



FamilyLife[®]
A Cru Ministry

PERMANENT

MARKERS

by Janel Breitenstein

A HANDS-ON

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL OF

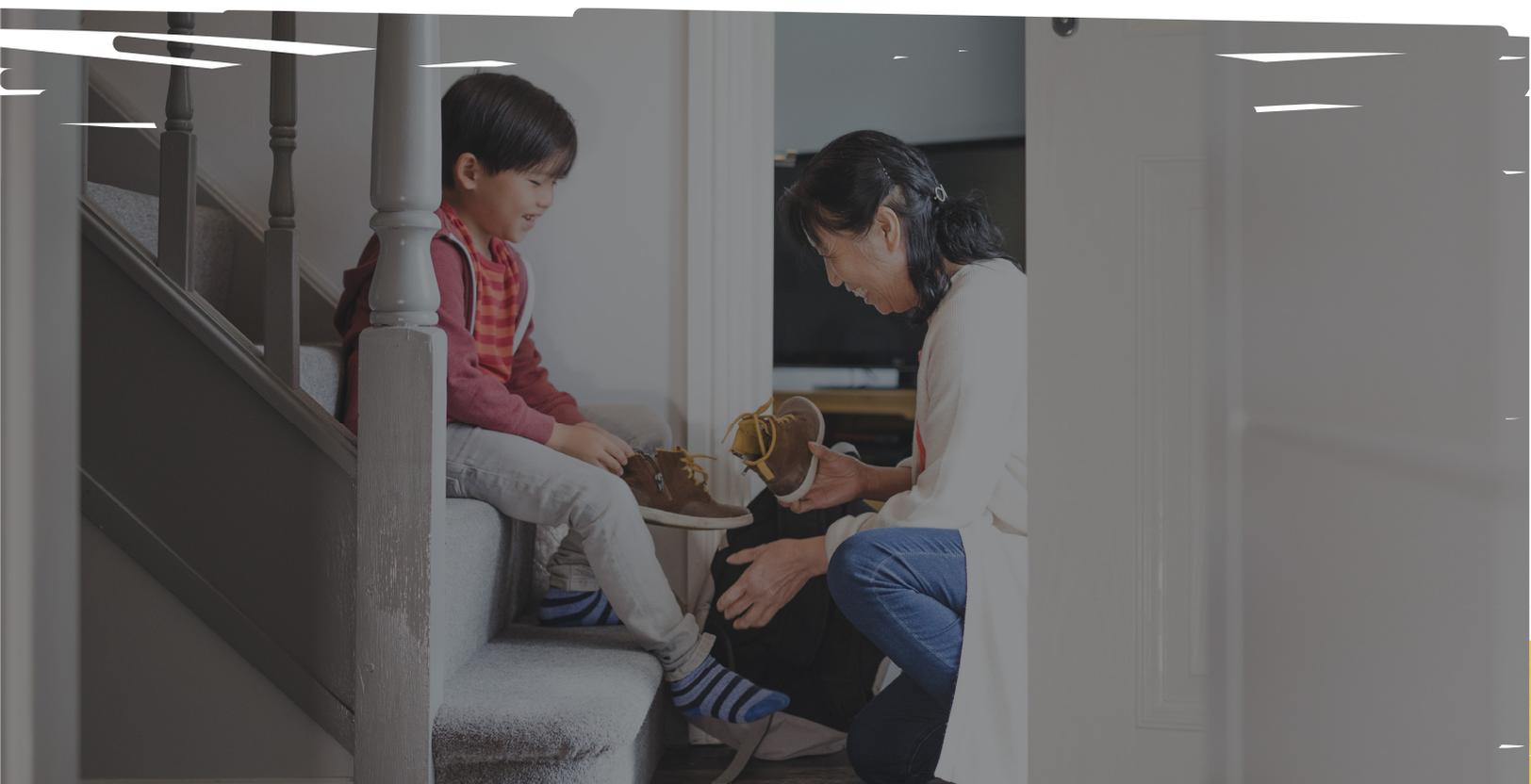
SPIRITUAL LIFE SKILLS

We get how skeptical you are of shoehorning more into your days already filled with carpools and just trying to get kids to hang up their towels. So we're making it easier to cultivate unerasable habits that prepare kids for a bold relationship with Jesus.

