August 2018

HomeFront

a spiritual parenting resource

OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

“GOD TRANSFORMS ME WHEN I STEP OUT IN FAITH.”
HOW TO USE

HomeFront

Each issue highlights an environment your family can create in your home. This month looks at OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE. 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.

© 2018 New Life Church
The environment of OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE recognizes that God transforms us when we step out in faith. Our flesh seeks comfort, but God’s Spirit wants to try our faith in order to grow it.

As children are challenged to step out of their comfort zone from an early age, they experience a dependence on the Holy Spirit, who will equip and strengthen them beyond their natural abilities and desires. We believe this will cultivate a generation of believers who, instead of seeking comfort, seek a radical life of dying to self and following Christ.

As adults, when we’re in situations where our own resources fulfill what’s needed, we tend to rely on our own abilities. Our kids, on the other hand, don’t have nearly as many personal resources on which to fall back. Their pure faith often helps them to depend on the Holy Spirit far more readily than we do as adults.

That’s why James tells us to “consider it pure joy” (James 1:2) when we encounter trials. Joy in trials may seem like an oxymoron, but when we come to the end of our resources and our strength and we depend on the Holy Spirit, then we’re truly in a relationship with the Almighty. That’s the place where sanctification happens ... and where we find true joy!

Michelle Anthony
Executive Pastor: Family Ministries | New Life Church
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
EDITOR’S NOTE

A comfort zone is a space we like to live in to minimize stress and risk. Most of us like to stay where things feel familiar and secure. When we step out of our comfort zone, the anticipation of what might happen often opens us up to stress and anxiety. As Christians, we can rely on the Holy Spirit and “take courage” knowing that God is with us.

Our STORYTELLING (page 18) shares the story of a family leaving everything familiar and moving across the country. It is a beautiful reminder that God is with us wherever we go. GOD’S WORD (page 28) shares the story of Queen Esther and how she risked everything to save her people. God used Esther to be a small part of His big story because she was willing to step out of her comfort zone and rely on Him.

Recognizing that August is back-to-school month for most families, we wanted to acknowledge the uncomfortable feelings that come with a new school year. Our TRADITIONS (page 14) has a list of ideas for some new traditions that can help ease the stress of a new school year. Our STUDENT ID HIGH SCHOOL (page 38) reminds us that we enter new seasons of life so God can present us with new opportunities. And when students trust and obey God, He will guide them as they step out of their comfort zone.

This environment is less about being uncomfortable and more about learning to rely on the Holy Spirit when we are. Our prayer is for this issue of HomeFront to provide ways to inspire, equip, and support your family as you live lives of risk for Jesus and the mission He calls you to!

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

Debbie is the Editor in Chief of HomeFront magazine. She has more than 25 years of experience working in children’s and family ministries. She is passionate about equipping parents to become leaders of God’s truth in their own households. She is a recent transplant to Austin, TX, where she 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.

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.

Consider purchasing an 8” x 10” frame to hold your family memory verse each month!
Be strong, and let your heart take courage.

Psalm 31:24 ESV

All you who wait for the LORD, take courage!

FAMILY VERSE
CONTENTS

26

FAMILY TIME

5
FAMILY VERSE
Psalm 31:24

8
CAPTURING THE SEASON
Colored Pencil Frame

10
WORSHIP
Kindness as Worship

12
CONVERSATION STARTERS
Homeroom Changed Me

14
TRADITIONS
Back-to-School Traditions

16
PRAYER
Back-to-School Prayers for Your Family
18  STORYTELLING
Wherever We Go

20  CREATE
Lunch Box Challenge

22  GAME TIME
Water Balloon Shoot

24  FAMILY TIME RECIPE
Taco Pop Tarts

26  KIDS IN THE KITCHEN
Savory Saltines

28  GOD’S WORD
Queen Esther

30  TOT TIME RHYME
When You Sit at Home

31  BLESSING
Bless With Your Words

32  TAKING ACTION
The Locker

34  GLOBAL
Niger

36  STUDENT ID
MIDDLE SCHOOL
Say Yes to New Things

38  STUDENT ID
HIGH SCHOOL
Trust and Obey

40  EVERYDAY MOM BLOG
Souls Over Stuff

42  EVERYDAY DAD BLOG
In Christ Alone

44  TOUGH TOPICS
Show Up

46  MARRIAGE
Connecting Questions for Couples

48  SPIRITUAL GRANDPARENTING
Step Out of Your Comfort Zone
CAPTURING THE SEASON

FAMILY TIME

**COLORED PENCIL FRAME**

BE STRONG, AND LET YOUR HEART TAKE COURAGE, ALL YOU WHO WAIT FOR THE LORD! PSALM 31:24 ESV
This month, have fun with your children creating this unique Colored Pencil Frame—and then use it to display the Family Time Verse (page 5). There is no right or wrong way to put this together; allow your children to create a pattern they like. As your family works together on the frame, talk with them about the Family Time Verse. Remind them that, as we step out of our comfort zone, God is with us and will give us courage to share His love with others.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 8" x 10" flat-surfacers wooden frame
- colored pencils
- strong cutting tool (like wire cutters, handheld garden shears, or strong scissors)
- sandpaper or sanding block
- glue gun and glue sticks

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Cut pencils into different lengths.
2. Use the sandpaper or sanding block to smooth the ends of the cut pencils.
3. Lay out pencils to create a random pattern on the face of the frame.
4. Begin hot gluing the pencils to the frame.
5. Print out the Family Time Verse at homefrontmag.com.
6. Place verse in frame and begin memorizing as a family!

by Debbie Gunn
For two years, my husband, Matt, and I have been part of a team that visits the people who work in Amsterdam’s infamous Red Light District. We tell them about God’s love for them—about hope. We pray, we listen, and we offer practical help. Sometimes the young women want to talk; sometimes we have to put in more effort to get to spend time with them. We always try to think of unique ways to bring something to bless them, surprise them, and show them God’s love in a tangible way.

For my 40th birthday I came up with a plan. I ordered a big birthday cake and cut it into about 50 pieces. On the box I wrote a note that said: “Today is my 40th birthday, and I love spending it with you because you are so valuable to me.”

Matt and I stepped out of our comfort zone and took the birthday cake and a large thermos of coffee to the young women. Their responses were so special! Hugs, birthday wishes, presents, and text messages. We even got to know new women—which is an opportunity to share Christ and to talk about the help we offer to get out of this work!

The reason we go out to the young women is because, in the gospel of Luke chapter 15, we see time and again that Jesus goes out to look for that which is lost. Sometimes finding and building relationships with the lost around us takes some creativity! We have brought various young women breakfast, coffee mugs that say “You are loved,” flowers, and even a beautiful bathrobe.

