IN THE EXAMPLE VOTIONAL

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Christ invested in twelve men and changed the world. Our desire is to take every opportunity to invest in the next generation and effectively steward a leadership pipeline to ensure our obedience to the Great Commission.

> Ephesians 4:11–13 1 Thessalonians 5:11 2 Timothy 2:2 Hebrews 10:24 1 Peter 4:10

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PURPOSE OF THE INVEST IN THE NEXT CAMPAIGN

When discipleship is happening in homes and every member of our church body is committed to exercising their gifts in service of God's church, Harmony Hill will flourish in her obedience.

Children are a gift from God. Believers are tasked with "bringing up [children] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," and the church has the honor of helping to equip families to see their children awaken to life in Christ.

Harmony Hill has a proven history of investing in our children, as seen in our members' commitment to serve in the Children's Ministry and support constructing a 30,000-square-foot facility that will serve as the training ground for our children. While our historical dedication to the Children's Ministry is worth celebrating, we must resist the temptation to focus on the past and risk missing the need our church body has today. Our new children's facility is nearing completion, and we each need to seek the Lord's will as to how we should commit to investing in the next by leveraging our time and resources to see families strengthened and children grow in knowledge of God's love.

We believe that discipleship starts in the home, with parents being the primary disciplers of their children. Therefore, our goal is to equip church families with resources and relationships to build them up as spiritual leaders in their households. If we want to see disciples made, we must be disciples ourselves. We also desire to see the church lead the Children's Ministry through service and financial commitments to pay for the children's facility that reaches more than 500 children each month during regular Sunday/ Wednesday worship.



GROUNDBREAKING 2019



CONTRUCTION 2021

ESTIMATED

MOVE-IN

023



SQUARE FOOTAGE ROOM TO GROW CAPACITY:

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY OVERVIEW

CHILDREN MINISTRY MISSION & STRATEGY

The Children's Ministry's mission is to see children awaken to life in Christ. We accomplish this by...

- Connecting children to Christ and showing them how to become the champion He created them to be (Luke 2:41–52).
- Equipping children and their families to be people of impact and reach His world with the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 4:12).
- Equipping parents to be the primary faith influencers in their children's lives (Deuteronomy 6:4–9).

Birth–Pre-K is centered on providing a safe, loving environment for babies and toddlers where children build friendships through play, memorize scripture through song, and learn Bible stories from our faithful teachers and through classroom activities.

K5–5th Grade builds on the foundations laid in preschool by incorporating more vibrant worship, mission focuses, and small group discussion. Children begin to build relationships with their teachers, who have the opportunity to impact them as they grow and mature.

Events (Camp, VBS, Retreats) are dynamic opportunities for children to engage in God's word and affirm biblical truths in safe and fun environments while experiencing God's love through the gospel, worship, and relationships.

Mother's Day Out (MDO) helps parents guide their children in God's ways. MDO uses WEE LEARN Curriculum and other developmental activities, encouraging social, physical, emotional, and spiritual growth. Through this program, children interact with friends and teachers, and age-appropriate learning opportunities are developed.

DID YOU

In recent years the Children's Ministry has supported many ministries, collecting more than \$25k+.



Harmony Hill (*) has baptized (*) students & kids in past five years.

> VBS reaches fundraising goal, so Pastor John gets a pie in the face!

KNOW?

In the Children's Ministry, kids are investing in others by:

WRITING THANK YOU NOTES TO PASTORS, STAFF, & COMMUNITY WORKERS.

SERVING IN CHURCH PRODUCTIONS.

LEADING WORSHIP & GREETING AT FAMILY WORSHIP.

SERVING WITH THEIR PARENTS AT COSTON, THE FOOD PANTRY, & OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

CLEANING UP THE CAMPUS.

INVITING FRIENDS & DEMONSTRATING RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR DURING WORSHIP.

SERVING FRIENDS IN THE ACTION MINISTRY.

PACKING "BAGS OF LOVE" FOR CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE.

It takes 135 volunteers (in 25 unique positions) to run the Children's Ministry each week.



The children's ministry reaches an average of 250 children on Sunday mornings & 180 on Wednesday nights!



The 2021 Census reported more than 11.5k children living in Angelina County.



VOLUNTEER ROLES

CONNECTERS

Parent Mentor: Help parents/guardians as they learn to navigate parenthood, and provide prayer, support, and encouragement as they encounter the joys and challenges of raising children. Mentors are experienced parents and mature believers who can provide wisdom and insight to families who are learning to invest in their children.

Action Prayer Partner: Make contact weekly with an assigned family affected by special needs for prayer requests and updates on family life events. Prayer partners can provide meals for families when they have something going on, like surgeries, illnesses, out-of-town appointments, etc.

