

APRIL 2017

# HomeFront

a spiritual parenting resource





# GETTING STARTED

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HOW TO PREPARE  
FOR EASTER.

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NEED SOME  
EVIDENCE OF THE  
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WANT YOUR HIGH  
SCHOOLER TO  
KNOW GOD?

KNOWING



“ We believe that the Holy Spirit is God’s chosen teacher. It is He who causes spiritual growth and formation when and as He chooses. As such, we have articulated 10 distinct environments to create in your home. We desire to create spiritual space, which we refer to as an environment, in which God’s Spirit can move freely. ”

Nothing is more spiritually vital 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 for knowing God, studying His Word, and cultivating a relationship with Him through Christ.

We live in a world that denies and dismisses the existence of absolute truth. What a tragedy! We face an urgency to pass on the truth of God and His Word to the next generation. **As we learn God’s truth, we open up to knowing God Himself and entering into relationship with Him.** Creating space for our families to study God’s Word will develop a hunger and thirst to know Him more.



**Michelle Anthony**  
Executive Pastor: Family Ministries | New Life Church  
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## OUR MISSION



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



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



**SUPPORT** families to engage their communities and change the culture around them.

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### INSPIRE, EQUIP, SUPPORT



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**I am the worst at getting-to-know-you games. In fact, you will usually see me slip out the back or find any excuse to get out of an awkward and forced introduction with complete strangers.** Don't get me wrong— I love meeting people and learning about their interests and life experiences, but there is just something about those games that sends me running for cover.

I'm grateful that getting to know God doesn't happen in a flurry of silly questions and uncomfortable introductions. Getting to know God and being known by Him is more like "deep calling to deep"—the depths of our souls finding their satisfaction in Him (Psalm 42:7). As we put this issue of HomeFront together, a theme began to appear—a theme that reflects the importance of a time-tested relationship with the one true God. What we discovered was: if you know God, you can trust Him. His faithfulness in some of life's most difficult situations demands our trust.

Samantha Fugate shares about trusting God's character even through a failed adoption in our **EVERYDAY MOM BLOG** (page 36). Our **TOUGH TOPICS** article (page 40) reveals the tremendous faith of Roxy and Holland Davis as they explain how Jesus sees and loves their son who struggles with mental illness.

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, we are able to have a deep and meaningful relationship with God. This month's **TRADITIONS** article

(page 16) highlights the powerful symbolism represented in a Passover meal. You will love the comparisons relating the original Passover meal to the fulfillment found in Jesus.

**Easter takes on profound meaning as we recognize that God sent His Son because He wants a relationship with us.**

He doesn't have to ask icebreaker getting-to-know-you questions because He already knows everything about us and loves us dearly!

**Debbie Guinn**  
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## WWW.HOMEFRONTMAG.COM

### 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.

## FAMILY VERSE

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.



**Consider purchasing an 8" x 10" frame to hold your family memory verse each month!**

## LET'S BE SOCIAL!



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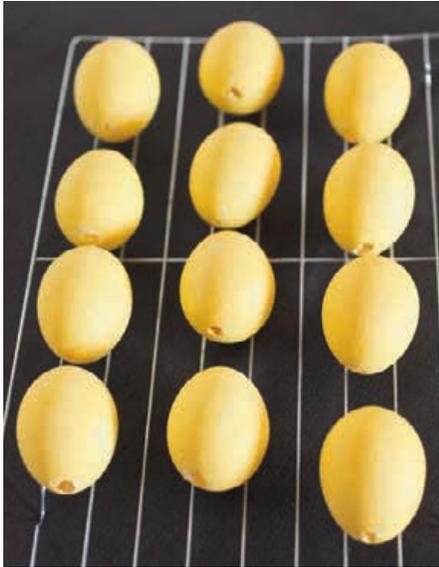
NOW THIS IS  
ETERNAL LIFE:  
THAT THEY KNOW  
YOU, THE ONLY  
TRUE GOD, AND  
JESUS CHRIST,  
WHOM YOU  
HAVE SENT.

JOHN 17:3



## CAPTURING THE SEASON

# HIDDEN MESSAGE EGGS



These surprise message eggs will create beautiful place settings for your Easter meal. As you celebrate the resurrection of Christ, your family and guests will be able to open the eggs and reveal a message of hope and joy!

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Hidden Message printout found at [bit.ly/homefronthiddenmessage](http://bit.ly/homefronthiddenmessage)
- eggs (1 per setting)
- needle
- bowl
- toothpick
- paint (chalk paint, watercolor, craft paint, or even egg dye)
- paintbrush

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Use a needle to pierce one end of an egg.
2. Then, using the needle again, make a slightly larger hole at the opposite end of the egg.
3. Position the egg over a bowl and blow through the needle-size hole; the raw egg will come out the other end.
4. Once your egg is empty, run some warm water through the holes and shake the water around inside the egg to clean it out.
5. Let the inside of the egg dry out.
6. Paint your egg and let it dry.
7. Cut out the messages on your Hidden Message printout.
8. Tightly wrap your message around the end of a wooden toothpick.
9. Slide it into the egg through the larger hole.
10. Before your meal on Easter Sunday, have your guests open their eggs to reveal their hidden message!

by 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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 Twitter @homefrontsp

## WORSHIP

# THE GIFT OF WORSHIP

Think of someone you know. How do you know that person? What do you know about him or her? Knowing someone means you've taken time to learn who she is and have heard her story. You've learned what her preferences are, what she likes to do, and how she reacts to certain things. This all comes about by intentionally pursuing and spending time with this person, which is how deep, meaningful relationships form.

When I think of the people I know, I often think about the time it took to really get to know them. We've engaged in countless conversations, shared meals, played games, hiked, cried, and laughed together. The more I've gotten to know these special people, the deeper and richer our friendships have become. Over the time it takes to cultivate relationships, we trust the other people with more and more of ourselves. The trust grows stronger the more we get to know each other.

As parents, our children know us because we are with them daily. We take care of them, we protect them, we teach them, and we love them. This is like the relationship God has with us. When we spend time developing a relationship with Him, we discover His true character and learn to trust Him more and more. As we share ourselves with Him, He speaks truth into our inmost beings and reveals certain gifts within us. This intimacy fills us with joy, and our response is to worship!

***"When we spend time developing a relationship with Him [God], we discover His true character and learn to trust him more and more."***

There are many ways we can worship God when we know His character and His delight in us. Fortunately, for me, they go beyond singing on Sunday mornings (I'm a terrible singer). God made us to be creative people. We reflect God when we create. My own form of expression is through the arts, specifically dance. I often use this form of creativity as a way to uniquely share the gospel. When I come before Him with an open heart and posture as I turn, jump, and wave my arms fluidly, my dance creates a beautiful story using movement.

"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another."

1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)

Whatever gifts God has given you can be used to worship God and know Him more. God created this beautiful world in His image. What we create can be used to worship Him. This month, as a family, discuss some ways to worship God together. Consider using the creative gifts He has given you. Remind your family that worship is a way to spend time with God, get to know Him better, and respond to His love for you. Put on some worship music and use your gifts to honor God. Sing, dance, draw, or paint in response to the words you hear. Pray together and thank God that He has created each of us with gifts that we can use to worship Him and know Him more.

by Brittany Charnley

*Brittany is a communications and public relations professional with a passion for helping brands creatively tell their stories. She and her husband, Kent, currently reside in Orange County, CA, with their daughter, Blake. Brittany has a BA in public relations from Pepperdine University. She loves Disney, products with a purpose, trying new foods, and discovering new music. She is a self-proclaimed "cool, hip mom" and blogs about it on her personal blog [www.TheCoolHipMom.com](http://www.TheCoolHipMom.com).*

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

## DO YOU KNOW?

**Pop quiz! As a family, read each of the questions below and try to choose the correct answer.** The questions focus on Jesus' resurrection. Jesus rising from the dead is a critical moment in The Big God Story—and was God's plan from the very beginning! The more we know about Jesus being raised, the better we can understand God's love for us and be equipped to share this life-changing truth with others.

