HomeFront
a spiritual parenting resource

May 2018

GOD’S FAMILY CARES FOR EACH OTHER AND WORSHIPS GOD TOGETHER.

homefrontmag.com
HOW TO USE

HomeFront

Each issue highlights an environment your family can create in your home. This month looks at FAITH COMMUNITY. 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.
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.

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.

In this issue, we explore the environment of FAITH COMMUNITY. The Bible refers to this community in many ways: the body of Christ, the believers, and those who walk in the faith. Since God designed us to live in community, there are experiences with Him that can only be had within the context of relationships.

In those relationships, we experience aspects of God's characteristics that are new to us, we receive a fuller picture of who we are, we get new pictures of what our Father's love looks like, and we learn to embrace our true identity in Christ as it is affirmed and called out by those who love us.

Michelle Anthony
Executive Pastor: Family Ministries | New Life Church
Twitter @TruInspiration

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: pushpay.com/pay/nlcministries and choose “HomeFront” from the Giving Type to make your tax-deductible donation. Thank you for helping HomeFront minister to families around the world.

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.

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.
EDITOR’S NOTE

Life together! Sounds beautiful, doesn’t it? Most of us enjoy doing life with others—especially if those “others” are just like us! We love spending time with friends who believe in and enjoy the same things we do. But what about life together with those who are different?

Luke tells us in chapter 6 beginning with verse 32, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ... But love your enemies, do good to them ... Then your reward will be great” (vv. 32–33, 35).

This issue of HomeFront encourages you to broaden your circle and step out of your comfort zone when it comes to doing life together. Our STORYTELLING article (page 18) shares a beautiful story of a forgotten group of people and how one church decided to create a diverse faith community by inviting them to serve. This month’s PRAYER article (page 16) points out the importance of letting others know we are praying for them and offers some fun and unique ways to do so.

TAKING ACTION (page 32) shares about an organization that works with the vulnerable and hard to reach around the world. STUDENT ID for high school (page 38) inspires us to invite others to “belong” even before they “believe” as a way to ultimately bring them to faith.

All in all, we hope this issue makes you look at the environment of FAITH COMMUNITY and the way we do life together in fresh, new ways.

Debbie Guinn
Editor in Chief | New Life Church
debbie@homefrontmag.com

Debbie is the Editor in Chief of HomeFront magazine. She has more than 25 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 co-parents two of her four grandchildren with her son. She spends her free time enjoying her grandchildren and perusing antique stores and flea markets.
MAY THE
God
WHO GIVES &
ENDURANCE encouragement
GIVE YOU THE SAME ATTITUDE OF MIND TOWARD EACH OTHER THAT CHRIST JESUS HAD,
so that with
ONE MIND and ONE VOICE
YOU MAY GLORIFY THE God and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ.
Romans 15:5-6
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Because most faith community gatherings center on a meal, we hope these quilted letters will be a great addition to your next get-together. The quilted pattern serves as a reminder that it takes all different types of people to make a community, and when we all blend together we create something beautiful! Even with all our differences we all have at least one thing in common—we love to eat!
WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- paper-mache letters spelling EAT
- several different prints of fabric—\(\frac{1}{4}\) yard each
- matte-finish Mod Podge
- small bowl or plastic container
- sponge brushes

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. Lay your fabric on each letter and cut the fabric into smaller pieces. Make sure you have enough to cover each letter entirely.
2. Pour Mod Podge into a bowl or plastic container.
3. Start with a small area and brush a thin layer of Mod Podge onto the letter with a foam brush.
4. Begin laying pieces of the fabric on the letter to form a quilt pattern.
5. Run your hand across the fabric to make sure it is smooth.
6. Continue covering small spaces on each letter with Mod Podge and fabric until each letter is completely decorated.
7. Let the Mod Podge dry for 30 to 60 minutes. Don’t worry if the lines are not perfect—the final coats of Mod Podge will smooth them out. If you do have some fraying, you can just snip the threads before the topcoat.
8. With the foam brush, paint a good layer of Mod Podge over your fabric while brushing in one direction.
9. Apply two topcoats of Mod Podge, and allow each layer to completely dry between coats.

by Debbie Guinn
Our lives often become consumed by the buzz, shouts, and laughter of the ins and outs of family life. I believe there is something worshipful about the shouts and laughter and even the busy buzz. If worship is about expressing praise and adoration to God, then simply being together in the family structure that God created brings glory to Him.

As beautiful as the buzz of family life may be, there are also appropriate times for individuals to steal away and worship God on their own, taking time to express focused praise and adoration to God. Our kids sometimes struggle to find that time away and even struggle with what to do with that time. Consider creating a specific place in your home this month for each person to worship God and to respond individually to what the Holy Spirit is speaking to her. These individual responses can feed into a corporate response as your family does life together.
FAITH COMMUNITY

WORSHIP

Family Time

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
• butcher or white wrapping paper
• markers
• optional: sheets of paper

WHAT YOU’LL DO

Write out the verses from Acts 2:42–47 on a piece of butcher paper or white wrapping paper. You might hang this on a wall in a quiet place in your home or lay it on a desk or table that can be designated as your “response station.” Place markers near the paper. Sit down with your family and explain the idea. You might say something like:

This space is for you to worship God in response to what the Holy Spirit is doing in you. When you feel led throughout the month, go to the station and use the markers to highlight words that stand out to you, circle parts of the verses that strike you, or write observations in the margins. You can also ask someone to read the passage to you and draw pictures in response. As you read or listen to the passage, think about:

1. What’s the big idea of this passage?
2. Are any words or phrases repeated?
3. What are people doing in this passage?
4. What is God doing? What sounds like the character of God? What do we learn about God from this passage of Scripture?
5. What is one message or principle we can learn from this passage? How can I write that in one sentence?
6. How could these verses change the way we live?

You may want to put extra pieces of blank paper next to the verses to give people more room to write or draw their thoughts. As the paper fills with observations, the margins become crowded with words and questions, and the verse becomes highlighted with colors and shapes, take time as a family to talk through those observations as you worship God as a family.

by Courtney Wilson

Courtney is the Elementary Director at Christ Community Church in the suburbs of Chicago. You can usually find her chasing her four amazing kids around with coffee in one hand and a camera in the other.
PLAY THE “THIS OR THAT” GAME WITH YOUR FAMILY BY CHOOSING BETWEEN THE ITEMS ON THE LIST BELOW AND THEN ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS ON THE NEXT PAGE. AFTER YOU HAVE PLAYED WITH YOUR FAMILY, PLAY THE GAME WITH YOUR FRIENDS.

