IDENTITY

“I belong to God, and He loves me!”
HOW TO USE

HomeFront

Each issue highlights an environment your family can create in your home. This month looks at IDENTITY. 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.

A NOTE FROM MICHELLE

The environment of **IDENTITY** highlights who we are in Christ. According to Ephesians 1, we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed, and given an inheritance in Christ. This conviction allows children to stand firm against the destructive counter-identities the world offers.

Our culture constantly feeds our families the lie of false identities. School, friends, TV, magazines, music, and so much more continually tell our children that who they are isn’t good enough, that they need to be someone different. As we attempt to spiritually raise our families and redeem what the world has taken, it’s essential to be rooted in truth.

We have to affirm the Christlikeness we see in our children as they strive to stand firm against false identities. In a world that finds identity in shallow and fleeting things, only the truth of our identity in Christ can offer true meaning and purpose.

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.

**HOMEFRONTMAG.COM**

**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.

**PARTNERSHIP**

*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.
Each new year we make our promises and pledges to start new and fresh. Most of us say, “Out with the old and in with the new!”—new schedules, new routines, new ways of eating, and so on. The new year becomes the right time to do the right thing. Our HomeFront team wants to challenge you to make this the year to take a stand and say, “It’s time to start living in the identity Christ has given me!”

From making your own DIY Clock in CAPTURING THE SEASON (page 8) to GAME TIME (page 22) where we ask, “What time is it, Mr. Fox?” you will see the theme of time throughout this issue of HomeFront. GOD’S WORD (page 28) reminds us of the importance of a daily time in Scripture to help us remember Whose we are. In our MARRIAGE article (page 46), Andy Comer points out the importance of investing time into your marriage—to put a stop to the natural drift and begin growing together.

Our STUDENT ID for Middle School (page 36) shares the story from Genesis 32:22-32 where Jacob wrestles with God. After the struggle, God changed Jacob’s name to “Israel”; God gave Jacob a new identity.

Our prayer is that 2019 will be a year marked in your life to focus on what it means to live in the identity of who you are in Christ—a year your children were saturated with words and truths that counteract the false identities the world tries to give them. Let’s stand together—it’s time!

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.

LET’S BE SOCIAL
Share your photos using the hashtag #homefrontmag

HOMEFRONT SUBSCRIPTIONS AVAILABLE
An individual issue of HomeFront can be delivered directly to your doorstep for as little as $4.16 each month. Need multiple copies per month? Order a bulk print subscription and save 20% to 35% off of the individual issue price. Simply choose your quantity—price includes shipping.

We also offer individual and bulk digital subscriptions. The bulk digital subscription is perfect for printing your own copies of HomeFront to hand out at your church or organization.

Consider gifting HomeFront to friends and family as a way to equip parents and grandparents to create fun, spiritually forming times in their homes!

Go to homefrontmag.com/store to check out all of our subscription options.

EDITOR’S NOTE

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Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6
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IT’S Time
A new year provides the perfect opportunity to mark new beginnings. We put the past behind us and, with fresh perspective, we plan for new ways to live. This year, we would like to challenge you to take a stand and live like you believe you are all that God says you are. It’s time to move forward in the truth that God Himself loves you beyond measure!

This Do-It-Yourself Clock can serve as a reminder that you are ready and willing to take the challenge and live in the identity of a son or daughter of the Most High King.

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

- plate or dinner charger
- quartz clock kit—available on amazon.com or at craft stores
- drill
- old towel
- ruler
- pencil
- ½- to 1-inch numbers (optional)
- strong glue
- protractor

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

1. To begin, lay your plate flat on a folded towel.
2. Use the ruler to find the middle of the plate and mark it with the pencil. You can do this by measuring side to side, marking the center of the diameter, and then top to bottom, again marking the center. If you’re measuring accurately, the marks from each measurement will be the same.
3. Once you’ve found the center, use a sharp drill bit (keep the size of the clock mechanism in mind) to drill a hole in the plate. Drill slowly to prevent breaking your plate.
4. Assemble the clock mechanism according to the instructions provided.
5. You can add numbers on the face of the clock with strong glue or leave it blank. If you do use numbers, use a protractor to place them in the correct positions.
6. Rest your finished clock on a shelf or attach a wall hook to the back to hang on the wall.

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**GOD DOESN’T WANT YOU TO ACT LIKE SOMEONE YOU ARE NOT. HE WANTS YOU TO ACT LIKE WHO HE SAYS YOU ARE.**

—LEVI LUSKO, _I DECLARE WAR_
GOD’S BIG
“I don’t know what I’m doing wrong. Why does she fight me so hard?”

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I wandered the grocery store aisles, cell phone pressed to my ear. Another long, wearesome day with an iron-willed four year old was drawing to a close, and as I loaded my cart with the week’s essentials, I also unloaded my burdens onto my mother’s proverbial shoulders.

“I know it’s hard right now,” she commiserated on the other end. “But remember that this child was given to you for such a time as this. The world is going to need that iron will someday... you just have to remain faithful in its shaping in the meantime.”

Daniel 2:21 features a profound statement on God’s sovereignty, reminding us that “He controls the course of world events” (NLT). Yet while many of us are quick to recognize God’s supremacy in the big-picture events of daily life, I wonder how often we stop to consider His purpose in crafting those traits in our children who push us to our limits?

In her excellent book You Can’t Make Me (But I Can Be Persuaded), Cynthia Tobias argues that what most annoys us about our children today will almost certainly be an important key to their success as an adult. But it’s up to us to reframe those challenges into positive identity elements. With big-picture vision, we can move beyond thoughts of “This child is driving me crazy!” to gospel-centered reflections such as “I wonder what amazing purpose this iron will (stubbornness, sensitivity, competitiveness, etc.) is going to accomplish someday?”

My mother’s gentle admonition that night in the grocery store was a reminder that when we pray to see our kids through spiritual eyes, we begin to grasp God’s big-picture plan for their lives. And with a big-picture mindset, we can look beyond today’s challenges to see tomorrow’s triumphs.

**TURN IT AROUND**

Family life is far from perfect. But when we choose to see God’s beauty in its sin-flawed bearers, to look on His creation (from the tantrum-throwing toddler to the smart-mouthed teenager) and use our spiritual vision to see its glorious potential, we practice a powerful form of worship.

