WHAT

1

WHAT

2

NEEDS

3

TO BE

4

DONE?

5

SERVING

6
GETTING STARTED

THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING YOUR EYES UP AND OUT!

NEED TO GET YOUR MARRIAGE IN FOCUS?

MAKE MATTHEW 25:35-40 COME ALIVE FOR YOUR FAMILY.
The environment of SERVING encourages a posture of the heart that asks the question, “What needs to be done?” It allows the Holy Spirit to cultivate sensitivity to others and reminds us that we’re called to a cause bigger than our own individual lives. It helps fulfill the mandate that, as followers of Jesus, we’re to view our lives as living sacrifices we generously give away!

“What needs to be done?” What if you and I and our kids walked into every situation, with every person, and simply asked this question? Somebody’s crying. “What needs to be done? Does she need to be left alone? Does she need to be hugged? Does she need to talk to someone? Does she need someone to pray for her?”

Selfishly, I don’t always want to answer that question the way I know the Holy Spirit wants me to. But when we hear God’s voice and respond to it, we enter a very rich environment that enables us to lead an others-centered life. What might it look like if we started pursuing this posture of serving with our children from an early age … teaching them to walk into any situation asking, “What needs to be done?” Wow—we’d live in a different world!

Michelle Anthony
Executive Pastor: Parenting, Junior High, and Children | New Life Church
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INSPIRE, EQUIP, SUPPORT

INSPIRE parents with ideas to create fun, spiritually forming times in the normal rhythm of everyday life.

EQUIP parents to become the spiritual leaders of God’s truth in their own households.

SUPPORT families to engage their communities and change the culture around them.
Memorizing Scripture can be an incredible practice to engage in as a family. But words in and of themselves will not necessarily transform us; it is God’s Spirit in these words who transforms. We come to know God more when we’re willing to open our hearts and listen to His Holy Spirit through the words we memorize. Have fun with this verse, and think of creative ways to invite your family to open up to God as they commit the verse to memory.

Our FAMILY TIME VERSE (page 5) this month is from Psalm 119—it’s a prayer asking God to, “Open [our] eyes to see the wonderful truths in [His] instructions.” One of those truths is to serve others—like the Lorton family does with the first responders in their town. Erin Lorton shares their story in the PRAYER article (page 22) and relates some practical ways we too can pray for and serve these brave men and women in our communities.

Our GOD’S WORD (page 24) this month focuses on Matthew 25 where Jesus calls us to look for people in need, and then to serve them out of compassion. First we see, then we serve.

Our prayer for your family this month is that you would be bold and ask God to give you His eyes for every situation you enter. Don’t wait until it’s too late and your vision is blurred and gone—begin this New Year by looking for service opportunities that God has placed in plain sight!

Debbie Guinn
Editor in Chief | New Life Church
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 Things you won’t want to miss:

- Parent blogs to inspire you
- Mobile-friendly format
- Lots of downloadable giveaways
- Marketplace to purchase article bundles and more!

The website is filled with fresh ideas and creative resources to help you spiritually parent your children.

LET’S BE SOCIAL!

Consider purchasing an 8” x 10” frame to hold your family memory verse each month!
OPEN MY EYES TO SEE THE WONDERFUL TRUTHS IN YOUR INSTRUCTIONS. PSALM 119:18 NLT
WHAT IS THE PRICE OF TWO SPARROWS—ONE COPPER COIN? BUT NOT A SINGLE SPARROW CAN FALL TO THE GROUND WITHOUT YOUR FATHER KNOWING IT. AND THE VERY HAIRS ON YOUR HEAD ARE ALL NUMBERED. SO DON’T BE AFRAID; YOU ARE MORE VALUABLE TO GOD THAN A WHOLE FLOCK OF SPARROWS.

— MATTHEW 10:29–31 NLT
Create a snowy winter terrarium as a beautiful reminder of God’s faithfulness. We can be assured that if His eye is on the sparrow, He will watch over us. Take a moment to look back over the past year and recount the ways God has been faithful to your family. Then, enter the New Year with full assurance that He will again be faithful and meet every need in 2017.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- glass bowl or vase
- artificial snow
- small bird’s nest
- artificial birds in winter colors
- artificial bird eggs
- sprig of evergreen and pinecones (real or artificial)

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Fill the bottom of the glass vase with the artificial snow.
2. Arrange the bird’s nest and place the eggs inside.
3. Nestle the birds into the nest and add evergreen and pinecones to complete the winter scene.

When I became a mom of two, I entered into a season of what I found to be a new kind of crazy. I had gotten one child all potty-trained and sleeping through the night and drinking out of a cup without a lid and giving me a chance to take a shower and go to the bathroom by myself most of the time. And then, there I was, starting the process all over again. Didn’t we just do this?

It was in that particular season that I vividly remember how I felt when I would somehow, magically, find that I had an hour or two all to myself without the munchkins around. I’m pretty sure that the build-up moms feel as they wait for those kid-free moments is exactly like the build-up the astronauts feel as they prepare for the space shuttle to launch. Watching the clock as the minutes, then seconds, count down. Hearts pumping with eager anticipation. Doing all of the last-minute checks to make certain that things will go off without a hitch. And then, it’s time. A dramatic pause, maybe a few tears, sparks flying and then it’s all-systems ‘GO’! There was always this glorious moment when I finally found myself alone where I would just simply pause and soak in the silence. I would close my eyes and just feel it enveloping me, wrapping me up and reminding me that I was, in fact, an actual person and not just a pacifier-finding, train-track-building, baby-food-making, diaper-changing robot.

But then, sometimes, that same wonderful silence would become almost overwhelming. I would feel like it was mocking me with all of its possibilities. I’ve been craving this alone time and now, all of a sudden I felt a sense of panic beginning to rise up in me. Should I take a nap? Should I sit down and read a book which will inevitably lead to taking a nap? Should I clean the kitchen? Should I take a nap? Should I catch up on the shows I haven’t watched in 2 years? Should I take a nap? Should I call that friend who I never get to talk to without being interrupted a million times? Should I take a nap? The thoughts would swirl and twirl all around in my mind until I felt like I was developing a temporary case of schizophrenia. I would find myself wandering around the house, never actually determining how I was going to spend the time. Here I had longed for, intensely craved a few minutes to myself and now that I had it, I didn’t know what to do with it. What felt like a gift had suddenly become an overwhelming burden because I was so afraid of not making the absolute, positive MOST out of every single minute.

Think about the pressure I was putting on those 2 hours. They were expected to live up to this fantasy I had created in my mind and somehow magically fulfill every longing.

And, inevitably, I would be left feeling let down. The kids would come back home and my life as
‘mom/pacifier finder/train track builder/diaper changer/robot’ would resume and I would look back on that free-time with regret.

Somewhere deep in the recesses of my heart I knew that I had wasted it. I felt as though I had failed at yet one more thing. As a mom of young children, that sense of failure was already something I was very familiar with. It seemed like at every corner I was coming up short and now I realized that I was even a failure at what should be a guarantee. I should know how to relax, right? I should know how to make the most of two hours without running around like a chicken with my head cut off. I should feel refreshed afterwards, not sad and confused. Shouldn’t I? I’ve recently realized that I tend to approach the start of a new year in the same way that I used to approach those kid-free moments years ago. I see the months and weeks and days (and minutes and seconds!) of this fresh year stretching in front of me with all of its possibilities. At first, it all seems so exciting and ripe with opportunities and I have no doubt as to how I will fill each moment. I’m going to give the dining room a makeover! I’m going to get up extra early in the morning! I’m going to organize the attic! I’m going to spend more time studying the Bible! I’m going to find another way to volunteer! And then, just like in those days of early motherhood, I find myself completely overwhelmed by all of the options and stressed out thinking about how critical it is that I make the absolute most out of every day. Oswald Chambers said,

Certainty is the mark of the commonsense life—gracious uncertainty is the mark of the spiritual life. To be certain of God means that we are uncertain in all our ways, not knowing what tomorrow may bring. This is generally expressed with a sigh of sadness, but it should be an expression of breathless expectation. We are uncertain of the next step, but we are certain of God. As soon as we abandon ourselves to God and do the task He has placed closest to us, He begins to fill our lives with surprises.