1. How many days after Jesus' death did God raise Him from the dead?
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
2. In which of the books of the Bible can you read about the resurrection of Jesus?
  - a. Matthew and Luke
  - b. Matthew, Mark, and Luke
  - c. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
3. What does the angel say to the women at the tomb in the book of Matthew?
  - a. "I am sorry for your loss."
  - b. "Do not be afraid."
  - c. "Behold, God is good."
4. True or False: Each of the four gospel accounts of the resurrection records an angel saying, "He is not here; He has risen!"
5. In Luke's account of the resurrection, who runs to the tomb after Jesus has risen?
  - a. Peter
  - b. Judas
  - c. James
6. In John's account, Mary Magdalene does not recognize the resurrected Jesus. She instead mistakes Him for whom?
  - a. a soldier
  - b. an angel
  - c. a gardener
7. True or False: Before Jesus' death, He predicted that He would rise from the dead.
8. What did the women bring with them to the tomb?
  - a. children
  - b. spices
  - c. flowers
9. How did the angel appear at the tomb?
  - a. His clothes shone like a rainbow.
  - b. His appearance was sunlight and his clothes were bright.
  - c. His appearance was lightning and his clothes white as snow.
10. True or False: The guards were instructed to tell everyone the truth about what happened to Jesus at the tomb.

## GET YOUR CHILDREN TALKING

1. Have someone retell the story of Jesus' death and resurrection in their own words.
2. What is one new thing you learned about Jesus rising from the dead?
3. Why is it so important for us to know about Jesus' resurrection?
4. If someone asked you about why Jesus rose from the dead, what would you say to that person?

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

Answer Key: 1-c, 2-c, 3-b, 4-T, 5-a, 6-c, 7-T, 8-b, 9-c, 10-F

# AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE SAVIOR



## STORYTELLING

**The sun rose over the hills as the morning light warmed Jerusalem.** The elderly grandfather stood outside his humble home, watching the sun rise while stretching his sore muscles and moving joints stiffened from the night of sleep. He smiled and breathed in the fresh air that was always crisp this early in the day, before the streets got dusty with the commotion of the city. Despite his aches and pains, he felt more alive than ever!

You see, it had been several months since that amazing encounter, yet the details ran through his mind every morning, as clearly as if it had happened yesterday ...

The old man had been repairing the broken door on his house when he heard someone from down the street call his name. He looked up and could hardly believe who it was. It was Jesus, the Teacher, and, according to some, the Messiah! The Teacher was walking toward him with some of His followers. Jesus approached the surprised man, smiled, and then proceeded to have a casual yet meaningful conversation with him. They had never met before, yet Jesus somehow knew his name and asked about his children, his grandchildren, and the soreness in his back from the carpentry injury years ago.

**The elderly man was taken aback: Jesus knew his name and both knew and cared about the small details of his life.** What was even more remarkable than that was, well, you see, Jesus was supposed to be ... dead. Jesus had died. The man had been there and had actually seen, with his own eyes, Jesus take His last breath. He had watched Jesus' followers take down His broken body from the cross. There was no doubt about it: He had been dead.

The shocked grandfather, staring at Jesus, remembered that the third day after the burial, rumors had circulated that the body was missing. Some even claimed Jesus had risen from the dead. The man had wanted to believe that this incredible miracle was true, but he couldn't quite embrace it. He didn't want to get his hopes up. He didn't want to sound foolish to his friends and family. However, those excuses and doubts fled his mind on that astounding day when Jesus showed up at his house. There's something about receiving a hearty hug and a kiss from a formerly dead person that tends to have that effect!

After friendly conversation, Jesus had prayed with and for the old man before He went on with His day. Jesus prayed that this man would continue to see and

know the true God and allow himself to be known by God—and, in doing so, experience the abundant, eternal life humans are made for. During that prayer, the old grandfather felt his heart well up with love, energy, and joy that he had never experienced before! He felt like a kid again! **After that prayer, as he watched the Messiah walk away down the road, he knew he would never be the same ...**

And on this cool, bright morning, as the bleating of an awakened sheep snapped his mind back to the here-and-now, the man just smiled and shook his head with amazement for the thousandth time since his encounter with the risen Lord. For he knew that Jesus, God with us, had been dead but now was alive. But resurrection did not just stop there ... for he himself had been dead for most of his life, but through Jesus, he too had come alive!

## PARENTS

"The Bible says that Jesus made a number of appearances after His death. They were to a number of different people over a forty-day period. The Bible specifically says that on Easter Sunday Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, the women who came to Jesus' tomb (Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna), Peter, and two disciples on the Emmaus road. He also appeared to the remainder of the Twelve Disciples with Thomas absent. Later He appeared to them with Thomas present. There was also an appearance to seven disciples on the Sea of Galilee. On another occasion He appeared to over five hundred people at the same time. There is also an appearance to James. Finally Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus—the man who became the Apostle Paul. **These appearances convinced His disciples, beyond any doubt, that He had risen from the dead.**"

[blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_814.cfm](http://blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_814.cfm)

by Jason Kliewer

Jason is a husband, a dad of two daughters, and a Community Pastor at ROCKHARBOR Church in Costa Mesa, CA. He has a master's in Biblical Studies from Grace University in Omaha, NE.



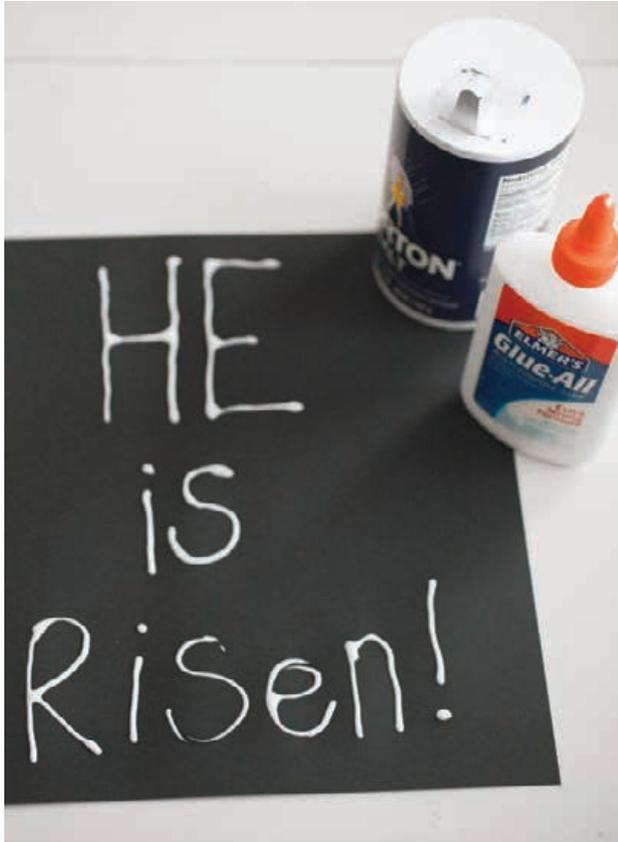
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# SALT PAINTINGS



## We are the salt of the earth! (Matthew 5:13).

This means we are to “flavor” the earth with what we know to be true about God. One truth we know is that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead three days later.

**Together as a family, create these Salt Paintings as a reminder to flavor the earth with truth.** This craft is fun for all ages—from preschoolers through adults. You can choose to draw the words “He is risen!,” make a cross, or do a combination of both. Have fun being creative!

### WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- black construction paper\*
- white glue
- salt
- watercolor paints
- paintbrush

\*Black paper will hide any excess paint.

### WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Start by “drawing” your picture on your black paper with the white glue. (Create simple outlines. It doesn’t work well to fill in big chunks of the paper with glue.)
2. Sprinkle salt over the glue.
3. Pour off the excess salt. The glue does not have to dry before painting; however, be gentle so as not to disturb the wet glue under the salt.
4. Start painting your glue outlines with the watercolor paints. Because the salt is so absorbent, just touching the paintbrush to the salt will spread the color.

by Debbie Guinn



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# PUZZLE HUNT

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Family Verse puzzle from [bit.ly/homefrontpuzzlehunt](http://bit.ly/homefrontpuzzlehunt)
- card stock
- scissors
- 15 Easter eggs
- small baskets or bowls (1 per child)

## BEFORE YOU START

Print out the Family Verse puzzle on cardstock. Cut out each individual puzzle piece and place one piece in each Easter egg. Hide the eggs around your yard or home.

## TIME TO PLAY!

Gather your children and give each of them a basket or bowl. Explain to your kids that they are going on an Easter egg hunt! When they find an egg, they must put it in their basket and continue looking until all 15 eggs are found.

