

1 What Makes You So Sure?

Knowing the Heavenly Father in Your Life

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling place (Ps. 68:5).

The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked (Ps. 146:9).

I CERTAINLY DIDN'T FEEL PREPARED to be a single mom when it was thrust upon me. It wasn't my plan to raise children alone. When I found myself separated and consequently divorced from my sons' father, I was scared and overwhelmed. How will I do this alone? I've never been a little boy! How will I show them what it means to be a man? How will I show them how to be fathers? Will they only know how to *sit down* on the toilet? (Believe it or not, that was one of my greatest fears).

I purchased a book called *Fathering like the Father*, hoping to learn what a good father would do so I could do

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some of those things. I also bought Dr. Dobson's book, *Bringing up Boys*, hoping to understand my foreign little creatures. In fact, I bought every book I could get my hands on; but they seemed to raise more questions than they answered. All of them emphasized how critical it is to have a father in the home. The books seemed to suggest that without a man in

the house, I was pretty much doomed.

I finally decided that the books on the market each have one or two good nuggets to learn from, but for the most part, you can just throw them away. The only book with real answers is the Bible. While society constantly

teaches just the opposite, I decided to hold tight to the promise that God the Father is the perfect Father who will be the head of our home and father to my boys. Together we would do it. What better partner to have than the one who is completely perfect in every way?

I am constantly asked how I'm managing to raise two boys on my own. I struggle with an answer. The one thing that gives me comfort and encourages me that I can do it is because the Bible tells me so. I read it as if God wrote a personal letter to me to tell me that He will be there for me. When the God of all creation tells you that you can do it, you better believe it!

You may not yet know the Heavenly Father, and that's OK. The stories in the Bible, however, are universal, and anyone who is raising boys will be able to relate to the experiences and concepts and find them helpful. "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15). I guess the answer to the often asked question of how I do it is simply that I could NOT do it without the Father as the head of our home. If you don't know Him, I hope you will meet Him.

The Plan

During the years I worked with women and girls who were experiencing unplanned pregnancies, I learned

quickly that the initial shock of testing positive for pregnancy overrides whatever else is said to them at that moment. They are in such a state of confusion they rarely hear or remember anything said. They are completely preoccupied with the revelation of their new circumstance. Suddenly, they must decide whether or not to choose life for their child, figure out if they can care for a baby, determine who they must tell. It is a lot to take in. My first suggestion was always that they take some time to digest the information.

I always asked them to commit to writing down three things they would accomplish before the next meeting in one week. Just three things. That's it. The three things could consist of simple things such as taking prenatal vitamins. What those women needed was the sense of accomplishment that comes from feeling they were making progress on this overwhelming new direction of their lives. Rather than becoming discouraged and giving up, it helped give them something positive to do and kept them processing and returning for the next steps to take until they could get their feet back under them and start moving again. It's a good practice whenever life gets overwhelming. Just break it down into manageable pieces. It's a tool I use every day. I like lists; they are manageable. And at the end of a long day they help me see that I really have

accomplished something—even if it’s something as simple as helping another mom over coffee.

The Confusion

I think confusion comes when we concentrate on *proving* we can raise sons on our own rather than focusing on taking the steps toward actually *doing* it. That’s one of the many reasons I’m so sure God is in the picture. Because society and the world want us to perform in order to prove to them that we can be as good as two people. But God wants us to thrive, to be fulfilled, and to point our sons toward Him on a daily basis to receive the leadership and fathering they need. I know this, because He wants all of us—men, women, and children—to look to Him for guidance every day.

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I’ve heard it said that the Lord allows us to fall down so we are forced to look up, meaning that when we humans finally exhaust all our own resources, we often then try to find God. Personally, I would rather try to find God a little sooner and avoid enduring all the trials and pain that finally cause me to turn to Him! Maybe you’ve already discovered through grief that you need God to comfort you. Or maybe you’ve discovered through financial trials that

you need God's provision. The Bible says "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

Society's reaction to that verse sometimes seems to tell us, "I can do all things through Christ, except raise a son without a father, because statistics tell us that we really need a man to do that." No, the Bible says *all* things—*all*. So no matter what circumstance has brought you to the place of raising sons alone, you can look to Him for the strength to do it well.

The Marriage Debate

Recently I asked a good friend what she thought about what society drums into single moms raising sons and what her response is. How did she raise such great boys on her own?

