

2021 | July | August

HomeFront

a spiritual parenting resource



COURSE CORRECTION

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



STORYTELLING

"God has a big story, and I can be a part of it!"

*The Gift
of Freedom*

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A NOTE FROM MICHELLE



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

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 you will be focusing on the environments of **COURSE CORRECTION** and **STORYTELLING**.

- The environment of **COURSE CORRECTION** puts on display the way in which God seeks to discipline us in love. While punishment has the goal of pain, **COURSE CORRECTION** has the goal of healing the broken places of sin deep within our hearts and souls. We find a three-step process for **COURSE CORRECTION** in Hebrews 12:11-13: a season of pain, being built up in unconditional love, and setting a corrected course for future decisions. In all, we must remember that **COURSE CORRECTION** is done in love and the desire to see our children grow in maturity in Christ. **The statement that sums up this environment is "When I get off track, God offers me a path of healing."**
- The environment of **STORYTELLING** allows our children to understand the great narrative of the Bible, which emphasizes redemption. When we and our children know the story of God, we start to see that we are also a part of this story and desire to find our place in it. We further understand that God is asking us to share our stories of redemption with others so they in turn will be able to find their places in His story. **The statement that sums up this environment is "God has a big story, and I can be a part of it!"**

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



EDITOR'S NOTE

I must admit that I am an extremely patriotic person. Walking through national monuments, historic homes, and significant battlefields often brings me to tears. When I see a soldier returning home from deployment, I get choked up. Recently, my children started to make jokes about my emotions in these moments, which eventually led to questions. Their statements and questions made me realize that I have not effectively communicated the price of our freedom. As a child, I was highly aware of the sacrifice soldiers and families make when serving our country. My grandfather, a World War II pilot, was shot down, severely injured, and left disabled for the rest of his life. This single act changed our family in many ways. And I will never forget what it was like to stand next to him while he saluted the flag and stated he would choose to serve our country over and over again. His honor and devotion were inspiring.

As we celebrate our country's Independence Day, I pray the articles within the pages of this magazine **help communicate the importance of the biblical principles our country was founded upon.** Enjoy the red, white, and blue desserts, crafts, and games before you sit on a blanket to watch the fireworks. At the end of the evening, sing the patriotic song from the Early Childhood article.

As summer comes to an end, kick off the year with the back-to-school breakfast celebration listed in our recipes while you read a story about wisdom from our Elementary article. God's Word focuses on a few different stories in the Bible that your children are sure to relate to as they start a new school year. **Speak a blessing each morning over your children as they head to school.**

May God bless you and keep you. May you know His love deeper and deeper every day.

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 *Girlltime*. Her passion is for families to create influential, faith-building moments with their children. She has been married to her high school sweetheart, Jared, for 18 years. They have four children. In her spare time she loves to get outdoors with her family.

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DID YOU KNOW

It is our prayer that homes and churches would create these environments for children to live in so their faith will grow in a community of consistency, common language, and practice. To learn more about how these environments can ignite a transforming faith in your family, we suggest you read:



*SPIRITUAL PARENTING:
An Awakening for Today's Families*

BY MICHELLE ANTHONY

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10

ENVIRONMENTS

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

2

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

OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

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

1

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

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.

3

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

SERVING

This posture of the heart asks the question, “What needs to be done?” It allows the Holy Spirit to cultivate a sensitivity to others and focuses on a cause bigger than one individual life. It helps fulfill the mandate that as Christ-followers we are to view our lives as living sacrifices that we generously give away!

4

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

LOVE & RESPECT

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

5

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

STORYTELLING

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

6

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

KNOWING

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

7

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

IDENTITY

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

8

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

COURSE CORRECTION

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

9

*"God's family cares
for each other
and worships God
together."*

FAITH COMMUNITY

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

10

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

MODELING

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

38



JULY

MONTHLY ★ PLANNER

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
27	28	29	30	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

SHOPPING LIST

[illegible]

IDEAS | SUPPLIES | NOTES

IDEAS | SUPPLIES | NOTES

Whoever
HEEDS DISCIPLINE

SHOWS THE WAY TO

life,



BUT WHOEVER

IGNORES CORRECTION


leads others astray.

(PROVERBS 10:17)



GOD'S WORD WEEK 1

GOD STATEMENT: GOD CONVICTS SCRIPTURE: 1 SAMUEL 24



Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." (1 Samuel 24:5-6)

King David: a shepherd boy anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel, a teenage boy famously known for defeating a Philistine giant, and a king defined as "a man after God's own heart."

However, even with his humble upbringing, glorious victories, and faithful moments, Scripture reveals that David was in need of grace to lead him back to paths of righteousness. **David, like all of us, was not without his faults and weaknesses.** This moment of encountering his adversary, King Saul, in the cave is proof of that. Though anyone in David's situation would have desired to seek vengeance upon his adversary, David recalled his true vindicator. It was God who chose David, and God would be the one to establish David. David, in this

conscience-stricken moment, is reminded of this truth. As a result, God corrects his course to a position of humility and honor as opposed to pride and vengeance.

Oftentimes God corrects our courses in a similar way. It can be easy to react in many situations based upon what we "feel" is right, but the gospel reminds us that Jesus has provided a new way. We respond to the world around us not by what others do but by what Christ has done. This is why Jesus says in the famous Sermon on the Mount, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Jesus invites us to treat others the way He has treated us: with simple grace.

DISCUSSION


Have you ever found yourself doing something you knew you shouldn't do? In what ways has the Holy Spirit redirected your course back to paths of righteousness through that still small voice?

by Tim Shepard, Student Ministry Pastor

GOD'S WORD WEEK 2



GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS WISE SCRIPTURE: 1 SAMUEL 25



"When the LORD has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself." (1 Samuel 25:30-31a)

God is our Creator. He allows us to make our own decisions, no matter the consequences. Though He allows us to choose our own path, God brings correction our way for our best interest and for His glory. Our God is a jealous God who wants all—not just part—of our lives. We learned last week that God often corrects our path using our conscience. This week, we'll see how God used a woman to correct David's course.

Even though David loved God and was a true worshipper, he was human and made many mistakes. However, David also avoided many potential mistakes because God helped steer David in the right direction through the wise advice of others.

In 1 Samuel 25, we witness David seeking revenge through bloodshed because of a lack of hospitality

from a wealthy man named Nabal. David had protected Nabal's servants and property, so during a festive time, he asked Nabal for some provision. Nabal refused and insulted David and his men. As David was getting ready to avenge himself, Abigail, Nabal's wife, took action. She brought David a multitude of gifts and asked for mercy on Nabal's household. Then she reminded David of God's promises to him. David relented and then thanked her for preventing him from seeking vengeance through his own hands and for preventing needless bloodshed.

God's willingness to guide us to the right path is a crucial part of our lives. God's correction often includes others—even unlikely people. David was moved to change his course by a woman who acted with boldness and wisdom. We need to be open to receive God's correction from whomever He sends.

