

2021 | November | December

HomeFront

a spiritual parenting resource

*Holiday
Edition*

Light of the World

FAITH COMMUNITY

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

KNOWING

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



HOMEFRONTMAG.COM



HomeFront magazine is designed to help parents and grandparents disciple their children and grandchildren by creating environments in their homes that put God and His character on display. Each issue is created to give 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 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.



A Note from Michelle

In this issue you will be focusing on the environments of **FAITH COMMUNITY** and **KNOWING**.

The environment of FAITH COMMUNITY invites our children into a safe refuge away from some of the hostility and temptations of the world. It is a place to have a “spiritual family” of those from older and younger generations who help us grow in our understanding of who God is. The faith community is critical in allowing our children to hear the faith stories and journeys from others outside of their own parents, which often fosters a greater trust in the truth of Jesus and His Word during times of questioning or doubt. *The statement that sums up this environment is: “God’s family cares for each other and worships God together.”*

The environment of KNOWING reminds us that we live in a world that denies absolute truth, and yet God’s Word offers just that. Nothing could be more important than knowing and being known by God. As we create an environment that upholds and displays God’s truth, we give children a foundation based on knowing God, His Word, and a relationship with Him through

Christ. God is holy, mighty, and awesome, yet He has chosen to make Himself known to us! The statement that sums up this environment is: “God knows me, and I can know Him.”

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

*Dr. Michelle Anthony 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

The holiday season is my favorite time of the year. As the weather turns colder, I can often be found wearing my fuzzy slippers, snuggled under a warm blanket with a piping hot cup of coffee. There are days that lend for a slower pace and days that require dressing up for a holiday party. One of my family's favorite traditions is to host a “family holiday competition” night with our faith community. We invite a few families over to compete in games, eat festive food, and spend some time reading the Word of God. In this issue of *HomeFront*, we are highlighting the *Spiritual Parenting* environments of **FAITH COMMUNITY** and **KNOWING**. Consider using this issue of *HomeFront* magazine to host your own holiday family night with your faith community.

The month of November is a perfect opportunity to practice a thankful heart in all circumstances. As you dive into **God's Word**, you will focus on several passages of Scripture in the book of Psalms. Psalms illustrates how beautiful it is to remain thankful, even when life isn't going our way. There are fun ways to practice thankfulness throughout the month within

the pages of the activities and a great devotional for students in **Student ID** that discusses thankfulness in difficult times. Don't forget to check out our turkey tape-painting **Create** and Thanksgiving-themed game.

Every December we highlight the season of Advent. We want to help you draw your children into the wonderful anticipation of Christ's birth! Each week, read through one devotion from **God's Word** and choose either a game, craft, serve, or worship response article to accompany the devotion. Be encouraged with good news of joy with the coming birth of Jesus, and keep Jesus at the center of your holiday season.

Last, how can you involve others in your holiday traditions? Is there a family you can invite over for dinner, send a Scripture or encouraging letter to, organize a playdate with to play one of the games, or create a holiday-themed craft for? After a season of isolation, we need one another to encourage our faith and to spread the good news about the Light of the World.

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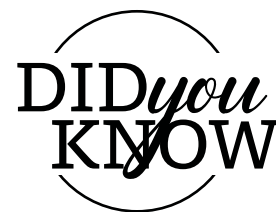
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It is our prayer that homes and churches would create these environments for children to live in so their faith will grow in a community of consistency, common language, and practice. To learn more about how these environments can ignite a transforming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



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

BY MICHELLE ANTHONY

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10

ENVIRONMENTS

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

2

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

OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

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

1

RESPONSIBILITY

This environment captures the ability to take ownership for one's life, gifts, and resources before God. A child must be challenged to take responsibility for his or her brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as for those who are spiritually lost. Our hope is that the Holy Spirit will use this environment to allow each child to understand that God has entrusted His world to us.

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

3

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

SERVING

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

4

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

LOVE & RESPECT

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

5

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

STORYTELLING

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

6

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

KNOWING

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

7

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

IDENTITY

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

8

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

COURSE CORRECTION

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

9

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

FAITH COMMUNITY

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

10

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

MODELING

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



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NOVEMBER

| SUN | MON | TUES | WED | THURS | FRI | SAT |
|-----|-----|------|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| 31 | 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 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

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Shopping List

Ideas | Supplies | Notes



Enter his
gates with
thanksgiving
and his courts
with praise;
give thanks
to him and
praise his
name.

PSALM
100:4

GOD'S WORD WEEK 1

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS UNCHANGING
THEME: GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR
HIS CHARACTER
SCRIPTURE: PSALM 145

*Crisp wind robs browning leaves
From the trees
Which held them all summer long.
Nature's worship song
Changes with the season
Yet the eternal reason
To praise hasn't altered
Because Christ's mercy has never faltered.*

by Chase Windebank, North Associate Student Ministries Pastor: Junior High

This season never fails to evoke a heart of thanks, wonder, and renewed worship in me, and poems like the previous one is the fruit of it all. Likewise, for reasons I can't quite voice, autumn draws me toward spending more quality time with people, namely the faith family God has woven my life around. And when the faith family spends more time together, their collective stories of God's great works build on one another, culminating in a crescendo of praise befitting our King.

DISCUSSION

Have each member of the family share what he or she loves most about autumn. After that, ask the family this question: How can our favorite parts of this season inspire us toward sharing the works of God in a creative way?

GOD'S WORD WEEK 2

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS WORTHY
THEME: GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR
WHAT HE'S DONE
SCRIPTURE: PSALM 103:1-13; 105:1-5;
EPHESIANS 1:3-8

God is worthy of thanksgiving! However, we aren't always thankful. Why is that? Often, we take God's gifts for granted or forget to thank Him. Sometimes we're angry with God. But even in difficult situations, having a grateful heart reminds us of God's goodness and blessings. Though it doesn't always come naturally, thankfulness can be developed and nurtured.

The first step in cultivating thankfulness is to pay attention. Think about what God has done for us. As our Creator, He has given us our very lives! As a loving heavenly Father, He gives us good gifts for our benefit. Through Jesus, we have forgiveness of our sins and a restored relationship with God. **We have God's presence with us always through His Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom to live the life God designed just for us. Recall some specific things God has done in your life. Has He healed you, provided for a need, protected you from an accident or harm?

The next step in thankfulness is just taking time to say, "Thank you." As we paused last week to thank God for who He is, this week, let's thank God for what He's done. Thousands of Bible verses describe God's loving care for us. Read the previous verses with your family and perhaps add some of your favorite passages to remind you of God's goodness. Then create your own psalm (poem) of thanksgiving to God, for He is worthy of all our praise!

DISCUSSION

How can we as a family become more thankful? Make a point this week to end each day with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for what He has done.

by Jill Nardini, North Elementary Teacher

GOD'S WORD WEEK 3

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS WORTHY OF REMEMBRANCE

THEME: GIVING THANKS FOR OUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND FAITH COMMUNITY

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 78:4-7; GALATIANS 6:10

There is something about remembering. So often throughout Scripture, God commands His people to practice the art of remembrance. This is because humanity is prone to forgetfulness. We are quick to forget all the wonderful things God has done in our lives. As a result, the next generation suffers. In Psalm 78 the psalmist recounts the mighty works God accomplished for Israel. He commands the older generation to pass on the stories of these mighty works to the next generation for three primary reasons: so they will (1) put their hope in God, (2) remember His faithfulness, and (3) keep His commandments.

These three principles lay out the beautiful significance of the family and faith community. God's

"Plan A" for the message of the gospel to go forth to every generation primarily falls within the context of the family and faith community. These relationships are God's grace and invitation in our lives to know that God has not asked us to embrace the walk of faith alone.

He calls us into a people, a family, a body. Family and faith community remind us that our hope rests solely in the Lord alone. Family and faith community remind us of all the marvelous works God has done for His people throughout all of history. And finally, family and faith community are where we learn to walk in holy obedience to the Lord. For this reason, as Paul says, "Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). Thanks be to God.

DISCUSSION

In what ways can you as a family remember the marvelous works that God has done in your lives? Ask your parents or grandparents some of the things they watched God do in their lives that is worthy of thanksgiving. Then thank the Lord as family together.

by Tim Shepard, North Student Ministries Pastor

GOD'S WORD WEEK 4

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS WORTHY OF A JOYFUL NOISE

THEME: SHARING GOD'S LOVE WITH OTHERS

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 98:3-4; MATTHEW 5:16

The most beautiful aspect of the gospel is that God made a choice. A choice to save and redeem all of creation from brokenness through the finished work of Christ the Son. The only logical conclusion for those who have received this good news is to make a joyful noise and tell all the world of the saving power that comes from Christ alone.

As followers of Jesus, we are invited to make this joyful noise and share this good news to the world. Jesus states in His famous Sermon on the Mount, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way,

let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

The purest joyful noise we could ever make with our lives is by letting our "light shine before others" so that they can see and perceive the glorious beauty and majesty of our Creator and Redeemer. We are living proof of God's extravagant love for the world. Let us therefore brothers and sister ... make a JOYFUL NOISE!

