

Parents Crosslink

“May Jesus watch over you”

The practice of speaking blessings to the members of your family

Jerry Kastens

Do you bless your children or your spouse? Are the members of your family comfortable with giving and receiving blessings from one another? God’s people are not limited to the pronouncement of a weekly blessing during worship by a pastor. In our daily coming and going, wishing one another well in Jesus’ name is a custom worth cultivating.

Blessings in the past

The idea of blessing one another is hardly a new concept for God’s people. The Bible has examples of such blessings, both among individuals and within larger groups. Scripture makes it clear that God wants us to pronounce his blessings on one another. God told Moses to have Aaron bless the Israelites with these words: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26, known as the *Aaronic blessing*).

The apostle Paul called upon the name of the Lord Jesus to bless the New Testament believers at Philippi. “The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Throughout the ages, believers like Isaac, Jacob, and the apostles spoke the Lord’s name to invoke his protection and as a prayer of benediction on behalf of other believers.

God’s power, his faithfulness, and his undeserved love stand

behind any words pronounced in blessing to others.

So, here is the challenging question:

If spoken blessings had such value among ancient believers, is it possible that we also need to make better use of this valuable tool?

Appropriate for everyone

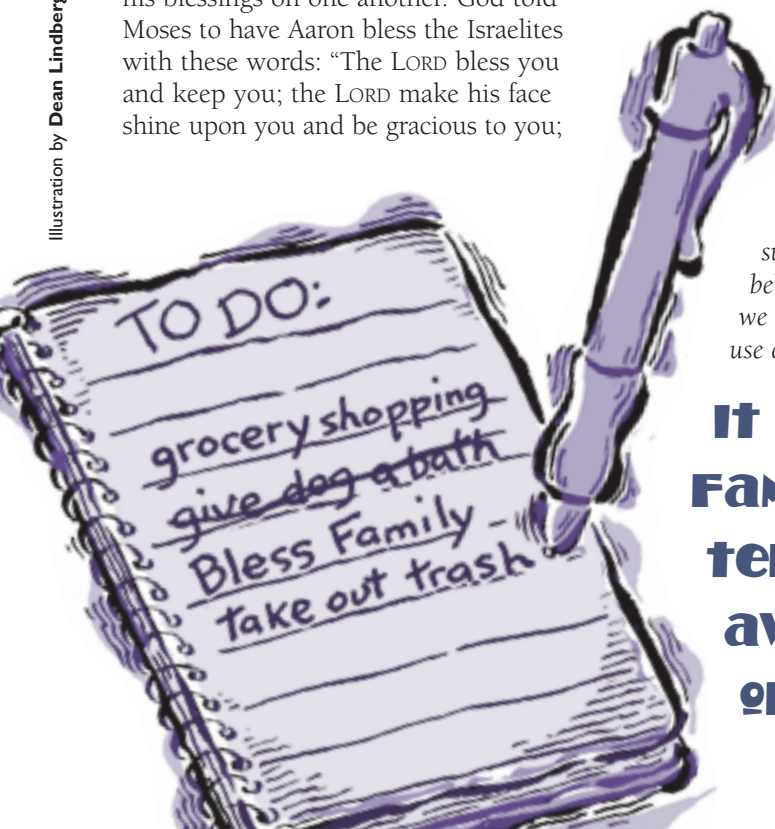
Several years ago I met a woman who convinced me of the benefits of this faith practice. She was a member of a workshop group I was leading. I asked the group if any of them blessed his or her children. A few hands popped up. Then I asked if there was an age at which parents might discontinue the practice. The mother of a teenager told the group that when her son entered high school, she decided to stop speaking the words of the Aaronic blessing to him before bedtime. She sensed he had outgrown this routine. Weeks later, as her son headed off to bed, he paused to ask his mother, “Aren’t you going to bless me anymore?” The simple act of a mother speaking a nightly blessing had become important to the young man’s spiritual and emotional security.

Elements of a blessing

When it comes to blessing others, are there some basic elements? None of what follows is sacred. But some components are common among the blessings we find in Scripture. You can apply them to your own situation as well.