DISCUSSION

Has God ever used someone unlikely to correct you? How did you respond, and what changed about the situation?

by Hailey Edwards, Worship Volunteer for New Life Student Ministries



GOD'S WORD WEEK 3

GOD STATEMENT: THE LORD IS SOVEREIGN
SCRIPTURE: 2 SAMUEL 7

"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day.' (2 Samuel 7:5-6)"

In this week's passage, we read how David wanted to build a temple for God. For 400 years, since the time of Moses, God's tabernacle had been a tent moving about from place to place. It made sense that David wanted a permanent place where people could worship God and meet with Him. And when Nathan the prophet heard David's desire, he immediately said, "Go ahead and do it!" However, the Lord said "no" to David's request because David was a man of war.

There are times in our lives when we have right desires and want to do good things for God. **But sometimes, the Lord says, "No" or "Wait."** We can choose to listen to God or forge ahead in our own strength. Proverbs 16:3 says,

"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." When we choose to go God's way and not our own, He will bless us.

David listened to God and made preparations for his son Solomon to build God's house. Then God promised David that He would build a "house"—a dynasty of kings—from David's family. As we know, every king of Judah came from David's family line. And because David trusted God enough to obey Him, God even brought the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world, Jesus, through David's family line!

DISCUSSION

Have you ever experienced God saying, "No" or "Wait" for something you wanted to do? How did you respond? What was the result?

by Jill Nardini, Elementary Teacher

GOD'S WORD WEEK 4



GOD STATEMENT: JESUS IS LORD
SCRIPTURE: 1 CHRONICLES 21

"This command [to take a census] was also evil in the sight of God; so he punished Israel. Then David said to God, 'I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.'" (1 Chronicles 21:7-8)

Pride. We all struggle with it. The reality is, we live in a me-centered world. We are so focused on promoting and projecting "the self" that we lose sight of the one we owe it all to: Jesus. Even King David had an encounter with pride.

We see in 1 Chronicles 21 that Satan gave David an idea to take a census, and David listened. He took the census to feed his pride in the vastness of his army. This was wrong, and it was evil in the sight of God (1 Chronicles 21:7).

Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Because of David's sin, God

punished Israel. A plague spread throughout the entire land, killing 70,000 people (21:14).

David then dealt with his pride by confessing his sin to God: "I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt for doing this foolish thing" (see 1 Chronicles 21:8b). To get rid of our pride, we have to put our focus back on God.

David built an altar to offer sacrifices unto the Lord. This is important because David was surrendering. He was letting God take control.

So how do we deal with pride? Through putting our focus back on God and relinquishing control. It's only by selflessness and surrender that we overcome pride.

DISCUSSION

In what areas of your life do you recognize that you are prideful? How can you give God control to begin overcoming your pride this week?

by Jace Akridge, Volunteer for New Life Student Ministries

FIRECRACKER FLOAT

Your kids will love this fun twist on a classic root beer float. The patriotic colors and the snapping pop candy “fireworks” make this a celebration in a glass! The best part is you will only need three ingredients and a warm evening.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- strawberry soda
- Blue Razz Pop Rocks
- vanilla ice cream

WHAT YOU’LL DO

Place a few scoops of ice cream in a clear glass. Slowly add in strawberry soda so that it starts to foam. Top with blue Pop Rocks. Serve immediately and enjoy!



AMERICAN FLAG FRUIT PIZZA

For most Americans, the Fourth of July is a day filled with celebration, family time, and lots of red, white, and blue. Join in the festivities with this easy, yummy fruit pizza dessert that looks fancy but is super easy to make. The buttery cookie crust, fluffy cheesecake mousse, and fresh, colorful berries arranged in the shape of a flag may quickly become a tasty tradition!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 1 tube (16.5 ounces) refrigerated sugar cookie dough
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 8 ounces whipped topping, thawed
- 3-4 cups fresh raspberries
- 2 cups fresh blueberries

WHAT YOU’LL DO

Preheat oven to 375° F. Open tube of cookie dough and slice into 1/4-inch pieces. Place remaining cookie dough slices on a lightly greased 12-inch pizza pan or large tart pan and press into an even layer. Keep one slice of dough out to cook separately and use a cookie cutter to cut a star. Bake cookie crust in the oven for 11 to 12 minutes or until lightly browned. Let cool. Beat cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla together until smooth. Beat in half of the whipped topping. Once the mixture is slightly thickened, fold in the remaining whipped topping. Scoop a little less than half of the cream cheese mixture onto the cooled cookie crust and spread all the way to the edges. Use blueberries to outline the pizza and create the blue portion of the flag with the star cookie on top. Next, use raspberries to create seven red stripes. Use the rest of the cream cheese mixture to pipe the white stripes. Keep in the fridge until ready to serve.



Kids can help!

FAMILY TIME RECIPES

SMOKED MAC AND CHEESE

If you are looking for a crowd-pleasing side dish to take to a summer picnic or Fourth of July celebration, look no further! The delicious variety of cheeses melded to perfection will be sure to satisfy children and adults alike.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 8 ounces Muenster cheese, grated
- 1.5 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated
- 16 ounces dry cavatappi pasta or elbow macaroni
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 2 cups whole milk
- 8 ounces Velveeta, cut into 1/2" chunks
- 6 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, grated
- 6 ounces Gruyère cheese, grated

a family favorite!



WHAT YOU'LL DO

Heat your smoker or your oven to 350° F. Boil pasta until molto al dente (cooked about three minutes less than al dente). While pasta is boiling, prepare the cheese sauce. Melt the butter in a 12-inch cast-iron skillet over medium heat (not too hot or you'll scorch the milk). This pan should be both stovetop and oven safe. Add the flour and whisk for a minute or two, just until the butter darkens a shade to golden. Pour in the milk and stir continuously for another minute or two until it begins to thicken. Add the Velveeta and continue stirring until it's nearly melted.

Add the cheddar and Gruyère and stir. Once the cheeses have completely melted, take the pan off the heat. Drain the pasta and pour it directly into the pan with the cheese sauce. Stir to combine well and smooth out the top. Sprinkle evenly with the Muenster cheese and Parmesan cheese. Smoke or bake for at least 30 minutes or until nicely browned and bubbling.



BBQ RIBS

Grab your rib bib and some extra napkins and sink your teeth into this tender, sweet, and spicy goodness. These ribs smoke low and slow but are worth the wait. The meat will fall off the bone making this a great main dish at any summer BBQ or holiday party.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 2/3 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup paprika
- 1/3 cup garlic powder
- 2 tablespoon onion powder
- 2 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground white pepper
- 1 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 4 racks baby back ribs
- 1/2 cup apple juice
- 1/2 cup white grape juice
- honey as needed
- BBQ sauce

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Combine all dry ingredients in a mixing bowl. Rub both sides of the ribs liberally with the mixture. When ready to cook, set grill temperature to 275° F and preheat with the lid closed for 15 minutes. Place ribs on grill, close the lid, and cook for 45 minutes. Meanwhile, combine the apple and grape juice in a small bowl and set aside. Remove the ribs from the grill and place them bone side down on heavy-duty aluminum foil or a large disposable foil pan. Pour the juice mixture over the ribs. Drizzle a generous amount of honey over each slab. Wrap up the ribs completely with the foil and seal the edges. Return the ribs to the grill and cook for 1 hour. Remove the ribs from the foil and place directly on the grill grate. Turn the temperature up to 350° F and cook for 30 additional minutes. Slather ribs with your favorite BBQ sauce and cook for an additional 5 minutes to set the sauce. Remove the ribs to a cutting board. Slice into single-serving pieces.



