



FOCUS
ON
THE FAMILY[®]

Helping Families Thrive™

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Planting Seeds of Biblical Truth

Researchers affirm what Christian families have known intuitively for years: families that eat together, pray together and play together are stronger. But today's crazy schedules and priorities are making it more difficult to make every day count in the simplest ways.

That's why we're excited that *Focus on the Family* magazine makes it easier to invest a bit of time each week on family devotions. Our staff compiled 52 weekly devotions that you can start anytime. Each contains faith-affirming biblical principles that will help you do what no one else in this world will ever do as well as you: help build a lasting, thriving faith in God into your child's heart.

Try them out, and let us know how they're helping your family thrive!

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Week 1: God Is Kind

Talking to God

Ask God to help you notice the ways He is kind to you and to others.

Diving In

Fill a bowl with a bag of your family's favorite small treats. As a family, take turns sharing ways God has been kind to you today. Enjoy a piece of candy for each example given.

Going Deeper

God's kindness can be personal, meant especially for one person. David experienced God's kindness, and he praised God for it, saying, "He reached down from on high and took hold of me" (Psalm 18:16).

God's kindness may also affect many people in a particular way. God shows His kindness through the ongoing provision described in Acts 14:17: "He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons."

God's kindness is part of His nature. It's easy to overlook the everyday expressions of His kindness, but as you intentionally look for them, you become more aware of God's love.

Talking to Each Other

- Talk about a time when God has been kind to you.
- Why is it important to notice God's kindness?

—*Bridgette Booth*

**Consider therefore
the kindness and
sternness of God.**

Romans 11:22

Week 2: A Peaceful Home

Talking to God

Ask God for forgiveness if you've hurt the feelings of someone in your family or have been unkind. Then thank God for your relationships with your family and friends.

Diving In

Use bright colors to draw a picture of a home with sunshine and birds outside and with cake, presents and a family inside. Then use dark colors to draw a second home with storm clouds and lightning outside and siblings upset with each other on the inside. Compare the pictures. Talk about why one is more peaceful.

Going Deeper

Families are made up of people with different personalities and emotions. Sometimes family members feel happy, and other times they feel angry. How a person is feeling should not change a family's peaceful home. Romans 12:18 says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." This mention of everyone includes the members of your family. Getting along with those in your family may seem like a lot of work some days. But Proverbs 17:1 says that a peaceful home is a true treasure, something worth working for. "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife."

Talking to Each Other

- How should you act toward family members?
- What can you do to be a peacemaker in the family when someone is angry or upset?
- How can God's peace fill your home, even when you disagree with each other?

—*Karen Schmidt*

**Blessed are those who make
peace. They will be called
sons of God.**

Matthew 5:9, NIV

Week 3: Yearning for God

Talking to God

Thank God that He loves you and wants you to learn to talk to Him through prayer. Ask God to teach you how to pray.

Diving In

Make three sets of note cards with the following words/phrases on them: grandparent, best friend, your pastor, grocery store clerk and a neighbor's cousin. Spread out the first stack according to the person you talk to most at the top and the person you talk to the least at the bottom. Arrange the second set in the same way, with the person you most want to be around at the top. Line the third set next to the other two, with the person you most miss at the top. Compare how similar your lists are.

Going Deeper

Prayer is simply talking to God, who loves you and wants what is best for you. Just as you may miss someone you love when he is gone, your spirit misses God when you do not spend time talking to Him. The Bible often says that this longing to be with God is like being thirsty or hungry. Read Psalm 42:1-2: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" You can go to God in prayer and find Him, just as the deer finds water in a stream when it is thirsty.

Talking to Each Other

- What do you think about when you are hungry or thirsty?
- How is being with God similar to being with a person you love?
How is it different?
- How might you tell that your spirit is thirsty to be with God?

—Lee Smedly

**Whoever drinks the water I give him
will never thirst. Indeed, the water
I give him will become in him a spring
of water welling up to eternal life.**

John 4:14

Week 4: Receiving Forgiveness

Talking to God

Silently confess the things you have done that are hurtful to others. Ask God for forgiveness. Then thank Him for forgiving you.

Diving In

At your next family meal, have everyone wear earplugs or earphones but talk as usual, without trying to help each other hear what you are saying. Also wear them as you clear the table as a family.

Going Deeper

When you don't come to God to be forgiven, it is as if you refuse to listen to Him. By not hearing God, you separate yourself from Him, just as you did when you suddenly could not hear your family well. Read Psalm 32:5, "I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin." When you ask for forgiveness, God forgives you. It is as if He removes the earplugs from your ears, and you can hear Him again.

Talking to Each Other

- Have you ever kept something you did wrong a secret?
If so, how did trying to hide this secret make you feel?
- What might keep you from going to God and confessing a sin?
- How do you feel when someone forgives you for something you've done wrong?

—Lee Smedly

**If we confess our sins, he is
faithful and just and will
forgive us our sins and purify
us from all unrighteousness.**

1 John 1:9

Week 5: Praising God in Prayer

Talking to God

Praise God for making you and everything you have, including food, a home and people who love you.

Diving In

Think about the things you're grateful for. Make a list of 10 of them. Tell someone why you're grateful for each, and praise God for all that He has given you.

Going Deeper

Through the use of short blessing prayers that relate to everyday life, people learn to praise God and express thanksgiving. The moment you open your eyes in the morning, you might pray, "Thank You, God, for my eyes. Thank You for sight." While getting dressed, you could pray, "Thank You, God, for meeting my needs—giving me clothes to wear, such as these," and at the first sight of the sun, you may declare, "God, You are so great! Thank You for your creation." Psalm 145:1-2 is a great example of how to praise God: "I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever." Praise God today and every day!

Talking to Each Other

- How did writing down a list of things you're grateful for change your attitude?
- If you praised God for everything He has given you, how long would it take?
- How might praising God change you?

—Lee Smedly

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

Psalm 145:3

Week 6: Sweetness for the Soul

Talking to God

While praying together, take turns thanking God for your favorite foods.

Diving In

Post a sheet of paper on the wall. Draw a simple platter on the paper and invite family members to draw their two favorite desserts on the platter. All of these desserts will combine to be one spectacular, yet imaginary, family dessert. Now ask your child to make up a name for this treat.

Going Deeper

It's fun to imagine all your favorite desserts in the same place at the same time. And while this may be fun to imagine, it wouldn't be healthy to actually eat all those goodies. Self-control keeps you from making poor eating choices; at the same time, it helps you learn to appreciate things that are better for you. Have you ever considered developing a taste for wisdom?

Proverbs 24:13-14 says it like this: "Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste. Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off." Just as eating your favorite desserts can be pleasant, so exercising wisdom in your choices can have a sweet influence on your life now and in the future.

Talking to Each Other

- How can wisdom be sweet to your soul in the same way desserts are sweet to your taste?
- How can you find wisdom?

—Janine Petry

The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit.

James 3:17

Week 7: The Discipline of Scripture Study

Talking to God

Thank God for His Word, which helps you understand what is best for your life, and pray that God would give you a desire to study and obey it.