IT IS POSSIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY FAMILY LIFE TO BE CLOSE IN TERMS OF PROXIMITY BUT FAR AWAY IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ONE ANOTHER’S NEEDS.

(Continued on page 2.)



(May Jesus . . . cont.)

All blessings are relational. Every blessing requires some kind of personal commitment in the form of time and energy.

Blessings involve spoken words. If you are a parent, your family needs to hear a heartfelt blessing articulated in simple, clear, and certain terms. And the words you speak will need to be supported with your daily life—*walk the talk* so that your words aren't perceived as empty.

Blessings often involve meaningful touch. Researchers are discovering more about the importance of touch. Physical contact has incredible power. Children of all ages need hugs, kisses, handshakes, high fives, pats on the back, hand-holding, and group hugs. Touch signals often come naturally for moms. Many Christian fathers still need to discover meaningful ways to communicate love for their children in a simple touch.

In contemporary family life, it is possible to be close in terms of proximity but far away in terms of understanding one another's needs, goals, hopes, and fears. A spoken blessing can often become the opportunity for sharing deeper thoughts and feelings about a wide range of personal issues.

A time for blessing

The milestones in life such as a baptism, the first day of school, a confirmation, heading off to college, or getting married are ideal times to speak special blessings to another member of the family. But don't miss the everyday routines. Heading off to school is a great time to encourage children with simple blessings such as "May Jesus go with you" or "May God watch over you." And then there are those opportunities for pronouncing a blessing and saying a little prayer following discipline. Who of us doesn't need to hear "Jesus loves you. He forgives you. And so do I"?

The idea of blessing one another at home may sound like something new or unusual. While it may not be a common practice, it is a very natural activity for Christians. No matter what life stage your family finds itself in, your blessings can become an important part of family life. They represent incredible power. You may waste precious time and energy on a thousand different things every day, but you will never be wasting those brief moments when you speak a word of blessing to your loved ones. *May the Lord bless your efforts and allow you to be a blessing to the members of your family.*



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Share your thoughts and ideas regarding the practice of blessing family members by joining us online at www.parentscrosslink.net.



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

www.parentscrosslink.net.

Q Jesus taught his disciples to turn the other cheek, but my dad tells me to fight back when someone pushes me around. Who should I listen to?

A Many people use Moses' words in Exodus 21:24 out of context, as justification for fighting back. When God said "eye for eye, tooth for tooth," he was giving regulations to the court systems of that day.

God forbids us from taking revenge in Proverbs 24:29: "Do not say, 'I'll do to him as he has done to me.'" Instead, we try to respond in a way that follows Jesus' command to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). It might also help to remember that defending yourself does not only mean "fighting back." It can also mean trying to talk with this person to find out why he

wants to hurt you, or seeking the help of an adult.

Remember Christ's perfect example of being willing to suffer even unjustly at the cruel hands of others. Use his example as a guiding principle. Then look into your own heart and know your own motives before you decide to defend yourself.

Q Our children are ages 5, 7, and 11. Their very dear grandma is terminally ill. How can my husband and I approach her imminent death in a way that will not traumatize them?

A Many parents are afraid that they will traumatize their children by discussing death, especially the death of a loved one. They avoid the topic, give misinformation, or "candy coat" the issue. These approaches are rarely helpful.

You will not traumatize your children by being open and honest about death. How can parents in this situation proceed?

- Ask children individually how they understand Grandma's illness.
- Explain Grandma's treatment and imminent death in simple and general terms.
- Deal effectively with your own grief, versus projecting it onto your children.

- Provide outlets for your children to express their grief. It's okay to cry. Draw pictures and write letters. Create a memory box and fill it with items that celebrate Grandma's life. Recite or sing the words of the well-known hymn "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."
- Reassure your children that God will give them the strength they need to deal with their pain and sadness.
- Reassure your children that Grandma will be enjoying the peace of being in heaven with her dear Savior.
- Share memories and encourage them to talk about their feelings.

We are asking our readers to respond to this recently received question. Please go to www.parentscrosslink.net.

Last Sunday, after church, I watched dumbfounded as the children of one of our member families climbed all over a statue of Jesus that stands near the entrance. This happened in view of both parents. How should a Christian react in such a situation?

