"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.
"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 STORYTELLING recognizes that God has been working throughout history. He is still moving and working today. All of the things He has done, is doing, and will do in the future aren’t stand-alone, independent stories. These things all relate to one another, and, together, they create one amazing story, which we like to call The Big God Story.

As we’re inspired by The Big God Story, we’re called to share it with others. We’re called to relate our experiences of encountering a loving and faithful God. We’re a faith community that needs to hear how God is moving and creating a unique story in each of our lives. As we share these stories, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can inspire and strengthen one another’s faith.

Our hope is that this next generation will get a firsthand, awe-inspiring view of God as we pass down our personal stories of dependence on the Holy Spirit and share how God has shown Himself to us in unique and tangible ways.

We pray that this month, as your family begins to tell stories, you will be encouraged, and that telling these stories will compel you to share them with others.

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

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Things you won’t want to miss:

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

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

OUR MISSION

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

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

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

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

Debbie is the Editor in Chief of HomeFront magazine. She has more than 25 years of experience working in children’s and family ministries. She is passionate about equipping parents to become leaders of God’s truth in their own households. She is a recent transplant to Austin, TX, where she spends her free time enjoying her four grandchildren and perusing antique stores.
Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8
14 FAMILY VERSE
5 CAPTURING THE SEASON
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12 CONVERSATION STARTERS
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16 PRAYER
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26  HOMEMADE MARSHMALLOWS

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30  TOT TIME RHYME
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31  BLESSING

32  TAKING ACTION
    HEARTWORK

34  GLOBAL
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36  STUDENT ID MIDDLE SCHOOL
    THINK ON IT

38  STUDENT ID HIGH SCHOOL
    THE ENJOYMENT GAME

40  EVERYDAY MOM BLOG
    THE AWESOME JAR

42  EVERYDAY DAD BLOG
    WRITE IT OUT

44  TOUGH TOPICS
    A STORY OF REDEMPTION

46  MARRIAGE
    A MATTER OF CHOICE

48  SPIRITUAL GRANDPARENTING
    THE GIFT LIST
Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8
As this New Year begins, consider making a resolution to memorize Scripture together as a family. Each month HomeFront offers a Family Time Verse that fits the environment of the magazine. You can download these verses at homefrontmag.com for FREE!

This Scripture Hanger is a great way to display the Family Time Verse and you can change it out each month. Remember, memorizing the words in these verses will not necessarily transform us; it is God’s Spirit in these words who transforms. We come to know God more when we are willing to open our hearts and listen to His Holy Spirit through the words we memorize.

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

- (4) 12” wood pieces, 1 1/2” x 1/2” (these come prepackaged at craft stores or you can have them cut at a home improvement store)
- (6) 3/8” wood screws
- 2 small eye screws
- wood stain or paint
- rags or paintbrush
- 2 1/2’ leather cord or ribbon
- printed Family Time Verse

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

1. Using the wood stain and rags (or paint and paintbrush), stain (or paint) the wood strips.
2. Place your printed Family Time Verse facedown. Sandwich the bottom of the paper between two of the wood strips.
3. Use three screws to attach the two pieces of wood together from the back side. Make sure to screw through the paper as well so the wood doesn’t just fall off the bottom when you lift it up.
4. Repeat the process at the top of the Family Time Verse paper with the two remaining wood strips.
5. On the back of the top wood strip, screw in two eye screws about 1 1/2” from either edge.
6. Attach a piece of leather cord or ribbon to the eye screws to create a loop for hanging your frame. Trim the excess.
7. Hang your frame in a prominent place in your home so your family can see it each day! The screws will be easy to remove and reinstall each month as your change out the Family Time Verse.

by Debbie Guinn
I’ve always been fascinated by the power of music. Sometimes my husband and I like to turn on 90s pop music. We’ll be sitting in our kitchen, playing a game, and singing along with every single word we hear. How is that even possible? How, after all these years, do our minds still remember every word?

I believe it’s because we have been wired for music. For years I conducted parent-child dedication ceremonies at my church. Each dedication ended with a picture slideshow of the kids set to music. The room was always filled with adults and at least 20 little ones who were being dedicated. As the music began to play, the room would fall silent. All the fussing, cooing, and random noise from these kids stirring in their parents’ arms totally stopped. Then, as the song wrapped up and the slideshow ended, there was always a sudden jolt of noise. Babies would start moving again, and the moment had passed. Every time I would look out at the parents and say, “Did you hear that? Did you hear the quiet?” Kids know. From a very early age they are wired to fix their minds on and respond to music.

So if we are wired for music and we have a tendency to remember the lyrics for the rest of forever—what kind of music are we fixing our minds on? What lyrics do we allow to fill our minds and impact our hearts?

I have learned over the years that if I fix my mind on music and lyrics filled with praise for God, I am much more likely to maintain that attitude even when the song is no longer playing. Listening to and singing along with these songs has become a powerful form of worship for me.

As this New Year begins, would you join me in fixing your mind on songs that draw you into the presence of God? I’m not sure what music you typically listen to as a family, but would you commit with me to making time for songs that fix your mind on Jesus? Try starting a simple practice of adding worship music into your morning. Decide that either during breakfast, as you are getting ready, or in the car on your way to school or work, the very first thing your family will listen to every day is music that glorifies God. As I’ve begun to live this practice out in my own life I’ve found that focusing on what is true each morning has brought me a peace I didn’t even know was possible. My prayer for your family is that as you offer up your minds to worshipping God, He will show up and bring you peace.

by Krista Heinen

Krista is a pastor who desires to help the next generation understand their 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.
What’s on Your Mind?
Oftentimes, the negative or frustrating moments in our lives have a way of overshadowing the good things that have happened. We allow negative thoughts to creep in and take over, but God’s Word encourages us to think differently.

Philippians 4:8 gives us some concrete direction:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

GET YOUR CHILDREN TALKING

True: in accordance with fact or reality; genuine, accurate, or exact
- What is truth? Are you in the habit of examining the things you hear against God’s truth (Scripture)?

Noble: having or showing fine personal qualities or high moral principles and ideals; of excellent or superior quality
- When we think about and speak of others, do we focus on their noble traits? Or do we focus on their faults and flaws?

