

Home Front

a spiritual parenting resource



Modeling

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

Responsibility

"GOD HAS ENTRUSTED ME WITH THE THINGS
AND PEOPLE HE CREATED AROUND ME."



Discipleship Steps at New Life Church

Parents are the spiritual nurturers of their children's faith and are the main disciples in their lives. We are committed to engaging, empowering, and resourcing our parents and families to succeed in their God-given role. Time and resources make this role challenging in our busy world. At New Life Church, we have created a clear path of discipleship for our parents with convenient times and locations. We hope to see you there!

PARENT ORIENTATION A first step toward engaging in our ministry. Hear philosophy, meet staff, and learn how to get involved.

SPIRITUAL PARENTING A six-week class that dives deep into what God's Word says about parenting.

PARENTING CONVERSATIONS An every-other-month evening for parents to discuss tough topics with other parents and hear from leading experts.

HOMEFRONT MAGAZINE A magazine designed to help you have a successful family night in your home.

FAMILY NIGHT An intergenerational family night as the body of Christ.

PARENT CURRICULUM A weekly or series handout that shares biblical information, discussion questions, and activities.

HomeFront

How to Use

1 Start by deciding on a day and time that works well for your entire family. It can be an evening around a meal, breakfast on a Saturday, or a break between sporting events. Just commit to "family time" once a week.

2 Utilize this magazine as a workbook to plan your family time. The calendar pages are designed to help you plan ahead. Pick a God's Word devotional, recipe, and one of the other activities titled Create, Game Time, Worship Response, or Serve. At the end of your time together, speak a blessing over your family members.

3 There are four weeks of devotionals and activities. When you have a fifth week in the month, let the kids plan the family night. Remember to HAVE FUN! Family night does not have to be perfect. If you spent time with God and with one another, it was a great family night.

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.



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NLC Family Min

A Note from Michelle



we get it wrong. Simply by acknowledging our efforts as a good representation or as a faulty one, we can establish truth in the hearts and minds of the next generation.

- **The environment of RESPONSIBILITY** reminds our children that God has commissioned us to be His ambassadors of grace and good news to those who know about the gift of God's love and forgiveness. Responsibility is a critical step in allowing our children's faith to become more about others and building God's kingdom than simply being a Christian for our own benefit.

My prayer is that you will grow together as a family during this holiday season as you faithfully engage in the content of this resource over the next two months.

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 30 years of church ministry experience as a children's and family pastor. She is also the author of *Spiritual Parenting*, *The Big God Story*, *Becoming a Spiritually Healthy Family*, and *7 Family Ministry Essentials*. Michelle loves a good book and a cup of coffee.

@TruInspiration

Editor's Note



This issue of *HomeFront* is near to my heart—maybe a personal favorite. It is most likely because of the season in which it falls. The Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons are filled with family time, wonderful memories, and lots of yummy food. So many delightful things to celebrate and love ... and it is all because of our wonderful Savior. He truly gives us the best blessings, including salvation and redemption. As we enjoy the days counting down to significant holidays, I pray this magazine helps you with **MODELING** the reason for the season and embrace the **RESPONSIBILITY** to share the gospel message with those around you.

The month of November is a perfect opportunity to practice a thankful heart in all circumstances. As you dive into **God's Word**, Hannah from the Old Testament illustrates having a thankful heart in the middle of difficult circumstances and seeing God's faithfulness prevail in the end. God answers prayers. There are fun ways to practice thankfulness throughout the month within the activities pages and an encouraging devotional for teens in **Students** that focuses on contentment. What a great attitude to adopt as we approach the Christmas season where gifts and treats are abundant. In **God's Word** for December, enjoy unpacking the story of Christ's birth as well as a small advent resource in the **Elementary** section.

In a world that seems hateful and chaotic right now, the holidays tend to be a time that brings joy, happiness, and kindness all around. I want to encourage you to be a light to others. Extend kindness at all times and look for ways to love others. As you live your life following Christ this holiday season (and every other day), your kids will see the love of their heavenly Father through you. What can you do to make a difference in our hurting world, city, community, or in your own home this holiday season?

May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace. Amen.

Holly Newman

Holly is the Editor in Chief of *HomeFront* magazine and Pastor of Parents and Families at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She has pastored in family ministry for nearly 20 years and written curricula for other authors as well as developed her own tween and teen curriculum on identity called *Girlytime*. Her passion is for families to create influential, faith-building moments with their children. She has been married to her high school sweetheart, Jared, for 18 years. They have four children. In her spare time she loves to get outdoors with her family.

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did you know

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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10

ENVIRONMENTS

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

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.

1

RESPONSIBILITY

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.

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

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.

6

"God knows me, and I can know Him."

KNOWING

Nothing could be more important than knowing and being known by God. We live in a world that denies absolute truth, and yet God's Word offers just that. As we create an environment that upholds and displays God's truth, we give children a foundation based on knowing God, knowing His Word, and a relationship with Him through Christ. God is holy, mighty, and awesome, and yet He has chosen to make Himself known to us!

7

"I belong to God, and He loves me!"

IDENTITY

This environment highlights who we are in Christ. According to Ephesians 1, we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed, and given an inheritance in Christ ... all of which we did nothing to earn. This conviction allows children to stand firm against the destructive counter-identities the world will offer.

8

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

COURSE CORRECTION

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

9

"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.

10

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

MODELING

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



17

Let the peace of *Christ* rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be **thankful.**

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Colossians 3:15-16

GOD'S WORD

1

GOD STATEMENT: GOD HEARS SCRIPTURE: 1 SAMUEL 1:11

Have you ever been distraught over an unfulfilled hope or dream? Maybe you have prayed about it, begged God for it, and done everything you can do to try and make it happen, but you still find yourself waiting for it. This is where we find a woman named Hannah in 1 Samuel. Hannah's greatest desire was to have a child, but she was not able to get pregnant. Year after year, Hannah waited for this dream of hers to come true. One day, in her desperation, she went to the temple to pray; she went to God in her hurt and disappointment to ask Him for help.

When we don't get what we long for, we may be tempted to handle our disappointment in different ways. We can get mad at God. We can beat ourselves up. Sometimes, we even blame others for our pain. Hannah shows us the best way to handle our hurts and disappointments as she runs to God and shares

her sadness, hopes, and dreams with Him.

Later in the story, we find out that God not only heard Hannah's prayer, but He also answered it in His time with a son for Hannah. Psalm 34:17-18 says, "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." God is not far off; He is close to you and cares how you feel. He hears you when you cry out to Him. He may not always give you exactly what you want or ask for in the way you desire, but He is always working on your behalf and providing you with exactly what you need.

DISCUSSION

- What hope or promise are you waiting for right now? Ask God for His help in waiting and be honest with Him about your hopes and dreams.

by Jeni Mason, Pastor of Pastoral Care

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS COMPASSIONATE SCRIPTURE: 1 SAMUEL 1:20

In our last devotion we learned that God heard Hannah's prayers of hurt and disappointment. In today's Scripture we read that "in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son." Not only did God hear Hannah's prayers, but He also responded. God is compassionate and cares about our hurts and disappointments as well as our hopes and dreams. In this instance, God heard Hannah's prayer, had compassion on her, *and* answered her prayer for a son. There are times when God doesn't answer our prayers the way that we hope, but He still has compassion on us and comforts us, and as we move through life, we realize that His plan for us was greater than the plan we had hoped for.

In your life, you may have had times where God answered your prayers very specifically and in the way you had hoped for. But maybe there are other prayers you are still waiting for God to answer—maybe even *desperate* for Him to answer.

We can choose to rejoice and remember God's compassion and faithfulness toward us when our prayers are answered and unanswered. We can choose to remember the times He's been our comforter when we've been sad, our peace when we've been fearful, and our fullness when we've been disappointed. He hears us, has compassion on us, and will answer in His way and timing, which is *always* good.

DISCUSSION

- Have you felt compassion and love from God in seasons when you've been waiting for His promise?
- When He answers your prayers do you remember to go back and praise Him for those answered prayers? When you are still waiting on promises, practice recalling His faithfulness and ask God to show you His love, comfort, and compassion for you.

by Jeni Mason, Pastor of Pastoral Care

2

GOD'S
WORD

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP
SCRIPTURE: PSALM 113;
1 SAMUEL 2:1-10

Hannah's prayer of praise and thanksgiving provides a model for our own worship.

The word *worship* comes from the old word "worthship." It means to give honor, reverence, and devotion to the One who is worthy. We were created to worship!

God is worthy of worship because of who He is and what He has done. Using the Bible passages above, let's create our own worship psalm to God giving Him thanks!

Who God is: Hannah worships God for who He is. She acknowledges that God is holy (v. 2), all-knowing (v. 3), the author of life (v. 6), the Most High and judge of all the earth (v. 10). God alone is Creator of all, and He loves us unconditionally. He is the eternal God who wants us to live forever with Him. Knowing who God is causes us to worship. Write some things about God's character starting with "God is ..."

What God has done: Hannah also praises God for what He has done. God delivers us from our enemies

(v. 1), determines life and death (v. 6), humbles and exalts (v. 7), and provides protection and strength (vv. 9-10). Hannah looked forward to God's promised redemption, but we now have the full revelation of God's salvation. Through faith in Jesus, we receive forgiveness of our sins and a restored relationship with God. Jesus also gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit to live in us so we can live for God! Write down some of the things God has done for you recently!

