



February 2011



Celebrate Spiritual Milestones

Marking children's physical "firsts," such as first steps and first words, is an exciting and memorable part of parenting. Just as important, and just as worthy of celebration, are spiritual firsts, or faith milestones.

These milestones, or rites, help children know they're growing up as Christians and continually reconnecting to their faith family. Milestones also allow churches and parents to partner together to raise up lifelong followers of Jesus.

Spiritual occasions that warrant family celebrations include:

Dedication—Because children are a gift from God, we "give" them back to God by committing their lives to him. By witnessing a dedication, fellow church members agree to partner with parents to help raise children in the Christian faith.



Receiving a First Bible—When children receive God's Word, it's like their very own special love letter from God. He wants us to read the Bible and apply it to our lives. Making a "big deal" out of getting a Bible shows kids how important the book is to our faith and its growth.

Transitioning to the Preteen Years—Leaving behind elementary school symbolizes that preteens are beginning to "own" their faith. Somewhere along their spiritual journey, they'll decide whether to draw closer to God or reject him. The great thing is that God is always there, waiting for young people to find him. And he's always there for parents, too, guiding us as we lead our children through faith milestones.

Good Intentions Don't Always Pan Out

- In a Barna Group survey, 85% of parents said they believe they have the primary responsibility for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters.
- But in another Barna study, fewer than 10% of parents who regularly attend church have consistent family time with God.

PowerSource



Ask God:

1. To help you nurture your children's developing faith.
2. To show your children how he's with them as they grow.
3. To help you make faith milestones important.

Parenting Insights

In *Shift* (Group), Brian Haynes discusses the value of at-home "Faith Talks" for leading kids spiritually:

1. **Faith Talks should occur regularly and be age-appropriate.** Each week, set aside time to focus on biblical truth in a relational way.
2. **Faith Talks should focus on God's Word.** Read the Bible together, celebrate it, and adjust your lives accordingly.
3. **Faith Talks don't have to be difficult or formal.** Make them fun; for example, go outside on a hot day and compare standing in the sun and shade. Then read and discuss Psalm 121:5.
4. **Faith Talks are a priority.** They shouldn't depend on children's choices or attitudes. God instructs parents to be intentional about leading their children spiritually.

OpenTheBook

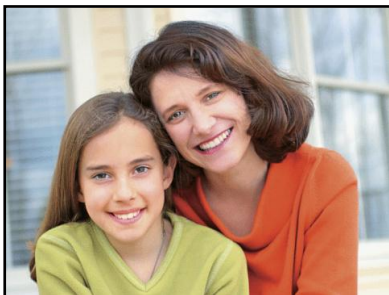
"Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

1 Timothy 4:7-8

The apostle Paul reminds Timothy—and parents—that a strong relationship with God should be our ultimate goal.

Teachable Moments

- 1. Celebrate Baptisms**—After seeing a baptism, talk to your children about their own baptisms—or their desire to be baptized. Tell them God washes away our sins. As a family, make handmade cards for newly baptized people.
- 2. Make the Bible Relevant**—Show children how God's Word applies to their lives. Talk about biblical heroes and how they both stumbled and grew in faith. Tie Bible verses into kids' interests, from music or poetry to travel or adventure.
- 3. Model Lifelong Learning**—Preteens often feel as if they've outgrown Sunday school. Provide age-appropriate Bibles and devotionals for preteens who are forming their identity in Christ. Also help them anticipate the future rather than be anxious about it.



"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**

Get your children thinking about their own faith milestones by asking these discussion-starter questions:

1. What times or events in your walk with God stand out the most to you, and why?
2. As you grow up as a Christian, what occasions would you like to celebrate, and how?
3. In what ways has your faith changed since you were younger?
4. What can I do to help your faith grow even stronger?

Family Experience: Journeys With Jesus

Use these activities to celebrate your family's past and future.

