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FRUITY SCRUBBERS

Cleaning the bathtub can be a daunting task for children. I discovered a hack that has made bathtub cleaning fun and safe for my little ones. I take a grapefruit and slice it in half. Then I sprinkle a little salt inside the fruit’s flesh and, voilà, my young children have their own scrubber to get that dirty ring out of the tub. It’s cheap, chemical free and leaves my tub shining—not to mention the smell is wonderful.

—Courtney Roberts

The Puzzle Box

Loading and unloading the dishwasher is not exactly a coveted chore in our house. To help make it feel less like work, we recently started a weekly contest. Each child gets one night to organize the dishes into the dishwasher, which we refer to as the “puzzle box.”

We count the dishes as we unload the dishwasher, and dishes that are not completely clean are not included in the count. At the end of the week, whoever has been able to fit the most dishes in the dishwasher is deemed the dish puzzle champion.

From this, the kids are learning how to stack dishes so they get clean, and they are motivated to unload the dishwasher because that is their time to count their clean pieces.

—Allison Struber

Tiny Helping Hands

I have my preschoolers do age-appropriate chores. For example, I let them use their sorting skills to put away silverware. Additionally, they can put away nonbreakables (mixing bowls, plastic plates, etc.) on a lower shelf in our kitchen cabinet.

—Sara Beth Meyer
kids and turbulent emotions
Empowering your kids to win the battle in their mind

By Levi Lusko / Illustrations by Sija Hong
MY SENIOR YEAR of high school, I had an art class in a metal barrack on the far end of campus. A gravel path snaked past the cafeteria, gym and bus pick-up lot before winding its way down to a row of portable buildings. It has been 17 years since high school, but I can still vividly recall how it felt to walk to art class. The gravel crunching under my feet. The weight of my backpack. And my bad mood. That happened pretty often. Something during the day would set me off: being excluded, being mocked, embarrassing myself with something I said or did. So I shuffled to art class, wrestling with self-loathing and self-pity.

Maybe tomorrow will be better, I’d think. This day is doomed.
A funny thing happened, however. While I remember frequently walking to art class in a bad mood, I can’t recall ever leaving that way. In art class, each student had a private cubby, and our teacher sometimes let us bring music to listen to while we worked. I’d slip headphones over my ears, play worship music and fill pages with colors and shapes. Before I knew it, class was over, and I was walking that same gravel road but in a completely different state. The combination of music, art and a quiet place acted as a sort of lullaby that took my mind to a different place, helping me get my turbulent spirit under control.

I didn’t recognize it in high school, but now I understand a bit more about what makes me tick. I also recognize that nothing influences my life as much as the ability to control my spirit in the middle of volatile feelings and maddening circumstances. As a parent raising kids who now face their own daily challenges, I want them to discover this same truth—that how well we respond to external battles depends entirely on our ability to fight the internal war successfully.

That war takes place in our spirit, the part of our being that responds to God and receives His power. I tell my kids that if our spirit is out of control, it’s difficult to put our life under God’s control. Indeed, Scripture says that without a controlled spirit, we leave ourselves vulnerable for attack “like a city that is broken into and without walls” (Proverbs 25:28, NASB).

Teaching our kids to steer their spirit starts with helping them learn to manage their thoughts and emotions.

**Whatever is lovely**

When I taught my daughter Alivia to snowboard, one lesson I emphasized was that she needed to turn her head in the direction she wanted her body to go. So if she wanted to set up a turn to her heel edge, she needed to look over her left shoulder. Otherwise, her fancy footwork would be in vain.

Turn your head the way you want the rest of your body to go. The thoughts we allow to take up residence in our head determine the direction the rest of our lives go. Thoughts fuel emotions, which affect our words and behavior. This is why Scripture urges us to keep our heads filled with only good things—true, honorable, just, lovely and pure things (Philippians 4:8). Our lives depend on it.

No, your kids won’t be able to simply ban negative thoughts from creeping in. These thoughts will show up. The problem is that we let them come in and spend the night. We dwell on them, as they dwell within us.

I tell young people that we need to have a security checkpoint in our brain. Much like how the TSA screens every item that passengers bring onto an airplane, so must we carefully monitor the thoughts that enter our head. This process examines thoughts before we let them settle in and make themselves comfortable. Are you true? If you aren’t, you’re not welcome here. Are you noble? How about pure or lovely? No? Well, you gotta leave.