**THIS OR THAT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dogs</th>
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<td>Batman</td>
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<td>Cake</td>
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CONVERSATION STARTERS

THIS OR THAT

A fun trend is popping up on social media these days. It’s basically a game of “This or That.” People post a list with two columns and then go through it and choose which item they prefer for each row. Then you are supposed to post a blank copy of the same list so your friends can choose their favorites and post them on their own pages or stories.

When my friends post these lists, I immediately look to see how many things we have in common. It feels good when we like the same thing. In fact, I’m realizing more and more that we are easily drawn to people who are similar to us. There is definitely some good in this. It is fun to have things in common that we can do together and share conversation about. But this month, what if we tried to look at places where we are different from our friends? Sometimes our differences spur us to be brave, try new things, and grow as a result.

GET YOUR FAMILY TALKING

1. When you compared your lists, what were some things you had in common?
2. What were some of your differences?
3. Look at one of the rows where you picked different things. Take a moment to explain to each other why you made the choices you did.
4. How can our differences help make us a stronger family or community?

While it can be fun to be part of groups of people who share common interests, celebrating our differences often invites God to show up in powerful ways. In these places He stretches us and molds us, preparing us for the ultimate community we will join one day when people of all nations, tribes, and languages come together to worship Him.

by Krista Heinen

Krista is a pastor who desires to help the next generation understand its place in The Big God Story. She has her BS in elementary education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her MDiv from Bethel Seminary. Krista loves to preach, play board games, and spend time chatting over coffee. She and her husband, Greg, live in Wisconsin.
I love sharing special moments with friends, and I never want to miss out on fun. But I was REALLY pregnant when our young couples fellowship group began talking about going on a camping trip together in our own beautiful state of California. Most of the couples had one child, and it sounded SO FUN! So, I bought a porta potty for my tent (because we all know that a woman eight-and-a-half-months pregnant gets up eight times a night to use the bathroom), and we were in for the trip.

As we planned our time away together, we envisioned camping near the ocean with a beautiful view and a gentle breeze—kids frolicking in the water and making sandcastles while we enjoyed time together. In actuality, we ended up in a parking lot (camping slot) with record-high temperatures. Ten children (most under the age of two), 16 adults, and temps around 90 degrees with hot tents for naptime were not what we had pictured. We coined the phrase “Survivor Weekend” because we survived the challenges together. That was 21 years ago.

We continued the tradition each year, eight families going away together and living in community for a three-day weekend. We played fun games together and prepared meals together, and the kids slept together in fun sleepover fashion. Each one of us cherishes the memories and traditions we created. As the years progressed, the ratio of adult to child changed, and we were outnumbered. It didn’t matter. The places we went changed too. We transitioned from camping in a parking lot with

Survivor Weekend 2005
crying children all night to two cabins with four families in each, in the mountains. Then one year, one of the ladies had the brilliant idea to look for a house large enough for all of us. We stayed at a three-story house in Oceanside, CA. It was on the beach and glorious! The activities changed as our kids got older, and it was so fun to see the older kids play and interact with the younger ones. They all played games together instead of going solo on electronic devices. They were actually interacting with each other!

Through the years, we cheered friends on and celebrated new children arriving. We attended birthday parties for the kids, we walked with friends through trials in marriage, and we encouraged each other through tumultuous teenage years. Just this past summer we all celebrated the first of the kids in our group getting married. My husband whispered to me, “They look so young!” “They are two years older than we were when we got married,” I whispered back. How can our children now be getting married? What a joyous time we had—all the families together celebrating a wedding. Some of our Survivor Weekend kids were in the wedding party.

Friendships formed through years of community together have developed into lifelong friendships. We have since moved out of state but still return to California to spend time with these dear friends. We have laughed together, cried together, cheered one another on, and supported one another. This is what community and life together is all about.

by Cheryl Howard

Cheryl is the Kids Director at Woodmen Valley Chapel in Colorado Springs, CO. She has been in children’s and family ministry for the past 26 years. She married her college sweetheart, and they have two grown children.
...pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. -JAMES 5:16 (NIV)

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• a small chalkboard and piece of chalk or a piece of cardboard and a marker
• silly hats, sunglasses, party blowers, fake flowers, toys, etc.
• optional: construction paper, scissors, craft sticks, tape

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Gather your family together and brainstorm a list of members of your faith community. Challenge yourselves to brainstorm enough people to have a different person to pray for every day this month.

2. Make a sign that says, “You’ve just been prayed for!” You can use a small chalkboard or a piece of cardboard for this. You’ll just want to write big enough and clearly enough for the words to show up in a picture.

3. Gather and make a few props. You can simply pick up items you have lying around the house that would make for good photo props, or, if you want to get extra crafty, you can cut out sunglasses, lips, mustaches, hats, etc., out of construction paper and tape them to craft sticks.

4. After that, choose someone from your list to pray for. Spend a couple minutes praying for that person. (Repeat this every day, crossing people off your list as you go.)

5. Finally, snap a selfie—using your props, holding up your sign, and making silly faces, of course—and send it to the person you just prayed for!
YOU’VE BEEN PRAYED FOR

One of the most essential elements of faith is prayer. To be in a faith community is to be praying for others and to know you’re being prayed for as well. Yet, how often do we say we are going to pray for somebody and then just plumb forget? We don’t mean to neglect prayer. We know it’s important. It just doesn’t always feel urgent. And so it’s forgotten. We might remember to pray for the big things—if someone in our faith community is battling cancer, or just lost a loved one, or was recently laid off. But what about the little things? The daily stuff?

The lifting-someone-up-to-God-just-because-you-love-her prayers? If you’re anything like me, this kind of prayer takes a bit more intentionality. This month, take this fun and easy challenge as a family to show the members of your faith community you’re remembering them in prayer. The key to this challenge is to not just pray for these people but to tell them that you prayed for them. This isn’t a way to boast or brag but to bless. What a blessing it is to know for sure that someone is praying for you! Consider this a gift you can give to your faith community this month.

One caution: if you’re praying for someone who is going through an especially tough time, sending a lighthearted photo may be insensitive. In those situations, a simple text saying that you’re praying for him may be more appropriate. The bottom line is to be intentional about praying for those you love and those who will be encouraged to know they are being prayed for.

by Emily Schulz

Emily is the Family and Women’s Ministries Pastor at New Denver Church in Denver, CO. She has her BA in Christian Ministries from Biola University and her MDiv from Denver Seminary. Emily loves seasonal activities, date nights with her husband, Phil; cooking; playing games; spontaneous song and dance; and creating space for people to be known and loved.
CREATING A DIVERSE FAITH COMMUNITY

God designed us to live in community and to experience Him in ways that can only happen in proximity to one another. I have come to discover that our “community” must include those who are not like us. If we only invest in relationships with people who are similar to us then we miss out on the opportunity to grow, expand our understanding of who God is, and appreciate each other’s differences.

