

November 2019

Home Front

a spiritual parenting resource



Identity
homefrontmag.com

“ We believe that the Holy Spirit is God’s chosen teacher. It is He who causes spiritual growth and formation when and as He chooses. As such, we have articulated 10 distinct environments to create in your home. We desire to create spiritual space, which we refer to as an environment, in which God’s Spirit can move freely. ”

OUR MISSION

INSPIRE parents with ideas to create fun, spiritually forming times in the normal rhythm of everyday life.

EQUIP parents to become the spiritual leaders of God’s truth in their own households.

SUPPORT families to engage their communities and change the culture around them.

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Things you won’t want to miss:

- Parent blogs to inspire you
- Mobile-friendly format
- Lots of downloadable giveaways
- Marketplace to purchase article bundles and more!

The website is filled with fresh ideas and creative resources to help you spiritually parent your children.

PARTNERSHIP

HomeFront magazine is a nonprofit ministry of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. If you are passionate about this resource and the families it equips, please consider making a one-time or monthly donation to allow this ministry to continue to reach thousands of homes.

Please go to:

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Consider gifting *HomeFront* to friends and family as a way to equip parents and grandparents to create fun, spiritually forming times in their homes!

Go to homefrontmag.com/store to check out all of our subscription options.

A NOTE FROM MICHELLE

The environment of **IDENTITY** highlights who we are in Christ. According to Ephesians 1, we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed, and given an inheritance in Christ. This conviction allows children to stand firm against the destructive counter-identities the world offers.

Our culture constantly feeds our families the lie of false identities. School, friends, TV, magazines, music, and so much more continually tell our children that who they are isn't good enough, that they need to be someone different. As we attempt to spiritually raise our families and redeem what the world has taken, it's essential to be rooted in truth.

We have to affirm the Christlikeness we see in our children as they strive to stand firm against false identities. In a world that finds identity in shallow and fleeting things, only the truth of our identity in Christ can offer true meaning and purpose.



Dr. Michelle Anthony

Michelle is the Executive Pastor of Family Ministries at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. Michelle has graduate degrees in Christian education, theology, and leadership and more than 25 years of church ministry experience as a children's and family pastor. She loves a good book and a cup of coffee.

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HOW TO USE

HomeFront

*Each issue highlights an environment your family can create in your home. This month looks at **IDENTITY**. Each magazine is divided into two sections: **Family Time** and **Inspire, Equip, Support**.*

***Family Time** articles are created to equip you to engage with your children on a regular basis.*

***Inspire, Equip, and Support** articles are parenting stories, devotions, and ideas to encourage you as you spiritually lead your household.*

USE THIS GUIDE TO GET FAMILY TIME STARTED. IT'S AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3 ...

- 1** *Start by deciding on a day and time that works well for your entire family. It can be an evening, afternoon, or morning. Just commit to building this time into your family's natural rhythm—perhaps around a meal.*
- 2** *Look through HomeFront to see what stands out. Choose two or three experiences you would like to incorporate into your family times this month. Don't feel burdened to complete all the activities—just do what fits your family best. This resource provides more than enough experiences to create transforming environments in your home throughout the month.*
- 3** *Remember to **HAVE FUN!** Strive to make each gathering unique to your own family as you enjoy spending time with God and one another.*

EDITOR'S NOTE



“Give thanks to the LORD for he is good; his love endures forever.” These beautiful words from 1 Chronicles 16:34 are our **FAMILY TIME VERSE** (page 5) and set the theme for this issue of *HomeFront*. Recognizing God’s enduring love for us gives us great reason to be thankful. Remembering that, in Christ, we are loved, adopted, chosen, redeemed, sealed, and given an inheritance—all of which we did nothing to earn—should fill us with overflowing gratitude!

In **TRADITIONS** (page 14) Paul and Silas, followers of the Way, did not let their circumstances rule them. In the darkness of their cell they began to sing! “Praise God from whom all blessings flow ...” In a culture full of hopeless discontent and greed, their act of worship reminds us to live as thankful people of God. **CREATE** (page 20) gives us a fun and tangible way to record our “Thankful Words” during our Thanksgiving meal with friends and family. The Corn Soufflé in our **FAMILY TIME RECIPE** (page 24) and the Cornucopia Creations in **KIDS IN THE KITCHEN** (page 26) will make great additions to your family’s Thanksgiving celebrations.

This month’s **GOD’S WORD** (page 28) challenges us to create an action plan for how our families will feast in a way that honors God. We look at the purpose behind feasts and what God intended when He instructed His people to have them. **BLESSING** (page 31) helps our children remember WHO they are and WHOSE they are by providing identity Scriptures for us to read throughout the month.

As the holiday season is upon us, we’ve provided a **LOOKING AHEAD** article (page 48). We share some easy-to-implement ideas as we prepare to celebrate Christ’s arrival and engage the season of Advent with expectation and hope.

Parents, our team here at HomeFront wants you to know we are grateful for you. As you train your children to stand firm against the destructive counter-identities the world will offer, we are in it with you! Our prayer is for this resource to give you inspiration and hope as you choose to spiritually parent your children and that together we will raise a generation that courageously, “Give[s] thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever” (1 Chronicles 16:34).

Debbie Guinn

Debbie Guinn

Debbie is the Editor in Chief of HomeFront magazine. She has more than 30 years of experience working in children’s and family ministries. She is passionate about equipping parents to become leaders of God’s truth in their own households. She is a recent transplant to Austin, TX, where she spends her free time enjoying her five grandchildren and perusing antique stores and flea markets.

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FAMILY VERSE

Memorizing Scripture can be an incredible practice to engage in as a family. But words in and of themselves will not necessarily transform us; it is God’s Spirit in these words who transforms. We come to know God more when we’re willing to open our hearts and listen to His Holy Spirit through the words we memorize.

Have fun with this verse, and think of creative ways to invite your family to open up to God as they commit the verse to memory. **Go to homefrontmag.com for a free downloadable copy of the family verse.**

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Give *thanks* to
the LORD,
for *he* is good;
his love *endures*
forever.

1 Chronicles 16:34

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CAPTURING THE SEASON

Rusted Pumpkin

We don't usually relate rust with beauty. Our first thoughts about rust more typically include words like “old” and “corroded.” But some antique hunters and junk lovers look at an object covered in rust and clearly believe that the corrosion actually adds to the beauty of the object. This is how God sees us! He looks at us—rust and all—and sees the beauty of His beloved children. In fact, He is filled with tender compassion for us—He knows the scrapes and bruises that caused parts of us to break down. As you create these Rusted Pumpkins with your family members, remind them that they are chosen children of God and He loves us beyond measure—rust and all!



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 20-24 mason jar bands
- 1 spray bottle
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- 1 cup hydrogen peroxide
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- yarn or twine
- 4-5 (4") cinnamon sticks
- scissors or another sharp object
- small paintbrush

WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Lay out some newspaper or craft paper in a well-ventilated area.
2. Most of the mason jar bands have a protective coating. Use open scissors or another sharp object to carefully scrape off the coating in random spots.
3. After scraping, lay out all your mason jar bands several inches apart on the paper.

4. Pour the vinegar, peroxide, and salt into a spray bottle and shake it up.
5. Spray the bands, misting generously.
6. Allow bands to dry completely, then use the paintbrush to dust off any excess rust.
7. Make sure all your mason jar bands are facing the same direction.
8. Thread a piece of twine or yarn through the bands.
9. Tie the bands together as tightly as you can.
10. Cut off any excess string.
11. Once you have the twine tied, gently begin separating the jar bands, so they are spaced evenly.
12. Place a few cinnamon sticks in the middle to create the pumpkin stem.
13. Display this pumpkin in a prominent spot in your home as a reminder that God loves us and sees beauty in us, rusted and broken spots included!





CONVERSATION STARTERS

Thankful

What is your identity? In truth, identity is something so complex and multidimensional that it's hard to concisely define it. We have family identities, vocation identities, and faith identities. We gain a sense of identity from friends, hobbies, and the society we live in. With all of these layers and facets to what makes up our identity, there is a need to not only ask "What is my identity?" (as though it is an unchanging reality), but also to reflect on "How am I participating in the formation of my identity?"

A remarkable ministry called Royal Family Kids Camp partners local churches with the local government foster care department to offer foster kids the experience of a lifetime: a weeklong sleepaway camp filled with positivity, hope, love, and belonging. It is a week where volunteers relentlessly love kids in the foster care system and impart a sense of identity to them: that they belong to the royal family of God.

We play a "game" at Royal Family Kids Camp called "I'm Thankful." Instead of sharing a list of what we're thankful for and going in order, it's a dynamic, popcorn-style sharing celebration of gratitude. Anyone can go next. You can share something big or small. You just shout out what you're thankful for and then everyone else cheers in agreement. Then it goes to the next person and so forth. It is not a philosophical soul-searching for the most impressive answer; it is a contagious celebration of thanksgiving.

