

# One Foot Out The Door...

Changes abound! So many things happening that I can't keep up writing about them on my blog. It seems like every time I sit down to relax, I'm doing something with the kids – playing board games, homeschooling, doing puzzles, cuddling while we watch home videos together... Mommy and kid time is so much more important than blogging, of course, so I'm not losing sleep over it... but I do miss blogging, and I know I will miss having a chronicle of these days for future reading. I was just looking back at my blogs from the past; looking to see how I felt after my cesarean 3 years ago, hoping to maybe find some tips for recovery this time around. It was so nice to read about what was going on in our lives at that point, the challenges we were enduring, how the kids were growing, what they were doing, that kind of thing. But these days, if I have a kid in my lap, there is NO extra room to have a laptop nearby! As of Friday September 16, I am 36 weeks pregnant – home stretch for sure! While my belly is not bulging nearly as much as it did with my previous 4 pregnancies (I've actually LOST weight since July, but dr said baby is growing fine and that's what matters), I am looming large these days, and the seemingly most mundane of tasks is an effort on my part and seems to take me forever. I am blessed with an awesome Hubby who has really stepped up around the house to keep us running despite the craziness and challenges that a 4-kid household brings. Very Honorable Mention goes to my oldest daughter who has also been amazing lately with her willingness to help. She has gone above and beyond, not only doing everything that is asked of her but also coming up with her own ideas to pamper pregnant mom, following through with these ideas, and also excelling in our newly designed homeschooling program. A few weeks ago, Taylor surprised me with a manicure/pedicure, and she even kept going outside to check on the little ones while Mom's nails were drying. The other day, she came up with the idea and made me breakfast in

bed. Her emotional and spiritual growth lately has been amazing to see, and hopefully I will have the time to blog about the lesson in forgiveness that she taught our whole family.

So how is the homeschooling going for us? If you remember, we began homeschooling our two eldest this year – 6th and 2nd grades. Many people have asked how it's going, so it's time for a formal update on the blog... It's going GREAT! Thanks for asking! We began with a very planned out schedule, but we've found it necessary to be more flexible. We've also tweaked our planned curriculum here and there and attended our first homeschooling book sale and picked up some things to supplement our curriculum. All normal and necessary parts of the process, and we've seen the kids become closer with each other and us their parents, all while getting to watch them learn new things up close. I can't wait to jump in as a full time homeschool teacher, but my patience is being tested since I have to wait until I recover from my planned cesarean in October.

Now for the big news: a few blog posts ago, I wrote about many doors opening for our family. We were still determining at that time which paths to explore, and our prayers have been answered; the paths whittled down to an almost definite road. Loonngg story made very short is this: my husband was offered a job as a pastor at a local church, and he accepted. This means that we will be, in effect, switching churches. Talk about something that came out of the blue! There is nothing about our current church that I don't like, and I had planned on going there for years to come and raising our kids among our church community. But, as we all too often learn, God has plans for us. And who am I to argue? I KNOW His plans are so much better than any road map I could have drafted for myself and my family. So now comes the transition to the new church. It's a much smaller church, so among my husband's and my first duties will be to acclimate ourselves into the new

church environment and create a children's ministry. It will be challenging but also extremely exciting. My husband has one final meeting with the regional governing board of the church to finish out the interview process, but everything we've been told by the elders of the church is that this is just procedure. So, last Tuesday, I sadly gave my notice to my friend and mentor that oversees my 2nd/3rd grade girls Sunday school class. Oh, how I will miss those kids! I've known them and watched them grow for a year and a half now, ever since I had them as 1st grade students last year. But as I said, who am I to challenge God's plan? While this all happened so suddenly in our lives, the chain of events and circumstances that led up to my husband being chosen to lead this church was so obviously orchestrated by God that there is no need to doubt whether it was meant to be, nor is there need to go into detail about exactly how it happened. I will just say how much we KNOW that it was meant to happen, and that will guide me in the future if I ever begin to have fears or doubts in my own abilities to fulfill His work for me.

October 7 is when I am scheduled to have the baby, and 2 days later (while I'm still in the hospital) is when my husband is to spend his first Sunday at our new church. As soon as I feel up to it, I will join him there, and our kids will follow as soon as we set up our children's ministry. That leaves me 2 Sundays to teach my current Sunday school students, or possibly just one if I decide to go and meet more of the congregation at the new church before I go into the hospital. I may have one foot out the door, but I'm walking into a whole new world. Because it is the world that God has designed for me at this point in my life, I could not be more excited!!!