Right: morally good, justified, or acceptable; true or correct as a fact; that which is morally correct, just, or honorable
- What does justice mean? When someone hurts us, do we take revenge? Or do we respond like Jesus would have?

Pure: wholesome and untainted by immorality; free of any contamination
- What does it mean to have pure thoughts? What are some actions we can take to abstain from impure thoughts?

Lovely: exquisitely beautiful; very pleasant or enjoyable; delightful
- Do we thank or praise people who deserve it? Who is someone in your life you would like to thank or express your admiration for?

Admirable: arousing or deserving respect and approval
- What does it mean to admire someone? Who are some people you admire or look up to? What are some godly characteristics these people possess that you would like to emulate?

Excellent: extremely good; outstanding
- How can we show excellence in our own lives? Do we strive to do our best no matter the circumstances?

Praiseworthy: deserving approval and admiration
- What is on Your Mind?
Stories are my jam.

As a kid my nose was perpetually buried in a book, my dearest friends residing not down the street but right on my nightstand. Thanks to books, my childhood days were rife with wonder, imagination, and an unfettered belief in magic.

Twenty years later, I still believe in magic—the magic of a great story, at least. And now that I have children of my own, our days are filled to the brim with breakfast Bible studies, lunchtime chapter books, audio dramas while running errands, and kids’ choice at bedtime. We take our books with our oxygen. A life without stories is simply not an option.

So when I recently heard a popular Christian author emphasizing the power of reading great books at bedtime, I smiled smugly and turned my attention to the laundry pile. I’ve got that part down, I mused as I began folding crumpled towels.

But then she uttered a few simple words that forever changed my perspective:

When it comes to bedtime, parents are tired ... but children are tender.

I immediately thought back to our bedtime routine the night before: we read, we prayed, and we turned off the lights. My husband and I each snuggled up next to a warm body (our girls still covet our nearness while falling asleep), but when those tender little hearts asked to spill forth their nectar, we turned cold. “No talking,” I said sternly. “Mommy is tired and you need rest. Close your eyes and go to sleep.”

There’s something about those drowsy moments just before slumber that cracks our kids’ hearts wide open. The child who earlier said her day was “good” suddenly starts remembering specific details—and she’s ready to talk about them. The child who’s been sullen and stoic for the past week suddenly responds to your gentle touch—and he’s ready to talk about what’s been bothering him.

Those sweet, sleepy moments are like windows opened wide into the souls of our children—windows that I’d been slamming shut because I was just too tired to peer through.

THE GREATEST STORY

When it comes to book lists, library cards, and Penguin hardcover classics, I am nailing it. But somewhere along the way, I became so enamored with great stories that I forgot the importance of the greatest Story: the one in which my children are protagonists, daughters of a righteous and powerful King.

I can procure every book on every must-read list, but if I’ve neglected to gently shape and direct the Story unfolding right in front of me ... what’s the point?

So this year, my husband and I are adding a new tradition to our family’s bedtime routine: in addition to storytelling, we’re embracing the sacred responsibility of “story shaping.” We will welcome conversation and encourage discussion, because we know that those tender bedtime moments are mapping out plotlines that will echo for eternity.

When it comes to bedtime, yes, I am tired ... but I am also a character in this Story, a guardian chosen by God to raise His princesses into mighty kingdom warriors.

And bedtime is our training ground.

by Brittany Woodward

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 alllll the coffee).

Blog letterstomylittles.com

Facebook Letters to my Littles
So many of the stories we hear on the news are about death and destruction. It seems like everywhere we look there’s another war, another natural disaster, another crime of mass violence. When we hear story after story, we tend to fall into one of two dangers. Some of us become gripped by worry and begin to view the world through that lens. We end up turning inward to self-protect instead of reaching out to offer hope. Others of us become desensitized to these stories. We don’t grieve for them in the way they warrant. We become so numb to the hurt and pain that we no longer have the capacity to offer compassion. Whether we react in fear or apathy, either way, our hearts become hardened.

So, what do we do? When we hear daily stories of tragedy, how can we keep our hearts soft and our minds fixed on hope and compassion?

I want to suggest a simple three-step method you can use with your kids to engage difficult stories.

1. Acknowledge
2. Pray
3. Respond or release

Say, for instance, you hear about a devastating earthquake that hit some part of the world. The first step is to acknowledge the story. Talk about the event with your kids. Look at a map and show them the place where it happened.

Then, step two is to pray. Pray for the people involved, and ask God to show you if there’s anything He is inviting you to do as a way to respond. You might sense His voice prompting you to join some relief effort or to get involved in some creative way. Or, maybe you won’t hear Him whispering anything at all.

Step three is to respond or release. If you felt God directing you toward some way to help, follow His leading! If you didn’t sense God inviting you to respond in a specific way, release the situation into His loving care. Know that through prayer, you’ve done your part.

When we pray, we are trusting that God is still in control in this topsy-turvy world. We come to Him remembering that He is bringing about the renewal of all things, even in the midst of the tough stories we hear.

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.
“Where do you think that plane is going?” I asked my son as we gazed at the sky together.

My son quickly responded, “To the beach!”

A few minutes later we saw another plane, and he asked me, “Dad, where do you think that one is headed?”

My response was, “No way! That’s the Chicago Cubs headed to Washington, D.C., to play the Nationals.” For a second, he thought I had some superpower of sight. Then he realized I was just kidding.

Every day over 100,000 airplanes take people from one city to the next. On average, there are 7,000 planes up in the air at any given moment in the United States.

When I was in college, I had a professor named Dr. Knofel Staten who was the spitting image of Kenny Rogers. He always wore these gray suits and big cowboy boots like he was ready to go to a hoedown after class. Before he was a professor and pastor, he was an air traffic controller at Chicago’s O’Hare airport. Knofel, with his awesome white beard, would often start class by telling incredible stories from his time at the helm of the control tower. It was his sole responsibility to tell the pilots when they could land their planes in Chicago. He was the gatekeeper to the city. A few years back I was able to go to the top of an air traffic control tower and watch planes take off and land. It was stunning and actually a bit stressful.

