

2022 | March | April

HomeFront

a spiritual parenting resource



SHOWERED *in love*

COURSE CORRECTION

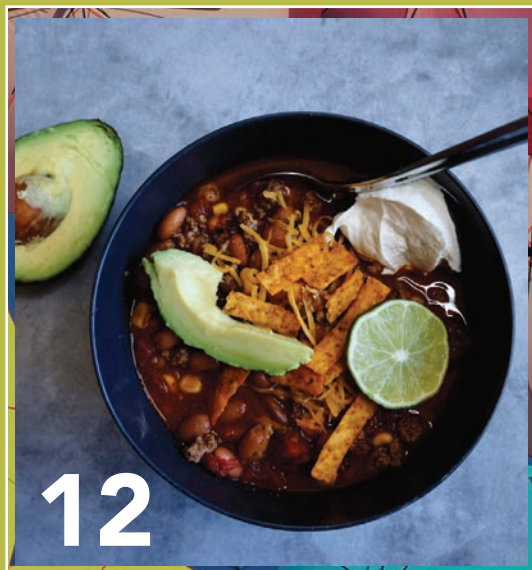
*"When I get off track, God
offers me a path of healing."*

LOVE & RESPECT

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

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It is our prayer that homes and churches would create environments for children to live in so their faith will grow in a community of common language and practice. To learn more about creating environments that 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

*"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.

1

*"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.

3

*"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.

4

*"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!

5

*"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.

6

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

RESPONSIBILITY

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

7

"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.

8

"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.

9

"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!

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.

29



[illegible][illegible]

THEREFORE
everyone who hears

these words
of mine and
puts them into
practice is like a

wise man

who built his
house on the

ROCK

Matthew 7:24



GOD'S WORD



GOD STATEMENT:
GOD ESTABLISHES
SCRIPTURE:
MATTHEW 7:24

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matthew 7:24)

Rules—you either love them or you hate them. Some people are natural rule followers while others are prone to write a script of their own. For some, rules establish a sense of order and safety, while others feel rules dampen their joy with seemingly pointless constraints. The Bible can seem to be a book full of dos and don'ts, but a closer look will reveal that it is indeed a "lamp for my feet" and a "light on my path," as the psalmist says (Psalm 119:105). It is filled with the wisdom we need to live life abundantly amid great challenge. This wisdom is what Jesus' words reflected during His time on earth. Matthew 7:24 comes at the end of the His famous and revolutionary Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, Jesus did not simply give His listeners a new set of rules to follow. He gave them an entirely different way to conduct every area of their lives. His teaching transcended the established sense of duty of the rule follower and provided a compelling alternative to those who were simply determined to manage their own way to live. **His words gave people the responsibility to not only hear what He said but also apply it to their lives.** And His words still invite and challenge us to do the same thing today. Everyone wants to build their "houses" (their lives) on a rock. The people listening to Jesus lived by the sea. They knew the ramifications of not building houses on the rock and the likelihood of destruction that could cause. The example Jesus gave was an excellent word picture for them to understand how they should conduct their lives. In the same way, we can look at the mountains in Colorado and know that our lives must be established on the principles and ways of Jesus in order to be steady and secure. We do not need to conduct our lives in our own way. Let's practice the words and ways of Jesus. That is the wisdom He is inviting us into that will establish us on the rock.

DISCUSSION

Review the words of Jesus in Matthew 5–7 and choose one of His statements that resonates with you. Practice what He said for a week. It could be abstaining from judging others, praying for those who persecute you, or another one of His sayings. Observe the impact putting His words into practice has on your soul.

GOD'S WORD



GOD STATEMENT:
GOD IS FAITHFUL
SCRIPTURE:
MATTHEW 7:25

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. (Matthew 7:25)

Have you ever tried to build a small, makeshift house out of popsicle sticks? I have. It was for a classroom activity to test teamwork, problem solving, and work speed. The only way to succeed in the exercise was to ensure the little house could withstand a small nudge or puff of air. Everyone would wait anxiously while the teacher came around and poked and prodded to see if what we had painstakingly built would fall. At times, life can feel a lot like a popsicle-stick house project. The fragility of our worries and cares loom ever before us as we hope nothing will make what we've built shatter around us. Jesus knew this and, in His sovereign way, gave us assurance that it is possible to build a life that can withstand obstacles. Jesus was known for stating the facts but also presenting an opportunity for hope. **Think of what He says in John 16:33: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** It may feel natural to focus on the troubles of this world or the "rain" and "winds" life will inevitably bring our way. However, Jesus gives us a new reality in which we can participate: the peace we have in Him and in His power to overcome. As Christians, we do not need to be afraid of the trials or obstacles of life. We do not need to see unfavorable circumstances as proof we did something wrong. These things happen. Instead, we can turn our attention and our hearts to the promise and assurance in Matthew 7:25: "it did not fall." When we trust in Jesus, we know what we've built will be secure because we are not dependent upon circumstances for our peace; we are dependent upon Jesus. Isaiah 26:3 says, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you." As we focus our minds on Jesus we will experience lives built on the rock and the relief that comes from trusting in Him.

DISCUSSION

Think of one obstacle you are currently facing. How can you "weatherproof" this obstacle in light of the wisdom of Jesus for us to "take heart" and His promise of overcoming?

GOD'S WORD



GOD STATEMENT:
GOD IS LIFE
SCRIPTURE:
MATTHEW 7:26

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. (Matthew 7:26)

Obedience is a big deal to God. Not because He is some unloving dictator who wants to stifle the joy of His creation, but because He always knows what is best and what is good for His children.

He desires us to flourish, and the only way for us to flourish is to follow Jesus. King Saul had to learn this the hard way in the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel 15 God ordered Saul to do something, and Saul did not do it. He asked Saul to wipe out the Amalekites and destroy all that belonged to them. Saul did most of what God instructed, but instead of destroying everything, he kept the best of the spoil to offer up as a sacrifice to the Lord. As a response, the Lord stated to the prophet Samuel, "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions" (1 Samuel 15:11a). Following this statement Samuel confronted Saul. Saul was convinced that he was doing God a favor by offering him a burnt offering, but the prophet Samuel replied,

"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (v. 22).

When we walk in obedience to God's Word, Christ builds our life of faith on a foundation that can never be shaken. However, when we hear the words of the Lord and simply ignore them, we will always find ourselves on unstable ground. Let us surrender to the beauty of being children of God who hear the words of Jesus and put them into practice.

DISCUSSION

In what ways has God spoken His words to us today? How can you put these words into practice in your day-to-day life? How does this keep you from building your life of faith on an unstable foundation?

GOD'S WORD



GOD STATEMENT:
GOD SANCTIFIES
SCRIPTURE:
MATTHEW 7:27

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matthew 7:27)

Life has a way of throwing us curve balls. All of us at some point in our lives will face difficult trials and circumstances of various kinds. These moments have a way of revealing to us where we have placed our hope and our strength. Everyone places hope in someone or something. Trials and difficult circumstances help show us where or in whom we have placed that hope.

Preceding these words in Matthew 7:27 Jesus states, "But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand" (Matthew 7:26) If our obedience (or disobedience) to Jesus is the foundation of our faith, then trials and circumstances are the rain, streams, and winds that reveal how sturdy our foundation truly is. Therefore, obedience to God is essential for the Christian life; it is the means by which God enables us to persevere as followers of Jesus.

It can be easy to say that our faith, hope, and love is in Jesus when life is going well, but it's when life is not going well that our faith is tested. **This is why James writes, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).** James informs us that instead of being afraid or anxious when trials arise, we should have joy! Why? Because trials and difficult circumstances reveal to us where God is giving us opportunity to trust Him more. This is a beautiful invitation and isn't always easy. That is why it is so important to cherish and treasure the words of Jesus and walk in obedience.

DISCUSSION

What kinds of trials and difficult circumstances have you or your family faced in your life? In what ways did God give you opportunities to trust Him through those times? How do these verses shape your view of difficult circumstances and trials?