As a family, read Proverbs 18:21 (“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”[KJV]). Discuss together (even with your young ones) ways you can speak life over each other—even in your most unlovable moments. Then commit to do so.

**FOR EXAMPLE**

“You’re too emotional” becomes “I love your ability to feel things so deeply.”

“You did it wrong” becomes “You have such a unique way of looking at things.”

“I don’t understand you” becomes “I value our relationship. Help me understand.”

As our words of life echo onward onto the paths set before us, may we be daily, profoundly amazed by the discipline of seeing our loved ones as individuals created in the image of God—iron wills and all. And may we recognize by doing so we are giving honor and glory to our Creator.

by Brittany Woodward

Brittany is a classically homeschooling mama who lives in the heart of Tornado Alley with her husband and three young daughters. A lifelong book junkie, she’s passionate about early literacy and the power of storytelling to shape faith and culture. When she’s not drilling Latin conjugations, she can probably be found running, reading, baking, or attempting to brew the perfect cup of coffee.
It’s easy to see the influence of technology on identities of all ages: toddlers asking Alexa to play Baby Shark, the viral influence of the bottle-flip challenge, teenagers with Instagram selfies, the virtual note-passing world of Snapchat, and parents sharing their child’s first and everything on Facebook.

Technology offers us beautiful ways to connect, to simplify life, and to gain knowledge. However, families need to engage in conversations about how technology is often silently shaping identity.

Andy Crouch, in his book *The Tech-Wise Family*, articulated this thought: “Technology in its proper place helps us bond with the real people we have been given to love. It’s out of its proper place when we end up bonding with people at a distance.” True identity grows in an environment built on trust, respect, and love where your behavior, words, and emotions can be shared face-to-face with others. Technology’s broad assortment of communities can deceive us into feeling known but ultimately lead us away from authentic relationships and toward loneliness, isolation, and a loss of self.

Take time this month to pay attention to your family’s interaction with technology and how you are engaging with the growing smorgasbord of options in your home, on the road, or in your hand. Watch each other to discover how technology is positively or negatively influencing identity. Is it helping with eating healthy, monitoring exercise, keeping you punctual, and encouraging learning? Or is technology creating a disconnect in family relationships or promoting a lack of eye contact and respect and an increase in laziness?

Cultivate a culture in your home of regular unplugging from technology to turn away from the noise of society and the words of strangers to focus on the source of our true and everlasting identity.

**GET YOUR FAMILY TALKING …**

- **God, You are ...** Remember God’s character by creating a list of words to describe Him throughout the Bible.
- **God, I am ...** As image-bearers of God, use God’s character traits to share how you see each person growing in God’s image.
- **God, we will ...** Pray for God to guide you to see where identity has been shaken. Ask Him to reveal a course to correct it.

By Dawn Heckert

*Dawn is the Children’s Pastor at Christ Community Church Leawood Campus in Leawood, Kansas. She loves Jesus and the opportunity to share His story with all ages. She spends her free time deep in glitter, crafting, creating, and chasing life with her two teenage daughters and husband.*
“MY HOPE IS THAT AS WE SPEAK THE THINGS GOD SAYS ARE TRUE OVER OUR LITTLE ONE, MY HUSBAND AND I WILL BE REMINDED THAT THESE THINGS ARE TRUE OF OUR IDENTITY AS WELL.”
I love the fresh start of each January! The New Year is a time to reorient on the things that matter, a time to begin incorporating new rhythms and traditions to point your family in the direction you desire to go. This couldn’t be truer in my own home right now. With the arrival of our first little bundle of joy over the holidays, my husband and I are in the midst of establishing a new normal. Along with our new rhythms of momentary survival (feed, diaper, swaddle, repeat), we have the immense privilege of creating environments in which our baby girl might come to know God and love Him all her days. One tradition we’d like to start this year is to speak truth over our daughter about her identity in Christ.

As much as we want our little girl to be fed, clean, and well-rested, we don’t want our parenting to stop there. It’s much more important to us that she knows she is created and loved by the one true God and that He desires to have a relationship with her! It’s easy to fall into the parenting trap of merely trying to get by day by day, so with the start of this new year, we’re choosing to lift our heads out of our sleep-deprived fog and begin a tradition to refocus on what matters most. My hope is that as we speak the things God says are true over our little one, my husband and I will be reminded that these things are true of our identity as well.

Maybe you’re already in the habit of intentionally speaking truth to your children about their identity in Christ. If not, I invite you to embrace the new beginning this year has to offer and start this tradition with us!

Here’s our plan. First, we’re going to fill a jar with references to 31 verses that talk about who God says we are. Then, from January 1 through 31, we’re going to set a timer for 7:00 a.m. each morning. (I like the idea of doing this in the morning so we are starting off our day with truth, but you can choose whatever time works best for your family.) Each day when the alarm goes off, we’ll pause what we’re doing, pull out one of the references, open our Bible to that verse or passage, and read it together.

What you’ll need:
- 31 verse references downloaded and printed from: bit.ly/JanPrayerVerses
- mason jar
- tape
- pen
- ribbon (optional)
- Bible

What you’ll do:
1. Cut out the 31 verse references and jar label.
2. Fold the verse references and put them in the jar.
3. Tape the label to the front of the jar.
4. Tie a ribbon around the jar (optional).
5. Choose a time to read a verse each day and draw hands on the label’s clock to correspond to that time.
6. Set an alarm for the time you chose, and each day in January, when the alarm goes off, pause, choose a reference from the jar, find that verse in your Bible, and read it over your children.

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!
January 2019 is here! The time is now! Let’s step into the identity our Father in heaven sings over us. Scripture tells us in Ephesians 1 that we are chosen, adopted, redeemed, and sealed. What if we prayed these things over ourselves and our families? What might change? Perhaps we would stop believing the lies the world constantly speaks over us and start living like true sons and daughters of the one true God.

A new year is a good time for families to recommit to praying for and with one another every day. This can be difficult when each family member is committed to different things: sports, music lessons, dance classes, Bible studies, etc. However, do not let this deter you from praying as a family—for each other and for others!

A practical way to make prayer an intentional part of your everyday life could be as easy as picking a specific time for all of your family members to set alarms on your phones; when the alarms go off, you all stop to pray. These prayers can be short and sweet or longer depending on how much time you have that day. I have a friend who sets a different alarm ring for each of her children, and when an alarm goes off she stops to pray for that individual.

