KNOWING

"GOD KNOWS ME, AND I CAN KNOW HIM."
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!
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.

Nothing is more spiritually vital 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 for knowing God, studying His Word, and cultivating a relationship with Him through Christ.

We live in a world that denies and dismisses the existence of absolute truth. What a tragedy! We face an urgency to pass on the truth of God and His Word to the next generation. As we learn God’s truth, we open up to knowing God Himself and entering into relationship with Him. Creating space for our families to study God’s Word will develop a hunger and thirst to know Him more.
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!
BUT GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE FOR US IN THIS:

WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.

ROMANS 5:8
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HEAR, SEE, AND EXPERIENCE GOD’S GREAT LOVE
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CAPTURING THE SEASON

SOMETHING GREAT HAPPENS WHEN WE REALIZE OTHERS WANT TO PURSUE A RELATIONSHIP WITH US. HOWEVER, SOMETHING EVEN GREATER OCCURS WHEN WE REALIZE THAT THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE DESIRES TO KNOW US AND BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH US. DID YOU KNOW THAT GOD LITERALLY ASKS YOU TO BE HIS EVERY DAY?

THIS MONTH, ALLOW THIS DOORKNOB HANGER TO SERVE AS A REMINDER THAT GOD IS SAYING, “BE MINE” TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY. MAKE SEVERAL IN DIFFERENT COLORS TO BRIGHTEN EVERY DOOR IN YOUR HOME!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- yarn (several different colors)
- pom-pom maker (find at craft stores or online)
- scissors
- 3” x 6” piece of cardboard
- yarn needle or darning needle
- safety pin
- Be Mine tag from bit.ly/beminetag

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Download and cut out the tag from bit.ly/beminetag.
3. To make the pom-poms, wrap yarn around both sides of the tool. For full, fluffy pom-poms, wrap until the yarn fits snugly in the circular caps. Cut around the wrapped yarn following the groove in the tool. Tie yarn tightly around the cut yarn pieces. Flip the plastic pieces of the tool up and separate the two sides to remove the pom-pom.
4. Trim any loose or long yarn pieces to make your pom-poms look fuller and more spherical.
5. Make your tassel. Wrap yarn around the cardboard piece about 40 times and cut. Cut a piece of yarn about 10” long, thread it under the wrapped yarn, and tie a knot at the top center of the cardboard. Cut the yarn at the end opposite to the knot and remove the cardboard. Pull the yarn taut and, using another 10” piece of yarn, tie a knot about an inch from the top of the tassel and leave the knot tail threads long. Wrap the knot tail threads around the knot, and tie another knot with the tail thread. Using the yarn needle, tuck the threads under the wrapped up yard at the top of the tassel, and trim excess thread.
6. Cut three 35” lengths of yarn and braid. Tie a knot at the top and have someone hold it or safety pin it to something stationary as you braid.
7. Thread your braid into the yarn needle and sew through the bottom of the tassel.
8. Working from small to large, sew through your pom-poms. Tie knots in the braid where the pom-pom centers will sit, and gently pull pom-poms in place over the knotted braid.
9. Once all three pom-poms are in place, create a top loop by folding over a 10” length of the braid and tying a knot nestled into the largest pom-pom. Tuck the remaining length of yarn into the pom-pom using the yarn needle and cut any excess.
10. Tie your tag on the top of the hanger and celebrate with your family knowing that God knows you and wants you to be His!

by Debbie Guinn
Music has always been a huge part of my life. It’s also been deeply significant for my wife, Kerri. In fact, music brought us together. So it should be no surprise that my son also has a love for music.

I vividly remember driving in the car with him when he was around four years old. An R & B song came on the radio and he was hooked. He started wanting to listen only to Motown or R & B—and not just occasionally, but all the time. Granted, we loved it too, but we were shocked by how quickly he became attached to it.

A couple years later, my son began asking us to leave music on as he fell asleep. I could identify with his request because I loved falling asleep to music when I was young. One of my favorite cassette tapes to listen to was a kids worship album called The Music Machine. To this day, I have no idea who sang it, but I could recite every single one of those lyrics for you right now 40 years later! I started to sense that, because my son loved music so much and because he learns lyrics so quickly (as most kids do), it might be a good idea to only allow worship music during bedtime. As a parent, it was soothing to know that the songs being sung over my son while he slept have real meaning and that God would use those bedtime songs to speak truth into him.

As we head into a month overwhelmingly themed with love, think about songs that speak of God’s love for us. Together with your children, take some time to build a playlist of these worship songs. A great place to start would be to see what Bethel, Elevation, or Hillsong has to offer. Also, talk to the worship leader at your church or in your children’s ministry department.

Then, allow your children to listen to these lyrics about God’s love as they fall asleep. Repeat this playlist the following morning as your family prepares to head out for the day. Talk together about what they learned about God by listening to this music. There is no greater joy as a parent than to hear these truths of God’s love naturally flowing out of your kids as they get ready for their day—and my guess would be they too will be able to repeat each lyric even 40 years later!

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.
CONVERSATION STARTERS

YOU ARE LOVED

This month, like no other, people tend to focus on the idea of love. Walk into any store and heart-shaped chocolates or gifts of pink and red beckon you to buy them. While I’m not one to turn my nose up at chocolate, and it’s true, I might treat my three boys to valentines every year, it can be dangerous to get too caught up in a worldly idea of love.

The idea of being loved and chosen by another person is so captivating that many teens and young adults sacrifice everything to experience it. As parents, we have a preciously small window of time to be the authority on ALL THINGS to our children. We need to impress upon them that they are loved. When they make mistakes: loved. When they are unkind: still loved. **We need to raise up a generation of young people who don’t need people to choose them because they are confident knowing that Jesus loves them.**

**GET YOUR CHILDREN TALKING**

- How do you know God loves you? How does that make you feel?
- What unique gifts or qualities did God give you?
- How can we respond to God’s love together? Independently?
- Whom do we know who needs to hear that God loves him?

**Sometimes God shows love in unexpected ways.** Get inspired and pass it on to your kids. Whisper it 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 Nicole Griesi*

Nicole is the Director of Children’s Ministry at Green Valley Church in San Diego, CA. She is a disciple of Jesus, wife, and mother of three boys. She loves coffee, good fellowship, and books with happy endings.
One of my favorite things to do is take walks with my grandchildren. We started these “adventures” at a very young age, and somewhere early on, one of the kids discovered a leaf in the shape of a heart. As my granddaughter excitedly brought me her heart-shaped find, I told her it must be a message from God telling her how much He loves her. I explained, “God shows His love for us in all kinds of ways—all we have to do is be on the lookout for it.”

So now, our walks have turned into adventures looking for signs of God’s love. Over the years we have found everything from heart-shaped leaves to special rocks and even clouds in the sky. The kids are constantly on the lookout for all the places God has hidden His secret messages of love for us. Sometimes it comes in the form of a heart-shaped strawberry or their last few pieces of breakfast cereal that mysteriously float into a heart shape in the bowl. My granddaughter has a treasure box where she keeps many of these reminders, and friends even send her heart-shaped things they find in nature!