At camp these kids discover that they belong to the royal family of God, and in the royal family thanksgiving is not some static list—it's part of their dynamic identity. It's astounding just how much the kids get magnetically drawn into thanking God through this time, and how in that environment their identity is actually being formed.

This doesn't just work with camp family, either. I took this game to a family reunion celebrating my in-laws' 45th wedding anniversary. Toddlers, grade-school kids, and young teenagers who were "too cool for school" suddenly found themselves absorbed in giving thanks. It wasn't a duty; it was a response to the environment. We were raising glasses, cheers-ing, pounding the table in applause, and so on. This game and that moment of somewhat over-the-top thankfulness translated into active participation for our family's identity to be formed as a thankful family.

by Evan Reedall

Evan is pastor of marriage and family ministry at New Life Downtown in Colorado Springs, CO. He and his wife, Karen, have been married for nine years and they have two boys, William and Alistair. He is currently finishing his M.A. Pastoral Counseling at Denver Seminary. He also has a B.S. Biblical Studies & Theology from Multnomah University. Apart from work and school, life is well filled with family time, date nights, good friends, and the pursuit of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

get your family talking

Sometime this month, try it out. Get crazy thankful.

INTENTIONALLY FORM YOUR IDENTITY.

THE RULES TO THE GAME ARE SIMPLE:

1. At the table, share something big or small, menial or meaningful, that you are thankful for.
2. Come up with a creative celebratory response (pound the table, cheer, clink your glasses). This is key. The more affirmed and celebrated the thanksgivings are, the more people will want to participate.
3. Repeat randomly.



To learn more about Royal Family Kids Camp visit:
rfk.org

WORSHIP

PRACTICING

Gratitude

My church talks a lot about “practices.” Practices are the things we do over and over, and our practices shape our identity. I think we intuitively get this—if we practice playing soccer over and over, we become better soccer players. The more we practice playing piano, the better pianists we become.

Gratitude is one of the practices that shapes us. When we practice expressing gratitude to God over and over, we become more grateful worshippers.

This month, we’re focusing on the environment of Identity. I want to challenge you to practice gratitude to God each day as a form of worship, but I don’t want you to thank God for just anything. I want you to thank Him for who He says you are. I want you to think through what’s true about your identity in Christ (you’re chosen, loved, adopted, forgiven, redeemed, etc.), and I want you to thank God each day for one of those things.

Here’s what this could look like. Encourage each family member to come up with a short, one-sentence statement thanking God for some truth about her identity in Him. (It can be as simple as “Thank You, God, for loving me!”) Write down your statements and display them somewhere in your home. (You may choose to make them into a seasonal decoration by cutting out fall shapes like pumpkins or leaves and writing your statements on those.)


Then, once a day (maybe at dinner or before bed) have each person read his statement out loud. Say the same statement every day over and over for a month. Practicing gratitude to God for one of the amazing things He says about you will not only help impress in you a deeper sense of your identity but will be an act of worship to the One worthy of all of our thanksgiving.

by Emily Schulz

Emily is wife to Phil and mom to baby Eva. She serves as the Family Ministries, Women’s Ministry, and Discipleship Pastor at New Denver Church in Denver, CO. Emily has her MDiv from Denver Seminary and her BA in Christian Ministries from Biola University. Her current hobbies are the same as Eva’s: all she wants is for someone to feed her and let her sleep!

“I WANT YOU TO THANK HIM FOR WHO HE SAYS YOU ARE.”



A photograph of two hands, palms up, holding small yellow seeds. The hands are positioned vertically, with the top hand above the bottom hand. The background is a dark, textured surface. The seeds are small, round, and yellow, resting on the palms of the hands.

“PAUL AND SILAS, FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY, WOULD NOT LET THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES RULE THEM. IN THE DARKNESS OF THEIR CELL THEY BEGAN TO SING! ‘PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW ...’”

TRADITIONS

An Identity of Thankfulness

The darkness of that night was different. No moon graced the sky, the stars hid behind a veil of thick clouds, and dense stone walls defended those inside from any of the street torches' warmth.

The identities of anyone who made a sound were obscured by the darkness. Besides the moans of the ill inmates and the muffled voices of guards along the outer walls, it was silent. It seemed the darkness took any will the prisoners had left to speak. What would they say anyway?

Then, shuffling footsteps and the sound of chains dragging behind them broke the silence. In a flash, the guards hurled two more men into the cell closest to the door. As soon as the cell door smashed shut, the guards left, inviting the eerie silence to grip the night again. But not for long.

Paul and Silas, followers of the Way, would not let their circumstances rule them. In the darkness of their cell they began to sing! "Praise God from whom all blessings flow ..." The others sat up and leaned toward the voices, finding their hope was returning.

The duo did not stop after the first song but kept singing until they welcomed the morning with their thanksgiving, which gave the others something better than their shackles to identify with. The apostles' identity as children of a good God gave them reason to be thankful, and their thankfulness gave others hope while in that Roman prison.

Although none of us are trapped in a first-century prison, we ought to realize where we are imprisoned. As a culture, the walls of discontent surround us and try to block out the light that comes in recognizing the goodness of God in all circumstances. In a culture full of hopeless discontent and greed, living in an identity as the thankful people of God ought to be at the forefront of our minds.

Neither we nor our children will naturally live in such an identity. It must be cultivated by habits, patterns, and traditions of the practice of thankfulness. It will feel awkward in the beginning, but it will build an identity of thankfulness in us that will light up even the darkest places. One way to start is what my family called "thankfulness kernels."

For as long as I can remember, this was our Thanksgiving tradition. We all received one kernel of corn for each other member in the family, so six total for our family of seven. Throughout the meal, we were free to give a kernel to any member of the family and give a specific example of how we felt thankful for them. The kernel was a way for us kids to practically see how our thankfulness was being "sown" into the family's identity. One year my dad gave us all our kernels at the same time and said how he was thankful we all loved and served Jesus, and how it was the greatest answer to prayer he could ever receive. It would have been one thing for him to tell us that individually, but by saying it for the whole family to hear, he created a common identity of thankfulness for Christ's work in us.

This year consider starting this tradition for your own family and any friends who might join in on your thanksgiving feast. Simply distribute popcorn kernels to each person in attendance—one for each family and friend, excluding themselves. Then, encourage them to look for opportunities to share the ways they are thankful for each other and how they see God working in unique ways.

by Chase Windebank

Chase and his wife, Katie, live in Colorado Springs, CO, where he is a Children's Director at New Life Friday Night. They love the performing arts, hiking, reading, and the little things of life. Their passion is to show the world the love and grace of Jesus in every aspect of daily living.

PRAYER

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

This July, our son was born. There is nothing in the world like bringing a tiny human into your home and feeling the weight of responsibility for his life. Everything about the first few weeks was overwhelming. Then, one day a visitor from church came. She brought us a meal (thank you!), but she also brought something 10 times more meaningful. She had researched the meaning of our son's first and middle names—then she had found corresponding Bible verses. She asked if she could pray those verses over our son, and my mama heart crumbled into a million pieces.

Jackson: God is gracious

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (Psalm 145:8-9).

Alexander: defender

“How I love you, LORD! You are my defender. The LORD is my protector; he is my strong fortress. My God is my protection, and with him I am safe. He protects me like a shield; he defends me and keeps me safe” (Psalm 18:1-2 GNT).

This thoughtful act powerfully reminded me that my son belongs to God, and his heavenly Father loves him more than I ever could. Those verses spoke to his identity, and I continue to pray for my son to remember that God is gracious and that He is his defender. I'm so thankful that these things are true of God.

From now on, when I go to love on a family with a new baby I plan on borrowing this incredible gesture. What a fun way to pray over and ask God to bless a new life.

This month, find a time to try out this activity in your family! First, look up the meanings of each family member's first and middle names. Once everyone has heard what they mean, start searching for Bible verses that expand on the meanings. There may not be verses that are a perfect fit, but see where God leads you in the exploration.

Once everyone has meanings and verses, spend some time sharing these as a family. Talk about where you feel God has shaped your identity around your name. Talk about areas where God may be stretching you to grow into your identity. Spend time in prayer thanking God for how He has shaped each of you uniquely. Then, take turns praying the verses you found over each other. Insert your children's names wherever possible and remind them they are chosen children of God!

by Krista Heinen

Krista is wife to Greg and mom to Jackson. After more than five years of working in family ministry roles, she now has the privilege of staying home with her son. Krista continues to minister through momming, writing, speaking, and encouraging others in their faith journeys.

A newborn baby with blue eyes and a slightly open mouth, wrapped in a white and blue striped blanket. The baby is lying on a wooden surface, possibly a manger, with a tan cloth underneath. The background is a dark, textured surface.

Jackson: God is gracious

PSALM 145:8-9 "THE LORD IS GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE, SLOW TO ANGER AND RICH IN LOVE. THE LORD IS GOOD TO ALL; HE HAS COMPASSION ON ALL HE HAS MADE."



Count on It

Ethan woke up earlier than usual, too excited to sleep. He threw off his covers, tumbled out of bed, and raced to the kitchen. His mom, standing by the stove, was scooping scrambled eggs onto a plate.