Each time we stop, quiet our hearts, and speak to our heavenly Father, not only do we step into our identity as His child, but we give Him an opportunity to speak identity over us.

So, here’s the challenge—encourage each family member to:

1. Choose a time
2. Set an alarm
3. Stop and pray
4. Wait expectantly for the Lord to work

by Kendra Baker

Kendra is the Preschool and Kindergarten Coordinator at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO, where she loves watching kids fall in love with Jesus. In her free time, she can be found enjoying the outdoors, kickboxing, or curled up with a cup of coffee and a good book.
“EACH TIME WE STOP, QUIET OUR HEARTS, AND SPEAK TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, NOT ONLY DO WE STEP INTO OUR IDENTITY AS HIS CHILD, BUT WE GIVE HIM AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK IDENTITY OVER US.”
You are valued
We gently clean it to keep dust and dirt off of it. It’s treasured, and because it’s treasured, we treat it with respect.

“TO GOD, YOU ARE MORE PRECIOUS THAN THIS TEACUP. HE WANTS YOU TO BELIEVE YOU ARE WORTHY OF BEING CARED FOR AND RESPECTED. HE VALUES YOU, AND HE WANTS YOU TO VALUE YOURSELF THE SAME WAY HE DOES.”

As Jenny looks at the teacup in her mom’s hand, she feels a wave of love crash over her. Her eyes fill with tears once more as she looks up at her mom. “I think it may be time to start treating myself like a treasured teacup. Even when the other kids pick on me, I can choose to believe what they say or what God says. Thanks, Mom.” Jenny hugs her mom, and together they walk downstairs and gently put the teacup back in its place inside the hutch.

Parents, whether your child is being bullied or not, children tend to receive their value from others. As parents it’s time for us to speak God’s value over them louder and more consistently than any other source. We need to first believe that our heavenly Father has already established our value and then pass that heritage to our children. They are precious, treasured, and worthy of love and respect. Take some time to intentionally speak words of life and value over your kids. Show them how much the Lord loves them.

by Amanda Visser

Amanda is the Family Ministries Administrative and Ministry Assistant at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She enjoys running, painting, and a strong cup of coffee.
Throughout our lives, you and I are building sandcastles. What kinds of sandcastles, you ask? I’ll give some examples from a few of mine: I have a marriage sandcastle, a parent sandcastle, a job sandcastle, and an “I love to read” sandcastle (book nerds unite!).

These sandcastles represent pieces of how we identify ourselves. We might choose to build sandcastles that reflect God’s glory, or we might not. While many of our sandcastles are very good, none of them represent the deepest core of who we are. Simply put—we are His, a beautiful reflection of His glory, beloved sons and daughters of the King! There is nothing we can add or take away from ourselves to make God love or value us any more than He already does.

As we go through life and build our sandcastles, we don’t have to be afraid of what others think or if our castles will survive or not. When the waves of life come through and take down our sandcastles, whether we are cheering for the waves to roar over (like a over a job that needs to end) or begging for them to stay away (like when we lose someone or something and can’t do anything about it), we find that we are still exactly who we are meant to be because our identity in Christ can never be threatened by the destruction of or changes in these sandcastles.

We all face difficulties, failures, victories, and celebrations, but our true selves are not identified by any of these things. This way of thinking is counter-cultural in a world that tells you your value and identity comes from the type of sandcastles you build. But you, precious one, are identified by the One who reflects His glory in you, and you are deeply loved, always and no matter what.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• Kinetic Sand (can find on amazon.com or in stores like Walmart, Michaels, or Target)
• baking sheet or butcher paper
• sandcastle toys (or measuring cups, utensils, and bowls)
• “His Beloved” flags found at: bit.ly/HFJanCreateFlag
• toothpicks
• tape

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Gather your family at the kitchen table with your supplies.
2. Color and decorate your “His Beloved” flags, and then attach them to toothpicks with tape.
3. Build a sandcastle with the Kinetic Sand using the toys or measuring cups, utensils, and bowls.
4. When you have completed your sandcastle, put your flags on your castle. As you create, talk about the different sandcastles each of you is building in your life. Look at the one you have created together! It is good and displays God’s beauty, but it doesn’t take away or add to who you are. In fact, that flag is a reminder of your true identity: His Beloved.
5. Have fun demolishing the castle you just made and talk about a time when your family faced changes (maybe a job or a move, for example) or a time you went through something difficult (death of a loved one or difficulty at school, for example). In all that your family has experienced and built, God remains unthreatened by all the worries of our world and the false identities we might wear from time to time. He looks at us, a proud daddy, full of love for His Beloved.
by Bekah Bowman

Bekah resides in Irvine, CA, with her husband, Danny, and is mom to two boys, both diagnosed with a fatal disease. Ely is 5. Titus, at the age of 6, went to live life big with Jesus. Bekah works as the Associate Children’s Pastor at Journey Christian Church in Irvine. Follow her family’s story:

@Team4TitusEly
@cantstealmyjoy2
youcantstealmyjoy.com

Whether the castles you have built are standing or have been demolished, God’s never-changing message will always remind of you of your truest identity: His Beloved. Enter this New Year knowing you are sons and daughters of the Most High King and image-bearers of Christ!
GAME TIME
WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- an open space (indoor or outdoor, for running)
- Find a big open area for the game, indoors or outdoors. There will be running, so keep that in mind!

REMEMBER!

When you think about “identity” a million aspects of your life may pop up. Parents, maybe you’re a teacher, a stay-at-home dad, a grandmother, a police officer, etc. Your children may identify as good students, soccer players, dancers, etc. We may identify with these titles, but they are not our identity. Our identity is “child of God.” If that identity has been obscured for you, this New Year is the perfect time to embrace truth and step into it … without question. It may be a silly comparison, but when Mrs. or Mr. Fox tagged a running player, that player became a fox without question. He just was. On a similar note, we have been “tagged” by God, and there should be no question of who we are in Him. We just are. And what an amazing identity to have! As your winter break comes to an end, encourage your children to enter this next season taking hold of their identity in Christ and finding their confidence in Him alone.

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!
SLOW COOKER
SLOPPY JOES

Sometimes good things become even better over time. This slow-cooker version of the classic Sloppy Joe will make an even more flavorful sandwich than the nostalgic version you may remember!

