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M O N T H L Y

ENVIRONMENT

faith community unity

*God's family
cares for
each other
and worships
God together.*

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How to Use this Resource

It's as easy as 1 ... 2 ... 3 ...

1 Start by deciding on a day and time that works well for your entire family. It can be an evening, afternoon, or morning. Just commit to building this time into your family's natural rhythm. It's usually best to build this time around a meal!

2 Look through the HomeFront Monthly and see what stands out. Choose one or two experiences you would like to incorporate into your family times this week. Don't feel burdened to complete all the activities at once, but carefully select which ones will fit your family best. Each issue provides more than enough experiences to last you throughout the month.

3 Remember to **HAVE FUN!** Strive to make each gathering unique to your own family as you enjoy spending time with God and each other.



Editor's Note

There she stood—all decked out in her Sunday best, a beautiful yellow dress with a matching hat. In her hand was a hymnal, and I loved standing next to her in church while we sang.

I am so fortunate to have such clear memories of worshipping with my mom in church. With the exception of our yearly vacations, I can never recall missing a church service on the weekends while growing up. This meant that a community of believers always surrounded us. Potlucks, the missionary quilt society, youth groups, and ice cream socials filled my childhood.

When my mom passed away, it was our faith community that brought us meals and helped prepare her funeral service. When my sister got married, that same group of believers stepped in with support and celebrated with us. And it was that community that joined my family in pleading with God to bring me back on a corrected path when I rebelled and chose to go my own way.

God did not create us to live as islands. We were created to live in community to support and encourage one another. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Our hope is that this issue of HomeFront Monthly will give you and your family opportunities to engage with your faith community. And it is our desire that you understand the significant value God places on families caring for each other, encouraging one another, and worshipping Him together. ☺

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Debbie Guinn".

DEBBIE GUINN | EDITOR
the Tru Team | Costa Mesa, CA

ENVIRONMENT

FAITH COMMUNITY

God designed us to live in community and to experience Him in ways that can only happen when we are in proximity to one another. The FAITH COMMUNITY environment serves to create, equip, and disciple parents to celebrate God's faithfulness and to bring a richness of worship through tradition and practices, which offer children an identity.

In this issue, we explore the environment of FAITH COMMUNITY. The Bible refers to this community in many ways: the body of Christ, the believers, and those who walk in the faith. Since God designed us to live in community, there are experiences with Him that can only be had within the context of relationships with others. In those relationships, we experience aspects of God's characteristics that are new to us, we receive a fuller picture of who we are, we get new pictures of what our Father's love looks like, and we learn to embrace our true identity in Christ as it is affirmed and called out by those who love us. May you and your family be blessed by exploring God together, and may you be encouraged to participate in greater ways in the faith community found around you. ☺



MICHELLE ANTHONY | FAMILY MINISTRY ARCHITECT
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VERSE OF THE MONTH

Memorizing Scripture can be an incredible practice to engage in as a family. But words in and of themselves will not necessarily transform us; it is God's Spirit in these words that transforms. We come to know God more when we are willing to open our hearts and receive His Holy Spirit's teaching. Have fun with these verses and think of creative ways to invite your family to open up to God as they commit these verses to memory.

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

Ephesians 4:32

"Cheer each other up with the hope you have."

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIRV)

FAMILY FOOD TIME

Recipe: *Sharing a Potluck Meal*

The key to choosing a winning potluck recipe is selecting a dish that transports well, tastes great after sitting on a buffet table for a while, and has widespread appeal.

It's a good idea to avoid choosing recipes that require ingredients that tend to be an acquired taste or that many people are allergic to. No matter what you decide to prepare for your next potluck dinner, the most important thing to remember is that the purpose of getting together with close friends or family and great food is to have a terrific time.

Slow cooker recipes are a great choice for potluck meals, as it's easy to keep hot foods hot when transported in and served from a slow cooker. This recipe for baked beans will be a hit at your next potluck. 🍴

Potluck Baked Beans (SERVES 8)

Prep Time: 20 min. *Cook Time:* 6 hr.