Once your family has found all of the eggs, open them and create a pile of the puzzle pieces. Then, begin to piece the puzzle together.

After the puzzle is complete, you will be able to see the Family Verse for this month. Take advantage of the opportunity to read the verse together, create fun motions to help with memorization, and/or talk about what it means.

## LET'S ADD A TWIST!

Here are a couple of fun twists you may consider adding to your game time:

**Make It Sweet:** If you have a larger family and would like to add more eggs to the hunt, or you just have a sweet tooth, simply add some eggs filled with candy. When your family opens the candy eggs, have your kids dump them into a small bowl and enjoy a family treat as you put the puzzle together.

**Frame It:** We encourage you to frame the Family Verse each month. In addition to framing the verse found in the magazine, frame this puzzle and place it in a child's room or common area for your kids to continue memorizing and talking about the Scripture this month.

## REMEMBER

The environment of Knowing is all about the amazing fact that "God knows me, and I can know Him." Easter is a special time to remember God's deep desire to have a relationship with each and every one of us. He sent Jesus to die in our place and raised Him from the dead so that we may live with Him forever. What an amazing Father we have! As you talk with your children about what it means to know God and be known by Him, encourage them to remember the truth of the resurrection and what our celebration of Easter is really about.

---

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 houseplants.*

# PASSOVER: PREPARING FOR EASTER

Grad school, overtime, and getting ready for a mission trip. It was a particularly busy Easter season, so for sanity's sake I asked my family, "If we can't do all our Easter traditions, what is the one thing we can't miss?" I was surprised to hear my kids agree on "Passover."

## Why is Passover such an important tradition to our family?

Like many traditions, our version of Passover morphed over time and has multiple layers of meaning. When our kids were young, we had a normal supper on the Thursday before Easter but added matzo unleavened bread. We talked about the original Passover and how that relates to Jesus' last supper with His disciples. Over the years, it has grown with our family to be a special time together.

One year, we read that "Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table" (Luke 22:14), so we gathered pillows around the coffee table and "reclined" on the floor. That was a favorite part that continues each year! We now begin with me lighting candles and my husband, Scott, looking around the house for leaven (we previously placed a few small piles of yeast!). He sweeps it into a spoon and napkin with a feather and "chases" it out of the house.

The youngest child asks, "**Why is this night different than all other nights?**" Scott answers, "For on other nights we eat bread, but tonight we eat only matzo." Then we tell the story of the first Passover and God's deliverance from Egypt, and we eat the first round of matzo and drink a goblet of grape juice.

"**Why is this night different than all other nights?**" "For on other nights we eat other vegetables, but tonight we eat only bitter herbs." The kids never actually ate the bitter herbs, so I stopped buying them (I know—weak!). We eat chopped apples and cinnamon and tell of the bricks the slaves made and how the redemption of God turns bitterness into sweetness.

"**Why is this night different than all other nights?**" "For on other nights we eat sitting up, but tonight we all recline." We tell how God delivered His people from slavery to Egypt's pharaoh and His people today

from slavery to sin. Free people recline; servants stand. We pray for others who are still in physical or spiritual slavery.

And so the evening continues with food (parsley dipped in salt water, roasted eggs, and roasted lamb), questions, storytelling, Bible reading, and prayer (amazingly, there's not much eye-rolling, as there has been with some of our other attempts at family worship!). Our time ends with a fresh reminder that Jesus is our Passover Lamb, that His death bought us back from sin and death, and that when we put our trust in Him, we have fellowship with Him forever. It gets our minds ready to grieve with the disciples over Jesus' death and to celebrate His amazing and triumphant resurrection. God knows us intimately, He knows our need, and He makes a way for us to know Him.

**I love traditions that highlight the meaning of celebrations.** Passover takes a step back in time, celebrating God's work through thousands of years and reminding us that faith in the Messiah is still our only hope. It teaches our kids the unity of Scripture and that the Israelites were saved by faith in the coming Messiah, just as we are saved through faith in the Messiah who has come. Passover is a mixture of fun (reclining on pillows), close fellowship (sharing Scripture, stories, and prayers), and celebration of God's redemption.

## BUILD YOUR FAMILY'S PASSOVER TRADITIONS:

The original Passover story can be found in Exodus 12. The Lord's Supper is found in Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, and Luke 22:7-38.

Books like *Let's Make a Memory* by Gloria Gaither and Shirley Dobson help script a Passover meal.

Use just part of the Passover to fit your family's attention span and choose what is most meaningful. Younger kids can ask the questions and older kids can help answer the questions and read Scripture.

Invite friends to join you—it can be a culturally rich setting for sharing the meaning of Christ's sacrifice.

## TRADITIONS

## MEANING OF THE SYMBOLS

**MATZO****ORIGINAL PASSEVER**

Bread was unleavened because the Israelites had to leave Egypt quickly and didn't have time for the bread to rise. Leaven represents sin.

**FULFILLMENT IN JESUS**

Bread represents Jesus' body given for us. The holes and stripes in the matzo remind us that Jesus was "pierced for our transgressions ... and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

**GRAPE JUICE**  
or wine

Represents joy.

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20).

**BITTER HERBS**  
such as horseradish  
or onions

Reminder of the bitterness of slavery.

Reminder of the high cost to Jesus for our redemption.

**PARSLEY**  
dipped in salt water

Life without redemption is full of tears.

Parsley is green all year, representing eternal life in Christ. We look forward to the day when God will "wipe every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4).

**HAROSETH**  
a mixture of chopped apples,  
nuts, cinnamon, and wine

Reminds us of the bricks and mortar used to build Pharaoh's cities.

Redemption brings sweetness from bitterness.

**ROASTED EGG**  
or hard-boiled egg

Represents the burnt offerings in the temple.

Jesus gives us new life when we trust in Him. We no longer need to offer sacrifices because Jesus was the final sacrifice.

**LAMB**

The blood of a lamb was placed on the doorpost so the final plague of the exodus, the death of firstborn sons, would "pass over" Israelite families.

Jesus is our Passover Lamb. God's judgement passes over us when we place our faith in Christ.

by Sarah Willis

*Sarah and her husband, Scott, have been married for 33 years and have four grown children, two children-in-law, and one grandson. She just finished her doctorate in physical therapy, building on her specialty in pediatrics. Sarah has a heart for those going through life challenges and loves to see God honored and trusted in day-to-day life. She likes to knit funny kids' hats and IV covers, take walks on beautiful days, and read Spanish stories.*



# MAC-N-CHEESE CUPS



**One thing I know to be true in my family: Everyone loves mac-n-cheese! Whether it is from a blue box or a painstaking homemade batch, it is always a win. These Mac-n-Cheese Cups are a fun twist on the classic and will be a great addition to your Easter brunch menu!**

Prep Time: 35 min. Cook Time: 20 min. Yields: 12 Mac-N-Cheese Cups

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1/2 pound uncooked elbow macaroni
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup milk
- 2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese (8 ounces)
- 1/2 cup plain panko bread crumbs

\* For an easy metric conversion chart, search the Internet for "metric kitchen."

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. Heat oven to 425° F.
2. Place 12 foil muffin liners in a muffin tin.
3. Spray liners with cooking spray.
4. Cook macaroni as directed on package, drain, and set aside.
5. In a medium-size saucepan, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat.
6. Add flour, salt, and pepper. Cook and beat with whisk 1 to 2 minutes or until thickened.
7. Slowly mix in milk. Heat just to boiling, stirring frequently.
8. Remove from heat. Stir in cheese.
9. Stir in macaroni.
10. Divide mixture evenly among cups.
11. In medium-size microwavable bowl, melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter.
12. Stir in panko bread crumbs.
13. Spoon on top of mixture in cups. Gently press.
14. Bake 18 to 22 minutes or until bread crumb mixture is golden brown.
15. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

by Debbie Guinn

# EDIBLE EASTER TERRARIUMS

These nesting-hen terrariums are perfect for little hands to create. Simply lay out the ingredients below out and allow your children to build their nests. These can be used at your Easter meal or given away as gifts. You may even consider using these as a creative way to invite your friends and neighbors to join you at church on Easter Sunday!



# KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

One each per terrarium:

- Heath bar, chopped
- chocolate graham crackers
- edible Easter grass
- malted egg candies
- marshmallow hen
- Mason jar
- twine or string

\*These are guidelines—with so many varieties of Easter treats available, the options are endless!