Stephanie is Jesus' Little Lamb

Michelle Butzine

Stephanie is Jesus' Little Lamb

GOD'S COMMAND IS SIMPLE: EVERYONE IS TO BE BAPTIZED.

What isn't always so simple is arranging the traditional celebration that follows.

If only there were ten commandments for party planning. "Are we serving turkey or ham?" "Did you order the cake? We can't take a picture of the cake if there is no cake."

When it comes to important occasions in a Christian family's life, just who is it that we're trying to impress?

Many fathers may not be out to impress anyone. This may be a slight exaggeration, but from a mother's perspective, the father's role usually involves socializing and making sure everyone has something to drink.

Most mothers, on the other hand, are probably trying to please everyone.

Moms feel a need to make things seem as perfect as possible, while leaving the impression that they have put forth a minimal effort. A new mother, planning her baby's baptism celebration, is likely to be in charge of all the details. And details are a lot of work! Will the baptism be before, during, or after the service? What will the child wear? What will I wear? (As she considers such weighty questions, a rubber band holds her pants up because nothing in her closet fits.) She must contact the pastor and the church secretary, send out invitations, clean the house, plan the menu . . . all before the day of the baptism. Then, when it finally arrives, she will be functioning on about five hours of frequently interrupted sleep, and all her preparations inevitably will be implemented on a wing and a prayer anyway.

With all the planning, the final outcome is never completely in our hands. The cake that my mother-in-law ordered for Stephanie's baptism (Stephanie is my niece) was more memorable than anyone could have imagined. Maybe the bakery was especially busy that Sunday morning. Or perhaps the cake decorator was especially tired. Whatever the circumstance, what was meant to be a special message for Stephanie became quite absurd. Not only was her name spelled wrong, but the arrangement was altogether confusing. In the center of the cake, delicately crafted in white icing, were the words "Stephanie is Jesus." Running down and off to one side of the cake, the rest of the message, also misspelled,

was written as a separate phrase: "Litte Lamb." Of course, we took a lot of pictures of the cake. My mother-in-law even snapped an extra shot to take back to the bakery for a partial refund. Though the words were distorted, the message was clear. Like all who are baptized, "Stephanie is Jesus' Little Lamb."

It is possible to lose sight of the real reason you've gathered together. Talking with an infant about the significance of Baptism may be impractical, but there are other ways to keep Christ at the center of this special day. Celebrating a baptism offers each of us a chance for renewal. It's an opportunity to explore the meaning of Baptism in our daily lives. Saint Paul wrote, "We were . . . buried with [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4). This is a good time to consider what Paul meant. His message is actually quite simple: Through Baptism, we have new life in Christ. As we take time to celebrate this new life, we can reflect on our own baptisms and share those reflections with family and friends.

WHILE HE DOESN'T GIVE US A GUIDE TO PLANNING THE PERFECT CELEBRATION, OUR LORD DOES INSTRUCT US ON WHAT IS IMPORTANT.

Although he doesn't give us a guide to planning the perfect party, our Lord does instruct us on what is important. In Luke chapter 10, we read about a visit Jesus made to the home of Mary and her sister, Martha. While Mary listened intently at Jesus' feet, we are told, "Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made" (verse 40). When Martha expressed her frustration with Mary, Jesus

lovingly reminded her that "only one thing is needed" (verse 42). That *one thing* is Christ. And our goal is to keep him at the center of all our celebrating.

As you plan your child's baptism, keep the following in mind. It doesn't matter if you serve turkey or ham. In fact, you may even choose to forgo the cake. What really matters is that you've brought your child to be baptized, and that is truly something to celebrate.



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For some great tips on preparing to celebrate a baptism in your home, go to www.parentscrosslink.net.

UNLOCK the reading code

How we can help our children understand what they read

Sally Davis

A parent-teacher conference may surprise some unsuspecting parent when a teacher says, “Your child recognizes the words, but I’m not sure he always understands what he is reading.”

Reading needs to be driven by a search for understanding, otherwise it could be argued that it is not reading at all. But sometimes the understanding part gets lost in the shuffle, especially in the primary grades. When that happens, parents and teachers need to help children break the reading code.

