

February 2016

# refreshed

Real life. Real community.

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San Diego's inspirational lifestyle newspaper





**“I was unwanted, a loser.”  
At that point, Robin Jones Gunn  
felt about as low as possible.**

## From fibs to fulfillment

She thought she wanted to be a missionary, but the missions organization denied her application. In its kindest choice of words possible, it said that her skills weren't a “sufficient match” for their purposes.

It wasn't like she had applied for a leadership position. She wasn't asking to be director, worship leader, preacher. The job she was applying for was—wait for it—“Laundry Supervisor.” But her skills weren't “sufficient.” She received this message just a little while after her fiancé told her he didn't want to marry her.

“I was unwanted,” she wrote later. “A loser. No one wanted to marry me, and now I couldn't even wash clothes for Jesus in Africa.”

At that point, Robin Jones Gunn felt about as low as possible.

She decided to get on with her life, though, figuring she needed to fit in, conform, live a normal life.

She kept teaching her Sunday School class of middle school girls. They knew about her desire to be a missionary. She had told them all about it, and they were her Greek chorus, cheering her on. When she gave them the bad news, one of

them, in a Yoda-like manner, was happy to hear it.

“Good,” the girl said. “We don't want you to leave. We want you to stay here. We think you should find a job telling stories. We love it when you tell stories.”

The problem was that Robin didn't WANT to tell stories. Telling stories always got her in trouble when she was little. Teachers had a word for her stories. They called it “lying.” There was nothing special about telling stories.

“I put aside all hopes of traveling to unknown corners of the world, and for the next 10 years I lived the life that had been given to me,” she wrote.

One day when she and her husband were on a camping trip with the girls in their church youth group, she found several girls in one of the tents on a sunny afternoon. They were reading. But the books they were reading made Robin cringe.

“Read something else,” she begged them.

The trouble was that there wasn't much for that age group that was positive and uplifting. The girls challenged Robin. “Why don't you write some books for us?” they asked. “We'll help you.”

Robin wrote her first novel by taking a chapter each Sunday for the Sunday School class to read.

“They told me everything I did wrong and everything I needed to change, including the characters' names,” she wrote.

The result was a novel about a girl named Christy Miller and her boyfriend Todd. The response of the girls was that they wanted more stories.

“We need more role models like Christy and Todd and the rest of the gang,” they told her. “You tell us things about God when you teach, but when you write about them in a story, we remember them. Your stories change us on the inside.”

The encouragement from the girls kept her going. So did a Bible verse that Robin claimed as a message from God. It was Psalm 102:18: “Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.”

That first Christy Miller book led to another one. Then another, then another, as Christy went through middle school, then high school, then college, then got married.

Robin started other book series, too. The books have sold more than five million copies.

A gift that she had from the very beginning, one that originally caused her embarrassment, turned into something much bigger than she could imagine. From the very start she was “sufficient.” She just needed some girls to help her realize it.

Do you think that maybe you're already equipped to participate in what God is doing in the world? My guess is that you are. And that's no lie.

*Robin Jones Gunn will be speaking at 7 p.m. at Point Loma Nazarene University on Feb. 17 as part of the annual Writer's Symposium by the Sea. Tickets are at [www.pointloma.edu/writers](http://www.pointloma.edu/writers), or call (619) 849-2695.*



Dean Nelson directs the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. His book about seeing God in everyday life is “God Hides in Plain Sight: How to See the Sacred in a

Chaotic World.”



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# Car crash kills Carlsbad missionary in Africa

CARLSBAD — Daybreak Church has launched an online crowdfunding account for the widow of one of their missionaries, who was killed in a car crash in early December while ministering in South Africa.

Reg Cowie, who was serving in South Africa with his wife Nancy, was traveling on a two-lane road while on his way to minister to prisoners at the time of the crash. He was 56.

The Cowies, who were married in 1998 after meeting at a university in Tucson, Arizona, were longtime members of Daybreak. They joined the church after relocating to Carlsbad after their wedding. Nancy served on the pastoral staff at Daybreak for seven years. They also helped to build the congregation's first building.

In a letter to the congregation Nancy Cowie said she and her husband's family were overwhelmed by the support they were receiving.

"I don't know what God has in store

for my future but I know He holds me and guides me," she wrote. "For now I will remain in (South Africa) as these were my last marching orders from my Father and I still believe I have work to do here. I have lost my husband, but not my faith nor desire to serve my Lord. No big decisions for now—where God leads from here I will follow, missing my Reg every step of the way."

Reg Cowie had deep roots in South Africa. His great-great grandfather was Carl Preller, the first mayor of Pretoria. Cowie's parents also served in South Africa. Following in their footsteps, the couple had been serving in South Africa for 10 years after leaving their jobs when they were each 47.

According to Nancy, her husband often said "I was born in America, but I choose to be South African."

More than 400 people turned out for his three-hour memorial service in South Africa.

The Cowies worked with numerous ministries in South Africa, including Monte Cristo Ministries, the Andrew Murray Center and most recently Hope Prison Ministry in Wellington. Their first assignment was as the wait staff at a ministry coffee shop and working with children in an after-school program.

But Cowie loved discipling men and his outlet for that was prison ministry, supporting the work of Restorative Justice, which challenges inmates to take responsibility for their actions, and Staying Well, which serves the needs of correctional officers.

"Reg was at the height of his life calling and in the country he loved, with the woman he loved," read an obituary prepared by



Reg and Nancy Cowie served as missionaries in South Africa for 10 years. Reg Cowie was killed in a car crash in December on his way to minister to prisoners.

his family. "He will be remembered as a man with a bright smile and a twinkle in his eyes...a man who stopped and prayed immediately for anyone who had a problem or concern. He went out of his way to care for the unlovable in prisons."

More information on the fundraiser can be found at [www.youcaring.com](http://www.youcaring.com) or by sending an email to Dr. Lauren Jefferis, the Daybreak liaison, at [lauren\\_jefferis@yahoo.com](mailto:lauren_jefferis@yahoo.com).

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# TACTICAL MISSION



## Former Navy SEAL brings passion to men's ministry

story by LORI ARNOLD

photos by KEVIN MCGREW PHOTOGRAPHY

Jeff Bramstedt was working out at a local gym as part of an intense regimen to keep himself fit for service as a Navy SEAL when a stranger tentatively approached him.

"He said, 'I know that God has something very unique and special but I'm apprehensive to talk to you about it because you look a little intense.'"

That intensity was part personality, part training. By that time, Bramstedt had already completed his third deployment.

"I wasn't that approachable," Bramstedt said of the 1997 incident. "I was that guy (who) every single person that walks up to me I know everything about them as they get close to me. I know if they know how to fight. I can tell by how they walk. I can tell where their head is at. I can tell if they are a force to be reckoned with or if they are going to be easy to walk through. Everybody is an adversary. Everybody, before they prove themselves different. That's the headspace I was in."

Seeing that Bramstedt wasn't going to rip apart his limbs, the stranger continued.

"God is going to use you in the film industry," the man said. "He's going to give you a platform in the film industry to reach literally thousands of people. He is also going to give you a voice. You are going to be able to stand in front of millions of people sharing the gospel."

Bramstedt listened with cool detachment. He was enjoying his elite, but spontaneous, Navy experience too much to even consider what the man in front of him was saying.

\*\*\*

As a young adult, Bramstedt hadn't given much thought to the military as a career option.



Former Navy SEAL Jeff Bramstedt uses his experiences for Life of Valor, a ministry he founded to build up men.

"I was in college and hating it like every 19 year old," he said of his pre-enlistment days.

But then his younger brother called. He had just signed up with the Navy after graduating from high school.

"He said, 'Hey man, there's this group of guys in the Navy and they do everything we did as kids, only it's legal,'" Bramstedt said, laughing and recalling his childhood penchant for playing with fire, blowing things up (including his GI Joes), and dismantling firecrackers.

