I BELONG TO GOD, AND HE LOVES ME!
“I BELONG TO GOD, AND HE LOVES ME!”

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.
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.

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 lies 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 tarnished, it’s essential to be rooted in truth.

We have to affirm the Christlikeness we see in our children as they strive to stand 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.
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.

Consider purchasing an 8” x 10” frame to hold your family memory verse each month!
I have been crucified with Christ. And I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20
Food

24 ASPARAGUS TART

Fun

20 IDENTITY CROSSES

30 TOT TIME RHYME
SIT AT HOME

31 BLESSING

32 TAKING ACTION
31 BITS

34 GLOBAL
UGANDA

36 STUDENT ID MIDDLE SCHOOL
A SENSE OF BELONGING

38 STUDENT ID HIGH SCHOOL
OUR BRAND MANAGER

40 EVERYDAY MOM BLOG
DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

42 EVERYDAY DAD BLOG
IDENTITY FAIL

44 TOUGH TOPICS
IDENTITY LOST

46 MARRIAGE
COME OUT OF HIDING

48 SPIRITUAL GRANDPARENTING
ROCK YOUR CROWN
Moss Cross

The cross is one of the most recognizable icons on earth—it represents the sacrifice Jesus made for us. To Christ-followers, an empty cross is everything our faith is based on. Knowing that Jesus is no longer on the cross is what celebrating Easter is all about!

This month, create this beautiful moss cross and place it in your home to serve as a reminder that He has risen!

What You’ll Need

- 3 pieces of Styrofoam approx. 2’ x 4’ x 12” each (or any size of your choice)
- 2 bags of sheet moss or peel-and-stick moss
- hot glue gun and glue sticks

What You’ll Do

1. Cut two of the pieces of Styrofoam in half and place three of the resulting pieces on the top and sides of the remaining long piece of Styrofoam.
2. Use your glue gun to adhere the Styrofoam pieces together to form your cross.
3. Then begin laying the sheet moss on top and sides until the Styrofoam is completely hidden.
4. Glue the sheet moss on with your glue gun—or, peel and stick.
5. When you have finished covering your cross, lean it against a wall to display or attach a ribbon and hang it.

by Debbie Guinn
HELPING OUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND WHY GOOD FRIDAY IS REALLY “GOOD” CAN BE A CHALLENGE. WHEN WE THINK OF THE BRUTAL DEATH OF OUR SAVIOR IT’S HARD FOR ANY GOOD THING TO COME TO MIND.

THIS MONTH, SET ASIDE SOME TIME ON GOOD FRIDAY TO WALK THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITY AS A FAMILY.
GOOD FRIDAY?

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
• 2 pieces of wood (approx. 12” x 2’ and 24” x 2’ pieces work well; your home improvement store will cut these for you)
• nails
• hammer
• unlined white index cards
• markers

WHAT YOU’LL DO
Before getting started, nail the two pieces of wood together to form a cross.

Call your family together and remind your children that the Bible says in Romans 3:23, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Share with them that “sin” is simply any act or thought that separates us from God.

Then, ask your children to write down whatever sins they want to confess on the index cards. If your child does not want his sin exposed, have him fold his card for privacy—you may want to do the same. If your children are small, they can simply write the word “sin” on the cards.

Share 1 John 1:9 with your children, which says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Remind them that our sins can be wiped out and forgiven because of what Jesus sacrificed on the cross. Using the hammer and nails, take turns nailing your “sins” to the cross. Parents can help young children if necessary.

Next, talk together about what happened after Good Friday. Share with your children that three days later Jesus conquered death! Then, celebrate and worship Jesus together. Thank Him for His sacrifice on the cross that leads to the forgiveness of our sins—which truly is the definition of GOOD!

by Debbie Guinn
Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully God. As the King of Kings, He has royal blood running through His veins. Jesus died on the cross and gave Himself for us. He took every weighty sin and every wrongdoing on Himself so we can be forgiven—so we can receive “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7). We were chosen to receive this gift! The blood He shed was for us. Amazing, right? So, there must be more to us than we know. As adopted sons and daughters, we too have royal blood running through our veins.

When you take the time to stop and say, “My heavenly Father chose me for this life,” the next logical question is, “So how does He want to use me in this world?”

The world wants to slap labels on us to define who we are. How do we combat this? As a family or one-on-one, take time at the dinner table or in the car running errands to discuss the truths about who we know we are in Christ. My personal identity statement is: I know that I am loved, chosen, and made perfectly in His image. He made me to be kind, funny, and responsible. What do you know about who you are in Christ?

GET YOUR CHILDREN TALKING

We know from Galatians 2:20, our Family Time Verse this month, that we have “been crucified with Christ and [we] no longer live, but Christ lives in [us].”

• What does your personal identity statement look like?
• How have you seen His presence shine through your actions?
• Do your words glorify Him?

Sometimes God shows love in unexpected ways. Get inspired and pass it on to your kids. Whisper His love in their ears in passing. Tuck notes in their lunchboxes: a simple phrase for younger children or a verse for older kids. Take them on a mini mission to share the love: tape coupons to products in the grocery store, bring a treat to a neighbor, or box up a fun toy set and share it with a friend. Give grace at an unexpected time. Tell your children God loves them and watch Him shape their hearts.

by Allison Rosenbach

Allison, a native of the Texas Panhandle, is currently experiencing the excitement of what it means to be a military spouse in Colorado Springs, CO. She and her husband, Korban, enjoy spending time together and spoiling their four-legged son, Yogi. Allison loves to volunteer at New Life Church, can deliver a great yoga class, and has a strong appreciation for coffee.
strong
loved
kind
chosen
creative
honest
strong
responsible
kind
funny
brave
PARENTS, ALTHOUGH THE SEASON OF LENT BEGAN ON FEBRUARY 14, IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO BEGIN ENCOURAGING YOUR FAMILY TO PRACTICE DISCIPLINES THAT KEEP OUR FOCUS ON JESUS!
Lent is a season of reflection and renewal for the 40 days leading up to Easter. Through spiritual practice and discipline, Lent prepares followers of Christ for the celebration of Christ’s resurrection. Jesus Himself gave us an example of this when He spent 40 days and nights in the desert fasting, praying, and refusing to give in to Satan’s temptations at the start of His ministry (Matthew 4:1–11).

Isn’t it beautiful that in the tradition of Lent, we get to share in what our Lord and Savior practiced? The practice of Lent encourages us to slow down our busy lives and focus on our relationship with God. The three spiritual practices Jesus modeled in Matthew 4—fasting, prayer, and reflection on Scripture—are a great place for any family to begin. All of these disciplines create space for the focus to shift from self to God.

FASTING

Fasting often refers to a restricted diet related to food. During Lent, many people practice fasting from food—giving up sweets, soda, or coffee. But fasting can also be a practice to forfeit TV time, FaceBook, social apps, eating out, or going to the movies. Fasting is not meant to harm or punish. Rather, the absence of those things is to make time to spend with God in prayer or Scripture reading.

