

RESOURCES *and* SUPPORT

Prayers for Your Child's School Year

Heading back to school can be filled with uncertainty and mixed feelings. And with the growing uncertainty in our world, it is important to cover our families in prayer. We serve a BIG God who spoke the universe into existence with a word, and we can go to God to intercede for our children.

- Pray that your children will know God is with them. He is their strength! "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not be terrified nor dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9 NASB).
- Pray that your children will listen to God's voice and follow in His ways. "Your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left" (Isaiah 30:21 NASB).
- Pray that your children will be confident in Christ and set an example for others. "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:12 NASB).
- Pray that your children would be diligent and hardworking in their academics and in their study of God's Word. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB).
- Pray that your children will do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with the Lord. "He has told you, mortal one, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8 NASB).
- Pray that your children will do good to their teachers, fellow students, school staff, coaches,

teammates, church friends, and your family. "So then, while we have opportunity, let's do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Galatians 6:10 NASB).

- Pray that your children will not choose to do wrong but instead will overcome evil with good. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21 NASB).
- Pray that your children will love God with all their heart, soul, and mind and that they will love others well. "And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF'" (Matthew 22:37-39 NASB).
- Pray that the Lord would complete the work He is doing in your children and that you would be able to trust His timing. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6 NASB).
- Pray that your children will know, through the power of the Holy Spirit, how wide, long, high, and deep is the love of Christ for them. "[I pray] that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:16-19 NASB).

by Help Club for Moms, helpclubformoms.com

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

EARLY CHILDHOOD

TATER TOT'S SEASON OF CHANGE

The time has finally arrived. The little sea turtles are hatching—getting ready to start off on their first adventure.

The tiniest turtle's name is Tater Tot. He climbs from his nest and notices three things. The first is that the sand is really hot on his little flippers. The second is that the sky is very blue and the sun is very bright. And the third is his destination: the gleaming ocean that glints like distant diamonds in the summer sun.

That beautiful ocean—Tater Tot knows he is supposed to go there. He starts to move toward the water but nearly takes a tumble over his flippers. He pauses before trying to move again. And again, he finds it hard to move forward. How is he supposed to get to the ocean with these small flippers? He feels so awkward, and the ocean is so very far away.

Little Tater Tot thinks through his next steps. He could stay in his nest where it's safe. But something tells him that being in the ocean—that change—is a good thing and will help him grow.

But is he ready for this next season of his life?

Tater Tot uses his little flippers to push himself toward the sea. One push. That's all it takes for Tater Tot to know the truth. The change will be worth it. The ocean is where he is supposed to be. He has to get there.

He starts off at a slow pace. His flippers were made to propel him swiftly through the ocean, not the sand. Nevertheless, he keeps moving forward toward his new home.

A shrill squawk above him causes him to panic. He had anticipated the long journey with the heat and the

sand and the distance, but he hadn't seen the hungry seabirds flying overhead. His pace quickens, his flippers moving as fast as they can against the sand. The ocean draws closer, but a bird swoops down, barely missing Tater Tot, and the wind from its wing launches him into a giant mountain of sand.

He tries to move more quickly and pushes himself harder. Getting past the mountain of sand seems impossible, but he keeps moving. The hideous squawks follow him as he nears the ocean.

Soon those squawks diminish as the first small wave crashes over Tater Tot. Relief floods over him as he is gently swept into the ocean's embrace. The squawks are but an echo as Tater Tot feels a change come over him. His flippers help maneuver his tiny body through the water. His eyes adjust to his new surroundings and wonder rushes through him.

The change is beautiful—perfect.