"Before you knew it I was in SEAL training," he said.

The grueling training resulted in just 23 graduates out of an original class of 143. Just 16 percent succeeded.

Then there was the matter of faith.

Bramstedt, adopted at six months by a young Lutheran pastor and his wife, was raised as a Christian but never really pursued Jesus on his own. (His father later left the pastorate to support his family as a mechanic).

"There was a miss in there somehow," he said. "I knew who Jesus was. I knew about the Holy Spirit. I understood the Trinity. I didn't understand destiny and I definitely didn't understand the enemy, and part of getting through everything you got to get through in life is knowing that in your battle space is another side to this thing. There is an enemy who definitely wants you dead. I didn't under-

stand spiritual warfare."

\*\*\*

Quickly assessing his spiritual life, Bramstedt decided it didn't match the bold words of this stranger so, exercising the same confidence he displayed in SEAL training, Bramstedt told the man that he had no interest in Hollywood or speaking in public.

The man politely said OK and walked away. As Bramstedt later discovered, though, the battle was not over. As it turned out, his workout partner had given Bramstedt's phone number to the man, Greg Wark. At the time, Wark was a San Diego-based pastor, counselor and chaplain.

Apparently the intense demeanor that caused Wark to proceed cautiously with Bramstedt at the gym didn't transmit through the telephone. Wark began calling him two to three times a week. He interrupted parties. He often called as Bramstedt was using his "targeting" skills to chase women. Bramstedt told Wark that he was infringing on his style.

"Three months later things in my life started circling the drain enough to where I started to feel it was time for me to call this guy back and pick up what he was putting down," the former SEAL said. "I haven't looked back since."

Wark mentored his new convert and Bramstedt seemed to thrive and began helping his spiritual dad with Force, the



pastor and chaplain’s military outreach.

**Hollywood calling**

A year after his conversion to Christianity, Collins received an unlikely phone call from Hollywood seeking his particular skill set as a stunt double for a movie about a Navy diver. After securing permission from his commanding officer, Bramstedt said he spent four days as Cuba Gooding Jr.’s stunt double in the 2000 film “Men of Honor.”

Sixteen years later he’s still doing stunt work, with his most recent project expected to be showcased with this fall’s release of “Deepwater Horizon,” based on the catastrophic 2010 BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. In a departure from his previous film work, “Deepwater Horizon” is the first movie in which he has a speaking part.

“You make one stunt coordinator happy and you start getting phone calls,” the Point Loma resident said. “It’s been an interesting evolution, and on top of that being out and traveling.”

The timing of the Hollywood work proved providential as it filled a void after Bramstedt was medically discharged from the service in 2004. It was also a welcome diversion after his wife left him in 2008.

“I came home and the house was emp-

ty,” he said.

In true SEAL fashion, Bramstedt pressed on, or so he thought. Four years later he came face to face with demons he didn’t even know were there.

“I woke up one morning and felt like a thousand pounds was on my chest,” Bramstedt said. “I literally couldn’t breathe and it was hard for me to get out of bed.”

Also concerned about his lack of focus, and steeled by his steadfast resolution not to do “pity parties,” he called his mentor, Wark.

“He said, ‘I’ve been waiting 15 years for this conversation.’ I’m like, ‘15 years and you couldn’t just tell me then?’” Bramstedt said, a slight chuckle defying his serious facade. “It’s one of those things where God has to bring you to a certain place before you can deal with it.”

Wark referred his protégé to a local counselor and, after three intensive sessions over three days, Bramstedt said he was free of emotional pain, including the four years of “seething” he had suppressed from his wife’s abandonment.

“I had to step back and re-evaluate my life,” he said. “The rejection that happened at the hands of women just set me off.”

Although he loved his adoptive par-

ents, there was anger toward his biological mother that he hadn’t acknowledged.

“It was as if God was showing me what was really happening,” said Bramstedt, the father of three.

**Deep digging**

His counselor helped him to process the truth: his biological mother had shunned pressure to abort her pregnancy and, by putting her son up for adoption, she had ensured that her son would be able to escape the racial tension and broken relationships of her East St. Louis neighborhood.

“I was still questioning that, and the rejection was still there and then when my wife left it made it even worse,” he said. “I wasn’t any good. I wasn’t healthy. After I forgave my mom—forgave her in the context that I wasn’t holding something against her, just releasing that out of my

life—it seemed like all of a sudden everything started falling into place.

“It was as though God was saying that ‘rejection is the red carpet that the enemy will use to roll all this bad stuff into your life. Stinking thinking, and bad behavior and anger. All this stuff is present because you are trying fix something that only I have the keys to fix.’”

A week after the intense counseling session, Bramstedt receive another unexpected telephone call. This one was from Jonathan Bock of Grace Hill Media, a Los Angeles marketing and production company specializing in faith-friendly movies.

Bock was looking for someone to help write curriculum for Life of Valor, a supplemental Bible study produced in conjunction with the 2012 release of “Act of Valor,” about a covert mission by Navy SEALs to recover a kidnapped intelligence agent. Bock also wanted Bramstedt to co-host a



One of Life of Valor’s programs includes a three-day Warrior Weekend that includes a day of tactical shooting and closes with a tandem parachuting jump.



**Life of Valor: Adventurous gospel**

Life of Valor offers four distinct programs, the newest being a daily devotional and physical workout. Daily Dose, or D2, is designed to help men build up their spiritual and physical endurance. Participants are encouraged to share their experiences with the Life of Valor team. YouVersion recently featured the first 14 editions for 2016.

**Single day men’s conferences**

Life of Valor is in the process of developing large conference hall or arena events designed to attract thousands. The first event, scheduled this summer in the Philippines, could draw as many as 14,000 to 20,000.

The conferences are described as high-impact gatherings with fastpaced worship and teaching. The teaching will consist of comedic moments complemented by “TED-style” messages. The events will conclude with music by secular bands made up of Christian believers. The Life of Valor team will also present attendees

with ideas for personal applications they can use after the event’s conclusion.

“The people we want there aren’t necessarily the people who would darken the doorstep of a church,” said Life of Valor founder Jeff Bramstedt.

Each conference will have its own name and theme.

“We don’t want the patrons and participants to feel like they are part of a cookie cutter experience that somebody else in another town is experiencing the exact same thing,” he said. “They are all going to be somewhat different.”

**Tactical Fatherhood Initiatives**

Held in the evening, these gatherings are usually hosted at a church. The Life of Valor website describes them as “not a typical conference type event (speakers, bands, boredom, ‘Jesus is my boyfriend’ music, and hand holding). This is a true man’s event. You will be exposed to real military-style courses that will be tied together at the end of the event. You will have a true sense of

purpose and what needs to be done to ensure that your sons and daughters have a father that is a ‘General,’ not lacking in godly tactics and strategy.”

The personal application tips provided for these meetings center on parenting skills and encourage participants to become spiritually aware of what message their actions are conveying.

**Warrior Weekend Adventures**

Bramstedt and his team of SEALs lead a group of 15 men in an intensive three-day experience. The first day features a Tactical Shoot Course in which guests are trained in shooting and then spend much of the day together on the range learning the basics of handgun and rifle firing through a variety of drills.

Day two is spent learning tactical driving skills such as the pit maneuver. The session includes track driving to put the concepts into practice.

The final session on day three is skydiving under the direction of SEALs and several stunt divers. After the ground-level training, participants will fly to 13,000 feet where they will skydive in tandem with an instructor.

“Through this these guys bond together,” Bramstedt said. “You see guys getting together in one-on-ones and two-on-ones where they are really learning about each other and they start talking about some of the tough stuff men deal with. That has had a massive impact.

*Learn more [www.lifeofvalor.com](http://www.lifeofvalor.com).*



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video promoting the project.