PRAYER

Many of us think of prayer as our conversation with God—sharing with Him our troubles, celebrations, and petitions. If you are going to focus on prayer for the 40 days of Lent, challenge yourself to do something different than you usually do. Perhaps spend time in prayer for others and write them notes telling them you prayed for them. Start a prayer journal as a family, leaving it where any family member can add to it. Create a physical space for family members to practice listening for God. This can be a small space in your home with a simple Scripture verse to repeat aloud before praying.

SCRIPTURE

Jesus grew up hearing and learning the Scriptures He used to defeat Satan in the desert. As a family, read together and memorize Scriptures that focus on the character of God, which can be an encouragement to you when tempted.

- God Is Merciful—Ephesians 2:4
- God Is Gracious—Romans 1:5
- God Is Love—Deuteronomy 7:7–8
- God Is Trustworthy—Numbers 23:19
- God Is Wise—Romans 11:33

Easter Sunday brings closure to the 40 days of Lent, celebrating the resurrection of the Savior promised in Genesis. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy and promise God told His children throughout the Old Testament. Praise be to God!

by Dawn Heckert

Dawn is the Children’s Pastor at Christ Community Church Leawood Campus in Leawood, Kansas. She loves Jesus and the opportunity to share His story with all ages. She spends her free time deep in glitter, crafting, creating, and chasing life with her two teenage daughters and husband.
Each month, our ministry team celebrates “Birthday Blessings.” The birthday person sits at the front of the room, and we each take turns shouting out how we see God working through him or her as someone writes these words down for a keepsake. When it was my birthday month, I did not look forward to sitting in front of the room—my personality is definitely not one that enjoys the “spotlight.” However, I keep the birthday blessings taped up right next to my desk in the office. On hard days, I look through the positive words to remind myself of how others see God working in and through me—ultimately how others see my identity rooted in Christ: brave, advocate, and hands and feet of Jesus.

I think a big reason I like to look over these words often is because the world constantly throws alternate identities my way. God says we are chosen, yet the world tells us that we must be chosen by the right group of people. God says we have been adopted, but the world tells us that we are not worthy enough to be children of God. God says we have been redeemed, yet the world tempt us and then reminds us of our sinful nature. As much as we struggle with our identity as adults, our kids are struggling too. How can we help them to understand they can find their true identity in Christ alone? How can we help them to stand firm against any counter-identities the world throws their way?

This month, take time to gather your family and spend time sharing intentional words with each other. Let the question “How do I see God working in you?” lead your time with each person. Create a keepsake for each family member to keep and read over as a reminder of Whom our identity is rooted in! Here are some ideas:

- Create a first name acrostic with each letter representing an aspect of the person’s identity in Christ (“S” for secure, “A” for available, etc.)
- Have one person at a time sit at the head of your table. Write her name in large letters in the middle of a sheet of paper. Have each person in the family write ways he sees God through that person on sticky notes, and then stick the notes to the paper around the name.
- Have one person sit facing the room in front of a whiteboard or a poster board taped to the wall. Around his head, write ways you see God in this person. When everyone is finished writing, take a picture. The end result (the keepsake) is the person’s face surrounded by positive, identifying words from his family members.

Lastly, and most importantly, pray these words of identity over each other. Hang your keepsakes in a common place, and pray these words often. We must speak against the identities the world places on us by declaring these godly identities over one another on a regular basis.

by Samantha Fugate

Samantha Fugate is employed by New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She also manages social media and customer service questions for HomeFront magazine. She and her husband, Joseph, are foster parents and have one biological daughter. She enjoys a good lazy day around the house with her family.
NAME ACROSTIC

Redeemed
Adopted
Chosen
Honored
Embraced
Loved
Made new
Accepted
Treasured
Truly valued
Held dear
Exalted
Worthy
PARENTS, BEFORE YOU READ THIS STORY TOGETHER, YOU WILL NEED A FEW SUPPLIES.

- 2.9” x 2.9” Styrofoam cube
- Easter story coloring sheets found at bit.ly/thestoryofeaster
- scissors
- crayons
- tape

Print out and allow your children to color the coloring sheets. Then, cut out the pictures and tape them to the Styrofoam cube. As you tell the following story, show the pictures on the cube when you read the passages from the book of Matthew. This is a fun way to help your child learn to tell the Easter story to others.

Jolie ran off the bus and straight into the house. She could feel hot tears streaming down her face. Her mom looked up from the sink and said, “Jolie, what’s wrong?”

Jolie wiped her face. “I’m fine,” she sniffled.

Her mom walked over and wrapped Jolie up in a big bear hug. “Let’s go sit on the couch and talk.”

Jolie didn’t want to talk. She was mad ... sad ... maybe both? She was confused and embarrassed and did not want to have to share the whole story with her mom. Maybe if she avoided her mom’s questions she wouldn’t have to tell her the truth. “Oh, who am I kidding?” she thought. Her mom always found out the truth.

“Okay, Jolie. What happened?”

Jolie took a deep breath and recounted her awful experience on the bus. “Mom, I was sitting on the bus, and Willow asked if she could sit next to me today. Willow and I don’t talk much, and she asked me if the Easter Bunny would come to my house next week. I told her that I was really looking forward to celebrating Jesus at Easter—even more than eating the candy or the eggs. Willow didn’t understand. She said her family doesn’t go to church and she doesn’t know anything about the Easter that I told her about. Then she asked if I would share the Easter story with her.

“But that’s when everything went wrong. Mom ... I couldn’t remember. I didn’t know where to start. I know Easter is about Jesus, but I didn’t know what else to say. So I just told her that I knew it was important to celebrate Jesus at Easter. Then it was her stop. She said, ‘Well, it doesn’t sound that important to me,’ and she just got off the bus. We learn at church all the time the importance of telling people about Jesus—this was my chance and I blew it. Now Willow doesn’t know about Jesus and Easter, and I don’t think she even likes me anymore!”

Jolie’s mom held her close. Jolie could feel the tears begin to pour down her face again. “How could I not remember?” she scolded herself.

Finally, after what felt like forever, her mom let her go. “Honey, you will see Willow again. What if we created a good way for you to tell the Easter story? It could even have pictures you could show Willow as you tell the story.”

Jolie thought for a moment, “Okay, Mom. Let’s do it!”

“Great. I will get on the computer and find some pictures about the Easter story. I will print them off for you to color, and we can put them together so you can share the story.”

Jolie jumped off the couch, “Thanks, Mom!” she yelled as she ran up the stairs to get her crayons.

After her mom had spend some time on the computer, they sat down at the kitchen table.

“Oh, Jolie. I found six pictures that will help you tell the Easter story to Willow. I want us to read each part of the story together from the Bible. Once we have read each part, then I want you to color in each of these pictures. As you color, repeat that part of the story in your head. Then we can tape them all together to make a cube you can take to school.”

“This is so great, Mom. Now I will always be able to give an answer to anyone who asks me about Jesus!”

“Let’s look at this first picture together. Do you remember anything about this part of the story?”

“Yes! Jesus rides into a city on a donkey. He does that because the Bible said He would, right?”

“Right, Jolie, Jesus is riding into Jerusalem. Let’s read the story together in Matthew 21:1-11.”

After they had read together, Mom asked, “Now, what did you notice about this passage?”

“Well ... I think this happened at the end of Jesus’
He’s already gone around teaching people and now He knows He is going to die. He rides in to fulfill something that was said about Him in the Old Testament. This is like the beginning of the end for Jesus.”