DISCUSSION

In what ways does your life show the world that you have been rescued and redeemed by Jesus? How can you, as a family, make a "joyful noise" so those around you can see and know you are recipients of the extravagant love of God?

by Tim Shepard, North Student Ministries Pastor

Cinnamon Roll French Toast

One of the best things about the holidays is the lazy mornings with extended family all cozied up in one house. With just a few ingredients, this delicious breakfast casserole is easy to put together and allows you more time to focus on your guests.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Casserole

- 2 (17 1/2 ounce) cans refrigerated cinnamon rolls
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- 4 eggs
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Icing

- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 2 containers icing (from the cinnamon rolls cans)
- 2 tablespoons cream cheese, softened
- 1 tablespoon milk
- For extra icing, combine 3/4 cup powdered sugar, 3 ounces cream cheese, and 1 1/2 tablespoons milk



WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat oven to 350° F. Remove cinnamon rolls from packages and cut each roll into cubes. Drizzle melted butter in 9" x 13" pan. Spread cinnamon roll pieces evenly in pan. In a separate bowl, combine eggs, milk, cinnamon, and vanilla. Whisk until combined. Pour egg mixture over cinnamon rolls. Bake for 30-35 minutes or until top of casserole is golden brown and center is set. Prepare icing by combining cinnamon roll icing with powdered sugar, cream cheese, and milk. Mix until smooth. Pour icing evenly over casserole.

Cauliflower Kale Sausage Soup

This creamy, thick soup is loaded with incredible flavor. While most comfort food is not the healthiest option, this comfort dish is packed with veggies and protein. With fewer than 10 ingredients, this soup is a great family dinner that is ready to go in 30 minutes.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 12 ounces mild Italian sausage, removed from casing
- 3 slices bacon, chopped
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 6 cups cauliflower florets, about 1 1/4 pounds
- 1 (32 ounce) carton chicken broth
- 1 cup half and half
- 4 cups curly kale, chopped
- salt and pepper to taste



WHAT YOU'LL DO

In a large Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add sausage and bacon. Cook until sausage is browned and bacon is crisp, breaking up the meat as you go, about 8-10 minutes. Remove to a plate. Drain all but 2 tablespoons of grease. Add onions and cook until soft, about 3-4 minutes. Add garlic and cook for 30 seconds, stirring constantly. Add cauliflower and chicken broth. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Simmer uncovered for 15 minutes or until cauliflower is tender. Puree the soup until smooth in either a high-powered blender or with an immersion blender. Add half and half and bring to a gentle simmer. Stir in sausage, bacon, and kale. Simmer until kale is wilted, about 5 minutes. Salt and pepper to taste.

Owl S'mores

Kids love treats that look like animals. These easy, no-bake treats are a HOOT to make! S'mores don't have to be reserved for just camping trips. Make these adorable owl treats for a fun fall party, Thanksgiving gathering, or just a yummy afternoon snack.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- graham crackers
- large marshmallows
- chocolate chips
- yellow candy melts
- candy corn



WHAT YOU'LL DO

Cut one marshmallow in half and place both pieces on one side of a graham cracker square. Put a candy melt on each of the marshmallow halves. Heat in the microwave for about 2-5 seconds, just enough to make the marshmallows puff up but not get too hot. Take out of microwave and add a chocolate chip on each yellow candy melt and the candy corn beak in between. Let cool and serve!

All-in-One Thanksgiving Casserole

This dish is basically what it sounds like—a cozy, hearty, festive casserole that celebrates everyone's favorite Thanksgiving dishes. It's made with a classic mix of turkey, herbed sourdough stuffing, sweet potatoes, green beans, and dried cranberries. If this year you aren't feeling up to cooking a dozen dishes, but you are craving those nostalgic flavors, try this fun and simple recipe.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- | | |
|--|--|
| • 2 tablespoons olive oil | • cubed and dried out (about 6 cups) |
| • 1 small white onion, diced | • 1 pound cooked turkey, diced |
| • 1 large sweet potato, peeled and diced | • 2/3 cup dried cranberries |
| • 2 cups fresh green beans, ends trimmed off and chopped | • 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh herbs (rosemary, thyme, sage, etc.) |
| • 6 cloves garlic, minced | • 2 cups chicken stock |
| • 3 stalks celery, diced | • 2 eggs |
| • salt and pepper to taste | • 1 batch gravy |
| • 1 small loaf sourdough bread, | |



WHAT YOU'LL DO

Heat the oven to 350° F. Spray a 9" x 13" baking dish with cooking spray. Heat oil over medium heat in a large nonstick sauté pan. Add the onion and sweet potato and sauté for about 5-7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sweet potato is mostly softened. Add the green beans, garlic, and celery, and season the mixture with generous pinches of salt and pepper. Sauté for 2-3 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the garlic is fragrant. Transfer the cooked veggies to a large mixing bowl. Add in the bread, cooked turkey, dried cranberries, and fresh herbs. In a separate bowl, whisk together the chicken stock and eggs. Pour the mixture into the large bowl and toss evenly. Transfer it to the baking dish and spread evenly into the dish. Bake the casserole uncovered for 40-45 minutes or until golden. Drizzle each individual serving with heated gravy and serve warm.



CREATE

TURKEY TAPE PAINTING

The book of Psalms illustrates God's goodness and majesty through poetry and songs. Most readers find encouragement and comfort within verses like Psalm 107:1: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever." Many psalms shout to God with praise and thanksgiving. The God's Word section highlights four passages in Psalms that paint a picture of God's goodness.

As we approach Thanksgiving, you can paint your own picture that illustrates the traditions of the holiday and then fill it with words of thanksgiving and praise. Paint a picture bursting with God's goodness!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- cardboard or poster board
- painter's tape
- black permanent marker
- washable paint
- paintbrushes
- paper plates
- optional: tarp or plastic for painting area



WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Start with a rectangle of cardboard. In the middle front, make a semicircle out of tape.
2. From there, make five diagonal lines to section out the feathers.
3. In the middle of each section, add another diagonal line.
4. Last, use smaller diagonal lines to connect to the larger lines, giving the feathers dimension.
5. If your kids are skilled enough, they can paint a face in the middle. If not, use googly eyes or cutouts for eyes, beak, and mouth.
6. Begin painting each section of the feathers.
7. When finished, let the paint fully dry.
8. Last, take the tape off the board to reveal your masterpiece.

Hang the picture up at Thanksgiving to display your artwork. Take turns allowing family members to write things they are thankful for in the spaces of the feathers.

by Holly Newman, North Pastor of Parents and Families

GAME TIME

Slide Groat

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 5 large coins: quarters or silver dollars
- brown craft paper or wrapping paper
- drawing utensils (crayons, marker, chalk, etc.)
- optional: blue painter's tape
- optional: cornstarch

BEFORE YOU START

Playing games as a family and faith community is a great way to laugh and have fun together. Holidays should be fun—and not all work! A time to connect with our community and de-stress ... especially at Thanksgiving. In early colonial America, people played a game called Slide Groat (a “groat” was a large coin). This game was a forerunner of shuffle board.

Different ages can play Slide Groat together, offering an opportunity for grandparents and young kids and everyone in between to connect and have fun!

To set up the “table,” roll out the brown craft paper to fit the size of your table or your desired area of play (maybe half a table if the table seats six or more). Using your drawing utensil, mark 10 horizontal lines one inch apart from each other (resembling a football field), creating nine spaces between the “beds.”

Option: If you're not concerned with scratching the tabletop, and depending on slideability, use the table top without the paper. Use painter's tape to mark the “board” directly on the table.

Option 2: For better sliding, consider sprinkling some cornstarch on the playing area.

HOW TO PLAY

Start with 2-4 players. The goal is to get two scores per “bed.” To increase difficulty, players can shoot for three scores per bed. Line up the five coins at the end of the table, with part of the coins hanging off the edge. With any part of the hand, the first player shoves the coins one at a time toward the beds. Each coin has to reach the first line to be counted as “played.” If not, it is a re-do for that coin. A coin is considered a “score” if it is between the two lines in a “bed.” (If agreed, younger players can count a coin that touches the line.) Players take turns sliding the five coins until a player reaches two “scores” in each “bed.”

Keep a tally to the side of each “bed”—one player on the right and one on the left—to keep track of score with chalk/pencil.

If a player's coin nudges a previously slid coin into a new “bed,” that score is counted as well. So, it is possible to score more than one coin with each bump/slide.

For added difficulty: To get a score, the coin has to not only make it into a “bed” but into the “center” of that “bed”—as agreed by the players. Additionally, any “score” by a player in addition to the maximum two or three per bed results in the other player receiving that “score.”

by Jessie Ragain, New Life Downtown Pastor of Children's

JAR OF *Thanksgiving*

Every year in November, I like to help my children cultivate an attitude of thankfulness. As we approached the 2020 Thanksgiving season, I found it difficult to focus on gratitude after another cancelled family vacation due to the pandemic.

