“WHEN I GET OFF TRACK, GOD OFFERS ME A PATH OF HEALING.”
USE THIS GUIDE TO GET FAMILY TIME STARTED.
IT’S AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3 …

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

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

3. Remember to HAVE FUN! Strive to make each gathering unique to your own family as you enjoy spending time with God and one another.
We believe that the Holy Spirit is God’s chosen teacher. It is He who causes spiritual growth and formation when and as He chooses. As such, we have articulated 10 distinct environments to create in your home. We desire to create spiritual space, which we refer to as an environment, in which God’s Spirit can move freely.

A NOTE FROM MICHELLE

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

Most people probably think this sounds like a painful process. And it can be! When we find ourselves “off course” in life, sometimes just the realization that we’re wrong can be painful. Sometimes the consequences of our decisions can be painful. However, God has a way of using our mistakes and missteps to make us beautiful and powerful examples of His love. We pray your family will experience the healing and restoration God brings to His children.

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

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.

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.
When we think of the environment of COURSE CORRECTION we oftentimes focus on the negative aspect: a season of pain. We forget that this environment has three parts. Yes, it does include a season of pain, but it also incorporates building another up in love and creating a vision of a corrected path with the purpose of healing at its core. This month, our team focused on the second part of COURSE CORRECTION—building another up in love.

GOD’S WORD (page 28) shares the story of a woman caught in an act of sin. The religious leaders were ready to stone her for her actions, yet Jesus did not stand against her with her accusers but rather reminded them of their own sin. One by one, the accusers left, and Jesus literally sent this woman down a corrected path.

Jesus’ act of love is a perfect example of unmerited grace and shows us how we can disciple and discipline our own children.

In our EVERYDAY DAD BLOG (page 42) Pastor Brady Boyd reminds us of the heart of spiritual parenting. “Discipleship, teaching, and training should always begin at home and be reinforced at church.” CREATE (page 20) will be a fun family project that makes the statement that your home is a place where loving-kindness can grow and flourish!

STORYTELLING (page 18) is a special one for me personally this month. The author, Kathryn O’Brien, taught my own son’s second grade class over 25 years ago. When she shared her idea for the story I knew the main character needed to have my son’s name—Kyle. Kathryn was most definitely a teacher who built my son up in love and always looked for the good, exactly like the principal in this story! Although SPIRITUAL GRANDPARENTING (page 48) was written to grandparents, it is great advice for everyone. We all should be aware of our praise-to-criticism ratio and decide if we want to be our children and grandchildren’s critics or coaches.

We hope this issue of HomeFront will help you discover new and creative ways to build others up in love. Our prayer this month is that we will all choose to practice what our FAMILY TIME VERSE (page 5) encourages: “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).

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.
debbie@homefrontmag.com

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.
Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

HEBREWS 10:24
CONTENTS

FAMILY TIME

5 FAMILY VERSE
Hebrews 10:24

8 CAPTURING THE SEASON
14 Days of God’s Love

10 WORSHIP
Taking a Supportive Role

12 CONVERSATION STARTERS
Praise and Correct

14 TRADITIONS
Love Always Cards

16 PRAYER
Whatever Is True, Whatever Is Lovely
14 Days of God’s Love

Love is in the air during February! As followers of Christ, we know there is no greater love than the love of God. Scripture overflows with verses that tell us about this incomprehensible love. When we read God’s Word, we begin to glimpse His steadfast and unchanging love. It comforts us. God crowned His love by sending His one and only Son, Jesus, and His love compels us to love one another and even our enemies.

As a family, open one envelope each day from this countdown for the first 14 days of February. Inside you will find a beautiful message of God’s love right from His Word. Read the Scriptures together and talk about all the ways God shows His love to each of you as individuals and together as a family.

What You’ll Need

- open frame
- chicken wire
- wire cutters
- staple gun
- 16 small envelopes
- 14 verses found at bit.ly/HFFeb14Verses
- scissors
- red paper
- glue stick
- small number stickers
- small clothespins

What You’ll Do

1. Using the wire cutters, cut the chicken wire to fit the inside of the frame.
2. Staple the wire to the back of the frame.
3. Download and print out 14 verses.
4. Cut each verse out and place one in each envelope.
5. Use the red paper to create hearts or other decorations, then glue them to the envelopes.
6. Use the small number stickers to number the envelopes. Then hang the envelopes on the chicken wire using the clothespins.
Have you ever considered the movie of your life? If the “Story of You” appeared on the big screen, or if the weekly reality-show audience tuned in to watch, what would the pivotal moments hinge upon? Who would be the hero? After the ending credits, who would be standing up to receive the award for best actor or actress, and who would be in the supporting role?

Whom would people worship after watching the story of your life?

It’s a humbling thought, isn’t it? At the moment when the music hits a climax, the action quickens and yet goes into slow motion—whom is the camera focused on? Our environment this month says, “When I get off track, God offers me a path of healing.” The crux of that statement is not that we make a right choice but that God offers healing. This is not because of who we are but because of who He is. In this movie, I’m the one the audience is calling out to through the screen, “DON’T DO IT!” God is the one giving me the second chance, offering the path of healing. It is His people, made in His image, with His Holy Spirit living in them, spurring me on. It is Christ’s righteousness covering my sins.

In this movie, God is worshipped. He wins the award.

As we worship together as a family and consider this environment of course correction, it is important to emphasize the character of God in His Word lest our kids develop an inaccurate view of God and His discipline. It is also important that we see our supporting role in course correction as we live as a family. When we see our proper role in course correction, shame diminishes as we reflect the image of God to our friends and family.

What if, in our moments of getting off track, we worshipped? What if, when we know our family members are struggling with something, we told them who God is, and it moved them to continual surrender? Our verse this month is “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). Cheering on our family members is a good thing—spurring them on toward love and good deeds means continually pointing to God as He offers healing so that even when our
voices are not there, God is the hero. Our act of spurring one another on can be an act of worship.

This month, worship as a family by pointing out who God is and how you see His character in those closest to you as they surrender to His path of healing. Have each person in your family write down a true story of something she is struggling with right now. Pray together to surrender that struggle to God. As a family, discuss the question: “Because God offers a path of healing, how can we each respond? What would it look like for the Holy Spirit to guide us on this path?”

By reframing the situation and ascribing all glory to God, we make Him the hero, and though He doesn’t need the award, we surrender our temptation to take control. When we spur one another on in His name, rebuking shame and taking the supporting role, we can worship God as we journey the path of healing He offers us.