“Mom!” Ethan slid a few inches as his socks hit the slippery tile. “Today’s the day!” he hollered as he took a seat at the kitchen table.

“Well, good morning to you, too,” his mom smiled. “Would you like some eggs?”

“Yes, please,” Ethan said. “But Mom! Remember? Today is the field trip to the pumpkin patch! And when we get back to school, we get to play Native American drums in music class. And then, after school, Zachary’s coming over! It’s going to be the best day ever. You can count on it.”

“Yes, buddy, I know. You’ve been looking forward to this day for weeks now.” Ethan’s mom grinned as she set his breakfast in front of him.

At school, Ethan’s second-grade class had been working on a pumpkin unit. Students brought pumpkins to school and measured and weighed all different kinds. They investigated the inside of a pumpkin, learned new pumpkin vocabulary, and used dried pumpkin seeds to do math problems. They wrote pumpkin stories, created beautiful watercolor pumpkins, and studied the life cycle of the pumpkin. On the very last day, today, the class would celebrate with a field trip to the pumpkin patch.

Ethan ate his eggs quietly, thinking about the excitement ahead. Suddenly a sound grew outside. Tree branches swayed and swished in the wind. Whoosh. Then a light, rhythmic tapping sound began.

“It’s bigger than pumpkin patches and drums and playdates. It’s stronger than rainstorms and illnesses and toothaches. And nothing can take it away.”

TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT.

“Mom? Is that ... rain?” Ethan ran to the window. Drops of water ran down the glass in long, thin lines. Puddles began to form on the sidewalk. Ethan sighed and his shoulders slumped. “No field trip today,” he whispered.

“I’m sorry,” Ethan’s mom said sadly. “That’s very disappointing.”

By the time they drove to school, the rain was coming down in sheets and the wind had started to howl.

Miss Hopper, Ethan’s teacher, told the class they would have to reschedule the pumpkin patch.

“At least we still have music class,” she told the second graders. “Playing the Native American drums will be such fun.”

Just then the phone rang. BRRRRING. Miss Hopper picked up the receiver and listened for a few seconds. “Oh my,” she answered. “I’m very sorry to hear that.” She hung up the phone and turned to the students.

“Boys and girls, unfortunately, there won’t be any music class today. Our music teacher, Mr. Bell, has gone home with a terrible cold.”

For the second time that day, Ethan sighed and his shoulders slumped. How disappointing. First, no field trip. Now, no drums. At least I get to play with Zachary after school, Ethan thought to himself.

After school Ethan dashed around puddles and ran to his mom’s car. “Ethan,” she said as he got in, “I’m so sorry, honey. Zachary’s mom just called. He has a bad toothache so he had to go to the dentist.”

For the third time that day, Ethan sighed and his shoulders slumped. Another disappointment.

That night, it was still raining when Ethan’s mom

and dad came to tuck him in. “It’s been a hard day, hasn’t it?” his dad said, giving Ethan a hug.

Ethan felt like crying. No field trip. No drums. No playdate with Zachary. “I was really looking forward to today. I was counting on lots of fun. But everything I hoped for didn’t happen. It all got taken away,” he said quietly.

“Those days are difficult.” His mom put her arm around him. “It doesn’t feel fair when things get taken away.” Ethan nodded.

“You know, Ethan,” his father told him, “there is one thing in this world that can never be taken away. No matter what. There is one thing we can always count on.”

“What is it? What can we count on, no matter what?”

“It’s bigger than pumpkin patches and drums and playdates. It’s stronger than rainstorms and illnesses and toothaches. And nothing can take it away.”

“Really? What is it?”

“God’s love for you. He chose you—He calls you His own. His love is so big and strong and powerful, you will never lose it. He has adopted you into His family.”

“Never? No matter what?” Ethan asked.

“No matter what,” his mom said. “You can count on it.”

“GOD’S LOVE FOR YOU. HE CHOSE YOU—HE CALLS YOU HIS OWN. HIS LOVE IS SO BIG AND STRONG AND POWERFUL, YOU WILL NEVER LOSE IT. HE HAS ADOPTED YOU INTO HIS FAMILY.”

by Kathryn O’Brien

Wife of thirty years, empty nester, educator, and award-winning children’s author, Kathryn O’Brien serves as Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Stoneybrooke Christian School. She loves writing for kids, from preschool picture books to middle-grade mysteries, hiking the canyons, and texting her three grown children from her home in sunny Southern California.

CREATE

Thankful Word Scramble

What tops your gratitude list? If you're like me, your identity in Christ may not be the first thing that comes to mind. I often focus on tangible things like food, shelter, friends, and family. But lately I've been thinking that some of those tangibles that easily pop to mind change over time. We go through seasons of plenty and seasons of want. We move in and out of friendships and even struggle within the family relationships we hold so dear. However, one thing never changes: our identity in Christ. Nothing can change the fact that God loves us and created us with a unique purpose. Nothing can change the truth that God chose us and calls us His own.

This year, as you gather to celebrate God's good gifts, create these Thankful Word Scrambles as a reminder of what God says about our identity in Him. Simply print out multiple word scramble pages and encourage your children to color and decorate them to go at each place setting around the table. Allow each guest to add some of his or her own "thankful for" items and scramble the letters. Then, each person at the table will pass the word scramble to the person on his right and allow that person to unscramble the words. Read together and share about all the ways you are thankful and the abundance of blessings in your lives.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1 Thankful Word Scramble sheet for each place setting, found at bit.ly/thankfulwordscramble
- 1 pencil or pen for each place setting
- markers and crayons

WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Print out the Thankful Word Scramble sheets.
2. Allow your children to color the sheets with crayons and markers.
3. Place one sheet and one pen or pencil at each place setting.



THANKFUL WORD SCRAMBLE

WE ARE THANKFUL FOR
Our Identity



- I AM DOLVE _____
- I AM DTEPAOD _____
- I AM CONHSE _____
- I AM NRETEOG _____
- I AM SEVAD _____

SCRAMBLE THE LETTERS OF
Your Thankful For Words





GAME TIME

SAY WHAT?

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- pens or pencils (1 for each person)
- 2-4 strips of paper
- big bowl or hat

BEFORE YOU START

Play this fun game around the Thanksgiving table (or any other meal you'd like). The setup is simple! Set paper strips and a pen next to each person's table setting. Set the large bowl or hat to the side, ready to collect everyone's papers.

TIME TO PLAY!

As your friends and family eat, invite them to write something about themselves—the more unknown, the better—on the strips of paper. For example, they can write something silly they have done, the food they dislike the most, their dream job, something unknown from their childhood, a hidden talent, the most unusual item in their bedroom, etc. They should also write their names on the paper. Any young children playing may need some help coming up with ideas and writing them down. Assign one adult to walk around and help the little cuties out!

Once everyone is done, collect the papers and place them in the bowl. Give them a good mix! Now it's time for the fun.

Pull out one paper and read it aloud to the group. Everyone must try to guess who said it! Continue going through until all the papers are gone. This is a sure way to enjoy getting to know everyone a little bit more.

REMEMBER!

God created each person to be unique, as you will glimpse in this game. We have such distinctive identities, but we also have a wonderful and simple overarching identity in Christ. In November, many of us have a heightened awareness of all we have to be thankful for. My encouragement to you is to spend extra time talking to your family about their identity in Christ. No matter what they are experiencing in school, at work, on the playground, etc., no one's idea of who they are stands up to who they are in Christ, and that is something to be thankful for!

by Heather DePartee

Heather worked in children's ministry for seven years and recently earned her degree in early childhood development. She is now working on her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential and MA in teaching at Fresno Pacific University in Fresno, CA. She is in love with her husband, Adam, and all of their adorable houseplants!



FAMILY TIME RECIPE

Corn Soufflé

PREP: 15 min.	COOK: 45 min. (oven)	YIELDS: 8 servings
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* For an easy metric conversion chart, search the Internet for "metric kitchen."

Have you ever had a recipe that identifies you?

You know ... the one recipe that everyone asks you to make and bring to a gathering? Well, this is that special recipe for me. It's almost embarrassing because the recipe is so easy, but despite its simplicity it's always in high demand. Consider adding it to your holiday feasts this year—I promise, you won't be disappointed!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 (15.5 ounce) can creamed corn
- 1 (15.5 ounce) can regular corn, drained
- 1 box cornbread mix
- 8 ounces sour cream
- 1 stick (1/2 cup) butter, melted

WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Preheat oven to 375° F.
2. Mix everything together in a large mixing bowl.
3. Transfer to a 9" x 13" baking dish.
4. Bake for 45 minutes.
5. Serve warm.

by Lindsey Collier

Lindsey lives in Georgetown, TX, with her husband and three children—one of whom has special needs, which has created her passion and commitment to this community. She has worked for Marriott Hotels for 18 years and enjoys the travel her position affords her. She loves entertaining in her 1905 historic home—even though the kitchen is very dated, she finds joy crowding in as many people as possible.





