

THE Beautiful
CHAOS

PARENTING TEENS

**Small Group Discussion
Leader's Guide**

BY Leneita Fix

INTRO

One day I woke up as the parent of tweens and then teenagers. No one told me what these years would really be like. No one shared the wisdom that no matter what choice you make, according to my child, it's all wrong. No one prepared me for when my child says things like, "I don't really need a parent anymore" as they run out with the door slamming behind them. Even if they don't say it, there is real tension that comes when your teenagers try to show you they believe this to be true. No one mentioned I will do all the things "effective" parents of teens aren't supposed to do. In fact, I have done all the things you said you'd never do. I give lectures standing with my hands on my hips or with an exasperated sigh in the car. I've lost my temper and said things like, "How many times have we been over this?" while beating my head against the steering wheel.

No one warned me of the day my kids would be too old for me to fix a myriad of situations, from school to friends to frenemies. What about the moment I held my child while she cried over a lost friend, dealt with a bully, or mended a broken heart? There's also the first time my kids realized they really weren't good at something or someone throws the words "smart" around like an insult.

I talk to parents of tweens and teens often and we speak in hushed tones attempting to figure out similar situations. Just the other night my husband John commented about one of our kids, "This was the one that was easy. They laughed, wrestled and loved life. Then one day it's like we woke up with a ball of emotions that doesn't know what to do with themselves. I really hope they can get beyond all of this turmoil one day." It's a conversation I have often with many who are raising kids ages 10-22. "I thought it was hard to have a toddler in the house, this is terrifying."

Part of each of us longs for the days when we could solve their problems with a fresh diaper and a hug. I've worked with teens for twenty-four years, but as a parent of teens there are days I'd love for someone to tell me how to feel less like a failure.

However—I am discovering there is hope. I am coming to see that while these years are tumultuous for sure, in the middle of all the chaos lies great beauty. We catch a glimpse of it—

- when our kids actually "get" our jokes and think they're funny.
- when they come to us to ask for our advice.
- when a hug still makes things better for them, even though we don't have the right words.
- when we no longer need a babysitter, and we actually enjoy hanging out with these interesting young people instead of escaping from them.
- when we can finally spend time in the bathroom, uninterrupted. (All right, this may not happen until after they leave home.)
- when we notice they're becoming leaders and using words and thoughts you instilled.
- when we see compassion, selflessness, and even brilliance peek out from behind the quirky demeanor.

Who doesn't want to give our kids a standing ovation for the times they show us just how magnificent they are? We haven't forgotten that. But during this season, they may forget. That's what has made it so hard for me personally. Our job is to show them they can't hide their wonder behind apathy and lack of self-confidence.

It's hard to help our kids see who they really are, to hold their face to the mirror and say, "You're made in the image of God. That's His reflection in there." We may sometimes do it with gritted teeth, but we must keep reminding them of their true identity, of who they were created to be.

No one told my husband and me that raising three, all in adolescence, would be so emotionally exhausting. This is the season of life when our kids like to act as though they don't need us while at the same time needing us more than ever.

It would often be easier to back off and leave them to do as they please. But we're still in the learning process. One has left home without becoming an axe murderer, but that hardly makes us experts. Instead, I want to share some things we're learning along the way. My goal is to share both triumphs and failures as I encourage you not to give up.

This is the heart behind this book. Sometimes it helps to get together with others and have some honest, helpful discussions about raising kids in the "toughest years you'll ever love." The goal of our time together will be to support, encourage, and give you some fresh ideas to meet your adolescents where they are. For those staring down the barrel of the teen years, I've tried to include some practices you can make part of your daily life today to help ease you into the tumultuous years of raising teens. Please feel free to add your own ideas as you walk through discussion time together. For those of us in the heat of the fire, this book is meant as a reassurance to keep going.

Try some new approaches, and feel free to share some of yours with each other. We're all learning together. None of us is perfect, and we must remember our kids don't belong to us but to the Lord. Through this book, I hope to help you find some times and ways to connect back to your children. You'll often read recurring words and themes, and I pray you will walk away with many practical helps as you travel alongside your kids on the journey toward adulthood.

I'll also use lots of examples from my children, Bethany, Caleb, and Kaleigh (and yes, they are aware of every story I tell in these pages, they are told with their blessing.) However, you won't hear a lot about Crystal, our oldest. As I mentioned, she joined our family later in life, and out of respect to her extended family, I've chosen to focus on stories of my biological kids.

"Beauty in Action" sections at the end of each chapter provide interaction, questions, and steps you can use in your own family to apply what you've learned, these will be where we spend some of our focus in this discussion guide as well.

You may have heard the old saying, "How do you eat an elephant?" The answer, of course, is, "One bite at a time." Each chapter ends with "One Bite for Today," a small activity to help you connect with your kids. Please feel free to spend time on whatever topics, or sections are the most helpful for you as you move forward in your time together.

Remember as you share that not every idea will work with every child. There are too many variables for "one size fits all" parenting of teens. Make sure to steer clear of statements like, "This is what works." Instead, make your little group a safe place for vulnerability. Take the time to work it out, cry together, laugh more, and strategize. Remember, the goal is to see our kids turn into the amazing adults we know is buried under all of their current angst.

