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Is your
church
too noisy?
p.62

**“Your
daughter
has cancer.”**

***A Mother's
Love Story*** *p.42*

**Why You MUST
Share Your
Mate's Interests**

**The Disaster Plan
Your Family Needs Now!**

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HOMELIFE

Our heartfelt passion is to nurture godly families by providing biblical solutions for life.

Volume 61, Number 6 March 2007

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We believe the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. The 2000 statement of **The Baptist Faith and Message** is our doctrinal guideline.

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During premarital counseling, we encourage couples to minimize surprises. Notice we didn't say eliminate them. Surprises are part of marriage and life in general. The saying "Life happens on the way to doing something else" is so true.

Two weeks after we were married, we rolled up to the front gates of seminary. We had preregistered, and our deposits were paid, so we confidently marched up to the administration office and told them we had arrived. They looked at us

like we were from another planet. They were expecting us two weeks later!

How we handled that surprising situation said a lot about our infant marriage. We didn't panic. We simply took a deep breath, the housing people scrambled, and soon we settled into an apartment for our seminary experience.

Sometimes the unexpected news can be good ... sometimes not so good or even devastating. The unexpected gives us opportunities for growth in our relationship with God and time to acknowledge our dependence on and trust in Him. We can pull together as a family team and say in little ways and big ways, "We're in this together."

This issue of *HomeLife* focuses on preparing for the unexpected. Don't miss the lead story about the military marriage of Jeff and Dawn Struecker. This couple courageously deals with the unexpected every time Jeff is deployed.

Remember, God knows the future as well as the past. Even though we are surprised, He is in control.

P.S. How has your marriage or family tackled (and survived) the unexpected? E-mail us at homelife@lifeway.com.

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Sharing your mate's interests is crucial for the health of your marriage. Learn from one woman's story.

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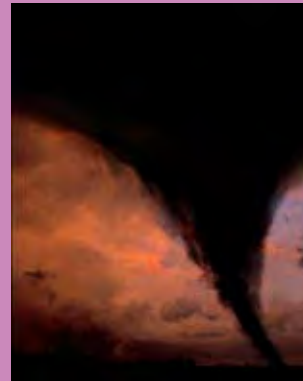
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Cover Photograph by Michael Gomez

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QUESTION of the Month

How has your marriage or family tackled (and survived) the unexpected?

Send your answers to homelife@lifeway.com.



BLIND FAITH

I was in the doctor's office and picked up the July 2006 issue of *HomeLife*. The article "Blind Faith" caught my eye. A partner and I started a business a year and a half ago that was based on blind faith. I enjoyed [how Ivey Beckman] shared her heartfelt story of her fears about the possibility of losing sight

in her other eye. Thank you for inspiring us to go forward even when we cannot see where God may be leading us.

Eileen Long
South Carolina

JUST WONDERING

I love reading *HomeLife*. We order several copies at our church for our members.

Recently, I was searching for materials to send to our college students in care packages. I was shocked to discover that LifeWay has monthly publication options for singles, men, women, and families, but no magazine publication targeted at college students.

Is this something LifeWay is considering publishing or they would possibly consider? I think it would be a great addition to the list of available products.

Amelia
E-mail

Editor's note: Thanks for your e-mail, Amelia. Actually, LifeWay does produce a Bible study magazine titled Collegiate. Check it out online, along with articles, downloadable devotions, and other opportunities and events for college students at www.lifeway.com/collegiate. One-year individual subscriptions are \$14.35 (4 issues) and are available by calling (800) 458-2772.



RUNNING FROM CHURCH

Thanks so much to Art Rainer for aptly pinpointing the tragic reasons the church has nearly lost its relevance in 21st century culture ["Are You a Christian Jerk?" September 2006]. In our present state of anger, combativeness, and hyper-paranoia, it's no wonder the world increasingly is looking elsewhere for the unconditional love and grace they should be finding in us. If I were a person without Christ today, I would run, not walk, from much of what I see in the evangelical church.

Kevin
Alabama

COMMUNICATION TOOL

When we got home from vacation last summer, my [July] *HomeLife* had been dropped off with a note: "The postman keeps leaving your mail in our box by mistake. I started reading this magazine before I realized it was yours. It's a great magazine. Think I'll subscribe. Maybe it wasn't a mistake at all. Maybe God has something He wants to communicate [to me] through this publication."

Marian
Omaha, Neb.



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Send your letters to *HomeLife* magazine,
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0175;
or e-mail them to homelife@lifeway.com;
or fax them to (615) 277-8272.
Letters become the property of *HomeLife*
and may be edited prior to publication.



In the Next **HOMELIFE**

- **Profile: How Double-Amputee Gracie Rosenberger Stands Strong**
- **Author Karen Kingsbury Exposes the Courage of Pilate's Wife**
- **Blended Families: Hidden Challenges of the First Year**
- **Why Your Soul May Need a Spring Cleaning**

HomeLife often lists Web sites that may be helpful to our readers. Our staff verifies each site's usefulness and appropriateness prior to publication. However, Web site content changes frequently, so we encourage you to approach all Web sites with caution. Make sure sites are still useful and appropriate before sharing them with friends and family.

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For **bulk orders**, ask your church to provide copies as a ministry to families. If your church already orders, thank them for providing *HomeLife* as a gift to members.

Your church can e-mail orderentry@lifeway.com, call (800) 458-2772, fax (615) 251-5933, or write to the above address.



Contributors



Clint Kelly
"Facing Fear," p. 16

Clint is a novelist for children and adults. His latest book is the suspense thriller *Scent* (www.clintkellybooks.com). Clint and his family live in the Seattle area.



Dawn Hollomon
"Get It Together," p. 26

Dawn loves her husband, Chris; their dog, Topher; and her 8th grade girls small group. She's learned how to get her family's paperwork in order.



Kent Shingleton
"Walk This Way," p. 30

Kent has a passion for student ministry and youth evangelism. He is married to Shawnah, and they have three children: Jared, Maci, and Molly.



Pattie A. Kline
"Ready ... or Not," p. 38

Pattie is a wife, real estate agent, teacher, and grandmother. Pattie knows about disaster preparedness, since she's personally weathered several tornados.

SHELLI A. LITTLETON

Tickled Pink

*O*h, how I'd love to repaint the girls' room, I thought as I vacuumed their bedroom.

I had painted the girls' room pink when we first moved to our new home two years earlier. Unfortunately, the pale pink I had selected looked white when on the walls. Since we live on a tight, one-income budget, I was stuck with the color. I put the thought of repainting out of my mind and kept cleaning.

That same day, a representative from the local chapter called to ask about Katelyn's favorite things so they would know how to decorate her room. When I told her our two girls shared a room, she offered to make it special for Karalee as well.

The group scheduled a weekend to work on the girls' room. We agreed to their request to remain anonymous. Leaving them our house key, we left for the weekend, not returning until we knew the project was finished.

As soon as we walked into the house, the girls noticed their bedroom door was shut. Karalee found a note taped to the door. What a wonderful transformation awaited them!

The dark pink walls were accented with huge flowers painted above their beds and a pretty floral border. All of the furniture had been painted white; the beds sported new bedding; someone had even made blankets. Beautifully wrapped presents sat on the floor. There were new decorations on the bookshelves, books, a lamp, curtains, a clock, and a rug. The room was a little girl's fantasy in pinks and purples.

To say the girls were excited cannot describe their joy. Six-year-old Karalee asked, "Mama, who did this?" I just smiled and told them I thought God was behind it all because we know everything good comes from God.

I hadn't prayed about their room, believing it was insignificant in the grand scheme of things. But God knew the desire of my heart. Scripture tells us, "You understand my thoughts from far away ... Before a word is on my tongue, You know all about it" (Ps. 139:2,4). And again in Matthew 6:8, "Your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him."

God showed us in such a sweet way that He is believable. We were truly tickled pink!



Karalee and Katelyn

About an hour later, my phone rang. A representative from the American Cancer Society told me that a group of people from the local chapter wanted to recognize our 4-year-old daughter Katelyn, who is a cancer survivor. I suddenly realized God was up to something amazing.

I hadn't prayed about their room, believing it was insignificant in the grand scheme of things. But God knew the desire of my heart.

The representative explained that the volunteers wanted to redecorate Katelyn's bedroom. I almost fell out of my chair in amazement! I had just finished Beth Moore's Bible study *Believing God*. The verse that meant so much to me was Hebrews 11:6: "Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him." I just had to say, "I'm believing You, God!"

Shelli A. Littleton and her husband, Brian, live in San Angelo, Texas. She loves being a homemaker and mother to Karalee (8) and Katelyn (6). She is passionate about Bible study and knowing God.

We want to hear how God is working in your home life.

Send your typed 700-word stories, along with your contact information, to homelife@lifeway.com, or mail them to My Home Life; One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0175. We will pay \$75 for each submission that is printed.

Simple Solutions Quick Pick-up Tips for Unexpected Guests

You receive a call from friends who announce they're going to stop by in 30 minutes, and the house is a mess. Turn to these quick spruce-up tips to get the house in shape:

- Use a laundry basket to pick up miscellaneous items and store in a bedroom closet.
- Close all doors to rooms not intended for guests.
- Gather hangers and make room in the coat closet for guests' coats.
- Remove dishes from the sink or countertops. If the dishwasher is full, put them on a cookie sheet and stick them in the oven — but don't forget about them!
- Wipe off counters and inside the kitchen and bathroom sinks.
- Empty then reline trash containers in the kitchen and bathrooms.
- Lightly dust the coffee table and other spots where guests will congregate.
- Vacuum high-traffic areas, and shake out throw rugs ... especially at the front door and in the bathrooms.
- Burn scented candles in the bathroom and kitchen, or set out potpourri. A mixture of 1½ cups water, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 1 teaspoon cloves, and 1 teaspoon allspice in a small pan warmed on the stove burner provides a nice fragrance to welcome visitors.

Adapted from *THE MAIDS Home Services*, www.maids.com.



© Getty Images

POST INFO IN CLEAR VIEW

If your child is being cared for in your home, post the following key information in a prominent place:

- Your home address and phone number (in case this information needs to be given quickly in an emergency)
- Your work address and phone number
- Your cell phone or pager number
- The following phone numbers:
 - * Fire and police departments
 - * Ambulance
 - * Poison control center
 - * Your child's pediatrician
 - * Nearby relative
 - * Trusted friend or neighbor
- Important medical information about your child, including medications and allergies
- Your child's food preferences
- Your child's schedule

From *Keeping Kids Safe* by Dr. Kenneth Shore (Prentice Hall).



© Rubberball

012345678 *by the numbers*

1912 Year Juliette Low founded Girl Scouting in Savannah, Ga.

18 Number of original members

3.6 Millions of girl and adult members in the United States today

50 Millions of women in the United States who have participated in Girl Scouts during their childhood

99 Percentage of all adults in Girl Scouting who are volunteers

25 Percentage of Girl Scout Cookies sold that are Thin Mints

From www.girlscouts.org.



© Digital Vision

Dollars & Sense



CUT MEDICAL COSTS

© Corbis

- 1. Learn to negotiate.** There may be times when you need to go out-of-network. Ask your doctor to lower his or her fee. Call your insurer and ask how much the company will cover for the type of service you need. If your doctor isn't willing to come down in price, you may want to find a physician who will.
- 2. Manage your own medications.** Ask your doctor or pharmacist for a generic equivalent whenever possible. When a generic substitute isn't available, ask if there's a comparable medication on your plan's preferred drug list. Use your drug plan's mail service for maintenance medications.
- 3. Take advantage of tax breaks.** Use your employer's Flexible Spending Account, which allows you to set aside pretax dollars for medical expenses. Middle-class families who set aside \$1,500 can save more than \$400 a year in taxes. Keep track of all out-of-pocket expenses. Taxpayers can write off any medical bills that exceed 7.5 percent of your adjusted gross income.

Adapted from www.smartmoney.com.

How To ... Stop Procrastinating

- 1.** If you struggle with perfectionism, set deadlines for yourself. Determine a time for decision-making and the criteria for making decisions. Share your deadline with others. Encourage them to check up on you.
- 2.** Develop a clear mental picture of the completed task. Remind yourself how good you'll feel when you're finished.
- 3.** Break complex projects down into smaller, more manageable tasks.
- 4.** Reward yourself for your accomplishment.

Adapted from www.getmoredone.com.

© Getty Images



Root Out Bitterness



© Botanica

Nothing is harder to deal with than a perceived injustice. When you feel wrongly accused or something senseless happens to you — that’s where radical forgiveness really begins. Such total pardon is a work only the Holy Spirit can do in your heart and requires several important steps:

- Step 1:** Make the choice to forgive. It’s only as you let go of the resentments that bind you that things begin to change.
- Step 2:** Find a faithful friend who will help you handle conflict in a godly manner.
- Step 3:** Bless, don’t curse.
- Step 4:** Keep no record of wrongs.
- Step 5:** Bring it all to God. He can handle your feelings even when you can’t.

What grudge do you bear? What offense do you carry? Isn’t it time to give your burden to the Lord? Jesus is willing to pick up anything you’re willing to lay down. He’ll help you pull up the bitter root of resentment so completely that it can’t return to ruin your life.

Adapted from Having a Mary Spirit by Joanna Weaver (WaterBrook).



Couple Connections A Wrinkle in Time

In between any two generations, there usually is a shift in expectations, goals, priorities, and core desires for marriage. That’s why it’s important to look at your marriage in terms of what God is doing today; don’t try to squeeze your relationship into a model that fit a past generation.

God has given each of us a past to draw from, whether it was largely healthy or highly dysfunctional or somewhere in between. Marriages you observed while growing up, both positive and negative, tend to serve

as defining models for your marriage. Most couples either try to replicate a marriage they admire, or they

try to fashion the exact opposite of a destructive relationship to which they were exposed.

You can learn from both the good and the bad that you observed in your parents’ marriage (or marriages, as the case may be). It’s important to emphasize an attitude of honor toward the heritage you received. As you look at your past, identify what should be honored, whether little or much. Honor and respect that and build on it. But don’t allow your marriage to be completely defined by it.

God’s purposes and basic principles for marriage don’t change, but the applications and expressions of those biblical values change constantly and emerge in unique ways in every generation.

Adapted from Not Your Parents’ Marriage by Jerome and Kellie Daley (WaterBrook).



© Image Source



Tips for ... Preventing Home Fires

According to the American Red Cross, four out of five Americans don't realize that home fires are the single most common disaster across the nation, and only 26 percent of families have actually developed and practiced an escape plan.

"Preparing for a home fire doesn't require a lot of expensive equipment or training," said Red Cross fire expert Heidi Taylor. "To stay safe, families need to develop a fire escape plan and take steps toward fire prevention."

The American Red Cross offers these simple steps to prevent a fire in your home:

- * Keep all sources of fuel (paper, clothing, bedding, and rugs) at least three feet away from all heat sources.
- * Provide constant adult supervision during cooking or in rooms with lit candles or fires. Do not leave burning candles unattended.
- * Keep matches and lighters away from and out of reach of children.
- * Teach young children to tell an adult if they see matches and lighters and not to touch them.

For more tips on fire safety, visit www.redcross.org or contact your local chapter.

From Featurettes.