FAMILY TIME RECIPES



Taco Soup

Loaded with incredible flavor, this easy soup is a go-to on a chilly day. The best part is that you can add everything in the slow cooker or stockpot and spend some quality time with your family. Be ready to enjoy a rich beef taco soup full of warm spices, savory vegetables, and meaty beans.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 ounce ranch salad dressing mix
- 1 1/4 ounce taco seasoning mix
- 2 cans green chilies, diced
- 1 can tomatoes with chilies
- 1 can tomatoes, diced
- 1 can Mexican tomatoes
- 1 can whole kernel corn, drained
- 2 cans pinto beans
- 2 cups onions, diced
- 1/2 cup green olives, sliced
- 1 small can black olives, drained and sliced
- 2 pounds ground beef
- chopped green onions
- cheese
- sour cream or crème fraîche
- corn chips
- jalapeños, optional

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Start by browning the ground beef and onions in a large skillet. Drain the excess fat. Add the ground beef and onions to a slow cooker or stockpot. Add all the canned ingredients and seasonings. Cook on LOW heat for 6 to 8 hours. If you are not using a slow cooker, you can simmer over low heat for 1 hour on the stove top. Stir occasionally. Serve and top with corn chips, sour cream, grated cheese, and jalapeños.

3 in 1 Egg Muffins

Children love it when they can help in the kitchen. This is an easy, healthy, and family-friendly breakfast egg muffin recipe made with ingredients you may already have in your refrigerator.

MAKES 3 TYPES OF EGG MUFFINS:

- Spinach, tomato, and mozzarella
- Bacon and cheddar
- Garlic, green onion, and bell pepper

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

BASE

- 12 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
- salt and pepper, to taste

BACON AND CHEDDAR

- 1/4 cup cooked bacon, chopped
- 1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese

SPINACH, TOMATO, AND MOZZARELLA

- 1/4 cup fresh spinach, roughly chopped
- 8 grape or cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/4 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

GARLIC, GREEN ONION, AND BELL PEPPER

- 1/4 cup green onions
- 1/4 cup diced red bell pepper
- 1 tablespoon fresh chopped parsley
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder or 1/3 teaspoon minced garlic

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly spray a 12-cup capacity muffin tin with nonstick oil spray. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs and onion and season with salt and pepper to taste. Fill each muffin tin halfway with egg mixture. Place each topping combination into 4 egg-filled muffin cups each. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes until set. Let cool slightly, then serve or store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 4 days and reheat when ready to serve.





Tuscan Chicken

Turn your kitchen into a chef's kitchen with this simple and delicious skillet recipe. Bring the flavors of Tuscany to your table.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 12 ounces fettuccine
- 4 slices bacon, chopped
- 1 pound chicken tenders, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 plum tomatoes, chopped
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup baby spinach
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the fettuccine according to package directions; drain. Cook the bacon in a large, cold skillet over medium-high heat. Stir occasionally. Cook until crispy, approximately 8 minutes. Remove and place bacon on a plate. Prepare the chicken by lightly adding salt and pepper. Place chicken in the skillet in a single layer. Let cook, undisturbed, until golden brown on the underside, 2 to 3 minutes. Then, stir occasionally, until cooked through, for about 4 minutes more. Transfer chicken to the plate with the bacon. Reduce the heat to medium and add the garlic, stirring until fragrant for 30 seconds. Add the tomatoes and cream and bring to a simmer. Add the spinach and stir until just wilted. Add the bacon, chicken, fettuccine and Parmesan and toss with tongs until well coated; season to taste with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with basil and serve.

Let's cook
together!



A Firm Foundation

March transitions us from winter to spring. The arrival of spring brings with it a colorful story filled with signs of rebirth and new life unfolding all around us—a story told in the budding trees, the tulips peeking from the soil, and the birds announcing the start of a new day. Spring has a story for those who will listen.

Did you know that Jesus was a great storyteller? He gave amazing illustrations and used parables to teach people about God's kingdom and salvation. A parable is a story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. In Matthew 7:24-27 Jesus shares a very special lesson in the form of a parable. It is a story about two men who were building houses. There was the wise man who built his house on a strong rock and a foolish man that built his house on the sand. Jesus wasn't telling this story to give advice on how to build an actual house. He was sharing this to teach that when we choose to trust and obey Him, we are building our lives on a strong foundation, on the rock. **When we listen and follow the truth of God's Word, Jesus tells us that we will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock.**

To remind yourself of this truth, you can make a demonstration of this parable. **May it remind you that trusting and following Jesus is the firm foundation**

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- shallow 8" x 10" plastic bin or metal pan
- sand
- rocks
- construction paper to make 2 houses
- 2 short wooden sticks or small pieces of plastic straws
- glue or stapler
- pitcher of water

WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Fill one-half side of the bin/pan with rocks.
2. Fill the other half with sand.
3. Draw and cut out two houses from the construction paper.
4. Glue or staple each house on a wooden stick or plastic straw.
5. Stick one house in the sand.
6. Place one house on the rocks and secure it in place with the support of surrounding rocks.
7. Slowly pour the water from the pitcher between the sand and the rocks to demonstrate the parable.

1



2



3



TELEPHONE CHARADES

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- a fun dance move
- a silly and random saying
- a prize or reward

BEFORE YOU START

The point of this game is to realize there are consequences to our words and actions. It also demonstrates the importance of not just being hearers but doers. Each person playing has the opportunity to see an action and hear a saying and either copy it or change it. Let's see who can keep up!

HOW TO PLAY

Have all the players line up, one person behind another all facing one direction. The person in the back, person 1, will come up with a funny dance move and a saying for the other players to copy. To begin, person 1 will tap the person in front of her (person two) on the shoulder. Person two will turn around to face person one. Then, person one will whisper the saying in the ear of the person facing her (person two) and then do the dance move. Once person one has relayed the saying, person two will turn back around and tap person three on the shoulder. Person three will turn to face person two, who will

demonstrate the dance move and whisper the saying in person three's ear. Person three will then repeat with the person in front of him. This will repeat until the dance move and saying has traveled all the way up the line as players try to remember and relay both components to the next person. If the last person in the lineup does the exact same dance move and says the correct saying, everyone gets a reward! But if the last person gets the move and/or saying wrong, the whole group gets a consequence. One person in charge (parent or leader) can create the reward and consequence. The reward can be a family ice cream party and a consequence can be everyone has to do 10 push-ups each. Get creative and have fun!

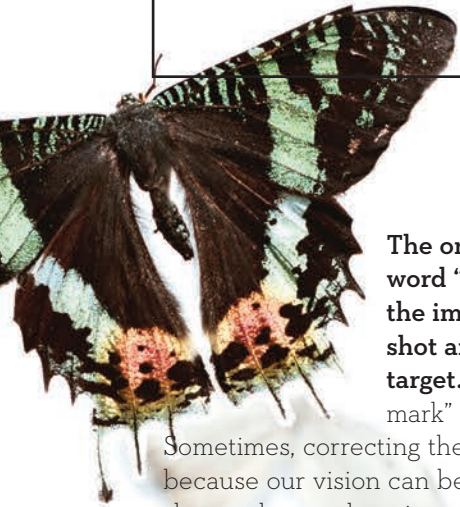
This is a fun way to show the importance of watching and listening. Sometimes when we read the Bible or come to church, we just hear the words of the pastor, but do we actually listen, hear, and then obey what the Scriptures say? If you were to just watch someone do the dance move, you would not be able to repeat it unless you were intentionally watching. The reward or consequence helps us realize that our words and actions matter and result in good or bad consequences.

by RuthAnn Massey, Student Ministry Administrator, New Life North



TARGET PRACTICE

Read John 8:1-11.



The original translation of the word “sin” is meant to evoke the image of an archer who has shot an arrow and missed the target. When we sin, we “miss the mark” that was intended for us.

Sometimes, correcting these errors can be difficult because our vision can be impaired by things like shame, the condemning voices of others, or our fear of never being good enough. **Thankfully, we have a great example of what righteous course correction can look like.** In John 8:1-11, we see Jesus address a woman in the midst of her sin. The voice of the Pharisees’ condemnation seemed to be heavy on the woman. That was until Jesus spoke.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger. When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:6-11)

Jesus met the woman in her sin with compassion and truth, calling her to a higher standard. This is how He meets us too. And this is how we can meet others. It’s as if Jesus grabs another arrow, gently places it in our hands, and directs us, “Straighten your elbow, dear child. Deep breath. Try again.”



