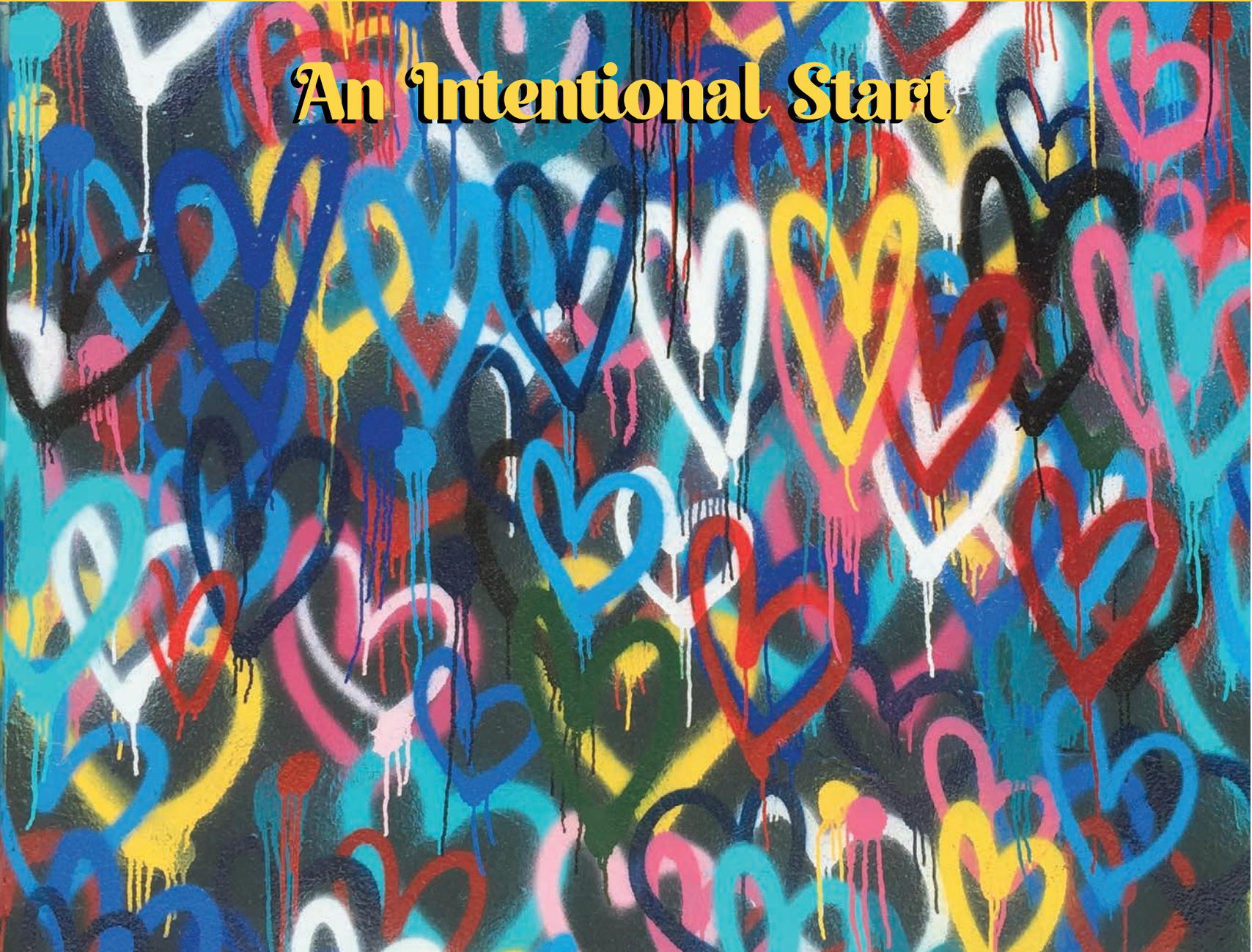


# HomeFront

a spiritual parenting resource

## An Intentional Start



### Out of the Comfort Zone

"GOD TRANSFORMS ME WHEN I STEP OUT IN FAITH."

### Serving

"ASKS THE QUESTION, 'WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?'"

### Special Insert p. 32

## 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.

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.

**2** There are four weeks of devotionals and activities. When you have a fifth week in the month, let the kids plan the family night.

**3** 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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### LET'S BE SOCIAL



## A Note from Michelle



*HomeFront* magazine is designed to help parents and grandparents disciple their children and grandchildren by creating environments in their homes that put God on display. Each issue gives practical ways to develop family nights or experiences in your home based on the 10 environments in my book *Spiritual Parenting*. It is vital for our children's and grandchildren's spiritual growth to set aside time on a regular basis to engage in spiritual conversations and activities that are both fun and developmental.

In this issue we focus on the environments of **OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE** and **SERVING**.

- **The environment of OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE** allows our children to begin to step out of what is familiar, safe, or comfortable. When we do this, we recognize our need for the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives to give us what we need and what we cannot manufacture outside of God's provision. This environment allows our children to learn a certain type of dependence on God that is needed to walk in faith all of their days.
- **The environment of SERVING** asks the question, "What needs to be done?" This is a question from the heart and is asking God to give discernment and wisdom for a need or situation. When we ask, "What needs to be done?" versus "What do I want to do or feel like doing?" we are entering into the life of a servant. Jesus shows us true servanthood by becoming the ultimate sacrifice—He saw that what was needed was salvation from our sins and relationship with the heavenly Father.

My prayer is that you will grow together as a family in this new year as you faithfully engage in the contents of this resource over the next two months.

With blessing,

**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



**A new year usually means new beginnings ... usually. Unfortunately, this year feels oddly similar to the last with its limitations and frustrations.** But take heart! Jesus has overcome the world and the brokenness within it. He is still on the throne and moving in mighty ways. As you embark on a new year, step out of your 2020 comfort zone into new routines, new challenges, and new patterns for 2021. **Shine brightly for Jesus as you serve those in your own family and the hurting and broken in your community, and bring hope all around.**

We have seen and experienced injustice of many kinds recently. As parents it can be challenging to navigate teaching spiritual values to and impressing personal responsibility upon our children. For the month of January, God's Word tackles different types of "injustice" that the Bible addresses. In addition, several articles in the resource section highlight personal stories and parenting tips we hope you find valuable in this season. As we move into February, I love that the environment focus is on serving. One way to bring peace and forgiveness is through serving out of love. God's Word dives deep into the ways Jesus demonstrated serving from a place of genuine love. We can show love with our actions because He first loved us.

**Finally, my husband and I take some time at the beginning of each new year to evaluate the previous year in prayer and discussion as well as set goals with a unified vision for the coming year.** It is one of my favorite things to do and the one tradition that has produced the most fruit in our lives. Pastors Glenn and Holly Packiam participate in this same practice and have graciously laid out a step-by-step guide for a retreat. Check out the two-page spread on page 32 **and fight for time to start the new year off right.**

May you know that your heavenly Father loves you. May you know that He is bringing life to dry bones and dead areas. **Seek His kingdom first** and may joy, peace, and hope fill you as you trust in Him.

**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 *Girltime*. 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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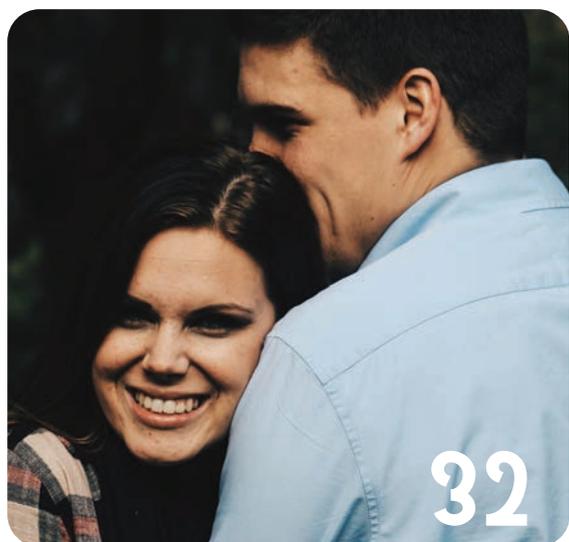
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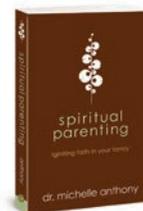
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## did you know

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

## 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.

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

# 5

## STORYTELLING

The power of The Big God Story impacts our lives by giving us an accurate and awe-inspiring perspective into how God has been moving throughout history. It is the story of redemption, salvation, and hope and tells how I have been grafted into it by grace. It further compels us to see how God is using every person’s life and is creating a unique story that deserves to be told for God’s glory.