“That’s exactly right. This is a good place to start when telling the story because it explains that Jesus is coming into Jerusalem.” Mom pulled out the next picture. “Now our second picture takes place after He is in the city. Let’s read Matthew 26:17-30.”

After they read the Scripture, Jolie said sadly, “Mom, I don’t like this part of the story. I bet Jesus was so sad that He knew His friend was going to betray Him.”

Mom nodded. “I’m sure He was very sad. But I imagine He was also grateful for a moment to have all of His friends together to share this special meal before He died. After supper, Jesus went to a garden to talk to God. He asked God if there was any other way, but the whole time He knew that it was almost His time to die. Jolie, why don’t you read Matthew 26:36-56?”

After she finished reading, Jolie looked up and said, “Ugh, I don’t like this part either. Why? Why is Jesus betrayed by His friend? Why do they arrest Him? Why doesn’t He do something?”

Mom answered, “Jesus knew this was the only way for us to be connected with God again. Jesus also knew that no matter what He would obey God—even if that meant He was going to die.” She continued, “Jesus wasn’t guilty, but the Jews were demanding He be crucified. Eventually Pontius Pilate gave in. I’ll read the next part of the story in Matthew 27:27-37. Jesus was hung on a cross, but even until His very last breath He wanted people to know about God.”

“Is this when He dies, Mom?” Jolie asked.

“Yes, this is right before He dies. After Jesus died they took His body down from the cross. We pick up the story in Matthew 27:57-60.” Mom read the passage.

“So this rich man took Jesus’ dead body and buried it in a tomb?” Jolie asked.

“Yes, he did. But I think you know the next part of the story.” Mom looked at Jolie with a sparkle in her eyes.

“Yeah—Jesus didn’t stay dead!”

Jolie’s mom laughed. “That’s right. And this is my favorite part of the story. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. Jolie, why don’t you read this part in Matthew 28:1-10?”

After reading, Jolie yelled, “Jesus is alive!”

Mom agreed. “He is alive. And that’s why we celebrate Easter. When Jesus died and rose again He proved He has power over sin and power over death, and He has made a way for us to be connected with God again.”

“Mom, I think I can tell this story now. Once I get these pictures colored and put together, I can tell Willow all about Easter.”

“I’m glad you will be able to use this cube to talk to Willow, but there is something very important I want to talk to you about first. Because you love Jesus, your life is tied to this story. Because of what Jesus did on the cross for us, you never have to be ashamed or embarrassed. Your identity is in Christ.”

“What do you mean ‘my identity’?” Jolie asked.

“Your identity is who you are. You are a follower of Jesus. You do not have to worry about trying to fit in with other people or making people like you. The only person I want you to try to be like is Jesus. Every day we try to make the choices Jesus made, and when we do that, we are able to show God’s love to others.”

“Well, Jesus told lots of people about God, so I’m going to do the same thing with my cube.”

Jolie’s mom stroked her daughter’s hair out of her face, “I’m so proud of you. Just remember that because of the cross, the most important thing about you is that you’re someone who follows Jesus.”

The next day Jolie flew off the bus. She ran into the house so fast she forgot to shut the front door. “MOM! It worked. I told Willow all about Jesus and how we have a new identity because of the cross. Willow said she wanted to hear more about Jesus! Can you believe it? The cube worked! It totally worked!”

Jolie’s mom threw her arms around Jolie in a big hug. “I think this calls for some ice cream to celebrate.”

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.
In The Message paraphrase of Galatians 2:19–20, the apostle Paul says, “What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn’t work. So I quit being a ‘law man’ so that I could be God’s man. Christ’s life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.”

In Ephesians 1:7 Paul tells us that God chose us, adopted us, and “because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we’re a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds” (MSG).

This month, read these verses together as a family. Then, encourage your family members to fill this Identity Cross by writing out who they are because of the cross. Because of the cross I am chosen, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, valued, royal, blessed, worthy, pure, blameless—and more!

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**
- 6 small boxes
- 14 sheets of 8 ½” x 11” colored paper or card stock
- tape
- markers

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**
1. Find a place in your home to arrange the six boxes in the form of a cross. Choose a spot where the cross display can be kept all month.
2. Print out the “Because of the Cross” template at bit.ly/identitycrosses onto the colored paper.
3. Cut each paper along the dotted lines to make four pieces.
4. Place the papers and markers near the cross.
5. Write out an identity statement and then roll the paper and tape the edges.
6. Place the roll in one of the boxes of the cross.
7. Encourage your family members to fill the cross throughout the month with all the ways they can claim their identity in Christ.

by Debbie Guinn
CROSS TOSS

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 35 paper or plastic cups
• several sheets of construction paper (same color)
• scissors
• bucket
• 46 plastic Easter eggs
• various small candies
• Easter basket
• masking tape

BEFORE YOU BEGIN …

Cut the construction paper into a total of 11 strips. The width of the strips should be at least half the height of the cups. Form a circle with one strip of construction paper and place it inside a cup (it’s okay if the strip of paper overlaps inside the cup). Repeat this with the remaining 10 strips.

Find an empty floor space (hard surface if possible) for the game to be played, and use the construction paper cups to create a cross in the center (seven cups in a vertical row and two cups on each side of the third cup down). Use the remaining 24 cups to create and fill in a rectangle around the cross. The final rectangle, including the centered cross, should be five cups across and seven cups down. Place a piece of masking tape on the ground a few feet away from the rectangle. This is where players will stand when it’s time to toss.

Fill 11 Easter eggs with small candies. If possible, put a different type in each egg so your family will be surprised along the way! Place the candy-filled eggs in the Easter basket and set it to the side. Place the remaining 35 empty eggs in a bucket in front of the rectangle.

TIME TO PLAY!

Gather everyone around the Cross Toss game. Explain that players will take turns standing at the line as they try to toss an empty egg into one of the 11 colored cups that form a cross. If a player’s egg does not land in a cross cup, the player must go to the back of the line. If her egg does land in a cross cup, she gets to select a candy-filled egg from the basket to keep and then head to the end of the line to wait for her next turn (enjoying her sweet treat while she waits). If the egg does not land in any cup at all, the player may toss again.

The goal is to fill the cross cups first and collect as many candy-filled eggs as possible!

REMEMBER

During this time of year, egg dying, Peeps, and all the egg-shaped candy can leave everyone feeling extra excited for spring and celebrating Easter. It can sometimes be easy to get caught up in the various fun, lighthearted traditions of this holiday and lose sight of what the celebration is really about. While this game is fun and may leave some of your children with a small sugar rush at the end, it is also a great opportunity to remind them that their identity is found in Christ and not in the number of Easter eggs they find during an egg hunt. Jesus died on the cross to rescue us and create a way for us to live forever in community with Him. He paid the price so that our identity may never be bound to anything or anyone outside of Him. This is the truth we get to remember and celebrate on Easter—and every day that passes!

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!
ASPARAGUS TART

This tart is as delicious as it is beautiful and can be served as an appetizer or side dish for your Easter meal. Be prepared—you may want to make two because it will go fast!