© Corbis

Get Involved



MOTIVATION TO GET MOVING

Need some motivation to fire up your stale workout plan? If so, consider training for and completing a distance run for a charitable cause. There are 5Ks, 10Ks, half-marathons, and marathons to benefit cancer research organizations, children's hospitals, or individual causes. One of the largest events benefits breast cancer research through the Susan G. Komen Foundation. The Komen "Race for the Cure" is an annual, nationwide spring event. Visit www.komen.org to locate a race near you. Check your fitness center or newspaper for other local opportunities. Here are some of the personal benefits:

1. You increase your fitness level as you train.
 2. You'll be motivated to stick to your training plan as the race gets closer.
 3. You'll raise money to support a good cause that will benefit others.
- To learn how to train for a distance race, go to www.runnersworld.com.

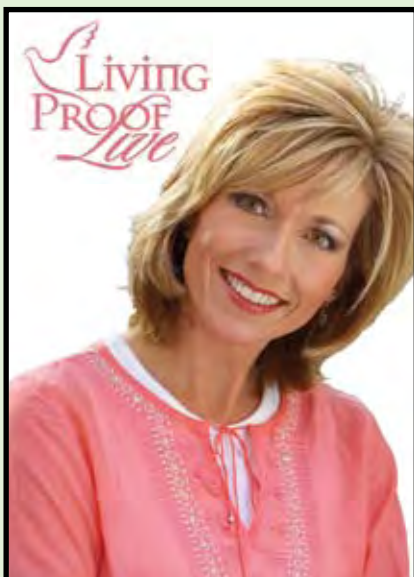


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We Recommend ... **Enrichment Events**

DEEPER STILL *The Event*

Featuring internationally renowned Bible teachers Beth Moore, Kay Arthur, and Priscilla Shirer, this unique event will help you to go deeper into God's Word under their teaching, deeper in prayer with thousands of women across North America, and deeper in worship with Travis Cottrell and the praise team, with special musical guest Anthony Evans. Cost: \$70
Upcoming Date: September 7-8, 2007, Nashville, Tenn.



If you're in need of divine refreshment, want to delve deeper into the Word of God, or you're just looking for a fun and uplifting getaway with "the girls," this is the place for you! Beth's focus will be on the Scripture that God lays on her heart for each Living Proof Live event — no two are the same. As she explores the Bible and how it applies to real life, you'll be amazed by her own experiences as a believer, and you'll be inspired to magnify and strengthen your own relationship with God. Cost: \$55
Upcoming Dates: Ongoing; various locations.



Festivals of Marriage offers a Friday through Sunday getaway set in an exciting location in the mountains, at the beach, or at a resort location. The topics and speakers vary, and potential workshop topics include resolving conflict, keeping intimacy alive, managing stress, sexuality in marriage, and affirmation. Cost: \$119 per couple
Upcoming Dates: Ongoing; various locations

downpour

Featuring James MacDonald, this event based on Hosea 6:1,3, challenges believers to make a radical change in how they view God and how they live the Christian life. Downpour encourages all Christians to pick themselves up from the mire of life and rejoice in God's outpouring of mercy and grace. Cost: \$50
Upcoming Dates: March 9-10, 2007, Houston, Texas; March 23-24, 2007, Charlotte, N.C.



Led by Dr. Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages*, this event for married and engaged couples will strengthen your marriage by helping you to apply practical, biblical principles in your relationship. Sessions focus on communication, understanding and expressing love, initiating positive change, making sex a mutual joy, and how to share the things that bug you. Cost: \$80 per couple; \$40 per person
Upcoming Dates: Ongoing; various locations



This fun and informative event for moms and their daughters, ages 8 to 18, is led by best-selling author and speaker Vicki Courtney. This event will encourage and equip participants with sessions about mom's teen years (and why she's freaking out over her daughter's!), the number one must-have for a happy life, and five things your daughter wants you to know but doesn't know how to tell you. Cost: \$45.00 for moms, \$30.00 for the first daughter, \$15.00 for each additional daughter, and \$15.00 each for up to two friends.
Upcoming Dates: April 28, 2007, Birmingham, Ala.; May 19, 2007, Ridge-land, Miss.; September 15, 2007, Joplin, Mo.; October 20, 2007, Lenoir City, Tenn.

For more information about these enrichment events and to register, visit www.lifeway.com, and click on Events then Enrichment.



Crisis Crossroad

RODNEY & SELMA WILSON

*When times
are tough,
pull together.*

Marriage is about forging a new life together in the midst of the good, the bad, the ugly — and the unpredictable. What happens to a couple when they experience a crisis? They pull together, or they pull apart. A crisis is a relational crossroad. Here's how to pull together when times are tough.

1. Call it what it is — a crisis. Don't deny it. To deny the situation is to add even more stress to the marriage. Denial forces each partner to go through difficulty alone. Instead, as a team, acknowledge the reality of a crisis, and rise to the challenge. Once recognized and addressed, the problem becomes more manageable.

© Corbis

2. Expect stress. A crisis places pressure on your relationship. There will be relational tension! Like the crisis itself, stress is a part of life. Your marriage is not necessarily falling apart because of the stress you're feeling.

3. Don't blame. It's easy, in the midst of anxiety, to cast blame. Don't go there. Some processing may need to take place, but timing is critical. When a fire is blazing in your living room, don't yell at your wife for leaving a candle burning. Blanket your relationship with extra grace during a crisis. Your marriage is a team. When the team succeeds, the team celebrates together. And when the team encounters a crisis, the team should share the burden.

4. Frequently do a feelings check. When difficult times hit, the tendency can be for each mate to retreat into his or her solitary world. This distancing can be subtle but devastating. Two who became one can slowly revert back to two. Set aside a time to share how each mate is handling a crisis period. The feelings check doesn't have to be long, but it may need to happen frequently. Simply touching base with each other can reconnect you. Give each other permission to freely express feelings.

5. Seek help when needed. In the midst of a crisis, it can be difficult to see clearly. Often the unbiased perspective of a Christian counselor or pastor can help guide your marriage through the muddy waters brought on by crisis.

6. Remind each other that God is aware. God is not surprised by crisis periods. When we wonder *why God would allow ...*, we can take heart in these verses: "For now we know in part ... we see indistinctly, as in a mirror" (1 Cor. 13:9a, 12a). We simply don't see or know everything in this life. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways" (Isa. 55:8). Although certain experiences in our lives just don't add



© Radius Images

up, it can be a comfort to know the Lord has the bigger picture view.

A couple of dictionary definitions of the word *crisis* are: 1) the turning point, for better or worse; and 2) the decisive moment. Crisis indeed provides a crossroad for us and for our marriages. Let your crisis periods become turning points for a stronger marriage. Choose to draw closer to each other in the midst of what you're going through and glorify God in the process.

BONUS! A crisis impacts your kids, too. For godly wisdom that will help you nurture them during difficult times, visit lifeway.com/marriage.



Rodney and Selma Wilson
Rodney is Marriage and Family Minister at First Baptist Church in Smyrna, Tenn., where he and Selma live with their beagle, Pebbles. They have two daughters and one son (in-law). Rodney and Selma are authors and speakers on marriage and family.

Facing

Army Ranger Captain Jeff Struecker has been on the front lines of every U.S. military initiative since Panama — and God has given him and his family peace at every turn.

BY CLINT KELLY

“Honey, the unit just got orders. I have to go now.”

“Where are you going?”

“I’m not allowed to say.”

“When do you fly out?”

“Can’t say ...”

“How long will you be gone?”

“I don’t know ...”

“What’s the mission? Is it a dangerous one?”

“Just know that I really love you, and I’ll get back to you as soon as I can.”

He would, that is, if he weren’t shot, bombed, or captured in combat. For six of the first nine months of their marriage, Dawn Struecker’s husband, Jeff, had been away from home. He was a U.S. Army Ranger, the toughest of the tough. His First Ranger Battalion was deploying overseas, that much she knew. Dawn was free to question all she wanted. But Jeff couldn’t say or didn’t know where he was going, how long he would be gone, or the level of danger he would face.

The gaping separation and dark uncertainty these newlyweds faced were as frustrating as they were frightening. There at the fragile beginnings of their marriage, intense fear threatened to tear them apart before they could celebrate even one anniversary as husband and wife.

Today, after 16 years of marriage and the births of five children, Jeff and Dawn have stared fear in the face on numerous occasions and found reassuring faith in the midst of trying circumstances. Decorated for valor, Jeff has survived the front lines of every U.S. military initiative since Panama, including the heart-wrenching rescue mission memorialized in the motion picture “Black Hawk Down.” Surrounded and outnumbered, fully expecting to die, he led a rescue convoy under heavy fire to retrieve downed soldiers. And he did it not once, but twice.

RANGERS LEAD THE WAY | How is it possible for someone trained to run into battle, not to avoid it, to also be able to give comfort and be comforted in the face of fear? The image, Jeff stresses, is U.S. Army Rangers don’t get scared.

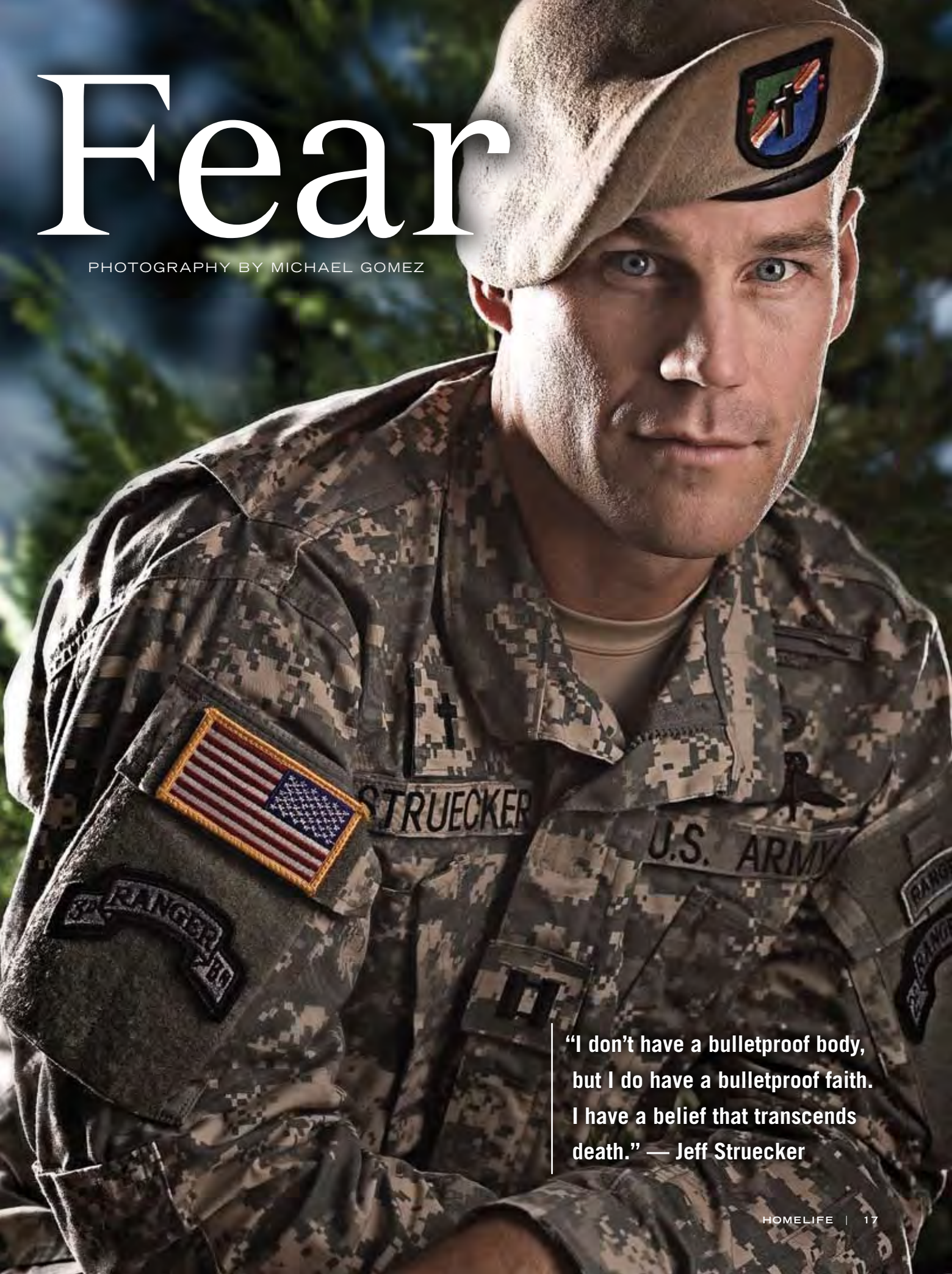
“We’ve made a name for ourselves as the fearless ones. We’re a tough, disciplined, quick-strike force that parachutes or helicopters into nasty situations, kicks down doors, captures the bad guys, and forces openings for the rest of the Army to follow — hence our motto, ‘Rangers Lead the Way.’”

Surrender is not an option. Death is more acceptable than defeat.

Most often, Jeff is in the forefront of battle. From the steamy jungles of Panama to the overwhelming odds in Mogadishu, Somalia, to more than a half-dozen tours in the explosive chaos of Iraq, he’s fought on the side of freedom. Among his many awards are the Kuwaiti Liberation

Fear

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL GOMEZ



“I don’t have a bulletproof body, but I do have a bulletproof faith. I have a belief that transcends death.” — Jeff Struecker

Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Bronze Star for courage under fire.

Yet Jeff, Ranger or no Ranger, would be the first to tell you he experiences many fears, including fear of financial loss, fear of losing those you love, and fear of death. For a time, he was even afraid to answer the phone, for fear it was another call to arms. He's convinced, "The difference between a coward and a hero is not whether you are scared; it's what you do while you are scared."

What he and Dawn have come to discover in their life together is how to trust God. It's not about an absence of fear; it's more about trusting God to meet their fears and to provide His strength.

"How we handle our fears makes a huge difference" is Jeff's ironclad conviction, both in conflict and out. "We can let our fears paralyze us, or

we can find the courage to rise above them," he says.

Dawn agrees. With the kids looking to her for hope and strength during their father's long absences, she can't allow fear to take her family hostage.

"Although we might physically be at opposite ends of the earth, our hearts stay connected," says Jeff. "It's a paradox."

FAITH AND FAMILY | Jeff met

Dawn in his senior year of high school. They worked in the same Burger King restaurant where Jeff was assistant manager. Jeff put his faith in Christ as a teenager. Dawn accepted Christ shortly after the birth of their first son.

According to Jeff, much of the credit for the strength of their bond lies with Dawn. "She's the most capable woman I know, but keeping the family connected is her

most difficult challenge," he says. Sometimes after months of separation, Jeff and Dawn must relearn how to be comfortable as a couple. They work at ignoring minor irritations. With their kids, they maintain nightly devotions and pray before lights out. When Jeff is home, he's fully home.

Each of the children is unique. Jeff will proudly tell you Aaron, 12, is studious and a voracious reader. Jacob, 10, is a natural-born leader. Joseph, 8, makes friends easily. Abigail, 7, is the nurturing one, while Lydia, 4, is a real charmer. He loves them dearly and to be forever cut off from them is unthinkable.