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.
This verse may ring familiar in the ears of many a Christian. The writer of Hebrews chose these words carefully—not one is wasted or misused. This, the 24th verse of the 10th chapter of Hebrews, is purposeful. So, one may ask, what is its purpose and how is it applicable to our lives today? Let’s look at the context of the verse. Hebrews 10:23 states, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” The promise of the hope found in Christ gives direction for the verse that follows. God’s faithfulness empowers us to “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

The context is beautiful, the phrasing is purposeful, but I am sure many of us would agree that the application is not so easily lived out. Speaking life over someone can be difficult, especially when that person is being difficult. It is much easier to tear down than it is to build up. Though that may be the case, it is imperative that we consciously choose to live out Hebrews 10:24.

My brother-in-law is an excellent martial artist, and during his years of training he learned many important techniques. But when we discuss the most useful aspect of his training he consistently refers to his coach’s ideology of encouragement. She, a two-time Olympian and seventh-degree black belt, lived by the practice of praising her students, then correcting a wrong that had been committed, and following that correction up with another praise. Praise-correct-praise. This rhythm is the lived-out version of Hebrews 10:24. When done in love it exemplifies the context of the hope-filled, faithful life of a Christian to the believer and nonbeliever alike. In light of these verses let’s think about how we can consider a praise-correct-praise course of action.

GET YOUR FAMILY TALKING …

• Describe a time when you were corrected for doing something you should not have done. How did that make you feel?
• What would happen if no one ever corrected anyone else?
• How does God lovingly correct His people? What would happen if He did not correct those He loves?
• How is correction a loving act?
• Act out or talk about a scene in which a wrong has been committed and the praise-correct-praise method is enacted.

by Mary Grace Windebank

Mary Grace Windebank is the ministry coordinator and an elementary teacher at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. After graduating from Taylor University with a bachelor’s degree in media communication, Mary is continuing her education by pursuing a master’s degree in theology. She and her husband, Kyle, live in Colorado Springs.
How do you respond when your world falls apart? If I’m honest, my response is typically to look inward—and I often become consumed with myself until a loving friend or a nudge from God draws me out. But what could our response look like if we chose to do something different?

My friend Marissa chose differently. Her life was falling apart. She was in a terrible season fraught with pain, and a wise voice suggested that she find something she enjoyed. So she decided to start sending cards, which was something she had enjoyed since she was a little girl. She thought that in the midst of her struggle she could send cards to encourage others. It would be a way to spread love and it would help take her eyes off of her own situation.

Marissa started small. She checked which of her friends had birthdays coming up on Facebook, and she messaged them and asked for an address if they wanted a card. Then she would handwrite a card and send it off. She was blown away by the response and amazed to see how excited people got about receiving a handwritten card.

Marissa started with birthday cards back in 2016, and over the last few years this simple expression of love has grown and grown. She has written cards for every occasion as well as written in groups to children with cancer and sent cards to MLB teams. She is now focusing specifically on her community. Marissa works at a store, and for Thanksgiving she got her front-end team involved and together they wrote and gave out 500 cards for customers who came in on Thanksgiving; at Christmas she wrote 100 cards to be given to customers. She also wrote cards to place in the mailboxes of people in her neighborhood. When I talked to Marissa about why she writes these cards, she said, “I want people to know how loved they are and that they have a purpose.” On average, Marissa writes 50 cards a month (although she definitely has seasons where she ends up writing far more). Marissa has developed this into her personal ministry: her sister designs the cards, and then Marissa prays over each one, writes a handwritten message, stuffs the card with glitter, and sends it out.
I love Marissa’s heart. She has embraced Hebrews 10:24. Her love has spurred me to take this tradition and want to follow in her footsteps. What if this month we all decided to send some love? What could it look like to start a new family tradition of sending handwritten letters? This month, have everyone in the family choose one person to send a card to. Spend some time making cards and writing out messages. Like Marissa does, pray over the cards and ask what God might have you write to encourage the person you will send it to and that the recipient would feel God’s love. Just imagine how much love we could spread if we all sent just one card this month! That’s the kind of tradition I want to pass on.

(If you want to learn more about Marissa’s story, see the cards she’s sending, or have her send someone you love a card, visit her website lovealwayscards.com.)

by Krista Heinen

Krista is a pastor who desires to help the next generation understand its place in The Big God Story. She has her BS in elementary education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her MDiv from Bethel Seminary. Krista loves to preach, play board games, and spend time chatting over coffee. She and her husband, Greg, live in Wisconsin.
WHATEVER IS TRUE, 
Whatever Is Lovely

One of the goals of course correction is to train our children’s minds, hearts, bodies, and souls to know and love God. It’s our privilege to introduce our children to the One who created their courses. As parents, we partner with God to reveal His nature to our children and sit in a front-row seat to watch how God has uniquely created each child He entrusts to us. What an honor God has extended to us to be a part of shaping another’s life!

HOW CAN WE “SPUR ONE ANOTHER ON TOWARD LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS” (HEBREWS 10:24) WITHOUT FOCUSING ON OUR LIMITS BUT RATHER DIRECTING OUR ATTENTION TOWARD THE COURSE CREATOR?

We all know that if we are told NOT to think about a pink-and-white-striped elephant sitting on a purple velvet couch, we will immediately have that silly image float through our minds. Because of human nature, this concept also influences how we go about course correction with our children. As soon as we position something “off limits,” the focus narrows down to that off-limits object. It can be a challenge to teach kids that we have been created with God-given limits. Many of our limitations are part of the original design of humanness, not a product of the fall in the garden. We are most alive and can experience the full capacity of our humanness when we embrace our limits and depend on a limitless God. In this sense, course correction should be about reminding our children where they can freely go, be, and do.

How can we “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24) without focusing on our limits but rather directing our attention toward the Course Creator? God gives us the answer in Philippians 4:8:

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.

This month let’s take time in prayer to train our focus away from what we cannot do or be but instead look toward what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Look up the definitions to each of those words with your children and then write ways you see each member of your family demonstrate each word. Then list how you see those qualities in God. Take each list and cut it into strips and place them in a jar, a small gift bag, or a box. Throughout the month pull out those strips and speak them over one another. You may find it helpful to have these words available in moments of course correction with your children; encourage your children with what is true and lovely about their identity and remind them that your desire is for them to live more fully out of that reality.

by Kelli Coltman

Kelli is a mother of three with a passion to eat and share delicious food whenever possible. She is the Director of Nurture—a gathering of moms—and a lay counselor with Life Care Counseling at ROCKHARBOR Church in Costa Mesa, CA.
Kyle sat quietly in the school office waiting for the principal's door to open. He knew what he had done was wrong. It was also against the rules. And besides that, it just wasn't nice. Now he was in trouble.

After a few minutes, the door slowly opened and out stepped Mr. Hall, the school principal. "Hello, Kyle," he said. "Come on in."