Worship centers our thoughts and actions on God. When we ponder Him, we realize that God alone is worthy of our worship and we need His presence to live the life He created us to live. Hannah rejoices that God lifts up those who are poor and needy. As we worship God, He satisfies our deepest desires and we are transformed into His likeness. Praising God with all of our hearts, words, and actions gives Him the glory that He deserves.

DISCUSSION

- What are some other ways that you can express your worship and thanks to God?

by Jill Nardini, Elementary Teacher

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS FAITHFUL
SCRIPTURE: 1 SAMUEL 3

Hannah was so grateful God had given her a son that she gave Samuel back to God and took him to live at the tabernacle with the priest, Eli. Eli was the last judge of the nation of Israel and the first of the prophets. Samuel was set up for success!

However, things weren't so easy for Samuel. As a child, he only saw his own mother once a year. When we think of God's faithfulness, we often imagine that God will protect us from hardships and make our lives easy. But God never promised us an easy life. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33). So, what can we learn about God's faithfulness through the life of Samuel?

1 Samuel 3:19 tells us that "The Lord was **with** Samuel ... and let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground" (emphasis added). When God tells us to do something, we don't do it alone. Samuel had some

challenging messages to deliver, but God strengthened him. We can confidently obey whatever God tells us to do, knowing that He is faithful to be with us.

We can also trust that He will fulfill His promises. Samuel trusted God, even though he didn't receive all that God promised in his lifetime. The book of Hebrews reminds us that through the trials of life, we are commended for our faith in God and His promises. The Lord disciplines us as His sons and daughters for our good that we may share in His holiness. **God is always faithful—even when we can't see the big picture as to how or why He's doing certain things.** We must choose to trust in God's faithfulness and His plans for us. In Him and only Him will we be fulfilled. God is faithful!

DISCUSSION

- What are some of God's promises that you're thankful for today?

by Jill Nardini, Elementary Teacher

CREAMY SAUSAGE AND TORTELLINI SOUP

The holiday season can be busy. Instead of grabbing takeout, make this delicious soup ahead of time, freeze, and thaw on busy evenings.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 6 Italian sausage links, sliced
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 (28 ounce) can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 (14 ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 large zucchini, sliced
- 19 ounces frozen tortellini
- 4 cups baby spinach
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup fresh basil, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
- salt and pepper to taste
- additional basil and parmesan cheese for topping

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Coat the bottom of a large Dutch oven with olive oil and heat over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until softened. Then, add the garlic and sauté for about 1 minute. Add in the sausage and cook, stirring occasionally until heated through. Stir in the chicken broth, diced tomatoes, and tomato sauce, and bring the mixture to a boil. Add the zucchini and cook for 2 minutes. Then add the frozen tortellini and cook for another 5 minutes. Remove the mixture from heat and stir in the spinach until wilted. Stir in the cream, Parmesan cheese, basil, and parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Top with additional basil and Parmesan before serving.

CORNBREAD STUFFING WITH BACON AND SAGE

Bacon makes everything better! This delicious Thanksgiving side dish has lots of bacon and fragrant herbs like sage and thyme.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 package cornbread mix, prepared according to package directions
- 12 slices thick-cut bacon (about 12 ounces)
- 2 large onions, chopped
- 4 stalks celery, including some leaves (about 2 cups)
- 2 tablespoons fresh sage, chopped
- 2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/2 cup butter (1 stick)
- 2 1/2 cups chicken stock
- 2 large eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 4 tablespoons cold butter, chopped

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Tear the cornbread into bite-sized chunks and spread out on 2 large baking sheets. Let the cornbread sit out uncovered overnight or for several hours, and then bake at 400° F for about 10 minutes. Flip the cornbread and turn off the oven to continue drying out the cornbread while you prepare the rest of the stuffing. In a large skillet, cook the chopped bacon until crispy (cooked but still flexible). Transfer bacon to a paper towel, and leave the bacon grease in the pan. Add chopped onions and celery stalks to the pan and sauté for about 10 minutes. Add salt, pepper, sage, and thyme and sauté for another minute until fragrant. Remove from heat. Mix dried cornbread, onion/celery mixture, and bacon in a bowl. Set aside. Return the empty pan to medium heat and add the cider vinegar, scraping the brown bits off the bottom of the pan until the liquid is nearly evaporated. Melt a stick of butter in the pan and pour over the cornbread mixture.

In a glass measuring cup, whisk together chicken stock and eggs. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Slowly pour the stock mixture over the cornbread mixture and gently stir. Add more stock if the cornbread is too dry. Grease a 9" x 13" pan. Scrape the stuffing mixture into the pan. Top the stuffing with 4 tablespoons of chopped butter. Spray a sheet of foil with nonstick spray and cover the stuffing, sealing the edges. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes. Then, raise the oven temperature to 450°, remove the foil, and bake for another 20 minutes. Let cool slightly and serve.



TURKEY BROWNIES

As Thanksgiving approaches, one way to begin talking about Thanksgiving dinner etiquette, thankful hearts, or exciting family plans is to chat with your kids while making these adorable turkey brownies. The ooey, gooey chocolate goodness mixed with candy corn is sure to build the anticipation of Thanksgiving in your little one.



BROWNIE INGREDIENTS

- 1 package brownie mix, prepared according to package directions
- 1 package candy corn
- 1 package candy eyes

CHOCOLATE FROSTING INGREDIENTS

- 1 stick butter
- 2/3 cup cocoa
- 3 cups powdered sugar
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Grab your favorite brownie mix and bake according to the box instructions. Once the brownies are cool, use a round cookie cutter to cut brownies into circles. In a separate bowl, combine butter and cocoa. Slowly add in powdered sugar and milk, alternating just a little at a time until well mixed. Stir in vanilla. Use the icing, candy corn, and candy eyes to make the adorable turkeys in the picture.

MINI PUMPKIN CHEESECAKES

Mini pumpkin cheesecakes are an excellent dessert for any fall celebration! They combine all the flavors of pumpkin pie and creamy cheesecake in a delicious bite-sized treat. This dessert is sure to be a family favorite during the holidays.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1/4 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar (divided)
- 3/4 cup brown sugar (divided)
- 1/4 cup salted butter
- 1 1/2 cups pumpkin puree
- 3 large eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3 packages (8 ounce) cream cheese, softened
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

WHAT YOU'LL DO

In a medium mixing bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs, 1/4 cup sugar, 1/4 cup brown sugar, and melted butter. Mix well. Line a muffin tin with paper liners and firmly press about a spoonful of the graham cracker mixture into each cup. Chill the tin as you prepare the filling. In a large mixing bowl, combine pumpkin, 1/2 cup brown sugar, eggs, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and salt, and mix well. In a separate bowl, combine softened cream cheese, 1/2 cup sugar, and vanilla. Blend until smooth. Scoop 1/4 to 1/3 cup filling into each muffin cup. Bake at 350° F for 25 to 30 minutes or until centers are set. Let each mini cheesecake cool on a wire rack. Refrigerate covered for 2 to 3 hours or until ready to serve.

oh, let us
PRAISE HIM

**MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO THE LORD
 AND WORSHIP HIM WITH GLADNESS!**



*Praise the LORD.
 Praise God in his sanctuary;
 praise him in his mighty heavens.
 Praise him for his acts of power;
 praise him for his surpassing greatness.
 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
 praise him with the harp and lyre,
 praise him with timbrel and dancing,
 praise him with the strings and pipe,
 praise him with the clash of cymbals,
 praise him with resounding cymbals.
 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
 (Psalm 150:1-6)*

*Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us
 shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
 (Psalm 95:1)*

The Lord delights in our praises to Him. It is right to give Him praise for His wonderful creation, His greatness, His glory, and His salvation. He is the Lord Most High. Let's praise God as we craft an instrument and then sing praises to our God.

PRAYER

Lord, we praise Your holy name, for You are our salvation. We raise our voices and rejoice for all Your works and wonders. You are worthy to be praised forever and ever. Amen.

CRAFT: CREATING A TAMBOURINE

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- wood wreath
- ribbon or fabric strips
- 1/4" ribbon
- jingle bells
- scissors

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Together as a family, thread the 1/4" ribbon through the loop of a jingle bell, and then cut the ribbon, leaving about 1" of ribbon on each side of your bell. Thread as many jingle bells as you wish. Then cut 4" strips of ribbon or fabric. Tie the ribbons with the jingle bells and colorful strips of ribbon to the wood wreath. As you create your tambourine take turns sharing something you love about God.

When you are finished making your tambourine, turn on worship music and sing, dance, and praise God with your instrument.

by Katharine Sanchez, New Life Downtown Kids Ministry Director

FOLLOW MY LEAD

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- family members
- creativity

BEFORE YOU PLAY

As parents we have the privilege and responsibility of being living role models for our children. We are imperfect, but we have a perfect Father to imitate! Choosing to follow the example Jesus sets for us will never fail. We will not always get it right, but one of the most important behaviors we model as parents is acknowledging our own shortcomings, asking for forgiveness, and making things right. We must ask ourselves, “What kinds of attitudes and actions do I want my children to imitate?” and “How can I be intentional in the ways I model these things?”