- **Family Timelines**—You'll need a 6-foot piece of butcher paper, markers, masking tape, and a Bible. Tape the butcher paper to a wall. Together, create a timeline of your family's journey with God using words, drawings, and Bible verses. Include marriages, birthdays, and milestones, such as when a child entered preschool or when you moved. Add fun memories and difficult times that affected everyone (illnesses or injuries, vacations, job or school changes, and so on).

Afterward, discuss these questions: "What are our best memories? What difficult events have we overcome? How did those events make us closer? How have you seen God moving in our family through the years? How have we experienced God's faithfulness? What are our future dreams for our family?"

- **God's Path**—You'll need a map of your hometown, a highlighter, a Bible, and a red marker. Mark important spots on the map, such as your home, school, church, friends' houses, and more. Highlight the roads your family uses most often. Read aloud Psalm 139:1-3. Say: "God always knows where we are, what we're doing, and where we're going. He has big plans for us as we grow and get to know him better. God loves us and will always be with us." With a red marker, draw a large heart around all the map sites you've highlighted. Hang up the map as a reminder of God's promises.





What's Playing at the Movies

Movie: *Gnomeo & Juliet* (Feb. 11)

Genre: 3D animated comedy

Rating: G

Cast: James McAvoy, Emily Blunt, Michael Caine

Synopsis: In this film, which features several songs from Elton John, two garden gnomes get caught up in a feud between neighbors. Despite their many obstacles, Gnomeo and Juliet try to find lasting happiness.

Discussion Questions: How would you define "love"? Why does everyone seek love? What challenges stand in the way of having loving relationships? Read aloud 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Which of these traits of love is the most difficult, in your opinion? What are some ways we can love other people better—even when they don't act lovingly in return?



What Music Is Releasing

Artist: Yancy Richmond

Album: *Stars, Guitars & Megaphone Dreams*

Artist Info: Yancy, a Christian singer, songwriter, and worship leader, grew up in the church. She loves ministering to preteens through songs that empower them and praise God at the same time.

Summary: Yancy's new album contains energetic anthems and heartfelt ballads. The song "God Is for Me" is about "putting our confidence and future in God's hands," she says. "I'm really thankful for the promises in God's Word [and] how we can hold fast to those things, whether we're in the valley or the mountaintop, because God is on our side!"

Discussion Questions: How comfortable are you with the thought of putting your entire future in God's hands? Explain. In what ways do you feel like God is rooting for you? Read aloud Romans 8:26-28, 37-39. How can God's promises help you be more confident in your faith?



What Games Are Out

Title	Content	Rating & Platform
<i>Herotopia.com</i>	In this virtual world, players learn about global culture and defeat bullies. Some portions are free; others require paid membership.	Web; ages 6-12
<i>Learn Science</i>	Mini-games teach players about anatomy, biology, physics, and more. Geared toward first- through fourth-graders.	E; Nintendo DS
<i>Lost in Shadow</i>	In this fantasy-based game, the action takes place between shadows. Violence has a key role but isn't excessive or graphic.	E10+; Wii

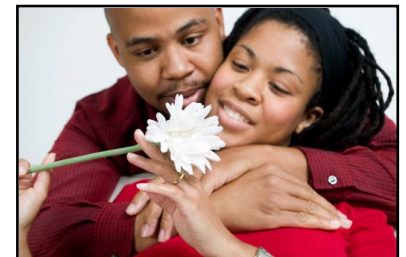
GAME RATINGS KEY: EC=Early Childhood, E=Everyone (ages 6+), E10+ (ages 10+), T=Teen (ages 13+)



Culture & Trends

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

- Parenting forecasts for 2011 include more emphasis on "couple time," child-rearing philosophies such as RIE and Free-Range Kids, and "flash sale sites" for buying kiddie gear.



- Kid-trend predictions include 1980s fashions, personalized party décor, more GPS-tracking technology, and iPad-hungry youngsters. (ivillage.com)

Quick Stats

- 65% of parents say texting helps them communicate more often with their kids when they're apart. (Parenting)
- 65% of young children were spanked by a parent at least once during a four-week period research shows. (medicalnewstoday.com)