A LIGHT *for* OUR PATH

Every summer, our family goes camping, and we all look forward to talking and eating s'mores around the campfire. At the end of the night, we pack up and head to our camper to sleep. There have been times I've forgotten my flashlight and tried to navigate my way in the dark. Often, I wind up bumping into something or getting off course. A few years ago, we started putting solar lanterns on the path back to the camper so we could easily find our way at night, and this has kept us on track back to our "home" base.



MAY YOU KNOW YOUR
HEAVENLY FATHER
LOVES YOU AND
PROVIDES A LIGHT FOR
YOUR LIFE IN HIS WORD.
MAY YOU READ HIS
WORD, MEDITATE ON IT,
AND LET IT GUIDE AND
DIRECT YOU!



Photo taken from A Little Pinch of Perfect blog

God knows that on our own we tend to get "off course." We make our own decisions, try to navigate unclear paths, and can tend to find ourselves far from God's will as we stumble through life. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path." God provides a "lantern" for us in His Word. **As we read His Word, meditate on it, and allow it to shape us, we will be able to see and understand God's clear paths for our lives in a world that often feels confusing to navigate.** Make this paper lantern to remind you that God lights our way.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- cardstock (red, white, and blue)
- ruler
- scissors
- star punch or star stickers
- pencil
- glue sticks
- ribbon
- stapler

WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Cut a 1" strip off a sheet of cardstock for your handle. Set aside.
2. Fold the remaining piece of cardstock in half lengthwise.
3. Using a ruler, draw lines from the fold to about 3/4" before the edge of the cardstock. Lines should be about 1" apart.
4. Cut on each line, stopping when the line ends (don't cut all the way to the edge of the paper).
5. Unfold your cardstock. (You should have cut lines through the middle all the way across, but the page should still be intact.)
6. Decorate the cardstock with punched out stars or stickers.
7. For added fun, glue or staple a bit of ribbon at the top and bottom of the paper.
8. With folded "bumps" on the outside, bring the edges of your cardstock together to form a cylinder. Staple together at the top and bottom.
9. Staple the reserved 1" strip of cardstock to the top of the lantern to create a handle.
10. Make multiple lanterns and hang outside on a porch, deck, or your camper!

by Jeni Mason, Family Care Pastor

Red, White, and Blue MARSHMALLOW GOLF

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 bag jumbo marshmallows
- red and blue food coloring
- golf clubs, hockey sticks, brooms, or sticks
- 3 targets in the backyard (a tree, a chair, etc.)

BEFORE YOU START

There will be plenty of opportunities to talk about being “off course” as you use marshmallows as golf balls.

Instead of penalty strokes (which would be similar to punishment for poor play), help your kids to course correct by trying a different club or a different technique. There may be some unfortunate “pain” in their score as they keep track of each stroke, but the goal is for each individual to experience the goal of hitting the target. To prepare the marshmallows, paint or dye several with red and blue food coloring.

HOW TO PLAY

This is a fun Fourth of July-themed game that will allow you to celebrate the patriotic holiday while engaging with your family. Give each player a colored marshmallow (either red, white, or blue). Depending on the number of clubs you have, give each player a golf club or determine who will share. The goal of this game is to see who can hit her marshmallow to the target with the fewest number of strokes. The person who makes it to the target with the fewest number of strokes wins!

Show your players the “holes” or targets. Next, have players take turns hitting their marshmallows toward the targets; make sure you keep track of how many times they hit their marshmallows.

If a player happens to shank or hit the marshmallow in the wrong direction, give him ideas about how to change his technique. You may even choose to have players underhand toss the marshmallow toward the target. **Remember the goal is to make it to the target in the least number of strokes. Have fun!**

WORSHIP RESPONSE

Do Not Lose Heart

What comes to mind when you think of discipline? If I had to guess, I'd say receiving correction isn't your favorite thing. It can be uncomfortable and embarrassing. But what does God say about discipline and how we are supposed to respond to it?

In Hebrews 12:5-6 we read, "Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the **Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.**" The Lord uses hardships and challenges to develop us because He has our best interests in mind!

Take some clay or playdough and form it into a cross. Notice how you have to shape the clay in your hands, changing it from its original lump to create something new. We are like the clay and God is the one changing us. How comforting is it to know that God uses discipline and correction to shape us to be more like Christ? Not out of wrath but out of love!

As a family, take 10 minutes each week to go on a prayer walk and focus on each of these prompts.



WEEK 1

Ask God to give you an obedient heart and a teachable spirit.

WEEK 2

Ask God for willingness to receive God's correction and parental correction with love and grace.

WEEK 3

Trust that the Lord and your parents have your best interests in mind.

WEEK 4

Thank the Lord for leading us through life.

by Lauren Sayers, Family Production Coordinator

Make Independence Day EVEN BIGGER

Here in the United States, holidays center on families. July Fourth is no exception. Families gather on Independence Day to watch parades, barbecue in backyards, light sparklers, and enjoy all things red, white, and blue. These family celebrations bring joy and fulfillment to our lives. But what about the person who isn't able to gather with other family members?

If this last year has shown us anything, it's that isolation brings loneliness and sadness. And let's face it—a mix of other emotions that we can't always identify. **Even those who have an abundance of friends but live far from family can tend to feel lonely on holidays.**

As the body of Christ, God has called us to be family for one another. We are called to open our homes to strangers, feed the hungry, and to care for those in need. Our first thought may be of the homeless or less fortunate. But what about the elderly neighbor down the street who does not have family in town? Or what about the single mom who has to work and does not have time to plan festivities for her kids? Or what about the person at the coffee shop who just lost a spouse? **All of these people could experience God's love through your family opening your home, sharing a meal, and building a friendship.**

Is there a person or a family in your neighborhood or church, someone from work, or even a close friend to whom you could show God's love on the Fourth of July? Consider serving in the following ways:

- Invite a person or family to your Independence Day festivities
- Make the fruit pizza from July recipes and deliver to a friend with a note of encouragement
- Invite your neighbors to a time of thankfulness and prayer as you light sparklers

by Holly Newman, Pastor of Parenting and Families

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

SCRIPTURE:

Exodus 4:10-17;
2 Timothy 1:7;
Philippians 1:6

(Child's name), may you know that God is trustworthy. He has not given you a spirit of fear but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. As His Spirit fills you, may you trust Him completely and obey Him when He calls. Know that He who began a good work in you is faithful to complete it!

Week 2

SCRIPTURE:

Jonah 1-4;
Hosea 11:4;
1 Corinthians 10:1

(Child's name), may you know that God is merciful. May you sense His loving kindness as He gently leads you and corrects you. Your Father in heaven loves you faithfully, and when you get off track He will always offer you a path to wholeness and healing. Stay close to Jesus and know that when temptation comes, He will always show you a way out and be your strength to endure.

Week 3

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 17:27;
Ephesians 3:20;
Proverbs 3:5-6

(Child's name), may you know that your Father in heaven is faithful to do what He says He will do. May you discover that as you obey, He faithfully provides more than you can even ask or imagine! Be filled with courage to trust Him with your whole heart!

Week 4

SCRIPTURE:

Acts 9;
1 Corinthians
13:4-8;
2 Peter 3:9

(Child's name), may you know that God is love. His love is patient, kind, and quick to forgive because He doesn't want anyone to perish but for everyone to come to repentance. May you experience the fruit of obedience and see many others be blessed as you share God's love.