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# Teacher, Teacher

Well, I survived. Today was my try at teaching my 3-year-old daughter's Sunday school class. Every summer, church members have the opportunity to serve in our church's Kids' Kingdom in order to give the regular teachers a much deserved summer break. Instead of requesting a specific age group where I might have been comfortable (last summer my husband and I taught 4th grade boys, and I'm used to teaching 5th and 7th grade girls from my youth group teaching experience), I decided to let the Kids' Kingdom coordinator put me where I would be needed the most – so the 3-year-old room it was. And lucky for me (cough cough), there aren't very many 2-year-olds at our church at this time, so they were just combined with the 3-year-olds, putting me in charge of fourteen 2 and 3-year-olds for over an hour. But it was SO much fun!!!

Not something I'd like to do every week (just because of my responsibilities at home with 4 of my own kids 24/7), but definitely worth a shot, especially since I was helping out. I might even sign up for another Sunday with the 2/3-year-olds; they were so cute!! In anticipating my teaching experience today, one challenge I did not foresee were the kids who cried when their parents left. We had about 4 of those – their world was blown apart when this strange lady (me) was in their classroom in place of their regular teacher. 3 of them got over the shock right away; one little girl did an actual 180° turn in personality. She began the class by crying and clinging to the wall, only to come out of her shell later and insisting she sit by me at story time as well as wanting my constant attention. The 4th little boy held out a little longer; he was a cute little guy who clung to the wall for most of the class. He stopped crying for his parents within the first few minutes, but I couldn't get him to participate in any of the activities. I kept asking though, I didn't let him fade into the background, and I think

that helped. Also helping was my teenage helper, without whom I surely would have lost track of all those kids.

Upon arriving, I was given a packet of papers detailing my lesson plan and ideas for activities related to the lesson which I will share:

**Basic Truth: God Made Me**

**Key Question: Who can help you?**

**Bottom Line: God made people who help me.**

**Memory Verse: "Be kind and loving to each other." Ephesians 4:32, NCV**

**Bible Story Focus: God wants families to help each other.**

**Boaz cares for Ruth and Naomi • Ruth 2:1-23**

As kids were arriving (and some were bawling into the doorframe), I had them sit at the table and draw their favorite foods in the pre-printed basket they were given on cardstock. I got a big kick out of one little girl who drew chocolate fudgicles, chocolate soy milk (?), and chocolate pancakes. I attempted to draw my own basket (filled with spaghetti; I didn't think I could draw Greek food nor did I feel like explaining saganaki or kafta to 2 and 3-year-olds), but there was too much to do for me to finish my artwork. Soon, we ran out of table space to color, so I moved on to this activity:

### ***Get Up and Go***

*What You Need: Blue painters' tape, masking tape and different forms of transportation toys such as cars, horses, trucks, trains, buses, boats and airplanes.*

*What You Do: Make "roads" on the floor with the masking tape. Make "waterways" on the floor with the blue tape. Pretend you are traveling on the roads with the trucks, horses and cars and in the water with the boats. Fly the airplanes around the room. Make up places to go and let your imagination take you on a fun trip.*

*What You Say:*

*During the activity: "Who wants to go on a trip with me? These cars and trucks can take us places. These boats can take us places. Oh! And look! We have horses and an airplane too! We can use these to go all kinds of places. This white tape can be our road and this blue tape can be water. Come on! Let's get up and go!"*

*At the end of the activity: "Cars and trucks and boats can take us to all kinds of places. There's one more way to get somewhere that we haven't talked about...our feet! We can WALK to places too! In our Bible story today, two ladies named Ruth and Naomi have to use their feet to get to a new place."*

So as you can see, the instructions were laid out pretty well for me. After the kids laid out their "roads" (and had a BLAST doing so, I must say! Gives me a great idea for an inexpensive, non-messy fun activity to do at home this summer with my own kids!), it was time to go down the hall for story time. Here we met up with the 4-year-old group and the 5-year-old group (of which my other daughter belongs; she was happy to see me!), and the kids listened to a Bible story. During the story, my teenage helper stayed behind to set out the snack, so it was solely up to me to keep our group of 14 quiet and listening to the story – yeah right. I did the best I could, and I even got to dance with the kids.