Diving In

Grab a notebook and pen, head outside or go exploring in your home. Write what you see, hear and smell. Younger kids can work with a parent or sibling. Afterward, discuss the details you noticed when you carefully studied your surroundings. Talk about what you've never noticed before.

Going Deeper

Just as you find new things in a familiar environment, you can find new things in the Bible—even if you've read it before. You can discover new details of who God is, what He's like and how you can become like Him.

One way to make these discoveries is by studying the lives of Bible characters. Or study certain subjects, like prayer or giving. You can also study the Bible from beginning to end. No matter what type of Bible study you choose, the Holy Spirit brings God's Word alive in your heart by helping you discover things you've never noticed before.

Talking to Each Other

- What stories in the Bible are special to you? Why?
- What are the benefits of studying the Bible?
- What are some topics you would like to study in God's Word?

(Refer to the concordance in the back of your Bible for topical ideas.)

—*Renee Gray-Wilburn*

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:25

Week 8: Showing Kindness

Talking to God

Thank God for your family and friends. Ask Him to help you always treat other people with kindness.

Diving In

Before mealtime, have each family member gather five shirts. Any style will work. The idea is to have a stash of shirts to pull from.

As you prepare for dinner—setting the table, filling drinks, serving food—kindly offer to help one another with tasks. You may also compliment a task well done: “Wow, Mom! This smells great.” As you are kind to another member of your family, put on one of your shirts. The goal is to put on all of your shirts.

Going Deeper

Each shirt you put on was a symbol of kindness you showed to a member of your family. You were demonstrating the action of Colossians 3:12. In that verse, God tells us to clothe ourselves with kindness. As you did and said kind things, you were showing kindness that comes from God.

Talking to Each Other

- Tell about some ways other people have shown kindness to you.
- How can you show kindness?
Why is this important?

—*Bridgette Booth*

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Colossians 3:12

Week 9: God Is Faithful

Talking to God

Thank God for His faithfulness—for being strong when you are weak and for being with you no matter where you are.

Diving In

Go on a scavenger hunt. Each person should find one thing that is “strong.” As a family, talk about the items you gathered and why you chose them. Then test each item to prove that it is strong in some way.

Going Deeper

In Joshua 1:7, God tells Joshua to “be strong and very courageous.” Joshua’s strength comes from God and not from his abilities. In the same way, people today are asked by God to do things such as loving their neighbor, doing what is right by their enemy and feeding the poor. When you allow God to strengthen you, He demonstrates that He is faithful to you. Because of Jesus’ example and God’s strength, people can do what God requires, even when their inclination may be to love only those who are good to them. In 1 Thessalonians 5:24, the apostle Paul says, “The one who calls you is faithful.” God will never ask you to do something without faithfully giving you the strength to complete the task.

Talking to Each Other

- What do you think it means to be “strong in the Lord”?
- How does your strength show God’s faithfulness?
- When you say God is faithful, what does that mean?
- Why does His faithfulness matter?
- When have you seen God’s faithfulness to your family? To you?

—*Janine Petry*

Let us hold unswervingly
to the **hope** we profess,
for he who promised is
faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

Week 10: Good Motives

Talking to God

Thank God that He motivates you to do the right things. Ask Him to help you bring Him honor through your good choices.

Diving In

Make a “good deeds chain.” Cut several strips of paper into equal lengths. On each strip, write one good deed that could be done for a family member or friend. Using glue or tape, form the strips of paper into interlocking loops (a chain). Each family member can remove one loop per day and do that good deed for someone else. Here’s the catch: Don’t tell the person that you did it. Let goodness be your focus instead of getting recognition for doing something good.

Going Deeper

It’s nice when you’re noticed for doing good. But you shouldn’t do good deeds simply because you want to be noticed by others. Jesus said, “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). The reason *why* you do something (motivation) is just as important as *what* you do (good deed). True goodness is motivated by your love for God and your desire to please Him. Your love for Him is the best motivation for doing good because it brings God honor.

Talking to Each Other

- Tell about a time when you did something good because you wanted to be liked or noticed by others.
- Is it more difficult to do a good deed if you know no one will notice it? Why or why not?
- Why is God pleased when you do good deeds in secret?

—*Jeanne Gowen Dennis*

All a man’s ways seem innocent
to him, but motives are
weighed by the LORD.

Proverbs 16:2

Week 11: Be Patient

Talking to God

Thank God for His patience and for helping you to be patient with yourself.

Diving In

Try to write your name or draw a picture with the hand you don't normally use. If you make a mistake, start over. Talk about why it's so frustrating to write or draw with your opposite hand.

Going Deeper

Think about times when God has been patient with you. In 2 Peter 3:15, the Bible says, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation." God is patient with you not just in the area of salvation, but in every area of your life. He won't give up on you, even when you make mistakes. You need to be as patient with yourself as God is with you. Instead of becoming frustrated, you should keep trying to do what is right before God, even when you fail, so you can become more like Jesus every day.

Talking to Each Other

- How do you know God is patient with you?
- What is one area where you easily become frustrated?
- What is one thing you can do to become more patient with yourself?

—Renee Gray-Wilburn

I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

1 Timothy 1:15-16

Week 12: Moving in the Right Direction

Talking to God

Take turns thanking God for your favorite animals and for the wonder of His creation.

Diving In

Think of an animal that you would like to ride. Encourage the younger children in your family to act out the animal of their choice, then take turns talking about which animal you would choose to ride and why.

Going Deeper

Many different kinds of animals can be ridden: horses, llamas, donkeys, elephants, camels and even ostriches. And while it may be fun to ride these animals, it would be difficult to actually get anywhere without some way to control them. For many animals, a bit and bridle are used to apply pressure to steer them in the right direction.

The Bible uses a bit and bridle as an illustration. "Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you" (Psalm 32:9). If you have trouble controlling yourself, you may feel the pressure of God's discipline as He points you in the right direction. This discipline can come through parents or other authorities. However, when you choose to follow God's Word and quickly obey Him, He'll keep you on the right path.

Talking to Each Other

- What kinds of things could be like bits and bridles for people?
- From whom or from where do you get guidance?
- How do you respond to God's directions? Do you easily obey them?

—Janine Petry

Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

Proverbs 25:28

Week 13: Finding Your Place

Talking to God

Thank God for the gifts He's given you. Pray that you will use them to help others.

Diving In

Take turns guessing how many muscles you have in your body. Try counting your muscles and come up with a total number.

Going Deeper

The human body has more than 600 muscles! Some muscles are large and some are very small, but they all work together to help you get things accomplished. As they work together, you grow stronger.

It's also like this with God's family. You need others. Ephesians 4:15-16 says: "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Just as each muscle has a unique function in the body, so each one of us has a unique place in the body of Christ. St. Paul writes: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). You have special gifts and abilities you can use to support others and help the body of Christ grow.

Talking to Each Other

- What are some things you do well?
- How are you using your gifts and abilities to help others?