REFLECTION

For Parents

- Read the passage again. Imagine yourself in the place of the woman. You have been caught in your sin, but Jesus comes to you to speak truth and freedom over you.
- Once you have read the Scripture from this perspective, write a letter of thanks to the Lord for His forgiveness and kindness that leads to repentance.

For Kids

- Draw a target on a large piece of paper. Then, write the things you have done recently that have “missed the mark” around the target.
- Spend a moment with the Lord, asking forgiveness for these things.
- Read Hebrews 8:12. Then pray this prayer: Thank You, Lord, for forgiving me for the ways I’ve missed the mark. Thank you for sending Jesus to take my place. Would You, by Your Spirit, help me in the future to choose life, not sin.

by Shayleen Smith, Children’s Director, New Life East



Serving Undercover

Read Matthew 6:1-4.

Have you ever felt tempted to say yes to a serving opportunity because it was high-profile and you knew you'd get a lot of kudos for doing it? Let's face it, it's nice to work hard, give our all, and have our labors be recognized and appreciated. That's fair. Everyone has felt that way from time to time. But God calls us

to something more. He challenges us to serve with a different focus—**to serve without the hope or intention of being noticed by anyone, anyone that is but Him.** We serve a good God who sees even when others might not see our good works. We are free to serve with all that we are with an audience of one.

This month consider practicing serving “undercover.” Ask God for opportunities to bless and serve others without anyone but Him knowing. Try to find opportunities that can be done anonymously and/or those that might not seem to be the most fun—the jobs no one else wants to do.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES

1. Shoveling neighborhood driveways and sidewalks without being asked (perhaps before the neighbors wake up).
2. Choosing the most undesirable chores in the house: cleaning a bathroom, picking up dog poop in the backyard, taking out the trash, or cleaning your brother or sister's room for them without them knowing.
3. Picking up trash at your neighborhood park (make sure to wear gloves).
4. Writing anonymous notes of encouragement or a blessing for kids and staff at your school (or coworkers).

CREATE WAYS TO MAKE THESE TASKS FUN

- Invite others to help (such as siblings secretly surprising parents or a group of your friends quietly helping a neighbor who may be ill or physically unable to do his or her own chores).
- If doing these as a family or group of friends, make it a competition (who can finish first).

Remember to thank God for the opportunities He gives you. Continue to make undercover serving a part of how you put God on display each day!

by Gabe McDaniels, Family Ministries Elementary Volunteer, New Life North

You are
seen!

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

PSALM 27:1; MATTHEW 21:42-44

(Child's name), may you know that Jesus delights in you. May you find hope in Jesus, your rock and cornerstone. May you know that you are strong because of who Jesus is within you, and may you be a light to others shining His light in the darkness.

WEEK 2

PSALM 46:1-5; DEUTERONOMY 31:6

(Child's name), may you give grace to others just as God has given grace to you. May you find comfort in our loving God who directs your steps. May you know that with each step you take in life, God is walking with you, and He is for you.

WEEK 3

PSALM 139:13-16; MATTHEW 7:24

(Child's name), may you know that the God of the universe sees you, cares about you, and is crazy about you. Trust in Him. He will lead your steps in all wisdom and understanding. Call upon His name and He will answer.

WEEK 4

PSALM 23; ISAIAH 58:11

(Child's name), may you know that God is present. May you be aware of His presence as He leads you beside still waters and restores your soul. May you be strengthened by His steadfast love, knowing He will never leave you. May you be like a well-watered garden and a spring whose waters never fail.

by Catherine Andersen, Associate High School Director, New Life North, and Annie Cribbs, Family Care Administrative Assistant, New Life North



Journal

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise

[illegible]

IDEAS | SUPPLIES | NOTES

**Above all,
love
each other deeply,
because**

**love
covers over
a multitude
of sins.**

1 Peter 4:8



GOD'S WORD



GOD STATEMENT:
GOD HEARS US
SCRIPTURE:
1 PETER 4:7-8

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:7-8)

Being “alert” is more than just being awake; it’s being aware, observant, and vigilant, especially regarding danger or difficulty. A “sober mind” is serious, studious, and characterized by soundness of thought and a lack of excess. To be alert and sober minded so that we can pray boils down to studying, observing, and knowing who God is and what He is like. As we see God’s heart more clearly, we can more rightly pray about the things that are important to us.

If we pray without increasingly knowing, believing, and experiencing God, we can find ourselves disappointed and disillusioned by our wrong expectations, perceptions, and assumptions about Him and what He should do to answer to our prayers. To correctly examine the difficult or dangerous circumstances or world we live in can cause us to be afraid or hopeless, but when we look at it through the lens of who God really is, we can pray with confidence, knowing He loves us, hears us, and will answer perfectly. **Psalm 116:1-2 says, “I love the Lord because He hears my prayers and answers them. Because he bends down and listens, I will pray as long as I breathe!” (TLB).**

1 Peter 5:8 warns, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” Scripture is urging us again to studiously and vigilantly be aware of the enemy’s plan to deceive or trap us. **This doesn’t mean we can never be silly or have a good time, but we do want to set our focus on the Lord and be clear minded and obedient in all circumstances.** We can trust God; He hears us and moves on our behalf when we pray.

DISCUSSION

What is one situation you are praying about? Who is God in that situation? Why will it help to be alert and sober minded as you pray?

by LaJean Hertel, Family Care Volunteer Director, New Life North

GOD'S WORD



GOD STATEMENT:
GOD IS WELCOMING
SCRIPTURE:
1 PETER 4:9

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. (1 Peter 4:9)

The Oxford dictionary defines hospitality as “the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.” The Bible is filled with instructions on how to treat others with love, so why this emphasis on hospitality?

From a biblical perspective, hospitality is treating strangers as friends and offering both an arms-wide-open welcome at our table. While the context of the 1 Peter 4:9 passage referred to Christians welcoming travelers into their homes, hospitality extends beyond our table and our homes. God wants us to care for others by inviting them into our lives and our hearts. **First Thessalonians 2:8 says, “We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become so dear to us” (CSB).**

The world can be a very inhospitable place. Oftentimes our natural tendency is to congregate with those who think and act like we do, and we can, in turn, exclude or ignore those who are different or with whom we don’t agree. Even though many of us know the pain of being rejected, we may not readily choose to include those outside our circle.

Let’s consider this: “How would you treat the presence of Christ in your midst? Of course, He is God and would be revered as holy, but to begin to think about that image of God in everyone He has created is a sobering thought” (*Spiritual Parenting*, page 172). Our response then is this: to be intentional to welcome the stranger, include the outsider, and forge friendships with those who are lonely, different, or unpopular—and do so with a joyful spirit, no grumbling. In this we share the love of God with others, showing them due respect as people created in His image.

DISCUSSION

What does it mean to share our lives with others? What is one practical thing you can do to include or offer hospitality to someone you know who is lonely, outcast, or different?

GOD'S WORD



GOD STATEMENT:
GOD IS GRACIOUS
SCRIPTURE:
1 PETER 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10)

God has given gifts to all of us. In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Paul lists spiritual gifts God gives through the Holy Spirit. We have been given gifts of the Spirit and practical gifts. Spiritual gifts are things that flow directly from the Holy Spirit within us while practical gifts are either the material possessions God has given to us or certain abilities He put inside of us from the time we were born.

What does this have to do with the love and grace of God? Take a look at Matthew 7:9, 11: "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? [...] If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" God gives us good things even though we don't always deserve them. That's love! Our response, then, can be to use these gifts to display God's love and grace to those around us.

What kind of gifts do you have at your disposal? Do you have a warm home? Food on your table? Consider inviting someone over for dinner who doesn't have those things. Do you have a gift for drawing or writing? Make someone an encouraging note. Do you have a gift for speaking? Tell someone about the love of Jesus! You may be thinking, "That is so much easier said than done." For me, there are some things that are easier than others. Sometimes all we need is to put ourselves in situations where we are using these gifts to serve God and others in ways we had previously been too afraid to try. You may be surprised by what you experience.

DISCUSSION

How can you, as a family, show the love and grace of God to those in need this month? How can each of you, individually, use your gifts to share God's love?

by Hayley Valdois, Student Ministries Volunteer and Worship Leader, New Life North

GOD'S WORD



GOD STATEMENT:
GOD ENTRUSTS
SCRIPTURE:
1 PETER 4:11

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)

What a mighty statement Peter makes in this

Scripture! We should speak "as one who speaks the very words of God." Peter is clearly laying out that our assignment, no matter our age, is to represent Jesus to everyone we interact with. God is such a gracious Father that He would entrust us to bear His image in what we say and in what we do.