When those fears assail, Jeff and Dawn lean on biblical assurances. For all his superb training, Jeff places his faith not in his own abilities, but in Christ's.

"We have a Savior who sticks closer than a brother and has

Dawn homeschools the children.

Left, The boys share a classroom joke. Near Right, Lydia is immersed in a Bible story. Far Right, Abigail and Dawn discuss an assignment.



promised to bear our burdens. It's not that as a Christian I never have to deal with fear again. It's that I have something the guy next to me in combat [may not] have."

Time and again, that ability to leave his fears with Christ is put to the test. "My Savior has never bailed on me when the chips were down," Jeff professes. That repeated faithfulness builds Jeff's ability to overcome fear with trust.

IN THE FACE OF FEAR In his book, *The Road to Unafraid*, co-written with Dean Merrill, Jeff writes of the woman who keeps the family together despite her loneliness and anxiety — his bride, Dawn. And he writes of the peace of God that has made him a full-time military chaplain, offering the gift of eternal peace to his fellow Rangers. A graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and awarded Best Ranger of

1996, Jeff recently completed the chaplain's career course and was assigned to a new Ranger unit at Ft. Benning, Ga. He wants to share what he's learned on the battlefield and by God's grace to the men he serves.

In repeatedly facing the unknown, the Strueckers have developed coping strategies for handling the anxiety and doubt that fear produces. In his book, Jeff shares some of their insights:

1. Don't borrow worry from tomorrow. God's mercies are new every morning. Ask for and accept God's strength one day at a time.

2. The buildup to fear is worse than the real thing. People tend to think the worst. "Take situations one at a time," Jeff says. "Stay calm, and cope with what's right in front of you — not what's ballooning inside your imagination."

3. Rise above your fear. Persist by putting daily anxieties in their

place. This consistent, daily discipline in the small things builds confidence that will make you more effective when more serious challenges come along.

4. Fear vanishes in the face of beauty. The Bible says to dwell on that which is pure and lovely. Because of the divorce of his parents, Jeff stood at the altar, scared about the success of his own marriage. Scared, that is, until Dawn appeared looking "absolutely spectacular!" At the sight of her loveliness, he was overwhelmed with joy and hope.

5. Peace displaces fear. Calm is an extension of knowing you belong to God and your future is in His hands. In Christ, the matter of your mortality and eternity has been settled.

"The Christian life, to some degree, parallels Ranger school," Jeff says. "As we grow in faith, we test our limits, learn what we can do, and what's



In this riveting book, Jeff recounts frontline stories of how God delivered peace and courage in the midst of certain death (W Publishing). Available at LifeWay Christian Stores.



required to attain something greater. That builds your competence and confidence in what you are capable of doing.”

Is it healthy to feel a degree of fear, for our nation to feel jitters over the unrest in the world? “Yes,” Jeff asserts. “Soldiers sometimes have the opinion that, as a nation, their fellow Americans back home don’t know what’s going on in the world and really don’t care. So to sit on the edge of our seats is a good thing. It makes us more dependent upon God.”

GOD IS IN CONTROL | Jeff believes Christians need a realistic and biblical worldview of unfolding


events. Christ declared there will be wars and rumors of war. Jeff wants that to translate to a nation at prayer for God to be merciful and to grant peace. Turmoil should force people to seek God’s face, to desire His intervention for the nation to be successful. As Christians, Jeff says, focusing on the bigger picture rather than the fear itself “provides opportunities to display our faith in ways that will blow away the rest of the world. It will cause others to say, ‘There must be something to this Jesus Christ!’”

Jeff tells soldiers, “I don’t have a bulletproof body, but I do have a bulletproof faith. I have a belief that

transcends death. No matter what happens to me ... or wherever the Army sends me, I’m guaranteed an eternity in heaven.”

None of us wants fear to paralyze us, nor should it. Wonderfully, miraculously, God has already settled the outcome for all eternity. What we can do is to call on Him, to pray, and to trust. And then, as the Strueckers readily testify, instead of worrying, “Leave the rest in God’s capable hands.” 🏠

Clint Kelly is a communications specialist for Seattle Pacific University as well as an author and journalist (www.clintkellybooks.com). Clint and his family live in Everett, Wash.



Reading to his children is one way Jeff keeps his family focused on what really matters.

THE FIRST PRIORITY

As chaplain to one of the world's elite fighting forces with roots deep in the Revolutionary War, one of Capt. Jeff Struecker's most important tasks is to help first-time soldiers face their fear of combat. "I remind them of how well-trained and well-equipped they are. I tell them that if they do their job, in the long run, they will be successful and accomplish their mission. But I cannot say who will make it back and who won't. Death is 100 percent certain for everybody on the planet, and there's no vaccine for it. So I urge them to make their lives right with Christ because then the worst that can happen to them is actually the best. Get your eternity settled, then you can march off and face anything."

Jeff worries most about soldiers who won't admit to their fear of death. Some are willing to abuse their newfound freedom to drink and behave promiscuously. Others wait until the rockets are flying before they give serious heed to spiritual matters. In all cases, he boils it down to a need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

To those anxious soldiers, Jeff offers these assurances for overcoming fear:

- **Fear is not God's invention.** "For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment" (2 Tim. 1:7). God is in control. He loves you and is looking out for your best.
- **Fear drives us closer to God.** It causes us to call out to Him. "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Heaven awaits at the end.
- **Fear results in humility.** There's not a person who ever lived who didn't experience pain or apprehension. To be human is to be subject to weakness and uncertainty. It's



"Get your eternity settled, then you can march off and face anything." — Jeff Struecker

not wrong to express it, but let others see how Christ sustains you.

"Paul's whole life as an apostle was pretty much an extended version of Ranger School," Jeff says. Whether shipwrecked or imprisoned, Paul never swaggered, but always gave God the glory.

- **Fear is meant to be given to the God of love who is love.** "There is no fear in love; instead perfect love

drives out fear ..." (1 John 4:18a).

- **Fear is neutralized by the love of God.** Jeff says, "If we forget about the anchors of His love for us, His promise to hear our prayers, and the heavenly future that awaits us, we will wallow in our apprehensions like everyone else. But if we hold on to what we know is true, we can live above our fears."



Racing to Save Her Marriage

BY GARY THOMAS

Different interests drove them apart. God's grace brought them back together.

For years, Diana and Ken Franklin had separate interests they rarely shared. Diana loves movies; Ken tolerates them. Ken follows NASCAR; Diana has never quite understood the fascination of watching cars drive in circles.

Slowly but surely Diana sensed Ken was pulling away from her. When she pressed him, he told her he cared about her but no longer loved her.

"Is there anyone else?" Diana asked. "No," Ken said, to Diana's relief. Unfortunately, Ken was lying.

A few weeks after Ken declared his lack of feelings, Diana asked God to use whomever and whatever to save her marriage. She never expected

that help to come from the "other woman's" mother.

The very day she prayed, a woman phoned Diana and asked, "Is your husband Ken Franklin?"

"Yes."
"Do you realize what your husband is doing with my daughter Cheryl?"

Diana felt her heart beat fast. "What are you talking about?"

"Your husband and my daughter met in a NASCAR chat room. They started sending e-mails to each other, and now

© Image Source

they've exchanged pictures. They're planning to meet this weekend.

Sadly, it all added up. Ken had arranged for Diana to spend time at her parents' house while he went on a "business trip."

And then came the kicker: "And my daughter is married and has two kids!"

Would Ken really blow apart two families? Diana wondered. That's when she took the action that saved their marriage. Diana drove to her friend Darla's house, her mind racing with questions about the future. *What will happen to me? What will happen to our daughter, Hillary? OK, God, technically, this is emotional adultery; I can leave this marriage, right?*

And yet Diana had a strong sense that divorce played no part in God's plan.

On Darla's front porch, Diana blurted out the entire story, venting her rage and anger and calling Ken nasty names.

Darla had survived a similar situation; her husband had an emotional affair several years prior, so she understood Diana's feelings of betrayal. She patiently listened as Diana worked through her emotions.

When Diana gained control of herself, only then did she return home, where she immediately went to Ken and said, "We need to talk. Cheryl's mother called."

Ken's face went white.

Here's where the story becomes remarkable. With incredible detachment, devoid of accusation and fiery emotions, Diana talked through everything with Ken. Because she had vented her emotions to Darla,

she was objective and dispassionate in the conversation that had the potential either to save or to wreck her marriage.

"Tell me about Cheryl," Diana began.

Ken slowly described how he met Cheryl on the Internet. The two shared a love of NASCAR. Ken admitted they planned to meet. They had even talked about a possible future together.

"You've contemplated a life with this woman?" Diana asked. "You're prepared to tell our daughter you won't be her daddy every day, but you'll be Daddy to these two other kids whom you've never met?"

Ken began to see the ridiculous nature of the situation. Diana's eyebrows lifted, almost comically. "You can't be serious about ending 12 years of marriage for someone you met on the Internet," she said with a

laugh, and Ken laughed with her. The entire evening went like that. Diana spoke forcefully but maintained a light enough air to elicit some comic relief at just the right moments.

Not once did Diana swear or call Ken any of the names she'd uttered on Darla's porch, even though Ken expected exactly that. Later, Ken told Diana that if she had reacted harshly to him, he would have bolted. Instead, he saw a picture of God's grace and mercy through Diana — and it made all the difference.

Diana remembers, "When I [confronted] Ken, the disappointment and sadness were still there, but the anger was gone, replaced by God's





© iStockphoto

Find a way to share your husband's interests.

peace and the confidence that if Ken chose to stay in our marriage, it would eventually be better than it was before. It was so totally God, because I didn't expect to act that way; I was hurt and disillusioned."

The evening concluded with Diana giving Ken a challenge: "Be obedient to God's Word, contact Cheryl, say it's over — and work on our marriage. If you do that, I believe God can give you astounding feelings for me again."

The next day, Ken closed the e-mail account he'd used with Cheryl and gave Diana the password to the new account so she could keep tabs on what happened from then on.

Cheryl continued to pursue Ken. Diana even received a couple of calls from Cheryl. But in the end, Ken ended the relationship, and Diana's words proved true: Ken's feelings for her returned.

Diana wisely understood that Ken's breakup with Cheryl was just the first step. She needed do her part to patch up an obviously shaky

relationship. She began by giving the relationship the time and attention it deserved.

"I don't mean to diminish the importance of parenting, but if you put your children first to the neglect of your marriage, what will happen to your kids if the marriage falls apart? I realized I needed to take better care of my marriage," Diana said.

The second thing Diana did was to keep her finger on the pulse of her marriage to prevent another emotional drift.

"It sounds like such a cliché to say that communication is important, but it is," Diana said. "Regularly ask your spouse, 'Are we OK?' Do a periodic checkpoint — use a scale of 1 to 10, or empty to full, whatever works. But watch for relational drift."

Finally, Diana made a strong effort to enter Ken's world. She'd learned the hard way that when common interests fade, over time a couple can slowly drift apart.

When Ken met a "NASCAR woman," he realized that shared

intimacy is far more fulfilling than solitary fun. That's why Diana now counsels other wives to "find a way to be share your husband's interests, because it shows him you care about things he cares about."

Diana admits when she attended her first NASCAR race, she was bored. "I asked myself, *Why am I here?* And then I remembered: *I'm doing this to please him.* And it got better."

During that fateful conversation with her husband, Diana had asked Ken, "What would you do if you left me?"

"I'd go to more NASCAR races," Ken replied. Keeping the conversation light, Diana half-laughed, half-inquired, "So you'd leave me for NASCAR?"

"It's not just going to NASCAR," Ken explained. "It's about being interested in the standings, the driver, who won the last pole, who's in line to win the championship."

So Diana chose her favorite driver, and on most weeks, she can tell you who leads the points race. She even enjoys the races.

You're thinking: *That's all well and good, but when will my husband start doing the things I like to do?*

Give it time. Diana admits, "In the beginning, some of my needs were in the backseat, and I asked God to love me so I could focus entirely on loving Ken." Sometimes the person who's more invested in the relationship must accommodate the other. By pleasing your husband, you're winning the intimacy you can use to influence him in a positive way, including his building an interest in your interests. 🏠

Adapted from *Sacred Influence* by Gary Thomas (Zondervan). Used by permission. Available at your local LifeWay Christian Store.





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Get It Together

BY DAWN HOLLOMON

It's never easy to discuss life-and-death questions, but it's crucial.

He stared at the ER doctor. There were so many questions, so many decisions to make. *Where did his wife keep their insurance information?* he wondered. "Your wife needs a transfusion; do you know her blood type?" a nurse asked. And the doctor asked a question no husband wants to hear: "Do you know your wife's wishes about life support?"

Although husbands and wives vow to love one another in sickness and in health, it's easy to put off tough discussions. By communicating your wishes with your family now and keeping updated records, you empower your family to act on your behalf in the event of an unexpected medical emergency.



GET STARTED | The first step is to gather all of your records in one, easy-to-access place. A binder with tab dividers, sheet protectors, and storage pockets works well. *Get It Together: Organize Your Records So Your Family Won't Have To* by Melanie Cullen contains forms you can complete and a

CD-ROM so you can save information on your computer (available for \$18.69 at www.nolo.com).

Gathering the necessary information can be tedious. Set aside blocks of time to work on tracking down paperwork, updating documents, and filling in the blanks with information you already have.

Design the following sections in your planner:

1. Family Profile. Create individual profiles for each family member. Include full legal names, Social Security numbers, dates and places of birth, and driver's license numbers. List your current home address and telephone number, as well as places of employment or schools with phone numbers. For each family member, include copies of birth certificates, adoption records, marriage certificates, divorce documents, military records, citizenship documents, and Social Security cards. It's also vital for you and your spouse to discuss each family member's spiritual condition, including your own. (See p. 25.)

2. Essential Medical Information. List each family member's blood type, primary doctor with contact information, any major health conditions or past surgeries, mental health conditions, dietary restrictions, prescription and non-prescription drugs taken, and any allergies.

3. Legal Matters. Include contact information for financial and legal advisors, as well as designated guardians for minor children. Provide these legal documents:





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Living Will (Advanced Directive), Health Care Durable Power of Attorney, Durable Power of Attorney, Declaration of Guardianship, Will, and, if applicable, Living Trust. Jeff Mobley, an estate planning attorney in Nashville, Tenn., adds, "It's also beneficial to have an informal list ... designating items of personal property to loved ones."

4. Last Wishes. If you have preplanned funeral arrangements, such as a family plot in a particular cemetery,

include this information in your planner with contact names and phone numbers. Let family members know whether you wish to be buried or cremated; if buried, where you would like to be buried, and if cremated, what you would like to be done with your remains. If you want a particular minister to perform the service, or prefer certain music, Scripture readings, speakers, or pallbearers, include this information in your planner.

By communicating your instructions and ensuring that your family knows where your records are located, you enable them to fulfill your wishes in case of an unexpected medical emergency.



