

Parents & Crosslink

Linking parents to one another and the cross

Recharge Your Marriage Batteries

Heather Bode

Do you remember the Energizer Bunny? The oversized pink rabbit sporting shades still graces battery packages because people know that the Energizer Bunny just keeps going and going and going.

Wouldn't it be great if marriage were like the Energizer Bunny? You and your spouse just keep going and going and going. But people get tired. Marriages suffer. Perhaps what we need is an opportunity to "recharge" our marriage batteries.

My husband and I recently had the opportunity to attend a WELS Marriage Retreat, and I am excited to share the experience with you!

WHY ATTEND A MARRIAGE RETREAT?

Role Modeling Marriage: It may be hard for us parents to think of our pudgy-faced little pumpkins as adults, but it happens soon enough. That baby-fresh smell turns into the smell of dirt, then progresses to the nose-wrinkling stench of body odor, and finally transitions to the pleasant scent of cologne or perfume. How do you want your children to be treated when they enter a marriage relationship? How do you want your children to treat their own spouses? Setting an example now is key.

Preventative Medicine: Have you heard of the term *gray divorce*? Several years ago, trends showed that divorce in the general public declined by a slight one percent. But divorce among those 50 and over increased greatly . . . and continues to grow today. The National Center for Family & Marriage Research reports that 1 in 4 marriages end up as gray divorces. Why? A common issue seems to be

the empty nest. More and more, our lives tend to revolve around our kids. There is huge debate over the number of extracurriculars in which kids should be involved. Perhaps an important issue in this debate is to look at the parents. How do the number of our children's extracurriculars impact our marriages? Do we have too little time for each other because we are so busy with the kids? If all of our energy is

devoted to our children's activities, the connection between spouses steadily disintegrates. By the time the children leave home, a huge gap can develop, a gap that some apparently think is too wide to repair.

Spend Time Growing Together in God's Word: How often do we spend an entire weekend with our spouse studying what the Bible says about marriage? Dedicating time to both God's Word and our spouse shows priorities. When those priorities are clear, marriage is strengthened.

THE FORMAT

Our retreat was held at a hot spring resort in Montana. Although remote, it created a "getaway" feel many couples appreciate. Pastor Randy Hunter from Middleton, Wisconsin, led our retreat. We began with a session on Friday evening. Eight o'clock may have seemed late to those of us with small children, but we soon realized why: couples from Utah, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Minnesota, along with those of us who live in Montana attended this retreat. One couple drove 1,200 miles to join us! Sessions ran from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. on Saturday. Then we were given free time for further discussion on topics of our choice; we were also encouraged to have a date night. Sunday morning included a final session and a worship service. Some of Pastor Hunter's closing words were, "Go home and share what you learned with your children."

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

"Whether or not you think your marriage is special, God says it is,"

(Continued on page 2.)

Dedicating time to both God's Word and our spouse shows priorities. When those priorities are clear, marriage is strengthened.



(Recharge Your Marriage Batteries . . . cont.)

Pastor Hunter said. It is easy to get distracted by work, parenting, and other obligations—at the cost of your marriage. It is comforting to realize so many other couples have similar struggles. To hear and learn (again) about communication styles, setting boundaries, and managing conflict can only reinforce your marriage for the times when the inevitable problems arise.

Look at the following list of biblical couples and their marriage issues:

- Adam and Eve: blame and accusation (Remember, they knew what a perfect marriage was!)
- Abraham and Sarah: relocation and infertility
- Isaac and Rebekah: deceit/favoritism
- Moses and Zipporah: career change
- Jacob and Leah and Rachel: jealousy
- David and Bathsheba: adultery, murder, and the death of a child