Host: Help our team make a great first-time impression that leaves kids and families excited to return. Hosts welcome families and assist first-time guests with check-in, walk them to their classroom, and answer any questions.

Follow-up Team: This role is perfect for a friendly person who is familiar with church life and events. Follow-up team members call guests within the first week of attending to welcome them and answer questions they may have about getting connected to the church. They may also check in with members we are missing or who are going through a major life change such as moving, new baby, illness, etc.

Team Photographer: This person's weekly role is to capture pictures of the team engaging with kids/families per your safety protocols.

TEACHERS

Worship Leader: A Children's Ministry worship team is a great way to model for kids how to worship Jesus. The worship leader can be responsible for choosing engaging worship songs, facilitating training and practice for the Kids worship team, and can be mic'd on stage to lead kids through the worship set.

Bible Teacher (PreK or Kids): Using the assigned curriculum as a guide, Bible teachers will present 20-to-30-minute lessons in an engaging and effective way. A Bible teacher should be comfortable in front of a large group of children and adults.

Sunday Teacher (PreK or Kids): Build relationships with children and help them understand and learn to apply biblical truths as you study together. Study the provided curriculum and prepare an age-appropriate lesson. Create an opportunity for children to engage in the lesson and provide opportunities for application in their lives. Lead your classroom in provided activities/crafts that reinforce the Bible story.

Wednesday Teacher (PreK or Kids): Help kids engage in worship, Bible story, and Bible game activities. This role helps children to participate in programming. You also get to connect with children on a deeper level through prayer, discussion questions, games, etc.

Action Teacher: Build relationships with special needs children and help them understand and learn to apply biblical truths as you study together. Study the Bible story, use associated tools (videos, activities, etc.), and lead your classroom in activities and crafts that reinforce the Bible story.

CLASSROOM/MINISTRY SUPPORT

Sunday or Wednesday Helper (PreK or Kids): Support the classroom teacher, assist children with activities, engage with them in playtime, and help them stay focused during Bible study and discussion. Maintain a secure environment throughout programming, and check security stickers at pick-up.

Student Leader (Sunday or Wednesday): Student leaders (age 12–17) help the classroom or Bible teacher in many different ways. These volunteers play an active role in the classroom by engaging kids in the lesson, connecting children with one another, leading activities and discussions, and modeling worship and active listening.

Nursery Caregivers: Caregivers create a loving, caring environment for infants during each worship service. Caregivers also follow the curriculum posted above the changing table each month.

Calm-down Crew: This position helps support kids who may need to calm down outside their age-appropriate environment. (Perhaps they become

overstimulated or are emotional and need a change of scenery.) The calmdown crew can go for walks up and down the hallway or take kids for a ride on a wagon or stroller.

Diaper Crew: Two or three volunteers rotate between classrooms to help facilitate all the diaper changes during services. This crew helps our classroom volunteers keep their focus on the class while reassuring parents that all their children's needs are being met.

Action Buddy: Families with children who have special needs can sometimes struggle to attend church. Depending on the specific challenges, they may struggle to participate in many things that other families take for granted. A "buddy" is an individual trained and equipped to partner oneon-one with a child with special needs. They provide individual support and accommodations that allow the child to integrate into the Children's Ministry environment and participate to their fullest capability.

Action Helper: Support the classroom teacher, assist children with activities, engage with them in playtime, and help them stay focused during Bible study and discussion.

MDO Host: Welcome children and their families on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Help inform parents of upcoming events or direct new families to their classrooms.

MDO Event Volunteer: Assist the MDO staff on program days and/or during classroom parties.

Admin Team: This team can work onsite on Sunday mornings or from their home during the week. Assist the Children's Team with logistics, organization, curriculum, and classroom setup.

Tech Facilitator: The tech facilitator is a great role for someone who has an understanding or is interested and inclined to learn the tech components inside the children's facility.

VOLUNTEER LEADERS

Service Leader: This is a position for a high-capacity volunteer. They oversee the details for one service hour and are the go-to person, serving shoulder-to-shoulder with the Children's Ministry team.

Floater: A floater has the opportunity to be engaged in an incredibly supportive and flexible role. A floater would receive training in each of the children's environments. On the weeks when they are available to serve, they may plug into the environment that would most benefit from their support.

Team Mentor: Think of the team mentor as a coach. This is a leadership position that serves to manage the training of new volunteers to the team— someone who can lead and teach the expectations, policies, and procedures, and answer questions on behalf of the team and church.

Onboarding Team: Work with the team mentor to walk new volunteer candidates through the onboarding process. This team is responsible for handling the details for background checks, training, shadowing, and follow-up. This team makes sure everyone is confident in their new roles, and that volunteers fit into the best serving opportunity.