Kyle had never seen the inside of Mr. Hall's office. It was big and bright. It had white walls, light blue carpet, and a large wooden desk in the middle. On one side there was a tall shelf filled with books, and on the other, a window covered with colored pictures—artwork from students, Kyle thought.

“So, Kyle, would you like to tell me what happened this morning?” Mr. Hall asked as he sat behind his desk.

Kyle lifted himself onto a brown leather chair. Suddenly his tummy hurt and he felt like crying. "Well ..." he started, "at recess we started playing soccer. Then I saw AJ walking by himself near the swings so I asked him if he wanted to play with us."

“Okay. Go on.”
“AJ came over and we played for a while. Then Harrison fell and hurt his knee. So we stopped the game and a few of us walked him to the nurse’s office.”

“What happened next?”

“When we got back to the field, the whistle blew and it was time to line up. I picked up the ball and brought it to the ball bin.”

Mr. Hall nodded as Kyle blinked away tears and took a deep breath. “Then … we all started running to get a drink. Some of the other kids beat me to the drinking fountain, but I wanted to be first. So … I, uh … sort of … pushed them a little and cut in line.” Kyle looked down at his shoes.

“I see,” Mr. Hall said. “And how do you feel about that now?”

“Sad.” Kyle whispered, brushing a tear from his cheek. “I told the kids I was sorry and that I wouldn’t do it again. And now … I’m in trouble, right?”

“Well,” Mr. Hall said, sitting up in his chair, “let’s see if I have this right. You pushed your way to the front of the line at the drinking fountain and you know that it was wrong.”

“Yes.” Kyle wiped another tear.

“And you’re sorry for what you did. And you apologized.”

“Yes. That’s what happened.”

“But I think there is more to this story,” Mr. Hall said.

Kyle was confused. “More?”

“Yes, definitely more,” Mr. Hall continued. “Kyle, while you were playing soccer, AJ was all alone, and you asked him to play with you, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, that was a very kind thing to do.”

Kyle looked up at the principal. Mr. Hall went on, “When Harrison scraped his knee, you stopped the game and walked him to the nurse’s office. That was very helpful of you.”

Kyle wasn’t sure what to say.

“And when the whistle blew, who picked up the ball and brought it to the right place?” Mr. Hall asked.

“I did,” Kyle told him. “I brought it to the ball bin like we’re supposed to.”

“How responsible you are!” Mr. Hall said. “Kyle, I know that you did something wrong at recess and you are very sorry for it. But I also know that you are a kind, helpful, and responsible boy. There is always more to the story.” Mr. Hall smiled as he walked Kyle to the door.

On his way back to class, Kyle smiled, thinking about Mr. Hall’s words. “I’m kind, helpful, and responsible,” he thought to himself for the rest of the day.

After school, Kyle stood in line at the bus stop. When it was time to get onto the bus, a group of boys noisily rushed past him. Bumping into him, they each tried to get on first.

Kyle took a step back to let the others go in front of him. “You are a kind, helpful, and responsible boy,” Mr. Hall’s words went through his mind. “It’s okay,” Kyle told the boys. “You can go first.” He was happy to go last and happy to share the rest of his story.

Note to Parents: In this story, school principal, Mr. Hall, used an effective and sometimes overlooked technique in providing course correction for Kyle. Once he’d determined that Kyle understood his wrongdoing, was genuinely sorry for his actions, and apologized, there was no need for continued focus on the negative. Acknowledging a bad choice by leading little ones to confession and forgiveness, we can then guide our kids to feel encouraged by the good choices they make and set their hearts on the hope and positive change of a corrected path.

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.

kathobrien.com  iamkathobrien  @sit4abit
Love Grows Here

This adorable sign can hang in your home or on your porch as a reminder that you want your home to be one where love grows and flourishes. As you make this together as a family, remind your children that God loves us and, in turn, wants us to spur one another on toward love and good deeds!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 1’ x 4’ thin piece of wood
• stencils
• stencil brush
• craft paint—white, pink, red, and black
• 2’ ribbon
• hot glue gun and glue sticks

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Find or purchase a piece of wood.
2. Dry brush or paint your wood. Let dry.
3. Stamp each person’s handprints onto the wood to create the shape of a heart. Be careful not to put too much paint on your hands. You can always add extra to complete the look.
4. After the heart hands have dried, use the stencils to paint your text.
5. Hot glue some ribbon onto the back, let it dry, and hang up your sign!
LOVE GROWS HERE
...spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
hebrews 10:24
GAME TIME

FILLED with LOVE

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 1 large bag of conversation hearts per team
• 1 plastic spoon per team
• 1 clear jar per team
• 1 bowl per team

BEFORE YOU START

• Pour the conversation hearts into the bowls and place in an open area a few feet apart. Directly across from the bowls, about 10 to 20 feet away, place the clear jars.

TIME TO PLAY!

Once you have gathered your family around the playing area, divide them into two teams. Teams can consist of one or more people. Give each team one plastic spoon.

Explain to your family that this game is a relay race, and the goal is to be the first team to fill a jar with conversation hearts. Have the first person on each team stand directly next to his bowl of hearts. When you say, “Go,” the first person on each team will take one scoop of conversation hearts and walk over to the glass jar, pour the hearts in, and hurry back to the start. Teams will repeat this process until one team wins.
LET’S ADD A TWIST!

Mix up the game a bit by adding various ways of transporting the hearts over to the jar. Here are some ideas:

- walk backward
- tiptoe
- walk sideways
- run
- spin (carefully)
- crawl
- hold end of spoon in mouth

REMEMBER!

In this game, the more your children focused on staying the course, no matter how challenging the journey, the more hearts they were able to put in the jar. If they lost focus and spilled the hearts, they had a harder time filling up the jar. Much like filling these jars, we have the opportunity to fill or build others up in love. When we engage in and respond to God’s leading in our lives, we are able to stay on the course He has laid out for us. When we are on course, we are much more capable of building others up in love. The farther we get from God’s path, the harder it is to love others well. As you talk to your children, encourage them to remain steady as they follow Christ and respond when God corrects their course. Loving others well is one of the most beautiful aspects of our relationship with Him, so let Him lead your heart.

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!
FAMILY TIME RECIPES

LAYERED CHICKEN Alfredo

This Layered Chicken Alfredo will fill your family up with some of their favorite ingredients. As you eat together, talk about ways you can build each other up in love. Then, encourage your children to give a compliment to each person at the table for each layer in this yummy recipe!