Another reason we meet with these young women is because we are doing it unto Him! If we read Matthew 25, we discover that anytime we help, love, and serve the least of Jesus’ brothers and sisters, we are doing it unto Him. In the hurting, oppressed, lonely, and poor we can see Jesus. When we do something about their hurt, their oppression, their loneliness, or their poverty, we do it for Jesus. We can see our acts of love as acts of worship to Him!

Every time I go into Amsterdam’s Red Light District and enter the women’s workspace, I don’t look at their clothes, I don’t look at the surroundings. The thing I do is focus on each young woman’s eyes. Because when I look in her eyes I see a beloved daughter of the Lord. And when I focus on that, loving her is an act of worship to her Maker!

God has placed each one of us in a place with people in need of His love. I know that if you listen to the Holy Spirit, He will give you and your family creative ideas to make His love tangible to those around you—even if that means stepping out of your comfort zone.

As an act of worship, brainstorm some unique ways to share God’s love with others. Then, step out and put your plan into action and watch as God transforms your family.

by Femke Helland

Femke and her husband, Matthew, have been International Pentecostal Holiness Church missionaries to Amsterdam for 12 years. They have four children. Their focus is church planting, and they would love to see a church community planted out of the harvest in Amsterdam’s Red Light District. Would you pray for their ministry?
IF WE READ MATTHEW 25, WE DISCOVER THAT ANYTIME WE HELP, LOVE, AND SERVE THE LEAST OF JESUS’ BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WE ARE DOING IT UNTO HIM.
The first day of ninth grade was a defining moment for me. The summer before my high school career began, our family moved to the charming small town of Sulphur Springs, TX. A couple of key questions ran through my mind: What was the style here? What trendy school supplies did the other kids have? I was the new kid with no clue how to fit in.

There I sat, snugly tucked into my homeroom desk with the cold classroom wall on one side and 20 or so ninth graders on the other. I had made up my mind to stay in my comfort zone when it came to making new friends. But God taught me a valuable lesson when a small group of kids approached me and started asking me questions. Their kindness and genuine interest impacted me and set a positive path for the rest of my high school days. Those students gave me the gift of experiencing what it felt like to be on the receiving end of someone following the Holy Spirit’s prompting to leave comfort and show kindness to others.

Now I have the privilege of teaching my three girls to listen for the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit and to follow His leading. My husband and I allow them to be in new, possibly uncomfortable environments and then give them an opportunity to tell us about it. These are great teaching moments. Before an event where they could easily stay in
their comfort zone, we spend a few moments in preparation. First we remember times they have been the new kids or left out and how that felt. Then we talk about times they were loved or included and how that felt. The girls purpose to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit when He asks them to show His love. Of course we hope they show His love to everyone, but sometimes they must leave their comfort zone and reach out to a specific person in a special way. Do they always succeed in this? No. But they are building the muscle.

This year, as the new school year ramps up, spend some time with your family discussing how the Holy Spirit is asking you to leave your comfort zone.

GET YOUR FAMILY TALKING …

• Talk about a time you felt left out. How did that feel?
• Remember a time when you were included. How did that affect your experience?
• Discuss ways to remember to pray for the Holy Spirit to show you specific people to care for in various social situations.
• Memorize Joshua 1:9 together as a family. When you are stretched out of your comfort zone, say this verse and go for it!

by Erin Comer

Erin and her husband Andy are church planters near Austin, TX. They enjoy time with their girls, restoring anything old, and learning new things. They are growing forward together!
As my oldest child gears up to start kindergarten this year, I have been researching traditions to begin each school year. I want the tradition to be relatively simple, easy to replicate each year, and something that my now-kindergartner can still participate in when he is a senior in high school. Here are some ideas I have found:

- Back-to-school breakfast: Make something special like pancakes with sprinkles and whipped cream.
- Back-to-school dinner: Gather the entire family for dinner the night before school starts and pray for the upcoming year.
- Back-to-school picture: Take a picture each year on the first day of school. I found some free chalkboard printouts online that allow you to fill in your child’s age, grade, interests, etc.
- Jitter glitter: This could be glittery lip balm or some confetti in your child’s backpack or lunchbox that will remind her that God is with her if she gets jittery about the first day.
- First-day-of-school lunch: Make the same thing for the first day of school each year. The Taco Pop Tart recipe (page 24) would be a fun and unique tradition for this lunch!
- Back-to-school trip: Take a camping (or fishing or hiking or shopping) trip on the weekend before school starts each year. It isn’t about where the trip is, it’s just about making it the same each year—an intentional time to pour into your kids before they start another year of school!

The beginning of the school year can be a time of high anxiety for children. My little one, for instance, is leaving the comfort and familiarity of his preschool to start kindergarten at a new, bigger school. He will be in a new place, with new people, and that in itself will put him out of his comfort zone for a while. You may have a child like this too. We can encourage these children to “be strong, and let [their hearts] take courage” (Proverbs 31:24 ESV) as they trust in Jesus to protect them and provide for them for this school year. Remind them that when they feel out of their comfort zone and they feel stretched, God is right there with them.

Your child may not have any anxiety about the upcoming school year—in fact, school may be her comfort zone. If this is your child, you can still encourage her to step out of her comfort zone this year. Encourage your child to befriend the new kid, to never let someone sit alone at lunch, and to play with someone new at recess. You could even encourage your child to invite someone new to church or start a prayer group or Bible study for friends and classmates. Remind this child, too, that the Lord gives us courage to step out of our comfort zone and that we learn to depend on the Holy Spirit to equip and strengthen us to live radical lives of faith.

SHARE YOUR FAMILY’S FAVORITE BACK-TO-SCHOOL TRADITIONS WITH US. USE THE HASHTAG #HFBACKTOSCHOOL. IT WILL BE FUN TO SEE WHAT TRADITIONS YOUR FAMILY HAS IMPLEMENTED AND WILL GIVE OTHERS SOME FRESH, NEW IDEAS!

by Samantha Fugate

Samantha is the Subscription Manager and Social Media Coordinator for HomeFront magazine. She and her husband, Joseph, live in Colorado Springs, CO, with their two young children, Liam and Sloane. Samantha enjoys lazy days and spending time with her family.
Can you believe it is time to head back to school already? I feel like summer just got started. When I was a kid, going back to school was something that always made me nervous. While I was excited for a new year and a new teacher, I always wondered: Will I have the same friends as I did last year? Will I like my teacher? Am I even smart enough to be moving to the next grade?!?