Why is meaning—specifically *deep* meaning—so important to reading development? Well, for starters, it engages the part of our intellect that God uses to help us study his Word. That’s not to say that faith isn’t imparted through the spoken Word or by the power of the sacraments. But using one’s intellect to unlock the truths hidden in the written Word can certainly deepen an understanding of God’s great love for his people.

Reading for deep meaning occurs in the part of our intellect that helps us communicate and think. The focus on understanding then applies not only to reading but also to thinking.

We all want our kids to learn to read and make decisions based on their knowledge of factual information. But we also want them to develop a deeper understanding of God’s plan for them. We will want them to learn how to apply the things they read in Scripture to the many experiences of their lives.

Reading is a process. It connects what each reader knows about letters and sounds, oral sentence structures, and expected meanings with words on the page (Clay, *Becoming Literate*). This article focuses on the *meaning*, or *understanding*, part of the process—the part that some parents learn is weak in their child’s reading development. The strategy featured here is called *inferring*. Its purpose is to teach children how to grasp a deeper understanding of what they read and, thereby, enhance their ability to think about that meaning.



Illustration courtesy of imagezoo

A definition for *inferring*

It has been said that inferring is the bedrock of understanding. *To infer is to go beyond the literal interpretation of words—to open up a new world of meaning.*

Words have their own original meanings. But as we read them, they intersect with our background experiences and accumulated knowledge. Our minds have a remarkable capacity to merge the original meanings of words with our life experiences, turning their literal meanings into something that is uniquely ours. Inferring, then, is the capacity to weave ourselves into the words we read. The original meaning of what we read is revised, enriched, or sometimes completely abandoned as we place the words against the backdrop of our own lives. And our children have the same capacity (Harvey and Goudvis, *Strategies that Work*).

By the time children reach the age of 10, 11, or 12, they have accumulated a wellspring of background experiences to draw upon. Some youngsters are able to apply their life experiences to what they read earlier—to *infer* a uniquely personal understanding of the written code. These kids have managed to construct a strategy

on their own. But many children are not able to figure out a strategy for inferring. The result for them is a kind of surface understanding to everything they read and hear.

Helping your child learn to infer

The good news is that inferring can be taught. By thinking aloud for our children, we can show them how we use our experiences and knowledge to intersect with new information. This approach gives them a window into our minds and our thinking. But it is a process that is best taught by modeling.

This process is especially useful among Christians. When we think aloud for our children, we have the chance, over and over, to demonstrate that we don't create new meaning based on our own opinions but, rather, filter every one of our thoughts through an understanding of God's plan for our lives. God's Word—the Bible—is the unchanging filter. Children need to see adults using the filter of God's Word as they develop their strategy for thinking deeply.

My favorite example of inferring from a text in the Bible occurs when God, in a vision, took Abraham outside to look at the stars. The Lord explained that Abraham's descendants would outnumber the stars. Although it is speculation, I imagine what Abraham might have inferred from this encounter: *This is my loving God. He brought me to this new land, made me a wealthy man, and kept every promise. Now he's showing me these stars—more than I can count. But he can count them because he made them. He is letting me know once more that his plan is bigger, wiser, and more miraculous than anything my human brain can grasp. I don't know where my life will lead, but I know that whatever happens, it will all be for my good and he will keep his promise to send a Messiah through my offspring.*

Remember the first time you studied this Bible lesson? The questions probably went something like this: Q: *What did God tell Abraham?* A: *He would give him as many*

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offspring as the stars. Now, how deeply did you think about that? When you heard about Isaac being born, did you further infer that Abraham might later take Isaac out on a clear night to explain the promise of a Savior in the same way to help young Isaac understand? Scripture doesn't tell us this happened. But I know the same starry illustration would be my first choice to help my son understand.

When I teach this lesson to young children, I "think aloud" to let them hear me

infer: "When God later gave a child named Isaac to Abraham and Sarah, one of the first things Abraham probably told Isaac was about the promise of the Savior. Since God used the stars to teach Abraham about the promise of a Savior, Abraham might have taken little Isaac outside and, pointing to the stars, explained the promise of many children and grandchildren. Then Abraham would tell Isaac that one of those offspring would be the promised Savior. God kept that promise; the offspring-Savior's name is Jesus."