Cathy's husband was put in jail when her boys were 2 and 4 years old. They are now 16 and 18, and they are awesome young men! She has done a great job with them. They are independent, they both love the Lord, and they are already successful with their own start-up company. They teach abstinence education to youth in schools, lead worship, and have their own band they named "Not4Gotten." Their slogan is "Be the voice, not the echo." I adore these two young men.

While at dinner with Cathy and her boys, I asked her what she thought of all the rhetoric about single moms raising failures. She agreed that the hype was hurtful to her, because she felt it was an attack on her sons. She was NOT what the statistics claimed she was, and she is confident she is raising wonderful men. She simply said, “Ask Blake what he says first when he speaks about abstinence and self esteem to high school students.”

So I turned to Blake and asked him. He said, “I hear all the time that boys in single-parent homes will grow up to be failures and rebel, even end up in jail. So I decided if they all think I am going to rebel, I’ll rebel against their stereotype. I’m not going to be a failure—I’m rebelling against *that*.”

These two boys had a father with skin on whom they spoke to every night by phone who also pointed them to the Heavenly Father. But more importantly, both boys stayed focused on the Heavenly Father as evidenced by everything they did—right down to their band.

Generations of Success

Cathy is a mom raising successful men. When I look at my boys and Cathy’s boys, I see that they are not failures. I speak to adult male friends who are successful, happily

married men today, and many of them came from single-parent homes. How? Is this single-mom household a new phenomenon?

I found some interesting statistics supporting the fact that this is not new. During the Depression, men were leaving their wives and kids at a rate that outpaces today's divorce rate. However, I think the political argument of that was different. I don't think single parenting was the issue that was considered the "downfall" of the day. I think they understood it was economics.

War? That has been around since Cane and Abel. During the Revolutionary War, John Adams was away fighting for eight years. He left his wife and five kids behind with no child support, no government assistance, no Medicaid, and no weekend visits to give her a break or model how to be a man to their young sons, one of which grew up to be President.

Abigail Adams was a strong Christian woman who single-handedly led her family in the face of great adversity. There was a war going on in her backyard—literally. She managed to be a teacher, provider, mother, held down full-time work to feed her family, and raised successful Christian men. She knew the Lord was her provider while her husband was gone as evidenced in her letters to her husband and their friends.

Statistics Dispelled

I've seen research cited that says boys raised in single parent homes are more likely to be homosexual. Some research says boys raised without fathers will be more aggressive and given to being bullies. Yet another researcher just came out with a new book on "maverick moms" that says boys raised by moms will turn out as some sort of super-males because they absorb the better characteristics of womanhood and bring those characteristics to their lives as men.

I find these extremes absurd. Could it be that the bullies grew up to be bullies because of abuse or fighting in the home? I'm sure many boys do have pent-up aggression. But is the only contributing factor the lack of a male presence? What about the *quality* of male presence? In fact, there is a study that says it is not the kids of single moms who are the most dysfunctional; the kids became dysfunctional when the parents were still married. If you trace those kids of single parents back to their dysfunctional origin, it was the fighting and other factors that resulted in a single-mom home with a dysfunctional kid.

And how about the theory that boys raised by women turn out *better*? The study says these boys use their verbal skills more effectively, are more sensitive, and more in

touch with their own feelings. That implies two things; that men do not naturally have characteristics that are as good as the characteristics women have (that's an extreme turn around) and it is almost an admission that boys raised by women will turn out to be more "girly."

Wow. OK—I'm either going to raise overly aggressive boys or overly sensitive boys. These seem to me to be questions of outcome, not process. It is very hard to pinpoint which factor is the *most* influential, not the *only* factor.

Head of the Home

I have a plaque in my entryway that reads:

"Christ is the Head of this home, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation."

It's the first thing you see when you enter my home, and the last thing you see as you leave. It's a reminder to me to walk with Christ every day, and it is evident to all who enter my home. Christ is real, not just a billowy figment of imagination. He is sitting with us at meals, visiting with us as a family, leading decisions, and participating in daily life.

I think this concept was planted during my growing-up years when my mom reminded me to behave as if Jesus was sitting right next to me when I was in public or on a date because He is always with us! That image was deeply

embedded. When I went to kiss a guy, Jesus was sitting right next to me. Would He approve of my behavior with this guy?

This was before the “What Would Jesus Do?” craze. Before WWJD, there was “Jesus is sitting next to you. Behave yourself.”