Children don’t need a formal Bible study to know how much God loves them—they can see Him in everyday moments if we just point them in the right direction. Whether it’s the vivid mural God paints at sunrise and sunset or the way the leaves turn color and are carried by the wind—the evidence of His great love for us is everywhere.

This month, start looking for signs of God’s love with your children or grandchildren. Begin by sharing all the ways you have experienced His love. Then, take them out into nature and go on a God’s Love Scavenger Hunt. Here are a few things to look for to get you started:

- Something colorful
- Something bumpy
- Something pretty
- Something smooth
- Something rough
- Something fuzzy
- Something you think is a treasure
- Something heart shaped—extra points!

Remind them that our world is filled with variety and beauty and, through nature, God teaches us, speaks to us, and provides for us. Share with them that the Bible testifies that creation gives clear testimony to God’s existence and His love for us. So be on the lookout—His love for us is everywhere!

by Debbie Guinn
“Dear God …” It seems each of my kids’ prayers, and often my own, begin with those two words. A pastor once challenged me to consider whom I pray to—is it always God the Father? Do I ever pray to Jesus? What about the Holy Spirit? How often do I picture a one-dimensional God when I pray, possibly mentioning His attributes but never calling Him by any other name?

To engage in prayer with God implies a certain level of knowing something about Him—knowing that you can trust Him with the words and thoughts you share in prayer and knowing that He hears the prayers you speak or write. Engaging in a rhythm of prayer with our kids and families has the potential to not only increase our knowledge of God’s attributes but to influence our own identities in Christ and our understanding of how He interacts with the world.

In this month, when most of us are declaring our feelings of love, take the next 28 days to write prayers to God in the form of letters or notes. Set out paper or sticky notes and markers somewhere in your home along with a list of the following attributes and names of God, one for each letter of the alphabet. A good format to follow is to address God by the name for that day, thank Him for a way you have seen Him reveal that attribute in your life, and then direct any requests for yourself or others around that particular attribute. Finally, praise Him for who He is!

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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Know Your God</th>
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| 1   | **God:** Who is God, and why do you love Him?  
| 2   | **Almighty:** What difference does it make to you that God is the Almighty?  
| 3   | **Banner:** A banner flies over people to identify them or goes before them. How is God your banner?  
| 4   | **Confidence:** Do you ever feel afraid or unsure? God is confidence, and we can approach Him with confidence.  
| 5   | **Defender:** How do you need God to be your defender today?  
| 6   | **Everlasting:** God has no end, so we can pray big prayers! Say a worshipful prayer to an everlasting God.  
| 7   | **Father:** What does it mean to you that God is a trustworthy Father?  
| 8   | **Given:** God gives us what we need and hears us when we ask. Thank Him!  
| 9   | **Help in trouble:** We can cry out to God when we are in troubling times. Praise Him, and ask for help if you need it.  
| 10  | **I AM:** “I AM” means He needs no other explanation; He will always be enough for our needs.  
| 11  | **Jesus:** Jesus is God in the flesh—God with us. Do you know He identifies with everything you go through?  
| 12  | **Knowing:** Nothing is hidden from God; we can tell Him anything, and nothing is a surprise.  
| 13  | **Light of the World:** God is the Light of the World—in Him there is no darkness. Pray for those who do not know Him yet.  
| 14  | **Maker of all things:** What do you love that God has created?  
| 15  | **Name above all names:** No one is more important than God! Confess any idols you may have.  
| 16  | **Omega:** God is the Alpha, the beginning, and the Omega, the end. Write a prayer with any questions or concerns you may have about the end or things you don’t yet see.  
| 17  | **Perfecter of our faith:** God is writing your story, and He knows you. Do you trust Him as the author and perfecter of your faith?  
| 18  | **Quieter:** God can quiet our hearts when we feel upset or anxious. What would you write to someone who brings you comfort?  
| 19  | **Redeemer:** Jesus redeemed us—He took the payment for our sins! Write a note of gratitude.  
| 20  | **Savior:** God as our Savior means He gave His life for us. What does it mean to you that the saving work of faith is complete?  
| 21  | **Teacher:** What does it mean to look to God as your teacher?  
| 22  | **Unchanging:** God will not change. How can the unchanging God make a difference in your ever-changing life today?  
| 23  | **Vine:** John 15:5 talks of Jesus as the vine. He is the source of life; without Him we can do nothing. What are you trying to do on your own apart from Him?  
| 24  | **Worthy:** Spend time praising the One worthy of all praise!  
| 25  | **Zealous:** Ezekiel 39:25 uses the word zealous to refer to God. Zealous means passionate and committed. God is passionate about His name and who He is, and He wants us to know Him!  
| 26  | **Yahweh:** This Hebrew name for God describes how God’s chosen people interacted with Him—totally depending on God for everything. Where are you on the spectrum between perceived self-sufficiency and dependence on God?  
| 27  | **Choose your favorite:** What have you learned about God this month? How would you address God and pray to Him?  
| 28  | **Zealous:** Ezekiel 39:25 uses the word zealous to refer to God. Zealous means passionate and committed. God is passionate about His name and who He is, and He wants us to know Him!  

The splash of ocean water hit Brooklyn’s snorkeling mask as she popped her head above the waves. The warm sunshine felt good on her face as she watched the water dance around her. It was a perfect day to explore an underwater world.

Brooklyn had snorkeled many times, but this was her friend Jack’s first time. She couldn’t wait for him to see the treasures hiding on the ocean floor. With their masks, snorkels, and swim fins, they could glide through the water just like fish!

Masks tightly secured, they plunged their faces into the water as their parents swam close by.

Colorful coral and fish of all kinds flashed into Brooklyn and Jack’s view. Long-bodied creatures called eels glided around the rocks. Brooklyn swam to the bottom and picked out a seashell that looked perfect for her treasure box. What a great day of snorkeling!

Brooklyn watched the fish dart around her and Jack and dreamed about how wonderful it would be to see a sea turtle swim alongside them. She had swum with all types of ocean life but never a sea turtle. Brooklyn found herself wanting this rare adventure with such a unique creature.

As Brooklyn imagined a sea turtle swimming near her, she was reminded of a Scripture she had heard in kids church. She thought about Matthew 21:22: “You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it” (NLT). Brooklyn felt it was a little silly to ask God for a sea turtle. God had much bigger things to do than to bring a sea turtle her way. Yet, the word “anything” replayed in her head.

Brooklyn decided her faith in God was bigger than any embarrassment. She prayed, “God, I know this may be a small request, but I would love to see a sea turtle today. I know that You see my heart’s desires. Thank You for caring, even in the little things.”

Brooklyn heard Jack splashing around as he tried to catch a school of fish. She smiled around her snorkel mouthpiece as she knew those fish were too fast for Jack to catch. As she swam closer to Jack and the fish, she noticed something dark off in the distance. She wondered if it could be seaweed. Suddenly the dark shape became clear. It was a sea turtle! A real, live sea turtle! Brooklyn couldn’t believe her eyes!