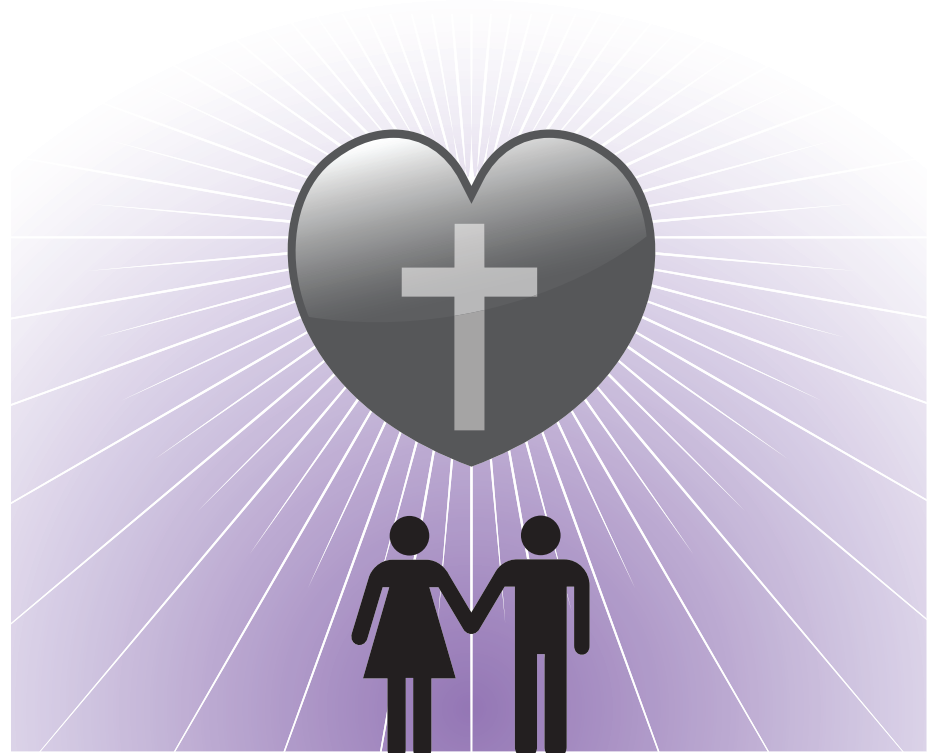
Although the Bible is silent on specific conversations between these spouses, we can be sure of two things: They struggled with serious marriage issues, and God guided them through these situations.

WHY IS THIS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS?

In volume 4 of the *Handbook of Parenting*, J. H. Grych, PhD, from Marquette University, says that since the 1980s “increasing attention has focused on understanding how marriage and parenting are related, and this research has supported the general proposition that the quality of the marital relationship is associated with the quality of parent-child relationships.”

But Grych also says there is a problem: “Although there is ample evidence that marriage and parenting are related, precisely how they affect each other is a question that remains unanswered.”

This must drive researchers insane! But, really, it’s not surprising, is it? This complex relationship began here: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them



“ . . . this research has supported the general proposition that the quality of the marital relationship is associated with the quality of parent-child relationships.”

(J. H. Grych, PhD, from Marquette University)

and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’ (Genesis 1:27,28a). God connected marriage and raising a family (parenting) at creation.

As Christians, we understand this interdependence. Husbands and wives rely on each other, children rely on parents, and parents have responsibilities to their children. Colossians 3:18-20 says: “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.”

What a beautiful relationship to model for our children! But the most important reason we live and model these relationship roles as husbands, wives, dads, and moms is because we are forever thankful for God’s saving

grace; he loved us enough to send and sacrifice his son (his family) for us.

Do your marriage “batteries” need a recharge? Gathering around God’s Word each week is a great way to do that. But an entire weekend dedicated specifically to marriage and surrounded by like-minded Christians gathered around God’s Word, for us, was even better!

To find a list of future WELS marriage retreats visit the synod’s website at www.wels.net. Another option is www.graceformarriage.com where you can view video segments and ask questions pertinent to your marriage.

(See page 8 for a discussion of marriage retreat myths.)

Heather Bode lives in Helena, Montana, where her husband serves as pastor for Valley View Lutheran Church. They have been blessed with five children.

A PICTURE OF Marriage

Katie Martin

Sandwiched somewhere between the day she wears a pillowcase veil and pretends to marry a prince and her senior prom, there will be a conversation with our daughter about marriage. As our son outgrows the wooden sword once used to rescue the damsel in distress from the bad guys and begins to notice girls, the same conversation will no doubt take place. What do these conversations sound like? How do we instill a deep respect for marriage within our sons and daughters and equip them to choose a God-pleasing spouse? Below are just a few things parents can do from the time their children are very young, adding more detail as they grow, to paint a picture of a God-pleasing marriage:

1. Look at the Scriptures. Marriage was established by God in the Garden of Eden as the building block of society. Its design was not flawed. Adam and Eve's marriage was perfect until sin entered the world. Since then, Satan has used every weapon in his arsenal to attack marriage. God designed marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman. Within this relationship, God designed husbands to love their wives as God loves the church and wives to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ (see Genesis 2:18-24 and Ephesians 5:22-33).
2. Model. Daily model love and respect for your spouse. Do your best to keep bitterness, pettiness, and arguing away from your children. When this endeavor fails, model forgiveness. Ask your

spouse for forgiveness and offer it freely in return. Single parents can surround children with other couples who model this love within their marriage and speak well of a former spouse no matter how difficult. When all else fails, see #1. See your Savior's arms spread wide on the cross, forgiving you for every failure. Every single one.

