

A FAMILY RESOURCE

home|front

M O N T H L Y

ENVIRONMENT

love & respect

*God fills me
with His
love so I can
give it away.*

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ENVIRONMENT

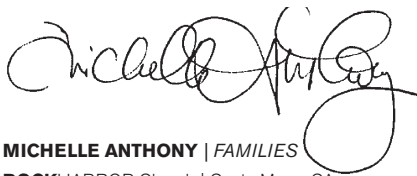
LOVE & RESPECT

Without love, our faith becomes futile. This environment recognizes that children need an environment of love and respect in order to be free to both receive and give God's grace. Innate in this environment is the value that children are respected because they embody the image of God. We must speak *to* them not *at* them, and we must commit to an environment where love and acceptance are never withheld due to one's behavior.

First Corinthians 13 says that if we don't have love, then everything else we do is futile. It's worthless. So, without love, it doesn't matter if we have all the knowledge in the world. It doesn't matter if we're helping kids understand who God is, and we're modeling what that looks like. If we don't do all of it in a way that is loving, then it is simply worthless. Wow! That is a sobering thought. When we create an environment of love and respect, we're helping to identify the image of God in every person.

One of my favorite ways to show love and respect is to actually get down on my knees and look at a child in his or her eyes. If they're telling me a story or something that's really important to them, getting on their eye level and holding their eye contact can be such a valuable act to a child. Often we forget that we tower higher than they are, and coming down to their level is a posture of humility that conveys, "I respect you and what you have to say."

This month, be looking for ways to take the environment of LOVE AND RESPECT beyond your family time with HomeFront. Challenge your family to find opportunities to show love and respect in your every day interactions. ☺



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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 through the words we memorize. 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.

ELEMENTARY VERSE

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, ... neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
Romans 8:38–39

PRES/KINDER VERSE

"Love one another. You must love one another, just as I have loved you." John 13:34 (NirV)

by Cheryl Wong

FAMILY FOOD TIME

DINNER ACTIVITY

During Christmas 2008, my sister and her family were living with us for a period of time. It was also the year when our church decided to try something different. Rather than having numerous church events for families to attend, it provided a resource they could use at home to create traditions and celebrate together.

It was the night of the “Special Plate Affirmation” activity. My sister grabbed onto this idea with delight. We would mark one of the dinner plates on the bottom and whoever received that plate with their meal was to be affirmed. Everyone would then take a turn saying what they appreciated about the “special plate” person. Many times it turned into fits of laughter and other times there were tears rolling down someone’s face. This became one of the highlights of our time together with two blended families, and also became a blessing to our family.

The love and tenderness that flows from this time is precious. In the busyness of life, it is easy to skip eating dinner together or just hurry and eat to move on to the next activity of the night. Affirming each other takes moments, that are too often forgotten, and pausing to celebrate reminds us of the love we have for one another.

Although my sister and her family don’t live with us anymore, there are times when we get together for dinner, and the “Special Plate” makes an appearance. 🍷

Show love to those around your dinner table!

- Tell one person one thing he does that makes you smile or laugh.
- Tell a story about a time when that person showed you love.
- Tell that person how much you love him and why.
- Tell that person what you appreciate about him.



FAMILY FOOD TIME

RECIPE

My aunt has made this dessert for as long as I can remember. It's a family favorite, and I'm sure your family will love it too!

Strawberry Pizza Pie

Prep Time: 30 min. *Cook Time:* about 45 min.

PIZZA CRUST

- 1 ½ cups butter, softened
- 1 ½ cups flour

Combine ingredients with a fork or pastry cutter until crumbly. Pat into 12" pizza pan. (Any prepared crust will do, too.) Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 10 minutes, until just lightly browned. Let cool.

TOPPING

- 1 jar or container of strawberry glaze
- 2 small baskets (about 3 cups) fresh strawberries, sliced

Clean, hull, and slice strawberries. Mix together with glaze. Refrigerate while preparing filling.

FILLING

- 1 (8 oz.) pkg. cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 1 (12 oz.) container whipped topping

Blend together cream cheese, powdered sugar, and vanilla until creamy. Add whipped topping, blend well.