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

# 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

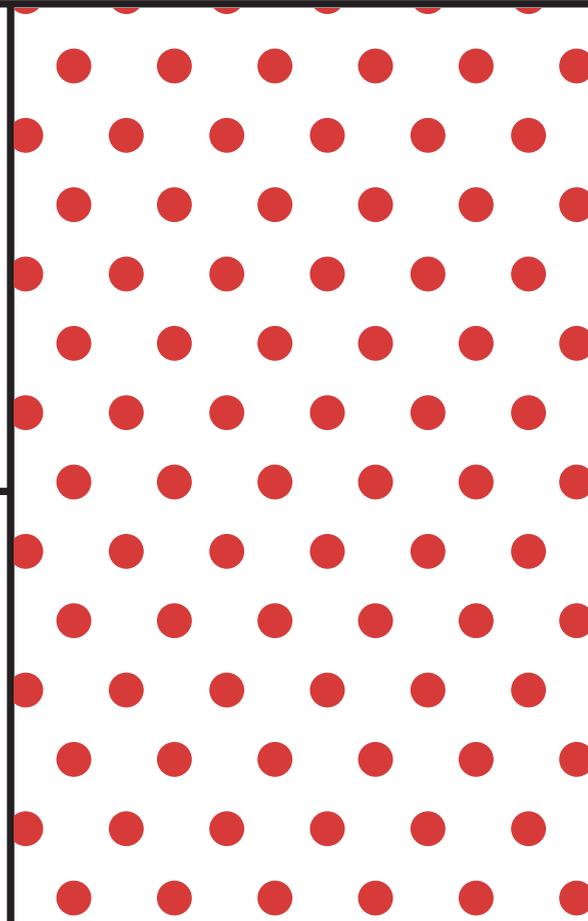
God designed us to live in community and to experience Him in ways that can only happen in proximity to one another. The faith community serves to create an environment to equip and disciple parents, to celebrate God's faithfulness, and to bring a richness of worship through tradition and rituals, which 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.





FAMILY VERSE

**“The Spirit of the Lord  
is on me,  
because**

**he has anointed me  
to proclaim good  
news to the poor.**

**He has sent  
me to proclaim  
freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of  
sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed  
free,**

**to proclaim the year of the  
Lord’s favor.”**

Luke 4:18–19

# 1 GOD'S WORD

**GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS JUST**  
**SCRIPTURE: READ OR SUMMARIZE**  
**EXODUS 5–12**

**Justice is something that burns in the heart of every human being.** Something simply feels right about good vanquishing evil. This is why so many stories and movies convey an underlying theme of justice. Justice can take many forms. In the story of God delivering the nation of Israel out of Egyptian oppression, we see an act of physical justice.

Despite Pharaoh and Egypt's strong grip of tyranny over the people of Israel, God reveals, through the 10 plagues, that His power and superiority over Egypt's gods are greater still. This passage reveals that no circumstance, obstacle,

adversary, or situation holds more power than God Himself. Moreover, this story reveals that God will not tolerate evil being done to His people.

The people of God today still face many circumstances, adversaries, and situations that seek to stifle our faith. These challenges can come in the form of a global pandemic, schools getting shut down, or tough family situations. The story of God delivering the nation of Israel from Egypt reminds us that God is just. Though at times it might not feel like it, God never allows evil to have the final word.

## DISCUSSION

- As a family, where have you seen God make a way in a difficult circumstance when it appeared that there was no way?
- In what ways can you, as a family, trust God to deliver you out of a difficult situation you are facing right now?

*by Tim Shepherd, Pastor of Student Ministries*

# 2 GOD'S WORD

**GOD STATEMENT:**  
**GOD IS THE ONE TRUE GOD**  
**SCRIPTURE: READ OR SUMMARIZE**  
**DANIEL 3**

**Have you ever felt pressure to do something you did not want to do?** The three men mentioned in the book of Daniel struggled with whether to obey the command of an earthly king or the command of the one true God. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon gave a decree for everyone in the land to kneel and worship his idol instead of their God. Three young men remembered how the Shema, an ancient Hebrew prayer, taught that their God was the one true God and was alone worthy of all their worship, so their knees did not bend, even under the weight of looming, harsh punishment.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were mistreated, made fun of, and, now, being threatened with death all because they loved the God of

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one true God, not an idol of a mean king. As they were escorted into the flames, everyone around thought that injustice had won and evil had trampled good, but God knew otherwise. In the midst of the flames of injustice, God appeared to deliver them and encourage them to fight the good fight, run the race, and keep the faith.

Standing up to the king was not the comfortable path to take, but it was the right and holy one. In our culture today, it can be challenging to boldly proclaim the Word of God to others as well as follow God's commands when others may choose another path. The one true God is worthy of our worship and our obedience. In return, He promises to walk every day, side by side, with each one of us.

## DISCUSSION

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have done what everyone else was doing and worship the idol, so why didn't they?

*by Chase Windebank, Pastor of Student Discipleship*

## 3 GOD'S WORD

**GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS COMPASSIONATE**  
**SCRIPTURE: READ OR SUMMARIZE ESTHER 3–7**

**Esther is a Jewish woman living in a country that isn't her home.** Through a beauty contest, the King of Persia chooses her to become his wife and queen. During this time, a man named Haman plots to get rid of the Jewish people by tricking the king. Esther is the only one in a position to go to the king and save her people. In 4:14, Esther's cousin Mordecai speaks of God's purposeful timing: "Who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?" Mordecai was reminding Esther that God had planned her outer beauty and position for a purpose.

Although going to the king could mean death, Esther steps out of her comfort zone to stand up for injustice. She calls for the Jewish people to fast and pray for three days, and then she approaches the king. Of course, we know the end of the story. God saves His people through Esther's obedience.

As believers there are no such things as accidents or coincidences. God's timing is perfect. Esther's divine moment came by accepting her responsibility to use her beauty and position to take a stand for the injustice of her people. Mordecai was clear that Esther could be the one who saved the people or she could choose not to. Either way, God would save His people. God will use you only if you are willing to stand up for injustice and step out of your comfort zone ... or He will find someone else.

### DISCUSSION

- How can we extend compassion and love to someone experiencing mistreatment by others?

*by Chase Windebank, Pastor of Student Discipleship*

## 4 GOD'S WORD

**GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS LOVE**  
**SCRIPTURE: LUKE 19:1-10**

**A beautiful thing about the kingdom of God is that it is a kingdom of plenty.** God does not overlook or neglect anyone based upon wealth, fame, or status. One of the most extravagant qualities about the God of the Bible is that He is generous. He is a God of abundance, and He willingly and joyfully shares all that He is and all that He has with the world.

The story of Zacchaeus gives us a picture of what an encounter with Jesus can do to a corrupted heart. As a wealthy and dishonest tax collector, Zacchaeus held a position of power over those who were less fortunate. He stole from those who had less to build his own wealth and reputation. However, Zacchaeus has an encounter with the living God in the person of Jesus Christ. As a result, his heart is transformed and his response to generous grace is generous living.

Instead of being an enemy of the kingdom of God, he becomes a signpost to the world of what the kingdom of God actually looks like!

Zacchaeus is a picture of what can happen when we encounter God in a personal way. Our character and our lives get transformed and we begin to strive to look more and more like Jesus. This is why the apostle Paul said, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Ephesians 5:1-2 ESV). God does not forget or neglect those who are commonly overlooked in society. He cares for them and calls us to do the same.

### DISCUSSION

- In what ways has the extravagant grace of God transformed the way your family lives life?
- What is one practical thing you can do as a family to care for those who are less fortunate than you?

*by Tim Shepherd, Pastor of Student Ministries*

# SPICY TACO QUINOA BOWL

The beginning of a new year means it's time to shake off a season of cookies and chocolates and embrace protein, veggies, and fresh ingredients!

This spicy quinoa is packed with delicious Mexican flavors and healthy ingredients. Don't worry, it isn't too spicy for the kids. They will love it!



## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 1/2 cups uncooked white quinoa
- 1 avocado
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes
- 2 cups black beans
- 2 cups corn
- 1/3 cup cilantro
- 3 green onions
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- tortilla chips
- taco-seasoned ground beef or chicken (optional)
- salsa or verde sauce

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Cook the quinoa according to the package directions or combine 1 part quinoa with 2 parts water. Bring to a boil. Simmer over low heat until water is absorbed (about 20 minutes). While the quinoa is cooking, prepare the fresh ingredients. Dice the avocado. Halve the cherry tomatoes. Slice the green onions. Chop the cilantro. Prepare the corn (frozen works well). Drain the can of beans. Prepare the sauce in a small bowl, combine the juice of about 2 limes along with the listed spices in a small bowl, and whisk until incorporated. If you would prefer more sauce, add in water or chicken broth. Combine the quinoa, fresh ingredients, and sauce in a large bowl and mix everything together. Use chips to dip or crush and sprinkle over each bowl. Top with fresh salsa or verde sauce.

# OVERNIGHT OATS



It can be a struggle to find a breakfast your children enjoy that does not take much prep time.

These overnight oats are a delicious, quick breakfast the whole family can customize with toppings of their choosing. Although there are many different ways to make these, we have suggested banana bread, strawberry shortcake, and chocolate peanut butter.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

### Base Mix

- 1/2 cup old fashioned rolled oats
- 1 tablespoon chia seeds
- 2 teaspoons maple syrup
- 2/3 cup milk

### Chocolate Peanut Butter

- 2 teaspoons cacao powder
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter
- 2/3 cup almond milk (substitute milk in the base)
- chocolate chips

### Strawberry Shortcake

- 2 strawberries, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons coconut yogurt
- 1/2 cup almond milk (substitute milk in the base)

### Banana Bread

- 1/4 banana, mashed
- 2 tablespoons walnuts, chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2/3 cup almond milk (substitute milk in the base)

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Mix the base ingredients in a small Mason jar (note milk substitutes for flavors) and add additional toppings either together or in layers depending on preference. Let sit overnight.