Prep Time: 20 min.     Cook Time: 1 hr. 15 min.     Yields: 6 servings

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

SALAD TONGS FROM 31 BITS. SEE PAGE 32
WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 1 sheet frozen puff pastry, defrosted
• 1 tablespoon honey Dijon mustard
• 4 ounces (about 1 1/2-2 cups) grated Gruyere cheese
• 3/4 pound small to medium asparagus
• 1/2 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
• salt and pepper
• nonstick cooking spray
• balsamic glaze

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Preheat oven to 400° F.
2. Trim the bottoms of the asparagus spears and cut to fit the width of the tart pan. Set aside.
3. Lightly coat the tart pan with nonstick cooking spray.
4. Place the defrosted puff pastry sheet in the tart pan.
5. Using a fork, pierce the dough all around in the center but not on the edges.
6. Bake the pastry dough until golden, about 15 minutes.
7. Remove the pastry shell from the oven, let it sit for a minute or two, and then spread on the honey Dijon mustard.
8. Sprinkle on the cheese.
9. Arrange the asparagus in a single layer over the cheese, alternating ends and tips.
10. Brush with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.
11. Bake until the spears are tender, about 20 to 25 minutes.
12. Remove from oven and let cool for a few minutes. Slice and serve with balsamic glaze.

by Debbie Guinn
Granola Tartlets

This Recipe Allows Your Kids to Show Their Individuality! After They Help You Mix and Make the Granola Crusts, Allow Them to Choose Their Favorite Yogurt and Fruit to Create These Yummy Tartlets.

Yields: 8 mini tarts Prep time: 20 min. Cook time: 15 min.

What You’ll Need

- 1 1/2 cups old fashioned oats
- 1 cup walnuts, pistachios, or almonds (finely chopped)
- 5 tablespoons butter or coconut oil, melted
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 cups Greek yogurt sweetened using your favorite sweetener (or any flavor thick-style yogurt you like)
- 4 cups mixed fruit
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries

What You’ll Do

1. Preheat oven to 325° F.
2. Mix oats, nuts, cranberries, melted butter or oil, honey, vanilla, and cinnamon together in a bowl until thoroughly combined.
3. Press about 3 tablespoons of the mixture into 8 greased mini tart pans— or you can use a 10-inch tart pan to make one large tart. Use the back of an oiled spoon to help press the granola evenly across the pan and up the sides.
4. Bake in the center rack of the oven for about 15 to 17 minutes or until golden.
5. Immediately after removing the tart shells from the oven, use the back of the spoon to press down the center of each shell’s crust to create an indentation, and push up the sides. The shell puffs up in the oven, so it helps to reshape the crust after it bakes while still hot.
6. Allow to cool completely in the pan before removing.
7. Use a small knife to gently release the sides of each crust, and then very carefully remove it from the pan, turning it over into your hand if necessary. The crust should be crisp on the sides and hold together but will be delicate.
8. Fill each tart with 3 to 4 tablespoons yogurt and smooth out evenly.
9. Arrange the fruit on top and serve immediately. The crust will become a little soggy if left to sit for too long.
10. The unused tarts can be stored for a day in an airtight container—do not stack.

by Debbie Guinn
A NEW IDENTITY

A part of Easter often gets overlooked. We know that Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the grave means we can be forgiven from our sins, but sometimes we forget that it also means we can have a new identity.

As humans, we’re tempted to use lots of different things to define us. We use our careers, personalities, hobbies, talents, relationships, etc., to tell ourselves and others who we are. We often make “I am” statements such as “I am a teacher,” “I am a mother,” “I am a hard worker,” etc. As kids seek to organize their world into categories that make sense, they grow up defining themselves this way too. They may say or think their worth depends on identities—they might say, “I am a good student,” “I am an athlete,” “I am the funny one,” and so on.

On Easter, we’re reminded that none of the false identities we cling to really matter. Because Jesus died and rose again, He made the way for us to claim a new identity—one found in Him and given to us not because we’ve earned it but out of His great love.

In the letter to the church in Philippi, Paul compares the identities the world has to offer with identity in Christ and helps us see the truth that what Christ offers is far more valuable. Paul had everything going for him according to the world’s standards of success, but when he became a follower of Jesus he discovered that his new identity in Christ was the only thing that mattered.

As parents, you have the privilege and responsibility of helping your kids to put aside any false identities and to cling to the identity God gives them. As you interact with your kids this month, watch the words you use to encourage or praise them. Are you tempted to reinforce false identities that are wrapped up in what they can do or how well they behave or perform? Take an extra effort in the next few weeks to speak your children’s true identity over them, reminding them that they are made by God, loved, chosen, forgiven, and set free.

HEAR IT

Gather your family together and read Philippians 3:1-14 out loud. (If your kids are younger, you can shorten it and just read verses 3b–8). Choose a version that everyone can understand (like the Easy-to-Read Version, which you can find online). As you read, make sure to pause and define any words your kids do not know.

After reading, use these questions as a guide for discussion:

- How would you summarize this passage in your own words?
- How would you describe who you are? (an athlete, a good student, a musician, a good friend, etc.)
- What are some things God says are true about you no matter what? (God made you, God loves you, God is with you, God has adopted you into His family, etc.)

DO IT

What you’ll need

- 1 sheet of paper per person
- crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- craft sticks (optional)
- hot glue gun and hot glue sticks (optional)

Invite each family member to draw a self-portrait. If you’d like, you can glue craft sticks around your picture to make a frame. Write some words on the frame (or around the picture if you didn’t make a frame) that describe your identity in Christ. Hang your pictures somewhere in your home where they will serve as reminders of your true identity.

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.
I am a son of the Most High King!!!

Don't mess with me!

I am a daughter of the most high King!!!

Don't mess with me!!!
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

**SIT AT HOME**

**THIS MONTH, FIND A TIME TO LEAD YOUR CHILDREN IN THIS RHYME TO THE TUNE OF “HERE WE GO ’ROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH.” BE SURE TO REMIND THEM THAT THEY BELONG TO GOD AND HE LOVES THEM!**

(reach hands down to ground and up high as toddler follows along)

From my toes up to my hair

I’m made with care

Made with care

From my toes up to my hair

Made by God the Father

(cup hands behind ears as if to listen)

I can hear God anywhere

Here and there

Here and there

I can hear God anywhere

Hear from God the Father

(reach out arms wide as if giving a big hug)

All of us have love to share

Everywhere

Everywhere

All of us have love to share

Love from God the Father

by Chad Coltman

Chad and his wife, Kelli, have been married seven years and they have three kids. Besides his family, his most valuable things are his Nespresso and his SodaStream. (You could say he really likes beverages.) He has been on staff at ROCKHARBOR Church in Costa Mesa, CA, for more than 15 years and now serves as the Director of Churchwide Operations.

Twitter @chadcoltman

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

Our culture constantly labels our children, dictating who they should be and what they should accomplish. From entertainment to our school systems, the world is far too eager to tell our kids who they are and to assign them their value. But does the culture know who our children are in Christ? Unlike the fickle opinions of the world, His love for them never changes. Does the world know that when God looks at our kids His heart bursts with love? Do the entertainers know He calls every child beloved and chosen? Does the social media machine know God fashioned every fiber of a person’s being with an unconditional, indescribable love and made each one just the way He wanted him or her to be?