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MANDATORY DOCUMENTS

Jeff Mobley, an estate planning attorney in Nashville, Tenn., gives these definitions:

- **Will** — The traditional written document that disposes of your property at your death.
- **Living Will (Advanced Directive)**— This document expresses your wishes and/or instructions concerning medical treatment at the end of life.
- **Durable Power of Attorney** — This document designates another person as your agent to make legal, financial, and business decisions, usually intended only to be used in the event of disability or incapacity. “The durable clause is an absolute necessity. Without [it], the power of attorney document becomes invalid as soon as the principal becomes legally incompetent,” Mobley explains.
- **Health Care Durable Power of Attorney** — This document designates another person to make health care decisions when you are unable to make those decisions for yourself, including end-of-life decisions and care-giving decisions. Don’t confuse the Living Will and Health Care Durable Power of Attorney. A Health Care Durable Power of Attorney appoints someone to make health care decisions when you’re unable to make those decisions for yourself; the Living Will instructs all persons, including your health care agent, what type of medical treatment you want (or don’t want) at the end of life. “Everyone should have both,” Mobley advises.

5. Insurance. For health insurance policies, include the names of the insured and policy number, the agent’s name and number, the insurance company’s name, and what the coverage includes. Also note if you have supplemental insurance, such as a cancer policy, accidental death policy, or other disease-specific policy. For life insurance, include beneficiaries’ names, the name of the insurance company, policy number, and the agent’s name and number.

6. Personal Finances. Include the following information for checking, savings, and money market accounts: names on the account, name of the institution, account numbers, and names on any signature cards. Add the same information for credit cards. Include information for stocks, bonds, mutual funds, individual retirement accounts, 401ks, and annuities. Note: If you use online banking or automatic payments, note this, and include user names, passwords, and account numbers.

7. Property. Include mortgage information on any residences, including terms of loan and monthly payments with due dates; vehicle information, including title holder and location of the title, financing information, license plate renewal date, and auto insurance information.

8. Secured Places and Passwords. The executor of your will needs access to information that is password-protected. Make a list of places where you have user

names, passwords, combinations, keys, or personal identifications numbers. Common items include: online services, e-mail accounts, cell phones, vehicle and home alarm systems, and home safes.

STORE AND UPDATE YOUR RECORDS

Cullen recommends keeping your planner in a home safe rather than in a safe deposit box, as access may be delayed until after your family needs it. Just be sure the appropriate people know the safe combination.

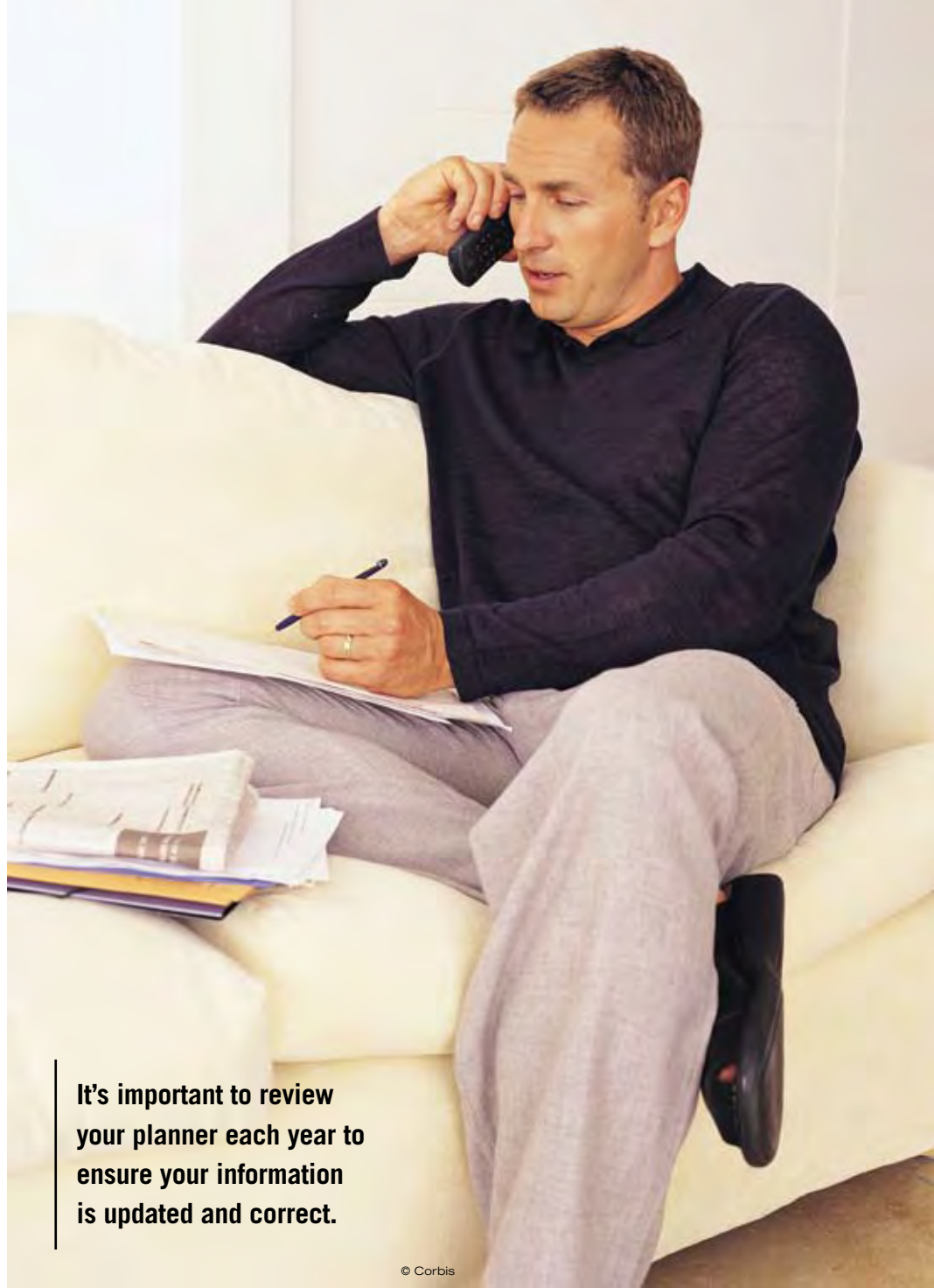
Sensitive documents, such as wills and financial information, can be kept in a safe deposit box. But a word of caution: Cullen cites the story of a woman who worked diligently to organize her records. She made two copies of her safe deposit box key and made sure family members knew the box number. However, upon her death, her family realized she had forgotten to tell them one important detail: the name of the bank! Even if her family had been able to locate the correct bank, it wouldn't have done them any good, as the papers authorizing them to access the box were locked inside.

For your safe deposit box, list in your planner:

- Contact information for the financial institution,
- A list of people authorized to access the box,
- The box number,
- The location of the box keys, and
- A brief description of what the box contains.

It's important to review your planner each year to ensure your information is updated and correct. Mobley recommends reviewing and updating your beneficiary information every five years. "Often they are out of date, incorrectly worded, or inconsistent with the will," Mobley explains.

COMMUNICATE YOUR WISHES | Now that you and your spouse have gathered and updated your records, you need to let other family members know



It's important to review your planner each year to ensure your information is updated and correct.

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of your wishes. This is not an easy topic, so broach the subject in a sensitive way. "Since none of us knows what the future will bring, we've done our best to prepare you and the rest of the family should anything ever happen to us," might be a good way to begin. By communicating your instructions and ensuring that your family knows where your records are located, you enable them to fulfill your wishes in case of an unexpected medical emergency. You also may inspire your family members to do the same for you. 🏡

Dawn Hollomon is a copy editor for HomeLife. She enjoys serving alongside her husband, Chris, who is Minister to Students at First Baptist Church in Smyrna, Tenn.



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Walk This Way

Are you moving in the right direction or digging in your heels?

BY KENT SHINGLETON

It was an amazing morning, the first day of our family vacation on the Gulf Coast. The kids were still asleep, and my wife and I were sitting on the balcony drinking coffee and soaking up the warm, quiet beauty of the beach. In the serenity of that perfect morning, Shawnah and I heard a distinct voice moaning below our balcony. I peeked over the edge.

The voice we heard was coming from a teenage boy. He appeared to

be 13 years old or so, and it was obvious he was mentally challenged. The boy was accompanied by his father.

We watched in awe as this patient father did his best to convince his son to walk 200 feet from the swimming pool to the edge of the shoreline. No big deal, right? Wrong. The boy didn't want to walk across the sand, and he made that clear. For every step forward, the boy and his father took three steps back. I felt guilty watching this struggle, but I couldn't look away.

The son became so angry at times, he attempted to slap and hit his father. Yet over and over I watched this dad respond with love and patience.

LIFE LESSONS | That morning on the balcony, God spoke directly to my heart. He showed me a clear picture of how I needed to improve my daily walk.

1. Don't take your blessings for granted. My health, the health of my wife and children, my job, the

opportunity to actually go to the beach — the list could go on. One of the secrets to responding with a loving, patient, grace-based heart is simply this: Learn to experience life by focusing on God's blessings.

2. Slow down and focus on other people. As I watched the father and his son on the beach, I was overwhelmed by the time and patience the father devoted to his son. (I get impatient when I have to wait in line at the convenience store.) God said to me, "Slow down, Kent. Learn to listen. Focus on others." He reminded me that the reason I do such a poor job responding in love to others is because I refuse to give the time necessary to invest in them.

It's the struggle of living a God-centered life versus a self-centered life.

3. Relax in the love and patience of God the Father. So many times I'm just like that 13-year-old boy; I have an attitude. I don't want to do what my Father wants me to do, even though His best interest is in my best interest. Instead, I want to stick to my plan. It's the struggle of living a God-centered life versus a self-centered life. What a blessing it is to know God's grace, His patience, and His indescribable, unconditional love. Like the patient dad on the beach, whose unconditional love kept him focused on what was best for his son, God remains focused on what's best for me. When I lean into that love rather than pull away from it, I find my center.

REALITY CHECK | How's your walk? Is it purposeful? Or are you digging in your heels to do it your way? Is God honored by the ways

you demonstrate grace, love, and patience to others? And how are you doing with the "love people" part of the great commandment Jesus gave in Matthew 22:36-40?

Ask yourself the following questions. Your answers will reveal a lot about your current focus.

- How do I respond to my spouse who seems to have time for everyone but me?
- How do I respond to my teenager who wrecked the car ... again?
- How do I respond to the guy who refused to let me change lanes in rush hour traffic?

• How do I respond to that co-worker who drives me crazy?

Yes, that morning on the beach, the determined father and his reluctant son did make it to the edge of the shoreline. They only stayed long enough to get their feet wet and to snap a couple of pictures. But with grace, unconditional love, patience, and perseverance, they made it!

You can, too. 🏠

Kent Shingleton is a husband and father of two teenagers and a preteen. He works with college students at his local church.



FAMILY CHALLENGE

This month, commit to moving your family in the right direction spiritually. A great first step is to memorize one verse per week as a family. You can do it! Stick notes on the mirror, make up a silly song (opera-style, of course), whatever it takes.

- Week 1: Are you worried about something? 1 Peter 5:7
- Week 2: Do you have anger issues? Proverbs 14:29
- Week 3: Are you impatient? Galatians 5:22
- Week 4: Do you need to forgive someone? Ephesians 4:31-32

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100 Steps in the Wrong Direction

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Close your eyes and rewind the video tape of your childhood. Now think of a time when you blatantly disobeyed your parents. Got it? Freeze frame that portion of the memory when your parents nailed you for running 100 steps in the wrong direction. Most likely the punishment was steep because your disobedience was blatant.

Running in the wrong direction temporarily distanced you from your parents. But they didn't want the distance to remain because they love you. What you did was wrong, but with love, forgiveness, and discipline, things were made right.

Your relationship with your earthly parents bears similarities to the personal relationship your Heavenly Father wants to have with you. God created you with love. You are His cherished child, and He wants a very personal relationship with you! But something stands in the way of that relationship: the many times you've run 100 steps in the wrong direction. The Bible calls this "sin." Romans 3:23 tells us, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Even though you've sinned, God wants to redirect your life and give you hope. He wants to free you from the sin that keeps you so directionally challenged and give you eternal life with Him.

In order to provide this gift of salvation, God made a way through His Son, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:8 explains,

"But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!" Isn't that amazing? God loves you so much that He sent His only Son, who never sinned, to die in your place for your sins.

You receive this incredible gift by faith alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 explains, "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift — not from works, so that no one can boast."

Faith is a decision of your heart demonstrated by turning toward God and away from sin. Romans 10:9 affirms, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

If you're choosing right now to believe Jesus died for your sins, to receive new life through Him, and to run in the right direction, pray a prayer similar to the one below, accepting Him and thanking Him for your new life.

If you'd like to talk with someone about how to have new life in Christ, call toll free (888) 537-8720.

Dear God, I know I'm a sinner. I believe Jesus died to forgive me of my sins. I now accept Your offer of eternal life. Thank You for forgiving me of all my sin. Thank You for my new life. From this day forward, I will choose to follow You.

HERBAL SUPPLEMENTS: FOOD FOR THOUGHT

These days, people are taking herbal supplements for everything from weight loss to hair growth. According to Dr. Patricia Clai-borne, pharmacy coordinator for Baptist Memorial Health Care in Memphis, Tenn., before you spend your money on any herbal supplement, there are a few things you must consider:

- Herbal supplements are a type of dietary supplement and can act in the body the same way as prescription medications.
- A product labeled “natural” does not mean safe or without harmful effects.
- Pregnant or breast-feeding women, children, the elderly, and anyone with a history of liver complaints or other serious health conditions should approach the use of herbal supplements with great care and medical consultation.
- Prior to a surgical operation, always tell your doctor about any herbal medicines you are taking. When discussing your medications with your health care provider, include any herbal supplements with the list of prescription and non-prescription drugs you take.
- Dietary supplements in the United States are regulated by the FDA as foods and do not have to state proof of safety, effectiveness, or what the FDA calls “Good Manufacturing Practices.”
- Many Web sites sell herbal supplements. Know how to evaluate the claims that are made for all supplements. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine clearinghouse (<http://nccam.nih.gov>) is a great resource for additional information on herbal supplements.



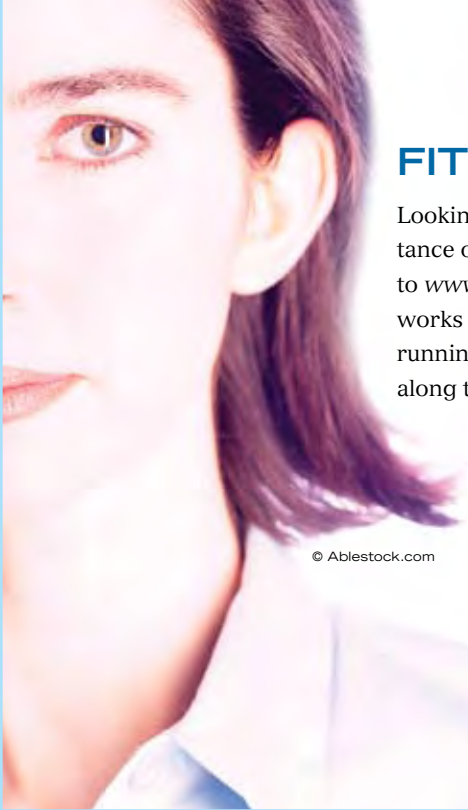
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SAVE A LIFE

According to the American Heart Association, someone in the United States has a heart attack every 33 seconds. Would you know what to do if someone you loved had a heart attack?

