoors In

Scripture

"The flowers are springing up, the season of singing birds has come, and the cooing of turtledoves fills the air."

— *Song of Solomon 2:12*

Devotional Reflection

One of the sweetest parts of spring is how it calls us to notice again. During winter, we often move quickly between rooms, pulling blankets tight, turning up the heat, and shutting out the chill. But when spring arrives, we open our eyes in a new way. Suddenly, there are blossoms on trees we thought were bare. The air smells different—cleaner, softer, alive. Birds begin to sing again, and it's as if the whole world has been holding its breath, just waiting for this moment.

Bringing the outdoors in isn't just about decorating a home; it's about remembering who created it all. When you set a vase of wildflowers on your table, you're not just adding color—you're making a space to pause and say, *"Thank You, Lord, for this beauty."* When you open the windows and let the breeze carry in the sound of songbirds, you're not just airing out a room—you're inviting a reminder of God's presence into your daily life.

God knew we would need these reminders. That's why so much of Scripture is wrapped in nature's language. He speaks of sparrows that do not fall without His knowing. He talks of lilies dressed in glory greater than Solomon's. He describes the righteous as trees planted

by streams of water, bearing fruit in their season. Jesus Himself pointed to seeds, fields, and vineyards to explain His Kingdom. He knew our hearts would understand His love more deeply when we looked at what He created.

But here's the truth: we don't always take time to notice. Our homes are filled with laundry baskets, dishes, and schedules, and in the middle of it all, we forget to lift our eyes. Bringing the outdoors in is a way of training ourselves to notice again—to pause long enough to see God's fingerprints all around us.

Maybe for you it looks like filling a jar with daffodils from your yard. Maybe it's hanging a spring wreath on the front door. Maybe it's keeping a little pot of basil or mint on your kitchen windowsill, so every time you brush past, the scent reminds you of freshness. These aren't big changes, but they have a way of softening the mood in your home.

Children especially notice. They might not say it, but they feel it when the house is filled with light and beauty. A small bunch of flowers on the table can turn an ordinary supper into a memory. An open window on a breezy day can make chores feel lighter. By bringing nature indoors, you are teaching your family that home is not just a place of function, but also a place of joy.

This practice also speaks to the deeper places of our souls. Sometimes the inside of our hearts feels as closed off as a house sealed for winter. We may feel heavy, weary, or stale. But just as a room transforms when sunlight streams through a window, so do our spirits when we let God's Spirit breathe fresh air into us.

Creation testifies of His character—steady, faithful, and always renewing. The grass doesn't question whether it should grow; it just does. The flowers don't wonder if they are beautiful enough; they bloom in their time.

The birds don't store up for years ahead; they sing in the morning and trust that provision will come. Each of these simple rhythms can teach us how to rest in God. So this spring, don't be afraid to bring the outdoors in.

Place fresh reminders of His handiwork where you will see them every day. Use them as gentle nudges to stop, breathe, and remember that He is still in control. Let your home become a reflection of what He is doing in your heart—filling the quiet places with new life, light, and hope.

Bringing the outdoors in is more than a homemaking habit—it is a spiritual practice. It's pausing to notice His beauty in creation and choosing to weave it into your daily rhythms. And as you do, you may just find that the atmosphere of your home—and your heart—becomes lighter, brighter, and filled with peace.

Reflection Questions

- When you look around your home, are there simple ways you could add beauty from outdoors—a flower, a branch, a breeze from an open window?

- What part of God’s creation speaks most to your soul—flowers, birds, trees, sunlight? How can you bring more of that into your daily rhythms?
 - Think about your family’s routines. How could you slow down enough this season to notice nature together?
 - How does creation remind you of God’s character and faithfulness?
 - What “closed windows” in your heart might need to be opened to let in His renewing Spirit?
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Bringing the Outdoors In

Emma stood at her kitchen sink, her hands resting on the cool porcelain edge as she looked out the window. Beyond the glass, the dogwood tree in her yard was beginning to bloom—soft white petals against a sky washed blue by spring sunshine. She sighed, not in sadness, but in relief. Winter had been long, filled with gray days and the heaviness of indoor routines. But now, finally, life outside was stirring.

“Mom?” her youngest daughter, Claire, peeked into the kitchen. “Can we eat lunch outside today? It feels too pretty to stay inside.”

Emma smiled. Claire had always been the first to notice the weather. “That’s a wonderful idea,” she said, drying her hands. “But before lunch, how about we bring a little of that pretty *in* here with us?”

The children tilted their heads, curious. Emma pulled open a drawer and grabbed her garden shears. “Come on,” she said, motioning toward the back door. “Let’s gather a little spring for the house.”

Outside, the air smelled like grass, damp earth, and sunshine. The children scattered across the yard, searching for blooms. Claire clipped a few daffodils, their bright yellow heads bobbing cheerfully. James, her older brother, found sprigs of wild greenery pushing up near the fence. Even little Caleb toddled along with chubby hands full of clover.

Emma clipped a branch from the dogwood tree, careful not to take too much. She thought about how often she had stared at this very tree through winter, its branches bare, looking lifeless. And yet here it was, clothed in blossoms, declaring, “*New life is here.*”

Back inside, Emma filled jars with water and began arranging. She placed the daffodils in a mason jar on the table, the greenery in a pitcher on the counter, and the dogwood branch in a tall vase by the front door.

None of it was perfect, but that wasn't the point. As the children watched, Emma said softly, "See how just a little touch of outside makes the whole room feel alive?" Claire grinned. "It looks happy."

"Yes," Emma nodded, "and sometimes our homes need just a little bit of happy."

They carried sandwiches and lemonade outside for lunch, spreading a blanket in the yard. The children laughed between bites, pointing out the clouds drifting across the sky. Emma stretched back, feeling the sun on her face, grateful for the simple shift that made the day feel lighter.

Later that week, Emma decided to weave more of creation into their routines. She opened windows in the morning while the children did schoolwork, letting birdsong drift through the house. She set a bowl of lemons on the counter, their bright color cheering up the whole kitchen. She even dug out an old wicker basket and filled it with fresh herbs from a local market—basil, mint, and parsley—all of which gave off their fragrance whenever she brushed past.

The changes weren't extravagant, but the children noticed. They commented on how the house smelled different, how the rooms felt brighter. Even her husband, Daniel, mentioned one evening, "It feels... lighter in here. Like the whole house can breathe again."

Emma smiled, knowing it wasn't really the flowers or the lemons—it was the reminder that God was present. Each sprig of green, each open window, was a nudge to look beyond chores and noise and remember His goodness.

One rainy afternoon, when the children were restless, Emma decided to make a project of it. She pulled out jars, paper, and crayons. "Let's make nature jars," she said. "We'll bring in little pieces of what we find and keep them as reminders."

The children ran with the idea. James filled his jar with small stones from the driveway, arranging them carefully. Claire added tiny wildflowers and taped a label that read "God's Little Masterpieces." Caleb proudly dropped in leaves of all sizes, though most were crumpled from his fists.

They placed the jars on a shelf in the living room, where they caught the light from the window. Every time Emma walked past, she smiled. Their home wasn't just a shelter; it was a space alive with reminders of creation.

One evening, after the children were asleep, Emma curled up with her journal. She thought back to the winter months, when she had felt weary and drained. Her prayers had been short, her patience stretched thin. But spring was reminding her of something vital:

God's Spirit was as present as the breeze through her window. She wrote, *"Lord, thank You for teaching me through flowers and birds that You are still making all things new. Help me to notice You, even in the little things."*

Daniel found her sitting quietly. "You've seemed lighter lately," he said, settling beside her.

"I think it's because I'm noticing again," Emma replied. "Bringing little pieces of outside in has reminded me to slow down, to see God's beauty, to breathe."

Daniel nodded. "It's been good for all of us."

The next morning, Emma rose early and padded into the kitchen. The dogwood branch she had clipped days ago was still blooming in the vase by the door. The house was quiet, but the air seemed alive with promise. She set her teacup on the table, whispered a prayer of thanks, and let the peace of God settle deep into her heart.

Bringing the outdoors in hadn't just freshened her home—it had renewed her spirit.

Activities & Traditions

Nature Gathering Walk

Take the family on a short walk around your yard, neighborhood, or a nearby park with baskets or jars in hand. Let everyone collect a few simple treasures—wildflowers, pinecones, pretty stones, or sprigs of greenery. Bring them home and display them in jars or bowls as reminders of God’s beauty.

Weekly Fresh Bouquet Tradition

Choose one day each week to bring home or gather a small bouquet. It doesn’t need to be fancy; even a handful of dandelions picked by little hands can make a table feel cheerful. Place it somewhere central, like the dining room, as a weekly reminder of God’s renewal.

Windows-Open Hour

Pick a time each day—maybe during morning chores or evening supper—when the windows are opened, even just for a little while. Let fresh air and bird song fill the house. Children quickly come to expect and love this rhythm of letting the outdoors become part of home life.

Indoor Herb Basket

Plant a few easy herbs—like basil, mint, or parsley—in pots or jars and keep them on a kitchen windowsill. Let the children be in charge of watering. Each time you use a sprig in cooking, remind them that God gives us fresh provision every day.

Spring Nature Journal

Give each child a small notebook to record what they notice outdoors—new flowers blooming, birds building nests, or even a sunny day after rain. End the week by sharing entries together over dessert or tea. This teaches everyone to slow down and notice God’s handiwork.

“Creation Corner” in the Home

Designate one small shelf or table where the family can display seasonal treasures from outside. In spring it might be jars of blossoms, shells from a beach walk, or pressed flowers. Rotate it each season so it becomes a natural rhythm of honoring God’s creation.

Outdoor-to-Indoor Meal

Once a month, prepare a meal that celebrates the outdoors by including fresh herbs, spring vegetables, or fruit—and then eat it picnic-style on the floor or porch. Light candles or open the windows so it feels like an indoor picnic that brings the freshness of creation into your daily routines.

Comfort Foods for Spring

Herbed Focaccia Bread

This bread looks beautiful on the table but it's honestly simple to make. The best part is pressing your fingers into the soft dough and drizzling olive oil into the little dimples before baking. The herbs perfume the whole house.

Ingredients:

- 2 ½ cups warm water
- 2 ¼ tsp yeast (1 packet)
- 2 tsp sugar
- 6 cups flour
- 2 tsp salt
- ½ cup olive oil, divided
- 2 tbsp fresh rosemary (or thyme, oregano, or a mix)
- Flaky salt for topping

Directions:

Mix the water, yeast, and sugar in a big bowl and let it foam for about 10 minutes. Stir in the flour, salt, and half the olive oil. Knead until smooth, then let it rise in a greased bowl until doubled. Spread it onto a sheet pan, dimple it with your fingertips, and pour the rest of the olive oil over. Sprinkle herbs and flaky salt on top. Bake at 425°F for 20–25 minutes until golden. Tear into pieces while it's still warm—you'll want to dip it in olive oil or serve it with soup.

Garden Vegetable Quiche

Quiche always feels like a gentle, welcoming meal. This one is filled with fresh spring vegetables, creamy custard, and melty cheese tucked into a buttery crust. Perfect for brunch or supper with a simple salad.

Ingredients:

- 1 pie crust (homemade or store-bought)
- 1 tbsp butter
- ½ cup onion, finely diced
- 1 cup asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 cup baby spinach
- ½ red bell pepper, diced
- 5 eggs
- 1 cup heavy cream or half-and-half
- 1 cup shredded Swiss or Gruyère cheese
- ½ tsp salt, ¼ tsp pepper

Directions:

Prebake the crust for 8 minutes at 375°F. In a skillet, sauté onion and bell pepper in butter until soft. Add asparagus and cook a few minutes, then stir in spinach just until wilted. Whisk eggs, cream, salt, and pepper together in a bowl. Layer vegetables and cheese in the crust, then pour the egg mixture on top. Bake 35–40 minutes at 375°F until the center is set. Let it cool slightly before slicing.

Honey-Glazed Carrots with Dill

Carrots get overlooked, but this recipe makes them taste like something from a holiday table. They're sweet, glossy, and bright with fresh dill.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs carrots, peeled and sliced on the diagonal
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

Steam or boil carrots until just tender. Drain and place in a skillet with butter, honey, and brown sugar. Stir until the glaze coats the carrots and starts to thicken. Sprinkle with dill before serving. They shine right alongside roasted chicken or ham.

Spring Vegetable Risotto

This is one of those recipes that feels like a hug in a bowl. It's creamy, comforting, and the vegetables keep it from feeling heavy.

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups arborio rice
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 3 tbsp butter
- ½ cup white wine (optional)
- 6 cups chicken or vegetable broth, warmed
- 1 cup peas (fresh or frozen)
- 1 cup baby spinach
- 1 small leek, sliced thin
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese

Directions:

Melt butter in a heavy pot and sauté onion and leek until soft. Stir in the rice and toast it for a minute. Add wine and stir until absorbed. Begin adding broth one ladle at a time, stirring often and letting it absorb before adding more. Continue until the rice is creamy and tender, about 20 minutes. Stir in peas, spinach, lemon zest and juice, and Parmesan. Serve warm with extra cheese.

Rhubarb Crisp with Vanilla Whipped Cream

This dessert tastes like spring in a dish—tart, sweet, buttery, and warm. Don't skip the whipped cream, it makes it perfect.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups rhubarb, chopped
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tbsp flour

Topping:

- 1 cup oats
- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ½ cup butter, softened

Vanilla Whipped Cream:

- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Directions:

Toss rhubarb with sugar and flour, then spread into a greased 9x9 pan. Mix topping ingredients together until crumbly and sprinkle over rhubarb. Bake at 350°F for 35–40 minutes until bubbly. Beat cream with sugar and vanilla until soft peaks form. Serve the crisp warm with a dollop of whipped cream.

Asparagus Tart with Puff Pastry

This looks like something from a French café, but it's so easy. The flaky crust and tender asparagus make it feel elegant.

Ingredients:

- 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed
- 4 oz cream cheese, softened
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Unroll puff pastry on a sheet pan and score a border ½ inch from the edge. Mix cream cheese, Parmesan, and garlic powder, then spread inside the border. Arrange asparagus spears neatly on top, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake at 400°F for 20–25 minutes until golden and puffed. Slice into squares.

Strawberry Shortcake Cups

Strawberries in spring are irresistible, and this version makes them feel special in individual cups.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups fresh strawberries, sliced
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 6 shortcake biscuits (homemade or store-bought)
- 2 cups whipped cream

Directions:

Toss strawberries with sugar and let sit for 10 minutes. Split biscuits in half and layer into cups or glasses: biscuit, strawberries, whipped cream, then repeat. Top with extra berries. Each cup looks like a little spring celebration.

Herb Butter Roast Chicken

This is the kind of meal that makes the whole house smell wonderful. The herbs under the skin make the meat so flavorful and tender.

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken (4–5 lbs)
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh thyme
- 1 lemon, cut in half
- 4 garlic cloves, smashed
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Mix butter with parsley and thyme. Loosen the skin of the chicken and rub the herb butter underneath and over the top. Stuff the cavity with lemon halves and garlic. Sprinkle generously with salt and pepper. Roast at 375°F for 1 ½ hours or until juices run clear. Let rest before carving. The skin comes out golden, the meat juicy, and the leftovers are perfect for sandwiches.

Closing Thoughts

Bringing the outdoors in is really about remembering that beauty doesn't have to be far away or complicated. It's right outside our door, waiting for us to notice. A simple sprig of green in a jar, a vase of flowers by the table, or even the smell of herbs on the windowsill can shift the atmosphere of a whole home.

These small touches are not about impressing anyone—they're about creating a home that feels alive with God's goodness. Your children may not remember the exact dishes you washed or the floors you swept, but they will remember how the house felt: light-filled, peaceful, and touched with little reminders of creation. And that's the deeper truth—when we invite bits of God's creation inside, we're really inviting Him to refresh our hearts. His beauty lifts our eyes from busyness to wonder. His creation steadies us when we feel weary. And His presence reminds us that, just like the blossoms outside, He is always bringing new life, even in places that once felt bare.

So let your home breathe this spring. Open the windows, set flowers on the table, and watch as the outdoors whispers hope into every room.

Reflection Questions

- What is one simple way you can bring a touch of God's creation into your home this week?
 - How does opening a window, lighting a room, or setting out flowers shift the mood of your home?
-

- Which part of nature—flowers, herbs, birdsong, fresh air—brings you the most peace, and how can you make space for it indoors?
- In what ways do you see God’s faithfulness reflected in creation right now?
- How can you use these small touches of beauty to point your family back to Him daily?

Chapter 3 — Spring Comfort Foods

Scripture (AMP):

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God."

— 1 Corinthians 10:31

Devotional Reflection

There's something about food that connects straight to the heart. It's more than fuel—it's memory, it's comfort, it's gathering. When the kitchen smells of something baking or bubbling on the stove, the whole house feels alive. Spring has its own rhythm of food, and after the heavier meals of winter, it feels like God is giving us a fresh table to sit at.

In winter, we crave soups, stews, and casseroles—the foods that warm us when the air is cold and gray. But spring brings lighter flavors. Strawberries sweet enough to eat by the handful. Crisp asparagus, tender peas, and bright citrus that tastes like sunshine. These aren't just ingredients—they're little reminders of God's abundance. He could have made food bland and functional, but instead He filled the earth with color, variety, and flavor. What a gift.

The Bible is full of food moments that tell us something about God's heart. In the wilderness, He fed His people with manna—a daily reminder that He provides for our needs. When the crowds followed Jesus, He broke bread and fish, multiplying what seemed too little into more than enough. And on the night before His crucifixion, He chose a table and a meal to leave His disciples with a picture of His sacrifice. Food was never just about eating—it was about remembering, connecting, and worshipping.

When we prepare meals for our families, we're stepping into that same pattern. A pot of soup simmering on the stove says, *you are safe here*. A loaf of bread cooling on the counter says, *you are cared for*. A simple cake with berries says, *this is worth celebrating*. Cooking is one of the most ordinary tasks we do as homemakers, but in God's eyes, it can also be one of the most sacred.

Spring foods carry a unique joy because they echo the season itself. Just as the earth begins to push out blossoms and new growth, our tables can reflect that same renewal. A salad filled with greens and strawberries mirrors creation's color palette. Lemon in a cake or glaze tastes like fresh beginnings. Even the herbs we chop into a dish remind us of gardens waking up from sleep. Each bite is a small testimony that God is always doing something new.

And yet, meals are about more than ingredients. They are about gathering. When families sit down together, something shifts. The table becomes a place where stories are told, laughter spills out, and sometimes tears are shared too. It's where children learn to listen, to pray, to wait their turn. It's where memories form that they'll carry into their own homes someday.

This is why Paul's words in 1 Corinthians are so powerful: "*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God.*" Even something as simple as sharing a plate of food can glorify Him when done with love and gratitude.

It doesn't take an elaborate spread to make a meal meaningful. Sometimes it's scrambled eggs and toast at the table together, phones put away and hearts open.

Sometimes it's a pot of soup stretched thin but shared generously with a neighbor. Other times it's a special dessert baked with children, messy counters and all, because joy is found in the process as much as the product.

As homemakers, it's easy to grow weary of the constant cycle—plan, cook, clean, repeat. But when we pause to see meals as ministry, the work looks different. Every plate is a chance to serve like Jesus, who broke bread with His friends and strangers alike. Every cup of tea offered is an invitation to rest. Every cake or casserole delivered is a piece of the gospel in action.

This spring, let your kitchen be a place of renewal. Try a recipe you've never made before. Let your children help wash berries or knead bread. Invite a friend over for coffee and something simple on a plate. Open the windows while you cook and let the sunlight stream in. Don't wait for the "perfect time" or the perfect dishes. The beauty is in the ordinary.