I’m not suggesting that fear should be the only motivating factor in how to live a good life. But I am suggesting that to raise successful sons, just taking them to church on Sunday won’t be enough. They need to see you living your own life as if God is in control, and then they will model what they see in you. You must show them that Jesus is involved in every decision in your life if you want them to live the same way. And if you haven’t been living that way up to this point and haven’t taken an interest in whether or not your sons are living that way, it is never too late to start!

Prove It to Them

We were house hunting, trying to find the perfect house a little further out in the country. Every time we found what my oldest son thought was the perfect house, we were either outbid or I felt we needed to wait to make a decision, and then we would lose the house to another buyer. My son was getting frustrated. All he saw was that I was keeping him from getting his perfect house. But I kept

telling him, “God is in control. He is leading this family and this decision. If we don’t get this house, it’s because it’s not the one He wants for us.”

We found another perfect house. My son was even more adamant that this house was *the* house. But it was \$100,000 more than we could afford. So I said to my son

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again, “If that really is the perfect one—the one God wants us to have—then they will lower the price and offer us the house.” Of course, my teenage son was very upset because he thought I was being foolish! “That will never happen, Mom! You’re going to lose this house too!” But I remained firm. We were going to wait, pray, and see what God did.

One afternoon as we were leaving our house to do errands, the owners of that perfect house came walking up my driveway. They came to me to ask if I was still interested in their house and if I would buy it for \$100,000 less than their original asking price. Of course, we took the house. When my son and I got in the car to leave to do our errands, he very solemnly said, “Wow, Mom. You were right; God did it!”

Yes, God did it. And He has done it again and again. But you have to be willing to say up front—again and again—“We are going to wait on the Lord.” Then be will-

ing to do the waiting. God is not always going to grant you three wishes. But again, if you wait on the Lord, He will give you the desires of your heart. And you need to point that out to your boys all along the way so they will have the opportunity to witness God taking care of things firsthand. If you show them how God is leading in your everyday life, my hope is that they won't have to experience greater tragedy than they already have to recognize their need for dependence on the Lord.

This house was exactly how I would have designed it—right down to the white color and the light-colored wood. I have a binder full of pictures of my “dream house,” and that is what the inside of my house looks like. I pointed that out to my sons. God didn't just answer our prayers and provide a house for us; He knew the desires of my heart and provided them. God cares about the littlest details.

Don't Forget to Ask Him

I want my sons to learn to turn to God through the experiences we share together. I'm afraid I didn't learn my lesson so gently. My husband and I got married because I was pregnant with our first son. I had just graduated from college and was on my way to graduate school when I met him. He was a good-looking guy, but we had nothing in common. I broke up with him because we were arguing a

lot, but then found out I was pregnant. I was in such shock from the circumstances; I immediately went into “fix-it” mode. I decided the best thing to do was marry him so the baby would have a father. I reasoned that I was a capable person and I could handle everything else.

We got married, but the relationship quickly deteriorated into complete dysfunction. I went to counseling on my own—thinking it was best for the boys if we stayed together. At this point there was a second child in the picture. One night, my four-year-old was awakened by our fighting. I will never forget the look on his face when he toddled into our room when he heard us fighting and said, “Wrestle with me, Daddy, not Mommy.”

That is the split second I realized that what I was doing was not right for my boys. I didn’t want them raised thinking abusive behavior was all right. It was scary to venture out on my own with a newborn and a four-year-old. But I went before God and surrendered everything, saying, *Lord, there is no way in the world I can do this alone. I need you.*

Through the many nights of crying desperation, I reflected on the past five years. What had gone wrong? Why couldn’t I make it work? I really *am* a strong person. Anyone who knows me would agree. Many would say I’m too strong. But I failed. Not at the marriage—although that

was one loss and failure I was faced with. But my real failure was in thinking I could fix it my way when faced with a crisis pregnancy. I had great plans to make it all better, fix the situation and the sin. But they were all worthless because I forgot the first step. I forgot to ask God what He wanted me to do.

God's plans are always perfect. And although they don't make sense at first, they are always better than anything I could have planned myself. This is something I knew in my life early-on. But in this major testing, I failed to simply ask Him the big question. I never got on my knees and asked Him, *What do I do now?*

I went on to work in crisis pregnancy centers—which proves that God can use our mistakes and hurts to His glory in helping others in ways we can't foresee. And knowing what I know now, I'm sure had I asked God, He would have given me any number of different directions other than marrying a man who was physically abusive to me and the boys and given to infidelity.