During that season, we were studying the book of Philippians at church, and I spent much of my prayer and journal time in Philippians 4:4–8. This section of Scripture is a call not to be anxious about anything but rather to be someone who is filled with joy, who seeks God, who surrenders every anxious thought to God and chooses to think about the goodness of God.

As I walked down from the tower, I realized a plane only lands when the air traffic controller says so. Then it hit me: I am the air traffic controller of my own mind and heart. I choose to decide what lands in my mind, and, to be honest, I was allowing a lot of anxious thoughts about my future, specific fears, and unresolved guilt to land. These unhelpful thoughts took up headspace and much of my heart, and I spent way too much time focused on these worries.

So now, whenever I feel anxious thoughts looking to land at SRC (my personal airport named with my initials), I tap into my inner Knofel and deny their requests to land! I now tell all those negative thoughts that they can go somewhere else like Columbus or Tuscaloosa. I wasted too much of my life thinking about the wrong things. I’m taking Paul’s words in Philippians 4:8 seriously—to think only about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—focus solely on that! Every day thousands of negative ideas want to land in your brain. Be brave and don’t let them! Fill your heart and mind with the good things of God and watch how your anxiety just flies away.

Parents, after reading this story to your children, discuss the following:

• If you could fly anywhere, where would you go?
• What are your initials? Use your initials to create your own personal airport code.
• What negative thoughts have you allowed to land lately in your mind and heart?
• Read Philippians 4:8 again. What’s a good thought of God that you have allowed to land in your mind and heart?

Pray for your family to be brave and take control of what lands in your hearts and minds.

by Steve Carter

Steve Carter is the teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL. He and his wife, Sarah, live outside Chicago with their two kids, Emerson and Mercy June, and their dog, Biscuit.
The Storytelling Book

Every story teaches us a lesson. Whether it is a story of good versus evil, a beautiful love story, or an exciting adventure, we usually learn something about ourselves by how we identify with the characters. Stories can also help us learn a lot about the storyteller!

In this month’s Create you will make a Storytelling Book filled with prompts to help you and your family tell stories. The prompts will give you a few ideas, but the real storytelling is up to you and your creative minds.

Each time you use the Storytelling Book, be sure to remind your family that God is writing the most exciting story ever told, and we get to be a part of it!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 3-ring binder
• markers, crayons, and stickers to decorate your binder
• 20 sheets of white card stock
• hole punch
• storytelling prompts printed from bit.ly/HFstorytellingbook

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Using the markers, crayons, and stickers, decorate your binder.
2. Print the storytelling prompts on the card stock.
3. Punch holes in the prompt pages in the designated spots.
4. Place the pages in the binder.
5. Cut along the dotted lines of each page, dividing the pages into thirds.
6. You will now have 60 different story prompts that you can mix and match to use in a family storytelling time.

STORYTELLING CHALLENGE

Before you start your storytelling time, challenge your family by choosing a theme from our Family Time Verse (page 5) as the filter for their story. Then, focus on a story that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy! Remind your family that these are the things God wants us to focus on!

by Debbie Guinn
STORY TELLING

THE FISH THAT GRANTS THE WISH
SECRET DOOR
UNDERWATER BICYCLE
FINALLY, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS NOBLE, WHATEVER IS RIGHT, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS ADMIRABLE—IF ANYTHING IS EXCELLENT OR PRAISeworthy—THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8
WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- bag of mini marshmallows
- 1 disposable cup per person
- 1 Bingo Card printable per person (found at bit.ly/HFwinterbingo)
- 1 Bingo Pieces printable (found at bit.ly/HFwinterbingopieces)
- scissors
- hat or bowl

BEFORE YOU BEGIN …
Go to bit.ly/HFwinterbingo and print the bingo cards. You will need one card per player. Then go to bit.ly/HFwinterbingopieces and print the bingo pieces. Cut out each piece, and place all of the pieces in a hat or bowl.

Fill one paper cup per player with mini marshmallows. Find a table or open floor space to play. Set one cup and one bingo card at each person’s place. Now gather your family, because it’s time to play!

TIME TO PLAY!
As your family circles around the table or on the floor, ask each player to find a seat in front of a card. If you have not already introduced this month’s Family Time Verse, this is a perfect time to do so! Take a moment to read Philippians 4:8 aloud. If you have readers at home, they can follow along as you read by looking at the verse located at the bottom of their bingo cards.

Once you have read the verse, ask your children if they heard the important things the verse encourages us to think about. Show your family that these words are listed on each bingo card. Read each word one at a time, and give players a moment to find the corresponding word on their cards. Adults and older children will need to help the younger ones who do not read.

Once everyone has identified these words, it’s time to talk about the game. Explain to your family that you are going to draw bingo pieces from a bowl or a hat. Some pieces are winter pictures and others are important words from the family verse. After you draw a bingo piece, the players must find the matching image or word on their bingo cards and place a mini marshmallow on top. Every card has a free space, so players can cover that at any point. Continue to draw bingo pieces until someone has covered five spaces in a row either vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. This person is the winner and the round is complete. Play as many rounds as you like.

At the end of each round, have one person share a story inspired by one of the important words found in the verse and on the bingo card. For example, someone might share a story about something admirable or brave she saw at school (a friend standing up for someone, someone picking up trash without being asked, etc.). The idea here is to share positive and uplifting stories of God’s work that may oftentimes be overlooked in the midst of a crazy world.

FOR THE YOUNG ONES …
Simplify this idea for little ones by simply affirming helpful, kind, or positive actions you have seen them do lately. This is a great way to model the idea of sharing stories of God’s work in His people.

REMEMBER
It can often seem as though every new story we hear is another heartbreak or tragedy. These moments can easily overtake our days and fill our minds with all the evil that exists in our world. In Philipians 4:8 we are encouraged to look for and think about the lovely and the admirable, the pure and the praiseworthy. While there is definitely a time for grief and sadness, remind your family that there is also always time for remembering and celebrating stories of the good. Our God is glorious and wonderful through every high and low our eyes see. Encourage your family to pause and think about “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable [and whatever] is excellent or praiseworthy.” Let’s celebrate the way God glorifies Himself through those around us.

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. She is in love with her husband, Adam, and all of their adorable house plants!
Skillet Scalloped Potatoes

These skillet scalloped potatoes are a perfect side dish to serve up for family dinner. Use the story prompts found in our Create Article (Page 21) to add some fun to your mealtime! Remind your children that God has a big story and they can be a part of it.