When we force each thought to go through a screening before we allow it to remain, we take back control from fear, shame, jealousy and doubt. Can you even imagine how
much of a game changer it would be if, as they’re heading off to track practice, walking to class or waiting to fall asleep, our kids allowed only the best thoughts into their minds? Look where you want to go. Don’t focus on the awful things you want to steer clear of; instead, direct your thoughts to a beautiful destination.

Staying plugged in
Positive thinking is important, but if it were really possible to do better just on our own willpower, we wouldn’t need God. But that’s not possible; we are fallen and bent toward sinful choices. The message of the Gospel isn’t “try”; it’s “trust.”

Our heavenly Father wants to send His ultimate power to aid us in our daily challenges. I tell my kids that being energized by God is like staying plugged into the power source we are designed to run on. There’s a night-and-day difference between using a coffee machine or a curling iron that is plugged in versus using one just sitting on the counter. We can’t try to do God’s work without His power.

How do we stay plugged in? One of the best ways I’ve found is intentionally spending time focusing on the love and wisdom of God, by reciting Scripture and singing or listening to worship music. Our kids can also be creative in involving the help of other people and calming situations to keep their spirits in check. Maybe it’s art, or taking a walk or enjoying time with God while sipping coffee. However we do it, meditating on God’s truth is the ultimate security screening: It focuses our mind and heart, making it impervious to the negative messages that bombard us.

The apostle Peter wrote, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3). Do you and your kids have all things that pertain to life and godliness? Potentially you do, but practically you have to tap into what belongs to you, one moment at a time. It’s a bit like having a gym membership: just because you have the right to go to the gym and freely use the equipment doesn’t automatically mean you’ll get stronger and more fit. You have to take advantage of what your membership gives you access to.

Let’s teach our kids that trying to overcome the challenges of life with their own strength is a serious error. We must rely on the power of the risen Lord, who is always ready to fight the battles He has already won for us.

Levi Lusko is the lead pastor of Fresh Life Church. His best-selling books include Through the Eyes of a Lion and Swipe Right.
CHERYL BACHELDER still remembers that hot and sticky night in her family’s Singapore home, an open-air British colonial where bugs, lizards and birds paraded in and out like uninvited guests. Cheryl was home from college for Christmas break, typically a joyous occasion for her, her parents and her three siblings. But not this time. Late that evening she found her father pacing the living room floor, worry etched deep into the lines on his face. She asked him what was wrong.

Cheryl recalls his answer: “Tomorrow I have to close a factory and 200 families will be impacted. I’m just sick about it.”

The manufacturing plant was in Malaysia—a factory Cheryl’s father had built, bustling with employees he had hired. In less than 12 hours, these hardworking laborers would walk into the plant for the last time. 

CHERYL BACHELDER: mom and CEO

How the woman who turned around Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen created a legacy of servant leadership at home and at work

BY ANA GASCON IVEY
“I was struck by how emotional my father was about the lives of these people,” Cheryl remembers. “He felt responsible for them. This was more than a business decision—it was about stewarding the lives of these employees and their families.”

Decades later, her father’s turmoil still influences Cheryl’s approach to servant leadership. She’s learned that “if you have to make that kind of huge business decision, you should be sick about it,” she says. “It’s embedded deep in my wiring now, to just care deeply about the people who are impacted by [my] decisions.”

It’s a lesson in servant leadership that informed her throughout her remarkable business career. Cheryl has served as the leader of several food chains, including as CEO and president of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen from 2007 to 2017, taking the company’s stock value from its low of $4 a share to a whopping $79. She’s been featured in Harvard Business Review and The Wall Street Journal and awarded top honors from the food industry.

For Cheryl, servant leadership is like a family recipe—one to be passed down from generation to generation. “My [life] purpose is to inspire purpose-driven leaders who exhibit competence and character in all aspects of their lives,” she says. “That is the organizing principle between my parenting . . . and my work.”

**Inspiring leadership**

The influence she and Chris, her husband of more than 30 years, have had on their daughters is the legacy she cares about the most. The servant leadership training of their daughters began unofficially at the dinner table. Cheryl and Chris wove servant leadership lessons into their dinner conversations about school projects and work issues. The couple also never missed the chance to point their girls to the ultimate servant leader—Jesus Christ.