Spread over cooled crust and chill in the freezer for 30 minutes, then cover with strawberry topping. Return to the freezer.

Thaw for 10–15 minutes before serving. 🍓



by Debbie Guinn

GAME TIME

YOUNGER KIDS

Love, Love, Hug!

This game will provide a tangible way for you and your little ones to show each other love. The format of this game is the same as “Duck, Duck, Goose!” The difference is players say, “Love, Love, Hug!”

How to Play

Gather your children together and sit in a circle. Pick one person to be “it.” This person will walk around the outside of the circle and tap the other family members on the shoulder, one at a time, while saying “love, love, love.” When this person says “hug,” she hugs, then runs around the circle. The person who was hugged must tag the hugger before she sits down in the empty spot around the circle. If the hugger sits down before being tagged, the other person now becomes the hugger. 🗨️



by Stacy Igarashi

GAME TIME

OLDER KIDS

Cup of Beans

Since we were little, my sister has teased me about my ability to come up with the funniest and most random games using household items.

I used to make up games involving floor mats, towels, bowls ... anything I could find! I can't wait to show my sister this game. I'm pretty sure she'll be laughing at me, again!

GAME PIECES: dried beans, large plastic bowl, small drinking cup, spoon, baking tray, stopwatch

Pour at least 3 cups of dried beans into the large plastic bowl. Place the bowl of beans and a spoon at one end of the room or yard. Have your family line up single file behind the bowl and spoon. On

the other side of the room or yard, place the baking tray with the small drinking cup sitting in the middle of it.

The first person in line grabs the spoon and scoops up as many dried beans as the spoon will hold, runs or walks quickly to the other side of the room or yard, pours his beans into the small drinking cup, runs back to the next family member, and passes off the spoon. This relay is meant to continue until your family fills the small drinking cup to overflowing with beans! Use the stopwatch to see how long it takes your family to complete this game. You can then play another round and try to beat your best time.

God calls us to love others because He first loved us. Sometimes it's hard to love others and show them respect without expecting anything in return. But God gives us so much love that hopefully it overflows onto the people around us. After playing this game, talk about some ways God's love can overflow from you to members of your family. Talk about ways to show God's love to your friends and others. 🗨️

STORYTELLING

LEARNING TO PRAY

For as long as I can remember, I've gone about my days in pretty consistent conversation with God. Sometimes I'm telling Him how I feel or asking questions. Sometimes I'm just saying good morning to Him or listening to Him remind me that He loves me.

As I think back over my life, I can honestly say that much of my easy conversation with God began with my parents' encouragement. I know my parents prayed for me while I was growing up, but I also remember doing a lot of talking with God myself. From a young age, my parents gave me the respect of telling me I could talk to God on my own. They recognized that I was a human being, created in God's image, and that I was also capable of talking to God.

I was talking with a friend the other day about praying. He said that he and his wife pray for their children a lot, which is great, but he feels like they haven't consistently empowered their kids to pray on their own. Sure, they pray at meals and before bed, but other than that, he does most of the praying. He sees a need in one of his kids' lives, and he prays for that need. He hears one of his daughters express feeling sad, hurt, or confused, and he begins to ask God to move in that. He and his wife are taking on all of the responsibility of making sure the Lord is hearing the requests of their children.

"I think a lot of parents do this," he told me. "They know that it is important to pray for their kids, so rather than foster conversation between their child and God, they take on all the responsibility themselves of talking to God for their children."

The first memory I have of talking to God, all on my own, was when I was five years old. My first day of kindergarten was really scary. I'm not sure why, but this normally outgoing, chatty, "wants to be the center of attention" girl was terrified to start school. I spent the entire night before my first day crying and asking my parents to let me stay home.

The morning I started school, my dad sat with me at breakfast and gave me a ring with a dove on it. He told me to wear the ring to school everyday and when I looked at it to remember that my daddy loved me, but more importantly, I should remember that Jesus is with me. He said he couldn't come to school with me, but Jesus could. He said whenever

I got scared, was feeling lonely, or even if I was happy, I should look at my ring and remember to tell Jesus how I was feeling.