In this game family members will practice modeling by taking turns leading the others through actions and attitudes.

TIME TO PLAY!

Start by inviting everyone in the group to stand in a circle facing each other.

Then pick one person and send her out of the room. While she is out of the room, pick a “leader.” This person will lead the others through various actions and attitudes (for example: stamping feet, spinning, standing on one foot, dancing, or singing to show emotions such as happiness, sadness, excitement, anger, etc.). Everyone else in the circle must mimic the leader without giving away who the leader is.

Bring the absent person back into the room and begin the game. Have fun watching everyone imitate the leader (especially if he models some crazy moves).

The aim of the game is for the person who was sent out of the room to guess who the leader is. She gets three chances to guess. When she guesses correctly, she becomes the leader and the leader then becomes the “guesser,” and the game continues until everyone has had a chance to be the leader.

by Lori Welch, Family Care Coordinator

Thankfulness



Tree

Thankfulness comes into focus during this time of year.

Oftentimes, at family dinners or friend get-togethers, you might find yourselves going around the table naming the things you are the most thankful for. Perhaps this year, you are full of thankfulness. Or maybe you find you are in short supply. Wherever you find yourself, take time as a family to sit down and give thanks to our big God who, no matter our circumstances, will never leave us or forsake us. Then, as you go about your day, remind yourself of why you are thankful, and encourage others you meet to do the same.

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. *His steadfast love endures forever*” (Psalm 136:1).

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- tree image (you can find a template online to print, draw your own, or use a decoration around the house)
- leaf cutouts (template online, draw your own, or just use pieces of paper)
- tape
- markers or pens

WHAT YOU’LL DO

- Sit down as a family with all of the items.
- Remember all that has happened over the last year. Talk about the good, the bad, and how the Lord has been with you and shown Himself to you.
- Then write on the leaves things or people or moments you are thankful for. Take turns sharing, and hang them up on the Thankfulness Tree. (Parents, model this for your children by going first.)
- Throughout the day, remember what you wrote, and share it with others, modeling what a thankful heart looks like.

by Kristy Holinrake, Olivia Bennett, and Kendra Baker,
Early Childhood

A THANKFUL HEART

"More, please" can be a cute expression coming from a two-year-old child. It's not as appealing to hear it from older children, especially when wanting "more" becomes a problem leading to ungrateful attitudes.

We live in a culture that bombards us with messages of excess and overindulgence. How do we help our children learn to be grateful and have thankful hearts?

Esther Archut, a longtime New Life Church member, found herself in this situation with her children many years ago. In her own words, she said, "We were not rich, but we had enough. I wanted my children to know that we had all we needed."

One Christmas season, with the intent of teaching her children to think outside of themselves and to cultivate thankfulness in their hearts, Esther asked her children to pick two little kids' names off the Angel Tree at the mall. **Esther created an environment for her children to see that God had blessed their family with so much and had opened a door of opportunity for them to make someone else's life better.** She modeled a way for her children to share God's love tangibly with others who had less. That marked the beginning of a yearly tradition for the Archuts.

BE THANKFUL. LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL AMONG YOU RICHLY, TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER IN ALL WISDOM, SINGING PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, WITH THANKFULNESS IN YOUR HEARTS TO GOD. AND WHATEVER YOU DO, IN WORD OR DEED, DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS, GIVING THANKS TO GOD THE FATHER THROUGH HIM. COLOSSIANS 3:15-17 (ESV)

Esther didn't just stop there. Her passion for serving God and others and putting God's love on display led her to adopt a neighborhood in Colorado Springs. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). For eight years, Esther made 50 sack lunches and delivered them to that neighborhood weekly. Most of the time, she brought her family along. Esther lived out her faith in front of her children. They developed relationships within that neighborhood, shared the gospel, and prayed with those who lived there. Years later, this same neighborhood God had laid on Esther's heart to pray for and adopt became the same neighborhood where New Life Church would build Mary's Home—a safe place for single moms and their children to live and rebuild their lives.

So how can we help our kids develop a thankful heart? As parents, we can set an example in word and deed, point out generosity, and create opportunities for our children to

serve others and be a blessing.

by Evie Swart, Director of Midweek



ESTHER CONTINUES TO SERVE OTHERS AND NOW BRINGS HER GRANDCHILDREN ALONGSIDE HER AS SHE SERVES. HERE ARE SOME YEARLY OUTREACH PROJECTS SHE ORGANIZES:

- feeding the homeless (monthly)
- back-to-school supplies drive
- delivering Thanksgiving meal baskets
- writing notes of encouragement for the elderly at senior homes
- Christmas toys, hats, and gloves drive
- adopt a family for Christmas (partners with Nueva Vida)
- Christmas gifts for the elderly at senior homes (partners with Crossroads Ministry)

If you are interested in partnering with Esther and being on her email distribution list, please contact her at:

 archavon@hotmail.com

For more information about serving with your family, please contact

 outreachevents@newlifechurch.org

BLESSING

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.

WEEK

1

(Child's name), may you know that God, the Father, is near to you and hears you. May you know that not one prayer in your life has been unheard. May you rest in the fact that God is faithful to His promises and close to those who are hurting. May you stand confident that you are seen, known, and loved by God!

WEEK

2

(Child's name), may you know that God is rich with and abundant in compassion. In the valleys of life or in the victories, may you know that God's grace is enough for you today. Rest assured that God is your comfort and your peace in the storms that life brings. May you live full of faith and confidence that the God who created the heavens and the earth has compassion toward you.

WEEK

3

(Child's name), may you know that God is worthy of your worship. May you go throughout today, this week, this month, and this year with your eyes fixed on God. May your attention not be fixated on your situation but on the One who holds all things together. May you know that as you worship God with your words, your thoughts, and your actions, the Holy Spirit is transforming you to look more like Jesus.

WEEK

4

(Child's name), may you know that God has always been and will forever be faithful. There has not been one day of your life where God has not passionately pursued you and radically loved you. May you know that the same God who was faithful to speak to Samuel is the same God who is faithful to speak to you, wherever you are. May you have peace in the truth that our faithful, heavenly Father will never leave you or forsake you.

Journal

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise



FAMILY VERSE

THE WORD

became flesh and
made his dwelling
among us.

We have seen
his glory, the glory
of the one and
only Son, who
came from the
Father, full of
grace and truth.



JOHN 1:14

GOD'S WORD

1

GOD STATEMENT: **JESUS IS REDEEMER** SCRIPTURE: **MATTHEW 1:21**

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed help? Oftentimes, it can be difficult for us to admit that we need help. The whole story of the Bible gives us a picture of how God made humanity to live and flourish in perfect relationship with Him, but that relationship was broken because of our sin. Humanity needed help. They needed a Savior. Someone who could save them from their sins and redeem the relationship that had been broken with God.

This is what makes the Christmas story such incredible news! In Matthew 1 an angel of the Lord appears to a man named Joseph (the soon-to-be husband of Mary) and states, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give

him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21).

The angel of the Lord reveals to Joseph that the child growing in Mary's womb is the one God has sent to help humanity, to heal humanity, to save humanity ... and His name is Jesus! Jesus is the One who restores the relationship between God and His creation. Jesus is the One who saves people from their sin and from their brokenness. Jesus is the One who makes all things new. Jesus is the One who helps. **Jesus is Redeemer!**

DISCUSSION

- In what areas of your life do you see that you need help? Sometimes this can look like sin that we continue to struggle with or broken circumstances beyond our control.
- In what ways can you entrust these areas of your life to Jesus so He can heal them?

by Tim Shepard, Student Ministry Pastor

GOD STATEMENT: **JESUS IS IMMANUEL** SCRIPTURE: **MATTHEW 1:23; ISAIAH 7:14**

One of the most beautiful things about God is that He always keeps His promises. Unlike us, in our sinful nature, He never goes back on His word! The Bible is filled with promises from God, and more importantly, the fulfillment of those promises. One of the most important promises God gave humanity is that He would send a Savior to heal our brokenness.

This promise is given in Isaiah 7 when the prophet states: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (v. 14). The name Immanuel means "God with us." In essence, God is promising to send Himself to come and heal the brokenness of humanity. **God fulfills this promise through sending His Son, Jesus Christ.** In Matthew 1 the apostle states: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')" (vv. 21-23).

God fulfilled His promise to humanity through His Son, Jesus Christ! Jesus is the very proof that God loves us. This is why John says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus is the one who heals our brokenness. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to save humanity. Jesus is "God with us." Jesus is Immanuel!

DISCUSSION

- Think of how important it is for us to keep our word. This is how we build trust with other people. How did God keep His word by sending Jesus? Why is this good news for us?

by Tim Shepard, Student Ministry Pastor

2

GOD'S WORD

GOD'S WORD

3

GOD STATEMENT: JESUS IS LOVE SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2:8-16

Luke 2:8 begins with some important people: “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby.” Shepherding was one of the oldest professions and, unfortunately, had a low socioeconomic status in society. Though animals were an extremely important element of the Palestinian culture, the people caring for them were considered unskilled and disposable. Thus, shepherds living out in the fields nearby caring for their sheep were looked down upon by many people.

We find in Scripture, however, that the first group of people whom the angels told of the miraculous birth of Christ were *shepherds!* The angels shared this incredible news with the lowly shepherds first! With this news, the shepherds ran to Bethlehem to see for themselves what the angels had spoken of.

