MODELING

“I SEE CHRIST IN OTHERS, AND THEY CAN SEE HIM IN ME.”

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HOW TO USE

HomeFront

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

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

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

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

1 Start by deciding on a day and time that works well for your entire family. It can be an evening, afternoon, or morning. Just commit to building this time into your family’s natural rhythm—perhaps around a meal.

2 Look through HomeFront to see what stands out. Choose two or three experiences you would like to incorporate into your family times this month. Don’t feel burdened to complete all the activities—just do what fits your family best. This resource provides more than enough experiences to create transforming environments in your home throughout the month.

3 Remember to HAVE FUN! Strive to make each gathering unique to your own family as you enjoy spending time with God and one another.

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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.

Ephesians 5:1 (ESV) says, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children.” We know that children love to imitate, so what do we as parents want them to imitate? As a parent, one of my deepest desires is for my kids to imitate God’s truth. The environment of MODELING, then, becomes an expression of that. We become living representatives of what that truth means.

We are people who have experienced God’s love through Christ and God’s forgiveness in the model of Christ. Christ was and is our living example. The environment of MODELING serves as a hands-on example of what it means for all of us to put this faith into action.

This month, as you model for your family what it looks like to live out a compelling and authentic faith, our prayer is that your view of God’s truth and love would be on display for others.

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

@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.

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

Please go to pushpay.com/pay/nlcministries and choose “HomeFront” from the Giving Type to make your tax-deductible donation. Thank you for helping HomeFront minister to families around the world.
“HE IS RISEN!” “HE IS RISEN INDEED!” When my grandson was two years old, we taught him this liturgical call and response to engage with our faith community on Easter morning. We practiced and practiced how to respond to friends and family as we celebrated that morning in church. We urged everyone we connected with to say, “He is risen!” and wait for the sweet reply of, “He is risen indeed!” from our precious boy! And although he wasn’t fully aware of what he was proclaiming, he entered in to what we had modeled.

As parents we are modeling all the time. Our behavior is on display, whether it is teaching our children to proclaim the good news that Jesus is alive or acting in ways we don’t necessarily want repeated. Thankfully, we have been given the perfect model to follow in the life of Jesus. With grace and mercy, He set the example for us. As this month’s GOD’S WORD (page 28) explains, Jesus did not come back and punish His disciples who misunderstood and deserted Him. He did not come back and destroy the soldiers who crucified Him. When Jesus appeared to individuals or groups after His resurrection, His first words were always “Do not be afraid” or “Peace be with you.” Jesus, in His death and resurrection, revealed a loving and forgiving God who invites us to live and relate to God in peace, not fear.

In this month’s STUDENT ID MIDDLE SCHOOL (page 37) Deanna Ramsay shares the importance of modeling the “how”– reminding us that our children often desire to make good choices but sometimes don’t know HOW. How do I get out of this situation? How do I not look at that image? How do I leave? She gives some great practical advice.

The EVERYDAY MOM BLOG (page 40) is definitely not just for moms. The wisdom Megan Marshman shares is a challenge to us all to vocalize the little wins. She encourages us that as we do, we are seeking and finding who God is shaping our children to become. This will be a foundation for how they see themselves in the future.

As you play this month’s GAME TIME (page 23), use Hide and Go Peep as a teachable moment for your children to hear that Jesus gave up His life to release us from our tendency to hide from God. Your family will also enjoy the FAMILY TIME RECIPE (page 24). I can vouch for the fact that this truly is the “best carrot cake ever”—the “boyfriend and his family” the author talks about is actually my own family, and you can be assured we will be asking her to bring that cake again this year!

Take some time this Easter season to focus on the example Christ set for us to follow. Our FAMILY TIME VERSE (page 5) states exactly how He wants us to live: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12–13). Jesus not only laid down His life for us—He rose again on the third day and lives with us now. It is because of this miracle we all can proclaim, “HE IS RISEN!” “HE IS RISEN INDEED!”

Debbie Guinn
Debbie is the Editor in Chief of HomeFront magazine. She has more than 25 years of experience working in children’s and family ministries. She is passionate about equipping parents to become leaders of God’s truth in their own households. She is a recent transplant to Austin, TX, where she co-parents two of her four grandchildren with her son. She spends her free time enjoying her grandchildren and perusing antique stores and flea markets.
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Family Verse
Memorizing Scripture can be an incredible practice to engage in as a family. But words in and of themselves will not necessarily transform us; it is God’s Spirit in these words who transforms. We come to know God more when we’re willing to open our hearts and listen to His Holy Spirit through the words we memorize. Have fun with this verse, and think of creative ways to invite your family to open up to God as they commit the verse to memory. Go to homefrontmag.com for a free downloadable copy of the family verse.
MY COMMAND is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

JOHN 15:12-13
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### FAMILY TIME

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CAPTURING THE SEASON

MESSAGE BLOCKS

This month, declare the glorious news of our risen Savior by creating these darling message blocks. The great part is, these blocks have six sides, so after displaying your Easter message you can use the other sides to create messages to inspire your family.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- 2" wooden blocks
- White craft paint
- Black or gold craft paint
- 1" letter stencils
- Stencil brush
- Paint brush

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. Paint the sides of each wooden block white but leave a small rough border around the edges.
2. Allow paint to dry.
3. Center a letter stencil on a block.
4. Using gold or black craft paint, stencil the letter onto the block.
5. Repeat with each block using the letters you need to create a message.
6. Display your blocks in your home.

He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. (Matthew 28:6)
He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

Matthew 28:6
I CAN ... CAN YOU?

FOR THIS FAMILY MEALTIME GAME, TAKE TURNS MODELING AN ACTION AND CHALLENGING EACH OTHER TO COPY IT.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- I can **scoop all my peas** on a fork with my left hand. Can you?
- I can **sing a note** without taking a breath for a long time. Can you?
- I can **recite my favorite Bible verse**. Can you?
- I can **touch my nose** with my tongue. Can you?
- I can **drink my whole glass of milk** without a breath. Can you?
- I can **balance my spoon** on my nose. Can you?
- And so on ...

GET YOUR FAMILY TALKING:

Throughout our lives we will be drawn to follow many different people’s ideas and actions. Following some people will bring us life and joy, while following others will lead us to poor choices that do not glorify God. Share with your children that Jesus set the perfect example for us to follow. He always put the needs of others above His own—to the extent of laying down His life for us.

- What makes a person a good role model?
- Who is a good role model in your life?
- What makes you want to follow him or her?
- What are some things Jesus did that make Him the most perfect role model of all?
- How can we follow Jesus’ example?

*by Debbie Gunn*
A few years ago I had the privilege of participating in a condensed seder meal designed to help kids more fully understand Passover and the Last Supper. Sitting in a room with dimmed lights and LED candles as God’s story of rescue and salvation unfolded was a powerfully moving experience. It drew me into worship. I was in awe of my God and His abundant goodness.

I would like to share this abbreviated seder meal with you and your family. The seder meal was established in Exodus 13:8 when Moses instructed the people to always remember God’s rescue of them from Egypt. It is possible that Jesus’ Last Supper with His disciples was a seder meal at which Jesus established the new covenant of communion.

I approach this seder tradition with the utmost respect. People around the world still celebrate the seder today on the eve of Passover. It is a story that unfolds with elements intended to draw the participants more fully into God’s story and rescue. Today families read from the Haggadah, which is a narrative of the Passover, and you can find many of these full Haggadahs online or in books. This version is a very abbreviated representation of the meal. It celebrates not only the story of Passover from Exodus but also the places where Jesus fulfills God’s long-awaited promises. It is intended to draw your family into worship.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- candle (and lighter or match)
- 1 cup per person
- 1 napkin or small plate per person
- large tray
- small bowl of water and a towel
- Bible turned to Psalm 113 (or print out copies of Psalms 113 and 114 for each person)
- optional: print copies of a portion of your choice from Psalms 115–118

For all of the food items you only need a very small amount. The items will be placed on the large tray, and everyone will simply get a taste of each.

