

Parents & Crosslink

How is your family handling this tough economy—the stock market’s roller-coaster ride, the mortgage foreclosures, the job losses and unemployment statistics, the reports of bailout abuses?

Does the financial situation in your home create an atmosphere of worry or tension? Do relationships get preempted and neglected by an obsession with domestic finances? Your approach to these circumstances affects your children.

In a materialistic and consumer-oriented society, perhaps new healthy values can emerge. In the meantime, we can make use of these times as special teachable moments. In a world that has emotionally marginalized God’s part in our lives, perhaps there can emerge a fresh appreciation of how God operates in our world. In times when the love of many has grown cold, perhaps these are the moments to rebuild relationships. One way to remember how our faith in God’s promises puts economic stressors into a healthy perspective is to use the acronym F.O.C.U.S.

F = Fix Your Eyes on Lasting Treasure

Talk over with your family how easy it is to get pulled into the marketing hype of the world. Advertising, peer pressure, and our own selfish desires easily draw us in. Then show how easily the things of this world come and go—from fads to theft to just wearing out. This is a good time to help family members fix their focus on Jesus. He resisted the temptations of the world (Matthew 4:8-10) to become our greatest treasure. He makes us more than con-

querors. He makes us royalty. He has given us an inheritance in heaven that can never spoil or fade—secured by the power of his resurrection from the dead (1 Peter 1:3,4).

O = Overcome Worry, Knowing the Father’s Care

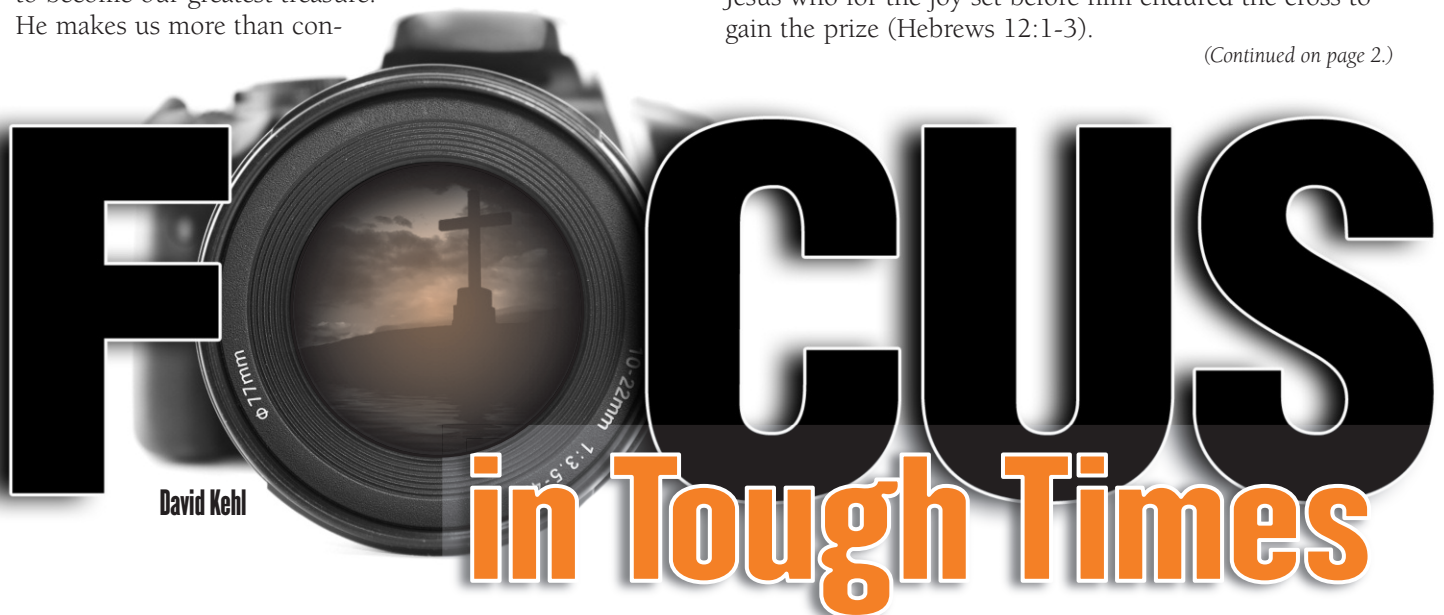
Watching all the news and hearing all the hype can cause plenty of the kind of worry that chokes the joy and energy out of life. This is a time to remind one another that our heavenly Father cares about us and watches over the details of our world. Since he takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:25-34), how much more can we expect him to care for us! Spend time thinking through the blessings you have. Share stories from the past of people who grew stronger and more caring through hard times. Discuss the words of Paul, who learned to be content whether well fed or hungry, living in plenty or in want, knowing that everything we have comes from Christ (Philippians 4:11-13).