DEVOTIONAL INTRODUCTION & INSTRUCTIONS

We have provided weekly family devotions to help you build healthy habits of reading and discussing God's Word. This guide is meant as a starting point for your family and is in no way all-encompassing of what family devotional time can be. The following is a simple outline of what family devotion time could look like:

- Begin your devotion time in prayer, thanking God for His Word and asking Him to guide your time of study and discussion.
- Read the focus scripture together and then the devotional content; the devotion may instruct you to read additional verses.
- Each author has outlined steps of obedience and prayer guidance in response to the scripture.

Your family may prefer to incorporate a time of worship, additional questions, or scriptures. Asking your family what they would like to include can help this time be more meaningful and engaging for the whole family.

We have also included an activity to help your family memorize 2 Timothy 2:2 and "Family Challenge" ideas. These family challenges range from taking a selfie to doing an act of kindness and are meant to help our church body celebrate this intentional season of investment. Share your family pictures with #IITNFamilyChallenge. -WEEK]-

MEMORIZE 2 TIMOTHY 2:2.

What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

FAMILY CHALLENGES

Take a family selfie at a children's check-in area and share it on social media using #IITNFamilyChallenge.

Ask each person in your family to share a way someone in your home has invested in them.

Have each person write a thank you card to someone who has been impactful in their life through investing in the next—pastor, teacher, church volunteer, life group leader, mentor, family member, etc.

Do an act of service/kindness for someone in your family. For example...

- Help with their chores or homework.
- Take them for a treat.
- Let them choose dinner or screen time.

A GUARANTEED INVESTMENT

2 Timothy 1:14, 2:1-2

In college, one of my professors showed us what it would look like to invest a small sum of money every month for 25 years into a few low-risk funds. His illustration was astounding, but the results were not guaranteed. As newlyweds, my husband and I decided to try it. Being young and poor, what did we stand to lose? We began to invest a very small amount of money once a month into some low-risk funds, and we did reap the benefits over those 25 years! It wasn't easy, especially as we watched others purchase more "things" than we did, go on more trips, and drink more coffee (that didn't come in a can), and it took discipline, consistency, and time. But looking back, it was worth it.

Investing in money funds provided NO guarantee of return. But what would it look like if we could invest in something in which there was a guarantee? What if we invested the little that we have faithfully and consistently into the next generation?

Paul knew the value of investing in others, as his letters to Timothy so beautifully express. He emphatically exhorts Timothy to "guard the good deposit entrusted to him" and be committed to "entrusting it to faithful men." Paul knew an essential part of being a believer was living it out by investing in the next generation.

Throughout January, we will prayerfully walk through practical ways your family can invest in the next through prayer, discipleship, giving, and more. How will God use your investment to grow His kingdom in 2023?

- Take a few minutes to set aside the phone, turn off the television, and listen well. Ask your children what they learned. Ask open-ended questions and give them time to respond.
- Continue to mentor your children consistently. This can be done in the following ways:
 - Read scripture with your children regularly and discuss life application.
 - Share your testimony with your children.

- Create healthy rhythms in your day to apply the truths in scripture to their daily lives.
- Celebrate answered prayers with your children.
- Share with your children about a few people who have invested spiritually in your life and how that has changed you.
- Take a few minutes and choose a way to serve your church or community with your children this month. Serving together allows you to grow together.
- Have a family member close in prayer. Thank God for all He has done for your family and thank Him for investing in each family member. Ask God to show you ways to invest in the people in your life.



INVESTING STARTS AT HOME

Joshua 24:14–18

What sports team does your household cheer for and follow? How did this team become the official team of your house? Most people begin to follow a team for three primary reasons. They live near the team, went to school at a particular university, or inherited the team from a family member. If I had to guess, I would assume that most people root for the team that their parents did. At some point, each household member must choose whether to root for the family team or find a new one.

This brings us to our devotional passage, Joshua 24:14–18. Joshua had gathered the people of Israel to remind them of God's faithfulness to bring them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land of Canaan. Joshua then instructed each family to make a choice about their worship. The choice was between the pagan gods of their fathers (which preceded the call of Abraham), the pagan gods of the Amorites, or the Lord who had saved them. Joshua made the declaration for his family by saying in verse 15, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Our church family has begun an emphasis called "Invest in the Next." One of the key components of this campaign is to help equip families to invest the gospel into their households. In the same way that those who live in our house know our favorite sports team, we want to make sure that those in our home know who we worship. The fact that you are taking the family devotional challenge is a huge win already!

- Discuss some ways that people know you are fans of your favorite team.
- Joshua recounts all the goodness that God displayed in Israel. How has God demonstrated His goodness to your family?
- Discuss ideas for new ways that you can worship/serve the Lord as a family.
- This passage ends with the statement, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." God's Word is a playbook for our service. As a family, determine a time you will gather around His Word each day.
- Have the head of the household pray for this month of family devotions and for the house to commit to seeking the Lord.