JOURNAL

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise



AUGUST

MONTHLY • PLANNER

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	1	2	3	4

Shopping List

[illegible]

Ideas | Supplies | Notes

20

FAMILY VERSE

THEY
TRIUMPHED

OVER HIM

by the blood of the
+

LAMB

AND

BY THE WORD
OF THEIR

TESTIMONY

[REVELATION 12:11A]

GOD'S WORD WEEK 1

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS *EL ROI*
SCRIPTURE: 1 SAMUEL 24

"She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me.'" (Genesis 16:13)

Everyone likes to be seen. To be seen acknowledges that we exist, that we are here. Being seen helps us experience meaning and value in our lives. In contrast, no one likes to be overlooked or unacknowledged. Being ignored and unseen feels dehumanizing and degrading. Over time, it makes us feel less connected to the people and world around us.

The story of Hagar is one of an Egyptian slave who felt unseen, abused, and neglected. After conceiving a son by Abram and being treated harshly by Abram's wife, Sarai, Hagar fled into the wilderness and found herself at a spring of water on the way to Shur. In this moment of desperation, the God of the universe pursued her and blessed her and her offspring. The angel of the Lord stated, "You are now pregnant and

you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery" (Genesis 16:11).

God saw Hagar. She was not overlooked or forgotten; she was seen by her Creator. This is the case for every human being on the planet. God sees us. He has not abandoned us to figure out our pain and circumstances. Instead, He sent His Son for us to know that He has chosen to embrace us in our brokenness. Jesus makes a way for us to eternally know that we are seen, known, and ultimately loved by the God of the universe.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever felt invisible? In what ways has God revealed to you that He sees you? In what ways can you show others that God sees them?

by Tim Shepard, Student Ministry Pastor

GOD'S WORD WEEK 2

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS REDEEMER
SCRIPTURE: THE BOOK OF RUTH

SUGGESTION: READ ONE CHAPTER EVERY DAY FOR FOUR DAYS BEFORE THIS DEVOTIONAL.

"But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.'" (Ruth 1:16)

The story of Ruth centers on God's faithfulness during a dark period in Israel's history. Ruth's devotion has always inspired me. Ruth lost her husband, yet she trusted in Naomi's God and left everything familiar to follow Him.

When I was 23, I also experienced the death of some of my dreams. My mom died of cancer, we sold our family home, my fiancé broke our engagement, and I moved for my first real job in a big city—all within three months! But during this time of loneliness and grief, I really sensed the Lord's presence. And though I wasn't fully living for God, He was faithful to me.

A few years later, I had a defining moment when I had to choose to continue to go my own way or God's way. I declared Jesus as Lord, and my life has never been the same. But it hasn't always been easy.

Just as Ruth needed to work hard to provide for herself and her mother-in-law in Israel, I worked and trusted the Lord for provision. By divine providence, Ruth chose a field belonging to Boaz who would be her "kinsman-redeemer." I found a church home where the Lord provided me with a husband, children, and even a mother-in-law who was a mom to me for 30 years!

Finally, Ruth was blessed to be in the family line of Jesus. And because of Jesus, I am redeemed as part of the family of God. God is faithful!

DISCUSSION

Is there a person in the Bible who has been an inspiration to you? How do you see God's character through that person's life? How can your life reflect the character of God to others?

by Jill Nardini, Elementary Teacher

GOD'S WORD WEEK 3

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS FAITHFUL SCRIPTURE: LUKE 21:1-4

“Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” (Luke 21:3-4)

Faith is not what we often think it is. It's not always the wildly spiritual experience of trust. Sometimes it's just the desperation at the end of our strength where our struggles collide with His mercy. Where we release everything and plead, “Lord, I have nowhere else to turn, no one else to ask. But all I have is Yours.”

This woman in Luke 21:1-4 had to rely on the kindness of others to survive. She didn't live lavishly, and she easily could have grasped what little money she had to provide for her needs. Yet she not only gave over what she had financially to live but also surrendered her trust to God. She recognized that if God didn't hold her life in His hands, no amount of money could sustain her. In faith, she placed God first, and that was immensely precious to Jesus.

Each of us has the choice to give both the meager and abundant pieces of our lives to the Father; to do this messy, beautiful life with Him; and to trade our independence for an extraordinary relationship with God. His exceeding goodness will always surpass our weakness.

DISCUSSION

Where in your life do you often hold back belief in God's goodness? What is one way you can boldly trust Him for something big or small?

by Amy Escalera, Volunteer for New Life Student Ministries

GOD'S WORD WEEK 4

GOD STATEMENT: GOD TRANSFORMS SCRIPTURE: ACTS 8—9

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’” (Acts 9:3-4)

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God can take anyone, no matter how broken and sinful, and transform that person into a beautiful object of His grace. This is the case for all those who follow Jesus. One of the most transformational stories of this revealed in Scripture is that of the apostle Paul.

Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, circumcised on the eighth day, and a Hebrew of Hebrews. Yet, the first introduction of Paul in Scripture is as one who is persecuting and approving the murder of Jesus followers. Following the stoning of Stephen, Luke, the author of Acts, states, “But Saul [Paul] began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3). Paul was determined to destroy all that Jesus had worked to build. But that did not stop God from pursuing Paul.

On the road to Damascus, Paul had an encounter with the living God and his life was forever changed. In the face of being blinded and confronted by Jesus, Paul finds a God filled with grace whose love fueled a lifelong mission of making disciples. In fact, right after God restored his sight, the Scriptures say, “At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God” (9:20). Paul went from destroying Christ's church to being one of the primary vessels Christ used to build His church.

God delights in turning sinners into saints. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) You, me, Paul, and everyone else fall into the category of those who have sinned and fallen short. Yet, the gospel is that God's grace and love is deeper still. He takes what is broken and sinful, and by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ, He makes us holy and whole.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever felt hopeless or broken? In what ways has Jesus come to make you whole? How can you surrender your life to His transformational work?

by Tim Shepard, Student Ministry Pastor

Back-to-School Breakfast Roll-Ups

The start of a school year can be filled with mixed emotions of happiness, excitement, and nervousness. No matter how your child is feeling, start the year off with a big breakfast celebration! After eating this breakfast treat, read a Scripture and bless your children before sending them off to a great school year.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 16 slices white sandwich bread
- 1 cup apple butter
- 2 eggs
- 1/4 cup milk
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon, divided
- 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar

DIPPING SAUCE

- 3 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 cup apple butter
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat oven to 375° F. Line a baking sheet with a silicone mat or grease the pan well. Flatten one slice of bread to about half of its original thickness. Spread roughly 1 tablespoon of apple butter evenly on top. Roll up bread and set aside, seam side down. Repeat with the remaining bread. In a bowl, beat together the eggs, milk, 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon, and nutmeg. Dip each roll-up into the egg mixture, completely covering and then shaking off the excess. Place on the baking sheet. Bake 10 minutes. Pull out of the oven, brush the top sides with melted butter, flip each roll, and then brush the bottoms with butter. If they stick, gently use a spatula to loosen them. Leave bottom side up and bake another 10 minutes. In a small bowl, combine the sugar and remaining 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon. As soon as the roll-ups have finished baking, roll each one in the cinnamon sugar mixture. Serve warm with dipping sauce.