This year, as your kids head back to school, use the acronym “BACK TO SCHOOL” to speak truth into their lives. Throughout the month, spend time reading each of the following verses and praying that your children will embrace these traits, truths, and teachings. Help your kids see that they can be bold in their faith as they head back to school.

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.
PRAYER

TRAITS

BRAVE
(2 Timothy 1:7)

APOLOGIZE
(James 5:16)

COURAGE
(Deuteronomy 31:6)

KIND
(Ephesians 4:32)

TRUTHS

TRUST IN THE LORD
(Proverbs 3:5–6)

ONLY ONE WAY
(John 14:6)

TEACHINGS

STEP OUT IN FAITH
(Philippians 4:13)

CHOOSE GRATITUDE
(1 Thessalonians 5:18)

HELP COMES FROM THE LORD
(Psalm 121:2)

OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE
(Psalm 31:24)

OPEN YOUR HANDS
(Acts 20:35)

LOVE
(Matthew 22:37)
With tears in their eyes, my sons George and Clark climbed into the minivan. They had just said goodbye to our family and friends and to the only home they’d ever known. We were moving from Illinois to Colorado.

“Mom, I don’t have any friends in Colorado.”

“We will meet new friends, George,” I assured him. “We will go to the park and talk to the kids playing there. We can invite people over to our new house. Let’s ask God to help us meet good friends and to be good friends to others.”

“Mom, what will the school be like? I’m scared to be in a new class with no friends.” Clark was worried too.

“God is always with you wherever you go, Clark,” I looked at him tenderly as I continued, “I know there will be other kids who are brand-new and feel the same as you. Look for those kids and invite them to play with you on the playground and sit with you at lunch.”

I reached for my Bible and said, “Let me read one of my favorite verses to you. Joshua 1:9 says, ‘Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.’ What do you think this verse means?”

George answered, “God is always with me and I do not need to be afraid.”

“Yes! And do you think God can help you find friends if we ask Him to?” I responded.

“Yes,” the boys replied in unison.

I flipped over a few pages in my Bible. “Isaiah 41:13 says, ‘For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.’ We can move and have peace knowing that God is with us and will help us no matter where we are!”

“I’m excited about the new things we will get to do and the new friends we will meet!” said George with a smile.

We drove the rest of the way to Colorado dreaming about our new adventure—imagining the places we would discover and the friends we would make.

And today, this “new place” feels like home!

by Kathryn Egly

Kathryn Egly is the wife of one handsome man, and together they are raising four young men (aka four cowboys). She works at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. You can find her blogging about their family’s adventures at kathrynegly.com and get a copy of her first children’s book, Climb, Soar, Swim, Explore!, on amazon.com.
PARENTS, HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON HELPING YOUR CHILD ADJUST TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT:

1. **Learn more about your new city, state, or country.** If you’re moving, do a little research and learn about the new place with your children. What are some family attractions you can visit together? Is there a park nearby where you can play when you arrive?

2. **Make a list of things you will do in your new home.** You could plant a garden or come up with a new weekly family tradition. Maybe plan to “camp out” on the living room floor for the first night or plan out the first meal you want to eat there.

3. **Be friendly and say hello.** When we moved to Colorado Springs, I took my kids to the park. I noticed another mom sitting and watching her kids (who were playing with mine) and went over to say hi. I found out that she was new to the area too. From that first hello, we became good friends.
SMILE AT SOMEONE HAVING A BAD DAY.

LOOK FOR SOMEONE SITTING ALONE & GO SIT WITH HIM OR HER.

CLEAN UP AFTER SOMEONE ELSE.

SHARE A PORTION OF YOUR LUNCH.

WRITE SOMEBODY AN ENCOURAGING NOTE.

SAY HI TO SOMEONE NEW.

TELL SOMEONE WHAT YOU ADMIRE ABOUT HIM OR HER.

COMPLIMENT SOMEONE

THANK AN ADULT IN SCHOOL FOR SOMETHING HE OR SHE DOES.

CHOOSE AN UNLIKELY FRIEND TO BE ON YOUR TEAM IN P.E.

TELL A JOKE OR MAKE SOMEONE LAUGH.

HOLD A DOOR OPEN FOR SOMEONE.
These Lunch Box Challenge cards are designed to do exactly that—put the needs and desires of others first. Our Family Time Verse tells us, “Be strong, and let your heart take courage!” Remind your children that God’s Spirit is with them and will help them as they meet each challenge.

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

- white card stock
- markers or crayons
- scissors

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

2. Allow your children to color and decorate the cards.
3. Cut the cards out and put them in a container next to where school lunches are packed.
4. Surprise your child with a different card every few days.
5. Talk together at dinner each night about how the challenge went.

by Debbie Guinn
GAME TIME

FAMILY TIME

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

LOTS of water balloons

1 large tub or bucket for every 2 players

1 Hula-Hoop for every 2 players

water

timer

paper

pen

WATER BALLOON SHOOT

BEFORE YOU START …

Fill all the water balloons and disperse them evenly among the tubs or buckets. There should be one filled tub for every team of two players (i.e., four players require two filled tubs). Add some water to each tub of balloons to keep them cool and help them last longer.

Find an open, preferably grassy, area outside to set up. Place each team’s bucket on the grass in a straight line spaced about four to six feet from the next team’s bucket. Place each team’s Hula-Hoop roughly four feet in front of their water balloons. If placed correctly, the Hula-Hoops will also be in a straight line directly in front of the tubs of balloons.

TIME TO PLAY!

Invite your swimsuit-clad family out to the game area and break everyone up into teams of two. Explain to the players that, to start, one person will stand by the water balloons and the other person will hold the Hula-Hoop with both hands. They will have 30 seconds (or more if you are playing with younger ones) to toss as many water balloons through the hoop as possible. The team must count and keep track of how many balloons make it through. Once time is up, they will report their score to the person keeping time.

After this first round, players will switch. The person who tossed balloons first will now hold the Hula-Hoop and the person who held the Hula-Hoop will now toss the balloons. The catch is that they must step another few feet apart from one another, making getting the balloons through the hoop just a bit more challenging. They will get the same amount of time and must keep track of the number of balloons that make it through. At the end of each round, add each team’s number to their total score.

Continue each round by having the players
switch roles and move farther away from each other. The game should last until you see that players are struggling to get balloons through the hoop. The duration of the game will depend on the age and skill of your kids. If playing with older children, you may play one game that lasts quite a while and ends up very far apart. If playing with younger children, you may play many short games. Either is great!

The team with the most points wins!

WHAT IF I HAVE FEWER THAN FOUR PLAYERS?