“Only 5 percent of the U.S. population knows CPR,” says Rebecca Miller, RN, BSN, owner of Heart Start CPR Plus.

Learning CPR, or cardiopulmonary resuscitation, is a great investment of time and money. The American Heart Association, Red Cross, local hospitals, and fire departments offer classes for the public to learn this valuable skill. If you’ve taken a class in the past but don’t have current certification, retake the class for the latest information. As of March 2005, the methods for performing CPR have been revised. Visit www.americanheart.org for information about a class near you.



FITNESS TECH TIP

Looking for a new route to walk or run in your town? Or would you like to know the distance of your current path? Now the Web makes it easier than ever to find a new path. Go to www.mapmyrun.com, type in your starting address, and click your way to a path that works for you. Map My Run offers a variety of services. It calculates the distance of your running/walking path, gives the elevation, and even shows where public rest rooms are along the way (if applicable). This is a great tool to use on vacation or business trips, too.

Enter your lodging address, and map a route in your temporary location. There's also a great "Workout Calculator" to calculate average speed, average pace, and calories burned during your run based on gender, age, height, weight, and running/walking speed when you've completed the mapped course. Check it out!



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SCOOP UP SUPER FOODS

Daniel and his friends definitely had the right idea when they asked the Babylonian guards to feed them vegetables and water for better health (Dan. 1). According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, six of today's super foods are fruits and vegetables. While there are technically no bad foods, here are 10 foods that have amazing health benefits. They're all low in fat and sugar and high in vitamins, minerals, fiber, protein, and healthy carbohydrates.

1. Sweet potatoes
2. Grape tomatoes
3. Skim (fat-free) or 1 percent milk
4. Blueberries

5. Wild salmon
6. Crispbreads (whole-grain rye crackers)
7. Brown rice
8. Citrus fruits
9. Butternut squash
10. Dark, leafy greens (e.g. kale and spinach)

For more information about these super foods, go to www.cspinet.org.



© Photos.com

Branda Polk

Branda Polk is a certified personal fitness trainer and wellness coach in Memphis, Tenn.

HealthWise is for educational purposes only and is not providing medical or professional advice for your specific situation. Please consult your personal physician for answers to your medical questions.

CINDI WOOD

Defrazzle Your Life

*Discover the joy
of doing less.*

Emily managed to get away from her family to attend a women's retreat for the weekend. As she sat in a crowded auditorium with other women who shared the same frustrations of having too much to do and too little time, she heard some eye-opening words:

"God will not bless you in doing the things He has not called you to do — even if they're good things."

Emily was stunned. Her life was full of good things. Could it be God didn't want her to do all these things?

Look at the following list of good things:

- Teaching Sunday school
 - Volunteering in school
 - Singing in the choir
 - Belonging to a civic club
 - Visiting the elderly
- It's a small sampling,

but you get the idea.

And you could add a lot of other examples from your own life, I'm sure.

In fact, I know many

women who've filled their lives with way too many good things! Many Christian women, swallowed up in an endless array of duties, responsibilities, and service, miss out on God's best for them. This plethora of activity often steals their creativity, their playtime, their joy, and leaves them physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually depleted.

God has a beautiful invitation to all who find themselves caught up in the lifestyle of too many things to do with not enough time to do them. Through Isaiah, God issues an invitation to all who are thirsty, to all who are not satisfied with life, to all who are too busy to enjoy His peace and joy:

"Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters; ... Seek the Lord while He may be found; call to Him while He is near ... 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways. For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isa. 55:1a, 6, 8-9).

If you're anxious, pressured, and depleted by the demands placed on your life right now, God has something better in mind for you. Too little time is not the problem. The core of the problem may be having too much to do! And through accepting the invitation of the Lord to come to Him, He will give you His thoughts about the scheduling of your time.

God does not want you to do every good thing. That's why you must check His thinking and seek His counsel

in everything you do. He alone can tell you what you need to be involved in during this time in your life.

It may sound a bit cut-and-dried at first, this notion of asking God what you should be doing and waiting for Him to tell you, but it's true. If you offer heart, mind, and emotions to your heavenly Father, He will direct you about all the things He wants you to be involved in during your daily schedule.

For me, the revelation about what should occupy my days comes in my quiet time. Part of what I do daily during that time with Him is go over my plans, praying

over each item and asking His take on what fills my day. More than once, He has impressed me to strike something off my list.

I've learned not to assume that just because something is good, God wants me to do it at this particular time in my life. Most everything I do could be classified as good

— visiting the nursing home, serving on church committees, checking on my neighbors. I can't, however, do all those good things all the time.

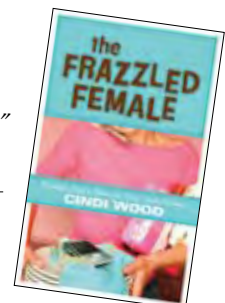
When I seek God's counsel and ask Him to control my to-do list, He truly impresses on me what should be on it in the first place. Sometimes I'm impressed to strike off little things. There have been other times when He has called me specifically to drop out of an activity for a while so I'll have more time to be with my family and grow our relationships.

I believe God wants us to learn to enjoy His fellowship at a more relaxed pace. For some reason, we busy women equate being busy for God as being productive for Him. But He is showing me that I'm more productive when I'm less busy and more relaxed.

Check your life. Are you overcommitted? Take time with the Lord to seek His direction. And remember, making sure you're less busy will help you have more time for sitting at God's feet, and that's to your advantage.

"There is need of only one or but a few things. Mary has chosen the good portion [that which is to her advantage]" (Luke 10:42, AMP).

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Ready... or Not

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BY PATTIE KLINE

**A weather-related disaster
can strike quickly and
without warning.
Is your family
prepared?**

“To end our broadcast, we bring you scenes from the airport earlier today. A mock disaster drill was conducted in cooperation with the Red Cross, disaster alert officials, and local police and medical organizations. The purpose was not only to practice disaster procedures but to stress the importance of being prepared before you’re faced with these conditions.”

As the news went to commercial, 9-year-old Lauren Wheeler said, “We ought to do that, too, Dad.”

“Do what?” her father asked.

“Practice what we’d do if there were a hurricane or a tornado or something.”

The discussion that followed included jokes from the older siblings about how they were too far inland for a hurricane but ended with serious consideration by everyone about how unprepared they were for a weather-related disaster.

Tornados appear quickly. You may only have minutes to seek safety. Floods often give more warning time, but safety and survival needs still exist. What would you and your family do in the event of a weather-related disaster? Are you prepared for safety and survival?

Because of young Lauren’s request, the Wheeler family has taken an

important step in disaster preparedness: They’ve recognized the need. Disaster strikes quickly, often without warning. A wise family is prepared for a disaster that hopefully never happens.

Here’s a simple plan to help get your family prepared.

P — PLAN | Create a disaster plan to fit your family.

- Talk about weather-related disasters common to your area. Discuss different responses needed for each.
- Choose meeting places both inside and outside the home.
- Provide all family members with a contact name and phone number, preferably in another city.
- Determine evacuation plans from both your home and city.

R — RESOURCES | Know resources available in your area.

- Contact the American Red Cross or local emergency management. Request information about warning signals, emergency numbers, and services in your community.
- Post phone numbers of area hospitals, police, or emergency services



EMERGENCY KIT ITEMS:

- A three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that won’t spoil
 - One change of clothing and footwear per person, and one blanket or sleeping bag per person
 - A first aid kit that includes your family’s prescription medications
 - Emergency tools including a battery-powered radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries
 - An extra set of car keys, and a credit card, cash, or traveler’s checks
 - Sanitation supplies
 - Special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members
 - An extra pair of glasses
 - Important family documents (in a waterproof container)
- (Keep a smaller kit in the trunk of your car.)

From www.prepare.org/basic/basic.htm.



© IT Stock Free



- Train young children to dial 911.
- Locate your area's designated shelters.

E — EDUCATION | Keep family members informed, regardless of age.

- Discuss your disaster plan. Involve children of all ages in making the plan, discovering evacuation routes, etc. Involvement in planning ensures ownership in the plan and better recollection in time of crisis.
- Spend time with each family member, reviewing the plan. Share concerns, fears, and ideas. Provide the security of being prepared.
- Review the plan regularly.

P — PRACTICE | Practice your disaster plan.

- A disaster drill is a serious matter, but try to lighten the tone, especially with smaller children. Crawl on the floor with them through the evacuation route for a fire drill. Run with them to the designated safe place for a tornado drill. Remind them that, during an actual disaster, they must be serious and follow directions.
- Discuss changes to the plan. Evacuation routes may need to be altered, disaster kits placed in a more convenient location, etc.
- Unplug phone lines, and have young children practice dialing 911. Provide an actual detail of what to say when the operator answers. Recite those words with them until you're confident they will remember what to say in an actual emergency.
- Discuss and plan what to do if a disaster occurs while family members are at school, work, or church.

A — ASSEMBLE | Put together an emergency kit.

- Disaster kits can be purchased through several organizations. See www.prepare.org/basic/basic.htm for American Red Cross options, or search the Internet for other options.
- Prepare your own emergency kit (see sidebar "Emergency Kit Items").

CHILDREN AND DISASTER

Children's response to any trauma is greatly influenced by the actions of their parents and other adults.

- Expect security issues, and treat them as a reaction to fears. Give support rather than scold behavior regression.
- Soothe fears without dismissing them as insignificant.
- Try to provide areas of control for the child who may feel helpless.
- Discover inner fears through role play, puppets, art, etc.
- Maintain normal discipline, but allow for behavior flare-ups as children of any age are confused, afraid, and possibly disoriented.
- Keep as many activities in their normal routine as possible.
- Create new routines to fit the circumstances.
- Allow special privileges to comfort needs (e.g. night-light, sleeping with a sibling, etc.).
- Limit exposure to media coverage of the disaster. Too much information can be overwhelming for adults, but especially for children.
- Talk, talk, talk to your children. Be available, and treat their thoughts and feelings as important, real, and honest.
- Pray with your children. Let them hear you thanking God for safety, family, and the security of His love and protection even in tough times.

Adapted from "Helping Young Children Cope With Trauma," www.prepare.org/basic/basic.htm.

- Emergency kits should be packed in sturdy, waterproof, easy-to-carry containers (backpacks or duffle bags).

- Keep enough food, water, and medical supplies in your home to meet your needs for at least three days. Replenish supplies every three months to maintain freshness.

- Keep all prescriptions filled with at least a three-days supply.

- If needed, keep a generator on hand to keep medical equipment operational.

as they reach out to help those in need. Expect to see people opening their hearts to the love of God because they literally have nothing else left. Expect to see your heart, and the hearts of your family, strengthened in faith as you walk through the hard times. Expect to see God's hand ... and you will not be disappointed. 🏠

R — REALIZE | Realize the importance of training.

- Contact your local Red Cross, Emergency Management training, or local medical facility for training in CPR and first aid.

- Consider the importance of all family members receiving training, regardless of age.

E — EXPECT | Expect to see God at work.

- By its very name, a disaster brings hardship, questions, and often the inability to explain God's presence in the midst of devastation. Yet, for those who know the God of the universe, there is no question that He's still in control and He loves His children very much.

Expect to see evidence of God's love in the unselfish actions of others

Pattie Kline is a wife, mother, and grandmother who lives in Ft. Worth, Texas.



“By its very name, a disaster brings hardship, questions, and often the inability to explain God’s presence in the midst of the devastation. Yet, for those who know the God of the universe, there is no question that He’s still in control.”

UTILITY ALERT

In the case of an emergency, locate the main electric fuse box, water service main, and natural gas main. Learn how and when to turn off these utilities; teach all responsible family members how as well.

Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves. Remember, only turn off the utilities if you suspect the lines are damaged or if you are instructed to do so. If you turn the gas off, you will need a professional to turn it back on.

From www.prepare.org/basic/basic.htm.



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A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is shown in profile from the chest up, looking towards the right. Her hands are clasped together in a prayerful gesture, with fingers interlaced. The background is a bright, soft white light, creating a serene and contemplative atmosphere. The woman's face is partially in shadow, while her hands are illuminated by the light.

“Your daughter has cancer.”

BY BRENDA HARRIS

**Four Words That Brought
a Mother's Faith Into Focus**



© Getty Images

Our life was good. Normal. Routine. Mike and I were enjoying the empty nest in our hometown of Cleveland, Tennessee. Stephanie, our older daughter, lived in Nashville and was finishing her master's degree. Our younger daughter, Amber, had married her high school sweetheart, graduated from college, and was eager to get a full-time job teaching middle school.

But all that changed one Wednesday morning in the spring of 1998. Amber couldn't seem to shake the flu — or so we thought. I took her to the emergency room. We assumed she simply was dehydrated. But the results of her blood work told us otherwise. "Your daughter has cancer," the doctor told us. Leukemia. Acute myelogenous leukemia.

The next 24 hours were a blur of activity. The decision was made to transfer Amber to Vanderbilt Medical Center in Nashville. We left her at the local hospital, with her husband by her side, and went home to get ready. We called family members, our church family, and a few friends. Within hours, Amber's name was on prayer chains around the world. We moved ahead in a state of shock.

Our dear friends, Bruce and Ann, lived in Nashville and met us at the hospital with keys to their house. "As long as you're here," they said, "you'll live with us." Countless others extended God's grace to us in a variety of ways as the battle began.

Amber began an aggressive round of chemotherapy. On Easter Sunday, three days after she was admitted, Dennis, her care partner, asked if he could sing to us since he couldn't be in his church choir that morning. Amber and I listened as he led us in worship, singing, "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross."

Regina, a dear friend of Amber's, gave her a verse of Scripture that she kept posted beside her bed: "And

the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 5:10-11, NIV). God’s Word became a lifeline for us as we prayed and waited for Him to heal our daughter.

In June, Amber went into remission and was allowed to go home. We had a great summer together. Amber began the school year, teaching sixth grade at the same school she had attended as a child. But six short weeks later, the cancer returned. Amber returned to Vanderbilt for more chemo and to prepare for a bone marrow transplant.

A RAM IN THE BUSHES | God had been so real to me during Amber’s first round of treatment. I had seen His hand through countless people, through medical technology, and through the prayers of others. But for round two, I needed His presence and His peace more than ever.

I went to the Bible, to the story of God’s instructions to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. I prayed for an Abraham solution to our situation — that God would provide “a ram in the bushes” for us, too. I struggled as I watched my daughter suffer, and I waited for God to heal her.

We spent Thanksgiving and Christmas at home. Amber returned to Vanderbilt for her bone marrow transplant in January. But, despite

more chemo, total body radiation, and the bone marrow transplant, Amber’s leukemia was never gone. In February, the doctors wept as they told us they had done all they could.

SEIZE THE DAY | We took Amber back home, knowing our time together was limited. We spent the next days doing everything we could together. We went to Disney World, one of her favorite places; we had a reunion of sorts with her former youth group, complete with games and a cookout (in February!). We chose to seize the days and savor the time we had together.