As they mature, children will need to have a well-developed inferring strategy to make life decisions and defend their beliefs. They will need to be equipped with the ability to apply deep meaning to everything they encounter in their lives. Life is filled with opportunities to teach children how to use this strategy to study and think. So it is important that we to start to help them develop this strategy at an early age, with "think-alouds" to teach inferring.



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Look at www.parentscrosslink.net for a live chat with the author.

Here are a few examples of how parents can use a think-aloud strategy while assisting with homework.

TO INFER THE MEANING OF WORDS

CHILD: "What does *simplistic* mean?"

PARENT: "It must have something to do with being *simple* because *simplistic* looks like the word *simple*."

TO INFER THEMES BY USING EVIDENCE IN THE TEXT

CHILD: "I don't understand why each chapter told a story about meeting a new neighbor."

PARENT: "All of the new people you met probably have something in common. Could it be that each one was nice in a different way and felt sorry that Ginny's mother had died. Is the author saying that friendship can be expressed in many ways?"

TO INFER THE MEANING OF TITLES

CHILD: "We have to research the religions of Antigua. Should I look first under *Culture* or *Facts*?"

PARENT: "The *Facts* section will give statistics for the country's area, population, and the names of big cities. The *Culture* section will tell you about the people and how they live. My first choice would probably be to look under *Culture*."

Viewpoint

Body parts

For years we've lamented how many of our youth become inactive after confirmation. With a sad shrug of the shoulders and voices filled with frustration, this confirmation dirge is sung so often that we all know the chorus: "Chalk it up to adolescence. Pray they come back when they're older and have families of their own." This attitude may seem a bit cynical, but the struggles of adolescence are unique, and the frustrations of trying to keep our youth connected to Christ are very real.

Our young people do struggle. They face a lot of temptations and personal trials in life. But perhaps the greatest struggle in this awkward and uncomfortable life stage is the struggle to find one's self. *Who am I? Where*

do I fit in? These profoundly personal questions fill a teen's mind as he or she tries to discover that special niche in life. Sometimes these questions, and the internal wrestling match that goes on to resolve them, are overwhelming. And all too often the teen's faith life—that precious, blood-bought relationship with the Savior—suffers as a result.

One way of helping teens stay active actually capitalizes on their search for identity and belonging. It's called *commissioning*, and it happens in connection with confirmation.

The process actually begins during the years of formal catechetical instruction. Lessons are taught about the body of Christ and each believer's special role. Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians and chapter 4 of Ephesians are key portions of Scripture supporting the concept. The students are shown that this isn't just a truth for future application. They are even now part of Christ's body. They already have unique gifts—special skills, abilities, personality traits, etc.—to offer in service to their Lord Jesus. In connection with these "body-building" lessons, students are exposed to the congregation's work. Congregational leaders visit their classes to talk about

various areas of ministry and the many opportunities for serving Jesus by serving others. And the students are each invited to sample these activities and get to know some of the people in the congregation who are involved in service work. It's important for them to have a little hands-on experience and to get to know active members.

As confirmation day approaches, each teen is encouraged to choose one or more service activities that match his or her gifts and interests.

Then, on the day of confirmation, the young confirmands are also publicly *commissioned* into Christian service. During the service, the same spirit-born faith that moves

these students to pledge themselves to remain faithful to Christ and his Word also moves them to pledge themselves in faithful service to the members of his body—the church. Some are commissioned as lectors or ushers. Others are commissioned as greeters or Sunday school teaching assistants. All are recognized as important members of Christ's body and, therefore, important members of the congregation.

Identity. Acceptance. Purpose. Teens long to *be someone*, to *belong*, and to *be needed*. Christ provides all three to the members of his holy body. Commissioning is a great way to help teens experience their identity, acceptance, and purpose in Christ.

Go figure! Keeping teens from becoming inactive might just be as simple as making them active members in the body of Christ.



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Want to learn more? Log on to www.parents-crosslink.net for an open discussion about how we can keep our teens actively involved in congregational life.

our family MATTERS

I need my Shepherd in parenting

Kelly Diersen

"Mom, where are you?"