About a year ago, I met the Browns. The Browns are a couple at our church who feel called by God to spiritually invest in a community of adults with special needs. Some of these special needs are cognitive, some are behavioral, and others are physical. Each need presents a barrier to these adults thriving in a typical church setting. Most churches don’t understand how to minister to adults with these needs. Due to their limitations, these individuals struggle to adapt to most adult ministries offered and yet they obviously don’t fit in the children’s ministry either. Without a clear path for discipleship, many faith communities do nothing.

I thought about a statement I had written many years prior: “God’s family cares for each other and worships God together.” I felt convicted. In what ways was I caring for this community, and how were we worshipping God together?

As I met with the Browns I was struck not only by their compassion for these adults but also by their passion for them. Their passion was that these individuals would have a tailor-made discipleship process available to them in a loving and caring environment. They also shared with me that they felt passionate about these individuals having the opportunity to serve as well. This statement stood out to me. The Browns wanted these adults to not only be served by our church but also to be able to use their gifts to serve others. To be honest, I had never thought about this. I knew I wanted them to be cared for, but I hadn’t even thought about ways we could worship and serve together.

This idea began to take root in my heart as we started planning our next “Family Night.” Our church hosts family nights once a quarter. On these occasions we gather together with all the generations for a night of eating, worshipping, and participating in various stations, using HomeFront magazine articles for inspiration for each area. Of course we wanted to invite our new adult friends with special needs, but the Browns challenged me to go one step further … let our new friends also serve by leading a station of their own!

And this is exactly what they did. The Browns and the rest of the adults spent weeks coming up with a station that would allow our families to understand how to live in compassion and understanding for people with diverse disabilities. This station would include trying to talk with taffy in your mouth, trying sign language, getting through an obstacle course in a wheelchair, and trying to read an eye chart with glasses that were not the right prescription. In each of these areas, adults with special needs led the families through the experience and shared their own stories with them.

Throughout the night I watched as we came together across boundary lines that usually separated us. I watched the Holy Spirit give us a new vision of what it means to live in community with those who are different from each other. And I watched our new friends soar with pride and confidence as they were able to serve others in our church as leaders.

I am thankful that God is expanding my heart to think of my community with other followers of Christ in more inclusive and diverse ways. As I lean into this type of “doing life together,” I see a fuller picture of who God is. I see His love, compassion, faithfulness, and joy in ways that I could never experience by staying in the safe confines of only sharing life with those who are just like me.

by Michelle Anthony

Michelle Anthony is the Pastor of Children and Parents at New Life Church and the Family Ministries Ambassador at David C Cook. Michelle has graduate degrees in Christian education, theology, and leadership and over twenty-five years of church ministry experience as a children’s and family pastor. She lives in Colorado Springs and loves a good book and a cup of coffee.
SPRITUAL MOTHER’S DAY CARDS

Did you know the roots of Mother’s Day date back to the 19th century? In the years before the Civil War, Ann Reeves Jarvis of West Virginia helped start “Mother’s Day Work Clubs” to teach local women how to properly care for their children.

The official Mother’s Day holiday arose in the 1900s as a result of the efforts of Anna Jarvis, daughter of Ann Reeves Jarvis. Following her mother’s 1905 death, Anna Jarvis envisioned Mother’s Day as a way of honoring the sacrifices mothers make for their children.

After gaining financial backing from a Philadelphia department store owner named John Wanamaker, in May 1908 she organized the first official Mother’s Day celebration at a Methodist church in Grafton, West Virginia. That same day, thousands of people attended a Mother’s Day event at one of Wanamaker’s retail stores in Philadelphia.

Following the success of her first Mother’s Day, Jarvis—who remained unmarried and childless her whole life—resolved to see her holiday added to the national calendar. Arguing that American holidays were biased toward male achievements, she started a massive letter-writing campaign to newspapers and prominent politicians urging the adoption of a special day honoring motherhood.

By 1912 many states, towns, and churches had adopted Mother’s Day as an annual holiday, and Jarvis had established the Mother’s Day International Association to help promote her cause. Her persistence paid off in 1914 when President Woodrow Wilson signed a measure officially establishing the second Sunday in May as Mother’s Day.1

MOTHER’S DAY AROUND THE WORLD

While versions of Mother’s Day are celebrated worldwide, traditions vary depending on the country. In Thailand, for example, Mother’s Day is always celebrated in August on the birthday of the current queen, Sirikit.

Another observance of Mother’s Day can be found in Ethiopia, where families gather each fall to sing songs and eat a large feast as part of Antrosh, a multi-day celebration honoring motherhood.

In the United States, Mother’s Day continues to be a day to present mothers and other women with gifts and flowers, and it has become one of the biggest holidays for consumer spending. Families also celebrate by giving mothers a day off from activities such as cooking or other household chores.

This Mother’s Day, consider celebrating those mothers and grandmothers in your faith community who have invested in your life. Encourage your children to join you in thinking of women whose testimonies have displayed God’s faithfulness, grace, and wisdom. Then, create these beautiful cards and write a note to each woman acknowledging the ways she has impacted your life.

by Debbie Guinn

1. history.com/topics/holidays/mothers-day
WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- card stock
- markers or crayons
- multicolored buttons
- craft or hot glue
- scissors

WHAT YOU’LL DO

2. Cut out the card.
3. Color and decorate the front of the card.
4. Glue on buttons.
5. Write a note or draw a picture inside the card.
6. Deliver to a spiritual mother or grandmother in your faith community!

Older women likewise are to ... teach what is good, and so train the young women ... that the word of God may not be reviled.
Titus 2:3-5 ESV
REMEMBER!

Being part of a faith community allows us to experience God in ways we otherwise would not. He designed us to live in community—to support, encourage, love, and care for those around us, the people we call our family. As communities of God’s children come together to connect in this way, we are also worshipping our Father who delights in the gathering and communion of His people. Remind your children that being part of a faith community allows us to see God in others and celebrate the richness of His love with like-minded people.
Bedsheet Ping-Pong

Before you start...
Find a big space outside to play the game. Lay the two bedsheets across from each other with some space in between. Now gather everyone you know for a crazy game of Bedsheet Ping-Pong!

What you’ll need
• 2 flat full bedsheets
• 1 ping-pong ball
• 1 coin

Time to Play
Once you have your friends and family together, split the group into two teams. Assign one team to one of the sheets and the other team to the second sheet. Flip a coin to see who gets to start with the ball.

The players on each team should evenly surround and pick up their sheet. The team that won the coin toss will place the ball on their sheet. As a group, they must serve the ball to the other team.