Prep Time: 15 min.  
Cook Time: 1 hr. 15 min.  
Yields: 6-8 servings

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

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

- 6 medium Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 2 - 2 1/2 cups cups shredded Gruyere cheese
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 sprig thyme
- salt and pepper to taste

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

1. Preheat oven to 400° F.
2. Heat a 9- or 10-inch cast iron or oven-safe skillet over medium heat. Add the butter and reduce heat to low. Once the butter melts, add the flour and whisk for 30 seconds. Add the garlic, thyme, and a pinch of salt and pepper and whisk in the milk until smooth.
3. Remove the skillet from the heat and pour the milk mixture into a separate bowl.
4. Arrange the sliced potatoes in the skillet in an overlapping spiral pattern, season each layer with salt and pepper, and sprinkle cheese between each layer.
5. Pour the milk mixture over the potatoes and then cover with the remaining cheese.
6. Cover with foil and bake for 1 hour.
7. Remove the foil and bake for 5 to 10 minutes or until top is golden.
8. Let cool for 5 to 10 minutes and serve.

by Debbie Guinn
Homemade Marshmallows

AFTER MAKING THESE SIMPLE MARSHMALLOWS TOGETHER, STIR A CUP OF COCOA AND PLOP THE MARSHMALLOWS ON TOP. THEN, GATHER FOR STORYTIME AND SHARE WITH YOUR CHILDREN ALL THE WAYS YOU SEE GOD WORKING IN YOUR FAMILY. REMIND THEM THAT WE ARE ALL A PART OF GOD’S BIG STORY, AND HE IS WRITING A NEW CHAPTER DAILY!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 3 packages unflavored gelatin
- 1 cup cold water, divided
- 1 ½ cups granulated sugar
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon vanilla
- powdered sugar for dusting

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Combine gelatin and 1/2 cup cold water in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment and allow to sit while you make the syrup.

2. Combine sugar, corn syrup, salt, and 1/2 cup water in a small saucepan and cook over medium heat until the sugar dissolves.

3. Raise the heat to high and cook until the syrup reaches 240° F on a candy thermometer. Remove from the heat.

4. With the mixer on low speed, slowly pour the sugar syrup into the dissolved gelatin.

5. Put the mixer on high speed and whip until the mixture is very thick, about 15 minutes. Add the vanilla and mix thoroughly.

6. Generously dust an 8” x 12” nonmetal baking dish with powdered sugar. Pour the marshmallow mixture into the pan, smooth the top, and dust with more powdered sugar.

7. Allow to stand uncovered overnight until it dries out.

8. Turn the marshmallow block onto a board and cut it into squares.

9. Dust them with more powdered sugar.

Prep Time: 8 hrs. 30 min.  Prep time: 30 min.  Inactive time: 8 hrs.  Yield: 20 to 40 marshmallows

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

by Debbie Guinn
The prisoners could not believe their ears. Who could possibly be singing in a place like this? The jail was cold, dark, and depressing, and it smelled horrific! Most of the prisoners were battered from beatings, their ankles sore from the shackles. Their upcoming days held only a trial, maybe even an unfair one, in which they could be sentenced to death. Yet, in spite of all this, the two new inmates were singing!

After the initial shock of hearing these voices praising God, a few of the other prisoners, angry at the joy of Paul and Silas and fearful of further punishment from the guards, started yelling for them to be quiet, calling them all kinds of nasty names. Yet, the singing kept on.

Even more furious at Paul and Silas now, the other prisoners yelled again. “You sing about God. What has God ever done for us? Where is your God now? Curse Him!” But instead of cursing, Paul and Silas continued to fill the jail with prayers and songs of worship, trust, and even gratefulness!

Gratefulness? How could Paul and Silas be grateful while chained up? How could they worship a God who had abandoned them to rot in prison or be killed? Their fellow prisoners were bewildered.

You see, Paul and Silas knew something the others did not. And what they knew (or rather, whom they knew) gave them a perspective that overflowed—something much bigger than the unfortunate story of two guys in a jail. They knew that a world-changing story of salvation was unfolding—something much bigger than the chains and bars that held them. And they knew that their Creator loved them far more than their enemies hated them.

The angry and confused inmates were getting ready to shout another barrage of insults when all of a sudden …

HEAR IT
Parents: Beforehand, please familiarize yourself with the context of this story about Paul and Silas by reading Acts 16:16–40. Also please read Philippians 4:8 to get an idea of the perspective and motivation of Paul and Silas.

With your family, read the article aloud. When you get to the end, switch to the Bible and finish the story by reading Acts 16:26–34.

Use questions to help your family enter into this story of Paul and Silas in prison, e.g., “If you had been thrown in prison, how do you think you would have reacted?” “What do you think the angry, bewildered prisoners thought/felt when the earthquake freed them?” “Have you ever been in a hard situation and still able to focus on praising God?”

DO IT
As a family, think of a neighbor, friend, or relative who is having an especially hard time right now. Without minimizing or ignoring the pain, the stress, and the difficulty of his situation, come up with a creative way of reminding that person that God is with them and loves them. Maybe you can create a piece of art? Or a video? Make dinner for them? Write notes of encouragement and send them in the mail?

Let’s jump deeper into this true and beautiful and praiseworthy story that God is writing!

by Jason Kliewer
Jason is a husband, a dad of two daughters, and a Community Pastor at ROCKHARBOR Church in Costa Mesa, CA. He has a master’s degree in Biblical Studies from Grace University in Omaha, NE.
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

ALONG THE ROAD

This month, every time you hop in the car, sing the words of our Family Time Verse to the tune of “The Wheels on the Bus.” Let this song serve as a reminder to your little one that God wants us to think about these things.

Whatever is true, whatever is noble
Whatever is right, whatever is pure
Whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable
Think about such things

by Tommy Larson

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

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

Each morning as I send my kids off to school, I take a moment to speak a blessing over them. Those words of blessing are different from the morning admonishments of “Don’t forget your homework!” and “Please don’t wear shorts in 30-degree weather!” Though those words might make my children’s days easier, the blessing words, spoken in a pause of the morning flurry, with eyes locked and meaningful touch, carry with them an anticipation of what God might do with my child on this particular day. They carry the hope of a story yet to be told and the wonder of how they might be lived out.