- karpas: parsley
- matzah: unleavened bread (3 pieces of matzos, stacked)
- maror: horseradish
- haroset: sweet salad (mix or apples and nuts flavored with juice and cinnamon)
- korban chagigah: hard-boiled egg
- cup of salt water
- juice (4 small cups per person, or refill 1 cup per person throughout the seder)

To prepare for the meal, place the large tray on your table where everyone will gather to participate. Place four small cups of juice and a napkin or plate in front of each seat. Place the candle in the center, unlit. All of the food items go on the tray. You can have your cup of salt water and the bowl with plain water and a towel next to the tray. In the following text, the bold text is intended to be read at your meal. Have everyone sit around the table and begin.
The Passover celebration traditionally lasts seven days. Passover celebrates Israel’s rescue from slavery in Egypt. The seder meal marks the beginning of Passover. It is celebrated around a table, and it is a story that unfolds with many symbols that draw us into worship of God.

Families would begin their celebration at night. A family would read the Haggadah, which means “the telling.” It would recount with these very symbols the Passover story we find in the book of Exodus. On our table you see the items of Passover.

Have someone light the candle.

When everyone was gathered, someone would light the special candles. That person would say a blessing. We will say simply, “We praise You, oh Lord, our God.

Point out the four cups at each person’s place.

We are going to be drinking four cups of juice. This first juice is the cup of sanctification, which reminds us that God has set us apart. In the Last Supper with His disciples Jesus took the cup and shared it with His disciples. Again, a blessing would be said: “We praise You, oh Lord, our God, who created the fruit of the vine.” Let us drink the first cup of Passover together.

Next, we are going to wash each other’s hands. One at a time, dip your fingers into the bowl of water. The person to your left will dry them off with the towel. This washing reminds us of when Jesus washed His disciples’ feet.

Allow time for everyone to wash. When everyone has washed you can place a small bit of parsley on each person’s plate or napkin.

This is called the karpas. It is a lowly vegetable that grows into a crucial part of our seder. It reminds us of the lowly Israelites who were slaves in Egypt and how they grew into God’s chosen people. We are going to dip our karpas into this salt water. This water reminds us of the many tears the Israelites shed while they were in slavery. Before we eat we will say a blessing: “We praise You, oh Lord, our God, who created the fruit of the earth.” Go ahead and eat your karpas dipped in saltwater.

Next, turn to the stack of three matzah. Take the middle matzah and break it in half.

Everyone needs to close his eyes. I’m going to hide half of this for us to find later.

Hide the bread somewhere close by and easy to locate again. Then hold up the piece of broken bread you did not hide.
This is the bread the Israelites ate while they were in Egypt. It reminds us of how difficult it was for them to be slaves.

Next, we will all take part in reciting the story of the exodus together. This can take a long time, but it helps us all remember how great our God is! Let’s all take turns talking about the Passover story and what we remember about God.

(Note: The story can be found in Exodus 12:1–42. It would be good to talk about how the Israelites were slaves in Egypt before this point. God was about to rescue His people and this final plague was what would finally allow His people to be free.)

After the story, families would sing a blessing to God. This blessing is Psalm 113 and 114, which we will read together. As we read, everyone needs to lift his second glass of juice and keep it raised the entire time.

Place the Bible so everyone can see and read the psalms together, or read from preprinted sheets.

After the blessing has been read it is time to drink our second cup. This cup reminds us of God’s deliverance. He was the one who freed the Israelites from being slaves. And He delivers us today. Let us bless God: “We praise You, oh Lord, our God, who created the fruit of the vine.”

Next the youngest child would ask four questions to highlight the different elements we are eating. Each question would end with “Why is this night different from all other nights?” Then the leader would answer the questions.

Raise the remaining matzah and say, “We praise You, oh Lord, our God, who brings forth bread from the earth.”

Break up the matzah remaining on the tray. Place a little on each person’s napkin or plate.

Next, we eat the maror (horseradish). Maror is intended to be very bitter. It is a reminder again of the bitterness of slavery. Anyone who wants to can now taste the maror. Often the point is to eat enough of the maror to cry—a symbol of deep bitterness. We are not going to do that. But that is a warning that this stuff is strong, so please be careful.

After the bitter maror we will make a sandwich. Take a little of your matzah and place some of the maror on it. Also place a little of this haroset (sweet salad) on it as well. Then place some matzah on top to form a sandwich. This sandwich reminds us of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt but also points to the sweetness of God’s rescue.

Now we will eat the korban chagigah: the hard-boiled egg. The egg reminds us of the sacrifices that were made in the temple.

At this point in the Passover celebration, traditionally families would eat a meal together. After the meal the symbols would continue.

Then the hidden matzah would be found. This is called the afikomen.

Find the hidden piece and reveal it with a big gesture.

The afikomen represented the Passover lamb that was to be the last thing eaten at the meal. Today those of us who follow Jesus are reminded of how Jesus revealed what He was about to do during the Last Supper—that He would be the ultimate Passover lamb. Let us again praise God before partaking of the afikomen. Typically, at this point the family would recite Psalm 115 through 118. Let’s find a portion we want to read together.

Read together some portion of those psalms, or read from preprinted sheets.

Let’s eat the afikomen. Now we are going to drink our third cup. This is the cup of redemption. In Luke 22:20 we read that Jesus lifted up a cup after supper and explained that He would make a new covenant with us. It is God who has redeemed us. Let us bless God, “We praise You, oh Lord, our God, who creates the fruit of the vine.”

Lastly, we will drink the cup of completion. Let us bless God: “We praise You, oh Lord, our God, who created the fruit of the vine.”

Finally, all of us will say, “This is the lesson of Passover, this is God working in history, this is the story of freedom.”

After the meal, spend some time as a family discussing what the meal made you feel and how it helped you worship God.
Easter is my favorite holiday. With it comes the arrival of spring, new life, hope, and the reminder that nothing is ever as finished as we believe. As a mom, I long for ways to celebrate Easter with the same depth, warmth, and tradition that surrounds Christmas. A sweet baby in a manger is easy to get kids excited about. Our family adds pieces to a nativity scene throughout the Advent season, and, each day, anticipation mounts for the coming of Immanuel, God WITH us! Yet I struggle to captivate our kids’ hearts with the story of Easter in a similar way. The good news of what we believe, the story that we hang every fiber of our lives upon, plays itself out in the remembrance of Jesus’ surrender to a horrific death, a watchful burial, and a miraculous, world-altering resurrection.

Those are big topics; they involve surrender and loss, pain and death—things we don’t normally fill our days talking about. But, the good news doesn’t only come as a baby wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger. It comes to fulfillment in Jesus’ broken body wrapped in a shroud and lying in a tomb—and rising again! I knew that to engage our family in this story, we needed something tangible, something we could hold, touch, and move. We have done resurrection eggs, attended our church’s “Journey to the Cross,” and, one year, I even planned an entire historical Passover meal from scratch (which was great—until I burned the lamb, and now that’s the only part of it they really remember).

Each year I long for something simple, a tradition we can do together like our nativity set or the Advent calendar. After years of looking, I decided to make a “Journey to the Cross” for our family. It is the focal point of the Easter decorations in our home and a tradition that allows us all to feel the weight of Christ’s sacrifice and the glory of His resurrection in a special way.

Each day of holy week the kids move Jesus carrying the cross one stone further on His journey
as we light a tea candle and read a Scripture card for that day. On Friday, Jesus is placed in the tomb, it is sealed, and the cross is placed beside it. Then for two days nothing moves as you read the cards; only the stillness of the tomb remains. In our home, from sundown on Thursday to Easter morning, we also add to the feeling by living only by candlelight. No TV, no phones, no lights, only candles—a fast of sorts—and an experience of darkness that can only really be conquered by Jesus, the Light of the World.

Then we talk, we remember, we ask questions about what it would have been like if we had been there, if we had walked beside Him, loved Him, watched Him die, and thought He was really gone. We talk about what it means to us now, that He did ALL of this because of His unending, perfect love for us. We pray as a family that this story never loses its impact on our hearts, and we pray for those still in darkness to experience the Light of the World in their lives too. Then Easter morning arrives with the opening of an empty tomb and the excitement of declaring He isn’t there—“He is RISEN!”