On our last trip to Vanderbilt, Amber was admitted with pneumonia. Cancer cells were raging



WHEN CRISIS COMES HOME

by Mike and Brenda Harris

We don't have a secret formula for grief survival. But we do know what helped us on our journey:

- 1. Have an unwavering faith in God.** When the storms come — and they will come — there’s no time to figure out your faith. Even though we were scared, we knew without a doubt that Amber was going to be all right and we would navigate the journey with our faith in God as our guide.
- 2. Hold each other up.** Tough times are not the time to be tough on each other. Be strong when the other is weak; be supportive and encouraging even when you’re hurting. Our whole life was turned upside down. We needed each other like never before. Our marriage and our faith are stronger today because we walked through that difficult time together.
- 3. Be vulnerable with each other.** We were totally transparent with each other. Allow yourself to fall apart with each other. Cry, question, comfort; don’t blame, accuse, or put down.
- 4. Surround yourself with godly friends.** Let people help you. Allow others to demonstrate Christlike love. Then you can rest physically and emotionally in the loving arms of God.

throughout her body. Mike and I went to the hospital chapel and read the day's devotion from *Our Daily Bread*. The Scripture was Psalm 27:14: "Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD" (NIV). The devotional thought ended with the words, "God will make a way when there seems to be no way."

Late in the evening on Tuesday, March 9, 1999, we watched as Amber left this world and entered into the presence of Christ, where she experienced perfect healing.

Our hearts were broken; our loss was excruciatingly deep, but our faith was steadfastly secure. Before we headed home to Cleveland, we went back to the chapel and once again read *Our Daily Bread*. This time, the Scripture was Mark 5:19: "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you" (NKJV).

CELEBRATE LIFE | Our pastor and friend, Dr. Jay McCluskey, shared from Amber's Bible at her memorial service. He noted that, in the margin beside 1 Kings 18 and the story of Elijah, Amber had written: "I believe in the sun when it's not shining, I believe in God even when He is silent." We listened as Tim, one of her close friends, played Michael W. Smith's "Friends," and we gained a whole new appreciation for the lyrics of that great song.

Amber had written a letter to us before her bone marrow transplant. She shared memories from her childhood and wrote words to comfort and assure us: "Don't worry about me; I'm not afraid, and I know where I'm going!"

God gently reminded me that He had already provided a solution for Amber, a sacrificial substitute. Just like He did for Abraham and Isaac, He gave Amber "a ram in the bushes." Years earlier, when she was six years old, Amber trusted Jesus as her Savior one Sunday

morning at our kitchen table. God provided Jesus as the substitute for Amber. He did not abandon her or us.

A FIRM FOUNDATION | Our faith has sustained us during the months and years since Amber's death. We hurt, we grieve, and we have what we call our "Amber moments." But we know, without a doubt, she is healthy and whole and celebrating life in the presence of her Savior.

Many people ask how we go on after such a devastating loss. Each person who loved Amber had to walk through grief in his or her own way. For me, I couldn't have faced this monumental crisis without my faith in a loving, holy, and healing God. I was reminded over and over of His promises. And I'm continually challenged to rest in the assurance that He is God and He is in control. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11, NIV). 🏡

Brenda Harris is editor of HomeLife. She and her husband, Mike, continue to celebrate life with their daughter Stephanie and new son-in-law, Justin.

SUGGESTED READING

God's Word was and continues to be our source of strength after Amber's death but these other resources were also helpful:

- *Confessions of a Grieving Christian* by Zig Ziglar (B&H)
- *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler* by John Claypool (Morehouse)
- *Heaven: Your Real Home* by Joni Eareckson Tada (Zondervan)
- *The Journey is More Than the Destination* by Cathy and Frank James (iUniverse)



Amber's special friend, Julia, went with her to school as part of an education project. When it was time for Julia to go home, Julia was not very happy!

AMBER, THE TEACHER

Amber's love for teaching and learning started early. When she was just a pre-schooler and big sister Stephanie started kindergarten, Amber would eagerly wait for her to come home. Stephanie would teach Amber everything she had learned in school that day, as only a 5-year-old can.

Amber's first classroom was our basement, where she would line up her dolls and stuffed animals and conduct school. She looked for opportunities to teach her cousins, her friends, and even her dad.

During high school and college, Amber loved to baby-sit. She worked as a caregiver in our church's day care. She loved children, from her special 2-year-olds to the boisterous adolescents in the church youth group.

When she began teaching sixth graders at her former junior high school, Amber worked hard to design a classroom filled with challenging and creative learning opportunities. She brought animals into her classroom: her parakeets, Garth and Reba, and a gecko named Old Paps. She used music and innovative learning tools to make math come alive for her students. Even after her cancer returned, she worked with the new teacher to ensure that her students continued to enjoy fun and exciting days at school.

Those sixth graders have finished high school now; Amber would be proud.



Out of Africa

BY TAMBI SWINEY

**If God calls your child
to the mission field,
don't stand in the way.**

It was late when he arrived home from the youth conference, but 15-year-old Stephen Bunger couldn't wait until morning to share the news with his parents. Carolyn and Paul listened intently as their son explained. During the conference, he sensed God calling him into the ministry. The high school junior felt a call to share the gospel wherever the Lord might lead.

Carolyn listened to her firstborn son's emotional testimony. Tears began to flow. She urged Stephen to listen carefully to God's voice. "We've prayed for you all your life that God would use you," she reminded him. Then as the reality of what this call might mean sunk in, she added, "If you go overseas, I just want you to be safe. I don't want to be selfish. I've got to let you go."

TRUST | Surrendering your child completely to God is easier said than done. When a child senses God's call to serve on the mission field, parents naturally begin to process the ramifications of answering that call. *Will he be safe? When will he come home? Will he ever have a family of his own — and if he does, will I get to see my grandkids?*

Stephen reassured his mom that night by quoting Philippians 4:13. “Mom, this verse says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. He’ll take me wherever He wants me to go, and He’ll keep me safe, so don’t worry about me.”

Carolyn knew Stephen was right. She needed to surrender him — and his future — to God. After all, Stephen’s sensitivity to God’s call and his willingness to obey was an answer to prayers she’d prayed since his premature birth more than 15 years ago. She’d prayed for God’s direction in Stephen’s life and that God would use her son for His glory. Her husband had quoted Proverbs 3:5-6 to Stephen before he was born. Carolyn knew she would have to follow the lead of that Scripture passage and trust in the Lord with all her heart.

Melinda copes with prayer. Aware of the joy Toby experiences through his mission work, she has reconciled herself to the idea that he’s following the Lord’s will and the Lord will take care of him. She also recognizes that God will help her handle things on her side of the ocean.

SURRENDER | In his 22 years of working with college students, Bill Choate, Collegiate Ministries Coordinator for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, has often encountered the parental anxiety that surfaces when a child is called to missions. Sometimes the anxiety is prompted by the sudden clash between the parents’ hopes and dreams for their child and the child’s sense of call in a different direction. Other times the parents are anxious because they fear giving up control over their child’s life.

When her son announced he felt called to Africa, Melinda wept.

OBEY | Melinda Fleming understands Carolyn’s struggle. When her son, Toby, announced he felt called to Africa, Melinda wept. Her mind replayed the stories she’d heard about mission field dangers. In fact, a missionary from her home church died serving the Lord in Africa, the victim of an ambush. Even if her son was willing to go, Melinda wasn’t ready to see him sacrifice his life.

Toby was in his early twenties and out of college. Melinda had envisioned this period of his life as a time of preparation. *He should be working and saving money for the day when he’ll get married and buy a home.* She knew missionaries didn’t make much money. *What would his financial future be like?* Toby assured her that he would be fine. He just knew he had to be obedient to God’s call.

Since beginning his work in Africa, Toby has dealt with a number of health issues — malaria, a parasite, a scorpion bite. It hasn’t been easy for Melinda. Receiving news that your son is ill and thousands of miles from home is one of a mother’s worst nightmares. Having to deliver bad news to your out-of-the-country son is also heart-wrenching, something Melinda experienced when her father died.

“A parent’s job is to rear healthy adults, capable of moving into life dependent on God alone, not their parents,” Choate asserts. “Parents should begin preparing children when they’re young to follow God.”

Shiela Thompson, whose son Austin spent part of his college summer break on a mission trip to East Asia, knows God can ease a mother’s mind while a child is serving far away, even when he’s in a potentially dangerous situation. Watching her son cover his Bible with duct tape prior to his departure temporarily elevated her concerns about his safety. But God gave her a sense of peace that allowed her to concentrate on asking God to give Austin opportunities to share His Word.

God has already begun preparing Shiela for the possibility that Austin’s short-term mission trip might lead to a full-time missions vocation. Her advice? “Pray. Read God’s Word every day. Take time to listen to God. Listen to your child. Know what is in his or her heart. God really does prepare us. Trust your child; trust God.” ▲

Tambi Swiney and her husband, Paul, enjoy spending time with their son, Chaney, and watching God at work in his life.

Music to Our Ears

When you mingle children and music, laughter is sure to follow.

BY MARTHA KIRKLAND

Close your eyes and recall that unforgettable children's choir performance — the one when you, the parent, had great expectations, and your kid — well, he had a few expectations of his own. Maybe he expected he would get to go to the bathroom before he had to sing? Or maybe your daughter didn't expect those new tights to be, well, quite so tight?

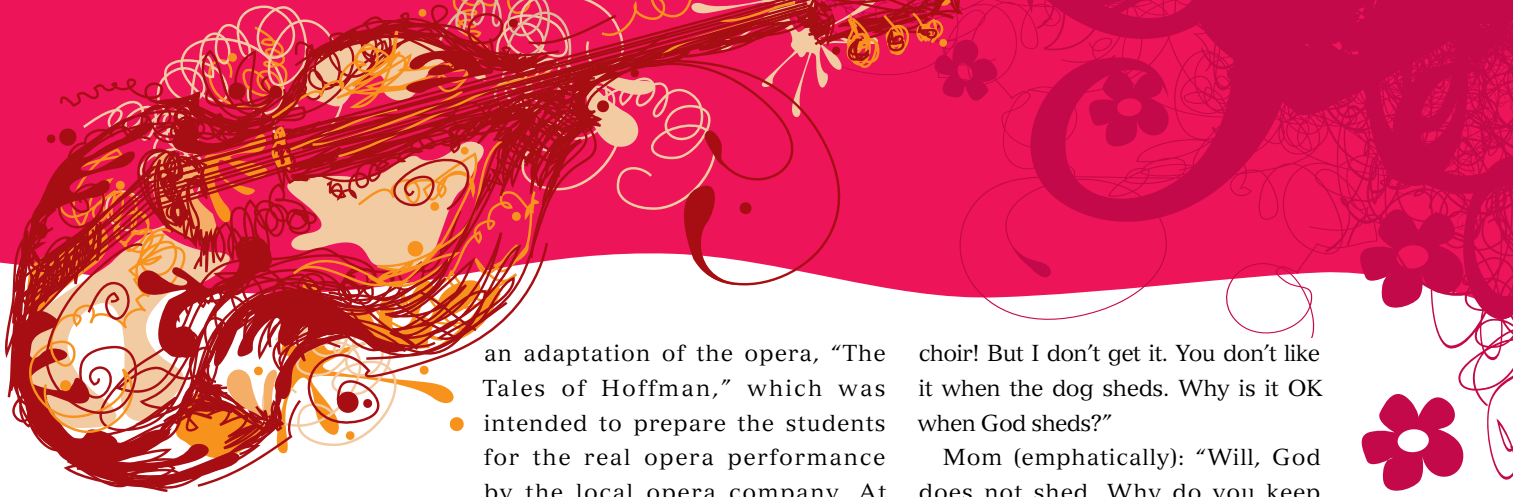
Children are masters at award-winning performances, especially when they involve unintentional lyric rewrites. One mom cherishes the memory of hearing her daughter belt out, "Baa, baa, black sheep, have you any wool? / Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full. / One for the master, one for the dame, / And one for the little boy who lives down the DRAIN."

Aah, kids. Their innocent misperceptions have us grinning and recalling precious moments for years on end. Sometimes one misconstrued word produces tons of laughter: Ginger, a children's choir leader, asked her 4- and 5-year-olds at music camp: "What are hymns?" A little girl wildly raised her hand and confidently replied, "It's the BOYS!"

In the land of music there are, of course, the inevitable moments when a child makes an unexpected executive decision based on logic as pure as it gets. At a certain point in a



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patriotic musical program, a 5-year-old boy approached the microphone to announce the song “Yankee Doodle.” He looked at his teacher — then the audience — and back to the teacher, who was encouraging him to speak. He said with a loud and clear voice, “We would now like to sing ‘Jingle Bells’ because we know it better than that other one.”

And who can discount the enthusiasm young children bring to a musical experience? At the closing of a preschool choir performance, a small boy, upon hearing a song about Jonah and the whale, jumped to his feet, thrust both arms into the air, and yelled at the top of his lungs: “Yeah, God!” The other children in the room immediately jumped up, applauded, and joined the enthusiastic young boy in cheering wildly.

Speaking of audience participation, a sixth-grade class performed

an adaptation of the opera, “The Tales of Hoffman,” which was intended to prepare the students for the real opera performance by the local opera company. At one point in the script, the lead character, Hoffman, hid behind the curtains but within the view of the audience. On cue, another character ran in, asking “Where is that wicked man Hoffman?” A young kindergartner in the audience jumped from his seat, pointed frantically, and yelled, “There he is! There he is!” Hoffman had to hide his face a bit deeper in the curtain to conceal his laughter.

As a parent, you must quickly learn to tune in to the unexpected where music is concerned. Five-year-old Will was riding home with his mom from church after children’s choir, and the conversation went something like this:

Will: “Mom, why does God shed?”

Mom: “Will, honey, God does not shed.”

Will (quite insistent): “Yes, He does, Mom. I know He does! We learned it at

choir! But I don’t get it. You don’t like it when the dog sheds. Why is it OK when God sheds?”

Mom (emphatically): “Will, God does not shed. Why do you keep saying that He does?”

Will: “Because we sang it at choir, ‘America, America, God sheds His grace on me!’”

And last, but not least, there was the young man who stole the show with his rendition of the song “He Is Exalted.” His version went something like this: “He is exhausted, the King is exhausted on high! I will praise Him!”

Aah, children, music, laughter. Use your heartstrings to wrap the three together, and thank God for such special blessings. 🏠

We want to hear your funny stories of kids singing it their way! Send your stories to homelife@lifeway.com.



Martha Kirkland is mother to four, mother-in-law to three, and grandmother to seven. She is a longtime children’s choir director at First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn.



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GARY & CARRIE OLIVER

Lifestyle Parenting

“The greatest gift you can give your child is found in who you are.”



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Q. I want to be the best parent I can be, but at times, the task is overwhelming. Do you have any suggestions?

A. One of the biggest mistakes many parents make is that they don't take the ministry of parenting seriously enough. By recognizing the importance and difficulty of parenting, you have already taken an important first step.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Moses reminds the people to love the Lord with all of their hearts, souls, and might and to focus on the things of God. He instructs parents to teach these principles to their children: to talk about them at home; in daily life; at bedtime and the first thing in the morning.

Moses tells the people there are two basic ways to teach their children: formally and informally. In formal instruction, we tell children the truth. With informal instruction, we live or model the truth before them. Both are important, but in this passage, Moses emphasizes the informal or lifestyle instruction.