Early on in our morning blessing tradition, we learned that to bless with expectation means to follow up later that day with the opportunity to tell the story of what God did with those weighty words and precious hours we were apart. So when we bless in the morning, we tell stories of God’s goodness at night.

This month, take a moment each morning to bless your children. Then, each evening, ask them how God fulfilled the words of your blessing in the course of the day. By doing this, you allow your children to let their minds dwell on the good things of the day and to pass on “a good report” of what God has done.

READ
Read Philippians 4:8–9:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

BLESS
Your morning blessing may be as simple as “May you choose justice and truth today,” or “May you use the gifts God has given you to show others evidence of who He is,” or “May the God of peace be with you today.” Just as important as those morning words is making the time and space for your children to tell stories of how they were able to choose justice and truth by the power of the Holy Spirit, or to use their gifts, or to experience the peace of God in the course of the day. Affirm their good choices, and name God’s evident power and strength in them. Each night, as your family shares stories of how your morning blessing was fulfilled, end your time with this blessing:

May we all take time to think about what God is doing in our lives. As we live each day practicing what we learn from God and living in His big story, let’s be people who dwell on His goodness. May those thoughts that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy be the evidence of God’s incredible love and power in our lives.

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.
OUR STORY

Heartwork began in a youth group in 2008. As youth pastors, we were seeing an increase in addictions, broken homes, and suicide across society as we also navigated tragedies within our own church. The Lord led us to Isaiah 58:10. He said if we would spend ourselves on those in need, our darkness would turn to light. It was this upside-down kingdom thinking that turned our group right side up. We committed several weeks to living a different story than the narrative of self-focus our culture was telling us. We learned about poverty issues, fasted, and worked really hard. The junior high and high school students allowed God to use their transformed HEARTS to contribute to His great WORK.

Entrepreneurship flourished, faith grew, and the joy of giving was cultivated. The first group of Heartwork students sacrificially gave $67,000. This experience impacted their college and career decisions and their view on following Christ and touched our community more deeply than we could have ever imagined.

Since then, Heartwork has worked with students and families all over the country, empowering them to raise over one million dollars for poverty relief and development projects nationally and internationally.

WHAT WE LEARNED

It’s hard to look at James 1:27 (true religion is taking care of orphans and widows) and not feel a little numbed by the staggering number of orphans in our world right now. 153 million little ones go to bed every night without even their basic needs met. This number pricked our hearts so deeply that we set out with our students to bring some relief to this global orphan crisis. What we didn’t realize when we began was that this journey was just as much about our OWN depravity as it was those brothers and sisters living on the other side of the world. Our young people needed healing, and this call to spend ourselves on behalf of others (Isaiah 58) became a beacon of light for our own souls.

So, our mission is simple: We exist to teach students the joy of spending themselves for others.
DID YOU KNOW?

- 95% of young people we’ve surveyed say they want to be more compassionate. Main reasons they’re not? Time, money, and apathy. They either don’t feel they have enough time or money, or, if they are being honest, they have a hard time caring about things outside of themselves.

- 74% of the young people we’ve surveyed (mostly ages 13–18) have anywhere between $5 to $200 of cash flow a week!

Now, we know these are broad and somewhat general statements—but here’s what this data tells us:

1. Kids WANT to be more compassionate—but they don’t always know how to co-suffer (that’s the original meaning of the word compassion) in their everyday lives.

2. Kids do have resources (like time, money, and opportunity). Early on, they learn how to spend these commodities.

Heartwork is here to help support your family as you spend your time, talents, and money on the work of the kingdom.

HOW TO HEARTWORK

30 Days of Heartwork is a radical invitation to live differently. It’s simple, but it’s not easy, and it shouldn’t be! Challenges are how we grow, so we invite your family to join the Heartwork challenge with faith and passion!

For 30 days you’ll:

- Invest one night a week for five weeks in a family night.
- Invest a few minutes each morning and each evening on Heartwork conversation topics.
- Engage your children in daily devotional reading and challenges (different depending on age but all follow the same weekly themes).
- Choose a project in your community or around the world to sacrificially give to.
- Share the amazing stories of what God does in your family.

VISIT US AT WWW.HEARTWORK.TV TO GRAB YOUR 30 DAYS OF HEARTWORK FAMILY KIT!
WHERE IN THE WORLD IS...

Croatia?

The Republic of Croatia is located in southeastern Europe with a long coastline on the Adriatic Sea to the south. It borders Slovenia and Hungary to the north and Serbia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina to the east and south. Croatia has an area of 21,829 square miles. The country’s coastline stretches for 3,598 miles and consists of 1,104 miles of mainland coastline and 2,494 miles of island coastline.
If you lived in Croatia you might eat a dish called crni rizot. This savory dish is Croatia’s version of squid ink risotto. Influenced by neighboring Italy, Croatia’s version of this deep, dark, and rich dish is very similar to the Italian version, with chewy and soft arborio rice, tender cuttlefish, squid or octopus, and lots of olive oil, lemon, and parsley for garnish.

If you want to think about something beautiful and lovely, the city of Split, Croatia could be on your list! Split is the second-largest city in the country and the largest city in the Dalmatia region. This city was originally built around Diocletian’s Palace (a fortress-like palace built for the Roman emperor Diocletian), where the locals sought refuge many centuries ago. While wandering through the historic center of Split, you will notice the Roman walls, squares, and temples. Because of its ideal climate, with 2,800 hours of sunlight per year, locals have other names for Split: “The most beautiful city in the world” and “Mediterranean flower.”
As I walked down my seventh- and eighth-grade hallway, crude jokes, inappropriate comments, and words intended to tear others down filled my ears. Day after day I listened, knowing this wasn’t the way I was taught to behave or speak. Words I would never say out loud in front of my parents crossed my mind all day long though I kept them secretly hidden inside.

