

Slow and steady wins a turtle-filled evening

When I was a child, we would often pack a picnic, get into our station wagon, and drive to a park to feed the ducks. It was an inexpensive and fun way to spend time together as a family, and we always loved throwing bread crusts to the ducks.

We take our boys for picnics fairly frequently, but our picnic spots don't have ducks to feed. So when I realized we were near to a pond with turtles, I picked up a hamburger roll and a few saltines and Daniel and I headed for the pond. It was a special outing just for the two of us.



As we headed to the pond, I worried that the turtles might not be there. I've been told that one of the rules of parenting is not to make promises that might fall through. But we all have to deal with disappointment at some point—rain will cancel picnics, and turtles sometimes won't show up. I figured I'd take my chances.

Besides, part of the fun of feeding the turtles was imagining what it would be like ahead of time and picking out a snack for them. So we talked about the turtles, and I hoped they would be there.

As it turned out, I had no reason to worry.



The turtles were ready and waiting. They didn't care who was throwing the bread and crackers into the pond, but they were more than happy to swim over to help themselves. They gobbled the pieces as quickly as Daniel could throw them.



A bigger surprise for me was that our 3-year-old listened when I explained that it would be better not to throw the whole roll in at once. He pulled the bread apart, piece by piece, and threw bits down to the turtles.



After we finished, Daniel asked if we could go get more bread, so we did. And we went back and fed the turtles again. As we finally headed home, he talked on and on about feeding the turtles. He was so happy.



The turtles looked large and well-fed. They probably didn't need the bread or the crackers, and they certainly didn't notice the enthusiastic preschooler who talked to them earnestly as he fed them. But Daniel didn't care whether the turtles were grateful. He got to feel he was helping the turtles. He just loves to help—even if the animals he's helping don't care how this bread happens to fall out of the sky and into their pond.



I found myself thinking of how often I am like those turtles, accepting what's good as it comes without showing a great deal of gratitude. I hope I never take for granted these special moments God is giving me with our growing sons.

After all, they won't always find such joy in such a simple activity, feeding turtles. I should be so, so thankful that a piece of bread, a few crackers, and a hot summer evening can make for such a beautiful memory.