My hope is that this journey, made for our family, can be a gift for others as well—an heirloom passed down through generations of believers. A simple way to experience not only Jesus’ journey to save us but our own journey, from lost and alone to found and loved—from God WITH us to God IN us.

by Season Cowdrey

Season is a Colorado native who has been married to the love of her life for 15 years. She is a stay-at-home mama of four (three biological and one adopted through foster care). Her fine arts degree from the University of Colorado was a natural fit as creating is like breathing to her. Season’s days are filled with chaos and kids, crochet and laundry, and she’s learning to spin yarn (in all her free time). One of her deepest desires is to leave a legacy of faith for her family to follow.

[Link to Season’s Etsy shop]

My hope is that this journey, made for our family, can be a gift for others as well—an heirloom passed down through generations of believers. A simple way to experience not only Jesus’ journey to save us but our own journey, from lost and alone to found and loved—from God WITH us to God IN us.
I’ll be honest. I’ve never really liked fasting. I’m all about feasting and reveling in God’s goodness and grace. The dying-to-self part of Christianity is harder for me. When Easter rolls around, it’s easy for me to get excited about remembering and celebrating Jesus rising from the grave. But I sometimes neglect what comes before that. I often skip right over the Lenten season and Jesus’ journey to the cross, jumping straight to the cheery Easter morning greeting of “He is risen!”

The truth is, without the cross there is no resurrection. Before Easter comes Good Friday. Death precedes new life. While my flesh fights back against anything uncomfortable and flinches at the first sign of pain, deep down I know that it’s part of the package. Before Jesus rose from the dead, He modeled sacrifice and surrender. He gave up His life.

Fasting is a practice of giving up and taking up. When we fast, we sacrifice by giving up something, and then we take up something else in its place. One common way to fast is to give up food for an allotted period of time, but there are other kinds of fasts too. A person might fast from entertainment, certain technological devices, etc.

This month, choose one day to fast as a family. For kids, fasting from food is not recommended, so choose something else to give up—maybe screen time or junk food/dessert. Choose something you can realistically live without for a day but something
that feels like a sacrifice. In its place, take up a time of prayer. Set aside 30 minutes (maybe more or less depending on the ages of your kids) to spend with God individually. Play some worship music in the background. Draw or journal. Think about Jesus and all He gave up, and spend this time responding to God.

One activity you might do during this time is creating a family paper cross mosaic. You’d need a variety of colored paper, scissors, something to write with, and glue. First, cut two strips of paper (one short and one long) and glue them together to make a cross. Then, cut small scraps of paper in different shapes. On each scrap, each family member writes down something he wants to pray about: the name of a person you want to pray for, a characteristic of God you want to praise, etc. As you pray for each one, glue the scraps to your cross, continuing until your cross is fully covered.

At the end of your time, come together as a family to debrief your experiences of giving up and taking up. Talk about what was challenging, what you noticed about yourself, how you chose to respond to God, anything you feel like God might be wanting to say to you, etc. Read Romans 8:17 and encourage one another that if you share now in the sufferings of Christ, one day you will also share in His glory. Hang the cross in a prominent place in your home as a reminder of the sacrifice Christ made. Then, go and celebrate Easter to your heart’s delight!

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by Emily Schulz

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

“It’s all going to work out,” her mom said softly as she pulled into the busy parking lot. Megan nodded and kept looking through the glass at her new school. Kids were laughing and talking and swinging their backpacks on crowded sidewalks. Others students were getting off a school bus. Megan’s eyes filled with tears, not at all sure that it was going to work out.

A few weeks earlier, Megan’s dad had come home from work with some big news. He’d gotten a promotion and was getting a different job. In a different city. In another state. Megan’s family would have to move. And they were leaving in just a few short weeks, right after Easter.

At least Megan had still been able to do the play. She and her friends from church had performed in the Easter story at all three services on Easter Sunday. She loved being on stage, and they’d had such fun practicing. But when Easter came, she just felt sad. She didn’t want to move, and saying goodbye to her friends made her cry.

Driving slowly through the parking lot of her new school, her mom found a space and turned off the engine. “Ready?” she asked, trying to sound cheerful.

Megan sniffled. “Uh-huh.”

“Jesus knew He had to die on the cross,” her mom continued. “He knew that it was God’s will so people would have a way to be forgiven of their sins. That was a really big, scary, difficult thing to do. The hardest thing anyone has ever done in all of history! And what was the first thing Jesus did?”

Megan thought about the Easter play. “Well, first, He went to the garden to pray. He told God He didn’t want to go to the cross, but if God wanted Him to, He would.”

“That’s right. And what have we been doing every night?”

“Praying,” Megan answered. “Praying for God’s will for us.”

“Yes. And after that, what did Jesus do?”
“Then ...” Megan thought some more. “He trusted God and did the really hard thing. He wanted to say yes to God,” she remembered, “so He allowed the soldiers to arrest Him. He allowed people to put Him on the cross. He gave up His life so we could be forgiven.”

“That’s right. And we want to say yes to God, too. You said goodbye to your friends. We moved into a new home. And this morning, you’re starting a new school. Those are hard and scary things, but we can trust God, just like Jesus did. But was that the end of the story?”

“No, that wasn’t the end. God had something bigger planned. He promised it would be okay, and three days later, Jesus rose, just like He said He would!”

“That’s right. God had bigger things in store. Something no one could imagine! And guess what, Meg—this isn’t the end of your story either. God has big things in store for you, too.”

Megan felt a little better as they turned down a hallway and headed to her new classroom. On the wall next to the door hung a large poster painted with bright red letters. Megan and her mom stopped to read it.

COME TO THE MUSIC ROOM ON FRIDAY AFTER SCHOOL! TRYOUTS FOR THE SPRING MUSICAL START AT 3:00 P.M.!

Just then two girls about Megan’s age ran up to read the poster.

“Are you trying out?” one girl asked Megan.

“You should!” the other cheered. “It’s going to be so fun!”

Megan and her mom smiled at each other. It wasn’t the end of Megan’s story. God had bigger things in store.

As a parent, there is nothing more difficult than to watch our kids struggle. When they hurt, we hurt! Praise God we can point them to the example of Jesus. His attitude and actions when facing trials gives them a path to follow, a plan to help them grow, and peace to give them hope.

by Kathryn O’Brien
Kathryn writes books for kids and has a heart for moms. She’s published five children’s picture books, including her latest series (Sit for a Bit), which teaches Bible verses to little ones in a fun and lasting way! Kathryn loves writing about faith and family for several publications and online blogs.

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Jesus is the greatest example of love we will ever know. His love is unconditional, patient, kind, unselfish, honest, truthful, and never fails.

The Holy Spirit instructs, guides, and helps form us into the image of Christ. As you shape these hearts together as a family, share some ways Jesus has shown His love to you. Then, share ways that you can put your faith in action by sharing the love of Jesus with others.

The cross in the center of these hearts reminds us of the great love Jesus displayed for the world when He gave His life for our sins. God promised that Jesus would be victorious over sin death and the grave—and He is! We celebrate His resurrection on Easter Sunday. Oh, how He loves! Let us love one another as He has loved us!

by Christy Thomas

Christy was born and raised in Ohio and recently moved to Colorado Springs, CO, where she now serves as the Nursery Coordinator at New Life Church. She is blessed to be the wife of her amazing husband of 41 years, mother of two beautiful daughters, and Nana to three precious granddaughters who are the apple of her eye!
SALT DOUGH HEARTS

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 2 cups all-purpose flour
• 1 cup salt
• 1 cup water
• 1–2 drops of desired food coloring (optional)
• rolling pin
• large heart-shaped cookie cutter
• small cross charms (can be purchased at craft stores)
• craft glue
• permanent marker
• newspaper or drop cloth

WHAT YOU’LL DO

This dough can be made ahead of time and stored in a sealed plastic bag until ready for use.