*quick
&
easy*

FAMILY FAVORITE

KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

CORNUCOPIA CREATIONS

PREP: 30 min.	COOK: 10-12 min.	YIELDS: 8 cornucopia
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* For an easy metric conversion chart, search the Internet for "metric kitchen."

A cornucopia is a symbol of plenty—a horn overflowing with an abundance of good things like flowers, fruits, and corn. Encourage your children to choose some of their favorite vegetables and cheeses and help you create this beautiful addition to your Thanksgiving Day feast.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 2 packages crescent rounds
- aluminum foil
- vegetables such as cucumbers, carrot sticks, celery sticks, cherry tomatoes, broccoli florets, cauliflower florets, peppers, etc.
- cheese such as cheddar, Colby Jack, etc.
- 1 (8 ounce) container garden vegetable cream cheese
- 2 cups sour cream
- $\frac{3}{4}$ (1 ounce) packet ranch seasoning mix
- mini fall-shaped cookie cutters
- nonstick cooking spray



WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Unroll the dough. Separate the 8 crescent round strips using a knife or pizza cutter.
2. Cut a square of foil and press it into a V shape about 4 inches long and about 1/2-inch wide at the tip, and 2 inches wide at the top. Start by pushing your fingers into the center of the square, folding the foil up and around your hand. Continue to shape it until you get your desired shape.
3. Spray foil cornucopia with nonstick cooking spray.
4. Starting at the bottom of your V, begin wrapping a strip of crescent roll around the foil, overlapping and stretching the dough each time by a little bit.
5. Pull the tip up a little to create a curved end.
6. Place on a baking sheet and bake according to the package directions or until the dough is golden—about 10 minutes.
7. Allow to cool.
8. Remove the foil from the crescent roll by grasping the roll and pinching the foil edges together. Then, gently twist the foil back and forth until it loosens from the sides and pull it out.
9. In a medium-sized bowl, combine sour cream, vegetable cream cheese, and ranch seasoning mix until well blended; chill.
10. You can store the cornucopia crescent rolls in an airtight container for a couple of days before filling them.
11. When you are ready to serve, use miniature fall-shaped cookie cutters to cut cheese, peppers, and cucumbers.
12. Dry any moist vegetables on a paper towel.
13. Fill your cornucopia with prepared vegetables and cheeses.
14. Serve with the dip as a sign of all the good things we have to be grateful for!

GOD'S WORD

Feast to Honor

I've been thinking a lot about feasts lately.

November is my favorite month of the year, a breathless 31-day stretch wrapped in rugged autumnal beauty and boasting the irresistible combination of food and family—two of God's most extravagant gifts. Yet, with a tight budget and 15 pounds of third-baby weight still clinging to my hips, I've far too easily found myself saying, "I can't afford to feast this year."

But according to Scripture, I can't afford *not* to feast.

In ancient Israel, the biblical feasts were tied to much more than the simple joys of food and fellowship. God's people were called to celebrate, yes, but more importantly, they were called to remember. Whether recalling the last plague that befell the Egyptians (the Feast of Passover), the hardships the Israelites endured during their exodus (the Feast of Unleavened Bread), or God's gracious provision throughout the year (the Feast of Harvest), the Israelites knew the discipline of remembrance was absolutely imperative to their endurance as God's chosen people.

“As Thanksgiving approaches, create an action plan for how your family will feast in a way that honors God.”

In Deuteronomy 8:19, God gave the Israelites a somber warning: “And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish” (ESV). God knew how easily their hearts could become proud as they settled into the abundance He had prepared for them, how easily they could believe their prosperity was the result of their own efforts (or worse, the result of some powerless foreign god).

In other words, He knew how quickly they would settle for scraps when they rejected the bounty of His feast.

In his essay “The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis famously stated, “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

My friends, regardless of how tight our budgets or how tight our pants, the sad reality is that we indulge ourselves in continuous feasting. That weight you feel every time you balance the checkbook? It’s a feast of worry and self-reliance. That crushing belief that your worth is tied to the number on the scale? It’s a feast of narrow self-focus. And that contentment you feel when everything in your world has fallen into place? It’s a feast of self-sufficiency—arguably the most dangerous indulgence of all.

We are a people filled to bursting with the paltry offerings of the world while Christ urgently whispers, “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:2).

We are a people who have forgotten the purpose of the feast.

HEAR IT

Read Deuteronomy 8:11-14 as a family:

Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Discuss the various ways we can become distracted by feasts the world offers. How can the presence of both hardships and prosperities affect our appetites for the things of the Lord? In what ways have we forgotten Him in our daily lives? What actions can we take to ensure we stay hungry for His Word?

DO IT

As Thanksgiving approaches, create an action plan for how your family will feast in a way that honors God. Budget and dietary restraints may certainly exist, but don’t allow them to keep you from the table! Remember—feasting is about remembering. Take it a step further by working as a family to create your own festival of remembrance. What do you want to commemorate this year? What types of foods, practices, or disciplines will help you remember the goodness of the Lord? Involve small children by inviting them to create place mats, place cards, and other types of decorations to match the theme of your feast.

“THESE ARE THE APPOINTED FEASTS OF THE LORD, THE HOLY CONVOCATIONS, WHICH YOU SHALL PROCLAIM AT THE TIME APPOINTED FOR THEM.” (LEVITICUS 23:4 ESV)

by Brittany Woodward

Brittany is a classically homeschooling mama who lives in the heart of Tornado Alley with her husband and three young daughters. A lifelong book junkie, she’s passionate about the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty, and the power of storytelling to shape faith and culture. When she’s not drilling Latin conjugations, she can probably be found running, reading, baking, or attempting to brew the perfect cup of coffee.

TOT TIME RHYME

TOT TIME RHYME

THESE COMMANDMENTS THAT I GIVE YOU TODAY ARE TO BE ON YOUR HEARTS. IMPRESS THEM ON YOUR CHILDREN. TALK ABOUT THEM WHEN YOU SIT AT HOME AND WHEN YOU WALK ALONG THE ROAD, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU GET UP. (DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7)



This month, reinforce your little one's identity in Christ by singing this darling call-and-response song to the tune of "Do You Know the Muffin Man?" Be sure to tell your child how much God loves her and that He chose her to be His own!



Parents Sing

Do you know that you are loved, and unique, from God above? Do you know that you are saved because of Jesus Christ?

Kids Repeat


Yes, I know that I am loved and unique from God above! Yes, I know that I am saved because of Jesus Christ!

Parents Sing

Do you know that God would say you're His friend every day? Do you know that you are made to be with Him forever?


Kids Repeat

Yes, I know that God would say I'm His friend every day! Yes, I know that I am made to be with Him forever!

 [Get the audio recording of this song at bit.ly/novttimerhyme](http://bit.ly/novttimerhyme)

written by Chad Coltman

Chad and his wife, Kelli, have been married 11 years, and they have three kids. When he's not hanging out with his family, Chad enjoys sweating it out in a good hot yoga session. He has been on staff at Rockharbor Church in Costa Mesa, CA, for 18 years and now serves as the Director of Church Wide Operations.

 Instagram @ccoltman

sung by Chad and Lainey Coltman

Lainey Coltman

Lainey is a 10-year-old fifth grader living in Orange County, CA. She is the oldest in her family, with a younger sister and a younger brother. In her free time she likes to write stories, sing the current pop hit on the radio, and craft and create new things. She also loves spending time with her guinea pig, Marshmallow!

BLESSING

BLESS WITH YOUR WORDS

A BLESSING CAN BE A PRAYER OF COMMISSION, A BIBLE PASSAGE, OR WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT. BLESSINGS CAN BE SPOKEN OVER A CHILD FOR THE PURPOSE OF DECLARING GOD'S PROTECTION, JOY, AND WISDOM OVER HIM.

God created you with thought and intentionality.

Do you know "full well" that you are valuable to God? God has loaded you with potential! Scripture reminds us of our identity, our significance, and who we TRULY are.

Read the following Scriptures over your child—insert her name wherever possible.

YOU ARE QUALIFIED

Giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:12)

YOU LACK NOTHING

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. (Psalm 23:1)

YOU ARE WITHOUT BLEMISH AND FREE FROM ACCUSATION

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. (Colossians 1:22)

YOU ARE RIGHTEOUS

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Romans 3:22)

YOU ARE LOVED

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. (Jeremiah 31:3)

YOU ARE GOD'S CHILD

See what great love the Father has lavished on us,

that we should be called children of God! (1 John 3:1)

YOU ARE STRONG

And the God of all grace ... will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (1 Peter 5:10)

YOU ARE PROTECTED

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

YOU ARE CREATED WITH A PURPOSE

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

PARENTS

Let's help our children remember WHO they are and WHOSE they are by speaking the following blessing over them.

(Insert child's name), you are loved by your heavenly Father. You are chosen, special, and created with a purpose. You are protected, you are strong, and you are honorable. You were made on purpose and have a purpose. You have significance

because you are a child of God. When God thinks of you, He smiles!