# GARLIC BEEF AND BROCCOLI LO MEIN

**Put this yummy meal together in under 20 minutes!** It is simple and easy to make at the last minute. You can also make it ahead to reheat after a busy day running kids around.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 8 ounces lo mein noodles or spaghetti noodles
- 3 cups broccoli florets
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 8-ounce flank steak, sliced against the grain
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 medium carrot, shredded
- 1/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/4 cup reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil

- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Cook the noodles in a large pot according to package directions. Add the broccoli for the last 5 minutes of cooking and let it cook until tender. Drain the noodles and broccoli. While the pasta is cooking, add olive oil to a medium-sized skillet. Cook the steak until no longer pink. Add the garlic and carrots, and cook for a minute more. In a small bowl, whisk together the brown sugar, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, sesame oil, ginger, red pepper, and pepper. Add the spaghetti or lo mein to the skillet, pour the sauce on top, and toss until mixed well.



# MONSTER PIZOOKIE



**What is a pizookie?** It is a delightful hybrid of a pizza and a cookie (without the cheese and sauce). It is a pizza-sized, warm cookie that is sure to make a delicious treat for family night.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1/2 cup white granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon light brown sugar, lightly packed
- 1 large egg, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 10-12 miniature Reese's cups, unwrapped and cut in half
- 1/2 cup milk chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup milk chocolate M&Ms

- Optional toppings: vanilla ice cream, hot fudge sauce, whipped cream

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Lightly grease a 9-inch cast iron skillet. In a medium-sized bowl, cream the butter, white sugar, and brown sugar for 2-3 minutes. Add in the egg and vanilla. Mix until combined. In a separate bowl, stir together the flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Add dry ingredients to the wet and mix until it becomes dough. Do not overmix. Divide dough in half. Press one half of dough into bottom of skillet.

Press the unwrapped and halved Reese's cups on top of layer of cookie dough. Add in milk chocolate chips and M&Ms to remaining cookie dough. Stir to combine and then press remaining cookie dough on top of the layer of Reese's cups. Bake for 20-35 minutes or until edges are golden brown. Serve immediately with optional toppings.

# UNIQUELY DESIGNED



**How amazing is it that your fingerprint is unique?** No other person on the earth has an exact copy of your fingerprint! Your fingerprint is one of a kind. Just like you! God created each of us with individual, beautiful, and wonderful qualities. We each have a unique combination of gifts, talents, looks, etc. And He loves every single one of us because He created us! No matter our race, gender, or social status, God has created us individually and uniquely. He created us *imago Dei*, which is Latin for “image of God.”

To remind yourself of your beautiful uniqueness, and also to remind you to see the beauty of other people, consider making a snowflake with your family! These snowflakes can represent the uniqueness of each person in this world and remind us to treat ourselves and others like we matter, because we DO! Because God created us and loves us all!

## PRAYER

May you know you have been individually and uniquely created as a child of God, in His image. May you be filled with God’s love to share this good news to each and every person.

## WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- colored paper
- markers
- yarn or ribbon
- glitter or other craft decorations
- scissors

## WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Start with a perfectly square sheet of paper.
2. Fold it in half, corner to corner, so it looks like a triangle.
3. Fold in half again, bottom triangle corner to bottom triangle corner.
4. Unfold that crease and fold the right edge up over the left edge (It will look like the edges are arms wrapped around themselves).
5. Draw a snowflake pattern (like pictured) on the folded paper.
6. Cut it out and unfold.
7. Enjoy your creation and place it somewhere you can be reminded of people’s uniqueness.

by Shayleen Smith, Director of East Campus Children’s

# THE BLIND TASTE TEST

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- blindfolds for each family member
- a variety of foods

## Some Ideas

- vegetable baby food
- vanilla Greek yogurt
- strawberry jam
- cashews or macadamia nuts
- blueberries
- tuna salad, deli style
- granola
- cheddar cheese
- hard-boiled egg
- favorite cereal
- paper with a list of the chosen foods



## BEFORE YOU PLAY

**Playing games can take us out of our comfort zone as we often have to use our bodies and minds in creative ways!** Trying new foods can be intimidating, especially when you cannot see what you are putting in your mouth. Play this game below to see if you can step out of YOUR comfort zone!

## TIME TO PLAY!

This game is a fun guessing game that engages most of your senses. To start, place a quarter-sized serving of all the food items you chose on a plate for each player. Feel free to include spicy or gross items if you think your children will enjoy the surprise. Keep the plates hidden until the players are seated and ready to go. Blindfold each family member so the players are not able to peek. Place a plate of food in front of each player and tell them they need to sample every serving of food on the plate. Once the player thinks she knows the food, she will state her guess out loud. Parents should take note of each guess on the paper next to the actual name of the food. After the players guess each food item, remove the blindfolds to see how many guesses were correct.

The blind taste test encourages children to try new foods, but it also provides sensory play for younger children. If you have a picky eater in the family, this food test game will get him “out of his comfort zone” as he tries new textures and tastes in a fun way.

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*by New Life Family Care Team*

# STEP UP for INJUSTICE

**How often have you exclaimed, “That’s not fair!”?**

Maybe it was when your sibling wasn’t sharing, someone cut in line, or the last piece of cake was eaten before you got a bite. In today’s culture we often hear people shouting, “That’s not fair!” but how often are we compelled to step up to bring justice to their situations?

Throughout God’s Word we see God calling His people to take a stand for injustice—to make right what was unfair. When Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery he endured physical injustice, while Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fought for spiritual injustice. Queen Esther took a stand for ethical injustice and Zacchaeus righted his own social injustice. God even sent His own Son to bring justice to our broken world.

**As a family, take time to talk about how you see injustice in the following areas:**

- Your schools
- Your home
- Our city
- Our world

Think about how God might be calling you to “step up” to pray or get involved in the areas you talked about.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

- 4-6 cutout feet (use template provided or draw your own)
- string, yarn, or twine
- corkboard
- tacks
- tiny clothespins

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

1. Gather your family with all your supplies.
2. Zigzag your string across the corkboard using the tacks to secure it.
3. Cut out the feet.
4. Write the injustices you came up with on the cutout feet.
5. Attach cutout feet to the board with the clothespins.
6. Throughout the month, pray over your board and remember what you are stepping up to do.

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*by Shannon Baer, Director of Systems and Operations*



# ACTING UPON INERTIA

## READ 1 PETER 4:10-11.

**I don't know about you, but all of these "Safer at Home" requirements have made me a little more ... comfortable.** It is easier to keep to myself. I've found myself becoming the very definition of inertia: "an object at rest will stay at rest until acted upon by an outside force." And I know I'm not the only one. **In a society where we're becoming more and more isolated, what will be the "force" to get us out of our comfort zones and into motion?** God's Word is a great motivator, and the passage above gives us three prompts:

### 1. GOD COMMANDS US TO SERVE.

**God has given each of us unique gifts in order to benefit others.** As believers in Jesus Christ, God expects us to serve, and He wants to reward us. The two faithful servants in Matthew 25 were commended for multiplying the talents God had given them. We want to hear God say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

#### ACTION

What gifts has God given you? How can you use your gifts to serve others? For example, do you like to write or draw? Perhaps you can make an encouraging note for a lonely resident in a retirement community. Often, needs are posted on community websites such as Nextdoor or our New Life Church Family Care ministry page.

### 2. GOD IS WITH US AND WILL HELP US.

**What is standing in your way of serving?** Fear of failure? Unsure of where to begin? Now picture yourself as God's coworker. God promises to be with you always (Matthew 28:20). That means you are never alone! Our Bible passage goes on to say that we serve "with the strength God provides" (v. 11). In other words, we have almighty God helping us do whatever He wants us to do.

## ACTION

Pray and ask God to reveal to you what needs He's passionate about. Now, whether it be feeding the homeless, leading a Bible study, picking up trash in a neighborhood or park, raising money for a specific cause, or some other act of service, know that God is with you to help accomplish these goals.

### 3. WE CAN BRING GLORY TO GOD!

**If our main motivation for helping people is based on the needs of people, we can quickly get burned out.** If we're serving to get the praise of people, we can become prideful. Ephesians 6:7 says, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people."

And Peter reminds us that we serve "so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (v. 11).

When we serve others with a humble and grateful heart—acknowledging that all good things come from God—we bring God's kingdom to earth. Our service should show people the goodness of God; then God receives the honor and praise due His name.

#### ACTION

When you are helping someone, how can you bring God into the conversation? Think of ways you can direct people's gratitude for your service back to Him.

Let's pray that God and His Word will continue to move us to action to bring praise and glory to God!

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*by Jill Nardini, Teacher at North Elementary*

# 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 the strong God of Joseph who rescued His people from oppression through Moses.** May you rest in your Father's arms knowing He protects you and fights on your behalf. May you find peace in every battle knowing you are not alone but held in the mighty embrace of almighty God. Jesus goes before us and will restore all things to perfect justice. Amen.

## WEEK 2

**(Child's name), may you know that the God who stood with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace stands with you.** When you live for Jesus and others do not support you, God stands by your side, helping you to remain steadfast for Him. Your faithfulness will often be met with resistance from the world, but do not worry. You are pleasing the One who makes you strong and courageous. Amen.

## WEEK 3

**(Child's name), may you know the God who rescued Esther and her people from the destruction and wrath of Haman.** He is the Judge who sits on the throne and will reign for all eternity. He is perfectly good, full of mercy, and abounding in justice. He will lift up the oppressed and remove the oppressor. May you find hope in His reign and righteous ruling. Amen.