We returned to our classroom, had snack, and then we tried the Foil Food activity:

### **Foil Food**

*What You Need: Aluminum foil.*

*What You Do: Give each child a piece of aluminum foil. Show them how to shape the foil into different food shapes like a hot dog, banana, apple, small grapes, chicken fingers, French fries and carrot sticks or anything a child could easily shape with foil.*

*What You Say: "Watch what I can do with this foil. (Shape the foil into a food item.) Look! It's a (name of food). I have some foil for you too. You can shape it into all kinds of*

*foods like a banana or several small grapes or even an apple. Ruth and Naomi were very happy to find food to eat when they got back to Bethlehem. God gave them Boaz to help take care of them. God gives you people to help take care of you too. Who can help you? [Bottom Line] God made people who help me."*

The kids had a ball with the foil activity too, even though some of them misunderstood – my little friend the chocolate lover, requested that I make her a butterfly out of the foil... oh, and there was one little guy who completely misunderstood and began to EAT the foil ☐

When the kids grew tired of that activity, there was still about 15 minutes left, so we did some free play with the toys and puzzles in the room as I did not feel prepared for the other activities on the list. One little girl kept putting a cow toy on my shoe, and she and about 5 others were loving it when I would react every time – OH, there's a COW on my shoe! Am I going to have to take this cow home with me?!? That lasted about 10 minutes; imagine if I had tried that one with my 7th graders – they'd be gossiping about me being bi-polar as they do about one of their teachers, gossip which I try to stop, of course.

My teen helper had to take about half the kids to the bathroom at some point, so I decided it was a good time to try this activity – I didn't want to try it with all the kids there since we were only given about 6 pieces of fake food. Having 4 kids of my own, I'm well-versed in kid-fight-prevention, so I knew doing the following activity with only 6 pieces of food and 14 kids was a recipe for disaster. But with about 8 in the room, I thought it was worth a try... until the bathroom group came back in the middle of the activity...

### ***Fast Food***

*What You Need: Toy food items, a large basket like a laundry basket and a stopwatch.*

*What You Do: Spread the toy food items all over the room.*

*Place the laundry basket in the middle of the room. Challenge the children to see how fast they can get all of the food into the basket. Time them and be ready to tell them how fast they do it each time. Continue doing the activity as long as the children are interested.*

*What You Say:*

*At the start of the activity: "A girl named Ruth has to look for food to go in her basket in our Bible story today. Our basket needs some food in it too. Do you see some food that we can put in it? (Pause for response.) OK. When I say "go," I want you to put the food in our basket as fast as you can. On your mark...get set...go!"*

*At the end of the activity: "You got faster and faster each time you put the food in the basket. I wonder how long it took Ruth to put food in her basket? I can't wait to hear her story."*

Ok, I wasn't given a stopwatch, so I just had half the kids hide food items and the other half find them... but then the bathroom group came back and we had too many kids and too little room and too few food items to hide. My little friend threw a not-so-little tantrum because she wanted to be the one to hold the basket – and she was going to have her turn as I said, but first she had to wait, which wasn't cool with her (ADHD diagnosis, anyone? It's sad, but they seem to be slapping that one on kids left and right these days). But oh, great, now I had a kid screaming just as parents are starting to arrive. Luckily she got over it quickly, and the parents came a few minutes earlier than I had expected – good thing too, since I was out of activities for which I had supplies.

Overall, a GREAT experience – I'm so proud of my own little 3-year-old who was not only one of the best behaved in the group (of course), but who was surprisingly not very clingy to mom and let me be a teacher to her peers. I think the kids had trouble remembering my name, so by the end of the hour, I was known as 'Teacher, Teacher' complete with pant-leg-tugging –



hence the name of this blog post.

Next up – in August I'm scheduled to help with my 5-year-old's class, and I'm excited to see the differences in behavior between the two groups. But after today, I'm quite tempted to volunteer for another Sunday in the 3-year-old room... they are fun kids who are quite sweet. My only regret is that there were so many of them, which impeded my ability to get to have more fun with them on a one-on-one basis. Plus there were a few that were handfuls (well, just my little friend and then another little boy who started all kinds of trouble all morning!), but it was still hard to give attention to the kids who were being good, and that should never be the case. Too bad I know in my heart that I'd be spreading myself way too thin if I volunteered to be a Sunday school teacher. I need to stick with the youth group kids I committed to, and both groups plus my own kids at home would be way too much... something to think about when my kids get older and my youth group kids graduate though!!