Ingredients

- ½ lb. bacon
- 1 sm. onion, chopped
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup white sugar
- ½ tsp. dry mustard
- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 can pork and beans
- 1 can butter beans, drained
- 1 can kidney beans

Get together with your **FAITH COMMUNITY** and share a meal!



Directions

- Fry bacon till crisp; remove from pan and crumble.
- Brown onion in bacon grease; drain.
- Mix all ingredients in a large bowl.
- Place in slow cooker on low for 6 hours.
- Remove lid for the last hour, and switch to high to thicken. 🍴

COOK WITH YOUR KIDS

IF YOU ARE CAUGHT BETWEEN FINDING TIME TO PREPARE MEALS AND SPENDING QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR CHILDREN, TRY COOKING WITH THEM. CHILDREN ENJOY HELPING IN THE KITCHEN AND OFTEN ARE MORE WILLING TO EAT FOODS THEY HELP PREPARE. IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU GIVE KITCHEN TASKS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR CHILD'S AGE.

2 YEAR OLDS: CAN BRING INGREDIENTS FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER, WIPE TABLETOPS, TEAR LETTUCE OR GREENS, BREAK CAULIFLOWER, PLAY WITH UTENSILS.

3 YEAR OLDS: CAN DO ALL THAT 2 YEAR OLDS CAN, PLUS ... WRAP POTATOES IN FOIL FOR BAKING, POUR LIQUIDS, MIX INGREDIENTS, SHAKE LIQUIDS IN A COVERED CONTAINER, SPREAD SOFT SPREADS, PLACE THINGS IN THE TRASH.

4 YEAR OLDS: CAN DO ALL THAT 2 AND 3 YEAR OLDS CAN, PLUS ... FORM ROUND SHAPES WITH DOUGH, CUT PARSLEY OR GREEN ONIONS WITH DULL SCISSORS, MASH BANANAS WITH A FORK, SET THE TABLE.

5 TO 6 YEAR OLDS: CAN DO ALL THAT 2, 3, AND 4 YEAR OLDS CAN, PLUS ... MEASURE INGREDIENTS, CUT WITH A BLUNT KNIFE, USE AN EGGBEATER.

ELEMENTARY AGE: CAN DO ALL THAT THE PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN CAN, PLUS ... ASSEMBLE SANDWICHES, READ RECIPE DIRECTIONS, ROLL DOUGH, GRATE CHEESE, CRACK AND BEAT EGGS, AND MORE.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL: INVOLVE THEM IN MEAL PLANNING, SHOPPING, AND PREPARING THE MEAL FOR YOUR FAMILY NIGHT.

by Stacy Igarashi

FAMILY FOOD TIME CONVERSATION STARTERS

To the Left, To the Left

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). When I was a kid, I have to honestly say that thinking about nice things to say to my sister was a foreign concept. So this would have been a stretching activity for me.

And let's be honest, sometimes the people we love the most are the ones we forget to tell. At first this may be a little difficult for your kids, if they are unaccustomed to giving and receiving encouraging words, but it's a worthy exercise. It's important that we continue to instill Godly values from an early age—not only in your own family, but also in the family of God.

As your family sits around the dinner table, explain that each family member will share 3–5 things they like about the person on their left.

Encourage them to come up with specific qualities they like about each family member (not just "nice," or "cool").

"IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE CONTINUE TO INSTILL GODLY VALUES IN OTHERS FROM AN EARLY AGE."

by Angelina Pavone

GAME TIME

YOUNGER GAMES

Family Fort

What child (or adult, for that matter) does not love to build a fort?

As a child, my parents could see my creative expression through the materials I would gather to construct my imaginary castle-like forts.

My forts were often made out of old quilts, nightgowns, and umbrellas. I would then drape my materials over furniture, chairs, or trees. In my fort, I would escape to another place, a safe place, where life felt a little more exciting.

This could be a great time to have some family fun together. Build a family fort, indoors or outdoors, giving everyone two to three minutes to gather one to three items from around the house to contribute to the building of the fort.