C = Conquer the Obstacles

Many times we reap what we sow, either in our attitude or our actions, and put barriers in the way of God’s blessings. Other times we hinder our progress by complaining that it’s just the way we are and we can’t do anything about it. We are God’s workmanship; as a work in progress, we need to learn to trust his ability to keep unfolding the design he intends for us. This is a good time to improve work habits, use time more wisely (especially for relationships), and develop godly character. Use the visual encouragement of Jesus who for the joy set before him endured the cross to gain the prize (Hebrews 12:1-3).

(Continued on page 2.)

**WE MAY NOT KNOW
WHAT THE FUTURE WILL
BRING, BUT WE KNOW
THE ONE WHO DOES.**



David Kehl

Photo: Shutterstock

(Focus in Tough Times . . . cont.)

U = Use His Money Wisely

This is also a good time to review the fact that we aren't owners. It is so easy for us to get selfish and to think it is all about us. The truth is that we are merely stewards of everything God has placed as resources for our lives. He expects us to manage these resources in ways that fit his purposes and align with his will. But the owner also has a rich, unending supply that he will distribute as we have need. So an economic downturn is a perfect time to help the other members of your family make wise choices that mirror God's will. Following his plan puts your family in a position to "share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21).

S = Shift Your Priorities

What better time to stop and review where your family life is going. Paul encourages us to "live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received" (Ephesians 4:1).

These are times when it's good for us to stop and realize why God has put us here. Make this a relationship-building time in which you come closer to God, to the other members of your family, to your neighbors, and to the whole body of Christ. The impact we have on others can help them understand how much their loving Father in heaven cares for them.



It is hard to understand the economic climate we are living in. Will it make the history books? Will it be the story we tell our children or that they share with their grandchildren someday? We may not know what the future will bring, but we know the one who does. He makes all things new. Use these times to renew your FOCUS as one of God's families committed to growing and prospering through tough times.

Dave Kehl is the WELS administrator of adult discipleship. He and his wife, Joan, live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They are the proud parents of four children: Heidi, Erika, Jonathan, and Lisa.



To add thoughts and continue the discussions about these questions and answers, go to

www.parentscrosslink.net.

I've been hearing a lot about striving for excellence in schools lately. It seems like a noble goal. But some are questioning its validity. They imply that when schools are striving for excellence, the educational needs of the child can get lost in the shuffle. Please help me understand the issues.

The legacy of the Bush education policy under No Child Left Behind is a competitive, high-stakes education environment that emphasizes a narrow definition of student achievement

based on standardized test scores. As a result, schools all too often measure their success comparatively: "How do our test scores compare with other schools?" "How does the average student's yearly progress compare with other area schools?" In many cases, the pursuit of excellence amounts to little more than avoiding being labeled as a failing school. Today's education leaders struggle with a system that was established to ensure that individual students make adequate progress. Too often the de facto policy of that same system ties the hands of teachers to do what is necessary to help students excel.

The problem is not in striving for excellence, but rather in inappropriately defining excellence. Lutheran elementary schools can easily be swept along with the tide as school board members, principals, and teachers feel pressure to define their schools by comparing test scores. A negative definition (avoiding any children left behind) lowers the standard and

leaves excellence wallowing in the mire of bubble-coded answer sheets.

The most important question for Christian teachers and parents to ask is, How does God define excellence? God gifts children not only with saving faith but also with unique talents and abilities that are in keeping with his purpose for their lives. The apostle Paul's analogy of the body of Christ demonstrates how every student should be valued for his or her uniqueness. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) relates our master's desire that we leverage our individual gifts in service to his kingdom.