—*Karen Schmidt and Janine Petry*

**Now you are the body of
Christ, and each one of
you is a part of it.**

1 Corinthians 12:27

Week 14: Jesus Frees You From Fear

Talking to God

Thank God that He promises to always be with you. Ask God to help you trust Him so that you can be free from the burden of fear.

Diving In

Gather a stack of books. Choose a family member to stand with arms extended while others load books onto his arms, one at a time, until he can hold no more. In the process, family members will share fears as books are added to the stack.

Going Deeper

Fears are like the books you carry—each one adds weight and increases the burden. In contrast, when you give your fears to God, it's like removing a book from the stack—the load is lighter as your burdens are lifted. God does not want your fears to burden you. John 14:27 says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." God loves you and is in control of your circumstances. Even when things do not work out the way you expect or hope, you do not have to worry or be afraid. You can be free from your fears because He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). He will carry the burden for you!

Talking to Each Other

- How does it make you feel to know God wants to give you peace and freedom from fear?
- Is it ever difficult to trust God with your worries and fears? Why?
- What fears do you need to give to Him?

—*Lee Smedly*

**Cast all your anxiety
on him because he
cares for you.**

1 Peter 5:7

Week 15: The Flavor of Kindness

Talking to God

Thank God for giving you the ability to speak. Ask Him to show you how to use your words carefully.

Diving In

Have each family member write down six words on a piece of paper: three kind words and three unkind words. Don't share your lists just yet.

Fill two bowls with snacks. One bowl should have a sweet snack (candy-coated chocolate) and the other bowl a sour snack (lemon burst). Then, have each family member take a turn reading a word from his list. The others have to guess if it is a kind (sweet) or unkind (sour) word. When guessed correctly, everyone gets a candy-coated chocolate or lemon burst to "taste" the word.

Going Deeper

The words you use make a difference. Words can be sour, or they can be sweet. They can hurt feelings, or they can repair relationships. Words can build people up or tear people down.

Because your words are powerful, you need to choose them carefully. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, the apostle Paul urges believers to "encourage one another and build each other up." When you choose kind words, you're giving others a taste of God's kindness, and that brings Him honor.

Talking to Each Other

- Is it easier for you to think of kind or unkind words? Why?
- How does sharing kind words make you feel? How does receiving kind words make you feel?
- What are some things you can do this week to replace unkind words with kind words?

—*Bridgette Booth*

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 16:24

Week 16: Working as a Team

Talking to God

Thank God that you have a significant part to play in the body of believers.

Diving In

Turn a household task into a bucket brigade by passing items hand to hand to complete the chore. Do this when loading the washer with laundry, unloading groceries from the car or putting away clean dishes.

Going Deeper

Notice how quickly the work got done when everyone pitched in. Each person's contribution was valuable. It's easy to think that certain roles or people in the body of Christ are more important than others. Leaders who speak publicly might appear most essential, but Jesus asks you to play your part in the life of His church. The apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 how he planted "seeds" of the Gospel, then another believer, Apollos, watered the seeds, and God made them grow. Both believers played a part in the process, but each of their roles was different. Can you imagine a baseball team where one player decided to stay home on game night? The team would be ineffective. God wants you to work with others as players on His team.

Talking to Each Other

- How would the body of Christ suffer if members didn't do their part?
- How can you build teamwork in your family and with other believers?

—*Karen Schmidt and Janine Petry*

There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:6-7

Week 17: Sharing the Truth in Love

Talking to God

Ask God to give you a loving attitude toward people who are different from you and for the opportunities to share His love with them.

Diving In

Place a dab of toothpaste on your lips. Ask your family members to suggest how they would tell you that you had toothpaste on your lips if you were a famous actor. Have someone else put on the toothpaste and ask the family to address him or her as if that person were your pastor. Continue changing roles to tell a good friend, a school bully, a stranger and a grouchy teacher about the toothpaste on their faces.

Going Deeper

Just as it might be hard or awkward to tell a famous actor or a stranger that she has toothpaste on her lips, so sharing God's truth can feel difficult. But authentic, biblical tolerance allows you to treat others well, even when you have something to share that they may not want to hear.

Think about the way you role-played talking to someone you respected, such as a pastor or a famous person. You were probably careful to show respect and kindness as you shared the truth. By treating all people, including those who are different from you, with the same kindness and respect, you can more effectively share the Gospel.

Talking to Each Other

- Is it difficult for you to share God's truth with nonbelievers? Why?
- How could you show God's love to a friend who doesn't believe in Jesus?
- What kind words could you use with someone whose opinion of God is different from yours?

—Lee Smedly

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:15

Week 18: Practice Patience

Talking to God

Thank God for His gift of patience and the experiences you've had that have helped you to learn to be more patient.

Diving In

Put on a pair of shoes with shoelaces. Tie one shoe as you normally would. Then tie your second shoe using your hands to do opposite tasks. For example, if you usually make your first loop with your right hand, then make it with your left. Notice how difficult a simple task becomes when you do it a new way. Your usual way is easier because of how you've trained your muscles to work.

Going Deeper

Galatians 5:22 tells us that patience is a gift from God! But just like muscles, our patience needs to be trained so that it comes more easily and you learn how to handle challenging situations. The next time something happens that requires you to wait, thank God for helping you practice your gift of patience. Being grateful may even help you keep from getting upset and losing your patience.

Talking to Each Other

- What's one area where it's hard for you to show patience?
- What are some ways you can exercise your gift of patience in that area?
- How might thanking God for opportunities to exercise patience keep you from becoming upset?

—Renee Gray-Wilburn

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.

Proverbs 19:11

Week 19: God's Timing

Note: Parents should be prepared to give their children a treat after today's family devotion.

Talking to God

Thank God for answering so many of your family's prayers at just the right time.

Diving In

Guess how long the following people had to wait for things: How long did Noah and his family have to wait inside an ark for the rain to stop? (40 days) How long did Abraham and Sarah have to wait for a baby? (25 years) How long did the Israelites have to wait to enter the Promised Land? (40 years) Ask your parents how long you will have to wait for a treat.

Going Deeper

Sometimes it seems that prayers will never be answered. But God promises that when you pray according to His will, He always hears and answers (1 John 5:14-15). Sometimes you have to wait patiently for His answer, and sometimes He answers differently than what you expect. Still, He knows how to give you what you need, exactly when you need it. To learn what the right timing for an answer is, wait for God to answer it. That's the right time, and the perfect answer.

Talking to Each Other

- What's the longest you've had to wait for something you've really wanted?
- What can you do to wait patiently for an answer to prayer?
- What are you waiting for right now? Are you waiting patiently?

—*Renee Gray-Wilburn*

Every living thing looks to you for food. You give it to them **exactly when they need it.**

Psalm 145:15, NIV

Week 20: A Strong Faith Brings Peace

Talking to God

Steady, steadfast, unwavering, firm, reliable, solid—these words describe who God is. Tell God as you pray how you appreciate Him for these characteristics.