That is, until one day I let something inappropriate slip across my lips in front of my five-year-old sister. I thought I was safe until later that day she repeated the word in front of my mom. My mom was quick to rebuke her and let her know it was not okay to say that. When my mom asked my sister where she had heard that word, she quickly ratted me out. I denied it ’til my face turned red and my mom saw right through me. I knew I was in big trouble. I confessed to her my struggle with those words running through my mind because I heard them all day long at school. It was as if they just barged into my brain without an invite, but I couldn’t kick them back out.

As I reflect back on that memory, I don’t remember a reprimand or even getting grounded. But the way my mom did choose to intervene has stuck with me even now as I find myself in my own parenting journey. She didn’t burden me with shame and guilt but rather graciously gifted me a tool to allow the Holy Spirit to be the loudest voice in my head.

At the beginning of each school day, as I’d go to the front door to catch the bus, she’d say, “Okay, your song for today is [fill in whatever worship song she felt prompted to give me]. Let that song fill your mind today. Jesus is with you and can help you, even in the hallways of middle school, Bekah.” I’ll admit, I kinda rolled my eyes at this every once in a while. But it worked! And each day, she faithfully met me at the door to assign me some Holy Spirit mind protection. Not only did she teach me how to shut out the bad, but she equipped me to fill my mind with good, which enabled me to live in a passionate relationship with Jesus.

I spent my day singing praises to Jesus as I had lunch with my friends and they chose to play music that didn’t glorify Him. I sang praises to Jesus as I walked down the hallway and crude jokes filled the air. This tool never lost its usefulness. Still to this day, when lies and negative thoughts enter my mind, I turn worship music on loud and fill my mind with what is true, noble, right, pure, and admirable. Thanks, Mom!

by Bekah Bowman
Bekah resides in Irvine, CA, with her husband, Danny, and is mom to two boys, both diagnosed with a fatal disease. Ely is three. Titus, six, is living life big with Jesus.

facebook.com/Team4TitusEly
“How do you get your children to enjoy God?” I asked.

My friend’s response was as challenging as it was profound: “Show them how you do.”

Yes and amen! And, yikes!

The Westminster Catechism says the purpose of life is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Enjoy God. Clearly, enjoying God is something we can and ought to be doing. Therefore, figuring out how to enjoy God ourselves is where we must begin before we turn to our teenagers.

We most often talk about the things we enjoy, so let’s begin with our words. What do you talk about the most with your family? Do you serve up a daily dose of “How was your day?” to your kids? What do you talk about with your friends?

These thoughts about enjoying God transformed a recent lunchtime conversation I had with a friend. In the midst of our typical answers to typical friendship questions I chimed in with a startling, “Wait! Let me ask you something really important! How have you enjoyed God lately?”

“Enjoyed God? What do you mean?” she responded. I appreciated her honesty.

I continued, “I have a feeling when God invented spices it was on purpose because He didn’t want us to just eat. He wanted us to enjoy eating. I think God enjoys our enjoyment! And, ultimately, I enjoy God by enjoying the things He enjoys—and let me remind you again—He enjoys my enjoyment! Confusing!? Maybe. Either way, let’s jump in!”

For the next hour, my friend and I went back and forth naming anything we enjoyed:

- Lemon pepper chicken
- Watching my two-year-old son scooter at the local skate park
- Laughing
- Encountering God for myself
- Watching my parents start over

This one required a few intentional follow-up questions. I was adjusting the rules to this new Enjoyment Game as we went along. The 10-minute follow-up conversation led to some tears from my friend. We mutually agreed that we enjoyed a good cry ... and so the game continued ...

- Breakfast for dinner
- HomeFront magazine
- Getting email to zero
- Intentional questions from caring friends
- Backyard movies
- Praying authentically and sensing God’s presence
- Corn hole tournaments
- Storytelling by a campfire
- Tears surrounded by people who care about them
- Stories that inspire me to try something new as a parent. With that ...

Parents, your teenagers are still learning from you! You get to choose what to focus on, and that tells your story!

So, what do you enjoy? Remember, God enjoys your enjoyment. If you seek the Lord, you’ll find Him. If you seek enjoyment in Him, you’ll find Him enjoyable. Therefore, enjoy an impromptu mealtime conversation about everything you enjoy. Laugh. Ask questions. Be creative. And if possible, grab your teenager and show what it looks like to not just glorify God—but enjoy Him forever.

You thrill me, LORD, with all you have done for me! (Psalm 92:4 NLT)

by Megan Fate Marshman

Megan is the author of SelfLess: Living Your Part in the Big Story of God, leads the Women’s Ministry at Hume Lake Christian Camps in Hume, CA, shepherds young adults at Arbor Road Church in Long Beach, CA, and shares Jesus around the world. She is married to Randy and they live in Long Beach, CA with their son, Foster.
Tattling. Tattle-telling. Tattle-taling. Whatever you want to call it—it’s been around since the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:12-14). I haven’t found a way to stop my boys from pointing out what their brothers have done wrong, but my husband and I found a tool that encourages them to tell us what is going right!

We use something called the “Awesome Jar.”

We stumbled across the idea of an Awesome Jar and use it in our home to help us live out Philippians 4:8—to notice and call out things that are excellent, praiseworthy, right, noble, and admirable.
The Awesome Jar is just a glass container that sits on our counter. My husband and sons decorated it with stickers, a permanent marker, and some duct tape. We use this jar to celebrate the good things in our day. When something happens that is admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy, my kids, my husband, or I will write it down on a slip of paper and add it to the jar. You’d think we’d remember all these good things, but somehow we forget. This Awesome Jar is like our “remember the good” jar. It’s a way to highlight the small wins and bright spots that occur throughout the day.

Recently, on my son George’s 10th birthday, we put a note in our family’s Awesome Jar that simply says: “Clark’s birthday surprise for George.” Let me tell you about it. Clark, my eight year old, gathered the neighbor kids and gave them each a gift bag. Each of the kids put random (used) toys the bags, placed them by our front door, rang the doorbell, and then hid. When George answered the door, they all jumped out and shouted, “SURPRISE! Happy birthday!” George opened the silly gifts, and we all laughed about each one and enjoyed a few minutes there on our porch—brothers and neighbors. It was awesome.

Every few weeks we sit down and pull out the notes from our Awesome Jar and “relive” those sweet moments. It also reinforces to my kids what they’ve done that is praiseworthy and honorable. It encourages them to keep thinking about these things, doing these things, and looking for times when their brothers are doing these things!