Hitting bottom before you are ready to look up is a good description of me. There was no way in the world it looked possible at that point to raise two small boys alone. I hear the same from moms everywhere. The realization that you are responsible for raising sons can be an eye-opening experience.

Quantity and Quality

I am in awe of a friend of mine for the way she handled this realization. Ann has been divorced for 14 years, which is not uncommon. Her husband was caught cheating on her, and he married that gal after Ann's divorce. That is not uncommon either. What is so amazing about Ann is that at the time of the divorce, she had nine children ranging from 8 months to 13 years in age, four of which were boys.

Ann recalls that when she was faced with the unthinkable, she held tightly to her faith to get her through. That certainly makes sense. It is recorded that survivors of tragedies—the Holocaust to name one—survived because of their faith. Now I'm not saying raising nine kids alone is a crisis equal to the magnitude of the Holocaust, but I'm sure there were days when it felt close to that for Ann!

With tragedy such as divorce and abandonment, or death of a spouse, it is tempting to blame God and be bitter or angry. And those are all real feelings that are justified. The good news is that God is a big God who can handle your anger when life throws you a curve. Even David in the Bible was an extremely emotional guy, and he cried out to the Lord in anguish. And David was referred to as the “man after God's own heart.” That's quite an honor. If David got

mad at God and he was still honored that way, I think God can handle just about anything you can throw at Him.

Knight in Shining Armor

Part of me hesitates, however. It's true that David made big mistakes and still had the character to admit it and change his ways. And that is something I want my boys to do. But how did he come to the point in his life that he was willing and able to place his whole life in God's hands? I think for us, it's coming to the point where we must rely on God and then see God really come through for us. As He comes through for us again and again, we learn to trust that He will do it next time.

Be sure to share it with your boys when God comes through for you and for them so they won't have to learn it on bigger and more painful things later—all by themselves. We women try to “fix” things, and we think we can fix the lack of a man in the house with a man. *If only I had a husband, everything would be just right. Or, If I can fix this man I've got, everything will be great!* Unfortunately, that thinking is just a distraction from the real solution—which is looking to God in the first place.

As has happened to me a lot, I picked up a book that changed my way of thinking just when I needed it. The book was *Knight in Shining Armor*. In this book, the author

suggests making the Lord the “Prince” in my fairytale, rather than expecting a man to come to my rescue.

We tend to expect a man to be our protector, our lover, our romantic pursuit. But in order to be whole enough to offer ourselves to someone, we need to focus

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our energy on making the Lord our pursuit—to spend as much time thinking about the Lord as we would a new romantic interest. We need to give God first place in our lives, and then we will be whole enough to offer a whole person to a relationship with a man as well as being there for our kids. If we make God first in our lives, then He, if He chooses,

can put a man in our lives who will be those things for us. But it will be because of Him, not because of who that man with skin on is.

We have heard all our lives that God should come first. But to put that into practical action is difficult. A human man is something you can touch, see, and hear. It takes a little more practice to hear and see the Lord. But I decided to make a real effort to put Him as the head of my home in practical ways and to make Him first in my life.

If you learn to trust and rely on God completely—even when things look hopeless—He will amaze you every

time. The outcome may not be the outcome you pictured or how you would have done it yourself, but in the end it will work out better than you could have hoped for. I'm a slow learner sometimes, but I have learned to ask God first and to let Him go before me in all matters. He is an excellent decision maker. He has a better overall picture of the situation than I do anyway!

Fragrance of Life

Remember my friend Cathy, whose husband is in prison? Both she and her husband have a ministry to families in prison. Her hope and faith in the Lord—even in the face of injustice and adversity—is a constant encouragement to me. We share often, and do not get nearly enough time drinking coffee together because she lives so far away in Ohio, but she wrote this in a letter to me once and gave me permission to share it with you.

I remember a time when I found myself standing over Brandon in the intensive care unit. He had had a severe allergic reaction to something and was struggling to breathe. He was so sound asleep (or sedated) that he did not even respond when the nursing staff administered his care. I sat for hours by his bed just watching him sleep and praying fervently

that God would restore him to complete health. I felt abandoned and alone and completely ill-equipped to deal with this situation. Since sleeping in the hospital room was not allowed, the nurses finally convinced me to rest in the parents' lounge while he slept, promising to come and get me at any change in his condition or if he awakened. I slept for about 40 minutes before I found myself walking back through the glass doors into the pediatric intensive care unit. They insisted he did not even know if I was there or not, so I may as well take advantage of the opportunity to get some rest. I had to see him. I quietly walked into his room, pushing the curtain aside as I approached his bed. He moaned softly and said, "Mommy? Mommy is that you?"