**PREP: 45 min.  COOK: 1 hr.  TOTAL: 1 hr. 45 min.  YIELDS: 8–10 Servings**

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

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

FOR THE ALFREDO SAUCE

• 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons butter
• 3 cups heavy cream
• 2 cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese
• 1 1/2 tablespoons minced garlic

LAYERED ALFREDO

• 2 pounds chicken breast, cooked and chopped or shredded
• 18 lasagna noodles, cooked per package instructions
• 12 ounces fresh spinach
• 12 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded (about 4 cups)
• 3 teaspoons Italian seasoning

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

ALFREDO SAUCE

1. Melt butter in a medium saucepan.
2. Slowly add the cream. Whisk together for about a minute to fully combine the cream and butter. Add garlic and stir to combine.
3. Bring to a simmer, stirring often, and allow to simmer for just one minute. The sauce will be just slightly thicker.
4. Remove sauce from heat and add grated Parmesan.

LAYERED ALFREDO

1. In a large bowl, combine chicken, spinach, half the mozzarella cheese, and Italian seasoning. Toss to combine.
2. Lightly grease a 9” x 13” baking dish.
3. Layer the following to create five filled layers, ending with lasagna noodles on top:
   – ¾ cup Alfredo sauce
   – 3 lasagna noodles
   – 1/3 of the chicken mixture
4. Pour remaining Alfredo sauce on top and cover with remaining cheese.
5. Place in a 350° F oven for 45 minutes to an hour until cooked through and top is golden and bubbly.
6. Remove from oven and allow to sit for at least 10 minutes before serving.
Allow your kids to help you layer this delicious trifle. As you work together, share with them all the ways God has lavishly layered His love upon us. Remind them that there is nothing we can do to separate us from God’s love. And it is out of His great love for us that He corrects our courses and restores us.

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

- 1 package brownie mix, made according to package directions  
- 1 (4 ounce) package instant chocolate pudding mix  
- ½ cup water  
- 1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk  
- 1 (8 ounce) container frozen extra-creamy whipped topping, thawed  
- 1 (16 ounce) container frozen whipped topping, thawed  
- 1 quart fresh strawberries, cleaned, hulled, and halved  
- 2 chocolate-covered toffee bar

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

1. Cut brownies into 1-inch squares.  
2. In large bowl, combine pudding mix, water, and sweetened condensed milk. Mix until smooth.  
3. Fold in 8 ounces of the extra-creamy whipped topping until no streaks remain.  
4. In trifle bowl or glass serving dish, place half the brownies.  
5. Then, layer half the pudding mixture, half the strawberries, and half of the 16-ounce container of whipped topping.  
6. Repeat layers.  
7. Chop toffee bars onto top layer for garnish.  
8. Refrigerate 8 hours before serving.
The terrified woman stood with slumped shoulders and head down, whimpering sadly, her strength gone from crying and yelling at her accusers. Tense energy filled the air. At the moment, no one spoke. The crowd of teachers and Pharisees surrounded the woman who had just been caught breaking the law. The men clenched stones in their hands, ready to punish her, but their angry gaze was on the Rabbi, Jesus.

The men had literally dragged this woman to the temple to trap Jesus. They wanted to see if He would obey the ancient law of Israel that said she should be stoned to death for her sin, or if He would let her go free and unpunished, which would make Jesus guilty of breaking Israel’s law.

All eyes were on the Rabbi, Jesus. How would He respond?
At first, Jesus did not say anything. Then, calmly but authoritatively, He told the Pharisees that whichever one of them had never sinned should throw the first stone at the woman.

It was brilliant! Jesus did not give them either answer they were hoping for. He turned the situation around, and now the decision was on them. Would any of them actually claim to be without sin? Of course not!

Jesus outsmarted the Pharisees again.

It was the older men who first realized that their trap didn’t work and that they needed to admit defeat. The hands that tightly gripped rocks slowly opened, and the rocks fell to the ground. One by one they walked away, furious.

As the last Pharisee reluctantly gave up, just the woman and Jesus were left. In a gentle, loving voice, Jesus asked the scared, humiliated woman to look around and see that no one was there to accuse her anymore. Her tearstained face revealed her disbelief … her life had just been saved! But how would the Rabbi treat her?

Jesus did not need to remind her that unwise choices bring shame and brokenness and fear. She knew all about that.

HEAR IT

Parents: This portion of Scripture talks about a woman caught in the act of adultery. Be sensitive to the maturity level of your children before reading.

Either read the narrative above aloud to your family or read John 8:1–11. Also read Hebrews 10:24 aloud.

DO IT

Ask your family some questions (see examples below) to engage more deeply with the narrative.

• How would you have felt if you had been the woman surrounded by people wanting to punish you?
• How would you have felt if Jesus had saved you like He saved the woman?
• When you think of God, do you picture God being more like the Pharisees in the narrative or more like Jesus?
• Do you feel like you deserve punishment for anything you have done wrong?
• Has anyone sinned against you and made you want to “throw a stone”? Ask God to help you see that person more like Jesus does. Like Hebrews 10:24 mentions, how can you help this person increase his or her love and good deeds?

As the last Pharisee reluctantly gave up, just the woman and Jesus were left. In a gentle, loving voice, Jesus asked the scared, humiliated woman to look around and see that no one was there to accuse her anymore. Her tearstained face revealed her disbelief … her life had just been saved! But how would the Rabbi treat her?

Jesus did not need to remind her that unwise choices bring shame and brokenness and fear. She knew all about that. Instead, He taught her that a peace-filled, meaningful life is possible, and she could experience it by living a new way. By loving herself, God, and others, she would discover new hope and new life! And though she always carried with her the memory of the Pharisees’ scornful looks, she also carried with her a more powerful memory of the loving face of her Rabbi, Jesus.

by Jason Kliewer

Jason is a teaching pastor at Canopy Church in Orange County, CA. He lives with his wife and two daughters in a 200-square-foot RV camper. Jason loves to hear from readers, so feel free to send any comments or questions to jasonmkliwer@gmail.com
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)

There are times I seem to get off track
And sometimes I wish I could go back
But my God, He loves me where I am
And He shows me ways to change my path
There are times I seem to get off track
But my God, He loves me where I am

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

written by Tommy Larson

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

sung by James Larson

James is eight years old and lives in Costa Mesa, CA, with his sister, Mazie, and his parents, Tommy and Keri. James sang on Josh Groban’s Christmas record and appeared on his Christmas special on CBS. James looks forward to singing in an upcoming animated film from Universal Pictures. He also is part of an educational music project that helps children in China learn English.
BLESS WITH YOUR WORDS

A BLESSING CAN BE A PRAYER OF COMMISSION, A BIBLE PASSAGE, OR WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT. BLESSINGS CAN BE SPOKEN OVER A CHILD FOR THE PURPOSE OF DECLARING GOD’S PROTECTION, JOY, AND WISDOM OVER HIM.

Being a parent is like being a bumper on a bowling lane. The goal is to get your children (the bowling balls) from Point A to Point B, but they rarely make it there in one straight line. Instead, they often veer to the right or to the left, and your job as the bumper is to continually correct their course along the way.