"FOR YOU CREATED MY INMOST BEING; YOU KNIT ME TOGETHER IN MY MOTHER'S WOMB. I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. YOUR WORKS ARE WONDERFUL, I KNOW THAT FULL WELL. MY FRAME WAS NOT HIDDEN FROM YOU WHEN I WAS MADE IN THE SECRET PLACE, WHEN I WAS WOVEN TOGETHER IN THE DEPTHS OF THE EARTH."

(PSALM 139:13-15)

by Ted and Kathryn Egly

Ted and Kathryn live in Minnesota. They are parents to four "cowboys." They love to read and explore. You can find their books on Amazon and follow their adventures at:



KathrynEgly.com

GLOBAL

*Awakening a compassionate heart and a global mind-set
in children for people beyond the boundaries
of their own neighborhoods.*

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS ...

SOUTH KOREA?

South Korea occupies the southern half of the Korean Peninsula in eastern Asia. It is bordered by North Korea to the north, the Sea of Japan to the east, the East China Sea to the south, and the Yellow Sea to the west. South Korea has an area of 38,023 square miles. It has 148 miles of land borders with North Korea and 1,499 miles of coastline.



NOW THAT WE KNOW WHERE IN THE WORLD SOUTH KOREA IS, LET'S MEET AND GREET THE PEOPLE.



There are over 51 million people who call South Korea their home.



If you lived in South Korea you most likely would not attend church. Religion: no religion 56%, Protestant 20%, Buddhist 16%, Catholic 8%.



If you lived in South Korea you would speak Korean. To say, "Hello, how are you?" in Korean, you would say, "Annyeong haseyo?" (pronounced an-nyeong-ha-se-yo).



If you lived in South Korea you might eat something called kimchi. This famous traditional side dish consists of salted and fermented vegetables, such as napa cabbage and Korean radishes, made with varying seasonings including gochugaru (chili powder), spring onions, garlic, ginger, and jeotgal (salted seafood).

DID YOU KNOW?

- Only three percent of South Koreans are considered obese. Compare this with countries such as the U.S., where more than 60% are considered obese.
- K-pop, also known as Korean pop, has taken the world by storm in recent years. First out was Psy with his world hit "Gangnam Style," which is one of the most-viewed video ever on YouTube!
- When taking a photo, South Koreans say "kimchi" instead of "cheese."

Thanksgiving in South Korea

Chuseok, also known as Korean Thanksgiving Day, is one of the most important and festive holidays of the year. This year, *Chuseok* falls on Friday, September 13, 2019, but the holiday period actually lasts for three days in total, including the day before and after *Chuseok*. Traditionally, Koreans return to their ancestral hometowns to celebrate with their families, causing one of the biggest traffic jams of the year as people often take to the road to reach the provinces outside of Seoul.

The origins of *Chuseok* can be traced back to Korea's past as an agrarian society. *Chuseok* is also known as *Hangawi*, which means the 15th day of August, according to the lunar calendar.

On this day, a full harvest moon appeared in the sky and families gathered to enjoy time together and give thanks to their ancestors for the plentiful harvest.

Koreans celebrate *Chuseok* by making special foods, particularly a certain kind of rice cake called

songpyeon. *Songpyeon* is made with finely ground new rice and the dough is kneaded into small round shapes and filled with sesame seeds, chestnuts, red beans, or other similar ingredients. The rice cakes are arranged upon layers of pine needles as they are steamed, filling the home with the delicate and fresh fragrance of autumn. On the eve of *Chuseok*, family members gather to make *songpyeon* together, illustrating the importance of family in Korean society.



<https://asiasociety.org/korea/chuseok-korean-thanksgiving-day>

STUDENT ID
MIDDLE SCHOOL

Image Bearer

I'm pretty sure if you asked your children to finish the sentence, "In the beginning ..." they would say "God created." This Scripture is so common, I believe it's lost some of its power. We know that God is the Master Designer and created all things, but we tend to overlook the fact that the only thing He created with His hands was mankind. As God's masterpieces, we bear His image. He gives us our identity and blesses us with unique spiritual gifts and talents (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Each gift has one purpose and that's to glorify our heavenly Father. As your child gets older you will start to become more aware of these spiritual gifts and talents.

As a parent, you are the primary nurturer of your children's faith (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). You can help them grow in their identities and faith by encouraging them to recognize their God-given gifts and talents. If you are having difficulty seeing your children's giftings, pray and ask God to give you eyes to see. He will help you and your children identify their gifts and will empower them to operate in them. Remember not to put too much emphasis on the gifts but focus on the gift-giver. Help your child understand that their heavenly Father intentionally placed these gifts and talents in them to build His kingdom.



Maybe you notice that your child demonstrates boldness and likes to take charge; others naturally tend to follow her. This could be a sign that she has the gift of leadership. Share with her that God has wired her this way, and encourage her to lean into His presence for wisdom. Help your child understand the power of this gift.

Maybe your child is amazing at a sport. Remind him that God has given him this talent and wants him to use it to glorify God—and possibly to tell his playmates the good news about Jesus.

Helping your children discover the way God created them gives them an understanding of their unique identity and purpose. Your children will realize that the God of the universe cares about them. He has a plan for their lives and has gifted them with all they need to fulfill it!

by Rayshawne Hayes

Rayshawne Hayes is the Friday Night Elementary Coordinator at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. He is a Colorado native and loves spending time with his family, hiking, swimming, and going to coffee shops. Rayshawne was called to minister to elementary students after a mission trip to Tijuana, Mexico. He loves pouring into the next generation and empowering children of any age to own their faith.



KEEPING UP WITH YOUR KIDS

Vaping A Safe Alternative?

THAT IDEA IS GOING UP IN SMOKE?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported at least nine vaping-related deaths and over five hundred vaping-related sicknesses and hospitalizations. Around the same time, Juul, a popular e-cigarette company, announced that Kevin Burns would be stepping down as CEO amidst company layoffs and restructuring. Smoking e-cigarettes, or “vaping,” has recently become wildly popular. It has been marketed as a safe alternative to smoking, a solution to quit smoking, and easier and cooler for teens to participate in while adding flavors and drugs like THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). “Electronic cigarettes, also known as e-cigarettes, e-vaporizers, or electronic nicotine delivery systems, are battery-operated devices that people use to inhale an aerosol, which typically contains nicotine (though not always), flavorings, and other chemicals. They can resemble traditional tobacco cigarettes (*cig-a-likes*), cigars, or pipes, or even everyday items like pens or USB memory sticks” (Drugabuse.gov, September 2019).

The technology of vaping has been around for years, but companies like Juul, founded in 2015, have only become well-known in the last few years. Although it is illegal for minors to purchase e-cigarettes, laws vary from state to state and students are finding ways to get them. Companies have quietly marketed to teens through flavors, fashion, and accessories. With vaping-related sickness on the rise, there is a need to be educated for the sake of our children and students we interact with. Because vaping is still relatively new, much is still unknown about these devices and the lasting effects they have on the human body. That being said, there is plenty of research available about the effects nicotine and THC have on our bodies. A typical cartridge of e-cig juice has the equivalent of 20 cigarettes, worth of nicotine. So, what we do know is that this is an easy method to deliver nicotine to a body, and that is concerning.

As people who interact with students, I encourage you to engage them in the conversation. If they are

not vaping, they are around students in the general population who are. Vaping is relatively easy to hide as e-cigarettes are small and often look more like flash drives than cigarettes. They don't produce smoke and usually generate a sweet smell that disappears quickly. As with most trends, students are curious about it, and even if they don't want to participate, they will be pressured to at some point. The marketing narrative makes vaping sound safe and better than smoking while still making you feel good due to the drugs and act of “smoking.” We have a chance to engage, inform, and correct this trend for our students so they know it is not only illegal for minors to vape, but more dangerous than anyone ever suspected.

Families, I encourage you to ask your children good, open-ended questions to learn together and challenge what they know about vaping. Here are a few questions to start with:

- Do you know what vaping is?
- Have you ever seen anyone do this at your school/sports/activities?
- Why do you think your friends or other people are doing this?
- Have you ever wanted to try vaping?
- Why do you think vaping is so concerning for students your age?

by Jeff and Shara Bachman

Jeff and his wife, Shara, have more than 40 years of youth ministry experience between them. When they are not spending their time equipping family ministry workers, taking photographs of adorable newborns, or keeping their three children alive and thriving, Jeff and Shara co-host a pop-culture podcast called What It Is. What It Means. They love all things youth ministry and pop culture—specifically Marvel movies.



KEEPING UP WITH YOUR KIDS!

Know what your kids are talking about

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

VSCO GIRL

It began as a description of someone who used the photo editing app VSCO; however it has now transitioned into meaning a girl who likes puka shell necklaces, scrunchies, hydro-flasks, and messy buns. This recognizable style has made its way around the Internet.