1

## LAYER YOUR TERRARIUM

- Add the chopped Heath bar to mimic gravel.
- Add crushed chocolate graham crackers for dirt.

2

## BUILD A NEST

- Form a small clump of edible Easter grass and add that to the jar.



3

## ADD EGGS

- Top the grass nest with a few colorful malted egg candies.



## MAMA HEN

4

- Place a marshmallow hen on top of the eggs.



5

## TIE IT UP

- Cut a length of twine and tie it around the rim of the jar.



6

## ADD A LABEL

- Tie on a label with wording of your choice.



Help me  
to know  
you more.

Thank  
you!

I  
choose to  
Believe  
you Love  
me!

Protect  
those I  
Love.

Lord,  
Give me a  
spirit of  
wisdom.

Heal my  
heart!

I  
will honor  
my spouse  
and fight  
for our  
marriage.

# BECAUSE OF THE CROSS

**Prayer is how we begin to know the privilege of God's promises to us.** It's our communication with the Creator of the universe who cares about every infinitesimal detail of our hearts. It is the part of our day where we pause to ponder what *He* has to say about us rather than the myriad of voices we oftentimes choose to hear instead. Why is it easier to believe the lies of the enemy than the truth of what God says about us?

There is a real enemy who wants to destroy our homes, our marriages, our children. It is time, as Priscilla Shirer says, "to take the fight into [our] prayer room[s] rather than [our] living room[s]"<sup>1</sup> and to get specific with our vocal pleas to God instead of against one another.

**Do you know that God wants to give you wisdom regarding your family?** And He does it through prayer. In Ephesians 1:17, Paul prays that we would be given "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that [we] may know him better." The church has long been preparing for a wedding, but our culture is clearly in a war, and as Christine Caine so poignantly states, "One gets ready for a war much differently than for a wedding."

I have a teen son who is currently struggling. I like to rescue. The problem is: the more I swoop in, the farther he runs. My husband likes to remind me that the prodigal son can't return until we first let go. One day in prayer, when I had finally quieted my restless spirit long enough to listen to what God thought about the situation, I heard, "He belongs to Me. Let him go—because your rescue looks like enabling, but My rescue looks like salvation."

A hard place. But truth, and relief.

**Some moments in life are hard. Prayer is how we know we are not alone.** God wants to be in relationship with us, which is why He sent Jesus. This month, create this cross prayer board as a declaration that God hears our prayers. Keep it in a place where your family members can write their prayers throughout the month and be reminded that, through the cross, God knows us, and He will fight the battles for us.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- board (any size will do as long as there is space to write prayers)
- twine
- paint (optional)
- permanent marker

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

1. If you decide you'd like to paint your board, be sure to allow it to dry completely before wrapping it with twine.
2. Wrap twine around the board—vertically first, then horizontally.
3. Take a small piece of twine and wrap around the intersection of the vertical and horizontal twine.
4. Display the cross in a prominent place in your home along with a permanent marker for your family to write their prayers.
5. Remind your family that, because of what Jesus did on the cross, we can be in relationship with God, and He will respond to us as we cry out to Him.

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by *Chris Blue*

*Chris is a pastor's wife and mom of five who loves Anthropologie! Originally from Nashville, TN, she left for California to dance with the Laker Girls and pursue a career in film. A graduate of USC and founder of the Trojan Dance Force, Chris spent many years coaching competitively, which is where she met the young lady who led her to Christ. That same night she met NHL player, John Blue, and she's been crazy about him for the last 21 years! John pastors Pacific Pointe Church in Costa Mesa, CA, where the "Blue Crew" resides with toddlers and teens under the same roof.*

1. Shirer, Priscilla. *Fervent: A Woman's Battle Plan for Serious, Specific, and Strategic Prayer*. B&H Publishing, 2015.

# RESURRECTION EVIDENCE



Paul says that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our Christian faith is worthless, our sins are not forgiven, and we are the most pitiful people on the planet (1 Corinthians 15:12-18). However, as twenty-first century people with access to sophisticated modern technology, we are skeptical of anything that we cannot rationally explain or scientifically prove. Therefore, we become haunted by the question, *"How can we know that Jesus really did rise from the dead?"*

## GOD'S WORD

**Jesus's resurrection is recorded in all four gospels (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20).**

**Each gospel writer is writing for a slightly different purpose, and therefore each one emphasizes the details he thinks are most important.** The accounts are not contradictory but are distinct perspectives on the same event and can be harmonized together to get a fuller picture of what happened. When our expectations are not for the texts to be exactly the same, it is amazing how similar the accounts truly are—not to mention the fact that they are written not long after the event, and by people close to the situation (some were even firsthand witnesses).

**If we agree that the New Testament is a reliable source for historical information,** we can emerge with three pieces of evidence that help us know Jesus' resurrection did, in fact, happen.

1. **Jesus' tomb was empty.** Matthew even tells us that the Jewish leaders spread a rumor that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body (Matthew 28:11-15), which shows even Jesus' enemies admitted the tomb was empty! All the Jewish leaders needed to do to prove Jesus was still dead was to find His body, but nobody ever did. What is maybe even more amazing is that the first witnesses of the empty tomb were women! In that day, the testimony of women would not have been considered credible. If the gospel writers had wanted to make up a story about Jesus rising from the dead, they definitely should not have written that the first eyewitnesses were women. That fact would have been embarrassing and would have discounted their story.
2. **Jesus appeared to many people.** We have several accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:13-53; John 20:11-21:25). Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to over *five hundred* people before He ascended to heaven (1 Corinthians 15:6).
3. **Jesus' disciples had a new boldness, and Christianity spread.** When Jesus died, His followers scattered, crushed and afraid for their own lives. This was the pattern with many people who rose as leaders and then died—their followers disbanded and their teachings eventually died out. However, after Jesus' resurrection, His disciples were emboldened like never before and proclaimed the good news everywhere they went! Christianity spread and has only grown more and more to this day.

The best explanation for these pieces of evidence is that Jesus really did rise from the dead. We can know and have confidence that Jesus is alive!

If the biblical resurrection accounts confuse you or if the validity of the resurrection itself is difficult to pass on to your kids because you struggle to believe it yourself, I encourage you to dig into some books and articles written on this topic. I merely scratched the surface here; check out *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* by Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, or *Can We Trust the Gospels?* by Mark Roberts.

## HEAR IT

**Read Matthew 28:1-10 and Luke 24:1-12 as a family.** (If your children are older or want to explore this further, have them compare Mark 16:1-8 and John 20:1-18 as well.)

Discuss the following questions:

- Which details are the same in each account? Which are different?
- Why do you think one writer might have emphasized one detail over another?
- What are some clues that can help us know this really happened?
- Why does it matter that Jesus really did rise from the dead?

## DO IT

Have each family member (parents, you too!) make his own news report announcing Jesus' resurrection, based on the details found in the gospels. Write it out and draw pictures. Then show each other your reports. Compare which details you each mentioned and which you chose to leave out. End your time in prayer, thanking God that we can know that Jesus really did rise from the dead, and that our sins are forgiven and we can have eternal life with Him because of it!

by *Emily Schulz*

*Emily is the Family and Women's Ministries Director at New Denver Church in Denver, CO. She has her BA in Christian ministries from Biola University and her MDiv from Denver Seminary. Emily loves seasonal activities; date nights with her husband, Phil; cooking; playing games; spontaneous song and dance; and creating space for people to be known and loved.*

## TOT TIME RHYME

(AGES 3 &amp; UNDER)

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you **SIT AT HOME** and when you walk **ALONG THE ROAD**, when you **LIE DOWN** and when you **GET UP**.  
Deuteronomy 6:6-7



SIT AT HOME



ALONG THE ROAD



LIE DOWN



GET UP

**GET UP**

As you wake your little one this month, sing this sweet rhyme to the tune of "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" as a reminder that, because of Jesus, we can know God.