3. Make a wish list. Encourage your child to think about what qualities are important in a future spouse. While humility, intelligence, kindness, and sense of humor are important, nothing tops a shared faith in Jesus. A relationship built on Christ has a solid and sure foundation.
4. Define love. Love isn't that fluttery feeling in your gut when you see that special someone. Love isn't an emotion; it's commitment. Love is putting the needs of your spouse before your own. In good times and bad. This does not come naturally for sinful human beings, and it is not easy. A spouse who loves Jesus first, you second, and himself or herself third is a blessing from God. Here again, see #1. (Read 1 Corinthians 13.)
5. Pray. Pray with them and for them. Pray that the Lord will lead them to a Christian spouse who will encourage their walk with Jesus and support a lifetime of service to him.

The picture of marriage that society and the media paint for us is filled with infidelity, selfishness, and divorce. Instead of throwing up our hands in disgust and advocating arranged marriages (although these become slightly more appealing as our children reach the dating age), look again at the Scriptures. In his Holy Word, God gives us exactly what we need to navigate every aspect of our earthly life. When the conversation with our sons and daughters about marriage is grounded in the Scriptures, we see a different picture come into focus. We see a union of two sinful people united to Christ and to each other. Within Christian marriage, we can see a loving God pouring out blessing on his people and taking care of them in this life while preparing them for the life to come in heaven.

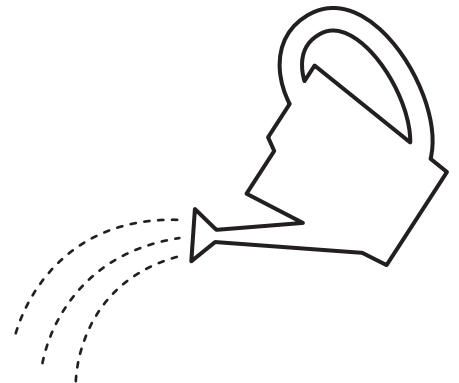
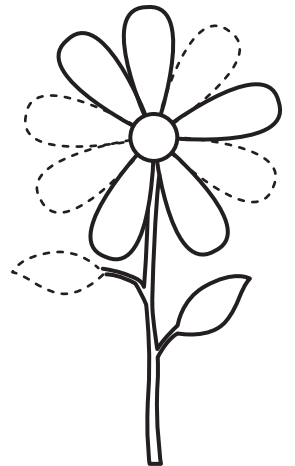
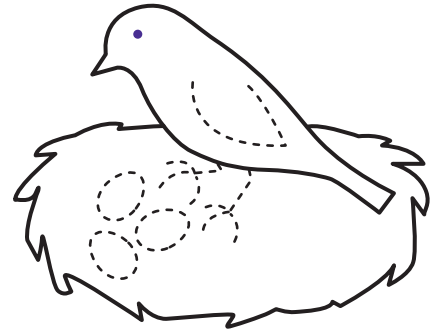
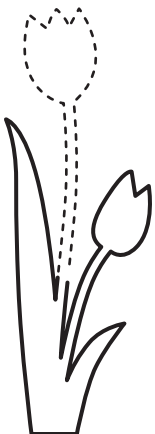
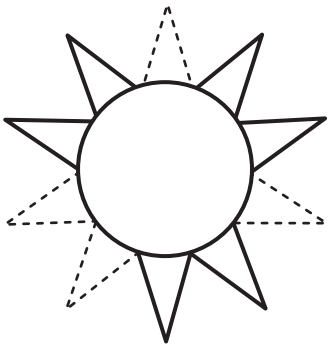
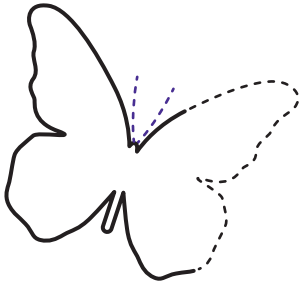
Katie Martin, a wife, mother of four, and author, lives with her family in Spiesheim, Germany.



A RELATIONSHIP BUILT ON
Christ HAS A SOLID FOUNDATION.

Spring Blessings

Complete each drawing of a spring blessing from God and thank him for it. Then look up and complete the Bible passage.