She quickly motioned for Jack so he could see what was swimming toward them. His eyes grew as big as Frisbees. As the sea turtle came closer, Brooklyn and Jack tried their best to swim alongside it as it glided through the water. The sea turtle quickly moved past Brooklyn and Jack into deeper ocean. Brooklyn watched in amazement as her heart filled with joy. She knew God cared, even in this small request. Brookybelieved this amazing adventure would be a lifetime reminder to bring anything, big or small, to God in prayer.

The author, Lindsey Snider, experienced this story firsthand on a trip with her husband. She uses this story of the sea turtle to encourage children in hospitals. With a plush sea turtle in hand, Lindsey tells children about her ocean adventure and how God sees us, hears us, and answers our prayers no matter how big or small our needs may feel. Parents, you can make this an opportunity to share with your children a time that God answered your prayers. When we share our God stories with our children, it cultivates their faith and allows them to see how God has worked in the lives of their families.

by Lindsey Snider

Lindsey currently serves as a Creative Specialist for the IPHC Discipleship Ministries Headquarters in Oklahoma City, OK. She has served as a Community Outreach Pastor, Kids Pastor, and Media Pastor across Oklahoma and Texas. Lindsey and her husband, Jared, have a daughter, Brooklyn, and a son, Jack. They love to travel, try new foods, cheer on the Texas Rangers, and cuddle with their dog, Frisco.
Bouquets of Love

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.

We sometimes take God’s love for granted. On a grand scale we know that God loves us because He made us, because the Bible tells us He loves us, because Jesus died for us, and so on. However, we often miss out on all of the little ways God communicates His love to us every day. This month, invite your family to become detectives asking the question, “What evidence can I find to help me know God loves me?”

What you’ll need

- vase or container
- a few branches
- colored paper
- scissors
- pen
- tape
- twine/string (optional)

What you’ll do

1. Choose a vase or container and place it in a prominent spot in your home.
2. Go outside and gather branches to put inside your container.
3. Cut out 28 small paper hearts per family member—this will be one heart per day for each person this month.
4. Encourage family members to look for signs that God loves them every day. They might notice a beautiful sunrise or sunset, a song that comes on the radio at just the right time, an encouragement from a friend, a good meal … the possibilities are endless! The idea is to find some small thing that points to the fact that God sees them, cares for them, is providing for them, is with them, etc.
5. At the end of each day, have each person write down the piece of evidence he or she found of God’s love on a paper heart.
6. Tape a piece of twine or string to the back of the heart, tie the ends together, and hang it on a branch. (You could also tape or tie the hearts directly to the branches if you prefer.)

At the end of the month, look back on your heart bouquet as a reminder of all the little ways God showed your family His love over the past few weeks!
HE GAVE US A BEAUTIFUL WORLD TO LIVE IN.
WHAT YOU’LL NEED
• scissors
• cards found at bit.ly/heartmatchingcards

BEFORE YOU BEGIN …
Cut out the heart matching cards. Fill in the blank cards with all the ways God has shown His love to your family. Be sure to make two of each card. Find a table for your family to gather around. Lay the heart cards facedown on the table arranged in a square or rectangular grid.

TIME TO PLAY!
Gather everyone around the table. Explain to your family that this game is just like Memory, the matching game. Written on each card is one way God shows us His love. Every card has a matching partner.

The person who starts the game will turn over any two cards. If the cards match, the player gets to keep the pair. If the cards do not match, the player must turn them back over. Then the next player repeats this process. The goal is to collect as many pairs as you can. The person with the most pairs at the end wins!

TIPS & TWISTS
My kids aren’t readers: That’s okay! If your little ones are not reading yet, simply read the cards aloud for them, pointing at each word so they can follow along. After you’ve read the cards aloud, you can let your child determine whether they say the same thing or not. You can also add colors or shapes to the cards, making sure each pair matches.

I have a big family: This game may fly by quickly for bigger families. If this is the case, feel free to play this game “challenger style.” In this twist, instead of allowing everyone to play the game at once, invite only two players to battle each other until one person wins. The winner will stay in the game and play against someone new. Continue to swap people out until there are only two players left. The winner of the final round wins the whole game! Don’t forget to mix the cards up before each round so a consistent winner does not have a sneaky advantage.

REMEMBER
February can be such a fun month filled with special treats and funny valentines. In the midst of all the red and pink, remind your family of the greatest love of all time. God has given us an unwavering and amazing love that we can’t get from anyone other than Him. His love is perfect, and even though not one of us deserves it, He still chose to create us and love us! Let the truths of this game serve as a reminder that God knows us and we get to know Him. He offers us the most fulfilling relationship of all, and no chocolate is sweeter than that!

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 house plants!
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.”

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 4 tablespoons butter, melted, divided in half
• 1 package (1 pound) frozen, shredded hash brown potatoes, thawed
• 8 large eggs
• 1 cup whole milk
• 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
• 1/2 cup onion, diced
• 4 ounces pancetta, diced
• 1 clove garlic, minced
• 1 teaspoon salt
• 1/2 teaspoon coarse ground pepper

Optional add-ins

• your favorite cheese instead of cheddar
• bacon or ham instead of pancetta
• 1/2 cup frozen spinach, thawed and drained
• 1/2 cup broccoli or asparagus
• 1/2 cup red, yellow, or green bell peppers

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Preheat oven to 400° F.
2. Line the sides of a 9’ x 21/2’ springform pan with strips of parchment paper; brush bottom of pan and paper with 2 tablespoons melted butter. (Be generous on the bottom of the pan so the potatoes don’t stick.) If you don’t have a springform pan, use a 9’ pie pan without parchment paper.
3. Squeeze excess moisture from hash browns.
4. In a large bowl, mix thawed, drained hash browns with remaining butter, 1 egg, salt, and pepper.
5. Press hash brown mixture firmly onto bottom and up the sides of your prepared pan.
6. Place pan on rimmed baking sheet. Bake until set and edges of hash browns are lightly browned, about 20 to 25 minutes.
7. While the “crust” is baking, sauté the pancetta in a small skillet until it’s crispy. Remove from skillet and drain on paper towels. Do not discard the bacon fat.
8. Put onions and garlic in the same skillet and sauté in the fat until the onion is soft and the garlic is fragrant, about 3 minutes.
9. In a large bowl, whisk the remaining eggs and milk, and then add the rest of the ingredients.
10. Pour into prepared crust. Bake until set, 45 to 50 minutes.
11. Let sit for 5 to 10 minutes to set completely. Carefully unmold quiche and remove parchment paper.
12. Serve warm or at room temperature.

by Debbie Guinn
YOUR KIDS WILL LOVE ASSEMBLING THESE SUPER EASY, LIGHT, AND FLUFFY BERRY TRIFLES. REMIND THEM THAT JOHN 13:35 TELLS US THAT PEOPLE WILL KNOW WE ARE DISCIPLES OF JESUS BY OUR LOVE, AND SHARING THESE TRIFLES WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY IS A GREAT WAY TO START SHARING THAT LOVE!

