

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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God's LOVE makes the difference.

■ by Mel Jonkman, MDiv, Executive Director

*God's love offers freedom.
Are you living free?*

I enjoy reading the comic strip "Calvin and Hobbes." In one of the comics, Calvin's mom is lying in bed. It's dark and obviously the middle of the night. "Mom! Wake up. Come quick." It's Calvin calling for her. She sits up and kind of mumbles. "What is wrong, what is the matter?" "Come here." In the next scene his mother is standing in the bedroom with a wide eyed Calvin and he asks, "Do you think love is nothing but a biochemical reaction designed to make sure our genes get passed on?"

His mom looks at him and says, "Whatever it is, it's the only thing that is keeping me from killing you right now."

The last box shows Calvin safely tucked back in bed, saying, "Mom's midnight reassurances are never very reassuring."

A different kind of love

I think that all of us who are parents are grateful that Calvin is not one of our children. However, he often makes me think. He does so again in this comic strip by raising an interesting question. What is love?

How would you answer that question? Is it simply a noun or is it a verb? Is it something that you can fall into and out of? Does it mean the same when you say "I love pizza" and when you say "I love my wife"? Is love selfish or selfless? Is it about what you get or about what you give?

I think that most of us realize that love should be selfless, but we also know that selfless love isn't easy. From the time we are very young we look to have our needs met. We grab things from those around us; we holler "Mine!" when someone touches our things and we cry when we don't get our way. It doesn't change much as we grow into adulthood. The objects of our affection change, but the root is still the same: we want our needs to be met. There are needs that should be met and asking our partner or friends to help meet those needs is legitimate. However, when we are primarily concerned about our own needs at the expense of needs of those around us, we are no longer functioning in a healthy manner.

How can we give up that strong desire to pull things toward us and replace it with a strong desire to encourage, build up and serve others? I believe that the only way we can do that is to



experience God's love and to live out of that love. The Bible in 1 John 4:10 says; This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. God's love is selfless, it is sacrificial and it transforms us when we experience it.

Are you living free?

God's love is transformative because it offers freedom. We are freed from our guilt. All of the wrong things we have done won't be held against us. We are freed from our shame. We are no longer defined by our actions or inactions. We are freed from the need to fill a void in our lives with drugs, alcohol, sex or things. God fills that void with his love and acceptance of us. Because God loves us unconditionally even though we don't deserve it, we are free to love others unconditionally and model God's love to them.

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God's love makes a difference because it lifts us up as we recognize that the creator of the universe loves each one of us as we are. God's love makes a difference because it shows us what true love really is. God's love makes a difference because it allows us the freedom to love others sacrificially even as we have been loved sacrificially.

Chicago Christian Counseling exists to provide Professional Christian Counseling to all who come to us for help. Our aim is for you to receive the best care as you interact with highly trained men and women. Our hope is that in the process you experience the wonderful love and acceptance of God through the care that you receive, because God's love does make a difference. ■



Mel Jonkman, M.Div.
Executive Director

Retiring Staff

Celebrating 20 Years at CCCC



Beth Elgersma, MSW, LCSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Beth was part of the staff for about 4 years in the 1970s, right after CCCC was founded in 1973. She came back to us in 2001 after she and her husband, Hank, moved back to the area. Beth has worked at our South Holland office ever since.

She will be retiring in mid November, after dedicating a total of 20 years to CCCC as a therapist. We are grateful for all that she has done to promote health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation, and education from a Christian perspective during her years here. She will be missed. We are praying for God's blessing upon her as she enters retirement.

*"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
Galatians 6:2*



LESS is MORE: De-stressing your Holidays

■ by Joy Bocanegra, MA, LCPC

Holidays are intended to be joyous celebrations. And yet when we think of the holidays we tend to think of too much to do, not enough money, hectic hurry, difficult family members, feeling depleted, and so much stress. Here are some ideas on how to approach the holidays from a more relaxed and playful perspective.

Meaning of the Season

Holidays are celebrations filled with spiritual meaning remembered through traditions we share with family and friends. Ask yourself what is the core meaning of the holiday and what does it mean to you. What do you want to be mindful of and how do you want to experience it?

Simplify

Scale down what you do. Reassess your traditions and think about what is important to you and your family. Ask your family what matters to them and what can be eliminated. Some people enjoy baking but if that isn't a priority to your family give yourself permission to let it go. Christmas cards, decorating etc. can all be re-evaluated.

Focus on people rather than things

Tune in to time with loved ones rather than "doing" for the holiday. Activities shared are more important than extravagance or lots of gifts.

Pitch Perfection

Perfect holidays aren't possible! When our



expectations aren't met we become disappointed. Adjust your expectations to match reality. Ask yourself what is realistic and bring your expectations of yourself and the holiday down to that level.

Live in the Moment

Be present to whatever you are doing or who you are with. Don't allow worry and stress to steal the joy of the moment.

Practice good self-care and awareness

The better you care for yourself the better you will feel which makes it easier to cope with whatever comes your way. Good self-care is essential all year round but even more so during the holidays or when stress increases. Pay attention to your body and be aware of thoughts and feeling. For example, let's say you are worrying about several things and feeling tired and restless. You can use this information to be kind to yourself by cutting short an activity to go home and rest, do some deep breathing or have a cup of tea. Self-awareness can help you make wise choices. Take time to de-stress. Rest, play, laugh, reflect, journal, exercise, color, do yoga, eat nutritious food, get plenty of sleep, pray and tell God your worries. Allow yourself to enjoy activities that help you relax.