Easy Baked Ravioli

The hustle and bustle of a new school year can often mean dinner from a drive-through or late-night snacks. This quick and easy comfort food will slow the busiest evenings to a pause at the table ... even if for only a few minutes. Easy Baked Ravioli has lots of cheese, plenty of garlic, and meaty marinara sauce. Enjoy with a salad and garlic bread.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 medium onion, chopped
- 1 pound extra-lean ground beef
- 3-4 cloves garlic, minced
- salt and pepper to taste
- 3 cups marinara sauce (24-ounce jar), divided
- 20 ounces cheese ravioli, uncooked
- 2 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat oven to 350° F and move rack to the top third of the oven. Shred the cheeses. Add the oil and onion to a skillet and sauté for 4 to 5 minutes over medium-high heat. Add in ground beef and garlic. Break up and brown the beef. Drain excess fat and season with salt and pepper. Add 2 cups marinara sauce to ground beef mixture and stir. Lightly spray a 9" x 13" baking dish. Pour the remaining 1 cup of marinara sauce evenly on the bottom of the dish. Add half the ravioli to the baking dish on top of the marinara. Then add half the beef mixture followed by half of each of the cheeses. Repeat this process until you have two generous layers and finish with a layer of cheese on top. Cover the baking dish with foil and bake for 30 minutes. Take the foil off and broil for a few minutes until browned and bubbly. Serve immediately.



Baked Honey-Garlic Chicken Tenders

Forget Chinese takeout! The crisp Panko breadcrumbs with the sweet and spicy sauce make these tenders a delightful dinner. Make extra sauce to pour over rice, and serve with a side of green beans.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 pound chicken tenders
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon ginger, grated
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 1 cup Panko breadcrumbs
- green onions, sliced
- toasted sesame seeds

SAUCE

- 1/3 cup honey
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sriracha
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat oven to 400° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Marinate chicken tenders with a splash of soy sauce, garlic, and ginger for 15 minutes. Place the beaten eggs in one shallow dish and the Panko breadcrumbs in another shallow dish. Dip chicken tenders into beaten eggs and then in the breadcrumbs. Place on baking sheet and bake until golden brown and crispy—about 15 minutes. While chicken is baking, make the sauce in a saucepan. Combine the honey, soy sauce, sriracha, and garlic and simmer. Stir cornstarch and water together to form a paste. Add the paste to the simmering sauce, and stir constantly until thickened. Remove from heat. Once chicken is out of the oven, pour the sauce over the chicken and gently toss. Serve garnished with green onions and toasted sesame seeds.



Oatmeal Energy Balls

These Oatmeal Energy Balls will feel like a special treat but are actually a healthy after-school snack packed with all sorts of good stuff and a little something sweet. The protein from the peanut butter and fiber from the chia seeds will keep those afternoon hunger pains away.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 3 cups quick oats
- 1 cup peanut butter, smooth
- 1/2 cup honey
- 4 tablespoons chia seeds
- 1/3-1/2 cup mini M&Ms

WHAT YOU'LL DO

In a small mixing bowl, combine all ingredients and mix well. Roll into balls and set on a baking sheet lined with a silicone baking mat or wax paper to keep them from sticking. Refrigerate for about an hour. Serve immediately or store in an airtight container to enjoy for several days.



CREATE *share your story*

Testimony BOOKLET

Have you ever read a story and thought to yourself, “I’d love to be part of this world?” As a child, I longed to live in the land of Narnia. I would spend days outside in the fresh spring air daydreaming about meeting the regal Aslan and adventuring with the Pevensie children through unknown woods.

But as I grew older—and experienced new stages of life—I realized something that changed my outlook on stories: I was participating in one. By no means was I the main character, but I realized I had an important role to play.

Just like the disciples after the resurrection, Jesus tasked me with bringing a message of restoration to a kingdom living in exile. And the proof of the power of my message was found in my own experiences and interactions with God—namely, how He’d reached me in the most loving of ways.

We get to step into this story and share the way in which God reached us. This is what a testimony is—the story of how God saved each of us.

I invite you to share your testimony.

For this you will need a little booklet—you can make this with paper and staplers. Each member of the family will write and/or illustrate the way in which they encountered God and then share it with each other.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- stapler
- paper
- pens/markers/crayons
- stickers and other craft decorations

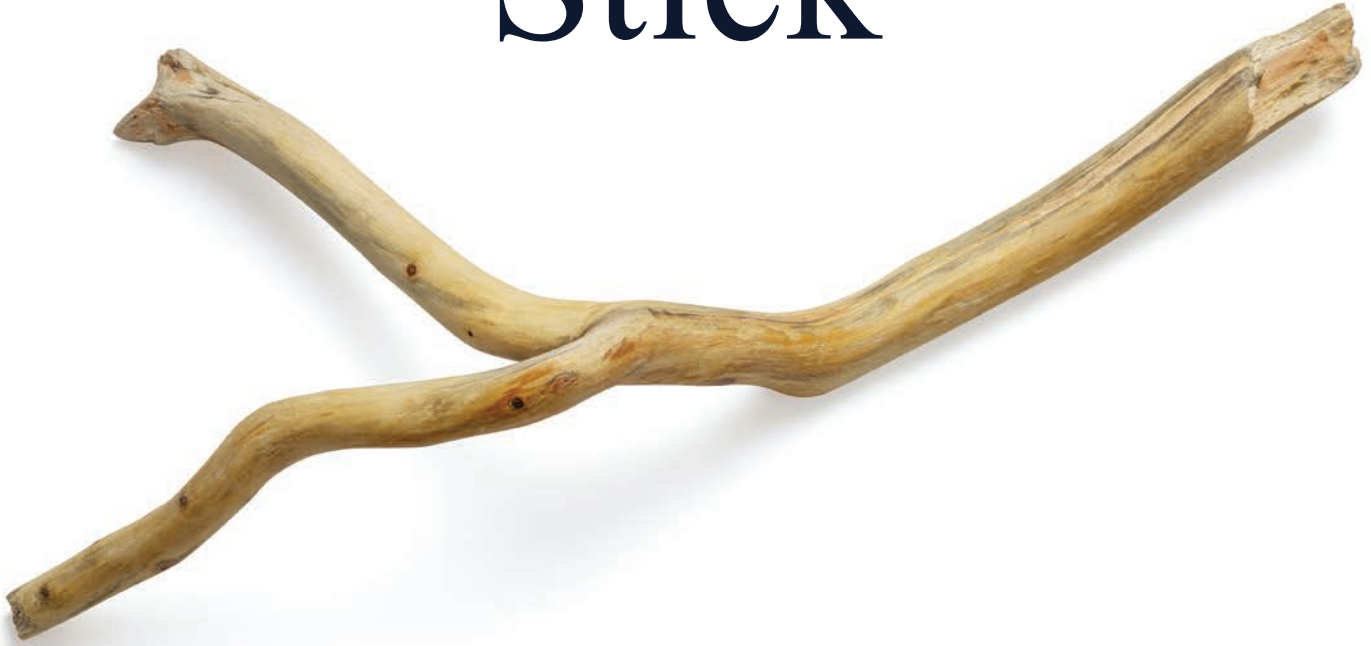
WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Make booklets by folding the paper in half and stapling.
2. Decorate the cover of the book and include your name.
3. Write or color the story of how you met God.
4. Share with family and friends.

by Olivia Bennett, Midweek Ministry and Curriculum Assistant



Storytelling Stick



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 stick, plain or decorated

BEFORE YOU START

God is a storyteller. We don't often think of Him that way, but the Bible was written by the Holy Spirit telling the story of God's faithfulness and love. You may think the Bible is only about people who lived a long time ago, but guess what? You are actually one of the characters in His story! Just like He chose David and Peter, God has chosen **YOU** to be part of His plans on earth! **God is working in you today with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.** So don't be afraid to share your story! And tell everyone about God's great love for you.