Find a container and make it your family’s Awesome Jar. Make it a habit to add one thing each day. It might be something like:

“[My son] cleaned up the playroom without being asked.”
– or –
“[My daughter] befriended the new girl at school.”

If it was a really hard day, it’s still important to pause and reflect at the end of the day and identify at least one moment, event, or person for which you are grateful. Write that down and put it in the jar.

When you look for the good, you will find it! And the more praiseworthy and noble things you notice today, the more you will notice tomorrow. Not only you, but your children as well. My sons have started to say, “Mom, did you see/hear that? It should go in the Awesome Jar!”

Do my boys still tattle? Yes. But they are also noticing and calling out things that are excellent, praiseworthy, right, noble, and admirable! And that is AWESOME!

Kathryn Egly is the wife of one handsome man, and together they are raising four young men (a.k.a., four cowboys). She works at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. You can find her blogging about their family’s adventures at kathrynegly.com and get a copy of her first children’s book, Climb, Soar, Swim, Explore!, on amazon.com.
Have you ever stopped to think that thoughts are invisible? Like we can’t see the wind, we cannot see thoughts, but we can see the effects of thoughts. What lives in our minds materializes through our actions and our words, either spoken or written.

We know that God has thoughts, and God chose to reveal many of His thoughts to us through written words. Thank God for the inspired writers who listened to and obeyed God so that we have His written Word to guide us today. Spoken words are powerful but can be forgotten. However, written words have the potential to exist far beyond memory.

I believe that if God chose to communicate His thoughts primarily through the written words of the Bible, we should learn to develop a habit of writing down what we see God doing in our lives. Although our written thoughts and stories will never be Holy Scripture, it is important to continue to keep written records of God’s goodness and faithfulness so that our children and many generations after us will be able to see our thoughts about God and how we were a part of His grand love story.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35 ESV).
The habit of journaling does not come easy to most, but it can be powerful. People develop habits both intentionally and unintentionally. Unfortunately, in most cases, it seems that our worst habits form easily with little effort while our best habits form with intentional hard work. I wish this were not so, but I believe it is a result of our fallen nature.

I will confess, I currently have an unhealthy habit of eating ice cream ... at night ... in bed! My bedtime ice cream-eating habit formed easily because it is pleasurable and requires very little effort. However, this bad habit of mine does not pass along any lasting benefits to my body. Conversely, physical exercise, although it can also be pleasurable, does not come to me as easily as eating ice cream. Even though physical exercise passes along many positive benefits to my body, it is still easier for me to form a bad habit of eating ice cream than it is for me to form a good habit of exercising.

While the above example is related to the physical body, the same is also true for our mind and our soul. It is very easy to allow our minds to be filled with junk by way of social media, television, music, books, or movies. In fact, we don't need secular entertainment to help us with this. Our sinful minds are very good at naturally thinking negative, untrue, unholy, impure thoughts on their own. This is why, as Christians, we know how important it is to soak in God’s Word and take our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). So what should we be thinking about? And what thoughts should we materialize into words? God’s Word tells us:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8 ESV)

Like any good spiritual discipline, journaling takes intentional effort that does not come naturally to most, but the benefits are great. Dads, I encourage you to start a habit of writing down and journaling the good things that God is doing in your life so that generations after you will be able to actually see your thoughts and how God worked in your life.

Write out your prayers and even your honest struggles. Pour out your heart on paper or on the computer. Write down (journal) your thoughts so that, one day, your written words can encourage someone and bring glory to God. When appropriate, read your written thoughts and prayers to your children. Let’s help teach our children that the stories of our lives are part of God’s great love story. Everyone’s story has significance and is worth writing down.

Let’s also teach our children to journal and share their stories about what God is doing in their lives. Do not put unnecessary pressure on yourself to be good at this, but simply take some time each week or each month to write out your true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy thoughts about God and what He is doing in your life.

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
It was June of 1992. I had just graduated from eighth grade, and like all the other kids my age, I was looking forward to the next “big event” of our lives: starting high school. While I did start high school that August, my journey looked a little different. At the age of 14, I found myself pregnant with a baby boy.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

Honorable, pure, lovely … When I read this verse, I don’t exactly think about my early life as any of those things. My sister and I were raised by our mom, and our dad was not a part of our lives. I longed for a dad and to be a “daddy’s girl.” In fact, I vividly remember thinking to myself at the age of five years old, “When I get BIG, my kids will have a mommy AND a daddy!” By middle school, all that I longed for and needed from a dad was now coming from a boyfriend—he told me all the things I so desperately wanted to hear. Nine months later, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy.

My life drastically changed. I decided to give up the things my friends were doing so I could be a mother. I had to find a new group of friends, so I started attending church with my boyfriend’s family. At 16 years old, I gave my life to the Lord, and I married my son’s father. I was learning about God’s dream for marriage and families, and I remembered the dream that I had as a little girl—I wanted my son to have a mommy and a daddy. I knew that I wanted my kids to be close in age, so after getting married, and shortly before my 18th birthday, I delivered my second child: a gorgeous baby girl with bright red hair.

I wish that I could say that life got easier then, but it didn’t. I was 18 years old, with two children, and in a very abusive marriage. I struggled with wanting to keep my family together but knowing that it wasn’t a good situation. I felt like my dream was gone and that I wouldn’t have a family unit for my children. I was upset with myself because I couldn’t keep the promise I had made to myself as a five-year-old girl … but God didn’t let my story end there. We serve a faithful God whose heart is for redemption.

As a divorced 20 year old, I had no intention of getting married again, but God had other plans. A man I met at church asked me on a date, and while I initially declined, this man pursued me for several months. I finally said yes, and the rest is history. Rob and I got married three months after our first date. He had a daughter from his first marriage, so we blended our families and started our marriage with three children.

Four years into our marriage, my husband adopted my two children and the promise that I made to myself was redeemed—my children now have a mommy and a daddy. The Lord never forgets what we hold in our hearts. He is faithful, and He is a redeemer. Rob and I are now in our 20th year of marriage with our five children. Meaghan is 28 and lives in Arkansas. Pablo is 24, serves in the Air Force, and lives in Maryland. Breana is 22, lives in Colorado Springs, and is getting married next year. Jackson, 15, and Lincoln, 13, keep us both very busy with soccer.