YIELDS: 6 sandwiches  |  PREP: 20 min.  |  COOK: 4–8 hours

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

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 pounds lean ground beef or ground turkey
- 1/2 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 medium red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and diced
- 1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup ketchup
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon dry ground mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 6 hamburger buns, toasted if desired

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add the ground meat and use a stiff spatula or wooden spoon to break the meat into small pieces.
2. Cook, stirring occasionally, until browned and no longer pink—8 to 10 minutes.
3. Transfer the browned ground meat to a slow cooker.
4. Add the onions, bell pepper, tomato sauce, ketchup, brown sugar, Worcestershire sauce, dry ground mustard, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Stir until well combined.
5. Cover and cook on the LOW setting for 4 to 8 hours or on the HIGH setting for 2 to 3 hours.
6. Stir the mixture again, and then divide the mixture among the hamburger buns and serve immediately.
Each New Year many of us start with a list of resolutions; unfortunately, most of those resolutions are abandoned before February even hits. One resolution I made a few years ago that I have actually followed through on was telling my children how God saw them and who He has called them to be.

This month, as you make these Confetti Cookies with your children, share with them that the sprinkles that cover the cookies are like all the wonderful blessings and truths God says about us—too many to count!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- 1 cup butter or margarine
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 ¼ cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup oatmeal
- multicolored sprinkles

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. In a large bowl, cream together butter and powdered sugar until fluffy.
3. Add vanilla and mix.
4. Beat in flour, salt, and oats.
5. Coat hands with powdered sugar. Divide sticky dough in half and shape into two 1-inch diameter logs.
6. Place the cookie dough on a piece of wax paper and gently pour sprinkles in a line next to the cookie dough log.
7. Roll the dough on top of the sprinkles until they stick to the dough.
8. Continue to add sprinkles until the cookie dough is covered in sprinkles.
9. Wrap in wax paper and chill in refrigerator for 15 to 20 minutes.
10. Remove from refrigerator and slice the cookie dough into ½-inch slices.
11. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
12. Bake for 7 to 10 minutes or until light brown and allow to cool.

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 so she can 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.
I love the beginning of the New Year! Everything is filled with such hope and promise. It’s also the time to decide on goals for the coming year. One of the things I’ve done for several decades is read through the Bible at least once throughout the year while memorizing specific verses. God’s Word is so amazing that, even when I’m reading familiar passages, the Holy Spirit reveals something unique and fresh about God’s character and who I am as His child.

The logos, or the written Word, tells us about God and the people who are part of The Big God Story—including us. But the rhema word is that living word God speaks to us personally. For example, let’s say that you are fighting with your sister and you say some unkind words. You apologize to her and ask for God’s forgiveness, but you still feel guilty. Suddenly, this Scripture pops into your mind: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). You realize that when you repent and ask for forgiveness, God removes that sin and it’s gone! God brought the verse you had memorized alive for your circumstance. Therefore, it’s important to not only read the Word but to meditate on it and commit it to memory.

Before we can understand who we are, we need to know our Creator. Reading the Bible is key to knowing God. Through the Bible, we learn (among other things) that God is loving, holy, good, just, mighty, merciful, and awesome. God created everything, and He made people in His likeness (Genesis 1:27). Unfortunately, the first people, Adam and Eve, didn’t trust God or realize their true identity. So, when they were tempted to “be like God,” they disobeyed and brought sin into every human born (Genesis 3:5–6). Our sin separates us from His presence (Colossians 1:21).

We see this in today’s society where there is so much focus on “self” and confusion of identity and purpose. But God loves us so much that He makes a way for us to be free from sin and brings us back into His family (John 3:16). Jesus takes our sin and gives us His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through Jesus, we not only can live in God’s presence, but God’s Holy Spirit lives in us to help us to become like God (2 Corinthians 3:18). Only in Jesus can we find our true identity and purpose.

by Jill Nardini

Jill serves as an elementary and preschool teacher at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She loves Jesus and has been blessed to teach the Word of God to all ages for several decades. Her favorite title is “Mom,” and she homeschooled her two wonderful children (now 22 and 20) through graduation. Jill enjoys taking walks with John, her loving husband of 27 years, and spending time with family and friends.
**Hear It**

2019

Each month, commit a verse to memory. Find additional verses related to the verse by using a word search on the Internet or a Bible concordance. As you study these verses as a family, discuss the following:

- What does this verse teach me about God’s character?
- What does it mean that I am ___ (a new creation, God’s child, etc.)?
- What is one of your favorite promises of God?
- What can I do when I don’t feel like who God says I am?

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<tr>
<th>JANUARY</th>
<th>FEBRUARY</th>
<th>MARCH</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I AM A NEW CREATION!</strong></td>
<td><strong>I AM LOVED!</strong></td>
<td><strong>I AM GOD’S CHILD!</strong></td>
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<td>“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17</td>
<td>“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” 1 John 4:10</td>
<td>“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12</td>
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<td><strong>I AM FORGIVEN!</strong></td>
<td><strong>I HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST!</strong></td>
<td><strong>I AM GOD’S TEMPLE!</strong></td>
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<td>“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9</td>
<td>“‘Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 2:16</td>
<td>“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.” 1 Corinthians 6:19</td>
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<th>JULY</th>
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<td><strong>GOD CREATED ME TO DO GOOD WORKS!</strong></td>
<td><strong>I AM CHOSEN!</strong></td>
<td><strong>I AM NEVER ALONE!</strong></td>
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<td>“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10</td>
<td>“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9</td>
<td>“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20b</td>
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<td><strong>I AM PROTECTED FROM THE EVIL ONE!</strong></td>
<td><strong>I HAVE VICTORY OVER SIN AND DEATH!</strong></td>
<td><strong>I HAVE ETERNAL LIFE!</strong></td>
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<td>“But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.” 2 Thessalonians 3:3</td>
<td>“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:57</td>
<td>“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.” John 10:28</td>
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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)

It’s time, it’s time to share God’s great love

God loves me, chose me, says I am brave

He said He’ll help me, I know it’s true

It’s time, it’s time to share God’s great love

As you wake your little ones, remind them that God loves them. Share with them who God says they are—chosen, adopted, brave sons and daughters of the Most High King! Then, sing this rhyme together to the tune of “Humpty Dumpty.”

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

Written by Evie Swart
Evie has been in children’s ministry for 17 years and is currently working as the Midweek Director for Family Ministries at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She enjoys traveling with her husband, Russ, and teenage kids, Zach and Cassidy, and eating spicy food.