## WEEK 4

**(Child's name), may you know the God who sat with Zacchaeus, who ate with the poor, and who healed the outcast.** May your heart never feel far from Jesus, who came to lift up the broken and heal the sick. You cannot run so far as to escape His love. You have been called His child, and He has already cast your sin as far as the east is from the west. Rest in His grace knowing He has made you new and will welcome you into His home. Amen.

# JOURNAL

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise





**GREATER  
LOVE**

*HAS NO ONE THAN THIS:*

**TO LAY DOWN**

**ONE'S LIFE FOR**

**ONE'S FRIENDS.**

**JOHN 15:13**



# 1 GOD'S WORD

**GOD STATEMENT: JESUS GIVES HOPE TO THE HOPELESS**  
**SCRIPTURE: JOHN 5:1-17**

The first four books of the New Testament, known as the Gospels, give us a glimpse of the life and ministry of Jesus, the Savior of the world. It is here where we see Him teach those willing to listen a new way of life. We read about how He performed miracle after miracle, revealing to the world who He was and what He was about.

Close your eyes and imagine for a moment what it feels like not to be able to walk. Perhaps this is something you have experienced before because of a broken leg, a sprained ankle, or an unexpected accident. Now imagine being in that condition for 38 years—with no one to help you. How would you feel? Do you think you might feel hopeless? The dictionary's definition of hopeless is this: "having no expectation of good or success; incapable of redemption or improvement." Sounds about right.

The man Jesus meets in John 5 must have been feeling hopeless and alone, among other things. However, once he

encounters Jesus, his life is forever changed. As you read in the Bible passage, after a short conversation, Jesus says, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Scripture tells us that "at once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked" (v. 9).

Perhaps you find yourselves in a season where things feel hopeless. Whether it be finances, broken relationships, or a diagnosis, take a moment and remember that Jesus is Immanuel. He is faithful to be with you in all seasons, even this one.

Just as He asked the man at the pool, He asks you, "Do you want to be healed?" Now, His healing may not look exactly like you might expect, but He will bring His hope to your circumstances. When Jesus enters into a situation, things change. Miracles happen. Hopeless situations become full of hope. So, invite Him into your hopelessness, and see what He does.

## DISCUSSION

- Is your family or someone you know facing what seems to be a hopeless situation? If so, commit to praying that Jesus would bring hope.

*by Kendra Baker, Pre K/K Coordinator North Campus*



**GOD STATEMENT: JESUS FEEDS THE POOR**  
**SCRIPTURE: MARK 6:30-44**

As you read through the Gospels, you will often find Jesus withdrawing from the crowds—oftentimes by Himself, and sometimes with His disciples, to rest and recharge. This is the scene set for us in the book of Mark.

How would you have responded to the crowd? Maybe you would have been frustrated because all you wanted was some time to yourself, to be with your people and to not be interrupted. Or maybe you would have been overwhelmed by the scene before you and ran in the other direction because you just couldn't deal with them at that moment. Jesus responded quite differently.

Jesus responded with compassion. He saw them as "sheep without a shepherd," and so He became the "Shepherd," teaching them many things.

# GOD'S WORD

Jesus modeled for His disciples, and us as His followers, what it looks like to serve each other from a place of love. It surely would have been easier for Himself and the disciples to call it a day when the people were hungry and to send them on their way to find food of their own. However, Jesus performed one of the most well-known miracles: feeding the crowd with only five loaves and two fish.

As followers of Jesus, we should follow in His footsteps, and instead of being angry or annoyed at those who appear in our path, we should find ways to serve them as Jesus did. There are so many ways we can do this; we just have to have open eyes to see the opportunities He brings our way.

## DISCUSSION

- Whom we can be compassionate toward as a family? What opportunities do we see to serve those people?

*by Kendra Baker, Pre K/K Coordinator North Campus*



**GOD STATEMENT: JESUS FORGIVES**  
**SCRIPTURE: MARK 2:1-12**

**Luke, the third book of the New Testament, communicates one of the reasons God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to the earth: to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).** God exemplified His love by providing an avenue for the forgiveness of sins through His Son. The book of Mark documents Jesus' ministry on the earth and gives an important example of Jesus' act of forgiveness.

We can often look at a situation like this and see the need for healing. If I had been present as the men lowered the paralyzed man into the room in front of Jesus, I can imagine myself expecting Jesus to heal the man and allow him to walk. But

## **GOD'S WORD**

Christ knew what the man needed more than physical healing. Jesus met the man's deepest need: forgiveness.

Jesus' claim to be able to forgive sins was a claim to deity, which some of the teachers of the law considered to be blasphemous. Blasphemy not only involved reviling the name of God but also included any affront to His majesty or authority.

"This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" (Mark 2:12). Some may conclude that people were amazed because Jesus had healed the paralytic. Perhaps even more amazing would have been to witness Christ's authority to forgive sins.

### **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*

## **4 GOD'S WORD**

**GOD STATEMENT: JESUS LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE**  
**SCRIPTURE: MARK 14:12-26; JOHN 15:12-17**

**At the Last Supper, the meal held before Christ would fulfill God's redemptive plan, Jesus spoke to the disciples about what was to come.** Mark 14:21 states, "The Son of Man [Jesus Christ] will go just as it is written about him." Because of the triune God's love, He sent His perfect Son down to the earth to be the blameless sacrifice for sins.

During the Last Supper, Jesus took time to explain what was to come through what we call now communion elements. First, Jesus addressed the sacrifice of His body through the representation of the bread: "Take it; this is my body" (Mark 14:22). Secondly, Jesus took the cup of wine to represent His blood. Christ took the cup and

passed it around to His disciples to drink and stated, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). Jesus sacrificed Himself for all people.

Scripture tells us in John 3:16, "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." An important observation of this known Scripture is that God chose to redeem and save the world because of His **love**. And in response to the Father's love, Christ would lay down His life for all people.

### **DISCUSSION**

- As a family, talk through the weight of Jesus Christ's decision to lay down His life for the sins of the world. Jesus' sacrifice for redemption was the most selfless act ever. How can you as a family imitate Christ and care selflessly for others?

*by Mary Windebank, Director of Elementary, North Campus*

# HEART-SHAPED POT PIE

Looking for a great dinner to serve the family on Valentine's Day? Try this warm, comforting chicken pot pie packed with vegetables. Nothing says love quite like comfort food in the shape of a heart.



## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

### Base

- 1 1/2 pounds chicken breast
- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 teaspoons chicken stock powder
- 2 sprigs thyme

### Filling

- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 large carrots, chopped
- 3 celery ribs, chopped

- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/3 cup white wine
- 1/3 cup flour
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 2 sheets puff pastry
- 1 egg, whisked

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Pour milk, broth, and stock powder in a large saucepan and bring to simmer. Add chicken and thyme sprigs and simmer covered for 15 minutes. Remove chicken; shred or dice (don't worry if inside is a bit uncooked). Save liquid. Melt butter in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add garlic and onion and cook for 2 minutes. Add thyme, carrot, and celery and cook for 3 minutes. Add wine and stir, scraping the bottom of the pot, and cook for 1-2 minutes or until wine is mostly evaporated. Add flour and stir for 1 minute. Add 1/2 of the milk-broth liquid and stir until the flour is incorporated. Add remaining milk-broth, Parmesan, and pepper and stir. Once well mixed, add chicken and peas. Let the mixture thicken while stirring regularly for 3 minutes. Spoon into heart-shaped individual pans and cool for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, remove puff pastry from freezer to partially thaw. Use a heart pan or cutout as a guide to cut the tops from the pastry. Wider is better so the crust drapes over pan. Cover each pan with the pastry and brush with the whisked egg. Cut 1 small slit in middle of the pastry. Bake at 350° F for 35-40 minutes. Serve immediately.

# CHOCOLATE-COVERED COOKIE-DOUGH HEARTS

Everyone loves to eat cookie dough! Most children will grab a spoonful when Mom isn't looking. However, the raw eggs aren't always the best idea. This cookie dough recipe skips the eggs so you can eat all the dough to your heart's content.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 6 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 6 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2-3 tablespoons water
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 2 cups milk chocolate chips

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Combine flour, baking soda, salt, sugars, softened butter, and vanilla extract in a large bowl. With clean hands or the mixer on low, work the dough. Add in semisweet chocolate chips until well incorporated. Add

water 1 tablespoon at a time if needed to get the desired consistency. Lay a piece of parchment paper on a flat surface. Place the dough on the parchment and spread evenly until about 1/2 inch thick. Let dough cool in the fridge for 20 minutes. Once cooled, use a heart-shaped cookie cutter to cut out hearts from the dough. Continue to reform the dough scraps to make as many hearts as possible. Once the dough is used, place milk chocolate chips in a microwave bowl and melt on high for 15-20 second intervals; stir and repeat until chocolate is melted. Don't overheat. Place 1 heart in the chocolate at a time and cover halfway. Using a fork, lift the heart out of chocolate, tapping the side for excess chocolate to drip off. Place the chocolate-covered heart on the parchment paper. Chill in the fridge for 10 minutes.