It's hard to define a highly successful school, but easy to recognize one. Give me a school that helps each individual child to grow academically, physically, and spiritually every day, and I'll show you a school that embodies excellence in every sense of the word.



The ultimate SUPERHERO

Emily Kratz

Lately my house has been taken over by Spider-Man. I catch him zooming down the hallway to go play in the living room. I find him asleep in my children's beds. Sometimes I have to scold him for spilling cereal in the pantry. No, there's not an actual superhero living with us, just two little kids with some new Spider-Man pajamas, webbed under the arms. My two-year-old and four-year-old would wear the pajamas all day if I would let them. (And, yes, I have!) You may wonder why they are so fascinated with Spider-Man. Do I let them watch Spider-Man cartoons or movies all day?

No, in fact, I don't think either one has ever seen Spider-Man on TV. Do I read them stories about Spider-Man before bed? Although I'm pretty sure there are Spider-Man comic books around, I certainly wouldn't know where to find them. So why the fascination with Spider-Man? Through the blessing of hand-me-downs, we became the proud owners of four pair of Spider-Man pajamas. The situation has *spun* out of control since.

There is something about the superhero phenomenon that grasps children's imaginations. And I know it's not just my kids. I've seen tiny Supermen and Batmen walking down the aisles of the local grocery store. Judging from the popularity of the last few superhero movies, it's not just kids who like superheroes. Children and adults alike seem to enjoy imagining that there is someone out there who can save the world from certain destruction.

Is this obsession with superheroes a recent development? Well, Superman and Batman have been around since the 1930s. But let's go back a little further. What about in Jesus' time? Surely people weren't looking for a superhero then. The actual Savior, true God, was walking among them. People came from far and wide to watch him perform miracles. But even his own disciples wanted him to be the hero they had been waiting for. They wanted a champion who would save Israel from the Romans and restore the country to the Jews. Jesus was not the superhero they were looking for. He was, however, the superhero the world needed.

And if there's one thing that superheroes show us, the world does need saving. Even little kids know that. Parents

worry about the economy or the environment. We are concerned about the best way to keep our children safe from the many dangers of this world. I think one of the reasons we like superheroes so much is that we realize we *need* to be saved.

So God sent a superhero to save us. Our ultimate superhero could have leapt from a tall building without suffering any injury. But he knew it was more important not to put God to the test. He had the ability to satisfy his hunger whenever he wanted but showed us that man does not live on bread alone. He

had the power to control the nations of the world but served God instead.

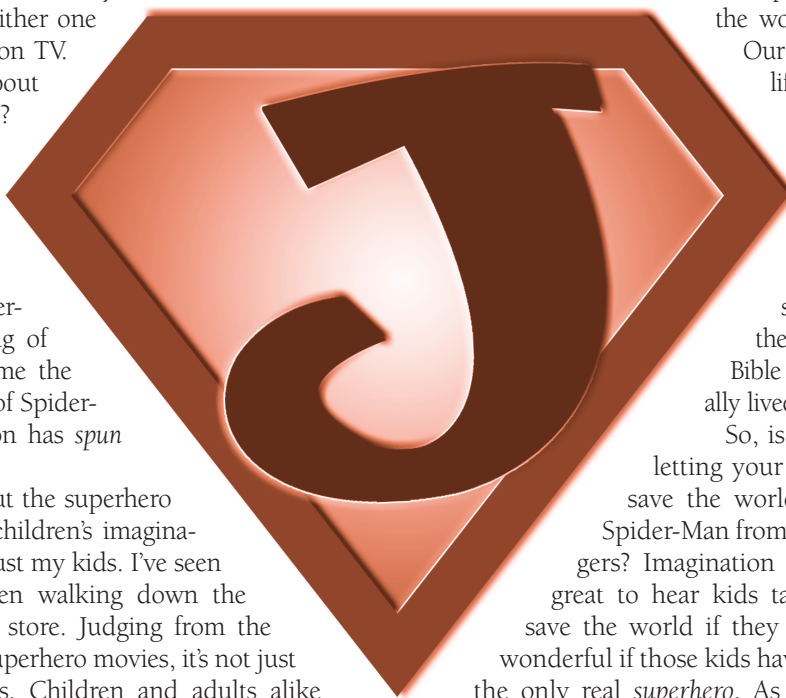
Our superhero not only risked his life for us, he gave up his life to save ours. Though he may not fit the world's idea of a superhero, he met every one of God's requirements. And he has a definite edge over the superheroes of today. Though there are many who think the Bible is just a storybook, Jesus actually lived.