My parents greatly cared about the way I respected my elders. My mom and dad did a beautiful job in teaching me that loving and respecting people was about much more than being a "good person." **From a young age, my parents wanted me to understand that each time we speak with words of grace and truth, we are demonstrating the character of God to those around us.** Whether it's giving a word of encouragement or complimenting strengths we see in others, Christ is praised in that moment. Whenever you and I intentionally show our respect to people our age, younger, or older, we are representing Christ. It can be as simple as making eye contact during a conversation or going out of our way to hold the door open for someone. Our day-to-day lives and conversations greatly change when we recognize that in every moment we have an opportunity to glorify God, who has entrusted us to represent Him.

So may you know that you bear God's image. As an image bearer of God who is rich in compassion and abounding in love, may you be filled with the Holy Spirit so you can show Christlike love and respect to everyone around you. I pray your life is a beautiful demonstration of our heavenly Father who has graciously entrusted us to be His ambassadors for the rest of our days.

DISCUSSION

How does Jesus show love towards you? How can you follow Jesus' example of love and respect to those around you?

by Victor Mendoza, Student Ministries Worship Leader, New Life North

FAMILY TIME RECIPES



Easy Creamy Herb Chicken

With simple ingredients such as garlic, dried thyme, and rosemary you will make juicy, tender chicken breasts simmered in a flavorful and creamy herb sauce that will only take minutes.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 4 chicken breasts (pounded 1/2-inch thin)
- 2 teaspoons each onion powder and garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon fresh chopped parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon each dried thyme and dried rosemary
- salt and pepper, to taste
- minced garlic)
- 1 teaspoon fresh chopped parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon each dried thyme and dried rosemary
- 1 cup milk (or cream)
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch mixed with 1 tablespoon water until smooth

FOR THE SAUCE

- 4 cloves garlic, minced (or 1 tablespoon

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Coat chicken breasts with onion and garlic powders and herbs. Season generously with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large pan or skillet over medium-high heat and cook chicken breasts until opaque and no longer pink inside (about 5 minutes each side, depending on thickness). Transfer to a plate; set aside. To the same pan or skillet, heat another 2 teaspoons of olive oil and sauté garlic, parsley, thyme, and rosemary for about 1 minute or until fragrant. Stir in milk (or cream); season with salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil; add the cornstarch mixture to the center of the pan and stir quickly until sauce is slightly thickened. Reduce heat and simmer gently for another minute. Return chicken to the skillet. Sprinkle with extra herbs if desired and serve.

Petite Cheesecakes

Have fun creating mini Easter cheesecakes! Colorful and fun, these homemade cheesecakes are perfect for Easter. Decorate with your kids and family. Top with speckled chocolate Easter eggs and enjoy!



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 cup crushed Arnott's Nice biscuits
- 1 cup melted butter
- 2 cups cream cheese
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup cream
- 1/2 cup baker's sugar (super-fine sugar)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 handful shredded coconut
- 1 package speckled chocolate eggs

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a 12-hole muffin tray with paper muffin liners (kids can help). In a food processor, blitz biscuits to form a fine crumb. Transfer to a bowl, add melted butter, and mix to combine. Divide mixture evenly between muffin tins and use the back of a spoon to press down firmly to smooth the tops. Add cream cheese to the food processor. Process cream cheese for 1 to 2 minutes until smooth. Add eggs, cream, sugar, and vanilla and process to combine. Pour over biscuit bases to fill muffin liners. Bake for 20 minutes, turning trays halfway until just cooked. Turn off the oven, leave the door ajar, and allow to cool. Transfer trays to the fridge to cool completely. To serve, carefully remove paper liners and place cheesecakes on a serving platter. Invite your family to top with a sprinkling of shredded coconut and speckled eggs.

Salty Sweet Crunchy Treats

These Easter cookies are fun and easy to make. Use candy eggs to decorate with family!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, room temperature
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup white chocolate chips, plus more for garnish
- 2 teaspoons pastel sprinkles, plus more for garnish
- 1/3 cup crushed potato chips, plus more for garnish
- 1/3 cup crushed pretzels, plus more for garnish
- 1/4 cup chopped mini candy eggs, for garnish

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper. In a large bowl, cream together butter and sugar until light and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes. Beat in egg and vanilla. In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. Add dry ingredients to wet and mix until ingredients are completely incorporated. Gently fold in white chocolate chips, sprinkles, potato chips, and pretzels. Scoop heaping tablespoon-sized balls of dough and gently flatten onto cookie sheet, spaced about 1 inch apart. Press in the candy eggs and extra mix-ins. Bake until golden, 10 to 12 minutes. Let cookies cool slightly on baking sheet before placing on the cooling rack.



Mediterranean Chard Salad

This salad celebrates springtime, when fresh new vegetables begin to show up at the market. Nothing tastes better than the first few springtime salads

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 4-6 cups shredded baby chard
- 1 thinly sliced red pepper
- 4 sliced radishes or carrots
- 1/2 sliced English cucumber
- 6 cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 sliced avocado
- 1 cup chopped Italian parsley (or substitute half cilantro, basil, or mint)
- 1/4 cup toasted pepitas (or slivered almonds)
- 1/4 cup kalamata olives, optional
- 1 cup cooked chickpeas, optional
- sprouts, optional
- crumbled goat cheese or feta, optional

LEMONY DRESSING

- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
- 1-2 finely grated garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Place all the salad ingredients in a large bowl, either separating ingredients into small piles over the greens or toss all. Whisk dressing ingredients together in a small bowl. Dress the salad and toss; you may not need all the dressing. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with nuts or seeds and optional crumbled cheese and sprouts. Serve immediately and enjoy!

WATERDROPS

My kids love to craft! A few months ago, while I was at work, my son created suncatchers and hung them in the window. When I got home, he was so excited to show me his creations. When I asked him to tell me more, he explained how the sun reflects through the suncatcher and spreads the light. That conversation made me think about God's love for us. The Father's love shines through us and spreads light to those around us. When we are showing others kindness, extending grace, or serving those around us, we are showing God's love.

Create the following craft and share with your kids about how God's love shines through us.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- clear protector sheets
- colored tissue paper
- cardboard
- Mod Podge
- sponge brush
- double-sided tape



WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Cut out small squares from the tissue paper (about 1" x 1").
2. Create a waterdrop-shaped template by drawing a waterdrop on cardboard and cutting it out.
3. Cover your plastic sheet in Mod Podge with your sponge brush.
4. Press tissue paper squares on top of Mod Podge.
5. Use your sponge brush to apply more Mod Podge on top of the tissue paper.
6. Once the Mod Podge has dried, gently peel back the plastic sheet.
7. Use your waterdrop template to cut a heart from the decoupage.
8. Apply the double-sided tape and hang in your window.

by Shannon Baer, Director of Operations and Events, Family Ministry, New Life North

ACT OF Love EASTER EGG HUNT

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 3 plastic Easter eggs per person
- 1 small piece of paper per egg
- pen or pencil
- candy
- bin to hold the eggs

BEFORE YOU START

This game is designed to help us consider others before ourselves. Incorporate fun with Easter eggs as you practice showing love and respect to others.

HOW TO PLAY

First, each person should select three eggs, three pieces of paper, and a pen or pencil. On the papers, write one way you can love the person who receives the egg, then sign your name on the paper.

Here are some ideas:

- I will do the dishes
- I will clean your room
- I will do your chores for the day
- I will give a word of encouragement
- I will give you a gift
- I will make you laugh
- I will give you a hug
- I will speak a blessing over you

Once you have written on the paper, put it inside the plastic egg and place each egg in the bin. Feel free to add other fun prizes or candy to the eggs. Then hide the eggs. Once all of the eggs are hidden, send the players on an Easter egg hunt. **Open your eggs and redeem the act of love inside.** Repeat the game as long as eggs and attention allows.

As a family, discuss ways you can bless others by being intentional to love and care for one another. Explain how God loves us and has shown us how to love one another through the life and example of Jesus. **When we love each other, people get to see Jesus' love through us!**

by Rachel Guttman, Kids Ministry Director, New Life Midtown





LOVE FIRST

Jesus is the perfect model of how to love others.