Once it is constructed, huddle up inside your safe abode, and read the God's Word section of this HomeFront Monthly together. 📖



by Rae Lynn Lott

GAME TIME

OLDER GAMES

Family Game Night

Game nights are always a blast, and they are even better when you add different families to the mix.

One of my favorite game night memories happened when I was in the fourth grade, and my dad and I headed over to my friend's house for a game of Charades with her family. It was fun, interactive, and a great way for me to connect with my dad and another family.

Here is your challenge for this family experience: Invite another family over for family game night. We recommend playing games that everyone knows like Charades or Pictionary—they require no preparation and allow for group interaction. They are also appropriate for various ages. Expect a lot of laughter and fun as your family experiences game night while connecting with others in your community. 📖

TAKE THE CHALLENGE!
INVITE ANOTHER FAMILY OVER
FOR GAME NIGHT!

STORYTELLING

When my kids made the decision to be baptized, we wanted to share the experience with others who had been participants and eyewitnesses in their lives. For each of their celebrations, we let them be the ones to assemble the guest list. At my son's baptism celebration, we had many friends and neighbors attend who did not know Jesus personally or belong to a faith community.

We gathered at the beach for my son's baptism in the ocean. After the baptism, we gathered to bless him and speak words of encouragement over him. Some shared how they had seen God working in his life, or had observed special gifts God had given him in order to bless others. Some read verses of encouragement, and others prayed for him. It was a meaningful day for my son to hear so many strengthening words by those who knew and loved him. When it was finished, his grandfather closed in a prayer of blessing.

As we started to gather things together for dinner (our form of a "feast"), one of my neighbors came up to me with tears in her eyes. The number of people from multiple generations who had gathered together to celebrate and support my son overwhelmed her. She commented that it was encouraging to witness such a strong spiritual support system guiding a boy

of his age. With that, she confessed that she wanted this for her three boys. As we shared, her heart was awakened to the power of God's faith community. Soon after, she attended church with us, and she and her children came to faith in Christ. This friend of mine remains a strong follower of Christ.

I'm often struck by how we as believers try to "package" our faith in ways that might make those not familiar with it feel as if it is "just like their world," only better. We may water it down or compromise our beliefs. Yet that day, I realized how much my friends and my children's friends are hungering for something other than what they already have. When we invite them into the faith community in benevolent and gracious ways, they have the privilege to taste and see how good our God is—and how good His community of refuge and celebration is for our souls. *(Excerpt from Spiritual Parenting, by Michelle Anthony.)*

Ask your children if they know who is part of your family's faith community. Then share a story with your children about how your life has been impacted by your faith community. Maybe friends brought meals when your children were born, or helped by praying for your family when there was a special need. The possibilities are endless. After sharing, pray together thanking God for the friends and family He has placed in your lives.

This week, tell your kids the story about how you came to faith. Who told you about Christ? What were the circumstances that allowed Christ to capture your heart? Share with them how you came to know Him. ☺



There's just something about hearing a good story. **Stories have the ability to capture us in ways that are almost unexplainable.** They draw us in. They inspire us. A good story can actually change a life. God's true story is one of them.

GOD'S WORD

I love being a part of things. That feeling of being connected to other people and feeling like I'm part of the team ... there's just not much better than that! In fact, I think one of the greatest parts of being a Christian is knowing that I'm not in this alone.

Not only is God with me in everything I do and say, but the faith community that He's provided is here to support and encourage me on the journey. Of course, we have non-Christian friends, co-workers, and fellow students, too, but the uniting power of the Holy Spirit that's found within each Christ follower is an undeniable force that can take our relationships to a deeper level.

HEAR IT

JESUS HEALS A PARALYTIC

Read Mark 2:1–12 together as a family. After reading this portion of The Big God Story, stretch out on the floor, close your eyes, and put yourself in the place of the paralyzed man. You can't walk. You can't move by yourself. But you know that Jesus is nearby ... in your very own town ... and that if you could just meet Him, you might be healed. How would this make you feel? Would you be frustrated? Upset? Impatient?