**God knows me and I know Him**

**I know Him, I know Him**

**God knows me and I know Him**

**'Cause Jesus rose again**

*by Cristi Thomas*

*Cristi has been in children's ministry for more than 15 years and was the Senior Managing Editor for Tru curriculum. She is currently serving as the Associate Children's Director at McLean Bible Church, Montgomery County Campus. Although new to the east coast, she has quickly settled in and enjoys visiting museums, writing in cafes, turning the music up, and dancing in the car.*

 Get the audio recording of this song at [bit.ly/apriltottime](https://bit.ly/apriltottime)

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

## BLESSING

**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.**

**I love Froot Loops cereal. I'm 44 years old and I still love it.** I have very fond memories of eating this cereal at my granny's house when my family was home from the mission field. But the main reason I love it so much is because I was staring into a bowl of this cereal when I gave my life to Jesus.

That decision came on the heels of a conversation with my mother one night as she put me to bed. She shared with me (as she had before) the significance of knowing and choosing to follow Jesus. She shared her love and passion for Him in hopes that it would inspire me to desire that same closeness and a relationship with Him.

Her words stayed with me as I slept, and then, as I awoke and poured myself a bowl of cereal, I prayed a prayer of submission to Christ on my own as I ate. Later that day, I shared my decision with my mom who proceeded to parade me around at church with great excitement.

**The truth is that as much as we want our kids to choose to follow Jesus, we can't demand that they do so.** We can only show them what we know and believe and then pray that our knowledge spills over into a transformative faith for them as they begin to know it for themselves.

**READ**

**Read John 17:3 over your child:**

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

**BLESS**

**Then, pray this blessing:** Lord, give (insert child's name) a spirit of knowledge and truth. Allow him to hear Your voice as You call out to him. Open his eyes to You, the one true God. I pray that as (child's name) grows he will choose You each and every day and Your attributes will shine through him—that any kindness bestowed on a stranger would be attributed to You, Jesus. And that through knowing You, (child's name) would be a shining example of love to those he meets.

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*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.*

TAKING ACTION



**OUR MISSION**

Building inclusive communities so that every person with disability and his or her family can live a full life within relationships.

**OUR VISION**

Changing the story of disability by proclaiming the worth and image-bearing beauty of each and every human being.

**OUR STORY**

An underdeveloped lung, a heart with a hole in it, and DNA that placed faulty information into each and every cell of your body could not stop God from revealing Himself through a child who never uttered a word. Not a pulpit, not a slick presentation, not a best-selling book but a six-pound boy with Trisomy 18. God found great pleasure to take a lowly thing in the eyes of the world, and show truth. (Matt Mooney, 99 Balloons video)

When my wife was carrying our firstborn son, Eliot, he was diagnosed with Trisomy 18 and was not expected to make it until birth. We prayed against that. We prayed for healing. We prayed for nothing less than a miracle, and on July 20, 2006, he was born.

We celebrated the miracle of his life with a birthday party every day at 4:59 pm. We brought Eliot home when he was 13 days old, and many people and friends rallied around to take care of us while we took care of Eliot. They threw us surprise birthday parties for Eliot and brought us meals when eating was the last thing on our minds. Eliot surpassed all odds, yet he went to be with Jesus after 99 days on earth. At his funeral, we released 99 balloons.



*Matt and Ginny Mooney*



**40**

rEcess sites in 3 countries



**133**

respite hostings



**12,574.5**

volunteer hours

## TAKING ACTION



When we got to share our story through national television outlets (including The Oprah Winfrey Show and The Today Show), we were inundated with stories from others. Because people rallied around us, we assumed that was the case for other families, but we often heard how a diagnosis or disability made persons and families experiencing disability feel isolated from church, from school, and from their community at large.

### WHY 99 BALLOONS

Among the many gifts that Eliot brought us, one was the passion to help children with special needs and their families. 99 Balloons, Inc. was founded in 2007 to serve as a nonprofit umbrella organization to fulfill this vision. 99 Balloons refers to the balloons we released at Eliot's funeral—each balloon represented a day he spent on this earth. rEcess was the first 99 Balloons initiative. The capitalized “E” in rEcess is no mistake—it is a sweet reminder of Eliot. We were on the receiving end of much help and assistance from others that enabled us to better care for Eliot. rEcess is a respite event where volunteers are able to partner with the local church to come together and give parents, children with disabilities, and their siblings a few hours of rest. And that is what this one-night event is all about: helping others come around families

and welcome them into community as our friends had welcomed us. One rEcess site in Northwest Arkansas turned into 40 rEcess sites in 3 countries, and 99 Balloons Inc. has grown to become an organization to help others engage persons with disability globally.

### ABOUT RECESS

Much time, energy, and effort has gone into making rEcess a model that can travel to any community. 99 Balloons has developed volunteer training, policies and procedures, event software, and an ever-growing community of people who engage their community through respite. rEcess is never the end game, but it works well as a tangible starting point for many.

rEcess is changing the story of disability, loving people, and empowering others to serve families experiencing disability in their communities.

### LEARN MORE

 Website [99balloons.org](http://99balloons.org)

 Facebook [99 Balloons, Inc.](https://www.facebook.com/99BalloonsInc)

 Instagram [@99balloonsorg](https://www.instagram.com/99balloonsorg)

 Twitter [@99balloonsorg](https://twitter.com/99balloonsorg)

 **OVER 200**

families served

 **1,231**

respite experiences for children with disability

 **1,087**

respite experiences for their siblings

*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 ... SPAIN?



The mainland of Spain covers most of the Iberian Peninsula in southwestern Europe and shares borders with France, Andorra, and Portugal. The country has northern and western coasts along the Atlantic Ocean and the Bay of Biscay and an eastern coast along the Mediterranean Sea. Spain has a total area of about 194,897 square miles.



### QUICK STATS



**POPULATION** 45,986,456



**LANGUAGE** SPANISH



**RELIGION**

ROMAN CATHOLIC 67.8%  
IRRELIGIOUS 18.4%  
ATHEIST 9.11%

NOW THAT WE KNOW THE LOCATION OF SPAIN, LET'S MEET ITS PEOPLE.



There are over 45 million people who call Spain their home.



If you went to church in Spain, you would most likely go to a Catholic church.



To talk to your friends in Spain you would speak Spanish.



To say, "Hello," you would say, "Hola," pronounced *Oh - la*.



If you lived in Spain you might eat something called *gazpacho*, which is a Spanish-style soup that is served cold. It is made from ripe tomatoes, olive oil, garlic, bread, peppers, and cucumber, which are all blended together until silky smooth, and then chilled and poured into bowls.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Tortillas in Spain are not the same as tortillas elsewhere. You will not find corn or flour tortillas in Spanish dishes. In Spain, *tortilla española* refers to a very popular and delicious egg and potato dish. Spaniards use the word *tortitas* to refer to flour/corn tortillas.
- The national anthem of Spain has no words.
- *La Tomatina* is an annual festival held in Spain where people throw thousands of tomatoes at each other.

**Easter is the most important celebration in Spain and stands out for its unique, age-old traditions specific to each region.** The fasting period of 40 days that leads up to Easter is called Lent. Lent is called *La Cuaresma* in Spanish. Holy Week, or *La Semana Santa* in Spanish, is a week of spectacular street processions all over Spain. Holy Week is the annual commemoration of the passion of Jesus Christ celebrated by Catholic religious brotherhoods and fraternities. These groups perform penance processions on the streets of almost every Spanish city and town during the last week of Lent, the week immediately before Easter.



# GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Growing up, I attended church almost every Sunday and even an occasional Wednesday night. I learned many wonderful things about God, but looking back, I would say I only knew *about* Him and didn't really *know* Him. I would liken it to knowing about a celebrity but never meeting him in person or doing a research project on the Amazon rainforest but never actually experiencing it. I had no personal relationship with God, and my factual knowledge about Him did not really change my life.

It wasn't until college that a friend showed me: **God knows me, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, I can know Him too! I can have a relationship and eternal life with God because of the death and resurrection of Christ.** Now *that* was life changing! When I put this knowledge together with the facts I had learned as a child, something powerful happened and I wanted to know and experience God more every day. **In seeking Him and finding Him, I came to know Him,** and as I applied His Word to my life, He drew me deeper into a loving relationship with Himself. Now that I have a family of my own, I long to see the proverbial coin drop in the hearts of my two middle school boys and two teenage daughters so they can know God on a deeper level too.

**I believe this takes place when we as parents intentionally model our own relationship with God so that our children can see Him in us and be drawn to Him.** God's Word tells us in Deuteronomy 11:19 that we are to be teaching our children God's Word and His ways all the time and everywhere. Start by showing them how you commune with God—possibly invite them to have quiet time with you. Show them how you pray, how you listen and read His Word, and how to recognize God's voice—the same way you taught them to walk and then run or throw a ball. It will take some practice of their own, but that's okay! Remember, seeking and finding leads to knowing.