This job can be a tiresome one. Some days it might feel like all you do as a parent is feed, drive, and discipline your children. Have you ever tried to count how many times in a week (a day? an hour?) your statements toward your kids start with “Stop,” “Don’t,” or “No! Why? Lord, help me!”?

What I love about the environment of COURSE CORRECTION is that it is more than just pulling your hair out trying to get your kids to stop their bad behavior. It’s not about punishment. Sure, it includes a season of pain, but it doesn’t stop there. It goes on to build up in love and gives a vision of a corrected path. Course correction isn’t just an endless flurry of stops and don’ts. It’s an opportunity to shower your children with love. After all, isn’t that how we want to be disciplined?

As adults, we aren’t perfect. We mess up all the time. We too need people in our lives who care enough about us to act as our bumpers and help us course correct. And yet, I know that when I receive negative feedback, it goes down a whole lot easier when padded with some affirmation and assurance of love.

I think my soul would be ground to pieces if I received constant discipline without being built up in love, and yet I think sometimes we expect our children to just deal with it. They’re messing up, they need correcting, so we discipline, over and over and over. I can’t help but think that if our ratio is off and we aren’t supplementing the discipline with a whole lot of love, their souls may very well get ground up too.

One easy way to build your kids up in love is to pray blessings over them—to speak life-giving words of truth right into their weary souls. A blessing reminds your kids of your love for them and, even more importantly, of God’s love for them, which never wavers no matter how many times they go off course.

This month, read Psalm 103:8-13 out loud to your children in a translation that’s easy to understand. Then, pray the following blessing over them.

BLESS

“(Child’s name), may you know that God loves you SO much. He loves you when you’re on your best behavior. He loves you when you’re at your worst. He loves you when you’re playing, when you’re eating, and even when you’re sleeping, not doing anything at all. Nothing you do can ever make Him love you more or less. More than you can ever know or imagine, God loves you.”

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.
THERE IT WAS. THE HOPE.

“One chapter in the story of my husband’s terminal illness began with attending a Legacy Retreat® hosted by Inheritance of Hope. It was one of the lights that shone brightly during our dark days! There it was. The hope. That retreat was unconditional love and extravagant grace in action. It helped to reframe our suffering—we were not alone!”

—Julie, mom to Sam and wife to Ken. Ken passed away a year after their family’s Inheritance of Hope New York City Legacy Retreat®, when Sam was just 11.

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

Did you know that 1 in 20 children will lose a parent by the age of 16?

The foundations necessary for a fruitful life are laid by a child’s family, and every family deserves a legacy. That is why Inheritance of Hope walks alongside diagnosed parents, caregivers, and children through uncertainty and fear with the purpose of finding a place of hope. We serve any family with children ages 18 and younger in which a parent has been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness—families from different places, backgrounds, and dynamics. Families from 41 states have experienced a life-changing Legacy Retreat® in locations including Colorado, New York, California, and Florida.

OUR HISTORY

When Kristen Milligan was barely 30, she was diagnosed with a rare terminal cancer. Her prognosis did not take into account that she was the mother of a preschooler, toddler, and baby. As she and her husband, Deric, struggled with their new reality, they
quickly realized Kristen’s illness was taking a toll on each of them, including their son and two daughters. In 2007, the Milligans founded Inheritance of Hope to help other families and their own.

Kristen and Deric took control of what they could: the legacy they yearned to leave their children. For the Milligans, this took shape in four primary forms: making intentional memories together, preparing gifts and letters for their children to receive after Kristen died, creating an empathetic community of support, and, most importantly, teaching that we have a source of hope independent of our circumstances.

**HOW WE INSPIRE HOPE**

We strive to inspire hope in each family we serve by loving them uniquely and wholeheartedly. Online materials and literature round out the services provided, but Inheritance of Hope’s signature offering is the Legacy Retreat, an all-expenses-paid experience where hurting families create lifelong memories while receiving tools to navigate the challenges of a parent’s terminal illness.

It’s more than a trip. We bring people together from across the country, people who actually understand the challenges of raising children while fighting a terminal illness. We provide legacy development resources, volunteers who are eager to help with everything from childcare to carrying luggage, and hope—all to help families thrive despite the uncertainty they face. Making fun memories together is a priority, and sessions are provided for each member of the family—diagnosed parent, caregiver, and children of all ages. Licensed counselors are also available throughout the event.

Through honest conversations, strangers become friends. The emphasis on family broadens as we share acceptance and love that shows every retreat-goer the heart of the Inheritance of Hope family and ultimately the family of God.

As a faith-based organization, we welcome all while serving under the core principles of the Christian faith, because that is the wellspring of our hope.

**HOW YOU CAN JOIN US IN INSPIRING HOPE**

Our family is full of volunteers and donors who make a difference in a variety of ways. Team Inheritance of Hope is comprised of athletes raising money leading up to an endurance event. Families have organized garage sales, and kids have hosted bake sales, movie parties, and more to help serve families facing the loss of a parent. Volunteers on Legacy Retreats must be at least 16 years of age and complete an application process. Much of our funding comes from individuals who have a heart for those who are hurting. There is room at the table for everyone!
GLOBAL

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 ...

WALES

Wales is situated in the United Kingdom and borders England on the east, the Irish Sea to the north and west, and the Bristol Channel to the south. Its total area is 8,006 square miles.
If you lived in Wales you might eat something called Welsh rarebit or Welsh rabbit. It is a dish made with a savory sauce of melted cheese and various other ingredients and served hot poured over slices of toasted bread. The hot cheese sauce may also be served in a chafing dish like a fondue, accompanied by sliced, toasted bread. The names of the dish originate from 18th-century Britain. Despite the name, the dish contains no rabbit meat.

If you lived in Wales you would speak either English or Welsh. To say, “Hello” in Welsh, you would say, “S’mae” (pronounced s-my [north] shoo-my [south]).

DID YOU KNOW?

- The country of Wales is said to contain more castles per square mile than any other country in the world.
- Wales is often termed “the land of song” and is known for its harpists, male choirs, and solo artists.
- The letters “K,” “Q,” “V,” and “Z” do not appear in the Welsh alphabet.

WELSH LOVE SPOON

You won’t find the Welsh celebrating Saint Valentine—instead, people in Wales celebrate Saint Dwynwen, the Welsh patron saint of lovers, on January 25.

One traditional romantic Welsh gift is a love spoon. As early as the 17th century, Welsh men carved intricate wooden spoons as tokens of affection for the women they loved. Patterns and symbols were carved into these love spoons, each signifying a different meaning. A few examples include horseshoes, which stand for good luck; wheels, which symbolize support; and keys, which symbolize the keys to a man’s heart.