Prep time: 1 hr. Yield: 8 jars

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

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 8 pint-sized mason jars
- 2 (3.4 ounce) boxes instant cheesecake-flavored pudding
- red food coloring
- 1 pint heavy whipping cream
- 1 angel food cake mix
- 1 cup raspberries
- 1 cup blueberries
- 2 cups strawberries (sliced)
- ribbon and tags (optional)

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Wash and pat the berries dry. Let them continue to air dry while you prep the rest.
2. Bake the angel food cake according to package directions and cut into cubes.
3. Whip the cream and make the pudding. Stir several drops of red food coloring into the pudding to make it pink.
4. Then start layering the ingredients into mason jars. Start with the pudding, and then add cake cubes so they can soak in the pudding.
5. Add the fruit and whipped cream. To make it look pretty, stand sliced strawberries vertically against the sides of the jar so they look like a row of hearts from the outside.
6. Continue layering until all the ingredients are gone, finishing with whipped cream and a few berries on top.
7. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours.

by Debbie Guinn
When I first accepted Jesus into my heart (15 years ago, when I was 32), I began to spend a lot of time with new Christian friends. Everyone I talked to seemed to have opinions and advice about what I should do to be a “good Christian.” Some people actually used that specific term outright; others just talked about the “dos” and “don’ts” of Christianity. For a new believer, it was all a bit confusing, but from what I gathered, there were certain things that “good Christians” did (and avoided) that made them stand out from the crowd.

A good Christian attended weekend services regularly (and a really good Christian volunteered at church throughout the week); a good Christian read the Bible every day (bonus points for highlighting verses in different colors); a good Christian listened to good Christian music, watched good Christian movies, and used good Christian language. The math here was pretty simple: do good, and you get blessed with the things you want. Do bad, and hard times and suffering are on the way. Now, this might be a simple enough equation to understand, and variants of this message are preached and embraced in many churches (especially in America), but there is a fatal flaw in the logic: it is simply not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The real truth of Christianity is stunning, captivating, and wondrously freeing. There is no such thing as a “good Christian” or a “bad Christian.” There is just you, and me, and all of us fellow sinners saved by grace. The truth is that at our very worst, God gave us His very best: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 ESV). Pause. Think about that. Let that sink in. When we were fully against God, He was fully for us at great cost to Himself.

Christianity, as it turns out, is not about bartering or negotiating with God to bless us; it is about gratitude, thanksgiving, and grace. We don’t do good things to get good things from God; we do good things because God is good. There is a world of difference between these two perspectives. One way leads to performance-oriented religion, exhaustion, pride, and shame; the other way leads to relationship, restful obedience, lasting love, and joy. We walk with one another on this shared journey of faith. Some days we choose the foolish path; other days we walk confidently in our true identity in Christ; every day we are loved in our stumbles, missteps, slips, and falls. After many years of learning by error, I am at last recognizing the beautiful gift of knowing that I am not a good Christian, but I am loved by a good God. And that is good enough for me.

HEAR IT
Read Romans 5:8 to your children.

Parents, it might be helpful to discuss the meaning of the word sin, since it figures so prominently in this verse. Depending on the age of your child, the concept of sinfulness can be a difficult topic to grasp, but here it helps to know that the term sinner comes from a Greek word (hamartia) that means “to miss the mark” (as in archery, missing the very center of the bull’s-eye).

Parents can communicate inherent sinfulness to children in understandable and applicable ways, while still remaining faithful to the biblical teaching of sin. What are some ways that both parents and children have “missed the mark,” or been less than perfect in the ways they relate to God and to others? Discussing this can be a great opportunity to shower grace and love upon your children (and to reflect on how much grace and love God has showered upon you). Your family can recognize together how good God is—for each confession of “missing the mark” is truly a moment to embrace the fact that Jesus already paid the price for each sin. We are loved! Now, how do we respond to this undeserved love?
DO IT
Together as a family, pray for one another. There is great power in prayer, and inviting your children to pray over members of their family is a wonderful gift. Encourage one another to be a bright light in a world that is far too often dark. Remind your family members of how much they are loved, even/especially when they “miss the mark.” The terrible lie that God loves us less when we sin is debilitating, shame-inducing, and never results in changed hearts. Only a solid foundation of love (reinforced daily by kind words and actions, reminders of our true identity in Christ, and honest, safe conversations), can ever support and build people up to be the kind of disciples of Jesus who do good things simply because God Himself is good. That is the pathway to true life. Let the journey begin!

by Keith Haughton
Keith recently graduated from Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, CA with a master’s degree in Theological Studies. When he is not writing, nerding out on theology, or working with special needs students in Round Rock, TX, he spends much-needed time with his loving family and supportive friends. He has been writing poetry and short stories since childhood, and his publishing experience includes writing for Power for Living, Focus on the Family, The Penwood Review, and Together Magazine.
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

GET UP

THIS MONTH, AS YOUR LITTLE ONES WAKE UP, SING “JESUS LOVES ME” TOGETHER AS A REMINDER THAT THEY CAN KNOW GOD LOVES THEM. THIS POWERFUL HYMN WAS WRITTEN IN 1860 AND STILL SPEAKS TO US TODAY!

Jesus loves me; this I know
For the Bible tells me so
Little ones to Him belong
They are weak but He is strong
Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
The Bible tells me so

sung by Valentina Faubion
Valentina is a student at Biola University in La Mirada, CA, studying commercial music. She gets to put her studies into action as a worship leader at ROCKHARBOR Church in Costa Mesa. She loves good coffee, but her guilty pleasure is a Dunkin’ Donuts iced caramel coffee.

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

Last night I received the shocking news that a friend’s husband passed away two days ago in a freak accident. She’s a young mom with two precious little boys—a toddler and a preschooler. We visited less than two months ago in her beautiful home, surrounded by all the signs of their happy life—family photos, home-improvement projects, colorful toys, the rambunctious dog. A few days after our visit they headed to Florida for a beach vacation, not knowing that it would be the last one with Daddy. How on earth do they even begin to move forward after such a tragedy? A family of believers who love and honor God—how does it make any sense? I don’t know. It feels really, really wrong.

It leaves me here thinking: What can any of us do when the floor drops out from under us and our world falls apart? How do we remind ourselves of God’s love for us? That He has not forgotten us but knows us and knows our deepest heartaches? From a practical standpoint, how do we remember to breathe, to get out of bed, to keep living?

I do know, both from personal experience and from watching others, that one way to begin the healing process can be to shift our perspectives off ourselves and onto others. When we begin to look for ways to love those in our world and maybe add just a bit of joy to another’s day, such acts change us as well.

When we were still in a bad spot because of our sinful condition, Jesus reached out to us. In turn, what if we too had the mentality of reaching out to others not just when they are in pain but also in response to OUR pain? Here’s the irony—the worst times in life can simultaneously feel the most sacred. I somehow feel more known by God during the rough times than the smooth.