I remember feeling pretty grown up that day. My dad thought I could talk to Jesus on my own? I knew that he talked to Jesus all the time, but he must really believe in me if he thought I could do that too.

On the drive to school, we prayed the whole way. We made simple requests: "Jesus, I want a nice girl to sit next to me," "Jesus, I'm afraid I will cry when my daddy leaves," "Jesus, help Laura to know that you are with her." I vividly remember talking to God throughout that day. I told Him I was scared, I asked Him for a friend, I told Him the art project had been pretty fun.

As I grew, my parents continued to encourage me to share my feelings with God, to simply talk to Him about the things going on in my head. The day I graduated from high school, my dad gave me a letter he had written to me on that first day of kindergarten (I still have it). He wrote, "More than I want you to know and trust that your daddy loves you, I want you to know and trust that your Heavenly Father loves you. I want you to run to Him and confide in Him even more than I want you to run to and confide in me."

My parents loved and respected me enough to know that I needed my own relationship with Jesus. They loved me enough to acknowledge their love would never be enough. I needed the love of my Heavenly Father. Instead of taking all of the responsibility of praying for me on themselves, they empowered me to do it myself. As a small child, there was something incredibly life giving about being respected enough to be told, "You can talk to God, you are big enough and know enough to do this important thing." 🙏

GOD'S WORD

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

HEAR IT

Open your Bibles and read Mark 12:28–31 together as a family.

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these

- Jesus, in one quick statement, just boiled all the laws the Jewish people had been following down to two short statements.
- Jesus says that we should love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. What does that look like? What does it mean to love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength?
- He then says that we are to love others as much as we love ourselves. How does that change the way you see your friends, family, neighbors, or people who aren't nice to you? What makes this commandment hard for you?

“LOVE GOD
WITH OUR
ENTIRE LIVES
AND LOVE
OTHERS.”



DO IT

In this short part of The Big God Story, we have learned God wants us to do two things: Love God with our entire lives, and love others.

As a family, brainstorm all the ways you can love God with your lives. Have someone in your family write down all of your answers. After that, spend one minute brainstorming all the ways you can love others. Write down these answers too.

When you are done brainstorming and thinking of creative ways to love God and love others, have each family member pick one from each list to focus on for the next month.

Check in with one another over the next month to see how everyone is doing. Remember, don't try to do this in your own strength. Ask God to give you the strength every day, at every moment, to be able to love Him and to show His love to those around you. ☺

by Matt Barnes

TRADITIONS

AFFIRMATION WALL

LOVE AND RESPECT is an environment that, at first glance, sounds almost obvious. However, it's pretty amazing how often we don't create an environment that shows love and respect to our kids and families. It's easy to take the time to actually show we care.

My challenge to you is to create a tradition of intentionally showing love and respect to each member of your family. An easy and effective way of doing this is by starting an Affirmation Wall in your home. First, choose a location for the Affirmation Wall. It can be anywhere ... the fridge, a door, or a window! Give each family member a pad of sticky notes (varying the color) and a pen. Make a pact to write at least one affirmation to each member of the family each week and post it on the Affirmation Wall. Affirmations might be something you saw a family member do, accomplish, or give to God.

Each week, fill up the wall with affirmations. During your weekly family night, take the time to share the affirmations with one another. I pray this will help you and your family begin to affirm each other with love and respect on a regular basis. 🙏

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.



CREATE

SERVE KIT

I am incredibly blessed to have three roommates who I feel loved and respected by. I have to brag about them for a moment and recognize the ways in which they love me.

Kelly makes coffee for both of us in the morning. This might seem like a small thing to someone else, but it speaks volumes to me and I feel so loved. It's something the two of us love, and dare I say we have a mini addiction to. Tina is a card person and the best affirmation person I have ever met. It seems that just when I need a word of encouragement, a note pops up somewhere in my day. Chelsea and I have great open communication and conversation. I feel loved and respected because I know where she stands, and I know we can come to each other and work things out. It is amazing how the environment of LOVE AND RESPECT is played out day to day in so many ways. So keep an eye out.