Because here's the truth: when you cook with love and gratitude, you're not just filling stomachs—you're filling souls. And one day, your children won't only remember what you served; they'll remember how it felt to sit at your table.

So, whether it's a bright salad, a lemon-scented loaf, or a roast chicken filled with herbs, let your spring meals reflect God's abundance. Eat with joy. Cook with love. And remember that every table, no matter how simple, is a place where His glory can dwell.

Reflection Questions

- What spring foods remind you most of God's goodness and provision?
- When was the last time you felt God's presence around your table?
- How can you make ordinary meals feel special this season without extra stress?
- In what ways can you use food to bless someone outside your immediate family?
- How might cooking or sharing a meal be an act of worship in your daily life?

Spring Comfort Foods

The morning light poured through the east-facing windows as if the house itself had opened its eyes. Sarah pressed her palms against the cool porcelain of the sink and watched the yard wake—dandelions like tiny suns in the grass, a robin tilting its head as it tugged at a worm, the dogwood loosening white petals into the breeze. She had opened the windows early and the whole kitchen smelled faintly of earth and something sweet she couldn't name, the promise-of-something smell that always arrived with April. On the counter, a basket of strawberries waited beside a stack of recipe cards, a lemon, and a softening stick of butter. Today, she decided, would be a kitchen day.

Grace padded in with socked feet and sleep-creased cheeks, pushed her hair behind her ears, and leaned over the basket. "Can I taste one?" she whispered, as if the strawberries might answer before her mother did. Sarah nodded. Grace bit into it and closed her eyes dramatically, red juice blooming on her lip. "It's like sunshine," she declared, and then giggled because people don't eat sunshine. Sarah reached for a berry herself and understood. They were the kind that didn't need sugar, the kind that didn't last long because everyone "just had one more."

The boys came next: Noah with his determined morning scowl that vanished the second he found something funny, and Ethan with a blanket cape he refused to abandon until breakfast was in sight. Matthew followed, tying his tie with one hand and holding a mug of coffee in the other, pausing to kiss Sarah's temple and inhale the room. "It smells like we moved into a bakery," he said. "Is that the plan?"

"It's a spring kitchen day," Sarah said, as if that were explanation enough. "Windows open. Something simmering. Something baking. Something bright." She had scribbled a little list while the coffee brewed: lemon garlic shrimp with orzo for supper, chive and cheddar biscuits, roasted beets for a salad with feta and walnuts, and a lemon blueberry pound cake that would glaze while the kids cleaned up. She didn't plan days like this every week, but when she did, the house shifted. It breathed.

They ate eggs and toast and talked about the day's small plans—math pages and a library pickup, a seed tray on the sill begging for attention. After breakfast, Sarah set bowls like stations around the kitchen: flour and baking powder for the biscuits; blueberries to be rinsed and dried on paper towels; two bright lemons waiting for zest; a bundle of beets to scrub and wrap in foil. "Aprons," she said, because aprons could catch at least half of the mess. She handed Grace the colander for the berries, gave Noah the zester with a careful demonstration, and set Ethan up with a wooden spoon and a mixing bowl that did not yet contain anything important.

"First," she told them, "we'll get the cake in the oven so it has time to cool." Noah hovered near the lemon like a scientist, running the zester in quick, careful strokes. The air lifted with citrus. Grace dried each blueberry as if it were a jewel. Ethan banged the spoon against the empty bowl until Sarah slid flour into it with a laugh. "Make a mountain," she told him. "But a gentle one."

When butter met sugar, the mixer purred and the scent of home rose—rich and sweet, a hum of memory that made Sarah think of her grandmother's kitchen and the way sunlight used to slant across the old table at four o'clock.

They poured the batter into a pan, the blueberries dotting the pale gold like beads. Grace scraped the bowl with diligence, assuring her mother that one cannot waste batter in a world like this. Sarah slid the cake into the oven and set the timer. On the other counter, she laid out beets and wrapped each one like a present in foil. "When they're tender," she said, "they'll slip right out of their skins." Noah wrinkled his nose and asked whether the kitchen would look like a crime scene; Sarah smiled and told him he'd be on walnut duty instead.

By midmorning, Matthew texted that his lunch meeting had shifted and he could be home earlier than usual. "Perfect," Sarah replied. "We'll have more hands to chop." She took the boys to the porch to shake out the welcome mat—an exercise that somehow turned into a sweeping contest—while Grace carefully arranged a handful of daffodils in a juice glass, squinting as she trimmed the stems to just the right height. When the timer sang, the cake emerged golden, high with pride. Sarah set it on a rack and the scent rolled through the house until even the hallway smelled like lemon.

They moved to biscuits next. Sarah showed Ethan how to pat the dough without bullying it. "We're kind," she said. "Firm but kind." Grace pressed a cutter into the soft round and lifted perfect circles that looked like little moons. "Don't twist," Sarah reminded, and Grace nodded as solemnly as if the fate of the biscuits depended upon her wrist alone. Noah grated cheddar and measured chives with exactness that made him proud. When the tray went into the oven, Ethan stood on his toes to watch the biscuits rise behind the glass.

"They're puffing!" he cried, as if witnessing a miracle.

By noon the kitchen had gathered a small choir of sounds: the ticking of the cooling cake, the kettle settling after a boil, the faint squeak of the back door as it opened and shut with each small person who thought of something they needed outside. Sarah built sandwiches with leftover roast chicken and a swipe of herb butter, tucked apple slices into the corners of everyone's plates, and the five of them ate on the porch, the light slanting just enough to feel like a storybook. Matthew asked the kids for their "three good things" and the answers spilled out in the way children's lists do—biscuits, sunshine, the worm the robin found, the possibility that the library might have the next book in a favorite series. Sarah added her own: open windows, strong coffee, flour on everyone's noses.

After lunch, the kitchen settled into a slower pace. The beets, unwrapped and cooling, gleamed magenta on the cutting board. Sarah slipped their skins away, sliced them into moons, and set them aside with a bowl of crumbled feta and toasted walnuts. She whisked a quick vinaigrette and tasted it with the tip of her finger, bright and sweet. Grace, humming, stacked the juice glasses back into a neat row. Ethan pushed toy cars in quietly forbidden circles around the base of the mixer until Sarah redirected him to parsley, which he "snipped"

with child-safe scissors in proud, crooked confetti. Matthew returned in the early afternoon with a bundle of mint from a coworker's garden and a bag of lemons he'd "accidentally" bought too many of. Sarah laughed; accidents were delicious today. "You're just in time," she said. "Shrimp and orzo is a two-person job." He put on an apron and stood at the stove while she stirred broth into the orzo. "It smells like the sea," he said, and Sarah told him to stop making her want a beach trip they hadn't planned.

In the middle of their rhythm came a knock. Mrs. Turner from next door stood on the porch holding a paper-wrapped bundle and wearing the kind of cardigan that made you feel instantly cared for. "Rhubarb," she said. "The garden decided to be generous." Sarah waved her in, and the neighbor surveyed the counters with a gleam. "Mercy, it's a feast." Sarah flushed and said it only looked impressive because flour had somehow decorated every surface. Mrs. Turner stayed long enough to drink a glass of lemonade at the table and tell a story about making rhubarb custard with her mother by lamplight when she was a girl. The children listened, the way children do when a voice is soft and memory is present, and when she left, Grace waved as if the woman had gifted them a fairy tale.

Four o'clock arrived with its practicalities. Sarah sent Noah to set the table—mismatched plates, cloth napkins patterned with little green leaves, forks that clinked in an oddly satisfying way when stacked. She asked Grace to tuck a sprig of mint at each place setting "just for pretty," and Grace took the assignment seriously, stepping back after each plate to assess her work. Ethan arranged the biscuits in a basket lined with a towel and then arranged them again until he declared them officially nice.

Sarah brushed phyllo sheets with olive oil and layered them over the chicken pot pie filling she had altered from winter's version: no heaviness today, just tender chicken, peas, leeks, and green beans in a sauce that wasn't shy about tasting like spring. The top crackled into a quilted gold in the oven. On the back burner, the orzo turned glossy and tender; the shrimp curled pink with a quick sizzle of garlic and butter, the lemon zest sending up a little confetti of scent. The beet salad waited in a chilled bowl, ruby and cream and brown, each piece wearing its own halo of vinaigrette.

At last the house gathered itself. Sarah called everyone in and Matthew stood, as he always did, with one hand resting lightly on the back of her chair. "Let's pray," he said. His prayers were simple and unpolished, like a wooden spoon that fit perfectly in the hand. "Thank You for what You've given. Thank You for work and rest, for food and for the people at this table. Help us taste Your goodness in all of it." When they lifted their heads, there was a hush, a tiny pause as if the room had changed its breathing.

They ate with the unhurried joy that only happens when nothing pulls you out the door. Noah discovered he liked beets if they came with a walnut. Ethan declared the pot pie "crispy pie soup," which made everyone laugh and somehow made perfect sense. Grace buttered a biscuit and passed the plate without being asked, and Sarah tucked that small unprompted kindness away as the kind of thing a mother remembers later with a smile. The shrimp tasted like the sky was blue even after dark. The orzo held lemon the way a sponge holds water and released it with each bite. They told stories—small ones about the robin and the library, and big ones about the time Sarah's own mother had forgotten sugar in a pie and nobody at the table had had the heart to confess for the first five bites.

When plates had thinned to crumbs and the last of the lemon in the orzo had been chased with a fork, Sarah stood to slice the cake. The glaze, stirred a few minutes earlier with lemon juice and powdered sugar until it found that perfect drizzle, had set into a soft sheen. She sliced thick pieces and the blueberries winked from the crumb like tiny midnight skies. "I helped with the zest," Noah said to no one in particular. "And the

drying,” Grace added. Ethan announced he had arranged the biscuits and was willing to arrange cake too if that was a thing. They ate slowly and then not slowly at all, the way families do when something tastes like a memory already.

After supper, a soft drift carried everyone outward. Matthew stacked plates; Noah ran warm water into the sink; Grace wiped the table in careful circles. Ethan delivered silverware to the drawer one piece at a time and then, on his fifteenth trip, remembered to carry two. Sarah wrapped the leftover pot pie and tucked it into the refrigerator with the quiet contentment of tomorrow’s lunch sorted. The windows still stood open. Somewhere near the back fence a mourning dove called, the sound low and comforting as a psalm.

Outside, the yard had become blue with evening. The children gathered lightning bugs in cupped hands and then opened their palms to watch the tiny lanterns lift. Matthew lowered himself to the porch steps beside Sarah and bumped his shoulder against hers. “You did all of this,” he said, and she shook her head. “We did.” They sat in something like silence except for the small noises of a home that enjoys itself—clinks and hums, the occasional clatter followed by “I’m fine,” laughter unafraid to be heard.

The bedtime hour arrived the way bedtime always does—in a flurry of baths and mismatched pajamas and the search for that particular book someone had put somewhere “safe.” Sarah moved through it with a tiredness that felt like the good kind, like muscles used for something worthy. In the boys’ room, Noah asked a question about why beets were so red, and Ethan wanted to know whether biscuits grew on trees. Sarah

kissed their foreheads, trying not to laugh at the second question, and promised to plant a biscuit tree if she could find one. In Grace's room, the girl held out the daffodil vase. "Do you think flowers sleep?" she asked, tucking the blanket under her chin. "I think they rest," Sarah said. "And tomorrow they'll open again."

Downstairs, the kitchen had returned to itself. Sarah clicked off the overhead light and left only the lamp on the sideboard, a soft glow that made the room look like a painting. She poured a small cup of mint tea and sat with her journal, the pages dog-eared and flour-dusted because it lived on the counter more than the desk. Her pen hovered for a moment, then found words without trying. She wrote about lemon zest and beets that stained her fingers pink, about the way Matthew's prayer had settled in her chest like a stone in a river, steadying the current. She wrote about Grace's mint sprigs at every plate, about Noah's careful measurements, about Ethan's certainty that arranging is a real contribution. She wrote about Mrs. Turner and the rhubarb that would become tomorrow's crisp, and about the robin who had somehow become part of the day's story, too.

She set the pen down and looked around the room that hours earlier had been loud with children and clatter and delight. Now it held a different kind of fullness. The cake plate wore a few crumbs; the basket kept the last warm biscuits; a thin line of glaze, unnoticed earlier, shone on the edge of the cooling rack like a small moon. The breeze, cooler now, brushed the curtains and brought in the night sounds—crickets stitching the dark together, the distant hush of a car passing on the road, the faint creak of the porch swing when the wind remembered it.

Matthew came back in from locking the back door and leaned against the doorway the way he had in the morning. "You staying up?" he asked quietly. "For a little," she said. "I like to sit with it while it's still close." He nodded. "It was a good day." She looked up at him and smiled, a slow one. "It was." He crossed the room and kissed her forehead like punctuation and then padded up the stairs, the house keeping his footsteps as if it had pockets.

Sarah closed her eyes and breathed. She thought of the verse they had read at breakfast—whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God—and wondered how many times glory hides in ordinary days. Maybe it is in the way a lemon surrenders its zest to make a cake sing. Maybe it is in small hands learning to measure, in brothers who argue and then pass a basket without being asked. Maybe it is in the neighbor at the door with a bundle of rhubarb, or in mint tucked at a plate simply because beauty belongs at the table, too.

She rinsed her cup and left it to dry, turned the lamp off, and let the soft dark gather. As she moved toward the stairs, she paused at the window—the one that looked over the dogwood. In the dim light the blossoms were only shapes, but she knew their edges. She knew they would fall soon, and then leaves would carry the green forward into summer. There would be other days like this and days that were harder, days when the kitchen felt like a battleground and not a sanctuary. But tonight, the house, the food, the people under her roof—all of it felt wrapped in a kind of gentle abundance. She whispered, "Thank You," the words simple and sufficient, and climbed the stairs to bed with the contented ache of a day spent pouring out and being filled in return.

Activities & Traditions for Spring Comfort Foods

Family Bake Day

Choose one afternoon and set aside time to bake together. It doesn't have to be complicated—biscuits, muffins, or even simple cookies will do. Let the children measure, stir, and taste along the way. At the end, gather around with tea or lemonade and enjoy the fruit of your work.

Farmer's Market Tradition

Make a Saturday trip to your local market and let each child pick one fresh item to bring home. Maybe it's strawberries, a loaf of homemade bread, or a bunch of herbs. Build a meal around their choices. Not only does it teach them about food, it gives them ownership of family meals.

Recipe Box of Memories

Start a family recipe box this spring. Each time you make a dish that becomes a favorite, write it down on a card with the date and a little note about the day. Over time, you'll build a box full of memories, not just meals.

Spring Garden-to-Table

Even if you don't have a full garden, plant something simple together—herbs in pots, lettuce in a planter box, or a tomato plant by the porch. Let the children help tend and harvest, and then use what you've grown in a meal. Nothing makes food more meaningful than eating what you've nurtured.

Picnic Suppers

Spring evenings are perfect for eating outside. Spread a blanket in the yard or on the porch, pack sandwiches, fruit, and lemonade, and let the family experience the fun of a picnic without ever leaving home. It turns an ordinary meal into a special memory.

Cooking as Hospitality

Choose one neighbor, friend, or church family each month and deliver something fresh from your kitchen. It could be a loaf of bread, a batch of muffins, or even a jar of soup. Let your children help with the delivery so they see how food blesses others.

Seasonal Celebration Meal

Mark the first warm spring day or the first flowers blooming with a small "celebration meal." It could be as simple as a lemony pasta dish and a strawberry dessert, but gathering everyone to say, "*Look what God is doing around us*" creates a tradition of noticing His goodness.

Comfort Foods for Spring

Spring Pea and Prosciutto Crostini

These little bites are perfect for an appetizer or a light lunch. The sweetness of peas and the saltiness of prosciutto balance beautifully, and they look so cheerful on a plate.

Ingredients:

- 1 baguette, sliced and toasted
- 1 cup peas (fresh or thawed frozen)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup ricotta cheese
- 4 slices prosciutto, torn into pieces
- Fresh mint leaves

Directions:

Mash peas with olive oil, salt, and pepper until chunky. Spread ricotta on toasted baguette slices, top with pea mixture, and finish with a ribbon of prosciutto and a mint leaf. Serve right away.

Lemon Garlic Shrimp with Orzo

This dish tastes like a sunny afternoon. The lemony shrimp and tender orzo pasta make it light but satisfying.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 tbsp butter
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup orzo pasta
- 2 cups chicken broth
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley

Directions:

Cook orzo in chicken broth until tender. In a skillet, melt butter, add garlic, and sauté shrimp until pink. Stir shrimp and lemon juice/zest into orzo, then sprinkle parsley over the top.

Chive and Cheddar Biscuits

Fluffy, cheesy, and flecked with green chives—these biscuits smell heavenly as they bake. They're lovely with soup or just with butter.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup butter, cold and cubed
- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar
- 2 tbsp fresh chives, chopped
- ¾ cup milk

Directions:

Mix flour, baking powder, and salt. Cut in butter until crumbly. Stir in cheese and chives, then add milk until dough comes together. Pat out, cut biscuits, and bake at 425°F for 12–14 minutes.

Roasted Beet and feta Cheese Salad

Bright pink beets with creamy feta cheese make a salad that feels like a celebration of spring.

Ingredients:

- 3 medium beets, roasted and sliced
- 4 cups arugula or mixed greens
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese
- ¼ cup walnuts, toasted
- 2 tbsp balsamic glaze

Directions:

Arrange greens on a platter, top with beets, feta cheese, and walnuts. Drizzle with balsamic glaze just before serving.

Herbed Ricotta Tart

This tart looks fancy but comes together easily with store-bought puff pastry. The ricotta filling is creamy and savory, perfect for a spring brunch.

Ingredients:

- 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh basil, chopped

Directions:

Unroll pastry onto a baking sheet. Mix ricotta, Parmesan, egg, parsley, and basil, then spread over pastry, leaving a 1-inch border. Fold edges over slightly. Bake at 400°F for 25–30 minutes until golden. Slice into squares.

Spring Chicken Pot Pie with Phyllo Crust

A lighter twist on the classic, using flaky phyllo sheets instead of heavy pie crust. It's cozy, but not too rich for spring.

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 cup asparagus, cut into pieces
- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 cup peas
- 1 cup chicken broth
- ½ cup cream
- 6 sheets phyllo dough
- Olive oil spray

Directions:

Sauté onion and carrots in butter. Add asparagus, chicken, peas, broth, and cream, cooking until slightly thickened. Pour into a casserole dish. Layer phyllo sheets on top, lightly spraying each with olive oil. Bake at 375°F for 25 minutes until crisp.

Raspberry Almond Coffee Cake

Moist cake swirled with raspberries and topped with a sweet almond crumble—it's perfect for breakfast or dessert.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 tsp almond extract
- 1 cup raspberries

Topping:

- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ cup sliced almonds

Directions:

Cream butter and sugar, then add eggs, sour cream, and almond extract. Stir in dry ingredients. Spread half the batter in a greased pan, scatter raspberries, then top with remaining batter. Mix topping and sprinkle over. Bake at 350°F for 40–45 minutes.