READY FOR ENGAGING, TOTALLY

DOABLE FAMILY DEVOTIONS?

Each day of this seven-day devotional includes an easy, captivating activity; a short read; and questions drawing your kids into changed hearts that live out truth. Follow with prayer, and engaging kids in vital spiritual life skills just got a little easier.



DAY 01

IDENTITY: WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

READ

(For families of only younger kids, read only the bold verses.)



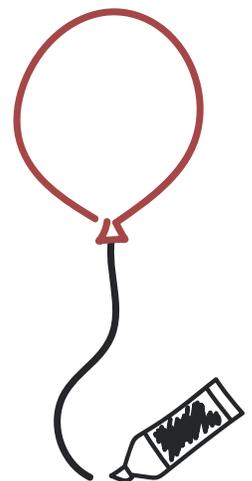
Jesus said to her, “**Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.** The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14)

PLAY

Give each person a deflated balloon. When you read the statements below, everyone blows air into their balloon if the event would make them feel more valuable. Or they let the balloon deflate if it would make them feel less valuable.

Ready?

- Out of your friends, you're the best at something.
- Someone says you're good-looking.
- You trip and fall in front of someone you're trying to impress.
- With a joke, you make everyone laugh.
- You fail an audition or tryout.
- You make your parents proud.
- You tell a sibling to do something and they do it.
- You try your hardest at a project and totally fail.



Tired of trying to inflate this balloon?

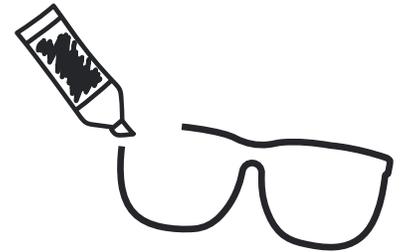
When we don't feel safe in God's love, we inflate or deflate ourselves based on what people think of us, what we have, and what we do. But because we're deeply loved by God, we're valuable. We don't have to try to pump ourselves up anymore.

TALK IT OUT

What do people your age think makes someone a cool person?

Isn't it weird that we all have different ideas of what makes a person valuable?

If you feel comfortable, share something dumb you did—that's funny now—while trying to be cool. (*Parents, get the ball rolling!*)



We try a lot of things to inflate the “balloon” inside us so we feel *worth something*, even if there's nothing but air inside.

Pastor Henri Nouwen said we believe three lies about why we're valuable:

- *I am what I do.* (I'm talented, helpful, or unique.)
- *I am what others say or think about me.* (I'm loved or respected.)
- *I am what I have.* (I want control, comfort, or safety. I have family, friends, nice things, or reputation.)¹

Which is most tempting to you? How have you seen that lie in your life lately?

These lies tempt us every day—filling our balloon when everything works out, falling flat when it doesn't.

But God gives us unchanging value, saying:

- Jesus has done enough. (2 Corinthians 3:4-6, 5:21, Hebrews 10:14)
- God accepts us because of Jesus. (Romans 5:1,8, John 1:12)
- He gives us everything we need. (2 Corinthians 9:8, Philippians 4:12-13)

You don't have to keep wearing yourself out! You're a beloved child of God. It's who you are and why you matter.

¹ Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 28-29.

DAY 02

PRAYER: LISTENING UP

READ



When Jesus saw [the crippled man] lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” (John 5:6-7)

PLAY

We’re going to play charades but with something that happened to you today. You pick the event, and we’ll try to figure out what went on.

After each person’s turn, have them explain what happened and how they felt.

After we saw you act out the event, why did we still have you explain what happened?



TALK IT OUT

Communication is about more than facts. A lot goes on inside us that actions don’t tell. And we want to know someone rather than just knowing about someone—like reading a book about someone isn’t the same as being friends.

In fact, God and Jesus ask questions in the Bible when they already know the answer. And God already knows what we need (Matthew 6:8).

Why pray if God already knows what we're going to say?