It is important to recognize that God chose to send His messengers to those men, the men that were looked down upon. Why? Because Jesus Christ

came for all people—poor and rich, male and female, educated and uneducated, young and old. By the announcement of Christ’s birth to the shepherds, God was demonstrating His love for all people, not just the rich or seemingly important. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1).

During this Christmas season, take time as a family to stop and ponder the reality that God loves you so much that He sent His Son to the earth as a humble, innocent little baby. Not only did He send His Son for you, but for all people, because Jesus is love!

DISCUSSION

- What are some ways you have felt God’s love?
- How can you love others like Christ this Christmas season?

by Mary Windebank, Director of Elementary

GOD STATEMENT: JESUS IS THE GOOD NEWS SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2:17-18

Scripture tells us that the shepherds rushed to see the birth of Jesus Christ. After their visit, Luke 2:17-18 states, “When [the shepherds] had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.” Not only did the shepherds get to see the King of Kings born as a baby, but they were able to share the good news of His birth!

We have all experienced celebrating others. Maybe it was going to a wedding to celebrate marriage, joining a birthday party to celebrate someone’s life, or attending a graduation to celebrate someone’s accomplishment. Have you ever had to keep any of these celebrations a surprise? Like a surprise birthday party?! It can be so difficult to keep these things a secret, because you just want everyone to celebrate with you! It’s good news that you want to share with others!

We see in Scripture that the shepherds were also excited to share the news of Jesus’ birth! They did

not keep the information to themselves but spread the word. They recognized that the birth of Christ was to be acknowledged and celebrated. Even later, in the early years of Christ’s life, we see the magi come bearing gifts to celebrate the birth of the new King. His birth brought good news of salvation to the world! Jesus is the good news!

And like the shepherds, we as followers of Christ are to share the good news. God did not design the birth, life, and death of Christ like a secret surprise that we have to wait to share. God calls His people to share the good news of Christ to all the world. The gospel of Matthew concludes with Christ commanding His people to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

DISCUSSION

- What is one thing that excites you about sharing the good news of the gospel? What’s one thing that makes you nervous?
- Whom can you share the good news with this season?

by Mary Windebank, Director of Elementary

4

GOD'S WORD

ITALIAN PESTO WREATH SLIDERS

These warm, cheesy Italian sliders make an easy recipe to throw together for a party, gathering, or an easy weeknight meal. Pull apart for a tasty appetizer or plate with a salad for a full meal. The best part is your older kids can make these for dinner while you shop for Christmas presents.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 24 slider rolls, Hawaiian bread recommended
- 1 cup pesto
- 2 vine-ripened tomatoes, sliced thin
- ¾ pound sun-dried tomato turkey
- 8-10 slices of provolone cheese
- 8 ounces butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat your oven to 350° F. Spray a 9" x 13" pan with cooking spray. Cut the sliders in half, but keep all the rolls together. Do not separate. Lay the bottom half of the sliders across the pan. Spread the pesto over the bottom layer. Add a layer of sliced tomatoes followed by the turkey and cheese. Cover the layers with the top half of the slider rolls. Combine the melted butter, Italian seasoning, and garlic. Generously spread over the top of the slider rolls. Bake covered with foil for 15 to 20 minutes and then uncovered for 5 minutes or until the sliders are golden brown. Cut out each individual slider and form a circle in the shape of a wreath. In the center, place a bowl of warmed marinara sauce for dipping. Enjoy!

HOT COCOA MARSHMALLOW COOKIE CUPS

December celebrations offer many opportunities for fun treats and cookies. These adorable cocoa cups are easy enough for the kids to create all by themselves and share with their friends. Make a bunch in no time or just a few for a fun after-school snack.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- large marshmallows
- Maravillas cookies (or any flat cookie base you desire)
- mini candy canes
- red and green confetti sprinkles
- tree sprinkles
- white and chocolate cookie icing
- marshmallow bits



WHAT YOU'LL DO

Lay the cookies flat on a plate or cookie sheet. For each cookie, add dots of white icing to the edges of the cookie. Place your confetti sprinkles on the dots, alternating colors. Add white icing to the bottom of a marshmallow and then place it in the center of the cookie. Squeeze chocolate icing on top of the marshmallow and spread using a toothpick or the tip of a dull knife. Place 3 to 4 marshmallow bits on top of the chocolate icing. Cut the top off of a mini candy cane using kitchen scissors and attach the candy cane to the side of the marshmallow using just a small amount of the white icing. Dab the icing on both ends of the candy cane for support. Finally, attach the tree sprinkles to the front of the marshmallow using your white icing. Let stand for about 15 minutes before you serve or store in a container.

POPPY SEED TURKEY NOODLE CASSEROLE

An abundance of holiday dinners usually produces an abundance of leftovers. And nothing takes care of leftovers quite like a casserole that uses a little of this and a little of that to create a delicious meal.



Delicious

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1 package (8 ounces) medium-size egg noodles, uncooked
- ½ cup chopped onion
- ¼ cup chopped green pepper
- ¼ cup butter, melted
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 3 cups milk
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese plus 2 tablespoons for topping
- 1 tablespoon poppy seeds
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon red pepper
- 3 cups diced cooked turkey
- 1 jar (4 ounces) diced pimientos, drained

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Cook noodles according to the package directions. Drain well and set aside. Using a Dutch oven, sauté onion and green pepper in butter until tender. Add flour and stir until smooth. Cook 1 minute. While stirring constantly, gradually add milk. Cook over medium heat, continuing to stir until thickened and bubbly. Stir in noodles, ¼ cup Parmesan cheese, poppy seeds, salt, red pepper, and turkey. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the pimientos and mix thoroughly. Spoon mixture into a lightly greased baking dish. Cover and chill for 8 hours (don't skip this step as it seals in the flavors). To bake, let stand at room temperature for 30 minutes and then bake covered at 350° F for 45 minutes. Uncover and sprinkle with 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese. Bake uncovered for an additional 10 minutes. Let cool slightly before serving.

CHRISTMAS DANISH

Dessert or breakfast? Why not both? Serve this charming Danish shaped into a candy cane for breakfast on Christmas morning and then enjoy seconds with a hot cup of coffee later in the evening. The cream cheese and cherry filling form a delightful combination for the holiday season.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla (or ½ teaspoon vanilla and ½ teaspoon almond extract)
- 2 tubes crescent rolls
- 1 can (21 ounces) cherry pie filling

GLAZE

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tablespoon butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon milk
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla



Family fav.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat oven to 375° F. Line 2 cookie sheets with parchment paper and set aside. In a medium mixing bowl, cream together cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla. Set aside. On 1 cookie sheet, align 4 crescent roll triangles in a straight line along the wide ends, slightly overlapping the corners. On the fifth triangle, begin curving the head of the cane. Spread half the cream cheese along the wide end of the triangles. Top with a layer of cherry pie filling. Fold over the points of the triangles to form stripes. Repeat assembly on the second baking sheet with remaining tube of crescent rolls, cream cheese, and cherries. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes until golden brown. While the pastries are baking, combine the ingredients for the glaze and mix until smooth. Frost the pastry part of the Danish while it is still warm. Let cool slightly and serve.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Have you ever been outside when it was pitch black and you could not even see your hand right in front of you? What if you had a flashlight and turned it on? What would you be able to see? You could then see an illuminated path and make out the rough or smooth terrain. The light would be a guide and would allow you to see if there were any rocks in your path you might need to go around or jump over. This is how God leads us in His glorious light. He reveals to us His path and shows us where we may need to move slowly, jump over obstacles, or go a different direction.

Jesus is the Light of the World, and we are to entrust our lives to Him. While Jesus walked on this earth He declared, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). This declaration of truth is relevant for us today! He continues to guide and lead those who walk through faith in Him. As fellow believers in Christ we are to daily choose to walk in God's light, free from the darkness of this world, and to live in the love of Christ.

PRAYER

May God illuminate your path with His glorious light all the days of your life. May you find yourself daily soaking in His presence and discovering your purpose in Him.



JESUS, LIGHT OF THE WORLD LANTERN

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

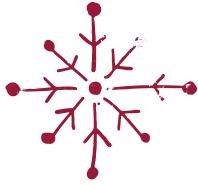
- Mason jar
- strand of 22 gauge silver craft wire
- crystal beads
- strand of 100 LED battery-operated fairy lights

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Wrap the wire 3 times around the lip of the Mason jar, and then wrap the wire around the body of the jar as many times as you would like. This will give you the length of the wire you will be using. Leave about 5 to 6 inches at the end of the wire and then cut the wire. Remove the wire from the jar and string crystal beads onto the wire, looping the wire over each bead and stringing back into the loop to make a secure setting. After threading and securing the beads, wrap the wire at the top of your jar 3 times and then begin to make your way down the jar. When you come to the end of your wire, simply loop the wire four times over the nearest wire to secure and set the wire in place. You may wish to use a drop of glue to complete the secure connection. Then place your fairy lights into the jar and voila! You have a beautiful lantern to display and to remind yourself that Jesus is the Light of the World!

by Katharine Sanchez

GAME TIME



Christmas Treasure HUNT

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- time
- car
- some decorated neighborhoods

BEFORE YOU START

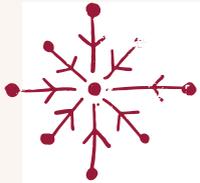
The wise men followed a star in search of treasure unlike anything they had seen before. As these men journeyed over hills and passed through towns, eyes locked on the bright star, they searched for the King of Kings—the greatest treasure. Can you imagine the reward waiting for them at the end of their journey? They saw the One who would save us all.