In the Bible, we find story after story of how Jesus went out of His way to feed, heal, and care for those around Him. When the world labeled others as outcasts, Jesus welcomed them with open arms. He shows us that regardless of anyone's age, status, or tradition, we are all worthy of love and respect.

The unique way Jesus lived should cause us to stop and reflect on our own lives. We are called to show the world the love Jesus has given to us. This can be difficult when we are confronted with people who are rude, have different values than we do, or question our beliefs. At times, our children can even challenge us in these ways, which can be frustrating. But how do we choose to treat people—even the difficult ones—with both love and respect? We must see everyone in the image of God, as a beloved child of the King of Heaven who deserves love and respect simply because God created him or her.

Romans 12:10 says, "Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."

AS A FAMILY, REFLECT ON THESE QUESTIONS:

- How can I put others above myself?
- Are there ways that I haven't been loving or respectful?

Share your thoughts and ideas of ways each person can put others before himself in daily life. You may choose to make a list to post and discuss throughout the week at dinner. Take a few minutes to pray together for these opportunities.

*by Lauren Sayers, Families Operations and Events
Coordinator, New Life North*

SERVE

Easter Invitations

Matthew 20:28 says, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Easter is a time of remembering and celebrating. We remember that God gave His Son as the suffering servant who took our place on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin. We celebrate that God’s Spirit raised Jesus to life to forever be the conqueror over sin and death.

Easter is a great opportunity to invite others into this season of remembering and celebrating by serving them.

- **Read 1 Peter 4:9-11.** Take time as a family to ask God to show you the gifts He has given you. Make a list of these gifts. Talk about ways you can use your gifts to serve others this month. Here are some ideas to help get you started.
- **Create a special Easter basket** to deliver to a neighbor or someone in a senior care home. Bake some sugar cookies, add some chocolates, create a card with a special Bible verse, and include some soft Easter-themed socks and a small decorative cross from a dollar store.
- **Invite someone to church with you.** Easter is a perfect time for someone who may not be familiar with church to hear about Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- **Ask a family to share Easter lunch or dinner at your home.** Sharing a meal with others around your table is a great way to create an environment of community and make others feel like they belong.
- **Donate food to your church or local food pantry.**

May you find joy in offering hospitality and serving others this Easter!

by Lauren Akridge, Family Ministries Support Staff and Elementary Teacher, New Life North





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

HEBREWS 10:22; ROMANS 8:31-39

(Child's name), may you know that God is love and nothing can separate you from His love. May you realize that He longs to hear from you and draw you close to Himself. May you love others deeply as you receive God's deep love for you.

WEEK 2

1 PETER 4:7-11

(Child's name), may you know that God is a friend and trusted companion. May you trust and rest in His strength. May you embrace the gifts He has given you and use them to further His kingdom and deepen your love toward others.

WEEK 3

JOHN 7:38; ISAIAH 58:11

(Child's name), may you know that God's love is abundant. May your life be filled to overflowing with the love and goodness of the Lord, pouring out onto those around you. May you know that He desires to give you abundant life through Himself. May you receive His Spirit so His springs of living water flow from within you.

WEEK 4

GENESIS 1:27

(Child's name), may you know that you bear the image of God. God embodies perfect love, wisdom, and goodness. May you know that through the power of the Holy Spirit, you carry the same traits and by living them out, you show others the love of God. May you know that people will know God by the way you love them and one another. Go from here in confidence that you reflect the image of God!

by Annie Cribbs, Family Care Administrative Assistant, New Life North; and Catherine Andersen, Associate High School Director, New Life North

Journal

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise

RESOURCES & SUPPORT



RESOURCES AND SUPPORT KEEPING UP WITH YOUR KIDS

GET Sleepy

When my husband and I first became parents, we read all the parenting books and tips about establishing a bedtime for newborns—each complete with suggestions for baths, songs, books, snuggles, feedings, and then finally sleep. As our kids have gotten older, the routines have simplified. At the end of the day, sometimes all our kids get is a quick, “Guys! It is time for jammies, teeth, and bed! It’s late!”

As adults we need to feel safe to go to bed peacefully. So, we lock our doors, leave the outside lights on, and employ any other security devices we deem necessary to help us feel secure.

Our kids need that too, not with lights and locks but with our words and interactions with them.

HERE ARE FIVE WAYS TO HELP CREATE PEACEFUL BEDTIME HABITS FOR KIDS.

1. **Give your kids a chance to settle down and unwind.** Allow them the time and space to decompress from the day. Encourage them to read or do something quiet before bed. No matter how old your child is, reading to him is always a beautiful thing. For older kids who may not be big readers, consider letting them color or journal.
2. **Slow down together.** Some kids need to talk through their day with you. Chances are that if they start talking to you at bedtime, the conversation that follows will be a beautiful glimpse into their inner thoughts and feelings.
3. **You’ve heard it before: “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26).** If you blew it with your children during the day and haven’t fixed it, now is the time. Tuck them in and confess your mistakes to them. Seek forgiveness. Let your child know you messed up. Imagine trying to fall asleep with the weight that comes from a reprimand or disagreement with a parent. Now imagine the weight of that being lifted with that parent reminding you of your value and worth.
4. **Say “I love you.” Every night.** I like to whisper to each of my kids this series of questions: “Did you know that you are my favorite [age]-year-old in the whole wide world? Did you know that you are one of the best gifts God has given me? Did you know that there’s no one else I love the way I love you? Did you know that I will always love you, no matter what?” This matters as much to my three-year-old as it does to my preteen. Find a way to fill your child’s cup, especially if she had a rough day or the two of you had a rough day together.
5. **Pray.** Pray specifically for your child by name. Pray for who he is now and who God is shaping him to be. Pray thanksgiving for your child and the things that bring him joy. Model that it’s okay to bring everything before God, be it a sick fish, an upcoming test, or a broken heart. Invite God into your relationship with your child, and thank Him for the privilege of being your child’s parent. You may also choose to pray Scripture over your children (for example, Numbers 6:24-26).

We have our kids in our homes for a short 18 years. The days can be long, and we can be anxious for a break and rush getting these babies to bed, but if we slow it all down and take a few minutes to send them to a place of rest with full hearts, full cups, and the peace of knowing they are loved and safe, we create the safety they need to rest well.

LISTENING EARS

I am known as “Kenna” to the ever-increasing number of children in my friend group, and it is one of my favorite titles. I love seeing the world through the eyes of the littles and getting to watch as they experience things for the first time. Just a few weeks ago, my friend’s son experienced the joy of eating a cream puff for the first time. The look on his face was priceless, and cream puffs will now be known as “ice cream cookie donuts.” If you have the pleasure of having a preschooler or kindergartener in your life, in any capacity, you have most likely been on the receiving end of some extremely silly stories, phrases, badly told jokes, and an endless stream of questions, some of which have answers and some of which don’t.

Young children are filled with awe and wonder when it comes to just about everything. **They have big imaginations and even bigger feelings.** In learning how to communicate with the children in my ministry as well as those who are in my everyday life, I came across a quote that changed the way I listen and engage in conversation with these precious children: “Listen earnestly to anything [your children] want to tell you, no matter what. If you don’t listen eagerly to the little stuff when they are little, they won’t tell you the big stuff when they are big, because to them all of it has always been big stuff” (Catherine M. Wallace).

So, what do we do to be people these children can tell the big stuff to now and in the future? Here are some things I have learned and can see the benefit of in my own relationships:

- Actively listen when kids are telling a story or sharing about their day. Asking questions and commenting on the things they share are a couple of ways to show kids you are engaged.
- Be silly with them. Play their games; turn on music and have dance parties. Tell bad jokes and engage in all the silliness that comes with being a preschooler.
- Ask questions that help inspire wonder and curiosity. Open-ended questions allow young children to use their big imaginations.
- Allow time and space for kids to ask you questions.