READ
This month, read Romans 5:8 out loud to your child: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

BLESS
(Child’s name), during life’s times of loneliness or sadness, I pray that you would be reminded that God sees you and loves you. During such times, look for ways to be a blessing to others who are also in pain. When you share God’s love with them, you will also experience God’s love for you!

by Hanna Erickson
Hanna publishes and manages the blog posts on HomeFront’s website. She lives in Colorado Springs, CO, with her husband and three kids. She’s passionate about helping her family intentionally love those around them in both little and big ways.
ABOUT

In 2007, we learned about something terrible—that thousands of young girls around the world were being bought and sold for sex every day.

Like you, we were horrified, and we had to do something. So, we looked at a map and researched countries in need. Some were getting a lot of help; others weren’t. We wanted to go where there was a great need but not much help.

We went to Indonesia. Because it’s a nation of islands, thousands of children are easily trafficked from island to island, and the police have limited resources to stop it.

**OUR GOAL WAS TO CREATE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE THAT COULD EMPOWER SURVIVORS OF SEX TRAFFICKING TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES.**

So we opened an aftercare shelter for girls who had been trafficked, we hired Indonesian staff, and we provided partnered training for the local police. Along the way, we started working with at-risk children and set up a sponsorship program to empower families and prevent exploitation.
THE TRAFFICKING LANDSCAPE OF THE NATION IS CHANGING.

As Compassion First expands, we will always go to the most underserved corners of the world to restore precious children and find sustainable solutions that break cycles of exploitation.

WE PROVIDE
AFTERCARE FOR SURVIVORS
Gives rescued children an opportunity to rebuild their lives and pursue their dreams.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING
Creates a sustainable model for rescuing children, arresting traffickers, and disrupting trafficking patterns.

PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING
Empowers the vulnerable and breaks cycles of trafficking and exploitation in communities.

GET INVOLVED
Your partnership is vital to our work with survivors of trafficking and exploitation.

compassionfirst.org
WHERE IN THE WORLD IS ...

INDONESIA?

The Republic of Indonesia consists of five large islands and 13,677 smaller islands (about 6,000 of which are inhabited) forming an arc between Asia and Australia. With a total area of 741,100 square miles, Indonesia is the fourth-largest Asian country—after China, India, and Saudi Arabia. Indonesia has land boundaries with Malaysia (on the island of Borneo), Papua New Guinea (on the island of New Guinea), and East Timor (on the island of Timor). It is bounded on the north by the South China Sea, on the north and east by the Pacific Ocean, and on the south and west by the Indian Ocean.
If you lived in Indonesia you might eat something called satay. These tasty meat skewers cook over coals so hot they need fans to blow the smoke away. Whether it's chicken, goat, mutton, or rabbit, the small pieces of meat get marinated in turmeric, barbecued, and then bathed in a hearty peanut sauce. The chili-based sauce known as sambal is also a staple at all Indonesian tables where people top nearly all of their dishes with it. Sambal is a combination of chilies, sharp fermented shrimp paste, tangy lime juice, sugar, and salt all pounded together with a mortar and pestle.

In 2007, Compassion First went to Indonesia to help with the human trafficking problem there. Because it’s a nation of islands, thousands of children are easily trafficked from island to island, and the police have limited resources to stop it. Compassion First’s goal was to create sustainable change that could empower survivors to rebuild their lives.

Compassion First opened an aftercare shelter for girls who had been trafficked, hired Indonesian staff, and provided partnered training for the local police. Along the way, they started working with at-risk children and set up a sponsorship program to empower families and prevent exploitation.

The trafficking landscape of the nation is changing! To learn more about Compassion First and the work they are doing in Indonesia and around the world, read the Taking Action article on page 32.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- The Komodo dragon, found in Indonesia, is the largest lizard in the world, growing up to 9.8 feet in length.
- The world’s largest flower, *Rafflesia arnoldii*, weighs up to 15 pounds and only grows on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. Its petals grow to be 1.6 feet long and 1 inch thick.
- Java has become a slang term for the word coffee because of the coffee beans grown on the island of Java in Indonesia.

**NOW THAT WE KNOW WHERE IN THE WORLD INDONESIA IS, LET’S MEET AND GREET ITS PEOPLE.**

There are 265,369,154 people who call Indonesia their home.

If you went to church in Indonesia, you would most likely go to a mosque. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world.

- Muslim 87.2%
- Protestant 7.0%
- Roman Catholic 2.9%
- Hindu 1.7%

To talk to your friends in Indonesia you would speak Indonesian. To say, “Hello” or “How are you?” you would say, “Apa kabar,” pronounced “AH puh KAH bar.”

If you lived in Indonesia you might eat something called satay. These tasty meat skewers cook over coals so hot they need fans to blow the smoke away. Whether it’s chicken, goat, mutton, or rabbit, the small pieces of meat get marinated in turmeric, barbecued, and then bathed in a hearty peanut sauce. The chili-based sauce known as sambal is also a staple at all Indonesian tables where people top nearly all of their dishes with it. Sambal is a combination of chilies, sharp fermented shrimp paste, tangy lime juice, sugar, and salt all pounded together with a mortar and pestle.
PRAYING SCRIPTURE
I remember that after a horrible day I had in eighth grade, all I could think to do was worship. However, I am not the least bit musically inclined and just couldn’t focus when I turned on a song from my iPod. I recall feeling frustrated at my inability to lead myself into “the place of worship,” which added to my already-sour mood. I felt “less than” and lost as to how to climb out of the day’s awful emotions. I remember going to bed that night feeling defeated.

Months later, I told my dad about my frustration in a passing conversation. He paused and invited me to sit down next to him on the couch. In the span of 30 minutes, he explained and then demonstrated another form of worship that has since helped me praise the Father despite my inability to sing or play an instrument. The heart of this mode is the same as that of a Sunday morning worship set—to glorify God and know His presence—but its frame looks and feels quite different.

Not too long ago, we led some middle schoolers in an experience similar to what my dad shared with me that night. We gathered our Student Leader team together on a Thursday evening for a night of worship with a desire to show this handful of students that worship exists in more ways than one. We instructed them to grab their Bibles and scatter around the room. As they shuffled about, one of our leaders picked up a guitar and began to play music over us. We turned to the 23rd Psalm, and they followed along as I read its familiar first verse: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (KJV). Then, I explained to them how our night would be structured. Instead of singing songs, we were going to “worship in the Word” by reading one verse at a time from any chapter in the Bible and praying it or singing back to the Father. I went on to demonstrate worshipping in the Word just as my father did for me those years ago. Then I told the students to go after it!

At first, timid and unsure prayers issued softly from each student; however, as the night progressed, I began to see and hear confidence growing in the room. The Holy Spirit moves in profound ways when His children pray back the words He spoke to us in Scripture. Any hindrances that previously veiled our eyes from knowing the Father’s heart and being known by Him begin to lift as we make His Word our words, His thoughts our thoughts, and His songs our songs. Our prayers go from talking to God to conversing with Him, which leads to a deeper knowledge of the Holy One. By first reading the Scriptures, we allow God to speak to us, and then, when we echo the excellencies of those words back to Him, our hearts get to intimately know the language and heart of heaven.