If you’re playing with a smaller bunch (two to three players), not to worry! You can make one simple adjustment: Instead of playing as teams, each person can play individually. Here’s how this would work:

• Begin in the same manner, by having one person toss the balloons and the other hold the Hula-Hoop. Time the tosses and have this person keep track of how many he makes through the hoop. This number will count as his own score.

• Once this first person has finished and recorded his score, the players will switch roles but will not move farther apart just yet. Because these two people are playing against each other, we want each one to have the same shot.

• After each player has tossed balloons from the same distance and recorded his score, the round is complete and you can now increase the distance.

• If there is a third player, simply add her to the rotation before a round is complete.

REMEMBER!

Many of us have probably experienced what it feels like to try something scary or intimidating on our own. As followers of Christ, however, we can take courage knowing that we have been given the Holy Spirit to depend upon as we are called outside of our comfort zone. This is a gift we can easily forget the farther and farther we are from Jesus and the less we practice listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As you talk to your children about what this looks like in their lives, remind them of the challenge presented during this game. The farther they got from the Hula-Hoop, the harder it was to make it through. Encourage your family to make depending on the Holy Spirit a regular practice in all areas of their lives.

by Heather DePortee

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!
IF YOUR FAMILY IS USED TO EATING TRADITIONAL POP TARTS, THESE TACO POP TARTS WILL DEFINITELY TAKE YOU OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE. HOWEVER, YOU WON’T REGRET THAT THEY DID! ADD THESE TACO POP TARTS TO YOUR CHILD’S SCHOOL LUNCH OR TRY THEM FOR DINNER!
WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 2 boxes refrigerated pie crusts (total of 4 pie crusts), room temperature
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 pound ground beef or turkey
- 1 tablespoon taco seasoning
- 1 cup frozen corn, thawed
- 1 cup canned black beans, drained
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 egg, beaten with 1 tablespoon water
- sesame seeds for sprinkling

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.
3. Working with 1 crust at a time, unroll it onto your work surface and cut into 6 (3” x 4”) rectangles.
4. Repeat with the remaining crusts; cover with a towel to keep from drying out.
5. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat the olive oil until hot but not smoking. Sauté the onion for 5 minutes.
6. Add the beef or turkey and break up with a wooden spoon until completely cooked through (no pink remaining).
7. Add the taco seasoning and stir to combine.
8. Add the corn and beans and cook for 2 to 3 minutes more. Remove from heat and let cool until warm.
9. Place 6 pie crust rectangles on 1 of your prepared baking sheets.
10. Top each with a spoonful of the beef filling followed by a small handful of shredded cheese.
11. Top with 6 more crusts and gently press around the edges. Use a fork to crimp and seal; make a few small incisions in the top to allow steam to escape.
12. Brush with some of the beaten egg and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Repeat with remaining crusts and fillings.
13. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown.
14. Serve immediately or let cool and freeze for longer storage.

by Debbie Guinn
IF YOUR CHILDREN ARE ANYTHING LIKE MINE, THEY COME HOME FROM SCHOOL “STARVING”! AND, IF YOU ARE ANYTHING LIKE ME, YOU DON’T WANT TO SERVE THEM SOMETHING THAT WILL INTERFERE WITH DINNER. THESE SAVORY SALTINES ARE JUST THE THING TO CURB THEIR CRAVINGS AND TIDE THEM OVER UNTIL YOUR MEAL IS SERVED.

These can be made ahead of time and kept fresh for a least five days. Serve with a few pieces of cheese and you have the perfect after-school snack!

**SAVORY SALTINES**

**PREP:** 5 min.  **BAKE:** 20 min.  **YIELDS:** 48 crackers

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

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

- 2 sticks salted butter
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 2 sleeves saltine crackers

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

1. Preheat the oven to 275° F.
2. Melt the butter in a saucepan and add the Italian seasoning and seasoned salt.
3. Remove from heat.
4. Using tongs, dunk the saltines in the mixture and place on a rack over a baking sheet. This is a good step for your little ones to help with.
5. Pour remaining butter mixture evenly over crackers.
6. Bake for about 20 minutes or until golden brown.
7. Package in an airtight container.

As an optional topping, simply slice a block of cheddar cheese to approximately 1/4” thick slices and use alphabet cookie cutters to cut out your message! This is also a fun way for young kids to review their letters.

by Debbie Guinn
I love the story of Esther in the Old Testament. As a young girl, I loved that it was a rags-to-riches story, a story of a little orphan becoming a beautiful queen. Now I see that there’s so much more to it than that, and that the true hero of this story is God. This is really a story about how God saves His people from being destroyed, but Esther does play a key role. God uses Esther to be a small part of His big story because she’s willing to step out of her comfort zone and rely on Him.

Esther was a Jew living in Persia during a time when the nation of Israel had been scattered. The Jewish people no longer had kings of their own. Instead, they were forced to live in exile under the oppressive rule of other nations. Esther’s parents had died and her uncle Mordecai had raised her. When the king of Persia, King Xerxes, chose Esther to marry him and become his queen, he did not know that she was a Jew. King Xerxes’ right-hand man, Haman, was trying to destroy all of the Jews living in Persia. When Esther heard about Haman’s plan, she made a plan of her own. She knew that anyone who approached King Xerxes without being invited could be put to death. However, she decided to go and talk to the king anyway. King Xerxes listened to Esther, and eventually Esther told him all about Haman’s plan so the king could stop it. Esther’s plan worked, and the Jews were saved! God used Queen Esther to save
His chosen people from annihilation because she was willing to step out of her comfort zone and approach the king, trusting God and relying on Him to protect her.

HEAR IT

Read the story of Esther together as a family. If your kids are younger, read the story from a children’s Bible. If your kids are older, consider reading the whole book (10 chapters) over the course of several days, or read it for yourself first and choose several passages to read together that will give your kids the gist of the story. Use a version that’s easy to understand, like The Message paraphrase or the Easy-to-Read version. If you don’t own a physical copy, you can find the text online.

After reading, discuss the following questions:

• What did Queen Esther do that was out of her comfort zone?
• How do you think Esther might have been feeling when she went to talk to the king?
• How do you feel when you are out of your comfort zone?
• When is a time you took a risk that forced you to rely on God? (Parents, consider sharing your answers for this question first to model for your kids.)

DO IT

SUPPLIES:

• premade paper crowns or construction paper, scissors, and stapler
• markers
• jewel stickers or other decorations

1. Buy or make a paper crown for each family member. You can buy paper crowns at a craft store or draw and cut out your own. Consider searching for crown templates online and printing out one to trace. It may take multiple pieces of construction paper to make a crown big enough to fit around a head, so use a stapler to hold the pieces together.

2. Once you have the crowns ready, brainstorm and write on them a few ways you could take risks this month that would force you to rely on God.