TIME TO PLAY!

Begin by having your family stand in a circle. Whoever is holding the story stick will tell a story about going back to school. The story can be about a real experience or it can be a shared story that each person will add to on their turn. What are you excited about? Who will you see? Is there anything scary about going back to school? If it helps, create a fictional character to tell a story about. Children may find it easier to share their feelings when talking about a make-believe character. If there are reluctant storytellers, encourage their thinking with questions such as "What did you see?" or "What happened next?"

by Mary Windebank, Director of North Elementary

Your Story Matters

There is just something about worship that refreshes the soul. When we feel weak, discouraged, or sad, worship has the ability to change the posture of our hearts to focus on God and encourage us. In the same fashion, telling our stories can refresh and encourage others. When we share vulnerably, we bring darkness to light, we help others to feel not so alone, and we reveal God's work in us.

You might be in a place where you are asking God to help you overcome something in your life. **We are always works in progress.** God will not leave you undone; He will continue the work He has started in you. In the midst of the fight, remember to look back at His faithfulness in your life. He is still writing your story, and you can share, trusting His faithfulness. This will encourage others to keep pressing on in their stories.



Over the next few weeks, be intentional about looking to see how God has overcome different obstacles in your life. Try journaling your story. Writing it out will bring confidence to speak it to someone later on. Use the weekly prompts to help you.



WEEK 1

Listen to the song "Overcome" by Jon Egan. Let this song resonate in you.

WEEK 3

Look inward. What areas do you feel you need to overcome? (Fear, insecurities, lies you believe, anger you are holding on to.)

WEEK 2

Share something you have already overcome with your family. Celebrate what God has done and prayers He has answered.

WEEK 4

As a family discuss areas you can overcome together. (Words you speak to each other, kindness, actions.)



The Gift of Stories and Blessings

READ MATTHEW 25:31-41 TOGETHER AS A FAMILY.

Jesus delights in how we care for one another and commands us to extend love to those we meet. Jesus explained to His disciples that when the people of God extend care to others, they are doing it unto the Lord. God sees our actions, knows our hearts, and is preparing a place for us to live in eternity with him.

He knows all we do for the kingdom and the glory of God. We are called to exalt God, to honor God, and to love His people—the people He has created in His very image. We are called children of God, and because of this calling and God's grace, mercy, and love in our lives, we can extend grace, mercy, and love to others.

Every righteous thing we do on earth is for the kingdom, from the smallest personal interaction with another to the grandest service. It is all for God's kingdom. I was serving one Sunday morning and saw a young lady on crutches hopping down the hall. I stopped her and asked what had happened and we enjoyed a beautiful conversation between strangers. As we spoke, she paused, looked right at my eyes, and said, "You have very kind eyes," and she went on to say that she believes that we met on purpose. She was grateful for the care and genuine conversation we shared that morning.

As I think back on that interaction, I believe that God has gifted His children in a variety of creative and unique ways so others can encounter His Spirit. Even through something physical, such as the eyes God has given me, this young lady saw kindness and felt care. The Holy Spirit orchestrated this spiritual encounter to extend love to a lady who needed to hear that she is seen, loved, and valued. **God sees these small interactions and counts them as "wins" for His eternal glory.** We are to walk in

obedience hand in hand with God and He will place divine appointments in our path.

ACTION STEP

God, the Creator, the greatest storyteller invites us to extend care and love to this broken and hurting world. **I want to challenge you to seek opportunities to speak truth and love over someone you meet.** One unique way we can do this is to share a story and a blessing with a total stranger.

Write a word of blessing on a colorful notecard. Place the notecard in one of your favorite Christian-based books and place it in a neighborhood Little Free Library.

Some favorite books may include: The Chronicles of Narnia series by C.S. Lewis, Wingfeather Saga series by Andrew Peterson, The Imagination Station series by multiple authors, and any Christian-based children's literature suitable for children up to age five.

Words of blessings may include: May you always remember that you are a precious and beautiful creation. May you know that you were created for a purpose. May you know that you are never alone. May this story bring you laughter and joy! May this story fill you with thanksgiving. May this story bring you peace and comfort knowing that there is hope!

To find the location of a Little Free Library near you, visit littlefreelibrary.org

by Katharine Sanchez, Downtown Kids Director



BLESSING

Bless with your Words

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

Based on the stories from God's Word articles

Week 1

SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 16;
Isaiah 43:2;
John 14:27

(Child's name), may you know that your Father in heaven sees you in all circumstances. He knows your fears and understands your pain. Trust that He is with you and will never leave you. Let the strength of His love fill your heart with peace.

Week 2

SCRIPTURE:

Book of Ruth

(Child's name), may you know that your heavenly Father loves you. Believe that He is worth following no matter the cost. Walk closely with Him for He is faithful to protect you from the enemy's schemes. He alone is your Redeemer who will be with you all the days of your life.

Week 3

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 21:1-4;
Matthew
22:37

(Child's name), may you believe that your heavenly Father is worthy of all you have to give. He is worthy of your time, your worship, and your wealth. When you give more than you think you can, you honor Him and model for those around you what it means to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

Week 4

SCRIPTURE:

Acts 8-9

(Child's name), may you be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and be bold to tell the story of your encounter with the one true God. May those around you see what the Lord has done in your life and be compelled to put their faith in Jesus.

Journal

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise

RESOURCES and SUPPORT

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

CONNECTING CONVERSATIONS

get your family **TALKING**

The Fourth of July is more than big, sparkly fireworks and juicy watermelons. The Fourth of July is a day to celebrate our freedoms, our patriotism, and our independence as a country. A fun way to share the significance of this holiday is to play Patriotic Trivia while driving in the car, sitting around a campfire, or after the fireworks show. **After each trivia question, you may want to look up more information on the Internet to learn more about the history of our nation.** (Answers on page 43.)

PATRIOTIC TRIVIA



1. Who was the first American president?
2. How many stars are displayed on the American flag?
3. The Statue of Liberty was a gift from what country?
4. Which president freed the slaves?
5. Which four presidents' faces are on Mount Rushmore?
6. What year was America discovered?
7. What is the smallest U.S. state?
8. What year was the Declaration of Independence signed?
9. Which country were the colonists seeking independence from?
10. What is the U.S. national anthem?



Feelings of excitement and hesitation often accompany the beginning of a new school year. One way to calm some nerves and concentrate on the great things ahead is to help your children think about what they hope to accomplish academically, physically, spiritually, and relationally in the coming year. Not only will you help your children focus their efforts, but you will also help them develop the critical life skill of goal setting. Below are some tips to guide a wonderful time of dreaming and vision planning with your child.