# MAKE YOUR PARENTS DINNER

One great way kids can show their parents love is to cook a Valentine's dinner for them. Spaghetti and meatballs paired with a salad and garlic bread make a fairly easy dinner. Help your children be successful by buying prepared meatballs if they are too young to make homemade. They are sure to be proud of the wonderful feast they prepared.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

### Meatballs

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1/2 cup Italian breadcrumbs
- 1/4 white onion, chopped
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano

### Entre

- 2 jars (48 ounces) spaghetti sauce
- 1 pound spaghetti pasta, cooked as directed
- 1/2 cup reserved pasta water
- Parmesan cheese and Italian parsley, for garnish

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Cook your spaghetti pasta of choice and reserve 1/2 cup of the cooking water. Combine all meatball ingredients in a large bowl and gently mix together with your hands. Once completely mixed, form into balls using about 2-3 tablespoons per meatball. Place on the baking sheet about 1 inch apart. Add 1-2 tablespoons olive oil to a large frying pan and cook the meatballs over medium heat. Cook on each side for 3-5 minutes or until they are browned. Pour the red sauce and 1/2 cup reserved water over the meatballs and bring to a simmer. Turn down the heat to low and cover. Simmer for 15-20 minutes. Serve meatballs over cooked spaghetti noodles and garnish with Parmesan cheese and Italian parsley.



# PIZZA ROSES

Giving someone roses is a beautiful expression of love and care. Pizza Roses might be an even better way to show your children you love them. Create an entire bouquet of roses in no time for a midday snack, grab-and-go meal, or dinner with a salad.

## WHAT YOU NEED

- 1 (8 ounce) tube crescent dough
- 1/4 cup pizza sauce
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan
- 1 cup large pepperoni slices
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat the oven to 375° F and spray a muffin tin with cooking spray. On a lightly floured surface, unroll crescent dough and separate into 4 rectangles. If the dough has perforated edges, pinch together to seal. Using a pizza cutter, cut each rectangle of dough lengthwise into three 1-inch-wide strips. Mix the



cheeses together in one bowl and the sauce with seasoning in another bowl. Spread a very thin layer of sauce onto each strip of dough. Sprinkle with cheeses, and then layer pepperoni on top half of each strip so they slightly overlap and the top halves of the pepperoni slices are off the pastry. Fold up the bottom half of the dough and tightly roll. Transfer to prepared muffin tin and bake until golden, 15-20 minutes. Serve warm.

# SACRIFICIAL LOVE

## When was the last time you remember someone going out of his or her way to serve you or take care of you?

How did it feel? Scripture tells us there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for another (John 15:13). This type of "greater" love can be expressed through sacrificing time, money, and resources.

Consider using this creative and fun project as a visual reminder to serve someone as often as you can. Serving can start by helping your family or friends create the gnome project below. Let your love be on display this month!

### PRAYER

May the love of the Father fill you and strengthen you so it may pour out onto others as you serve them.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- old sock
- 2 fuzzy socks or fabric
- rice
- rubber bands
- faux fur fabric
- hot glue gun
- foam cone
- pom-poms, wooden beads, and other decorations

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

Fill the old sock with rice and close it with the rubber band. Cover the old sock with the fuzzy sock for the body. For the nose, glue the wooden bead or pom-poms onto the sock about  $\frac{3}{4}$  from the bottom. To make the beard, cut the faux fur into a "U" shape making sure it covers from the nose to the bottom of the sock. For the hat, fit the foam cone into the second fuzzy sock (or fabric) and glue it to the top of the gnome—connecting it at the top of the nose and beard. Now, you can personalize your gnome any way you like. Enjoy!

by Catherine Gerstenberg, Student Ministries Coordinator





# “SERVING” BINGO

## WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 1 sheet cardstock or paper per person
- 1 ruler
- 1 pencil
- conversation hearts (or another small candy)

## BEFORE YOU START

**February is the month of love!** First John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.” Jesus loves us so much He chose to serve us by giving His life. We, in turn, can love each other by serving in practical ways in our family.

## TIME TO PLAY!

1. Make a bingo sheet for each family member by drawing a 5" x 5" grid for each paper, writing B. I. N. G. O. across the top and putting a “FREE” space in the middle.
2. As a family, discuss different ways you can serve each other (folding laundry, cleaning the bathroom, unloading the dishwasher, helping pick up toys).
3. Fill out the rest of the spaces with the ideas you come up with. Be sure to switch up where you put the ideas on each card.
4. Serve each other in these areas and when finished, add a conversation heart to that space.
5. The first one to spell BINGO wins!

# How He Loves Us

People display love in many different ways: freshly baked cookies, a gentle hug, an encouraging word, giving up something for someone else, and so many other ways. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us so we could have eternal life. He did this out of great love for us. This month, as you explore the worship response suggestions for each week, make sure you stop and listen to what God says. Take some time to look at the things Jesus did in the Bible that showed His love (John 13:31-38; 1 John 4:19). How does He show His love to you? Kids can journal their responses or draw a picture that represents His love.

**Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13)**

*by Kristy Hollinrake, Family Ministries Midweek Administrator*

## WEEK 1

**HOW DOES JESUS  
GIVE US HOPE?**

## WEEK 2

**HOW DOES JESUS TAKE  
CARE OF US?**

## WEEK 3

**HOW HAS SOMEONE SHOWN  
US THE LOVE OF JESUS  
THROUGH FORGIVING US?**

## WEEK 4

**HOW HAS SOMEONE LAID  
DOWN HIS OR HER LIFE FOR  
US THROUGH SACRIFICE  
AND SERVING?**

# A COUPON TO SERVE

IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER, HAVE THE SAME MINDSET AS CHRIST JESUS: WHO, BEING IN VERY NATURE GOD, DID NOT CONSIDER EQUALITY WITH GOD SOMETHING TO BE USED TO HIS OWN ADVANTAGE; RATHER, HE MADE HIMSELF NOTHING BY TAKING THE VERY NATURE OF A SERVANT, BEING MADE IN HUMAN LIKENESS. (PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7)



**Let me ask you a question: What do you think is Jesus' most astounding attribute?** In other words, what about Jesus most surprises and amazes you? For some, maybe it's the impressive miracles Jesus performed, such as raising the dead, walking on water, or opening blind eyes. For others, maybe it's how loving and kind Jesus was toward the poor, the marginalized, and the broken. For me, the aspect of Jesus' character that always gives me a sense of wonder is His unrivaled humility.

No passage in Scripture better describes the humility of Jesus like Paul's does in Philippians 2. After encouraging the church in Philippi to do nothing out of selfish motives, Paul points our attention to Jesus by using Christ as the prime example of humility. Jesus, the Lord of all Lords, taking on human flesh is the ultimate revelation of God's truest identity. Jesus' servanthood displays His humility. Jesus' humility displays His outrageous, extravagant, sacrificial, and everlasting love. Simply put, to serve is to love like Jesus.

So how do we become more like Jesus? We also must take on the very nature of a servant. In our actions, in our words, and in our everyday life, we have the opportunity to portray Christlike humility by serving. Today, I would like to invite you to engage in a serve challenge.

The primary holiday in the month of February is Valentine's Day, which is a day set aside for people to express their love toward one another. **While the world around us thinks love is about getting, we as Christ followers portray that the essence of love is giving.**

## FAMILY COUPON BOOK

Each family member will write three coupons, each containing practical ways to serve. Compile the coupons to create a Family Coupon Book. For the week leading up to Valentine's Day, each member of the family can cash in one of those coupons. The person who submitted the coupon will then serve the family in the manner written on the coupon. **Everyone will have a chance to serve and be like Jesus.**

# 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 is hope. May you be filled with joy and peace as you trust in Him. May you be so full of God's hope that it overflows from you—and others see your hope, and they come to know Jesus too. May you hold on tight to Hope Himself, despite whatever circumstances you find yourself in, knowing that God is faithful to keep His promises.

(Romans 15:13; Hebrews 10:23)

## WEEK 2

(Child's name), may you know that God is close to those who are poor in spirit. May you know that the kingdom of heaven is yours. May you trust God to give you your daily bread, nourishing you with His Word and meeting your needs. As a shepherd takes care of his sheep, may you know that God takes care of you. You lack no good thing.

(Matthew 5–6; Psalm 23)

## WEEK 3

(Child's name), may you remember that you have been given the greatest gift of all: Jesus! He holds none of your sins against you. Even more than that, He runs to receive you, His child whom He dearly loves. May you accept the gift of salvation and life that He offers. May you rest in His forgiveness and live your life for Him.

(Isaiah 43:25; Luke 15)

## WEEK 4

(Child's name), may you know that there is no greater love that can be shown to you than Jesus laying down His life for you. May your heart be filled with gratitude; may you thank Jesus and praise Him for all He has done. Because you know you are eternally loved, may your heart be at peace. May you be prompted to share this good news with everyone you meet.

(John 15:13)

# JOURNAL

REMEMBER AND CELEBRATE

PRAYER

THANKFULNESS AND PRAISE

A SPECIAL FROM



# An Intentional Retreat

The following resource article is laid out for individuals and couples to pause and take time to reflect, pray, and look to the future. As the new year begins, this is a great way to seek God for His thoughts and plans for your life and your family's life.

**For well over a decade now, we have taken a few days either at the end of December or at the beginning of January to pray, reflect, and plan for the year ahead. We've discovered a pattern of sorts to guide our time, and I share it here in hopes that it may provoke a practice of your own.**

We begin with a sort of **pause**—a night out for dinner; long, unhurried conversation; catching up on life; an opening of our hearts; a plumbing of the depths of our emotions.

The next morning, we begin **prayer and reflection**. This is a time for us to find separate corners of the retreat center or hotel to look at the year gone by. We try to pay attention to the signs of grace along the way, stopping to recognize God's work and to give Him thanks for it. It is also often a moment of allowing the Holy Spirit to show us where we've fallen short, the particular moments or episodes and the trajectories that are bending the wrong way. Reflection. Gratitude for the gifts. Repentance for the failures. All offered to God.

