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theParentLink

Children's Ministry Edition

Make Faith-Friendly Resolutions

The beginning of a new year offers the promise of a fresh start. Many people celebrate by resolving to make changes, often related to how they care for their bodies.

This year, take time to reflect on what you can do differently in your home to strengthen your family—and each member's faith in God. Use these ideas to transform your family in 2011:

Begin the day with music. Mornings are hectic in most houses. Play some soft Christian music to wake everyone up and to set the tone for a calm, God-directed day.

Reclaim mealtime. Eat together as often as possible. Research points to all kinds of child-development benefits from this practice. But family meals also help you get to know one another better—and provide opportunities for faith growth. For example, ask specific, open-ended questions, such as "What's the best thing that happened to you today? the worst?"



Make devotions fun and active. Bible reading should be a social, bonding opportunity, not a dry discipline devoid of purpose. Use resources such as the "Family Night Tool Chest" series by Jim Weidmann and others (Chariot Victor), the "Not-So-Quiet Times" devotion series by Tracy Harrast (Standard), and *52 Fun Family Devotions* by Mike and Amy Nappa (Augsburg Fortress).

Develop a family mission statement. As a family, pinpoint your worthy purposes, worthy visions, and worthy values. A mission statement will unite you because everyone gives input into your family's "big picture." And God will be placed at the center of your home on purpose, not by chance.

Start a Parenting Revolution

According to research by the Barna Group, fewer than 10 percent of parents who regularly attend church have consistent family time with God. George Barna's book *Revolutionary Parenting* applies modern-day research to show that parents who faithfully apply God's instructions for family life raise spiritual champions. Unfortunately, most people parent "by default" or use "trial-and-error parenting," according to Barna.



PowerSource

Ask God:

1. To bless and guide your family during the year ahead.
2. To help you all embrace new habits so you grow closer to God and each other.
3. To grow each family member's faith this year.

Parenting Insights

Thom Schultz, president of Group Publishing, offers these tips for helping children's faith take root:

1. **See the sacred in the ordinary.** Attach "God thoughts" to daily activities. Bathing a child can remind you of baptism, and talking with one another can remind you of the gift of prayer.
2. **Be alert to teachable moments.** Put up your "God antennae." For example, use the media as a teaching tool that sparks discussions.
3. **Just "be" with your kids.** Simply be present without an agenda. When you stop trying so hard, it's freeing—and you'll actually relate better.
4. **Realize your family doesn't have to be perfect.** Read the Bible together to see that God's grace was—and still is—sufficient for imperfect people.

OpenTheBook

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"
2 Corinthians 5:17

Jesus offers us a fresh start not only on New Year's but each and every day. By paying the price for our sins, Jesus made each of his children a new creation.

Teachable Moments

- 1. Keep It Short**—You can make a big impact even when you're short on time. For example, read aloud one Bible verse at the breakfast table to start the day. At bedtime, tell a Bible story in your own words. Remember: "Short passages for short people."
- 2. Take a Pause**—Your family doesn't always need to be on the go. This year, make it a priority to step away from some commitments and shorten your to-do list. Use the extra time to regroup, reconnect, and recharge.
- 3. Be Peacemakers**—If one of your goals is less sibling conflict, help redirect tension by focusing on positive qualities. Whenever one family member is mean-spirited to another, have the offender say or write three things he or she appreciates about the other person. This will make your family more tenderhearted and thankful for one another.



"So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are ON THE ROAD, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up." Deuteronomy 11:18-19, NLT

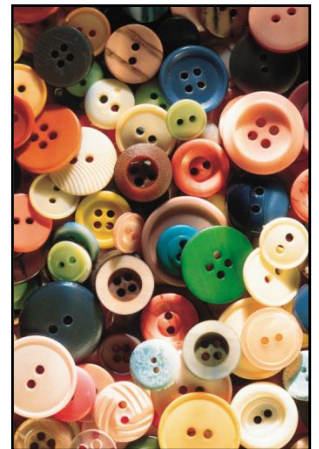
Begin a conversation with your children about the new year by asking them these questions:

1. What excites you the most about the new year, and why? What are you the most uncertain about, and why?
2. What are some things you want to do differently or change in the upcoming year?
3. What types of goals do you think our family should set, and how can we work together to meet them?
4. What are your suggestions for a family mission statement? What best describes who we are and what we want to do?