I look back on my life and can clearly see that God had a plan for me all along. I took a long, winding path, but my story is marked by God’s faithfulness and redemption. He is the one who makes our stories honorable, pure, and lovely through His story of redemption.

by Trina Hoosier

Trina is the Family Relations Director for family ministries at New Life Church in beautiful Colorado Springs, CO. She has a passion for serving moms during childbirth and newborns, you will often find her with a baby in her arms. She is most happy when spending time with family and friends and also enjoys a really hot cup of coconut creamer with a little coffee in a cute mug.
A Matter of Choice

TELLING FAMILY STORIES TO CHILDREN IS IMPORTANT. KNOWING ABOUT OUR HERITAGE AND LINEAGE GIVES US A SENSE OF UNDERSTANDING HOW WE FIT INTO THE FAMILY THAT HAS GONE BEFORE US.
Melvin and Velma grew up during the Great Depression and were military veterans who got married shortly after World War II. They were the hardest working people I’ve ever known. They were also the unhappiest people I’ve ever seen. I am their only child.

From my earliest memories, there was always turmoil between Mom and Dad—harsh words, strife, and sometimes a big fight.

As an elementary school kid, in my bed at night, I would often pray, “Lord, when I get married all I want is a happy home.” Something I never saw in my parents’ marriage was what I wanted the most. There was an ever-present ache in my soul for peace and a sense of quiet calm at home.

Mom and Dad both passed away during my teen years. Their tragic, unexpected deaths caused me to be afraid. Suddenly, I was on my own. Fear began to nag at my soul and was present for some time. Certain thoughts would torment me: “I wonder how I’m gonna die?”

Freedom came to my heart and mind in a prayer meeting when a wonderful pastor’s wife spoke these prophetic words to me: “The curse that’s been over your family is stopped with your generation.” She referenced a passage from Scripture, Galatians 3:13-14: “Christ redeemed us from the curse … by becoming a curse for us … that the blessing given to Abraham might come … so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

I received that promise. I was really free from fear in my spirit and mind for the first time in my memory. I also realized that the opportunity to have a blessed and happy family was ahead of me.

In the years since we said, “I do,” my wife, Becky, and I have learned that a good marriage and happy home does not happen by chance. Loving on purpose, asking for and extending forgiveness, and giving God the primary position in our home makes it possible to enjoy our marriage and children.

A good marriage is a matter of choice. We daily choose to embrace God’s promises and to do what we say we believe. A happy home is a result of hearing and doing God’s Word.

A happy home is all I ever wanted, and I’m thankful this has been God’s blessing for us. I’m so glad this is the family story I can tell our children.

by David Grothe

David has served the local church in several pastoral roles over the past 40 years. He’s an experienced musician with a pastor’s heart and a great love for his wife, Becky; their four children and their spouses; and their 12 grandchildren. David serves as Executive Pastor of Marriage Ministry and Pastoral Care for New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO.
I'm in the midst of reading Anne Voskamp's book One Thousand Gifts. In this New York Times bestseller, Voskamp beautifully shares the spiritual discipline of chronicling gifts. She writes:

In the original language, "he gave thanks" reads "eucharisteo."

The root word of eucharisteo is charis, meaning "grace." Jesus took the bread and saw it as grace and gave thanks. He took the bread and knew it to be gift and gave thanks.

But there is more, and I read it. Eucharisteo, thanksgiving, envelopes the Greek word for grace, charis. But it also holds its derivative, the Greek word chara, meaning "joy."

... Deep chara joy is found only at the table of euCHARisteo—the table of thanksgiving. I sit there long ... wondering ... is it that simple? Is the height of my chara joy dependent on the depths of my eucharisteo thanks?

As I read the book, I realize the importance of journaling and listing out "gifts." I recognize that choosing thankfulness is the key to choosing joy. I knew this revelation was important information to pass on to my children and grandchildren.

I have a very large whiteboard in my laundry room; I decided this would be a perfect place to begin our list. I knew the idea of 1,000 gifts would be too much for my six- and nine-year-old grandchildren to grasp so I numbered the board to 100. I explained the idea—look for God’s gift in every situation. List all the true, noble, and right things you see. Write out all that is lovely and admirable, excellent and praiseworthy—focus on these things.

And so, our list began:
1. Hot showers
2. Electricity
3. Fresh food
4. A beautiful sunrise
5. God being our King
6. A funny brother
7. Trash cans
8. Paper to color on
9. Feet to walk
10. Minds to think happy thoughts

And on and on it goes ... in elementary handwriting and words that are precious and phonetically spelled. We aren’t to 100 yet, but when we get there, I will number that board again starting at 101 and numbering to 200, and when we finish that we will repeat until we reach 1,000. Because by the time we reach 1,000 their little minds will be trained to see the good in every situation. They will be on the lookout for God's gifts and choose thankfulness, which in turn will lead to true joy.

GRANDPARENTS

Because my grandchildren live with me it is a little easier for me to teach this lesson daily. But don’t let that stop you. Get creative and make a list with your grandchildren. Maybe it is a journal that you share between your homes, or maybe it is calling or FaceTiming weekly and sharing your lists with each other. Consider making a list of 100 gifts on a chalkboard or whiteboard in your home for each time they visit. And don’t just stop at the items on the list. Have them share the stories behind the gifts they listed—get to the why! You won’t regret the investment—it may make the top of your own list!

by Debbie Gunn
Gift List

1. Cozy beds
2. Eyes to see Beauty
3. Electricity
4. Family night
5. Soldiers to fight for us
ENVIRONMENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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.
STORYTELLING | homefrontmag.com

It is our prayer that homes and churches would create these environments for children to live in so their faith will grow in a community of consistency, common language, and practice. To learn more about how these environments can ignite a transforming faith in your family, we suggest you read:

**Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today’s Families**

By Michelle Anthony

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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!

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.

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.

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.

Knowing

“God knows me, and I can know Him.”

Faith Community

“I belong to God, and He loves me!”

Course Correction

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

Modeling

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

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