"That video got released and it started blowing up," he said. "That year I was on stage 200 times speaking. It really got shot out of a cannon. I'm doing exactly what Greg prophesied over me that day in the gym. Everything is happening."

After that project concluded, Bramstedt acquired the Life of Valor name and website, which he used to start his own military ministry after Wark moved to Nashville.

### Restoring men

Launched in 2012, Life of Valor is a men's ministry that offers large single-day conferences (including one in the Philippines later this year), church-based seminars called Tactical Fatherhood Initiatives and an intensive three-day Warrior Weekend Adventure in which a group of 15 or so men spend extended time on a shooting range, tactical driving course and skydiving.

"It's a really fun, action-packed weekend," he said.

While the ministry specializes in adventures, Bramstedt said the goal is to point everything back to the life-changing power offered through Jesus, a power that goes well beyond a salvation experience in an effort draw men into their full calling.

"From a state-of-the-union perspective on men, it took us 200-years-plus to get to where we are now... over-comfortable, over-scheduled, over-caffeinated, over-medicated, to where we are not (allowing) our children—the next generation of believers, who are going to pick up the mantle after us, especially our young boys—to be the leaders they are supposed to be," he said.

Compounding the issue, he said, is most men report having few close friends, which results in a barren life without trust, confession and accountability.

A key to reversing that trend is building community, which Bramstedt said he tries to do at each men's gathering. But building community requires vulnerability. Bramstedt tries to model this by sharing his own experiences.

"I stand before guys and say my credibility isn't because I have the P-word (for pastor) before my name," he said. "My credibility isn't in any of my education. My credibility isn't in any of my military career. My credibility isn't in any of my film

stuff. That's not where my credibility is.

"My credibility is in this: I hold my hand up and say 'Who here has been rejected? Who here has had anxiety? Who here is apprehensive and nervous and afraid and in fear of the future? Who here has been divorced? Who here has been abused and pushed around and discounted and cast aside and disregarded? Yeah? Well, OK, hands have been going up and down this entire time that I've been saying these things, but my hand has been up the entire time. I've lived 65 years in my 45 years of being on this planet.'"

### Diving in

In early January, Bramstedt realized a long-time dream when he purchased Skydive San Diego in Jamul, where Life of Valor has hosted the parachuting element of its Warrior Weekend program.

"Where I come from some people call it crazy, some people call it nuts," the adventurer said. "I call it stepping on out in faith. Doing what I know I'm supposed to be doing, which is calculated and (taking) chances, but I call it faith because I've been thinking about it, working on it, praying about it for seven years."

The business not only meshes well with his SEAL experience and the Warrior Weekend adventures, but Bramstedt said it will also help to underwrite the growth of Life of Valor as he and his business partner have vowed to tithe into the men's ministry. That means time he would normally have to spend fundraising can now be diverted back into the ministry's programming.

"Things continue to climb," he said. "I'm just amazed every day at what God is doing with Life of Valor. It's literally growing on its own. But it all happened as a result of me being obedient and doing what God asked—and really, quite frankly, required me to do."

"He requires of all men to get rid of their junk, to take authority over the stuff that's in their heart. The stuff that is holding them back. The stuff that the enemy has designed and planted so that it can grow and produce fruit. When you taste that fruit it's bitter and it's nasty, and when you eat that it really impedes on what God has in store, what God wants you to do, what God has for you. That can affect your destiny. Now what I'm doing is walking men through the exact same things I went through." ■

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# Renewed vision

## New YFC director seeks to revitalize teen program

by LORI ARNOLD

Josh Collier was watching a promotional video, his first created as the new executive director of San Diego Youth for Christ. It featured one of the young teens transformed by the ministry's local outreach.

"The girl in the video says, 'I have a purpose: to inspire, to love, to find kids living the darkness I was and to give them a glimmer of hope,'" Collier, 35, said.

The ministry executive, familiar with the story of transformation, was deeply moved, adding that the teenager "described so clearly what excites me about Youth for Christ ministry."

"Every time I watch that video I get chills when I hear her say that line because every time I see a young person in a tough place, every time I hear about kids dropping out of foster care, or being homeless, or struggling in poverty or addictions, I hear that line and I think, 'Yes, that's what we're about,'" Collier said. "We're going to find every kid living in darkness and give them a glimmer of hope. That's our fight, that's our mission. That's something worth giving my life to."

That life of his changed dramatically over the past year when the Tacoma, Washington native accepted the San Diego post. Last summer he and his wife Latisha relocated their family to Rancho San Diego.

The transition to San Diego was nearly two years in the making and sparked by an intimate moment during a national YFC conference.

"I was at this conference and I was singing that song 'Oceans' with the line, 'Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders, Let me walk upon the waters, Wherever You would call me,' Collier said. "Tears were coming down my face. I was just praying, 'God, I'll do whatever you want me to in life.'"

About nine months later Collier and his wife, sensing God was preparing them for a change, took to their knees.

"We prayed for Him to open something if He wanted us to make a change," he said. "The next day I was at a YFC training here in San Diego, and one of the leaders turned to me and said, 'Josh, what would it take for you to move to San Diego?'"

They spent the next few months in extended prayer and ongoing conversations with the San Diego team.

"We felt increasingly called to San Diego," Collier said. "Part of what excited me about the role in YFC—other than the sun—was the adventure of starting something new, of coming into a place like San Diego where there is incredible opportunity to grow new ministry in a large city."

Collier was first acquainted with Youth for Christ in 2003, when he began volunteering for the organization as a youth leader for a Tacoma church plant. His pastor suggested he contact Youth for Christ.

"I visited my first Campus Life club and I was totally hooked," he said. "I loved the relational focus, the heart for the gospel, and that teens were hearing about Jesus and responding."



Josh and Latisha Collier with Henry and Lucy. Josh Collier is the new executive director for San Diego Youth for Christ.

He officially joined the staff just months after volunteering.

Although raised in the church, Collier said it wasn't until he was in high school and being mentored by young adults that his faith became his own.

"(It) just made such a huge difference. That's probably part of what got me on the path toward youth ministry," he said, adding, "I love my parents and they're really great, but I think that as we transition into adulthood we just need these other people to come alongside us and tell us, 'Hey, this is your identity. This is who God made you to be. This is the potential you have because of God's work in your life.'"

Collier said Tacoma and San Diego are surprisingly similar in several key areas.

"Tacoma sounds like a small city, and by comparison it certainly is, but the challenges facing youth are really similar," he said. "Tacoma is also a major sex trafficking hub, has distinct pockets of poverty, youth involved in gangs, drugs, and crime."

San Diego, however, has a significantly larger refugee population.

"You're talking about youth who have come from another culture entirely, and then you have many different groups of those youth, so there's just a lot of different cultures," Collier said.

The youth leader said he was also surprised by the size of San Diego's homeless youth population.

"You know, a lot of people never think about that because you don't really see homeless youth," Collier said. "They fly under the radar. But there's an estimated 2,000 youth literally living on the streets, and that's not counting kids who are couch surfing, living in cars or in shelters. That's just a big number. These are kids made to be loved and cherished, and (yet) so many are just out there on their own. They should be going to school and hanging out with friends and making their parents roll their eyes, but they're out there. Many are alone just trying to find food and shelter and survive."

Collier and his San Diego team are committed to changing that through a series of new initiatives designed to reach out to the region's burgeoning, and often troubled, urban population. ■



In October of 1951, San Diego Youth for Christ became an official charter member of the national organization, Youth for Christ.

## YFC effort to shift toward inner cities

Once the largest Youth for Christ chapter in the United States, the San Diego ministry has been through ebbs and flows over the past decade or so that likely would have buried other organizations. But with a rich tradition and an alumni list with ties to many of the region's most high-profile leaders, YFC refuses to throw in the towel.

Last summer its board infused more life and hope after hiring Josh Collier away from the Tacoma YFC.