Lemon Blueberry Pound Cake with Glaze

This cake is sunshine on a plate—moist, buttery, and filled with bursts of fresh blueberries. The lemon glaze makes it sparkle and is simple enough to whip together on a spring afternoon.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 3 cups flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup milk
- Zest of 2 lemons
- 1 cup fresh blueberries (tossed lightly in 1 tbsp flour)

Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2–3 tbsp lemon juice

Directions:

1. Cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating well.
 2. Stir together dry ingredients in a separate bowl. Add to the creamed mixture alternately with milk, mixing just until combined.
 3. Fold in lemon zest and floured blueberries. Pour into a greased loaf pan or bundt pan.
 4. Bake at 350°F for 55–60 minutes, until golden and a toothpick comes out clean.
 5. Cool slightly, then drizzle with glaze made from powdered sugar and lemon juice. Slice thick, and serve with tea or lemonade.
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Honey Lavender Panna Cotta

Creamy and fragrant, this panna cotta is infused with lavender and sweetened with honey. It feels elegant but is very simple to make.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups heavy cream
- ½ cup honey
- 1 tsp dried culinary lavender
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 ½ tsp gelatin
- 3 tbsp cold water

Directions:

Sprinkle gelatin over cold water to bloom. Heat cream, honey, lavender, and vanilla until hot but not boiling. Strain, then stir in gelatin until dissolved. Pour into ramekins and chill 4 hours. Serve with extra honey drizzled on top.

Zucchini & Tomato Galette with Basil

This rustic tart is the kind of dish that looks like you worked much harder than you did. The flaky crust, juicy tomatoes, and tender zucchini taste like a farmer's market wrapped in pastry.

Ingredients:

- 1 sheet refrigerated pie crust (or homemade)
- 1 medium zucchini, thinly sliced
- 2–3 small tomatoes, sliced
- 1 cup mozzarella or provolone cheese, shredded
- 2 tbsp Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg, beaten (for brushing)
- 2 tbsp fresh basil, chopped
- Olive oil, salt, and pepper

Directions:

1. Roll pie crust onto a parchment-lined baking sheet.
 2. Sprinkle shredded cheese in the center, leaving a 2-inch border.
 3. Arrange zucchini and tomato slices on top, overlapping slightly. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.
 4. Fold the edges of the crust up over the filling in rustic pleats. Brush the crust with beaten egg.
 5. Bake at 400°F for 30–35 minutes until golden and bubbly.
 6. Sprinkle fresh basil over the top before serving warm.
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Closing Thoughts

Food has always been one of God’s sweetest gifts to His people. It nourishes our bodies, but it also carries joy, memory, and togetherness. Spring comfort foods remind us that His provision is not only enough—it’s abundant, colorful, and full of life. Every strawberry, every herb, every loaf of bread pulled warm from the oven whispers of His care.

When you gather your family around the table, remember that you’re doing something holy. It might feel ordinary—just another meal, another set of dishes—but in God’s eyes, it’s ministry. You’re offering love on a plate, hope in a cup, and peace around a table.

This spring, don’t strive for perfection. Instead, look for delight. A salad tossed with bright fruit. A cake drizzled with glaze. A loaf of bread that fills the house with its fragrance. Let your kitchen be a place where gratitude rises as naturally as the steam from a pot. And let your table be a place where His presence is felt in every bite shared.

Reflection Questions

- Which spring recipe or meal makes you feel closest to God’s goodness?
- How can you use food this season not just to feed, but to encourage your family?

- What small traditions could you begin around the table that would point to joy and gratitude?
 - How can you welcome others to your table in simple, meaningful ways?
 - When you look at your kitchen, do you see it as a place of work or a place of ministry? How can you shift that perspective this spring?
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Chapter 4 — Celebrating Easter and Resurrection Hope

Scripture (NLT):

"He is not here! He is risen from the dead, just as He said would happen." — Matthew 28:6

Devotional Reflection

Easter morning begins not with trumpets or fanfare, but with women walking quietly toward a tomb. They carried spices and sorrow, expecting to anoint a body. Instead, they found a stone rolled away, angels declaring good news, and an empty grave that changed the world. *"He is not here! He is risen."* (Matthew 28:6). This is the heartbeat of our faith. Without the resurrection, Paul says, our faith would be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). But because of the resurrection, everything is different. Death does not win. Sin does not hold the final say. Jesus has triumphed, and His victory is ours.

When we talk about Easter, it's easy to picture the lilies in church, the pastel dresses, the egg hunts, the ham in the oven. These things have their place in family traditions, but at the core, Easter is about *resurrection hope*. That hope means that what feels dead in our lives can be raised. The broken can be restored. The weary can find new strength. Because Jesus lives, we live too (John 14:19).

Easter also teaches us something about waiting. Good Friday brought despair. Saturday was silence. And Sunday... Sunday was glory. Sometimes our lives feel stuck in Friday or Saturday. We feel the weight of sorrow, or we wait in the silence of unanswered

prayers. But Easter reminds us: Sunday is always coming. The resurrection shows us that God is working even when we cannot see. He is faithful to finish what He has promised.

For families, Easter is a chance to anchor children in these truths through rhythms and traditions. We may dye eggs and set baskets on the table, but we can also plant seeds in soil while explaining Jesus' words:

"Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, it is never more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over." (John 12:24 MSG). We can let them bake "empty tomb" rolls—finding sweetness where they expected sorrow.

We can gather in the backyard at sunrise, wrapped in blankets, and read Luke 24 aloud, letting little ears hear big hope.

But Easter is not only about one Sunday a year. It is about living resurrection every day. When we forgive, we live resurrection. When we choose joy over despair, we live resurrection. When we hold on to faith in the middle of unanswered questions, we live resurrection.

Every time we proclaim, *"He is risen indeed,"* we are reminding our hearts that Christ's victory is still true today.

Spring itself becomes a sermon. Bulbs press through cold soil. Branches that looked dead burst into green. Birds return with their songs. Nature preaches resurrection—what looks finished can bloom again.

What looks silent can sing. God writes His promises into creation so we won't forget that He is always bringing life out of what looks lifeless.

If this year has been heavy, Easter is for you, tenderly. The resurrection does not erase grief, but it promises that grief is not the end. Jesus Himself wept at Lazarus's tomb even though He knew resurrection was moments away. Easter hope holds both tears and joy together. You don't have to pretend everything is fine. You only need to remember: Jesus is alive, and that changes everything.

This Easter, don't worry about creating a picture-perfect table or crafting flawless celebrations. Instead, let gratitude be your decoration. Let joy be your centerpiece. Light a candle, read the gospel story, pray with your family, and remember that the risen Christ is present in your very home. The resurrection is not distant—it is as close as your breath, as real as your prayers, as steady as His love.

And when Easter Monday arrives and life slips back into laundry, dishes, and errands, carry this truth with you: we are resurrection people. We don't live toward victory—we live from it. We walk in the light of a Savior who has overcome the grave, and nothing in our lives is untouched by His power.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in your life do you most need resurrection hope right now?
2. What traditions can help your family center Easter more on Christ and less on "busyness"?
3. How does remembering Good Friday, Saturday's waiting, and Sunday's victory encourage you in your own seasons of waiting?

4. What part of creation reminds you most of resurrection this spring?
 5. How can you carry Easter's message of "*He is risen indeed*" into your ordinary, everyday routines?
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Resurrection Morning

The Saturday before Easter always felt like a hinge day to Emma. The house hummed with preparations—children helping half-heartedly to set the table, the smell of bread baking, baskets being dug out from the closet. But beneath the bustle was something quieter, an expectancy that she always held close.

"Tomorrow's the big day," Daniel reminded everyone, holding up the carton of eggs he'd just pulled from the fridge. "And these need dyeing if they're going to look decent in a basket."

Emma smiled. She let the kids take over the kitchen table, spreading newspaper and lining up mugs with vinegar, water, and little tablets that fizzed in bright colors. She sat with her Bible open nearby, rereading Luke's account of the women at the tomb. It never got old. "*Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen.*" The words were just as astonishing today as they were that morning so long ago.

Lily dipped her egg carefully in the yellow dye, whispering, "This one's for the sun Jesus made." Claire plopped hers into blue, splashing her sleeve, and giggled. Daniel drew a cross with a crayon on his before dunking it into red. "Blood, but also love," he explained. Emma tucked that comment into her heart.

By evening, the house smelled of glazed ham warming in the oven for tomorrow's meal and sweet bread cooling on the counter. Emma tied napkins with twine and tucked sprigs of rosemary inside each one. The table wasn't fancy, but it was ready. As she stood back, she whispered a prayer of thanks—not for perfection, but for presence.

That night, after teeth were brushed and baskets set out, Emma and Caleb tucked the children in. "Tomorrow we'll wake early," Emma said. "Sunrise is when it all began." The children nodded solemnly, sleep softening their excitement.

Easter morning came gently. The first light crept through the curtains as Emma slipped from bed and started the kettle. She wrapped herself in a sweater and stepped onto the porch. The grass still held dew, and the air was cool, but the sky carried the promise of day. She whispered, "Thank You, Lord. You are risen."

The children tumbled down a few minutes later, still sleepy but eager. They each carried a blanket, and together they padded into the backyard where Caleb had set up a simple wooden cross in a pot of soil.

Around it, Emma had helped them plant wheatgrass seed a week earlier, and tiny shoots of green now pushed through, like a miniature resurrection garden. They sat in a circle on the quilt, the sky blushing pink behind the trees. Emma opened her Bible and read aloud Luke 24:1–12, her voice hushed but strong.

When she came to the words, "*He is not here, He is risen!*" Daniel shouted, "He is risen indeed!" and the girls echoed him. The sound carried through the morning air, as bright as the birds joining their song.

Caleb prayed a short, simple prayer of gratitude. Then, with cold fingers wrapped around mugs of cocoa, they sat for a while just watching the sun climb. Emma thought about how the disciples had been hiding in fear while the women saw the empty tomb. About how the angels had delivered the news, and how Jesus Himself

had spoken Mary's name. And she wondered, as she always did, how many times He had whispered her own name, calling her back to hope when she was tempted to despair.

Back inside, the house quickly filled with sound and scent. Baskets were discovered on the hearth—simple ones with a few candies, a book for each child, and one small toy. Claire squealed at her bubbles, Lily hugged her sketchpad, Daniel grinned at a pocketknife he had been asking for.

Breakfast was cinnamon rolls warm from the oven, eaten quickly before everyone dressed for church. Emma braided Lily's hair, buttoned Claire's cardigan, and watched Daniel wrestle with his tie until Caleb stepped in to help. She tied her own scarf and caught her reflection in the mirror—tired eyes, yes, but joy too.

At church, voices rose together in hymns that never lost their power: "*Up from the grave He arose...*" Emma's eyes filled as the congregation sang, and when the pastor declared, "Christ is risen!" the sanctuary thundered with the reply, "He is risen indeed!"

After service, they hurried home to finish preparing the meal. Emma basted the ham with maple and orange, while Caleb mashed potatoes. The children arranged dyed eggs in a basket on the table, and Mrs. Ruth from next door arrived with tulips in a jar, as she always did on Easter Sunday. "He is risen, dear," she said, hugging Emma. "And I brought beauty to prove it."

They gathered at the table—family, neighbors, friends who had no relatives nearby. Plates passed, hands reached, laughter rang. Emma carved the ham, grateful for abundance. Between bites of potato salad and

spoonfuls of carrots glazed in honey, they shared what resurrection hope meant to them this year.

“For me,” Emma said softly, “it’s knowing that even in the waiting, God is working. Friday looked final, Saturday looked silent, but Sunday came.” Caleb squeezed her hand under the table.

Daniel said, “It means even when I don’t understand stuff, Jesus is still stronger.” Lily added, “It means new beginnings.” Claire piped up, “It means happy forever!” Everyone chuckled, but Emma thought it might be the truest summary of all.

After the plates were cleared, the children tumbled outside for an egg hunt, shrieking with delight when they found jelly beans in the flowerpots and chocolate tucked in the crook of the maple tree. Emma lingered at the doorway, watching them. Behind her, the kitchen held stacks of dishes and crumbs on the counter, but before her, the yard was full of laughter and sunlight. She chose gratitude.

Later, as twilight softened the edges of the day, the family returned to the backyard cross. Now it was covered in blooms—the children had tucked in daisies, tulips, and branches of flowering shrubs until it was a cascade of color. What had been bare wood in the morning now stood alive with beauty.

They gathered close, and Caleb prayed again. “Lord, thank You for the cross, and thank You for the empty tomb. Help us to live resurrection every day.”

Emma looked at her children’s faces glowing in the last light, at the flowers bright against the wood, and at the sky turning from pink to deep blue. Hope was not abstract—it was here, woven into their laughter, their

prayers, their very breath. She whispered to herself, "He is risen indeed," and the words wrapped her in peace.

That night, after dishes were finally washed and the children tucked into bed, Emma sat with her journal. She wrote, *This was Easter. Not perfect, not fancy, but full of resurrection hope. And that is enough.*

She closed her eyes, tired and content, grateful for a Savior who met her in both the sacred and the ordinary. Tomorrow would be laundry again, meals again, life again—but Easter meant that every "again" could hold hope.

Activities & Faith Traditions for Easter

Backyard Sunrise Scripture Reading

Wake a little earlier on Easter morning, wrap in blankets, and head outside with mugs of cocoa. Read Luke 24:1–12 as the sun rises. Let the children shout, *"He is risen indeed!"* at the end—it sets a joyful tone for the day.

Resurrection Garden

Create a small tabletop "garden" in a shallow dish with soil, moss, and a small flowerpot laid on its side as the tomb. Cover with a stone on Good Friday. On Easter morning, roll it away and plant a few fast-sprouting seeds (like wheatgrass) to symbolize new life.

Flowering the Cross

Place a small wooden or cardboard cross in a pot of soil. Invite each family member to add a flower on Easter morning until the cross is bursting with color—a visual reminder that life has triumphed over death.

Empty Tomb Rolls

Bake crescent rolls wrapped around marshmallows. As they bake, the marshmallow melts away, leaving an "empty tomb." This hands-on activity helps children grasp the truth of the resurrection in a tangible, sweet way.

Acts of Resurrection Kindness

Encourage your family to deliver a plate of food, flowers, or a small gift to a neighbor who may be alone. Share a note with "He is risen indeed" written on it. Resurrection hope is meant to be given away.

Seven Days of “He Is Risen Indeed”

After Easter Sunday, light a candle at dinner each night for a week. Take turns sharing a “resurrection sighting” from your day—something that reminded you of God’s presence and new life.

Scripture Egg Hunt

Instead of just candy, fill a dozen plastic eggs with small scrolls of Bible verses that tell the Easter story. As children find the eggs, read the verses together in order to piece the story of the resurrection.

Easter Recipes

Maple-Dijon Glazed Ham with Rosemary & Orange

Nothing says Easter quite like a ham on the table, but this glaze makes it extra special—sweet maple syrup, tangy mustard, and a hint of citrus.

Ingredients:

- 1 spiral-cut ham (8–10 lbs)
- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- 3 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsp orange juice + zest of 1 orange
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary, chopped

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325°F. Place ham in a roasting pan. In a bowl, whisk maple syrup, Dijon, orange juice, zest, and rosemary. Brush half the glaze over the ham. Cover loosely with foil and bake about 1 ½ hours, basting every 30 minutes. Brush with remaining glaze during the last 20 minutes. Serve warm and fragrant, slices fanning out beautifully.

Herb & Garlic Leg of Lamb with Mint Sauce

If you want a classic centerpiece that feels both rustic and elegant, lamb is perfect for Easter. The fresh mint sauce brightens every bite.

Ingredients:

- 1 leg of lamb (about 5 lbs)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp fresh rosemary, chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh thyme, chopped
- 2 tsp salt, 1 tsp black pepper

Mint Sauce:

- ½ cup fresh mint leaves, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- ¼ cup boiling water

Directions:

Rub lamb with garlic, olive oil, herbs, salt, and pepper. Roast at 350°F for 1 ½ to 2 hours (until 135°F for medium-rare). For sauce: dissolve sugar in vinegar, stir in mint, add boiling water, and let sit 10 minutes. Slice lamb thin and drizzle with sauce.

Spring Pea & Parmesan Risotto

This creamy side feels luxurious but uses simple ingredients. Sweet green peas and nutty Parmesan make it taste like spring in a bowl.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup arborio rice
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth, warmed
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 tbsp butter
- ½ cup white wine (or extra broth)
- 1 cup frozen peas, thawed
- ½ cup grated Parmesan
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

In a pan, sauté onion in butter until soft. Stir in rice, cooking until edges look translucent. Pour in wine and stir until absorbed. Add warm broth, ½ cup at a time, stirring often until rice is creamy and tender (about 20 minutes). Stir in peas, Parmesan, and seasonings. Serve immediately with extra cheese sprinkled on top.

Brown Butter Carrots with Orange Zest

Carrots are humble, but brown butter makes them extraordinary. Bright orange zest lifts the flavor and makes this side dish shine.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs carrots, peeled and cut into sticks
- 3 tbsp butter
- Zest of 1 orange
- 1 tbsp honey
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

Steam or boil carrots until just tender. In a skillet, melt butter and cook until golden and nutty. Stir in honey, orange zest, and salt. Toss carrots in the sauce until glossy and fragrant. Serve warm with a sprinkle of parsley.

Butter Lettuce Salad with Radishes & Buttermilk Dressing

Fresh, crisp, and light—this salad balances the richness of Easter mains.

Ingredients:

- 2 heads butter lettuce, torn
- 4 radishes, thinly sliced
- ½ cucumber, thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp fresh dill, chopped

Dressing:

- ½ cup buttermilk
- ¼ cup mayo
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

Arrange lettuce, radishes, cucumber, and dill on a platter. Whisk dressing ingredients in a small bowl until smooth. Drizzle lightly over salad just before serving.

Hot Cross Buns with Orange Glaze

These sweet, spiced rolls are Easter in bread form. The orange glaze gives them a lovely spring twist.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups flour
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 ¼ tsp yeast
- 1 ½ tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup warm milk
- ¼ cup butter, melted
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup raisins or currants

Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tbsp orange juice

Directions:

Mix flour, sugar, yeast, spices, and salt. Add milk, butter, eggs, and raisins. Knead until smooth; let rise 1 hour. Divide into 12 rolls, place in greased pan, and rise again. Score crosses on top, bake at 375°F for 20 minutes. Cool slightly, drizzle glaze in the cross pattern.

Lemon Elderflower Bundt Cake

A light, fragrant cake that feels celebratory but not fussy. Perfect for ending a feast.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 2 ½ cups flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup milk
- ¼ cup elderflower cordial (like St-Germain syrup)
- Zest & juice of 1 lemon

Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tbsp lemon juice

Directions:

Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs one at a time. Mix in flour, baking powder, and salt alternately with milk. Stir in cordial, lemon zest, and juice. Bake in greased Bundt pan at 350°F for 45–50 minutes. Cool, then drizzle with glaze.

Strawberry–Rhubarb Crisp with Vanilla Custard Sauce

Sweet strawberries and tart rhubarb topped with a buttery oat crumble—this dessert tastes like joy, especially with creamy custard poured over.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups rhubarb, chopped
- 2 cups strawberries, sliced
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 tbsp flour

Topping:

- 1 cup oats
- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup butter, melted

Custard Sauce:

- 2 cups milk
- 3 egg yolks
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions:

Toss fruit with sugar and flour in a baking dish. Mix topping ingredients and sprinkle over fruit. Bake at 375°F for 35 minutes until bubbly. For custard: heat milk until steaming. Whisk yolks and sugar, then slowly whisk in hot milk. Return to pan, cook gently until thickened. Stir in vanilla. Pour warm custard over servings of crisp.

Chapter 5 — Family Fun Outdoors

Scripture (NLT):

"The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known."

— Psalm 19:1–2

Devotional Reflection

There is something refreshing about stepping outside after a long winter. The air feels different in spring—lighter, fragrant, alive. The world that looked so bare only weeks ago is suddenly bursting with color and sound. Green grass pushes through the earth, blossoms unfold on branches, and birds return with their joyful songs. All of creation seems to be whispering the same message: *"God is faithful. Life is renewed."*

Scripture tells us that creation is not silent. Psalm 19 reminds us that the heavens declare the glory of God and that the skies display His craftsmanship. Nature doesn't simply exist—it proclaims. Every sunrise preaches faithfulness. Every flower opening its petals testifies to His design. Every star in the night sky points to His majesty. And Romans 1:20 teaches us that God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—are clearly seen in what He has made. The outdoors is one of God's first classrooms, constantly teaching us about who He is.