Using only the sheets, teams should toss the ball back and forth just as you would in a real game of ping-pong. If a team does not catch the ball in their sheet and the ball falls on the ground, the other team gets one point and gets to serve the next round. The first team to 11 points wins the round, and the best three out of five rounds wins the match. Feel free to move about and let this game get as big and crazy as you’d like!

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!
Potlucks are a time for fun, easy dishes that please a large crowd. These three dips will do exactly that! Serve all three with a big bowl of your favorite corn chips and your guests will be happy.

by Debbie Guinn
1 COWBOY CAVIAR

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/3 cup white wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- juice of 1/2 a lime
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 pound Roma tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 1 (15 ounce) can black-eyed peas, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15 ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (11 ounce) can sweet corn, drained
- 1 large ripe avocado
- 1 red onion, diced
- 1 cup red bell pepper, diced
- 1 cup fresh cilantro, chopped

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. In a large bowl, blend the olive oil, white wine vinegar, chili powder, cumin, lime juice, and salt.
2. Add the tomatoes, black-eyed peas, black beans, corn, avocado, red onion, bell pepper, and cilantro.
3. Cover and chill for an hour for flavors to blend.

TOPPING
- 4 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 cup panko bread crumbs
- 1/4 cup of Parmesan cheese

*You may replace the jalapeños with another can of green chiles if you don’t want the dip to be too spicy.

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. Preheat oven to 375° F.
2. Mix the first 6 ingredients together using a mixer.
3. Place in an 8” x 8” baking dish.
4. In a small bowl, stir together the topping ingredients.
5. Spread the topping evenly over the dip mixture.
6. Bake for 25 minutes until dip is bubbly and topping is lightly browned.

2 POPPER DIP

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- 2 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup Mexican blend cheese
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 (4 ounce) can diced jalapeño*
- 1 (4 ounce) can diced green chiles

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. In a large bowl, combine the first 8 ingredients.
2. Transfer to a small (1 1/2 quart) slow cooker.
3. Cover and cook on high for 2 hours or until heated through, stirring intermittently.

3 BEAN DIP

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- 1 can (16 ounces) refried beans
- 1 cup picante sauce
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded cheddar cheese
- 3/4 cup sour cream
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. In a large bowl, combine the first 8 ingredients.
2. Transfer to a small (1 1/2 quart) slow cooker.
3. Cover and cook on high for 2 hours or until heated through, stirring intermittently.
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KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

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KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

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THE NEXT TIME YOUR COMMUNITY GATHERS, THEY WILL SURELY DELIGHT IN THESE BUTTERY, CHOCOLATEY SANDWICH COOKIES. YOUR CHILDREN WILL HAVE FUN SPREADING THEIR FAVORITE NUT BUTTER AND HELPING YOU COVER THESE COOKIES WITH CHOCOLATE. WHETHER YOU USE WHITE, MILK, OR DARK CHOCOLATE WITH PEANUT BUTTER OR NUTELLA, YOU CAN’T GO WRONG. MIX AND MATCH AND ENJOY AS YOU SERVE YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS!

Yields: 50 sandwich cookies  Time: 30 min.

* For an easy metric conversion chart, search the Internet for “metric kitchen.”

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 100 round, buttery salted crackers, such as Ritz
• 1 1/2 cups creamy peanut butter, Nutella, or nut butter, or a combination
• 24 ounces chocolate or white almond bark or melting wafers
• wax paper

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Lay wax paper on a cookie sheet and place a wire rack on top. Set aside.
2. Spread about 1/2 tablespoon of nut butter on a cracker. Top with another cracker. Do this until all crackers are gone.
3. Place sandwich cookies in refrigerator to chill.
4. Melt almond bark or melting wafers in the microwave, stirring every 30 seconds.
5. Drop each chilled sandwich cookie into melted chocolate. Make sure cookie is covered and then remove with a fork.
6. Place cookie on wire rack.
7. Repeat until all sandwich cookies have been dipped.
8. Store in airtight container with wax paper between cookie layers. These also freeze well!

by Debbie Guinn
Following Jesus is hard sometimes, isn’t it? Of course, we want to follow Jesus. We try to follow Jesus. But there are so many distractions and challenges. Not to mention we are surrounded by people every day who either don’t know Jesus yet or simply choose not to follow Him.

No one knew this better than the apostle Paul. Once he met Jesus, things got extremely difficult for Paul. The strict Jewish leaders he used to work and live with—called the “Pharisees”—felt like Paul had turned his back on God, even though the opposite was true. The Pharisees even tried to kill Paul!

Not only that, but the Christians didn’t believe Paul had really become a Christian! They thought he was trying to trick them so he could put them in prison. (See Acts 9:26.) Fortunately, after Barnabas stood up for Paul, most of the Christians came around and supported Paul as he started lots of churches.

Yup. Paul knew following Jesus was hard. Maybe that’s why he wrote so many times about “encouraging one another.”

In fact, Paul said something in almost every letter he wrote about our need to encourage each other. Here are just a few encouraging passages …

- In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul says to “encourage one another and build each other up” (v. 11).

- In Ephesians 4 Paul reminds us that the whole body of Christ (that’s us!) “grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (v. 16).

- Second Corinthians closes with these words: “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace” (13:11).

Romans is Paul’s longest letter. He writes about so many topics: how God reveals Himself in creation, our need for Jesus, the gift of grace, God’s acceptance of people from every culture and background, worship, obedience, serving God with our whole lives, living with hope and endurance.

It seems like Paul covers it all in Romans! What’s really interesting is looking at why he wrote Romans. Early in the very first chapter, right after the greeting, Paul writes these words:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. (vv. 11–12)

Paul wants to visit so he can encourage the believers—and so they can encourage him!

Since he can’t come right away, he writes this long letter filled with words of encouragement.

You need encouragement. I need encouragement. The other Christians around you need encouragement. (Not to mention our friends who don’t know Jesus yet.) Let’s follow Paul’s example and encourage one another … starting today!
HEAR IT
Read the article together. Then read Romans 1:1-16 together as a family. You might want to read a few of the other verses mentioned earlier if you’ve got the time. They’re really good! Then discuss these questions:

1. What are the hard parts and easy parts about following Jesus?
2. What is one way we, as a family, can encourage you? (Answers will likely be different for each person!)
3. Who is someone you can encourage at school, church, or youth group; in the neighborhood; or on your sports team?