Diving In

Prepare two shallow baking pans filled with sand: one damp and firmly packed, the other loose and dry. Roll a toy car or marble across each type of sand. The goal is to see which type of sand allows the object to roll farther.

Going Deeper

Just as it's easier to roll things across firm sand, a firm faith makes it easier for you as you go through the good and bad things in life. Faith brings a lot of blessings, including peace. Psalm 29:11 says, "The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace."

But when you don't trust God, you have faith similar to loose sand; you get bogged down and have trouble getting through the hard things in life. That's why you need to pray for God to draw you closer to Him and to build your faith in Him.

Talking to Each Other

- Describe a time when your faith has grown. What helped you grow in your faith?
- How have you felt God's peace? What did it feel like?
- God is the author of peace and every good thing. Have you asked Him for more faith? Have you asked Him for His peace?

—*Karen Schmidt*

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

Colossians 3:15

Week 21: God Leads in His Gentleness

Talking to God

You serve a loving God. Thank Him for His desire to gently lead you toward Him and His willingness to give you the choice of obedience.

Diving In

Put on a blindfold. Then, have another family member guide you through different rooms by “steering” your shoulders from behind. Then walk through the same rooms, still blindfolded, following the whispered directions of a trusted family member.

Going Deeper

Just as family members can guide you with touch and whispers, God has many ways of gently leading you forward. He directs you through His Word (Psalm 119:105), with a quiet voice (1 Kings 19:11–13) and through other people (Hebrews 13:7). No matter how He leads you, God can do so without being harsh. If you accidentally head in the wrong direction, He can gently help you back onto His path. Even when you purposely disobey, His desire is to lovingly correct you. In the process of learning to follow Him, God allows you to make choices and suffer the consequences of your choices; but He also knows how to pull you gently back into His fold.

Talking to Each Other

- How was having someone steer you through the rooms different than having directions whispered to you?
- Which way is more like how God leads you? Explain.
- How can you learn to better recognize God’s gentle leading?

—*Renee Gray-Wilburn*

**He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms and
carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.**

Isaiah 40:11

Week 22: Learning to Be Faithful

Talking to God

Thank God for His willingness to teach you how to be faithful to Him with the gifts and talents He has given you.

Diving In

Choose one person, and have everyone in the family suggest a few ideas about what the person does well. Then vote on those ideas to figure out which of those things the person does best. Repeat for each person in your family.

Going Deeper

Jesus told the story of the master who entrusted three servants with different amounts of money while he left on a trip. When the master returned, he found that one servant had doubled the money he had been given. To this servant, the master said: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matthew 25:21). The master did not like when one of his servants buried his money. The master said that this servant had not been faithful with what he had been given. God has given you gifts and talents. He wants you to use them faithfully to serve God and others.

Talking to Each Other

- What did your family say you do best? Do you agree?
If not, what do you think you excel at?
- How can you use your talents to serve God?
- How can you improve in this area?
- What can your family do to help you become better at doing this?

—*Janine Petry*

**Now it is required that those
who have been given a trust
must prove faithful.**

1 Corinthians 4:2

Week 23: Friends Help Each Other

Talking to God

Thank God for His constant help and for the people around you (family, friends, teachers, pastors) who help you, too.

Diving In

Sit in a circle. One person should stand and say, “I am your friend. I will _____.” In the blank, the person can make up an ending, such as “help you comb your hair” or “take your favorite toy without asking.” The rest of the family should give a thumbs-up if the action is that of a friend and a thumbs-down if the action is not that of a friend. Go around the circle a few times. It’s OK for people to suggest funny ideas that don’t belong in a friendship.

Going Deeper

The Gospel of Mark tells about four men who helped their friend find a way to Jesus (2:1-12). Their friend was not able to walk, so they carried him through the crowd, made a hole in the roof above Jesus and lowered him through it. Because they loved their friend enough to help him, he was able to meet Jesus, and Jesus healed him so he could walk.

Talking to Each Other

- How have your friends helped you?
- How have you helped your friends?
- Do you have friends with special needs? How might you help them?
- What other ways can friends help each other?

—*Lettie Kirkpatrick Burress*

**Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for
their work: If one falls down, his friend
can help him up. But pity the man who
falls and has no one to help him up!**

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Week 24: Accepting Differences

Talking to God

Ask God to show you people in the body of Christ who are different from you. Pray that you will accept and respect them.

Diving In

Play a quick game of “Who Am I?” Rather than guessing people by name, explain that you will be guessing types of personalities (shy, inquisitive, mature, goofy).

Write different personality types on slips of paper. Drop the slips in a bowl. Then have each family member draw one. Take turns acting in character as other family members ask questions to figure out the personality type you are pretending to be.

Going Deeper

Talk with your child about how the different personalities your family acted out could complement one another. God created each of us with unique personalities, and our differences can draw us closer to one another and to God.

Jesus connected with people of all kinds. His closest friends included passionate and sometimes short-tempered Peter, loyal and devoted John and rational yet doubting Thomas. Jesus said in Mark 3:34-35 that whoever does the will of God is His family. To be like Jesus, we must accept all who make up the body of Christ. Respect for our differences has the potential to bring us together to serve Him.

Talking to Each Other

- What kinds of people tend to frustrate you?
Why do you think they are hard for you to accept?
- How can you show acceptance to people in the body of Christ who are different from you?

—*Karen Schmidt and Janine Petry*

**My command is this: Love each
other as I have loved you.**

John 15:12

Week 25: Who's Your Master?

Talking to God

Thank God for being the Lord of your life. Ask Him to show you any areas where you have not yet made Him Lord. Trust Him for help to exercise self-control.

Diving In

Play a game of charades, and try to guess the title of popular movies or cartoon series.

Going Deeper

It's fun to do things you enjoy, like watch your favorite television show or play your favorite games. But it might not be so fun if those things had control over you. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, the apostle Paul says: "Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me'—but I will not be mastered by anything." When something that you enjoy doing becomes something that you are driven to do, it may have control over you. This means that you've given up your ability to choose what is best. It's important to only have one Master—God—and to make sure He comes first in everything you do.

Talking to Each Other

- What do you enjoy doing in your free time?
- Name a few characteristics of a "master." How can you tell if something in your life is becoming a master over you?
- Discuss some ways that you can develop more self-control.

—Janine Petry

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

Matthew 6:24

Week 26: Peace in Safety

Talking to God

What things keep you safe every day? Being safe gives a feeling of peace. Thank God for things that keep you safe—seat belts, locks on doors, parents, police, fire fighters and even smoke alarms.

Diving In

Who or what might scream if you burn your toast or oatmeal? (you, your mom or dad and the smoke alarm)

Going Deeper

In the old days, people were warned of a fire when someone in the street twirled a wooden rattle. People who were asleep, however, sometimes didn't hear the rattle. Now houses and other buildings have small plastic boxes with batteries that warn when there is a fire. You can sleep peacefully without worrying you won't hear a rattle in the street.