So, is there anything wrong with letting your little boy put on a cape to save the world? Should I stop my little Spider-Man from shooting webs from his fingers? Imagination is a wonderful thing. It is great to hear kids talk about how they would save the world if they could. And it is especially wonderful if those kids have an intimate knowledge of the only real *superhero*. As these kids try to save the

world from bad guys, they realize that the world has already been saved from the worst bad guy of all. They know that even though Superman can be defeated with a little kryptonite, nothing, not even death, could harm their Savior. And though Metropolis may never

be free of bad guys, we will be going to heaven someday, where we will be forever safe from the bad guys. So let the kids wear their capes and costumes. But use every opportunity to teach them about the ultimate superhero, Jesus.

Emily Kratz lives near Birmingham, Alabama, with her husband, Benjamin, and their four children: Hannah, Lydia, Norah, and Thaddeus.



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Threats Made;

Picture this: The father of an 18-year-old lies awake at night, replaying in his mind the painful conversation he had with his son a couple of hours ago. The young man insisted on withdrawing the money from his savings to go to Florida with his friends during spring break. He argued that the account is set up in his name and that he has been saving money all year from his part-time job. “It’s my money, and there is nothing you can do to stop me from going!” The son, furthermore, felt he deserved the trip. This is his senior year; he and his classmates will be going their separate ways after the semester is over.

His parents see things differently. It has been their intention all along that he put the money saved during the high school years toward his college tuition. They had set up the account when he was born and have been contributing to it ever since. Besides, like any parents, they worry about the freedoms (and temptations) of such a trip. Given the spring-break mentality of other young people, they wonder if their son has the maturity to make wise decisions. They were adamant, especially the young man’s father; the trip was simply not going to happen.

During the painful conversation, each had only heard one side of the story—his own. After the son approached his father about the idea of taking this trip, the father objected without giving the matter much thought. In his mind there was no room for discussion. The son was just as rigid in his demand and never considered anything that might help explain his parent’s hard-line position. Threats were made. Voices were raised.

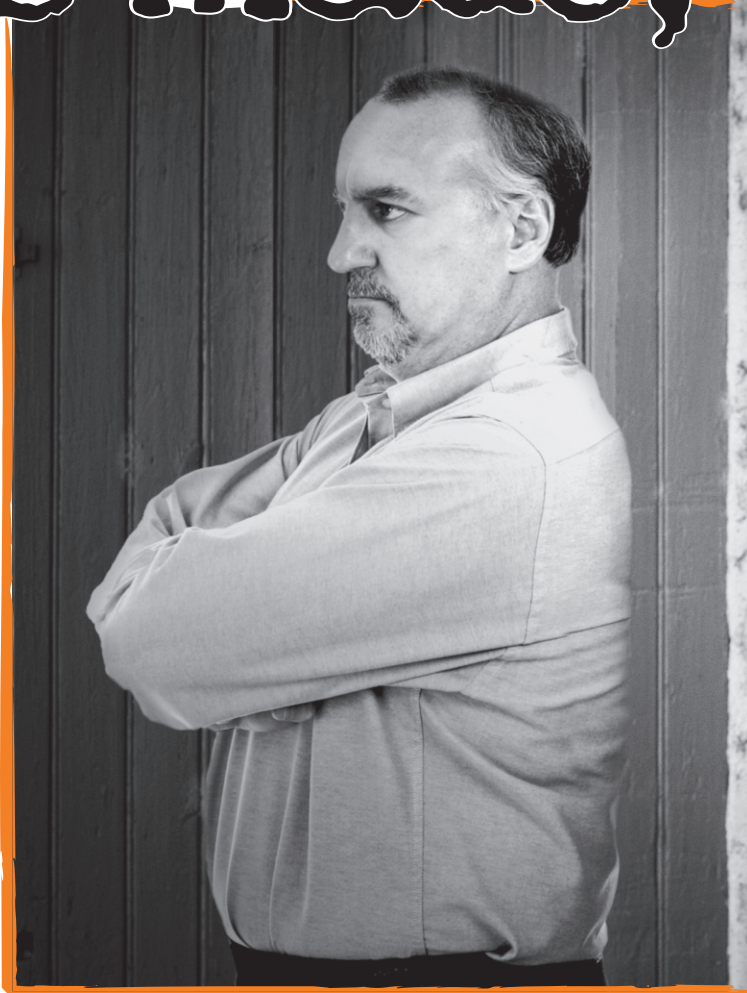
Finally, the young man’s mother felt compelled to intervene, telling both parties to back off and cool down for the rest of the evening. But the damage had already been done, and meaningful communication was now all but impossible. The father’s last-ditch effort to save face only made matters worse. “You are being completely selfish! If you would only appreciate what your mother and I do for you! We will talk about this later!”