You see, I think I’ve had it all backwards. I’ve spent way too much time trying to be certain of myself and of “all of my ways.” And this striving for certainty in my life has led me to that place where the thought of what “tomorrow may bring” doesn’t just fill me with “a sigh of sadness.” It fills me with fear and doubt. The more I’ve reached for certainty all on my own, the more uncertain and untrusting I’ve become of God.

Frankly, the thought of abandoning myself to Him seems completely and utterly terrifying. The unknown has never been something I’ve been particularly fond of.

When I was given the glorious gift of kid-free moments all of those years ago, it was my inability to abandon myself which ultimately led to it feeling like more a punishment than a blessing. And it always ended with a ‘sigh of sadness’. Not because it was over, but because it never lived up to what I had imagined in my head. But, what if I did it differently this year? What if, instead of running around trying to figure out what is going to happen in the months, weeks, days, minutes and seconds of the New Year, I embraced the uncertainty of it all? In fact, what if I not only embraced the uncertainty of it but I replaced that uncertainty about what tomorrow will bring, with certainty about God. About who He is. About His character. About His love for me.

Being certain about God doesn’t mean I can’t have dreams or make plans or wonder about what is to come. But it does mean that my trust in Him trumps my need for certainty. And I’m ready. I’m ready to abandon myself to Him and to the task He has placed closest to me. I’m ready for my life to be filled with surprises. Which is saying a lot for a girl who absolutely hates surprises! But, I know that His surprises will far surpass anything that I could have ever imagined. They always have!

Excerpt from the book, Life in Season.

by Vanessa Hunt and Heather Patterson

The authors of the popular blog, At the Picket Fence, Heather and Vanessa share their inspiration, struggles, faith, and encouragement with women who, just like themselves, want a warm, God-centered, joy-filled life. Meditations, photographs, and simple, budget-friendly home decor tips and recipes are woven throughout Life In Season to help you celebrate the moments that fill your home, heart, and faith. Their easy-to-follow style and real-life stories prove that you don’t need to consider yourself creative to create a home you will love.
What comes to mind when you ask the question, “What needs to be done?” The first few needs that come to my mind are oftentimes physical. I can cook for my husband, clean up trash in my neighborhood, or babysit for a friend. The list of physical needs around us is never-ending, and serving others in this way is right and good.

However, serving goes beyond meeting physical needs. We need eyes to see the deeper, emotional needs of people as well. The reality of scared, lonely, sad, and desperate people is all around us—people whose greatest need might be a friend, a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, or a glimmer of hope. Meeting emotional needs takes keen observance, intentional action, compassion, and time. This month, talk with your kids about the needs around them which may be lying beneath the surface. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you eyes to see the hurting people in your lives, and the wisdom and creativity to best serve those people.

**GET YOUR CHILDREN TALKING**

- What are some needs that people have?
- What are some ways we can meet the needs of our family members? Friends? Neighbors?
- How can you spot someone who needs encouragement?
- Who is someone you know who could use a friend?
- What’s one thing you can do this week to show God’s love to that person?

*by Emily Schulz*

Emily is the Director of Family Ministries at New Denver Church in Denver, CO. She is enjoying the newlywed life with her husband, Phil, and recently graduated with her MDiv from Denver Seminary.
When Brendon Anthony was a young boy, his family took him on numerous mission trips across the globe to serve and love his brothers and sisters in foreign countries. However, as he reflected on these trips, he struggled with questions like, “What are we leaving, when we leave?” And, “Are we effectively helping and loving these people?” And, “What needs to be done to provide sustainable ministry to the people we serve?”
When Brendon went to college, he met Craig Erickson. Craig had been living in Haiti before he came back to California for school. He was working with orphanages to develop agriculture systems to produce their own healthy food for the orphans. This type of ministry resonated with Brendon. It felt like an answer to the questions he had had as a young boy. Craig was doing ministry in a tangible way. Brendon immediately had a strong desire to help, and this practical avenue to engage in ministry led Craig and Brendon to partner in the creation of the non-profit organization, Harvest Craft.

Harvest Craft has been engaged in sustainable agricultural development across the south of Haiti for the past four years. The organization’s focus has been to empower communities through food production systems to generate income for families, provide healthy local food, and offer vocational skills training and environmental education.

In October of 2016, Hurricane Matthew ripped through southern Haiti and killed nearly a thousand people, left tens of thousands homeless, and ruined many cities. However, the real disaster is still looming. Yes, the initial destruction and devastation has occurred, but the future is really what hangs in the balance for those living in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The southern portion of this nation is rich in agriculture and with the hurricane’s destructive effects, many farmers and their fields were wiped out, livestock were killed, and very few trees are left standing. Therefore, an impending food crisis threatens the whole area unless action can be taken.

Temporary projects like providing clean water, access to food, and pop-up shelters are certainly needed to provide momentary relief. But, for long-term relief, the goal needs to be combatting the inevitable food crisis. Food shortages cause deep suffering and can even lead to war. This is where funding and action need to be taken.

Harvest Craft has a pig project in Les Cayes, Haiti, which is just miles from the epicenter of where the hurricane tore apart the country. The pig project provides income and jobs for five families and provides food for its neighboring community. In the aftermath of this natural disaster, the project was damaged. The project lost pigs, structural components, and the ability to provide for the people.

The founders of Harvest Craft saw this situation and asked, “What needs to be done?” So they came up with an idea. Moving forward they want to not only allocate funds to repair and keep this pig farm, but they want to double their efforts. They want to create more opportunities to generate food in the midst of a looming crisis. They want to provide more jobs and empowering opportunities for those who are desperately asking and ready for them.

Velo, a Haitian staff member of this pig project, had this to say about Harvest Craft and the impact it has had in their community, “I thank God that Harvest Craft came to our community here in Les Cayes at the right time. I was able to pay off all my debts, clear college fees for both of my daughters and pay my son’s high school fees with no strain this year.” His wife, Regis Marie, who is also employed by the project, testified that this was her first “real” job with a stable income, and she is nearly 60.

Harvest Craft is beginning to hear testimonies like these all over southern Haiti from those associated with their projects. The founders are encouraged from the impact they have had so far, but are eager to do much more in an area that desperately needs further development.

God sparked something beautiful in the hearts of Brendon and Craig. They had eyes to see what God was showing them. They recognized that to answer the question, “What needs to be done?” requires sacrifice and hard work—especially in a country like Haiti. What might God be calling your family to? Where might He be calling you to serve?

To learn more, visit: www.harvestcraft.org

Pray together as a family and ask God to give you eyes to see where the need is. Then, step out in faith and begin to serve. You might also want to partner with Harvest Craft, not just to provide relief, but redemption in the wake of this devastating hurricane. Consider purchasing a pig for $100, a chicken for $15, or plant a fruit tree for $5.

by Brendon Anthony

Brendon is the co-founder of Harvest Craft. He has a B.S. in Environmental Sciences from Biola University, and is currently pursuing his M.S in horticulture from Washington State University researching apples. He spends his down time adventuring and camping with his husky, Kaskade, in the Washington mountains.

Email brendon.anthony@harvestcraft.org
My desk is always covered in sticky notes—I think I have a note for everything! I learned many years ago that unless I have reminders on my desk, the little things will slip my mind. The truth of this principle applies to many things in life. If we continually surround ourselves with brief reminders to be on the lookout for ways to serve, it will encourage service-oriented behavior in our lives.

