

Shaped by Repetition

It's a sight I've seen thousands of times before, sometimes just taking it for granted, other times cherishing it deeply. We were at dinner with our children and grandchildren. Someone said, "Let's pray," and hands instantly clasped together as the familiar table prayer was said. "Come, Lord Jesus, ..."

This repetition came back to mind later that evening, as I resumed reading a book recently recommended to me. The author, Kathleen Norris, wrote:

"A recent study that monitored the daily habits of couples in order to determine what produced good and stable marriages revealed that only one activity made a consistent difference, and that was the embracing of one's spouse at the beginning and end of each day. Most surprising to Paul Bosch, who wrote an article about the study, was the 'it didn't seem to matter whether or not in that moment the partners were fully engaged or even sincere! Just a perfunctory peck on the cheek was enough to make a difference in the quality of the relationship.' Bosch comments, wisely, that this 'should not surprise churchgoers. Whatever you do repeatedly has the power to shape you, has the power to make you over into a different person—even if you're not totally "engaged" in every minute.'"

Looking to the weeks ahead, each of us will soon be embroiled in the 'repetitions' of the season: decorating, hunting, shopping, travel, Thanksgiving celebrations and Christmas preparations. We've done these things each year, every year, for many years, and we're going to do them yet again. Would that we could all be fully engaged in every minute of what we do, but we know that won't be the case.

Perhaps that doesn't matter so much, as long as we pay attention to what we will be repeating—what will be shaping us throughout the season—for that's what makes us over into different people.

Think of the things God tells us to do repeatedly:

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:23-25).

"This is my body which is for you. ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

So fill your schedule for the season ahead, but plan it carefully. Remember to plan time for the things of God: weekly worship with your fellow believers, daily time in the Scriptures, daily prayers through the Psalms. Choose to do those things—repeatedly—that will help reshape you, make you over into a "different person," encourage you to be the faithful follower of Jesus Christ that God has called you to be.