Today, love spoons are also exchanged for celebrations such as weddings, anniversaries, and births.
It was one of those days. You know, the type that tempts you to question whether your sweet child has been abducted by aliens and replaced with a snarky drama queen who plans to dominate and enslave the human race, beginning with you. Oh, I patiently weathered the first half-dozen assaults of said preteen with the calm of Mother Teresa and parried the next few with moderate self-control. But by the tenth disrespectful interaction, I completely lost my cool.

“What’s wrong with you?” I yelled hotly, sending my alien transplant to her room.

I slumped onto the couch and rubbed my weary face with my hands. I wanted to feel justified in my anger. Surely enough was enough. How much should a parent take? But deep down, I knew better. See, I know what it is to be loved fully even when I slip up royally, again and again. God has faithfully modeled the very verse He called to my mind in that moment: “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7 ESV). All things.

In the emotionally charged, challenging middle school years, I’ve easily and often digressed to disciplining with a barrage of negativity. I get so caught up in pointing out the wrong that I “bear” nothing, “believe” the worst, fear unrepentance, and fight for my rights “in all things.” I can focus so fiercely on correcting the wrong that I forget the goal of all discipline: to show my children a better way.

The truth is, I get off track all the time, but each time God offers me a path of healing. Sometimes that path involves consequences, but it always includes a way back home where He waits with open arms for my return. And I want to return because He has modeled 1 Corinthians 13 love perfectly toward me. My goal as a parent is to offer the same—albeit imperfect—irresistible love toward my children.

Let me tell you what isn’t irresistible for any of us: criticism, sarcasm, exasperation, and belittling. Rather, because God sees me as covered by the blood of Christ even when I’m at my worst, I naturally want to do better. I want to walk worthy of the gospel. His correction spurs me on toward love and good deeds (see Hebrews 10:24).

In light of God’s love for me, I reluctantly sat down on my daughter’s bed and apologized for my hurtful words. I offered her unconditional love and assured her that my goal in discipline was to help her be her very best and to cultivate our relationship. I let her know that my arms would be open to her no matter how many times we quarreled. No, it didn’t magically transform the moment, but later that day she put her arms around me, apologized, and told me she loved me too. It was a beautiful reminder of Hebrews 12:11: “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (ESV, emphasis added). Both theirs, and ours.

by Jessie Minassian

Jessie is a popular speaker, blogger, and the author of 12 books and Bible studies, including Family: How to Love Yours (and Help Them Like You Back). She is also the “resident big sis” at lifeloveandgod.com, a Q&A website for teen and college-age girls. Jessie and her husband live at Hume Lake, CA, with their two daughters.
Why Porn Could Bring Down This Generation of Teens
Perhaps more than any other issue of today’s culture, pornography has the greatest chance of bringing down the morals and values of this generation. Studies tell us that the greatest number of new pornography users are 12- to 17-year-old boys. The girls, however, are catching up. All the while, the multibillion-dollar pornography industry is reaching into the souls of this generation and wreaking havoc. It is so powerful that it can snatch any kid in any house today.

A few years ago, a 13-year-old boy at our church was looking for a new baseball glove online. There used to be a large sporting-goods chain in our area called Chick’s Sporting Goods. We all called it “Chicks” for short. He innocently typed the word “Chicks” into a search engine thinking he was going to find the store’s new baseball glove collection. What he found were pornography sites, and plenty of them. His first exposure to porn took him on a journey that caused him to daily, sometimes for hours at a time, look at awful porn. This was a good kid, from a strong family, with high morals, and he just got caught in the maze of porn addiction. When the family found out (they began to suspect something when he was on the computer in the middle of the night and his grades were dropping), they did the right thing and got their son help. However, that young boy will have thousands of vivid images stored in his brain and subconscious for his whole life.

One of the many problems with viewing pornography is that your mind takes a picture of the image. Sadly, millions of young people today have hundreds of these images stored in their minds. Pornography is extremely addicting, and for many it can escalate. Here are the stages of pornography addiction progression:

1. Viewing pornography
2. Addiction
3. Escalation
4. Desensitization
5. Act out sexually

In today’s world, kids cannot help but see very unhealthy sexual images. As parents, you can help your kids see the negative consequences of viewing pornography.

Information on the effects of porn is very prevalent today. Needless to say, pornography is fantasy. And feeding fantasy often leads to sexual addiction. Pornography is a tool for going beyond reality and, once used, is difficult to live without. Sadly, sexual addiction among young people is growing, and for many, it becomes a strong obsessive compulsion similar to the intensity of alcohol, drug, and gambling addictions. Sexual addiction destroys marriages, breaks families apart, causes people to view the opposite sex as objects, and tears at the very moral fiber of really good people.

The days are over when pornography was confined to a dark section of town at XXX-rated movie theatres. Pornography is distributed through what were once safe channels, like cable TV, bookstores, phones, and of course the Internet. As parents, we must be intentional to counter this influence with love, example, and instruction. Otherwise, someone else will teach our children about pornography, and the visual aids they might use may be so enticing that they lure our kids into a fantasy world full of guilt, shame, and remorse. Pornography is not safe, and we can’t assume our kids will never be tempted. Being proactive but not preachy or panicked is the best way for helping the students we serve. As the Scripture says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23).

by Jim Burns

Jim is the President of HomeWord. He speaks and writes on the four values of HomeWord: strong marriages, confident parents, empowered kids, and healthy leaders.

homeword.com
To earn my master’s degree in psychology, I completed intern hours at a local clinic to provide therapy and a weekly parenting class for at-risk youth and their parents. The premise of the class was simple: practice “Special Time”—quality, one-on-one time with your child each week—no distractions, screens, or other people. I began with two bags of potato chips: one opened a week ago and the other opened in front of them. I passed the chips around and asked, “Which would you like to eat?” to illustrate that if given a choice, children will always prefer the fresh chips of their parent’s positive attention. But, if starved of attention and affection, children will rummage for sustenance any way they can get it (resourceful creatures that they are). Unfortunately, the stale food we often offer looks like our glares and reprimands—attention, but irritable and fleeting.

Each week, parents came prepared to argue the impossibility of the task. Their children needed to obey, they reasoned, not play board games and go on coffee dates. I first taught this class at 26, pregnant with my first child and completely baffled by its supposed difficulty. “It’s just one hour,” I remember saying to those poor wrung-out souls who came to me for guidance. Now, a decade and a half and four more children later, I prickle with shame at my response, mostly because I have been utterly unable to practice something I once preached.

I pick up my older kids from school after spending the day chasing the toddler. By 3:00 p.m., it feels like every nerve in my body is exposed. I can barely force myself through the motions of ballet practice and reading logs. To keep our home from becoming a hazmat situation, I hear myself barking orders more
When I make space for my child, the air between us shifts from one of authority to one of curiosity. I’m here to enjoy him, to ask good questions and listen to what quickens his heart. I’m here to relearn what I thought I knew.