1. In a large mixing bowl, stir together the flour and salt.
2. Gradually add water while stirring and mixing to form a dough with Play-Doh-like consistency.
3. Add food coloring if desired.
4. Form the dough into a ball and knead for approximately 10 minutes, adding a bit more flour if the dough is too sticky or a bit more water if it’s too dry.
5. Roll out a portion of the dough and use the cookie cutter to make a heart of at least ¼”-½” thickness.
6. Place a small amount of craft glue in the center of the heart.
7. Gently press the cross into the glue and hold in place for several minutes until set in place.
8. Place your salt dough heart on a baking sheet in a preheated 200° F oven.
9. Bake for approximately 1 to 2 hours. Baking time will vary depending on the size and thickness of your craft, so remember to keep a close eye on it. If your craft is too doughy, place back in oven until it reaches your desired firmness.
10. Use a permanent marker to write “Oh, How He Loves” on the back of the heart to serve as a reminder that Jesus showed perfect love for us.

Love each other as I have loved you.

John 15:12
GAME TIME

HIDE AND GO PEEP
“Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gave up His life to free us— to release us from our tendency to hide and be separate from God.”

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 12 plastic eggs
• 1 marshmallow chick or bunny
• permanent marker
• 2 dice
• bowl or basket
• pen
• paper

BEFORE YOU START …

Using the permanent marker, number the eggs 1 through 12. Place the marshmallow chick or bunny inside any one of the eggs. Spread the eggs out on a table with the numbers visible. (The eggs may want to roll a little, but just set them up the best you can.) Set the dice out on the table and you’re ready to play!

TIME TO PLAY!

Invite everyone to the table. Explain to your family that each person will take turns choosing to roll one or two dice. Once a player has rolled, she will open the egg with the corresponding number (add the dice together if she throws two). If the marshmallow is inside, she will get one point. If the marshmallow is not inside, she will not get a point.

If this player finds the marshmallow, then you will need to scoop all the eggs into the basket and, away from the players, put the marshmallow into a new egg, and lay the eggs back out for the next roller to take his turn. If that player does not find the marshmallow, then he will immediately pass the dice on to the next player.

The first person to find the marshmallow five times wins the game. Play as many rounds as your family would like!

LET’S ADD A TWIST!

Give me sugar! If you’d like to make scorekeeping a little more fun, stock up on packages of marshmallow chicks or bunnies. This way, when someone finds the marshmallow, he can keep it in place of the point and you can simply fill the next egg with a new marshmallow. The first person to get five marshmallows wins!

My kids are older. If you’d like, you can make this game a little more challenging for older children by increasing the number of dice and eggs. For two dice, you need 12 eggs (this is how the game is currently set up), or you can increase that by adding in a third die and labeling 18 eggs. Or add a fourth die and number the eggs to 24. This is a fun way to incorporate some simple addition practice for your kiddos!

REMEMBER!

Have you ever felt the desire to hide? Hide from your fears, your troubles, your mistakes? Maybe you feel the need to keep pieces of who you are hidden for fear that you will not be understood or loved. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gave up His life to free us—to release us from our tendency to hide and be separate from God. This Easter, and every Easter, we intentionally set aside time to remember and celebrate this truth. What’s better is that the story does not end there. Jesus was not defeated by death. He paid our debt, yet He is still alive and desires us greatly! As you talk to your children about this, encourage them to remember the hidden marshmallows they found throughout the game. The wonderful difference (one of many) between these marshmallows and us is that God always knows where we are and who we are … and He loves us still! Let’s model this truth in all of our celebrations!

by Heather DePartee

Heather worked in children’s ministry for seven years and recently earned her degree in early childhood development. She is now working on her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential and MA in teaching at Fresno Pacific University in Fresno, CA. She is in love with her husband, Adam, and all of their adorable houseplants!
This Carrot Cake will receive rave reviews for its unbelievable moistness and flavor! It’s truly the BEST CARROT CAKE you’ll ever try! It’s so easy to make, and, as an added bonus, there’s no oil or butter! I know this cake will quickly become a family favorite. For the first Easter I spent with my boyfriend and his family, I was assigned “something sweet” and made this delicious cake in hopes of making a good impression. The cake was a huge hit among everyone, including the kids!
WHAT YOU’LL NEED

Cake
List 1
• 1 1/4 cups unsweetened applesauce
• 2 cups granulated sugar
• 3 eggs, room temperature

List 2
• 2 cups all-purpose flour
• 1 teaspoon baking soda
• 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
• 1/2 teaspoon salt
• 1 teaspoon cinnamon

List 3
• 2 cups grated carrots
• 1 cup shredded sweetened coconut
• 1 cup chopped nuts (optional)
• 1 teaspoon vanilla
• 1 cup crushed pineapple (in juice, not drained)

Cream Cheese Frosting
• 1/2 cup butter, softened
• 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
• 1 teaspoon vanilla
• 1 pound powdered sugar
• toasted pecans or coconut (optional)

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Choose your cake pan size—you can use a 9” x 13”, two 9” rounds, or three 8” rounds. Line the bottom of your cake pan(s) with parchment paper and then grease and flour the sides. The cake is very moist, so placing parchment in the bottom of your pans will ensure the cake doesn’t stick.
3. Mix all List 1 ingredients together in a large bowl.
4. Combine List 2 ingredients and add in. Then, stir in the ingredients from List 3.
5. Pour into prepared cake pans.
6. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes for the 9” x 13” and 9” pans and 25 to 30 minutes for the 8” pans. Cake is done when an inserted toothpick comes out clean.
7. Let cakes cool for 10 minutes in the pans and then remove to a cooling rack and let cool completely.

For the Frosting
The frosting recipe can be doubled if you would like to pipe a border and add frosting decorations to the top of the cake.
1. Beat the butter and cream cheese until fluffy.
2. Add in the vanilla and powdered sugar and beat until smooth.
3. Invert one cake layer onto a cake plate or stand.
4. Apply a generous dollop of frosting and spread.
5. Gently place the second cake on top and continue frosting. Repeat with the third cake if you made three.
6. Refrigerate for an hour before serving for best results.

by Hanna Staley
Hanna lives in Leander, TX, and is the director of a home care agency that helps elderly residents continue to live independently in their homes. She loves spending her free time outdoors and enjoying quality time with her family, her boyfriend, and his two amazing children. Baking is another one of her favorite hobbies—as long as there are plenty of people to share with!
Pull-Apart Brunch Biscuits

**YIELDS**: 24 biscuits  **PREP TIME**: 10 min.  **COOK TIME**: 20 min.

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

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**
- 2 cans flaky layers biscuits (8 per can)
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 cup cooked and crumbled bacon
- 6 large eggs
- 1 cup milk

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**
1. Preheat oven to 375° F.
2. Spray two 12-well muffin pans with nonstick spray.
3. Divide the biscuits into approximately 6 layers each. This should yield 12 biscuits total.
4. Take 1 biscuit for yourself and then place the remaining 11 on plates for your children.
5. Divide the cheese and bacon between each child.
6. As you explain each of the following steps, encourage your children to follow your lead.
7. Peel off a layer.
8. Sprinkle a little cheese and bacon on the layer.
9. Top with another layer of biscuit.
10. Sprinkle with more cheese and bacon.
11. Top with another layer of biscuit.
12. Continue sprinkling cheese and bacon on each layer until every layer has been covered.
13. Cut each of the 12 biscuit stacks in half.
14. Place each half in a well of the muffin pan, cut side up.
15. In a separate bowl mix the eggs and milk.
16. Pour the egg and milk mixture evenly over the cut biscuits in the muffin wells.
17. Bake for 10 minutes.
18. Rotate the pans and cook for another 6 to 8 minutes or until egg is done to your liking.
19. Remove the pans from the oven and let cool for 2 minutes.
20. Remove the Pull-Apart Brunch Biscuits from muffin wells and serve warm.
NOT ONLY WILL THESE PULL-APART BRUNCH BISCUITS BE A TASTY ADDITION TO YOUR EASTER MEAL, BUT YOUR KIDS WILL ALSO BE ABLE TO FOLLOW YOUR LEAD AS YOU MODEL EACH STEP TO PREPARE THEM.
The ornately colorful “Spirit Houses” were everywhere we looked. They were just one of many unfamiliar and amazing sights, sounds, and smells to take in as my family and I visited friends in northern Thailand last month. When we asked the locals about these Spirit Houses that were outside many homes and businesses, we were told that the property owners put them up to appease any evil spirits that might be in the area. In the mornings, offerings (in the form of food or drink) are given to the spirits, incense is burned, prayers are spoken ... all to protect oneself and one’s property from the evil spirits. Where there is a Spirit House, there is fear.