My sister is a senior in high school, and I know how the world is trying to tear her down and diminish her sparkle. I hear the way she puts herself down without even realizing it—it shatters my heart. This world tells us over and over that we are not enough. If we believe in a perfect God who intentionally made all of creation down to the tiniest microscopic detail and called the galaxies into existence, why would we ever believe that He had somehow messed up when He created us?

We may not be able to make the world value us in all of the beautiful and unique ways we have been created. But we can start believing it for ourselves and speaking it over our kids.

As parents, take time to speak the truth of God’s love over your kids, and pray it makes all the difference in how they see themselves.

READ

Read 1 John 3:1 over your children: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (ESV).

BLESS

(Child’s name), may you know that your heavenly Father loves you. May you know that He made you exactly how He wanted you to be and that His heart bursts with love for you. He created you with a purpose, to be a blessing to those around you in a way that only you can. May you know that His love for you will never change; there is nothing you can do to make Him look at you any differently. May you see yourself reflected in the eyes of the Father. You are a gift, you are beloved, you have been chosen, and you are a child of God. YOU are His pride and joy.

by Amanda Visser

Amanda Visser is the Family Ministries administrative and ministry assistant at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She enjoys running, painting, and a strong cup of coffee.
We’ve explored countries that are rich with beautiful resources and incredible talent but have limited access to the global market.

Consider 31 Bits the bridge, connecting you as a consumer to artisans around the globe. You can get your hands on thoughtfully designed ethically made goods, and artisans worldwide can get their art in front of you. It’s a win-win.

Behind every product we make, there are real people. There are stories of heritage and tradition. There are stories of hardship that has been overcome. There are families and personalities and joy. We wish we could transport you to every workshop so you could hear the chatter and laughter, see who made your product. But for now, this is the best we can do … read the following about the artisans behind the products at 31 Bits.

We work with artisan communities throughout Uganda and Indonesia to bring you unique and ethically made accessories and home goods. Every piece tells a story of the person who made it and is bringing dignity and change to these people’s lives and communities.
Some of our wood products come from a family-owned business in Layibi, Gulu, Uganda, owned by an artisan named Charles. He and his three adult sons have built a workshop under a giant mango tree by their home.

Charles has a family-run business creating wood products such as serveware and animal figurines. He went to a technical school where he was trained in building furniture but soon after perfected the art of detailed carving while working as an artisan with the Roman Catholic priests at the Gulu Cathedral. During the war, there were many Congolese refugees living at the cathedral who had a lot of knowledge in making wooden products and trained Charles in how to carve detailed items like rosary necklaces, sculptures of the Virgin Mary, and animals. He fell in love with the practice and eventually opened his own business. He got married and had three sons. As his sons grew up, he taught them how to carve, and they joined the family business.

They source high-quality wood in a village along the Nile. The whole family is hardworking and has developed a deep bond by working together. Charles told our team, “We believe time and quality are the most important factors in production. We know that if we continue to create quality products, we’ll be able to achieve our goals, and that brings us so much joy and happiness.” Eventually, Charles wants to buy land for a new workshop and commercial farming. He’ll pass his current workshop on to his sons and continue mentoring his sons in the business.

Beatrice weaves baskets from raffia and banana leaf sourced from local markets in Kampala, Uganda. This type of basket weaving is native to western and central Uganda.

Beatrice is a determined and hardworking basket weaver. Her mother taught her to weave when she was young and she began selling her work at 17 years old. She’s now been weaving for over 30 years! She is part of a national association of women who all practice the art of weaving. This allows her to learn new patterns, sell her work, and also get to know a community of female basket weavers. Weaving baskets allows her to take care of her child as well as two other children. She is saving money to build a home and to continue sending the three children to school.
WHERE IN THE WORLD IS ...

UGANDA?

A landlocked country in east-central Africa, situated north and northwest of Lake Victoria, Uganda has a total area of 91,136 square miles, of which 14,027 square miles is water. Uganda is bounded on the north by South Sudan, on the east by Kenya, on the south by Tanzania and Rwanda, and on the west by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC).
If you lived in Uganda you might eat something called *matooke*—green bananas boiled or steamed then mashed and cooked in a sauce of peanuts. You might also eat *luwombo*, a stew of either chicken, beef, mushrooms, or fish steamed in banana leaves.

31 Bits began in Uganda with a simple idea: to give artisans dignified job opportunities by making products that women would buy. Sounds simple, but it took passion and grit.

The Ugandan women may not have had an education, but their skills and resourcefulness were astounding. They were making incredible jewelry out of old posters. These women had skill but needed a market. The founders of 31 Bits lived in dorms and apartments in the United States filled with people who would love the jewelry. The American founders partnered with a group of six women in Uganda. One summer, they sat with them daily, making beads and listening to their stories. They visited their homes and met their families. They laughed together, cried together, and learned from each other. The Ugandan women valued real relationships. They taught the founders to always be learners, to always have faith in God, and to never take themselves too seriously. 31 Bits was founded on these lessons.

To learn more, read our Taking Action article (page 32) and visit 31bits.com.
Raise your hand if you loved middle school!
I mean, you really hit it out of the park as your most confident self with no problems or conflicts whatsoever. Yeah, me neither. Middle school can be a difficult time for our children as they discover who they are and what defines them. (Not to mention a whole lot of hormones and some awkward growth spurts thrown into the mix.) I’m so glad it only lasts a few years, aren’t you? They are, however, a few very critical years. I remember a particularly rough year of middle school when I encountered some bullies on the school bus. I wasn’t much for confrontation back then, so I would turn the other cheek and pray for the ride home to go quickly. I would think, “If I can just get home, I will be okay.”

Home was where I felt loved, understood, and accepted—where who I was made sense, like a perfectly fitted puzzle piece despite my imperfections. It was where I belonged. In many ways, I understood the goodness of God because I felt it first from my parents. I am always amazed how the harsh words and lies of this world so easily chip away at years of strongly formed character and identity. We have our work cut out for us as parents: to battle for the souls of our children.

The earlier you start conversations about identity with your children the better. Talk with them about who they are as members of your own family and what that means. (Perhaps there are rules, values, mottos, and even traits specific to your family.) Also tell them that they are children of God, adopted sons and daughters and heirs to His throne. When they are young it can be as simple as, “I belong to God, and He loves me, just like I belong to Mom and Dad, and they love me.”

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

Talk with them about their value as sons and daughters of the King and that they are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” with grand plans and bright futures. Tell them that these truths come from the Bible, and show them how to find the passages themselves. Tell them that the God who created the heavens and the earth loves them and thinks about them every moment of every day. When I was young, these truths rang out in my soul, combatting the lies the world pressed on me. As I matured in my faith I recognized this as the voice of God who, through Jesus Christ, lived in me and was shaping and defining my true identity.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Make no mistake about it—the world will pull at your middle schooler, and temptation will come seeking to define him or her, saying, “Come this way. Do these things. Be like us.” Teach your sons and daughters that they can always access Christ and His power to overcome evil. Remind them to draw on all they know to be true about themselves and place their confidence in Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of their faith!

by Tami Overhauser

Tami is a native of Southern California who now lives in Austin, TX, with her husband, Chad, and four children. Tami writes and blogs about tough parenting and building strong families. Her passion is helping others to parent well and encouraging them in their journey, believing we are stronger together. When she is not writing she can be found hanging out in her kitchen with friends and family.