Spending time outdoors is not just good for the body—it is food for the soul. The gentle rhythm of creation has a way of calming us. When we feel restless or overwhelmed, stepping into God's creation reminds us that He holds everything together. The seasons change, the rains fall, the sun rises, and the stars return each night—because He ordained it to be so.

For families, enjoying the outdoors can be one of the simplest ways to reconnect with each other and with God. It doesn't take a vacation or special equipment—just willingness. A walk after supper, a Saturday spent planting flowers, a picnic blanket in the backyard with sandwiches and lemonade—these small choices build big memories. Children may not remember the details of the food or the activity, but they will remember the laughter, the warmth of togetherness, and the way their parents paused long enough to notice.

Nature also teaches lessons that books alone cannot. A seed pressed into the soil teaches patience as you wait for it to grow. Watching a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis teaches transformation. Observing the stars teaches wonder, reminding us how small we are and how great God is. Even something as simple as rain shows us how God provides in His timing. When we slow down enough to notice, the outdoors becomes a living parable of God's care.

One of the sweetest things about enjoying the outdoors is how it resets the pace of our hearts. We live in a world of constant screens, noise, and schedules. Stepping outside, even for a few minutes, interrupts the rush. It clears our minds, quiets our souls, and helps us hear the gentle voice of the Lord. How often did Jesus Himself slip away to pray on mountainsides or by the water? He knew that solitude in creation was a place of communion with the Father. If He needed it, how much more do we?

For homemakers, leading our families outdoors can feel like a small thing, but it's a holy invitation. It is telling our children, *"Let's notice what God is doing around us."*

It is showing them that faith isn't confined to church walls or Bible study tables—it is alive in every part of creation. Watching fireflies dance at dusk can open the door to wonder. Sitting beneath a tree's shade can lead to gratitude. Gathering around a picnic table can become a moment of worship.

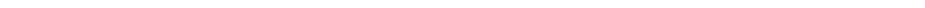
And we don't have to make it complicated. A backyard scavenger hunt, a walk around the block, or catching the first star of the evening can all be moments of worship if our eyes are open. Sometimes the holiest thing we can do is simply go outside and say, *"Lord, I see Your handiwork, and I thank You."*

This spring, accept the invitation that creation offers. Step outside, slow down, and notice. Look up at the sky. Feel the grass beneath your feet. Watch the flowers unfold. Let the outdoors remind you that God is faithful, that He provides, and that He delights in filling our world with beauty. When we enjoy the outdoors, we are not just enjoying nature—we are enjoying Him.

Reflection Questions

- When was the last time you felt God's presence while being outside? What were you doing?
- How can you build simple outdoor traditions for your family this spring?
- What part of nature speaks most to your soul—sunsets, flowers, birdsong, stars? Why do you think that is?

- How can you use time outdoors to teach your children about God's faithfulness and creativity?
- What might change in your own heart if you made time to step outside and notice God's handiwork each day?



Enjoying the Outdoors

The screen door creaked open, and Emma stepped out onto the porch, balancing a basket of sandwiches on one hip and a pitcher of lemonade in her hand. The air smelled like freshly cut grass, and somewhere in the distance a lawnmower hummed. The sky stretched wide and blue above her, with the warmth of late afternoon spilling across the yard.

"Come on, kids!" she called, her voice lifting across the lawn. "Picnic time!"

Within seconds, three pairs of feet pounded across the porch. Lily carried a stack of paper cups, Daniel trailed with a blanket slung over his shoulder, and little Claire clutched a bag of pretzels almost as big as she was. "Where should we set up, Mom?" Daniel asked, eyes scanning the yard.

Emma nodded toward the oak tree at the edge of the property, its branches spreading wide with new leaves. "Under there. Plenty of shade."

The children raced ahead, dropping their bundles on the grass and spreading out the blanket. Emma followed more slowly, savoring the moment. The yard, once dull and lifeless in winter, now bloomed with green.

Dandelions dotted the lawn like drops of sunshine. A robin darted across the grass, tugging a worm from the soil. The whole world seemed to hum with life.

As they settled onto the blanket, Caleb came out from the garage, wiping his hands on a rag. He smiled when he saw them gathered. "Did I hear picnic without me?" Emma grinned. "You snooze, you lose. But I saved you a sandwich."

He dropped down onto the blanket with a contented sigh. "This beats dinner at the table any night."

They passed sandwiches, poured lemonade into cups, and munched on pretzels while the breeze rustled the oak leaves above. The children laughed at silly jokes, crumbs scattering across the blanket. Claire spilled her lemonade, and Daniel quickly offered half of his without complaint. Emma's heart swelled at the sight—it was these small gestures that made the family bonds stronger.

After eating, Lily leaned back on the blanket, staring up through the branches. "The sky looks like it goes on forever," she whispered.

Emma followed her gaze. The blue was so pure it almost hurt to look at, and the clouds drifted lazily like tufts of cotton. "It does go on forever," she said softly. "And the God who made it is even bigger."

Caleb nodded, stretching out beside them. "And yet He still notices us. Every flower, every bird, every person." They lay in the grass for a while, pointing out cloud shapes and laughing at their wild imaginations—a dragon, a bunny, a castle in the sky. Then Daniel jumped up, energy bursting from him. "Race you to the garden!" he shouted.

The girls scrambled after him, and soon all three children were tumbling into the backyard garden plot. Emma and Caleb followed more slowly, hand in hand. The garden beds were just waking from their winter sleep. Tiny green shoots poked through the soil—lettuce, peas, carrots—each one a little miracle of life. "Can I water them, Mom?" Claire begged, reaching for the small watering can.

"Of course," Emma said, filling it from the hose. "Be gentle—these little ones are still growing."

Claire toddled carefully down the rows, tilting the can so water spilled over the shoots. Lily crouched beside her, pointing out the first pea tendrils curling upward. Daniel dug a small hole, eager to plant the marigold seedlings they had picked up at the market.

Emma watched them, her heart full. Gardening wasn't about the perfect harvest—it was about lessons learned in the soil. Patience, care, trust in God's timing. She thought of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians: "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.*" Every seed they planted was a reminder of that truth.

As the evening sun dipped lower, Caleb lit a small fire in the stone pit. The children gathered sticks, excited for what they knew was coming. Soon, marshmallows toasted over the flames, turning golden and gooey.

They sandwiched them between graham crackers with squares of chocolate, sticky fingers and all.

"Best picnic ever," Daniel declared, chocolate smudged across his cheek.

They sat around the fire as the sky darkened, the first stars blinking above. Crickets chirped in the grass, and a soft breeze carried the scent of earth and smoke.

Emma leaned back against Caleb, watching the children chase fireflies with squeals of delight. She felt the stress of the week melt away in the glow of the firelight.

This—this was what mattered. Not the endless lists or the cluttered counters inside. Not the busy schedules or unfinished chores. This moment, under God’s sky with her family around her, was enough.

“Let’s thank Him,” she said quietly, pulling her children close as they settled back onto the blanket. Together they prayed—simple words of gratitude for food, laughter, stars, and springtime. As they whispered *amen*, the night seemed to hush around them, as if all creation joined in.

Later, after the children were tucked into bed, Emma lingered outside a moment longer. The fire had burned down to glowing embers. She looked up at the sky—deep and endless, sprinkled with stars.

“The heavens proclaim the glory of God...” she whispered, the verse from Psalms echoing in her heart. And in that quiet moment, she felt His nearness in a way words couldn’t capture.

Activities & Traditions for Enjoying the Outdoors

Backyard Picnics

You don't need to drive to a park to make memories—spread a blanket in the yard, pack sandwiches and fruit, and let everyone eat under the open sky. Add lemonade in mason jars and you have a spring tradition worth repeating.

Evening Walks Together

Choose one or two evenings a week to walk the neighborhood or nearby trail as a family. Use this time to talk about your day, listen to the sounds of nature, or even pray together as you walk.

Garden Helpers

Even small children can take part in planting or watering. Give each child a small patch or pot that's "theirs" to tend. Watching plants grow teaches patience and sparks conversations about God's design in creation.

Firefly Chasing

On warm evenings, head outside with jars or nets and let the kids chase fireflies. End the night by releasing them together, thanking God for the beauty of even the smallest lights He made.

Backyard Stargazing

Spread blankets in the grass and look at the night sky. Point out constellations, trace the moon's shape, and read Psalm 19 aloud. Bring cocoa or cookies for a cozy finish.

Nature Scavenger Hunt

Make a list of simple items—like a yellow flower, a smooth rock, or a feather—and let the children search for them in the yard or park. It's an easy way to get them noticing details in God's creation.

Sunday Afternoon "Outdoor Hour"

Start a weekly tradition of dedicating one quiet hour outdoors together. No devices, no agenda—just reading, resting, playing, or sitting in the fresh air. Over time, this rhythm becomes something the whole family looks forward to.

Comfort Foods for Enjoying the Outdoors

Grilled Chicken and Veggie Kabobs with Herb Marinade

Kabobs are the definition of easy outdoor food—colorful, flavorful, and fun to eat off a stick. The marinade makes everything juicy and bright.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs chicken breast, cut into cubes
- 1 red bell pepper, cut into chunks
- 1 zucchini, sliced thick
- 1 red onion, cut into wedges
- 1 yellow squash, sliced thick
- ½ cup olive oil
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tsp salt, ½ tsp pepper

Directions:

Whisk olive oil, lemon juice/zest, garlic, parsley, salt, and pepper. Toss chicken and vegetables in marinade, cover, and chill at least 1 hour. Thread onto skewers. Grill over medium heat 10–12 minutes, turning, until chicken is cooked through. Serve hot with extra lemon squeezed over the top.

Pasta Salad with Lemon and Fresh Herbs

This is the kind of pasta salad that tastes light and refreshing instead of heavy. Perfect for picnics—it only gets better as it sits.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb rotini or bowtie pasta
- 1 cucumber, diced
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup feta cheese, crumbled
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- ¼ cup fresh basil, chopped

Dressing:

- ¼ cup olive oil
- Juice and zest of 2 lemons
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp honey
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Cook pasta, drain, and let cool. Toss with vegetables, cheese, and herbs. Whisk dressing and pour over salad, tossing well. Chill until ready to serve.

Homemade Hummus with Pita Chips & Veggies

Creamy, garlicky hummus with crunchy dippers—it feels special but takes only minutes to make.

Ingredients:

- 1 (15 oz) can chickpeas, drained (reserve liquid)
- 2 tbsp tahini
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 cloves garlic
- ½ tsp cumin
- Salt to taste

For serving:

- Pita bread, cut in wedges and toasted until crisp
- Carrot sticks, cucumber slices, bell pepper strips

Directions:

Blend chickpeas, tahini, olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, cumin, and salt in a food processor, adding a splash of chickpea liquid until smooth. Spoon into a bowl, drizzle with olive oil, and serve with pita chips and veggies.

Fruit Salad with Honey-Lime Dressing

This is no ordinary fruit salad. The honey-lime dressing makes the flavors pop, and it looks so pretty in a big bowl.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups strawberries, sliced
- 2 cups pineapple chunks
- 2 cups green grapes, halved
- 2 kiwis, peeled and sliced
- 1 cup blueberries

Dressing:

- 2 tbsp honey
- Juice and zest of 1 lime

Directions:

Whisk honey, lime juice, and zest. Pour over fruit and toss gently. Chill before serving.

Grilled Corn on the Cob with Chili-Lime Butter

This is a picnic classic with a twist—the buttery, slightly spicy topping makes it irresistible.

Ingredients:

- 6 ears of corn, husked
- ¼ cup butter, softened
- Zest and juice of 1 lime
- ½ tsp chili powder
- ½ tsp smoked paprika
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

Grill corn directly on the grates until charred in spots, about 10 minutes, turning often. Mix butter, lime, chili powder, paprika, and salt. Spread over hot corn before serving.

Mason Jar Strawberry Shortcakes

These are as cute as they are delicious—layered in jars so they're portable and easy to serve outdoors.

Ingredients:

- 1 batch homemade or store-bought biscuits, crumbled
- 2 cups strawberries, sliced and tossed with 2 tbsp sugar
- 2 cups whipped cream

Directions:

In small mason jars, layer crumbled biscuit, strawberries with their juices, and whipped cream. Repeat layers, finishing with whipped cream and a strawberry slice on top. Chill until ready to serve.

Homemade Lemonade (Classic + Sparkling Variation)

Nothing says spring outdoors like a glass of fresh lemonade. This recipe makes a perfect base—and the sparkling version feels extra fun.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup fresh lemon juice (about 4–5 lemons)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 5 cups cold water

Directions:

In a pitcher, stir lemon juice and sugar until dissolved. Add water, taste, and adjust sweetness. For sparkling lemonade, swap half the water with chilled sparkling water. Serve over ice with lemon slices.

Picnic Hand Pies (Savory or Sweet)

These little hand pies are great because they're portable and can be made with endless fillings—savory or sweet.

Ingredients:

- 1 package refrigerated pie dough (or homemade)
- Filling of choice:
 - *Savory:* ham and cheese, spinach and feta, chicken and mushroom
 - *Sweet:* apple pie filling, peach preserves, or Nutella with banana slices
- 1 egg, beaten (for brushing)

Directions:

Roll out dough and cut into circles with a large biscuit cutter. Place a spoonful of filling in the center of each, fold over, and crimp edges with a fork. Brush with beaten egg. Bake at 375°F for 18–20 minutes until golden brown. Cool slightly before packing.

Closing Thoughts

There is something about stepping outside that refreshes the soul in ways nothing else can. The air feels lighter, the colors brighter, and suddenly, the noise of life seems quieter. When we slow down to enjoy the outdoors, we're not just taking a walk or eating a picnic—we're stepping into God's creation, His masterpiece, and letting Him remind us of His care.

Family life can get so full that we forget how healing it is just to sit under a tree, watch the clouds, or gather around a simple picnic. These moments don't require grand plans or perfect weather. What matters is that we notice—the way the sky glows at sunset, the smell of the grass after rain, the sound of laughter carried on the breeze. Every detail is an invitation to see God's fingerprints.

When we take our families outside, we're giving them more than fresh air. We're teaching them to pause, to breathe, to recognize that God is in the details. We're shaping memories that will last longer than any to-do list—memories of sticky hands from strawberry shortcake in jars, or fireflies caught in cupped palms, or laughter echoing across the yard at dusk.

So step out often this spring. Take your coffee to the porch. Walk after supper. Pack a picnic, even if it's just peanut butter sandwiches on a blanket in the backyard. Let the outdoors reset your heart and draw your family closer—not only to one another, but to the God who created it all.

Reflection Questions

- When was the last time you slowed down enough to notice the beauty of God's creation?

- How can you make outdoor time a consistent rhythm in your family's life this season?
 - Which outdoor activities bring your family the most joy, and how could you make more space for them?
 - How can you use time outdoors to gently point your children (or yourself) back to God's presence and provision?
 - What simple outdoor moment from your past still lingers sweetly in your memory? How can you recreate that feeling today?
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Chapter 6 — Hospitality in Bloom

Scripture (AMP):

"Contribute to the needs of God's people [sharing in the necessities of the saints]; pursue the practice of hospitality."

— Romans 12:13

Devotional Reflection

Hospitality in spring feels like opening a window after months of keeping it closed. Fresh air comes rushing in, the light is brighter, and suddenly we see our homes in a new way. Just as nature wakes up after winter, our hearts are stirred toward community. There's something about spring that makes us want to share life—whether it's around a table, out on the porch, or across a picnic blanket.

The Bible is clear that hospitality is not just a suggestion, but a calling. Romans 12:13 tells us to *"pursue the practice of hospitality."* The word *pursue* is intentional. Hospitality doesn't just happen on its own. We have to lean into it, choose it, and sometimes stretch ourselves to practice it. Yet when we do, we are reflecting the heart of our God who continually welcomes us.

True hospitality is not about a perfect house or a flawless menu. It is about people. It is about creating a space where someone feels loved, noticed, and safe. You may not remember the exact meal someone served you years ago, but you will remember if you felt welcomed. You'll remember if their table carried warmth, if their presence made you feel valued. That is what we carry away, and that is what we are called to offer.

Spring makes this practice easier in many ways. The weather is gentler. The outdoors provides a natural gathering place. A simple meal can be taken to the porch, a backyard, or a picnic in the park. Lemonade and cookies on the patio can speak as much love as a three-course dinner inside. The beauty of spring is that it reminds us that hospitality doesn't have to be formal. It can be simple, spontaneous, and lighthearted.

Hospitality also extends beyond our walls. It can look like carrying a casserole to a new mom, dropping off a basket of muffins for a neighbor, or delivering soup to a sick friend. It can mean offering a ride, opening your car door, or even sitting on a park bench with someone who needs encouragement. Hospitality is not limited to the home; it's a posture of the heart that says, *"I see you, and I will make room for you."*

One of the greatest barriers to hospitality is the feeling that things must be perfect first. We worry that our house is too messy, our furniture too old, our food too simple. But scripture never calls us to perfection—it calls us to love. Jesus often ate in ordinary homes and shared ordinary food. The meals became holy because of His presence, not because of the presentation. When we open our homes and our tables with humility, we invite His presence to fill the space.

There is also a blessing in hospitality that we often overlook. When we welcome others, our own lives are enriched. The table feels more joyful, the house feels more alive, and our hearts are stretched in love. Our children, too, learn generosity not from lectures but from watching us open the door. They see us make space for others, and they learn to live with hands and hearts open.

Hospitality in spring reminds us that what we have is not really ours—it's God's. Our home, our table, our food, even our time are all gifts from Him. When we share them, we are simply passing on what we've been given. In doing so, we not only bless others, but we also honor God.

So this spring, ask yourself: who could use an invitation? Who might need a seat at your table, a walk in your garden, or a simple cup of coffee on the porch? Don't wait until things are perfect—just begin. Hospitality doesn't have to be grand. It only has to be genuine. And when we practice it, we find that the joy multiplies.

Reflection Questions

- What holds you back from practicing hospitality—fear, perfectionism, busyness? How might you release that this spring?
- Think of a time when someone's hospitality blessed you. What did you carry away from that experience?
- How can you create a simple rhythm of hospitality in your home this season?
- Who in your life might need an invitation right now? How could you welcome them in small, meaningful ways?
- How can you teach your children the heart of hospitality by including them in the process?

Hospitality in Spring

The sun was still lingering in the sky, casting a golden glow across the porch railings, when Emma placed the vase of daffodils on the table. The flowers were simple—picked from the edge of the yard earlier that afternoon—but they brightened the whole space. She stepped back, brushing her hands on her apron, and let herself breathe.

“Everything doesn’t have to be perfect,” she whispered to herself. “Just warm and welcoming.”

That was something she was learning about hospitality—it wasn’t about polished perfection. It was about creating space for people to feel loved. Tonight, she and Caleb had invited their neighbors, the Martins, over for supper. The Martins had three children close in age to their own, and Emma knew the evening would be lively.

The kitchen already smelled of roasted chicken and herbs. A berry cobbler cooled on the counter, its sweet aroma filling the house. Emma pulled a basket of bread from the oven, steam rising as she set it beside the butter dish.

“Mom, are they coming soon?” Lily asked, setting forks on the table.

“Any minute,” Emma said. She glanced around the dining room. The table wasn’t fancy—just their everyday dishes, a few mismatched glasses—but it looked inviting with the daffodils at the center and sunlight streaming through the windows.