Jesus was in the business of creating something out of nothing; where there was not sight He gave it, where there were few loaves, He multiplied them. We tap into something similar when we create time and space for another person where there was none. Even if it is not as often as I’d once promised myself it would be, even if it’s haphazard and dinner isn’t made and the laundry isn’t folded. Here in the mess and the unfinished I make room for you and you make room for me. I offer only myself, the gift of presence.

When I make space for my child, the air between us shifts from one of authority to one of curiosity. I’m here to enjoy him, to ask good questions and listen to what quickens his heart. I’m here to relearn what I thought I knew. Without the daily fluff that props us up, we descend to our foundation: we once shared a body, we once gazed into each other’s eyes for hours. We have an unshakable intimacy that I’d forgotten about. This space becomes more than positive; it becomes holy.

I see with fresh eyes the true nature of my child, his personality apart from the distractions of friends, the irking of siblings, or the relentless drive of a schedule. From this clarity, I can better call forth that which is good in him, blessing what is already there; for surely a blessing is less something I bestow and more something I call forth. Only God can make goodness and beauty; I simply give language to what He has done. This is who you are, I say, who God made you to be. I’m reminded that what is true for him is true for me, too: apart from my striving and failure, I too I am chosen; I too am loved.
HOME AND CHURCH: THE GREAT PARTNERSHIP

Recently, I was in a meeting with some church leaders talking about complex social concerns like suicide, depression, porn addiction, and sexual brokenness. These issues are complicated and nuanced, for sure. During the conversation, which lasted for several hours, one of the leaders said the reason these issues have not been solved is because the church has not taught enough on the topics.

I know it’s easy to blame our societal ills on failures from the pulpit, but it deflects the blame from the real culprit. The church should certainly tackle all these issues—consistently, purposefully, and graciously. However, the family has always been the best place to educate and inform. Discipleship, teaching, and training should always begin at home and be reinforced at church. Too many people want the church to do heavy lifting that should be happening around our dinner tables.
When family life is robust and centered on holy conversations, kids learn from their parents. Good parents refuse to wait for others to have healthy conversations with their own kids. Right now, pastors feel enormous pressure to fill the gaps left by broken families. I know my sermons often contain information some people are hearing for the first time, and most of those people don’t have mature mentors to further process what I’m teaching.

This creates a huge gulf in the discipleship journey. The home has no answers for them, the world is telling them lies, the church is trying, but failing, to tackle all of their concerns. Therefore, people are left immature and discouraged. To make matters worse, these same people are attending church less than ever, which means they’re missing most of what’s actually being taught. Right now, the most committed people in our churches attend fewer than two and a half Sundays per month, and there’s no margin in their calendars for advanced classes and discipleship courses.

Believe me, most pastors want to make disciples. This is our sacred duty. We want people to grow up, be strong, get well, and find the truth. At times, it seems the church is overwhelmed with pressures to preach on a myriad of complex issues like violence, politics, immigration, sexuality, abuse, mental health, and so many others. All are critical topics, but a 30-minute message on Sunday will not suffice.

Dads, we must take individual responsibility for our homes and for our friends. Turn off the devices and have real conversations. Do this regularly. Make it a habit. Each week, we must put ourselves in a small circle of trusted friends and talk deeply about the complexities of life. We must listen well, pray sincerely, and not relent until truth is found. Then come to the church and help your pastor lead those who are abandoned and distraught.

Don’t show up on Sundays wanting all your questions answered. Show up on Sundays and get involved with the people sitting around you. Most of them do not have homes and families that are safe for vulnerable conversations. Build them up in love by offering them your friendship, your empathy, and your prayers. Set them on the corrected path and go make disciples in partnership with your church and pastor. We need you.

by Brady Boyd

Brady is married to his college sweetheart, Pam, and is the dad to two great kids, Abram and Callie. He has written five books: Addicted to Busy: Recovery for the Rushed Soul; Fear No Evil: A Test of Faith, a Courageous Church, and an Unfailing God; Sons and Daughters: Spiritual Orphans Finding Our Way Home, Let Her Lead: Creating a Better Future for Women in the Church; and Speak Life: Restoring Healthy Communication in How You Think, Talk, and Pray. (All are available online at amazon.com and Barnes & Noble.) He has a degree in Journalism from Louisiana Tech, has been a radio announcer for professional baseball and basketball teams, and was the sports editor for his college newspaper. Before coming to pastor New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO, in 2007, he served Gateway Church in Southlake, TX, for almost seven years.
One of my friends is walking through the Valley of the Shadow. As I was listening to him share his heart this morning, and when the appropriate amount of silence had settled over us, this came out of me:

“You have permission to live the most difficult days of your life in the safety of our presence.”

That's a summary of Christian community. We all need that permission from each other, permission to be where we are.

Some folks understand faith to be a rugged shaking-off of our feelings. Some people have been taught that faith means you ignore the painful realities in favor of a grit-your-teeth positivity. No, sir.

The life of faith is the life where the saints learn to play the long game with each other. If we do it right, the seasons of bottoming out in grief and overwhelming despair do not have to be seen as final but can be seen as stops along the way where we can build each other up in love.

Impetuous Peter wobbled in his faith and denied he had ever even known Jesus, but he didn’t stay there. He grew into the man on whose back the church would ride. Thomas didn’t always do it right either. Neither did Mary Magdalene. And neither will you or I.

So, let's sign up for the long game with each other. Let's covenant to be companions as we pass through the Valley of the Shadow and our courses are being corrected. Let's give each other permission to live the most difficult days of our lives in the safety of each other’s presence. And let's do it until we're able to look back and see the difficulties swallowed up by God's deliverance.

by Daniel Grothe

Daniel and his wife, Lisa, moved to Colorado Springs as a newly married couple in July of 2005. Daniel works as an associate senior pastor at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO, and loves the place! He and Lisa have three children—Lillian, Wilson, and Wakley—and they are delightful. Daniel received his undergraduate degree in theology from Oral Roberts University and completed a master’s in theology through Fuller Theological Seminary. Daniel loves to write, and he’s spent a lot of his life playing drums for wonderful singer/songwriters like GUNGOR, The Brilliance, Darrell Evans, and Michael Rossback.
YOU HAVE PERMISSION TO LIVE THE MOST DIFFICULT DAYS OF YOUR LIFE IN THE SAFETY OF OUR PRESENCE.
In the early years of our marriage, we were awful at owning our mistakes. Our pride didn’t allow us to admit that we were imperfect and messy, so we spent a lot of time blaming everything else, especially each other. We fought about the same things over and over again. A dark cloud hung over us and, although we were praying for a great marriage, we weren’t doing anything about it.