CONSISTENCY IS KEY

2 Timothy 3:14-16; John 15:5

One of the most common New Year resolutions is to lose weight or establish an exercise routine. The problem with exercise is that you don't yield visible results after just one or two sessions at the gym. The truth is that visible results come only after consistent visits to the gym over long periods of time. The benefit of exercise comes only to those who commit to diligent exercise throughout the year.

The same principle is true regarding our union with Jesus and His Word. In our devotional passages for today, we first see Paul writing to the young pastor, Timothy. He reminds Timothy to stay committed to the "sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." These words from Paul echo Jesus's words in John 15, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me, you can do nothing."

As we seek to invest in our families and the next generation, it is imperative that our lives stay connected to Jesus and His Word because it is only then that we can speak "God-breathed" (inspired) words to those whom God has placed in our lives. Only when we abide in Christ will we see the fruit or visible results of our training.

- Discuss other examples of this principle where consistent deposits over a long period yield results. (For example: sports, learning an instrument, cursive writing, relationships, etc.)
- List some of the ways that your family interacts with the Bible regularly. (For example: personal reading, family devotions, attending church, etc.)
- Discuss ways you can help each other stay committed to God's Word.
- Have someone pray that God would bless your family as you commit to abide in Christ by reading and obeying His Word this year.

MEMORIZE 2 TIMOTHY 2:2.

What you have	from	me in	the	presence	of many	witnesses
to		, wl	ho w	rill be able	to	
others also.						

—WEEK 2—

FAMILY CHALLENGES

Take a selfie with a Children's Ministry team member and thank them for all that they do (staff, greeter, Bible teacher, classroom volunteer, etc.) and share it on social media using #IITNFamilyChallenge.

Have everyone in your family choose a church member to pray for each day of this week.

Challenge every family member to say their memory verse out loud every night and share it with someone at church, work, or school.

Do an act of service/kindness for someone in the church. Examples:

- Take a meal to a family who has had a new baby.
- Offer to babysit so parents/guardians can have a night out.
- Surprise them with a gift card for a coffee, meal, or movie night.

INVEST IN THE NEXT

Matthew 19:13-15

I remember a chorus that was sung before the children's sermon each Sunday at my childhood church: "Let the children come to me. Let the children come to me. For such is the kingdom, the kingdom of God. Let the children come to me."

Those six words, "Let the children come to me," didn't mean much to me as a child; they were a signal that it was time to go up front for the children's Bible lesson. It meant I could walk to the very front of the sanctuary, where all the good stuff happened! From the front, I could look out at all the people in the pews. Sometimes the Bible teacher gave us candy, so I might even enjoy a piece of candy at church! Even if I didn't yet understand the purpose of including a children's sermon in worship, I loved attending children's church.

Through the simple act of providing a 5-minute lesson for kids, church leaders communicated two key values that are found in Matthew 19:13–15. First, leaders demonstrated that kids are important in God's kingdom and should be encouraged toward Jesus! Secondly, as seen in verse 14, we are to "leave the children alone." In other words, Jesus encouraged the disciples to get out of the way of the children who were just trying to get to Jesus. Like the church of my childhood, not only do we need to get out of our children's way, but we must also make a way for our children to run to Jesus and have an authentic encounter with Him on their own, so they know for themselves that fullness and meaning in life come only from Him.

Children and students, let the children in these scriptures serve as an example to pursue Christ and not let anything discourage you from also running to Jesus. Parents and caregivers, as we "Invest in the Next," we have a very special role to play as we create space for the next generation to have their own relationship with Jesus. Here are a few steps you can take as a family this week to invest in your children and push them toward Jesus.

STEPS OF OBEDIENCE

• Model prayer for your children by praying for them aloud and invite them to lead family prayer from whatever is on their hearts.

- Set aside time each day, even if only two to five minutes, to read a Bible story or verse as a family.
- Share with your children ways you intentionally invest in the next or how God is leading you to begin investing.
- Ask your children about the volunteers who invest in them in the Children's or Student Ministries and challenge them to consider ways they can invest in the next (at home, school, or church).
- Have a family member close in prayer, asking God to help your family rest in His open invitation for us to know Him. Also, ask God to provide opportunities for your family to invest in others as He has invested in you.

THIS IS THE GOSPEL

John 3:16

Vince Lombardi, the legendary Green Bay Packers coach, began his 1961 training camp by declaring, "Gentlemen, this is a football." He then had the players open their playbooks to page one to begin reviewing the basics of tackling, blocking, etc. The point he was trying to make with his players was that the fundamentals of the game are important to master if a team is going to succeed. His team went on to the championship that year and actually won it five of the next seven years. This story of going back to the basics has been a staple of coach speeches ever since.