I am beginning to see the fruit of years of what seemed like unimportant conversations about the big red slide at the park, silly questions, and hours of knock-knock jokes. Children who were once in my preschool classes are now in elementary school and junior high. They update me on life and share with honesty and vulnerability. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I have become someone they feel deserving of the “big stuff.” **May this be our goal with the preschoolers and kindergarteners the Lord has entrusted to each of us—both in our homes and in the church.**

by Kendra Baker, Pre-K/K Discipleship Coordinator, New Life North

DEVELOPMENTALLY

THREE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN:

- Can copy adults and friends
- Are able to name most familiar things

FOUR-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN:

- Enjoy doing new things
- Talk about what they like and what they are interested in
- Tell stories

FIVE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN:

- More likely to agree with rules
- Want to please friends, and be like friends

Between the ages of three to five years of age, kids are in the stage where they learn to imagine, broaden skills through play, and learn to engage and participate with others. Young children are also learning to relate to peers. **Most of their social and emotional growth occurs in their relationship with caregivers.**

The ways we care for, guide, and encourage children are all part of their spiritual formation.

When we model for them someone who is trustworthy, we are showing them that God is trustworthy. When we listen to them (thoughts, feelings, and all they want to share), we model to them a God who does the same.

A Rainy Day with Forest Friends

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

Parents, this is a story about how love and friendship refresh. Read this to your children and use the questions provided at the end of the story for further conversation.

Speckles hops through the forest, luxuriating in the falling rain and cloudy skies. Rain is a frog’s favorite thing in the world! Every time the weather changes from sunshine to thunderstorms and rain, Speckles makes sure to leap around and take full advantage of his favorite weather.

“I should find my friends so we can enjoy this weather together!” he says to himself. And with his decision made, he hops off in the direction of his closest friend, Fawna.

As he hops along in the rain, he sings a little tune about how the rain washes away all that is old and dirty and makes things new. And his loud, croaking singing draws attention from Fawna, a hedgehog who lies not too far off his chosen path.

“Hello, Fawna! Want to come and play with me in the rain?”

Fawna peeps her head out from under the bushes and just as quickly ducks back inside. “No thanks! I’ve eaten already and have no reason to leave my cozy bush. We can play another day.”

Hearing his friend’s distaste, he hops into the bush and laughs. “But it’s wonderful and beautiful and it’s fun to hop in puddles and play in the mud!”

“Speckles,” Fawna says, burrowing deeper under the leaves, “I am not in the mood, nor do I want to get wet and muddy. We can play another day—a day when it isn’t raining!”

The frog stares in disbelief at his woodland friend. “Are you saying you don’t like the rain?”

Fawna laughs. “Not as much as you, my friend. Why don’t you see if Birch wants to play?”

Speckles thinks about his woodpecker friend, Birch. He remembers quite a few times that Birch flew around in the rain. That must mean he likes it. Speckles is so excited that he hops up and down. “Yes, Fawna! I’m sure Birch will enjoy playing with me in the perfect, wonderful, beautiful rain.”

Speckles turns and hops toward Birch’s home set up high in a tree. **Good thing frogs are good at climbing trees.** As he ascends the tree, he calls out his friend’s name.

“Birch!” he calls as he crawls up the tree. “Birch! Come out to play! The rain is wonderful.”

Speckles can’t frown, but if he could, he would frown as he comes to an empty hole in the tree—Birch isn’t there. Speckles saddens as he climbs back down the tree and sits in a normally exciting puddle. All he wants is a friend to play with in the rain.

He thinks back to Fawna’s dislike of the rain. How can anyone not like the rain? It is perfect. It waters and refreshes the earth, it washes away anything bad, and it helps things grow. Speckles is so lost in his thoughts that he doesn’t see Whiskers come up behind him. “Why do you look sad, Speckles?” Whiskers asks, making the frog leap three inches in the air.

“You startled me, Whiskers!” Speckles gasps as he turns to his longtime friend. “You shouldn’t scurry around like that.”

Whiskers chuckles and replies, “I’m a mouse. It’s in my nature to scurry. But tell me, my frog friend, why are you so sad?”

Speckles seems to melt a little, looking very much like the puddle he is sitting in. “None of my friends will come and play with me in the rain. It’s my favorite thing in the whole world! But Fawna doesn’t enjoy the rain. And Birch isn’t home. I’m alone.”

“I’ll play with you,” the mouse responds happily.

The frog gives him a skeptical look. “Really? You don’t mind getting soaked in the rain?”

The mouse shakes himself out and huffs, “I was looking for dinner, but I have time to play. Even if I didn’t like the rain, I’d play with you because you are my friend.”

“Really?” Speckles hops up and down with pure excitement.

Whiskers gives a huge grin. “Let’s jump in the puddles.”

And the two hop down the trail as the rain refreshes the forest around them—and a longtime friendship.

QUESTIONS

1. What’s your favorite rain-time activity?
2. Who is your best friend?
3. How can you refresh your friend? Or how can you show love to your friend?

by Olivia Bennett, Family Ministry Team New Life North

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT
STUDENTS

God's Grace Is Far Greater Than April Showers



Who knew water could demand such respect? I stood at the base of the scaffold looking up, shielding my eyes from the runaway drops that screamed down from the lofty cliffs above me. My chest shook at Niagara's thunderous crashing, and the timbers beneath me quaked due to the sheer volume of water that hurled itself over the cliff's edge some 200 feet above. Despite being drawn closer to the edge of the observation deck, close enough to touch the torrent of H₂O before me, I didn't dare place my hand under its streams for fear of losing it altogether. I loved how The Falls enveloped me—its swirling mist coming to rest on my dry Colorado skin, its fresh aroma inviting my lungs to expand past their regular rhythms, its rumbling roar pulling me into a world of a singular sound, and its overwhelming magnitude welcoming me to accept feeling small. At the same time, the sense of danger I felt from being so close made my heart skip with vibrant feelings of being fully alive. If water can demand such respect and evoke such love for life in the body, how much more ought God's lavish falls of grace demand respect and evoke love within the soul?

Psalm 42 cries out of such lavish grace saying, "Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life" (vv. 7-8). This psalm declares that God's waterfalls crash over the saint at a dangerously lavish rate—the old self, when caught under such a torrent, will inevitably die, but in dying there is new life. This divine waterfall's rumbling roar drowns out all other voices but the Father's, its aroma bids the saint to breathe deeply of the wind of the Spirit, and the sheer volume of grace that pours over the cliff of heaven invites the saint to remember just how big a God we have. His grace covers our past transgressions, erases our present doubts, and guarantees us strength to keep the faith long into the future. Such an outpouring of grace *is the love of God* to us.

With such a picture in mind, we do not need to have a scarcity mindset when lavishing others with the love of God. In this life, you will commit a multitude of sins and have a multitude of sins committed against you, and if we do not have the right understanding of how these sins are covered, we will withhold love from others because we believe there is only so much to wash over us. **The beauty of the gospel is that God's love is not a small rain shower once a day but a gushing waterfall that never ceases.** So when we give others the love of God, we are not depleting our own supply but merely redirecting the love that has washed over us. May you experience the divine Niagara Falls of God's love this spring season so you can help others do the same.

NOW WHAT? SPEND SOME TIME THINKING THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS:

1. What sin in your life have you believed God's grace is not lavish or powerful enough to wash over? First allow God to wash you clean, and then confess to a trusted faith mentor so you can continue to walk in God's empowering grace.
2. What is an act of lavish love or grace that you have been holding back from doing for someone else? How does this view of God's grace and love embolden you to do such an act?

by Chase Windebank, Student Ministries Director, Student Leadership, Family Ministries, New Life North

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT GRANDPARENTING

A STRONG TRIAD

In the summer of 2021, my husband and I became oh-so-proud grandparents of our fourth grandchild. There was something about the arrival of this precious little one that made us stop and truly ponder our God-given role in the lives of these four little ladies.

Although I have not taken a scientific poll, I would imagine that most grandparents are asked to do two main things: 1) babysit, and 2) reinforce (rather than undermine) the parents' teaching. While both of the above are needed and noble, I believe there is so much more!

My experience as the grandmother has taught me that our first responsibility as grandparents is to coach our adult children as they learn how to parent. What do good coaches do? Coaches stay on the sidelines and encourage those who are playing the game. Coaches can help rookies improve because they now know a lot more than they did when they were players themselves. Good coaches suggest what players can do without demanding or expecting perfect compliance. Our main job is to be a support, help, backup, guide, fellow-traveler, prayer partner, and an encourager for our children while they raise up their children.