DO IT
A simple way to encourage someone is to write him or her a note or send a text or email, Facebook message, or Snapchat. Let that person know you’re thankful for him. Tell him you’re praying for him. Include how you’re praying for him. (Look at Paul’s prayers in Philippians 1:9-11, Ephesians 3:14-21, and Colossians 1:9-14 for examples of specific prayers.) Ask your friend if there’s any other way you can pray for him. Then follow up! You can also take action based on one of your answers to questions two and three from the Hear It section.

by Keith Ferrin
Keith is a husband, dad, conference speaker, author, and biblical storyteller. His passion is helping individuals, churches, and families not just read and study the Bible but truly enjoy it!

keithferrin.com.
TOT TIME RHYME
FAITH COMMUNITY

ALONG THE ROAD

As you are driving along the road this month, have a fun family sing-along by singing these lyrics to the tune of “Yellow Submarine.” Be sure to remind your children that God’s family cares for each other and worships God together.

We all live in a faith community, a faith community, a faith community
We all live in a faith community, a faith community, a faith community

We stand for each other in our faith community, our faith community, our faith community
We stand for each other in our faith community, our faith community, our faith community

We serve each other in our faith community, our faith community, our faith community
We serve each other in our faith community, our faith community, our faith community

We care for each other in our faith community, our faith community, our faith community
We care for each other in our faith community, our faith community, our faith community

Get the audio recording of this song at bit.ly/maytottimerhyme

by Tommy Larson

Tommy has been serving as a pastor at ROCKHARBOR Church in Costa Mesa, CA, for the past 11 years. He was part of the development team of the Tru curriculum. He lives in Costa Mesa with his wife and two children.
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.

I cannot overemphasize how important it is for children and teenagers to have godly voices speaking truth into their lives. I’m forever grateful for those in the faith community who have invested in my life. Those godly men and women taught me so many important lessons when I was young and trying to figure out who I was and where I belonged. I learned (among other things) that GOD IS MY FATHER and He LOVES me!

Because I discovered this unconditional love and acceptance by my Father God at a young age, I didn’t have to seek superficial love and acceptance from other things. I’m still learning and growing because I’m connected to a faith community. It strengthens my marriage, improves my friendships, and benefits my everyday life.

As my husband and I now raise our children, I am grateful to have other adults speaking grace, love, encouragement, and truth into their lives. I know my sons don’t always listen to my husband and me, so it’s good to know they have other people providing wisdom and insight and guiding them toward living God’s best for them.

READ
Read as a prayer over your child. Hebrews 10:25 (NIrV): “And let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us encourage one another with words of hope. Let us do this even more as you see Christ’s return approaching.”

BLESS
(Insert child’s name), may you know you are loved by God and by others in our church. May you give and receive encouragement. May you always be learning and growing into the person God created you to be. May you stay connected to the faith community, and may God’s peace and grace rule and reign in your life!

by Kathryn Egly

Kathryn is the wife of one handsome man, and together they are raising four young men (a.k.a., four cowboys). She works at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. You can find her blogging about their family’s adventures at kathrynegly.com and get a copy of her first children’s book, Climb, Soar, Swim, Explore!, on amazon.com.
That's over 65 million people globally who have been forcibly displaced by war, violence, and persecution. We believe that no border or barrier should stop people from experiencing God’s love. That’s why we go where others have said we cannot, working with vulnerable and displaced communities that are difficult to reach in order to bring practical solutions that build a future free from hardship and exploitation for children.

1 in every 113 people are displaced. Over half of those are children.

It all began in a refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border where Partners Relief & Development founders Steve and Oddny Gumaer encountered a young, orphaned girl. Their simple gift inspired a community of people across the world to respond in partnership to help children affected by conflict and oppression.
WE WORK WITH THE VULNERABLE AND THE HARD TO REACH.

REFUGEES
Refugees are forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster and have legal right to seek safe asylum. They face limited access to healthcare and education and often with no means of official employment. Also, they are dependent upon outside assistance for the basic necessities to survive.

MIGRANTS
A migrant worker is someone working outside of his home country. Migrants often represent a country’s poorest people as they work in the lowest paid and most dangerous jobs. In many cases, migrant workers are not entitled to the same rights as citizens, leading to exploitation by employers and officials, with children in particular at risk of being trafficked.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE
Internally displaced people are those who are forced to flee their homes but remain within their country’s borders. They are often extremely vulnerable, facing food shortages, inadequate shelter, and lack of access to water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. This severely impacts the well-being of children and contributes to high malnutrition and mortality rates.

STATELESS PEOPLE
A stateless person has no recognized citizenship in any country. These people can experience persecution, arbitrary taxation, extortion, restrictions on movement, and limited access to education and healthcare. Their lack of recognized rights and their desperation lead many to attempt to escape their circumstances, and they often end up in the hands of traffickers or lose their lives at sea.

WE HAVE 3 BIG IDEAS TO CHANGE THEIR FUTURE

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
for community well-being and a nurturing environment for children.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES
and restoring communities to stop the trafficking, oppression, and exploitation of children.

EMERGENCY RELIEF
provision of food, shelter materials, and basic survival necessities during times of acute crisis.

GIVE CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT AND OPPRESSION A FREE, FULL LIFE. DONATE NOW:

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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 ...

THAILAND

Situated in Southeast Asia, Thailand borders Burma (Myanmar) to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the east, Burma and the Andaman Sea to the west, and Malaysia and the Gulf of Thailand to the south. Its total area measures 198,455 square miles. The length of its coastline measures 2,000 miles. Its capital city, Bangkok, is the most populated city in the country.
If you lived in Thailand you would most likely eat a lot of rice. Rice is the main dietary staple of Thailand. Thais eat two kinds of rice: the standard white kind and glutinous, or sticky, rice. Thai food is known for its unique combinations of seasoning. Coconuts play an important role in the Thai diet.

Religion: Buddhist 93.6%  Muslim 4.9%  Christian 1.2%

If you went to religious services in Thailand you would most likely go to a Buddhist temple.

If you lived in Thailand you would speak Thai. To say, “Hello” you would say, “Sawasdee” (pronounced sah-wah-dee).

If you lived in Thailand you would most likely eat a lot of rice. Rice is the main dietary staple of Thailand. Thais eat two kinds of rice: the standard white kind and glutinous, or sticky, rice. Thai food is known for its unique combinations of seasoning. Coconuts play an important role in the Thai diet.

DID YOU KNOW?

- In 2017, seven of Thailand’s popular dishes appeared on the list of the “World’s 50 Most Delicious Foods (Readers’ Pick)” — a worldwide online poll of 35,000 people by CNN Travel.
- Thailand is where you'll find both the smallest and the largest creatures in the world. The smallest mammal in the world, the bumblebee bat, calls Thailand home. You can also find the largest fish, the whale shark, in Thai waters.
- Bangkok, Thailand, has been named the world's hottest city.