"Yes, baby, Mommy is here. How did you know it was me?"

Much to my surprise, he replied, "I could smell you."

I wondered if I should even ask the next question, but I did. "What do I smell like, Brandon?"

"Like a hug," he whispered.

God began to speak of His faithfulness to us. Through Brandon's observation about the aroma of a hug, God showed me that all I do and think affects my

children. They will know the best of me and the worst of me. The things that are not appealing (sins) are those things in my life that will leave an unpleasant aroma behind and infect my sons with the sickness of this world. The sweet smelling parts of my life are nothing less than God manifesting in me to reassure, comfort, protect, and heal my sons. He was gently telling me I could truly choose to “do it alone” and risk raising my sons infected with the stench of the world and the disgusting odor of being raised fatherless or I could choose to allow Him to work in me and through me to protect them and nurture them by filling them with the sweet perfume of His constant presence in their lives. It is the sweet fragrance of His abiding presence, undying love, and unwavering fathering that raises boys to become men of unwavering essence.”

Cathy wrote that to me without ever seeing my writing in this book. That’s how I know we are on the right track. Without conferring, we have arrived at the same conclusions. It is our decision to make God the head of our home and raise men after God’s own heart. We have decided through our experiences that to go the way of the world would be to give in to the doomsday statistics of society and fail. He has a better plan for us if we choose to take it.

Coffee with a Friend

Things to Remember:

- With the Heavenly Father in the picture, the family is not broken.
- Society is wrong—moms CAN do it and HAVE been doing it for centuries.
- Your boys will turn out great! Others have done it, and you can too!
- He promises to be the husband to the widow, our Knight in Shining Armor.
- Little eyes are watching us, lead by example.
- Knowing Christ as Savior is the key to success. If you haven't done so already, invite Him into your life and to be the head of your home.

Meeting the Author of Fatherhood

Some people wonder why it's important to know the Author of Fatherhood. Maybe they have had a bad experience with men in their lives—or even with their own fathers—and God is the last thing they think they need.

Some may even think a woman can't be a Christian and be a single mom or have any other flaws in her life, because only good people or married people can attain a perfect Christian life.

The other night I was at a friend's house for the most amazing luau in her backyard. She started talking about another friend of hers who had not come, and she thought the reason was because this person was a Christian and wouldn't approve because there were hula dancers. Then she realized I was in the group she was talking to, and she recovered with, "Except you, Dana. You're a cool Christian. You're not stuffy—you know, like most Christians." I laughed, but it dawned on me that many people have a stereotypical idea of what it means to be a Christian, and it doesn't include moms raising boys, broken marriages, or what they consider to be "cool" people.

But, I can assure you, I am very cool, I am a single mom, and I am a Christian.

At church I occasionally see Kristina, a single mom

who is raising one son. Recently she told me all that was going on with her son—the disappointments of Father’s Day and her 9-year-old son trying to reach out to his father only to be rejected again. It breaks her heart. I know exactly what

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she is talking about, having walked through it just a few years ago. I asked her if she had reminded her son of his Heavenly Father who never ignores him or lets him down.

She said, “You know, I know that and all, but I guess I just forget sometimes.”

Sometimes it’s not a case of *refusing* to have a relationship with God. Sometimes we know Christ as Savior, but we forget to lean on Him in a real and personal way. That’s why it’s important to not only meet Him but also to build a relationship with Him. And building a relationship with Him—like all relationships—takes a little work. But it is so worth it.

There are two important reasons I need to know the Author of Fatherhood—for me and for my sons. For me, because I simply cannot do this huge task alone. I know I have family and friends and a church family, but to supply my real needs and provide for me and the boys, a supernatural touch is required. When I do my taxes at the end

of each year and look at the total income I have brought in and all the amazing things my sons and I have done and places we have visited, it is nothing short of a miracle that we get by, let alone thrive! And when I list all the things I accomplish each day and each year, I create another to-do list of goals for me and the boys. Again, it is nothing short of a miracle that God allows me to work full time, take care of kids, scrapbook, go on vacation, write books, write for the local paper and Christian papers, take care of two horses, three dogs, two birds, and two gold fish (that just keep living). Plus, laundry that is always waiting, bills that are always there, cleaning house, keeping up the yard, being the team mom for both soccer and football, traveling for work, volunteering at my church. Really—how could a person do it without God regularly working miracles? I need Him.