The sound of a car door closing out front made the children rush to the porch. Emma followed, smiling as she saw the Martins walking up the steps, arms full of salad bowls and a pitcher of lemonade.

“Come on in!” Emma called, holding the door open. “We’re so glad you could come.”

The house quickly filled with cheerful noise. The children disappeared into the backyard, their laughter carrying through the open windows. The adults gathered in the kitchen, setting dishes on the counter and swapping stories as Emma finished the gravy. “Your home smells amazing,” Mrs. Martin said, breathing deeply. “You didn’t have to go to all this trouble.”

Emma laughed softly. “It’s really nothing fancy—just roasted chicken and a cobbler. But it’s the company that makes it special.”

They carried the food to the table, and soon everyone was gathered—plates filled, glasses of lemonade clinking. Caleb bowed his head and led a short prayer of thanks: gratitude for food, for friendship, for the gift of sharing life together.

As they ate, conversation flowed easily. The children popped back inside now and then, cheeks flushed from playing tag, grabbing rolls before darting out again. The adults talked about everything from gardening tips to favorite books to the challenges of raising teenagers.

Emma watched the faces around the table—the way Mrs. Martin laughed with her head thrown back, the way Mr. Martin leaned in to listen, the way Caleb’s eyes sparkled as he told a story. This, she thought, is what

makes a house a home. Not spotless rooms or perfect meals, but the sound of voices mingling together, the joy of sharing.

After supper, they moved to the porch, bringing plates of cobbler topped with melting scoops of vanilla ice cream. The children caught fireflies in jars while the adults sipped coffee and let the evening settle in. The sky turned soft shades of pink and lavender, and the air was filled with the hum of crickets.

“Do you remember when neighbors used to gather like this all the time?” Mrs. Martin asked, smiling wistfully. “My grandmother always had people in her kitchen—there was never a week that went by without someone stopping in.”

Emma nodded. “I think we’ve lost some of that, haven’t we? Everyone is so busy, or worried about things being perfect. But maybe it’s simpler than we make it.” Caleb leaned back in his chair. “Scripture calls it a practice for a reason. Hospitality doesn’t happen by accident—it’s something you choose to do, over and over.”

The Martins stayed late, long after the children had grown tired and curled up on the porch swing with blankets. As they finally said their goodbyes and walked back across the yard, Emma felt a quiet joy settle deep in her chest.

Inside, she stacked plates in the sink and blew out the candles on the table. The house was messy now—crumbs on the floor, smudges on the glasses, chairs pushed back—but it was a holy kind of mess. It was the evidence of lives shared.

Later, as she wrote in her journal, Emma reflected on the evening:

"Lord, thank You for the gift of hospitality. Thank You for neighbors who became friends around our table tonight. Remind me that what I offer doesn't need to be grand—just genuine. Help me to keep saying yes, to keep opening the door, to keep making space. Because when we welcome others, we are really welcoming You."

She closed her journal with a smile. Tonight had been simple, imperfect, and beautiful. And she knew it was exactly what hospitality was meant to be.

Activities & Traditions for Hospitality in Spring

Porch Coffee Invitations

Hospitality doesn't always require a full meal. Brew a pot of coffee or tea, set out a plate of cookies, and invite a neighbor to sit on the porch. The casual setting takes away pressure and still creates space for meaningful connection.

Potluck Picnics

Choose a sunny Saturday and invite a few families to the park or your backyard. Ask everyone to bring one dish to share. The simplicity of a potluck eases the workload, and children love running around while adults relax and talk.

Bake-and-Share Saturdays

Set aside one Saturday a month for baking something as a family—muffins, bread, or cookies—and delivering them to friends or neighbors. Let the kids decorate simple notes or tags to go along. Over time, this becomes a sweet family tradition of giving.

Open-Table Night

Pick one evening every couple of weeks to keep supper casual and welcoming. Make something simple like soup, chili, or sandwiches, and let it be known that friends are always welcome to drop in. It doesn't need to be planned—just open.

Spring Bouquet Blessings

Let children pick wildflowers or clip blooms from the yard and deliver them in mason jars to a neighbor, widow, or someone who needs encouragement. It's a small gesture of hospitality that carries big joy.

Hospitality Basket Tradition

Keep a “ready-to-give” basket on hand with extras like tea bags, a small candle, or homemade bread. When someone in your circle needs encouragement, grab the basket, add a personal note, and deliver it together as a family.

Easter or Spring Tea

Host a once-a-season gathering—a tea or brunch where you invite a small group of friends. Serve simple spring foods like fruit, scones, and finger sandwiches. It doesn’t need to be elaborate; the tradition itself becomes something everyone looks forward to.

Comfort Foods for Hospitality in Spring

Savory Spring Herb Quick Bread

This bread is fragrant, soft, and speckled with fresh herbs—perfect to serve warm with butter or alongside soup and salads. Best of all, it's a quick bread, so no yeast or rising time required.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 2 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh chives, chopped
- 1 cup buttermilk (or milk with 1 tsp vinegar)
- 1 large egg
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ½ cup shredded Parmesan cheese

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a standard loaf pan.
 2. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, garlic powder, and herbs. Stir in Parmesan.
 3. In another bowl, whisk buttermilk, egg, and olive oil.
 4. Gently stir wet ingredients into dry until just combined (do not overmix).
 5. Pour batter into loaf pan and smooth the top.
 6. Bake 40–45 minutes, until golden and a toothpick comes out clean.
 7. Cool slightly before slicing. Serve warm with butter or herb-infused olive oil.
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Spring Quiche with Asparagus and Gruyère

Quiche feels fancy but is really just eggs, cream, and whatever fresh things you have on hand. This one highlights asparagus and nutty Gruyère cheese for a very “springtime” flavor.

Ingredients:

- 1 pie crust (store-bought or homemade)
- 1 tbsp butter
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and cut into pieces
- 5 eggs
- 1 cup cream or half-and-half
- 1 cup Gruyère cheese, shredded
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Pre-bake the pie crust at 375°F for 10 minutes. Sauté onion and asparagus in butter until just tender. Whisk eggs, cream, salt, and pepper. Spread vegetables in the crust, sprinkle with cheese, then pour egg mixture over. Bake at 375°F for 30–35 minutes until golden and set. Let cool slightly before serving.

Deviled Eggs with a Twist (Herbs & Smoked Paprika)

Deviled eggs are the kind of food that always disappears first at gatherings. Fresh herbs and smoked paprika make them a little more special than the classic.

Ingredients:

- 6 large eggs, hard-boiled and peeled
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp fresh dill or chives, chopped
- Salt & pepper
- Smoked paprika for garnish

Directions:

Slice eggs in half, scoop yolks into a bowl. Mash with mayonnaise, mustard, lemon juice, herbs, salt, and pepper until smooth. Pipe or spoon filling back into egg whites. Sprinkle with smoked paprika before serving.

Almond Cake with Vanilla Glaze

A simple but impressive cake—moist with ground almonds, light vanilla notes, and a sweet glaze. It's the kind of dessert you can slice thin and serve with coffee, perfect for welcoming guests.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 tsp almond extract
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup almond flour (finely ground almonds)
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup milk

Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tbsp milk or cream
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease and flour a bundt or loaf pan.
2. Cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy.
3. Beat in eggs one at a time, then stir in almond extract.
4. In a separate bowl, whisk flour, almond flour, baking powder, and salt.
5. Add dry ingredients to the wet mixture alternately with milk, mixing just until combined.
6. Pour batter into prepared pan and bake 45–55 minutes, until golden and a toothpick comes out clean.
7. Cool, then drizzle with glaze made from powdered sugar, milk, and vanilla. Slice and serve with coffee or tea.

Cucumber Tea Sandwiches

Sometimes simple is best. These tiny sandwiches are refreshing and light, perfect for spring teas or porch visits.

Ingredients:

- 1 loaf soft white or wheat sandwich bread
- 1 cucumber, thinly sliced
- 4 oz cream cheese, softened
- 2 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Mix cream cheese with dill, salt, and pepper. Spread on bread slices. Layer with cucumber slices, then top with another slice of bread. Trim off crusts and cut into triangles or squares. Serve chilled on a little platter.

Dill & Chive Potato Salad

A fresh twist on the classic — lighter, herby, and perfect for spring picnics.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs baby potatoes, halved
- ½ cup mayonnaise (or Greek yogurt for lighter)
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- 2 tbsp fresh chives, chopped
- 2 tbsp lemon juice (or vinegar)
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Boil potatoes until just tender; drain and cool slightly.
2. Whisk mayo, mustard, dill, chives, and lemon juice.
3. Toss potatoes with dressing. Chill before serving.

Mini Pavlovas with Fresh Berries

These little meringue nests look elegant but are easier than you'd think. Crispy on the outside, soft in the middle, topped with whipped cream and berries—they're a beautiful way to end a meal.

Ingredients:

- 4 egg whites
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp cornstarch
- 1 tsp white vinegar
- 1 cup whipped cream
- Fresh berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries)

Directions:

Beat egg whites until stiff peaks form. Slowly add sugar, then vanilla, cornstarch, and vinegar. Spoon into small circles on a parchment-lined baking sheet, making a little dip in the center of each. Bake at 250°F for 60 minutes, then turn off oven and let cool inside. Top with whipped cream and berries before serving.

Rosemary Lemonade Punch

Fresh lemonade gets an upgrade with rosemary and sparkling water. It's fragrant, refreshing, and makes any gathering feel special.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 1 cup fresh lemon juice (about 4–5 lemons)
- 4 cups cold water
- 2 cups sparkling water

Directions:

Heat sugar, 1 cup water, and rosemary until sugar dissolves. Let cool, remove rosemary. Stir lemon juice, cold water, and rosemary syrup in a pitcher. Just before serving, add sparkling water. Serve over ice with lemon slices.

Closing Thoughts

Hospitality doesn't have to be complicated. It doesn't require perfect décor, a spotless home, or a five-course meal. At its heart, hospitality is simply making space—for conversation, for connection, for God's love to flow through ordinary moments.

Spring reminds us how refreshing openness can be. Just as the world is stretching wide again after winter, our homes and hearts can open wide too. A plate of bread shared with a neighbor, a simple quiche on the table for friends, or a pitcher of rosemary lemonade passed around the porch—these gestures preach love louder than any words.

True hospitality is less about what we serve and more about how we serve it. It's about being present, listening well, and letting others feel they belong. When we open our doors, we are really opening our hearts. And when we share what God has placed in our hands, no matter how small, we find that He multiplies the joy. So this spring, don't wait for the perfect moment.

Extend the invitation. Carry a plate across the street. Brew the coffee. Set the table, however simple. And remember: hospitality isn't about impressing—it's about blessing.

Reflection Questions

- What simple, doable way can you show hospitality this week—porch coffee, sharing baked goods, or inviting a friend for supper?
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- Do you ever let fear of imperfection keep you from opening your home? How can you shift your perspective to focus on love instead of performance?
- How has someone else's hospitality impacted you in the past? What did it teach you?
- Who in your circle might be blessed by a small act of hospitality right now?
- How can you involve your children (or family) in practicing hospitality so it becomes part of your home's culture?

Chapter 7 — Simple Spring Cleaning: Freshening Up the Home Without Overwhelm

Scripture (NLT):

"Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me." — Psalm 51:10

Devotional Reflection

Spring always carries with it a sense of renewal. The sunlight feels a little brighter, the days stretch a little longer, and suddenly we notice things we hadn't seen all winter: streaks on the windows, dust on the shelves, closets that have quietly collected more than they should. Something about spring makes us want to clear, freshen, and make things new.

But let's be honest: *spring cleaning* can feel overwhelming. The very phrase may stir up guilt or exhaustion—like it means pulling the whole house apart, working until you drop, and never quite feeling finished. If you've ever started a spring cleaning project with good intentions but ended up discouraged, you're not alone.

What if this year we looked at spring cleaning differently? What if, instead of striving for perfection, we saw it as an invitation to peace?

Psalm 51:10 gives us a picture of what true renewal looks like: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me."* Cleaning our homes can mirror the deeper spiritual work God longs to do in us. Just as we open windows to let in fresh air, He invites us to

open our hearts so His Spirit can breathe new life inside. Just as we clear out clutter, He gently helps us release the attitudes, habits, and worries that weigh us down.

And the truth is, both kinds of cleaning—physical and spiritual—are best done in small, steady steps. We don't have to tackle every room at once. We don't have to make our homes spotless to feel God's peace.

Sometimes all it takes is wiping down one counter, sweeping one floor, or putting away one pile of clutter. Those small victories bring breathing room, and that breathing room invites joy.

God doesn't ask us for perfection; He asks us to walk with Him. Even in homemaking. Folding laundry can become an act of gratitude when we pray for the ones who will wear those clothes. Washing dishes can turn into worship when we thank Him for the food those plates held. Dusting can remind us that He wipes clean every corner of our hearts.

And here's the secret: a freshened home often leads to a freshened spirit. When the sunlight streams through clean windows, when the breeze carries through an aired-out room, when a cluttered shelf is finally cleared—it does something inside us. It reminds us that God is a God of renewal, and that He is always willing to bring order to the chaos and peace to the overwhelm.

So don't think of spring cleaning as a mountain to conquer. Think of it as a gentle walk, one step at a time. Open a window. Change one bedsheet. Donate a handful of things you no longer need. Light a candle and pray Psalm 51:10 as you tidy the kitchen. These small practices not only refresh your home but also center your heart on the God who makes all things new.

This spring, let's not aim for perfect. Let's aim for peace. Let's allow our homes to be places of calm, gratitude, and welcome. And let's remember that just as God renews the earth with each season, He is also faithfully renewing us.

Reflection Questions

1. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase *spring cleaning*—peace or overwhelm? Why?
 2. How might small, simple steps help you refresh your home without discouragement?
 3. In what ways does Psalm 51:10 connect the idea of cleaning your home to the renewal of your heart?
 4. What's one area of your home you could freshen this week as a reminder of God's renewal in your life?
 5. How can you turn ordinary chores (dishes, laundry, sweeping) into opportunities for prayer or gratitude?
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The Windows Open

The first truly warm Saturday of April arrived with a golden kind of light, the kind that made the curtains glow before Emma had even poured her tea. She set her mug on the windowsill and noticed how dusty the glass had become. Somehow, she hadn't seen it all winter, but now, with the sun shining through, the streaks were obvious. She sighed and laughed at herself in the same breath.

"I suppose you're tattling on me," she told the window. Caleb wandered in, rubbing his eyes, and followed her gaze. "Spring sunlight is good at telling the truth," he said. He kissed the top of her head and reached for the kettle. "So... do you want to tackle it all today, or shall we just run away and pretend?"

Emma laughed. "Both sound tempting."

She knew what he meant. Every year, as soon as spring came, she felt that tug—the pressure to deep-clean every corner, to overhaul closets, to make the house sparkle like a magazine spread. And every year, she ended up starting too big, losing momentum, and feeling guilty when she couldn't keep up.

This year, she promised herself, would be different. "Let's just open the windows," she said, surprising herself. "Let's not think about everything all at once. Just... let the fresh air in and see where it takes us." Caleb raised an eyebrow but smiled. "That sounds like the most manageable spring cleaning plan you've ever had."

By mid-morning, the children were awake and buzzing. Lily found the box of sidewalk chalk and dragged it to the driveway. Daniel, now old enough to take pride in

helping, offered to vacuum “the real way, not the halfway way.” Claire danced around with a sock on her hand, announcing she was “the Dust Queen.”

Emma laughed as she gathered them in the living room. “Alright, team. Here’s the plan. We’re not doing one of those scary spring cleanings that makes everyone tired and grumpy. We’re going to do this the simple way. Open windows, one space at a time, and then we’ll celebrate.”

“What’s the celebration?” Daniel asked suspiciously. “Lunch with dessert,” Emma said. “And if we really do well, maybe we’ll bake bread together.”

That sealed the deal. Even Daniel perked up at the thought of warm bread.

They started with the living room. Emma pulled the heavy curtains back, and the children squealed as a breeze rushed in. The lace fluttered, sunlight danced across the floor, and suddenly everything felt lighter. “See?” Emma said. “It already looks cleaner and we haven’t even started.”

Claire rubbed her sock-hand along the baseboards, giggling at the dust bunnies she collected. Lily stacked books neatly on the shelf, occasionally pausing to read a line or two. Daniel vacuumed with exaggerated seriousness, pushing the machine in perfect lines like Caleb had taught him.

Emma tackled the coffee table. She gathered stray pencils, wiped the wood with lemon oil, and lit a candle. It wasn’t perfect, but it smelled fresh and looked peaceful.

When the timer on her phone dinged after thirty minutes, she called, "Alright, stop!"

"But we're not finished!" Daniel protested.
"Exactly," Emma said gently. "We're not aiming for finished. We're aiming for fresh."

They moved to the kitchen next. Caleb chopped vegetables for soup while Emma cleared a shelf in the pantry. She tossed stale crackers, lined up jars, and rediscovered a forgotten bag of dried apricots. "We should do this more often," she murmured.

"Not the whole pantry," Caleb teased. "Just one shelf at a time."

Emma smiled. He was right. Already she felt lighter, less pressured. She made a mental note: *Small steps are still progress.*

Meanwhile, Claire helped stir onions in butter, the smell drifting through the house like a promise of comfort. Lily hummed a hymn while she wiped crumbs from the counter. Daniel stacked cans neatly, proud of his work. By the time the soup simmered, the kitchen looked brighter, fresher—not spotless, but refreshed. Emma breathed deep. "See? This feels like spring."

After lunch, Emma suggested something radical: a nap. "Not for you," she told the children, laughing at their groans. "For me. You all can read or play quietly, but I'm taking half an hour."

To her surprise, they agreed. Lily curled up with a book, Daniel sketched in his notebook, and Claire set up a stuffed-animal tea party. Emma lay down with her

window cracked open, the breeze lifting the curtain like a blessing. She whispered Psalm 51:10 before drifting off: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me."*

When she woke, the house was still calm. And somehow, that felt like spring cleaning, too—letting her spirit breathe.

In the afternoon, they tackled the bedrooms. Each child carried a donation basket, and Emma encouraged them to choose just a few toys or clothes to give away. Claire clutched a doll with torn hair, hesitated, and then placed it gently in the basket. "Someone else might like her," she said softly.

Lily offered up a stack of books she had outgrown, though she kept one for memory's sake. Daniel surprised them all by parting with a board game he said "was better for littler kids."

Emma's heart swelled. "See how much lighter your shelves look? And now someone else will be blessed." By evening, they had opened every window, freshened three rooms, cleared two donation baskets, and laughed more than they had worked. Emma sat on the porch with Caleb as the children ran in the yard.

"You know what?" she said. "This is the first spring cleaning day I've ever actually enjoyed."

"That's because it wasn't about finishing everything,"

Caleb said. "It was about fresh air and small steps."

Emma leaned against him. "And joy. I think that's the real secret."

Later, after the children were asleep, Emma wrote in her journal:

Today we didn't scrub every corner or reorganize the whole house. We opened the windows, breathed fresh air, and did what we could together. It wasn't perfect, but it was peaceful. And maybe that's the point. A freshened home, not a flawless one. A joyful spirit, not an exhausted one. Lord, create in me a clean heart, and help me keep this perspective.

She closed her journal, blew out the candle, and smiled at the scent of lemon still lingering in the kitchen. Spring had come—not just outside, but inside, too.

Activities & Traditions

10-Minute Refresh

Instead of tackling an entire room, set a timer for 10 minutes. Everyone chooses one small area to work on—straightening books, folding blankets, wiping a counter. The time limit makes it doable, and you'll be surprised how much can be accomplished in such a short burst.

Open-the-Windows Day

Pick a day each spring to throw open every window in the house. Let fresh air sweep through, play uplifting music, and maybe even serve lemonade or iced tea while you work. It becomes less about "cleaning" and more about welcoming a new season.