WHAT TO DOWNLOAD

The new iPhone iOS 13 can help keep your child safer. See below for why:

1. Enhanced location privacy: You now have the option to disable location services attached to photos and videos, which enables more privacy and control. "No one should have access to your kid's data without your permission, and iOS 13 is helping parents keep better control of who sees it."¹
2. Control over phone calls: iOS 13 allows parents to control phone settings for incoming and outgoing calls. This can be helpful in monitoring kids' phone calls with friends and classmates—but also offers protective measures against strangers, telemarketers, and scammers.
3. Dark mode option: Studies have shown that the blue light of screens can harm children's eyes through overexposure. The dark mode option of iOS 13 can help reduce the amount of blue light kids experience.

¹ Haley Zapal, "3 Great Features iOS 13 Offers Families," The Bark Blog, Sept. 24, 2019, bark.us/blog/ios-13-features-families/

FAMILY CHALLENGE

When we care about who our kids are becoming, then God's process for them to become what He intends is our top priority! This month, as you give thanks, encourage your kids in what they are doing right! What choices are they making and what friendships are they engaging in that have been beneficial and incredible? How are their good choices forming their character and identity? Dive deep into your encouragement, centered upon how much you care about who your kids are becoming.

EQUIPPING RESOURCES OF THE MONTH

Books

- *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic* by Foster Cline and Jim Fay

Podcast

What It Is, What It Means is a youth ministry/pop-culture podcast in a rapidly changing world. Join Jeff and Shara Bachman as they navigate through the complex world of music, movies, media, and tech to tell you what it is and what it means for you, your family, and your ministry. You can find *What It Is, What It Means* on iTunes podcasts or wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts.

by Haley Downey

Haley is the Middle School Pastor at Arbor Road Church, Long Beach, CA.



Parenting gives me all kinds of glimpses into God's character. My husband and I chose to name our second son Jedidiah, which means "God's beloved." We wanted our son to know his identity and hear it daily. We wanted to send him into every new environment, every job interview, and every future relationship with a predefined status: he is already loved.

I look forward to him being reminded of his identity each time someone calls him by name. I long for my boy to walk into middle school knowing that he is already loved so much so that he doesn't need to search for it from anyone there. He can simply remember his identity and then, out of an abundance of already being loved, overflow into those who need to know it for themselves.

Imagine a Little Leaguer walking up to bat. In the typical story, the little boy steps up to the plate, hits a home run, and the dad in that story stands up and shouts, "That's my boy!"

If you are in Christ, I have good news with a very different picture. If you have surrendered your life over to Him, you are one of God's kids. As you or I or Jed walk up to the plate of life, our Heavenly Father is already standing and shouting, "That's my child!" with absolute joy and love and acceptance before we even swing the bat. (That's good news for Jed, because he can't even walk yet!)

Did you catch that? Because of everything you already are in Christ, your heavenly Father loves you before you do anything for Him.

Before you hit a home run, God accepts you.

Before you hit a home run, He is proud of you.

Before you hit the home run, or simply get to first, or even before He knows that you will strike out, He lavishes His love and acceptance all over your being. This is your identity "in Christ." This identity was true of God's own Son—Jesus received this type of secure identity before He began His public ministry (see Mark 1:11). And it's true of you, too.

"I LOOK FORWARD TO HIM BEING REMINDED OF HIS IDENTITY EACH TIME SOMEONE CALLS HIM BY NAME. I LONG FOR MY BOY TO WALK INTO MIDDLE SCHOOL KNOWING THAT HE IS ALREADY LOVED SO MUCH SO THAT HE DOESN'T NEED TO SEARCH FOR IT FROM ANYONE THERE."

Child of God, may you know that your heavenly Father longs to pour identity into you so much so that you don't walk into work, job interviews, or church searching to be loved and accepted or defined by anyone else. In Christ, you're already loved. In Christ, before you walk up to the plate of whatever you have coming for today, your heavenly Father is standing up and shouting, "That's my kid!" Now, step up to the plate ... and swing for the fences!

by Megan Fate Marshman

Megan Fate Marshman loves God and delights in overflowing His abounding love to others. She leads the Women's Ministry at Hume Lake Christian Camps in Hume, CA, shepherds young adults at Arbor Road Church in Long Beach, CA, and shares Jesus around the world. She recently released her second book, entitled *SelfLess*, which will leave you thinking less ABOUT yourself, and more OF yourself at the very same time. Megan currently lives in Long Beach with her husband and two sons.

THE BURN

“Ryder, stop!” I said sternly in a hushed tone.

I quickly put out my arm to stop my son in his tracks as our headlamps reflected off two big, bright eyes. It was a moonless night and these eyes were about 30 yards away from our little makeshift campsite.

“What is that, Dad?” Ryder asked. “Do we need to run?”

“No,” I said. “I think it’s a bear. Just stand still.” The two glowing eyes started to move toward us and I let out a loud, “Git!” The glowing eyes stopped advancing and rose from two feet off the ground to six or seven feet in the air.

“Woah ... that’s a big bear, buddy,” I said to Ryder. “You don’t need to be afraid, just stay right with me.” I let out one more loud shout and the big glowing eyes quickly turned. The bear huffed at us and quickly ran off, accompanied by what sounded like a freight train crashing through the forest. Although we never actually saw the bear, we never will forget the glowing eyes.

For my son and me, this night will go down in our history book of good father-and-son adventures. This was our fourth father-son backpacking trip—a much-anticipated yearly tradition to this special place we affectionately call “The Burn.” This place has significant history for me because in 1985 my father and grandfather took me to this secret location for my first overnight backpacking trip.

.....

“IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS AHEAD, FIGHT TO FIND SOME ONE-ON-ONE TIME WITH YOUR KIDS. YOU WON’T REGRET IT. MORE THAN THAT, MAY YOU RETURN TO YOUR FUNDAMENTAL IDENTITY, AND FROM THAT PLACE MAY YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO BE, PLAY, AND DELIGHT IN THE FACT YOU ARE KNOWN AND LOVED BY YOUR PERFECT HEAVENLY FATHER.”

“What makes this place so special?” you might ask.

Is it the natural waterslides carved out of the granite riverbed? No.

Is it because you can catch the most incredible wild brook trout by the dozens? No.

Is it because of the beauty, adventure, and nostalgia this place can offer? No.

Is it because of all the backpacking gadgets, gizmos, and gear you get to play with? No.

It’s simply this.

It allows the two of us to **return to, remember, and reclaim** two fundamental identities: the identity of a father and the identity of a son.

As a father, it allows me to see my son.

I hear him and take notice of how he is a little boy maturing into a man. It allows me to engage his





heart, truly getting to know him and understand him. In these moments I get to be a father with no other distractions. Simply a dad lovingly focused on his son. And my son simply gets to **be, play, and delight** in the fact that he is known and loved by a father who really, really loves him.

I am so thankful for these moments I get to spend one-on-one with my son. In a world filled with distraction and the demands of life vying for my attention, there is nothing better than stripping all of that away and allowing myself the opportunity to lean deeply into this relationship.

These experiences are irreplaceable; yet each and every time I am reminded of another reality. I am reminded that my heavenly Father calls me “son.”

Before “dad,” this is actually my fundamental identity. What I know and have experienced is that He is a good Father, He is always inviting me closer, He is always desiring to spend time with me, and He is always inviting me to **return to, remember, and reclaim** the identity of “son.”

In the days and weeks ahead, fight to find some one-on-one time with your kids. You won’t regret it. More than that, may you return to your fundamental identity, and from that place may you have the ability to **be, play, and delight** in the fact you are known and loved by your perfect heavenly Father.

Kit Rae

Kit is the Campus Pastor at Rockharbor Church in Costa Mesa, CA. He is passionate about Jesus, his family, and the potential of the local church.

TOUGH TOPICS

Combating Rejection

Rejection. At one point or another we've each felt the gut wrench of offering ourselves and being turned down. Just the sight of that word brings up painful memories of believing I wasn't good enough, or that I was in some way less than. These hurts come from a variety of sources—from kids on the playground in grade school to words from family members that had a unique way of eviscerating me. Rejection hurts. It goes against our need to belong and the ways we have been designed to live in community with one another; but what does this mean for our kids?

There are oh so many avenues for our kids to experience rejection. Whether intended or not, these moments can have lifelong consequences such as loneliness, loss of self-esteem, aggression, and depression. Heartbreakingly, home can be one of the first places some kids experience rejection. Children who have been rejected by one or both parents struggle with their ability to relate to others, self-image, self-esteem, and personality development. This includes children who come from homes where divorce or the threat of divorce has occurred, even when the rejection is perceived rather than spoken. But kids also experience rejection in school, sports, friend groups, work environments, etc.—the potential rejection kids face is overwhelming.

As much as we may want to shelter our kids from ever being rejected, the reality is, we will never be able to. We can, however, give them the tools, knowledge, and faith to help get them through life's

painful moments—tools such as knowing that the God of the universe chose them before the beginning of time. Long before they could be cast aside by anyone else, God handpicked them. Further, He loved your children so much that He made the ultimate sacrifice for them. But most importantly their heavenly Father, who chose them and died for them, has plans for them. He created each child for a purpose. And in those painful moments of being rejected, where they may start to question their worth and identity, they can find hope in His plans for them. Sometimes moments of rejection open them to a greater dependence on the Lord and who He says they are.