Put God's truth on display in your home and in your life; talk about the fact that God is living and active and cares about every aspect of our lives. I purposefully let it be known to the family when I pray for something and also when God answers. I tell them about the things He says to me and when He blesses me. My daughter will sometimes laugh and say, "It's like Mom has a direct hotline to God or something!"

"Yes, my dear, it is just like that!"

Talk about your relationship with God, and allow your kids to see that He is a father and a friend, not just a character in a book. Make the most of your days (as the Bible instructs us), and take every opportunity to model your faith and your intimacy with God, showing your children that God is real and that He loves them. Pray that they will be drawn to Him just as you were.

When we create an environment that upholds and displays God's truth, we offer our children a solid foundation based on knowing God and His Word and an opportunity to develop a relationship with Him through Christ.

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by Tami Overhauser

*Tami is a native of Southern California who now lives in Austin, TX, with her husband, Chad, and four children. Tami writes and blogs about tough parenting and building strong families. Her passion is helping others to parent well and encouraging them in their journeys, believing we are stronger together. When she is not writing she can be found hanging out in her kitchen with friends and family.*

 Blog [Tamioverhauser.com](http://Tamioverhauser.com)

 Facebook [Tami Overhauser](https://www.facebook.com/TamiOverhauser)

 Instagram [@toverhauser](https://www.instagram.com/toverhauser)



# TAKE THEM BY THE HAND

**Nothing is more important than knowing God and realizing that we are known by Him.** But how can we know God? As a parent of seven, including four teenagers, I often spend time thinking about how my teenagers would answer this question. I wonder if they truly understand who God is and what that means for them. As a Jesus follower, and someone who is trying to know God more and more each day, I have an answer to the question. There are several specific ways I get to know God: read the Bible, talk to and listen to Him in prayer, spend time in worship. I could go on with many others—but how would my teenagers answer the question? What would your teenagers say?

**See, it's easy to make assumptions about what our kids think, but do we ever stop to ask the question, "How can you know God?"** In the culture we live in today, we are bombarded with information. Some of it is truth, and much of it is portrayed as truth, but is really just someone's opinion that doesn't line up with Scripture at all. We have all become so accustomed to believing what we see and read through the Internet, television, social media, music, and more that we often forget to filter everything through our guidebook for life: the Bible. If we aren't careful, our children will walk through life knowing facts about God but never really knowing God.

You might be asking the question, "What am I supposed to do about it?" I don't have all the answers. We could try to tell our kids the answers, such as read your Bible, pray, worship, and so on, and for some of our kids that might work. But, I am going to suggest something that requires us

as parents to step out of our comfort zones and be very intentional. I want to share a bit of advice given to me by a new friend; **Liz told me to grab my kids by the hand and take them along for the adventure!** It's exactly what Jesus did. When He was here on earth, He chose some people and took them along for an adventure. As they spent time with Him, they came to know His heavenly Father. See, God already knows each one of us intimately. He knows our children. His desire is for us and our children to know Him.

If this sounds hard—just start small. Invite your teenagers into your life. Invite them to share in your God stories. When God does something special in you, tell them! Let them know the struggles you are giving to God. When they see your authentic faith lived out before their very eyes, because you have taken them by the hand and brought them along for the adventure, they will long to know God and have their own relationship with Him. I am believing this for my children, and I am believing this for your children too.

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by Christopher Steenmeyer

*Chris has a blended family of nine and longs to see transformation in the lives of his wife and children. He has spent the last nine years investing in a young generation being raised up to passionately follow Jesus at Mountain Springs Church in Colorado Springs, CO. More and more he desires to see the church come alongside families in a practical way that equips them to accomplish all that God has for them.*



## I Will Trust in You

Samantha Fugate

*When You don't move the mountains  
I'm needing You to move  
When You don't part the waters  
I wish I could walk through  
When You don't give the answers  
As I cry out to You  
I will trust, I will trust  
I will trust in You.*

Lauren Daigle, "Trust in You," in *How Can It Be*, Centricity Music, 2015.

**I'd heard this song by Lauren Daigle several times, even hummed along to it, but on this day in the pharmacy drive-through, the lyrics on the radio pierced my soul.** My husband and I had recently experienced a failed adoption, and I was still crying out to God daily to give me answers.

Even before we were married, my husband and I had talked about adoption. After two years of marriage and lots of prayer, we felt called to not only adopt but to adopt before trying to have biological children. We explored different options and decided to adopt domestically through a private agency. We only had to wait about five months for a "match," and we were elated as some families wait years to be matched. We traveled to meet the birth mother soon after talking with her over the phone, and we started planning for our baby girl who would be born in April. We prepared a nursery, bought (too many) clothes, told all of our friends and family, and named this anticipated child Ava Hope. We traveled to Florida shortly before her due date and waited—waited until we got the news that the birth mom had changed her mind. Here we were, 1,800 miles from home, with a car seat installed in the back seat, a suitcase full of baby things, and no baby.

**Although we had immediate peace about the situation, on this day in the pharmacy drive-through I had found myself wallowing in the anger stage of the grief cycle.** I knew God's truths. He is faithful. He knows the whole story. His plan is greater than ours. Yet none of our journey in this made sense. "We traveled all the way across the country, God! How could You let this happen to us? We spent so much money for this, God! Why is this part of our story?" The song kept playing, and I was a blubbering mess by the time I made it to the window to get my prescription.

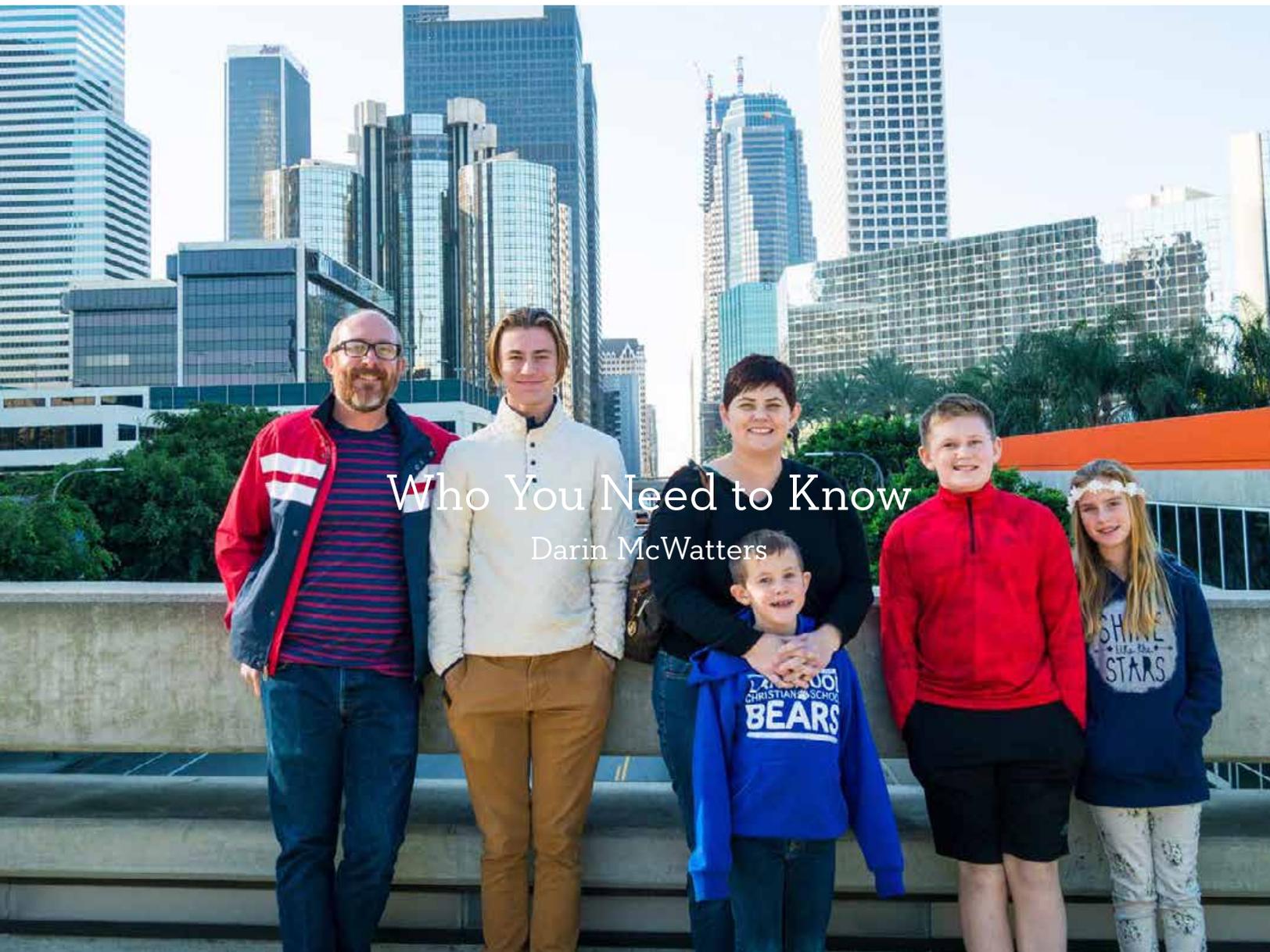
*Truth is You know what tomorrow brings  
There's not a day ahead You have not seen  
So in all things be my life and breath  
I want what You want, Lord, and nothing less.<sup>1</sup>*