Donation Basket by the Door

Keep a basket near the entryway for items you no longer need. As the basket fills, it's a visual reminder of how good it feels to share with others. When full, take it together as a family to donate.

Homemade Citrus Cleaner

Involve the kids in making a natural, fresh-smelling cleaner. Fill a mason jar with white vinegar and citrus peels (lemon, orange, grapefruit), then let it sit for two weeks. Strain, dilute with water, and pour into a spray bottle. The children love helping, and the scent is pure sunshine.

Before & After Photos

Pick one space—like a cluttered shelf or messy closet—and snap a "before" photo. After cleaning, take the "after." Looking back at the transformation builds motivation and helps everyone celebrate progress instead of perfection.

Family Declutter Challenge

Turn it into a game: who can find five items in their room to donate or toss? Make it fun with music, a prize, or even just a celebratory snack afterward.

Fresh Air Breaks

Pause mid-cleaning to step outside, stretch, and breathe deeply. Even five minutes outdoors can reset attitudes and help everyone return to the task with more joy.

Comfort Foods for a Fresh Start

Lemon-Garlic Roasted Chicken with Fresh Herbs

There's nothing like the smell of roast chicken filling the house, especially when it's seasoned simply with lemon, garlic, and herbs. It feels bright and fresh without being complicated.

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken (4–5 lbs)
- 2 lemons, halved
- 6 garlic cloves, smashed
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 2 tbsp fresh thyme or rosemary, chopped

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400°F. Pat chicken dry and place in a roasting pan. Rub with olive oil, salt, pepper, and herbs. Stuff the cavity with lemon halves and garlic. Roast 1–1 ¼ hours, until juices run clear. Let rest 10 minutes before carving. The lemon-garlic scent will make your whole kitchen smell clean and new.

Spring Vegetable Soup with Pesto Swirl

This soup is like a bowl of sunshine—light broth, tender spring vegetables, and a spoonful of pesto stirred in for brightness.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 1 zucchini, diced
- 1 cup asparagus, chopped
- 6 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 cup peas (fresh or frozen)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ cup prepared pesto

Directions:

Sauté onion and carrots in olive oil until softened. Add zucchini, asparagus, and broth. Simmer 15 minutes, then stir in peas and seasonings. Ladle into bowls and swirl a spoonful of pesto into each serving. Fresh, light, and so satisfying.

Asparagus & Cream Cheese Tart

Ingredients:

- 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed
- 4 oz cream cheese, softened
- ¼ cup sour cream (or Greek yogurt)
- ½ cup shredded mozzarella
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Roll out puff pastry on parchment paper.
 2. Mix cream cheese, sour cream, and mozzarella. Spread over pastry, leaving a border.
 3. Toss asparagus in olive oil, salt, and pepper. Lay across the top.
 4. Bake 20–25 minutes until golden. Cut into squares and serve warm.
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Citrus & Berry Salad with Honey-Mint Syrup

This salad is pure refreshment—juicy oranges and bright berries drizzled with a syrup that tastes like spring.

Ingredients:

- 2 oranges, peeled and sliced
- 1 cup strawberries, halved
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 cup raspberries
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp fresh mint, chopped

Directions:

Arrange fruit in a shallow bowl. In a small saucepan, warm honey with lemon juice until thin. Stir in mint. Drizzle over fruit just before serving. It's beautiful enough for company but simple enough for a Tuesday.

Cucumber & Dill Potato Salad

This potato salad is lighter than the mayo-heavy versions but still creamy and satisfying. Fresh dill and cucumber give it a crisp, clean taste.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs baby potatoes, halved
- ½ cucumber, thinly sliced
- ½ cup Greek yogurt
- 2 tbsp mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Boil potatoes until tender; drain and cool slightly. Toss with cucumber. Mix yogurt, mayo, lemon juice, dill, salt, and pepper. Stir gently into potatoes. Serve chilled or room temperature.

Herbed Flatbread with Olive Oil

Quick to make and always welcome, these flatbreads are soft, chewy, and perfect alongside soup or salad.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tsp baking powder
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup warm water
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp dried Italian herbs

Directions:

Mix flour, salt, baking powder, water, and 1 tbsp olive oil into a soft dough. Divide into 6 balls, roll thin, and cook in a hot skillet for 2 minutes per side until puffed and golden. Brush with remaining olive oil and sprinkle herbs. Simple and irresistible.

Zucchini Noodles with Lemon-Parmesan Sauce

Light, fresh, and cozy—zucchini noodles tossed with a lemony cream sauce taste indulgent but won't weigh you down.

Ingredients:

- 4 medium zucchini, spiralized
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- ½ cup cream
- ½ cup grated Parmesan
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

In a skillet, melt butter and sauté garlic until fragrant. Add lemon zest, juice, and cream. Simmer 3 minutes, then stir in Parmesan until smooth. Toss zucchini noodles quickly in the sauce just to warm. Serve immediately with extra Parmesan.

Vanilla Panna Cotta with Strawberry Compote

This dessert feels like a treat but is surprisingly simple to make. Creamy vanilla panna cotta topped with fresh strawberries tastes light and elegant after a day of cleaning.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups heavy cream
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 packet gelatin (2 ½ tsp)
- 3 tbsp water

Strawberry Compote:

- 2 cups strawberries, sliced
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp lemon juice

Directions:

In a saucepan, heat cream, sugar, and vanilla until hot but not boiling. In a small bowl, soften gelatin in water, then stir into cream until dissolved. Pour into 4 small glasses and refrigerate 4 hours. For compote, simmer strawberries, sugar, and lemon juice until saucy. Spoon over panna cotta before serving.

Closing Thoughts

Spring cleaning doesn't have to be overwhelming. It doesn't have to mean scrubbing until you're worn out or aiming for spotless perfection. Instead, it can become a gentle rhythm of renewal—a way to let fresh air into your home and into your spirit.

God never asked us to keep perfect houses, but He does invite us into peace. When we take even small steps to freshen our spaces, it reminds us that He is a God who makes all things new. A clean countertop, an open window, a basket of donations by the door—these little acts bring both order and joy.

So this season, don't let spring cleaning be about guilt or pressure. Let it be about gratitude. Let it be about creating a welcoming space for your family and for God's presence. Remember Psalm 51:10: "*Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.*" As you clear away clutter from your home, invite Him to do the same in your heart.

Fresh homes and fresh hearts don't happen in a single day. They're made little by little, with love and faithfulness. And that is more than enough.

Reflection Questions

1. What small space in your home could you refresh this week without feeling overwhelmed?
2. How does physical clutter affect your heart and mind?
3. What's one cleaning habit you could turn into a prayer practice?

4. How does Psalm 51:10 inspire you as you think about spring renewal?
 5. How can you invite your family to join in, making spring cleaning joyful instead of stressful?
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Chapter 8 — Caring for the Soul in the Busy Season

Scripture (NLT):

"Be still, and know that I am God." — Psalm 46:10

Devotional Reflection

Spring has a way of filling our calendars before we realize it. School programs, church events, sports, gardening, household projects, family gatherings—it all seems to arrive at once. The days lengthen, yet somehow our hours feel shorter. We push harder, sleep less, and before long our souls are weary even while our bodies keep going.

It is in these very seasons of busyness that God whispers the words we most need: *"Be still, and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10).

Stillness doesn't come naturally in a culture that prizes productivity. We measure our days by what we've checked off the list. But God measures differently. He looks not at the number of tasks completed but at whether our hearts are resting in Him. Busyness itself is not the enemy—Jesus was busy healing, teaching, traveling, and ministering—but He never neglected time alone with His Father. He knew that true strength flows from stillness in God's presence.

When our souls are neglected, the symptoms show. We become irritable, easily discouraged, restless, and drained. But when we make even the smallest spaces for soul care—through prayer, journaling, silence, or worship—we find a peace that no schedule can steal.

Think of journaling. There's something powerful about putting pen to paper, naming what's stirring inside us, and laying it before the Lord. It slows the racing thoughts and helps us see His hand at work. Or prayer—a whispered word while folding laundry or stirring soup can be just as holy as a long prayer in quiet. Soul care doesn't require elaborate retreats. It requires a posture of turning toward God in the middle of our everyday.

This spring, when busyness tempts you to push harder, remember that your soul is not sustained by your effort but by His presence. Just as a garden cannot flourish without water, your spirit cannot thrive without rest in Him. Making time for soul care is not selfish—it is stewardship. It allows you to love your family more fully, to serve with joy instead of resentment, and to walk through busy seasons with a calm heart anchored in Christ.

So when you feel stretched thin, let that be your reminder to pause. Light a candle, whisper a prayer, write a verse in your journal, or simply sit in silence for two minutes and breathe deeply. These simple practices are not wasted time—they are lifelines of grace. Caring for your soul in a busy season isn't about escaping life; it's about inviting God into it. He is your rest. He is your renewal. And He delights when you come to Him, even in the smallest pauses of your day.

Reflection Questions

1. In this season, what keeps you the busiest? How does that busyness affect your soul?
 2. When was the last time you allowed yourself to be still before God?
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3. Which simple practices (journaling, prayer, gratitude, silence) bring you the most peace?
4. What keeps you from making time for soul care, and how might you release that burden to God?
5. How would your home and family benefit if you consistently paused for soul care even in busy seasons?

Journals in the Garden

The calendar on the fridge looked like a patchwork quilt. Boxes crammed with notes—piano recital, dentist appointment, church picnic, Caleb’s work dinner, soccer practice, grocery run. Emma traced her finger over the weeks ahead and sighed. It was all good, every bit of it. But there was no white space.

She poured her morning tea and carried it to the porch, notebook in hand. The children were still sleeping, and she had ten golden minutes before the day began. She opened her journal and wrote at the top of the page: *Busy season.* Underneath, she scribbled, *Lord, how do I care for my soul when everything feels full?*

The maple tree in the yard was greening quickly now, each day new leaves unfurling. A bird darted across the yard with twigs in its beak, already preparing for the next thing. Emma smiled—maybe she wasn’t the only one with a full calendar. Yet even the birds seemed unhurried.

“Be still,” she whispered, thinking of Psalm 46:10. She breathed slowly until her shoulders dropped. Then she jotted a single sentence: *Stillness is not found in the absence of activity, but in the presence of God.*

The stillness ended as soon as the thundering of feet began. Daniel burst through the hallway, trumpet in hand, practicing notes far too early. Claire trailed behind, dragging her blanket, asking if it was Saturday pancakes. Lily rummaged through the laundry basket for her soccer socks.

By nine o’clock, the house was already humming with chaos. Emma loaded the dishwasher, answered questions, signed a field trip form, and reminded Claire

three times to brush her teeth. Her journal still sat open on the porch table, waiting.

Around lunchtime, her neighbor Mrs. Ruth stopped by with a bag of radishes from her garden. "You look tired," she said, eyes soft but knowing.

Emma smiled wearily. "It's just a busy season. I keep thinking if I manage it better, I'll feel better."

Mrs. Ruth chuckled. "Busy seasons never manage themselves. But you can anchor yourself in the middle of them. Find your pause, honey. Even a small one." Emma turned the words over all afternoon: *find your pause*.

That evening, after Caleb tucked the children into bed, Emma found herself back on the porch with her notebook. She flipped to a fresh page and wrote three columns: **Burdens. Blessings. Prayers.** Under burdens, she listed: endless laundry, full calendar, feeling tired. Under blessings: healthy kids, spring sunshine, neighbors who care. Under prayers: strength, peace, joy.

She closed her eyes and let the words settle. For the first time that day, her breathing slowed.

The next morning began as usual—scrambled eggs on plates, mismatched socks, the clatter of lunchboxes packed in a rush. But Emma chose differently. Instead of scrolling her phone while waiting for the toast, she stood by the window and whispered Psalm 46:10: "*Be still, and know that I am God.*"

It wasn't long. Only a breath. But it was enough.

Later, when Daniel argued with Lily about the last clean soccer jersey, Emma found she didn't snap as quickly. When Claire spilled milk across the counter, she laughed instead of sighing. The house hadn't changed—her heart had.

At lunchtime, she surprised the children with a new idea. "We're going to try something different today. Ten minutes of quiet."

"Quiet?" Daniel frowned. "Like... no talking?"

"No talking, no noise. You can draw, read, write, or just rest. But it's a time for our souls to breathe."

Predictable groans rose, but Emma softened her voice. "It's not just for me—it's for all of us. Our souls need quiet."

She set the stove timer and lit a candle in the middle of the table. At first, the children fidgeted. Daniel tapped his pencil, Lily turned a page too loudly, Claire hummed to herself. But slowly, the room calmed. Claire eventually rested her chin on her folded arms, Lily scribbled a flower in the margin of her notebook, and Daniel drew a careful sketch of a cross.

Emma opened her Bible to Matthew 11:28: "*Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*" She underlined *give you rest*. Then she whispered, "I'm coming, Lord."

When the timer dinged, the world hadn't changed—but she had. She felt lighter, like someone had taken a stone from her hands.

That Saturday, they took a family trip to the community garden. Daniel helped Caleb hammer supports for the pea vines. Lily watered rows of lettuce, careful not to drown the seedlings. Claire carried a basket of tools that clanked as she walked.

Emma brought her journal. She sat on a low bench while the kids worked nearby and began to write. The words spilled fast:

I keep trying to live out of an empty cup. But soul care is not selfish—it's survival. Lord, help me see stillness not as wasted time but as holy time. Help me model for my children what it means to pause with You.

Claire wandered over and peeked at the page. "Are you writing to God?" she asked.

Emma smiled. "Yes. It helps me remember He's close." "Can I write too?"

Emma tore a sheet from the back and handed her a pen. Claire scribbled a wobbly heart and the word *happy*. She folded it carefully and slipped it into the dirt by the pea vines. "That's my prayer," she said matter-of-factly.

Emma's throat tightened. Soul care, she realized, wasn't just for her. It could ripple outward, teaching her children how to bring their hearts to God in simple, childlike ways.

The days remained full. Errands piled high, school projects loomed, and the laundry seemed to multiply faster than she could fold it. Yet Emma began to notice something: when she took even ten minutes to pause, the whole atmosphere of the home shifted.

She was gentler with her words. She laughed more easily. Meals felt less like chores and more like blessings.

One evening after supper, they gathered around the table for their “rose, thorn, and seed” tradition. Daniel’s rose was winning his soccer game; Lily’s thorn was too much homework; Claire’s seed was “making more happy prayers in the garden.” Emma smiled. Her seed was simple: to keep making space for stillness, even in busy days.

Caleb squeezed her hand under the table. “That’s a good seed,” he whispered.

Sunday afternoon came, and for once they declared an “at-home sabbath.” No chores, no screens, no rushing. Just blankets on the grass, books scattered, and lemonade sweating in mason jars.

Emma stretched out, journal beside her, and listened to the children giggle as they chased a butterfly across the yard. She breathed deep and thought: *This is soul care, too.*

Later, as twilight draped itself across the sky, Emma lingered at the porch table with her journal. The calendar on the fridge still bulged with notes and reminders. But she didn’t feel the same heaviness.

She knew now that even in a full season, her soul could breathe. The busy wouldn’t stop—but neither would God’s invitation to come, rest, and be renewed. She picked up her pen and wrote one more prayer before the next week began:

Lord, in this busy season, remind me again and again that my worth is not in what I do but in Whose I am.

Anchor me in Your presence. Teach me to pause, to breathe, and to be still.

And with that, she closed the notebook and slipped it into her bag—ready to carry her soul-care practices with her into whatever the day might hold.

Activities & Traditions for Caring for the Soul

Morning Pause Journal

Keep a notebook and pen at the kitchen table or near your favorite chair. Before the day begins, jot down one verse and one prayer. Even if it's just two minutes, it sets the tone for the day and reminds your family that soul care comes first.

Prayer Walks

Choose one day a week to take a short walk as a family. Each person names one prayer as you walk—something they're thankful for or something they're asking God to help with. The rhythm of walking helps quiet the mind, and the prayers grow naturally.

Gratitude Chain

Cut strips of paper and invite family members to write things they're thankful for each day. Link them together into a paper chain and hang it where everyone can see. Watching the chain grow is a visual reminder of God's daily goodness.

Quiet Corners

Designate a favorite spot in your home or yard as a "soul corner." It could be a chair, a porch bench, or even a blanket spread under a tree. Encourage everyone in the family to take a few minutes there when they need rest or quiet.

Family Journal Jar

Place a jar on the counter with slips of paper and a pen. Each family member writes down one reflection from the week—something they learned, a prayer, or a blessing. Read them aloud together on Sunday evenings as a way to close the week.

Evening Candle Prayer

Light a small candle after supper and gather around for two minutes of stillness. Each person can whisper a one-sentence prayer or simply breathe in the quiet. Blowing out the candle together becomes a signal of peace for the evening.

Weekly Soul Sabbath

Set aside one block of time each week—maybe Sunday afternoons or a weeknight—for screen-free, chore-free quiet. Journaling, sketching, reading Scripture, or simply resting counts. Over time, this rhythm teaches that even in busy seasons, rest is sacred.

Comfort Foods for the Soul

Herbed Chicken and Orzo Soup

There's something about a steaming bowl of chicken soup that feels like medicine for both body and soul. The orzo pasta makes it just a little special, and the fresh herbs brighten it up.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 cup orzo pasta
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

Sauté onion, carrots, celery, and garlic until soft. Pour in broth, add chicken, and bring to a boil. Stir in orzo, simmer until tender, about 12 minutes. Add fresh herbs and season to taste. Serve hot with a squeeze of lemon if you like—it wakes up the whole bowl.

Honey-Glazed Carrots with Thyme

These are sweet, tender, and simple. They're quick to make but always feel like comfort.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb carrots, peeled and sliced
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 tsp fresh thyme (or ½ tsp dried)
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

Steam carrots until just tender. In a skillet, melt butter with honey and thyme. Toss carrots until glazed and shiny. Serve warm as a soothing side dish.

Savory Lentil Stew

Hearty but gentle, this stew is full of protein and vegetables, the kind of meal that makes you feel cared for.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 potatoes, cubed
- 1 cup dried lentils, rinsed
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- 1 tsp thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Sauté onion, garlic, and carrots in oil. Add potatoes, lentils, broth, and seasonings. Simmer 40 minutes, stirring occasionally, until everything is tender and thick. Remove bay leaf before serving. It's the kind of meal that warms from the inside out.

Spinach and Cheese Hand Pies

These little pies are perfect for busy days—you can make them ahead, then warm them up when you need a comforting snack.

Ingredients:

- 1 package refrigerated pie dough (or homemade if you're ambitious)
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- ½ cup mozzarella, shredded
- 1 cup fresh spinach, chopped
- 1 egg, beaten
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Mix ricotta, mozzarella, spinach, salt, and pepper. Roll out dough and cut into circles. Place filling in the center, fold over, and crimp edges. Brush with egg wash. Bake at 375°F for 20 minutes until golden. Serve warm with soup or tea.

Creamy Polenta with Mushrooms

This dish feels luxurious but is so simple—a creamy bowl of polenta topped with garlicky mushrooms.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup polenta (coarse cornmeal)
- 4 cups water or broth
- 2 tbsp butter
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 8 oz mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Bring water or broth to a boil. Slowly whisk in polenta, reduce heat, and stir until creamy (about 20 minutes). Stir in butter and Parmesan. Meanwhile, sauté mushrooms and garlic in olive oil until browned. Spoon mushrooms over creamy polenta for a bowl that feels like pure comfort.