“When our daughters were young, they naturally asked *why* questions,” Chris says. “Many times, these questions could be easily answered, but often they would lead to more *why* questions. When this happened, I made it a standard practice to say, ‘We won’t be certain about the answer to that question until we get to heaven.’ It was a way to encourage them to seek God and trust Him for the important answers in life.”

Cheryl (third from right) with her husband, and their daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren.
 Daughter Kate Odell, who is now married and writes editorials for The Wall Street Journal, remembers asking those **why** questions and seeking her parents’ wisdom for answers. More so, she recalls a mom and dad who demonstrated humble service to their children.

“My parents made a large sacrifice by moving across the state to put me in a high school that would be a good fit for me, even though their careers and interests may have been elsewhere,” Kate says. She also remembers a mom who made muffins for breakfast every Friday simply because Kate liked them.

“From what I understand about servant leadership, it isn’t about one-time grand gestures but a commitment to putting others first over and over again,” Kate muses. “These routines of grace are what I remember most about my childhood.”

Daughter Tracy Hyde, a married mother of three and a former industrial engineer for The Walt Disney Co., recollects a favorite childhood memory of her own—a mother-daughter trip. At the time, Cheryl served as the vice president of marketing and development for Domino’s Pizza, and together they visited Domino’s locations, connecting with all levels of company employees from the pizza delivery kid to store managers.

“She encouraged me to jump in and learn how to make pizzas because she knew you can’t lead or serve people well if you don’t understand the work they do,” Tracy recalls. “The way she interacted with the employees that she had never met before taught me that a good leader values all people and the contributions they make, regardless of how big or small their position is.”

**Leadership legacy**

Today, Cheryl continues to value and invest in the people around her. She left Popeyes in 2017 after a corporate buyout. She took time to mentor a handful of business and ministry executives and serve on corporate boards such as Proctor & Gamble, and she recently moved back into a corporate leadership role as interim CEO of Pier 1 Imports.

She remains available to her daughters as well, even though they’ve made their own homes and careers. Her daughters know Mom will always be there for them, just as Cheryl’s dad was for her. His advice informed her views about work, politics, community and parenting. “I had a strong relationship with him that continued until the day he died,” Cheryl says. “In my life, he was the person I always called with a major life decision.”

For Cheryl and Chris Bachelder, wise advice, availability and personal example make up the main ingredients in training kids to become servant leaders. They’ve also found that these ingredients are best served with a pinch of humility and a dash of sacrifice.

Ana Gascon Ivey is a freelance editor, career coach and writer who lives in the greater Atlanta area.
HOW TO RAISE KIDS WHO LOVE READING

Make your home a place where books are treasured

BY MEGHAN COX GURDON
PHOTOS BY THE BEAUTIFUL MESS
LAST SUMMER I stopped by the house of a friend to find her embroiled in a dispute with her son. It was the kind of dispute that many parents are excruciatingly familiar with in its contours, if not its specifics.

“Can I have my phone back?” These words were delivered with the droning petulance of a teenager who has said them many times before.

“No, Felix,” his mother said. “No phone until you read. Twenty minutes.” She turned to me. “He has to read.”

There was in her expression a blank exasperation. Of course, he has to read. Reading is important. Reading is enlightenment. Reading is required by schools, and this boy was about to enter the ninth grade.

“How about just the first chapter?” I chimed in, trading on my status in Felix’s family as “the book lady.” The novel he was holding had been my idea: Reluctant readers who start this thriller about a teen spy tend to finish it.

“Fine!” the boy said, dropping into an upholstered chair and letting out a theatrical sigh. He opened the book and started to read.

Victory! It may not have been the most harmonious scene, but by sticking to her guns, this mother got what she wanted—what so many parents today want. Her child was reading a book, the story blooming inside his mind even as the words increased his facility with vocabulary and syntax and grammar. Better yet, the boy wasn’t on his phone.

But was it really a victory?

Your home’s culture

Those of us who grew up loving books want our kids to do the same. We want them to read for intellectual and creative enrichment, certainly, but also to protect themselves against ignorance and academic struggles. We may feel a rising desperation when they’re reluctant or obstinate, like Felix, because they’d rather browse Instagram or play video games. At the same time, we may also harbor the uneasy recognition that we aren’t reading as much as we used to, either, and that we have our own unhealthy attachment to screens.