Next comes **listening**. We ask the Lord to give us—individually—a word for the year ahead. What is it that He wants to do in us and through us in the coming season? A new year does not automatically mean a new season, but it is a good occasion to stop and ask the Lord. Sometimes, the answer is something like, "Go ahead. Keep doing what you're doing." Other times, it's an adjustment of focus and attention.

The fourth phase for us is to contemplate our **circles of relationships**. Who are the people in our lives? Obviously, we begin with each other and our children. But then we list the staff team, the friends, the congregants, and more. We begin to pray about which circles will require more attention and intentional investment. You can't give equal weight to all these circles, and all relationships "breathe" and shift, so it's good to journal about which people to draw a tighter and closer circle around and which ones to set in a ring that runs wider from the center.

Finally, it's time to pull out the **calendar**. This often is what occupies us in the second morning. Priorities only work when they are turned into practices. For example, how are we going to invest in these relationships? Perhaps by a monthly dinner at our house. Okay, so what night of the week would work? And so it goes. We create calendar events for everything from morning prayer to working out to dates with the kids to meals with friends. We've learned over the years not to be too ambitious with this. It's better to start small with a few new rhythms and to leave plenty of margin for ... well, the unexpected.

On the next page are some questions to guide each phase for you.

---

by Executive Teaching Pastor Glenn and Pastor Holly Packiam, Downtown Congregations

# prepare the heart



## Pause

### ASK EACH OTHER ...

1. How are you coming into this retreat?
2. What weight are you carrying, and why?
3. What joy are you discovering, and where?

## Prayer and Reflection

### ASK THE LORD AND YOURSELF ...

1. Where did I discover gifts of joy in the past year?
2. Where did I experience sorrow and grief?
3. Where or how did I give and receive love?
4. Where or how did I fail to give and receive love?

## Listening

### ASK THE LORD ...

1. What word or phrase do you want to speak over me in this next season?
2. What do you want to do in my life in this next season?
3. What do you want to do through me in this next season?

## Calendar

### DECIDE ...

1. How often will I pray/meet with friends/work out/read/etc.?
2. What is the best rhythm or frequency for this?
3. What is the best day and time for this?

# RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

## CONNECTING CONVERSATIONS

# GET YOUR FAMILY **TALKING**

January and February can be a great time to help your children evaluate the last year and set goals or look to the year ahead with anticipation. As a parent, you can provide encouragement and direction for your child to jump confidently into the new year. One way to do that is to get them talking and listen to their dreams. Ask questions during a car ride, over dinner, or on a walk, and listen well to their responses.

1. What was your biggest accomplishment of 2020?
2. What was your biggest frustration of 2020?
3. What were a few highlights of the last year? (adventures, games, successes, friendships)
4. Looking ahead to 2021, what are you the most excited about?
5. What are some of the things you are believing God for this year?
6. If there is one area you would like to grow in this year, what would it be?



**I will be the first to admit that the technology world can be overwhelming to me and I have felt ill-equipped to navigate it ahead of my kids.** Not anymore! I happened to click on an advertisement that popped up on my Instagram account for a parental control monitoring system called Bark and I am thankful I did. Bark is a parental control phone monitoring app and router combination that keeps kids safe while viewing online sites, social media, and texting. For a yearly subscription, parents can link all social media apps, texting, emails, and Internet surfing with the Bark app to monitor bullying, suicidal talk, bad images, profanity, and more. While I could go on and on with how much I love this app, it is best to visit the website to learn more about the benefits of this company. Check out [bark.us](http://bark.us).

*by Holly Newman, Pastor of Parents and Families*

# RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

EARLY CHILDHOOD

## AN UNCOMFORTABLE BUS RIDE

**“Mom,” my son said to me with his eyes down, embarrassed and hesitant, “someone is really mean to me on the bus. Today he told me he wished I was dead.”**

I looked at my son. He was the new kid at school, and this broke my heart and made me mad.

“Thank you for being brave enough to tell me what’s been happening on the bus. I’m going to email the principal. We will also have to talk to the bus driver.”

My son resisted. He didn’t want to be labeled a “snitch” or “tattletale,” but I promised we would be discreet.

Thankfully, the school and bus driver handled it well, and the bullying subsided.

Just a few days later, I was volunteering at my son’s school. My role was to work with kids one-on-one. I recognized the name of the first kid I was to work with—it was the bully. We’ll call him “Jack.”

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When Jack approaches my table, I immediately notice his size. He is large for his age, tall and broad, with dark hair and sad eyes.

I reach out my hand and introduce myself. He pauses for a moment, then shyly extends his hand and gives a weak “Hello,” keeping his gaze toward the floor.

**At first, my mama bear instinct wants to give this kid a hard time.** I want to ask him some tough questions. But I know that hurt people hurt people. So I silently ask God for wisdom to guide our time together as he sits down across from me.

“How are you today?” I ask.

Jack: “I’m okay. My mom started a new job today.”

Me: “Oh yeah? What made her decide to change jobs?”

Jack: “Her boss was mean to her at her old job.”

Me: “That’s not good. Does that ever happen to you? Are people sometimes mean to you?”

Jack pauses and looks down. “Yes, kids can be pretty mean.”

I notice tears filling his eyes as he says: “Kids can say

things that hit me where it hurts.” A tear drips down his face. I’m sitting across from one of the biggest, toughest-looking kids in school, and my simple, heartfelt question has him crying.

I find him a tissue and tell him I’m so sorry. I ask if he’s talked to anyone about this.

“Yeah,” he replies, “I have people to talk to because my dad died last year. I have a counselor and we talk about stuff.”

Wait, WHAT!?! His DAD died?!

Again, I tell him that I’m so, so sorry.

I wish we didn’t have to do school stuff, but I use our time together to not only teach him but to speak life and encourage him as well.

He tells me he doesn’t have any siblings and that he gets off the bus and is home alone until his mom gets home from work.

**I invite him to come and hang out with my boys after school.**

His face lights up. “I’d like that!”

When our time together ends, he walks away with a smile.

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When my son got home from school that day, he said, “The weirdest thing happened on the bus ride. You remember that kid who was always mean to me? Today he asked if we could sit together and he gave me his phone number.”

“Wow, that’s awesome!” I respond. “Let’s call and invite him over.”

**I realized that I would not have gotten to really know this kid if he hadn’t been a bully to my son.** Our pain revealed another person’s pain. Our hurts make us more sensitive to other people’s hurt!

If you have a child who’s being bullied, get help. First, commend your child for telling you, and then get a teacher, bus driver, and/or principal involved.

If possible, get to know the bully; there’s probably something missing in his life and perhaps YOU can help! Visit [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov) for more tips.

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by Kathryn Egly, a mom to four boys. She writes to encourage families at [kathrynegly.com](http://kathrynegly.com)



# RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

ELEMENTARY

## LOVE FOR REAL

**When you hear the word “love,” what is the first thing that comes to your mind?** Is it your mom, dad, grandparents, a friend, one of your animals, or your favorite food? Many people have watered down the word love so that it no longer has the powerful meaning it was meant to have. Love is not just a word; it is something that cannot be described. When you think about your mom, dad, grandparents, or a special person in your life, I imagine you have thoughts of fun trips to the zoo, playing ball, running around in the yard, playing games around the table, birthday parties, and trips together. But, do you remember the times when the special people God put in your life took care of you when you were sick, hurt, or just having a bad day?

**God has a special lens or camera that we can look through to see what love really looks like.** Have you ever picked up a pair of sunglasses and looked through them only to see a foggy image of what was in front of you? Those glasses were probably streaked with fingerprints and smudges. But God gives us a lens that can take us from dirty to clean in record time. Who do you think demonstrates the kind of real love that cannot be faked or watered down? **The lens to see real love can only come from the heart of the One who is the Creator of love—not the kind of love that can be faked or watered down but the kind of love that cannot be altered.**

I remember one summer when my husband surprised us with four rescue calves that were about a week old. They were very sickly and needed to be bottlefed. We went to the farm store and bought bottles and calf formula to feed our newly acquired baby calves. Immediately, my two daughters took

over the job of taking care of the new additions to our family. What is important to note is that this was no easy task! We put together a feeding schedule that went around the clock for weeks. The girls took the day shift, and my husband and I took the night shift. I must say those little calves were hungry all the time. Since these little babies did not have a mommy cow to take care of them, we became the mommy. As the days went on the baby calves started to bond with us in a very special way! The girls named the baby calves Love, Joy, Peace, and Patience. What a special time that was for our family! God created the little baby calves, and He allowed us to help Him take care of His creation! **What a joy to be part of God’s plan.**

Day after day our family poured much love into those baby calves. You could not put any words to how we all felt about them. There was nothing to describe it! But through our actions and sacrifice, our love for them was obvious to anyone who saw us care for the baby calves—day after day and night after night!

The love we had for the baby calves does not come even close to the love Jesus has for us every day and night of our lives. **There is no greater love than the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross when He gave His life for you and me.** So, when we think about real love and who is the creator of love, there will be no doubt in our minds—the creator of love is **JESUS!** He can change our hearts to have the kind of love that cannot be explained.