Partners Relief and Development, this month's Taking Action organization, started in 1995 in response to the plea of Rose Mu, a widow living in Sho Klo Refugee camp in Thailand. She pleaded, “Tell your friends in the West what is happening to Myanmar’s children.” Rose is a wonderful Christian woman who insisted on doing something with her faith, not just talking about it. Read more on page 32.
Junior high is a rough period of life for most people. Students are in an awkward phase—not little kids anymore but also not adults yet. Junior high students are often searching for identity, trying to figure out who they are and where they belong, and looking for a community of friends to “fit in” with. Nobody wants to feel like an outsider; in fact, God designed us to live in community and to experience Him in ways that can only happen in proximity to one another. Our faith community is so important, and it’s especially important for our junior high students to feel like they belong.

Our junior high pastor recently told a story about how he saw faith community come alive and be pivotal to a student in his ministry. This particular student had just moved from another country to live with his aunt. She was a member of our church, so she brought Nicholas with her and checked him in to the junior high ministry. As the volunteers and staff greeted this new student, they soon realized that Nicholas didn’t speak any English. He was visibly uncomfortable, and despite all of their efforts to help him feel included, Nicholas left after 10 minutes.

The next week, Nicholas came back. Again, the volunteers and staff did their best to help him get plugged in, but he still left early. This went on for a couple of weeks until one volunteer heard Nicholas’s story. She had actually just returned from a six-month mission trip where she had learned Nicholas’s first language. The next Sunday she was giddy for Nicholas to arrive, and when he did, she greeted him in his language. For the first time since he started attending services, Nicholas smiled and appeared to relax a little bit. This volunteer sat by Nicholas and translated the sermon and the notes for him and even helped him get to know some other kids his age in his small group. Each week, he began staying longer and longer, and soon he was staying for the entire service. This volunteer welcomed Nicholas into a faith community, which offered him a new identity in his new church. Isn’t God faithful?

I would encourage you to read this story to the junior high students in your home. Remind them that God not only wants them in a faith community, but He has also equipped them all with different talents and gifts—gifts that can help them draw others in and make them feel included. Our love for each other reflects the love we have received from God—so how are we loving others?

by Samantha Fugate

Samantha is the Subscription Manager and Social Media Coordinator for HomeFront magazine. She and her husband, Joseph, are foster parents living in Colorado Springs, CO, with their two children. Samantha enjoys lazy days and spending time with her family.
As parents of four teenagers, Sarah and I constantly struggle with culture bombarding our children. Our kids are inundated by music, social media, television, and their friendships. We wrestle with the question, “How do we teach our kids to be in the world but not like the world?” So many young people are searching for something to belong to! They dress a certain way, listen to music that others like, participate in activities they otherwise wouldn’t—all for a feeling of belonging. They are really searching for relationship and community because that is how God has designed us.

God created within each person a desire to belong. So, how do we as parents of teenagers help our children navigate this desire? We, as a family, have chosen to open our home to our teenagers’ friends, whether they know Jesus or not. This sometimes leads to colorful conversation in our home or words that might not be used in our house otherwise. This philosophy of opening our doors to these young people has created unique opportunities to share God’s love.

Several months ago, my son invited one of his girlfriends over. As we hung out in the living room, with the television on in the background, we began talking casually. This young lady began to ask questions about what I do. I shared with her that I work at a church full-time. Her questions invited me to share the “why.” As the conversation continued, the door opened for me to share how I came into relationship with Jesus. The young lady didn’t come to know Jesus that night, but a seed of the gospel was planted, and I pray it will be watered and nurtured to salvation!
For many years, it was so easy to allow our kids to invite their “good” friends into the home. Funny that we would try to dictate who was “good” instead of allowing God to do that. The shift in our home has come through observing how Jesus pursued the lost. He didn’t come for the healthy but rather chased after the sick and needy. In fact, Luke 19:10 says, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” As we have continued to adopt this way of living, God has opened the doors for others like that young lady to enter into our faith community (home) to be known and loved. Sarah and I are so thankful that God sought us and saved us. We now want to offer that love to others and model to our children how to do that as well.

This month, take time to read through John 4. Here you see a great picture of Jesus allowing a woman who didn’t “believe” to “belong” in His presence, which ultimately led to her faith and acceptance into His family. Ask your teens whom they would want to bring into your home for the purpose of experiencing faith community.

by Chris Steenmeyer

Chris is the Family Life Pastor at Mountain Springs Church in Colorado Springs, CO. Chris and his wife, Sarah, lead a blended family of nine and love sports and the outdoors. Chris is passionate about equipping families to raise up the next generation of Jesus-followers.
You’re not going to believe what I’m about to tell you, but—it happened. When I was nine years old, my parents abandoned me at a convent. Just dropped me off and drove away.

I know. It sounds like the discarded plot of Sister Act 7, but it’s true. I’m still not sure how it all went down, but I suspect my parents were itching for a date night at Steak and Ale. Either that, or my mom thought it would be the best way to encourage me into the priesthood.

Both are equally plausible.

Whatever the case, one Friday evening, duffel bag slung over my shoulder, I met my Aunt Margaret at a convent somewhere in central Oklahoma. She was a bona fide nun from Ohio, in town for what I can only assume was the ecclesiastical version of a student exchange program.

Even though my parents tried to soft-pedal the whole engagement by saying things like, “Spending time with your Aunt Margaret will be fun!” my nine-year-old self had seen The Sound of Music and knew that a convent was no Chuck E. Cheese’s. Sure, I had fond memories of Aunt Margaret singing and giving me handfuls of root beer candies to keep me quiet during mass, but I had never considered her for the role of weekend cruise director. I envisioned myself spending two full days in forced silence, praying a lot, and avoiding ruler slaps to the knuckles.
So, imagine my surprise when my convent sleepover turned into a rollicking episode of VH1’s “Behind the Cloister.”

Forgive me if I’m blending my nun encounters here—it’s all a bit of a blur—but one of the first things I recall doing upon arriving at nun camp was going to the kitchen, where one of the sisters stood in front of a bunch of hole-filled (but not holy) sheets of wheat cracker dough. They looked like a bunch of unleavened Connect Four games. It turns out these were the leftovers that had been discarded from baking the round wafers used for Holy Communion. When I asked about them, the nun explained what they were, handed me an entire sheet, and said I could eat as much as I wanted. Knowing how they ration the communion wafers in church (one per worshipper), I dove right in, chomping on a feast of Savior sandwich crust. Not because it tasted particularly good, but because I felt like some sort of edgy altar boy.

But the excitement was just getting started.