*"Find rest, o my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken."
Psalm 62:5&6*

Be organized, break it up & delegate

Many holiday preparations take a good deal of time. Plan ahead and break tasks into smaller pieces. For example, make cookie dough on Friday night and bake Saturday morning. Decorate the Christmas tree over 2 or 3 days rather than spending all day on it. Assemble one day, put lights on another day and add ornaments yet another day. Delegating to other family members some of

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Parenting with Faith:

The Legacy of Discipleship

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

We struggle parenting children with a strong faith in a secular world, especially one that is becoming increasingly intolerant of Christian beliefs. We question the best way to help our children learn about, trust in and remain dedicated to God. **To help our children become spiritually strong, we must develop our own faith and deliberately, consistently disciple our children.**

Develop our faith

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith beautifully: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Trust and faith mean similar ideas. We cannot trust someone or something we do not know. If we desire to root our children in faith in Christ, we must first develop our own faith. First we must know him, and then we must believe that he wants our good (Hebrews 11:6). Our children's faith grows the same way our faith does. Some ways to grow include:



Spend time in the Bible. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, *ital added*). This includes parenting. Biblegateway.com contains over 150 different translations or paraphrases in 50 languages.

Pray. We must spend time sharing our heart and listening to God's heart. Trust builds with the intimacy developed here. (Colossians 4:2; Psalm 46:10)

Learn God's character. One way is to study the different names for God. In Biblical times, names defined character, and God revealed himself in this way. For example, Jesus is "The Good Shepherd" (John 10:11). Shepherds were the protectors, providers, etc. for sheep. I found lists online with scriptural references to use for devotions.

Spend time with a mentor. Mentors help when we struggle with life's hardships and when we are confused about what to believe. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Listen to other Christians. I love reading and music. When struggling with the question "why?" I found unexpected peace in Corrie ten Boom's biography "The Hiding Place." Many love C.S. Lewis. Max Lucado stirs the soul while teaching. I remember scripture better when it has been set to music or passionately preached. (Colossians 3:16)

Research to find the truth. We must check that what we are learning is not contrary to scripture. Biblehub.com contains interlinear commentaries that can be helpful. (Matthew 7:15-17; Colossians 2:8; Romans 16:17-18)

Practice what we learn. No matter how hard we study or how many scriptures we memorize, if we ignore or forget it later, our children will never know it. (James 2)

Consistent and deliberate discipleship

Discipleship means training or study, which takes time and work. How do we train our children without discouraging them?

"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. - Colossians 3:21"

Be age appropriate. We frustrate our children and ourselves when we expect what they cannot give. Learn about child development.

Be individual. Remember that there are different genders, methods of learning and personalities that can be creating different reactions to our training attempts.

Pay attention. We get busy and ignore our children's requests for time due to deadlines. How do we convince them the God who controls the universe pays attention if we cannot?

Allow for questions. As parents, we can become ingrained with a "Do it because I said so" mind-set. We forget that without questions, children cannot learn. It helps when we ask questions that guide them to answer their own questions themselves.

Maintain your relationship. We expect our children to talk to us, but they must know we will listen to them in order to do so. If a negative relationship exists with earthly parents, it also tends to be the lens by which our children view the Heavenly Father.

Our children's faith grows the same way our faith does: by getting to know God through all the facets available. If we include them in some of our growth times - prayer, Bible study/devotions, sharing how we see God each day - our children will grow, too.

None of it matters if we fail in this: model our faith. In Matthew 5, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Be someone your children see as God-honoring that they will deliberately imitate.

Our children have free will, and no parent will be perfect. With God's guidance and consistent, deliberate discipleship, we can influence our children so their lights shine brightly in a dark world. ■



Debi Mitchell is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and sees clients in our Schererville, IN location.

*Train up a child in the way he should go;
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

Proverbs 22:6



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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

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the tasks needing to be done can also lighten your load. A great website is <http://christmas.organizedhome.com>.

Prepare for Triggers

Think about what causes you stress and prepare for it to the best of your ability. One trigger might be a difficult family member. Reducing the time you spend with them can make things more manageable.

Be Flexible

Things seldom go exactly how we think they will, so be ready to flex with the unexpected. Keep things in perspective and look for the

humor. Don't allow mistakes or mishaps to ruin your day! Ask yourself, "Will this really matter in a year?"

Cultivate Gratitude

Choosing to be grateful helps counter the weightiness of what we struggle with. Find things to be grateful for like life itself, loved ones, a pet, the beauty of fresh fallen snow, sparkling lights, a child's giggle, etc.

Think outside the box and be creative in how you approach the holidays. Give yourself permission to make changes where you need to and keep only the traditions that are important to you and your family. Re-evaluating how you celebrate the holidays and practicing better self-care can free you up to experience more joy. You'll provide yourself the opportunity for Thanksgiving to be about giving thanks to God and Christmas a special time to adore Jesus. ■



Joy Bocanegra is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and sees clients in our Orland Park, IL location.

New Staff



Vilma Matthews, EdD, LPC
Licensed Professional Counselor

Office hours in Orland Park & South Holland, IL locations



Sara Miller, MSW, LCSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Office hours in Chicago (South Loop), IL locations