This month, create a set of coasters together as a family! Each time someone sets down a glass of water or picks up a cup of milk, he or she will be reminded to ask, “What needs to be done?”

**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

- printable from bit.ly/homefrontcoasters
- 4 ceramic tiles (4.25” x 4.25”, sold in most local hardware stores)
- Mod Podge
- clear acrylic sealer
- sponge brush
- small self-adhesive felt pads

**WHAT YOU’LL DO**

1. Cut out the printables from bit.ly/homefrontcoasters.
2. Using the sponge brush, apply a layer of Mod Podge on the flat side of the tile. Then place one of the cutouts on the wet Mod Podge. (Remember to leave about .5” empty space on all sides around the paper.) Then apply another coat of Mod Podge on top of the printable (even though it appears white, it will dry clear).
3. Repeat step 2 on the other three coaster tiles. Next, apply a second and third coat of Mod Podge to each coaster. Allow to dry about 15 minutes.
4. When the coasters are dry, take them outside and spray a layer of clear acrylic sealer on each of them. Follow the directions on the sealer you are using. Allow coasters to dry.
5. Once sealer is dry, adhere four felt pads to the bottom of each coaster—one pad per corner.

by Krista Heinen

Krista is the NextGen Associate Pastor at Elmbrook Church in Brookfield, WI. Krista helps equip and support the families at Elmbrook through resources, events, and conversations.

Twitter @KristaHeinen
GAME TIME
PIN THE SNOWFLAKE

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- coffee filters or small pieces of white paper
- scissors
- tape
- large white piece of butcher paper or poster board
- markers or crayons
- paint (optional)
- blindfold

BEFORE YOU START

Use the coffee filters or small pieces of white paper to cut out snowflakes. You’ll want to make five to six per person.

Next, using markers, crayons or paint (or all three), create an outdoor scene on your butcher paper or poster board. Don’t worry! You do not need to be Picasso for this. A simple hill and a bare winter tree will be just fine!

Finally, tape the outdoor scene to a wall, and you’re ready to start!

TIME TO PLAY!

Gather everyone and ask them to take a look at the outdoor scene hanging on the wall. Ask them to point out some different things they see (hill, tree, cloud, etc.). Explain to your family that, together, you will transform this picture into a beautiful winter wonderland! But here’s the catch: You’ll be wearing a blindfold.

This game is similar to Pin the Tail on the Donkey. Invite one player up at a time and place a blindfold over his eyes. Hand him one snowflake, with a piece of tape already on it, and instruct him to walk forward and stick the snowflake on the picture. Once he does so, he may remove the blindfold to see where the snowflake landed.

Continue rotating through until all of the snowflakes have been placed on the picture. Take a moment to point out to your family how different the picture looks with all of the snowflakes on it.

REMEMBER!

In this game, every time the blindfold was taken off, there was another new snowflake to admire on the picture. After working together, your family took something simple and turned it into a winter wonderland! Remind your children that sometimes we can’t see what God is doing, but as soon as He asks us to take the blindfold off, He reveals something magnificent! Encourage your children to continue asking God the question, “What needs to be done?” In doing so, He will surely lead us into a life of serving one another and the one true God, even when we least expect it.

by Heather DePartee

Heather has been in children’s ministry for seven years and is currently working at The Well Community Church in Fresno, CA, as the Kids Ministry Director for one of their three campuses. She has gone back to school for a degree in early childhood development and is loving every second! She is married to Adam and is crazy about pretty house plants.
There was a buzz in the house as the party warmed up. Rumors of their “life-giving experience” had spread through town and beyond about the last time these three siblings had been with the guest of honor.

Martha, ever the servant, mingled in and out of the crowd, making sure everyone had food and drink. Her brother, Lazarus, was busy in conversation with gawkers who had come to see him—the man who had been dead only a short time ago.

No one saw it coming. She had just been sitting and listening at His side—now here she was spilling a jar of extraordinarily fragrant, expensive perfume all over their guest of honor’s feet. The fragrance wrapped around each guest as they looked on, silent and shocked. Oblivious in her worship, Mary massaged the perfume onto Jesus’ feet and dried them with her hair.

**Mary’s eyes and heart were set on only One.** As her actions and tears cried out, “Holy, holy, holy!” she saw what no one else in the room could see. Mary had always been attentive to Jesus’ words, actions, character, and spirit. Her personal relationship with Him allowed her to clearly hear, know, and obey Him. Although Jesus had been telling the disciples about His impending death, they could not “hear” it. But Mary knew—and her response was love, service, and costly worship.

Jesus’ response confirmed Mary’s service: “It’s simple, she has chosen to honor my coming death.”

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**PARENTS**

As a way to worship Jesus this month, reflect together as a family on the ways you are hearing and seeing Jesus.

- What have you been learning about Jesus recently?
- Whose lives are you watching and learning from to become more like Jesus?
- Does learning more about Jesus cause you to want to serve Him? If yes, how?

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by Dawn Heckert

*Dawn is the Children’s Pastor at Christ Community Leawood Campus in Leawood, KS. She loves Jesus and the opportunity to share His story with all ages. She spends her free time deep in glitter, crafting, creating, and chasing life with her two teenage daughters and husband.*
SWEET & SALTY PEANUT BRITTLE PIE

This Peanut Brittle Pie replicates the exact flavors of the candy, but replaces the crisp snap of brittle with a lusciously soft caramel tinged with hints of salt.

They say you’re either into cooking or baking. I guess I break the mold on that one, because as much as I love cooking, grilling, smoking, and braising meat, I also like turning on the oven and flexing my baking muscles once in a while. They say you’re also supposed to be very precise when baking, but my “throw it all together haphazardly” method seems to contradict that. In particular, I seem to enjoy baking pies, as evidenced by this Peanut Brittle Pie.

If you’re one of those people who shies away from baking due to the degree of difficulty, do not fret. Thankfully, this recipe is extremely forgiving and outrageously easy—totalling a mere six ingredients (if you count a pie crust as one). Pies like this one are a great “make in advance” dessert, so you can focus your cooking efforts on the main meat event.

I’ll concede—there is nothing brittle about this pie. I named it so because I think it tastes exactly like peanut brittle, albeit with a different texture. The soft-set caramel filling develops a chewy crust when baked, offset by the crunch of roasted peanuts. A generous sprinkling of fleur de sel rounds out the sweetness. It’s incredibly rich, and you’ll want to serve it in pretty thin slices … until you can build up to a bigger portion!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 9” pie crust
- 4 ounces butter
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 14 ounces sweetened condensed milk
- 1/2 tsp fleur de sel* or other course ground salt to taste
- 1/2 cup roasted salted peanuts

*Fleur de sel is fancy French salt that has a chunky grain, usually used in salted caramel desserts. You can use any salt in its place, but you must salt to taste according to the type and brand you use.

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Preheat oven to 320° F.
2. In a small frying pan, toast the peanuts (without any oil) until they become fragrant and begin to turn golden.
3. Prepare pie crust in a pie tin; crimp edges.
4. In a saucepan, melt the butter, then add the brown sugar. Cook for 2 minutes or until bubbling.
5. Pour in the condensed milk, and whisk the whole mixture until it thickens slightly, about 5 minutes.
6. Add the salt to the caramel mixture; stir to combine.
7. Pour the mixture into the pie crust and scatter toasted peanuts on top.
8. Bake for 25-30 minutes until golden brown on top.
9. Allow to cool completely before serving.

by Jess Pryles
Jess is a former baker and a full-fledged, hard-core carnivore. She’s a cook, writer, and TV personality specializing in red meat, with a penchant for grilling. She’s also a respected authority on Texas competition-style barbecue. Born in Australia, she now resides in Austin, TX.