As we continue our emphasis on "Invest in the Next," it is equally important to be reminded of the basics of our faith. As J.D. Greear puts it, "the gospel is not the diving board, but the pool we swim in." Those of us in Christ never go beyond the gospel, but we spend our days swimming in it, going deeper in the spring of life where the purest of waters are found. It is only when we allow the gospel to take root in every aspect of our lives that we can effectively invest in others. John 3:16 is one of the most recognized Bible verses in the world. It contains the truth of the gospel at a very basic level, and it is free for all peoples. Church, this is the gospel:

God loved us despite our sin.

The Father sent the Son (Jesus) to pay for our sin on the cross.

Jesus resurrected and defeated sin, death, and hell.

Those who trust the work of Jesus for salvation will receive eternal life.

- Have each person read aloud John 3:16 and put their name in the verse. Example: For God so loved ______ that He gave His one and only Son, that if ______ believes in Him, _____ would not perish but have eternal life.
- As a family, brainstorm a list of Bible verses that teach about the basics of the gospel. For instance, what Bible verses teach us about sin, Jesus, the cross, heaven, etc.?

- What are ways you can live in the forgiveness, life, and freedom of John 3:16?
- Have someone close in prayer by praying for the families at Harmony Hill to know the gospel and to invest it in others.

INVEST IN THE NEXT WORD SEARCH

solution on page 35

C X O G L D A T W C E C C X A W L H P O O T M P P F G N X N Q E Y C K P B O O Q K Y Y R E G S E R V E N V O O Q F D R Y X L R H X O N D G R A T I T U D E S X I N U A U E I B M D X O S O R S T T Y D I N J U W W F H M E F A M I L Y F F Z F Y I W C I N H C P X B D L O M F V E W X W R C W E Z O N R P E | G Y S T T F N P Y N A U T A C T I O N F N I T H S W E L O D L H T B T B D Q C M R M Z W O R S H I P O N A Q R R U F R M X S N T M N K A K A D V O C A T E Z X V E E I C O Q U Q T M B C F Z Z C G I R Z E G K S C S J H Q R Y G X U U V N W P L S I P G A O C Y L R F F O J X V U R G M G S P E Z R J W S EAOPNPNPPOVQAUDWATKVYROFIPOFXV I R X S O H J W H Y K H S X R F S H S I E O W A O F T S Z L CIAPGGŔEBUZOTMMHENOFDTPCINVEST W F Z N Q O Z N S Y M Q U D D G N S H | Q E T F L B T L Y H RHENCOURAGEDQTNEDKIIQUUNKQRTNO M Y P U N N N E C W C E Z L R A N D I S C I P L E S H I P I Q O F W N N L D N D E V O T E E F L V T Y G B Q S R C X G W R Z T E Q S X R P E G Z F F P H A S E A Q H H D I Q L B S I NFPTUYHFAITHCELRFCOSSMOVHUURIH T N K Y S B M X G S V T Q L A Z A Z H T C Y Z Z A | C Y O W H C H A L L E N G E V A Q L H U J L I H R S Y Q O I C C X P K K A Q S B M C A E C A G O M B I I Q Q I Z Z M V X B H B F K R J E U C C I O Z Q E U W K L O F A M P D C O H D V U H E A Q R L V R H U N M L R A S F W A E P G T B R V M Q X R V I R F A A F D I Y L I M U S H W I M Q O B U V P X K D S C O Z OR Y E D N L M S I S I E I J I R K S Y R T M Y C E S H Y H R D U I N I D E T P R T T P A S K Q B B E D Y C B V P X G I Y | O C D C R M X T P S R A E S L H E O B A X Z D O | I C E Q B I V Q N E A O D E W U Y B L B H V W F F T U B S I Z C O AWAKENNIIIUAIDMFCMYYVYIFQIKUDE

INVEST	GRATITUDE	SCRIPTURE	AWAKEN	OUTREACH
DISCIPLESHIP	DEVOS	COMMIT	GOD	ADVOCATE
FAMILY	SERVE	MINISTRY	CHRIST	DEVOTE
CHURCH	CHALLENGE	CHILDREN	FELLOWSHIP	FAST
WORSHIP	ACTION	LIFE	FAITH	ENCOURAGE

GOD'S WORD IS PRECIOUS

Deuteronomy 6:4-8

Do you or have you had a favorite stuffed animal? When my daughter was little, she had a favorite stuffed pig. She slept with Piggy every night, she had to find her Piggy as soon as she woke up, and she took Piggy with us anytime we left the house. As believers, God's Word should be more precious to us than Piggy was to my daughter.

Please read Deuteronomy 6 as a family. What commandment has God given us in this chapter? Look at verses 5–6. God says that we are to love His Word so much that it becomes a part of who we are. When His Word is the foundation of our personal lives, it affects how we operate as individuals and consequently as a family. Through this practice, we will pass on the skills our children need to grow their relationship with God on their own.