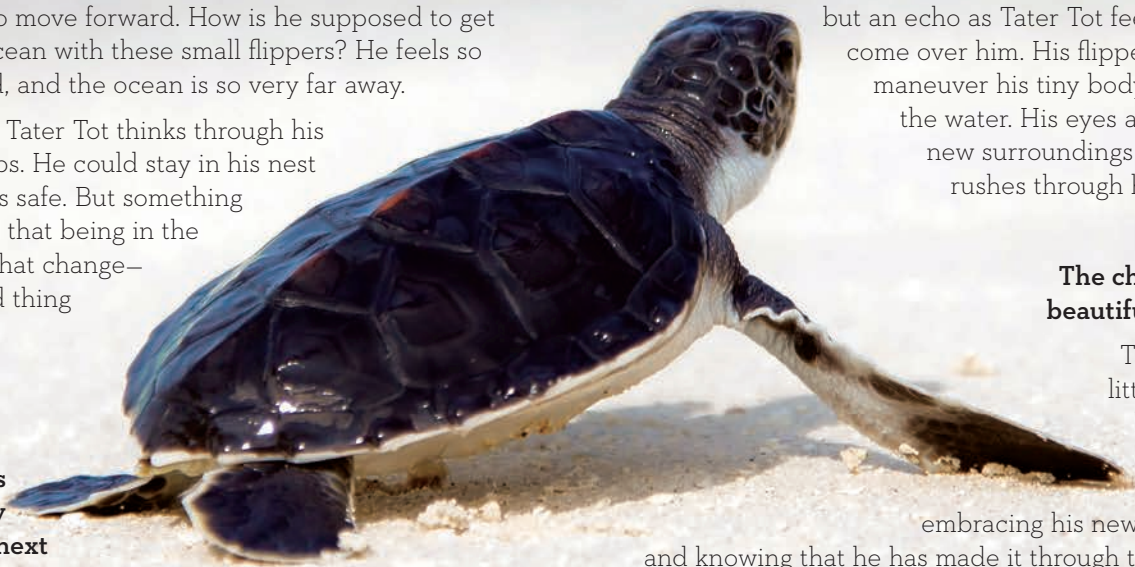
Tater Tot does little flips as he swims in the water,

embracing his new environment and knowing that he has made it through the toughest part of his journey. And little Tater Tot knows this is only the beginning of the adventure.

DISCUSSION

Have you or your family ever gone through a season of change? Was it frightening, exciting, or a little bit of both? How can you surrender to God in a season of change?

by Olivia Bennett, Midweek Curriculum and Ministry Assistant



RESOURCES AND SUPPORT ELEMENTARY

No Junior-Sized Holy Spirit

Kids are capable of amazing things. One of the most profound things we learned as parents a few years ago was the truth that kids aren't given a "junior-sized Holy Spirit." The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells inside them! They can pray and see miracles happen, they can give encouraging, prophetic words, and they can learn to recognize the voice of the Lord. Savannah, my 11 year old, did these exact things on our recent trip to the Middle East. Savy has been joining us on trips since she was 18 months old. She has a tender heart for Jesus and His children all over the world.

My husband and I desire to see all of our kids grow up with a worldview bigger than themselves, to see and appreciate different cultures, and to understand how blessed they really are. The prayer we pray for our kids is that they would have their own encounters with God and for their faith to be made real to them, to see Jesus move, and to understand their own callings and identities.

"Mom, can I please go to **** with you? I just really love the refugees and want to help!" When Savannah asked to join me on this most recent outreach, how could I say no?

Savy and I headed out for two weeks to serve amazing people who had been devastated by war and violence. We helped in a kindergarten, reinforcing the idea that God knows each child's name and each one is special. We encouraged new believers and introduced others to the love and power of Jesus. We also blessed and served refugees.

However, a highlight was connecting with three women from the underground church in a neighboring nation who had come for a few days of intensive training. One of them had her nine-year-old son with her. He delivered a presentation of the gospel he had just learned. It was so simple and so beautiful that I was ready

to get saved all over again! **This little boy is eager for everyone to hear the good news about Jesus.**

I was blown away at the faith of this mom to bring her son to another nation in order to know Jesus more and

to learn how to make Him known in areas of their home nation where there are zero expressions of the church yet. Now as I write this, I'm humbled at the revelation of the similarities of our stories as it pertains to our kids. **We both said yes to releasing our children to the Lord and seeing His will carried out in their lives.** I watched in awe as these two young ones played together with no common language other than smiles. Though their lives are very different, their callings are the same: **to see "the knowledge of the glory of the LORD" to cover the earth "as the waters cover the sea"**

(Habbakuk 2:14). I love how God's kingdom unites us all in a common love and purpose!