“There is nothing more to discuss,” answered the son. “I’m going on the trip.”

The event just described actually happened. And it wasn’t the first time such an intense conversation of this kind had cast an ugly shadow over relationships in this home. In fact, the same pattern plays itself out often, even in many God-fearing households.

Has it ever happened in yours? Can you relate to the family in our case study?

Parents of teenagers often wish they could talk to their children the way they did when the kids were in elementary school. Things were easy then—less arguing, more smiles, and fewer slammed doors. But you can’t go backward, so



A Better Approach to Crucial C

why not move forward in a positive way. Learn how to talk things through when the conversations you are having with your teenage son or daughter are placing a dear and valued relationship at risk.

Three key questions

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler (authors of the book *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*) teach people how to handle crucial conversations. They begin by explaining that we can all become better communicators if we first take a long look at our own intentions.

Begin with your own heart. The book suggests you ask yourself, *What do I really want for myself? What do I want for others? And what do I want for this relationship?* (page 34). This doesn’t mean that you have to cave in. It just means that you have to refocus on the bigger picture instead of the immediate conversation.

If the father in our story would have stopped to consider these three questions, he might not have responded

Voices Raised

Establish a safe zone

The next step in improving your crucial conversation skills is to create a safe zone. In chapter 5, the authors assert that when people feel *unsafe* in a conversation, they are going to either become silent or get verbally violent. Good conversation-ists take the time and make the effort to make the give-and-take of dialog safe by cultivating the sense of mutual purpose and respect. Both parties should be confident that their discussion is a process of working toward a common outcome.

Both parties should be confident that their conversation is working toward a common outcome.

Framing a crucial conversation as an effort to achieve a common goal is a great strategy. But it requires a few easy-to-learn communication skills. After creating the safe zone, you will need to step back from the communication process to take a hard look at what issues are fact-driven and which are emotion-driven. The expression *that's his side of the story* is in many ways very true. The authors say that it is necessary to “abandon your absolute certainty by distinguishing between hard facts and your invented story” (page 117).

Sometimes the distinctions between fact and *my version* of the story are not so easy to tease apart. But when we take the time to sort them out, it becomes easier for the communicator to state his message in a way that resonates with the opposing argument. It may not immediately lead to agreement, but it will go a long way toward building a base of common understanding with regard to the issues. The father and son mentioned could have discussed what was going on in far greater depth. Both would have come to a greater appreciation of the issues. It was their commitment to steadfastly ignore the other side of the story that made meaningful and constructive conversation all but impossible. In discussions that really matter, first take a long, hard look at the driving motives of your own heart. Then make sure that what you say and the way you say it will build the other person up and foster the relationship.

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Crucial Conversations Sarah Moore

so harshly. And, perhaps, the man's son would not have taken such a defensive posture.

In Luke 6:45, Jesus says, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” From those words we can conclude that Jesus wants us to stop and look at our hearts before we speak.