God gives you an even better kind of peace that helps you feel safe all the time. Jesus said in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Talking to Each Other

- Of what things are you afraid?
- When you're scared, how can you remember that God wants to give you His peace?
- How can you enjoy more of God's peace today?

—Karen Schmidt

I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Psalm 4:8

Week 27: Mirroring Goodness

Talking to God

Thank God for His goodness and ask Him to reflect His goodness in you.

Diving In

Take a mirror and stand near a window where the sunshine is bright. (If there is no bright sunshine, use a lamp.) Tilt the mirror so it reflects the light. Take turns using the mirror to shine the sun's light on each other. Avoid shining the light in people's eyes. Instead, focus it on their hearts.

Going Deeper

Those who stood in the reflected light of the mirror could see that the light came through the window and not from the person holding the mirror. In the same way, we can reflect God's goodness to others. Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." God's goodness shines through you and has the power to change hearts. When you do good for others, you are mirroring God's goodness to them.

Talking to Each Other

- In what ways can you mirror God's goodness to others today?
- What can blur your reflection of God's goodness?
- What can you do to keep your mirror bright and clean?

—*Jeanne Gowen Dennis*

The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

John 1:9

Week 28: Patience Amid Differences

Talking to God

Ask God to forgive you for the times you've been impatient with others. Thank Him for the times other people have been patient with you.

Diving In

Shout out as many pairs of opposites as you can. (For example: wet and dry; happy and sad; tall and short)

Going Deeper

Have you ever noticed how two people can have opposite personalities or likes and dislikes? God sometimes fills families with people who are quite different from each other. To learn to get along with those closest to you, you have to work at being patient with your differences. In 1 Corinthians 13:4, the first word used to describe love is patient. When Jesus told you to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39), He knew you would need patience to do this. God, in His creativity, made you different from all others. Because of this, you have the opportunity to learn patience.

Talking to Each Other

- Tell about a time when someone was especially patient with you.
- Why is patience an important part of loving people?
- Is there someone you need to be more patient with?
- What is one thing you can do to show patience to this person?

—*Renee Gray-Wilburn*

And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

1 Thessalonians 5:14

Week 29: God Is the Judge

Talking to God

Ask God to help you show love and tolerance to people who don't have a relationship with Him.

Diving In

Write "Jesus loves you" on a sheet of paper. On a second sheet, write "USEOJOSVUESLY," which is a scrambled version of the sentence. Then tell your family that you have an important message for them. Show the scrambled message to your family. When they express confusion over the message, show them the real message.

Going Deeper

People who don't have a relationship with God are not able to understand the truth of the Gospel. For them, God's Word is just like a scrambled message. Without this understanding, they will make wrong choices in life, even when they're trying to do what is right.

In 1 Corinthians 5:12, the apostle Paul says, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?"

God is the only one qualified to judge nonbelievers, people outside of the church. People who are not living according to God's Word may frustrate you, but as a believer, you shouldn't judge them or treat them harshly. Instead, offer them biblical tolerance—treat them with respect and patience even though you disagree with their poor choices.

Talking to Each Other

- Who can judge nonbelievers?
- How should you treat those who don't know Jesus?

—Lee Smedly

Jesus said, "Father,
forgive them, for
they do not know
what they are doing."

Luke 23:34

Week 30: Jesus Frees You From Death

Talking to God

Thank God that He sent His Son, Jesus, so that you can spend eternity with Him.

Diving In

Prepare some paper, writing utensils and coloring supplies for each member of the family. Together, talk about the promise of heaven—the assurance that you will live with God forever (eternity). Using the paper and art supplies, have each person describe heaven with pictures, words or both! Then share these original works of art, and explain how they make you feel about this amazing promise from God.

Going Deeper

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Because you believe in Him, you are set free from the fear of death and can look forward to living forever with God in heaven. Thinking and talking about heaven is one way of celebrating your freedom in Jesus and keeping your focus on God's promises.

Talking to Each Other

- As your family shared with each other about heaven, did you have any new insights about God's gift of eternal life?
- How does the promise of heaven make you feel?
- How does knowing you have eternal life influence the way you live?

—Lee Smedly

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1-2

Week 31: Repairing Wounds

Talking to God

Ask God to show you if you have been unkind or have hurt the feelings of others. As He brings specific events to mind, ask for His forgiveness.

Diving In

Playfully simulate a first aid situation. For example, have someone pretend to get a deep cut or break a bone. Make a plan regarding what needs to be done to help. Gather supplies and run through a couple of emergency scenarios, keeping the mood light but realistic.

Going Deeper

Proper first aid can minimize pain and promote a quick recovery. Just as a cut on your hand needs attention so it can heal, wounds in the body of Christ also need tending. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus directed His followers to resolve any wrong with a fellow Christian before coming to God in prayer.

Whether you've accidentally hurt someone by your words or actions, or you've been insensitive or selfish toward another believer, God expects you to repair that wound. Giving a sincere apology is always appropriate first aid.

Talking to Each Other

- How do you feel when another Christian hurts your feelings or is unkind to you?
- Why is it important to ask forgiveness when you hurt someone's feelings?

—Karen Schmidt and Janine Petry

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

Week 32: The Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

Talking to God

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be more aware of God's generosity.

Diving In

Write these categories on separate paper slips: after-school activity, toy or electronic gadget, snack, drink, TV show. Place the folded slips in a bowl. Have each person draw a slip, read the category and name one favorite thing in that category. Discuss how difficult it might be to give up each.

Going Deeper

Fasting means giving up something you enjoy or need for a designated period of time. In the Old Testament, fasting was common for entire nations who were seeking God's help or direction (2 Chronicles 20:3, Jonah 3:5). In the New Testament, Jesus fasted (Matthew 4:2) and taught His disciples about fasting (Matthew 6:17-18).

(Fasting is not always a good idea for children or pregnant women. They can consider giving up something else that they really want or like.)

Fasting allows you to focus your time and attention on God. When combined with prayer and time in God's Word, fasting strengthens your faith and helps you become more confident of God's power.

Talking to Each Other

- How does fasting bring you closer to God?
- What is one thing you enjoy that you can give up for a day?

—Renee Gray-Wilburn

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen.

Matthew 6:17-18

Week 33: Show God's Faithfulness to Others

Talking to God

Thank God for the people He has put in your life—your family, friends and others. Ask Him how you can show them His faithfulness.

Diving In

Look through a photo album. Talk about your favorite memories of your family and friends. Consider how you have influenced some of them and how they have changed you.

Going Deeper

Old Faithful—a geyser at Yellowstone National Park—erupts approximately 17 times per day, every 30 to 120 minutes, for one to five minutes! Why do you think it was named Old Faithful? God wants you to be reliable, just like this geyser in Yellowstone. Your consistency in loving and caring for others will demonstrate God's faithfulness to them.

Talking to Each Other

- How has God been faithful to you?
- Who have you told about His faithfulness?
- How might your faithfulness to a friend show that person God's faithfulness?
- Name one friend you intend to show God's faithfulness to this week.