TIME TO PLAY!

Hop in the car to hunt for the items on the list provided (sunset into the evening is recommended). Set a family prize for reaching the end in a certain time limit—for example, “We only have two hours to find all these items, and if we do, we get to go out to dinner as a family.”

Enjoy a creative way to understand the responsibility each member has in helping one another see the treasures hidden in plain sight. The treasures of this scavenger hunt are a fun reminder that the true treasure we are responsible for seeing and sharing in this season is the glory of Jesus. And the hunt is on!

by Chase Windebank, Pastor of Student Ministry Discipleship



HOUSE WITH ONLY BLUE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

REINDEER ON A ROOFTOP

OVERSIZED CANDY CANE (4 FEET OR TALLER)

DECORATED CHRISTMAS TREE ON A FRONT LAWN

SALVATION ARMY CHARITY BUCKET

YARD NATIVITY SET

LIT STAR

ANIMAL WEARING A CHRISTMAS SWEATER

SNOWMAN

THE WORD “NOEL”

SANTA CLAUS

ELF

HOUSE WITH ICICLE LIGHTS

GIANT WRAPPED GIFT

POINSETTIA

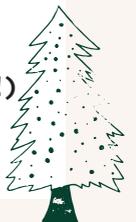
CHRISTMAS MOVIE POSTER OR ADVERTISEMENT

THE GRINCH

SNOW GLOBE

OVERSIZED CHRISTMAS WREATH

HOUSE WITH LIGHTS SET TO MUSIC (SAVE FOR THE FINALE!)



WORSHIP RESPONSE

THE

Paper Chain

TO CHRIST

The story of Christmas starts long before Jesus' birth. Long before a Savior was born in Bethlehem, God made a promise in the garden of Eden! One day, God was going to send Someone who would make everything right! And though generations of men and women failed to uphold His law, God's promise did not fail.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11 KJV). Imagine the excitement the shepherds felt when they heard the news of the King. For thousands of years, the people of God had waited for the descendant of David to come and save them, and here He was!

WORSHIP RESPONSE ACTIVITY

Make an advent chain as a family. Choose how long you'd like to make your chain and then cut that many strips of paper. Then go through the people of The Big God Story and choose which ones you want to highlight. You can choose from the list below or from the Bible. Divide up the strips of paper and have family members draw or write each person's name.



- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Adam and Eve | 8. Joshua | 15. Daniel |
| 2. Noah | 9. Rahab | 16. Esther |
| 3. Abraham and Sarah | 10. Ruth | 17. Zachariah and Elizabeth |
| 4. Isaac | 11. Samuel | 18. Mary and Joseph |
| 5. Jacob | 12. David | 19. John the Baptist |
| 6. Joseph | 13. Solomon | 20. Jesus |
| 7. Moses | 14. Josiah | |

Each day (for the same number of days you created strips), as a family, remember and talk about the person from The Big God Story. Then ask the Lord to give you the name of a person He wants you to pray for that day. Write that person's name on the back of the paper chain link, and then connect that piece with the previous day's link. Throughout your day, remember who the Lord has put in your life, and pray that they might know Him more and for the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with them.

Share the Good News

We all have a responsibility to share the gospel with others. As parents, how do we challenge our children to look around and take responsibility for the people God has placed in their lives? Take time during this holiday season to have intentional conversations with your family about how you can share the good news with those around you.

The New Life Chinese Church offers one beautiful example of sharing the good news in the community. Pastor Rachel Chen and her team have committed to befriending the owners of several restaurants in Colorado Springs. In addition to the relationships they are building, every Christmas, the Chinese church visits the restaurants to sing carols and share the gospel. Many of these families are from China where atheistic communism is all they have known. Through relationship, the Chinese church has had the honor of leading several restaurant owners and their families to the Lord and baptizing them.

Here are some ideas for how to love those around you this holiday season:

IN YOUR HOME

- Think of someone in your family you can share the good news of Jesus with

IN OUR CHURCH

- Dream Centers: info@dreamcenters.com
- Outreach Department: outreach@newlifechurch.org

IN OUR CITY

- Operation Christmas Child: samaritanspurse.org
- Springs Rescue Mission: springsrescuemission.org

by Shannon Baer, Director of Systems and Operations

BLESSING

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.

WEEK

1

(Child's name), may you know that you have been redeemed. By the work of the Father through Jesus, He has made you a new creation. May you know that even though we are broken, Jesus redeems our brokenness and makes us whole. May you know that the Father sees you as perfect, spotless, and holy, just as He sees His Son, Jesus.

WEEK

2

(Child's name), may you know that God is with you. He will always be for you. May you know that you have been chosen for this time in life and you have been given what you need to walk confidently and boldly—carrying grace, truth, and love with you wherever you go. May you know that because Jesus is with you, no weapon formed against you will prosper. So, go and live with the confidence that you are never alone. God is with you. God is Immanuel.

WEEK

3

(Child's name), may you know that you are loved and you have love to give away. Jesus said that the greatest of these (fruit of the Spirit) is love. Because Jesus dwells within you, and Jesus is love, then love is within you. May the words of your mouth, the thoughts in your mind, and the actions you portray be rooted in love. May you know that nothing you do can separate you from the perfect love of Jesus.

WEEK

4

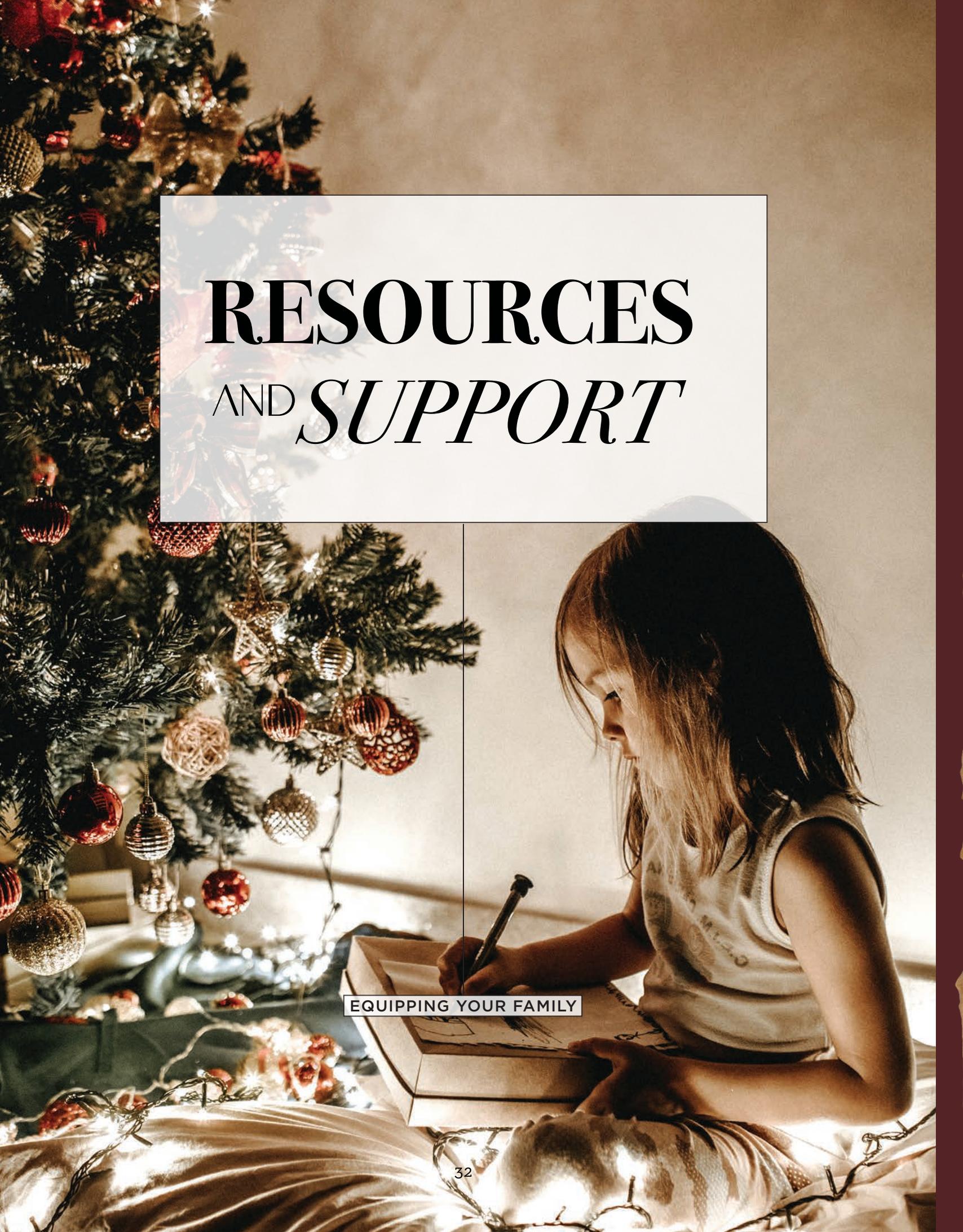
(Child's name), may you know that you carry the good news of the gospel within you. May you love boldly, may you teach the good news with confidence, and may you share this news with those ready to receive it. May the peace of God go before you and behind you, and know that because the Holy Spirit dwells within you, you have everything you need to share the good news. May your words be seasoned with salt as you teach about the sacrifice of Jesus that allows us to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

JOURNAL

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise



RESOURCES AND *SUPPORT*

EQUIPPING YOUR FAMILY

CONNECTING CONVERSATIONS

GET YOUR FAMILY TALKING

THANKFUL CONVERSATIONS

- What are you most thankful for this year?
- Who is someone who inspired you to live more for Jesus?
- What has reminded you lately that God is good?
- If you could change one thing about this past year, what would it be?