Warm Berry Crisp

This dessert feels like love in a dish—sweet, bubbling fruit under a golden oat topping.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups mixed berries (fresh or frozen)
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 cup oats
- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Directions:

Toss berries with sugar and lemon juice, place in a baking dish. In a bowl, mix oats, flour, brown sugar, butter, and cinnamon. Spread topping over berries. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes until bubbly and golden. Serve warm with a spoonful of cream or ice cream.

Golden Turmeric Latte

This warm drink is soothing and calming—perfect for journaling time in the evening.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups milk (any kind)
- 1 tsp turmeric
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp ginger
- 1 tbsp honey
- Pinch of black pepper

Directions:

Warm milk in a saucepan with spices, whisking until smooth. Simmer gently for 5 minutes. Stir in honey. Pour into mugs and sip slowly—it's like a hug in a cup.

Vanilla Bean Rice Pudding

Creamy, cozy, and nostalgic, this pudding is simple enough for a weekday but special enough for dessert.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup short-grain rice
- 4 cups milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 vanilla bean (or 2 tsp vanilla extract)
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

Combine rice, milk, sugar, salt, and vanilla in a saucepan. Simmer gently, stirring often, until thick and creamy (about 30–40 minutes). Sprinkle with cinnamon before serving warm or chilled.

Closing Thoughts

Life rarely slows down on its own. Seasons change, children grow, commitments pile up, and before we know it our days are overflowing. But the Lord's invitation remains steady: *"Come to Me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."*

Caring for the soul in a busy season doesn't mean escaping all responsibility—it means weaving God's presence into the fabric of our days. It looks like journaling one page before the kids wake, whispering prayers while folding laundry, pausing to breathe in His Word while stirring a pot of soup. These are not grand retreats; they are holy pauses in ordinary life.

When we make space for Him, even for minutes at a time, our hearts are renewed. We learn to carry peace into our homes, joy into our tasks, and grace into our interactions. Soul care is not selfish—it is the overflow of God's care for us, rippling out to bless our families and everyone we serve.

This spring, don't wait for a less busy season to begin. Start here, start small, and let God's Spirit remind you daily that your worth is not in what you do, but in Whose you are.

Reflection Questions

1. What tends to crowd out soul care for you in busy seasons?
2. Which of the practices in this chapter (journaling, prayer, gratitude, quiet corners) feels most doable for your current routine?

3. How do you usually know when your soul is weary? What signs show up in your daily life?
 4. In what ways could you invite your children or family to join you in simple soul-care practices?
 5. If you could carve out just ten minutes a day for God, when would it be—and what would you do with that time?
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Chapter 9 — Finding Joy in Creation

Scripture (NLT):

"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!"
— *Philippians 4:4*

Devotional Reflection

Spring is the season that seems to hum with joy. After the quiet barrenness of winter, the world around us bursts back to life. Birds begin their morning songs long before the sun peeks over the horizon, flowers push their way through the thawing soil, and the air itself feels softer, carrying with it the scents of lilac, rain, and freshly cut grass. We step outside and feel it—a deep reminder that God has built rhythms of renewal into His creation. What was once gray and lifeless is now green and blooming. It is as though creation itself is saying, "Rejoice, the Lord makes all things new."

Yet Paul's words in Philippians 4:4 remind us that joy is not simply seasonal. He writes, *"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!"* What makes these words remarkable is where Paul wrote them. He was in prison, chained and facing uncertainty. And still, he called believers to rejoice—not because of circumstances, but because of the unchanging goodness of God.

This is a truth worth holding on to: joy is not rooted in what is happening around us, but in Who is with us. Joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness depends on moments—the weather being nice, the pantry being stocked, the children behaving, the bills being paid. Joy, however, is deeper. Joy is a current that runs beneath

the surface of our lives, steady and sure, because it is anchored in the presence of Christ.

Spring helps us see this clearly. Think of the bulbs you planted in the fall. They disappeared underground, and for months you saw nothing. The soil looked lifeless.

But in time, those hidden seeds responded to the sun and rain, and suddenly you see green tips breaking through. That is what joy is like. It can be hidden for a season, but it is never gone. God has planted it in us through His Spirit, and in His timing, it blooms again.

But joy must be nurtured. Just as a garden cannot flourish without water, sunlight, and care, neither can our souls. Left unattended, weeds of worry, fear, bitterness, and comparison grow quickly. And those weeds choke out joy. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to lose joy when you scroll through social media, comparing your life to someone else's? Or when you dwell on all the things that aren't working, rather than what God is providing? The weeds of discouragement grow fast if we don't guard our hearts.

So how do we tend to joy?

First, joy flourishes through gratitude. A thankful heart notices God's gifts. It pauses to say, "Lord, thank You for this warm mug of coffee, for the laughter of my child, for the daffodils along the road." Gratitude shifts our eyes from what we lack to what we have already been given. And gratitude is often the doorway to joy.

Second, joy grows through worship. Worship doesn't have to mean an hour in church with a hymnal—it can be whispered throughout the day. It can be a song sung while stirring a pot of soup, a quiet "You are good,

Lord” while folding laundry, or turning on worship music while you drive. Worship lifts our perspective, moving our gaze from ourselves to the One who never changes. When we worship, joy finds room to breathe.

Third, joy multiplies when shared. A kind word spoken, a smile given, a laugh around the dinner table—these acts ripple out further than we realize. Joy is contagious. If you’ve ever noticed how quickly one child’s laughter spreads through a whole room, you’ve seen how God designed joy to multiply.

But let’s be clear—keeping joy alive does not mean plastering on a fake smile or pretending that life is always cheerful. True joy is honest. It knows tears, but it also knows hope. It can stand in the middle of grief and still whisper, “God is faithful.” It can look at unanswered prayers and still say, “I will trust.”

In spring, God gives us reminders of this truth everywhere. Rainbows appear after storms. Blossoms unfold on branches that once looked dead. Even the smallest details in creation—the song of a wren, the sparkle of dew, the smell of soil after rain—testify that life and beauty are still here. These are invitations to joy.

That’s why building rhythms of remembrance is so important. Maybe you keep a Joy Journal, where each night you write one thing that brought delight. Maybe you gather your family around the table and share “roses, thorns, and seeds”—the best part of the day, the hardest part, and the hope you’re holding for tomorrow. Maybe you start a Joy Jar, where slips of paper collect small moments worth celebrating. These simple traditions train our hearts to look for God’s hand at work.

Joy often requires faith. It is choosing to say, “Lord, I will rejoice in You, even when I don’t see the way forward yet.” That kind of joy is resilient. It does not deny reality but clings to the deeper reality that God is present and faithful.

So as you move through this spring season, take time to notice joy in creation. Hear it in the birdsong at dawn. See it in the tulips that brighten the yard. Taste it in the fresh foods of the season. Feel it in the laughter of family gathered at the table. Let these moments point you beyond themselves to the One who is the source of true joy.

Because joy is not just an emotion—it is the fruit of His Spirit, planted deep, meant to last, and designed to flourish in every season.

Reflection Questions

1. What does joy look like in your life right now—loud and obvious, or quiet and steady?
 2. How does creation—flowers, birds, rainbows, or sunshine—remind you that joy can bloom again, even after long winters?
 3. What “weeds” (worry, comparison, busyness) tend to choke out your joy? How can you invite the Lord to pull those out of your heart this season?
 4. What daily rhythms of gratitude or worship could you begin to nurture joy in your home?
 5. How could you share joy with others this spring so that it multiplies beyond yourself?
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Finding Joy in Creation

The first light of dawn painted the kitchen window pale gold as Anna poured water into the kettle. The house was still, except for the hum of the refrigerator and the tick of the wall clock. She loved these early spring mornings when she could steal a few minutes before the house woke—before little feet pattered down the hallway, before the chorus of “Mama, can you...?” began.

The kettle hissed, and she set a tea bag into her favorite mug, the chipped one with faded roses from her grandmother’s cupboard. Outside, the yard was soft with dew. A robin tugged at a worm near the garden bed, triumphant in his morning task.

Anna opened the back door an inch and let in the cool air. It smelled of earth and newness, like something about to begin. She wrapped her hands around the mug and whispered, “Lord, help me see joy today. Even in the small things. Even when I feel stretched thin.”

Her prayer wasn’t long, but it was true. Joy had felt harder to come by lately. Between homeschooling Caleb, chasing Ellie, and keeping up with laundry that never seemed to end, she often felt as though she was pouring from an empty cup. Spring had always been her favorite season, though, and she longed for its brightness to seep into her spirit again.

A thump upstairs interrupted her thoughts. So much for quiet. Moments later, Caleb bounded into the kitchen with an armful of Legos, hair sticking up like a dandelion. “Mama, look what I built!” he announced, setting down what looked like a spaceship missing its nose.

Anna smiled. "That's impressive, buddy."

Ellie toddled in behind him, dragging her stuffed bunny by the ear. Without a word she climbed into Anna's lap and tucked her head under her chin, as though she'd been waiting all night for this moment.

"Can we go outside today?" Caleb asked, already crunching cereal.

"If it doesn't rain," Anna said, glancing toward the gray-edged sky. "We'll see what the weather decides." Ellie whispered, "Mama, the flowers are growing." Anna kissed the crown of her daughter's head. "Yes, sweetheart. God is making everything new."

By mid-morning, the sun had decided to peek through, and the family spilled into the backyard. Caleb grabbed a stick and immediately began poking at the edge of the garden bed, convinced he'd discover buried treasure. Ellie crouched low to greet every dandelion as if it were a personal friend.

Anna knelt by the raised bed, brushing dirt from her fingers. Tiny green shoots of lettuce stretched upward, delicate but determined. She marveled that such small seeds, once tucked away in darkness, now reached toward the light with all their might. She whispered a prayer of thanks: *Lord, help me be like this—growing toward You no matter how small my start feels.*

Caleb called out suddenly, "Mom! Look! A ladybug!" He held up his finger proudly, the tiny red-and-black creature crawling across it like royalty. Ellie squealed and tried to copy him, only to end up with dirt smeared across her cheeks.

Anna laughed, pulling a wipe from her pocket. "That's part of the fun—getting messy."

The morning stretched slowly, like a ribbon unrolling. They drew chalk pictures on the driveway, ran races to the fence and back, and sprawled in the grass to watch the clouds. Caleb insisted one looked like a dragon; Ellie was certain hers was a bunny. Anna saw a heart in the sky and tucked it into her memory.

After lunch, gray clouds gathered and rain tapped at the windows. Caleb groaned. "Now what are we supposed to do?"

Anna thought for a moment. She remembered a jar on the shelf in the pantry—the one she had labeled JOY last spring and forgotten about when life grew busy. She pulled it down and blew off a thin layer of dust. "Let's go on a Joy Hunt," she said.

Caleb raised an eyebrow. "In the rain?"

"Yes," Anna grinned. "Joy doesn't melt."

They donned rain boots and jackets and stepped onto the porch. The world outside was rinsed clean. Puddles dotted the driveway like mirrors. Worms wriggled along the sidewalk. The maple tree shook water from its leaves with every breeze.

"Here are the rules," Anna announced, pulling Ellie's hood snug. "One, no complaining about being wet while you're getting wet. Two, find something that brings you joy—big enough to carry in your heart, or small enough to hold in your hand."

Caleb immediately leapt from the porch into the biggest puddle, water splashing in all directions. "That's joy!" he declared. Ellie shrieked with laughter and stomped in after him, her little boots making tiny waves.

Anna bent to pick up a heart-shaped stone. "Joy," she whispered, slipping it into her pocket. She noticed how even the rain-soaked soil gave off a smell that was strangely comforting—like God reminding her He was still nourishing the earth, still nourishing her.

By the time they came back inside, dripping and giggling, their arms were full of treasures—Caleb's feather, Ellie's fistful of daisies, Anna's stone. They spread them out on a towel in the kitchen, then wrote each one on slips of paper to tuck into the Joy Jar. "Exploding puddle," Caleb scrawled.

"Baby flowers," Ellie announced as Anna helped her draw circles.

"Heart stone," Anna wrote simply.

They placed the slips inside and sealed the lid with a satisfied nod. Joy didn't erase the rain outside, but it reframed the day.

The afternoon passed with books on the couch, hot cocoa in mugs, and the smell of cinnamon rolls rising from the oven. Anna called it "baking therapy," a way to bring warmth when the sky stayed gray.

Ellie's small hands were covered in flour, Caleb measured sugar with a seriousness that rivaled any scientist, and Anna felt her shoulders loosen as they worked side by side. The oven timer dinged, and soon the house was filled with the sweet, buttery scent of cinnamon and sugar.

They ate them too quickly, glaze sticking to their lips. Anna set two rolls aside on a plate and asked Caleb to run them over to Mrs. Greene, the widow across the street. He returned with a folded note: *You made my rainy day bright. Thank you.*

Without prompting, he slipped it into the Joy Jar.

Evening settled slowly. Caleb and Ellie colored at the table while Anna stirred a pot of soup—onions softening in butter, carrots joining in, broth poured like patience. She stirred, naming blessings as she went: *Thank You for Caleb's laugh. Thank You for Ellie's hug. Thank You for cinnamon rolls and rain boots.*

Her husband, Mark, came home to the smell of soup and the sight of chalk-stained children. He kissed her cheek and whispered, "Looks like you built a little sunshine in here."

Later at supper, they shared their "rose, thorn, and seed" from the day. Caleb's rose was the puddle jump; his thorn, the fizzless science experiment; his seed, to try again tomorrow. Ellie's rose was "baby flowers"; her thorn, spilling her milk; her seed, "more cinnamon rolls." Anna's rose was the Joy Jar returning to life, her thorn the morning's heaviness, her seed simply: *more days like this.*

Mark smiled and added his own: "My rose is walking into this house tonight. My thorn is being away all day. My seed is to spend Saturday in the garden with all of you."

After dishes were done, Anna stepped onto the porch with a cup of tea. The rain had stopped, leaving the yard sparkling with drops of silver light. She breathed in the smell of wet earth and let Philippians 4:4 roll over

her heart: *Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!*

She thought of the heart-shaped stone in her pocket, the feather on the counter, the daisies wilting in Ellie's hand. None of it was spectacular. But joy, she realized, rarely came wrapped in fireworks. More often it came in whispers—through rain, through laughter, through cinnamon rolls and small notes from neighbors.

Mark joined her, draping a blanket over her shoulders. "What are you thinking about?" he asked.

"That joy doesn't just happen," she said. "You have to look for it. But once you find it, it changes everything." They stood together, watching the last sliver of sun slip beneath the horizon. Anna felt her heart settle, steady and full. The day had been ordinary, messy, imperfect—and yet, threaded through it all, joy had been alive.

The next morning dawned bright and clear. As the children thundered down the stairs, Anna glanced at the Joy Jar on the counter. The slips of paper inside seemed to glow in the sunlight. She smiled, whispering again the prayer that had started it all:

"Lord, help me see joy today. Even in the small things. Even when I feel stretched thin."

And she knew He would.

Activities & Traditions for Finding Joy in Creation

Joy Jar Revival

Keep a jar with slips of paper, crayons, or pens ready for everyone in the family. Each time someone notices a moment of joy—a bird’s nest, a kind word, a laugh at the table—they write or draw it down. At the end of the week, read the slips together. You’ll be surprised at how much joy you’ve gathered without realizing it.

Joy Hunt Walks

Turn an ordinary walk into a treasure hunt. Ask each family member to spot something that sparks joy: a flower, a bird call, a funny-shaped cloud. Share what you’ve found when you return home. This practice trains your eyes to see God’s goodness in everyday creation.

Roses, Thorns, and Seeds at Dinner

Around the table, let each person share their rose (the best part of their day), their thorn (the hardest part), and their seed (what they’re hoping for tomorrow). It not only helps the family notice joy but also cultivates empathy and gratitude.

Kitchen Joy Food

Pick a “joy recipe” as a family—something that everyone loves, like cinnamon rolls, fruit salad, or a simple soup. Make it your go-to when spirits feel low. Soon, the smell alone will be tied to joy-filled memories.

Photo Joy Board

Print a few snapshots each week of small, happy moments—muddy boots after a garden adventure, a plate of cookies fresh from the oven, a silly family selfie. Pin them to a corkboard or tape them inside a cupboard. Let the collection grow as a visible reminder of joy in the season.

Sunday Joy Letters

Set aside a few minutes each week for everyone to write a short note thanking God for the joys of that week. Younger children can draw pictures instead. Save these in a notebook or binder to read back during harder seasons, when joy feels harder to find.

Comfort Foods for Finding Joy in Creation

Spring Herb Chicken Salad with Grapes

There's something joyful about a salad that's both fresh and comforting. Tender chicken, crisp celery, and juicy grapes come together in a creamy dressing that feels light but filling. It's perfect for a picnic blanket or a simple lunch with crackers on the porch.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups cooked chicken, chopped
- 1 cup red grapes, halved
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- ½ cup mayonnaise or Greek yogurt
- 1 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Mix chicken, grapes, and celery in a bowl. Stir in mayonnaise, dill, salt, and pepper. Chill for at least 30 minutes so the flavors mingle. Serve on croissants, in lettuce cups, or with crackers.

Pesto Pasta Salad with Roasted Veggies

A bright, herby salad that works for picnics or easy lunches. The pesto makes it taste indulgent while still feeling light.

Ingredients:

- 12 oz pasta (bowtie or rotini)
- 1 zucchini, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup pesto (homemade or store-bought)
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Roast zucchini and bell pepper with 2 tbsp olive oil at 400°F for 20 minutes.
 2. Cook pasta, drain, and toss with pesto.
 3. Add roasted veggies, cherry tomatoes, Parmesan, and seasonings. Chill or serve room temp.
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Spring Pasta with Crispy Polenta Rounds

Golden fried polenta cakes become the base for a light, fresh pasta dish — perfect for spring gatherings. The contrast of crispy polenta and tender pasta feels special but simple.

Ingredients:

- 1 (18 oz) tube prepared polenta *or* 3 cups cooked polenta, chilled until firm
- 2 tbsp olive oil (for frying)
- 8 oz spaghetti or fettuccine
- 1 tbsp butter
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 small bunch asparagus, cut into 2-inch pieces
- ½ cup peas (fresh or frozen)
- Zest & juice of 1 lemon
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese
- Fresh basil leaves, torn
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Prep polenta: If using a tube, slice into ½-inch rounds. If making from scratch, spread cooked polenta in a greased 9x9 pan, chill until firm, then cut into rounds or squares.
2. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Fry polenta slices 3–4 minutes per side until golden and crisp. Keep warm.
3. Cook pasta until al dente; reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain.
4. In a large skillet, melt butter and sauté garlic until fragrant. Add tomatoes, asparagus, and peas; cook 5–6 minutes until tender.
5. Toss pasta into the skillet with lemon zest/juice, Parmesan, and a splash of reserved pasta water to coat. Season with salt and pepper.
6. Serve pasta piled over crispy polenta rounds. Garnish with basil and extra Parmesan.

Strawberry Arugula Salad with Honey-Balsamic Dressing

Peppery arugula balances the sweetness of strawberries, while a honey-balsamic dressing ties everything together. It's colorful, simple, and feels joyful to eat.

Ingredients:

- 6 cups arugula
- 1 cup strawberries, sliced
- ½ cup feta cheese, crumbled
- ¼ cup toasted almonds or pecans

Dressing:

- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- Pinch of salt & pepper

Directions:

1. In a small jar, whisk or shake together olive oil, balsamic, honey, mustard, salt, and pepper until smooth.
 2. Place arugula in a large bowl. Top with strawberries, feta cheese, and nuts.
 3. Drizzle with dressing just before serving. Toss lightly and enjoy.
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Glazed Pineapple Bars

These bars have a buttery crust, a sweet pineapple filling made from crushed pineapple, and a light glaze on top. They're cheerful, tropical, and a nice change from the usual citrus desserts.