"I'm downstairs!"

"I can't hear you."

"I'm DOWNSTAIRS!"

This conversation with my three-year-old occurs often in my house. If he can't see me, he'll call until he can hear my voice. Then he'll scurry to me.

My confirmation verse is John 10: 27,28: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.* I've studied it many times. But only when I had children did I truly understand its depth.

Shepherds share a special relationship with their sheep. Even if several flocks graze together, a shepherd always knows his own and calls only them. The sheep know their shepherd's voice and respond only to him. They trust their shepherd to protect them and lead them.

Just as I know and love my children, and they know me, God knows us. He will watch over us, protect us, and lead us where we need to go.

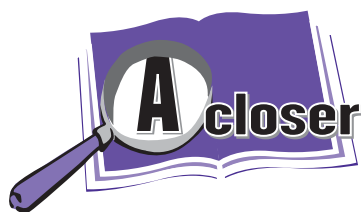
Our Good Shepherd's love for us has no limits. He has even laid down his life for us. How wonderful to know that *I am Jesus' little lamb!* How wonderful to be able to tell my children that they too belong to his precious flock!



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What's your favorite Bible text, and why is it so valuable to you? Let us know online at www.parents-crosslink.net.





Leon Ehlert

at THE MIRACLE AT JAIRUS' HOUSE

Meet Jairus, a man who, in the hour of parental anguish, experienced Jesus' compassion firsthand. This is his story.

She was my only child—only 12 years old. I pretended that all she needed was bed rest and nourishment. But soon her mother and I could no longer deny the gravity of her illness. Only a miracle would save her.

We had heard of Jesus. His popularity had grown recently. I went looking for him. When I found him, the crush of people that surrounded him was impossible—all were hoping to see him, hear him, touch him.

We were running out of time. But the rabbi was so busy that I had very little hope of reaching him. *Closer. Just a little closer.* I thought as I inched my way through the crowd. I started to mumble a prayer. "Dear God, please . . ." I didn't know where to begin.

When I finally caught sight of him, I was beside myself. Then, suddenly, I stood face-to-face with the rabbi. "My daughter is dying!" I gasped. "Please come. Please put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

He had only compassion in his eyes. I understood; he had time for me. He would come. Something in his expression told me all would be well. He would not let her die. I knew now why they followed him everywhere. They were like me. Desperate. Without hope. Clamoring for his help. But this was my crisis. *Don't they see my anguish!* I thought. *Don't they understand that my child is dying?* "Move aside! Give us room to pass!"

Then Jesus stopped. Abruptly. Or rather, he was stopped. "Who touched my clothes," he asked.

Oh, not now, I thought.

A woman impeded our progress. It was not good timing—not when Jesus was about to make his way to my house to help my daughter. The

woman must have touched his garment. Now she was at his feet, groveling in gratitude.

"Daughter, your faith has healed you," he said as he lifted her up. "Go in peace and be free of your suffering."

The joy on her face gave me hope. If the rabbi had healed her, he would certainly take pity on the sick daughter of a synagogue leader. Then we were interrupted again with unwelcome news from home—hard news for friends to bear to a loving father. "Your daughter has died. It is too late. Don't bother the teacher anymore."

"DEAR GOD,
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No! Not true, I thought. *How could the rabbi let this happen? God had heard my prayer; he had brought me to Jesus.* My mind whirled in confusion: *oh, my child, Lord!* Could it be we had wasted too much time?

Then Jesus spoke to me directly, "Don't be afraid; just believe." And in spite of the sobering news, he stepped away from the crowd and followed me to my house.

Believe what, I thought. *If she is dead, what more is there to believe?* But, oh, how I wanted to believe in something! The rabbi's words were all that I had.

The mourners were already keening when we arrived. "Why all this commotion and wailing?" asked Jesus as he stepped inside. "The child is not dead; she only sleeps."

Those who heard him laughed scornfully at the foolishness of his remark.

He told them to leave the house.

My wife and I, together with Jesus and three of his followers, stepped into the room where the child lay. The sight of her lifeless body was almost more than I could bear.