—*Janine Petry*

**I thank Christ Jesus
our Lord, who has
given me strength, that
he considered me faithful,
appointing me to his service.**

1 Timothy 1:12

Week 34: The Spiritual Discipline of Worship

Talking to God

Thank God for who He is and for all He's done for you. Ask Him to help you learn to worship Him with every part of your life.

Diving In

Have everyone collect a couple of common objects used during the day, such as a cellphone, a pen, a purse or a clothing item. Place the objects on a table and hold up one item at a time. As a family, try to come up with ways that each item could be used to glorify (worship) God. Take turns offering suggestions.

Going Deeper

People often think of worship as singing songs during church services, but it's so much more. Worship means to bring or give God glory. There are many different ways you can worship God.

You can also worship God with your mind by not thinking evil or sinful thoughts (Philippians 4:8). When you give generously, speak words of encouragement and serve others, you're also worshipping God. And, of course, praising Him through prayer and song is a great way to worship. God wants you to worship Him with every part of your life.

Talking to Each Other

- What is one of your favorite worship songs?
- What are other ways you can worship God?
- What's one form of worship you will practice this week?

—*Renee Gray-Wilburn*

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in
view of God's mercy, to offer your
bodies as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God—this is
your spiritual act of worship.**

Romans 12:1

Week 35: Jesus Is Your Friend

Talking to God

Name one good friend and tell God something you love about that person. Then thank God for him or her.

Diving In

Tape a large sheet of paper to the wall. Write as many words as you can to describe good friends.

Going Deeper

Jesus had 12 disciples who were His friends. You can become a friend of Jesus, too. When you follow and obey Jesus just as His disciples did, Jesus calls you His friend. What kind of friend is Jesus? In John 15:13, Jesus says, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” That’s what Jesus did for His disciples and for you.

Talking to Each Other

- How do the words on your sheet of paper (from Diving In) also relate to Jesus?
- What does it mean when Jesus calls you His friend?
- How is Jesus different from our other friends?

—*Lettie Kirkpatrick Burress*

**I no longer call you servants,
because a servant does not know
his master’s business. Instead,
I have called you friends,
for everything that I learned
from my Father I have made
known to you.**

John 15:15

Week 36: Gentleness in Speech

Talking to God

Thank God for giving you the ability to be gentle with your words. Ask Him to help you choose your words carefully so they are not hurtful.

Diving In

List five words that describe your best friend. Now list five words that describe someone you don’t get along with very well. Say each of the 10 words out loud and consider how you’d feel if each of those words were used to describe you.

Going Deeper

Words are powerful. “The tongue has the power of life and death” (Proverbs 18:21). Wow! What you say—and how you say it—really does matter. Words can hurt, or they can heal.

When you respond to hurtful words with more hurtful words, you only make things worse. If you answer with gentleness, you can soothe angry or bitter feelings and restore broken relationships. Your gentle words show people that they have value, whether you agree or disagree with them. Proverbs 12:18 says, “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Talking to Each Other

- How have others hurt you with their words?
- How have you hurt others with your words?
- What gentle words have been given to you, and how did they help you?
- Who is one person you can use gentle words with, even if this person doesn’t deserve them?

—*Renee Gray-Wilburn*

**A gentle answer
turns away wrath, but a
harsh word stirs up anger.**

Proverbs 15:1

Week 37: Peace Through God's Rules

Talking to God

Tell God what you love about His Word, the Bible. Tell Him why you like a certain verse or story, and thank Him for it.

Diving In

With Mom or Dad standing close by, try walking around the room wearing snowshoes, swim fins or shoes that are way too big. How far can you go without stumbling or wobbling? Do you think a rule that you shouldn't wear these things in the house would be a good idea? Explain.

Going Deeper

Consider Psalm 119:165: "Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble." God promises you a giant helping of peace when you do what His Word says. Following God's rules helps you make fewer mistakes, and you no longer have to worry about stumbling or getting hurt because of bad decisions. Living according to God's Word allows His peace to rule your heart. Whew! For a reminder of what God's Word says, review Psalm 18:30, 19:8, 33:4.

Talking to Each Other

- Think about a rule that you follow, such as walking in the crosswalk or not running in the hallway at school. Are you more likely to get hurt when you follow the rules or when you don't follow them? Explain.
- When have you felt peaceful because you obeyed God's Word?
- How can you get God's peace back after you've goofed up?

—Karen Schmidt

Doing what is right will bring peace and rest. When my people do that, they will stay calm and trust in the Lord forever.

Isaiah 32:17 NIV

Week 38: Controlling the Tongue

Talking to God

Thank God for His Word and for making you in His image. Take turns offering a prayer of praise for the many ways God has gifted you to communicate with each other.

Diving In

If possible, build a fire and enjoy the warmth together. If not, then simply recall a time when you enjoyed the warmth of a fire—whether during a special winter gathering or during a summer camping trip. Take turns describing your favorite fireside memories.

Going Deeper

The fireside memories that you cherish have one thing in common: control. Any fire that is out of control is far from a cherished memory because it is extremely dangerous.

James, Jesus' brother, teaches the importance of watching your words. He writes, "Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark" (James 3:5). If left uncontrolled, your words have potential for great damage, just as a spark can ignite a terrible fire. You keep fire contained to protect your family from harm; in the same way, you can exercise self-control in your choice of words to avoid hurting others.

Talking to Each Other

- What do you think James meant when he said that the tongue makes "great boasts"? Give some examples.
- How have you experienced the hurt that can come from a few "out of control" words?
- How can you be careful with your words so you don't hurt others?

—Janine Petry

He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

Proverbs 21:23

Week 39: Showing Gentleness

Talking to God

Thank God for the people in your life who show you gentleness. Ask God to help you find ways to show His gentleness to others.

Diving In

Gently tap objects as you walk through your house. You can tap a window, a hardwood floor, a countertop, a glass vase or the front door. Discuss why you need to be gentle when you tap items around the house. Concentrate on how fragile items can break and hard items can hurt your hands.

Going Deeper

Sometimes your actions are what you use to “tap” the people around you. It’s important to remember that you can hurt others with your behavior, just as you can be hurt by what others do. Because you are fragile, God wants you to be gentle with others. Philippians 4:5 says, “Let your gentleness be evident to all.” Your actions are evidence of your gentleness, and when you make an effort to be gentle with others, you show God’s character to the world.

Talking to Each Other

- What is one thing you do that shows gentleness to others?
- How difficult or easy is it to show gentleness to others?
- How have others modeled gentleness to you?
- What can you do this week to show gentleness to someone?

—*Renee Gray-Wilburn*

Therefore, as God’s chosen people,
holy and dearly loved, clothe
yourselves with **compassion,**
kindness, humility,
gentleness and patience.

Colossians 3:12

Week 40: Faithfulness in Creation

Talking to God

Thank God for the variety and beauty of the seasons—bright flowers, colorful leaves, sparkling snow and new buds.