3. Finally, add some finishing touches to your crowns, like jewel stickers or other decorations.

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.
TOT TIME RHYME

FAMILY TIME

SIT AT HOME

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

HAVE FUN

SINGING THIS RHYME
to the tune of “You’ve Got a Friend in Me” this month. Remind your little one that Jesus will always be with us and wants us to live without fear!

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

Jesus is the way
Jesus is the way
His love is bigger than the deep blue sea
And He’ll always give you the strength you need
So just remember what the Bible says
Yeah, Jesus is the way
Oh, Jesus is the way

by Alex Stringer

Alex grew up in Greenbrier, AR, but moved to Texas last year with a team to plant a church called Antioch Georgetown. She works as a behavioral therapist and currently serves at her church in the worship band and kids ministry. She loves a good cup of coffee and any excuse to travel!
This year my oldest son will walk through his precious lasts of high school. The last time he will choose a first-day-of-school outfit. The last time to eat first-day-of-school donuts at home. The last time he will stand on our front porch wearing his graduation-year shirt so I can take a picture. There has been comfort in this routine for the last 12 years, and there will be a mix of comfort, sadness, and anticipation in this last time before he goes to college next year.

While all of these lasts are swirling, my second born will be in a flurry of firsts. The first day of high school. The first time that graduation-year shirt anticipates something tangible. While the comfort of the first day routine ticks off the checklist, there will be a mix of fear, excitement, and anticipation in this first time as a high schooler.

Whether you are sending kids into their lasts or their firsts or anything in between, no doubt the first day of school holds emotion for you and your kids. While they step into the unknown and uncomfortable, bless them with tradition, knowing that the next steps beyond the routine may be transformative. When your heart begins to waver as they walk into new classrooms, be strong and have courage. There is security in their comfort zone and transformative growth outside of it. When you journey with your kids through their firsts and their lasts, you give security and confidence to their “nexts,” those spaces just beyond where the Holy Spirit grows them.

SO, TO THOSE SENDING KIDS OFF THIS MONTH INTO FIRSTS AND LASTS:

May you have the courage to encourage your kids’ independence, knowing they are growing in their faith. May you have the confidence in what God has done and is doing to send them boldly into both firsts and lasts. Take heart as your faith grows into a new frontier of parenting!

AND TO THE KIDS WHO ARE EXPERIENCING FIRSTS AND LASTS:

(Insert child’s name), be strong as you begin a new school year, as what you have anticipated begins! May you feel the blessing of your family’s traditions, and may they give you the security to step boldly into the unknown. May you find that the first steps out of the comfort of home bring you courage and confidence as you depend on the Holy Spirit for each next step.

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.
The Locker was created in 2008 by a group of student athletes who wanted to be more than just athletes. In a few short years this humble, thoughtful Service Learning project has grown into a relevant and vital part of the Georgetown, TX, community. In 2013 it appointed its first Board of Directors. In 2014 it became a 501c3 nonprofit foundation.

The Locker has become a part of the fabric of Georgetown. It is an integral part of our schools and our community.

MISSION STATEMENT
The Locker educates and empowers youth, through Service Learning, to meet the needs of others in their community so that every child has a sense of normalcy.

VISION
- Impact community culture so that others embrace intentional Service Learning
- Address the needs of youth in our community
- Create regional impact
- Increase community awareness regarding youth in need though education

MOTTO
“Kids Helping Kids”
The Locker provides life-enhancing items to help
students succeed. Some items are: caps and gowns, sports equipment and physicals, extracurricular expenses, academic fees, field trip fees, work clothes, emergency dentist visits, and bicycles and helmets. These items help students succeed. They allow them to stay involved in school activities and connected to school coaches, teachers, and peers. Research, like the 40 Developmental Assets, shows that children who are engaged are more successful.

The Locker provides necessities to students in need, on a daily basis, such as: NEW clothing and shoes, healthy snacks, water, bedding, hygiene items, and school supplies. These basic items are tools necessary to ensure success in school and everyday life. These items enable students to focus on school and be more successful as a result. We have physical “lockers” on several campuses. All lockers are open for every student.

MODEL
The Locker is managed by students. The adults involved are facilitators to help the students. The Locker helps students create Service Learning projects, and in doing so the students help their fellow students in needs. This makes for a very unique organization that is true to the STARS model of Service Learning.

EACH PROJECT FOLLOWS THE STARS MODEL:

- Student Leadership
- Thoughtful Service
- Authentic Learning
- Reflective Practice
- Sustainable Partnerships

Each school operates as a student club. The students conduct the meetings, create the agenda, and implement the projects. Adults are there on an advisory capacity. The Locker Board of Directors has a majority membership consisting of student officers from each of The Locker clubs. The Locker model is unique and effective. The Locker is expanding to other school districts across Texas. The students in Georgetown are not only making a difference in their community but in other communities across the state.

The Locker is distinctive because it truly is “Kids Helping Kids”!

LEARN MORE

thelocker.info
WHERE IN THE WORLD IS...

NIGER

Niger is a landlocked West African country. It is bordered by Algeria and Libya to the north, Nigeria and Benin to the south, Mali and Burkina Faso to the west, and Chad to the east. Niger is about 373 miles from east to west at its widest point and about 248 miles north to south, and it extends into the Saharan desert.
If you lived in Niger you might eat something called **dodo**, which is fried plantains.

You might also eat something called **efo**, which is a stew made with greens.

**Religion:** Islam 98%, traditional African religions and Christianity 2%

**Niger is considered one of the hottest nations. It is known as the “Frying Pan of the World.” It can get hot enough to make raindrops evaporate before they even hit the ground.**

**The W National Park is a major national park in West Africa. It’s located around a meander in the River Niger and it’s shaped like a “W.”**

**Uranium is Niger’s biggest mineral export with the country ranking fifth in uranium production globally.**

**Kids like to complain about going to school—there’s too much homework, they don’t like their teachers, or they aren’t fitting in socially. But in many parts of the world, kids would give anything to sit in a classroom with a teacher who cares about their future in a stable building with ample books and supplies. But because of various reasons—war, poverty, gender inequality—many kids around the world don’t get this chance. In fact, 61 million school-age children are not in school today.**

Access to quality schools is a problem that’s felt the hardest in Africa. Nine out of 10 counties with the highest percentages of children who’ve never attended school were in Africa during the 2000s. Today, the 10 lowest-ranked countries in the United Nations’ Human Development Report Education Index are African. While recent years have seen the region’s school enrollments rise, serious challenges still face these poverty-plagued countries grappling with how to provide access to education, keep kids in school, and foster learning. Niger sits at rock bottom of the U.N.’s Education Index. This West African country of 22 million tallies their mean years of schooling at a mere 1.5 years. Niger is the least-literate nation in the world (a little over 15 percent of adults can read and write), only 5.2 percent of citizens have any secondary education, and nearly 31 percent drop out in primary school.