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If we tie our identity to the acceptance of others, we run the risk of being completely devastated when we are inevitably

rejected in some form. But when we root ourselves in the truth that we have been chosen by God, before the beginning of time, we can build our lives on that assurance. Not only did He choose you, He died for you. Sometimes rejection feels like dying, but true acceptance from our heavenly Father is the exact opposite. It's life, freedom, joy, peace, and a confidence that is often imitated but never actually replicated.

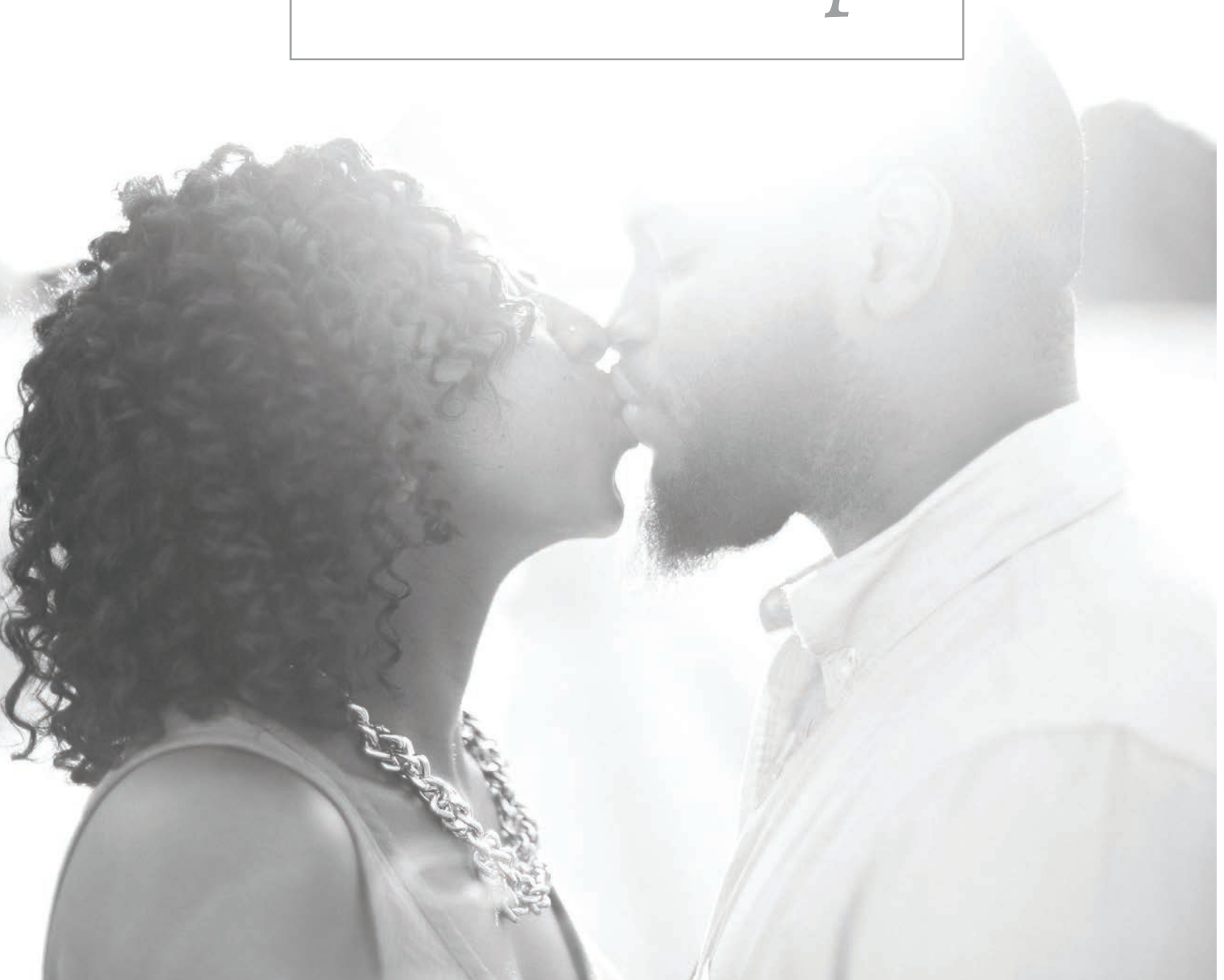
by Amanda Visser

Amanda is a long-run-loving, strong-coffee drinker who has been redeemed by a God who relentlessly pursued her. As a Colorado native, she enjoys time spent in the mountains and painting in her free time.



MARRIAGE

A Unique
Partnership



“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:10 NLT

If you’re like most married couples, it took some time to blend your life and your spouse’s life together in the first few months (or years) of marriage. Sure, spiritually two became one in a moment, but in day-to-day life things are a little more complicated. I’ll never forget one of our early (and incredibly silly) arguments in the first few weeks of marriage over ... wait for it ... the proper way to make tea.

Before you laugh, in the South, where we are both from, tea is one of the foundations of life. We’re not talking Earl Grey—we love our tea sweet and cold. And to my horror, my beautiful new bride was making it in a foreign way.

“That’s not how tea is made,” I said as I watched my wife boil a tea bag on the stove.

“Well, how do you make tea?” she asked innocently.

“The right way—in a coffeemaker,” I said, adding some snark. At that moment I realized my way was probably not the most common method—anytime you make a beverage in a machine that is literally called “something else” maker, you know you’re stepping out of the original purpose.

Marriage is a funny thing—even in circumstances where the family cultures are nearly identical (like mine), blending two people’s lives takes work and can be messy.

Though all people are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8) and find no distinctions in Christ (Galatians 3:28), we know from both Scripture and our own experience that we are still very much individuals—as God created us to be. In marriage, we should not run from our individuality and chase sameness, but celebrate the differences God intended.

Paul teaches us that “we are God’s masterpiece” (Ephesians 2:10 NLT). Masterpieces aren’t homogeneous—they’re one-of-a-kind. We have many copies of van Gogh’s *Starry Night*, but only the original work is the masterpiece. God created both you and your spouse on purpose for a purpose—you need each other’s uniqueness!

Paul continues, God “created us”—that’s you and your spouse—“anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10b NLT). God not only created you and your

spouse as individuals, but recreated you both in Christ so you both could accomplish His plan for your lives. Embracing the unique way God created you and the unique way God created your spouse is key for you both to be and to do what God intended.

This can be frustrating! We all love the way we do things (like making tea in a coffeemaker) and the way we are wired to think, but God has something bigger in mind for marriage. God intends marriage

to be a unique partnership of two specifically created individuals to work together toward His purpose for them. Instead of trying to make your spouse a carbon copy of yourself, celebrate his or her uniqueness and thank God for who He made each of you to be.

“INSTEAD OF TRYING TO MAKE YOUR SPOUSE A CARBON-COPY OF YOURSELF, CELEBRATE HIS OR HER UNIQUENESS AND THANK GOD FOR WHO HE MADE EACH OF YOU TO BE.”

by Stephen Castleberry

Stephen is a husband, father to a great son, and the Experience Pastor at Antioch Georgetown Church in Texas. He has a master’s degree from Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. He and his wife, Ashley, grew up in Arkansas, but are becoming more Texan every day.

SPIRITUAL GRANDPARENTING

Word Power

As grandparents we have lived enough life to understand the importance of words. We are a generation that knows “the tongue has the power of life and death” (Proverbs 18:21). I’m sure each of us could share a story of someone we know (possibly yourself) who has been torn apart by words, someone who has been assaulted with a tongue that should be registered as a lethal weapon.

But the tongue can also speak life. It can build others up and empower them to be brave and move forward. Words can speak identity deep into the soul of the recipient—especially children. Children are inherent learners, open and eager to receive the messages they hear—to discover who they are and what life is about. We know, from our own experience, that they get plenty of messages intended to wound, to make them feel less than enough and unlovable.

One way grandparents can make a difference is to practice speaking blessings to our grandchildren. Speaking a blessing is an opportunity to open their spiritual eyes and declare truth over them—God’s truth! A blessing can be a prayer of commission, a Bible passage, or words of encouragement. Blessings can also be spoken over a child for the purpose of declaring God’s protection, joy, and wisdom over him or her. In a blessing the recipient is encouraged, and God is exalted and glorified.

A blessing is different from a prayer: When we pray, we direct our words toward God; but in a blessing, we direct our words to an individual. Scripture is filled with examples of blessings and when we look to Jesus, we see how He speaks about us.

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JESUS TELLS US WE ARE:

- loved (John 3:16)
- forgiven (1 John 1:9)
- His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10)
- never alone (Matthew 28:20b)
- chosen (1 Peter 2:9)
- protected from the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

Blessings are most effective when given on a regular basis—we don't have to wait for lofty spiritual moments. We can bless our grandchildren when they come to visit or when we babysit. We can even text blessings and words of encouragement to our older grandchildren who have access to phones.