Every _____
and perfect
_____ is
from _____,
coming down
from the
_____ of
the heavenly
lights.

James 1:17



BEST TIPS FOR READING ALOUD to KIDS OF ALL AGES

Anna Geiger

What's your favorite candy? I love chocolate, and I don't need the fancy stuff. I could eat half a pound of M&M's by myself, no question. And if it weren't for the fact that my kids can smell chocolate from the other side of the house, I'd probably keep a bag in my desk.

It's a shame that something that tastes so good is so bad for me. Isn't that often how it is?

Well, today I have good news.

I'm going to tell you about an activity that's both enjoyable *and* good for you. It will entertain and delight your child. It will bring the two of you closer. It will improve your child's success in school. It will strengthen your child's faith in the Savior.

And it's practically free.

This may sound too good to be true, but it's impossible to overstate the benefits of reading aloud to children!

Why reading aloud to children matters

- It helps children be enthusiastic and positive about reading.
- It introduces kids to books they can't yet read on their own.
- It builds vocabulary, language, and writing skills.

- It enhances listening skills.
- It strengthens the bond between parent and child.

Most important, reading Bible stories and devotions to our children puts them at the feet of their Savior.

Make it routine

No matter how many children God has given you, life gets busy. Before you know it, it's bedtime, and you realize you haven't read a single book to them. With school, errands, appointments, activities, and meals—the time is gone.

My best advice is to create a read-aloud routine—whatever works for your family now.

You might try one of these:

- Read to your baby while you're feeding him.
- As soon as the breakfast table is clear, sit down for book time with your toddler.
- Read to your preschooler while the baby naps.
- Read aloud to your older kids as they enjoy an after-school snack.
- Enjoy a book with your teen or tween after the younger kids have gone to bed.

What if you can't find a good routine?

Squeeze in read-aloud time whenever you can.

- Do younger siblings get carted along for older kids' sports activities? Find a quiet corner of the school where you can read to your child when an older sibling is having basketball practice or warming up for the game.
- Did you miss read-aloud time with your toddler today? Grab a book and read aloud next to the bathtub while your little one splashes.
- Listen to books on CD in the car during your commute to school or after-school activities.
- If you have regular appointments, bring along a book for the waiting room.

Start when your children are babies

Babies are soaking up your vocabulary. Did you know that the more you read to your baby, the greater vocabulary she'll have at age 3?

At first, read whatever you're reading—out loud. Read aloud your personal devotions. Sing your favorite hymns.

As babies begin to focus, choose simple board books. Your best bet?

(Continued on page 6.)

(Best Tips for Reading Aloud to Kids of All Ages . . . cont.)

Books you can sing. Nursery rhymes are another big hit, as well as books with simple photographs and a word or two per page.

Tips for reading to busy toddlers

Some toddlers will snuggle next to you and listen to books for half an hour. Many won't.

If your toddler doesn't like to sit for read-aloud time, try these tips:

- Act out stories. (Fairy tales work great!)
- Substitute your child's name in the story.
- Ask your child to point out images in a book.
- Read aloud when your child is strapped in his high chair.
- Sing the book (even if you have to make up your own tune).
- Give your child something to play with while you read.
- Abbreviate. If your child won't listen to the actual story, name the pictures on each page and be content with that. It will come!
- Above all, have daily Bible story time together with a book at your child's listening level.

fascinated by nonfiction, entertained by fiction, and still like the nursery rhymes they loved as babies.

Keep these things in mind as you enjoy these special years:

- Remember to find quality nonfiction books for preschoolers. Ask your librarian to help you find a great series.
- Before reading, look at the pictures and ask your child to predict what the book is about.
- If you sense your child is losing interest, skip over the "boring" parts to move the book along.
- Ask questions to check understanding and promote critical thinking, but don't overdo it.
- Read with expression. Use different voices, and vary your rate and volume.
- Read as often as you have time for.
- Preschoolers soak up Bible stories! Make family Bible story time part of your daily routine.

Reading to grade-schoolers

This is where we are with my older kids, and it's a challenge. They've been confident readers since kindergarten, and they'd rather read on their own than have me read to them.

The best time, I've found, is after the younger children are in bed. I set aside 10-15 minutes to enjoy a book with my older kids.