In Niger (as well as in Guinea) the stats are even worse for young women. In 2012, 70 percent of the poorest girls in those nations had never attended primary school. For those who went, it was a serious financial struggle. School supplies and materials totaled up to almost 75 percent of the poorest household’s spending on education. It is little wonder, then, that the number of years Niger expects its students to complete is less than six years.

**As your kids go back to school this year, you may share these stats with them and spend some time praying for the boys and girls around the world who do not have the same educational privileges.**

[globalcitizen.org/en/content/worst-schools-world/](globalcitizen.org/en/content/worst-schools-world/)
SAY YES TO NEW THINGS
When asked to describe why I love middle schoolers, I can’t help but start with how much I love their innocence and ability to be silly combined with their desire to be treated like adults. It’s a fine line between encouraging them to be who they are and not grow up too quickly while also challenging them to go out of their comfort zone to be the men and women God wants them to be.

This past month, I had four middle school girls stuffed into my small Subaru on our way home from the beach. I always laugh when I listen to the back-seat conversation filled with talk of what boys they like, what new phones they’re getting, or where they’re going next with their families. However, this particular beach drive, I was caught off guard when I overheard Taylor ask the other girls if they were going to be “serving in the buddy program next year at school.” I felt insanely proud of Taylor for initiating wholesome conversation and began to pay close attention to the back seat. All of the the girls responded with a hesitant but excited yes! (Cue the unsure smiles I saw in my rearview mirror.) My helicopter youth pastor mode took over and I started asking question after question about this program.

The Buddy Program is an opportunity for seventh- and eighth-grade students to be “buddies” with students with special needs. If a student can’t run the mile in P.E., a buddy will walk with him. If a student needs someone to eat with, a buddy will sit with her. My girls wanted to be WITH people who are different than them. They were hesitant but excited about the idea of loving God’s children even if it meant sacrificing being with their other friends or doing everyday things at the speed they wanted. These girls, who had recently fallen in love with Jesus as their Lord as Savior, desired to love their peers despite differences. I love when God reminds me of His power by watching Him change hearts.

I asked the girls in my car what excites them about the Buddy Program, and one girl quickly responded, “I’m nervous, but I want to see my buddy as a friend rather than someone who is different. The way I’ll start to see her as a friend is by spending time with her outside of class.” She was aware that she was opening herself up for the possibility of a very different school year, but relationship was worth the sacrifice. She knew God’s desire for a relationship with her and understood it was important for that type of relationship with others to be a priority for her too. A desire to step outside of what is comfortable comes from a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit—a heart that desires to sacrifice in order to live and love like Jesus.

**BE STRONG, AND LET YOUR HEART TAKE COURAGE, ALL YOU WHO WAIT FOR THE LORD! PSALM 31:24 ESV**

The eighth-grade year for these girls will look radically different from last year. Their desire to say yes to a year of initial discomfort will change the way they live and love people they encounter.

**Parents, as you step into this new school year, in what ways do you want to challenge your children to say yes to going outside of what is comfortable?** How did God uniquely create your child? How can he or she walk more fully in God’s calling? How can you encourage him or her to depend on God as he or she says yes to new things? My prayer for this age group is that they live radical lives in need of Jesus amidst the mundane and the challenging. Please join me in this prayer!

---

*by Haley Downey*

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

@haleydowney
As we enter new seasons of life, God presents us with new growth opportunities. Often, we don’t seize these opportunities. We tend to stay in our comfort zone and rely on what we are used to and what we can control. Our fear is rooted in the unknown.

We wonder, “What if I fail?” “What if I’m rejected?” We begin to doubt ourselves. We begin to doubt what God has called us to. Students face these doubts and fears every August and September. Every new school year is a new season. And doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will.

In Deuteronomy 31:6, Moses commissions Joshua to be the new leader over the Israelites: “Be strong. Take courage. Don’t be intimidated. Don’t give them a second thought because God, your God, is striding ahead of you. He’s right there with you. He won’t let you down; He won’t leave you” (The Message).

Following this charge, Joshua is to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. Joshua had no knowledge of how to do this until he heard from God. The biggest challenge today’s students face isn’t hearing from God—but trusting and obeying what He says. When faced with new seasons, students don’t know if they want to get out of their comfort zone. If a student wants God to transform her life, she need look no further than Joshua’s pattern.

**TRUST**

- In Joshua 3:5, Joshua commanded the people to consecrate themselves. This may sound strange to us, but to consecrate yourself simply means to fully dedicate yourself to what God has promised you. In the case of our teens, God has given each student a calling and will present each one with opportunities this school year to share the gospel.

**OBEY**

- In Joshua 3:17, Joshua and the people of Israel do something CRAZY: They did what God told them to do. They stepped out in faith believing God would provide. This is the hardest step to take. Students can fall back onto the words in Deuteronomy 31:6: “[God] is right there with you. He won’t let you down; He won’t leave you” (The Message).

When students TRUST and OBEY, God will protect them as they step out of their comfort zone. God transforms His children as they step out in faith. As students go back to school, make sure they stay in the Word of God. Develop their spirits to hear His voice. Upon hearing His voice, He will call them to classrooms and classmates. Encourage them to trust and obey that calling. Stepping out of their comfort zone and into the leading of the Holy Spirit will enable them to participate in God’s holy work on earth.

---

*by Cody Phillips*

Cody is a graduate of Oral Roberts University and lives in Oklahoma City, OK. He currently serves on the staff at The Bridge Church’s Bricktown Campus in OKC. Cody desires to communicate the gospel and to show Christ revealed in all creation and culture. He’s also always ready to talk about Seinfeld and the latest podcast you listened to.

@CodyPhillips  @cdphillips13
Our most challenging seasons oftentimes allow us the most intimacy with the Lord. Leaning into the uncomfortable and the tension shapes us and brings about the most glory because we serve a God who’s in the business of redemption.

My husband, Justin, and I chose to build our family through adoption. God uses small people and small yeses to do big things.

In December of 2014, we flew to Uganda where we would spend about the next three months to adopt our son, Oliver. For two months, I was tired and exhausted but assumed it was just “new-mom tired.” Tired and exhausted led to more symptoms: fatigue, extreme thirst, frequent urination, weight loss, and on and on until eventually I was told I had parasites. I flew back to America because I wasn’t sure how much more my body could take, leaving Justin and Ollie in Uganda since Ollie didn’t have a visa yet. I thought some medicine and good sleep would surely get me feeling better and back on a plane to Uganda in no time. Except I was wrong, and I got worse and ended up in a coma in the ICU.