Blog tamioverhauser.com
OUR BRAND MANAGER
Social media is nearly impossible to avoid these days. Organizations and businesses of every kind depend on it. Your church probably uses it “religiously” (pun intended). I tend to be a nonconformist, and although I secretly dream about deleting all my social media accounts, I admit that I am not bold enough to do it, and maybe God wouldn’t want me to. Social media is here to stay, and so I have been asking God to show me how He wants me to use it rather than despise it. I believe God wants me to use social media in a way that encourages others and glorifies Him. So, how can we as parents encourage our teenagers to do the same?

So whether you eat or drink, or comment or post on social media, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31, my paraphrase)

First, we must never allow social media to replace God’s Word. It is important that we fill our minds with the truth of God’s Word more than anything else. We need to be intentional with our time and careful with what we allow to influence us. There is no substitute for God’s Word. God’s Word must be our daily meal, our nutrition, while social media should be likened to a dessert—if you eat too much you will get sick.

Then, we must recognize that social media does not determine our value. Sadly, many young people use social media to find their identity and prove their worth. This is a trap. People crave acceptance, meaning, and purpose, but social media can never fulfill these needs. Without hundreds or even thousands of followers, teenagers often feel less valuable than those they compare themselves to. This is dangerous because if we buy into this lie, we will be tempted to use social media to compete, boast, and glorify ourselves. As hard as it is, we cannot let social media determine our value. Jesus determined our worth by paying the highest possible price for us. No number of followers or likes can compare to your value in Christ. We must believe this! You have one “like” that is more valuable than 10 billion; Jesus likes you!

As the Scriptures say, “If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD.” When people commend themselves, it doesn’t count for much. The important thing is for the Lord to commend them. (2 Corinthians 10:17–18 NLT)

Now, we must remember that we represent Christ. As we gain confidence in our identification with Christ, we should desire to use social media for God’s glory and not our own. We have been chosen and adopted into God’s family. We have been purchased and redeemed by Jesus. Christ now lives in us and through us. We are His ambassadors. This truth should empower us to use social media more often as a ministry tool rather than a self-promoting tool. Jesus is thrilled to identify with us, and we should be thrilled to identify with Him.

One aspect of business we can learn from is branding. In business, branding is so important that many companies hire brand managers. A brand manager makes sure that the brand identity is healthy and consistent. He or she makes sure that all aspects of the brand deliver a cohesive message and that the brand is accurately represented. Metaphorically, our “brand” is Jesus, the Holy Spirit is our brand manager, and we are Jesus’ brand ambassadors. We have even been given a style guide to work from: God’s Word! In His “style guide” God gives us instruction so we can know how to best represent Christ. Do we allow our brand manager to approve our social media activity?

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20a ESV)

Finally, we should aim to inspire rather than impress. Let’s use social media to boast about Jesus, encourage others, and bring glory to God rather than compare ourselves to others, brag, exploit, criticize, or self-promote. Let’s encourage our sons and our daughters to study God’s style guide (His Word) so that as His “brand ambassadors” we consistently represent Christ well. To Him we belong.

Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast [or post] in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23–24 ESV)

by Trent Armstrong

Trent lives in Southern California with his wife and four children. Trent studied organizational leadership and holds a bachelor of science degree from Biola University. He currently serves at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA, as a drummer on the worship team and has been involved in music ministry for more than 25 years.

Trentarmstrong.com
“Do you know who you are?”

It’s a question we ask our daughters nightly, and one for which they always have ready answers.

“I’m a woman of God,” my six year old lisps through her missing front teeth. “I’m a speaker of truth, a light in the dark, and a victorious warrior.”

I turn to her three-year-old sister.

“I’m a woman of God,” Little Bit murmurs. “I’m a keeper of the cross, a fiery warrior, and a puuuuuuuure joy.”

I turn off my girls’ bedside lamp and slip out of their room with a sweet sense of peace: peace in the stillness that permeates our home, peace in the conversation my husband and I enjoy without interruption …

And peace in the knowledge that my children know who they are.

WHEN GOD NAMES

In January of 2011, my mother asked God to give her a word for the upcoming year—a word that would encompass His purposes and desires for our family. The word He gave her was “truth.”

Two months later, my husband and I announced our first pregnancy. I felt instantly that our unborn child was a girl, and since we had long been praying for my womb to be opened, we had already chosen a name.

“Her name is Laynie,” I beamed, months before an ultrasound would confirm my motherly suspicions.

“It’s beautiful,” my mother replied. “But what does it mean?”
I wish I could say we had chosen that name through prayerful consideration, but it was simply the only one my husband and I could agree on. I had no idea what it meant.

My mother grabbed her phone for a quick Google search, and after a few moments of stunned silence, she looked at me in awe.

“You’re right,” she whispered. “It’s a girl!”

She turned her screen toward me and I read: “Laynie is a Greek name meaning, ‘truth; light.’”

God had named my baby before she had even been conceived.

In ancient Hebrew culture, the process of naming a child was one of sacred importance. Expectant parents believed that names played a profound role in spiritual identity, and Hebrew children were often named in response to significant circumstances surrounding their birth. (A quick glance through the Old Testament reveals baby names with such definitions as “laughter,” “mighty wrestling,” and “good fortune has come!”)

And though our modern culture is generally more concerned with a name’s aesthetics than its spiritual impact, I am convinced the art of naming is one that is still profoundly important to God.

Repetition

As parents, we are afforded the priceless opportunity of shaping our children’s identities. When they are first placed in our arms, pink and snuggly, their names are naught but noise in their ears, a repetition rolling off the tongues of those who love them.

Laynie … Laynie … Laynie … And through that repetition, through the very act of speaking their names over and over, the seeds of recognition are planted. This is who I am, they realize. This is my identity.

Then they grow.

And regardless of how strong our fortresses or tall our ramparts may be, the quiet voices of the world creep in, whispering their own twisted versions of identity.

Worthless … failure … unlovable …

Our children must be so thoroughly bathed in the knowledge of their identity in Christ that the ugliness the world slings at them simply won’t stick.

So my husband and I crafted identity statements for our girls based on the meanings of their first and middle names. (After God convinced us of His delight in naming, we christened our second daughter Crosbie—“near the cross”—with much more deliberation!)

And every night, before they drift off to sleep, we ask them: “Do you know who you are?”

We started this practice as a means of washing away any untruths that may have taken root throughout the day. By repeating these phrases immediately before slumber, our girls’ hearts are once again bathed in truth and assurance.

But we soon found it was a question worth repeating much more frequently.

When our Speaker of Truth is caught in a lie … when our Pure Joy is acting anything but joyful … and when we see those persistent whispers of the world beginning to put down roots of identity, we look into our daughters’ eyes and ask:

“Do you know who you are?”

Scripture is rife with examples of our patient and loving Father renaming His children when a new course is required. (Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter … )

And by prayerfully crafting a statement of identity for each of our children, so we too can counter the whispers of the world with sweet whispers of redemption.

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1b).

Because we know the world will ask the question, it’s absolutely imperative our children know the answer.

“Do you know who you are?”