He spoke, "*Talitha, koum!*"

She stirred. Her eyes opened, bright and alert. She moved, taking in breath after life-giving breath. Sat up. Stood. Walked about.

Praise God! She was alive. Death had not won.

We gave her some food, and she ate as though she had never been sick. The miracle we hoped for had arrived, and the miracle's name was Jesus.

Words of Eternal Life

The words that Jesus spoke, *Talitha, koum*, mean, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" Jairus and his wife heard Jesus speak the very words that would raise their daughter from death to life.

Similar life-giving words are spoken today whenever a parent brings a child to the baptismal font: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." God's powerful miracle of Baptism raises the child from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Jairus only had Jesus' word of encouragement not to be afraid but to believe. Jesus didn't even tell Jairus what he planned to do. For us, Jesus' promise is more explicit: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25,26).



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Join us at www.parentscrosslink.net for more comments by the author on how we deal with death in our contemporary culture. Look for "Death in Our Culture."

SYMBOLS of the season Larry Collyard

The imagery on the walls and windows of your church is more than decoration. If you know its meaning, it can help you in your worship life. Then you can teach its meaning to your children to enrich their faith lives.



THE ROMAN CROSS

Saint Paul wrote, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). To the Colossian Christians he said, "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [his Son], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (1:19,20). *The Roman* (or Latin) *Cross* is the logo for all of Christendom and has been for two millennia. The Romans used this type of cross to crucify slaves and criminals. It reminds us of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross on our behalf, which are the crux of our faith and the center of our lives.



CROSS AND CROWN

The *Cross and Crown* is a symbol of Christian victory. Through Jesus' cross we have victory over sin and its damning consequences. Through his resurrection, we have victory over death. The apostle Paul speaks about that eternal victory in 2 Timothy 4:8, where he says, "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." In 1 Peter 5:4 we read the reassuring promise: "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." And the apostle John encourages us to "be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).



THE LAMB OF GOD

The lamb is an ancient Christian symbol taken right out of the Bible: "He was led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7). In the early church, this symbol often marked secret places of Christian worship in the Roman catacombs. It reminds us of Jesus as our Lamb, sacrificed for us, just as Old Testament lambs were sacrificed to take sins away. The banner and crown remind us that through Jesus' sacrifice, we have victory over death and Satan. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).



THE PELICAN

Legend has it that in times of famine, the female pelican tears open her breast to feed her young with her own blood. She sacrifices her own life to save the lives of her offspring. Thus, the pelican symbolizes Christ, who on the cross bled and died so we are washed clean of our sin and are saved eternally. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16).



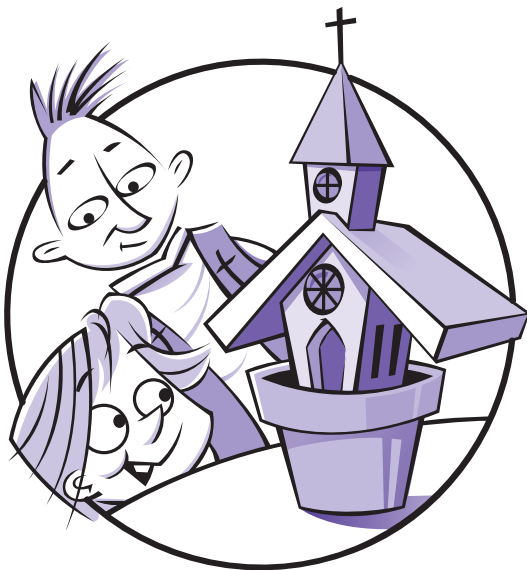
THE BUTTERFLY

The life cycle of the butterfly reminds us of the life of Christ. The lowly caterpillar enters the chrysalis and comes out a glorious butterfly. God's Son came to earth as a humble man. He lived, suffered, and died. But on Easter morning he arose victorious over death and his own grave. *The Butterfly* is also symbolic of our own resurrections. Paul told the Philippian Christians, "We eagerly await a Savior . . . , the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (3:20,21).

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Illustrations by Joe Boddy

Cartoon by Ed Koehler



"You said you would like a new church planted this spring."

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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