Soon, most of the students were reading and praying out loud, turning the psalms into their own songs and praying the Scriptures over their peers. One young girl was crying as she read a psalm aloud and turned the verses into personal petitions. It was beautiful.

The Father gave us the psalms to use as the words of our prayers when we don’t know how to pray and the hymns of our hearts when it seems we have nothing to sing about. A young person who has heard from God in the secret place and knows how to praise Him at all times, in all ways, is one who will not readily be carried down the stream of popular culture. Instead, he or she will stand unmoved like a boulder lodged securely in the knowledge of the Holy One while amidst that same stream.

Parents, whether you are well-acquainted with worshipping in the Word or this is the first time you’ve caught wind of it, you have the authority by God’s grace to pass on this formational mode of worship to your middle schooler. The Father has given you a special place of influence in his or her life—just like my father had in those few minutes on the couch with me all those years ago. Incorporate a few minutes of praying the Scriptures into your own devotional time, include it in this month’s family night around the table by taking turns praying Romans 5:8 back to God, or take your student out to breakfast one morning this month and simply share your own experiences of worshipping in the Word. May you know your heavenly Father has fully equipped you for the good task of making disciples of your children.

by Chase Windebank

Chase and his wife, Katie, live in Colorado Springs, CO, where he is a children’s director at New Life Friday Night. They love the performing arts, hiking, reading, and the little things of life. Their passion is to show the world the love and grace of Jesus in every aspect of daily living.
Over the past few years, high schoolers have invented and embraced a new word. It isn’t completely original, but it’s new nonetheless. It is the hybrid of two words creating one fancy superword.

prom•pos•al
präm’pōzəl/
noun
NORTH AMERICAN informal
1. an elaborately staged request to be someone’s date to a prom.

Students have taken the idea of “popping the question” to events like prom with the hope that their grand sweeping gestures will elicit a positive response from another person. Promposals are elaborate. They are usually public spectacles. And we all know that if it isn’t captured on social media, we’ll question if it even happened.

Before I got married, I proposed to my wife. It involved tall tales, misdirection (fine, a little bit of lying), and creating a memory that would show her that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. Regardless if we are talking about marriage or a winter prom, the heart behind it is the same. The whole act is done to show our affection for another person who holds special meaning to us. All of this supports the old adage “Actions speak louder than words.”

I find that this is how we are wired in most areas of our lives. It’s one thing to talk about hopes, dreams, and feelings, but we need to put our money where our mouth is and give physical evidence.

God gets this too. He knows how we are wired. I would suspect it has something to do with the fact that He made us, but beyond that, it is how He has communicated with us through time and space. I think of the grand meta narrative through the Bible (see also The Big God Story), and God’s big and small actions support the fact that He is absolutely crazy about you and me.

- God walked with Adam in the garden in the cool of the day (He loves spending time with us)
- God sent provisions to Moses and the people wandering in the wilderness
- God quietly sent His Son with very little fanfare or pageantry
- God rescues ...
- God provides ...
- God saves ...

We don’t have to hope or trust or wish that God loves us. We can KNOW this beyond a shadow of a doubt. God allowed His actions to speak louder than His already trustworthy words. And to have the final word in this matter, He left no doubt that He is in the business of lovingly pursuing His people. He gave a reminder that makes the difference between life and death.

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

God displayed His affection for us in an incredibly sweeping gesture of sacrifice and love. Far beyond a “promposal,” God’s faithfulness endures through every range of emotion.

PARENTS

What are some ways we can remind ourselves and our families that God has faithfully loved us? In the busyness of life, it is easy to forget, but when we recall God’s sacrificial love through the big and small actions in our life it roots our faith in Him. Look around. Make lists. Share stories. Remember AND remind others that God believes in us so much that He was willing to put His own Son’s life on the line. Seems like a pretty grand gesture to me.

by Jeff Bachman

Jeff has been in youth ministry for 25 years and is currently working as the High School Pastor at Mariners Church in Mission Viejo, CA. He is passionate about getting a glimpse of the eternal though the lives of the people he works with. Jeff communicates with thousands of students and young adults through preaching and teaching at his own church, speaking regularly at Hume Lake and other camps and equipping events, and student ministry training events such as the National Youth Workers Convention. He and his wife of 16 years, Shara, have three children: Jackson (11), Isabella (9), and Charlotte (7). He loves music, cooking, traveling, comic books, and sitting over conversation with a beverage.
At my first baby shower, a friend gave me a little book; I keep it on my bedside table. It's a small collection of letters, each page with a question prompt, and attached envelopes, dates to open, stickers to seal. My firstborn daughter is two now, and I've filled out about three letters ... but she DID get a baby book—like a legitimate baby book with ultrasounds and recorded cravings and signatures from her first birthday. My second-born daughter didn't get that. Oops ... So, although this book was given with the intention that I would fill it with letters to my firstborn, Scout, I've made it a combination of letters to both our girls, Scout and T.

Last night, I decided to grab the dust-collecting, but thoughtful, gift. I reached for a pen and perused the one-line prompts. I landed on this one: One Special Thing about You Is ...

And I started writing. I told my daughters how hard this season has been, navigating two around two (I just realized they are no longer “two under two,” but whatever, it's still hard) along with their
two older brothers. I told them where I’m lacking, where I’m afraid I’m failing. I told them how I wished they napped better. And then I started listing off the amazing things I’ve noticed them doing recently.

Like Scout, at two, grabs a pen and paper and writes her “homework” every single day. She carries around a notebook and draws tiny almost-letters. She’s writing something, and she’s way beyond the whole scribble stage. She’s intricate and inquisitive and intentional in what she is expressing.

And my T sings. All day. At one ... ONE, people(!) ... she sings multiple songs. It sounds like every lyric is “EH EH EH EH EH EH EH” (sing that to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” and you’ll get the idea), but the melody is true to the source. It’s incredible!

I wrote down all their little gifts and secret talents and things that have amazed me this year—that I’m sure no other child in the world can do (insert: eye roll). Then I wrote my PS: “I think, Scout, you are going to be Secretary of State one day ... or something justice oriented that uses your strong spirit for others. And I think you are going to be a musical prodigy, T.”

I wrote to them, “I don’t know what you’ll be, or what you’ll accomplish, but I need you to know you are set apart and spectacular.”

It’s easy to overlook their flaws. I’m actually pretty sure they don’t have any yet ... this morning. I forget the difficulties that come with toddlerhood in an instant. But their goodness has been branded on my heart—these are the days I’ll remember.

And I read the beginning of my letter, where I’m apologizing, explaining how exhausted I am, and that mommy wishes she were more. Just more ... more kind, more patient, more fun, more ... good? I see my flaws and outbursts and tantrums like a giant mirror is being held in front of me all day. I wish I were brave enough to reach out and punch that mirror so it would shatter.