After stuffing me full of wannabe Jesus crackers, all of the nuns changed out of their habits and donned blue jeans, western shirts, and cowboy hats. They drove me to a small town rodeo, bought me some candy, and sat me down in the stands to watch the proceedings. As the dust wafted into the bleachers, the sisters hooted and hollered at the barrel racers and bull riders, yee-hawing in the name of the Lord. It was surreal. The only discernible difference between the nuns and anyone else was that they sported wads of popcorn in their cheeks in lieu of the Red Man tobacco preferred by the local women. We stayed out well past my bedtime, and I think I fell asleep in the car on the way back to the convent.
I rose early the next morning, a little unsure of where I was. I stumbled into the kitchen and had some nonsugary (sin-less) cereal to get my juices flowing. Once again, the sisters chose to deviate from the wardrobe norms, opting for sweats and T-shirts, and informing me that the day’s adventure would be a trek to Red Rock Canyon State Park.

Once we had established our campsite for the day, we went on hikes, scouted for arrowheads, and played Frisbee golf. The icing on the cake—and what could only be described as a preview of the afterlife—was Aunt Margaret giving me access to a seemingly unlimited supply of Shasta soft drinks and generic-brand potato chips.

It was the weekend that changed my little nine-year-old world.

To this day, every time I look at a nun, I silently wonder what’s behind the habit. Is she into improv comedy? Can she dance the Macarena? Is she a closet fan of WWE’s Monday Night Raw?

After my time with Aunt Margaret, anything’s possible.

I wish I could say that this experience has extended beyond my encounters with nuns and changed the way I see everyone I meet. But sadly, that’s not the case. Too often I allow one thing to define a person for me. It’s ridiculous, I know. But what’s even more ridiculous is that we all do it.

Every one of us.

A few years ago, Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov wanted to see how long it took people to form a first impression. So, they showed people photographs of random faces for a fraction of a second and asked the subjects to form an opinion as to the person’s trustworthiness, competence, likability, aggressiveness, and attractiveness. Not surprisingly, the judgments made in a fraction of a second correlated highly with the impressions of people who looked at the photos for as long as they liked. Secretly, I’d like to think that any nun faces scored well.

In a follow-up study, the researchers wanted to see if these first impressions affected people’s actions. In trial two, they again showed split-second images. But this time, unbeknownst to the subjects, some of the faces they judged were actually the frontrunners in major US elections.
So what happened?

Two weeks after the study, the faces people judged as more “competent” after viewing them for only milliseconds won roughly 70 percent of the races.

I’m sure none of this is surprising to you. Big deal, right? We are hardwired for snap judgment. And, when you consider it, this is actually very helpful in life-or-death situations. If you’re being charged by a wild rhino or facing down an avalanche, you wouldn’t want to think long and hard about what is right or what is wrong. Such painstaking deliberation could mean the end of your existence.

But avalanches aren’t people. And rhinos aren’t relationships.

With each passing day, I am starting to realize that the reflexes that save me in these life-or-death situations are a danger to me in my everyday life and keep me from connecting with the body of Christ. I sometimes find it incredibly hard to see beyond the superficial into the deep marrow of that which makes us all unique. And maybe you do, too? I’m not talking about looks. I treat the entire human race as some sort of paint-by-numbers set—taking a tiny bit of information and allowing it to color your entire perception of a person.

The article she shares on social media.

The political sign in their yard.

The church they attend. Or don’t.

And it needs to stop.

Lately it seems that our shortcut world is hell-bent on encouraging us to confirm the worst in others while ignoring the good. New math is all about simplification and division. The quicker I can pigeonhole a person, the easier it is for me to shun my enemies and find my friends. This all sounds simple in theory (like spotting a nun at a rodeo) but is much harder in practice.

The truth is, God created us to be in community, and my prejudgment of people only serves to separate me from the family of God. Billions of us, give or take. With ears to hear, hearts to heal, and arms to embrace.

So my prayer today is this: that I can recognize my snap judgment when it closes me off and do my best to prove myself wrong. That I can be the one who looks for the good in a sea of negativity—looking past my silly stereotypes to see the person underneath. In the words of 1 Samuel 16:7, not seeing as mortals see, but seeing as the Lord does. Looking at the heart—my heart as well as that of my neighbor.

Breaking habits one at a time.

by Scott Dannemiller

Scott is a speaker, author, worship leader, former Presbyterian missionary, and now President of LifeWork Associates. Check out his book, The Year Without a Purchase: One Family’s Quest to Stop Shopping and Start Connecting.

accidentalmissionary.net
Her name could be Tonya, Leslie, or Katrina. The description of how she learned of her pregnancy could be a missed menstrual cycle, a feeling, or a pregnancy test that she takes every month “just to be sure.” However she learned of this news and whatever her name, of this you can be sure: she is scared.

On this particular day, I received a voicemail from a scared young woman informing me of her unplanned pregnancy and her plan to abort. She wanted to speak to a pastor to ask one question: “Will I be forgiven?”

When I called this woman back (I will call her Trisha) she said, “I won’t talk to you if you are going to try to talk me out of this decision!”

Sadly, in more than 20 years of ministry, I have had many conversations just like this one.

She described her fear of telling her parents and of how she suffered from multiple health issues. She shared about the brokenness of her relationship with her boyfriend, their financial struggles, and how “this would simply ruin [their lives].”

Unplanned pregnancies may not be in our plans … but they are in our heavenly Father’s! Psalm 139 assures us that we are fearfully, wonderfully, and uniquely purposed—created in our mother’s womb from conception. The safety of a mother’s womb is a sacred space. And as with all sacred things, we have choices of how we will revere them.

Trisha and I talked over her many options and how each of these choices came with unique consequences or blessings that would impact her body, her mind, and her heart.
Phone calls, visits, and simply crying together and A LOT of prayer later, Trisha called me with the news on the morning of her scheduled abortion. “I can’t do it. I can’t go through with the appointment.” Tears of joy rolled down my face as I assured her that she would not walk this journey alone.

**On the morning of her delivery, Trisha called and said, “Come see our miracle!”** As we’ve journeyed together, we’ve welcomed Trisha’s baptism, her baby’s dedication, and her boyfriend and her parents to our church family!

At the Dream Center Women’s Clinic, we have many opportunities to step into places fraught with fear and uncertainty. One of our greatest privileges with the women who call, visit, and trust us is to tell them this: YOU matter. Your story matters. Your life matters. And your choices matter. We are with you and for you.

Romans 3:23 declares that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Every person needs a Savior to forgive our poor choices—and God gave a Savior for us all. If you are struggling with a fearful decision, an uncertainty that is bigger than what you can handle, may I encourage you to reach out and seek help? The journey does not have to be alone. We were meant to do life together. Trust in Jesus and believe Him for your rewritten story with a happy ending just like Trisha’s.