Marriage is where our theology gets put into practice. We can fool others, but we can’t fool our spouses. If you are praying for a great marriage but doing nothing about it, don’t expect Holy Spirit magic dust to descend from heaven. We had hard work to do, and it all started with learning how to apologize properly to each other. Everything changed after that.
We make mistakes all the time, and we need a way to build love and trust back into the relationship, a way to validate each other’s feelings, to own our mistakes and get back on track, to walk in humility, and to show each other grace. A four-step apology helped us get there! Let’s walk through what a proper apology looks like. We are going to give you the example of Casey being distracted by technology during family time and Meygan calling him out on it … the struggle is real in our house!

4 STEPS TO A PROPER APOLOGY

STEP 1: I’M SORRY FOR [ACTION + FEELING].
Casey: “I’m sorry for being distracted and not having better boundaries with my phone. I know that makes you feel ignored and disrespected.”

This first statement identifies Casey’s action, and he takes ownership and responsibility. It also recognizes how the action makes Meygan feel. While Casey didn’t intentionally set out to ignore Meygan, validating how she felt gives Casey a chance to communicate that he understands that his actions have consequences. For most of us, unintended consequences keep us from apologizing because we feel like we didn’t do anything wrong. And of course, there is a period at the end of a proper apology because the minute you say, “I’m sorry … but …” you just wiped away the entire apology.

STEP 2: I WAS WRONG!
Casey: “I was wrong for making you feel ignored. That’s on me.”

Three simple words but so hard to say if you struggle with pride like we do. This is taking full ownership for the FEELING you evoked in your spouse. You’re owning your mistake. You’re taking responsibility for hurting your spouse, even if it was unintentional (which it usually is).

STEP 3: WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE THIS BETTER?
Casey: “What can I do to make this better?”
Meygan: “I would really appreciate it if you would put your phone on silent or leave it in the other room during family time. Let’s say that from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. we both turn our phones on airplane mode and be present with the kids. Do you think that’s reasonable?”

If you’re that couple who argues about the same thing over and over again and there is no change, this will become your favorite part of the apology. This is where you get to work together as a team to brainstorm ideas on how to make things better. This is an opportunity to try something new and then check in with each other in a week to see how things went. Make sure the request is realistic and very specific so there is no room for guessing. Keep in mind that sometimes there isn’t anything you can do and just a sincere apology is all that is needed.

STEP 4: WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?
Casey: “Will you forgive me, Babe?”

In this step, you’re asking for your spouse to let you off the hook for the pain you caused and to truly get back on the same course together. Whether the hurt was small or big, you want to make sure your spouse knows that you are apologetic and want his or her forgiveness on the matter. In the moments we struggle with letting the pain go, we remind ourselves of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice for us and remember that we ourselves continue to make mistakes and He forgives us. Now here’s the tricky part with forgiveness. A lot of people say, “I forgive you” when they really don’t—and resentment builds. If you’re not ready or need some time to talk to Jesus about your frustrations and hurt, be sure to communicate that to your spouse. It’s okay to say, “I want to forgive you but I need a couple of days.”

Another great part about learning how to apologize the right way is that you can teach your children how to own their mistakes and repair relationships. We have our kids walk through these four steps, and it’s incredible to watch them actually live out how to build each other up in love.

by Casey and Meygan Caston
Casey and Meygan are the cofounders of Marriage365, a nonprofit dedicated to helping couples connect on a deeper level. They reach two million couples around the world each month with their resources. They have published a three-part series of books: 365 Connecting Questions for Couples, Engaged Couples, and Families available at their website.

marriage365.org
Grandparents, if asked, would your children and grandchildren describe you as a critic or a coach? Do they view you as someone who stands in their corner guiding them with encouragement or someone who sits on the sidelines criticizing and focusing on what’s wrong?

The definition of a critic is a person who expresses an unfavorable opinion of something. A coach is someone who trains or urges with instruction. I don’t know about you, but I find myself in the critic’s corner far too often—pointing out mistakes rather than taking the time to encourage and spur my grandchildren on.

Recently, Harvard Business School studied the correlation between team performance and the frequency of praise and criticism given to the individuals on the team. The question asked was:

Which is more effective in improving team performance: using positive feedback to let people know when they’re doing well or offering constructive comments to help them when they’re off track?

The average ratio for the highest-performing teams was 5.6 (that is, nearly six positive comments for every negative one). The medium-performance teams averaged 1.9 (almost twice as many positive comments as negative ones). But the average for the low-performing teams, at 0.36 to 1, was almost three negative comments for every positive one.

American psychologist John Gottman has found similar results correlating spouses’ positive and negative comments to happiness (or lack thereof) in their marriages. My guess would be that these stats apply to our children and grandchildren as well.

It’s counterintuitive to think that discipline or course correction can be done with positive comments more successfully than with negative comments; however, it appears that’s the way God wired us. It’s important to guide our families by sharing what we see them doing well more often than what we see them doing wrong. As grandparents, we can play a vital role in helping our grandchildren get back on track—it just has to be done in the right ratios.

So, next time you see your children or grandchildren in a season of pain or getting a little off track, stop and think: Do I want to be a critic or a coach? Do I want to lovingly guide, encourage, and spur them on, or do I want to critique and point out where they failed? It takes a lot more work to be a coach, but the reward of seeing our children and grandchildren thrive in all that God has for them is worth the extra effort!

by 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 spends her free time enjoying her four grandchildren and perusing antique stores.

@homefrontsp
@homefrontsp

1. https://hbr.org/2013/03/the-ideal-praise-to-criticism
10 ENVIRONMENTS

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

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

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

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

4. 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.
IT IS OUR PRAYER THAT HOMES AND CHURCHES WOULD CREATE THESE ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN TO LIVE IN SO THEIR FAITH WILL GROW IN A COMMUNITY OF CONSISTENCY, COMMON LANGUAGE, AND PRACTICE.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW THESE ENVIRONMENTS CAN IGNITE A TRANSFORMING FAITH IN YOUR FAMILY, WE SUGGEST YOU READ:

SPIRITUAL PARENTING: An Awakening for Today’s Families
BY MICHELLE ANTHONY
© 2010 DAVID C COOK

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.

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.

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

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

Identity
I belong to God, and He loves me!

Course Correction
When I get off track, God offers me a path of healing.

Modeling
I see Christ in others, and they can see Him in me.
HEROES IN ACTION!
54 CARDS FILLED WITH DEVOTIONS & FUN FACTS

The Action Bible Heroes Card Collection will capture the imaginations of kids of all ages as they explore real-life Bible heroes!

TheActionBible.com
Visit your local Christian retailer or Amazon.com today!