Here are some tips to get the most out of those minutes:

- Take advantage of your child's longer attention span by reading books with developed characters, plots, and descriptive language.
- Begin each session by reviewing what you read the day before.
- Stop to discuss confusing passages or new vocabulary.
- Read above your child's reading level. Kids can enjoy more complicated books than they can read on their own.
- Read books that appeal to your child—whether that's fantasy, humor, mysteries, or realistic fiction. But branch out too. When

you read something outside of your child's preferred genre, you may motivate him to try something new when he reads on his own.

- Read reference books. My own kids love books of interesting facts.
- When choosing reading material for family Bible devotions, switch between Bible story books and devotions that relate to your child's life.

Don't stop! Read to your tweens and teens

Really? Read aloud to my teenager? Yes, really.

Older children have to read a lot. And most of the required reading they do isn't something they'd choose to read on their own. When you read aloud enjoyable literature, you're putting the fun back into reading.

It may be hard to connect with your older child. Read-aloud time can do that. If you've made reading together a priority through the grade school years, it will be a natural transition.

Tips for reading to teenagers

- Read books that inspire discussion.
- Take turns reading.
- When a nightly ritual is unrealistic, try to read a few times together each week.
- Read during chores: he washes the dishes, and you read aloud. Switch roles the next time.
- Make time to study the Bible together. Consider assigning a chapter and writing in the margin of your Bible. When you meet together, compare notes.

Enjoy the precious years you have to read aloud to your children! For a starter book list for kids of all ages, refer to the next page.

Anna Geiger, M.Ed., is a former teacher turned stay-at-home-mom. She and her husband are raising their six children (ages 0-8) in Mequon, Wisconsin, where Steve serves as professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Anna is the creator and writer of the education blog themeasuredmom.com, where she offers free lessons and printables for parents and teachers.

**IT'S IMPOSSIBLE
to overstate
THE BENEFITS OF
READING ALOUD
to CHILDREN!**

Reading in the preschool years

At our house, ages 3-5 are the golden years of read-aloud time. By this age, my kids beg to be read to and are attentive listeners. They're

RECOMMENDED READ ALOUDS

Here's a short list to get you started on reading aloud with kids of any age. Always remember to read the book yourself first to make sure it's the right fit for your family.

BABIES

- *Black on White*, by Tana Hoban
- *Busy Kitties (and other Busy Books)*, by John Schindel
- *Jesus Is With Me*, by Debby Anderson
- *Jesus Loves Me*, by Debby Anderson
- *Jesus Loves the Little Children*, by Debby Anderson

TODDLERS

- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Eric Carle
- *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault
- *Dear Zoo*, by Rod Campbell
- *Five Little Ducks*, by Raffi
- *Good Night Gorilla*, by Peggy Rathmann
- *Moo, Baa, La La La*, by Sandra Boynton
- *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, by Michael Rosen
- *The Wheels on the Bus*, by Raffi & Sylvie Wickstrom
- *My First Bible*, by Kenneth N. Taylor
- *The Rhyme Bible Storybook*, by L. J. Sattgast

PRESCHOOLERS

- *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs*, by Judi Barrett
- *Diary of a Worm*, by Doreen Kronin
- *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, by Mo Willems
- Frog and Toad series, by Arnold Lobel
- *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein
- Henry and Mudge series, by Cynthia Rylant
- *Little Pea*, by Amy Krouse Rosenthal
- Mercy Watson series, by Kate DiCamillo
- *Officer Buckle and Gloria*, by Peggy Rathmann
- Poppleton series, by Cynthia Rylant
- *The Pout Pout Fish*, by Deborah Diesen
- *Read with Me Bible*, by Doris Rikkers
- *My First Bible Storybook*, by Michael Burghof

KINDERGARTEN

— 2ND GRADE

- The Boxcar Children series, by Gertrude Chandler Warner
- *Charlotte's Web*, by E. B. White
- *Dory Fantasmagory*, by Abby Hamilton
- *James and the Giant Peach*, by Roald Dahl
- Magic Treehouse series, by Mary Pope Osborne
- *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, by Richard and Florence Atwater

- Mrs. Piggle Wiggle series, by Betty McDonald
- Ramona series, by Beverly Cleary
- Toys Go Out series, by Emily Jenkins
- The Complete Illustrated Children's Bible, by Janice Emmerson

3RD & 4TH GRADE

- The Adventures of Nanny Piggins series, by R. A. Spratt
- *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, by Roald Dahl
- The Chronicles of Narnia series, by C. S. Lewis
- *A Dog Called Kitty*, by Bill Wallace
- Little House series, by Laura Ingalls Wilder
- Poppy series, by Avi
- *Tale of Despereaux*, by Kate DiCamillo
- *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*, by Louis Sachar
- *The Story Bible*, by Edward Engelbrecht