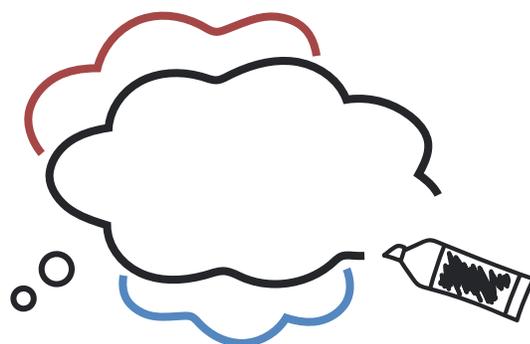
Prayer is our chance to connect with God: to know and love Him, and invite Him to love us back. If prayer is just about making sure we ask God for things, that makes God more like an Alexa or Google or Siri—someone's digital assistant!

When we don't talk with God about what's really on our minds—if prayer is more like ordering on a really good device—we don't come away connected.

What would it be like to have a friend who always talked, always asked you to do things for them, but never listened to you or talked about things that really mattered?

Of course God wants to know what we want and hear us tell Him about our days. But are we chatting about deeper things? Listening to Him in our hearts? ...Or does prayer feel more like we're reading a holy grocery list?

Prayer is like a conversation you'd have with a close friend throughout the day, hearing and responding. We keep our hearts open to what God might be trying to say back to us about our world and choosing to follow and be with Him all day. Just like He's right next to us.



When do you most like to talk with God? When do you feel close to God? When do you feel far away from Him?

The great news? God doesn't need to guess about what's going on in your life. But He does want to hear about it—and talk about it, too.

DAY 03

SELF CONTROL: THE POWER OF WHAT WE DON'T DO

READ



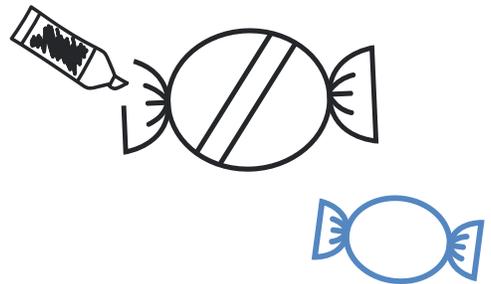
The mouth speaks what the heart is full of. (Matthew 12:34, NIV)

PLAY

Put a small treat (like a marshmallow) in front of each family member. They have two choices: If they eat it now, they can only have one. If they can wait 15 minutes, they can have two.

Set a timer and follow through.

You'll also need a full glass of a beverage (doesn't really matter what kind!) on a plate.



TALK IT OUT

Today's activity is similar to a science experiment performed in 1972.² (Who knew science could taste this good?)

As scientists followed the kids in the experiment through their lives, they found the kids who could wait for the second marshmallow tended toward better test scores, higher success in school, and healthy body weight.

² Water Mischel, Ebbe B. Ebbesen, and Antonette Raskoff Zeiss, "Cognitive and Attentional Mechanisms in Delay of Gratification," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 21, no. 2 (1972): 204-18, doi: 10.1037/h0032198.

How do you think being able to wait for a marshmallow meant kids were likely to have other life successes?

These kids were able to *wait for what they wanted*. They were self-controlled!

Each of us has different temptations that are either easy for us to avoid or hard to avoid. Maybe you're not a fan of marshmallows—but it's hard not to snap at your parent when you're interrupted in a video game. Think about one area of your life where it's hard for you to have self-control.

A big part of self-control is being able to listen to the Holy Spirit's voice inside us before, say, we try to get revenge on someone or take the seat they wanted in the car. Self-control is one of the signs the Holy Spirit is changing us inside (Galatians 5:22-23).

See, Matthew 12:34 says "The mouth speaks what the heart is full of." So look at this cup.

What's in it? What will come out of the cup? If you bump the cup, can vinegar come out?



When life bumps us around and we're stressed, what comes out of our mouths (*point to the mouth of the cup*) comes from our *hearts*—the sweet (or not-so-sweet) place where self-control starts.

This week, in one of those tempting times, first realize you're being tempted. Then tune into the Holy Spirit inside, asking Him for self-control.

DAY 04

MEDITATION: ON KEEPING QUIET

READ



Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)

PLAY & TALK IT OUT

Give everyone either candy to suck on, gum to chew, or a cup of warm water with a tea bag alongside.

Take a few seconds to focus on the flavor in your mouths or watch tea blend into the water before they sip it.