So, dear friend reading this, what is it that the Lord has put on the children in your life? What are their strengths and gifts, and how can they use them for the glory of the Lord? It may not be flying halfway around the world to share the gospel (though it very well may be!), but I encourage you to ask God what He'd have them do in their own sphere of influence. How can they love their neighbors? Their friends? Etc. **Help your kids to learn more about the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and then give them an opportunity to use them.** See what happens when they begin to pray for the sick or tell someone an encouraging word. Imagine how much this world will reflect the kingdom of God if the younger generation operates in this way their whole lives! But don't leave it all to them. **Remember, the same Holy Spirit that dwells in them dwells in you too.**

**The specific location has been omitted for security reasons.*

by R. Johnson. R. and her husband, E., have worked with a global missions movement in Colorado Springs since 2011.



New Seasons Mean NEW OPPORTUNITIES

A DEVOTION FOR STUDENTS

So school has begun yet again. How are you feeling about it? The school year can represent different things to different people. For some this is an exciting moment. A moment when you might be eager to connect with friends, get back into a daily routine, and seek new opportunities. For others, this can be a moment of dread. A moment where you feel isolated, alone, and constantly frustrated with the increasing demands of homework, teachers, and social pressure. No matter where you fall on the spectrum, like every other season in our lives, the start of the school year presents an opportunity—an opportunity to behold Jesus. In John 13, Jesus issues a new command to His disciples. He states, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). What would it look like to be known by our love for one another?

About nine years ago, I took a public speaking class at a community college. The professor opened the course by informing us of the types of speeches that we would have to give in the semester, one of which was facing off with another person in a persuasive/argumentative speech. The objective of this speech was to convince the class why one viewpoint was correct and why the opposing viewpoint was incorrect. One of the topics up for debate was “Christianity versus Atheism.” Despite my desire to argue for the side of Christianity, the professor gave the topic to one of my classmates. Arguing for the side of atheism was a smart, funny, kind young man.

On the day of the speech, he came prepared to tell the class why Christianity is a useless belief system made up of hypocritical sinners who are unable to live the “perfect” life. He stated that Christians are always trying to “help” people but really are just judgmental and behave worse than people of most other religions. He then concluded by saying, “If you are a Christian and you really want to help me, give me 20 bucks for gas and quit judging my life!”

The sad part is that people often see Christians like this. Many believers are known NOT for their love and respect but for a critical and judgmental spirit. **However, what the enemy intends for evil God can use for good.** Instead of feeling discouraged, I decided to behold Jesus. After class I chased after the young man and told him that he had prepared well and delivered a well-rehearsed speech. I then proceeded to give him a \$20 bill to help him pay for gas. Then I informed him that he was RIGHT! That Christianity is made up of a bunch of sinners who are unable to live the “perfect” life ... and that’s why we need JESUS! That the gospel is not about a people but a Person. His speech opened the door for me to share the good news with him. He was in shock. He thanked me and headed home.

This year will be filled with many moments. **Moments when you can trust the Lord or lean on your own understanding.** Moments when you can choose to love and respect those whom God has placed in front of you or moments when you can degrade and tear down those around you. The majority will choose the latter, but following Jesus embraces the former.

Read John 13.

SCHOOL YEAR CHALLENGE

I challenge you to decide that you will be known this year by your love and respect for others and not by your hatred or insecurity. **When you do this, you radiate the person and power of Jesus Christ!**

by Tim Shepard, Student Ministry Pastor

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT GRANDPARENTING

SEASONS OF CHANGE IN OUR GRANDCHILDREN

I've only been a grandmother for one year. I allowed my daughter to "name" me because this was my first grandchild. So, ever since my granddaughter's birth in September of 2020, I have been "Mumsie." It may not be the first word my little grand will say, but when she does say it, I'm certain my heart will melt.

Becoming a grandmother has changed my perspective on time. How are my children old enough to have children of their own? How am I old enough to be a grandmother? My mind, heart, and soul all feel as though I'm still in my 20s ... okay, maybe my 30s, if I'm honest. My body—well, that's another thing entirely, but I'm determined to keep up with the next generation no matter what I need to do!