This past year has been filled with disappointments. Most of us missed out on kids' "lasts" in their senior year or "firsts" in their kindergarten year. Cancelled vacations, sporting events, graduations, and visits with loved ones have taken a toll. Missing out has been a hard pill to swallow for us, and our children are no different. My children began to communicate their disappointment after experiencing one cancellation after another. At first, I responded to them as if they were acting entitled and selfish. But, I quickly began to realize that they were communicating the same feelings I was experiencing. **I had to approach this differently, and here is what I learned.**

As parents, we have to acknowledge the disappointment and allow our children to communicate the sadness. **But we also have to help them out of a place of sorrow to a place of gratitude.** How do we do that? We spent time talking through everything we did in the past year that we would not have done had our schedules been full. We laughed at the fun memories. Celebrated the victories and accomplishments, big or small. As we began to talk through the year, we were reminded to be thankful in all things. Sometimes when we look at things on



the surface we can see the difficulties. **But when we look deeper we can see how God was changing us, protecting us, or giving us a gift we had to look harder to see.** This month, try to cultivate a heart of thanksgiving each day as a family. Choose a time that works for you and write down the things you are thankful for that day. Take time to praise God for each of those things as you put the slip of paper into a jar. **At the end of the month close up your jar and put it somewhere special to your family.** Next year, or when you need to be reminded, pull out your jar and read your thanksgiving responses. This will be a sweet reminder of how God blesses us every day in every way.

by Shannon Baer, North Director of Systems and Operations

SERVE

FAMILY TRADITIONS

That Bless Others

My family has a lot of traditions. Does yours? It seems like most of our traditions take place during this time of the year. We compete in an annual pumpkin carving contest while drinking apple cider and remembering years gone by. We gather together to eat all sorts of food and play our favorite family games. We host football-watching parties where we have to try to be gracious when our team loses, etc. All these things lead up to the grandest celebration of all: Thanksgiving. This day is when we sit around the table together and talk about all of the reasons we are thankful: jobs, friends, family, and so many more.


If we're not careful, this month can fly by without us even taking a moment to think of those in our faith community who are not part of our inner circle. This year, challenge yourselves to think of others your family could serve during the season. **How can the traditions you normally engage in serve those around you?** Do you have a family baking competition? Choose to give these goodies to someone you know would be blessed by them. Do you have a craft night with friends? Make something for someone else to remind her how much she's loved. When you rake the leaves in your yard, walk over to the neighbors' and rake theirs too!

In addition to finding creative ways to serve others in your faith community through your family traditions, be intentional to express gratitude to those around you. **Choose another family or individuals to write encouraging notes to.** Let them know why you are thankful that the Lord has placed them in your lives. There are so many ways we can encourage and serve our communities, even through the traditions our families already have!

by Kendra Baker, North PreK/K Discipleship Coordinator



T H A N K F U L



BLESSING

Bless with Your Words

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

WEEK 1

(Child's name), may you know that God is abundantly generous. May your heart be full of joy as you remember His kindness toward you. May this week be full of worship, thanksgiving, and praise. Be encouraged and full of peace knowing that the Lord is good and His steadfast love endures forever.

WEEK 2

(Child's name), may you know that the Lord is faithful in all He does. As God was faithful to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the people of Israel, so God will continue to provide for and protect you. The same God who split the Red Sea, who poured out water from a rock, and who delivered manna from heaven is the same God who is alive and present in your life. May you know that you have a God who fights for you and will never stop pursuing you.

WEEK 3

(Child's name), may you know that you can put your hope, your trust, and your faith in God. Let the faithful saving work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit fill you with confidence. Remember the steadfast love of the Lord. And may the remembrance of God's goodness lead you to unshakable peace and inexhaustible joy.

WEEK 4

(Child's name), God has done marvelous things all around you. May you have eyes to see the simple blessings God lavishes on you every day. With open hands and an open heart, may your mind be fixed on the unchanging faithfulness of God. May your lips be dedicated to the joyful noise of worship in your song and in your words. Give thanks to the Lord.

by Victor Mendoza, Worship Pastor of New Life Student Ministries

Journal

remember and celebrate



prayer



thankfulness and praise



December

| SUN | MON | TUES | WED | THURS | FRI | SAT |
|-----|-----|------|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| 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 | 1 |

MONTHLY • PLANNER

Shopping List

[illegible]

Ideas | Supplies | Notes

20

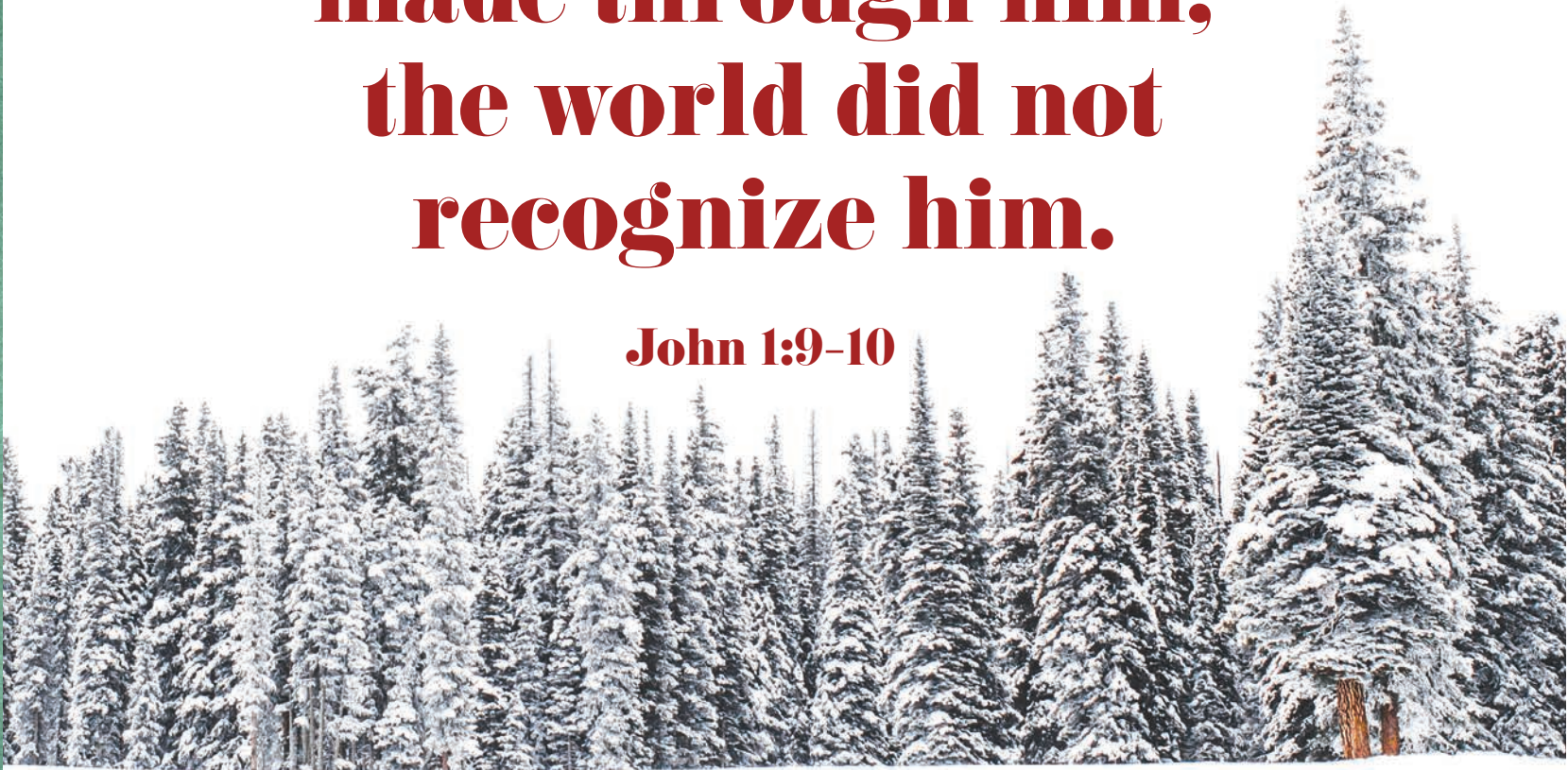
FAMILY VERSE

The true light that

*gives
light*

**to everyone was
coming into the world.
He was in the world, and
though the world was
made through him,
the world did not
recognize him.**

John 1:9-10



GOD'S WORD WEEK 1

GOD STATEMENT: GOD'S HOPE PRODUCES SIGHT
THEME: THE PROPHET'S CANDLE
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 3:1-6, 15-16

DISCUSSION

There's a type of hope that clouds judgment and hides reality. That kind of hope is like a spider's web—too thin to hold you up but just thick enough to stick around. And then there's the hope the gospel provides. It's the kind of hope that helps our vision clear and uncovers the truth for us to take hold of. Such a hope is like a trustworthy harness and climbing rope—it will never let you fall.

Luke 3 is that rope of hope. It anchors the children of God to the truth that Jesus is the Savior whose mercy our souls crave. Christian history has known the advent candle of hope to be "the prophet's candle." In other words, God loved us so much

to send prophet after prophet, the last of which was John the Baptist, to proclaim the hope of the coming Messiah. And now, even all these years later, the hope of Yahweh, the God these prophets proclaimed, burns bright through each one of us. In this Christmas season, we can choose to put our hope in the flimsy spider web of bonuses at work, gifts under the tree, or even family traditions. Or, we can place our hope where it will not let us down—the person of Jesus Christ.