Sung by Cassidy Swart
Cassidy is a junior in high school and loves to sing. She enjoys leading worship and being a small group leader in New Life Kids. At school, she serves as an officer in Future Business Leaders of America and as vice president for Student Council.
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.

So many voices and influences speak over the lives of our children every day, and it can be easy for them to value themselves based on others’ labels. Recently at a student ministry retreat, the leaders had the opportunity to speak a blessing over the lives of sixth- through eighth-grade students. We began to speak truth—not about what we thought of them but about what God thinks of them. After the retreat, one of the students confessed that he had believed he was “dumb” because of his difficulty learning in school. However, after hearing truth spoken over him, he is convinced that he had believed a lie from the enemy. He sees now that his value comes from the blood of Jesus and that God’s opinion of him is the only opinion that matters.

As parents, you have the opportunity each and every day to speak Christ’s identity over your children’s lives. Allow God’s truth to wash over them, give them strength, renew their minds, and define their value.

READ

Read Ephesians 1:7–8:

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding.”

BLESS

Speak this blessing over your child:

(Child’s name), may you know that your heavenly Father calls you His own. You have been bought with a price and have been sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise. May you know that you have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of your sins, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavishes on you with all wisdom and understanding. Jesus defines your value and anoints your worth. May you simply receive what He desires to pour out on you and embrace the new life that God gives you in His Son, Christ Jesus.

by Timothy Shepard

Timothy is the Director of the Junior High Ministry at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. He has been married to his wife, Mariah, for two years and was born and raised in Colorado Springs.
MISSION 108

OUR MISSION

Advocating for the marginalized, empowering the vulnerable, partnering with the willing, and focusing on human rights for the survivors of human trafficking and the extremely poor.

OUR VISION

We stand on the belief that we belong to each other. We envision a world dominated by love and generosity. We believe in looking at social issues through a global lens in order to bring human rights to every person.

LEARN MORE AT: mission108.com
Robbie and Brittany Ross started Mission 108 in 2012 while working with impoverished communities in their hometown of Lexington, KY. The high school sweethearts married in 2010 and went directly into life as a Major League Baseball player and wife to a professional athlete. Brittany prides herself in being an “adult against adulting” and figuring things out as she goes driven by her heart and intuition. Robbie is always smiling and keeping everyone around him laughing with his childlike soul.

The couple felt called to do something greater with the platform they’d been given as a MLB family and influencers in their community. Along their journey God opened the door to fighting human trafficking and loving the extremely poor. Whether it was seeing the reality of poverty and those that live on less than a dollar a day or seeing the darkness of modern-day slavery, their hearts have been undone. Brittany has been traveling the world, serving the poor, and investigating the eradication of modern-day slavery for the past several years. Robbie was moved to do more with his platform than just play baseball. He has supported his wife’s dream to explore different cultures and serve the poor since the beginning. He even travels to India to visit their partners in his off-season.

Mission 108 aims to capture the human heart with infectious love by means of extreme generosity, faith, joy, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We are a tribe of inspiring people who believe it is up to us to bring light into darkness. Robbie and Brittany found themselves losing their religion and clinging to faith at the end of 2015. Personal heartache, loss, and grief are what drive them to keep fighting the good fight. They both have tattoos saying, “Rebels For Life,” which reminds them their faith is not confined to the walls of a church building or by the rules of religious leaders. Rather, when they want to understand and see the face of God, they look into the eyes of their brothers and sisters around the world created in the image of a perfect and divine, eternal, and loving God.

Mission 108 is building a community where everyone knows that he or she belongs. We support and partner with organizations already doing good work in their communities and advocate on behalf of marginalized people. We know that because of the tribe members we are able to add more joy to the world. Mission 108 will break down cultural barriers because we stand on the belief that we belong to each other and we are all connected. Our journey has only just begun, and we are excited to invite you along with us!

“We are all just walking each other home.”
WHERE IN THE WORLD IS ...  

POLAND

Located in central Europe, Poland is bordered on the west by Germany, on the north by the Baltic Sea, on the northeast by Russia and Lithuania, on the east by Belarus and Ukraine, and on the south by Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Poland covers a total area of 120,728 square miles. The capital city, Warsaw, is situated in the center of the country.
Now that we know where in the world Poland is, let’s meet and greet the people.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- The name “Poland” (Polska) originates from the name of the Polanie tribe, which means “people living in open fields.”
- The 380,000-acre Białowieża Primeval Forest in Poland is Europe’s last ancient forest and home to 800 European bison, Europe’s heaviest land animals.
- Located in Wrocław, the “Piwnica Świdnicka” is the oldest restaurant in Europe. It’s been open since 1275. You can still eat there today.

**SERVING FROM POLAND**

Someone once said that 90 percent of life is just showing up. And after 18 years of serving in Poland, I have to agree.

I first “showed up” in Poland during the summer of 1996 to serve with a group of high school students at a summer camp for children. Those three weeks changed all of us. Shortly afterwards, I received the call to return and work full time. So in early 2001, I “showed up” once again to begin serving with the mission organization that had made my first trip possible. For the next seven years I had the awesome pleasure of equipping others to experience similar short-term successes.

Since that time I have continued to support the Polish mission, developing teachers and providing materials for the purpose of teaching the Bible to children. The best way to accomplish this is through supporting local churches. So I am excited to regularly show up at conferences to teach and support these dedicated teachers.

The best thing, though, is that I still get to show up during the summer for camps where it all started. God touches our lives so deeply at camp, and I love being part of His plans. The same is true at the after-school program where I show up the rest of the year. Being here in Poland these many years has given me a voice in the community, and the consistency of showing up opens many opportunities to build strong relationships with leaders, parents, and, of course, the kids. Daily I am blessed to see the impact of simply showing up.

**Jim Fournier**  
Krakow, Poland  
Serving with Misja Pokolen (Mission to the Generations)  
Volunteer at Christian School UCZEN  
Free time: exploring, photographing, and eating my way through the beautiful city of Krakow  
Instagram: jim4nier
Let’s get ready to rummbbllleee!!! I’ve always wanted to say that although I’ve never been one to enjoy watching boxing or wrestling. It looks painful and, somehow, weirdly too intimate? But the metaphor of wrestling seems so appropriate for our middle schoolers. The middle school years seem to be a wrestle.