How does that work? It starts with reading the Bible as a family and discussing the Word together, modeling for each other how to take a hard passage of scripture, break it down and digest it. Memorizing scripture is a great way to get the Word in us so that it becomes a part of us. Praying together as a family will feel awkward at first, but it is such a valuable part of our walk with God. I encourage you to push past the awkwardness and pray together as a family. If you make these rhythms a part of your family, you will find your relationship with God to be more precious than my daughter's beloved Piggy.

- Ask God how He wants to use you to instill a love for God and His Word in the next generation.
- Work on memorizing 2 Timothy 2:2 as a family.
- Read Deuteronomy 6:5–6 together each morning or evening for a week.
- Share ways you have seen God working in your life and the life of your family. Help one another to see His faithfulness.
- Have a family member close in prayer.

MEMORIZE 2 TIMOTHY 2:2.

What you have	 from	me	in	the	presenc	e of		-
	 to						, who will	l
be able to		al	so.					

 $-WEEK_{3}-$

FAMILY CHALLENGES

Ask each family member to share their personal fasting plan and help one another be accountable during the fast. Example: What meal, food, or activity will they fast from?

Have each family member share how they are committing to Invest in the Next. Examples: serving, giving financially, inviting a friend to service.

Do an act of service/kindness for someone in the community. Examples:

- Rake or mow for a neighbor.
- Take flowers to a nursing home resident.
- Take thank you cards and cookies to firemen, police officers, or nurses.

FASTING TIPS FOR FAMILIES

Biblical fasting is a spiritual discipline that humbles us and centers our attention on God (Daniel 9:3, 17–19; Ezra 8:21–23). Fasting grows us in our knowledge of God and prepares our hearts to respond to Him (Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2–3; Luke 18:9–14). When we fast, we trade or give up something important or needed to gain time with God.

- Biblical fasting must center on God.
- Intentionally help kids understand why you are fasting as a family.
- Fasting is a discipline, not a punishment. We don't fast to make up for past sin or gain God's approval.
- Kids learn more from what they see than what they hear. When teaching the discipline of fasting, know that you can't lead kids to do something that you're not willing to do yourself.
- Don't sell kids short. While the practice and understanding of biblical fasting will be best suited for older kids, teaching and allowing kids to participate in age-appropriate ways will lay foundations for deeper and more meaningful experiences in the future.

PURPOSE OF THIS YEAR'S FAST

To discern how God is leading each member of your family to invest in the next.

BEGINNING THE FAST

When fasting, it is important to choose a method that will not cause discouragement. The purpose is not the "doing" but growing nearer to the Lord through sacrifice and humility. Plan your fast before beginning. Decide whether you will fast from food, an item, or an activity, and determine the amount of time you will devote to prayer and fasting (Matthew 6:16–18; Joel 1:14, 2:12).

PRACTICAL WAYS TO FAST WITH YOUR CHILD

Fasting normally implies refraining from food for some set period of time; however, we can fast from all sorts of things.

- Abstain from sweets As a family, exchange sugar-based foods for healthier choices for a determined time—fruits instead of cookies, water instead of soda, etc.
- Modify play time Use time set aside for play to read a Bible story together and use the truths of the Bible story to pray.
- Digital fast As a family, decide to fast from technology. This could be as simple as not using screens while you are in the car.
- Daniel Fast or partial fast This fast focuses on eating nuts, fruits, and vegetables; it avoids foods from animals such as meat, eggs, and milk.

HALL OF FAITH

Hebrews 11, 12:1–2

Read Hebrews 11 as a family. This chapter in Hebrews is known as the Hall of Faith. At first glance, it would seem like a list of people who had it all together. If you scratch the surface of their story, you will see that they did not have all their ducks in a row. They forgot to put the uniform in the dryer the night before game day, fed their kids chips for breakfast as they ran out the door, and sinned against God and each other. But they also did one thing right—they lived by faith.

I love that all the people in Hebrews 11 are mentioned in this way, "by faith, (fill-in-the-blank)." My hope for us is that as we invest in the next generation, we can have confidence that our children and grandchildren will say, "by faith, they lived, and because of their example, I also live by faith." The three words, "live by faith," is a very simple statement of action with a very difficult assignment. If you have lived a day on this earth, you have experienced that difficulty. We are broken people, investing in broken people, but because of Jesus, we are more than that; we are disciples who make disciples.