As a Christian who was born and raised in the United States, it is all too easy for me to arrogantly judge these practices as being part of an archaic and incorrect religious tradition. But I must acknowledge that I, and many Christians, also regularly act out of fear. We frequently function out of the belief that God will punish us if we are not “good enough” and that God will bless us or love us more if we read our Bibles more, pray longer, etc. Where these beliefs are held, there is fear.

But do we need to be afraid of God?
Do we need to appease God with offerings or service?
What is God really like?
Easter speaks to these valuable questions.

Astonishingly, we can know what God is like. How?
We look at Jesus. Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). He is the exact representation of God’s nature (Hebrews 1:3). By observing Jesus in the Easter story, we see a powerful picture of God that can replace fear with peace in our hearts.

You see, at the cross, Jesus took the worst treatment that mankind could deliver—hatred leading to violent death—and His response revealed what God is really like. Jesus responded not with more hatred, violence, or revenge, but with forgiveness—not with retribution, but with love. (I don’t even respond to the crazy driver who cuts me off in that way!)

But He went even one step further—after He died, Jesus was raised from the dead. But He did not come back and punish His disciples who misunderstood and deserted Him. He did not come back and destroy the soldiers who crucified Him. When Jesus appeared to individuals or groups after His resurrection, His first words were always “Do not be afraid” or “Peace be with you.”

Jesus, in His death and resurrection, revealed a loving and forgiving God who invites us to live and relate to God in peace, not fear. This invitation is not only for people who construct Spirit Houses for evil spirits but also for those of us who have been following Jesus for decades. The Easter story is a timeless call to release our fear and our efforts to “please” God and to embrace the peace that comes from the God who freely loves and forgives us. Happy Easter!
HEAR IT
Read the story aloud to your family. Then, if helpful, read the following verses about the death and resurrection of Jesus:
Luke 23:32-34
John 20:26-29

DO IT
Consider looking at some photos of Spirit Houses online. Notice the offerings given. Lead your family in a discussion to discover if anyone feels afraid of God or feels like he needs to earn God’s favor. Talk about how the Easter story paints a different picture of God.

Then, spend some time in prayer asking God to help you trust His love and experience His peace in a deeper way this Easter.
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)

I will live what I believe Every single day And I will show the world His love Every single day Jesus Christ He died for me Then He rose Gave me life And He set me free So I will live what I believe Every single day

Get the audio recording of this song at bit.ly/apriltottimerhyme2019

written by Keri Larson
Keri Larson is a studio-session singer in Los Angeles, CA. She is the co-creator and co-producer of The Black & White Sessions, a YouTube channel project that launched in April 2015. She lives in Costa Mesa, CA, with her husband, Tommy, and her two children, James and Mazie.

sung by Keri and Mazie Larson
Mazie is five years old and enjoys attending transitional kindergarten. She loves singing, dancing, and hugs! She lives in Orange County, CA, with her parents and brother, James.
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.

Growing up, I had a legalistic view of who God was and questioned His love for me. I struggled with my faith and questioned my value most of my youth. Where did I fit into His story? Was I even a part of it? After my freshman year in high school, my family moved to another state and I was able to “reboot” my life and who I was. My English teacher and neighbor began to mentor and mold me without me realizing it. She was the wife of a church elder and the epitome of who Christ had called her to be. Her tender heart toward me, encouraging words, and affirmations helped me to see the person God had called me to be. I watched her study the Bible, lead classes for divorced women, support her husband, and love her children so unconditionally that I wished I was part of her family. Jesus’ love for her was reflected to me, and that love changed me forever.

God’s love for us is never-ending and unyielding. We get the privilege of modeling that fierce love to our own children and to others around us. God demonstrated the ultimate sacrifice of love when He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Jesus laid down His life so we could be in relationship with the Father and reflect His love to others by meeting them where they are—no matter their messiness or struggles.

Let us, as parents, take our cues from our heavenly Father to best model for our own children what it means to be loved, valued, and supported just as we are.

BLESS
(Child’s name), may you know that your heavenly Father delights in you and wants a relationship with you. He desires to show you how to love one another as He loves you. Always remember that Jesus modeled perfect love when He laid down His life for you. May you allow His light to shine through you for all the world to see.

by Elena Reever

Elena provides the creative elements for the Elementary Department at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. After 12 years in the automotive financial industry, Elena chose to stay home to take on the important role of “Mom.” Elena believes in serving where her children are to be able to reinforce the lessons taught during children’s ministry, watch her children respond to what God is telling them, and show them the value of serving at church.
Bethesda provides people with intellectual and developmental disabilities homes, careers, education, and faith resources to live full and empowered lives.

Have you ever wondered about the lives of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities? Perhaps you know someone with a disability or have one yourself! Today people with disabilities have many options. But it wasn’t always that way.

Throughout history, people with disabilities have been set apart for many reasons. Often, it’s because of preconceived notions or because their needs for help and support are unique.

Bethesda’s heart as a Christian organization is to provide residential, educational, employment, and faith support services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We do this through services that share the good news of Jesus Christ.

We often think of the biblical story of the four friends offering help and support to the paralyzed man by lowering him through the roof to get to Jesus. We desire to do the same thing!

Over 100 years ago in Wisconsin a family opened their home to children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The family’s mission was to provide support from trained Christian caregivers and nurses when the children’s parents could not provide that care. What started with just six children grew over the years to support over 2,000 people in 13 states today.

The type of care and support has changed dramatically since the beginning. As Bethesda has grown, we now support each individual to be all God created him or her to be! Psalm 139:13–16 tells us that God created every person to be unique and loves each of us as we are. He knits us together in our mothers’ wombs! Our mission values every individual and the gifts God has entrusted each and every person with.

What began as an individual Christian care ministry has also changed over the years to encourage and assist churches to include people of all abilities in their congregations. Our desire is to see each individual learn about the saving love of Jesus, share in the fellowship with others, and serve as only they can—uniquely as God designed them.

In the past, children with disabilities did not get to go to school. Public schools did not have to include them. But in 1975, a law passed stating children who needed special support to learn were entitled to an education—and special education was born. It too has changed over the decades, and now students can learn and plan for their future alongside their typical peers.

The opportunity to receive an education for those with disabilities led to a desire to also equip them for job skills and employment after high school. Today many special college programs exist across the country such as Think College. Individuals with disabilities can also receive job coaching to help them secure and keep a job.

Even young people can make a big difference! Look up and read about Rosa’s Law for an inspiring story of a group of siblings who banded together to help pass a law that removed the word retarded from public and government documents, replacing it with more respectful language. As these siblings used their power of advocacy, they helped bring dignity and respect to everyone.

Today many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities live independent lives—they work, go to church, marry, and have children. Bethesda continues to provide support for living, working, attending college, and finding a church of their choice. We exist to help you and your church family welcome and create a place of belonging for all God’s people.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION:
BETHESDALC.ORG
Awakening a compassionate heart and a global mind-set in children for people beyond the boundaries of their own neighborhoods.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS ...

BERMUDA

Bermuda is a British Overseas Territory in the North Atlantic Ocean. It is approximately 665 miles east-southeast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and 768 miles south of Cape Sable Island, Nova Scotia, and 1,093 miles northeast of Cuba.
If you lived in Bermuda, you might eat fish chowder. This tasty soup is considered a national dish and is a staple food not only in restaurants and hotels but also in homes. Fish is one of the main ingredients in Bermudian cuisine. Local fish include mahi mahi, snapper, spiny lobster, tuna, and wahoo.

On Good Friday, the locals celebrate by flying homemade kites and eating codfish cakes and hot cross buns.

DID YOU KNOW?

• The Bermuda Triangle is a treacherous expanse where many ships and planes have allegedly disappeared under extraordinary circumstances.

• Bermuda’s sand is pink! Tiny organisms with red skeletons grow on the underside of the reef. As the skeletons break down and wash up on the beach, they form pink sand.

• The wildlife in Bermuda includes the tiny, whistling tree frog, which is heard singing at night.