Have each member of the family share what they may have hoped in too much in Christmases past. After that, ask the family this question: How can we intentionally use this Christmas season to strengthen our hope in Jesus?

by Chase Windebank, North Associate Student Ministries Pastor: Junior High



GOD'S WORD WEEK 2

GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS WORTHY OF OUR FAITH
THEME: THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2:1-7

DISCUSSION

Luke briefly writes about the birth of Jesus in two short verses, leaving one of the most significant events in history somewhat under-described. From this side of history, we know the birth of Jesus was and is extraordinary—the promised One, the Messiah, our Living Hope, the Son of God! He was finally here, born of a virgin, in Bethlehem where Old Testament ancients prophesied He would be born.

Each promise, prophecy, and event in the Bible led to this occasion: the Son of God coming to earth to be the salvation of all mankind. An angel had

visited Mary a chapter before this one. The angel informed her she would conceive in her womb and bear a son whose name would be Jesus. Through faith, she believed God's Word. Though others mocked her, and she went through a rollercoaster of emotions as she prepared for the birth of the Savior, her faith increased as she trusted the voice of God and all He spoke to her.

As we draw near to God and He draws near to us, our faith increases. We begin to trust that all God has said, and will say, will come true because He is faithful. He is worthy of our faith!

As we look at the miracle of Jesus being born of a virgin, we see Mary's faith grow. Where is an area in your life where we have seen God move? Where can you ask God to increase your faith as you trust that He is working all things for His glory and your good?

by Catherine Andersen, North Student Ministry High School Associate Director



GOD'S WORD WEEK 3

GOD STATEMENT: GOD PRODUCES JOY
THEME: THE SHEPHERD'S CANDLE
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2:8-20

DISCUSSION

Many different people heard about the event of Jesus being born at different times and in different places.

This news was so good it brought joy to each person who heard. While Jesus was still in Mary's womb, she visited her friend Elizabeth. John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth's womb as he felt the presence of Jesus approaching (Luke 1:41). In addition, the shepherds were filled with joy when they heard the good news and could not resist going to see the Savior.

God can change our fear into joy. He can touch our hearts and transform even the hardest moments into joyful moments. God gave Mary joy in one of her darkest moments. He gave John the

Baptist joy before he was even born. He also turned the shepherd's fearful hearts into joyful hearts. Why? Because there is no better news than to know that God cares so deeply about us that He would send His only Son to live among us sinful people and teach us how to live holy and joyful lives unto Him.

Think back to a time when you were fearful. How can you let God intervene and turn your fear into joy, just like He did in the stories above? (Reference Nehemiah 8:10.)

by Catherine Andersen, North Student Ministry High School Associate Director



GOD'S WORD WEEK 4

GOD STATEMENT: GOD GIVES PEACE
THEME: THE ANGEL'S CANDLE
SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 1:18-25

DISCUSSION

After Mary shared the news of the coming Savior with her soon-to-be husband, Joseph was a little unsure and confused about this marriage he was about to start. Can you blame him?

That's some pretty shocking news. But thankfully, God sent an angel of the Lord to reassure Joseph, saying, "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20). The angel revealed the promise of the Messiah was being fulfilled through Mary. Through these words, God brought peace to Joseph.

It is so easy to get caught up in fear, but when we look at God's

Word, we are constantly reminded to "cast our cares on the LORD," (Psalm 55:22) and to "not be anxious about anything, but ... present our requests to God" (Philippians 4:6). God wants us to shift our perspective off of our temporary struggles and fix our eyes on His eternal promises. That is how we find the peace that surpasses all understanding.

When we bring our struggles, fears, and worries, He promises to bring us peace. **How amazing is it that our God calls us into relationship with Him, meets us in our mess, and walks with us?** God gives us peace.

What are some areas in your life that have caused you stress and what would it look like to give those things over to God? How can you invite God's peace that surpasses understanding into these areas of your life?

by Lauren Sayers, North Production and Worship Coordinator



Slow Cooker Christmas Soup

December is often filled with Christmas shopping, music concerts, and a variety of festive events that require a ready meal before you scoot out the door. This slow cooker recipe will free up time in your busy holiday schedule. With red tomatoes, green chilies, and tricolor pasta, this creamy, cheesy soup looks just like Christmas.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 tablespoon fresh basil
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 (14 1/2 ounce) can Italian stewed tomatoes with juice
- 1 (10 ounce) can Rotel original tomatoes and green chilies with juice
- 1 (14 1/2 ounce) can diced tomatoes with juice
- 4 cups vegetable stock or chicken broth
- 1 box tricolor spiral-shaped pasta, cooked
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 pound Velveeta cheese
- 2 teaspoons Italian seasoning
- red pepper flakes to sprinkle on top
- salt and pepper
- tortilla chips



WHAT YOU'LL DO

In a slow cooker, add all the tomatoes with the juice. Break up the stewed tomatoes into pieces with a spoon. Add the stock and Velveeta. Cook on HIGH for 1 hour. Whisk in the sour cream. Add in the cooked pasta and basil. Then cook for 1 hour on HIGH. Turn to low or warm once the soup thickens. Sprinkle with red pepper flakes and serve with tortilla chips.

Hot Chocolate Cookies

There is nothing better than curling up on a chilly day with a mug of hot chocolate topped with soft marshmallows—unless it is a chocolate cookie that tastes just like that cup of warm hot chocolate. These cookies have chunks of melted dark chocolate and big, gooey marshmallows on top. It's the perfect wintertime cookie recipe!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter
- 1 (12 ounce) bag semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 1/4 cups light brown sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 8 ounces dark chocolate, diced into 1/2-inch pieces
- about 12 large marshmallows, cut in half



WHAT YOU'LL DO

Microwave the butter and chocolate chips in a microwave-safe bowl on high, stirring every 15 seconds until chocolate is smooth (about 1 minute). Allow chocolate mixture to stand for 5 minutes to cool slightly. In a separate large bowl, add the brown sugar, eggs, and vanilla. Beat with a mixer until blended. Add the cooled chocolate mixture and beat on medium until well combined. Add the cocoa powder, flour, baking powder, and salt. Beat on low speed until combined. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 2 hours. Preheat oven to 325° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and spray with cooking spray. Spoon about 2 tablespoons of dough about 2" apart on the baking sheet. Flatten slightly with a spoon and bake for 10 minutes. The center may look glossy or slightly undercooked. Remove baking sheet from oven and add 1 piece of dark chocolate to the center of each cookie, pushing down slightly. Place one marshmallow half on the top of each piece of chocolate on all cookies, pushing down very slightly so the marshmallow adheres. Return the baking sheet to oven and bake for an additional 5 minutes. Don't let the cookies brown or overbake. The cookies will firm up as they cool. Allow cookies to cool on baking sheet for 10 minutes before serving.

Cheesy Cranberry Bacon and Turkey Sliders

These festive and flavorful little sliders are the perfect party food for your holiday potluck or gathering. The layers of cranberry, turkey, bacon, and cheese give a hearty nod to a Christmas dinner but in a bite-size snack that everyone will love.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 16 dinner rolls or slider buns (Hawaiian rolls)
- 1 1/4 cup cranberry sauce or cranberry jelly
- 2 cups leftover turkey or deli meat turkey, sliced
- 8 pieces bacon, cooked
- 7 slices Havarti cheese
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 teaspoon poppy seeds

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat oven to 350° F. Arrange the bottom halves of slider buns in a 9" x 13" casserole dish. Next arrange the layers of the sliders. Spread the cranberry across the buns, then the turkey, then the bacon, and finally the Havarti cheese. Place the bun top onto each slider. Melt the butter in the microwave on low power for 1 minute. Add 15 second increments as needed until the butter is completely melted. Stir the poppy seeds into the melted butter and then evenly spread the poppy seed butter over the slider bun tops until the mixture is used up. Bake in oven for 20-25 minutes. Serve immediately.



Rice Krispies Christmas Pudding Balls

Need a fun treat to make with your kids? Let the festive baking begin with these adorable Krispies Christmas Pudding Balls. Your kids can jump in to help make the perfect, easy treat for a school party or treat exchange or to give as a gift.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 7 ounces milk chocolate
- 3 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 cups mini marshmallows
- 1/2 cup Rice Krispies or coco pops
- 1 1/2 ounces white chocolate
- edible Christmas holly decorations

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Gently melt the butter and chocolate in a saucepan over low to medium heat. Add mini marshmallows and gently stir until well combined. In a large mixing bowl, add the Rice Krispies. Pour over the marshmallow and chocolate mixture. Stir together until fully coated. Leave the mix to cool slightly. Using a tablespoon, divide the mixture into equal amounts and roll into a ball. Dampen your hands before rolling so the chocolate doesn't stick to your hands. Place on a baking tray lined with baking parchment. Cool for 30 minutes in the fridge. To make the decorations, melt the white chocolate. After the chocolate has cooled, place in a piping bag. Snip the end of the piping bag and drizzle the white chocolate over the top. Decorate with holly leaves and berries.