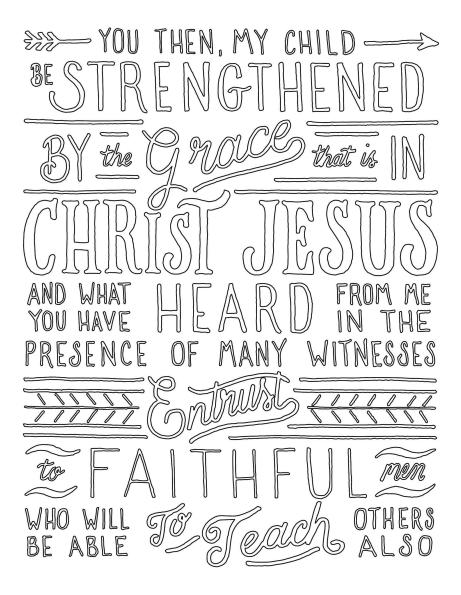
Hebrews 11 is full of examples of heroes in the faith. That is encouraging for us because if they can be considered heroes of the faith, then we can, too! The obvious question now is, how? Hebrews 12:1–2 tells us the actions we are to take if we are to live by faith effectively.

Please read Hebrews 12:1–2. Do you see the game plan in these scriptures? We are to throw off our sin and endure in our calling as we look to Jesus, who is our example and perfecter of our faith. Our children are looking to us. Are we showing them Jesus? Are we being heroes of the faith to them?

- Go to rightnowmedia.com, search for "The Book of Hebrews" by Derwin Gray, and watch Session 7, "Living by Faith."
- Discuss how to guard against sins that so easily weigh you down as a family.

- Discuss how God is calling each of you to invest in the next and how you can encourage one another toward obedience.
- Have a family member close in prayer. Ask God to give your family faith big enough to overcome every obstacle, problem, or challenge. Also, ask God to empower your family to take steps of faith by acting on God's promises, no matter how hopeless a situation might appear.





WHO HAS THE TIME?

Ephesians 5:15–16

President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "What is important is seldom urgent, and what is urgent is seldom important." Today more than ever, there is a battle waging for our time. Ephesians 5:16 urges believers to make the best use of our time because the days are evil. The phrase "making the best use of the time" literally means to redeem the time that God has given us. God wants us to get the full value out of our time here on earth. He wants us to squeeze all the good we can out of every moment of our life. But what does that practically look like in our quest to invest in the next?

The answer is found in the life of Jesus and how He leveraged His time to invest in others. While fully God, Jesus was also fully man, which meant He lived under the constraints of a 24-hour day. He had limited time, just like we do. So how did He "find the time" to do what God had called Him to do? In short, He prioritized the important over the urgent. He did not allow the demands of life to keep Him from investing in those around Him, which was the most important thing on His daily "to-do" list.

We must learn from Christ's example if we desire to truly invest in our family, friends, and a lost world. This world is full of annoyances and hardships, full of urgencies. Are you making the best use of your time? Don't let today's urgencies control the impact you have on others. Strive to look beyond your circumstances and see how God is putting you in the best position to invest in those around you.

- Ask members of your family to share what they feel is the most important task in their day.
- Together, discuss ways that you all might need to adjust your priories in order to truly invest in each other. What would that practically look like?
- Have a family member close in prayer. Ask God to help your family prioritize relationships over tasks. Ask God to give you the ability to leverage your time as Jesus did.

THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

Genesis 15:1–6

Do you know the children's Bible song, "Father Abraham"? I remember singing it as a kid; it felt like the Sunday School version of the Hokey Pokey. It was so confusing to me when we sang, "Father Abraham had many sons, I am one of them, and so are you, so let's all praise the Lord." I remember thinking, "A guy had sons, and so we praise the Lord?" I wish I had understood at 8 years old the magnitude of the blessing we were singing about. To give some context to what I am talking about, please read Genesis 15:1–6 as a family.

Abraham was old and childless. All hope of having a son of his own was long gone, but God made a promise to give him descendants that would outnumber the stars. I cannot imagine what he felt when he stood under the open sky and saw more stars than he could count. How could God keep His promise when Abraham didn't have one child? But verse 6 says that Abraham didn't question God; instead, he believed the Lord. In the face of what seemed impossible, Abraham believed God's promise to him, and God counted it to Abraham as righteousness.

Though Abraham and Sarah tried to fulfill God's promise on their own, they could not. However, after enduring 25 years of waiting, God fulfilled His Word and blessed them with a son, Isaac.

Romans 4 talks about Abraham's faith. I love what verse 20 says, "No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith, and he gave glory to God." This is the faith that Abraham passed on to Isaac, who passed it on to his children, who passed it on to theirs, and they continued to invest in the next generation after them. It is exciting to know that we are in line to pass this great heritage to the next generation.

- Share a time when you trusted God to provide or were surprised by His provision.
- What are practical ways that you can "trust in the hard" when it comes to dealing with tough problems?