Our children wrestle internally over how to dress, act, talk, etc. They wrestle with others as they figure out how to relate amidst a sea of hormones. And they wrestle with God over what it means to follow Him and how their identity can rest in Him. Fortunately, God has given us a powerful story in His Word that helps us understand how good can come from the wrestle.

In Genesis, we read about a man named Jacob. Jacob’s name means “deceiver,” and, wow, did he live up to his name! He deceived his brother out of his birthright, deceived his father in order to receive a blessing he didn’t deserve, and deceived his father-in-law out of a whole herd of sheep. Jacob’s identity was firmly rooted in deception. Then one day he wrestled with God. In Genesis 32:22-32 we read the crazy story of this wrestle. As Jacob wrestled with God, God changed his name. God called him “Israel.” In that moment, God changed Jacob’s identity. He was no longer one who deceives.

The next story we read is about Jacob humbly reconciling with his brother, Esau. Wow! As we watch our students wrestle with God we can cling to this beautiful story of hope. We can trust that God will meet with our children in their wrestling and change their identity for good.
TALK ABOUT IT

Find a time to talk about Jacob’s story with your middle schooler. Ask: How are you currently wrestling with God? If God gave you a new name that truly defines your identity in Him, what would that name be? (Think about names like “Warrior,” “Daughter,” “Beloved,” “Faithful,” etc.)

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.
Despite my best efforts, I usually find one. I try and control myself, but inevitably there is one Black Friday Sale that grabs my attention. This past year was no different, and I justified it because it solved a problem for me. I lose things. I set things down and forget where they are.

This year, for Black Friday, they were selling a locator device that I KNEW was made for me. There are different brands, but the one I had read the best reviews about was a device called TILE. You attach it to your keys, your bag, your dog, or whatever you don’t want to lose. Then you use your cell phone to locate the tile you have misplaced with the hope that the item of value is still attached. By the way, it works like a charm!

As I was finding my keys for the fourth time in a day, I thought about how forgetful I am and I wondered if it’s actually true about most of us. I know it’s true for my kids. They are forgetful of most things—including who they are. A while back my son was acting in ways that were contrary to who I KNEW he was. He was being unkind, acting out at school, and getting corrected often. Nothing different than I have seen in other children, but this one is mine, so I needed to do something about it. After some conversation, what I realized was that he had FORGOTTEN who he was. Or at the very least he was believing he was something that God had not made him to be.

At first, I got frustrated at how he was acting, but slowly I reminded myself (because I too am forgetful) that my job is to help remind him. So, we spent some time looking at who made him and what he is called as a son of God. Ephesians 1:3–5 declares that we are blessed, chosen, holy, blameless, loved, and adopted. And that’s just part of who we are. It is a powerful reminder of not only who we are but also whose we are. Paul says both are crucial!

And so, after we read through Ephesians 1 together, we had a point of reference as we talked. As we walked to school, we talked about Ephesians 1 and what it looks like to live when we are loved, holy, and chosen. Even if we don’t forget who we are made to be, there is a loud world out there trying to convince us that we are made for something less than what God has set aside for us.

High school is a prime time for the world to wage war against our children’s identity. As parents and pastors, it is our job to help our students find their way back, affirm their identity in Christ, and point out what God is doing in them.

Parents, may our voices be a gentle, encouraging, and constant reminder that in God we aren’t lost, we are FOUND. We aren’t bad, we are SAVED. And in our identity of who God made us to be, we are HOME!

by Jeff Bachman

Jeff has been in youth and family ministry for 26 years and is currently working at Mariners Church in Mission Viejo, CA, as the student ministry pastor. He is passionate about getting a glimpse of the eternal though the lives of the people he works with. Jeff has had the privilege of communicating with thousands of students and young adults through preaching and teaching at his own church, at camps, and at national and international student events. He has been a contributing writer for Download Youth Ministry, Interlinc, Journal of Student Ministries, and David C Cook publishing. Jeff has his master’s degree from Western Seminary in evangelism and equipping. He and his wife of 17 years, Shara, have three children: Jackson (12), Isabella (10), and Charlotte (8). Jeff loves music, cooking, traveling, comic books, and sitting over conversation with a beverage.
“Moms, if you are currently struggling with your ‘I am,’ you are not alone. The good news is, there is a God who sees you, knows you intimately, and loves you with a pursuing love.”

For years, I found a big part of my identity in my job—in speaking engagements, in meeting with leaders, in ministering to others.

This year, my role will change from a corporate-working momma to a full-time stay-at-home mom. When I felt God initially speak of this upcoming change, my knee-jerk reaction was “What in the world, God?! I am NOT the type of person who has a desire to be at home full-time. I am fulfilled in my job and I am good at it! I am doing what You have created me to do!”

I AM.

Those two words can be used carelessly—or, they can change the course of a person’s life. When spoken intentionally, with heart, they are a gateway to vitality.

Who I am is found in Scripture. Not in a job. Not in my home. Not in my people. Who I am is rooted in God’s words even on my biggest day of doubt.

I am chosen, holy, and blameless before God. (Ephesians 1:4)
I am redeemed and forgiven by the grace of Christ. (Ephesians 1:7)
I am a child of God. (John 1:12)
I am a new creature in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
I am God’s workmanship created to produce good works. (Ephesians 2:10)
God loves me and has chosen me. (1 Thessalonians 1:4)

God’s leading to change job roles left me in a two-week tantrum and in an emotional meltdown due to my identity misplacement. I’m sure it was hard to tell the difference between me and my two year old during that time. Eventually, I stopped and decided to invite a patient God back into the scene to fulfill His role as the great I Am.

My identity needed a severe course correction. For many years, I unintentionally found my identity outside of the original author. God brought me to a place of complete surrender to Him to be reminded of who I am. I am chosen, not by man, but by God. I am a change-maker, not by my works, but by Christ’s work. I am a leader, not because I lead others, but because I follow Jesus. When my “I AM” is soaked in
God’s truth I will accomplish the work He has set before me. I am equipped with all I need because I am found in Christ Jesus.

Moms, if you are currently struggling with your “I am,” you are not alone. The good news is, there is a God who sees you, knows you intimately, and loves you with a pursuing love. When we surrender who we think we are, God will reveal who we truly are in Him. Our seasons in life will ebb and flow, but our identity in God never changes. It is never too late to reclaim authenticity in Christ.