Light-Up Snowman Ornaments

When I was a kid, I loved to make homemade Christmas ornaments in school or church. Our Christmas tree was proudly filled with mismatched ornaments, each one commemorating a specific year or event. In recent years, our tree has been the centerpoint for lots of laughter and storytelling.

You can start your own homemade Christmas ornament tree now, if you haven't already. Turn on the Christmas music, bring out the treats, and heat up the hot chocolate. Let the creativity flow as you make these adorable snowman ornaments. The best part is most of these items can be found at the dollar store, which is a nice break on the pocketbook at Christmastime.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- battery-operated tea lights
- black permanent marker
- red ribbon
- red pipe cleaners
- red pom-poms
- black felt
- orange permanent marker
- glue gun

WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Place the tea light so the light is the center of the snowman's nose.
2. Use the black permanent marker to draw a simple face on the snowman: two eyes and four to five dots for a mouth.
3. Cut a piece of the red pipe cleaner to be about two to three inches long. Curve the pipe cleaner around the top of the tea light and fasten with hot glue gun. Leave both of the ends of the pipe cleaner open so you can slide the ribbon under the pipe cleaner later.



onelittleproject.com/tea-light-snowman-ornaments

4. Glue two pom-poms at the ends of the pipe cleaner to form adorable ear muffs.
5. To make the scarf, cut a piece of ribbon about four to five inches long. Then cross it over itself like wrapping up a snowman to keep warm in the winter. Add a small dab of hot glue where the ribbon crosses. Add some additional glue at the back of the snowman to keep secure.
6. Using a thinner ribbon or a piece of twine, hot glue both ends on top of one another to form the ornament hanger.
7. Last, use an orange sharpie to color the light to look like a carrot.

For a fun twist, each family member can decorate his or her snowman in a different way.

by Mary Windebank, Director of North Elementary

Light of the World Night Search

Jesus powerfully declares in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Jesus constantly leads His committed followers into the light. He calls us away from the darkness of this world and into a life centered on Him and His kingdom. As you seek after the “Light of the World,” remember that Jesus came to this earth to bring you out of darkness and into His light.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- flashlights for each person playing
- battery-operated votive candles
- Nativity Template found at bit.ly/nativitycutout

BEFORE YOU START

Read the story of baby Jesus together while coloring each of the template pieces. Once you read through the story, identify what was significant about each of the nativity characters.

After discussion, tape each character to a lit votive. (Option: tape the characters to upside-down plastic cups and use glow sticks inside the cups to illuminate.)

HOW TO PLAY

Send out one person to hide the nativity characters around the house. Then send the rest of the players out to search for “the Light of the World.”

Once all the characters have been found, you can choose to play again with a different player hiding the characters or set them up inside the optional homemade barn (see below).

EXTRA PROJECT

Create a barn using popsicle sticks, cardboard, or two pieces of wood for an A-frame stable.

by Ami Baxter, Downtown Children's Volunteer

WORSHIP RESPONSE

Worship in the Waiting

We hear the word **Advent** frequently as we enter the season of **Christmas**. It sounds important, but what exactly is it? Advent is defined in the dictionary as “the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event” (languages.oup.com). In even greater detail, Advent is a season of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the arrival of Jesus at Christmas and the return of Jesus Christ at His second coming (dictionary.com, christianity.com). **Christmas and Advent provide our families with a beautiful season of anticipation and worship as we celebrate the arrival of Jesus, the Light of the World!** As your family prepares and decorates for Christmas, find a special place to decorate and use as a station to respond in worship each week as you wait in expectation for the arrival of Christmas, the celebration of the arrival of Jesus!

by Lori Welch, North Family Care Assistant



WEEK 1: HOPE

Use greenery and candles (flameless LED or real) to create a wreath as a reminder of God's love and mercy that has no beginning or end. The greenery represents the life and hope we have in Jesus. Now, take time to reflect and pray:

Read Hebrews 6:19. What is this Hope we have? Respond by lighting or turning on the first candle, the Hope candle in the wreath, and worship Jesus for being our Hope!



WEEK 2: PEACE

Add berries or other greenery to the wreath.

Read Isaiah 9:6. How is Jesus the Prince of Peace in the world today? Worship Jesus for providing peace that passes understanding! Relight the candle of Hope and light the second candle of Peace.



WEEK 3: JOY

Add pine cones or sparkling decor to the wreath this week.

Read Romans 15:13. How does knowing God's hope and peace fill you with Joy? Respond in worship by lighting the candle of Hope, the candle of Peace, and now the candle of Joy.



WEEK 4: LOVE

Cut out heart shapes or add small heart ornaments to the wreath.

Read John 3:16 and 19a. What does God's great love mean to you? How do you see Jesus being light in a dark world? Worship the God of love and light who sent His only Son, Jesus, into the world by lighting each candle. Worship God as you remember Jesus is Hope, Jesus is Peace, Jesus is Joy, and Jesus is Love! Notice the beauty of the candlelight and worship Jesus for being the true light who gives light to everyone (John 1:9-10).

SHINE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

READ JOHN 1:9-10

Jesus came into the world to shine His light into the darkest places. When we are willing to receive it, Jesus' light reveals the truth: we are all broken people in need of His grace. But His light also reveals His heart of love for those who are broken. The world often has a hard time recognizing the truth and understanding who Jesus is. They may believe God only wants to point out their flaws or that He's disappointed in them. However, God shines His light into our brokenness to show us our need for Him. It's through knowing Him that we find healing and redemption. He has chosen us to be His vessels, and when we reveal His character to those around us, we help them understand that He is not an angry, accusing God. He is our personal friend and Savior—and the Light of the World.

ACTION

When we pray Scripture over someone, we're inviting Jesus' light to shine into that person's life. With a friend or family member in mind, choose a Scripture verse to pray over him or her during the entire month of December. Take time to write the verse out on a card or turn it into a craft. **Be sure to hand deliver the item and invite the person to come to your Christmas Eve service WITH YOU!**

This Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let's allow His light to shine through us so others may know Him more.

INVITATION TO CHURCH

When you deliver your card, add a note or verbally invite your friend or family member to your Christmas Eve service. Be sure to include where you attend, what time the service begins, and where you can meet each other. Print the one below at bit.ly/hfchristmaseveinvitation.

by Annie Cribbs, North Family Care Administrative Assistant



BLESSING

Bless with Your Words

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Week 1

(Child's name), may you know that Jesus, the hope of the world, is with you. You are never alone. As you put your trust in Him, Jesus will fill you with joy and peace. You will always find safety in God's presence; you can tell Him your needs, and He will help you.

Week 2

(Child's name), may you know your faith will grow stronger as you continue to place your hope in God and get to know Him better. God kept His promise by sending His Son, Jesus, and He will keep His promises to you as you put your faith in Him. Know that all things are possible in Christ Jesus.

Week 3

(Child's name), may you be filled with joy knowing that Jesus loves you dearly. May His love refresh and encourage you. Let the joy of the Lord strengthen you and enable you to share His love with those around you.

Week 4

(Child's name), may you know that Jesus is your peace. God has made the way for you to experience His peace by placing your faith in Jesus. Every day you can know that the Prince of Peace is with you and has empowered you to live for Him.

by Evie Swart, Director of Midweek and Support Staff

Journal

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise

RESOURCES & SUPPORT

life
together

Thanksgiving Table Conversation Starters

- What are you most thankful for this year?
- What was the best thing that happened to you this year?
- Pretend you just won \$1 million. What is the first thing you would buy?
- If you could only eat three things for the rest of your life, what would you choose?
- What is your favorite Scripture and why?
- What are your favorite and least favorite Thanksgiving foods?
- Pretend you had \$1 million that you had to give away in one day. How would you give it away?

Meaningful Gift Ideas



EARLY CHILDHOOD

- Make your own storybook. Document the cute, funny, and monumental moments for a certain time period. Create a storybook by using these stories and pairing them with a picture. Check out [Shutterfly](#) or [Snapfish](#).
- Personalized blessing. Write out a personal blessing for your child and frame it as a keepsake.

ELEMENTARY

- Make a storybook. Take time to write a “bedtime” story with your child. Once completed, make it a real storybook with pictures, drawings, text, and cover. Visit [mystorybook.com](#).
- Engraved Bible. As your child is beginning to dive into personal reading time, this is a great opportunity to give a keepsake Bible he or she will use for years to come.

STUDENTS

- Treasure box. Surprise your teenager with how well you know him. Gather his favorites to put in a box. Ideas: favorite candy or snacks, birthstone items, movie items, quotes, authors, etc.
- One-year photo collage. Purchase a 16” x 20” frame. Place colored paper or matte across the entire frame. Fill with pictures from the last year. Consider writing captions or identity statements beneath the pictures.

FAMILY

- National park scratch-off map. The entire family will enjoy keeping track of all the national parks you visit as a family. Not only does your family get this cool map, but they also receive the promise of many vacations and adventures to each park. Check out [waypointwanders.com](#).
- The adventure challenge. This book is a fun way to keep your family enjoying time together and connecting. Scratch off a new activity each week. Most activities are budget friendly. See [theadventurechallenge.com](#).

EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Heavens Declare ...

What do you see way up high in the sky during the day? How about at night? Isn't God's creation of the sky or heavens beautiful? Listen to what the Bible says in Psalm 19:1-2: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge."