Website jesspryles.com
Facebook jesspryles
Instagram @jesspryles

Prep Time: 20 min.  Cook Time: 25-30 min.  Yields: 9” pie
CARROT MUFFINS

We’ve all heard that eating carrots provides benefits for healthy vision. The truth is, even if you eat carrots every day, it will not restore your vision to 20/20. However, carrots actually do contain many vitamins and minerals that make them a good choice for a nutrient-packed snack!

These simple and sweet Carrot Muffins are a perfect choice for breakfast or a healthy snack. They can also be a good conversation starter to talk with your kids about the importance of having healthy eyes to see things the way God does and answer the question, “What needs to be done?”

Prep Time: 15 min.  Cook Time: 20 min.  Yields: 12 muffins or 24 mini muffins*

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

• 1 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
• 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
• 3/4 cup brown sugar, packed
• 1 tablespoon baking powder
• 2 teaspoons baking soda
• 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
• 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
• 1/2 teaspoon salt
• 3/4 cup unsweetened applesauce
• 1/2 cup coconut oil, melted
• 1 apple, shredded
• 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
• 2 cups grated carrots (about 3 medium)
• 1/2 cup raisins
• 1/2 cup flaked coconut
• 1/2 cup walnuts, chopped

* For an easy metric conversion chart, search the Internet for “metric kitchen.”

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Line a muffin tin with paper liners and set aside.
2. Preheat oven to 400° F.
3. In a large bowl, add the flours, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, and salt; whisk well to combine.
4. Add the applesauce, oil, apple, and vanilla; whisk just until combined.
5. Fold in the carrots, raisins, coconut, and walnuts; stir until ingredients are combined.
6. Divide batter evenly among prepared muffin cups.
7. Bake at 400° F for 10 minutes.
8. Reduce the heat to 350° F and bake for an additional 10 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
9. Cool muffins in the pan for 5 minutes before transferring them to a wire rack.

* If you make these in mini muffin tins, decrease the bake time to about 10 minutes total, or until the tops are golden and the centers are fully cooked.
Harrison delivering treats to local PD

Lorton family singing Christmas carols and bringing treats
As my husband and I stood in line at a busy fast-food restaurant to grab a late dinner with our three exhausted sons, I looked down at my youngest who was mesmerized by the uniformed police officer sitting a few feet away with a fellow first responder. I knew immediately this was an opportunity. My prayer this year had been, “Lord, let me see where I can be a light,” and God had been faithful in opening my eyes. But I didn’t necessarily want to be a light this particular evening. It had been a long day, it was approaching bedtime, and we still hadn’t eaten dinner. I just wanted to order our food and leave, but I had been praying for the Holy Spirit to prompt me and He had been guiding my heart to ask, “What needs to be done?” I knew I had a responsibility in this situation. I knew what needed to be done. I knew we needed to show our appreciation for these first responders—to let them know their courageous and heroic sacrifices for our community are noticed.

That night we decided that showing our appreciation was buying them a gift card for their next visit. We walked over, chatted with the officers and thanked them for their selfless acts of serving our community. The officers were, of course, thankful, but what we didn’t expect was how our actions would start a domino effect. Moments later, the family sitting behind the officers came up and thanked them. Then a woman sitting to the side thanked them as she exited the restaurant. Another family stopped at our table to talk with us. What I realized in that moment was that answering the call of what needed to be done meant so much more than blessing the two first responders. Kindness is contagious. It spreads. And we need to always be willing to ask and act on, “What needs to be done?” so we can show and share God’s love.

We left that night brainstorming other ways to answer the question, “What needs to be done?” One way is praying when we hear sirens. We live near a fire station, so we hear sirens quite often. At first, I prompted the boys, but now they hear the sound of sirens before I do and run to me calling, “I hear sirens! Let’s pray!” We pray for the situation the firemen are responding to, safety for all parties involved, and most importantly that God’s love is shown.

Asking what needs to be done and having the courage to follow through wasn’t easy at first, especially for our sons. We started with prayer. Now, every morning on our way to school we ask God to give us His eyes and show us what needs to be done in our community. Then we pray for the courage to be obedient.

This month as you pray together as a family, ask God to show you ways to respond to the question, “What needs to be done?” and think of ways this applies to the community around you. Fire stations, police stations, nursing homes, hospitals, schools, and our own neighbors need families to answer the call of this all-important question. Begin with prayer and then plan a fun family activity serving in your community.

by Erin Lorton

Erin lives in Kansas City with her husband and three sons. Owen is seven, Jackson is six, and Harrison is four. As a family, they love spending time traveling, being outdoors, and finding ways for God to use them.

Instagram @elorton
I was **hungry**
and you gave me something to eat,

I was **thirsty**
and you gave me something to drink,

I was a **stranger**
and you invited me in,

I needed **clothes**
and you clothed me,

I was **sick**
and you looked after me,

I was in **prison**
and you came to visit me.

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.
My daughters sometimes pretend they are animals. They ask me what animal I want to be, and though I suggest a t-rex or a grizzly bear or something else tough and dangerous, they usually end up making me a baby bunny or a fuzzy kitten. In Matthew 25:35–40, Jesus is in the middle of talking about dividing people up into two groups: the “sheep” and the “goats.” As I picture myself there with Jesus, I don’t know which group I would want to be in ... neither animal is very intimidating. Thankfully, we get more information. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, speaks of placing the sheep on His right, and the goats on His left. And skipping to the end of the story, the goats go away “to eternal punishment” and the sheep “to eternal life.” So, it’s kind of a big deal which group you’re in. But what determines who is a sheep and who is a goat?

The people are not separated by their wealth, their titles, their race, their attendance at the temple for worship, or even their claims of belief and faith. They are separated by their actions. Now, keep in mind, this is a story Jesus told to make a point. Let’s not get too hung up on searching for meaning in each detail of the story, such as, “Does ‘eternal punishment’ mean the goats go to a fiery hell forever?” or “Is Jesus teaching that we are saved by works?” To do that is to miss Jesus’ point.

So what is His point? It seems that, in this story, just like the two parables right before it, Jesus is calling us to live lives in which we actively wait until He returns. In this waiting time, He’s calling us to look for people in need, and then to serve them out of compassion. We see, and then we serve. He gives examples such as seeing the hungry and feeding them, and seeing those who need clothes and clothing them. This is part of what it means to follow Jesus, to live out the gospel, the good news. “Are you thirsty? Good news, we’ve got water! Are you lonely? Good news, you can join our family. Do you feel invisible? Good news, we see you!” For when we see and serve those in need, in some mysterious way, we are seeing and serving our shepherd, Jesus.

HEAR IT
Have a family member read Matthew 25:35–40 out loud (twice, if it is helpful). Ask for any initial thoughts, feelings, or questions it may have stirred. Explain that in order to serve those in need, we first must have eyes to see them. And though there are countless people around the globe with many basic needs, there also may be friends, family, and neighbors we see every day who have needs we have not even noticed.

DO IT
Pray as a family that God would open your eyes to those in need right around you. Spend a day or two looking to see whom God would have you serve. Then come up with a creative, generous (and maybe anonymous) way to help serve that person or family by meeting their need. Then, thank God for opening your eyes!

by Jason Kliewer
Jason is a husband, a dad of two daughters, and a Community Pastor at ROCKHARBOR in Costa Mesa, CA. He has a Masters in Biblical Studies from Grace University in Omaha, NE.
Teaching our little ones to ask the question, “What needs to be done?” can be life changing! This month, have fun teaching this rhyme to the tune of “Skip to My Lou” as a way to remind your children that we can serve in every situation we enter.