CHRISTMAS-LIGHT CAR CONVERSATIONS

- Where do you think the tradition of Christmas lights originated?
- What part of the Christmas story do you like the most?
- What is your favorite Christmas carol?
- What are you looking forward to the most about Christmas?
- Why do you think we celebrate Christmas?

Keeping Up with Your Kids



Christmas is magical through the eyes of a young child. It is easy to engage younger children, but teenagers require some effort. Whether you have a young child or a young adult, the best gift you can give your child this Christmas season is uninterrupted, quality time. Here are a few activities to make your holiday season magical for all ages.

An *Indoor Snowball Fight* is a fun way to engage family members of all ages. Using cotton balls or rolled-up white socks, create teams that try to throw as many snowballs as possible onto the opposing side's territory during a set amount of time.

Invite another family over for dinner and a game of *Christmas Family Feud*. Questions can be found online.

Hide the Christmas Ornament is an exciting game that challenges members to be the first to find the designated ornament. One person hides an ornament around the house. The other members try to be the first one to find the ornament.

Christmas Dress-Up

Do you like to play dress-up and pretend to be your favorite superhero or princess? Have you ever dressed up like a shepherd or an angel? Dressing up as shepherds and angels reminds me of an extraordinary holiday—Christmas!

Many years ago, when I was a little girl, the small town where I lived dressed up for Christmas. Red and green decorations crisscrossed each lamppost and hung above Main Street. Shop windows were dressed up with garland, gifts, and festive holiday scenes. Homes throughout neighborhoods were dressed up with colorful lights, wreaths, and ornamented Christmas trees.

Each year for Christmas Eve, my church put on a Christmas play. A manger scene dressed the stage, ready for the actors to take their places. One year, four children—two sisters, a brother, and their friend—were excited to dress up as characters to perform their roles in this play.

On this wondrous Christmas Eve, the oldest sister, dressed in her own lovely Christmas dress, took her place at the podium. She read her part from the open pages of the Bible, “While Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, she gave birth to her firstborn, a son” (see Luke 2:6-7).

The brother, dressed as a shepherd, stood up shyly on stage as the friend read: “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night” (Luke 2:8).

Dressed as a sparkling angel, the younger sister entered the scene. The older sister and the friend took turns reading. “An angel of the Lord appeared to

them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord ... You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger’ (Luke 2:9-12).

The play concluded as the cast, in unison, recited John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Did you know that God sending His Son is about the best dress-up of all time? When Jesus left heaven to come to earth, He wasn’t playing or pretending. Jesus left His throne in heaven to be born as a baby—a human being. He came as one of us to show us what God is like. He showed us true love, kindness, and forgiveness (Philippians 2:6-8).

This Christmas, when you see everything all dressed up—decorated shops, streets, homes, or maybe your own special Christmas clothes—remember Jesus came “dressed” as one of us to make the way for us to be friends with God. Someday all who believe in Jesus will see Him face-to-face at the biggest celebration of all. We’ll get to dress up in our true clothes, fine linen, bright and pure, and we’ll reign with Jesus forever and ever (Revelation 19:7-8; 22:5). Thank You, God, for Your special gift, Jesus, and the special Christmas dress-up!

by Laurie Bennett, Director of Early Childhood

TIPS FOR CELEBRATING ADVENT

FOR ADULTS

1. *The Divine Hours (Volume Two): Prayers for Autumn and Wintertime: A Manual for Prayer* by Phyllis Tickle
2. *Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Annie Dillard, and more

FOR FAMILIES & CHILDREN

1. *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd Jones
2. *The Wonder of the Greatest Gift: An Interactive Family Celebration of Advent* by Ann Voskamp (for young children)
3. *Unwrapping the Greatest Gift: A Family Celebration of Christmas* by Ann Voskamp
4. *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Susan Wojciechowski
5. *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

by Holly Packiam

Holly is the Parenting Ministry Director at New Life Downtown. She also writes and speaks on parenting and spiritual formation for Brio magazine and lifewithsally.com, a parenting resource. Holly received a BA in Communications and a Master's in Counseling. She enjoys drinking coffee, homeschooling her kids, long walks, and meaningful conversations with her family and friends.

The trouble with the generalized “holiday season” isn’t that it is a part of some calculated “war on Christmas”; it’s that it leaves us with no lexicon for longing. It gives us snow and songs, elves and sales, cookies and cards ... but no vocabulary for grief, for sorrow, for the deep ache in our hearts.

This is why we have come to appreciate advent. Advent isn’t a spiritual, alternative name for “Christmas”; it is its own season, a season of preparation for Christmas. Advent is when the anticipated joy of Christ’s first arrival puts us in touch with our anticipated joy at His return. Advent is a joy that helps us hope.

Advent is when we give voice to the ache and pain and longing in our hearts. Advent is also when we confess our own participation in the brokenness of the world. Advent, then, is not only about longing for Christ to come again and put everything back together; it’s about repenting and receiving grace so that we get to be put back together now.

But there’s one more piece. Advent is not only about longing for Christ to put the world back together, not only about repenting and letting Christ put us back together; it is also a chance to participate in bringing wholeness to others.

Here’s a list of advent resources to help you and your family enter into this season.



A Thankful *Heart* Brings a Content Spirit

When I was your age, my mom would always say to me, “Life is an attitude, Holly. You can choose to be upset, or you can choose to be joyful.” This statement would always follow one of my outbursts or tantrums about missing the opportunity to be with my friends or being told “no” to some clothing item I wanted my parents to purchase. The word “no” isn’t fun to hear from your parents, and the reminder to control your attitude isn’t either.

But as I raise my own teenagers, I realize how much truth is in my mom’s statement. Life really is an attitude that can determine the outcome of our circumstances, or at least how we endure an unmet expectation. In today’s culture, when you miss out on a social outing or don’t have the latest fashion trend, social media bombards you with reminders of what you are missing. Now, it is even more important to heed the wisdom to control our attitude.

THE POWER OF A THANKFUL HEART

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

As you scroll through social media, it is not always easy to give thanks for the things and relationships you already have. However, this is the best thing we can do! A thankful heart keeps us focused on the things above and gives us perspective on the temporary things of earth. Thankfulness has great power to bring joy to your heart and break the power of the Enemy in your life. Whenever you give thanks during difficult circumstances or in the midst of insecurities, it is like offering a sacrifice pleasing to God. It’s worship to Him!

Imagine what it might look like to give thanks to God for all the blessings He has given you instead of dwelling on the lack or the negative. Discontentment and negativity seem to only bring you down further. A thankful perspective can help align you with God’s heart and bring contentment. Elizabeth Elliot (a woman whose

husband was murdered on the mission field as he tried to share the gospel with an indigenous people) said,

To love God is to love His will. It is to wait quietly for life to be measured by one who knows us through and through. It is to be content with His timing and His wise apportionment. It is to follow in the steps of the Master, as did Paul, who was able to say that he had learned contentment no matter what the circumstances. His circumstances when he wrote that? Prison. No easy lesson, but great gain, which is the sum of godliness plus contentment (1 Timothy 6:6).¹

What does the Bible say about thankfulness?

Read Philippians 2:5-8. Whose attitude does Paul say ours should be like? What does that actually look like in our lives?

Here are three ways to practice an attitude of thankfulness in everyday life:

- **Thank and praise God for everything.** Look for the celebrations and victories even in the middle of difficulties. God will turn troubles to triumph. Psalm 116:17: “I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD.”
- **Don’t allow yourself to complain.** Be careful to watch what comes out of your mouth. Instead of complaining, think of ways you can turn that negativity into praise to God. Proverbs 4:23: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”
- **Don’t compare yourself with others.** God knows what is best for you and made you perfect for His plan. When we begin to thank God for what we have rather than comparing ourselves with others, it shifts our perspective in line with God’s. We begin to understand God’s love for His children (see Philippians 2:3-4).

by Holly Newman

1. Elisabeth Elliot, quoted in “Three Simple Ways Help You Obtain a Thankful Heart,” *The Christian Post*, accessed October 5, 2020, <http://ipost.christianpost.com/post/three-simple-ways-help-you-obtain-a-thankful-heart>



These Are a Few of My Favorite Things

Perhaps you have heard the famous song lyrics from *The Sound of Music*, “Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens, brown paper packages tied up with strings. These are a few of my favorite things.” I couldn’t have said it better. Neatly wrapped gifts or packages really are a few of my favorite things, especially at Christmastime. Several years ago, my friend group of about 10 women all decided to participate in a Christmas party in which we exchange our favorite things. Each person would think of an item that was a favorite from the calendar year to gift to the others in the group. Let’s face it, we all have those items we adore and can’t stop talking about. After setting a maximum dollar amount, each person purchases that item for the other ladies in the group, wraps each one the same, and prepares to share the reason the item has “changed her life.”