After Felix had cracked open the novel, his mom opened her laptop. “I need to check something,” she said. Felix glanced over, and I saw him register the fact that while he was expected to focus on reading a book, his mother was on the internet.

“This book is for 10- to 14-year-olds, which is not challenging enough for him,” my friend said to me. “He’s going into high school and has to be reading at a higher level.”

She returned her gaze to the glowing screen. I looked at her unhappy face, and then at Felix, sprawled out with the hated book, and it struck me that I was witnessing a perfect, miserable, circular display of why reading has become a source of conflict in so many families. As parents, we need to practice what we preach—being intentional about creating a home culture where reading isn’t seen as a chore kids must first accomplish before they can get back to the thing they really want to do.

Reading as currency

Why do kids do chores—or for that matter, eat their vegetables? Because parents insist on it. Often, we also tie chores to rewards, which creates an incentive to do the work. Unfortunately, this has the effect of putting the emphasis on the reward rather than the value of the task itself.
fun to share godly character

That’s what happened with Felix. The minute he finished the first chapter, he tossed the book away. “Done!” he announced, jumping up. “I’m getting my phone.”

His poor mom let out a sigh. She had gotten temporary compliance but no change of attitude. This is the problem with turning reading into a currency that buys screen time. The book becomes an irritant, an obstacle to be overcome before getting back online. Having a child perform this task alone, without other family members supporting or participating, makes it even less appealing.

Reading as a treasure

There is a happier way. It involves commitment, but offers the promise of lasting success. As parents, we have the chance to create a culture of reading that incorporates everyone in the family. By putting away our own screens and reserving time every day to read with our kids, we can make an eloquent and powerful statement on the value of reading.

Reading to children, starting when they’re born and continuing for as long as they will let us, is the first undertaking. These hours of warm, shared attention enrich relationships and dramatically enhance children’s emotional and cognitive development.

Reading with them is the second. Some schools schedule time for D.E.A.R.—Drop Everything and Read—and families can do it, too. Whether it’s during the odd half-hour or a regular stint every weekend, settling down to read silently together takes reading off the battlefield. Over time, this commitment can transform reading into a refuge for your family. If it sometimes involves more chatting than reading, or more graphic than classic novels—well, so what? Instilling a love of books is a process.

Reading battles—choose wisely

When a teacher assigns a novel, students have to read it whether they like it or not. At home, having created a time for family reading, we can kindle children’s interest by helping them discover books that delight them. Rather than fretting if reluctant readers choose insufficiently challenging books, we can celebrate when our children find something they enjoy and continue to validate their interest by finding more books like it. Libraries and bookshops are full of funny, wise, unforgettable stories that can enrich our families. We just have to make time to find them.

You don’t have to take it from me. Take it from Felix, who told me afterward (by text, of course) that “helping to find the right book is the first step” in getting kids like him to want to read. Felix confirmed that while parental reminders are helpful, nagging “turns reading into a chore, not a recreational activity.” He agreed that it would be helpful if adults put their screens away, too, and modeled their own interest in reading.

I had one last question: Had he finished the book I’d recommended?

He texted back: “Yeah, I loved it. It was really good.”

A victory after all, perhaps!

Meghan Cox Gurdon is the children’s book reviewer for The Wall Street Journal and the author of The Enchanted Hour: The miraculous power of reading aloud in the age of distraction.

How I Get My Kids to Read

The editors of Focus on the Family magazine asked parents how they’ve created a culture of reading in their homes. Their answers were surprisingly creative and practical:

**Book Bingo**

I gave my son a blank bingo card and helped him fill in each square with a reading-related activity. Some squares had book titles he wanted to read or the names of people he wanted to read aloud to or share the plot of a story with. Reading the Bible and writing a short letter to a family member about a story he’d read were also activities included in the bingo squares. Each time an activity was completed, I put a sticker in that square. Once he earned a bingo, he got to choose a reward, such as a trip to the library or skipping a chore that week.

—Diane Stark

**The Reading Hour**

“Can I stay up 10 more minutes?” I took that frequent request and transformed it into a reading tool. I had one simple rule: You can stay up an extra hour after bedtime, but only if you spend that hour quietly reading.

My kids gladly spent their extra hour reading page after page. I let the kids read comic books and graphic novels on the weekend, but I saved weeknights for character-building novels and educational nonfiction.

—Jessica Snell
An Audio Approach

I couldn’t get my second-grader to read. I tried several different approaches: I read to him, gave him books that were under his reading level and allowed him to pick the topics. None of it worked.