God knows. He knows me. He knows every intricate detail of my being. He knew this would happen long before we did, but even better, He knows my future—my future tomorrow, a week from now, a year from now, 10 years from now. My anger immediately turned to peace. "God, I want what You want for me and nothing less. Even if that means walking through trials and tribulations. You know my story; You wrote my story."

**Now, a year later, we have a little insight into the "more" that God had for our family.** We aren't celebrating a first birthday like we thought we would be doing this month, but instead we are celebrating the fourth birthday of our foster son. And in a few months we will be celebrating the fifth and sixth birthdays of our foster daughters. I have the privilege of being "mama" to three beautiful souls I otherwise would have never known. This new journey isn't any easier, but God orders our steps, and that keeps us going.

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*Samantha is the Special Needs Coordinator at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She grew up in East Texas but is loving the mountain life. She and her husband, Joseph, are former elementary teachers turned foster parents. Some of their favorite things to do with kids include playing outside, taking the dogs for a walk, and exploring the local hiking trails.*



## Who You Need to Know

Darin McWatters

**When our kids are little, it's fun to dream about what they'll be when they grow up.** Obviously, we want the best for them; and, if we're honest, some little part of us hopes they'll be so inspired by our example that they'll want to follow in our footsteps.

I remember when my son was little, I sat down on the floor next to him and asked, "Hank, what do you want to be when you grow up?" His response came so fast and clear that it was obvious he'd already given this question some thought. He looked up at me and said with a shrug, "A moth," and went back to what he was doing. I explained to him that this was an unrealistic goal and that the likelihood of him achieving this dream was very, very low. He seemed unconvinced.

A few weeks later while we sat at the dinner table, he said matter-of-factly, "Dad, I know it was silly to say I wanted to be a moth. And I want you to know that I don't want to be that anymore."

"Really?" I said, the hope audible in my voice.

"Yeah ... I've decided I'd rather be a rainbow."

Now that little boy is 14, his older brother is 16, and we're starting to have legitimate conversations about what their future might actually look like. As they look to me for answers and direction, I often feel at a loss for how best to direct them. So what I do instead is explain to them how I've made my choices about the very same things.

You see, when the choices of life start to feel paralyzing, I've always taken hope from Moses' speech in Exodus 14. The Israelites had followed God's direction explicitly and now found themselves trapped with the Red Sea before them and the army of Pharaoh rapidly approaching behind. Understandably, they panicked. They found themselves asking questions like: "Why are we here? What's going to happen? What should we do?" And in the midst of those difficult questions and that paralyzing situation, Moses speaks.

He says in Exodus 14:13-14, "**Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent**" (ESV).

He doesn't answer their specific questions but instead reminds them how they got there; and, more importantly, *who they are with*. The fear they were experiencing came from focusing on their own powerlessness, lack of knowledge, and potential threats. Moses essentially says, "Get your eyes off yourself and refocus your eyes on God."

In my life I haven't always known what to do, where to go, or what's going to happen; so, I've learned over time to make sure I know who I am with and whose directions I am following. You see, if we're following the direction of God as revealed by His Word and His Spirit, and He's with us, He will take care of everything else. The battles and obstacles we encounter while on God's route, He will empower us to overcome. It's only the battles and obstacles we face on our own selfish course that we have cause to worry about, as God will never assist us in distancing ourselves from Him or join us in glorifying ourselves or others.

***"In my life I haven't always known what to do, where to go, or what's going to happen; so, I've learned over time to make sure I know who I am with and whose directions I am following."***

**My kids may not know what they want to be when they grow up or where they want to go to college, but I'm praying that they do know Jesus.** I pray that they submit to His plans for their lives and that they rest in what they *do know of Him* instead of being worried about what they *don't know of the future*. In those moments when they feel crushed between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army, I pray they can feel confidence and peace in knowing who God is. And while I can tell them all of this in a mini sermon on the way to soccer practice, I find it's even more effective for me to demonstrate it for them in the way I live my own life.

Of course, I'm also kind of hoping Hank abandons his plans to be a rainbow.

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# GOD SEES AND GOD KNOWS

**I was so excited to introduce our firstborn son to the world.** I spent hours holding him, loving him, playing with him. He was full of life and had enormous amounts of energy. I thought everything was normal until we enrolled him in school. That's when I learned that our son was different. The teachers told us he had ADHD. I told them they didn't know how to handle a genius who was bored with traditional teaching methods. Because we were unwilling to medicate him for ADHD, we were asked to enroll our son in a school that was better equipped to handle kids like him.

At one point we decided to homeschool. That's when my wife discovered that he showed early signs of a thought disorder. He couldn't read a story and retell the sequence of events. My wife also noticed things that reminded her of growing up sharing a room with a mentally ill sister. She had firsthand knowledge of what mental illness looks like, but I was unwilling to accept that my son could be mentally ill. It caused a great degree of tension in our marriage.

**His high school years were painful for us and him. That's when I noticed symptoms I couldn't ignore.** He barely graduated high school. Barely made it through Bible college because his mental illness was beginning to dominate his life. His first arrest came in his early 20s, and the last 10 years have been a roller coaster ride of mental hospitals, arrests, jail time, and bearing the shame of being "that house" in the neighborhood. There were times when it was unbearable and we had no one to turn to who would understand. It was during this time that Jesus became deeply real to us. We've always believed that Jesus knew us and loved us, but through our quiet pain we've come to know Jesus in ways we never expected.

During a recent interview, my wife said something profound. She was asked what she would say to a mother who has a child who suffers from mental illness. She said, "I would first give her hope. There are a lot of resources available to us today to educate and to give hope. Then I would tell her when you don't know how to pray for your child, know that Jesus is praying for him or her perfectly." She ended by saying, "**When you've run out of tears, know that Jesus has held all your tears for you and He loves you.**" I was in awe of her wisdom.

My son is now homeless. We worry about him. He is born again, although he's been kicked out of most churches because he doesn't act born again. He's led more people to Christ than anyone I know. Imagine a world where everyone you talk to is using the words you use, but they sound like a foreign language. Imagine a world dominated by fear. Imagine a world where everyone is against you and you feel you've done nothing wrong. That's the world many mentally ill people live in. Their brains tell them they are normal, and everyone says they are not. They are real people with dreams and goals like everyone else, but their brains don't work the same. They need help, but often they don't have the capacity to see their need for help. But Jesus does. **Jesus sees them and knows them, and, even though it's often hard for us to see, Jesus sees the person He created and loves.**

by *Holland Davis*

*Holland is the Senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel San Clemente and has been happily married for over 30 years to Roxie Davis. They have 3 grown children: Austin, Chase, and Madison. Holland is an author, radio host, writer of the multi-platinum-selling song, "Let It Rise," and conference speaker. For more information visit [hollanddavis.com](http://hollanddavis.com).*



# WEATHERING THE STORMS OF MARRIAGE

## My husband and I fight big.

Though our seven-year marriage has largely been smooth sailing, we've learned that when the stormy winds of conflict start brewing, well, batten down the hatches, my friends. Because it's gonna get ugly.