Maybe you are thinking, *I have a temper and a quick tongue. I can't always hold myself back.*

God doesn't expect you to sit by passively, never to voice your thoughts. Nor does he expect you to always keep your emotions in check. But the things you say should undergo a transformation. Through faith in Jesus, you are a new person. In that newness you will want your words to be sanctified—words that God approves of, even when you are in the middle of a crucial conversation. For that, we need help. So we pray, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

Viewpoint

From Valleys to Hilltops

Lisa Rankin

Over the past months I have been in a valley. God has certainly been right there with me. I have learned many things, and I'm still trying to understand all he wants to teach me.

As a single parent, my tendency is to think that if I had a husband—someone who could go through this tough parenting time in my life with me—this business of being a parent would be a lot easier. My married friends remind me that being married is hardly a guarantee that you won't be alone when you're raising kids. I have one married friend whose marriage partner provides almost zero emotional support as her parenting partner. Solo parents sometimes tend to forget that the grass isn't always greener. Now, please understand that I have nothing against marriage; it's a key part of God's family plan. And maybe God will find a husband for me in my future. It's just not the way things are in my family right now. And that can be a challenge. Being a single parent is a journey filled with challenges.

Many of my best friends are single parents. Some were never married. Some are widows or widowers. Others have joined the ranks of single parents through divorce. The one thing we have in common is that we are raising our kids on our own—solo. The harsh economic reality of running a household on one income is also something most of us share in common.

For single parents the balancing act between one's home life and maintaining a career is more intense than it is in most two-parent households. Many single parents have to support their families by holding down two jobs or by working more overtime hours, just to make ends meet. This trade-off strips away much of the family time that all families need. The money to pay the bills has to come from somewhere, which means working more hours that could (and should) be

spent encouraging each other to grow stronger in faith and character.

Most single parents learn early that the older our kids get, the rougher the journey becomes. There is just so much out there in the world trying to pull them away from the God who loves them. That challenge is magnified for the solo parent whose messages are not being consistently reinforced by a partner's voice. Some children rebel against the only voice they hear. You tell them to go right; they go left.

How do you deal with a child who seems to go against everything you have tried to instill in him? Of course, you pray for him. You love him. And you remind yourself that God loves that lamb who is living so dangerously close to the edge.

You support him and provide guidance.

You try not to judge. (Oh, how you try not to judge!) And yet, there are times when a parent has to point out the dangers and temptations that worldliness presents. Our kids are exposed to so much via the Internet, television, and music. But that's part of the journey as well.

How hard it is to be a single parent these days! How hard it is to be a *Christian* parent these days! We need the prayers of our Christian brothers and sisters. We need all the emotional support we can get. All parents do. Parenting is a journey filled with challenges and heartache, struggles and disappointment. But it is also a journey that drives us back into our loving Father's open arms, where we can find peace for our troubled souls, rest for our weary bodies, and strength for the unknown road ahead. It's a journey that God means for us to have—a crucible that hardens us and teaches us to persevere in the hope we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. Would we want it any other way?

Lisa Rankin is a single mom of one and second mom to many. She strongly believes that it takes a village and a strong faith in Christ to raise a child.

Being a single parent is a journey filled with challenges—would we want it any other way?

our family MATTERS

Embrace the Changes

Karin Pacetti

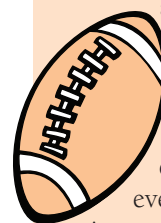


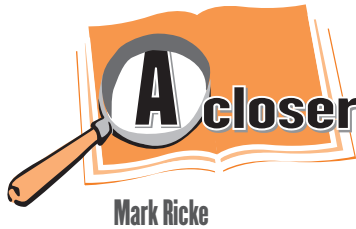
Do you know what it feels like to be hugged by a 220 pound, 5-foot 10-inch football player? It feels fantastic, especially when the person inside that football player is my *little* boy. At age 14, he's a big, strong, unmovable lineman. Yet every night I get two, sometimes three, "Goodnight, Mama" hugs and kisses. That's how I know that in spite of all the changes brought on by his teenage years—razor stubble, driver's ed, prom talk—there are changes going on in my little boy that will take some time.