Family Experience: A Fresh Start

Celebrate new beginnings with these Bible-based activities:

- **Goal Tenders.** Hold up an empty bowl and say, "This bowl reminds me of a new year, ready to be filled with new experiences and people." Hand each family some buttons and say, "Let's pretend these represent all those fun things. Your goal is to toss the buttons into the empty bowl from three feet away."



After everyone has a turn, say, "A new year is a good time to set goals, but achieving them takes persistence. God gives us each a special goal to strive for every day, week, month, and year." Read aloud Philippians 3:12-14 and discuss the goal of becoming what God wants us to be—and how we can pursue it. Close by having family members each toss one button into the bowl while thinking of a way to become what God wants them to be (for example, praying more often, being kind to others, etc.).

- **Presto Chango!**—Mix two parts glue with one part liquid starch. Stir well. Continue adding starch one spoonful at a time, using your fingers to work the mixture into a smooth putty. Press the putty onto a colored comic picture and then pull it off. Say, "This putty was plain, but it changed when it came into contact with the picture." Read aloud 2 Corinthians 5:17. Say, "When we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in us and changes us. He helps us meet our goal of becoming more like Jesus." Close in prayer, thanking God for the gift of a new year and for giving us new life in him.



What's Playing at the Movies

Movie: *Gulliver's Travels* (Dec. 22)

Genre: Adventure, comedy

Rating: PG (brief rude humor, mild language, action)

Cast: Jack Black, Emily Blunt, Jason Segel

Synopsis: In this twist on the Jonathan Swift tale, mail clerk Lemuel Gulliver talks his way into a travel-writing assignment. He ends up in magical Lilliput, where he's larger than life. Gulliver tells tall tales about himself and leads his new friends in battle. But when he's discovered, he must fix the damage and show that what's inside makes him a true "giant."

Discussion Questions: When have you fibbed to make yourself seem bigger or better than you really are? What consequences do people face when they stretch or ignore the truth? Read aloud Acts 5:1-11. What impact do you suppose these deaths had on others? Read aloud Luke 16:10. How do you try to be trustworthy in both big and little things?



What Music Is Releasing

Artist: Brandon Heath

Album: *Leaving Eden*

Artist Info: Heath, 31, is an award-winning contemporary Christian musician known for his rich voice and deep lyrics. Heath is also involved with overseas Christian missions.

Summary: In "Your Love," Heath sings that God's love is "the only thing that matters" and "all I ever needed." Heath says, "I just want to tell people that they are loved by God. My life's been an unbelievable journey, and it's all been because of God."

Discussion Questions: What things matter most to you, and why? How would your life be different if you didn't know about God or his love? Read aloud John 15:9-13. What are some ways you feel God's love? How do you share God's love with other people, including those who don't know God?



What Games Are Out

Title	Content	Rating & Platform
<i>Disney Epic Mickey</i>	Mickey Mouse becomes a hero in this "darkly inventive" new game. Using a magic paintbrush, he must save a fantasy realm. Contains cartoon violence.	E; Wii
<i>Pac-Man Championship Edition DX</i>	This deluxe edition featuring "gaming's oldest mascot" has nine new mazes with many game options, plus more ghosts.	E; Xbox, PS3
<i>Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit</i>	As cops or racers, players feel the thrill of the chase and can compare racing stats with friends. Contains some violence.	E10+; PS3, Wii, Xbox

GAME RATINGS KEY: EC=Early Childhood, E=Everyone (ages 6+), E10+ (ages 10+), T=Teen (ages 13+)



Culture & Trends

What's happening right now that may affect your children and family:

- Families are more diverse than ever, with people designing family structures that work for them. Almost 40% of people say marriage is becoming obsolete. (Pew Research Center)
- "Cyber-bullying" causes more depression than physical bullying, with victims feeling isolated and helpless. Parents say they're stepping up online monitoring. (Nat'l Institutes of Health)

Quick Stats

- Parents' interest in their child's education is six times more important for a student's eventual grades than are the child's own efforts. (telegraph.co.uk)



- When preteens were asked what they'd like to do someday, 54% said travel the world, 46% said speak another language, and 40% said invent something. (Harris Interactive)