"There's quite a legacy of Youth for Christ ministry in San Diego, and there's probably people reading this who first encountered Jesus through a Youth for Christ rally or Campus Life club," said Collier, who began his new post on July 1. "So we're standing on this legacy."

"For us, in San Diego, we're really looking at ourselves as a startup, so I'm not going to spend a lot of time looking in the rearview mirror," he said. "I am going to spend a lot of time dreaming about how we can reach youth who today are falling through the cracks in our community. So we've started with a posture of listening, learning and finding collaborative partners. And now that we've done that, we can use that knowledge to start well, start where the need truly is, and build the necessary funding and leader development components of sustainable growth."

Part of that fact-finding mission was tapping into the latest demographics that are impacting cities across the country.

"Culture has been rapidly changing around us," Collier said. "Right now, 65 percent of all young people live in the 35 largest metro areas in America, and that number is projected to hit 75 percent in the next decade. And a lot of youth ministry—including YFC ministry—has been really successful in suburban and rural

areas. But youth are moving into the cities, and into the inner city communities."

That means the national YFC ministry is pivoting toward a stronger focus on inner city work.

"It requires a different approach to ministry than we've been used to in the past," he said. "The really exciting thing is that across the country, Youth for Christ has been developing really fantastic and relevant inner city youth ministry models."

To accommodate the demographic changes, San Diego is now part of Youth for Christ's Cities Initiative, which will target the inner city areas of those 35 metro areas.

After his six-month listening tour with churches, non-profits, and business leaders, Collier is ready to implement programming aimed toward at-risk youth.

"What we've heard is that there are a lot of opportunities among youth whose parents are incarcerated, youth who have committed a crime and are on probation, and pregnant and parenting teens," he said. "So we're evaluating all our current ministry and deciding where we're called to grow."

The programs will include collaborative efforts to bolster mentoring programs with church volunteers. They also plan to work alongside other youth-oriented ministries.

"We've been talking a lot lately about what our collaboration will look like as YFC grows into new ministry areas," Collier said. "I've sometimes heard people wonder if there is any competition or territorial attitude between groups like Young Life and Youth for Christ, and I would say here in San Diego, absolutely not. We're all on the same mission."

*Learn more [www.yfcsd.org](http://www.yfcsd.org).*



A group of teens participate in outdoor games during a YFC outing at Oakbridge Camp in Ramona.



## Underground Railroad diary comes to life

“Union Bound,” a screenplay based on the diaries of Union soldier Joseph Hoover, hits the big screen Feb. 12 in time for Black History Month.

As detailed in his writings, Hoover was captured during the Battle of the Wilderness, a bloody 1864 campaign that pitted commanders Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee on the Virginia battlefield. Upon his capture prisoner Hoover was taken to the notorious Andersonville Prison Camp. Four months later, he was transferred to a new camp in South Carolina, where he managed to escape, aided by slaves.

Through the Underground Railroad, Hoover fought his way to freedom. Sean Stone (son of film director Oliver Stone) plays Hoover, who becomes a cabinetmaker after returning to his upstate New York

home. Directed by Harvey Lowry, “Union Bound” co-stars Randy Wayne (“To Save a Life”; “The Dukes of Hazzard: The Beginning”), Isaac C. Singleton (“Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl”), Christian Fortune (“New Year’s Eve”) and Drew Seeley (“High School Musical”). Cactus Moser (Wynonna & the Big Noise) recorded the theme song and makes an appearance as a wounded soldier.

The film is presented by Uptone Pictures, Moving Box Entertainment and Weathervane Productions.

A companion book from WND Books, will release on May 2.

## ‘90 Minutes in Heaven’

Pure Flix Entertainment has released DVD and Blu-Ray editions of “90 Minutes in Heaven,” the powerful true story of faith tested almost beyond human endurance.



Sean Stone, right, stars in a scene from “Union Bound,” which releases Feb. 12.

Based on the best-selling story by Don Piper and Cecil Murphey, the PG-13 film (rating based on intense accident scenes) stars Hayden Christensen (“Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones,” “Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith”), and Kate Bosworth (“Superman Returns,” “Still Alice”), the late Sen. Fred Dalton Thompson and recording artist Michael W. Smith.

The film originally released to theaters on Sept. 11.

During the 90 minutes Piper is declared dead after a violent traffic accident. He subsequently experiences love, joy and life like he’s never known.

Piper is declared dead after a violent traffic accident. He subsequently experiences love, joy and life like he’s never known. Piper is snapped back into reality, however, and the husband and father faces excruciating pain and emotional turmoil after his heavenly experience. His fight back to health is augmented by his strong faith and committed support of his family and community.

## ‘Women of Faith’

Women of Faith, which has hosted conferences across the country for the past 20 years, will host its first-ever cinema event

at 7 p.m. Feb. 18. A repeat performance is set for 7 p.m. March 3, with matinee shows at 12:55 p.m. Feb. 20 and March 5.

That’s when it will present “Women of Faith: An Amazing Joyful Journey.” BY Experience, pioneers of live cinema events, is producing the event in association with Fathom Events.

Described as part documentary, part live event, the show takes audiences on the historic journey of the Women of Faith movement through the years—on stage and off—and along their travels with World Vision, sharing how Women of Faith has been an influence in the lives of more than five million women.

The line-up includes never-before-seen interviews, hilarious outtakes and behind-the-scenes footage featuring some of the most beloved and popular speakers, including Patsy Clairmont, Mary Graham, Jen Hatmaker, Nicole Johnson, Marilyn Meberg, Sandi Patty, Luci Swindoll, Sheila Walsh and Thelma Wells, as well as music and performances from Christian contemporary artists who have appeared on the tour over the two decades.

San Diego venues include Mission Valley 20, Mira Mesa 18, La Jolla Village 12, Plaza Bonita 14, Otay Ranch 12 and San Marcos 18.



The cinematic event “Women of Faith: An Amazing Joyful Journey,” will be shown at theaters nationwide on Feb. 18.

## Indian worship team to release album

Pearl City Worship, a church-based worship team in Hyderabad, India, will release its first international album *We Won’t Be Silent* on March 18.

The band serves at Pearl City Church and was discovered by Ian Eskelin, a two-time Dove Award-winning Producer of the Year.

The church leads thousands of Christians in a city of more than seven million people.

“What I saw that day was a vibrant, exciting church where the chaos of the world was outside—poverty, people living in straw huts, cows walking down the street—and you walk through these doors and you see a thousand people praising God with guitars and vocals and smiles on their faces,” said Eskelin, founder of Radiate Music, which signed the group.

The producer was surprised to find the worship band ministering in English.

“Impacting culture is what I feel sets Pearl City apart of other churches in our city,” said Scott Norling, Pearl City Church’s pastor. “We have a unique cul-

ture from within for sure, but what matters most to us is not as much what is going on inside, but our impact outside the church.”

Already released in India, Pearl City Worship’s debut album soared to No. 1 on the iTunes “Religious” sales chart, topping Hindu, Muslim and all other religious recordings in India. The album is distributed by The Fuel Music.

## Sharing her inheritance

Audrey Assad fell in love with hymns as a child raised in the Plymouth Brethren church, where vocal cords (the “sacred harp”) were the only instrument in Sunday services.

“I learned to sing there, from the old hymnbooks, in four-part harmony, with my family and my neighbors,” said Assad, the daughter of a Syrian refugee. “It was multi-generational, it was deep and rich and beautiful, and like most of my favorite worship music, it was steeped in community.”

That love of hymns is reflected in “Inheritance,” a new album by the singer-songwriter. It releases Feb. 12 on Fortunate Fall Records with Tone Tree Music distribution. Assad calls her music “soundtracks for prayer.”