Suddenly, four friends show up, put you on a mat, and begin to carry you to where Jesus is. When you arrive, you find that it is so crowded there is no room left for anyone else to enter the house. You're not physically able to do anything about this. You can't push through the crowd or crawl underneath it. But, just as the reality of the situation begins to set in, your friends start to lift you up onto the roof!

They "heave," they "ho," and somehow get you up on top of the house. Perhaps you're feeling a bit embarrassed now. (I mean, you are on top of someone else's home!) And, now that you're there ... what now? Your friends are one step ahead of you though as they begin to tear a hole in the roof of this house! How do you picture the people inside reacting when a hole suddenly appears in the roof over their heads? Then there you are being lowered down on your mat. What might they be thinking? What might Jesus be thinking? How might you be feeling as you see the looks on their faces?

As you reach the ground, you prepare yourself for the worst. Will the mob become angry? Will the man who owns the house yell? Will Jesus be disappointed? And then you see Jesus' face. Jesus isn't angry that you tore a hole in the roof. He isn't upset that you

interrupted His preaching. No. Instead, He says He's going to reward you and your friends for your faith! In front of everyone, He forgives you of your sin and heals you of your condition. You aren't carried home that day. You walk home! Your life will never be the same.

What was it that united those four friends in such a way that they would do something so bold and risky for their friend? It was their faith. Those five people (the four friends and the paralyzed man) were joined together by their faith. They had faith that Jesus could heal their friend, and they acted on that faith in community. Because of their little faith community, the four took a chance for the one, and Jesus rewarded them all.

DO IT

Over and over throughout Scripture, we find God calling His people together in community. We call this the faith community, and we know that God works powerfully through it. As a family, take a few minutes and ask the following questions.

- **How are we connected to the faith community?**
- **Do we experience the support and encouragement that the faith community exists to provide? If not, why?**
- **Do we provide support and encouragement for others (individuals or families) as a part of the faith community?**
- **How can we be more intentional about connecting with the faith community?**
- **How can our family provide bridges for others to be connected to the faith community?**
- **What did you come up with? What are you going to do about it?**

If you're feeling disconnected from the faith community, come up with a family plan to make some changes. Don't overdo it ... rather think about what small steps your family can take this month to either become more connected to the faith community, or bring the encouragement and support of the faith community to others who might not feel connected.

☺

WORSHIP & CREATE

Being part of a faith community is rewarding in many ways. There is comfort in knowing that we have a shared belief among each other.

There is a sense of security that comes with knowing God will use others to encourage and support us. There is also a sense of being on a team, with one common head coach. This month, worship together in a posture of gratitude to God, recognizing the different areas of support you have as a family (with each other, or with others outside your home).

Come together as a family and ask yourselves, "Who, within our faith community, has God intentionally placed in our lives as a support for us? Is this a specific person? Could it be an entire family?"

After you've identified these individuals, **take time to pray corporately, thanking God** for your place in the faith community, and for others who stand beside you.

WE OFTEN THINK OF WORSHIP AS SINGING, BUT WE CAN WORSHIP GOD IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS: PRAYER, SILENCE, ART, DANCE, GIVING, SHARING, AND THANKSGIVING—JUST TO NAME A FEW. MAKE PLANS FOR YOUR FAMILY WORSHIP TIME, BUT PREPARE YOURSELF TO HOLD THESE PLANS LOOSELY IF THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS YOU IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION.



Now it's time to CREATE!

Take time now as a family to worship God by honoring those He's placed in your life. Here are some creative ways you can honor this individual or family.

- Create a spontaneous invitation to dinner, or offer to make dinner and take it to them.
- Create a card with encouraging words or thoughts.
- Create a gratitude video of reasons why your family is appreciative.

Once you've decided on an idea, set a deadline and make it happen! **Reach out to your faith community, and show others you notice them, are grateful for them, and are proud to be in community together.** 🍷

CREATE IS A TIME TO ENGAGE YOUR FAMILY IN A **COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE** TO HEARING GOD'S TRUTH.