Diving In

Hold an orange and shine a flashlight on the fruit as if it were the sun shining on the earth. Point out where the sun may warm the earth and where it won’t as the orange is turned. Talk about how the people living in the Northern Hemisphere pull out their sweaters and hats when those in the Southern Hemisphere head to the beach.

Going Deeper

Even if people in different places have seasons at opposite times, the seasons still come every year. You can count on them—just like you can count on other things in nature to always be the same. The sun always rises in the east, for example, and the stars annually shine in the same patterns in the night sky. Read Psalm 74:16-17. Remember that God sets “all the boundaries of the earth.”

Talking to Each Other

- What season is your favorite? Why?
- What other consistent patterns have you noticed in nature?
- Why is it important that God faithfully causes the seasons and other things to happen at their set times?
- What do these things teach you about God?

—*Janine Petry*

Your **word, O LORD,** is eternal; it
stands firm in the heavens. Your
faithfulness continues through
all generations; you established
the earth, and it endures.

Psalm 119:89-90

Week 41: Promises Are Important

Talking to God

Thank God for always keeping His promises. Ask Him for help so you can keep your promises, too.

Diving In

List some of the promises God gave people in the Bible and the way He kept those promises. Examples: putting a rainbow in the sky as a promise to never again destroy the earth with a flood; giving Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan; sending a Savior, Jesus; sending the Holy Spirit.

Going Deeper

The Bible tells the story of two young men, Jonathan and David, who became good friends. Because they loved each other, they made a promise to always be friends and exchanged gifts as symbols of their friendship. This story was written in 1 Samuel 18:1-4 and 1 Samuel 20:16-17. Twice, Jonathan saved David's life when Jonathan's father, King Saul, wanted to kill David. Later, after Jonathan died and David became king, David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Samuel 9:1). David remembered his promise of friendship to Jonathan and was kind to Jonathan's son.

Talking to Each Other

- When do people make promises?
- What promises have others made to you? Did they keep their promises?
- What promises have you made to others? How hard was it to keep your promises?
- Why is it important to keep your promise to a friend?

—*Lettie Kirkpatrick Burress*

You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed.

Joshua 23:14

Week 42: God Longs for You

Talking to God

Thank God for all the ways He loves and cares for you. Ask Him to show you how much He wants you to talk with Him.

Diving In

Line up a number of small glasses next to the kitchen sink. One by one, fill the glasses. Discuss how you could fill every container in your house and water would still flow out of the faucet. In a similar way, God's longing for you won't end.

Going Deeper

God is available to you at all times. Just as you can fill another glass with water simply by turning on the faucet, so you can enjoy God's presence by going to Him in prayer. Read Isaiah 30:18: "The LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!" God wants you to grow closer to Him, to be filled with His love and peace, because He longs for what is best for you. Although God works on your behalf, He wants you to respond to Him, showing a willingness to share your life with Him. One way you can do that is by talking to Him daily.

Talking to Each Other

- Who is your favorite person to talk to, and what makes this person your favorite?
- Tell about a time when you really wanted to talk to this person
- Why did you long to talk to this person?
- Why might God long to be gracious to you?

—*Lee Smedly*

Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:20

Week 43: Protecting What Is Precious in You

Talking to God

Spend some time thanking God for the protection He provides.

Diving In

Play a game of capture the flag. Divide into two teams, with each team having its own “flag.” (You can use any item that can be easily carried.) After both teams have found a secure location to place their flag, the game begins. The object of the game is for family members to make their way into the opposing team’s territory, grab the flag and return to their own territory without being tagged. Each team will have to work both offensively and defensively.

Going Deeper

It’s important to have defenses in place to protect things that are precious to you. Proverbs 25:28 says, “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.” The Bible teaches that developing self-control is a way to protect yourself from things that could harm you. When you practice self-control, you’re building strong walls that will keep important things safe—things like your love for God and for others.

Talking to Each Other

- Can you describe what walls around a city used to look like? How is self-control like city walls?
- What kinds of things do you find in cities that need to be protected? What kinds of things has God placed in you that need to be protected?
- In what areas do you have a hard time practicing self-control? How can these areas be strengthened so you are better protected from harm?

—Janine Petry

I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.

Psalm 119:59-60

Week 44: Showing Compassion

Talking to God

Ask God to help you see others as He sees them and to give you a heart of compassion for those who do not have a relationship with Him.

Diving In

Clear a space where you can walk blindfolded and not hurt yourself. Set the radio volume so it drowns out your normal speaking voice. On one side of the room, blindfold a family member. From across the room, have another person whisper directions that guide the blindfolded person to him or her. Ask the whisperer to gradually speak up until the blindfolded person can hear the directions and safely make it to the other side.

Going Deeper

One of the reasons that Jesus came into the world was to help the blind see (Luke 4:18-19). People who do not know God are like people who are blindfolded. They can’t find their way to God and to His forgiveness and love. They are “spiritually blind” and need the guidance of God’s truth to lead them. The noises of the world—such as people’s differing opinions about God—often drown out the truth that would guide them.

Clear directions helped your blindfolded family member cross the floor amid the blaring sounds of a radio. Similarly, Jesus wants to help those who do not have a relationship with God find their way to Him. He is the way through the distracting noises of the world, and He has compassion on them because they are blind and confused. As followers of Christ, we should have the same attitude toward those who are spiritually blind.

Talking to Each Other

- How did it feel to listen for or give directions with the distracting noise?
- What “noises” might keep nonbelievers from hearing God’s love for them? How might you show compassion to the spiritually blind?

—Lee Smedly

[Jesus] had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 9:36

Week 45: God's Love Is Faithful

Talking to God

Tell God how you intend to treat others well, but sometimes don't. Thank God for His unfailing love, and ask Him to help you love better.

Diving In

For one full day, try to treat others well. The "others" should be your family and everyone else around you. Do your best to keep from becoming upset, impatient or annoyed, regardless of what others do or how they treat you.

Going Deeper

Proverbs 20:6 questions whether anyone has unfailing love as God does. It asks, "But a faithful man who can find?" Then throughout the Old Testament, writers constantly praise the faithfulness of God's love. As believers, God helps you be more consistent in your relationships with others because of His faithfulness. You may not be able to perfectly love others by yourself, but God empowers you to more faithfully love others.

Talking to Each Other

- How easy or hard was it to love others all day?
- Do you think you could do this every day?
- What would keep you from treating others well?

—*Janine Petry*

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

Week 46: Choosing to Be Kind

Talking to God

Ask God to help you choose to be kind, especially when you don't feel like it.

Diving In

Place a baseball cap or other hat in the center of the table and gather around as a family. Ask one family member to put on the hat—signifying that she is going to share a compliment about someone else in the group. After she has shared the kind remark, she'll pass the hat to the person she complimented, who will then compliment another family member. Continue the game until each person has had at least two turns wearing the hat and saying something kind.

Going Deeper

Being kind is a choice. You make choices every day—some big and some small. Think about all the choices you've made in the last 30 minutes. Which food to eat first at dinner, whether to sit on the floor or stay in your chair for this devotion, and who to share compliments about—those were all choices. God wants you to choose to be kind.