We are passionate people with strong personalities, and our arguments follow the same pattern as the tornadoes we experience on a near-daily basis during springtime in Oklahoma: powerful, unpredictable, and fizzling out soon after they've begun.

### **But even the most fleeting of storms can leave utter devastation in its wake.**

*Why do we always do this? I used to wonder. How can we be so grounded one moment and so swept away by our emotions in the next?*

And then I read a book that changed our marriage.

In *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*, Shaunti Feldhahn explains the importance of "believing the best" about your spouse. According to her research, when individuals in highly satisfying marriages were hurt by their spouses, "they resolutely assumed that their mates cared about them and had no intention of hurting them to begin with" (pp. 45-46).

### **In other words, highly happy spouses have learned to process anger and disappointment through the filter of a pertinent truth: I know my spouse loves me.**

Though I consider myself a highly happy spouse, I'm also a highly emotional individual. And though I know my husband would never intentionally hurt me, I've struggled long and hard to make the shift to this simple (read: revolutionary) thought pattern.

And I suspect the struggle is rooted in a collective tendency of believers to diminish the cross.

Isaiah 53:5 says, "But He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

*We are healed ...*

And yet still I battle emotional ailments, still I remain selfish in my marriage, still I feel my body succumb to sickness and stress and age.

*I don't feel healed.*

But just as I am given a choice of how to respond when conflict arises in my marriage, I am also given a choice of how to respond when I am tempted to doubt Christ's redemptive work.

If I choose to operate in the *feeling*, my nearsighted grasp of God's sovereignty will surely lead me on paths of confusion, anger, and fear.

But if I choose to operate in the *knowing*, my certainty of His character will lead me on paths of clarity, peace, and rest.

So I choose the knowing. Every day, in my marriage and in my walk with Christ, I choose to anchor my soul in the truth that can weather life's fiercest storms.

Because just as my husband has proven that I can trust his heart even when I can't see its motives, the cross has proven that I can trust its power even when I can't see its immediate fulfillment.

And at the end of the day ... that makes all the difference.

by Brittany Woodward

*Brittany is a born-and-bred Oklahoman living in the heart of Tornado Alley with her husband and two young daughters. She is a homeschooling mama by day, an aspiring picture-book author by night, and a lover of literature, worship, fitness, The Office, and coffee (give her allllll the coffee).*



Blog [letterstomylittles.com](http://letterstomylittles.com)



Facebook Letters to my Littles



# WHAT I WANT YOU TO KNOW

**Life is messy and imperfect, isn't it?** If you know me, you know my family is certainly not perfect. Depression and divorce have darkened our doorstep. Custody battles and family dissension have caused alienation. We are broken and bruised. We are far from perfect!

Truly knowing people often means knowing their mess. My children and my grandchildren know me. They know my weaknesses and they know how to push my buttons. They see me at my worst and laugh at my shortcomings. But there is one thing they would all tell you—they know I recognize my need for a Savior. I have found that in the midst of brokenness, hope and redemption come through upholding God's truth and always pointing the next generation to the strong foundation of His Word. It's okay to be honest and real with them; I let them know I am broken and because I am, I follow after a God who is not.

**I try to constantly point my grandchildren to our perfect God**—my hope is that they will come to know Him at an early age and follow Him every day of their lives. One way I encourage their relationship with God is by praying with them. We pray for everything you can think of. We talk about God listening to our prayers, knowing us, and understanding the desires of our hearts. I explain that God not only knows us, but prayer is one way we can know Him too.

A couple of weeks ago my eight-year-old granddaughter pulled me into the seclusion of her closet. She wanted to share something special with me about her little brother, Jax. She began to whisper, "Mimi, last night Jax came into my room. He thought I was asleep. He kissed me on the cheek and started praying for me and thanked God that I was his sister." I was honestly at a loss for words. This may have been the most precious thing I have ever heard.

In the midst of all the crazy that happens in our home everyday—the imperfect situation of parenting these children with my son—my six-year-old grandson knew he could go to a perfect God and thank Him for giving him his big sister. He knows God well enough to understand that He is the giver of all good gifts and that thanking Him *matters*.

**No, I am not perfect—but what I want you to know is, I follow a God who is.** And knowing Him is the redemptive hope for the mess in each of our lives!

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by Debbie Guinn

# 10 ENVIRONMENTS

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

# 2

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

## OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

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

# 1

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

## RESPONSIBILITY

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

# 3

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

## SERVING

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

# 4

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

## LOVE & RESPECT

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

# 5

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

## STORYTELLING

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

# 6

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

## KNOWING

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

# 7

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

## IDENTITY

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

# 8

*"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.

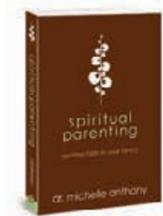
*IT IS OUR PRAYER THAT HOMES AND CHURCHES WOULD CREATE THESE ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN TO LIVE IN SO THEIR FAITH WILL GROW IN A COMMUNITY OF CONSISTENCY, COMMON LANGUAGE, AND PRACTICE. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW THESE ENVIRONMENTS CAN IGNITE A TRANSFORMING FAITH IN YOUR FAMILY, WE SUGGEST YOU READ:*

# 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.

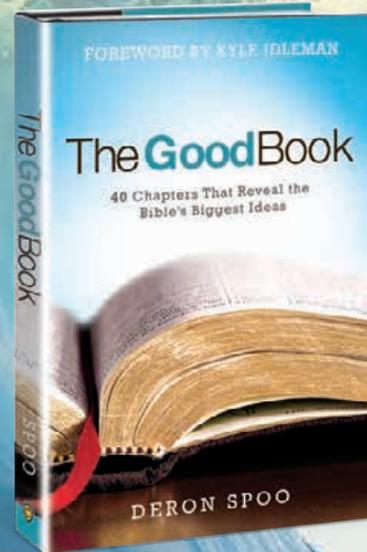
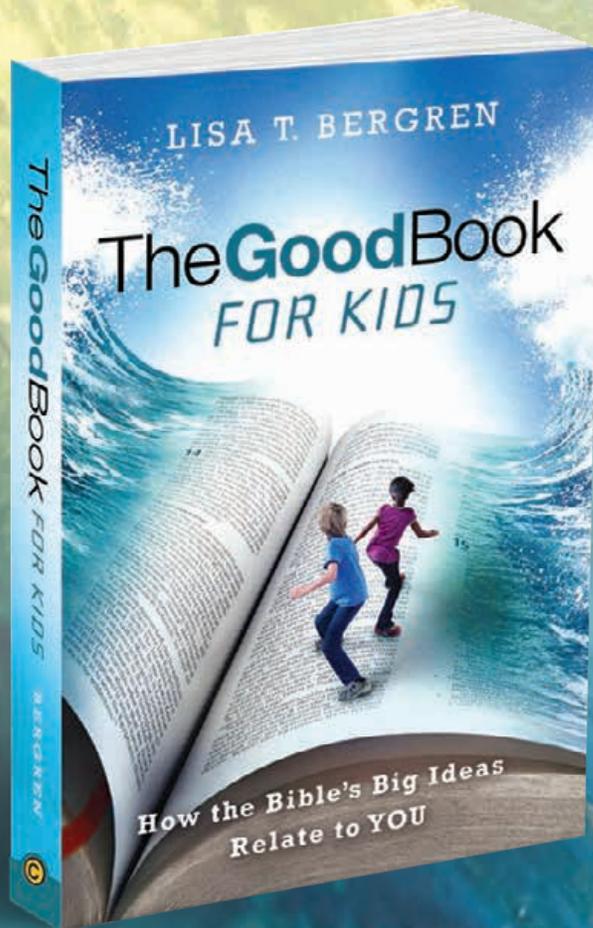


*SPIRITUAL PARENTING:  
An Awakening for Today's Families*

*BY MICHELLE ANTHONY*

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# God's Grand Story for Kids and Families



*The Good Book for Kids* is for children ages 8 to 12 and their parents who want to understand the hope, love, and promises that God gives in His Word. Through this inspiring guide to the **40 biggest themes of the Bible**, parents and kids alike will discover why the truths of the Bible can make a difference in your life and how God wants to build a relationship with you. Yeah ... **YOU!**

**Find out more about how you and your kids can engage together with God's Word at [www.ReadTheGoodBook.com](http://www.ReadTheGoodBook.com).**

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