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**by Yvette Maher**

Yvette is the Chief Development Officer at Dream Centers in Colorado Springs, CO. She and her husband, Tom, have three grown children and seven grandchildren with a new arrival this fall making it the “eight is great” club! Yvette is usually eating or laughing or both.
Remember when you got engaged and received all of that sage advice? Heaven knows I needed it; the much younger, more naïve version of myself had absolutely no idea how to be married.

That was when I first discovered the value of a strong faith community. Friends, relatives, mentors, and pastors generously shared wisdom about communication, finances, and balancing new roles and guidance about possible roadblocks, things to look out for, and how to avoid major conflict.

A few days before my wedding, I got a little anxious about all of the upcoming changes in my life. “Don’t be afraid of change,” my grandmother told me. “People, dreams, situations, seasons—things change.” Twenty-seven years of marriage later, Nana was right.

The older we get, the more this topic seems to come up within our faith community. Friends at church, Christian neighbors, home Bible study partners, the believers in our lives who have been married a while tend to agree: things definitely change. And with the guidance, support, love, and help of those in our faith community, we’ve been able to more easily navigate our way through transformation.

I don’t mean the little stuff, like I used to hate cilantro and he was once a huge Dodgers fan. I mean significant changes in our hearts and minds, the ones that impact our priorities and perspectives and how we see the world. Changes that could, if we let them, wreak havoc on our lives together. Fortunately, they don’t have to.

Expect it. Change is not a surprise. Situations and circumstances never stay exactly the same, so why should people? If we’re growing and experiencing and living life to the fullest, then transformation is bound to come. Don’t be shocked when you start enjoying yoga for the first time ever or astonished when your homebody husband wants to start traveling.

Evaluate it. Obviously, not all change is good. So continuously, steadfastly, adamantly, take a look. Together. Discuss it openly. Is it godly? Is it healthy? Is it wholesome? Is it helpful? If so, great! If not, then wise counsel is in order. Be honest with your assessment and allow your spouse to be honest with you, too.

Embrace it. How mundane to remain the same year after year! New interests, new styles, new adventures, and new views make life more interesting. More exciting. Find other believers who can join you on the journey. Our faith communities play an integral role in keeping our marriages strong. Step out and share newfound interests and hobbies with faithful friends. Have fun!
Entrust it. Most importantly, surrender. Let God take the lead in your role as a husband or wife and ask Him to bless your marriage in each new season. You can be free to explore your own new interests and ideas, and encourage your spouse to do the same. If your hearts are set on Him first and foremost, then you’re still moving in the same direction—changing together.

Clearly, God calls us to glorify Him with one mind and one voice (Romans 15:5–6). So how do we hold on to strong marriages and maintain one mind and one voice amidst all of this inevitable change? Hold on to one other as well as your faith community through all of the change, and most importantly, hold on to the One who never does.

by Kathryn O’Brien

Wife, mom, and award-winning children’s book author, Kathryn serves as an administrator for Stoneybrooke Christian School in Southern California. She is most grateful for family, fun, and the daily grace of a loving God.

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In November of 2015, my husband and I became grandparents for the first time. It was everything friends told us it would be! Emotion overwhelmed me as we witnessed our son become a parent. I remember being tired as we awaited the announcement of our granddaughter’s birth through the night, but we were also brimming with excitement (newborn babies have a way of causing that). I also remember feeling as if I had just watched the baton of faith being passed down to the next generation. Similar to a relay race, it felt like my husband and I had run our “spiritual laps” and were now handing off the baton to our son and our daughter-in-law. They would in turn pass their faith on to our precious new granddaughter, Bella Marie.

Almost two and a half years have passed since sweet Bella entered the world, and I feel so differently about the passing of the baton of faith. Although we live apart, we make it a priority to visit as often as we can, which means frequent trips to Tulsa. We can’t get over how much she’s grown, how much she talks, and how impressed she is with herself as she has recently learned to use the “big potty.” Not to mention her complete mastery of large motor skills like climbing, swinging, running, and dancing, to name a few. It is so much fun to visit and celebrate her as she delights in showing us how she has conquered a slide, or how she can dance to the music, or how she can practically read her toddler books to us!

What I underestimated at her birth was our continued spiritual influence in our granddaughter’s life. We are still a vital part of the relay—particularly as we do life together!

Our son and daughter-in-law are doing a beautiful job laying a spiritual foundation for Bella. There is no doubt about that. They have already established rhythms that provide Bella with a faith community and a biblically based identity, and they are faithful to speak a blessing over her nightly. With such intentional parenting you might be asking what our role could possibly be.

As Bella’s grandparents, we have the privilege of not only supporting our son and our daughter-in-law as they continue to walk out their faith, but we also get to reinforce what her parents are doing in the following ways:
• When we visit, we attend church as a family. Bella is watching three generations worship God. Occasionally, my father is able to attend, and there is nothing quite like watching four generations worship together!

• We listen closely and respectfully each time we visit, and we do our best to work with Bella’s parents as they guide her through each stage of development. If they are working on manners, for example, we are careful to reinforce her “pleases” and “thank yous.” We are very intentional about aligning ourselves with her parents in an effort to do this thing called parenting (or grandparenting in our case) together.

• We do not miss an opportunity to bless her on our own or when asked to participate in her bedtime routine. We have been blessed to be a blessing! What a privilege it is to speak goodness over our grandchild, reinforcing what her parents are doing so faithfully.

Paul reminds us in Romans 15:5–6 (The Message) that “our very lives [will sing] in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!” As Bella’s grandparents, we are delighted to work TOGETHER with her parents, still a part of the relay team, as they endeavor to raise this little one who will one day, very soon, sing an anthem with us to our heavenly Father.

by Patti Fenton

Patti is the Pastor of Parenting and Families at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She has served in children’s and family ministry for more than 30 years. This year, she and her husband, Bob, will celebrate 35 years of marriage, and both thoroughly enjoy spending time with each other and with their three adult children: Laurel, Jenna, and Drew (and his precious wife, Allie). On any given day you will find them hiking, boating, skiing, riding bikes, etc. They love anything that moves and is outdoors! Bob and Patti (Popi and Mimi) are completely at the mercy of Bella Marie and can also be found on playgrounds, at a local library’s storytime, at the zoo, or putting together dinosaur puzzles.
10 ENVIRONMENTS

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

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

2. OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE
   “God transforms me when I step out in faith.”
   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.

3. LOVE & RESPECT
   “Asks the question, ‘What needs to be done?’”
   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.

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

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Identity**

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:

**Spiritual Parenting:**

An Awakening for Today’s Families

By Michelle Anthony

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