

Theological Notes for the Season

Theology is the study of God. Just like other “ologies” (geology, ornithology, and psychology, to name a few), there are experts—with or without PhDs—and hundreds of thousands of pages written about the various nuances of theology. When we talk to children about faith or practice faith at home, we are *doing* theology (whether we realize it or not). We are living into the study of God. The faith practices in this book are deeply informed by my own theological perspective, though I leave plenty of room for your family and church community to decide how best to interpret them and incorporate them into your family’s life.

Because the seasons of Lent and Easter deal with the *heart* of the Christian faith, I’ve felt it necessary to add a few theological notes to help you guide your family through the season. If something I say here inspires your family to dive even deeper into theological study, I wish you well on that journey and invite you to consult the “For Further Reading” list found at www.traci-smith.com. If you’d rather not engage in further study, there is no requirement for you to do so. I’ve done the work of vetting these practices for you, leaving them in what I consider a theological safe zone, neither committing you to fundamentalist or damaging theologies nor making specific statements likely to fall outside the realm of your congregation’s orthodoxy. These practices are, in many ways, a blank canvas on which you can paint the images

most suited to you. My hope is that this will help you interpret and structure your practices and purpose.

Trauma and the Victim

Though I bristle at the portion of my career devoted to researching and writing about home, I regularly in my ministry profession have heard countless stories of what should be done when violence that are inappropriate for child development.

The bloody and violent nature of the difficult to process and tackle difficult issues exposing them to torture, crucifixion. *Families* perspective should be discussed with extreme caution and not be glossed over as a burden for children. Imagery distracting from the emphasis on what it belongs, but not torture, and vio

most suited to your own tradition and norms. My great hope is that this book is both flexible enough for you to interpret and structured enough for you to find direction and purpose.

Trauma and the Violence of the Cross

Though I bristle at the word “expert,” I’ve spent a great portion of my career studying faith formation. In addition to researching and writing books about faith practices at home, I regularly speak to groups of Christian educators, ministry professionals, and parents. Over the years I’ve heard countless stories about the lasting damage that can be done when violent stories of the Bible are told in ways that are inappropriate for a child’s age and emotional development.

The bloody and violent details of the crucifixion story are difficult to process, even for adults. Though I advocate tackling difficult topics with children, I do not advocate exposing them unnecessarily to the violent details of the torture, crucifixion, and death of Jesus Christ. The *Faithful Families* perspective is that violent imagery and symbols should be discussed and incorporated into the story with extreme caution, not because they are unimportant or to be glossed over, but because they are an unnecessary burden for children to carry. An undue focus on violent imagery distracts from the message of the gospel, putting the emphasis not on resurrection and new life where it belongs, but stuck, like a skipped record, on death, torture, and violence.

This book does not look the other way when it comes to difficult subjects such as death, suffering, and grief. In fact, you will find many prayers, practices, and conversation starters to help you and your family navigate the waters of these tough topics. That being said, those practices, prayers, and conversation starters deliberately avoid centering the symbols and stories related to the torture and violent death of Jesus because they are not appropriate for all ages.

What is the right age for parents and Christian educators to bring up these harder details of the story? This is a hard question to answer, and it depends greatly on the individual child. As a general rule of thumb, I believe middle school-age is the earliest we should start to discuss the violent and traumatic details of the story.

Atonement Theory and the Meaning of Jesus' Death

The phrase "Jesus died for our sins" is so common in Christian churches (and even in popular culture) that we rarely give it much thought. What does it mean to say, "Jesus died for our sins?" What is the relationship between *sin* and *death*? The Easter story is about death and resurrection. What is the meaning of Jesus' death, specifically, and human death, generally? What is sin? These questions might appear, at first glance, to have simple answers. When we speak to children, we try to make the answers even simpler for them to digest. Yet a statement like "Jesus died for you" or "Jesus died for our sins," while simple, carries tremendous weight and conveys complicated theological meaning.

In Christian theology of God and humanity, thousand years explained atonement a variety of different theories, orthodox Christianity what's really being that can be quite God who demands life for *ours*? Is and meaningful for justice? For a resounding *no* purpose, and de to understand Jesus using the explanation theories.

This book is my stories, prayers, death, and resurrection acknowledges the keeping the focus

Answering the question "what does it mean?" is a lifelong of faithful perspectives provide space for difficult topics in the hard realities simplistic theology

In Christian theology, “atonement” is the reconciliation of God and humanity through Jesus Christ. During two thousand years of Christian history, the church has explained atonement in a variety of different ways, using a variety of different metaphors and scriptures. Some of these theories, on the surface, sound like simple and orthodox Christian theologies; but when we peel back what’s really being said, we find a theological message that can be quite damaging for children. Is God an angry God who demands innocent blood? Did God *trade* Jesus’ life for *ours*? Is the torture and death of Jesus a good and meaningful necessity in order to satisfy God’s need for justice? For me, the answer to all these questions is a resounding *no*; I would never describe the mission, purpose, and death of Jesus in this way. It is possible to understand Jesus’ life and mission on earth without using the explanations above, all of which are atonement theories.

This book is my attempt to give you hands-on practices, stories, prayers, and ideas that teach about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in a way that both acknowledges the hard and sad details of the story while keeping the focus on the resurrecting work of Christ.

Answering the question “What does the death of Jesus *mean*?” is a lifelong pursuit. There is room for a variety of faithful perspectives. It is my hope that this book will provide space for you and your family to explore these difficult topics in an honest and open way, acknowledging the hard realities of death without imposing a rigid or simplistic theological framework. For those who wish to

explore atonement theology further, please visit www.traci-smith.com

Honoring and Embracing Mystery

Those who are familiar with my first book, *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home*, know that I am a strong proponent of using the word *mystery* with children. Mystery invites us into something deep within ourselves, the universe, and the world around us, and acknowledges that we do not know everything. "It's a mystery" is a great way to acknowledge some of the most profound aspects of our Christian faith. How did Jesus rise from the dead? What does resurrection mean? These are deep and important mysteries. Mystery says, "I don't know" without saying "I don't care." Just as there are many perspectives on death, there are many perspectives on resurrection. What is my own view? Well, quite simply, I believe resurrection is a profound mystery.

Blessings to you and your family as you embark on this journey through the mysteries of faith.

NOTES FOR PARENTS

On Letting Things Go and Trade-offs

Our time is finite. When we choose to do something, we are, by definition, choosing *not* to do other things. A decision to spend time with family is a decision to not

spend that time with holiday gatherings. "do it all," we can't consciously choose other things. If you list on top of an agenda yourself crazy! Instead things the season

Finding Rest as a Parent

As a minister, my heart pour out for other parents and children cannot drink from moments for your of peace and balance a parent, to take time something special exhausted, rest. I do that before trying. If this is not the year it aside. It will be first and foremost share with your family

Being Gentle When

One constant in my life I've embarked on faith moment with up straying quite