GUIDING TIPS

1. Write down a goal
2. Make it specific
3. Develop a plan
4. Create a visual reminder
5. Celebrate progress and success
6. Re-evaluate, encourage, and redirect in shortcomings

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

FEATURE



"A FUN GAME IS TO CUT OUT THE CHARACTERS
AND PRACTICE PUTTING THEM IN ORDER WHILE
RACING OR WORKING TOGETHER."



ADAM AND EVE



NOAH



ABRAHAM AND SARAH



ISAAC



JACOB



JOSEPH



MOSES



JOSHUA



RAHAB



EHUD



DEBORAH

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

THE BIG God Story

I grew up hearing all the major Bible stories. I memorized the Lord's Prayer and the fruit of the Spirit and practiced sword drills on the weekends. Going to church on Sunday and youth group during the week were staples in my weekly rhythm. Each time I stepped into church, I heard powerful stories such as David slaying the giant and Esther freeing her people. I can only assume I heard these stories in fragments or following a theme or even a holiday because I never knew the Bible was **ONE big story with ONE main plot and ONE main character.** I can remember the moment as an adult when I realized that the Bible is one continuous, epic, true story of a loving God who was moving and fulfilling His plan to redeem all creation. And this revelation completely reoriented my understanding of God, His character, and how I read the Bible.

When we teach the Bible as isolated stories, we can be tempted to believe that the individuals in the stories did all the work. Subtly, as we relate with these biblical people like David or Esther, we tend to think the gospel is all about us, our abilities, and our problems. In reality, none of us, back then or today, can do anything apart from God. **It is God who has the power to do all things.** He is in control and holds the victory. Let's teach our children to keep God in focus.

In teaching God's redemptive narrative, The Big God Story, our challenge is to help our children grasp its hugeness and yet keep it simple enough for them to understand. This can be an overwhelming task. Although there are many ways to creatively tell The Big God Story, we have a few resources to help. **Check out written versions in the book *Spiritual Parenting* and the children's book *The Big God Story*.** Both of these books concentrate on the overarching theme that our sovereign God has ALWAYS been working and moving to redeem His people. And He still is!

The Big God Story timeline is another resource to help your family visualize the gospel narrative. A fun game is to cut out the characters and practice putting them in order while racing or working together.

Perhaps you have had the privilege of hearing The Big God Story chronologically, or maybe you are experiencing this "aha" as an adult like me. However this article finds you, I hope you are inspired to teach the Bible to your children with God as the main character. Guess what! The story isn't just an old book of stories. **The Big God Story is relevant to us today, and each of us has a part to play.**

by Holly Newman, Pastor of Parenting and Families

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT



GIDEON



RUTH



HANNAH



SAMUEL



SAUL



DAVID



SOLOMON



JEHOSHAPHAT



ELIJAH



ELISHA



JONAH



KING JOSIAH



HABAKKUK



JEREMIAH

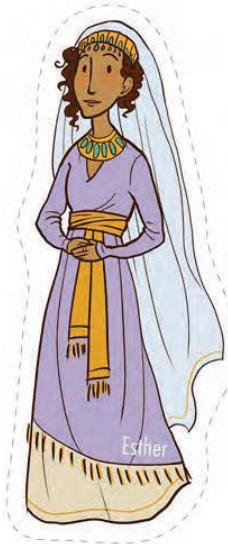


DANIEL



SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT



ESTHER



NEHEMIAH



ZACHARIAH



MARY



JOSEPH



JESUS' BIRTH



ANNA SIMEON



JOHN THE BAPTIST



JESUS' MINISTRY



DEATH AND RESURRECTION



PETER



STEPHEN



PHILIP



PAUL



JESUS' RETURN

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

EARLY CHILDHOOD

A SONG OF Freedom

What are some ways your family celebrates the Fourth of July? Do you like to BBQ and eat lots of ice cream for dessert? If you enjoy watching fireworks, where is your family's favorite viewing spot? What are some other traditions that help you celebrate? Music is always a fun way to celebrate holidays! Maybe you like to sing patriotic songs on America's Independence Day.

Take some time with your children to celebrate this year's Fourth of July by singing "God Bless America." The original lyrics were written by Irving Berlin in 1918. Berlin revised the lyrics in 1938, resulting in the version we sing today.

**GOD BLESS AMERICA, LAND THAT I LOVE
STAND BESIDE HER AND GUIDE HER
THROUGH THE NIGHT WITH THE LIGHT FROM ABOVE
FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES
TO THE OCEANS WHITE WITH FOAM
GOD BLESS AMERICA, MY HOME SWEET HOME**

Add your own twist to the song. **Have fun thinking of ways to change the tune and/or style of the song.** Can you make it an opera, country, or hip-hop song? Search some of these genres of music to help you get creative!

Finally, perform your song for friends and family members on the Fourth of July. Don't forget your instruments and dance motions to really make it an unforgettable show.

May God bless America!

by Laurie Bennett, Director of Early Childhood and Curriculum



RESOURCES AND SUPPORT ELEMENTARY

LET'S GET THIS School Year STARTED!

Does anyone else love purchasing back-to-school supplies? The supply list is the road map to beginning a successful school year. Paper, folders, markers, pens, pencil boxes, and crayons ... the list is the official invitation to join the ranks of all the other students in the school supply aisles of the local stores preparing for the same event: **THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL!**

Once this first official assignment of the year is completed, the purchased school supplies find themselves placed in notebooks, pencil pouches, and school bags. I just wonder what they would say if they could share some words of wisdom with us. I like to imagine it something like this.

The brightly colored pencils and those with cool designs stand tall trying to keep their places next to the sharply dressed mechanical pencils. They know that each student has a preference and that each one of them will eventually find their way into the chubby hands of a kindergartner or the student of a higher level of education. Each one patiently waits to be a small part of the big story that God is writing for His children. **The story that says God has a plan for you.** You can trust that He knows exactly what He is doing. He has plans to take care of you, and He will never leave you.

The pencils stand in agreement on this matter, and we move on to their counterpart, the eraser. It is a known fact in the world of pencils that mistakes will inevitably be made by all. The eraser knows this and is a constant reminder that God is faithful to forgive us and erase our sins when we admit them to Him and ask His forgiveness. Jesus removes our sins permanently. His mercies are new every morning. Mark the first day of school on your calendar with this declaration of faith from God's Word: **"This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24 ESV).**

The markers and crayons love attention. The jumbo crayons make themselves available for young hands learning to make the colors come to life. Scented markers

like to leave their mark on the tips of noses trying to identify the smell of cherry, watermelon, or licorice. Fine tip and gel pens, some with glitter and some metallic, have learned that they do not need to compete for attention but rather remind themselves that even the wildflowers in the fields don't fuss with their appearance. They have a question to ask us: **If God gives such attention to the wildflowers in their array of colors, sizes, and fragrances, don't you think He will care for you and do His best for you?** God made you unique and special. You are not just another crayon in a box. You are a child of God, fearfully and wonderfully made!