EASTER CELEBRATIONS IN BERMUDA

ON GOOD FRIDAY, THE LOCALS CELEBRATE BY FLYING HOMEMADE KITES AND EATING CODFISH CAKES AND HOT CROSS BUNS.

The tradition is said to have begun when a local teacher from the British Army had difficulty explaining Christ’s ascension to heaven to his Sunday school class. He made a kite, traditionally shaped like a cross, to illustrate the ascension.

A hot cross bun is a spiced sweet bun made with currants or raisins, marked with a cross on the top, and traditionally eaten on Good Friday in Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and some parts of the Americas.

A codfish cake is a delicious food made with fresh cod fillets, potatoes, bread crumbs, parsley, Parmesan, garlic, and egg.
I remember the first time my son was invited to a play date at a friend’s house. It sounded fun! So why was I uneasy? I wanted to keep my kids safely in my care. I wanted to guide them and protect them!

The reality is, my son knew how to make good choices. I knew that! I taught him to be a good friend. I modeled it in my own friendships. He knew to listen, to share, to forgive. He had manners and, more importantly, he had a good sense of knowing right from wrong. However, over time, I found there was a missing piece to how I had equipped him. I discovered it through a situation in my neighborhood.

“While you guys were gone, the neighborhood boys were playing and one of them pulled up pornographic images and showed them to everyone,” my neighbor said. “My son was there, and he didn’t know what to do, so he began pacing around while the images flipped on the screen. I know your son wasn’t there, but I wanted you to know since it could happen again.” I was stunned. These boys were eight and nine years old. My heart sank for them, and yet I was thankful we had happened to be out of town that day. But one phrase kept circling in my head: “He didn’t know what to do.”

So often we are good at equipping our kids to know right from wrong and giving them a strong moral compass. We even share the “why” behind the reasoning. So, in the end, many kids want to be obedient. They desire to make good choices. However, when they’re actually IN the situation, they don’t know HOW. How do I get out of this situation? How do I not look at that image? How do I leave?

My husband and I sat down with our son. We shared what had happened in our neighborhood. We talked about how he will be faced with hard situations at school, at a neighbor’s house, maybe even at church. You never know what someone is going to say, want to do, want you to do, want you to look at. So, we did some role play. We practiced what it might look like for someone to want to show an image to him on a phone. We practiced his responses and equipped him with ideas. (Which started with not even looking at someone’s phone before asking what’s on the screen.) We then discussed how to get out of uncomfortable situations. Did you know the bathroom can be your best friend? “Oh man, I gotta pee!” It gets you out of the room, into a room by yourself, and gives you a moment to think about how to handle the situation. We also created a “safe word/phrase” that he could call us with if he wanted to be picked up.

When this began, our son didn’t have a cell phone, so if he was at a friend’s house, he would have to ask to borrow a phone. We had a hamster named Percy, so we decided if he wanted to be picked up—for any reason—and didn’t feel comfortable saying it out loud in front of his friends, all he had to do was call and say, “Hey, Mom. I forgot to feed Percy! Can you feed him?” And I would know that he needed to be picked up immediately. As he got older and got a cell phone, it became easier since he could quietly text us. These tools proved so helpful to my son in the coming weeks, months, and years as he then became equipped on not just which choices to make but, practically speaking, how to make them.

Maybe you have modeled all the right behavior. You have taught right from wrong. Appropriate from inappropriate. Sometimes the missing link between the head, heart, and body (action) is the practical. The how. The role play and practicing and safe words. Will our kids be perfect? Never. Will we offer love and grace when they fail? Absolutely. But let’s bless them by equipping them the best we can. We are all in it together!

by Deanna Ramsay

Deanna is a speaker, worship leader, and blogger. She is also a wife of 18 years, a mom to four children, and a lover of chai lattes. Deanna has recorded on over 50 different albums and commercial jingles and has performed everywhere from the Rose Bowl to NATO headquarters in Belgium. Deanna lives in Rancho Cucamonga, CA, where her husband, Jon, is a pastor at Hillside Community Church. They have a passion for their local community and local church and seeing people experience a transformational relationship with their Creator God.
Toward the end of my senior year in college, I was knee-deep in an assigned project I had been working on for more than a year. I had written hundreds of pages of content, and, as I was working on the last few, my computer completely crashed. The kind of crash where you start crying, sweating, and feeling like the rapture may be happening. Okay, that’s a little bit dramatic, but you can imagine my fear! Then, I remembered the safety and comfort of the Microsoft Store—the computer doctors who would surely fix everything!

I walked in, eager to get the problem fixed. As I checked in, the woman behind the counter pulled out her Microsoft phone, and I quickly noticed her frustration. Ten minutes later, the woman was slapping her phone on her leg, raging with anger, and actually talking to the phone because it was not working and going too slowly for her. A little bit scared, I waited patiently when she told me she would be right back. As she turned around, I read the back of her uniform shirt: “Ask me how much I LOVE my Microsoft phone!” My mouth physically dropped open. Her actions and her shirt were completely incongruous.

This incident made me wonder: What is written on my shirt of life? What do I desire my life to portray, and am I putting on display the truth I say I believe?

In the beginning, God made us to be like Him. Although sin distorted that perfect image, through the death and resurrection of Jesus we can live free and alive! We can walk in the same purpose God had for us in the beginning—to be like Him—so others can experience life in Christ. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are called to be a visible picture of an invisible God. A friend of mine always reminds me to think of it this way: if someone were to follow you around for a week, and you were the only picture of Jesus they got, is that the Jesus you would want people to see?

Parents, what shirt are you wearing in front of your high schooler? As the primary model of Jesus for your almost-adult, my challenge for you is to walk in the freedom that comes from the resurrection. Give yourself grace when you make mistakes trusting that God has already given it to you. Cling so tightly to Jesus as your vine that you can’t help but look like Him as a result. Consider starting your day studying John 15. When your kids look at you, they have the opportunity to see Jesus. I wonder what characteristic of Him He may be calling you to model today. Commit to wearing shirts that scream who Jesus is—He wants to use you!

by Haley Downey

Haley is the Student Ministry Pastor at Arbor Road Church, Long Beach, CA. She is passionate about building community and adventuring alongside junior high students as they discover who God is and the gifts they’ve been given to make His name great.

@haleydowney
I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.
“Hi, my name is Jessica. Are you calling to give a compliment or a complaint?”

My husband responded, “I’m calling to give a compliment.”

There was a long pause. “I’m sorry, I think I may have misheard you. Did you say you’re calling to give a compliment?”

“Yes, you heard me correctly. I’d love to compliment one of your truck drivers. I’ve been driving behind him and noticed a ‘How’s-My-Driving?’ sign and a 1-800 number so I spent the next few minutes mentally noting everything he was doing right.”

Jessica couldn’t believe it. She immediately got a case of the giggles. After 10 years on the job receiving eight hours a day of back-to-back-to-back complaints about her drivers, this call was literally the very first compliment call she had ever received.

In her amusement she prodded him, “Please go on …”

My husband spoke up, “Well, he was doing a fantastic job staying in between the lines.”

She was now laughing hysterically. “Please tell me more, sir. What else did he do right?”

My husband began getting more creative while still remaining truthful. “Your driver maintained an adequate distance between his vehicle and the vehicle in front of him.” He continued, “Your driver also made multiple lane changes and used his turn indicator every … single … time.”

Screaming with laughter, she requested, “Please say that lane change one again!”

She wanted to make sure she jotted down each word so she could accurately share the story at the next lunch break without missing a single, hilariously simple detail with the other customer-service employees who were likely wearied from constant complaints.

Before my husband continued, we overheard her boasting to her coworkers in nearby cubicles. “Hey, everyone, you’ll never guess what I have on the line—a compliment!” Her coworkers were as shocked as she was.
Since witnessing my husband’s pastime of complimenting truck drivers, I’ve begun seeking to find the best in other areas of life. It’s amazing what a compliment can do!

Often, what we seek dictates what we find. If we’re not careful, we’ll fall into the all-too-familiar trap of finding and focusing on what people do wrong. No wonder it took 10 years for Jessica to hear a compliment; people are prone to critique. Not only is this true while driving, it’s urgent because it’s also true in our parenting.