What's something hard to get out of your mind lately (...even video games)?

Meditation is a spiritual life skill that's like paying attention to something for a long time. It's what we chew or suck on—like gum or candy—or what we steep in, like a tea bag in water.

We automatically “meditate” when we worry or when we're excited or planning something.

But our hearts “chew” on so many things. Meditating on God and His Word is like trying to hear one voice in a busy restaurant.

(To one family member:) When I count to three, I'm going to say something to you in a normal voice.

(To everyone else:) When I count to three, say something—anything—loud (not yelling).
(Try this.)

(Did the listening family member hear you?)

Once, Elijah was told God would be speaking with him. But God wasn't in a big earthquake or a huge wind. Anyone remember how God did speak to him?

(A whisper.)

What keeps us from being quiet inside of us to hear God in His Word or our hearts?

Screens make it hard. Worry makes it hard (instead of paying attention to God, we “meditate” on our fear!). Crammed schedules make it hard, too—and even our stuff that we own (see Mark 4:19).

So here are ways we can make space to be with God this week:

- Make a poster, or even a jigsaw puzzle, of a verse.
- Lay on your back in the grass, under the stars, or on your bed.
- If you have a phone, turn it off for a while. Go for a walk or a hike.
- Take pictures of creation that remind you of God.
- Write a song.
- Drink a cup of tea, praying and listening.
- Trace around your body (on butcher paper or with sidewalk chalk), drawing and labeling the armor of God (Ephesians 6).
- Put a verse in a zipping plastic bag, and use a little water to stick it to the shower wall for you to think about there.
- Color printable Scripture coloring pages while listening to worship music.

DAY 05

SIMPLICITY: WHEN LESS IS SO MUCH MORE

READ



The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (Mark 4:19)

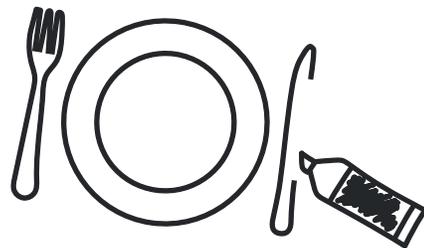
PLAY

Bring out a large bin or trash bag. Set a timer for five minutes. Can your family fill it with things they're willing to donate?

TALK IT OUT

What if for dinner, we set out a bowl of cheese puffs? What would it be like eating them? What about an hour later?

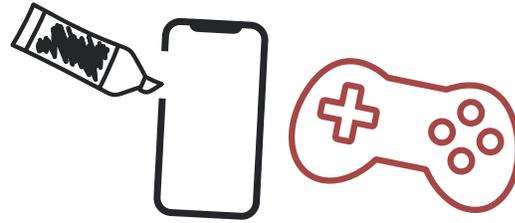
Eating cheese puffs can be pretty satisfying when you're doing it. But it fills you up so you don't want food that feeds a healthy body. You might feel a little sick.



Simplicity is like choosing not to eat cheese puffs for dinner.

Simpler lives get rid of extra items we don't need, even in our schedules. It can mean decreasing what doesn't make our souls healthier: social media, video or computer games, time on our phones, or TV shows or movies that make it harder to follow God and find what really feeds our souls.

Ever tried to find shoes or a homework assignment in a messy room? Creating simpler lives is like "cleaning the room," getting rid of things that keep us from finding God easily (see Hebrews 12:1).



Simplicity might feel weird or totally not fun! It's like a workout after months of sitting on the couch: You'll feel good soon, but for a while, it's hard to start. Because our culture tells us more stuff or more activities make us happier or more comfortable.

But really? Those things can leave us not rested or listening to God, less creative or connected to other people. Ugh. Like too many cheese puffs.

Where do you see messages telling you a life with another item, activity, or achievement will make your life better?

(Advertisements, social media, school, friends...)

Which of those might be right—and which might be wrong?

Pick a few ideas you could try this week:

- Pick something to give up (for a period of time) that might be a little hard: meat, social media, makeup, TV, buying something for self, complaining—or sugar, snacks, or dessert one day a week.
- Fill an entire trash bag of things to donate from your room or closet.
- Turn off the TV or music in the car, during meals, or while milling around the house. Plan what TV shows you'll watch; turn off the TV the rest of the time.
- What's one activity this week/month you could give up for a more relaxed schedule?