Many sincere parents interpret Proverbs 22:6 to mean that their most important task is to expose children to as much biblical teaching as possible. They hope if they can cram enough truth into their children's craniums, when they grow up, they'll have a heart for the Lord. Sadly, this doesn't always happen.

The greatest gift you can give your child is found in who you are. What do your children see in you? Do

they see a parent who has a visible love for God? Do they know your love for them is not based on their performance? Do they have healthy examples of problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills? Are they getting a clear idea of what it means to be made in God's image? Do you model and encourage a healthy experience and expression of emotions?

Consider what values and characteristics you hope to see in your children when they become adults. To what degree are you a model of those characteristics and values?

Lifestyle parenting begins in the vitality of your love-relationship with Jesus Christ. It involves prayerful planning, purpose, and a clear commitment to being a doer of the Word and not merely a hearer.

Have a parenting question? Send it to homelife@lifeway.com or *HomeLife*, Parent Line, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0175. You will not be identified.



Dr. Gary J. Oliver

is executive director of The Center for Relationship Enrichment and professor of psychology and practical theology at John Brown University. **Carrie Oliver** is an educator and a marriage and family counselor. They have co-authored *Raising Sons and Loving It!* Visit www.liferelationships.com.

LOVE COMPARISON CHART

What's your parenting style? This chart illustrates how healthy love differs from love that tends to overprotect, overcontrol, or overindulge.

Parents Who Give Healthy Love

- Nurture kids to be unique
- Are respectful and supportive
- Are kind and firm
- View mistakes as opportunities to learn
- Practice collaborative problem solving
- Believe children are a gift from God
- Teach living skills
- Teach balance of grace and biblical truth

Parents Who Overprotect

- Nurture kids to be safe
- Lack respect and are overly supportive
- Are kind, not firm
- Allow no opportunity for mistakes
- Believe their kids can't learn to make good decisions
- Believe children are a fragile extension of themselves
- Teach fearfulness
- Teach that the world is dangerous

Parents Who Overcontrol

- Nurture kids to be perfect
- Lack respect for their child
- Are firm, not kind
- Allow no opportunity for mistakes
- Consider only the parent's will
- Believe children are an investment
- Teach drivenness
- Teach a theology of works and performance

Parents Who Overindulge

- Nurture kids to be entitled
- Are overly supportive
- Are kind, not firm
- Believe mistakes do not matter
- Consider only the child's will
- Believe children are an expense
- Teach laziness
- Teach pride and selfishness

Adapted from *Loving Your Child Too Much* by Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Gary Sibcy (Integrity Publishers).



BY SHERRI GREER

Happy Campers

Outdoor adventures bring you close to nature ... and to one another.



“Can we stay here forever?” 5-year-old Tad asked as we walked back toward our campsite.

“Sorry, son, but reality beckons.”

“What does that mean?” he asked.

Lots of things: work, kindergarten, soccer, and birthday parties, I thought as we strolled under a canopy of trees, listening to the rippling of the creek. I absorbed the serenity, knowing it was worlds away from the realities of home.

Four years ago, my husband, Bill, and I began exploring activities we could do as a family. The idea of camping surfaced. Bill and the boys loved the idea. I saw obstacles — bugs, snakes, going to the bathroom in middle of the night. If camping were going to be a family activity, then I had to be sold on the idea, too.

We made a list of pros and cons. We looked at tents; we visited campgrounds. The more we looked, the more I became convinced this would be a wonderful family activity. No special skills needed. No breaking the bank required. Just a little planning. Before we knew it, there we were, sitting around our campfire. No cell phones, no TV, no traffic jams — just us. With a few easy steps, you, too, can be a happy camper.

PICK YOUR GEAR

Know what you’re looking for and choose wisely. (Ask experienced campers for their recommendations.) Tent size and type depend on the family. Begin small and upgrade as needed.

Sleeping bags are a must. Choose based on the temperatures you expect while camping. For versatility, purchase sleeping bags with layers that can be added or taken away. If anyone has an aversion to sleeping on the ground,

© Goodshoot

purchase cots. These items can be found at discount stores, outdoor/camping stores, or online.

If you need a real bed, a refrigerator, air conditioning, or your own toilet, invest in a pop-up camper or a fifth-wheel. You'll find the comfort you desire and still experience the advantages of camping with your family.

PLAN AHEAD

Make advanced reservations and understand campground cancellation policy. Check rates, and find out about extra charges for water, electric, sewer, etc. Check campground policy before bringing your pet. If possible, visit the campground ahead of time and choose your campsite. You may want to be near the creek, have lots of shade, or be off to yourselves. If you can't visit, ask for a brochure or check the campground's Web site.

Also, plan activities before you arrive. Are there bike trails or wading creeks? If you camp in the summer, is there beach access or swimming pools? Is there a camp activity staff? Are programs offered by park rangers? And don't forget your own family activities. Take favorite board games, your guitar, and all the ingredients for a special treat like s'mores.

PACK EFFICIENTLY

Before you go, check the weather, and choose clothing accordingly. Good shoes are important — hiking boots for the hills, tennis shoes for biking, and flip flops for the shower. And don't forget a rain coat and a light jacket.

When you pack toiletries, consider your destination. You may need soap for hand washing or your own toilet paper.

PLAN YOUR MEALS

Plan meals ahead of time. You'll know how to shop, as well as what cookware and utensils you'll need. Will you use camping dishes or paper products? Will you have sinks available at the campground, or will you need tubs for the dishes? What about bags for the trash, etc.?

Food storage is also important. If you have an RV, you may have a refrigerator. Otherwise, you'll need coolers. Find out in advance where to purchase ice.

PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

All campers need the basics: flashlights, batteries, a first aid kit, bug spray, and sunscreen. Other emergency supplies will vary, depending on your location. You may need a snake-bite kit, GPS, or life jackets.

Talk with your children about basic safety issues — what to do if someone is hurt, the steps to take if someone gets lost, and the importance of not talking to or going anywhere with strangers. Make sure each person in the family knows the safety plan, including where to find emergency contact numbers and how to locate the

family health care information (insurance information and each individual's current medications).

The best advice? Be flexible and have fun. Escape with your family to the great outdoors, and relax in the beauty of God's world.

Sherry Greer and her family love to camp. Trevor and Tad especially love the chance to ride their bikes and to make new friends.

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CAMPING RESOURCES

- *Frommer's Best RV and Tent Campgrounds in the USA*
- *National Geographic Guide to the National Parks of the United States*
- *National Geographic Guide to the State Parks of the United States*
- *Woodall's North American Campground Directory*
- *Trailer Life Director: RV Parks, Campgrounds, and Services*
- *The Everything Family Guide to RV Travel and Campgrounds* by Marian Eure

Simplify Mealtimes

Create an easy plan for your family.

We're marching toward spring! Soon the daffodils will surface, even while there's still a chill in the air. All too soon the children will be involved in more outside activities, and schedules will get even busier. Most of us moms are overworked and under-rested, so we need to create a mealtime plan for this very important time with our families.

Our model for a godly wife and mother comes from Proverbs 31. It describes an organized, thoughtful woman who leads her home with integrity, discipline, and giftedness. This wife and mother is a leader, not because she tries to be one, but because of who she is. What are her assets? She's trustworthy and protective, a positive influence, and a hardworking planner. She meets the needs of

her home and invests in her household. Now that's a positive role model!

Other than salvation through Jesus Christ, our families are our most important gifts from our Heavenly Father. Nurturing them is an awesome responsibility. I pray you and I will daily seek God's wisdom and direction for priorities as we strive to be who we are in Christ to those we love most.

SIMPLE SOLUTION

Our emphasis this month is simplicity, so I'm sharing with you quick ideas to make mealtime simpler. By following these simple steps, you'll be well on your way to four easy meals.

Purchase 5 pounds of ground chuck; brown the meat and drain. Divide the meat as follows, and place in containers for freezing:

- 2 pounds for Easy Spaghetti (recipe on p. 56)
- 1 pound for tacos
- 1 pound for chili
- 1 pound for lasagna; use Barilla oven-ready (no-boil) pasta (easy recipe on box)


This simple, think-ahead approach to meals will give you more time for relaxed conversation with those you love. Enjoy!



Barbara Smith loves to cook, and her husband, Paul, loves being the resident taste-tester. They enjoy sharing hospitality and fellowship with their family and friends.

Look for Barbara's new cookbook, Food That Says Welcome, at your local LifeWay Christian Store.



A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a bright green button-down shirt over a white top, is smiling warmly at the camera. She is seated at a white table with her hands clasped. In front of her is a large, ornate glass bowl filled with fresh fruit, including kiwi, blueberries, and strawberries. To the right of the bowl is a vibrant bouquet of yellow and red flowers. The background features a green wall with decorative plates hanging on it, a window with a plaid curtain, and a hanging lamp with white shades.

“A house is built by wisdom, and it is established by understanding; by knowledge the rooms are filled with every precious and beautiful treasure.” — Proverbs 24:3-4



EASY SPAGHETTI

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1 (26-ounce) jar spaghetti sauce | 1 tablespoon chili powder |
| 2 pounds ground chuck, browned and drained | 1 clove garlic, minced |
| 1 teaspoon brown sugar | ½ teaspoon cinnamon |
| 1 teaspoon vinegar | salt to taste |
| | 1 (16-ounce) box spaghetti |

Combine all ingredients except spaghetti in sauce pan and mix well. Cook on medium heat for 20 minutes. Serve over cooked spaghetti. Makes 8 servings.

Grocery List: spaghetti sauce

Items on Hand: ground chuck, brown sugar, vinegar, chili powder, garlic, cinnamon, salt, spaghetti

Time-Saving Tip: Cook spaghetti and drain; spray glass baking dish with cooking spray. Layer spaghetti and then sauce. Repeat layers. Top with cheddar cheese and freeze, or bake in 350-degree oven for 20 minutes and serve.

Per serving: 616 calories, 28.9 grams fat, 29.1 grams protein, 58.2 grams carbohydrates, 4.9 grams dietary fiber, 85 milligrams cholesterol

For a healthier option, use half the meat or substitute ground turkey breast.

Photography by Adam Barnes | Food Styling by Cheryl Beverage Barnes

MIXED GREENS WITH STRAWBERRY SALAD

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 pound spring greens mix | ½ cup chopped pecans, toasted |
| 1 pint strawberries, sliced | |
| 1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese | |

Layer spring greens, strawberries, cheese, and pecans in large bowl. Top with dressing just before serving.

DRESSING

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 cup vegetable oil | ½ teaspoon salt |
| ¾ cup sugar | ¼ teaspoon white pepper |
| ½ cup red wine vinegar | ½ teaspoon paprika |
| 2 cloves garlic, minced | |

Combine dressing ingredients, mix with wire whisk until thick, and serve over salad. The dressing can be made in advance and stored in refrigerator. Makes 8 servings.

Grocery List: spring greens mix, strawberries, Monterey Jack cheese, pecans

Items on Hand: vegetable oil, sugar, red wine vinegar, garlic, salt, white pepper, paprika

Seasonal Hint: Substitute a can of mandarin oranges for strawberries.


Per serving: 437 calories, 36.2 grams fat, 5.4 grams protein, 25.8 grams carbohydrates, 3.1 grams dietary fiber, 12 milligrams cholesterol


For a healthier option, use a sugar substitute, low-fat cheese, and/or canola or olive oil.




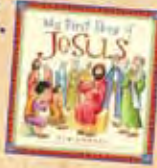


Dear
 a. Mom
 b. Daughter
 c. Girlfriend

I really thought you'd like
 a.  'cause I know you want to stay home with the kids and save money

b.  'cause I know how much you want the kids & grandkids to develop

c.  'cause I know you want to be consistent

d.  'cause I know how much you want the kids and grandkids to know the Lord

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SANDRA S. TOWNSEND

The Lost Art of Doing Nothing

My parents took time to do nothing in particular, but they gave me something priceless — their attention.



Seven-year-old Craig often asks, “Do I have to go to karate today? When I get back (home), I feel tired.”

Leana, age 13, sighs, “When I have a really busy afternoon, when I get home, I just want to go to sleep.”

Rachael, an active 16-year-old who’s involved at school and church, admits, “It’s stressful when I have several things to do at one time. It’s a lot of pressure.”

Somewhere along the way, many parents bought the pitch that scheduling more and varied activities for their children creates well-rounded adults. Perhaps they failed to consider the added stress busy schedules place on the family. Ballet lessons, Little League, and art classes can enrich children, but such activities should not replace family time. Overscheduled children can begin to feel their achievements are more important than they are.

But two towns, on opposite sides of the country, have chosen to take the time to reclaim the art of doing nothing so families can once again bond together in love rather than haste.

SLOW THE PACE

Ridgewood, N.J., began Ridgewood Family Night, *Ready, Set, Relax!*, in 2002. Their goal? To slow down a bit and make a conscious decision about ways to balance family time, unscheduled time, and outside enrichment activities. This year Ridgewood will hold its sixth family night on March 26 (www.readysetrelax.org).

Poway, Calif., wiped their calendar clean on the evening of May 22, 2006. No homework, no church meetings, and no Little League games. Each family planned their own agenda. Barbecues and board games took the place of busy schedules; families rediscovered the art of conversation. This year’s Poway Family Focus Night is May 21 (www.powayfamilyfocusnight.com).

Organizers in both cities admit one night isn’t enough for families to slow their pace and spend time together. But it does raise awareness of the need for balance in determining what matters most. Jeff Mangrum, an attorney and father of three from Poway, says the night off gives parents “a moment to think about whether they’re raising a child or a resumé.”

Don’t wait for your community to host a slow-down time; establish your own initiative to rediscover the lost art of doing nothing.

START HERE

To help you take a deep breath, spend time investigating the wonders of nature with your children. You’ll find treasures that will last a lifetime. Children who aren’t allowed to explore their environment can’t understand or appreciate it. Sharing time as a family without an agenda conveys to your children that they are more important than anything else. And you’re planting seeds for future generations.

When I was a child, stars twinkling in the night sky filled me with awe and wonder. Daddy told me how God hung the stars in place. Mother pointed out the Big and Little Dippers. Nighttime was my favorite time of day. My parents took time to do nothing in particular, but they gave me something priceless — their attention.

God expects us to be good stewards of our families, taking care to nurture one another as we bond together in love. Memorable family time can often be spontaneous and spur-of-the-moment. Take the time for your family to be together — doing nothing in particular.

Sandra S. Townsend is school teacher who lives in Northport, Ala. She loves doing nothing with her family.



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NATURAL WAYS TO SLOW THE PACE

Planning to do nothing doesn't take much effort. Do you need some ideas to get started?

- ☛ Walk in the rain with your child, and make a boat to sail in the mud puddles.
- ☛ Pull a leaf from a bush, just to smell the pungent odor.
- ☛ Examine a wildflower.
- ☛ Fly a kite.
- ☛ Watch bees in flight and figure out how they make that buzzing sound.
- ☛ Blow on a dandelion and watch the seeds scatter into the wind.
- ☛ Listen to tree frogs croak. Try to mimic their sounds.
- ☛ Take a walk after dinner.
- ☛ Observe a granddaddy longlegs as he ambles about.
- ☛ Watch fireflies in the back yard, but don't catch them. Let them fly free.
- ☛ Look up at the spectacular display in the night sky, and share the wonder of God's work with your children.