Our children's first responsibility is instructing their daughters. It's crucial that my husband and I respect that role. It is also crucial that wise parents do not abdicate their instructing responsibility to the grandparents. However, parents may choose to welcome appropriate coaching and empower the grandparents to help them learn how to be good fathers and mothers. Too many times, I have seen and/or heard about grandparents overstepping or undermining the parents, which causes broken trust and hurt feelings—not to mention the possible confusion this causes the grandchildren.

Finally, grandparents have a special responsibility to help our grandchildren grow up well. As I see it, grandparents are to model appropriate behavior for their grandchildren. This modeling teaches by demonstrating instead of lecturing or testing. Modeling means that grandparents have to be on their toes at all times because children learn just as much or more by watching as being taught directly. My husband and I have had the privilege of modeling a multitude of things: manners; patience; completing a task; taking responsibility for a mess that was made; praying at meals, at bedtime, and for others; being a part of a faith community; sincerely apologizing; listening generously; etc.

Ideally, a three-generation unit is built around three different but very complementary relationships. Life is seldom, if ever, ideal, and many families have damage to mitigate due to death, disability, deployment, dysfunction, and divorce. **Even in these stressful situations, the grandparents' and parents' knowledge of these roles and responsibilities can help a family adapt and survive.**

God's gift of Bella, Milan, Cora, and ViviAnne has inspired my husband and I to build a multigenerational family characterized by love, respect, communication, and mutual support. **The key is creating a strong "triad" consisting of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren bound together by God's perfect love.** With the Holy Spirit acting as the ultimate Counselor, we are trusting that the benefits endure for generations!

Resource: *A Guide to Great Grandparenting.* Paul and Diana Miller. Christian Grandparenting Network.

by Patti Fenton, Volunteer Ministry Leader, New Life North





Lost and Found

When our youngest was five years old, she got lost at the mall. It was the most terrified my husband and I have ever been as parents. Within seconds, our panic was at an all-time high. Moms around us heard us screaming her name and an army of women dispersed throughout the building searching for my child. Security guards were asking me, "What is she wearing?" and fear was washing over me.

I'll never forget the image of my husband bursting through the glass doors with Selah in his arms and the sound of relief that came from all the moms when we found her. She had been outside the whole time. She had gotten separated from her dad and walked through the wrong doors and couldn't find her way back to us.

WE ALL GET A LITTLE LOST. THANK YOU, JESUS, FOR COMING TO OUR RESCUE.

The whole time we were looking for her, I kept hearing the Lord say, "I can see her. It's okay." She had simply walked through the wrong door.

I think we're a lot alike, my youngest and I. How many times have I thought I knew exactly where I was going only to find myself surrounded by strangers and chaos? Lost. Confused. Scared. Doubting. Questioning. Jumping up and down just trying to get a glimpse of anything or anyone familiar. Was anyone looking for me?

The answer is yes. God is always looking out for you. We're not lost girls and boys who end up in Neverland separated forever from our Father. We all get off course, we all lose our way and we don't have to hide in embarrassment or shame. He welcomes us home with open arms no matter how long we've been gone or how far we've run. Even when we feel the furthest from His hand, His eyes have never left our path. His grace is always with us. **And the Lord, His gaze always upon us, dispatches His angel army with the passion of ten thousand moms looking for one of their own, and they don't stop until we're back in His arms.**

When we found Selah, I didn't yell at her or demand to know why she didn't follow closer behind. I didn't punish her and make her feel bad for causing us to worry. Instead, I fell to my knees and held on to her for what felt like an eternity, thanking Jesus that she was okay. If I respond to my human child this way, imagine how much more God feels about us. He will leave the 99 to find the one.

And it's okay if we're the one.

We all wander off course from time to time.

He doesn't shame us or scold us. He celebrates our return because what was lost has been found. What could have been dead has been found alive!

Even when I've been the most lost, He still calls me daughter. He still calls you son.

His eyes have never left us.

He knows exactly where to find His children. He knows how to get us back on the right path and will walk with us as we heal, learn, and grow.

As a parent, I pray every single day for the patience to lead my children beside still waters that will restore their souls, knowing I will have to use patience, wisdom, and a lot of Jesus to keep them from wandering off. I'll have to learn to be a good listener, an encourager, and be consistent in expectations, but even more importantly, an example of godly love to them. I'll have to learn to ask their forgiveness on the days I need their grace and lose my way and confess when I feel lost on this great adventure of parenting.

And on the days I'm short, at my wits' end with long days and sleepless nights, dealing with mac 'n' cheese slung on walls or a moody tween, **I am reminded how my heavenly Father is always redirecting my steps with great care.** So I'll ask Him for His Word, His heart, and His love.

We all get a little lost. Thank you, Jesus, for coming to our rescue.

by Natalie Runion, Women's Ministry and Family Ministry Creative Pastor, New Life North

God Rested

You know that moment where the workday ends, or the weekend comes, or vacation is finally upon you, and you just can't wait to stop and rest? But then you realize the workday ended and your family needs you, or the weekend doesn't mean you get to sleep as much as you thought, or you finally accepted the fact that family vacation with young kids isn't all that restful. The Bible begins with God being able to create everything in six days, and then get an actual day of rest—yet we are continually grasping to find the same rest He did. And we surely need it!

Well ... maybe it's not that we are or are not able to get as much rest as we need, but rather that we need to re-interpret the type of rest God is inviting us into. **How many of us think of rest as a resting from, meaning we stop doing something?** To rest from work is to stop working. Or rest with family means we stop handling all the parenting and household duties we normally handle. When we say we're tired, it's that we're tired of something or tired from something, and if that thing just stopped then we could get a break and rest.

Here, I want us to use some prophetic imagination regarding what it means that God created in six days and rested on the seventh. Yes, in one sense, we see that God's rest meant He stopped His work of creating. But rest isn't just about what God stopped doing, but also about what He started doing. When God created everything, His creation became His temple, and upon completion He filled it, inhabited it, took up residence in it ... or "rested" in it. The point of God resting was not stopping what He was doing, but rather it was inhabiting and enjoying all the good things He had been working toward.

DAD, WHERE CAN YOU BE LIKE YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND WORK HARD ... AND AT THE END OF THAT DAY OR WEEK OR SEASON, HOW CAN YOU REST FROM THAT WORK TO ENJOY THE PEOPLE AND PROVISIONS THAT WORK HAS CREATED?

Think of that now in your family space as a father. You go to work, you fulfill duties, you faithfully carry responsibilities. Joining in God's way of rest does not mean you just stop doing all of that. Rather, God invites us to rest from the work we have to do so we can joyfully inhabit the things work creates. We stop working so we can start delighting in the provision work gains for our families. We stop focusing on producing so we can rest and enjoy relating to the people God has given us.

So, I leave you with this question: Dad, where can you be like your heavenly Father and work hard ... and at the end of that day or week or season, how can you rest from that work to enjoy the people and provisions that work has created?

by Evan Reedall, Marriage & Family Ministries Executive Pastor, New Life Downtown



Course Correction in Marriage

My wife, Leah, and I were visiting Grandma in Indiana. We flew into Chicago and got a 30-minute Uber ride to her house. We had a late dinner and enjoyed catching up. We decided to visit family about 15 minutes away in the morning and jumped in the car. Grandma was insistent on driving and took the back roads as she showed us a new development in the distance. The problem was she pointed to the left with one hand, and the steering wheel followed, and we were now in the left lane with oncoming traffic in the distance. She course corrected and got back into the right lane just in time to miss the oncoming truck. When we arrived safely, I started breathing again; and with a stern whisper to Leah, I said, "I will need to drive home, or I am calling an Uber."

The basic message of Hebrews 12:11-14 is: "When I get off track, God offers me a path of healing." We've all gone off track. The impact and consequence of getting off track can be as minor as a scare or as significant as a head-on collision. Our marriage can get hit hard if we don't make course corrections together. Quickly making minor adjustments can help save us from an accident down the road. For us, we have learned to make those little changes through a tool called "Business Meetings."