If we seek perfection in our children, we’ll find all the ways they fall short. But a different focus is possible! Rather than falling prey to human nature by seeking perfection, we can seek to find the people our children are becoming. Our kids need parents who see Christ in them.

Gladly, we’re not without a model. Jesus, the one we seek to become like, not only saw the best in people, He saw who they were becoming before they had arrived. From choosing unqualified disciples, to sharing meals with sinners, to forgiving a thief on the cross, Jesus found opportune moments to call out who people were becoming.

“Let’s vocalize the little wins. And, as we do, we’ll be reminding them that we not only see their mistakes, we are seeking and finding who God is shaping them to become. This will serve as a model for how they see themselves in the future.”

We, too, can make a habit of seeking and finding the best in our kids by pointing out the seemingly small yet incredibly significant moments when they get things right. Not only does it impact them in that moment, it will impact their future habits as well. By pointing out what our kids do right, we’re modeling a countercultural lifestyle. How do I know? Because it took 10 years for Jessica to receive a compliment.

Over the past few months, I’ve made seeking the best in people, especially my family, a conscious habit. And, my friends, let me tell you, we have to be intentional to do this. If we’re not intentional, we’ll drift toward a critical life—critiquing terrible drivers and complaining about frustrating people. I don’t want my kids to live this way, and, as their model, it starts with me. Thankfully, intentionally seeking and finding the best in my boys has become one of my greatest delights—and, as a result, they’re getting to see the best in me.

Let’s vocalize the little wins. And, as we do, we’ll be reminding them that we not only see their mistakes, we are seeking and finding who God is shaping them to become. This will serve as a model for how they see themselves in the future.

Make a habit of finding the best in people today. May every “1-800-How’s My Driving?” sign be a reminder of the invitation to seek, find, and enjoy pointing out the best in your family. Let’s make complimenting a constant as we seek to find in them what Jesus has found in us—the best version of ourselves.

by Megan Fate Marshman

Megan loves God and delights in overflowing His abounding love to others. She leads the Women’s Ministry at Hume Lake Christian Camps in Hume, CA, shepherds young adults at Arbor Road Church in Long Beach, CA, and shares Jesus around the world. She recently released her second book entitled SelfLess which will leave you thinking less ABOUT yourself, and more OF yourself at the very same time. Megan currently lives in Long Beach with her husband and two sons.
In 1990 Robertson McQuilkin, president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary at the time, resigned to take full-time care of his wife, Muriel, who was struggling physically and eventually contracted Alzheimer’s disease. He was at the height of his spiritual leadership and teaching career—several years short of his retirement.

Some friends encouraged Robertson to put Muriel into the care of a professional institution. He refused. She was terrified when he wasn’t with her, so he vowed never to leave her.

For 13 years he stayed by her side until she passed away in 2003. When asked how he could sacrifice the crucial role he’d played in a major theological university he replied, “When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity” (Christianity Today, Feb. 1, 2004). He spoke humbly of his choice, but his action was actually heroic.

When Jesus described genuine love to His disciples in John 15:13, He spoke of one person laying down his life for another. Even His closest followers had no idea that He was foretelling exactly what He would do a very short time later. Jesus was painting a picture of ultimate sacrifice, one life given in place of another.

Other than those who serve in the military or as first responders, few of us will be called upon to actually sacrifice our lives for others. But we may be faced with a decision similar to McQuilkin’s: submitting our own preferences to benefit another person. It’s a sign of true love.

In 1 Corinthians 16:13, the apostle Paul described an attitude that we fathers, and grandfathers, would do well to model: “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.” Those words appeal to our masculine nature and we aspire to each of them. We want to be vigilant. We hope and pray we will be faithful. In the face of fear we lean on courage to compel us to action. And certainly we long to be strong; we’ll avoid appearing weak at almost any cost.
Those qualities serve us well particularly when we find ourselves in a competitive environment such as sports or the workplace. They sound masculine. We may not do all of them well, but we sure want to.

And then we stumble across verse 14: “Do everything in love.” Wait ... what? What does love have to do with strength, courage, and standing firm? Everything.

Having grabbed our attention, Paul turns the message upside down and inside out. The direction of love is always outward—it’s always other-centered. If we’re honest we have to admit our attitude is consistently inward—our well-being, our security, our success. We are often tempted to be self-centered, to believe life is primarily about us. Paul is telling us to do the opposite.

This transition, moving from a self-centered perspective of life to an other-centered focus is the primary distinguishing factor that sets apart real men from selfish men. It is the distinguishing quality that separates self-absorbed fathers from life-giving fathers.

The self-absorbed father is on guard; he looks out for himself. He may waver when others desperately need him to stand firm. His courage and strength are sometimes only skin-deep. In the face of fear, he intimidates, powers up, or shrinks back and disappears.

The other-centered, life-giving father is on guard on behalf of his family. He stands firmly on what he believes, and for whom he loves. He courageously acts in the face of fear in order to defend others, and he uses his strength in a gentle, humble way for the protection of his family.

Be on your guard.
Stand firm in the faith.
Be men of courage; be strong.
Do everything, everything, everything in love.

This was Paul’s charge to the church in Corinth, and to us. It’s not an impossible to-do list, though we are aware how often we fall short of living this way. I believe God has written these qualities on every father’s heart; He built these characteristics into you. Bring them up from your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And where you fall short, God is there.

When faced with the greatest challenge of his life, Robertson McQuilkin said “the decision was firm.” His decision was to lay down his life for his wife—he submitted his own preferences to her needs. Jesus said there is no greater act of love. It’s literally heroic.

by Craig Glass

Craig has served as vice president of ministries at International Teams, pastor to men at Willow Creek Community Church, and national director of field ministries at International Students Incorporated. He is the founder and president of Peregrine Ministries with the mission to guide and inspire men on their life journey. He is the author of the Passage to Manhood Field Guide and Noble Journey: The Quest for a Lasting Legacy. Craig and Beryl were married in 1976, have three children and five granddaughters, and live in Monument, CO. In his free time Craig enjoys biking, golf, fly-fishing, and competitive swimming.

“When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity.” (Christianity Today, Feb. 1, 2004).
As a parent you are the first role model for your children. When they’re younger they will look to you to know how to become kind, respectful, and generous and how to love others. As your children grow, they will come to you for advice on things such as time management, finances, and making good decisions. From the moment you become a parent, someone is watching you to learn what it means to live in God-given identity. No pressure, right?

We live in a world where false identities constantly barrage us—through social media, our friends, our family, and even ourselves. It’s easy to feel “blown and tossed by the wind” as we chase after this role or that thing to fulfill our deep needs for meaning and satisfaction (James 1:6).

How do we ground ourselves? The best way I know to combat false identity is to fill my heart with God’s Word and let His voice be louder than anyone else’s. When I still myself and allow the Creator to tell me who He’s made me to be, I naturally begin to live differently. Things that once hindered me and made me insecure lose power as I remind myself daily of my true identity: I am loved, protected, and known by the one true God.

As a parent, when you make space to hear your heavenly Father speak identity over you, you begin to overflow with truth and model to your children who God says you are—and tell them who they are from a place of integrity!

On the following page you will find an easy and fun illustration to help you communicate this truth to your children.
WHAT YOU’LL NEED
• water
• tall, clear vase
• waterproof tray
• ping-pong balls
• permanent marker

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. Together as a family, talk about some false identities or labels the world or people around you may offer (your worth comes from being the best, having money, being beautiful, being smart, etc. If you aren’t, the world may offer labels like dumb, ugly, weak, not good enough. You may then tell yourself you are worthless, unseen, unlovable).

2. Have each member of your family write a false identity he struggles with on a ping-pong ball. If your children are young, you can have them color the balls black and talk about lies the enemy may want people to believe.

3. Remind your children that our true identity comes from our Creator—God. It is very important to read His Word to find out who He says we are.

4. Put the vase on the tray and place the ping-pong balls in the vase; explain that the vase represents our hearts.

5. Begin to fill the vase up with water.

6. Tell your children, “When we read God’s Word it fills up our hearts with truth.”

7. Fill the vase up so the false identities (ping-pong balls) begin to fall out.

8. Explain to your children that when our hearts are full of our God-given identity there’s no room for false identities.