TRADITIONS

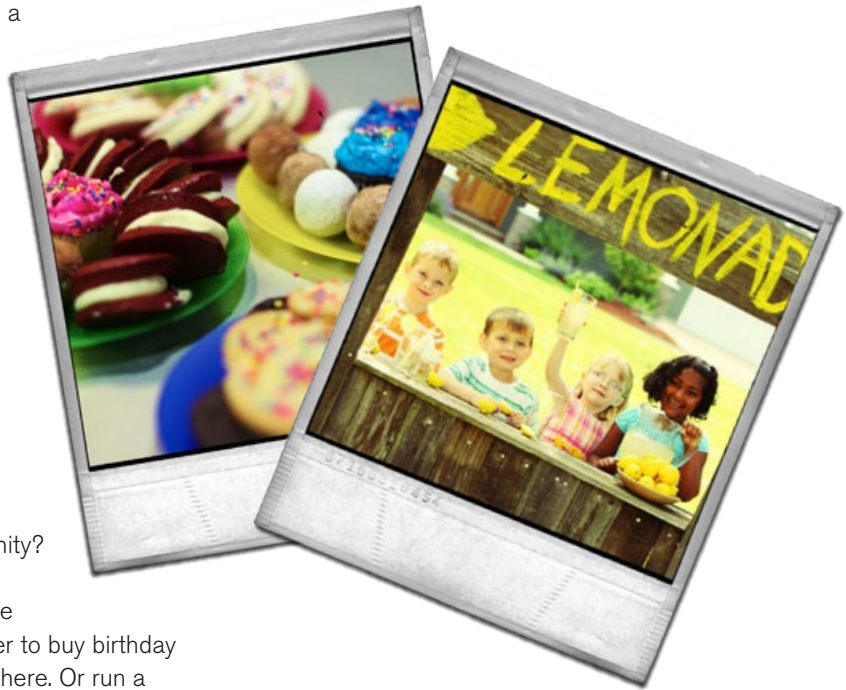
Choose Your Own Mission

I spoke with a group of friends about family traditions. We were commenting that sometimes traditions seem silly and do not appear to have well-thought-out significance.

However, we were struck with how important identity-giving traditions are to a community because they bond and unite us in ways we cannot explain. We asked the question: How could we use our resources to help the faith community at large, beyond our own family unit?

What if your family had a garage sale, or your kids had a lemonade stand, or a bake sale? Then, what if you used your profits to bless someone in your faith community?

For instance, your family could hold a garage sale and give the money earned to a local shelter to buy birthday gifts for the children who live there. Or run a lemonade stand to raise money for a specific mission at your church. One of the important things about traditions is that everyone participates, so make sure that every family member gets the opportunity to suggest ideas about how to bless the faith community with this gift. ☺



A TRADITION IS THE HANDING DOWN OF STATEMENTS, BELIEFS, LEGENDS, OR CUSTOMS FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. **WHAT TRADITIONS ARE IN PLACE FOR YOUR FAMILY? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO PASS DOWN TO THE NEXT GENERATION?** IT IS ALWAYS FUN TO CREATE NEW TRADITIONS WITH EACH GENERATION.

PRAYER

Prayer Chain

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them ... This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1–4 NLT)

In light of this Scripture, we are encouraged to pray for others and thank God for them in our lives. Here are a few ideas you can use for a unique, active, prayer experience.

Supplies: paper, glue sticks or a stapler, permanent markers

1. Spend a few minutes together making a list of the people you would like to pray or thank God for. Then cut strips of construction paper, approximately two inches wide by eight inches long, one for each person on your list. Write the name of someone from your list on a strip of paper.
2. Pray for that person, thanking God for whatever part she plays in your lives.
3. Glue or staple the paper to form a ring. Repeat with other people from your list, linking the papers together to form a chain.
4. Add to your chain throughout the coming days and weeks as God brings new people or requests to your family's attention. Watch your prayer chain grow! 🙏

Pray for that person, thanking God for whatever part she plays in your lives.



by Mike Kenyon

MARRIAGE

My wife and I love to run. This healthy break from our daily responsibilities gives us consistent, uninterrupted time together. We've made a commitment to hold each other accountable to the running goals we've set.