Paper. Blank sheets waiting to be brought to life with letters, numbers, words, and drawings. They know that great things are ahead when a student carefully opens the binder holding them in place. A blank page is filled with endless possibilities and waits to be included in the adventure of learning. One by one the papers expand in growing amounts, sometimes to the point of being placed in a file for future reference in order to make room for fresh, blank sheets in the expanding binder of notes, challenging assignments, due dates, and sometimes a random page of doodling. Scribbles, smiley faces, favorite Scriptures, hearts, funny animals with big eyes, and even the occasional robot or action figure mixed in with all the important lesson responses. Paper has a way of keeping track of where we have been and where we are going, along with the occasional pause of a blank page waiting to be filled with a few of your favorite things. **The psalms are filled with quiet moments of reflection, pauses, or *selah*.** Let the blank pages be a reminder to rest and remember that that God is good! "Praise the Lord; praise God our savior! For each day he carries us in his arms. [*Selah*]" (Psalm 68:19 NLT).

by Christy Thomas, North Nursery Coordinator



RESOURCES AND SUPPORT STUDENTS

MAKE SUMMER COUNT

Summer's already halfway spent, so what now? If you are anything like the average student, you've already capitalized on the first days and weeks of this season of freedom to do everything you couldn't during the school year. Stay up late and sleep in later? Conquer not one but two video games in a day? Go back to bed for a lazy afternoon nap? Burn last year's homework with some other liberated friends? Check, check, and double check.

But the glory of unfettered days, no set schedule, and little daily discipline has most likely already faded. So now what? Some of your peers may double down on the high number of video game hours and the insanely low number of hours sleeping. Some may even decide to find a new level of excitement in less-than-innocent fun since the fun they've done "inbounds" no longer gives them the same level of enjoyment. But what now for you? You've tasted the "good life" that school's schedule and responsibilities prohibited you from living, but was it all that you chalked it up to be? More than likely not. We were not created to live without limits or in a world that lacks order. From the very beginning, God gave creation a set order: The moon and sun were given their time to shine and hide, the waves were given a set time to rise high and be brought low in their tides, every creature was given its time to wake and time to slumber—its time to be born, its time to die. Solomon summed up the grand order of creation with the simple saying "There is a time for everything" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Summer is not a time to go against order but to order your life in such a way that allows you to enjoy Jesus, His creation, and His people in an unhurried, deeply meaningful way. The absence of homework does not mean the absence of productivity but the freedom to be creatively fruitful. Maybe summer has been a bit unruly for you thus far; that's okay, there's grace. But take note that you will not thrive if you continue in such patterns of disarray no matter how good it feels in the moment. Proverbs 10:17 says, "Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray." You have the great privilege of course correcting now before the summer is over so that when the first school bell rings in the fall you can look back on a time well spent on restoration that comes from pressing in to knowing Jesus, enjoying His creation, and loving His people in creative, unrestricted ways.

CHALLENGE

Write a list of daily activities that will challenge you to grow in knowledge, learn a new skill, express your creativity, and dig deeper into the presence of God. How will you fill the rest of your summer days?

by Chase Windebank, Student Ministries Director





STORYTELLING THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Several years ago, my husband and I celebrated one of our milestone wedding anniversaries. Usually we would go out to dinner and exchange gifts or cards. However, this time we decided to introduce the concept of *remember and celebrate* into our evening. The idea was that we would tell stories of God's faithfulness *before* entering into celebration.

At dinner, I took out a napkin and wrote down the years that we had been married, and next to each we began to remember stories of how God had showed His faithfulness to us in that year of our lives together. After we completed the list of stories, the only response that seemed fitting was celebration and worship! It was one of most meaningful anniversaries we have ever experienced simply because we took the time to stop, to pause ... and remember the faithfulness of our heavenly Father.

God ordained this rhythm in Scripture time and time again in the Old Testament because active remembrance cultivates relationship. **God wants us to look back and recognize His faithfulness, intense love, and our personal interactions with Him and then declare these stories of testimony to those around us.**

We live in a culture that demands a certain hurriedness in our marriages that compels us to constantly move forward and look ahead with busy distress. In contrast, God is asking for a posture of looking back *while* we move forward. He wants us to remember His faithfulness because this truth about His character will allow us to move forward with peace and confidence.

My husband and I have been married for more than three decades now. We have raised children, made several moves, and have transitioned through a variety of jobs and ministries. We both have a few more wrinkles and a few more pounds than the day we said, "I do." Careless words have been exchanged, stupid decisions have been made, and disappointments have crept into our minds and hearts at times. These are the realities of being human, living life in close proximity to another person on a daily basis. **However, because of God's faithfulness to us, we can forgive, love, and persevere in the midst of these trials.** *We are faithful because He is faithful.*

If I forget to remember the stories of God's faithfulness to me, I am tempted to fixate on an irritating moment or failure in my husband. Yet, when I remember God's great faithfulness to me, I am compelled to step into another day with the new mercies God has granted to me as an offering in my marriage.

This week, set aside a night specifically for storytelling the faithfulness of God in your marriage.

Perhaps you will want to take out a piece of paper or a journal and do what my husband and I did: writing down a fun story of faithfulness from each year of your marriage. If you can't remember something specific from that year, you can simply mark that year with a "heart" proclaiming God's sustaining love for you and your spouse during that year.

Close your time together by reading aloud the words from one of the greatest hymns of all time, written by Thomas Chisholm in the 19th century. As you read each stanza, personalize it for your marriage and ponder how these things have been (and can be) true in your relationship with your spouse:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not,
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

*by Michelle Anthony, Executive Pastor of
Marriage and Families*

TO SHARE OR NOT TO SHARE?

“Do you think differently of me now?” she asked with hesitation, knowing the information she had just shared with me might taint the way I see her. I had never heard that part of my mother’s story before and the fear of embarrassment lingered in her voice. **“Of course not,”** I reassured her. Hearing this story gave me new insight into who my mom was and what experiences made her who she is today.

We will all have parts of our stories that are tainted with embarrassment, shame, or fear of being perceived in a negative light. When these stories become a part of our reality, it is easy to tuck them into the shadows, locking them away to be sure no one ever knows—not our friends, not our coworkers ... and especially not our kids.

As an adult child, however, **I want to encourage you that your story, no matter how many dark spots stain it, has the potential to bring you into a deeper relationship with your children.** When my mother told me the story of what she did and what she should have done, I thought, **“Woah. She was only 19 when that happened. I remember all the dumb stuff I did when I was 19, too.”** In that moment, I imagined my mom as a 19 year old trying to figure out who she was, what she wanted, and what she believed in. I could relate to her in a way I had never related to her before. The same can happen for you, too.

But it will take courage and intentionality to share certain parts of your testimony at appropriate times. **Ask the Holy Spirit to help guide you in this.** If my mom had told me that story when I was 14, I would not have received it the way I did recently, in my late twenties. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment about what to share and when to share. Then, when the Lord has prompted you to, call up your courage as you swallow your pride and share your mistakes, embarrassments, and slip-ups with your children. Share how the Lord called you back to His arms with His loving kindness. In this, you will show humility, vulnerability, and, ultimately, glory to God for helping you through that rough decision or season. **Sure, your children might not see you as**

the absolute perfect parent, but they will have the opportunity to see God as the perfect, loving, forgiving Father who redeems all things. Maybe one day they’ll come to you when they make a mistake, knowing you’ve been there before and, most importantly, that you know who to turn to for help.

Because at the end of the day, it’s not about being a perfect parent. It’s about giving our children every opportunity to see Christ’s work in the world—including His work in our own lives.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1-5)

by Shayleen Smith, East Children’s Director