For those of you looking for ideas for Christian fun at home, for your small Bible study groups, or a Christian daycare, here are the rest of the activities I was given and didn't have the time / materials to do:

### ***Looking for Food***

*What You Need: A clear plastic soda bottle or a large clean peanut butter jar, uncooked white rice, several pieces of Runts® candy and a hot glue gun.*

*Tip: Runts® candy comes in a mix of green, red, yellow, purple and orange. You can pretend these are little green apples, red cherries or red apples, yellow bananas, purple grapes and orange oranges*

*What You Do:*

*At the start of the activity: Fill the plastic container no more than 2/3 full with the rice. Put in several pieces of the Runts® candy pieces. Put the lid on tight and hot glue it.*

*Tip: Make one bottle for every three children to share.*

*During the activity: Show the bottle to the children. Point out that there are different kinds of “food” inside the bottle. Their job is to roll the bottle around in their hands until they see a piece of “food.”*

*What You Say: “Come and sit with me. I have something to show you. Watch the white rice while I turn this bottle. Tell me if you see anything. (Wait for a child to respond.) Yes! There are little pieces of food hiding in the white rice. There are little green apples, red apples or red cherries, yellow bananas, orange oranges and purple grapes. Here. You can hold the bottle. Keep turning it and see what you can find. Two women named Ruth and Naomi have to go and look for food in today’s Bible story.”*

### **Make a Match**

*What You Need: “Food Items” (from the Activity Pages on the Web site), scissors and white cardstock.*

*What You Do:*

*At the start of the activity: Make two copies of “Food Items” on white cardstock and cut the cards apart along the perforated lines. This will give you one set of cards to play a game of memory match. To play the memory game, place all of the cards facedown. A child will turn over two cards at a time and try to make a match. If a match is not made the next person has a turn. If a match is made the player can go again.*

*Tip: Make more than one set of cards so more than one group of children can play at a time. You can pair children up or put as many as four children with each set of cards.*

*During the activity: Show the picture cards to the children. Ask them to help you identify each food picture. Next, place all of the cards face down and play a game of memory match.*

*What You Say: “Boaz helped Ruth and Naomi in our Bible story because they were in his family. God wants families to help each other. God gave you a family to help you too. Who can help you? [Bottom Line] God made people to help me. That’s right! In our story Ruth and Naomi had to look for food, right? Well, I have a game for us to play and we’re going to*

*have to look for food too!"*

### ***My Favorite Food***

*What You Need: No supplies needed.*

*What You Do: Sit in a circle with the children and play a food memory game. Begin the game by saying. "My favorite food is an apple." The child next to you will say, "My favorite food is an apple and (their food choice)." The next child will repeat, "My favorite food is an apple, (name of food) and (their food choice)." Assist the children in remembering when the list gets long.*

*What You Say:*

*At the end of the activity: "Raise your hand if you like food. (Raise your hand really high.) Me too! We all like food and we all NEED food. Ruth and Naomi needed food in our Bible story today. They also needed help to find food. God gave them Boaz to help them find food. God gives you people to help you too. Who can help you? [Bottom Line] God made people to help me."*

*(Ok, so this activity didn't require any materials, but I found it way too daunting to attempt for a group of 14 2-3-year-olds...)*

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## **Class of 2015**

We are winding down our first year of teaching youth group, and it's been an interesting experience, to say the least. Last week, my "small group" consisted of 17 girls, and it was totally crazy. We couldn't get much accomplished, but luckily they weeded themselves out – those who didn't want to participate (their choice) went to play in the gym, leaving quiet for those who did want to participate. It's not like that every week though; last week for some reason the other

two 7th-grade-girls teachers were missing, so I had to have ALL the 7th grade girls PLUS my 5th graders. Yeah, you read that right – I have 7th graders AND fifth graders, and it's been a challenge to bridge the gap between the two ages groups. It happened innocently enough – a new 7th grader brought her 5th grade sister. At our church, our student ministries typically don't usually start until 6th grade, but we didn't want to turn her away either. She liked youth group and started bringing friends, all of which are great things, but next thing I knew, I was getting a call from the office manager who handles attendance and things like that, wondering why I had all these 5th graders in my group. I explained to her what had happened, and she acted like she felt sorry for me rather than being upset – I was a bit anxious to know why I was getting called by my "boss". But no problem – the more the merrier! I just wonder what will happen next year – I cannot move up to 8th grade and 6th grade at the same time! I would think the now-5th graders would get a new group with other 6th graders, and I would stay with the 2015 group as the 7th graders are called for their graduation year. We'll see.

But anyway, it's been a fun year, and I've learned A LOT. Tonight is the final youth group of the year, and we're having a pizza party, plus another party in regular small group time. That will be interesting – I have a feeling that my girls will forget the snacks they pledged to bring as they've done in the past, so they'll probably just run around crazy doing gymnastics, cheerleading moves and whatnot as usual. Except tonight I don't have to interrupt them since we are supposed to be having a end of the year party! And, I'm bravely bringing my two youngest kids – my youth group girls have always wanted to meet my little ones, so I figured tonight is a good opportunity. I just hope I'm not going to overwhelm myself, but there's only one way to find out...