As suggested in the Traditions section of this issue, affirmations are a great way to intentionally show love and respect to one another. Try adding one of these creative ideas to your affirmation tradition as a way of keeping the rhythm going.

AFFIRMATION BOX

- Purchase boxes for each family member (the small boxes that hold recipe cards work well).
- Purchase 3" x 5" index cards or blank notecards that will fit in the box.
- Have each family member decorate the outside of their box (use paint, markers, fun paper scraps, jewels, glue, stickers, etc., and put each family member's name on it).
- Now when you affirm one another each week, you have a perfect place to keep affirmation cards after you collect them. When you are having an "off" day or need to be reminded that you are loved, you know right where to go!

AFFIRMATION FOLDER

- Purchase pocket folders or file folders for each family member.
- Add plain or decorative paper to each folder.
- Have each family member decorate the outside of their folder (use paint, markers, fun paper scraps, jewels, glue, stickers, etc., and put each family member's name on it).
- As affirmations are posted around the house, simply pull them off and stick them in your folder. Keep it somewhere that is easily accessible.



WORSHIP

HOT SEAT

The environment of LOVE AND RESPECT recognizes that each one of us has been created in God's image. His fingerprints and His character are in each and every one of your family members!

This month, as an act of worship, spend some time acknowledging the image of God in each of your family members. By recognizing God's handiwork in each person, and thanking Him for it, you are worshipping. And by calling attention to the amazing things God has put in each of your family members, you are giving them the respect that comes from being acknowledged as an image bearer of Christ!

So, gather your family members together and spend some time praying God will be honored and worshipped during your time together!

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Choose a "hot seat" in the room and place a member of the family in it. One by one, have members take turns identifying the gifts God has given the person in the "hot seat." When everyone has had time to share, give the person in the "hot seat" a chance to identify a God-given gift he sees in himself. Repeat this process until each family member has had a turn in the seat.

Now that gifts have been identified, it's time to thank God for what He's done. Share a few minutes of silence, explaining that this is a time of gratitude. Instruct everyone to thank God for the gifts He's given your family, and ask Him to reveal to each of you what He might have you do with them.

Next, use notecards to write down how you will use your gifts. This should be something that each person is committed to doing by the end of the month. Once everyone has completed their notecards, have each family member find a separate place in the house to stick the notecard, preferably somewhere visible, which will serve as a reminder of his commitment.

Once everyone has found a place for their notecard, regroup, read 1 Peter 4:8–10 together, and pray. Once again, thank the Lord for your gifts and pray for reminders to use those gifts. ☺

"ABOVE ALL,
LOVE EACH
OTHER DEEPLY,
BECAUSE LOVE
COVERS OVER
A MULTITUDE
OF SINS."

1 PETER 4:8

MARRIAGE

THE GAP IN THE COVENANT

More than anything, I want my marriage to overflow with love and respect. But, sometimes, my husband and I have a pretty hard time getting there on our own.

Sometimes my husband and I seriously don't get along. We've been through painful situations, we've gone to marriage counseling, we've sat in billions of Bible studies, and listened to enough sermons to fill a 64 GB iPod. We even counsel other couples and speak to groups about marriage. But, more than occasionally, we completely miss what the other is trying to communicate. Picture taking a tennis class and missing the fuzzy ball over and over again.

We talk loudly or hang up on each other. We glare and growl sometimes. We flop over in bed and turn toward the wall. We sulk and scowl. We expect the worst and live in the past. I sometimes think mean, selfish things:

"Why can't he just"

"What would be the harm in him"

"I've told him this a hundred times"



Even so, we have a covenant. We have binding promises. We didn't say, "Until one of us wounds the other," or "Until you get really mad at me," or "Until we really really hate each other." We said, "Until death do us part." It's forever, and we are learning to live in the gap of the covenant. Because sometimes only one of us is upholding our promises to love, honor, and respect the other.

When he doesn't hold up his end, I hold up mine. When I fail miserably and say something I can't take back, he stands still as my husband, unshaken by something as fleeting as a word in the face of a promise. Even though it hurts and it takes time to get over, we are learning to practice this.