Lord, please open my eyes
Lord, please open my eyes
Lord, please open my eyes
And show me what needs to be done

I will go where you lead
I will go where you lead
I will go where you lead
Show me what needs to be done

I will trust in you
I will trust in you
I will trust in you
Show me what needs to be done

by Tommy Larson

Tommy has been serving as a pastor at ROCKHARBOR Church for the past 11 years. He was part of the development team of the Tru curriculum. He lives in Costa Mesa, CA, with his wife and two children.

Get the audio recording of this song at bit.ly/januarytottime

Repetition is fundamental to almost any learning style, so when you’re teaching your children, use repetition!
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.

The environment of SERVING asks the question, “What needs to be done?” My husband recently took this environment to the next level when he asked me, “What is something that no one else wants to do?” He decided to volunteer in the children’s ministry at our church.

Wow. Here is a man with two Ph.Ds and decades of ministry leadership experience asking to serve in a place many people shun or ignore. It’s been a privilege watching my husband’s humility as he faithfully serves in areas where very few are willing.

As we disciple our children to see circumstances and people in their lives with a heart of service, we can also inspire them toward going the extra mile by seeking to serve where no one else does.

This month, take the question of “What needs to be done?” to the next level and participate in acts of service in unlikely areas. As we humble ourselves to care for each other in extreme ways, we put God’s heart on display. Jesus took on the act of serving when no one else would have … or could have. We follow in His steps when we serve with this kind of abandonment.

READ
Parents, read Romans 12:10-13 over your child:

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

BLESS
(Insert your child’s name), may you know that your heavenly Father loves you. May He give you eyes to see what needs to be done and a heart to serve in ways that reflect His extraordinary care for you—even to the point of serving in ways that no one else will.

by Michelle Anthony

Michelle is the Executive Pastor of Parenting, Junior High, and Children at New Life Church, and the Family Ministries Ambassador at David C Cook. Michelle has graduate degrees in Christian education, theology, and leadership, and more than twenty-five years of church ministry experience as a children’s and family pastor. She lives in Colorado Springs and loves a good book and a cup of coffee.
You could say we’re “The Little Engine that Could.”

We started with a few concerned members of a church Sunday school group who saw foster kids being treated like second-class citizens—or worse—and decided to do something about it.

Today we’ve turned foster care upside down and have emerged as one of the largest, most dynamic child placement agencies (CPAs) in the state of Colorado, with hundreds of children rescued from the foster-care system and happily adopted. Each year we provide short- and long-term in-family care to hundreds of children in crisis. At any given time, well over 100 families across the Front Range in Colorado are either providing care for foster children or are in training to become licensed with us.

Along the way we’ve created a program where children in foster care are nurtured and truly cared for, and where the foster parents who give these children a home can do so with a level of friendly, professional support not found anywhere else. Our
strength comes from our Christian commitment to children, from our large and highly invested community of donors and supporters, and from our pledge to only accept first-rate foster parents who believe, as we do, that no child should ever feel less than loved.

The result? Hope & Home is recognized by numerous judges, child welfare experts, and others as having the best foster parents, and as being the agency that does the best job taking care of foster children.

Among Hope & Home’s other distinctions:

- Ten-time recipient of the El Pomar Foundation’s Merit Award for outstanding service
- Member of the Center for Nonprofit Excellence
- Member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability
- Member of the National Indian Child Welfare Association (the only foster care agency in the state with membership)
- Executive Director Ross Wright’s parenting book, *Kids in Crisis*, published by B&H Publishing
- Overseen by a board of directors comprised of respected leaders in the Colorado Springs community

**OUR MISSION**

*We give kids more than just a roof over their heads. We give them a home ...*

As a nondenominational Christian charity, Hope & Home trains and actively supports foster families all across the Front Range who feel compelled by Christ’s command to take care of “the least of these.” Abused and neglected children who’ve been removed from their birth homes get a stable and nurturing family to live with until it’s safe to go home again, or—when that safety isn’t possible—a family to give them a “forever home” through adoption.

Our foster parents don’t do this for the money and don’t see foster care as a profession. To them, nurturing these children is a calling—missional work done right here in our community. Their goal is to help do what’s best for the children. Along with the training and support they get from Hope & Home, this missional approach is why children do better with Hope & Home families and have more successful placements.

**Making children feel special one kid at a time ...**

As we’ve long believed at Hope & Home, the difference is making a child feel truly special. To accomplish this when a child has endured abuse and neglect requires concentrated focus on that child’s needs and emotions—and Hope & Home parents are especially trained to address this need. It also requires the help of a community to lift up and support the parents and the ministry. Hope & Home counts a strong and committed circle of supporters among our biggest blessings.

We believe that children deserve to be raised in families, not just in a house or a home. Children must feel embraced as part of a family to feel loved and respected and to grow up with a healthy sense of self-respect and confidence. Hope & Home is committed to creating permanence for children through strong, healthy families whether they return to their birth parents or get adopted by their foster family.

**HOW DO CHILDREN END UP IN FOSTER CARE?**

Every single child who lands in foster care is the victim of severe abuse or neglect ...

Babies, brothers and sisters, teenagers: All kinds of good kids get caught in the middle when bad things happen in their families—things like drug abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, homelessness, mental illness. In many of these homes, the struggling parents abuse or neglect their children severely enough for county officials to remove the children and place them in safe foster homes.

That’s where Hope & Home comes in—and where you can, too—simply by giving these kids a strong sense of belonging and acceptance that only a loving family can offer. Some children need just a short time in foster care while their family receives help; the kids are then returned, or reunified, with their birth family. Others can never go back and need a new family to adopt them. However long a child is with you, your love and care may be the only light coming into their dark and scary world—and that can make a world of difference.
Awakening a compassionate heart and a global mind-set in children for people beyond the boundaries of their own neighborhoods.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS... HAITI?

Haiti occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola, between the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Haiti has an area of 10,714 square miles. It shares a border of 171 miles with the Dominican Republic and has a coastline of 1,100 miles.

QUICK STATS

- **POPULATION**: 10,915,119
- **LANGUAGE**: Haitian Creole
- **RELIGION**: 80% Roman Catholic, 16% Protestant, 3% Other Religions
NOW THAT WE KNOW THE LOCATION OF HAITI, LET’S MEET ITS PEOPLE.

• Haiti is the most mountainous nation in the Caribbean. Hayti is the Indian name for the country and means “land of the mountains.” The mountain peaks reach over 8,000 feet.

• A 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck 14 miles west of Haiti in January 2010, destroying most of the capital of Port-au-Prince. The estimated death toll ranges exceeded 300,000 people.

• Only about 10% of all Haitian children enrolled in elementary school go on to a high school.

DID YOU KNOW?

Haitian cuisine is a mixture of French, African, Spanish, and indigenous cooking methods, ingredients, and dishes. Rice and beans (dire ak pwa) are a staple. Vegetable and meat stews are popular too. Goat, beef, chicken, and fish are complemented with plantains, cabbage, tomatoes, and peppers. A favorite to add to every meal is Pikliz, which is spicy pickled vegetables.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE COUNTRY OF HAITI, READ THE STORYTELLING ARTICLE ON PAGE 10.
PARENTS

The middle school years can be tough—for our kids, and for us. Our children are changing, outwardly and inwardly as they develop into the men and women God intended them to be. Frankly, these changes can be confusing, uncomfortable, and downright difficult at times. And they often require us to change as well. While we remain committed to godly principles, Biblical discipline, and Christ-like behavior, our adolescent kids require a different set of parenting skills than our younger children. Pray daily for the Lord to allow you to see each individual child through His eyes—with His patience, grace, and unyielding love—through this time of change.
THE LETTER I WISH I’D WRITTEN TO MY MIDDLE SCHOOL DAUGHTER

Hi, Baby Doll,

Oops—sorry. I know you don’t like it when I call you that. It’s just that I’ve called you Baby Doll for like, ever. But it’s okay. I get it. I guess. Anyway. When I dropped you off at school this morning we were both a little irritated (for the record, it really was your turn to feed the dog, not your brother’s). Okay. Forget that. What I wanted to tell you is that I’m sad we keep bickering. We used to have so much fun together. Remember Girl Scouts? Softball season? All of those birthday parties? We were so close. I helped you with homework; you helped me with dinner. I told you how to do fractions; you told me about your day. I thought you’d be my Baby Doll forever, you thought I was cool.