“If it sounds too good to be true, it is.”
— Keith Durkin

Risky Business

FRANCINE L. HUFF

What you don't know about Internet fraud can hurt you.

© Corbis

The Internet is a great tool, but it's really opened up a lot of crime," says Cathy Milhoan, a spokeswoman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In 2005, the FBI received 228,400 complaints about Internet fraud, costing consumers about \$183 million. And that's just the cases the FBI knows about, says Milhoan. "A lot of people don't tell us because they're embarrassed."

Milhoan says the Nigerian letter fraud, also known as the "419 scam," continues to victimize people from all walks of life. Victims generally receive an e-mail with an urgent plea for help in moving a large sum of money (usually millions) out of Nigeria or some other country in exchange for a percentage of the money. But in order to get their share, victims are asked to provide a bank account number the money can be wired into or to pay a fee to help bribe officials to get it out of the country. Of course, the victim never sees these fantastic sums

of money. The FBI says the median financial loss from these schemes is \$5,000.

IN-GROUPS LURES

Greed lures some people in, while others are conned because new angles are found to get sympathy from specific groups, including Christians.

"There's a concept in social psychology called 'in-groups.' This is a group to which people identify and to which they belong," says Keith Durkin, a criminologist at Ohio Northern University. "For Christians, someone who claims to be a Christian would be a member of their in-group. We tend to mentally attribute positive characteristics to members of in-groups. Thus, our critical faculties could suffer, and we could make bad decisions." Durkin warns, "If it sounds too good to be true, it is. Don't ever blindly trust someone you meet on the Internet."

HIGH BID COULD BE COSTLY

Online auctions also result in many fraud cases. “A lot of the auction sites tell you not to take unsolicited e-mails,” says Milhoan. She says it’s crucial to follow the auction site’s rules and to remember that some online criminals have gotten much more sophisticated in their approach.

“It never ceases to amaze me the types of people who fall prey to this,” says Durkin. “Recently, a police officer I know who is very ‘street smart’ was conned out of \$3,500 in an online auction fraud.”

PHONY WEB SITES

Fraudsters also are adept at fooling people with fake Web sites. “Consumers are constantly bombarded with phishing e-mails that look like legitimate banks and ask for account information,” says Ron Teixeira, Execu-

tive Director of the National Cyber Security Alliance. “It usually says your account has been compromised and they need information to rectify it or they’ll cancel it. They’ll have this sort of urgent tone and then will ... say, ‘Click on this link.’ One thing consumers can do to cut the risk of becoming a victim is to never click on a link and provide your financial information.”

Supposed security breaches in financial accounts is a common theme in fraudulent e-mails. Fraudsters claim that customer accounts at companies such as eBay, PayPal, or Chase Manhattan Bank have been compromised and need to be “verified.” These e-mails look official and are being e-mailed to thousands of people, many of whom don’t even use the services being discussed.

TUGGING ON HEARTSTRINGS

Unfortunately, con artists also prey on people’s vulnerabilities in the wake of natural disasters, such as Hurricane

Katrina. “They know how to tug at people’s heartstrings,” says Milhoan. Some of these Web sites even claim the support of well-known people or institutions. If you’re thinking of donating to any charity, visit the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance at www.give.org to view a report about the organization. The Bible instructs us to help the poor and less fortunate, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t have a healthy dose of skepticism about appeals from unfamiliar organizations.

Dealing on the Internet can be risky business, and there are too many online scams to list. What’s the bottom line for Internet use? Educate yourself about the potential for fraud, and use common sense when dealing with people online.

YOU’VE BEEN SCAMMED! NOW WHAT?

If you find yourself the victim of an Internet scam:

1. File a report with the Internet Crime Complaint Center (www.ic3.gov), a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation and National White Collar Crime Center.
2. File a report with your local police department. Even though many local authorities don’t have the resources to investigate Internet crimes, many companies, such as banks or credit card agencies, may require a police report before completing a fraud investigation and returning your money.
3. Immediately close any financial accounts you think have been breached.
4. If you think you may be a victim of identity theft, call one of the three national consumer reporting agencies, Experian (1-800-397-3742), Equifax (1-800-525-6285), or TransUnion (1-800-680-7289), and ask to have a fraud alert placed on your credit reports.
5. Continue to monitor your finances to make sure new accounts aren’t opened in your name.



Francine L. Huff

is the author of *The 25-Day Financial Makeover: A Practical Guide for Women*. She lives in New Jersey with her husband and daughter. Visit her Web site at www.Huffwrites.com.

The Discipline of Silence

Is your church too noisy?

“We are afraid to lose the attention span of the congregation. But there was a time when this was not so, when there were long periods of silence, when your job was to be quiet, to think about God, to ponder your sin and pray for forgiveness.”

— *Fernando Ortega*

© Getty Images

Maybe that old bumper sticker was right: “The hurrier I go, the behinder I get.” It was a realization that hit singer/songwriter Fernando Ortega between the eyes and inspired his decidedly un-post-modern album, “The Shadow of Your Wings.”

“I came to the realization that my mind was constantly racing,” Ortega confessed. “I couldn’t concentrate on anything. I couldn’t carry on a decent conversation because I was so consumed by everything I had to get done. I hate to use a cliché, but it was the tyranny of the urgent ... At the end of the day I was exhausted, but it had nothing to do with my pursuit of God. It had nothing to do with doing the work of God. It had everything to do with my own busyness.”

A self-proclaimed perfectionist, Ortega recognized the necessity to push away the demands of the day in order to re-focus on the call of God. “I tend to get totally into doing what needs to be done, and then it’s all that’s on my mind until late at night,” he sighed. “When I find myself getting too wrapped up in my own agenda, I have to get out of town for a while, even if it’s only a couple of miles, and divorce my mind from all of that.”

What Ortega craves, and what he believes the church might be missing, is the discipline of solitude and meditation. It is not a discipline we hear much about these days.

“Our church services certainly don’t push us in that direction,” Ortega said. “I’ve been on staff at many churches, and what you hear is, ‘There’s too much down time. Let’s get the choir in place during the prayer so

as soon as the prayer is over, Boom! The choir is there.’ That’s the mentality. We are afraid to lose the attention span of the congregation. But there was a time when this was not so, when there were long periods of silence, when your job was to be quiet, to think about God, to ponder your sin and pray for forgiveness.”

Ortega patterned his album “The Shadow of Your Wings” on a more traditional, liturgical format for worship than generally is seen in the contemporary church. “The modern idea is that people are excited to be here, they are looking for their seats, let’s give them something to clap to and make them glad they are here,” he explained. “I’m not criticizing that approach. That is the way my church is. But for this album I used a more traditional approach. It starts as if a pastor stood up before the congregation and said, ‘Grace and peace be unto you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.’ From there the congregation does not burst forth into praise, but they respond, ‘All flesh is like grass. The grass withers and fades away, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.’ It is an acknowledgement of the majesty and eternity of God, and it all starts with the bending of the knee.”

Mike and Paula Parker cover the arts and entertainment industry from their home in Murfreesboro, Tenn.



NOTE: *HomeLife* in no way recommends or endorses this media selection or the personalities featured. The purpose of *Inside Look* is to offer information for your consideration.

Reviews

CD



Faith: A Hymns Collection by Avalon (Sparrow)

Hymns have stood the test of time, sharing encouragement, triumph, and praise from one generation to another. The award-winning group Avalon now shares *Faith*, a 13-track CD of hymns reverently presented in their singular style. This project includes the timeless hymn, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” along with “In Christ Alone,” a powerful song of confidence in the Lord. It finishes with “Freedom,” a tribute to the men and women in the military — and their families — who risk everything for freedom.

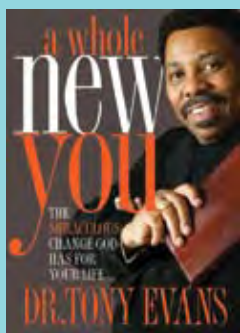
DVD



“Love’s Abiding Joy” (Fox Faith)

The fourth installment inspired by Janette Oke’s “Love Comes Softly” series follows Missie and Willie LaHaye as they carve out a new life in the wilderness. As the LaHayes build their family, civilization gains a foothold in the West. The railroad expands into their territory, allowing Missie’s father to visit. But their reunion is soon interrupted by tragedy, forcing the family to rely on their faith. Directed by Michael Landon, Jr., “Love’s Abiding Joy” is a heartwarming, tear-jerking chick-flick even a guy can love.

BOOK



A Whole New You by Dr. Tony Evans (Multnomah)

We live in a “how-to” society with a “do-it-yourself” mind-set. Even in the church, we’re inundated with programs and classes designed to help us live the Christian life. But according to Tony Evans, there’s nothing more discouraging than to give it your best shot and still come up short. Fortunately, he says, living the Christian life isn’t about our best efforts, but about the transforming power of God’s grace. It’s God who does the extreme makeover — our job, Evans says, is to unveil ourselves before God and to commune with Him face to face.

TEEN



HOMELIFE Team's Pick of the Month

[Book] BeTween by Vicki Courtney (B&H)

Popular author and speaker Vicki Courtney applies to her latest offering, *BeTween*, the same common-sense-meets-fashion-sense approach that made *TeenVirtue* Vols. 1 & 2 such hits among teenage girls. Designed in a hip magazine format, *BeTween* is geared for preteen and young teen girls and is chock full of the quizzes, games, articles, and advice from a biblical point of view. *BeTween* encourages young girls to celebrate who they are right now, rather than encouraging them to try to grow up too fast.

KID



[Books] Blossom: The Complete New Testament for Girls

Explore: The Complete New Testament for Guys (Nelson Bibles)

As children pass from little kid to not-quite-teenager, the changes come hard and fast. Nelson Bibles’ new series of Bible-zines is custom-made for this exciting age. The Scriptures (in the easy to understand New Century Version) are laid out in ‘tween-friendly magazine format, along with fun and informative sidebars to help them navigate their often confusing world. These new-look Bibles will help your middle schooler connect Scripture to everyday life.

HomeLife does not necessarily endorse the content or opinions of media or personalities featured. This information is simply provided as a resource for families.

Daddy's Girl

My dad joined the Army when he was 15 years old. World War II was raging, and I guess the recruiters simply chose to dim the underage issue in light of the stark, bigger picture. When Dad volunteered, it wasn't just for the cause of freedom; it was for love of family, too. He had eight brothers and sisters, and the Army pay he sent home helped to feed them.

Dad's commitment required no small sacrifice. When other 15-year-olds were studying math, Dad was slugging his way through the Philippines, often carrying wounded buddies on his back. His heroic efforts earned him the Purple Heart and a long list of other medals. At 17, he began a gruesome 18-month internment in a Japanese POW camp, where the heat was oppressive and the heartlessness of his captors even more so. Dad's childhood dreams of becoming a writer, a musician, or an artist were replaced by one simple dream: going home to Tennessee, where he could once again hear the whippoorwills sing. When Dad did come home, his spirit more badly bruised than his body, he eventually added new dreams, which included falling in love with my mom and watching six kids sprout like colorful buds under the influence of Miracle Grow.

Although supporting us consumed most of his time, Dad's raw talents colored the surface of daily life. Without a lick of training, he sketched images of wild horses, their muscles thick, bulky chests heaving, powerful hooves leaping right off the page. He could play almost any country song on the guitar, even though the first knuckle of his left little finger was missing. And he wrote stories filled with misspelled words but packed with emotion — powerful stories that drew you in and wrung out your heart.

I've often wondered what Dad would have accomplished had Hitler not turned the world on its axis, rerouting Dad's young life in the process. But I never once heard Dad mourn lost opportunities, only the buddies he left behind in the Philippines.

As I've grown older, I've come to recognize Dad's childhood dreams did not die on the battlefield; they have come to life through his children. All my siblings either sing or play a musical instrument. (Well, except me; I neither sing nor play an instrument, unless the CD player and radio count.) My sister, Connie, on the other hand, is an accomplished songwriter with number one hits for both secular and Christian labels. She can draw, too. If the rest of us didn't love her so much, we might



Ivey at age 6 with her dad, Chester Harrington.

have to lock her in a closet. (That and the fact she's had karate training and can outrun every one of us.)

No, I didn't inherit my Dad's musical gifts, and I can't draw a straight line, much less a wild horse. But I hope in some small way, I live out Dad's love for words by writing stories that draw people in and squeeze their hearts a bit. It's my way of celebrating the life Dad lived and the sacrifices he made for his country, for his faith, and for our family. I'm a Daddy's girl, and I love dreaming out loud with him.



Ivey Harrington Beckman

is the editor in chief of *HomeLife*. She would love to hear your stories about a parent whose life you celebrate by using the God-given gifts you share. Write to her at homelife@lifeway.com.



Celebrate

Celebrate a love for music this month with your family. No musical talent required!

1. **Put together a band with your kids.** Create your own instruments — use empty coffee canisters for drums, wrap rubber bands around empty shoeboxes to make a guitar, or use your child’s toy flute. You’ll feel like a kid again and enjoy time with your children.
2. **Rent a classic musical,** such as “Singin’ in the Rain” or “The Sound of Music.” Show your kids how fun it can be to burst into song.
3. **Play “Name That Tune.”** Hum a few bars, and have your children try to guess the name of the song.
4. **Attend a musical theater event with your family.** A local theater or high school can provide an inexpensive night of entertainment.
5. **Teach your children how to worship.** Cultivate a love for praising God, whether you’re at home, in the car, or at church. They’ll follow your lead.

March

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control.” — Gal. 5:22			
4 Invest in eternity — give to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. For info, visit anniearmstrong.com .	5	6	7 Write a note of appreciation to your favorite Sunday school teacher.	8 Pray that the Girl Scouts you know will work to make the world a better place.	9 Pray that the Girl Scouts you know will work to make the world a better place.	10 Pray that the Girl Scouts you know will work to make the world a better place.
11 Change the batteries in your smoke detectors. Daylight-saving time begins	12 Purchase a binder for your important documents. See page 26 .	13	14	15 Tell your kids how absolutely incredible they are.	16 Tell your kids how absolutely incredible they are.	17 Drink some green tea today. It's good for you! St. Patrick's Day
18 Invite the family of a deployed soldier to your home for lunch.	19	20 Do you know a teen called to mission work? Pray for his parents. See page 46 .	21 First Day of Spring	22 Take a walk around your neighborhood, and soak in God's sunshine.	23 Take a walk around your neighborhood, and soak in God's sunshine.	24 Take a walk around your neighborhood, and soak in God's sunshine.
25	26	27 Fly a kite with your children.	28 “The day the Lord created hope was probably the same day He created spring.” — Bern Williams	29	30	31 Is your emergency kit up to date? See page 39 .

The landscape of our lives has become dry and scorched. But heaven is bursting with the blessings God wants to rain down upon us. Not a drizzle, but a deluge. With its powerful call to revival, James MacDonald's new seven-session study leads believers to lift up their eyes and return to the Lord. Because when we do, He will heal us ... revive us ... and restore us. So if your church is thirsty for spiritual renewal, get ready to ...

Soak it in.



For more details or to order, visit lifeway.com/jamesmacdonald or call 1.800.458.2772.

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