Time is an odd thing because while we know it's passing (and quickly at that), there are aspects that mark its steps. Seasons, for example.

Within the past year, my Carter has lived through her first autumn, with pumpkin patch pictures, and enjoyed her first Thanksgiving with family members. She celebrated her first winter with Christmas at Mumsie and Grandad's home with the entire family in matching PJs (hers were the cutest) and adorable heart-clad outfits and Instagram stickers for Valentine's Day. Spring ushered in her first Easter and countless buggy outings. This summer, she was dedicated to the Lord on Father's Day, and her parents hosted a Fourth of July party in their newly purchased home. What a year!

Each season brought celebrations and growth. She physically grew and changed. She mentally develops each day. And she is growing socially and emotionally and adapting to new people and surroundings.

This year is vivid because it was a year of "firsts," but what about the years and seasons she has ahead of her?

My heart longs for her to know my thoughts, feelings, hopes, and prayers for her at each season of her life as she changes and develops into the woman God created her to be.



**TIME IS PRECIOUS.
SEASONS CHANGE. BUT
LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.**

As someone who is older, I understand the brevity of life. Someone once said, **"The days are long, but the years are short."** How true! I understand that I am forgetful, and I don't want to waste any prayer, thought, or expression of love over the seasons of her changing life.

For Carter's birthday, I have decided to surprise her parents and extended family with a dedicated email address. **I simply went to Gmail.com and registered her a Gmail address.** I will invite her family, including her three living great-grandparents, to write notes to her about how they feel about her, the prayers they are saying for her, and the verses/wisdom that they want to pass along to her. **One day**

she will be able to read these emails and know about the seasons of life and love that preceded her—and also about the silly antics and fun memories we might otherwise forget.

If you are a grandparent reading this, **join me in this practical expression of love** to the next generation in hopes that they will pass on this legacy to the future generations in our absence.

by Dr. Michelle Anthony, Executive Pastor of Families, "Mumsie" to Carter, who celebrates her first birthday in September.



Are You More Like Mary or Martha?

I have a hard time being still. My mind is always thinking and my hands are always moving. There's always more work to be done than there is time in the day. People depend on me at my job. At home, the laundry and dishes pile up. There are always crumbs on the floor and hungry children to feed.

This is why the story of Mary and Martha has always bugged me (Luke 10:38-42). If you aren't familiar with the story, Jesus comes to the home of Mary and Martha. Martha is the one doing all the work and Mary is just sitting by Jesus. Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her. Jesus tells Martha that MARY has chosen what is BETTER!!!!

I read this and think, "What?! Doesn't Jesus understand? Why does He say that Mary is making the better choice? Mary is just SITTING there, not doing anything productive."

I want to say, "Jesus, that's not nice or fair! You wouldn't have LUNCH if it weren't for Martha. The house wouldn't be clean and presentable if it weren't for Martha. How could a person just SIT in this situation? Tell Mary to get up and HELP!"

However, I'm *slowly* beginning to understand why Jesus said Mary made the better choice. She chose **relationships** over tasks. She chose people over projects.

I went from being irritated by this story to being so grateful that I follow a God who invites us to rest. To sit. To listen. Jesus doesn't need us to do anything for him. **He just wants a relationship with us.** Martha was doing so much—working so hard—for Him! Yet Jesus said that Mary chose what was better. Mary was sitting at His feet, listening. Growing in her relationship with Him.

This story always stung because I'm Martha. I choose to get work done when I could be connecting with my kids. My husband comes home from a long day at work and I continue to stay focused on a task (or hand him a list of things to do) rather than just stopping to connect—to make eye contact and ask about his day.

Ouch. Sorry, Ted.

I'm learning that it's good to be still. It's okay for the house to stay messy so I can invest in my kids. The dishes and laundry will eventually get done (or not?), but people are the only things that are eternal. My children need me to be present and engaged. My husband needs my heart and attention. Jesus wants me to sit at His feet so He can refresh my soul.

Mary chose what was better because she chose to stop, listen, and get to know Jesus.