Things sure have changed, haven’t they?

But I’ve been thinking, and (try not to hurt your neck rolling your eyes), I’m okay with it. No really, I’m good. Because I know that this time will pass. Don’t get me wrong, I will continue to try, to listen, to understand, to see things from your perspective. And you will continue to try, to listen, to obey, to be respectful. But believe it or not, in a few short years things are going to turn around for us. I promise, it’s true. We are going to be great again, you and me. Better than ever, in fact. Because God is for us. And since His love prevails, I know that one day …

1. You won’t mind me calling you Baby Doll.

Or Sweet Pea. Or Honey Bunny Lu Lu Bean. In fact, you’ll love it. Instead of annoying you, those silly names will actually make you smile. You will know that they’re not meant to rile you; each name is simply a way for me to express my overwhelming, colossal, crazy love for you. But it’s okay. For now, I will hold off on embarrassing you with the monikers. Don’t worry, one day they’ll be back. Love is patient. (1 Corinthians 13:4)

2. You won’t mind my advice.

Brace yourself, this one may be a little shocking. Honestly, there will come a day when you will not only listen to my opinion, you will actually seek it. You will consider my opinion and (wait for it …) follow it! You will consider my counsel as wise words worth heeding. You will listen to my suggestions because you will trust wholeheartedly that my only concern, my primary motivation, is keeping you safe and wanting what’s best for you. It always protects (1 Corinthians 13:7).

3. You won’t mind my prying.

Right now, we’re in transition; you’re not a little girl anymore and I’m not the mom of a little girl anymore. Growing up means wanting to make your own decisions and craving more privacy. The problem is, this is precisely the time in your life when Dad and I should know more about what’s going on in your life. That’s a challenge. But we will keep working it through. And one day you will share with me, not because you’re asked to, but because you want to. Always trusts (1 Corinthians 13:7).

4. You won’t mind having to get my approval.

You’ll even be terribly disappointed if you don’t receive it. About the friends you choose. The boys you like. Classes you take. Jobs you consider. You will care deeply that I endorse your judgment. And you will appreciate the fact that I only care because you are more valuable to me than anything in the universe. I am ready, willing, and able to keep walking through our temporary struggles because one day you will appreciate why I cared so much about your choices. Always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:7)

5. You won’t mind being seen with me.

In fact, you’ll think it’s pretty fabulous. You’ll post pictures of us together and tell all of your friends how close we are. Isn’t that hard to imagine? We’ll laugh and shop and eat together, because we want to. We’ll watch shows together. We’ll talk on the phone. We’ll chat on my bed late at night and have countless inside jokes. You will want to spend time with me. I can hardly wait. Because God is for us. And His love prevails. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Love, Mom

by Kathryn O’Brien

Both of Kathryn’s middle school daughters are currently in college. They both consider themselves besties with their mom, laugh about the tumultuous middle school years, and are fine with the fact that they were used in this article to share hope for other middle school moms. In fact, they don’t mind at all.
OPEN MY EYES

As we sat on the mountainside, I kept hearing the same kind of statements from the young people around me.

“I never knew there was poverty like this.”
“I’ve never prayed over a sick person before.”
“I never knew that I had a heart for children before this week.”
“I’ve never experienced Jesus in such a real way.”

This past March, I was a part of a team from my church that went to do ministry in Haiti. The team was close to 50% adults and 50% high school students. Each morning we would hike through the mountains to begin our day with prayer and reflection. Seeing the faces of these students as they made one of these “I never” statements, was like watching the words of Psalm 119:18 come to life: “Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions” (NLT). I was watching eyes open up right there before me.

At my church, this is not an uncommon occurrence since we’ve stopped seeing serving as something that only adults do, or segregating serving experiences by age group. There are a couple of different reasons for this change.

First, on a purely practical level, there are things that need doing. “What needs to be done?” We often know the answer to that question but we’re left confused when trying to figure out who will actually do it. Too often, we’re looking for help but missing the fact that we’ve left a significant group on the bench—our young people!

Since we’ve changed our approach, we have seen incredible things happen at our church. We’ve seen a huge fundraiser envisioned by a middle schooler, executed by high schoolers, and involving the entire church. A teenager from our church also organized an event that mobilized hundreds of people, both peers and adults, to pack meals for hungry people all over the globe. We’ve sent teenagers overseas on trips partnered with adults and seen many come to Christ.

We’ve been blown away by the way the Spirit has led teens to make a huge impact. When we see what needs to be done and ask who is going to do it, the answer might be you and your teenage kids.

Second, experiences bring life to knowledge. If you are a parent trying to teach your children to follow God, it’s one thing to tell them, but it’s another to show them. In each of these stories, every student was supported by parents, and in most scenarios, they were right there serving alongside their teenager. These moments were huge discipleship milestones for these teens and their families.

It makes sense! Jesus didn’t call His disciples to learn from Him, He called them follow Him. The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ!” This is the biblical model of discipleship. As a parent, then, the way of discipling our kids is to faithfully follow Christ and invite them to join us. Here are a few practical ways to put that into action through serving.

• Talk to your pastor about needs in the church that could be met by opening up serving opportunities for young people.
• Take a look at the ways you’re currently serving. Is there a way to invite your teenagers to join you?
• Ask your kids, “What do you think needs to be done? How might God be calling us to do it together?”

It’s an incredible experience to see eyes open and to see the kids we invest in become consumed with following Jesus. If you want to experience that with your own kids, boldly follow Jesus by serving and invite your kids to join you!

by Eric Hays

Eric is the high school pastor at Christ Community Church in the suburbs of Chicago. In addition to seeing young people follow Jesus, he is also passionate about food, podcasts, music, and running to burn off all the food. He and his wife, Adrianne, love going on adventures around Chicago with their two kids, Kendall and Kieran.
As moms, we continually ask, “What needs to be done?” and go about trying to do exactly that all day long. There are always plenty of clothes to wash, dishes to clean, and meals to prepare! One morning while I was trying to get “all the things done,” I kept hearing, “I want,” “Gimme,” and “That’s mine!” from my young children. I realized these three precious children needed a lesson in being thankful. We already ask our children to say, “please,” and, “thank you,” at the appropriate times (as most parents do). This certainly wasn’t enough, though. Like many people in our culture, we have so much and take much of what we have for granted. So, I started praying and seeking additional opportunities to train our children in being thankful.

One such time presented itself as my son and daughters were waving eagerly to our trashmen. When I suggested we go see the trashmen and say, “Thank you for taking our trash away,” the children were excited. This started a weekly routine of greeting our trashmen and thanking them for the service they provide to our family. This weekly meeting was a highlight for all of us and began a friendship between our family and the men serving us. Each week’s meeting ended with the children watching the trash truck drive out of sight while waving frantically, screaming, “Thank you!” I felt like I had at least a small victory.