“I knew that *Inheritance* had to be much more than me going into the studio and simply doing pretty renditions of hymns we all know and love,” Assad said. “I couldn’t be satisfied with that—I had to make something both bright and dark—colored honestly with my own doubts and weaknesses, so that the Lord who inspired these songs could be even more visible in it.”

Assad, a multiple Dove Award nominee and iTunes Christian Breakthrough Album of the Year recipient for 2010’s *The House You’re Building*, has toured with Tenth Avenue North, Matt Maher and Jars of Clay. She was also featured on Chris Tomlin’s RIAA certified Gold record, “Glory in the Highest” (2009).

## Passion for music

The newest album from Passion, *Passion: Salvation’s Tide is Rising*, releases Jan. 29. The album released in conjunction with the Passion 2016 Conference, where more than 40,000 college students gathered in three locations at the same time to proclaim the name of Jesus.

The album features acclaimed worship leaders Chris Tomlin, Crowder, Matt Redman, Kristian Stanfill, Christy Nockels, Brett Younker, Melodie Malone and Jimi Cravity.

The project’s 10 tracks include several new songs that were written specifically for Passion 2016.

## Jesus Culture echoes live

Jesus Culture, on the heels of 2014’s successful *Unstoppable Love*, has released the brand new live album, *Let It Echo*. This is the first album recorded live in front of the band’s new congregation at their newly established campus in Sacramento. *Let It Echo* captures the heart of the community seeking Jesus and the desire to see this passion spread from the cities to the nations.



## Distributing food to the needy

SAN DIEGO — Bayview Charities at Bayview Baptist Church holds a monthly food giveaway on the third Friday of every month.

The next distribution will be from 8 to 11 a.m. Feb. 19 at the church.

The church is located at 6134 Benson Ave.

Learn more at [www.bayviewbc.org](http://www.bayviewbc.org) or call (619) 266-3621.

## PLNU hosts anti-trafficking events

POINT LOMA — Eugene Cho, a Seattle-based pastor, humanitarian and activist, will be the keynote speaker at the “Just Saying—Freedom for the Captives,” a spoken word event set for 7 p.m. Feb. 11 in Brown Chapel at Point Loma Nazarene University.

The event will also feature Southern Californian musicians and a variety of spoken word artists. Spoken word is a style of entertaining that often involves poetry, word play or storytelling.

The free event is sponsored by Center for Justice and Reconciliation, the Center for International Development, and Spiritual Development, all at PLNU. Churches Against Trafficking, a San Diego networking group, is also a sponsor.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the Beauty for Ashes Scholarship Fund at PLNU.

The next day, the campus will host Pastors Day, an interactive breakfast workshop to show spiritual leaders how to help their congregation engage with anti-human trafficking work. The free event will run from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Feb. 12; a light breakfast will be served.

The meeting is an interactive session intended to inspire and inform pastors about the partnership that churches provide in the effort to end human trafficking. Presenters will describe how churches in the San Diego region have joined together to combat trafficking. Congregational resources will also be provided.

Although free, reservations for the breakfast are requested by Feb. 1.

Learn more at [www.abolishhumantrafficking.com](http://www.abolishhumantrafficking.com).

## Church planting school to open

EL CAJON — Apostolos School of Leadership and Church Planting is accepting enrollment for its new college. The name is Greek for “sent one.” Classes begin in March.

A ministry of Narratives Church, the school’s mission is to develop Christian leaders and church planters through an organic and academically accredited pathway. The faculty is comprised of local pastors from across denominational backgrounds who are academically qualified instructors and experienced church planters.

Students will earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Christian Leadership and will have the option of choosing one of four concentrations: Bible and Theology, Pastoral Ministry, Discipleship and Formation and Organic Organizational Leadership. A certificate program in Leadership is also available. A master’s program in church planting is scheduled to be offered in 2019.

Graduates will be provided with practical training in how to live, love and share the gospel.

In addition to its focus on academic training, the vision of Apostolos is to plant

20 churches in the next 10 years.

The school is located at 450 Fletcher Parkway, Suite 224.

For more information, call (619) 249-6386.

## Weekend resource for post-abortive women

CHULA VISTA — Silent Voices, a South Bay ministry assisting women in crisis pregnancies, will hold a weekend support group for women who have experienced an abortion.

The Post Abortion Healing & Recovery program will be held Feb. 19 to 21.

For more information, call (619) 422-0757.

## Stressing that marriage matters

SAN DIEGO — Ocean View Church will present its Marriage Matters conference on Feb. 19 and 20.

This weekend conference provides time and space for married couples to laugh together, pray together, and draw nearer to God for strength and encouragement.

The \$20 fee includes dessert on Friday night, dinner on Saturday, and materials.

The church is located at 2460 Palm Ave.

For more information, send an email to [dsanchez@ovcsd.com](mailto:dsanchez@ovcsd.com) or call (619) 424-7870.

## ‘My Therapist Sez...’

LA MESA — Skyline Church will host its monthly “My Therapist Sez...” program at 6:45 p.m. March 2 in the Worship Center Auditorium.

A panel of trained therapists will respond to questions on important life topics in a session moderated by Dr. Don Welch.

The meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month. Child care is available with an email RSVP to [esnelson@skylinechurch.org](mailto:esnelson@skylinechurch.org).

The church is located at 11330 Campo Road.

For more information, call (619) 660-5000.

## Parents Night Out

SANTEE — Just in time for Valentine’s Day, Pathways Church will host a Parents

Night Out event from 6 to 9:30 p.m. Feb. 12.

The event is open to children who are nursery age through the fifth grade.

The cost is \$10 for the first child and \$5 for each additional child.

The church is located at 9638 Carlton Hills Blvd.

Learn more at [www.pathways.cc](http://www.pathways.cc) or by calling (619) 449-1269.

## Christian Businessmen’s Breakfast

POINT LOMA — The Christian Businessmen’s Breakfast will be held 7 a.m. Feb. 26 at the Marine Corp Recruit Depot’s Bay View Restaurant.

The guest speaker will be Air Force Col. John Marcellus (retired), a Division Commander in the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

For more information, contact David Guzik at (619) 590-2110.

## Quilt-making fundraiser

SAN DIEGO — City View Church will host a Mystery Quilt workshop from 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Feb. 27.

During the event, participants follow a series of instructions, learning a variety of techniques. At the end of the day the mystery quilt is revealed.

The \$80 (\$65 is tax deductible) cost includes meals and snacks. Proceeds benefit Royal Family Kid Camp.

For more information, contact Kay Laboda, director of Prayers and Squares at City View, by email at [klaboda@san.rr.com](mailto:klaboda@san.rr.com) or by calling (619) 994-0559.

## Monthly homeless outreach

OCEAN BEACH — Newbreak Church, which has campuses in Tierrasanta, Pacific Beach, Scripps Mesa and El Cajon, hosts a monthly breakfast outreach for the homeless at Trinity Episcopal Church.

The next outreach will be held Feb. 6. Upcoming dates are March 5, April 2, May 7 and June 4. All times are 8 to 10 a.m.

During the outreach volunteers distribute clothing, prepare and serve breakfast,

help with cleanup, and spend time building relationships with the guests. Music and singing are also offered.

The church is located at 2051 Sunset Cliffs Blvd.

For more information, contact Karen Bombaci at [kbombaci@newbreak.org](mailto:kbombaci@newbreak.org).

## Rescue mission offers free site tours

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego Rescue Mission offers monthly tours for people interested in learning more about the programs it offers.

The tours are at 6 p.m. the second Monday of the month and at noon the second Thursday of each month. During the 45-minute tours, guests are provided details about the mission and the many programs offered by the Bankers Hill ministry, which include housing, counseling, feeding programs, education and alumni aftercare.

Reservations are required.

The rescue mission is located at 120 Elm St.

For more information, send an email to [dkrakauer@sdrescue.org](mailto:dkrakauer@sdrescue.org) or call (619) 819-1897.