It is time for me to take hold of my role as a child of God and pass these truths on to my own children. I AM a child of God.

by Lindsey Snider

Lindsey is an Oklahoma gal through and through. She has served as a kids pastor and creative specialist for churches across the states. She is currently embracing her new role as a SAHCM (Stay at Home Cool Mom) and working on their latest farm adventure, Wellstead. Lindsey and her hubby have two beautiful children, Brooklyn and Jack. They love to travel, blow bubbles, and cuddle with their dog, Frisco.

@okwellstead
That day started with me yelling at my kids for doing something I had told them no less than 3,000 times not to do. Of course, that put me behind schedule for the rest of the day (I tend to wax verbose when lecturing my children). So, by the time I finally wrapped up my eloquent, compelling, and completely justified homily—which none of them appreciated nearly as much as I thought they should have—got dressed and ready for the day, and hopped in the car, I was already 15 minutes late to work. I sped across town, or tried to—hitting each of the 27 red lights in the four miles between my home and office. By the time I arrived at work—at church, that is—people had already started gathering for the one-day spiritual discipline retreat I was leading. I had hoped to arrive early and spend a little time reviewing my notes but, late as I was, I just had to jump in. So, I got on the stage, opened my notes, and started talking.

“We are all in the process of becoming. In Christ, we are, right now, loved, redeemed, righteous, and holy. That is what is true of you, what is truest of you. Nevertheless, and you may be like me, I often don’t live my life like this is true. There is a gap between who I am in Christ and who I am on a daily basis. The question we’re going to consider today is this: how do we bridge the gap between who we are and who we are?”
I then went on to unpack the mystery of grace, rather persuasively, I thought, given my lack of adequate prep time. “The answer to the question,” I explained, “as every follower of Jesus knows, is grace. A miracle of grace secures our new identity. It is also grace that enables us to live into that new identity, closing the gap between who we are and who we are.”

“That being said, grace,” I continued to expound, “is not to be received passively but actively. The work of the Spirit, in other words, is not something that is done to us against our wills but something in which we are called to participate. Again, Paul says it best, this time in the book of Philippians:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (Philippians 3:12)

“You see,” I told the people gathered that morning, “grace is not something you are to be dragged through; it is something you are to walk in. And, that’s what the spiritual disciplines are. They are not means of earning grace but of participating in grace. Practices like Bible study, prayer, silence and solitude, fasting, and Sabbath are ways we can make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit and partner with Him in the work He is doing in us.”

Then, feeling rather good about myself, I dismissed them for an hour to spend some time silent in the presence of Jesus, participating in what Eugene Peterson so beautifully called “the unforced rhythms of grace.”

While they were off hearing from God, I decided to go for a walk and clear my head. I hadn’t made it more than a few steps before the Holy Spirit ruined my walk. I was midstride when He spoke, clear as a bell in my head: “Don’t you think that everything you just said to the church might be true of your kids too? Aren’t they too in the process of becoming? Why then do you expect them to have already arrived?” I just stood there in the middle of the road as the weight of His words settled over me.

Don’t I do to Him the same things that my kids do to me: ignore Him over and over again, still do the things He’s told me not do no less than 3,000 times, neglect the things He has made it very clear are best for me? And yet His answer to my stubbornness is an even more stubborn grace and kindness that leads to repentance. He doesn’t condemn me for the gap between who I am and who I am but invites me to see that He is working in the gap, invites me to join Him in that work. “Why don’t you try that strategy with you kids?” He asked me. “Why not help them in the process of becoming by offering grace and opportunities for partnership?”

All of that happened about a year ago, and I wish I could tell you that everything changed from that day forward. But it hasn’t, at least not completely. There have been glimmers of hope along the way, of change in me and my parenting, but there have been plenty of failures as well, plenty of times when I haven’t extended grace, when I haven’t given my kids realistic and tangible ways to partner in their own development. I’d like to say that I have become the model parent, but it’s just not true. Why? Because I’m in the process of becoming. Because there’s still a gap between who I am in Christ and who I am on a daily basis. And, God continues to invite me to join Him in it. So, today, I choose again to do just that, to receive and participate in His grace, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in [me] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, once again, Paul).

by Josh Harrison

Josh lives in Costa Mesa, CA, with his wife, Heather, and their three kids, Buzè (15), Marta (12), and Elijah (4). Until recently, he served as the Teaching Pastor at ROCKHARBOR Church, and he is currently awaiting his next kingdom assignment. In his free time, Josh enjoys spending time with his family, reading, watching, coaching, and playing sports, and barbecuing.
ROOTED IN TRUTH

If you ask my friends, they will tell you that I’m not a helicopter mom. However, when my kids play with other children, I like to observe how they interact with their friends. Earlier this year, my five-year-old daughter was playing with a friend who was being very unkind. I did not intervene. Instead, I watched to see how she would respond. She did not allow her friend’s unkindness to affect her behavior, and she kept on sharing and playing. I told her later that I was proud of her for being kind despite how unkind her friend had been and that it showed she was mature. “What’s mature, Mama?” she asked. I explained that it meant that she did something like a girl older than five.

The next day I noticed my daughter had a particularly sad demeanor. I asked her what was causing her sadness, and she explained that the same friend had been unkind again and had even embarrassed her in front of other friends. She said, “What he did made me feel the opposite of what you said I was yesterday.”

I cuddled my girl and responded, “I’m sorry your friend made you feel that way, Abby. But, what I said about you yesterday is the truth. You are kind and mature. What other people say or do might make you feel bad. But you have to remind yourself that what I said is true, no matter how you might feel.” It was a tough moment for my five-year-old daughter, but it became a sacred moment for both of us.

I know it won’t be the last one. My little girl will grow and have many moments where her feelings will not align with the truth of her identity as an image-bearer of Christ. One day she will see an unrealistic standard of beauty and success and may feel tempted to strive tirelessly for it. I have to teach her now about the truth of who she is in Christ and model for her the kingdom definitions of beauty and success. One day she will hear an alluring message that her feelings are her most reliable guide as she makes choices about relationships, beliefs, or gender identity. I have to remind her now, as I did earlier this year, that feelings are poor, deceptive substitutes for her Creator’s truthful words.