Brittany is a born-and-bred Oklahoman living in the heart of Tornado Alley with her husband and two young daughters. She is a homeschooling mama by day, an aspiring picture book author by night, and a lover of literature, worship, fitness, The Office, and coffee (give her allllll the coffee).
Last year I got into a fight.

Like a real fight. Like two grown men stepping into a ring and duking it out.

At age 39 I had a dream—a bucket-list item—which was to fight. And so I did.

I’m also a marketer and wanted to get the most out of my fight.

I used my fight to help motivate dads to get healthy but also to raise money for foster care (I’m a foster parent).

The story got some traction. I raised a good chunk of money for foster care and even the local paper picked up the story. "Colorado Springs stay-at-home dad gets off his couch to fight" was their headline.

Fight day came and went. I fought well but ended up losing a decision. My fight was over.

The next morning I woke up and my left foot looked like a loaf of bread. Turns out I fractured my foot in my fight. I went from training five days a week to zero. I went from the couch to the fight back to the couch.

This was a double whammy.

1. The excitement of the fight was gone. My fight was over. I lost.
2. The extensive training I went through was done, at least until my foot healed.

I hit a pretty bad depression that week and for the next couple months to come.
You see, I put my identity in “Mike the stay-at-home dad turned fighter.” I loved the attention it brought. “You’re doing WHAT?” And now I was back to just “Mike … stay-at-home dad.”

Through therapy and counseling, I got out of my depression. I vowed to never put my identity in myself or something I’m doing. I’m a Christian; my identity belongs in Christ. When I take my eyes off that I’ll fall.

I wanted to help other dads get healthy, to help them find their identities. I created a new business called Healthy Dads (healthydads.com). Our mission is simple: Every Dad Better.

We have a manifesto at HealthyDads.com; it’s our “6 F’s.” It helps us look at our whole lives. To be better in every dimension. When we focus on one dimension too much (like I did) we get off track.

You’ll see the manifesto starts off with having a belief in something bigger than ourselves. For most of us that is God. He is our identity.

Healthy Dads Manifesto

**FAITH**—A healthy dad believes in something bigger than himself. He has a higher purpose, a higher calling.

**FAMILY**—A healthy dad is committed to his family. He wants to give his family his “best self.” He understands perfection is the goal, and he strives for that in his marriage and parenting.

**FOOD**—A healthy dad monitors what goes into his body. He puts quality food in his system. When he does get off track, he is committed to “eating the next right thing.”

**FITNESS**—A health dad is active. He pushes himself. He commits.

**FINANCES**—A healthy dad spends less than he makes. A healthy dad believes in calling and is committed to understanding, and living, in his calling.

**FUN**—A healthy dad believes that “adventure is out there” and pursues adventure in his own life. A healthy dad understands the need for friends and pursues healthy relationships.

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HEALTHY DADS

- Know their **purpose**
- **Provide** for their families
- **Protect** their bodies
- **Pursue** adventure
- Don’t **pretend** they have it all figured out

What about you? Have you put your identity in …

- **Your work?** What happens when that job goes away? It can, very quickly.
- **Your kids?** What happens when they let you down? When they go astray?
- **Your spouse?** What happens when she fails you? She will, and you’ll fail her.
- **Your favorite sports team?** I’m a Detroit Lions fan. We Lions fans learn early on that putting our identity, our hope, in a sports team is a recipe for disaster.
- **Your pastor?** What happens if/when he falls? That will crush your world.
- **Your bank account?** Money comes and goes. And when it goes, it can go pretty quickly.
- **Yourself?** I did this. Trust me, it doesn’t end well.

The only hope for our identity is in Christ Jesus.

As Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

When we put our identity in Christ we will win every time.

If you need help in this area please reach out to me. I have a great library of resources that can help. And, I’m here if you just need someone to talk to—mike@healthydads.com

Mike Ruman is the founder of Healthy Dads (healthydads.com). Healthy Dads’ mission is “Every Dad Better.” Mike spends his days helping churches grow through digital marketing (ministryautomation.com), and by night he is the father of four crazy kiddos. He and Lisa have been married for 15 years and live in Colorado Springs, CO.
IDENTITY LOST

Twelve years ago, I took my then-two-year-old son in for a haircut. Just a trim. He needed more than that, but I wasn’t ready. We had just moved back to California from Texas, and I had recently been told by an outspoken neighbor that my furniture didn’t fit my house and my clothes didn’t make the cut. I just needed to hold on to something familiar for a minute, like my son’s bouncy blonde curls. As I emphatically explained to the stylist they weren’t to be chopped, I watched in horror as they fell to the floor.

I drove home in tears and then crumpled to the ground much like those curls. “I need another baby,” was the only way I knew how to verbalize to my husband the inadequacy that hit me all at once. I had not been without a child either on the way, on the breast, on the hip, or hanging on to my leg in eight years. And although I knew that my identity was supposed to be solely in Christ, somewhere along the way, even while being in full-time ministry, I had managed to be marked by motherhood instead. Somehow a loss of locks meant a loss of babies, which left me at a loss for words in a season where I wondered, “Who am I now?”

Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” What does it mean to be crucified with Christ and find our identity only in Him? It doesn’t mean we will physically hang on a cross one day, but there is a death to our old way of life. Max Lucado describes this glorious exchange as every dark moment of our lives written on a piece of paper that’s placed between Christ’s hand and the cross, and that nail goes all the way through, our sins forgiven and forgotten forever. True repentance isn’t just asking for forgiveness; there must also be a willingness and desire for change. It is the surrendering of one’s own control.

All self-recognition attempts at being defined by or finding worth, acceptance, and belonging in anything other than in a relationship with Jesus are building blocks to separation from the One to whom we long to be joined. Self-preservation causes us to build walls we hide behind, but God says, “I see your loneliness, your brokenness, your pain, and I still want you as my very own.” We did nothing to earn this beautiful, unfathomable, all-in adoption. We can do nothing to lose it. That’s more than our feeble attempts at control can offer, and yet we try and hold on to so much.

Some of us may take pride in being the homeschooling parent of a large family, or a working mom who can juggle job and home and still raise the star athlete and the state spelling bee champion. Some of us are so tired from toddlers that we just want to make it to the grocery store to lose ourselves for two hours in the magazine section. Some of us are so frantic to paint the perfect picture that when life pops
wildly out of its container like a jack-in-the-box, we scramble to stuff it all back in. Some of us think holding on makes us strong, but sometimes letting go is where we find strength.

**Jesus was the most secure man who ever walked the earth.** John 13:3 says that He “knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.” He knew where He was from, where He was going, and what He was supposed to do in between.

When your identity comes from knowing who you belong to and where you’re headed—when it’s hidden in Christ and you now live attuned to His will—you can release your insatiable need to fix and rescue; you can find the gumption to put your toddler back in his own bed five times a night and the wisdom to love on your depressed teen; you can stop worrying about what the neighbors think and know that being a parent significantly marks a part of your life but doesn’t define the whole of your life; and you will be glad that people think you are “only a mom” or “only a dad” as you strategically, with stealth-like precision, raise a generation of children who will know the whisper of their Maker and do great things for the kingdom as their lives are hidden in His.