We push one another when either one wants to quit, and we pace ourselves in a way that we're able to finish, preferably at the same time! It may come then as little surprise that one of our favorite Bible verses is from 1 Corinthians 9:24, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize."

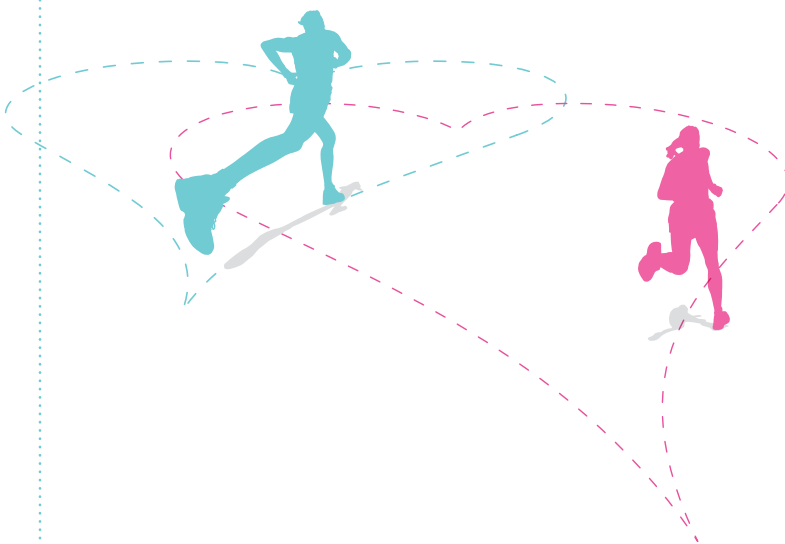
Just as runners set goals and develop habits to perform at an optimal level, it's crucial that husbands and wives do the same. The ultimate goal is to have a marriage that is healthy, maturing, and God honoring. After all, marriage isn't a sprint but a marathon. Pursuing our spouse and marrying them is not the finish line, it's the starting line.

"Take the challenge this month and call another couple from your faith community to invite them to dinner."

There are a variety of ways to develop our marriages. The one that surprised us the most is the impact of being in a couples' small group. It is so refreshing to have this time with other couples that are in the same season of life as we are. We meet weekly to update each other on our lives and pray for one another. We've learned to come expectant, believing that God will meet us when we gather. At times we laugh, other times we cry. We like being together. Each week as we drive home, my wife and I are relieved to know that other couples have the same struggles we do. We leave each week feeling supported and loved. Being in a group with other couples has helped us become better listeners when dealing with conflict and to be intentional about raising spiritually healthy children.

The Bible encourages us in Galatians 6:2 to "carry each other's burdens," and Romans 12:15 says to "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." The mutual investment each couple makes significantly impacts all of our marriages. We would feel lost without it.

If you're not meeting with a small group of couples on a regular basis, consider joining or starting one. You can start with something simple. Take the challenge this month and call another couple from your faith community to invite them to dinner. Ask them how you might pray for them and their family. **Be open and willing to share your prayer requests with them as well.** Then sit back, and watch how God will work as you begin to support and care for one another. ☺



"JUST AS RUNNERS SET GOALS AND DEVELOP HABITS TO PERFORM AT AN OPTIMAL LEVEL, IT'S CRUCIAL THAT HUSBANDS AND WIVES DO THE SAME."

by Ashley Otani

BLESSING

This month, consider praying this blessing over your children. As you pray, fill in the blanks with each child's name.

BLESSING

God, create in _____ a heart of love for others. _____, I pray you will find comfort, support, and strength, first from your heavenly Father, and second from the community of friends and family He has given you. May you consider yourself as belonging to a community that is united by faith and love.

A blessing can be a prayer of commission, a Bible passage, or words of encouragement. As your children are blessed, tell them they have the opportunity to also be a blessing to others. Encourage them to freely share with others the joy and love they have received from God. Blessings can also be spoken over a child for the purpose of declaring God's protection, joy, and wisdom over him. ☺



home|front

Don't forget the HomeFront Weekly: A resource to get parents and kids talking about God's Word together.

What's Happening in Your **FAITH COMMUNITY?**