You've heard of scheduling regular date nights, but how do you feel when your date night, intended for fun, is consumed with talking about budgets, kids' sports schedules, disappointments in work, or conflicts in your marriage? **If we schedule time for the hard conversations, we're able to enjoy the date nights for what we truly desire: laughing, having fun, and building intimacy together.**

We've experienced God's grace, and He's shown us how to make corrections in marriage. We have a long list of benefits from making this Business Meeting a priority. In whatever season you find yourself, we hope you and your spouse will try this tool and schedule a Business Meeting and enjoy the benefits of this practice. If you commit to trying this out for a few months, we believe you'll see growth in your marriage.

Our prayer is that you'll travel together on the same road. Amos 3:3 says, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (NKJV).

If you are thriving or just surviving in your marriage, remember the Lord desires to walk with you. He is kind and compassionate to us. He is ready to forgive us for our waywardness and give us wisdom when we ask.

You'll be happy to know that we made it home safely from the Chicago trip. Grandma lives in Colorado now and no longer has her driver's license.

HERE ARE A COUPLE OF OUR TIPS FOR HEALTHY BUSINESS MEETINGS:

1. Choose a time when you are both at your best. (We are not at our best after 9:00 p.m.)
2. Choose a space conducive to good conversation and a location that helps keep the conversation from escalating or being interrupted by kids. (We have a favorite booth at a local breakfast restaurant.)
3. Choose the length of the meeting. (We schedule about one and a half hours. If our schedule allows us to do this regularly, about halfway through our meeting we feel like we're on a date.)
4. Come prepared. (We take turns sharing and leading the meetings.)
5. Agree to healthy communication skills and fight fairly.
6. Pray together. (Invite the Holy Spirit to help guide your time and conversation.)

by Matthew Tisthammer, Executive Pastor, Section Community and Military Ministry, New Life Friday Night; and Leah Tisthammer, Women's Ministry Director, New Life North



The Love of God

“You are so strong! I don’t know how you do it!” These are two phrases I have heard SO MANY times over the last 20 years. After hearing this so often, I sometimes start to think I’m a superwoman and can do anything on my own.

In August of 2001 my husband and I were married and moved to Okinawa. I wasn’t sad about living so far away from my family; this is what military families do. However, my self-reliance was challenged September 11, 2001—less than a month after we were married. While we both sat in shock with the rest of the world, my husband was soon whisked away to another country to do what he did, **and I found myself all alone ... for months on end.**

One morning in the middle of a deployment, I was at the base gym when I heard over the military radio station that there had been a helicopter crash the night before. My heart dropped as I knew that the night before my husband had been on one of those helicopters that flew in pairs. I immediately went down to the gym phone and called his unit only to be told they couldn’t give me any information. I went home and sat for three hours knowing in my heart I would be going back to the States alone. Finally, I got a call from his commander. My husband was okay; his buddies on the other helicopter were not. The reason they could not give me information earlier was that my husband’s name was on the manifest for the helicopter that went down. At the last minute, he and his partner had changed helicopters with two of the guys from the one that went down. The realization that I have absolutely no control hit me for the first time in my life. **Along with that realization comes the humble recognition that I cannot, for one day, live without my God.** Every breath I have is because He granted it; every gift, every ounce of wisdom, every talent, every step in the midst of grief, all of it (Acts 17:25). It is His grace that carries every part of me (2 Corinthians 5:21).

God began a work in me. A work that showed me that apart from Him, I can do nothing (John 15:5). It was a work that transformed me from the inside out. However, God was still at work showing me that I not only needed Him, but that I also needed a community of believers around me. That stubborn pride still struggled to accept help from others.

We moved to Valdosta with three- and five-year-old boys while I was pregnant with my third. We visited a small church that, to be quite honest, **I did not want to attend.** In my mind, it was a stereotypical small, south Georgia church, and I envisioned judgement and gossip resulting from my every misstep. Yet I felt the Holy Spirit very clearly saying that was where we needed to be. I told my husband, “I don’t want to go there, but I don’t

think we have a choice.” With Sunday school, Sunday morning church, Sunday night prayer time, Sunday night service, and Wednesday night service, it wasn’t difficult for us to get plugged into the tiny church. We would soon learn that their love for others could not have been more opposite of my initial fear of reproach. **I would soon learn what it truly meant to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2).**

My husband left for deployment when my baby girl was seven weeks old. This community of believers wrapped their arms around my little family and took care of us by sending meals, inviting us over, watching my boys, and picking up kids when I was sick. During that time my daughter began to have what I thought were some “mild” health issues. She had begun to hold her head to one side, and her eyes had started pointing downward.

My sweet baby girl and I ended up in the hospital for a CT scan two days later. I sat waiting for many long hours that day, and our kind old southern pastor sat with me. His prayers and quiet display of love gave me strength and courage to face the news when I heard my precious baby girl had brain cancer. The moment she went back for surgery a few days later, the entire Christian school of our church got down on their knees and prayed together for my daughter. As a mother, with no control over the outcome of her daughter’s life, there could not be anything more comforting that my community of believers lifting up my daughter’s name to the ONE and ONLY GOD who was sovereign and in control. They supported us in more ways than I could ever recall during her treatment and then celebrated and praised God with us when she left the hospital seven months later. **I will always think back on the community of believers as God’s “hugs of comfort” for me during that difficult time.** They lavished God’s love on me and my family in ways too numerous to count. Our church reflected the image of God with love, care, and prayer in ways our family will never forget.

God has been real and near in my life in so many ways. **I’ll be honest, I’m not yet counting it all joy when I meet trials of various kinds, but I do see God working His steadfastness in me through the trials in my life (James 1:2).** Surely, whether you’re a military spouse or not, we all need to acknowledge that we truly aren’t superwomen. Every day we need God’s strength and everything He freely gives to us as His children. He has given us grace beyond measure, loved us through His people, and filled us with love so that we may then share His love with others who may be walking through something we have just come through.

by Jamie Butler, Early Childhood Coordinator, Woodmen Valley Chapel, Colorado Springs.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TOUGH TOPICS

GENTLY CORRECTED

Every year I sit down to review the previous year to remember and celebrate the things God did in our family. This January, I found myself struggling to find things to celebrate. 2021 was a hard year, starting with the unexpected loss of my father-in-law and the grief that ensued. The year continued with mental health struggles for two people I am close with, a painful interaction with a family member, and a dear friend's cancer diagnosis. I found that I could only see the year of 2021 through discolored glasses of disappointment, anger, and hurt.

When sharing with a friend that I was struggling with anger and finding hope, she listened and encouraged me to lament and grieve the loss of my expectations. Then, she gently reminded me of the many ways she had also seen God do beautiful things in our lives. **She didn't push past my pain—she listened to it and encouraged me to lament it, but she also recognized that I was stuck and needed a reminder of God's faithfulness to us.** Her gentle prodding reminded me of a verse in Proverbs 27:6a that says, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted." I began to think about this verse and how thankful I am that I have friends who can gently speak truth to me. Her words began a small stirring in my heart to lament and to also consider God's goodness.

Within a few days of this conversation, another friend shared with me about her New Year's tradition of reviewing the previous year. Instead of beginning by looking for things to celebrate, she first allowed herself to lament the hard areas. With my friend's encouragement, I felt challenged to move forward. I chose to do my "year in review" by looking through my photos of 2021. I sat with my journal and created two columns, one for the hard memories and one for the good. As I looked through my photos, I wrote down each memory in its appropriate

column and found in the end that the column of the positive, sweet memories was three times longer than the column of painful memories! I found myself in awe that I'd only been able to see my pain.

God showed me how gentle correction from a faithful friend could begin a course correction in my heart.

Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Quite a few years ago, I began to look at my friendships with this verse in mind. I saw women in my church that I respected, and I asked them out for coffee. As we shared our stories and our friendships grew, I found women who were fun to hang out with but who also sharpened my faith, and their stories began many course corrections in my heart. **Proverbs 15:31 says, "Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise."**

Do you have friends who can speak truth into your life? Do you have a teachable heart that allows for course correction? Modeling healthy friendships and a teachable spirit to your children will allow for course correction in their lives as well. If you find that you are lacking these friends, invite people you respect at church out for coffee and begin to build a foundation of trust that will allow for others to gently course correct you. **I would also challenge you to cultivate the practice of lament and thankfulness.** When your lens of life begins to look dark and cloudy, sit with a journal and go back over the things in your life you are thankful for and the things that you need to lament. To remember, to grieve, and to celebrate are ALL important in our life journey.

by Jeni Mason, Family Care Pastor, New Life North