What do you think David, who wrote this psalm, meant when he said, "Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge"? Did you know that scientists have discovered that stars sing? (Find out more about singing stars in the link below.)

Scientists study the stars and planets to find out more about the great big universe God made. Sailors have used the stars as a map to guide them on their ocean voyages, while others have used the stars to mark seasons. In the Bible, we learn about some men, known as magi, who saw a special star in the sky—"and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them" (Matthew 2:9a NKJV).

Maybe you have heard about these men during Christmastime. They were wise men who followed a star from a far-off place in the East to the town of Bethlehem. The magi did not have cars, planes, or trains to follow this star. The magi did not have hiking boots or comfortable tennis shoes for their long journey across the desert. They did not have a cell phone to give them directions. They most likely traveled by camels and wore sandals on their feet as God's star in the heavens guided them.

Do you know why they followed this special star? They were looking for a special king. **The magi wanted to worship this king.** The men followed the star "till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:9b-11 NKJV).

This King was God's only Son, Jesus. God had promised to send Jesus into the world from the very beginning. Jesus would make the way for each person to be forgiven of sin and become a part of God's family (John 3:16).

God used a star to tell the magi His Son, the King, had arrived. **God is using His creation to tell you how wonderful and powerful He is.** God is using His story, the Bible, to tell you how much He loves you. God is telling you that He sent the King—Jesus—for you! The magi rejoiced and worshiped Him. What are some ways you would like to respond to Jesus, the King? Ask God to help you respond to His love.

Check out this online article from NASA with the help of a parent or grandparent to learn more about singing stars: <https://exoplanets.nasa.gov/news/1516/symphony-of-stars-the-science-of-stellar-sound-waves/>

by Laurie Bennett, North Director of Early Childhood and Curriculum

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT ELEMENTARY



A House Full of Strangers

The holidays are upon us. Can you smell the cookies baking in the oven, see the lights strung on the trees, taste the juicy turkey, and hear the holiday music? If not already, I assume your family is starting to plan your family traditions, activities, and parties.

One of my favorite memories as a child was when our Thanksgiving meal was over, it was time to put the fall decor away and pull out our boxes and boxes of Christmas decor. There was a shift in our snacks, music, and overall enthusiasm. **The time had arrived to prepare for CHRISTMAS!** I remember finding the Nat King Cole Christmas album and playing it in our CD player. While Nat King Cole sang, our family would laugh and eat cookies and transform our home.

One year, this tradition shifted. We had extended family in town to join us for Thanksgiving. We were excited to have our cousins with us, but when they arrived, their van looked like a little clown car. More and more people—who were not my family—got out of the car. My brain wasn't sure what was happening, so I ran to my mom quickly and asked, "Mom, who did they bring? Who are those people?" My mom explained that my uncle had brought people from his church who did not have family to celebrate Thanksgiving with; they would have been alone if they hadn't come. I was very thankful at that moment for my mom. **She set a welcoming tone and guided my attitude toward these soon-to-be new friends who joined our family Thanksgiving dinner.**

The day was great! We ate food, watched football, and played lots of games. Nothing was different from past years, except as the evening slowed down, I wondered what was going to happen with our normal tradition of setting up Christmas?! Not a minute later, I heard my mom change the CD to good old Nat King Cole. As he started singing Christmas songs, my mom explained to our new friends our tradition of setting up Christmas and invited them to join.

My mom understood the importance of God's family. She knew God designed us to live in community and to experience Him in ways that can only happen when we are in proximity with each other. **From the moment our new friends joined our Thanksgiving meal, she modeled the importance of the faith community.** And it didn't stop there. She invited our new friends into our yearly family tradition for Christmas. My parents' welcome reflected God's love for us, for them, and for everyone.

As we enter this season of celebration and remembrance, how can your family care for other families in the faith community? Though, as a child, I was not part of the decision to invite new friends into our Thanksgiving and tradition, I quickly realized the importance of the family of God. **How can you invite your children to expand and invest in the faith community?**

by Mary Windebank, North Director of Elementary and Production

STUDENTS

Keep On Believing

“Do you have any questions, Ellie?” What? I sat on the cold, sterile bed, numb to what the doctor was explaining to me. I could not put words to my thoughts as the word *epilepsy* bounced around in my head. Although the diagnosis was hard, I did not even realize at the time how long I would struggle with this medical condition and how drastically it would affect my life.

Up until that point, life had been easy for me. Born into an amazing Christian family, my faith was just something that was always a part of me. My father was a youth pastor and my mother a parenting pastor at our church. Stories about God, Scripture memory, worship songs playing in the background, and prayer at dinner were all part of a normal week.

I remember the first time I asked God into my heart. It was not a big moment at the altar with other kids around. It was just me and my sister in our bedroom. But this is what made that moment special and memorable. As I held my little mermaid toy in my hand, I decided it was time for me to ask Jesus to be the Lord of my life. I promptly told my sister it was her turn, to which she rudely replied, “No.” Her moment would come later.

A few years later, I asked to be baptized at our church with my pastor, who was more like a second dad to me. The existence of God, the Bible, and the messages preached at the church were never something I questioned because they were just a part of every aspect of my life ... until several years into my diagnosis. After trips to the altar, prayers from the elders, anointing oil from our friends in ministry, I began to wonder where God was in my situation. Could He even heal me? Did He just not care enough to heal me? If God heals, why is He not choosing to heal me? The longer I struggled with the seizures, the more doubtful I became—and even bitter at times. The seizures began affecting other areas of my life: theater, driving, sports, and friendships. My confidence dropped and my medical condition limited me in many ways.

Today, seizures no longer hold me back. They are medically controlled. God did not miraculously heal me ... yet. However, when I look back at the last eight years of my life, I see God in every aspect of my journey. I see His faithfulness in many ways. I see His hand opening doors, providing opportunities, bringing the right people at the right time. He has been with me every step of the way. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” My mom always said to me, “Ellie I don’t know why God hasn’t healed you. But, I know that He is using all of this for His glory. Where can you see God in this?” Although I have not experienced the BIG miracle of healing, I have seen many miracles that let me know He cares for me and my journey.

The question of the existence of God no longer bothers me. I know He is real. I know He cares for me. I know He has a plan for my life. How? Every weekend, I get to teach the Bible to the first and second graders at our church. As I prepare for my lesson, the Scripture passages and stories come alive to me. The Scriptures are promises to me and I am reminded of God’s goodness. When I share the messages with children who may have a situation like mine or another struggle, it causes me to seek after God.

Only God knows what is ahead in my future, and I am content with the unknown. Because if there is anything I have learned from my situation, it is that God will work it all out for His glory. It may take days. It may take years. It may take longer than I thought. **His plan is always the best.** I can just relax and enjoy the adventure.

by Ellie Newman, Senior Student at College Pathways



GRANDPARENTING

Name • Above • All • Names

The traditional titles of “Grandma” and “Grandpa” are expressed in a variety of endearing ways. I happen to be known as “Nana” and my husband as “Poppi” to our three wonderful granddaughters. You may be known as “Mimi,” “Honey,” “Memaw,” “Papaw,” “Gram,” “Gramps,” “Abuelita,” or “Abuelito.” I cannot begin to cover the many ways this special title is expressed in families around the world. No matter how it is articulated, it all comes down to being known as grandparents.

I am reminded of the many names attributed to God. In the Bible, God is not revealed to us as just “God.” He is referred to by other names that show us certain aspects of His character. When we Christians hear these names, we know they represent God. Yahweh, Adonai, Jehovah Jireh, and Jehovah Rapha are just a few. Different expressions, but all names for our God.

The sweet memory of reading the Christmas story around the fire with our children as they grew up still warms my heart. One of our traditions has always been that one gift could be opened on Christmas Eve. Even though it was wrapped tightly with a nametag and bow attached, our girls knew what was inside ... Christmas pajamas! They would tear through the wrapping paper every year to usually reveal a soft, red plaid flannel gown that may or may not match their siblings’. This tradition is now shared with our granddaughters and, yes, our daughters still receive their very own Christmas jammies every year.

This year, Christmas 2021, we are going to make a new tradition in our family. Sharing the names of God

and their meanings with our grandchildren. A different name each week of December. **We will remember and celebrate** that the angel appeared to Mary and said, “His name shall be called Jesus.” We will light a candle and read John 8:12 together. **Remembering** that Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” We will **celebrate** with a coloring page created by Nana and a handwritten note from Poppi. We will listen to Christmas songs with lyrics that celebrate these names, along with discussing together over a mug of hot chocolate which name is their favorite.

And in the quiet moments of the season, I am looking forward to sitting by the fire, listening to “Emmanuel,” sung by Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant. A song filled with the names God. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Prince of Peace are just a few. Then there’s the chorus we sang as children: “Jesus, Name Above All Names.” Some of the lyrics include Him being known as Beautiful Savior, Glorious Lord, Blessed Redeemer, and Living Word. Each name is an expression of the love, grace, and mercy God has provided to us through the gift of His Son.