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*by Fran Thompson, PhD, Woodmen Valley Chapel Kids’ Team*

# RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

## STUDENTS



**"I AM SENDING YOU OUT LIKE SHEEP AMONG WOLVES. THEREFORE BE AS SHREWD AS SNAKES AND AS INNOCENT AS DOVES." (MATTHEW 10:16)**

### READ MATTHEW 10:5-20.

**The choice to follow Christ is the choice to be out of my comfort zone.** Matthew says it well. We are people of peace entering into a world at war against many evils—like injustice. As peaceful people, we are not without weapons. When we start to think about approaching injustice, a couple of our own “weapons” of peace are crucial.

Let's start with being shrewd. Some similar words would be “sharp,” “clever,” or “observant.”

I like to think of being shrewd as having practical wisdom. If wisdom is like money in your bank account, shrewd is how you take it out and where you spend it. So, not only knowing stuff but knowing when, how, and where to apply your time, your energy, etc.

One way to be shrewd when it comes to injustice is to be observant inside and out. Injustice is a beast not only in the world but within ourselves, too. You actually have a lot of personal experience with injustice. We all do. In its simplest form, injustice is any lack of fairness. Think about both the injustice you've felt and dished out to others. Don't do this alone but enlist the Spirit's help in prayer. The Spirit will show you what He wants you to see.

Also, learn about the injustice done to others. Make yourself an observer. Be shrewd but do it with

innocence by giving others the benefit of the doubt. If you go in with all the usual weapons of war—malice, envy, ill will—you are not going to land on justice.

Innocence can seem the opposite of being shrewd, but taken together they make an excellent team. Where shrewdness might keep you on the lookout, innocence gets you back in the battle.

**It won't be without its hazards.** The weapons we have to fight with don't keep us from pain and suffering, so your perspective matters. Remember when you learned to ride your bike? Shortly after I learned to ride my bike, I had a major accident, which kept me off of a bike for quite a while.

We can be the same way with injustice. We get hurt and we want to crawl in our hidey hole never to come out again. But we are equipped with innocence in order to keep us loving anyway.

Since it took me years to get back on a bike, my daughter is a better example. She learned to ride her bike with a few falls and, as a result, gave her bike the cold shoulder. But in her innocence, she quickly forgot those falls.

One day, we went to a bike-racing track. She still fell many times, but her innocence and excitement allowed her to get back on her bike. She had adventure and a goal she was working toward. We still talk about how much fun riding that bike racetrack was and have returned several times!

The battle against injustice is like riding a bike on a racetrack. In all honesty we have to address the fact that injustice is affecting us whether we choose to enter the battle or not. The choice is not whether or not to face it, but how. There will be many ups and down, crashes and tears. But there will be triumphs and successes too. And with weapons like shrewdness and innocence, we'll eventually cross a finish line.

In John 14:18 Jesus says, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

**He's here. And He is the Lamb. Look to Him to lead the way.**

by Katie Hoover,

*Katie is the official mom of the Haus of Hoov, an entertaining family of five that lives in Colorado Springs. She previously held the role of licensed professional counselor for 14 years working with teens and young adults. She loves God, her family, and laughing uncontrollably—in that order and all at once.*

## Keep Your Marriage Rolling

**They rolled into Colorado Springs one beautiful fall day in their 30-foot Class A RV.** After thousands of miles and many days on the road, Grandma and Grandpa T had made it to our house. We were still settling into this new season of being parents. While playing cards, we caught up on all the adventures they'd had that summer; I admired our grandparents' tenacity and drive for adventure. They had been married almost 60 years at that point, but their love was still young. On that day, they decided their RV life had come to an end. Although their adventures were ending, ours were just beginning in marriage and with our growing family. That day we inherited their RV and signed up for that and much more.

Through the years, we've put a lot of TLC into the RV; at one time, the shower was a crib, then it was a storage spot, and now a lovely reading nook. Whenever we take the RV out for an adventure, I think about the training our grandparents gave us and the thick binders they compiled with manuals, best practices, and long checklists. They always had their trips mapped out with the best stops along the way. They had every storage box labeled; I still have their antique matchbox and Cracker Jack tin! They were intentional with so much, especially their life as husband and wife. Till the moment Grandma passed away, Grandpa was there by her side, loving and serving her.

John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." We realize now it was a gift to see Grandma and Grandpa T live out this kind of love so beautifully. But here's what we want you to hear: it didn't happen by accident. Marriage is a gift—and being intentional with God's best gift honors the Lord, strengthens us, blesses others, and establishes thankfulness and gratitude.

As we follow in our grandparents' footsteps with the RV, we will aim to follow their example in intentionally loving and serving each other for the rest of our lives. We invite you to join us in this adventure of intentional love and service to your spouse. One of the most helpful ways we've been able to stay intentional is by inviting Jesus

to help create targets for our marriage. A target is like a goal (goals are important; set them), but they are not something you move on from or graduate from. A target is something you'll be aiming at your entire life. Where a goal helps us get something accomplished, the target keeps us on track. In our personal relationship with the Lord, our target is God. He is **THE TARGET**, hard to miss and worth all of our effort to know Him and be known by Him.

When setting targets with your spouse, **PRAY**, invite the Lord, and be intentional to ask good questions.

### OUR FRAMEWORK FOR TARGETS

- It must keep us on track—loving and serving Jesus first.
- It must line up with Scripture.
- It makes you a servant, not a hero.

Here's your homework. Set a time for a date, pray, invite the Lord, and ask each other some questions about your marriage. Here are a few example questions:

1. How are we doing mind, body, and spirit?
2. Are we serving each other well?
3. Where can we be more intentional with our marriage?

### PRAYER

Lord, please guide our marriage. May we have eyes to see where You are leading us so we can honor You with our lives. Help us live out this great love for each other as You modeled it for us on the cross. Thank You for this great gift of marriage! In Jesus' name, amen.

*by Pastor Matthew and Leah Tisthammer*

*Matthew and Leah Tisthammer are longtime New Lifers. Doing ministry together is a joy and delight. Their hobbies and favorite pastimes include family time in the RV, playing games, and enjoying their backyard firepit.*

## Shoulder to Shoulder

**Steve and I grew up in the Deep South surrounded by racial tension.** We were raised to notice the differences in other people and cultures, and we saw people around us judging those differences as wrong. That said, we've raised boys who have been minimally impacted by that mindset and who see everyone as equals. *This was an intentional act our part—it didn't just happen.* So then, how did it happen?

Much of the credit goes to our time in the military. We traded what we had learned in our culture about turning your nose up at those who are different for the military's demand for respect for other peoples and cultures. When you serve in any military capacity, there is no room for division of any kind. It would only hurt the mission. We all had to stand shoulder to shoulder and pull together as one team. The military is a melting pot of many different cultures. Almost weekly we were around those from different parts of the world—eating their food, learning their culture, and hearing their language. We are indebted to our time in the service for helping us raise our boys with this inclusive mindset.

It wasn't just the military teaching the lessons, though. *Steve and I had to flesh it out every day through how we treated everyone and engaged with other cultures.* This is, by far, the most important thing we did. If it didn't start with us, all of the other procedures implemented would have fallen on deaf ears. Our boys needed to see that we practiced what we preached. In addition to this we made a few other things a part of our "home culture" in order to see it fleshed out in our kids' lives. Here are a few of those things:

- Everyone was included in everything—intentionally. We always had people in our home. We were building our military family, since we were so far away from our biological ones. No one was excluded. Everyone had a seat at our table.
- We willingly and happily engaged with the cultures around us. As I said before, we ate their food, learned their cultures, and listened to them speak their languages. It was against the rules to make a joke of things that were different than what we were accustomed to, and it was never allowed to call something wrong that was simply different.
- Sometimes we had to redirect thinking when we went back home to where Steve and I grew up. There have been times the boys have heard the same things Steve and I heard as kids, but we have made a point to redirect their thoughts on the matter—effectively trade one thought for another.
- We demanded (yes, demanded) they respect everyone. No one was to be laughed at or made fun of because of the way he or she looked, acted, dressed, ate, etc. If you were to ask the boys today, they would readily agree that this was a nonnegotiable, and stern consequences would follow any breach of this rule.

The result of the hard work we put into our boys in this area—and let's face it: parenting is hard work—is that we have two fine young men out in society now who are compassionate, gracious, and kind to everyone they interact with. They love their neighbor—anyone they come into contact with—as themselves. They respect other people groups and cultures and find things to love in them all. As a parent, I count that as a win.

## Experiences Matter

**When my kids ask me about what it was like for me growing up, I usually explain to them that I didn't have a typical childhood.** Certainly not the childhood they are experiencing. I happen to have grown up in an extremely large family in an extremely poor neighborhood in north Louisiana alongside predominantly African-American families.

I remember standing in line with my mom at the welfare office to get our allotted block of cheese, powdered milk, and peanut butter you had to stir to make it come together. I don't ever remember being hungry, but I always knew we had a more difficult situation than many.

When I talk to my kids about racism, I liken it to my experience being poor. Everyone seemed to have an opinion about my situation. Adults told me things like, "Your mom should never have had that many kids!" or "You don't have a chance; you'll end up just like your siblings!" just to name a couple. Believe it or not, their kids seemed to have the same opinion about me and made sure I knew it on the playground and in the classroom and just about everywhere I went.

**I don't even want to admit the amount of self-worth I had at the time—I spent a large part of 30 years feeling like I didn't matter much.** That's how long-lasting and deep-rooted that pain can be. *If I'd only been born to a better family, a better situation, or if I'd only been born someone else,* are some of the things I used to think. All because we seemed to be the poorest, largest, neediest, and most mentally troubled family. Things we cannot control about ourselves, especially as children.