Today I'm choosing to be more like Mary. **I will STOP what I'm doing, look my husband and children in the eyes, LISTEN to them, and TALK with them.** That is the better choice.

Today I choose Jesus. I choose relationships and connection over tasks.

I choose PEOPLE over projects.

Have you found yourself trying to just "get stuff done"? What have you found that helps you overcome this and just BE STILL?

by Kathryn Egly, mom to four busy boys and wife to one handsome husband. They currently call Minnesota home. Kathryn blogs about what she's learning about Jesus, motherhood, marriage, and life at kathrynegly.com.

Step Out of Safe

I felt helplessly expectant listening to the hospital monitors chirp and whine well into the night as my wife endured that awful labor of love. Neither of us wanted to wait another second to meet our baby boy—nine months was more than enough waiting!

At long last, the doctor called out, “Give me one last good push!” There he was, Easton William Windebank. One minute we were a family of two and the next, a family of three. My soul could barely contain my joy. My eyes welled with those once-in-a-lifetime tears, and my love for both son and bride multiplied tenfold. This moment, June 26 at 3:46 a.m., was 15 years in the making for me—I had desired to be a dad since I was 10 years old.

I felt like I was ready. Anticipating this moment for 15 years and vigorously preparing for months on end felt like enough training. (I can hear all the seasoned dads’ chuckles). I learned rather quickly that anticipation and preparation do not add up to qualification.

I’m not going to lie, the anticipation of being a dad was much cleaner cut and the preparation was easier to feel a sense of control over than the real-life transition. However, if I would have stayed in that perfect little space of anticipation or worked diligently to have everything “just right” without ever actually transitioning into the hard, unpredictable reality, I would have missed out on all the beauty of depending on Jesus.

All too often we stay in a place of safe anticipation of what *could* be without ever allowing the dream to transition into reality. Abraham must have exuberantly anticipated the blessings in the land God was leading him to, but he was not content with anticipation alone—he wanted to transition with God from where he was to where God had called him to go. Staying in his homeland was the safer option. Not going on a massive

trek across the wilderness was the more comfortable option. Daydreaming about finding the land and being obedient to God was the controllable option. **However, transitioning with God out into the unsafe unknown, enduring the pain of the trek, and letting go of control along the way was the only option that brought generational blessing.**

Dads, we like to get things right and have our ducks in a row. We like it when everything has its place, and everything is *in* its place. We are not naturally fans of needing to depend on anyone other than ourselves. But if we try to anticipate and prepare for every scenario fatherhood will throw at us, refusing to transition into dependence on Jesus along the way, we will miss out on the blessing He has for us.

Easton is four months old now and all the preparation and forethought in the world could not have prepared me for the joy and excitement of transitioning through life with him. **I don’t want to get stuck in so much anticipation of what life should look like in the coming years that I miss out on depending on Jesus in the coming years.** I don’t want to spend energy on planning how to make Easton’s life predictable. I want to help Easton live a life that leans so heavily on Jesus for direction and guidance that when Jesus transitions him to a new place or calling, he falls over if he doesn’t follow. Our children and our children’s children need us to transition from the mere anticipation of what God could do if we trusted Him into living a life of active dependence on Him for what He is doing every day.

by Chase Windebank, Student Leadership &
Student Ministries Associate Pastor



Seasons of Change

Have you ever found yourself gazing back at what was, unable to accept what is? Military life can be an adventure with unexpected turns along the way—some leading down an exciting path while other turns can feel lonely, lackluster, and painful.

Twenty-six years ago, I married a first lieutenant in the Air Force. My husband and I met in Hawaii, and that was our first station as a military couple. Newly married and stationed in a beautiful tropical paradise, military life was not as hard as some say, so I thought.

It didn't take long before I started to feel the ebbs and flows of military life when we transitioned to a new location. I remember the struggle of coming to terms with being a stay-at-home mom. Our new station was so different from Hawaii. It was harder to make friends. With two children under the age of three and my husband away for work so often, life was not an adventure anymore. Was I the only one struggling with this transition? Complaints and disrespect flowed out of me quickly. With a growing bad attitude, life at home became tense. I was not happy.