In between the Xtra-Large loads of laundry, I remind myself that I need extra patience in letting his maturity and decision making catch up with the rest of him. I have to learn what Solomon wrote about by divine inspiration: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain" (Ecclesiastes 3:1,5). For me, it's hard enough just to keep track of the times and places we've agreed that I would pick him up from some event, let alone the times to scatter and gather stones. So when I get those good-night hugs, I take the opportunity to make a mental note that maybe a few good-morning hugs from me would make his day (and mine) begin better.

(Do you know the best thing about those hugs? I don't have to bend over anymore.)

Karin Pacetti is a member of the Parents Crosslink Concepting Team. She teaches in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where she lives with her loving husband and their two beautiful, huggable children.





Mark Ricke

A closer look at GIDEON

THE HESITANT HERO



Read Judges chapters 6–8.

Many superheroes have two names. Clark Kent is Superman. Peter Parker is Spider-Man. Bruce Wayne is your everyday rich guy; but when there is trouble, he's Batman.

Centuries ago there was trouble for God's people. All of it self-inflicted. The people of Israel had forgotten their commitment to the Lord, who loved them. The descendants of Jacob had turned to the worship of Baal, which involved the practice of sexual activities in places where everyone could see what was going on. God would not allow his chosen vehicle of grace to fall away. To get Israel's attention, he allowed a tribe of hostile nomads to plunder the Israelite's land year after year. The attacks destabilized the economy and looted the dwindling food supply. Finally, the people begged God to intervene.

The Lord sent them a superhero, a man named Gideon, who would later be named *Jerub-Baal*. We'll get to the meaning of our superhero's new name in a minute.

Like us, Gideon was familiar with the forces of his day that were luring God's people away. He had personal experience with the temptations that a heathen society had to offer. His own father had constructed a shrine to Baal in the remote town that Gideon's clan called home. Yet the Lord in his wisdom used Gideon to serve as a blessing to the people God loved.

When the angel of the Lord drafted him into God's army, Gideon did not look like a superhero. He was threshing wheat, at night, in a winepress. The "great warrior" was afraid that the enemy would see him working and steal his food again. So Gideon threshed in secret.

"The LORD is with you, mighty warrior," God communicated (6:12).

Mighty warrior? Gideon had his doubts. He doubted that the messenger

was who he claimed to be. He doubted his own skills and preparation.

The Lord told Gideon, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand" (6:14).

The mighty warrior said, "But . . . I am [a wimp]" (6:15).

The Lord reassured, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites [like they are just one man]" (6:16).

Gideon asked for a sign. He needed proof. He was no Jerub-Baal yet.

In response, the Lord proved that he was God, showing Gideon that Baal had no power at all.

ALONG WITH
ONLY THREE
HUNDRED MEN,
GOD USED GIDEON
AS HIS SWORD OF
RELIEF FOR THE
PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

You are a superhero to your family. Maybe your second name could be the *Right Arm of the Lord* or *God's Hand of Love*. You know that Jesus is who he claims to be. Yet the devil wants to shake your confidence. He wants you to be a wimp in Jesus' army. He whispers in your ear, "You are not worthy; you are ill-prepared and hopelessly afraid." And he brings up your checkered past associations with the Baals of our day as evidence. His plan is to sabotage the gift you are intended to be to your clan.

Gideon's first battle was with his own relatives. He was to destroy the altar to

Baal his father had built, kill the bull he used for breeding purposes, and sacrifice it to the true God. The mighty warrior did as his Lord commanded . . . albeit hesitantly, with the support of others, and late at night so as not to be seen.

When they discovered their high place destroyed, the town's men were enraged. God used the logic of Gideon's faithless father to save the hero and give him his warrior name. Joash said, "If Baal really is a god, he can [kill Gideon] himself" (6:31). But Baal could not harm the reluctant warrior.

Gideon received his hero's name from the gang that wanted him dead. They called him Jerub-Baal, which means "Let Baal fight him." Jerub-Baal became God's tool of liberation from the hand of Midian. Along with only three hundred men, God used Jerub-Baal as his sword of relief for the people of Israel. Forty years of peace followed Gideon's miraculous victory (8:28).