We gather for dinner and share our favorite foods, enjoy great conversation, and open the gifts. This evening is my favorite night of the holiday season. It isn’t because I take home a bunch of useful and fascinating gifts, although that does put a smile on my face. It is because of the rich friendships and support I receive from these women.

As moms, December can be filled with attending concerts or programs, baking treats, gift shopping, running children to party after party, and accomplishing all sorts of tasks to help our children feel the magic of Christmas. While this is fulfilling in itself, **I have come to realize that moms need to engage in the magic of Christmas as well.** We need friendships, laughter, and support just like our children do. Oddly enough, it makes us better moms! You may be thinking, *How could adding one more thing to my December calendar make me a better mom?* Let me highlight just a few reasons.

1. Time with friends is a healthy coping mechanism. Studies have shown that women need relational, social interaction so much more than men. Interacting with friends has been proven to lower stress, boost health stats, and increase optimism. I am pretty sure I am a better mom when I have less stress, a healthy body, and a positive outlook on my parenting.

2. All moms need guidance, support, and wisdom as they go through different stages of motherhood. In civilizations all over the world, women pass on knowledge and wisdom from one to another and generation to generation. Women have supported one another in many different ways. This is truly a gift when women offer encouragement, stating, “I have been there. Trust in the Lord. It will all work out.”

3. A night out brings a refreshing perspective to life and our role as mothers. Let’s face it, the role of a mom is hard work that requires physical and emotional strength. We can often find ourselves depleted, worn down, and short-tempered. Spending time relaxing, laughing, and enjoying a hobby or activity can fill up our depletion and refresh our weary souls.

If you don’t already have a close group of women, you are not alone. It takes effort and time to cultivate these relationships. Fight to find your tribe. Don’t give up! Ask God to bring you women into your life who will push you toward Him, encourage you when you are weak, and love you during stress and trauma. Perhaps God is asking you to start a group? Don’t wait for these women to come find you; go find them. Start by throwing your own favorite-things party.



The Joy of a Good Time Gone Bad

There's nothing better than a good time gone bad. Allow me to explain.

Say you have plans for Christmas to travel, and the day before you leave, a little person in your life taps you on the shoulder and says, "Mommy, I don't feel so good."

This little person proceeds to exhibit her symptoms all over your lap.

Or let's say you've lovingly opened your home to some family and their accompanying pets. You have a pet that you have not consulted. He has some opinions about this situation, and he decides to alert you to these by scenting your towels.

These are moments where you are anticipating something really wonderful and good. No one plans or seeks these moments out, yet when the dust settles, these are the stories we sit around and tell. They bring us together usually with much joy, laughter, and hilarity.

This has been the curious situation where I find myself in this special year of 2020. **The year of good times gone bad. I find myself regularly repeating this mantra: Just because the outcome is unknown doesn't mean it will be bad.**

My husband and I spent a few years in quite a bit of the unknown. Spring of 2009, after seven years of marriage and two kids, we felt like God was calling us to something new—a church plant. We were headed to calling, purpose, and adventure!

Or so we thought.

After packing up and selling our house, we moved back in with my parents after we both ended up jobless. We faithfully visited the church plant, built a network, and knocked on every door. But no one answered.

In the cold of winter, we sat together frustrated and confused. We decided the church plant wasn't the right path and started knocking on other doors. A year into our adventure, we moved into a room of my sister's condo in Colorado, wondering how we ended up here and what to do next.

What is it that makes a bad time better? What allows you to laugh together instead of cry at the circumstances around you?

For us, it was people—loving people—who came around to buoy us up like a raft in flooded waters.

It was also the Spirit who helped us reinterpret our circumstances with new perspectives. Every shut door was an opportunity to build our faith that the Lord is good and in control.

When I worry about the unknown, the terrible outcome I am gearing myself up for never arrives. God's Spirit and His people show up every. Single. Time.

With this in mind, I'm reminded of Mary. She's looking forward to a most exciting time in life, her marriage to Joseph, a bright future ahead. An angel appears to her and most assuredly derails all the plans. This is Mary's response: "May it be to me as you have said."

Mary is not expecting the worst here. She is looking for God, peering into the unknown and trusting He will be there.

And next, it says, "Mary got ready and hurried to a town ... where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth" (Luke 1:39-40).

Mary goes to her people! The Spirit falls on all of them (starting with baby John) and the women exclaim loudly and sing songs. JOY! There is incredible joy here. I can almost hear them sitting around laughing and talking (just like my husband and I do now) about how crazy that time was. "Do you remember that time when we used to make plans? Hahahhahah! That's all behind us now. Now we walk in the unknown and we do not fear."

As you head into this holiday season, get ready to laugh like you have never laughed before, hold your head high, and wear the "good time gone bad" of your life and family with pride.

All the good intentions, all the wasted effort, all the disappointment and tears. Hang them up like ugly homemade ornaments on your tree. Display them, love them, bring them to God and let Him work His Christmas magic over them.

by Katie Hoover

Katie is the official mom of the Haus of Hoov, an entertaining family of five. She previously held the role of Licensed Professional Counselor and worked with teens and young adults for 14 years. She loves God, her family, and laughing uncontrollably, in that order and all at once.

Going Deeper with Our Children

Being a dad is, at times, a challenge. If any skill should have an instruction manual, it should be fatherhood. Yet as I process that idea, I've come to realize that a manual wouldn't allow us to specifically minister to, love, direct, disciple, and support our children's unique character traits. There is no "one size fits all" parenting style; we must work at being intentional with our kids. It is our responsibility to write our own manual and become students of our children. So how do we do that?

I often ask my clients, "When was the last time you spent quality, one-on-one time with your child, doing what he or she wants on his or her level?" The typical response is, "Um ... I'm not sure." As fathers, we can have a tendency to drag our children along with whatever we are doing and can often miss the subtle cues of struggle or emotions. The deepest desire for every child is to be seen, valued, loved, and accepted for who he or she is. How do you do this well? Here are a few tips:



I OFTEN ASK MY CLIENTS, "WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SPENT QUALITY, ONE-ON-ONE TIME WITH YOUR CHILD, DOING WHAT HE OR SHE WANTS ON HIS OR HER LEVEL?"

1. **Put your phone down.** As a society, we are so engrossed in our devices that we are constantly looking down. We are so distracted by work, social media, the news, etc., that we can fail to notice what might be going on with our children. Spending quality time with our children requires us to put the phone or device down and look them in the eyes.
2. **Spend at least 15 minutes a day doing what they like on their level.** This could be a challenge if you don't like Legos or tea parties, but it is so important. I had a father come into my office once and was upset with his son's behavior. He admitted that he didn't spend much time with him, so I challenged him to do this very thing. I said, "If you spend 15 minutes a day (for two weeks) with him on his level, doing what he likes, and his behavior doesn't change, I will refund your session fees." Two weeks later, he came back and was surprised at how much the behavior had changed. Needless to say I didn't refund his money.
3. **Parallel process.** Some of the best conversations happen in the car or on a walk. There is freedom to talk when you are not being studied like a specimen. Face-to-face is good, but for kids, especially teenagers, parallel processing is better!
4. **Be curious without judgment or a desire to fix.** I hear this all the time: "I want to talk with my dad, but every time I do, he tries to fix me. I just wish he would listen." Our children want to talk with us. So, ask questions, be curious, and work really hard not to judge or fix.
5. **Invite them to teach you a new skill.** With the different generational gaps, there are a lot of things you probably don't know. Invite your child to teach you something new. This not only connects the two of you, but it also keeps you informed about what is going on in his or her world.
6. **Speak truth over them.** This is so important. Being in this world, our children are bombarded with lies. Be the one to speak life and truth over them. If you don't know how to do this, I would suggest starting by praying Scripture over them.

by Dr. Mark Mayfield

Dr. Mark Mayfield is founder, president, and CEO of Mayfield Counseling Centers in Colorado Springs, CO. He received his doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision with an emphasis in Nonprofit Leadership and Management from Walden University, and a master's degree in Counseling from Denver Seminary.



The Gift of Sharing

Recently, I had the privilege of spending time at a local park with one of our granddaughters who was visiting from out of town. In an effort to make our time at the park a wonderful experience, I brought all kinds of things for her to play with ... a bucket, several sand scoops, a small rake, empty cups and bottles for water play, and a toddler-sized “car” for moving her around the park.

Once we arrived, we found our spot, and I arranged the supplies so my granddaughter could see them and choose what she would like to play with. Much to her surprise, several other children at the park thought the supplies were a great idea too and began to come closer, hoping to be able to play with the “goodies” they saw.

My precious granddaughter had a moment ... a true, check-in-her-spirit kind of a moment. She looked at me, and although she spoke very few words, her sweet little face was saying, “Do I put up a fuss and keep all of these toys to myself, OR do I take a deep breath and, with a gracious attitude, freely share the items you brought to the park FOR ME with other children?”