*by Chris Blue*

Originally from Tennessee, Chris now lives with her husband, five children, and one grandson in Costa Mesa, CA, where they lead Pacific Pointe Church. With toddlers and teens under the same roof, there is plenty of “wild and wonderful” to write about, and Chris shares their crazy adventures on her Instagram at chris_blue. Passionate believers in things being altogether lovely, the Blue family motto is “Love hard and fight hard for the ones who matter,” and their story tells of the sweetest growth coming from the most difficult moments. When she’s not cleaning house or running carpool, Chris can be found in hip-hop class, at the beach, or vintage shopping.
When sin entered the world, it sent humanity’s first couple into hiding, both from God and one another. They hastily masked their naked vulnerability behind a handful of fig leaves. Not much has changed. Today, we still hide behind masks to protect ourselves from being rejected by the ones we love. But at what cost?

I can vividly remember one of the first times I was willing to be fully vulnerable with my wife, Cathy. We were driving home from a weekend away to celebrate our fifth anniversary. During that long car ride, we began discussing the state of our marriage, and the conversation quickly got heated. I started to feel defensive, so I did what I often do when I feel attacked: I got angry in the hopes that she would either see my perspective or just leave me alone.

It didn’t work out the way I’d hoped. Rather than making the car ride more comfortable, it only heightened the intensity. Eventually our conversation got so ugly and I got so defensive that I snapped and did the most reasonable thing I could think of in that moment: I pulled over and told her to drive home. I, in my need to avoid the tension, would walk home. Admittedly, my plan wasn’t very well thought out. I didn’t even know what county we were in and it would have been a long walk. However, my ploy did succeed in
getting her to go silent, which certainly wasn’t good for our relationship, but at least it gave me a momentary break from conflict.

When we finally got home, however, we could no longer avoid the elephant in the room. I wanted to hold onto my anger. Yet, during the silence of the car ride, I’d become aware of something deeper, stirring underneath the anger, crying to be noticed. As I sat with it, I began to realize that this was the nerve that had been struck, the reason I’d instinctively put on my mask of anger. It was a feeling of inadequacy, a feeling that was dripping in shame. Unconsciously I had tried to bury it, but as I sat there on the couch I realized that hiding this feeling would only push us further apart.

So in a moment of reckless abandon, I pushed my mask to the side and gave voice to the cry inside.

I said: “Cathy, I feel like a failure as a husband. After five years of marriage, I still don’t have a clue how to love you or communicate with you in the way you want. And I’m scared I’ll never figure it out.”

As I confessed, my anger retreated and tears began to flow. It was one of the first times in our relationship that I was allowing Cathy into an area of shame and vulnerability while I was still struggling with it. Admittedly, it was terrifying to pull away the mask of anger and let her in. I was showing her the real me, the weak me who didn’t have it all together, and I was making myself vulnerable to rejection.

I’ll never forget her response. Before I opened up, she had been at the far end of the couch, with crossed arms and hardened heart, but as I brought my defenses down and came out of hiding, she softened as well. Before I knew it, she was at my side, with her arms around me. And later that evening, she told me she’d never felt closer to me than when I opened up and allowed myself to be vulnerable.

Talk about irony! From my perspective, dragging that dark pearl of shame into the light had been an embarrassing admission of weakness. I was terrified to admit it, because it might cause her to think less of me. But it elicited the opposite response from my wife. Rather than rejecting me, she actually moved toward me, since we were no longer separated by the mask I’d been hiding behind. What a liberating feeling, to know that I didn’t need to perform for my wife’s approval. What a beautiful realization that I could be loved just as I am.

God has designed us to live before Him and one another in complete intimacy, naked and unashamed, and for one shining moment I was able to drop the pretense and rest in the magnificence of His design. Sadly, a moment of intimate transparency cannot overcome a lifetime of hiding in the shadows, and eventually I reaffixed the mask over my vulnerability and went back to proving my worth.

The fact is circumstances may force us to drop our masks and step into the light from time to time, but we will never be able to scrape together enough courage to actually stay in the light on our own. So long as we perceive our true selves as unacceptable, we will be tempted to hide them. Until we can rest in the belief that we are loved, we will attempt to perform for the approval of our peers. So before we can hope to rest in the light, a fundamental shift must take place in our self-perception. We must reclaim our God-given identities. Otherwise, we will continue running back into the shadows and hiding behind our masks.

Excerpt from Reclaiming Your Identity: Embrace Who God Created You to Be by Eric Wayman. Published by Westbow Press.

by Eric Wayman

Eric Wayman is the lead pastor of Lighthouse Community Church in Costa Mesa, CA, and the author of Reclaiming Your Identity. He also teaches at Vanguard University and loves getting to disciple people who are hungry to grow. He and his wife, Cathy, are raising two sons to be men of God.

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2. DON’T take sides in or interfere with your children’s marriages. I can’t take sides in my child’s marriage—it would be hurtful and a bad example for my grandchildren to see me do so. I also can’t interfere when my child has a different opinion than his spouse on parenting. I always try to support their joint decision and give advice only when asked for it. When my grandchildren want a different answer, I always have to say, “Whatever your parents decided is the ultimate decision.”

3. And most importantly, DO teach your grandchildren about God, especially their identity in Christ. Whether it’s reading Bible stories, telling them what God expects from them and what He will do for them if they follow His way, or just setting a Christian example in the way I lead my life—teaching my grandchildren about God is the most important part of being a grandparent.

As I enjoyed doing with my kids, I love to make up stories for my grandkids, tell them jokes, and teach them the importance of having a few fake voices to use when needed. I want my grandchildren to look forward to our time together. I know I do! I did nothing to earn this title, this reward, of being a grandfather, just as I want my grandchildren to know that they did not have to do anything to earn an inheritance in Christ. I want them to always know that they belong to and are loved fiercely by our family, but ultimately, they belong to God, and He loves them even more! Proverbs 17:6 says, “Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers” (ESV). In that case, I’m rocking my crown loud and proud!

by Craig Norman

Craig and his wife, Shannon, live in northeast Texas and have three grown children and five grandchildren. Craig enjoys coaching Special Olympics athletes, woodworking, and traveling the country visiting his children and grandchildren.
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. SERVING

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

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. LOVE & RESPECT

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

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. STORYTELLING

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

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. KNOWING
“God knows me, and I can know Him.”
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. IDENTITY
“I belong to God, and He loves me!”
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. COURSE CORRECTION
“When I get off track, God offers me a path of healing.”
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. FAITH COMMUNITY
“God’s family cares for each other and worships God together.”
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.

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

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 © 2010 DAVID C COOK

Eric Wayman is the lead pastor of Lighthouse Community Church in Costa Mesa, CA. He is passionate about helping people grow in their relationship with God so that they can better reflect Him in everything they do. He and his wife Cathy are raising their two sons, Ethan and Grayson, to be men of God.

This book is an invitation to strip away the layers of varnish we hide behind and allow our Father God to show us who we really are and what He made us to do. It’s time to reclaim your identity.

"I read the whole thing in one sitting. I couldn’t put it down!! I LOVE IT! It is compelling, relevant, excellently written, beautiful, honest and transforming. I am such a fan."

Michelle Anthony, Author of Spiritual Parenting and Becoming a Spiritually Healthy Family