Our example for this isn't each other (we are far from skilled at this) or even another couple we admire. Our example is the Covenant Maker. The One who stands strong in the face of our dishonesty, our hatred, and our selfish words and actions.

He is the gap in the covenant. He stands at the altar with us, knowing we will become distracted and trip over our own desires. He knows we will not keep our promises. He knows we are destined to mess up. But He lives there, right in that place where we don't keep our end of the bargain. He doesn't flop over in bed or think mean thoughts, He doesn't glare at us and live in our past mistakes. He wants us to live the way we were designed to live. The way we vowed. And He'll live in that gap, unshaken by us in the face of unmet promises, and He'll make up the difference when we can't. Are you living in the gap in your marriage? 🙏

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PRAYER

THANK GOD FIRST

Is there anything more precious than a picture of a smiling baby? As new parents we wait and watch for that first smile, then run to record the date in a baby book.

These days, it's likely to show up on Facebook while we're still pulling out the baby book. Or the more technically savvy of us posts an actual video clip. All of our Facebook friends smile and respond with oohs, ahs, and comments that surely there has never been a more beautiful baby. The image of God in the face of a child!

But what do we do to elicit that smile? We smile, coo, tickle, cajole, and pretty much make fools of ourselves in the process. It's our nature: A smile begets a smile, so we smile. It works negatively too: A frown begets a frown; a thoughtless word begets misunderstandings, hurt feelings, frustrations, and even anger.

Children learn what they live. They learn to smile and laugh, to react with frustration or anger, to resolve or bury conflicts, to fear or trust; they learn to respect or belittle another's personhood. They even learn to respect or disrespect God! They learn from us, the adults in their world.

What are your children learning about interpersonal relationships from you? The old adage, "Do as I say, not as I do," doesn't hold up any more. They observe every word, facial expression, and nuance of body language. Think about your own relationships. Can you see the image of God in every person you meet, lovely or not so much? What would it take to learn to see the image of God in every other face? Can you learn to let the negative reactions be a catalyst to pray for that person, believer or not?

FAMILY PRAYER PROJECT

Just for fun, find an old pair of plastic framed eyeglasses or sunglasses (one pair for every member of the family). Thrift shops are good sources. Remove the lenses and paint the frames a favorite color—maybe pink. "Seeing the world through rose-colored glasses" used to be a phrase



for an optimistic outlook. When your daughter rants about a classmate's unfair treatment, bring out the glasses. Remind her to look for the image of God in her classmate. When your son is furious that he didn't get to play on the team today because the coach played his son, bring out the glasses and help him picture the image of God in the coach. Then help him pray for the offending person. Acknowledge the hurt or anger, but also recognize the offender is made in the image of God. Of course, this, too, works better when you are able to model that yourself, openly confessing to your kids that you sometimes struggle with similar reactions.

Encourage your kids to put on the glasses as a wordless sign to you that something or someone needs prayer. Then pray together, aloud, often! 🙏

by Laura Weber

BLESSING

I don't know about you, but I sometimes have a hard time fully loving and respecting others. When my feelings get hurt or someone just irritates me, my broken human heart wants to say, "Why should I respect you or show you love?"

BLESSING

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38–39

I'm continually reminded by God that, in those moments, when I myself am less than lovable, He loves and accepts me. Shouldn't I do the same for others? There is something incredibly powerful in realizing that I am loved completely and unconditionally. Nothing I ever do could ever change the depth of God's love for me. That's life changing.

This month, as you bless your children, remind them they are fully loved by God. His love for them will never, ever change ... no matter what they do. Nothing can ever separate us from His great love. Encourage them to remember that when others seem less than easy to love, God loves that person, and He will give each of us all the love we need for others.

You will see a different blessing in each HomeFront Monthly. This will be your blessing for the entire month. Take the time to speak this blessing into the lives of your children at different times throughout the month. You can do this on the way to school, before bed, or while you eat as a family. Just make sure you have your children's attention. Look them in their eyes and pray the blessing over them. Affirm your love for them by placing a hand on their shoulder or holding their hands. Remember, God's Spirit is at work; He will bless and care for the growing and tender hearts of your children. ☺



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