I woke up from the coma to learn I had been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and it was a miracle I was alive. My husband and son were 9,000 miles away and it felt like my world was falling apart. All I could seem to do was to pray. I asked God to show me purpose in all of this, even in the tiniest way. I needed something, a glimmer of hope, to keep me pressing forward.

Through divine appointment, two months later we got a message that changed our lives forever. There was a six-year-old girl in Uganda who had just been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, and she needed a foster family. The moment I got that message, I knew she was my daughter. We didn’t hesitate for even two seconds to say yes. This was the answer to the prayer I had prayed two months earlier in that hospital bed, except more magnificent and extravagant than I ever could have dreamed of. Zola became a forever part of our family and her life has taught me so much about redemption and God’s love for us.

After a long and hard 15 months in Uganda, we flew home to America as a family of four, two functioning pancreases short, and our lives have never been the same. I know a new kind of hope and have learned to find joy in the unexpected. And after all we had been through, we just couldn't get back to America and go back to a comfortable, lukewarm faith. We were changed. Radically following Jesus means making radical decisions.
You see, before we left for Uganda to adopt Ollie, I prayed that we would never feel so comfortable that we lost our sense of total dependence on the Lord. OH. MAN. I had no idea the depth of the words I was praying. Justin and I said we would sacrifice anything to bring our kids home. But I think we limited what we thought God would really ask us to give up on behalf of his children. And I never thought our home would be one of those things.

Because we were being obedient, right? Here’s the thing about obedience: if we are being obedient with the expectation of something in return, it’s not really obedience. Obedience is the Holy Spirit living in us and moving us to follow Jesus no matter the cost. Even if it means we get nothing in return. Even if it means we lose everything here on earth. Because in reality, when we lose everything, we gain Christ. And Christ is everything!

Financially, it was devastating. When we finally got to America, we tried running the rat race, tried to catch up from the drowning debt we had accrued, the medical bills, etc. We were exhausted going from zero to two kids from hard places, homeschooling, working through trauma, re-entry, and PTSD. We worked our tails off, were miserable, still sinking, trying to keep up with society’s expectations. We missed the simplicity of Uganda. We had no time for serving, friends, or family.

It caused us to evaluate how we spent our time. So we said, “See ya” to the American dream and sold our house, bought and fixed up an RV to pursue a simpler, debt-free life with more time for the things we are most passionate about. It’s given us more family time, which has been so needed in mending weary hearts. It was a fresh start with less burden. Kingdom dreams over the American dream. You can invest in both, but only one is eternal. May we never limit what we’re willing to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. Because souls are worth far more than stuff and these two children were worth more than a house.

When you step out of your comfort zone you step into what God created you for and that, my friend, is greatness.

by Keary Cheney

Keary Cheney is a wife to Justin and mom of two through adoption. You can usually find her in the kitchen creating low-carb recipes or at the beach with her babies. She loves writing, speaking, camping, and is currently studying nutritional therapy. She is a loud voice in the type 1 diabetes community, a storyteller, a cultivator of hope, and longs for people to see joy beyond their disease. Keary is living the tiny and simple life in an RV in San Diego, CA, with really big dreams.
FOLLOWING JESUS CAN BE SCARY.

There’s a familiar story in the Bible of Jesus taking a nap on a boat while He and His disciples head to the other side of a lake. During His rest, a giant storm begins to swell up and sink the boat. The disciples are terrified. In their panic, they wake Jesus up and ask Him if He even cares about their lives. Jesus, being the God of all creation, simply looks at the storm and speaks three words:

“Quiet! Be still!”

Immediately the storm calmed.

He then turns to His friends and asks, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark 4:40).

The story could have ended there and we would have all been amazed. But something interesting happens. The Scriptures go on to say, “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the winds and waves obey him!’” (Mark 4:41).

CATCH THIS.

The disciples were scared out of their minds at the thought of drowning in the lake that day. They were completely out of control. But do you know what terrified them? Being in the presence of a man, the God of the universe, who had even more power than the storm.
Being in a storm where you have no control is scary. But, being near a God who can control the uncontrollable can be terrifying.

If you love the idea of having control, you will probably find yourself terrified as you draw closer to Jesus. Because here’s the thing: He’s uncontrollable. And the more you get to know Christ, the more you realize how not-in-control you really are.

At any moment He may ask you to quit your job, move to a new neighborhood, forgive someone who has hurt you deeply, or sacrificially give beyond what you feel capable of.

That’s terrifying.

But I think Jesus would say to you and me the same thing He said to His friends on the boat that day: “Why are you so afraid?”

The good news of the gospel reminds us that we don’t have to fear anymore. It reminds us that we can step out in faith to radically give, love, and forgive because even when everything fails around us, Jesus hasn’t left us alone in the boat; His Spirit lives inside us.

That’s the kind of life I want my kids to see. I want them to look back at their childhood and see a daddy who chased after Jesus harder than he chased after comfort—even if that involved taking risks with our time, money, and emotions.

In our house, we know that following Jesus can be scary. We often talk about how God will push us beyond our comforts to see His kingdom grow in our hearts and in our neighborhood. But we are pushing each other to step out in faith as we remember that our security isn’t found in money, relationships, or comfort. Our security and hope is found in Christ alone.

by Jerrad Lopes

Jerrad is a pastor and the founder of DadTired.com, a nonprofit ministry focused on equipping men to lead their families well. He hosts the weekly “Dad Tired” podcast and has published a book called Stop Behaving: A Gospel-Centered Devotional for Men. Jerrad recently signed a two-book contract with Harvest House Publishers, and his next book will release in 2019. He and his wife, Leila, are certified foster parents and live in Portland, OR, with their two children.
I’m sitting next to my husband in grief counseling, folding and refolding the tissue in my hand as tears drip from my chin. There’s no point in tissues anymore. When tears come this often and this easily, they’re now a part of my wardrobe. I’m not ashamed of them. I wear them on my face just like any other accessory. But just because I’m used to them doesn’t mean I like them. The grief I’m holding is uncomfortable.
“Grieving is like wearing a new pair of shoes that don’t fit right,” my counselor says. “They’re awkward and clunky and give you blisters. And sometimes you just want to throw them across the room.”

In March 2017, my husband and I welcomed our firstborn son into the world. Our joy quickly disappeared when we realized he wasn’t breathing, and after extensive measures to resuscitate him, he never regained a heartbeat. We said hello and good-bye to our sweet Titus all within a matter of minutes.