Oftentimes God uses the pain of life situations to grow us spiritually. God began to show me the idols I had erected in my heart. I had placed my worth and value in my job, my friends, and my comforts in life. Life felt out of control because I was trying to hold on to those idols to make me happy. I was not loving and respectful to my husband because I was so self focused. Andrew Arndt, in his book *All Flame*, wrote, "God will strip us of our idols, burn away sin, and break our attachments to lesser things, in order to reshape our wayward love so that it finally rises into the Love that he is." I had choices to make.

I remember a particular season where I found myself depressed. It didn't help that our previous assignment had been one of the best experiences in our military journey. I was not looking forward to spending the next four years at this new place. I began to look back.

One day, I lamented to a guest speaker at our church, hoping to answer why I could not find joy and purpose in this new season. She said, "Don't be like Lot's wife. You are paralyzed." If you are not familiar with the story of Lot's wife, you can read it in Genesis 19.

I heard the Holy Spirit loud and clear through that comment. **I was paralyzed with discontentment and disappointment because I kept looking back at what was.** Don't get me wrong. It can be good to look back. God instructs us to remember and celebrate His goodness and to give thanks. However, if we are not careful, our hearts can be weighed down with fear, anxiety, disappointment, and discontentment when current circumstances are not ideal. **Proverbs 4:23 reminds us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."** For me, it was a heart issue. I had allowed my less-than-ideal circumstances to rob me of joy, peace, and purpose. I could not see the new opportunities God had placed before me, which affected how I treated my loved ones. Would I remain paralyzed in transition or move forward?

All of us will face transitions in life. **During seasons of change, we must pay attention to our hearts.** For an environment of love and respect to be cultivated in our homes, we must yield our emotions, attitudes, and desires to God. Navigating through changes with a surrendered heart that trusts the Lord will create opportunities for God to show Himself strong on our behalf. We get to experience His grace and power even when it's hard; we learn to grow up in Christ and to discover how much He truly loves us. God is at work in and through every transition. **New opportunities and God moments await. It's time to move forward!**

by Evie Swart, Director of Midweek

Practical Advice for Couples

For the first half of our marriage, my husband was blessed to have a job that allowed him to be home for dinner in the evening and attend the children's sporting events on the weekend. But life has a funny way of changing quickly without much time to adjust or plan. After years of a consistent rhythm, my husband took a job that required frequent travel. Our life ... my life ... suddenly looked different, and I must admit that I did not handle the change well at first. But after a few bumps and bruises, my husband and I learned a thing or two about navigating change while treating each other with love and respect.

Most couples experience a wide range of changes over the years of marriage. No one is immune to it. Whether you have been married for one month, a few years, or more than a decade, you can expect curves ahead. Thankfully, some changes make life exciting! We're having a baby! We bought a new house! But all changes require meeting them head-on and not making assumptions about how the other person is experiencing the change.

PRIORITIZE COMMUNICATION

Obviously, communication is important in all marriage situations. It seems in times of change, it is harder to have healthy communication. **All sorts of emotions can cloud the way we communicate with one another.** And as time in the relationship goes on, things get comfortable and we often neglect communication with our partner. We assume our spouse knows exactly what we are thinking and feeling. They don't! We have to prioritize and fight for healthy communication during these seasons. Carve out a consistent, scheduled time for communication to talk through schedules, feelings, and thoughts and to pray with one another. Share your thoughts, but also equally listen to your partner's needs. This time will help keep you united as you navigate seasons of uncertainty.

MAKE TIME FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Life is filled with seasons where it is easier to spend time with your spouse and seasons where you and your spouse see each other for the first time that day as your head hits the pillow. Career changes, new babies, club sports, or a move to a new town can make life feel hurried and busy, and relationships can get lost or neglected. **And it is easy to find yourself simply going through the motions without remembering to love your spouse well.** But, it is crucial to care for your relationship, to date one another and laugh with one another. No matter how long you have been together, make time for a weeknight dinner, evening walk, bike ride, reading a book together, or back massages before bed. Never stop dating one another.