Ingredients:

For the crust:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 cups flour
- Pinch of salt

For the filling:

- 1 can (20 oz) crushed pineapple, undrained
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 tbsp cornstarch
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

For the glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1–2 tbsp milk
- ½ tsp vanilla extract

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13 baking pan.
2. In a bowl, cream butter and sugar. Mix in flour and salt until crumbly. Press evenly into the pan. Bake 15 minutes until lightly golden.
3. For filling: In a saucepan, stir pineapple, sugar, and cornstarch. Cook over medium heat until thick and bubbly, about 5–7 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in vanilla.
4. Spread filling over baked crust. Return to oven for 15–20 minutes until set. Cool completely.
5. Whisk glaze ingredients until smooth. Drizzle over cooled bars. Cut into squares and serve.

Joyful Spring Veggie Soup

A bowl of soup that tastes like the garden—light yet comforting, full of color and freshness. Perfect for rainy days when you need a reminder that new life is growing.

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1 zucchini, diced
- 1 cup peas (fresh or frozen)
- 6 cups vegetable or chicken broth
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tsp salt, ½ tsp pepper
- Fresh parsley for garnish

Directions:

In a pot, heat olive oil and sauté onion, carrots, and celery until soft. Add zucchini, peas, broth, and seasonings. Simmer 15–20 minutes. Ladle into bowls, sprinkle with parsley, and serve with crusty bread.

Raspberry Swirl Cheesecake Bars

Sometimes joy is found in dessert. These cheesecake bars are creamy, tangy, and topped with a swirl of bright raspberries—simple to make, but special enough to celebrate.

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups graham cracker crumbs
- ¼ cup sugar
- 6 tbsp butter, melted
- 2 packages (8 oz each) cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla
- ½ cup raspberry jam

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325°F. Mix crumbs, sugar, and butter; press into a greased 9x13 pan. Beat cream cheese, sugar, eggs, and vanilla until smooth. Pour over crust. Drop spoonfuls of jam on top and swirl with a knife. Bake 35–40 minutes until set. Chill before cutting.

Closing Thoughts

Finding joy in creation doesn't require a grand trip to the mountains or oceans—it can happen right in our own backyards. Joy is often waiting in the small things: the first buds on a tree, the cheerful song of a robin, the smell of rain on fresh soil. When we pause long enough to notice, these simple gifts become reminders of God's faithfulness and creativity.

Spring has a way of pulling our eyes upward and outward. The earth itself seems to preach hope: what was once brown and bare becomes green again. What seemed lifeless bursts into bloom. That's the story of our own hearts too—joy isn't lost forever, it can be renewed. Sometimes it takes rain before the flowers. Sometimes it takes quiet before we hear the song. But God is always weaving beauty into our days if we are willing to look for it.

As you move through this season, let creation be your teacher. Let it slow you down, lift your heart, and remind you that joy isn't something you have to chase far away. It's already planted around you—and within you—because the Lord Himself is near.

Reflection Questions

1. When was the last time you felt joy just from being outside in God's creation? What did you notice most?
 2. Which part of spring—flowers, birds, gardens, rain, sunshine—speaks most deeply to your heart about God's goodness?
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3. What small daily rhythm could help you pause and notice joy (a Joy Jar, a walk, a gratitude list, or something else)?
4. How does remembering God as the Creator help you hold onto joy, even when life feels busy or hard?
5. Who in your family or community could you share the gift of creation-joy with this week (through food, flowers, or time outdoors)?

Chapter 10 — Looking Toward Summer

Scripture (NLT):

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

— Psalm 133:1

Devotional Reflection

The days are stretching longer now. The sun lingers a little higher in the sky each evening, birds sing late into twilight, and you can almost feel summer waiting just around the corner. Spring has been full of renewal—gardens planted, closets cleaned, projects begun—and as we look toward summer, life tends to shift into yet another busy rhythm.

School wraps up. Sports and camps fill calendars. Family vacations start taking shape. There are picnics, church events, and neighborhood barbecues. The pace of summer often feels lighter in some ways, but busier in others. If we're not careful, the very togetherness we long for as a family can get swept up in the shuffle. That's why it matters so much to pause here, at the end of spring, and ask: *What kind of home atmosphere do we want to carry with us into summer?*

Psalm 133:1 says, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" Unity doesn't mean everyone always agrees, or that life is without conflict. Unity is the choice to value togetherness, to prioritize presence over perfection, and to let love win over busyness or distraction.

One of the most practical, beautiful ways to live this out is through intentional family nights in.

As the world outside your home speeds up—gardens growing, summer plans calling—choosing to gather inside says something powerful: *This family matters. These moments matter.* You're declaring that laughter around the table is just as important as the to-do list, and that sticky marshmallow fingers or a late-night game of charades are just as sacred as Sunday morning worship.

Family nights don't have to be elaborate to be meaningful. Sometimes it's popcorn and a movie. Other times it's board games, puzzles, or simply talking around the table. What matters isn't the activity—it's the togetherness. It's the way everyone feels safe, known, and loved in that space. Children may not remember exactly what you played, or even what you ate, but they will remember the warmth of belonging.

Jesus modeled this so beautifully. He often gathered with His disciples in homes, sharing meals and conversations. The early church carried this pattern forward, breaking bread together, praying, and encouraging one another. Faith was nurtured not only in synagogues, but around ordinary tables, in living rooms, and through shared daily life.

That's still true today. When we gather at home—without distractions, without needing to be anywhere else—we open a space where faith can take root naturally. A quick devotion before bed, a simple prayer of thanks before a snack, or a conversation about the day's "roses and thorns" plants seeds in our children's hearts. These little rhythms of connection prepare them to step into summer with a deeper sense of who they are and Whose they are.

There's also something steadying about family nights in during this transition. As children face the change of seasons—new schedules, endings and beginnings, even the nervous excitement of summer adventures—anchoring evenings at home give them a safe place to land. “This is who we are,” those nights whisper. “This is our family.”

Mothers, let me encourage you: you don't need to make these nights perfect. The living room doesn't have to be spotless. The snacks don't need to look Pinterest-worthy. You don't need matching pajamas or coordinated activities. What your children need most is your presence. Your willingness to slow down, laugh with them, listen to them, and simply *be there*.

As we look toward summer, ask yourself: *What memories do I want my children to carry into the next season?* Will it be rushing from one event to the next, or will it be evenings where everyone piled on the couch under a blanket? Will it be the smell of popcorn and marshmallows over the stovetop, or the sound of laughter echoing through the house after a silly game?

These are the moments that knit hearts together. They are what prepare your family for the busyness and changes that summer will bring. Because unity isn't something that just happens—it's something we cultivate, one evening at a time.

So let's take this final chapter of spring and be intentional. Mark out one night a week—or even once every two weeks—and make it family night. Guard it the way you would guard any appointment. Say no to unnecessary extras when needed. Choose presence over perfection. And remember that God dwells in the middle of those simple, ordinary evenings, turning them into something holy.

Your home doesn't have to be grand for it to hold joy. It doesn't need perfect lighting or polished snacks to be sacred. All it needs is your heart, gathered with the hearts of those you love, united in Christ. That is the best preparation for summer you could ever give your family.

Reflection Questions

1. What rhythms or traditions from spring do you want to carry into your summer season?
2. How could family nights help your household stay connected, even when summer schedules get busy?
3. What simple practices (like "rose, thorn, and seed" at the table, or popcorn-and-game nights) could anchor your family in unity this summer?
4. What gets in the way of setting aside time at home together, and how might you guard against those distractions?
5. How is God calling you to create more space for His presence in your family evenings?

Looking Toward Summer — Family Nights In Story

The evening sunlight stretched long across the yard, spilling gold onto the maple tree and painting the grass in warm stripes. Emma stood at the kitchen window, her hands still damp from rinsing dishes, and watched her children run barefoot through the last puddles left by the afternoon rain. Their laughter rose like a hymn, wild and unplanned, and she felt something inside her ease.

It had been a full spring. The garden was in, the closets had been cleared, the schoolwork was nearly done. She felt the tug of summer in the air—the kind of tug that whispered of longer days, swimming holes, sticky popsicles, and busy schedules filled with both joy and exhaustion. Summer always seemed to arrive with a mixture of excitement and overwhelm, and Emma had been praying about how to hold her home steady through it.

The kettle clicked behind her, pulling her back to the moment. She poured the steaming water into a teapot and set mugs on the counter, breathing in the calming scent of chamomile. Tonight, she had decided, would be family night. No phones, no rushing, no long list of chores. Just them—together.

“Shoes off, kids!” she called as the back door banged open and three pairs of wet feet padded across the floor. “Towels in the basket, please.”

“Yes, Mom,” Daniel said, already reaching for the towel she tossed. Lily followed with a dramatic sigh, dripping hair plastered to her forehead, and Claire trailed behind with muddy knees and a grin too wide to scold.

Emma dried them off quickly, the kind of practiced rhythm that comes from years of repetition, and then pointed toward the living room where the lamp glowed softly. "Game night first," she announced. "Then marshmallows. Then maybe a story."

Claire's eyes went wide. "Marshmallows inside?"

Emma nodded, smiling. "Your daddy has a plan."

As if on cue, Caleb stepped in from the porch, shaking the last drops from his jacket. He held up a bag of marshmallows like a prize. "Rain or not, we're roasting tonight. The stovetop works just fine."

Cheers filled the room. Daniel drummed on the table. Lily, who pretended she was too old for such antics, couldn't quite hide her grin.

The living room floor soon disappeared under a pile of board games. After much debate and playful arguing, charades won out. Emma watched her children leap and mime with abandon. Daniel attempted a lion's roar so ferocious he fell over. Claire waddled across the rug pretending to be a duck, laughter tripping her steps. Lily rolled her eyes at her brother's antics, but when it was her turn, she surprised them all with a spot-on imitation of their neighbor's cat.

Emma laughed until her sides ached. She realized in that moment that these were the nights her children would remember—not the tidy closets or the organized pantry, but the togetherness, the safe circle of family.

When the game ended, Caleb pulled out long skewers and set the bag of marshmallows on the counter. "Line up," he said, as though he were running a carnival stand. The children crowded close, eyes wide as sugar toasted over the stovetop flame. Claire shrieked when hers caught fire, and Caleb helped her blow it out before it turned black. The kitchen filled with the smell of caramelizing sugar and laughter that seemed to chase away every shadow of the day.

Emma cut slices of coffee cake she had made earlier and set them beside the gooey marshmallows. The children plopped onto the rug in a circle, balancing treats on their laps. Rain tapped the windows again, soft and steady, but inside the room was warm and bright.

"Let's do roses, thorns, and seeds," Emma said, once everyone had settled.

Daniel groaned playfully, but she saw his eyes light up—he liked the rhythm, even if he pretended otherwise.

"My rose was puddle-jumping," Lily said first. "My thorn was math this morning. My seed is... planting more flowers in the garden this week."

Daniel followed. "My rose was winning charades. My thorn was when Claire spilled milk all over my science notes. My seed is... making a volcano that actually explodes this time."

Claire giggled, marshmallow stuck to her chin. "My rose was marshmallows! My thorn was... milk mess. My seed is... more marshmallows tomorrow."

Emma laughed and shared her own: “My rose was watching you all laugh tonight. My thorn was feeling rushed all day. My seed is... more family nights this summer.”

They turned to Caleb. He leaned back, arms behind his head. “My rose is easy—sticky marshmallow smiles. My thorn was stepping on a Lego before dinner. My seed? Making more memories like this.”

The children cheered, and Emma tucked the moment deep inside her heart.

Later, with marshmallows eaten and crumbs scattered across the rug, Caleb pulled out the worn family storybook. The children curled into blankets on the couch, eyes wide as his voice carried through the room. Emma sat beside him, knitting needles still in her lap but unmoving—her hands too full with gratitude to stitch.

By the time the story ended, the children were nearly asleep. Emma kissed foreheads, smoothed blankets, and whispered prayers over each one. Then she lingered in the quiet living room, the lamp casting a soft circle of light over the scattered game pieces and mugs. She pulled her journal from the basket by the couch and wrote:

“Lord, thank You for this night. Thank You for laughter and sticky fingers, for popcorn bowls and marshmallow strings. Thank You that unity doesn’t require perfection—only presence. As we move into summer, help us to guard these nights. Help us to choose togetherness over busyness, love over distraction, joy over striving.”

When she closed the journal, her heart felt lighter. Tomorrow would bring chores, errands, and another full list, but tonight had been holy in its own way. Holy because they had chosen to gather. Holy because they had remembered joy.

She blew out the lamp, listened to the rain one last time, and went upstairs to bed, carrying the glow of family night with her like a lantern.

Activities & Traditions for Looking Toward Summer

Weekly Family Night

Choose one night a week to guard as “family night.” Treat it with the same importance as any other appointment. It might be Friday pizza night, Saturday movie night, or Sunday evening games. The consistency will give your children something to look forward to and remember.

Backyard Picnics

Spread a blanket outside and eat supper under the open sky, even if it’s just sandwiches and fruit. Food tastes different outdoors, and the memory of “picnic nights” becomes part of your family’s summer rhythm.

Rose, Thorn, and Seed Sharing

Keep the simple tradition of sharing the day’s rose (best part), thorn (hardest part), and seed (something hoped for). It encourages honesty, gratitude, and hope while teaching children to reflect.

Family Journals or Memory Jars

Start a summer memory jar or journal. Each family member writes down a highlight from the week and drops it in. At the end of the season, open the jar or read the journal together and celebrate all that God did.

Evening Prayer Walks

After supper, take short walks together. Use the time to notice creation, pray for neighbors as you pass their homes, and let children share what they see.

Indoor Camp Nights

When rain cancels outdoor plans, set up tents or blanket forts inside. Roast marshmallows over the stove, tell stories, and let the kids “camp” in the living room. These simple nights feel magical.

Family Worship Evenings

Choose one evening each week or month to sing, read a short passage, and pray together. It doesn't need to be long or formal—it just reminds the family that joy and unity are rooted in God's presence.

Comfort Foods for Looking Toward Summer

Summer Skillet Nachos

Nothing brings everyone together quite like a skillet of nachos in the middle of the table. It's casual, fun, and always disappears quickly.

Ingredients:

- 1 bag tortilla chips
- 1 lb ground beef or ground turkey
- 1 packet taco seasoning (or homemade)
- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 cups shredded cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese
- ½ cup diced tomatoes
- ¼ cup sliced green onions
- Sour cream, salsa, and guacamole for serving

Directions:

Brown the beef in a skillet, drain, and stir in taco seasoning with a splash of water. Spread half the tortilla chips in a large oven-safe skillet. Top with half the beef, beans, and cheese. Repeat layers. Bake at 375°F for 10 minutes until the cheese is melted and bubbly. Sprinkle with tomatoes and green onions, then serve hot with toppings. Everyone digs in together—it's messy, but that's part of the fun.

Homemade Lemonade Slush

This drink tastes like sunshine in a glass—sweet, tart, and wonderfully refreshing on a warm evening.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup fresh lemon juice (about 4–6 lemons)
- ½ cup sugar (more to taste)
- 2 cups cold water
- 4 cups ice
- Fresh mint sprigs, optional

Directions:

Blend lemon juice, sugar, water, and ice in a blender until slushy. Adjust sweetness if needed. Pour into mason jars or tall glasses, and garnish with a sprig of mint or an extra lemon slice. Perfect for sipping on the porch during family night.

Mini Pizzas on English Muffins or Naan

Kids love these because they can make their own, and moms love them because they're simple and quick.

Ingredients:

- 4 pieces naan bread or 6 English muffins, split
- 1 cup pizza sauce
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- Favorite toppings (pepperoni, bell peppers, olives, mushrooms, pineapple, etc.)

Directions:

Lay naan or muffin halves on a baking sheet. Spread with pizza sauce, sprinkle with cheese, and let everyone add their favorite toppings. Bake at 400°F for 10–12 minutes, until bubbly and golden. Cut into wedges or serve whole—either way, they'll be devoured in minutes.

Sticky S'mores Dip

If you don't have a campfire, this is the next best thing—gooey chocolate and toasted marshmallows eaten with graham crackers.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups milk chocolate chips
- 2 tbsp milk
- 2 cups mini marshmallows
- Graham crackers, for dipping

Directions:

Spread chocolate chips in a cast-iron skillet, drizzle with milk, and top with marshmallows. Bake at 400°F for 5–7 minutes until the marshmallows are golden and toasty. Serve immediately with graham crackers for dipping. Kids love pulling the marshmallow strings across the skillet.

Fruit & Yogurt Parfaits

Light, fresh, and colorful—these are a nice balance when family night is full of heavier foods.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups vanilla yogurt (or Greek yogurt)
- 2 cups granola
- 2 cups fresh fruit (strawberries, blueberries, bananas, or peaches)
- Honey or cinnamon, for topping

Directions:

In clear cups or jars, layer yogurt, granola, and fruit. Repeat layers and finish with a drizzle of honey or a sprinkle of cinnamon. Serve immediately or chill until ready. Everyone can build their own combinations for fun.

Caprese Skewers

These little skewers are colorful, fresh, and so simple. They bring the flavor of summer to the table without weighing anyone down.

Ingredients:

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes
- 1 (8 oz) package fresh mozzarella balls (bocconcini or ciliegine)
- 1 bunch fresh basil leaves
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp balsamic glaze (store-bought or homemade)
- Salt & pepper
- Toothpicks or small skewers

Directions:

1. Thread one tomato, one basil leaf, and one mozzarella ball onto each skewer. Repeat until all ingredients are used.
 2. Arrange skewers on a platter. Drizzle with olive oil and balsamic glaze. Sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper.
 3. Serve immediately as a light, joyful appetizer or side.
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Ice Cream Sundae Night

This one is less about cooking and more about creating an experience that kids (and adults) love.

Ingredients:

- 1–2 quarts vanilla or chocolate ice cream
- Toppings: chocolate syrup, caramel, sprinkles, crushed cookies, fruit, nuts, whipped cream, cherries

Directions:

Set everything out buffet-style and let each person build their own sundae masterpiece. Some pile on every topping, some keep it simple with syrup and sprinkles—but either way, the joy is in the creativity. Make it a weekly summer tradition, and your kids will remember it for years.

Closing Thoughts

As spring gives way to summer, we're reminded that seasons always flow into one another. The busyness of planting, cleaning, and preparing begins to shift toward slower evenings, warm nights, and the promise of long days ahead. Family nights in the spring prepare our hearts for the gatherings of summer—cookouts, picnics, laughter around fireflies and porch lights.

Looking toward summer is about anticipation, but it's also about carrying forward the lessons we've learned this season: that joy doesn't come from having everything perfect, but from being present; that unity grows when we make time for each other; that faith flourishes in the ordinary rhythms of home. Psalm 133:1 reminds us, "*How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!*" These nights—messy, noisy, full of laughter—are glimpses of that goodness.

Each nacho plate, marshmallow string, parfait, or ice cream sundae is more than just food—it's a thread weaving connection, stability, and love into our families. When we open our homes and our hearts, God meets us there.

So as you prepare for summer, let the lightness of the season bring hope to your home. Open the windows, pour the lemonade, gather the family, and welcome the warmth of togetherness. When you look back, you'll see that these evenings—sticky, imperfect, loud, and full of love—were the sacred moments that carried your family from one season to the next.

Reflection Questions

1. Psalm 133:1 says unity is “good and pleasant.” What does unity look like in your family right now?
2. How can you make family nights a regular rhythm, even when summer schedules get full?
3. What simple food or tradition (nachos, ice cream sundaes, Caprese skewers, etc.) could become part of your family’s summer memory-making?
4. What distractions most often pull your family away from togetherness, and how can you guard against them?
5. Looking back at this past spring, what one practice or lesson do you want to carry forward into summer?