

FAMILY MATTERS

Answers to your questions...

I'm a single parent raising a teenager. I worry about mentoring my child all by myself. Do you have any encouragement for me?

ANSWER:

As a single mom, I've found God to be full of grace and sufficient for what I need.

That doesn't come easily, however. It takes conscious effort to reach for Him and to believe He can answer those needs in my daily reality.

One day I was at the end of my rope. I'd done all I could to discipline my teenager, and it didn't seem to be working. Having just moved to a new city, I had no close friends locally to draw upon.

Finally, I dropped to

my knees. I reminded God that I had no husband with whom to discuss this problem. Would He please be that husband and co-parent? Would He please help me work through this situation?

I went to bed with no answer. In the morning, though, it was clear to me what steps I needed to take. I proceeded through those steps.

In return, my daughter gave me tears, anger and blame for everything wrong in her life. Yet I felt God telling me to hang in there. I did, and it proved to be precisely the right thing to do.

That was a turning point for me. I began to go to God with many issues that some would think only a

husband or a father could deal with.

God continued to fill those gaps, provide the answers and be there for me. Yet He never provided those things unless I went to Him for them.

There have still been many tears, many days of excruciating loneliness and the profound need for a human partner to share the load of life. But God is always there through those times.

(This is a real-life story from Lissa Johnson, adapted from *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Mentoring of Teens*, Joe White and Jim Weidmann, general editors.)

TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM KIDS

ANSWER:

Jesus is always with us even though we don't see Him. Jesus wants us to learn to trust Him, to believe and know that He is there. It's natural to feel afraid sometimes. God wants our fears to remind us to trust Him. Being afraid should be a signal to trust God and do what He wants us to do.

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Bulletin

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MARCH
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Welcome to Spring!

FILL IT TO THE BRIM

BY JIM DALY

IS YOUR MARRIAGE "FILLED TO THE BRIM"? IT CAN BE . . . IF YOU'VE got the faith to keep doing what's right.

Jesus' first miracle occurred after a wedding party ran out of wine. He told the servants to fill six stone jars with water—each one holding 20 to 30 gallons.

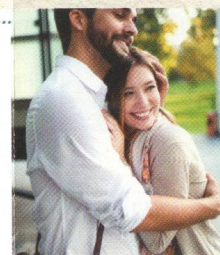
What's remarkable is the faith of the servants. Remember, this was first-century Palestine. There was no plumbing or garden hose. Their task would have required repeated trips to a well. Back and forth, pitcher after pitcher, likely in the heat of the day. At any point, they could have looked at the water in the jars and decided, "This isn't working." They could have given up and only filled the jars part way. Instead, they kept doing what they knew was right until the jars were filled to the brim. And because they did, everyone at the wedding party witnessed a miracle unfold right before their eyes.

That's the secret to a strong marriage: Keep doing what's right, even if it's taking longer than you'd like to achieve the results you want. You'll get there, but not if you stop halfway or do only enough to hold your relationship together.

Day after day, pitcher after pitcher, keep filling your relationship with love, intimacy and connection . . . until it's filled to the brim.

Tough
Questions
from Kids

Why do I
feel afraid if
Jesus is
with me?



MARCH 21 Bulletin

FIND STRENGTH IN YOUR DIFFERENCES

Recently my husband, Jon, and I were outside with our little son, drawing with sidewalk chalk. I was drawing lots of colorful pictures with my artsy flair. As I was finishing the layers of shading in my sunset, it occurred to me that I had never actually seen my husband draw anything. I looked over to observe his creations . . . he was writing math equations. Math. Using the same color over and over.

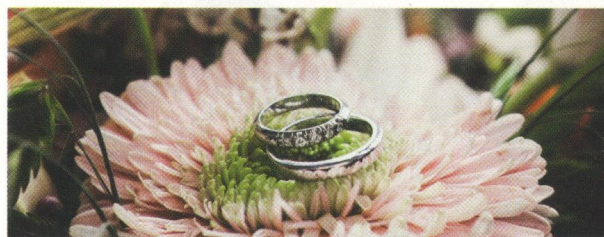
I then realized just how different we are, because it would never in a million years occur to me to draw math equations with sidewalk chalk for fun on a sunny day.

These differences sometimes make us laugh. But other times they've made us snap at each other. He wishes I would slow down and do things right—be a little more analytical. I wish he would speed up and finish so we can move on to the next thing—see the big picture.

Isn't it funny how opposites attract? But then after marriage, those differences can quickly shift from adorable to slightly aggravating. Suddenly you find yourself trying to make your spouse become more like you. You wish they'd do things the way you do, at your pace, with your perspective.

But God said marriage is about two people joining together to become something new, not two people coming together to make each person like the other. We shouldn't try to erase or silence our spouse's unique perspective, because God created it. A diverse approach to doing things is important to your marriage, otherwise the synergy—and the beauty—wouldn't exist. Your individual differences should make your marriage stronger.

—Ashley Durand



ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SINGLE PARENTS

As a single parent, you may sometimes feel like you're facing overwhelming odds. But have faith; your kids can succeed and flourish. Your belief in God gives you certain advantages that can help you out-perform the metrics.

Spirituality and family life are deeply intertwined, and studies have shown that transcendent religious beliefs are key to health and other positive outcomes. The positive effects of your faith can ripple down to impact your children.

In spite of your struggles as a single parent, your faith walk can be a strong counteracting force to potentially negative outcomes. Your faith affects how your kids see the world. Your spiritual commitment also helps your children develop a sense of purpose and calling.

And perhaps most importantly, your spirituality—lived out in front of your children—can help your family stand strong in times of crisis and give you the resources to bounce back after periods of hardship.

Whether you came to single parenthood by divorce, separation or the death of a spouse, your children can thrive. And even if your child is currently exhibiting problems, he or she can eventually flourish.

There is hope, and every reason to believe that your child's chance of success can be just as great as that of his or her peers in two-parent homes.

—Starla Quinn, Ph.D.

INVITE GOD INTO YOUR MESS

This is for all of you mommas and dads who are just hanging on by a string. Every parent who feels like you goofed up one too many times. For everyone who knows that your backstory isn't a story you'd want as front-page news: You are not alone.

When we give up the facade and the filters and the perfectly scripted posts, we welcome back intimacy with our mate, with our family, with ourselves and with our Maker. God sees the mess and moves into it with us. He isn't afraid, so we shouldn't be either.

Amid my mess, I asked God to take it all: the good, the bad and the ugly. The tears and the triumphs. My parenting victories and parenting defeats. When I laid it all down, God gave me the courage to be real. He taught me that sharing the real me is the only way that I can ever be truly known. And that being known is the heart dream of every kid, every parent and every minister. Being known beats being an expert every time!

—Jacqui Jackson