So Grandma, Grandpa, Nana, Poppi, Memaw, Papaw, or whatever sweet name you are called by your grandchildren, I hope you are inspired to consider this new tradition to share with your grandchildren this Christmas. **Jesus is the sweetest name they will ever know!**

by Christy Thomas, North Nursery Coordinator



Falling into His Arms with Thanksgiving

Hello, fall! This glorious and magical time of the year when the trees exhibit their grand finale of colors. Homes and doors are decorated with harvest colors, wreaths, pumpkins, and glowing lanterns. Our thoughts turn toward a new season of holidays and events. We anticipate the change of weather and pumpkin-spice everything with the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday and the season prompt to give thanks.

As we move into winter, with a cloak of snow covering barren trees, and Christmas comes to a close, we tend to forget we are still called to be grateful, even in times of emptiness or loss or even the unknown.

As life goes, some of us are walking in the midst of glorious beauty and are easily grateful. **However there are those among us who are struggling right now with being thankful.** This season might be painful or even excruciating and being grateful to God seems impossible. Walking through hard seasons requires our entire body's focus and physical strength.

My first several years of parenting seemed to be an endless barren winter in my soul. I didn't think parenthood would lead me to feel hopeless and heartbroken or imagine the amount of work and appointments for our child. It was a season of so many unknowns and diagnosis, and I'm not sure we ever got any real answers.

In a small way it was like being given a season pass to a membership that you didn't sign up for. The membership of grief. In this season, friends tend to disappear because they get exasperated with your pain and their own inability to fix or help you. I didn't know that grief was associated with anything other than death, and yet, as I sat with my counselor and walked through all the emotions, grief summed them up.

A friend recently asked me what event in my life brought me closer to Christ. With teary eyes and shaky breath, I said, "That season!" **I can't explain it. In what felt like a fire burning all around me and inside of me, I could feel God working.** But I didn't trust it. I would sing songs in church about His goodness, even though it took an insane amount of faith to keep me in the seat at the moment because I couldn't see it. But like the woman who desperately reached out to Jesus' cloak for healing, I grounded myself and grabbed His cloak. I found my circumstances didn't change much, but my heart changed.

Little by little, I started to recognize things to be grateful for. Each new step with our son took a painful amount of work and mostly felt like two steps forward and three back. Each time I thanked God because that was still progress. I wrote this verse down and it has reminded me numerous times to bring everything to Him and to thank Him.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT)

My son is now a freshman in high school and, like for many of the parents out there, last year was rough in so many ways. Depression, anxiety, suicide. Instead of living the year in fear, I went into my son's room and fell on my knees. **I thanked God for all He has done and started to sing songs of raw and broken worship.** I can't tell you what happens in the spiritual realm, but something happened inside all of us. Our year was resurrected in a completely different way. I have quietly witnessed my son worship and fall on his knees in prayer in service. I don't know what the Holy Spirit is doing, but He's doing something!

My hope is that you will thank God and praise Him in all your seasons, winter or summer or somewhere in between. May you know that He is with you and has never left you. If you feel distant, know that you will feel His nearness and breath on your face again. I hope you will find a deeper joy and you will know you are marked and called out to be an ambassador to others. Our pain can become a living sacrifice to be offered up with all our prayers and thanksgiving.

When hard seasons come, let Christ do what He is famous for: resurrecting lifeless and barren souls. All you have to do is fall into His arms with thanksgiving.

by Laura Iacono. Laura has two kids, Evan and Olivia, and an amazing husband, Scott, who cooks her dinner most every evening. You'll find her crafting, reading, baking a yummy dessert, or drinking a mean cup of Earl Grey tea most days. She also serves on the North Mom's Connect team and has volunteered in other places at New Life Church over the past several years.

Create Your Own Family Christmas Song

'Tis the season for ... Christmas music! Wouldn't it be great to have an original song your family could sing as you decorate your tree, gather together for a meal, or drive around looking at Christmas lights and decorations? As a creative project for the upcoming holiday season, I recommend a family songwriting adventure.

You might be thinking, "We could never do this," or "We're not musical," but the beauty of this project is that you can do it, and you don't have to have a lot of musical talent to make it happen. I'll help you get there. **Also, remember, this is a song for your family, created by you and them.** It doesn't have to win a Grammy or even be heard by anyone else.

So, let's get started.

First, you need a theme. Let's say our theme is Advent, Jesus coming at Christmas time. Step one is done! See how easy that was?!

Our next step is to put some words together about that theme. For this, you can go in two directions. You can use something already written, or you can create your own lyrics from scratch.

If you want to use something that already exists, I recommend a verse of Scripture or a poem about Advent or Christmas. Whatever you choose may need a little adapting, but that is all in the fun of the project. Have your kids suggest variations. Ask them what the words of the verse or poem mean to them. Feel free to rewrite it in their words.

Jot down one-line notes from the discussion. These notes become a resource for putting your lyric together. **Another resource is Scripture.** Ask your kids what they remember about the nativity story or what was prophesied about Jesus' birth. Look those verses up and make a note of them.

The next step is to look at all you have written down and find similarities. Put together four lines that convey a thought. Don't worry about rhyming and feel free to repeat a lot. The trick is in setting a meter—breaking up the words into lines with the same number of beats. Counting syllables is the most uncomplicated strategy. Lines one and two can have the same number of syllables, and lines three and four can have the same number of syllables.

Here is an example of some possible comments shaped into a lyric.

"God loves us, and so He sent Jesus." "Jesus was born in Bethlehem in a stable." "Angels and shepherds and

wise men were there to celebrate." "Good news has come to all people."

God loved so much He sent Jesus (eight syllables)

Born in a Bethlehem stable (eight syllables)

Angels and shepherds and wise men were there (ten syllables)

Good news has come to all people (eight syllables)

You'll notice that this doesn't fully rhyme—or even have the same number of syllables in lines three and four. It's nice that "stable" and "people" both end in "le," but that wouldn't have to be. If you want to work on it more, you can look for synonyms for the end words that rhyme. To do this, sometimes you have to rethink the entire line, but who cares—it's your song!

Enough on words. Let's think melody. It is easiest to use an existing melody. In picking an existing song, think simple. Nursery rhyme melodies work well. Let's put the tune to "Mary Had a Little Lamb" to the lyric above. You'll see we need to change a couple things, but that's okay.

God loved so He sent Jesus, sent Jesus, sent Jesus.

God loved so He sent Jesus

Born in a manger stall

Angels, shepherds gathered there, gathered there, gathered there

Angels, shepherds gathered there

Good news has come to all

We took our original poem and adapted it to the tune we chose. The wise men got lost in the process, but we were able to pick up a rhyme in "stall" and "all." A good trade, I think.

Melody is a little hard to explain with just text to rely on, but I would love to help you if you get stuck.

A final word of encouragement. We are not looking for perfection, **but for a song that is unique to you and your family**—something that may live on for as long as your family does, and maybe longer. It doesn't have to be perfect; it just has to be you.

by Jeff Boesel, Downtown Children's Worship. Jeff is a published composer who has been writing music for more than 50 years, mainly for the body of Christ. You can find some of his music on Spotify or his Soundcloud page. He is also an author, speaker, and mobilizer for those looking to become missionaries. You can connect with Jeff by email at JBoesel@newlifechurch.org.



Cultivating a Thankful Holiday Heart When Life Feels Anything but Merry

The sound of beeping heart monitors and smell of disinfectant greeted me as I stepped inside the NICU, scooping up my precious baby boy into my arms—wires and IV lines draped around his fragile body. It was Christmastime and we were confined to the hospital, our baby having been born with Down syndrome and two congenital heart defects just days before the “most wonderful time of the year.” This wasn’t the place I wanted to spend Christmas and it certainly felt anything but festive and jolly.

Being an active-duty Air Force family, we were fortunate that the Air Force put my husband on permissive TDY, allowing him to stay with me at the hospital, located several hours from our base, for the ensuing six weeks of NICU time. We took turns at our son’s bedside and exchanged Christmas gifts with our typical, three-year-old daughter at the Ronald McDonald House, the place we called home during our hospital stay. Thanks to a team of great doctors and the miraculous intervention of God, our son survived open-heart surgery and we left the hospital six weeks after I gave birth. It was a Christmas season we would never forget.

Undoubtedly, some holidays you just wish you could skip. Some holidays don’t feel very festive. Some holidays you want to throw stones at the car radio blaring Christmas music and just yell, “Does anyone see me? Can anyone understand that all this happy Christmas spirit only magnifies my depression?”

What do you do when everyone around you is in the holiday spirit but it’s all you can do to get out of bed each day? How can you cultivate a heart of thankfulness when your child is gravely ill, or your spouse is deployed or TDY? I learned a few lessons during our time in the NICU. They were the same lessons I experienced the year my husband was deployed and missed Christmas and all our children’s birthdays. Some days are just hard, but perhaps these ideas will bring a spark of joy to your weary soul.

1. **Stay in the Word every day.** This may sound like a no-brainer. You may already be doing this, but sometimes we allow dust to collect on our Bibles. Open the Word of God and soak up His promises for you.