I need Him because Christ is hope, and without Him, my life would simply be too overwhelming. Remember I told you that the first thing to do in crisis is to ask Him what you should do? Still, people don't think to ask Him until they have no other choice. They've tried everything and it isn't working, so they figure they might as well give God a try as a last resort.

Let me save you a little time. If you are a mom raising sons—in *any* circumstance—it won't work without God. Je-

sus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

So How Do You Meet Him?

First, remember that the first move was His. God loves you and your kids more than you can imagine, and He wants to have a personal relationship with you. He is already pursuing a relationship with you.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16, NASV).

Now this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).

So why is it that some people do not have a personal relationship with God? Because our sin cuts us off from God so we cannot have a personal relationship with Him and experience His love.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23, NASV).

Notice that the Bible says *all* have sinned. It does not say, “Single moms have sinned, and so fall short of the glory of God, and their kids must pay the price of her mistakes for the rest of their lives.” It does not say, “Those whose marriages have failed have sinned and those who

are married are all good.” It says *all* have sinned—married, single, man, woman, everyone has sinned and fallen short.

When I work with girls facing crisis pregnancies, they often face shame and embarrassment. I tell them the difference between their sin and the sins of the people they see at the mall is that the consequence of their sin is visible. But all sin is created equal, and whether it is visible or not, it keeps us from relationship with God.

“The wages of sin is death (spiritual separation from God)” (Rom. 6:23).

God is holy and pure and perfect, and before we have a personal relationship with Him, we are cut off from Him because He cannot tolerate sin. People often try to find a full and meaningful life through their own efforts.

This past summer I decided to take a drive with the boys to Arizona to see the Grand Canyon. It seemed like a great idea, but actually doing it was another thing. I’m afraid of heights. Actually, I’ve been skydiving and that wasn’t a problem, so, I think I am not afraid of heights as much as I am afraid of edges. Let me tell you, the Grand Canyon is just one big, gigantic, scary edge!

While I was standing (a few feet back) on the edge of the Grand Canyon, I said to the boys, “How far do you think we could get if we took a running jump toward the North Rim?”

It is physically impossible to do anything on our own to bridge the gap between us and perfection.

I was trying to give them a picture of what the Bible means when it says we have all fallen short. It is physically impossible to do anything on our own to bridge the gap between us and perfection. But the Bible clearly teaches that there is one way to bridge this gap.

Jesus Christ is God's only cure for our sin. Through Him, you can know God personally and experience His love. God doesn't want us to be separated from Him. We were all created to have a personal relationship with God, but then sin got in the way. Jesus died in our place, and He rose again from the dead and is our only way to bridge the gap.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8, NASV).

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6, NASV).

God has done the work to bridge the gap that cuts us off from Him. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sin. But it is not enough just to know these truths. People who just

know that Jesus is real won't be any more saved than Satan himself. Even Satan knows God exists. But to be saved we must take the next step and "cross the bridge." We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience His love.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12, NASV).

We receive Christ by personal invitation when we acknowledge that we are sinful and bridge that gap the size of the Grand Canyon by asking God to forgive us and come into our lives and change us. To ask for forgiveness and repent of our sin simply means to turn and go in another direction. Once Christ comes into our lives and forgives our sins, we can begin a personal relationship with Him. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of the will.

You can meet Him and ask Him into your heart right now. God is not as concerned with you saying the right words as He is with the attitude of your heart. And remember, God wants a relationship with all people—especially you. There is nothing in your past, no sin so great, that God can't forgive and heal you.

There is no one so bad nor anyone so good that his or her life won't be improved by the presence of Christ. But, remember the instructions we receive on planes?

We're instructed to place the oxygen mask on ourselves before placing it on someone else. In the same way, you and I must accept His love for us before we can help our children know His love for them.

Here is a suggested prayer to help you express your trust in Jesus:

Dear Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally.

Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins and for rising from the dead. I receive you as my Savior and Lord. I trust you now to forgive my sins and give me eternal life. Please lead me to become the kind of person you want me to be.

Amen.