- Children, are you paying attention to examples set by those older than you? How are others leading you in your faith?
- Have a family member close in prayer. Ask God to help your family trust in His promises even when encountering difficult situations. Ask God to place people in your life that you can encourage to place their faith in Jesus.

page 25 word search solution

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THE HEART OF THE SITUATION

Matthew 12:34-37

Growing up as children, we all heard the phrase, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." As adults, we have no doubt realized that the opposite of that statement is true. Broken bones can heal, but words can leave scars that last a lifetime—words matter.

Together as a family, read Matthew 12:34–37. Jesus is communicating in this passage that the words we speak are directly tied to the condition of our hearts. He says, "for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." While it is true that no one can see into the heart of someone else, the words a person uses will reveal where their heart is and what they are truly passionate about.

On this journey to discover how we can best invest in the next, it is crucial that we take the time for regular heart checkups along the way. If we prioritize comfort, success, or personal gain, it will affect how we speak to and invest in the people around us. We are always investing something in our family, friends, and acquaintances. The condition of our heart will determine whether we are investing in others, the things of this world, or the things of God.

Think about the words you have spoken today, yesterday, the day before, and the words you will speak later today. Were your words gentle, respectful, pure, and free of gossip? What have those words revealed about your heart? Sometimes we do a good job of controlling our tongues in public, but when we are at home or around those with whom we are closest, we reveal our true character. This is why it is important that we spend time with God and truly get to know Him, how He acts, and how He speaks. Only then will we bring forth speech that is seasoned with salt—speaking words that are gracious, kind, loving, tender, meek, and true, words that are not careless, and words that count.

If we want our relationships in our homes to truly be transformed, it will happen through our words, words that are glorifying and good for others to hear, words that are rooted in the heart of God.

- Ask each family member to consider a moment that they have spoken unhealthy words to another family member this past week.
- When are you most inclined to speak carelessly? What can you do to make it easier to slow down and ask God for help choosing your words wisely?
- Can you remember a time when someone's words changed the course of your life? Have you ever told that person what their words meant to you?
- What's one way you can exercise more self-control in your words today?
- Have a family member close in prayer, asking God to help root your heart in His and help provide the discipline to control your tongue.

GOD WILL LEAD US FORWARD

Joshua 4

One of my family's favorite Christmas traditions is buying a Christmas ornament representing something good that happened in the year. We enjoy thinking through the events of the year and how God brought us through each win and loss we encountered. Every year we get to remember and celebrate what God did in and through our family.

Joshua was the guy God chose to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and finally reaching the edge of the Promised Land, the Israelites realized their fight was not over. Please read Joshua 4 as a family.

This is so exciting! Just as God parted the Red Sea and made a dry road in the ocean for the Israelites to cross over, He did it again and made a dry road in the Jordan River. Verse 13 says that about 40,000 Israelites passed through, ready for battle. Joshua then instructed a leader from each tribe to place a stone at Gilgal "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever" (Joshua 4:24).

We are going to do a little bit of the same thing right now. You have only been going through this challenge to invest in the next for a short time. Still, I have no doubt that you have already seen how God has made roads in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Isaiah 43:19). It is possible that God has brought you right up to the edge of the riverbank. You are just waiting for the waters to part and a clear path to form; you can still look back and remember God's faithfulness that led you to where you are now.

STEPS OF OBEDIENCE

Spend some time discussing and processing the following questions:

- What scriptures were you able to memorize collectively or individually?
- Do you see any new rhythms forming in the structure of your home that will lead to deeper discipleship? If not, what would you like to see happen?
- How has your faith grown during the last few weeks?

- What new things has God revealed to you?
- What steps of obedience have you taken? Are there actions you feel you need to take that you have been too afraid to take?
- Close your time praying as a family, thanking God for all that He has done and will do, asking for courage to take the next step, and thanking Him for making roads in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

FAMILY CHALLENGE

How will each family member commit to Invest in the Next?

MEDIA RESOURCES

AGE-APPROPRIATE BIBLES

<u>Jesus Storybook Bible</u> by Sally Lloyd-Jones (birth–Pre-K) <u>The Gospel Storybook Bible</u> by Marty Machowski (K5–2nd grade) <u>NiRV Adventure Bible</u> (when able to read through 5th grade)

DEVOTIONALS

Old Story New by Marty Machowski

Long Story Short by Marty Machowski

One Year of Dinner Table Devotions by Nancy Guthrie

Exploring the Bible: A Bible Reading Plan for Kids by David Murray

WORSHIP AND BIBLE MEMORY

Seeds Family Worship (most available free on Right Now Media)

Songs for Saplings (Catechism and Bible Memory, also available on Spotify)

PARENTING

Shepherding a Child's Heart by Tedd Tripp

Family Discipleship by Matt Chandler

Leading Your Child to Christ by Marty Machowski

Habits of the Household by Justin Whitmel Earley

Family Discipleship Podcast



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