My stepmom, a literacy specialist, asked, “Have you tried audio books?”

Why would I let him get away with listening to a book rather than reading it? I thought. However, I was desperate, so I gave it a try.

From the start, I was amazed at how much he loved listening to books. There were days he spent hours in his room listening.

Gradually, I noticed less fighting from him when I asked him to read. Then he started taking books with him everywhere. The audio books even helped him read dialogue with voice changes. I was pleasantly surprised that my son developed a love for reading through audio books.

—Erica Sirratt

Book Towers

My two boys love to compete with each other, so I held a “book tower” contest. After a book was read, my kids would stack it on the last book read. Whoever had the tallest book tower at the end of the month was the winner. This activity was both fun for my children and motivated them to read more.

—Courtney Roberts

Bringing Books to Life

I have found that my kids love to read about things that they can experience. Before taking them to the petting zoo, I researched what animals would be on hand and then found books at the library about these animals. My children were excited to read the books because they knew they would soon be petting these animals.

—Jessica Tyson
Know What Your Kids Are Reading

Just because a book is trending or is written by an author you’ve trusted in the past doesn’t mean it’s a wise choice for your kids. Many contemporary authors include controversial cultural issues—like sexuality, suicide and opioids—in young adult books as well as middle grade novels.

Focus on the Family has tools to help parents know what topics are included in a book—and what the book’s biases are—so you can decide which titles are best for your kids. Go to PluggedIn.com/book-reviews to learn more about the content of the books your kids want to read.
the faith of a child

Sick pets, bullies, bed-wetting and other things kids pray about

BY DIANE INGOLIA
PHOTO BY SALLY DUNN

KIDS PRAY the darndest things. Whether asking God for help with bullies, an ailing pet or even a new brother or sister, little ones know how to get right to the point when they pray. The youngest visitors to Focus on the Family are no exception.

People come from all 50 states and many different countries to visit our Colorado Springs headquarters. Children in particular enjoy our fun indoor play area where we have a three-story slide, puppets, costumes, a toddler room, free birthday party rooms and so much more.

Another feature our young visitors love is “Wooton’s Mailbox” (inspired by our Adventures in Odyssey audio productions), where children are invited to share their prayer requests. Kids drop off thousands of prayer requests in this mailbox each year.

Their prayers can be sweet, funny or heartfelt—sometimes all at the same time. We pray fervently over all their requests, no matter how small they might seem, because all of them are important to us and to the children who take the time to write them.
HERE ARE SOME OF THE PRAYER REQUESTS WE’VE RECEIVED:

PLEASE PRAY FOR: me to have a good education [and] have a good life cause I am only 8, so I like just started life.

—Sara

PLEASE PRAY FOR: My cat Sugar is always getting into trouble and my family doesn’t want to keep her but she is one of my best friends and I love her a lot. Last week she ate mercury from a thermometer that she knocked off the counter and broke. Pray that she isn’t hurt.

—Penelope, age 14

PLEASE PRAY FOR: my dog’s metal leg.

—Logan, age 9

PLEASE PRAY FOR: My mom and dad left me at home alone for five days. Now I am in this foster home. She brought me here. My parents are still gone with my two younger brothers. I am 12. I miss them.

—Robbie

PLEASE PRAY FOR: Dear God, I pray for my mom. She struggles with kids in my family. She has to have a break soon.

—Erin, age 7

PLEASE PRAY FOR: a home for me and my sister and brother and mom because we are homeless.

—Sam, age 7

PLEASE PRAY FOR: my dad to go to church and become a Christian again!!

—Susie, age 12

PLEASE PRAY FOR: mom! Let her find a good guy to be with so I can have a dad and a sister or a brother.

—Holland, age 6

PLEASE PRAY FOR: my dad because he got a job. I love it when Daddy is gone because I can do whatever I want to do. Just kidding. I would never do that again ever and I helped a kid go down the slide.

—Nick, age 8

PLEASE PRAY FOR: my dad to not be so stressed and sad and please pray that he can forgive his parents. Please pray that we can find a house in the country that is nice. Also help my family to have faith and trust in God in hard times. Thank you for praying. (heart emoji)

—Piper, age 12

PLEASE PRAY FOR: For me to respect my parents and for me not to be swept away by the culture of today.

—Brooks, age 12

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