This last year, in the depths of grief, we’ve been stretched to our limits, but our weakness has taught us to depend on God’s Spirit day by day, minute by minute. We’ve gotten very familiar with what the Bible describes as “groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26 ESV). And we know how meaningful it is to have people in your life who are willing to get uncomfortable and sit in the pain with you.

A couple weeks after our son was born, we ordered a bunch of blue bracelets with his name and Joshua 1:9 on them. At his memorial service we passed them out and people wore them in solidarity to show us they stood with us in our grief and loved our son. Some of our closest friends still wear their “Titus bracelets” today.

What it means to be courageous is something God’s been teaching me through Ty’s life. One of the biggest lessons I’ve learned is that courage is not something I can summon in my own strength. The Bible’s command in Joshua 1:9 to “be strong and courageous” comes with a reason: “for the LORD your God is with you.” Courage and strength come from the presence of God, and praying His presence into our pain has been life changing. God doesn’t promise our circumstances will be what we expect or that our lives will be without pain, but He does promise that He will be with us.

If you have friends who have lost a child, the best advice I can give is to show up. Bring dinner. Pray with them, out loud and often. Pray God’s presence into their pain. Send a note or a text. If you’re thinking about them, tell them. If you’re thinking about their child, tell them. There’s a 100 percent chance they are thinking about their child too. When you acknowledge their loss, they will feel less alone. And when necessary, help them throw those blister-inducing grief shoes across the room and know that in the midst of the uncomfortable, the comfort of our Father shines brightest. Show up because in doing so, you’re mirroring God’s promise that He will always be with them. And that is the beginning of knowing true, Spirit-breathed courage.

by Hannah Hagen

Hannah is married to her high school sweetheart, Kent and mama to baby Titus in heaven and their beagle pup, Harvey. Hannah is a lover of books and a writer of stories who is slowly becoming obsessed with watercolor.

hannahhagen.com
Remember those dating years and how easy it was to spend hours lost in conversation? Curiosity about each other allowed time to pass so quickly. Unfortunately, the desire to get to know each other wanes as the years roll by. So, finding creative ways to connect and engage with your spouse becomes an unbearable task in light of all the responsibilities of work and parenting weighing on us. This is where many couples find themselves: bored, living on autopilot, longing for some connection, but stuck in a hypnotic cycle of wash, rinse, repeat.

Sadly, statistics reveal that loneliness inside marriage is reaching critical levels. We propose it’s mainly because we’ve lost the art of asking good questions to evoke conversations that connect us. In this day and age, it seems like most of us are far more concerned with sharing what is on our minds than listening to others.

Think about what a question does. Asking a question expresses your curiosity and desire to know more. When you ask a question about your spouse’s dreams, preferences, feelings, and memories, it communicates that you are looking for connection. The number one way to build emotional intimacy is asking open-ended questions.

Need a role model? Look no further than Jesus! He asked really good questions, didn’t He? It’s incredible how much He was able to draw out the desires, fears, and motivations of others with simple questions. What a great example for how to engage with your spouse!

So, will asking these questions be worth the potential awkwardness? Well, it’s only awkward because it’s unfamiliar, meaning if you haven’t engaged in asking each other good questions, you will experience the discomfort of feeling unskilled. Embrace it. Get out of your comfort zone, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, and take the risk of being vulnerable. Listen with empathy as your spouse shares what’s on his or her heart, and even if the response isn’t what you were hoping for, have an open mind.

by Casey and Meygan Caston

Casey and Meygan Caston are the founders 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. To get a copy of their new book, 365 Connecting Questions for Couples, go to 365connectingquestions.org

HERE ARE SOME CONNECTING QUESTIONS TO GET YOU STARTED:

• When you come home from work, what can I do or say that will make you feel loved?
• What do you wish you could tell yourself 10 years ago?
• What compliment would you really like to hear from me?
• In what ways has our relationship changed you?
• If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be and why?
• What are some of the talents, strengths, and gifts God has given you?
• What boundaries can we make that will protect us from spending too much time on our phones?
• If you didn’t have to work, what would do with your life?
• Do you feel like I try my best to understand your views, feelings, and opinions? Why or why not?
• What’s your favorite way to spend the weekend?
As a grandparent, you have a unique opportunity to pass down your faith ... and to help equip your grandchildren to make their faith their own. You can model and encourage your grandkids to pray, prioritize reading the Bible, talk with others about God, and develop ways to recognize and record their faith history.

Returning to school opens doors for children to intentionally step out of their comfort zone and grow in their walk with Jesus. Consider these ideas ...

- During the two or three weeks leading up to the start of school, pray for God to bring a character trait to mind for each grandchild—one you can pray about together throughout the school year as the child focuses on growing it in his life. It may be wisdom, kindness, compassion, faithfulness, thankfulness, etc. Have your grandchild make a poster with this trait to hang in his room where he will see it and be reminded to pray and ask God to help him grow and develop it this year. Give the child a pad of sticky notes and write the word on several to put where he will see them throughout his day—inside book covers, in his locker, on his bedroom wall, bathroom wall, closet, computer screen, etc. This will also give him the opportunity to step out of his comfort zone when friends at school see the sticky notes and ask what they are all about!

- During the first week of school, make a list of the teachers each child will learn from in the coming year. Add the names of the principal, assistant principal, Sunday school/youth leaders, and friends to the list. Each week, choose a name and contact that person to ask for prayer requests. Pray for that person the following week. If the person is a believer, this is easier to do, but if he or she is not it’s a good way for your grandchildren to step out of their comfort zone.

- Give your grandchildren notebook journals and ask them to record God’s answers to their prayers over the coming year. This is a great way for them to begin developing their own faith histories. Seeing God answer prayer and recording it are great ways to remember, and we want them to remember. When the Israelites forgot all God did for them, they fell into sin and away from God. Help your grandchildren remember! It matters. For grandchildren who live far away, send the supplies and connect online to walk them through how to make prayer a big part of their lives.

By prayerfully stepping out of their comfort zone in the new school year, your grandchildren will be able to tangibly see that God transforms them when they step out in faith.

by Lynda Freeman

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

grandmascookiejar.net

generationsquest.com
10 ENVIRONMENTS

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

1. Responsibility

“God has entrusted me with the things and people He created around me.”

Responsibility 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

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

Out of the Comfort Zone

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.

3. Love & Respect

“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.

4. Serving

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

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.

5. Storytelling

“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.
“God knows me, and I can know Him.”

**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.

“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


**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!

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

**Faith Community**

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

**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.

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

**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.

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

The #1 way to build emotional intimacy?

Asking open-ended questions.

This book will help you and your spouse have deeper and healthier conversations.

365connectingquestions.org/homefront