Fortunately, God answers mothers’ prayers much better than we expect or hope. I had only sought to teach thankfulness, but God softened and prepared my children’s hearts for another lesson. A lesson on serving! As we nurtured this friendship with our trashmen, my children learned about their new friends and saw some of their needs. The children love to draw pictures and make thank you notes for these men who may have a need to feel appreciated. On hot days the children bring chilled bottles of water or Gatorade to their thirsty new friends. When our driver was expecting his first baby, my children said, “The baby needs baby clothes!” We bought a gift to meet a need. Our faithful trashmen seem as eager to see the children each week, give high-fives, play tag, and hear “thank you,” as the children are.
As I saw a need for a lesson in thankfulness and sought to meet that need, God provided a lesson for our family on serving. Because of this, my children, without my intervention or encouragement, have begun to see the needs of others. My kindergartener’s teacher shares that our child sees the needs of her classmates and tries to help, share, or comfort. When my husband and I were talking about a disabled friend who needed help with yard work, our youngest overheard us and called out, “Of course we want to go help!” We realized they could help by simply pulling weeds and hauling small tree branches. As we drive through our neighborhood and the children see a lost dog, they now see the dog’s need to get home. They pray for the dog to find his way back to safety and usually ask if we can stop to see if the dog has a collar with a telephone number.

**God is so good in His lessons.** I’m a very thankful momma who is learning to see things through His eyes and answering the call to service right along with my children. In fact, they often lead me!

Diana is in love with being a wife, mother, and homemaker. She grew up in an Air Force family, mainly living in the southwest United States. She is a former certified public accountant, foster mom, and adoptive mom. She and her husband, Jim, have been married for over 20 years. Every week they enjoy Friday Family Fun Night with their three children.
What, exactly, makes a dad awesome?

I’m not sure there’s a definitive list or definition for what makes a dad awesome, but, to get the conversation started, here are at least 10 ways I know dads can be awesome ...

1. LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

Deuteronomy 6 talks about passing on our faith to our children. But, before we can do that, it says we must love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. Suffice it to say, an awesome dad loves God in this way.

2. LOVE YOUR WIFE.

This one I’m sure about! Dad loves Mom, and shows it! This, probably all by itself, qualifies Dad as awesome. Why? Because it says a whole lot about who Dad is. And if he loves Mom properly and shows it through his words and deeds, you can probably guess how he acts in a lot of other areas.

3. ENGAGE WITH YOUR KIDS.

I’m sure you’ve seen it before. Maybe at the store. Or maybe at the park. The kid is doing everything possible to get Dad’s attention, only to be ignored as Dad goes about his business, whatever that may be. Unfortunately, for many kids, this is the norm. At home. Away from home. Wherever they may be. An awesome dad engages with his kids. He plays with them. He has meaningful conversations with them. He knows their interests—and what they’re not interested in. He pays attention, even when his to-do list is a mile long and he’s rather be doing something else.
4. **PROTECT YOUR KIDS.**

It’s pretty natural for a dad to protect his kids physically. If my son runs out into a busy street, I’m absolutely going to put myself in harm’s way to protect him. But an awesome dad will protect his kids in other ways, too. Emotionally. Socially. Spiritually. An awesome dad is aware of the dangers in these areas by being involved enough in his children’s lives to be alert, and he’s not afraid to jump into the hard conversations or battle for his kids in prayer.

5. **PROVIDE BOUNDARIES.**

Oftentimes the media portrays Dad as the guy who lets the kids get away with anything and everything. If Mom is gone, it’s party time with Dad! This isn’t what an awesome dad does. He may be fun, but he also understands that boundaries are necessary for the good of his children. So he provides guidelines, and he’s not afraid to keep the children within those boundaries.

6. **BE ACCEPTING.**

We dads all want our kids to grow up to be just like us. Or we have mental images of what we want our kids to be like (can anyone say, “left-handed pitcher”?). But our kids usually aren’t exactly like us. And sometimes they are very, very different. An awesome dad recognizes this fact and is willing to not only accept it, but support his children for who they are. He’ll support their interests, their personalities, and their giftedness.

7. **WALK THE WALK THAT YOU TALK THE TALK ABOUT.**

Few things will derail a child’s character development faster than hypocritical parents and, specifically, a hypocritical dad. An awesome dad is a man of integrity who not only speaks wisely and instructs his children to grow in godly character, but displays it everyday through his words and deeds.

8. **BE A TEACHER.**

Besides the things of God, kids also need to learn about things to do with everyday life. An awesome dad teaches these things. Things like how to do good work. Or how to fix things. Or how to change a tire. Or how to communicate well. Or how to take risks. Or how to talk to the opposite sex. You get the idea. An awesome dad teaches his kids how to do life in the real world.

9. **HAVE GOD’S EYES FOR THE WORLD AROUND YOU.**

Awesome dads serve people, put the needs of others before their own, and facilitate ways for their children to live other-centered lives. Ask God to give you His eyes to see the needs of others, and then ask the question, “What needs to be done?” The next step is to be obedient and lead by example, serving in your home, your church, your neighborhood, and even the world.

10. **PRAY FOR AND PRAY WITH YOUR KIDS.**

It’s hard for us dads to accept, but, in the end, we all know that we really aren’t in control of our children. We must be dependent on God, and lean into His grace to raise our children to be young men and women of character, capable of handling what life throws at them. This understanding forces the awesome dad to his knees, laying his children before God on a daily basis. Likewise, we understand that they, too, must depend on God as they grow to adulthood. The single best way to facilitate this is through teaching them to come before God themselves. In other words, pray with them. An awesome dad immerses his fathering in prayer.

So, there are 10 ways to be an awesome dad, but this is just the beginning. We’d love to hear your ideas of what makes a dad awesome by sharing on our social media and using the hashtag #HFAwesomeDad!

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Greg has been in children's and family ministry for nearly 30 years as children's and family pastor, consultant, speaker, and coach. He now serves as VP of Global Resources for David C Cook. Greg has been married to Michele for more than 25 years and they have two grown sons, Taylor and Garret.
Parker and Macy Bennett greeting at church
Phew! We made it with seconds to spare. Our family was stationed at our church’s main door with stacks of crisp bulletins in hand, ready to greet people with a smile—or at least a largely cheerful “Good morning” (it was early for teenagers). We knew what to do; my husband, son, daughter, and I had been greeting since our son was old enough to stand in place and not bolt.

This same sweet boy is now looking at colleges, so I treasure the moments we have together as a family. This day I found my mind wandering back to memories of those early days of greeting: My toddler son in his fancy little outfit giving an elderly gentleman a high-five with a tiny-toothed giggle.

The wise words, “What needs to be done?” encapsulate our family’s desire to serve others. But long before we’d heard them, we knew we wanted to instill in our kids the value of loving others well. Years ago we attended a small church, and the call to help was almost desperate. There was so much to be done that every time we walked through the doors it was all hands on deck.

What we see when we ask, “What needs to be done?” has evolved for our family through the years. Intentionally cultivating an attitude of service in our little ones meant my husband and me finding ways to demonstrate love to others that could involve our children. Other wise words that have guided our family are ... keep your eyes up and out. If your eyes are down or focused on yourself, how will you be able to see the need in others and respond to it?

When our kids were very little, serving looked like greeting at church, picking up trash in the parking lot, shopping for canned goods to donate, talking about service, and generally loving others well. This took patience—slowing down to notice what needed to be done, and bringing our kids along with us.

When the children reached elementary age, the opportunities expanded: service days at church (or school), raking, cleaning, singing Christmas carols with other families, ringing the Salvation Army bell, baking and delivering cookies ... all as a family, encouraging others as we went. We had fun while we worked and modeled joy when interacting with others in need—never grumbling. We talked before and after about what we were doing, and why. We began to see certain gifts and strengths growing in our children. Through the years, we continued greeting—even through a move of hundreds of miles. This was my husband’s great love and a stable foundation for our family—encouraging and connecting with people.