## Cancer support group

BONITA — Bonita Valley Community Church presents its ongoing Living Hope support group for cancer patients from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Feb. 2.

The group is held the first Tuesday of each month in the Life Center Conference Room.

The support group tries to create a loving, compassionate and hopeful environment that is both safe and prayerful. The family friendly atmosphere is designed for patients and their family members.

The church is located at 4744 Bonita Road.

Learn more at [www.bonitavalley.com](http://www.bonitavalley.com) or by calling (619) 475-8000.

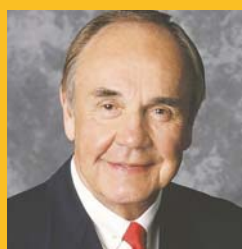
### ONLINE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

For more Community News and an online Calendar of Events for San Diego County, please visit [www.refreshedsandiego.com](http://www.refreshedsandiego.com).

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## Vonette Bright passes

ORLANDO — Vonette Zachary Bright, co-founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, the world's largest Christian ministry, died Dec. 23 due to complications from acute leukemia. She was 89.



In 1951, Vonette and her late husband, Dr. William "Bill" R. Bright launched Campus Crusade for Christ at UCLA with the goal to "win the campus today, win the world tomorrow."

Their heart for evangelism lasted more than half a century. The foundation that employs more than 25,000 staff members and 300,000 volunteers in 173 countries. The ministry is now known as Cru in the United States.

Though the Campus Ministry is still the largest branch of Campus Crusade, it is joined by other ministries like Athletes in Action, The JESUS Film Project, The Josh McDowell Ministry and FamilyLife.

In addition to the campus ministry, Bright was influential in founding the National Prayer Committee, a group of leaders who seek to motivate other Christians to unite in prayer for spiritual awakening in America. In 1988, she successfully petitioned Congress to designate the first Thursday of every May as the permanent day for the National Day of Prayer. She served nine years as chairwoman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force, a move-

ment that today includes more than 2 million people in 30,000 observances nationwide.

## Franklin Graham to bring national tour to Sacramento

SACRAMENTO — Evangelist Franklin Graham, who heads Samaritan's Purse, will be in Sacramento March 31 as part of his national Decision America Tour.

Graham launched the tour in January and will visit all 50 states in an effort to challenge Christians to pray for the nation and take a stand for their faith.

"I think the problem with our nation today is the failure of the Church," Graham said. "We have gotten ourselves into a mess as a country."

Graham plans to stop at each state capitol where he will hold a prayer rally, calling on Americans to boldly live out their faith and help turn the country back to God. One of his goals is to remind believers of the source of their hope.

"I don't have hope in the Republican party or the Democratic party," he said. "The only hope that I have is in the Church if it would repent of its sins," he said. "And if we confess our sins individually and then repent, then I believe God ... can use us."

Graham will not be endorsing any candidates, but is asking

Christians to pray for the country, vote for people who hold biblical values and to run for public office at every level.

## Faithbox donates 100,000 meals

NEW YORK — Startup nonprofit Faithbox, a monthly box subscription providing spiritual content and socially conscious products, provided more than 100,000 meals for impoverished children in 2015.

Through a partnership with Rice Bowls, Faithbox donated three meals for every subscription box it sold.

"From the start, Faithbox was founded on the principle of making an impact," said CEO Willie Morris, who founded the organization in 2014.

"We are grateful for the many subscribers who have helped us achieve this milestone. Reaching the goal of 100,000 meals our first year only energizes our team to raise the bar and do even more in 2016."

In addition to its monthly devotional, Bible verses and application suggestions, Faithbox includes a variety of ethically focused products. Many of the products are also selected because of the charitable commitments of those companies, Morris said.

Learn more at [faithbox.com](http://faithbox.com).



Subscribers receive daily devotionals and a variety of spiritual helps and socially conscience products through the monthly distribution of Faithbox.

includes passages by Cindy Woodsmall, Susan May Warren, Sherry Kyle and Renae Brumbaugh.

Learn more at [www.fictiondevo.com](http://www.fictiondevo.com).

## Darwin Day resolutions introduced

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Two members of the U.S. Congress have introduced resolutions designating Feb. 12 as Darwin Day. The resolution is designed to celebrate the achievements of biologist Charles Darwin and affirm the scientific consensus supporting the theory of evolution. Darwin was born on that date in 1809.

The first resolution, H.Res. 548, was introduced in the House by Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut. That was followed with a similar move by Sen. Richard Blumenthal, also of Connecticut, who introduced S. Res. 337. Both men introduced similar measures last year but they failed to advance.

Both resolutions are supported by the Secular Coalition for America.

In addition to supporting Darwin's work, the resolutions also condemn creationism and intelligent design saying, "the teaching of creationism in some public schools compromises the scientific and academic integrity of the education systems of the United States."

Kelly Damerow, interim executive director of the Secular Coalition for America, said the House resolution has gained a total of 15 co-sponsors since its introduction.

"This resolution celebrates the intellectual bravery and scientific discovery that contribute to the well-being of all people," Damerow said. "Congressional recognition will help foster the scientific inquiry and natural curiosity that builds a brighter future for all mankind."

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## Looking at love

MINNEAPOLIS — Forget the flowers and candy. Author Kathy Ide has another gift option for Cupid, a new book called "21 Days of Love: Stories that Celebrate Treasured Relationships."

Unlike most Valentine's gifts, which focus on romantic love, Ide's book explores a variety of relationship experiences, including the kindness of a stranger or a child for her teacher.

"These stories represent all kinds of love," a news release said. "Woven through each story is the sustaining hand of our loving heavenly Father. On Valentine's Day—and every day—whether your life is chocolates and flowers or loneliness and pain ... let these stories fill your heart with hope, peace, and most important, love."

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# Ultimate love

Our beloved housecat died last week. Marvin the Cat was a mere 6 years old and in his prime. We heard a crash in one of the bedrooms and there he was, on the floor, taking his last breath. His death is a mystery. Maybe he fell and hit his head, or maybe it was a heart attack. We will probably never know.

Although my wife and I aren't "cat people," we came to love Marvin and accept him as part of our family. Once again, we have loved and lost. To love a person or a pet is to risk feeling the pain of separation. In fact, it's more than a risk. It's a certainty.

In his book, "The Four Loves," C.S. Lewis points out this harsh truth:

*To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping your heart intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark,*

*motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. ... The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.*

Therein lies the trap that so many of us fall into. The safety of isolation—of being a "rock" or an "island" as described by Simon and Garfunkel—also means that we will not know love.

Protecting our fragile hearts by keeping others at bay also means that we will not be truly known for who we are. The wounds of past relationships remind us to keep up the walls in order to stay safe and hidden.

So many horrible beliefs seem true when we live in loneliness and isolation. As a client of mine recently exclaimed, "If you really knew me, you would not like me." But the opposite is actually true; the more someone knows you, the more they can genuinely love you.

In all my years of being a psychotherapist (nearly 30!), there have been very few times when I found a person to be evil

when they revealed themselves to me. Yes, everyone sins and falls short of perfection, but Satan has a way of magnifying those imperfections to create self-loathing and self-condemnation. The lie is clear: Isolation makes us weak, not strong. Our hearts become hardened, like a rock, and just as senseless.

As Alfred Lord Tennyson said, "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." This is especially true if you buy into the idea that earthly love eventually ends in separation. The only love that never fails, that goes on forever, is godly love. There's no hiding from it either. God knows everything about you, and yet He loves you even though the imperfections are many.

Maybe the truth is that God loves you because you have no secrets from Him. Maybe God's love is so deep because He does understand your pain and suffering. The One who loves us cannot be taken from us. There is no need to fear separa-

tion or loss of love.

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).*

With this foundational truth about our security, let us embrace the "dangers and perturbations of love" by being vulnerable to others with our thoughts and feelings. During this month of February, when we celebrate Valentine's Day to commemorate those we love, let us step out of our comfort zone and risk loving more.