Tough moments or seasons inevitably come as we raise our children. Instead of avoiding them, let’s get prepared for them and be ready to fully engage. We need to be a safe place where our kids can talk about the hard, painful, and confusing issues and also hear the complete truth soaked with the full measure of our love. And then the tough moments can become the sacred moments.

by Summer Sneed

Summer and her husband, Kevin, have served as International Pentecostal Holiness Church missionaries in Eldoret, Kenya, since April 2009. They are directors of East Africa Bible College. Summer also works with women to develop girls’ ministries. She and Kevin have two children, Abigail and Nathaniel, who were both born in Kenya.

kevinandsummersneed.wordpress.com

Amani podcast, now available on iTunes
I clearly remember the day God revealed to me a very important truth about my relationship with Him. I’m either actively growing or naturally drifting.

It was a quiet morning in the office, and as I gazed coldly at my chaotic desk I felt irritated. “I just cleaned this last week!” Somehow over the course of just seven days my clean desk had turned back into a cacophony of books and papers. How could this be? Was I that disorganized? Was I that busy? No. I was simply inattentive.

By not paying attention, my desk moved from neat and orderly to messy and untidy. And the same principle applies to your closet, your health, your flowerbeds, your spice rack, and your car. Not paying attention results in a natural drift toward chaos.

This truth also plays out in the marriage relationship. Not paying attention to your marriage results in a natural drift toward chaos. So, if you’ve ever felt like your marriage was falling apart, it probably was. Because of sin, there is a natural drift that occurs in every relationship—a drift apart. No one purposefully decides to drift apart. It just happens … naturally.

So, what do we do about it?

It’s time to make some decisions about your marriage. Here are three decisions you can make as you head into 2019!
It’s time to decide that you won’t settle for a drifting marriage. It’s okay to not be okay, but it’s not okay to stay there. The only way to move toward a growing, healthy marriage relationship is to actively reject passivity. It’s deciding, “I’m no longer going to remain inattentive to my marriage.” Your marriage is your most important human relationship. It’s of the utmost value and worthy of your utmost attention.

It’s time to decide that who you are in Christ is foundational to who you are in marriage. You won’t ever be able to fulfill your role as husband or wife if you don’t fully accept your identity as a child of God. The marriage relationship represents the relationship between Christ and His church! You can faithfully serve your spouse as you mirror how Christ has first served you.

It’s time to decide on one action step toward a thriving marriage. When I see a flowerbed grossly overgrown and overtaken by weeds, I feel overwhelmed. Where do I start? I can sit there and analyze the situation, or I can jump in and start pulling weeds. Don’t overanalyze your next action step toward a thriving marriage. It’s time to do something. Schedule a date night, a game night, or a night of conversation after the kids go to bed. Surprise your spouse with a gift. Speak his/her love language. Do something together.

Again, if you feel like your marriage is falling apart, it just might be. But it doesn’t have to be. It’s time to make some decisions, put a stop to the natural drift, and start growing!

by Andy Comer

Andy is the lead pastor of Antioch Georgetown, a new church in the Austin, TX, area that launched January 2018. He and his wife, Erin, have three daughters, and they enjoy an eclectic mix of ministry, graphic design, and making old things new.

andycomer.org
OUR GRANDCHILDREN’S INHERITANCE
Most species in the animal kingdom continue to reproduce until they die. Two exceptions to this are humans and elephants. They both live several decades past their reproductive years. While we know that humans are not animals but made in God’s image, He has nevertheless provided a lesson for us in the elephant. Research shows that baby elephants who are around their grandmothers have eight times less risk of an early death and demonstrate being better parents themselves. The presence of a grandmother brings stability and survival to the herd.1

It is no accident that God has given humans 70 to 80 years (Psalm 90:10) for us to be able to play an important role in our grandchildren’s lives. When Israel was given instruction to observe all that God had said and to remember God’s visitation, they were instructed to remember and teach these things to their children and their grandchildren (Deuteronomy 4:6–9). The apostle Paul even attributed Timothy’s devout faith, in part, to his grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5).

How does this look in practice? Well, here are a couple of examples from my own life.

1. My grandson Dawson changed schools this year. He was very discouraged and lonely. I saw this as an opportunity to affirm his true identity. So, I wrote him a letter reminding him of how God’s Spirit had been working in him when he had asked to be baptized and that God had a plan for him. Soon, Dawson had new friends, many of whom are believers.

2. Not long ago, we climbed a rock formation with my eight-year-old granddaughter Ellie, my grandson, and my son-in-law. Ellie was walking dangerously close to a drop-off edge. After several warnings, her father finally yelled at her to get back. He then immediately had to run after my grandson. Ellie’s hurting, angry look prompted me to sit her down and tell her of my profound joy when she was born. Her look of rejection melted into a smile, and I then explained that her father’s apparent anger was actually fear that she might get hurt, and God wants her to obey her parents.

3. I thought my seven-year-old grandson Jack could climb Mount Sherman (14,043 feet). We got within 400 feet of the summit when a 60 miles per hour wind came up, knocked him over, and terrified him. I could see the sense of failure on his face as we went back down. I assured him that most seven year olds would not have gotten that far and confessed that I was scared as well. I later sent him a framed picture of him and me with the words “Jack and Papa, Mount Sherman 2017.” He proudly showed it to all his friends.

4. My wife, Rosemary, has instituted a tradition of us taking each one of our grandchildren somewhere special on his or her birthday. I am amazed how well this creates dialogue and opportunities to share God’s love and speak our grandchildren’s God-given identities over them.

Grandparents, we have the unique calling to remind our grandchildren of the reality of their place in the family of God by loving them unconditionally, upholding His words, and recounting our own experiences in the Lord. Because of today’s unique strains on parents, grandparents are well suited to help pass the torch of faith, love, spiritual tradition, and true identity to our grandchildren. Much like the elephants, we are here for a reason—it’s time we step into our role!


by Mark Dawson, MD

Mark has pursued “reasonable faith” throughout his life. Recently, he retired as a physician specializing in internal medicine and took certificate courses in Christian apologetics from Biola University. He has been teaching apologetics to various groups, including Desperation Leadership Academy students, elementary students, and an adult life group at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. He and his wife, Rosemary, live in Colorado Springs and have three children and eight grandchildren.
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 “God transforms me when I step out in faith.”

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.

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

Serving

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

Love & Respect

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

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

Storytelling

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
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HomeFront

Equipping parents and grandparents to create fun, spiritually forming times in their homes.

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