There is a saying that goes something like “When you have more than you need, you build a bigger table, not a higher fence.” In that pivotal moment, as our grandchild’s “Mimi,” I had a chance to model what building a bigger table would look like. **Not only did we share our toys that day but, before you knew it, several other children had offered up their precious belongings to the group as well.** There were plenty of toys to go around and everyone had a great time!

Not too long after the aforementioned day, we had another opportunity to go to the park, again armed with lots of supplies. When the first child approached and took interest in the things we brought, my granddaughter said confidently to the interested child, “We do not bring what we do not expect to share.”

As we enter into the holiday season, I cannot think of a better time to seek out opportunities to practice, especially with little ones watching and learning, what it means to be thankful and grateful ... not only with people but with our things. Colossians 3:17 ends by reminding us that whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we should do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. **In the coming weeks, may the Lord give you eyes to see ways you and your family can build a bigger table rather than a higher fence.** We can be generous because God has been so abundantly generous to us!

by Patti Fenton

Patti is the Associate Pastor of Families at New Life Church and is passionate about ministry to children and their families. With a Master's degree in Organizational Leadership, Patti's favorite thing about ministry is mentoring and equipping dynamic young leaders who are passionate about the church tomorrow needs. In her free time, Patti never passes up a chance to travel, spend time with her kids and grandkids, and take on outdoor adventures with her hubby of 36 years.

MODELING

AS A PARENT



One of the most valuable pieces of parenting advice I've heard is this: Always talk with your kids when they are little, and keep on talking to them as they grumpily get into the car with you as they get older.

As a mother of a middle schooler and an elementary student, respecting others comes into our conversation quite often. It is no small job to teach my children to respect their teachers, friends, and classmates ... especially when my children don't think other people deserve it. I gently remind them that we, as Jesus followers, didn't deserve Jesus' grace either. When they don't like their teachers or bus drivers, I gently say, "Jesus loves, them, though ... so maybe we should, too?"

In parenting we get to do the fun thing called "modeling" as we teach our children. I wonder if any other parents out there struggle just as much as I do? We have to show our kids how to wait to talk, how to agree or disagree, and how to be assertive and not aggressive. Yet if we are honest, we are not always showing them our best.

And doesn't life seem to get in the way when we do try? Tired work days, endless time together in a pandemic, emotional exhaustion, and trying to keep people clothed, fed, and happy seem to catch up with our ability to speak kindly to each other at times. How often do I interrupt my kids when they are explaining something because I feel the need to lecture, or how many times am I sharp with my children or my spouse because they have stepped on a nerve? It's in those moments when I realize this love and respect thing is far easier to preach than to practice.

Half the time I think my job of parenting is apologizing for the things I don't know and the things I do wrong. Yet, I take heart in the fact that when I do model how to apologize and handle my sloppy mistakes correctly, I am teaching my kids an invaluable lesson. They see me make mistakes and also how I can overcome my mistakes by coming back to the conversation and saying, "I'm sorry."

Lately, I've realized that if I want my kids and spouse to exhibit a biblical trait, I have to first make sure I am characterized by that trait. After all, I'm finding more and more often that I need their grace just as badly as they need mine. We are not left without a Father in heaven who knows we are weak in the relationship department. After all, He did give us the Ten Commandments in which six out of the ten deal directly with our relationship with others. He clearly knows we need some help.

If any person had the right to walk around telling people they were wrong, Jesus did. In fact, He could have spent His entire ministry walking around with a pointed finger saying, "You're wrong, and you're wrong, and you, and you," but thankfully He did not do that. So how did He engage with those He loved? He asked questions. He invited people to share their stories, loved them in spite of their flaws, and continuously demonstrated unconditional love.

Parenting is not for the faint of heart. Remembering that we can't give away what we don't have, the only way we can be good parents is to allow God to transform our sinful behavior first. Giving grace to others as well as ourselves is crucial to growing in our relationship with Christ. Let's show our children how to follow Christ by modeling that life first. Remember, you are the perfect parent for your child. God handpicked you to disciple their hearts toward Him.

by Laura Iacono

Laura is the dedicated CEO of Team Iacono and has mastered the art of overloading the dishwasher, making killer homemade meatballs and so-so sushi, and being her husband's sous-chef. And she loves a good cup of Earl Grey tea. She has served at New Life Church in children's and women's ministry over the past eight years. Her passion is writing about Jesus with the sole purpose of helping others see the gentle, caring, and loving man He is and the length He goes to rescue, restore, and redeem our lives. Laura has been married to her husband, Scott, for 20 years. They have one boy, age 13, and one girl, age 10. Laura loves to read, make her own cards and other crafty things, and working out (but only after it's over), and she tries to get outside with her family whenever she can.

Traditions from Our Family to Yours



WE HOPE SHARING THE TRADITIONS OF OUR STAFF INSPIRES YOU AS YOU CREATE HOLIDAY TRADITIONS IN YOUR HOME.

A few weeks before Christmas, my family would go to a tree farm and pick out the biggest tree we could find! Afterward, we would go to a restaurant to enjoy a meal and unhurried time with one another. It was a blast!

Chase Windebank, Pastor of Student Discipleship

Every year I get together with some friends to drive around the city looking at Christmas lights while drinking hot chocolate and blasting Christmas music. It is one of my favorite things to do because we get to glimpse how other people celebrate Christmas. Over the years, I have found the lights bring out the best in people, and even in the midst of a crazy busy life they reveal a childlike joy in everyone!

Catherine Gerstenberg, Student Ministries Operations Coordinator

Each year, Bethany and I love to buy one new ornament that symbolizes the past year. We go store to store until we find the perfect ornament and then we put the date on it. At some point in the holiday season, we will look back at the various ornaments composed of symbols, special memories, and meanings hanging on our tree.

Andrew Cantrell, Pastor of Worship

My favorite tradition takes place Christmas morning. Our entire family gathers to host a birthday party for Jesus. The kids will retell the story of Jesus' birth, we sing "Happy Birthday," and then we cut the cake. Before we open any presents, we sing praises and pause to worship Jesus. My kids are 21 and 20, and the tradition is still going on, but the party now starts at noon.

Evie Swart, Director of Midweek

My favorite holiday memories were when our family would serve our community during the season. I remember working the Turkey Trot every Thanksgiving because my dad worked for the YMCA. I remember serving homeless and low-income families in a soup kitchen on Christmas. I remember passing out candy or serving at the church parking lot during Christmas Eve services. I don't remember what gifts I received each year, but these memories last for years and years.

Victor Mendoza, Student Ministry Associate Pastor

Each year on December 1, my kids make a list of things we will do during the month. Typical items they choose are decorating Christmas cookies, making Christmas cards for the nursing home, baking for the neighbors, and family movie nights. My personal favorite is grabbing hot chocolate while driving around looking at Christmas lights. In the beginning the list was overwhelming, but then it allowed us to be intentional with our family time during the busy holiday season.

Shannon Baer, Strategic Systems Director

On Christmas Eve, after going to church, coming home to eat a small dinner, and allowing each kiddo to open one present, we gather in the front room. With all lights off and only the Christmas tree for light, we listen to Mannheim Steamroller's "Stille Nacht." The music is beautiful, and it creates such a peaceful ending to the night together as family.

Jeni Mason, Pastor of Family Care

We would each be given five kernels of corn at our Thanksgiving meal. Throughout the meal, we would take turns listing five things we were thankful for that year.

Jill Nardini, Elementary Teacher

Every Christmas my siblings and I would wake up earlier than the sun and run out to the living room to see what was under the tree. Once everyone was up, we would start with the reading of the Christmas story. Following the story, my father would proceed to ask us fun questions about Christ's birth and thought-provoking questions about Christ's work in our own lives. After our discussion was complete, we would each get to open three gifts like Christ did at His birth.

Mary Windebank, Director of Elementary

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FAMILIES, LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO SERVE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON?

- Join us as we pack food for our partners in Guatemala.
- Due to the food shortage in Guatemala, our church will be packing thousands of meals to send to our partner ministries. Sign up to serve at one or more of the following times:

What: Food packing assembly line

When: November 11, 12, and 13 from 3:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

November 14 from 9:00 a.m.-noon

Register online: newlifechurch.org

ATTENTION JUNIOR AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS!

- Join us for a night of Christmas fun, fellowship, and games!
- Make sure to invite a friend! The more the merrier ...

What: Christmas Youth Night

When: December 16 from 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

Who: 6th-12th Grade

Where: New Life Church

COMMENTS TO OUR FAMILIES

In the last issue of *HomeFront*, we would like to correct a title for our specialized needs article. The correct title should be "The Good Father's Good Guidance." At first glance, the previous title misrepresents the heart of the article, and this title is more fitting to the blessing that sweet Margo is to Katie and Andrew.

During this holiday season, take time to listen to the stories of the elderly, those who are walking through difficult times, and those who may just need a friend. An encouraging note, a fresh batch of chocolate chip cookies, or a selfless act of love can spread the message of Jesus in a powerful way. Be the light for others this holiday season.



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VIRTUAL
FAMILY
NIGHT



Tuesday, December 15 from 6:00 pm to 6:45 p.m.

Join us on Facebook live at NLC Families or online at

nlcfam.org

contact us with any questions: families@newlifechurch.org