Daniel Jenkins, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist at Lighthouse Psychological Services in Mission Valley. He is also a professor of psychology at Point Loma Nazarene University. Learn more at [www.lighthousepsy.com](http://www.lighthousepsy.com).

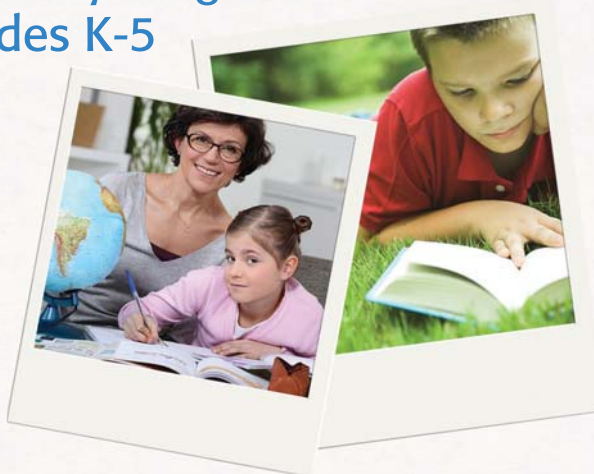
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# Practically Speaking—Changes to Social Security

Just when you think it can't possibly get more complicated, enter the Federal Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015. While there has never been—and probably never will be—a one-size-fits-all solution to Social Security filing, this new bill brings significant change. It will make the two most common filing strategies for couples, Restricted Application and File and Suspend, things of the past. So, if your birth year is 1953 or earlier, pay close attention to the following information as you have a very short window to act.

## Strategies to be eliminated

- **Restricted Application.** This spousal strategy allows one spouse at Full Retirement Age (FRA is currently age 66-plus if birth year is 1943-1954) to apply for a benefit based on the spouse's record while delaying their own benefit. This allows the larger benefit to grow an average of 8 percent per year until age 70. Couples who want some income now while waiting for the higher earner's benefits to grow can benefit from this strategy.
- **File and Suspend.** This strategy allows a couple to claim benefits at FRA but suspend payments based on their record

until a later age. Meanwhile the spouse can begin receiving benefits based on the primary filer's record. The primary can continue to accrue delayed retirement credits until age 70.

## How does this affect me?

- No impact if you are currently receiving Social Security benefits or widowed and remain unmarried.
- Pay close attention if you are NOT receiving benefits, are 62 or older, or turn 66 by April 29, 2016 and are married or divorced. Note: Divorcees who were married 10 years or more will only be able to claim a spousal benefit at age 66 if they were 62 by Dec. 31, 2015.

## What should I do now?

- Age 66 or older and not yet collecting benefits. Consider the File and Suspend strategy by April 29, 2016 if either of these two reasons for doing so makes sense for you:
  1. You want to allow a spouse/dependent to collect benefits based on the primary filer's record while the primary's benefits continue to grow.
  2. You want to preserve the primary's

option to request a lump sum payment of retroactive suspended benefits.

- Age 62 or older by end of 2015, married to eligible spouse who is 66 or older and not collecting benefits. Consider the Restricted Application strategy if either of these two reasons for doing so makes sense for you:
  1. You want to collect a spousal benefit while growing your own benefits.
  2. You want to maximize the survivor's benefit by having the higher earning spouse file the Restricted Application.
- Born after 1953. Although the Restricted Application and File and Suspend options are no longer available to you, it's never too early to begin planning for retirement. For most, Social Security remains a key component for future income. Consider this:
  1. Filing prior to your FRA will reduce your benefit while delaying benefits beyond your FRA will increase your benefits. At least this part of Social Security has not changed. For every year you delay taking benefits between age 62 and 70, they will grow an average of 8 percent. In today's investment environment, that's a very attractive return. It may even make sense to

temporarily tap into other retirement income to allow your Social Security benefits to grow.

2. Maximizing your survivor benefit to protect your spouse is another reason to consider delaying your benefit until age 70. To do this, you need to be sure to plan for income replacement until age 70.
3. Visit MySAA.com to obtain your current statement. Consider using the Social Security calculator ([www.SSA.gov](http://www.SSA.gov)) to help you determine the best strategy for your situation. This might also be a good time to meet with your trusted financial adviser to review strategies for your long-term income replacement needs.

Significant changes like this one to Social Security present a great opportunity to step back and review your overall financial plan regardless of your age. There are many important nuances to this budget bill. Don't let the apparent complexities of retirement planning—and specifically Social Security-related considerations—keep you from taking action. Being proactive rather than reactive allows you to make the wisest decisions possible for you and your family.

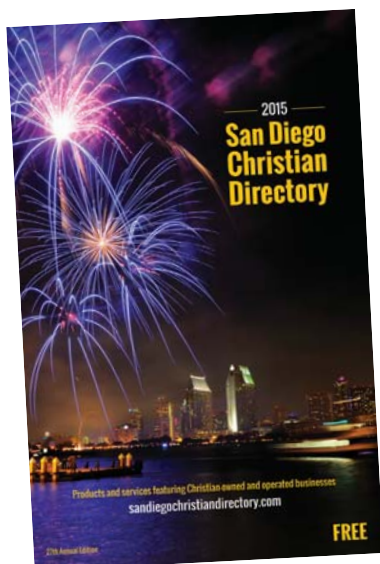


Janice Thompson is a certified financial planner and co-founder/CEO of One Degree Advisors, Inc. A frequent speaker on financial topics and mentor for financial professionals, she also serves on the board of directors for Kingdom Advisors. Learn more at [www.onedegreeadvisors.com](http://www.onedegreeadvisors.com).

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## 6 secrets to eating out with kids ... and enjoying it

The first time my wife and I took our newborn to a restaurant, time seemingly stood still. Sweet elderly ladies “oohed” and “aahed” over our little bundle of joy. Waitresses stopped by our table to take a peek, amazed by his long eyelashes and quiet manner. Heck, even a few rough-looking grown men—the type you don’t want to cross—cracked a smile.

It was, in one word, “wonderful.”

Fast forward two years, and restaurant visits were no longer the highlight of our week. Yes, our son, Graham, was still precious, but instead of sleeping, he was randomly putting pepper shakers in his mouth. Instead of calmly drinking a bottle, he was stubbornly tossing macaroni on the floor, wondering why Mommy and Daddy were stressed and the people at the next table were laughing. Then there was the time when we ordered our food and he immediately began pitching a fit. Unable to calm him, we boxed up *all of our food*, hopped in the car and drove home.

Not every instance with our then-2-year-old son was taxing, but there were enough tough moments that we began evaluating what we could do better to make visits to restaurants more enjoyable.

My family views “eating out” much the way people viewed meals during Jesus’ life—as a time of leisurely fun and fellowship. We’re not there simply to eat. We’re there to *talk* and enjoy one another.

So, can a family of small children eat out regularly without chaos ensuing? Yes.

Here are a few tips that helped us ... and may help you, too:

**1 Practice at home.** When my daughter was 2, she had a bad restaurant habit: not staying in her seat. She would get up and walk around the table, greeting each person with a kiss. Cute, yes, but not if *all* of the kids are doing it, over and over. So we began practicing her table manners at home. Eventually, after a few tears, she learned.

**2 Choose your restaurants wisely.** Perhaps you and your family act wonderfully at nice Italian restaurants. My kids don’t. It’s just too quiet, and at most of them there’s not enough visual stimulation. Here’s what works for us: restaurants with outdoor seating, restaurants with instant appetizers (read: Mexican), and restaurants with a loud atmosphere. If my wife and I want Italian, we get a babysitter. But



most everywhere else, we’re fine.