5TH & 6TH GRADE

- *Because of Winn Dixie*, by Kate DiCamillo
- *The Cay*, by Theodore Taylor
- *Crispin*, by Avi
- *Hatchet*, by Gary Paulsen
- *Holes*, by Louis Sachar
- *A Long Way from Chicago*, by Robert Peck
- *My Brother Sam is Dead*, by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier
- *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry
- Redwall series, by Brian Jacques
- A Series of Unfortunate Events series, by Lemony Snicket
- *Where the Red Fern Grows*, by Wilson Rawls
- *Jesus, Our Family Guest*, by Joslyn Moldstad
- *Five Minutes with Jesus: Grades 5&6* (Christ-Light CD includes several Bible reading plans for fifth grade students and up.)

7TH GRADE & UP

- *Across Five Aprils*, by Irene Hunt
- *The Call of the Wild*, by Jack London
- *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury
- *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry
- *Nothing But the Truth: A Documentary Novel*, by Avi
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee
- *As Luther Taught the Word of Truth*, by Richard Lauersdorf
- *Together With Jesus*, by Richard Lauersdorf



Marriage Retreat

Heather Bode

MYTHS

“Is everything okay?” This seems to be a common question when a couple announces they are attending a retreat. Yes, everything is okay...and we are trying to keep it that way. Call it preventative medicine.

“It’s expensive.” I had the same thought. But once we deducted the cost of our hotel room, we were left with a total of \$90 as the cost. We weren’t even thinking of things like conference room rental, meals, etc. In the end, the question really is this: Is our marriage worth X-amount of dollars? You bet it is!

“It’s embarrassing.” Yes, topics of sensitive and potentially embarrassing issues (to some) might come up. The entire roomful of people is probably thinking something similar. But guess what? Nobody is watching you. It is a time for you and your spouse to focus on each other, not on those around you.

“We don’t have child care.” I hear you. This takes planning; it is not a last-minute decision. For us, it included inviting my in-laws to drive out to Helena from Appleton, Wisconsin, to watch our five kids. Another couple had grandparents drive in from Washington to care for kids. Another couple brought Grandma and Grandpa along to the resort for on-site child care. Others left children with congregational members and friends. The possibilities are endless. Find what works for you.

Just remember that maintaining a strong marriage, built on the foundation of God’s Word, is the first step in nurturing a healthy family.

Maintaining a strong marriage, built on the foundation of God’s Word, is the first step in nurturing a healthy family.

Illustration: Shutterstock

Parents & Crosslink

Parents Crosslink is published by Northwestern Publishing House four times annually in partnership with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod’s Commissions on Youth Discipleship, Adult Discipleship, and Lutheran Schools. All comments should be directed in writing to **Ray Schumacher**, Editor, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53226 or schumacherr@nph.wels.net.

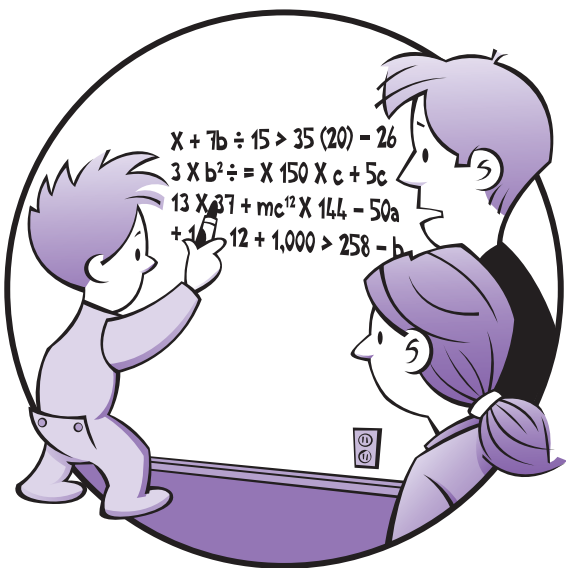
For subscription rates or other questions regarding subscriptions, call NPH Subscription Services at 1-800-662-6093.

Copy Editor – **Eric Kuenn**
Art Director – **Karen Knutson**
Designer – **Sarah Messner**

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. All materials contained in *Parents Crosslink* are protected under U.S. copyright law.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

James 1:17



“Do we punish him or give him lenare?”

Cartoon: Ed Koehler