But anyway, a fun year that makes me look forward to the next one, despite the time commitment involved. Here is a typical

schedule, in case you're wondering – especially since a friend suggested oh-so-nicely: “You should make more posts about your youth group.” ☐

6:30 – students have arrived and assemble in the Linc – a sort of clubhouse-type room. We watch a short video or two that's related to the message, usually 2-3 minute clips from movies. We'll play 2 audience participation games, and these are always really fun to watch. One had 2 teams of 2 kids each wearing pantyhose on their heads. They put bananas in the feet of the pantyhose, and their goal was to swing their pantyhose around until their pantyhose was wrapped around their partners – hilarious to watch. Another game involved speed-eating of baby food and another one had pies-in-the-face. Of course my girls were chosen for that one, and after they were late to small group after having to wash the pie off their face and out of their hair, that one wound them up all night!

Around 7pm, the worship band (not the same one we have on Sunday mornings) begins their set, and the leaders leave for a leaders' group prayer in another room. After this, the kids and leaders move to the Warehouse, a room with a small stage where they'll sometimes watch another very short video and hear the youth pastor's talk for the week for about 40 minutes. We get to small group around 7:40 and have until 8:18 if we need it to talk amongst our small group. We leaders get a paper with discussion questions on it, but we are allowed much freedom with this – we adjust the questions as they apply to the conversation we have.

I love all my girls, but of course some are better behaved than others. And some are much more interested in developing spiritually and bettering their relationship with God than others. The 7th graders are much more mature about this than the 5th graders – they just don't get it yet. Probably why our student ministries start at 6th grade, but they're worth a try! I wish that all my girls are on the same page, but

they're not. There is one girl in particular who causes a lot of drama amongst the other girls (they're all friends in the same social group), so if there is drama going on that day or that week, it's difficult to get anything done. I now understand the process a little better from when I was a new leader – the other leaders “cherry-picked” their students and left me with the clique. Not that they're bad girls at all or anything like that, but I can see where it would be so much more fun if I had a group of girls who were all there for the sole purpose of improving their relationships with Christ.

Well, that's it in a nutshell. I'm really hoping to have more leaders next year so that our groups aren't so large, but it's been difficult to find leaders that have the 3+ hours per week this volunteer job requires. It's a shame, but then again, for a job like this, you only want people who really want to be there – the kids can sniff out reluctant and moody adults like bloodhounds!

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## Facing Fear

In church as of late, we are in the midst of a pastoral series called Fearless. I am enjoying this series because so far we have been able to study the Biblical story of David and Goliath and also the story of Moses and the Parting of the Red Sea – two stories I've certainly heard about, but hadn't heard the details or about how they relate to modern-day Christianity until now. Last Sunday at church, our pastor told of an amusing story during his Fearless series, and I thought I'd share it. Also in this service, the band accompanied an amazing Bossa Nova / Spanish-style vocal duet unlike anything I've seen in church so far – it was awesome! I can't reproduce the song unfortunately, but here is a

summary of the pastor's fun story:

*A beautiful village nestled on the bottom of a valley erupted in flames. All of the surrounding villages' fire engines came to fight the fire, but they all stopped at the top of the hill on the road leading to the burning village in the valley, for they figured the village would not be savable and would only pose a danger to their own firefighters. A rickety old fire truck soon showed up from a distant town, and it didn't hesitate as it crested the hill and rode straight into the valley to fight the fire. The fire was extinguished, the village saved, and there was a grand ceremony of celebration. When the fearless fire department who put out the fire rose to accept their rewards and thanks, the fire chief took the stage. The mayor of the saved village asked him, "What are you going to do with your rewards and with your thank-you money?" The fire chief of that heroic fire department who fearlessly rode down the hill to save the neighboring town said, "The first thing we are going to do is to fix the brakes on that fire truck!"*

The moral of the story? Here's my take: The "fearless" fire-fighters didn't even mean to go into the fire to fight it... But they did just that, and once they got down in the valley accidentally (because of the failed brakes on the fire truck), they faced their fears and conquered that fire, even though they didn't originally intend to and also despite their fears.

The story tied in nicely with our church's Fearless series. And our pastor told us that story, I think, to get our attention and to get us thinking... And that it did.