But Jesus reminds me gently He is not the one holding the mirror. He wants to stand in its place. When I fail, He wants me to look up and see Him. When I cry in frustration (I’m sure I’m the only mom on the planet who cries), when I lift my hands in defeat, when I lose my temper or can barely muster the strength to clean the high chair one more time—He’s standing in my eyes’ gaze saying, “You are spectacular, and you are set apart.”

Just as I can look at my daughters and see their good after the difficult has been dealt with, Jesus goes even further and is perfectly with me in my mess, reminding me of my worth in Him. He is rejoicing over me with His singing and quieting my anxious thoughts with His love. He knows me and is reminding me who I am in the sight of the One who made me, the One who sees all of me, and the One who delights in me—the One who has my name branded on His heart.

There’s no such thing as a perfect mommy or parent. But there is a perfect Savior: His name is Jesus. All the good we feel toward our kids is just a little glimmer of the endless good that our Father in heaven feels for us. His love washes over our tantrums, our outbursts and power struggles, and reminds us of how strong, capable, and beautiful we are—simply because we are His.
Fellas, we have a problem; and it’s in the mirror.

We have a “toxic masculinity” problem, and no, I don’t mean the overused cliché phrase so often promulgated on blogs and talking head cable shows. I mean that everywhere I look, we’re failing to personify the biblical masculinity we’re called to throughout Scripture. Instead, we’re too often choosing one of two unhealthy extremes: Don Draper or Ned Flanders.

Draper, you may recall, was the main character of Mad Men, the AMC show about an ad agency in the 1960s where womanizing, alcoholism, and backstabbing ladder-climbing reigned supreme. Draper was cold and distant from his wife and kids, but when it suited him, he could be ruthlessly intimidating. Like many men today, Don defined himself by nailing the sales pitch, having another double bourbon, and finishing the night with a beautiful secretary. He was arrogant, distant, and self-absorbed.
Conversely, there’s Ned Flanders, the milquetoast neighbor of *The Simpsons*. Ned’s devoted to his family and church, but he’s weak, timid, passive, and massively insecure. Ned says the right things, checks the right boxes, and even wears the proper khakis, but he’s just as destructive as Draper, if only more subtly.

Draper and Flanders are two sides of the same “toxic masculinity” coin: where one overcompensates with empty bravado, the other is too terrified to be anything other than a doormat. Neither bears any resemblance to what we’re called to embody in Scripture, yet there are Drapers and Flanderses everywhere—yes, even in (and in some cases, especially in) the church.

**The effects of this toxic masculinity are manifold.** Substance abuse, domestic violence, and suicide are at all-time highs, and much of that can be traced to broken families. How many of those families are “led” by either a Draper or a Flanders? How many of those husbands and fathers are cold, distant, and intimidating or cowardly abdicate their mantle as leaders? They push their loved ones away, too afraid to know, be known, and make known the truth about God’s love.

We see this in Scripture, too. In Genesis, Cain makes it all about him, and when he doesn’t get what he wants he resorts to violence and lies. And when the serpent tempts Eve, where is Adam? Right beside her, cowardly abdicating his role as protector. When does our first father finally speak up? To blame Eve when God asks what happened! Where was this temerity moments before?

Nothing’s changed since Genesis 3. Our toxic masculinity, be it one unhealthy extreme or the other, is just an echo of Eden.

**We have to do better. We have to reclaim and then personify true biblical masculinity. The best example is, of course, Jesus Himself:**

He’s strong yet gentle. He’s bold but humble. He leads by serving. He’s confident but never arrogant. He makes Himself weak to overturn strength. He’s not afraid to be known and make known the truth of who He is. Jesus shows us that these things are not contradictions nor mutually exclusive. We can be gentle and authentic with our wives and kids and still be strong. We can boldly proclaim and confidently defend truth and still be loving.

Our families are dying and our culture along with it. We can help turn the tide through a biblical masculinity that doesn’t strive but serves; that doesn’t fake how tough we are but reflects God’s strength to others. We need to stop being stupid caricatures and start being more like Christ. He died for us while we were still sinners, and we need to confidently live in this reality, not hiding from it behind the masks of our own insecurities. Our wives desire and deserve this, and our children need it to fully grow into who God’s made them to be.

**Lastly, our sons are watching—so what are they learning?** As a cop, I can tell you that violent men are bred. They’re raised by Drapers too distant to guide them or Flanderses too terrified to lead them. Our sons are looking to us to learn who they should be. Do we want them to see a toxic caricature or Jesus? The latter creates a safe environment that upholds and displays God’s truth and love; the former promotes insecurity, fear, and the lies of this world. Which do you want to create for your family?

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*Chris Goble is a husband, father, and son of the Most High. A Westmont College graduate, he’s served in youth ministry, taught middle and high school, lobbied for parents’ rights in education on Capitol Hill, and was a regular contributor to the Centennial Institute ’76 Blog and News/Talk 710 AM KNUS. A combat veteran of the 82nd Airborne, he currently works in law enforcement in the Denver, CO, area where he and his wife homeschool their two young boys and adventure in the nearby Rocky Mountains.*
I remember the first time I saw my son. I loved him immediately. He was 14 years old and weighed only 67 pounds. He had written a short list of things he said he would like to have, but most of it was crossed out because he “didn’t deserve it.” My heart broke over and over for him as he told me about his life. Rejection, abandonment, abuse, neglect. He had never experienced unconditional love, grace, or mercy. Four months after he came, God answered our prayers, and his 13-year-old sister joined our family.

When our children came, they were broken. Years and years of ridicule and shame had taken its toll. In one of our foster-parent support groups, someone made a great analogy comparing our children’s experiences to Swiss cheese. They have holes caused by neglect and abuse, but we can fill in these holes by nurturing our children. It was a great visual and really helped me understand our children’s needs in a new way. Our mission became to love them as they had never been loved so they would know, without a doubt, the personal and immense love of the God who created them.

One of the biggest holes our children have is holidays. Christmas, in particular, was used to exclude and punish them. God gave me an idea to show them love in a tangible way for Christmas by making up for the past Christmases when they received nothing. They each received a note from Santa saying that he had kept their gifts until they were in a safe place to receive them. For their first Christmas they received a baby blanket. Because they are teenagers, I wasn’t sure how they would react, but it was incredible. Our daughter ran upstairs screaming that Santa had come. She woke her brother up and eagerly read me the note from Santa. They wrapped themselves in their little blankets and smiled and smiled. One hole in their hearts had been filled.

Throughout November we had many Christmas mornings, but one especially touched my heart. For her eighth gift, our daughter received a baby doll. She was so excited and jumped up and down squealing. She took that baby doll everywhere for weeks. She loves to love her baby. She told me, “I’m going to be a good mom one day.” As simple as that sentence was I heard her hope and determination. I heard her moving out of survival mode and into dreaming of a future. God knows them so well, and He knew these simple gifts would lead to tremendous healing.