That's the closest thing I have to explain to my children how deeply racism can hurt. It's my best attempt to scratch the surface of what cruel words do to the human soul. **I think the enemy works best in the nasty things we say to each other.**

Years ago, I watched a TED Talk about how to tell a liar just from facial expressions. Honestly, I remember very little about it other than one part that showed the look of a person condemning another person. It's a bit like a curled-lip expression. I had the eerie feeling of seeing that look my entire childhood. Just for being born.

**I fall in love more and more with Jesus knowing He's not here to condemn us.** He actually condemns those who curl their lips and look down upon us and make us believe we have no worth. He condemns our condemners. He is and always was and always will be fighting for us before we even know to fight for ourselves.

We talk about racism around our dinner table often. It comes up sometimes with what the children talk about at school and what they learn. Oftentimes, I tell my kids to look at their skin color and ask them, "Who made your skin color?" They answer that God did. I then tell them that God has so many types of flowers in the field and they don't look at each other comparing their beauty, but they look around and see how beautiful the world is with all of us in it.

**Really, how dull would it be if it were all just one shade of flower?** God knows what He's doing. He has a plan and a call on our lives. Even with this girl, who according to others "should never have been born"!

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by Laura Iacono

*Laura is the dedicated C.E.O. 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. She also loves a good cup of earl grey tea. She has served at New Life Church in children's and women's ministry for the past eight years. Her passion is for writing about Jesus with a sole purpose of helping others see the gentle, caring, and loving man He is. She has been married to her husband, Scott, for 20 years, and they have two children.*

A LOST STORY  
OF 30 YEARS ...  
FINALLY TOLD  
A GIFT OF STORY

A few months ago, I became a grandparent and my sweet granddaughter made me a “Mum Mum.” What every grandparent told me about how I would feel is true!

**I’m simply in love with this little gift from heaven.**

In the months preceding her birth, I pondered the kind of grandmother I wanted to be. What would impact my granddaughter’s life and her faith as she grew? **What did I want her to learn from my own story?** As I asked myself these important questions, I considered what sorts of things impacted me from my two grandmothers and from watching my mother and mother-in-law play this role so beautifully in the lives of my children.

So, one day, just weeks before my granddaughter was born, I intentionally began to write down traits and actions that were memorable to me from these incredible women. **Suddenly, I remembered something special I had tucked away nearly 30 years ago!** It was a storytelling book my mother-in-law had written for her first granddaughter ... my daughter.

In this beautiful book with hundreds of entries, my daughter’s grandmother recounted her early years growing up in England, her faith journey, her first boyfriend, favorite pastimes, and even included fears, failures, and frustrations from her life. She was remarkably vulnerable and candid. With great detail, she lovingly told her story so it would not only be treasured but also serve to give guidance and love to the following generations.

My mother-in-law wrote this when my daughter was just one year old. Upon receiving it, I nestled it away with the other baby items I had saved for “someday” when my daughter had children of her own. **Here it was almost 30 years later, and this timeless treasure was found in the midst of the other mementos I had saved.**

I was able to give this “gift of story” to my daughter at her baby shower just weeks before the birth of her daughter. In amazement, she tenderly opened and read each entry. Some provoked contemplation, some tears, and some laughter. Her grandmother even took time to recount injustices and discrimination while coming to America from an English and Canadian upbringing.

She shared personal stories of how women were not valued or even able to vote when she was a young girl. Much has happened throughout the years, but the necessity of understanding injustice and discrimination remains in our world.

Although I’m new at this grandparenting thing, I have been working on my own storybook for my new granddaughter with hopes that it will in similar ways serve to bridge one generation to another. **To bring insight into how walking with Jesus is not an easy path but a rewarding journey of learning and loving. It’s a faith adventure that draws us deeper into dependence and devotion.**

Today as I consider the best gift that I can give my little granddaughter, I realize that it is a sense of being a part of something bigger than her little life—a long continuum of faith that has found its way to the here and now through God’s faithfulness.

**Each of us has a story to tell.** As grandparents, we don’t need to shroud the messiness and pain in our stories nor shy away from proclaiming God’s riches in grace. As we tell our stories, we declare what **Psalm 78:1-7** so beautifully states:

My people, hear my teaching;  
listen to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth with a parable;  
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—  
things we have heard and known,  
things our ancestors have told us.  
We will not hide them from their descendants;  
we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,  
his power, and the wonders he has done.  
He decreed statutes for Jacob  
and established the law in Israel,  
which he commanded our ancestors  
to teach their children,  
so the next generation would know them,  
even the children yet to be born,  
and they in turn would tell their children.  
Then they would put their trust in God  
and would not forget his deeds  
but would keep his commands.

by Pastor Michelle Anthony, Executive Pastor of Family Ministries

# LOVE THE PEOPLE NEXT TO YOU

**It's hard to watch the news these days.** Especially if your kids are around. Do you find yourself turning it down, turning the channel, or turning it off? Do your kids look over your shoulder while you're on social media? Too much news is too much. We've had some terrible things happening in our world. Kids will find out about it. We hate for them to know the "newsworthy" worst of humanity, but we can also look at these events as a great way to teach our kids how to work through tough issues. If we run away from hard topics, we'll still be teaching our kids, but teaching them to ignore and hide their feelings rather than learning ways to cope. They will hear about these things. Isn't it better for us to be the ones teaching them and guiding them through how to handle these difficult times in our lives rather than letting our kids muddle through on their own?

**It is important to talk about tough topics.** Here are some basic steps you can try. You may have time and attention to go through all of the suggestions in this article in one sitting. Or you may do a little bit here and there. **Just start.**

**Let's talk about racial injustice.** We've seen horrendous and shocking videos. How can we broach these subjects?

**Ask your kids some questions and give them plenty of time and room to answer.** Sometimes you can talk in the car or around the dinner table. Sometimes, talk one-on-one at bedtime. Or bring it up just after you've seen something.

**Ask: Have you heard of racism?** What does that mean? Have you seen people treated differently just because of their skin color or where they live? Parent: Share your experiences with racism.

**Ask: Whom do we know who looks different than we do?** What can we learn from knowing them? How can we love them the way God does?

**Listen to their ideas.** See if you can make some of them happen.

You **CAN** talk to your kids about tough issues. Kids can handle it (and so can parents!). If we don't talk to them, if we're not honest with them, they can imagine even worse things than reality. Or they get their information from other sources. Or they hold it in and

worry about it. We want to guide them.

In Deuteronomy 6:5-7 God tells us to teach our kids His commandments and talk about them as we sit in our houses, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise. What are those commandments? Love God and love others.

**Take time to do a Bible study together.** You can look up some verses. Take time to read them slowly together. Maybe just take a section at a time. You know your kids and their interests and attention span. Try these:

1 John 4:11

1 John 3:16-18

Matthew 5:43-48

1 Corinthians 13

**Ask: How could we do some of the things these verses tell us to do?**

Brainstorm some ideas together.

**Listen to God.** Let's have a few minutes where we listen to God tell us what He wants us to do. We don't usually hear God's audible voice telling us what to do, but, if we can quiet our hearts and listen, sometimes we have a new idea in our heart or mind that we believe comes from God. Maybe it's part of a verse, maybe a song. Since we are asking God to speak to us, let's have faith that He really will. Don't worry if you don't have a big revelation; sometimes just sitting with God is enough. You can say, "Here I am, God. Is there anything You want to tell me?"

**Ask: Whom could we show love to?** How? Whom could we pray for? Is there something else God wants us to do?

I felt very overwhelmed when I became aware of all the horrible things happening in our world. I wanted to fix everything, but I felt helpless. As I was talking to God about it, **I felt Him tell me: "Just love the people next to you."** So, maybe that is what you and your family can do, too. Love them well. And that will look unique to you and your kids. And you'll make the world a better place.

by Mindy Harrington

*Mindy works with kids at Woodmen Valley Chapel. She has lived in Colorado Springs for 25 years while raising her family with her husband, Dave. She has two grandboys with one more on the way. She loves taking walks and eating lots of chocolate, preferably dark!*

I FELT HIM TELL ME, "JUST LOVE THE PEOPLE NEXT TO YOU."



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

JANUARY 27—PARENTING CONFERENCE

Check our website, [nlcfam.org](http://nlcfam.org), and social media handles for additional events.

## COMMENTS TO OUR FAMILIES

**As we kick off the new year, spend time in worship and prayer with our heavenly Father.** The beginning of a new year is a great time to establish as many rhythms and routines as possible to bring joy, peace, and stability in the middle of constant political and economic changes. Remember that our God is still on the throne and moving in mighty ways in your life. He is faithful to love and care for His children. May you know His love more deeply this year!



[Nlcfam.org](http://Nlcfam.org)



[Nlcfamilies](https://www.instagram.com/Nlcfamilies)



[NLC Family Min](https://www.facebook.com/NLCFamilyMin)



NewLifeFamilies



# PARENTING CONFERENCE

January 27, 2021, 6:30–8:30p.m.

Join us for an inspirational night of laughter, worship, and intentional teaching on parenting. The past year has brought new challenges for families. You will learn practical tips for how to build a healthy, connected family while your children are enjoying age-appropriate activities. Join us for an in-person two-hour session followed by online breakouts. For more information visit [nlcfam.org](http://nlcfam.org)

*Exciting activities available for every age group*

Register at [newlifechurch.org](http://newlifechurch.org)