**3 Choose your mealtime wisely.** For restaurants, my kids (ages 7, 4, 4, newborn) are at their best in the morning, after naps, and after a physical activity. This means we eat breakfast and dinner a lot and we only eat lunch if we’ve, say, been to the zoo or gone on a hike. By then, the kids will be hungry ... and ready to sit down.

**4 Clear the table.** Yes, literally. And quickly. See that nice silverware arrangement? That vase of flowers? Those packets of jams and jellies? If you have a young one, they all will be on the floor before you even sit down—and your meal will be ruined before you even order. If we’re near a window, we place table items on the windowsill. Otherwise, the items go on one

end of the table, the kids on the other.

**5 Use distractions when needed.** I loathe our society’s addiction to screens, but when I’m at a restaurant and have shelled out hard-earned money for a meal, I sometimes bend the rules. This means my kids, after they have finished their food, may get to play games on my smartphone. It extends our mealtime a bit, keeps the noise level down, and even gives my wife and I a mini-date.

**6 Be patient.** Kids, after all, are still kids. Even with all of the preparation in the world, your visit may still be a disaster. Sometimes I wonder if kids misbehaved around Jesus—particularly after His famous “let the children come to me” statement. I’m sure there were a few kids tugging on His robe or interrupting His talk. And if so, we’re all in good company.



Michael Foust is the father of four small children and blogs about parenting at [michaelfoust.com](http://michaelfoust.com).

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Psalm 139:14



# Please sir, may I have some more?

“Just a little bit more” was the response given by the world’s richest man John D. Rockefeller to the question, “How much money is enough money?” Here was a man who had it all and yet he wanted “just a little bit more.” Just a little, he wasn’t asking for much, just a little, is that too much to ask?

Christians, if we are not careful that ends up being our plea as well: “Just a little bit more.”

This can come in the most common forms man knows: health, happiness, wealth, safety, physical satisfaction and relationship. In fact, most often those peddling a false hope keep off of mankind’s common desires for

such things, prompting us to go down to the shop and buy the newest teaching or product that promises and guarantees us the answer to our problems.

Your health is bad? Eat organic and stretch. You don’t have enough money? Go to our school and invest with us. Your life seems out of balance and you’re unhappy? Take our drug. You will not survive a car crash without this car and our car seat. You will be miserable unless you buy our bed.

Maybe you have heard this:

“When are you getting married?”

“When are you having kids?”

“When are you having more kids?”

“Don’t you think you have enough kids?”

These all tap into the quest for “just a little bit more.”

What does God say about all this?

Romans 8:32 gives us the answer: “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

This delves into the biblical concept of moving from the greater to the lesser. If God gave us the greatest gift of all, salvation through the death of Jesus Christ—which He freely did—then why would we think He is keeping anything else from us?

For the Christian, God does not need to give us anything more. He has given us the greatest gift of all. Imagine standing before the cross as Jesus was being crucified. You see Him being whipped. His back bloody and raw, a crown of thorns pushed firm onto His head. The mocking crowd spitting on Him and laughing. Nails pounded into His hands one at a time and into the front of His ankles. Then, with each breath taken, He has to push up on His feet to gasp for air.

Finally, He gives up the ghost and a soldier with all his might heaves a spear right into His side and you see blood and water pour out. Imagine in the midst of that say-

ing, “Well I appreciate what you are doing, but it’s not enough. I need a little bit more. I need to feel a little bit better, be a little bit richer, little bit more successful. I need a little bigger family and a little more guarantee that things are going to work out for me. What you are doing is great but I need a little bit more.”

Preposterous?

Not from a gospel perspective. Too often we forget Christ’s work, and the wonder, cost and greatness of our salvation.

Let us remember what God tells us in Romans 8:32: He has already given us the greatest gift and that He is not going to keep from us what we truly need.

I know we have desires, but let us not make gods out of them. Let us not be unsatisfied and forget what we have already received freely, the greatest gift of all—life in Jesus Christ. We don’t need a little bit more. God has given us all we need in Christ.



Paul Rochford, executive pastor at Barabbas Road Church and a graduate of Southern California Seminary, is working on his Master’s of Divinity degree.

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# Mama mia, don't break the pasta

Over the holidays I noticed a new product on my grocery store shelf: half-sized spaghetti. It's basically plain spaghetti, but half the length of regular spaghetti and touted as the "perfect size for any pot" because there's no need to break it in half.

At the risk of sounding like a curmudgeon, have we become so lazy as Americans that we can't break our own pasta in half?

I posted that sentiment, along with a photo of the box of spaghetti, on my Facebook page. My intent was to generate discussion about the way we rely on convenience items and technology to do everyday things we really should be doing ourselves. I'm not even talking about things like relying on GPS instead of reading a map. I'm talking about using electric staplers and wearing self-tying sneakers.

The little rant made sense to me, so imagine my surprise when instead of people talking about the laziness of half-sized spaghetti, I was hit with a barrage of replies that all shared the same message: Never break the pasta.

Yes, dear readers, the fact that we're too lazy to break our own spaghetti is a far less serious offense than the fact that anyone would dare to break spaghetti in

the first place.

The debate over pasta size included comments from my friend, Bob, who regularly cooks a variety of delicious-looking Italian dishes for his family and shares the photos on social media.

"Never break the pasta," he wrote. When I asked why, he replied, "You're not supposed to break it."

For the record, I don't break the pasta; I know not to do that. But *why* am I not supposed to do that? I asked the question again and again, and dozens of people responded. The conversations went something like this:

Sarah: "Um. My Italian Grammy just rolled over in her grave. You do NOT break spaghetti, you do not cut spaghetti. I'm offended by this product for that reason alone lol, completely ignoring the laziness factor."

Me: "So what's the difference between broken pasta and pasta made half-sized? Nothing, right? Or is it just that it's smaller?"

Sarah: "No difference. Both are wrong. Haha."

Bob: "See. Do not break the pasta!"

Of course, some people love the half-

sized spaghetti. Lynda explains, "When I break the long spaghetti, I tend to have some pieces go flying around." Several people agreed with her; breaking the pasta is messy, they say, so pre-broken pasta makes sense.

Amy breaks the pasta to fit her small saucepan because it takes too long to boil water in a bigger pan.

"However," she adds, "I prefer to break my own pasta."

And then there's Kimberly, who unabashedly admitted, "I was so excited to see this product the other day that I bought some immediately. Too lazy to break my own dang pasta? You bet! Small luxuries like this turn me on, lol!"

Non-breakers were aghast.

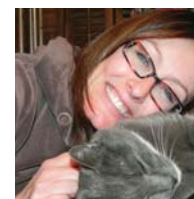
But why? Breaking spaghetti doesn't change the molecular structure, does it? So the half-sized spaghetti should taste the same as the longer spaghetti, right? The world won't end if you break your spaghetti or do it the lazy way and buy it already cut in half.

Or maybe it will. When I asked whether breaking the pasta makes it taste differently, people shared links to articles explaining how it changes the way the sauce

sticks to the spaghetti, thereby affecting the taste. The articles also insisted that breaking the spaghetti is bad luck and a crime akin to denying your Italian heritage. Someone even shared links to stores where you can buy a properly sized spaghetti pot.

Because, as any good Italian knows, to properly cook spaghetti you put it in a pot of salted, rapidly boiling water, with the ends of the pasta sticking out. You let it sit for about 30 seconds until it starts to get a bit soft, and then gently bend the rest of the pasta into the water.

If you can't do that in the pot you have, don't break the spaghetti. Go out and buy a new pot. Unless, of course, you're too lazy.



Award-winning freelance writer Joanne Brokaw spends her days dreaming of things she'd like to do but probably never will—like swimming with dolphins, cleaning the attic and someday

overcoming the trauma of elementary school picture day. She lives with two dogs, a cat, six chickens and one very patient husband. Learn more at [www.joannebrokaw.com](http://www.joannebrokaw.com).

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