

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.