The bottom line is to emphasize what God says about them. Remind them He chose them and calls them His own. Use your words to speak life. Speak Scripture over them and insert their names when fitting. In the battle for your grandchildren's identity, you can help lay the foundation of truth they need to combat the enemy's lies by simply using your words.

by Debbie Guinn

Debbie is the Editor in Chief of HomeFront magazine. She has more than 30 years of experience working in children's and family ministries. She is passionate about equipping parents to become leaders of God's truth in their own households. She is a recent transplant to Austin, TX, where she spends her free time enjoying her five grandchildren and perusing antique stores and flea markets.



LOOKING AHEAD

Advent

The Advent season is nearly upon us. 'Tis the season when we yearn, groan, anticipate, and settle in to a kind of holy waiting. We echo Isaiah's "How long, o Lord?" as we wait for Simeon's "At last!"

Life with children is lively and wonderful, but every once in a while I feel the expectations pressing in from all sides. Today, I found myself attempting to organize the attic, while at the same time instructing my children (in a nice, calm voice, of course) to stop turning our living room into a gymnastics studio, to please put all the furniture back where they found it, and to please return all the bath and pool towels to the closet. *Oh and Jane, please stop turning the faucets on in every room of the house and draining the entirety of the water supply from the refrigerator water spout.* After each incident, Jane mournfully confesses, "I'm sorry, Mommy. I won't do it again," only to turn around and do the very same thing exactly one minute later.

Our home is filled with erratic moments like these and today, like every day, I am yearning for Him to come near. I'm anticipating His coming. I'm ready for Advent.

So, what is Advent? Is it just the month of December? Is it an excuse to give a child a gift each day from the Santa Advent wall calendar?

Advent is different from Christmas. Advent is like the 37th week of pregnancy; Christmas is delivery day. In Advent, we are waiting; we hope. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming." We are in the season of anticipating Christ's birth, His coming to us.

How do we actively participate in this holy time of year? If we are not intentional, the season slips away and we wistfully recall the scurrying, the busyness, the hustle and the bustle—and miss the joy and the miracles all around us.

Lately, I've been pondering our past Advent seasons and remembering the numerous ways we have observed Advent as a family. As the ground yearns for the precipitation of the first snow, I

long to begin each Advent season prayerfully and thoughtfully, or at least as much as is possible for a family of six! And then there's the ever-present temptation to plan and attend holiday parties. Christmas celebrations are extremely merry and yes, we too will joyfully host one. But, I try to be vigilant about directing our attention toward Christ. As we enter the Advent season, could we as the people of God be a part of the answer to the longing in people's hearts?

A few years ago when all of our children were younger, we were doing well if we managed to read an occasional Advent devotion and light the weekly Advent candle (all while enduring meltdowns, children reaching for and blowing out the candle, and even climbing on the table to take the candles out of the Advent wreath). This year, now that the children are older, we hope to add to these practices.

Life can feel crowded, but I wish to inspire you to guide your family on a journey that will shape their souls and imaginations and lead them to truly behold the beauty of Christ during Advent.

Remember, these aren't legalistic rituals to impress God; these are life-giving practices that adapt to the unpredictable nature of family life.

Following are a few ideas I've culled over the years from several places; don't let this list be overwhelming—choose one thing.

I hope these ideas help you and your family prepare for Christ's arrival and engage the season of Advent with expectation and hope.

by Holly Packiam

Holly is the Pastor of Parenting Ministries at New Life Downtown in Colorado Springs, CO. She also writes and speaks on parenting and spiritual formation. Holly received a BA in Communications and an MA in Counseling. She enjoys coffee, homeschooling her four kids, long walks, and meaningful conversations with her husband, family, and friends.

Preparing for Christ's Arrival

expectation
&
hope



GRATEFULNESS LIST

Hang a sheet of paper or use a chalkboard to write an "I'm grateful for" list and ask all family members to write how they have been blessed this year by God or others.

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Gather the family for a daily Advent devotional, discussion, and craft. Family read-aloud favorite: *Unwrapping the Greatest Gift* by Ann Voskamp.

ACTS OF KINDNESS

Each day, commit to engage in an act of kindness toward a family member, friend, or neighbor. (Spend focused time with a child, bring a hot drink to a friend, deliver a warm meal to a family, give a baked good to the mailman.)

SERVE LOCALLY

Commit to serve a local organization, like a rescue mission or the Salvation Army or a shelter. You could also gather a group to go caroling at a nursing home.

GIVE GLOBALLY

Give something to an organization that serves people in need around the world. Last year, our kids chose to give a goat and chickens to a family in Africa.

ADVENT WREATH

Every Sunday of Advent, light a candle in the Advent wreath along with reading a devotion to your family as you prepare to celebrate hope, peace, joy, and love.

CONSUME LESS

Consider discussing how shopping less and giving out more to others could make this season holier and more Christ-focused. Encourage your kids in giving to others rather than thinking about what to add to their Christmas lists.

10

ENVIRONMENTS

The order of the 10 Environments listed coincides with the monthly distribution of this resource.

2

“God transforms me when I step out in faith.”

OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

As children and students are challenged to step out of their comfort zone from an early age, they learn to experience a dependence on the Holy Spirit to equip and strengthen them beyond their natural abilities and desires. We believe this environment will cultivate a generation that, instead of seeking comfort, seeks a radical life of faith in Christ.

1

“God has entrusted me with the things and people He created around me.”

RESPONSIBILITY

This environment captures the ability to take ownership for one’s life, gifts, and resources before God. A child must be challenged to take responsibility for his or her brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as for those who are spiritually lost. Our hope is that the Holy Spirit will use this environment to allow each child to understand that God has entrusted His world to us.

3

“Asks the question, ‘What needs to be done?’”

SERVING

This posture of the heart asks the question, “What needs to be done?” It allows the Holy Spirit to cultivate a sensitivity to others and focuses on a cause bigger than one individual life. It helps fulfill the mandate that as Christ-followers we are to view our lives as living sacrifices that we generously give away!

4

“God fills me with His love so I can give it away.”

LOVE & RESPECT

Without love, our faith becomes futile. This environment recognizes that children need an environment of love and respect in order to be free to both receive and give God’s grace. Innate to this environment is the value that children are respected because they embody the image of God. We must speak to them, not at them, and we must commit to an environment where love and acceptance are never withheld due to one’s behavior.

5

“God has a big story, and I can be a part of it!”

STORYTELLING

The power of The Big God Story impacts our lives by giving us an accurate and awe-inspiring perspective into how God has been moving throughout history. It is the story of redemption, salvation, and hope and tells how I have been grafted into it by grace. It further compels us to see how God is using every person’s life and is creating a unique story that deserves to be told for God’s glory.

6

“God knows me, and I can know Him.”

KNOWING

Nothing could be more important than knowing and being known by God. We live in a world that denies absolute truth, and yet God’s Word offers just that. As we create an environment that upholds and displays God’s truth, we give children a foundation based on knowing God, knowing His Word, and a relationship with Him through Christ. God is holy, mighty, and awesome, and yet He has chosen to make Himself known to us!

7

“I belong to God, and He loves me!”

IDENTITY

This environment highlights who we are in Christ. According to Ephesians 1, we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed, and given an inheritance in Christ ... all of which we did nothing to earn. This conviction allows children to stand firm against the destructive counter-identities the world will offer.

8

“When I get off track, God offers me a path of healing.”

COURSE CORRECTION

This environment flows out of Hebrews 12:11-13 and is the direct opposite of punishment. Instead, biblical discipline for a child encompasses a season of pain, the building up in love, and a vision of a corrected path for the individual with the purpose of healing at its core.

9

“God’s family cares for each other and worships God together.”

FAITH COMMUNITY

God designed us to live in community and to experience Him in ways that can only happen in proximity to one another. The faith community serves to create an environment to equip and disciple parents, to celebrate God’s faithfulness, and to bring a richness of worship through tradition and rituals, which offer children an identity. Our love for each other reflects the love we have received from God.

IT IS OUR PRAYER THAT HOMES AND CHURCHES WOULD CREATE THESE ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN TO LIVE IN SO THEIR FAITH WILL GROW IN A COMMUNITY OF CONSISTENCY, COMMON LANGUAGE, AND PRACTICE. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW THESE ENVIRONMENTS CAN IGNITE A TRANSFORMING FAITH IN YOUR FAMILY, WE SUGGEST YOU READ:

10

“I see Christ in others, and they can see Him in me.”

MODELING

Biblical content needs a practical living expression in order for it to be spiritually impacting. This environment serves as a hands-on example of what it means for children to put their faith into action. Modeling puts flesh on faith and reminds us that others are watching to see if we live what we believe.



SPIRITUAL PARENTING:
An Awakening for Today’s Families
BY MICHELLE ANTHONY
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These beautifully illustrated stories can be read aloud as a family each day in December, painting a sweeping picture of God's plan to rescue broken humanity.

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