Although our kids genuinely desire to serve, it isn’t as easy to be in harmony with how we’ll serve as a family. The days of signing us up without hearing numerous opinions or potential scheduling conflicts are long gone. Take greeting for example. I watched my tall son after he drifted outside to hold the door open for people and my sweet, shy daughter slightly smiling as she recognized a boy from school, and I realized that within our family, our kids have unique gifts and abilities from God. We’re each a part of the body of Christ, called to humbly serve others, and how that looks for each of us is going to be different.

When our kids are young, we train this spiritual muscle by serving alongside them. As they grow older, God will give each person their own unique set of eyes. When we reach this point, it’s only natural for us to start to branch off. In our family, my husband feels a strong call to reach out to be sure people feel seen and welcomed. My son invests hours serving as part of the student ministry worship band, playing bass guitar. My daughter and I love caring for dogs at our community’s shelter, and are able to share the love of Jesus not only with healing animals, but in building relationships while serving. Great joy comes from serving alongside others, in community. In this season, whenever possible, we come back together to serve, knowing God builds His body as we encourage one another. While God draws each of us to different ways of looking “up and out,” they’re all opportunities to love others well.

by Stephanie Bennett

Stephanie Bennett is an editor at David C Cook, wife, and mother who lives in Colorado Springs. She met her husband of nearly 23 years, Rich, at the University of Kansas. They have two teenagers, Parker and Macy, and now three rescue hounds, Penny, Sophie, and Digger. She enjoys books, movies, the ‘80s, and living near the mountains.
So many opinions and voices fight for our attention throughout our culture and media. Focusing on God’s instructions and truths for our marriages in this 21st century can be a real challenge at times. As a couple who has been happily married for over 40 years, we would love to share with you just a few basic principles and lessons we have incorporated into our own marriage that have served us well.

1. Leave, cleave, and become one.
   (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:7)
   This marriage advice comes straight from Scripture! Once you leave the altar, your relationship to everyone and everything changes forever— including, but not limited to, your parents, your friends, and your resources. Cleaving, or drawing toward your spouse, creates a safe place to be “naked without shame,” fully known, and still unconditionally loved. Even when it’s difficult and you feel like shutting down, it’s worth the time, energy, and selflessness to move toward the other person.

2. No problem is “yours” or “mine.”
   Every problem either of us has is “ours.” A wise pastor shared this with us in our pre-marital counseling and it has been helpful advice for us. We resist saying, “YOU have an anger problem,” or, “I have a fear problem.” Instead it’s, “WE have an anger problem,” or, “WE have a fear problem.” We’ve found empowering camaraderie in knowing that neither of us is alone, and together with God we can overcome much.

3. Have a life-long commitment to try to out-serve one another.
   In Mark 10:44, Jesus said that the greatest of all is the servant of all. This has actually become a fun practice for us—to consider and serve each other in big and small ways throughout our marriage.

4. Accept, appreciate, and celebrate one another’s differences.
   We came together from extremely different backgrounds. When we were dating we found the phrase “different is not worse; it’s just different” to be very helpful. Our differences have helped us become stronger, more united, more productive, and even better versions of ourselves. One of us was raised in a more regimented atmosphere, where the emphasis was on a strong work ethic in which there was no play until the “work” was done (which is never). The other was raised in a more out-of-the-box, fun-loving, and carefree environment. This combination in our early days was a recipe for plenty of robust dialogue. Over our marriage, one has taught us to work hard while the other has taught us to play hard and make it fun.

5. “Perspective is everything” is a common but true cliche.
   Perspective is simply the angle from which one views something. We encourage you to practice taking a view from your spouse’s perspective and examining ways that you can come together to experience more synergy, adventure, and joy.

6. Treat each day as a fragile gift to be treasured and protected.
   John 10:10 says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Often the thief that drives our day off-course looks a lot like us. We have learned and practice that THIS day will never be back again! With that in mind, we want to enjoy it to its fullest and not let the enemy or ourselves cause us to waste it in arguments, stewing, or anything that robs us of even a moment of our joy.

These six principles are just a bird’s eye view of focusing on God’s best for our marriages. Our prayer for you and your marriage is from Psalm 119:18: that He will open your eyes to see the wonderful truths in His instructions for your walk together in this life.

by Chip and Colleen Judd

Chip and Colleen have been happily married for more than 40 years. They have three amazing children, three spectacular children-in-law, five adorable grand-daughters, and one eagerly anticipated grandson expected to arrive in 2017. They pastored a church for 24 years and Chip, who is also a marriage and family counselor, currently serves on staff at Seacoast Church. They live in Charleston, SC.
My adult children often tease me that I am a way better grandmother than I was a mother. And to be honest, I think I agree with them. Something about my values and priorities has shifted over the years. It’s funny how things can seem so important to us as young moms and dads, but with age we become laser focused on the things that truly are important. This must be why Job tells us, “Wisdom belongs to the aged, and understanding to the old” (Job 12:12).

Consider my mind-set change in the area of chores. In my generation, we all had chores. They were usually delegated according to gender: boys dump the trash, girls do the dishes, boys do yard work, girls cook the meals, and so on. This was not necessarily a bad thing, but it wasn’t something that shaped a generation to look at a situation as a whole. I know that in my home it caused resentment when my brother had to “do a girl’s job!”

When my children were young, I didn’t necessarily divide their responsibilities by gender, but they each had duties listed on a chore chart. As the children completed their tasks, we happily checked off the boxes, and I handed out rewards each week.

After reading Spiritual Parenting by Dr. Michelle Anthony, I realized the importance of shaping a child’s heart for service. Five simple words flip-flopped my perspective: “What needs to be done?” Rather than checking off a list of chores, this simple question takes the responsibility off of me and puts it back on my grandchildren. Instead of me walking into a room and pointing out the blocks and Legos they left out, I simply say, “What needs to be done?” The beauty is that THEY have to look to discover the need. And then, they have to do what it takes to meet that need.

Training this muscle in our grandchildren can start from the earliest of ages. When my grandson was just two years old, we were prepping for a family party. As we all worked to clean up the backyard, I handed him a wet sponge and said, “Jax, what needs to be done?” He looked at me and walked over to the picnic table and began wiping down the benches. This may not have been the chore I would have assigned, yet, at age two he got to choose and participate in preparing for the party.

Raising a generation that has eyes to see needs and the obedience to meet them is truly turning duty to devotion. It starts with simple things in the home and leads to the profound things of life. What needs to be done in my school, in my church, in my neighborhood, in my city, and in the world? I get excited when I think about the possibilities that lie before my grandchildren as they enter every situation asking this question. They can become world-changers when they don’t limit themselves to a list and open their hearts to serving others in the ways that God directs them.

Debbie Guinn

Debbie is the Editor in Chief of HomeFront. She has more than 25 years of experience working in children’s and family ministries. She is passionate about equipping parents to become leaders of God’s truth in their own households. Her most cherished time is spent hanging out with her grandkids—they are her favorite people on this planet!

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10 ENVIRONMENTS

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

1. Responsibility

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

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.

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.

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.”

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.

7

“I belong to God, and He loves me!”

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!

8

“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.

9

“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.

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.

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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Did you know that between the ages of 8 and 12, kids often start to wonder if Christianity is true. In Cold-Case Christianity for Kids, detective J. Warner and Susie Wallace draws readers into the thrill of high-stakes investigation by showing them how to think rather than telling them what to think.

This children’s companion to the bestselling Cold-Case Christianity includes author illustrations and links to a website where kids can download activities, fill in case notes, and earn a certificate of merit.

J. WARNER AND SUSIE WALLACE have been training young people in the church setting for over a decade. J. Warner is a cold-case detective who has been featured on Dateline, FOX News, and Court TV. He is the author of Cold-Case Christianity, God’s Crime Scene, and Forensic Faith.