2. **Be a prayer warrior.** I pray for my kids and my family every day. Prayer makes a difference—it changes our hearts and perspectives. Prayer transforms our situations and reminds us that Jesus walks alongside us.
3. **Serve others.** Your spouse may be deployed, and you may be overwhelmed. But one of the greatest ways we can stop the cycle of “woe is me” is to serve. Volunteer at a homeless shelter. Make a Samaritan’s Purse shoebox for a less-fortunate child. Ask a chaplain which of the airmen in the base dorms are not going home for Christmas and then invite a few of those folks to your house for Christmas dinner.
4. **Involve your children in your acts of service.** Bring your children to a nearby nursing home and sing Christmas carols. Bake cookies with your kids and take them to Security Forces at the guard gate.
5. **Let others care for you, too.** After my son came home from the hospital, my neighbor came over for several nights and served as my “kitchen fairy,” cleaning up my family’s dinner dishes. It was humbling to accept the help, but I will never forget her act of kindness.
6. **Take time out for yourself.** Brew a cup of tea and enjoy a favorite novel or devotional book after you put the kids to bed. Take a short walk outside or listen to praise and worship music on your way to pick up the kids from school. Whatever it is, ground yourself in the truth of who God says you are and in His love for you.

Christmas is just a season. It passes. The same is true for the storms of life. In keeping our focus on Jesus at the holidays and, indeed, all year round, we can be reminded that these storms—no matter how fierce—will soon pass as well. **Now that’s a reason to be merry!**

by Heidi Spencer. Heidi lives in Colorado Springs with her husband, an active-duty Air Force chaplain, and their children. She enjoys serving military wives through PWOC (Protestant Women of the Chapel) at the Peterson SFB Chapel, reading, traveling, and visiting the beach any chance she gets. She attends New Life Church.

Holiday Pivot

We were sitting at our kitchen table waiting for the oven timer to ding before Christmas Eve service. Ding! But the frozen pizza was cool and limp. Our oven had gone out! Right before Christmas. We went to church and started brainstorming. We could use our crockpot, our grill, and the microwave, plus cook some things on the stovetop! Christmas was saved and we had a delicious Christmas dinner.

We've been pivoting and flexing way before Covid made it a thing. As a married couple, Dave and I have learned that family traditions must be adapted to family needs and change with the times. We learned this our first Thanksgiving together. Where do we eat? And when? Both our families lived within an hour's drive, so we felt we needed to please everyone. We went to one side of the family for Thanksgiving dinner at noon and the other side at 4:00. We still can hear Dave's mom say, "You won't eat; you're not hungry." That was a mistake! Two Thanksgiving dinners in one day is a little hard to work through to make everyone happy.

We tried the same thing on Christmas and over the years developed a routine that seemed to work well for all. We enjoyed a time at our home on Christmas morning with our own little family, opening gifts. Then we cleaned up and enjoyed an amazing Christmas brunch with Dave's parents. It became a cherished tradition to celebrate our California Christmas breakfast with tropical fruits as an opener and then the amazing, flavorful Spanish omelet. I added a little touch by making my famous Marshmallow Puffs, which came to be known as "Marshmallow Mindys." We opened gifts and enjoyed our time together before packing up to move an hour south to the Metzger side where we spent the rest of the day with aunts, uncles, and cousins.

These were our traditions for the first 15 years of our married life. Routine, everyone knew what to expect, and all were satisfied. And then, duh duh duh, we moved to Colorado! One thousand miles away from all we knew and loved. And I announced that we would not be traveling back for all the holidays. I knew in my heart that as important as family is to me, it would not work for Dave and me and our two kids to travel for every holiday.

So, our first Thanksgiving, we went skiing! And we took turkey sandwiches with us as a nod to the season. For Christmas, we started our own traditions but kept the favored California Christmas breakfast. Year after year, whether a large group or just the two of us, we enjoy the delicious fruit, Spanish omelet, and Marshmallow Mindys.

I never imagined it happening, but one day our kids got married and made homes of their own. Christmas each year is a little different now. It's wonderful when we can all be together, but some years we can't be. The first time Dave and I spent the holiday together alone, we thought we could change things up by going to the movies. I know some families find this to be a fun tradition and look forward to it, but it was just not for me. I cried through the double feature and thought, "Never again!" We've tried other things: going to a park, singing at a retirement home, and inviting others to join us. **We must flex and pivot and change with the times.** Last year, with one of the kids' families quarantining, we visited through the storm door and dropped off our presents. We presented them with some of the fixings for the famous California breakfast so they could keep the tradition.

I love traditions, but Dave and I have learned through our marriage that flexing with the changes is more important than sticking rigidly to what once served. Our constant is love for each other, love for the one whose birthday we celebrate, and, of course, our California Christmas breakfast!

I am not allowed to give out the family recipe for the famous Spanish omelet, but I can share the Marshmallow Mindys. I first made this delicious treat when I was in seventh-grade cooking class. It has since become known through other avenues as Resurrection Rolls, but whatever the name, they are delicious. Be sure to include everyone to help make them. Visit bit.ly/marshmallowpuffs for the recipe card.

by Mindy Harrington. Mindy finds that two Marshmallow Puffs with breakfast and one more later that morning is the perfect ratio. You can find her on Christmas Eve serving in Kids Ministry at Woodmen Valley Chapel.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TRADITIONS

Creating a Jesus-Centered Holiday

Christmastime has always been my favorite time of the year. The twinkling lights, Amy Grant's Christmas album playing in the background, the smell of fresh pine and cut Christmas trees, the feel of excitement, joy, and wonder. I love every single part of it. I wanted to create an atmosphere of awe and wonder for my children as they were growing up, but I also wanted to be sure I kept the focus on the true meaning of Christmas: Jesus' birth.

Our culture today is trying to pull the focus away from Jesus and onto the "things" everyone would want for Christmas. **How can we enjoy all the wonder and joy of the season but still keep the key focus on Jesus?** These are few of the things we have done.

- **Happy Birthday Jesus Party**—Throw a birthday party for Jesus and invite all the kids in your neighborhood. Have your kids help you prepare and decorate for the party. Have games and fun treats as you celebrate the true meaning of Christmas, and read the Christmas story at your party.
- My son was in public preschool, and the school sent home all sorts of holiday-themed songs and paperwork but never mentioned Jesus. I was so frustrated! Kwanza and the Jewish menorah were well represented but not the Christian celebration of Christmas. I decided to get creative. For the **Christmas party** in his class, I bought gifts for each child from Josh and wrapped them up. The gift was a children's book called "Happy Birthday, Jesus."
- Celebrate **weekly advent** with your family.
- We put a battery-operated **candle in our window** each year to celebrate Jesus, the Light of the World.
- We bought small, artificial **Christmas trees for my kids' bedrooms** when they were little. I wanted them to go to bed with the lights on their trees as a night light in their rooms. We also gave them a new ornament each year to help them start a collection of their own. Faith-based ornaments are a great way to remind them that we are celebrating Jesus' birth.
- One of my favorite traditions was **reading the Christmas story each year**. When the kids were little, my husband or I would read the story of

Jesus' birth to the kids on Christmas morning. As the kids got older, we began having them share the story with us. The first few years they read the story to us, then as they got older, we had them act it out. We also wouldn't begin opening the presents under the tree until we had heard the Christmas story, so the kids were very motivated to present it to us. Some years they would manipulate the nativity scene characters and tell it that way, and other years they would be Joseph and Mary. Whatever way the Christmas story was presented, the kids were engaged, and our focus was on Jesus' birth.

I also love how much the holidays can bring everyone together to enjoy time as a family. Some other things we enjoy doing are:

- Decorating the house for Christmas. The day after Thanksgiving we get all the Christmas bins out and begin decorating the house. Be sure to play loud Christmas music while unpacking your bins.
- Going shopping for a Christmas tree and then bringing it home and decorating it together.
- Singing Christmas carols at a senior center.
- Decorating a gingerbread house.
- Baking cookies and treats to take to friends and neighbors.
- Making or buying a card for each person in the family to put in his or her stocking. This is one of my favorite traditions because we stop and take the time to write things in the cards that we may not say to everyone during the year. It is a place to share our love and gratefulness for our family members, for the unique ways God created them.

I can't think of any other time in my lifetime when our world has needed the message of Jesus so desperately. Jesus changes everything, and what better time than Christmas to proclaim the difference He makes in our lives.

by Cheryl Howard. Cheryl is the Senior Director of Woodmen Kids at Woodmen Valley Chapel. She has been married to her college sweetheart for 31 years, has two grown children, and enjoys being outside marveling at the beauty all around her.

THE POWER OF PLACE

TODAY WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO BOUNCE FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER, NEVER MAKING ANYWHERE HOME. WE HAVE ACCESS TO A LIFESTYLE OF MOBILITY THAT NO OTHER GENERATION HAS KNOWN.

Sometimes a move is necessary to find work or to leave a toxic situation. But sometimes we dream of moving just because it feels like progress. We think, "Maybe I'll feel more fulfilled over there. Maybe the answer to my boredom is out there." However, it doesn't seem that our wandering is working out.

In *The Power of Place*, pastor Daniel Grothe helps us reclaim the ancient vow of stability. He teaches us that our feelings of restlessness open us up to our deepest longing for a lasting community, to our desire to be known, and to our need for a place to call home.