Your continuing battle is for your family. Destroy the altars of today's Baals, using the truth of God's Word and the courage of a chosen superhero. No matter how unworthy you may feel about your own abilities or preparation, remember that you also have a superhero. His mother called him *Jesus*. His warrior name was *The Anointed One*. He is your Lord. When the devil points out your sinful past, lean on the loving obedience that Jesus lived for you. Your superhero never worshiped any false gods; he was always faithful to his Father. He freely gives that same record of flawless faithfulness to you and me. No one can accuse us of not being worthy to lead. So, step up to the front and lead.

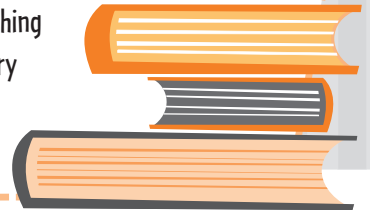
Mark Ricke and his wife, Lisa, are parents of four. Mark teaches religion and social studies at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Learning 101

Michael Albrecht



Perhaps you had a teacher who simply spoke words of knowledge and expected you to learn everything he said. If you are an auditory learner, this approach worked. If not, you probably didn't learn very much. Children learn in different ways. The information below, coupled with an online test, can show you how to take advantage of your child's strongest learning style.



I HEAR YOU! (Auditory)

—learns best by hearing

Applications:

- Read books aloud to help your child gain comprehension skills.
- Memorize or review by repeating information out loud.
- Learn math facts by drilling questions and answering out loud.
- Use poetry and rhymes to reinforce concepts.
- Set important facts (places, dates, formulas, etc.) to music.
- Use a steady beat or a rhythmic pattern to memorize facts.
- Use a tape recorder or other sound media to record and review class notes.
- Use discussions to help summarize written text.



LOOKING GOOD! (Visual)

—learns best by seeing

Applications:

- Use pictures to help comprehend written text.
- Draw pictures to summarize written text.
- Sketch pictures or draw diagrams for math story problems.
- Use flash cards for learning math facts.
- Demonstrate concepts through actions and experiments.
- Use photos, videos, and charts to reinforce concepts.
- Use color coding and highlighting to review written text.



FEELING GREAT! (Kinesthetic)

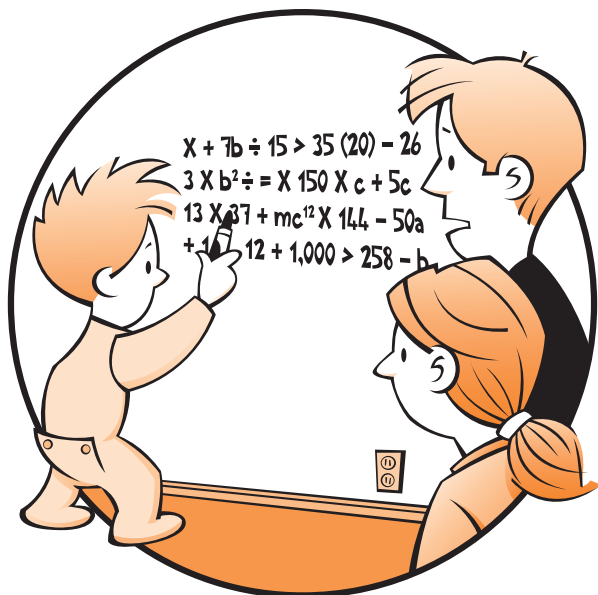
—learns best by doing

Applications:

- Use manipulatives (coins, jelly beans) when figuring out math problems.
- Use hands-on activities and experiments to prove concepts.
- Act out written text to help gain comprehension.
- Use games to reinforce concepts.
- Get up and walk around when studying.
- Act out role plays.



Now take the simple online test to find out which learning style best suits your child. Go to www.parentscrosslink.net and look for "learning."



"Do we punish him or give him tenure?"

Parents Crosslink

DEAR READER,

Today's parents learn from each other, sharing ideas and encouraging one another to meet the daily challenges of living in an increasingly godless society. In the context of the gospel, this is a very powerful dynamic. *Parents Crosslink* (PCL) is a response to the demand for an interactive approach to assisting parents with a biblical view of family. Please join our ongoing conversation about Christian parenting at the PCL Web site located at www.parentscrosslink.net.

Kenneth Kremer, PCL Editor

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