9. Remind them that we are human so we can forget who God says we are and believe something different even after we claim our identity in Christ. Put one of the ping-pong balls (false identities) on top of the water in the vase. Tell your children that since we’ve engraved who our heavenly Father says we are in our hearts, identities that aren’t congruent can only rest on the surface temporarily—until we remember or read more of God’s truth about us.

10. When we remember who God says we are and live in that confidence, others will see Christ in our lives.

by Rayshawne Hayes
Rayshawne is the Friday Night Elementary Coordinator at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. He is a Colorado native and loves spending time with his family, hiking, swimming, and going to coffee shops. Rayshawne was called to minister to elementary students after a mission trip to Tijuana, Mexico. He loves pouring into the next generation and empowering children of any age to own their faith.
Years ago, we found ourselves struggling with parenting our two kids (okay, let's be honest, the struggle has continued). So we decided to attend an eight-week parenting class and learned all about technology boundaries, discipline techniques, and how to engage with our children on a deeper level. While all of those were incredible, our number one takeaway was that the best thing we can do as parents is to model the behaviors we want our children to have using our daily interactions with each other.

Through our communication, we model how powerful words are. Through our laughter, we teach our children to enjoy the things God has created and share those experiences with someone you love. Through our arguments, we model what taking responsibility looks like. We hope our children are listening to what we say, but the truth is, they are learning from what we do!

Many parents are concerned about whether they will successfully pass down their faith to their children. Your marriage is your greatest opportunity to model the gospel. Follow the logic: if you love Jesus, who made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross as a demonstration of His love for you, and who has invited you to take the same journey with Him, then marriage becomes the perfect place to live out sacrificial love for your spouse. Easy to say—really, really tough to live out. Can we get an amen?!

Here are eight specific ways to use your marriage as a way to model the gospel to your children and even beyond them to a broken-hearted world watching how we love. We’ve also included some connecting questions for you and your spouse to talk through sometime this month.

8 Ways Your Marriage Can Model the Gospel

by Casey and Meygan Caston

Casey and Meygan are the cofounders of Marriage365, a nonprofit committed to building resources to help couples connect more deeply. Their most recent book series features 365 Connecting Questions couples can use to build a stronger marriage. Their newest in the series is perfect for parents looking to engage in more meaningful conversations with their children.

marriage365.org
1. Focus on each other's strengths. God created both of you with unique talents, personality traits, and spiritual gifts. Naturally, we tend to fixate on the negative of our spouse, which can cause disconnection. Instead, show grace and point out positive qualities in front of your children. Tell your spouse how proud you are of his/her accomplishments and affirm the good you see.

   Connecting Question: What is one thing you love about my personality?

2. Listen without interrupting. We are two opinionated extroverts who have a lot to say about most topics. We can easily talk over each other during conversations. We often find ourselves listening to respond rather than listening to understand each other. Leaning in and really listening with empathy shows your spouse you care about what he/she has to say, and, of course, your children are watching how you interact with each other and will learn the valuable lesson of waiting their turn.

   Connecting Question: What is one thing I can do or say that will make you feel like I am actively listening to you?

3. Be a learner. The healthiest marriages are made up of two people who recognize there is always room for improvement. These spouses actively find resources that help them become better versions of themselves. Sadly, too many people allow pride or laziness to cloud their own self-perception. The book of Proverbs has quite a few warnings against staying stagnant, and that’s certainly not what we want to model for our kids.

   Connecting Question: What is one thing we can do as a couple to help us grow in our self-awareness?

4. Open up. Being transparent with your spouse can unlock the shame and anxiety you both can carry. Knowing that you’re not alone and that you can be imperfect while still being loved and accepted is exactly why we follow Jesus! When you share openly with your spouse, you model for your children that they can have a safe place to open up and be authentic.

   Connecting Question: What is something I have done that has made you feel loved and accepted?

5. Have fun together. Marriage should be fun. Your kids should see that your love for each other brings joy and laughter. We are intentional to play board games in front of the kids, have random dance parties in our living room, and schedule adventures to the beach. Find a local adventure, bring your kids along, and remember to find joy in being together.

   Connecting Question: What is something we can do together as a couple?

6. Apologize to one another. We all make mistakes, but successful couples know how to apologize in a way that takes ownership, acknowledges the hurt, and finds solutions that move the relationship in the right direction. Rather than blaming circumstances or your spouse, apologize to each other in front of your children to show that it’s okay to make mistakes and that being responsible and accountable for your actions is most important.

   Connecting Question: Do you think we do a good job of apologizing for our mistakes in front of the children? Why or why not?

7. Be affectionate. We’re not telling you to have make-out sessions in front of your children, but we do want to encourage you to be tender with your spouse. Holding hands, bear hugs, and gentle back rubs here and there communicate to your spouse that you are present and care about his/her needs and feelings. Create a warm and affectionate environment so your children grow up with higher self-esteem and security.

   Connecting Question: What are some ways you would like me to be affectionate toward you?

8. Ask open-ended questions. Did you know the number one way to build emotional connection and intimacy with your spouse is to ask open-ended questions? Did you also know the Gospels record Jesus asking 307 questions? Apparently asking questions was a central part of His life and teaching. Think about it: A question can show desire, curiosity, and concern for another person. It gives us an opportunity to show up emotionally, listen with empathy, and learn new things about each other.

   Connecting Question: What can we do to make sure we’re having enough heart-to-heart conversations as a couple?
What’s in a Name?

I’ve always been fascinated by the labels my grandchildren give others. A label is one way to sum up a person quickly and create a word picture. My granddaughter of 16 may state, “That girl at school is such a snob.” Of course, I gather the girl is either really popular and does not run in the same circles as my granddaughter or perhaps she is shy and withdrawn. It becomes more interesting and even humorous when the label applies to other family members.

I’ve heard Grandma P is a good baker and Grandpa P is all about sports, Maw-Maw loves to shop, Gigi talks about everyone, and Paw-Paw is great at math. Although I know each of these people is deeper than the child’s label, I also know that children honestly assess what they see modeled to them in everyday life.

As Christian parents and grandparents, it is our privilege to point our children and grandchildren to the perfect role model: Jesus. When I became a grandparent, I felt the Holy Spirit prompting me to start something I called Grandma’s Boot Camp. This was a way for me to connect with my grandchildren for two weeks each summer. I had no idea what the Lord had in mind, but I was faithful through the potty training, the tears, and even my own cancer walk. Ice cream in unlimited supply was a winner.

God allowed me to reach out to each child in his or her need. I have tried to show them all I could about Jesus and how loved each child is. God has blessed me now with the tenth year of Boot Camp, and it has been a wonderful opportunity to point children to Jesus—children from broken homes and from godly homes.

So, you may wonder, when the children were passing out labels, what label did they give me? Well, one day I was cleaning up around the house and one of my granddaughters came to the house. She was beaming with delight and hardly able to contain herself. She had a wrapped gift in her hand as she extended it to me with joy. I asked her what the occasion was, and she replied that her dad had taken her to the thrift store and allowed her to purchase something. She chose to purchase me a gift! I opened the gift and inside was a metallic painted plastic cross. She gazed at me and said, “This is for my God Grandma.” That is a label I will cherish forever.

by Lori Layne

Lori is a juvenile fiction author, pilot, and God-loving adventurer. Lori enjoys sharing her love of Christ through Pilots for Christ, an aviation ministry that shares the good news of Jesus Christ while helping those in need. Lori is married to Timothy, and they have six adult children and 12 grandchildren. Lori is also a stage four cancer survivor and by the grace of God is still serving Him.

pilotsforchrist.org
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. **Love & Respect**

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

   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.

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. **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.

5. **Out of the Comfort Zone**

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

“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.

“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.

“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.

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

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

Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today’s Families
BY MICHELLE ANTHONY
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This Easter, arm your kids with *The Action Bible* of their choice. With full-color illustrations, kids go from just reading the Bible to experiencing it. Help them adventure through timeless truth and experience God's Word as alive and active!

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