DO THE PRACTICAL STEPS

Take care of your partner and yourself in seasons of change. What brings you rest? What brings you joy? How can you care for your marriage physically, spiritually, emotionally, and financially? Are you getting enough sleep? Whatever self-care looks like for you and your spouse, choose to focus on those things. Seek out mentors and friends that can encourage and support you during this season. And above all else, pray with one another. (See Philippians 4:6-7.)

Finally, counseling is always a great option. Counseling is a useful tool in developing healthy communication skills, processing emotions and feelings, and working through decisions together. For some, there has been a negative stigma surrounding counseling that deters couples from seeking help. Seeking counseling does not mean that your marriage is doomed or is beyond help. It is quite the opposite; counseling is a great way to pour into the health of your marriage.

by Holly Newman, Pastor of Parents and Families

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

TOUGH TOPICS

A Beautiful Approach to a Tough Conversation

TOUGH TOPICS ARE EXACTLY THAT: TOUGH.

When things get tough in your family, what can you say to the kids? Should you talk about it at all? Do you tell everything you know or hold back a little information? What about illness, dying, and death? What about long stays in the hospital? Did God cause the bad things to happen? Why do some people get healed and some don't?

These are tough topics. Each family will handle the discussion (or lack of discussion) differently, but there are a few things we can suggest.

Yes, talk about it. Each person has a capacity for what they can handle, and the age and personality of the child has a lot to do with that. With a very little person, you can talk about how Grandma or Cousin is in the hospital and is very sick. "Let's pray that she feels Jesus very near." And then actually pray that short sincere prayer. As the child grows, you can say something similar. You should be honest and age appropriate.

What if it is your own child going through an extended illness? You know your child and what he needs. Ask for help. Use the correct terminology for illnesses and disabilities. Allow your child to make as many decisions for himself as possible. Let him be as active and involved as possible. Talk about the ramifications for his future. Grieve with him. Talk about how Jesus never leaves or forsakes him. Give him hope—in healing, in heaven, in heartache. Find something to laugh about. Laughing can heal and bond. My son imitated the noises of the machines in the PCICU and created silly songs to go with the sounds to cut some stress.

Share your burdens with friends and family. Let them know what they can do to help. Give them specific prayer requests. Share God's answers with them. It is natural to think you don't want to worry the grandparents and other family members but they often want to know the details so they can participate and pray. They love you so much. Accept help graciously or have the hard conversation about how their help may be hurting. Start any conversation with love and acceptance of the other person. Don't steer away from tough topics. Dive in with prayer. Think through what you need and if this is the best time for the conversation. Ask God. He will help you.

I have learned some of this recently as my two-week-old grandson went into cardiac arrest and was hospitalized in the Pediatric Cardiac Intensive Care Unit for four weeks. There are easier cases and more difficult cases, but it was a very scary time for our family. It was life or death for a few weeks. We shared all the news and updates with family and friends for prayers. I was talking to my daughter, Liam's aunt, when she interrupted with, "Phillip would like to talk to you, Grandma." Of course, I wanted to talk to my grandboy, Phillip—Liam's five-year-old cousin. Phillip said in his sweet voice, "Grandma, is baby Liam getting better?" At that point things still looked rough, but instead of hiding the pain and fear, I answered, "Well, Phillip, Liam is not better yet. Let's keep praying for him."

Just a simple connection but short and honest and age appropriate. We are so thankful that Liam did get better and is moving quickly down the road to complete recovery.

I have other friends who have beautiful babies who are completely healed in heaven. Such a tough topic if we're honest. We want them to be healed on earth. I asked my friend how to pray for very sick kiddos. She answered that we don't always get the healing we expect and most desire—complete healing here on earth. She explained to me that we can pray, knowing God will answer. Requests such as: kind doctors and other staff, parents to know what questions to ask, and that they all would feel God's presence. You can discuss these tough topics with your kids and be honest with them. **You can ask God the tough questions.** You can tell God you don't understand. You can ask God to let you learn something new about His character and love through this situation.

Tough topics are exactly that: tough. God wants the best for you. With His help, you can move closer to Him and each other by being honest and upfront during the hard times.

*by Mindy Harrington, Woodmen Valley Early Childhood Director.
Mindy loves a good conversation, a good cup of hot chocolate, and time in her hammock.*