The Bible tells about a kind man named Boaz who shared his harvest by letting a poor woman named Ruth gather from his fields (Ruth 2:8). Sometimes kindness is a choice to share what you have with someone in need. Other times, it's a decision to encourage someone with a sincere compliment.

Talking to Each Other

- Does God care about whether we are kind to others? How do you know? (Matthew 25:31-40)
- What are some ways you can daily show kindness to those around you?

—*Bridgette Booth*

**Be kind and
compassionate
to one another . . .**

Ephesians 4:32

Week 47: God Is Good

Talking to God

Thank God for offering His gift of friendship and love to you, and ask Him to help you know and love Him more.

Diving In

Make a favorite fun drink (smoothie, root beer float, milk shake, etc.) for each family member. Give each person a straw to drink through. Then challenge them to drink the liquid without letting the straw touch it.

Going Deeper

When you tried to drink without letting the straw touch the liquid, you discovered that it didn't work. It's only when the liquid surrounds the straw that the goodness can flow from the cup and through the straw.

Jesus said only God is good (Luke 18:19), so you cannot become good without Him. In order to truly "drink in" God's goodness, you have to immerse yourself in Him. That's like drinking in His goodness. You can do this by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior and pursuing a relationship with Him. God works in your heart to help you recognize and do His will (Philippians 2:13). As you pray and learn from God's Word, you will grow in your relationship with Him, and His goodness will form in you.

Talking to Each Other

- In what ways do you "drink in" God's goodness?
- What are some things that keep you from doing this?

—*Jeanne Gowen Dennis*

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you **worthy** of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power.

2 Thessalonians 1:11, NASB

Week 48: Jesus Frees You to Love

Talking to God

Ask God to help you receive His love so that you can show that love to others.

Diving In

Place a small clear glass in a shallow bowl. Pretend you are the empty glass and the bowl represents the people in your life. Fill a pitcher with water. Pretend that the pitcher is God and the water represents God's love. As you pour water from the pitcher into the glass, think about the love that God pours into you. Continue pouring water from the pitcher until it spills over the sides of the glass, filling the bowl.

Going Deeper

The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 3:12, "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else." Just as the water filled the glass and overflowed into the bowl, God promises that He will give you so much love that it will overflow, and you will be able to love others. Because your love from God is more than enough, you are free to love everyone around you with the "overflow."

Talking to Each Other

- Will God's love for you ever run out?
- How does God's love help you love others?
- In what ways can you show God's love to others?

—*Lee Smedly*

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to **love one another.**

1 John 4:11

Week 49: Friends Need to Ask Forgiveness

Talking to God

Thank God for His forgiveness and for sending Jesus to wash away your sins.

Diving In

Find a partner. Do the following actions: Pat your thighs once, *clap both hands against your partner's hands, clap your right hand to your partner's right hand, clap your left hand to your partner's left hand, clap both hands against your partner's hands,* then pat your thighs once. The second time through, repeat the sequence within the asterisks five times before ending with the final pat on your thighs. When you are done, talk about which claps you did well and which ones you messed up.

Going Deeper

We all make mistakes. One day, Jesus' close friend Peter made a big mistake. When people were being mean to Jesus, Peter pretended that he didn't even know Jesus. In Luke 22:57, Peter tells a woman, "I don't know him." Twice more he tells people that he is not one of Jesus' friends. When Peter realized what he had done, he was sorry. Because Jesus loved Peter, He forgave him. Forgiveness is an important part of all friendships.

Talking to Each Other

- Have you ever hurt a friend?
What happened when you asked for forgiveness?
- How has a friend hurt you?
What would you do if the person asked for forgiveness?

—*Lettie Kirkpatrick Burress*

Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Matthew 18:21-22

Week 50: Jesus Frees You From Sin

Talking to God

Thank God for sending Jesus to free you from the sin that entangles you.

Diving In

Gather the following items: a laundry basket or box you or another family member can fit into, a ball of string or yarn, some tape and a pair of scissors. Choose a family member to crawl inside the container. Other family members will place pieces of string across the opening of the container, taping the string on each side. Each time a new piece of string is added, a family member will share about a sin or temptation that he or she sometimes struggles with. Continue adding strings, crisscrossing them until the person in the container is hemmed in. Then have a family member cut the strands to free the person.

Going Deeper

The string demonstrates the affect of sin in your life. Sin entraps you and prevents you from obeying God and enjoying true freedom. Romans 3:23-24 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." God understands that you struggle with sin. He knows that sometimes it is difficult for you to obey Him. But God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to save you, to rescue you from the sin that entangles you. Jesus is the only one who can set you free from sin. To receive this free gift, you must trust Him.

Talking to Each Other

- How does sin keep you from experiencing freedom?
- Do you sometimes get trapped in sin even though you know Jesus has set you free?
- When you feel trapped, what can you do to be free once more?

—*Lee Smedly*

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:36

Week 51: A Heart of Gentleness

Talking to God

Ask God to help you keep your heart gentle. Talk to Him about times when you haven't had a heart of gentleness, and ask for His forgiveness.

Diving In

Pour some flour into a paper bag and rocks or gravel in another. Without their knowing what is inside, have another family member guess, then reach into one bag at a time and describe how the contents feel.

Going Deeper

Both bags look the same on the outside, but the contents of one are soft, while the contents of the other are hard. People are like these bags—you can't always tell what's on the inside. You learn in 1 Samuel 16:7 that “man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

God knows you can use your outward appearance—how you act and what you say—to cover up what's really inside, just like the bags covered their contents. You might act kind and gentle but have bad attitudes or mean thoughts. While God wants you to be gentle on the outside, He also wants your heart to be gentle. When your heart is full of gentleness, God can use you to bless others.

Talking to Each Other

- Who is someone you know with a gentle heart?
What do you like about this person?
- Who is someone you know with a hard heart?
How does this person treat you?
- What causes your heart to become hard?
- What are some ways you can keep your heart soft?

—Renee Gray-Wilburn

[Your beauty] should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

1 Peter 3:4

Week 52: Excellence of Character

Talking to God

Thank God that you can trust Him, even when things seem to be going wrong, because His goodness and love for you never change.

Diving In

Take turns hiding behind a door. The person hiding can wear any expression he wants—silly, sad, angry. But when another family member opens the door, the hider must quickly put on a big smile.

Then, see if other family members can guess what the person's expression looked like before it changed.

Going Deeper

You try to look and act your best in front of others, but what about when no one's watching? Your goodness is not determined by how you appear to others, but by who you really are on the inside. Psalm 44:21 says God knows the secrets of the heart. He knows what you think, do and say—even when you're alone. God is always with you, and He helps you stay strong and make good decisions.

Talking to Each Other

- What are some ways you try to put on your “best face” in front of others?
- How does knowing that God is always with you make you feel?
- How does this help you make good decisions when you are with others and when you are alone?

—Jeanne Gowen Dennis

Search me, O God,
and know my heart;
test me and know my
anxious thoughts.

Psalm 139:23



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