Today our children aren’t broken anymore. They are being pieced back together a little bit more every day. They don’t sit in the corner and cry anymore. They are thoughtful and kind and have wonderful laughs. Our son has grown over four inches in just nine months. Everyone can see their progress and will often tell me it’s because they are living in a safe and loving home. Some people give credit to the many, many hours of therapy they have done. Those things do play a part, but the real healing is coming directly from God. He is healing them from the inside out. He is replacing the lies they have been told with truth. They no longer believe they are “bad kids” who caused all the problems in their lives. Now they know that they are loved, wanted, and cherished. Knowing these truths is changing their lives.

by Jaime Kopinski

Jamie is a ministry assistant for His Healing Light Ministries. She lives in Colorado Springs with her husband, four teenagers, two dogs, and a cat. She is passionate about helping others heal and become the people God created them to be.
Merry First Christmas!

I am so glad you are finally in a safe place where I can deliver a few of the gifts I have saved for you over the years. On random nights throughout November, my elves will be delivering one gift that I have saved for you for each of your first 12 Christmas. I hope these little gifts help to make up a little bit of the joy of Christmas that you missed out on.

Love Always,
Santa

Photos provided by Jaime Kopinski
To begin to comprehend the vast, divine nature of God is a life-altering event. When you start to understand who God is, you begin to think differently about yourself, your fears, your dreams, and your marriage. Knowing that God loves you, no matter what you do, allows you to see yourself in a different, more confident light.

The problem is that, while we often desire to know God, our hearts are confused. Here’s why. Life brings pain and trauma (unemployment, being bullied, not having loving parents, infertility, abuse, etc.). We pick up these fears along the way, and they give birth to insecurities. The way we handle these insecurities comes out in many ways, like compensating with a Pinterest-worthy life or numbing out with a variety of agents to help lessen the pain. We are all broken and all have areas of insecurities. That’s okay, because God knows them and can handle it.

It’s a huge deal to confront those insecurities, but if you don’t take them to God and ask Him for your true identity, it can severely damage your connection to your spouse. Understanding your identity builds confidence. Read Ephesians 1. It lists all the rights you have and the inheritance waiting for you to step into as a child of God. The amount of security that comes from this understanding will change the way you interact with your spouse and can even change what you expect from your spouse.

We have to get curious and cry out to God for understanding and wisdom if we want to truly know who He is and who we are. Here are some examples of how this can play out in marriage.

- A confident spouse: does what she believes to be right, even if her spouse criticizes her for it.
- A low-confidence spouse: governs her behavior based on what other people think.
- A confident spouse: is willing to take risks, speak truth, and go the extra mile to achieve better things.
- A low-confidence spouse: stays in his comfort zone, fears failure, and avoids taking risks.
- A confident spouse: admits his mistakes, apologizes, and learns from them.
- A low-confidence spouse: works hard to cover up or even minimizes his mistakes and hopes he can fix the problem before his spouse notices.

The BEST way to gain confidence in Christ is to get curious with God and with yourself. To truly know God and know who you are, you must seek wisdom and start creating the space in your life to do so.

Here are eight questions to ask your spouse and yourself. Really think about your honest responses.

1. What are your top five strengths? (strengths are God given)
2. What are five growth areas in your life?
3. What are your roadblocks, struggles, or things you just can’t get past?
4. Are the words you speak generally more positive or negative?
5. Were you able to share your ideas, feelings, and concerns growing up? If not, how do you think that impacts the way you handle marriage?
6. What is your biggest self-limiting belief?
7. Are you quick to apologize if you’ve made a mistake? Why or why not?
8. What kind of legacy do you want to leave behind?

Continue to get curious by creating space in your life to know God, and, in turn, you’ll know yourself and your spouse on a deeper level too. And isn’t that what God really wants from us—to spend time in His presence having honest conversations with Him?

by Casey and Meygan Caston
Casey and Meygan are the cofounders of Marriage365, a nonprofit dedicated to helping couples connect. They reach 700,000 couples worldwide each month by providing practical and affordable online resources for marriage.
I’m blessed with three sweet grandsons whom I love with all my heart. I tell them each time I see them how much I love them; and since I’m also blessed to see them at least a couple times a week, this adds up to a lot of “I love yous”!

My grandsons know I love them because they hear me say it; but, more importantly, they see and experience it. They see it in how my eyes light up and in the big smile on my face when I see them. They experience it in big and small ways—hugs, kisses on the cheek, special meals, and opportunities for them to experience the world around them while I point them to God. These boys are firmly convinced I love them with all my heart.

I want my grandsons to know I love them, but more importantly I want them to be firmly convinced God loves them; and He does so even more than I do. The first time my oldest grandson heard me say this his jaw about hit the floor! His eyes got big, and he replied in awe, “Then God must love me an awful lot!” I want them to know this love and believe it with all their hearts. They know I love them—they hear, see, and experience it on a weekly (or more) basis. So, to help my grandsons know God’s love for them is even greater, I’m intentional about helping them hear, see, and experience it as well.

So, how do my grandsons “hear” God’s great love for them? We read God’s Word. I’m intentional about sharing verses about God’s love that we talk about; and since God said He loves them, we know it is absolutely the truth, because we know God’s Word is totally true.

I’m focused on helping my grandsons “see” God’s great love for them by being sure to point out the many ways He shows His love. When the boys discover an interesting rock or stone to add to their collections, we talk about the amazing world God created. When they enjoy an apple, we talk about how apples are gifts from God’s hand. These are all small ways my grandsons are able to “see” God’s great love for them.

I want my grandsons to “experience” God’s great love for them as well, and the best way I know for them to do this is to help them keep their eyes open for how God answers their prayers. I gave each of them a notebook in which they draw/write their prayer requests and date them as well. Then we watch for how God answers; when He does, they draw/write how He answered and the date. Answered prayer is a huge way for my grandsons to “experience” God’s great love for them!

God and His love are so great. Helping our grandchildren understand this can feel like a big task, but it can be simple. Take them on walks in God’s beautiful world and collect small palm-sized stones. As God answers prayer and your grandchildren hear, see, and experience God’s love, have them draw or write what happened on one side of a stone and the date on the other. Set these stones where your grandchildren will be able to see them and be reminded of how God shows His love for them!

by Lynda Freeman
Lynda has three sweet, rascally grandsons who make her heart happy! She also writes the blog Grandma’s Cookie Jar and Generations Quest to help grandparents pass on their faith. Lynda is a senior writer and editor for the Legacy Coalition.

grandmascookiejar.net/2017/09/hand-down-your-faith-connect-with.html

generationsquest.com
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. 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

“God knows me, and I can know Him.”

Knowing

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

7

“I belong to God, and He loves me!”

Identity

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

8

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

Faith Community

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

9

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

Course Correction

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

10

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

Modeling

Biblical content needs a practical living expression in order for it to be spiritually impacting. This environment serves as a hands-on example of what it means for children to put their faith into action. Modeling puts flesh on faith and reminds us that others are watching to see if we live what we believe.
May 1-3 2018

Gathering

Life Together
Intentional community with God & with others

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Register at NewLifeChurch.org/TheGathering

The Gathering is a transformational family ministry event for children & family ministry leaders and parents & pastors passionate about young generations.