DAY 06

COMMUNITY: ALMOST HOME

READ



The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Corinthians 12:21-26)

PLAY

1. Cut a plastic straw into 1” pieces.
2. Push a piece of dental floss (six feet or more) through the straw, like beads.
3. Gather minifigures or other small toys, and tape one of them to each piece of straw.
4. Tie one end of the floss to the back of a chair. Set unused minifigures on its seat. Hold the other end of the floss high ... for your own zipline!
5. Help minifigures on the straws fall to be near the other minifigures.³



³ Activity revised from Rachel Miller, Holly Homer, & Jamie Harrington, *The 101 Coolest Simple Science Experiments: Awesome Things to Do with Your Parents, Babysitters, and Other Adults*. Salem, Massachusetts: Page Street Publishing Company (2016).

TALK IT OUT

It's not usually good when you find a minifigure on its own in your house. It could get lost. You can't play with it. It could stab your parents' feet. (*Ow.*)

But this is way more true with people. Even when Adam was in the Garden of Eden *with God*, God said it wasn't good Adam was alone.

In fact, the Bible says Christians need each other so much, it's like they're one big body, with Jesus as the head. Just like your body, we have to work together or things go really wrong.

Can anyone show us what your body parts might look like if they weren't working together?

It's not pretty.

But some of the ways we live keep us from community—from really connecting with people. Maybe we're too busy to really talk or hang out or have people over. Time on screens or social media might make us *feel* connected, but we don't usually talk about things that really matter. (And Jesus showed up with his physical body! See John 1:14).

All of us need “safe place” people: Not just where your body is safe, but who you could tell *anything*, even something scary or secret. You know they'd believe you, care about you, and take care of you.

Who's one person who's a safe place for you?

We also want to *be* safe places for people.

We want to be people others can talk to and know they won't be laughed at, ignored, hurried by, or preached at.

We always tell people the truth, like Jesus did. Yet we accept them and help them. Just like He does (Romans 15:7).

DAY 07

DISCERNMENT: PRACTICE MAKES (MORE) PERFECT

READ



But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:14)

PLAY

Out of kids' sight, prepare a plate of items, then have kids take turns blindfolded. Can they tell the difference between:

- Peanut butter and almond butter?
- Honey and maple syrup?
- Salt and sugar?
- Almond milk and cow's milk?
- Cheerios and Honey Nut Cheerios?
- Ketchup and tomato paste?
- (Make your own, but don't embarrass kids or have them try something gross or too spicy.)

TALK IT OUT

How can you tell the difference between these foods?

(Answer: They've tasted enough of at least one in each pair to know the difference between that and a "fake.")

Who was the best at this?

Picking out what's right and wrong in a situation is called discernment—and it's a really important spiritual life skill. We wish we could easily say, "That's wrong!" Or "That's right!" Or even, "That person's wrong!" and "That person's right!"

But usually, it's not that easy.

Because even in someone we disagree with, there's usually something true or good we can find.

And it works the opposite way, too. Ever done a good thing for the wrong reason? We could

- Obey so we don't get in trouble, but not because we actually want to do what's right.
- Do something good so people think or say nice things about us.
- Be kind or polite when a teacher is watching us and rude when they're not.



Today's verse tells us we get better at discernment—picking apart all the good and bad in a situation—through practice using God's Word in real life. Just like you can't sit down and play an instrument or sport like a pro the first time, discernment takes years of practice.

So let's practice a little. What would you do if...

- A sibling was bragging about how well they could ride a bike, then got in a bike accident?
- Someone ruined your favorite T-shirt?
- A friend told you to stick something tiny in your pocket at the store—without paying?
- You find some cash in the house that doesn't look like it belongs to anyone?
- At Christmas, you get a gift you don't like?

Knowing—and doing—right from wrong takes practice, prayer ... and sometimes someone older to help us know what God's Word says.

Discernment won't just keep you from eating dirt when you want crushed Oreos. It can help you make wise, sensitive decisions the rest of your life.



Adapted from *Permanent Markers: Spiritual Life Skills to Write On Your Kids' Hearts* (Harvest House), © 2021 by Janel Breitenstein.

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