-Leneita Fix

INTRODUCTORY SESSION:

Welcome this group of parents that are in these amazing years. Obviously if someone is taking the time to meet together with you to discuss parenting their tween or teen, they are looking for something. Remember some are here because they are feeling “desperate,” others are proactively trying to meet their kids where they are. Chances are many are merely looking for ideas and support in these years that have stopped making sense.

Recently, I asked a friend of mine who is pregnant, “So has everyone started with their advice yet?” Her eyes went wide as she exclaimed, “I had no idea this was a ‘thing.’ Everyone wants to tell me their tips and tricks for the first year of my child’s life.” Yet, during the tween and teen years instead it feels like parents are isolated and alone. I like to say we are all tripping forward trying to figure out what will help us raise our children well into adulthood. Truly we are discipling them into the grown up years, whether we realize it or not. This is ultimately why a group of parents of kids somewhere in the double digits have gathered together to read this book. Each wants to have a place to laugh at the ridiculousness, share the struggles, pray, learn practical tips, and celebrate who their kids are turning into. You need each other, far beyond a book. So in your first time together:

- Hand out the book (or make sure everyone has purchased one from an online store).
- Cover logistics: Sign in sheet, meeting time and place, refreshment rotation, etc.
- Introduce yourself by telling about your family, why you wanted to lead this discussion group, and what your hopes are for this time together.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves and share what they need from this time together.
- Read the introduction from this packet out loud.
- Make sure all participants know that anything shared in your group will stay in your group. Everyone agrees to pray for each other but, they will not share family secrets outside of the group. This includes not talking to each other’s children about anything shared as well. Remind the group you will respect different parenting styles and decisions. We are here to help each other, not judge each other in our parenting.
- Make sure participants know there are questions at the end of each chapter, and you will start each week discussing these.
- Give everyone a highlighter and a pen. Ask them to keep these in their book so they can write in the book. Also, suggest they highlight anything that stands out to them or an idea they want to talk more about, so weekly discussions can focus on their greatest need. You will move on each week to a few key questions that have been pulled out from the chapter to help parents think.
- Ask parents to try the “One bite for Today” that is an application suggestion at the end of each chapter. If it doesn’t resonate with them, then ask them to try something else this week. You will talk about what went well or did not in an accountability type setting.

Assure those attending that this group is to come together to find practical and applicable ways to better connect with their children as they are growing up. No one has all the answers. This group is a safe place

to share. There are no “rules” in working through the information at a certain pace. I suggest you discuss one or two chapters each week. However, feel free to skip chapters if members of your group don’t need that information or if it becomes too cumbersome. For example, Chapter 2 has work in it that tends to trip up many parents because they think they need to take a lot of time on it. The information is meant to be helpful, not a hindrance. So if parents seem “stuck” in any one place, move on. On the other hand, there might be a chapter you decide to dig deeper in for a few weeks in a row. This guide is broken into chapters as opposed to “weeks” so you can go at your own pace.

Keep in mind not every family will have two parents together at your group. You may have one parent, foster parents, grandparents, or other relatives raising children. Let them know you are here to help them go forward with what they CAN do. If they can’t get their spouse on board with the ideas in the book, then skip what they can’t do, and instead spend time on what WILL work. In addition, there will be different weeks that spark a heart issue with different parents. Be aware of not allowing anyone to “take over” the group, or making others feel less than or guilty. Help everyone feel safe to share. There may be times when you need to say, “Could you and I chat more about this after the group meeting?” Then take a few moments to check in with the person. Never be afraid to talk to someone about getting outside help if an issue is really too big for you or the group to handle. There are times when we may need someone who can help direct us professionally through hard situations. Listen to the Lord and let the group grow in the ways He sees fit!

FINALLY! This discussion guide may seem like it has “too much” to go through all at once. You may not answer every question, and that is fine. The discussion questions are here to help guide you. Pick and choose, or make up your own. The goal is to get together and help other parents with tweens and teens know they are not in this phase of parenting alone!

Take the time to pray for each other and take requests for next week.



Chapter 1

“Excuse Me, Have We Met?”

When Your Baby Gets Eaten by Puberty

Chapter Summary:

When our children are babies and toddlers it's a given that we are overwhelmed as parents. As my husband and I left the hospital with our first newborn, I remember thinking, “I can't believe they are letting us take her home. Don't they know how unqualified we are.” No matter how many books, articles, or blogs I read, nothing could prepare me for the moment that baby was fully our responsibility. Somehow we figured it out, tripped through the toddler years and found a rhythm when our kids entered Preschool. For a short period of time we actually felt like, “good parents.” Then one day my even keeled daughter became an emotional wreck. My confident boy became a ball of insecurity. It can feel like we just keep asking the question, “Where did my baby go?” In this chapter, we explore what we see and feel when our children start to move from childhood to adolescence. How do we start to grab hold of this seemingly “overnight” change?

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. Share three favorite memories from when your kids were little.
2. Name three ways your kids are struggling now that puberty has hit.
3. List the top three fears you have about parenting during these years.

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What do you think about the idea of “grieving” your child getting older?

Make sure to take some time to talk about this idea. This isn't the same type of grief that comes with death, but it is a sort of loss. We come to believe the “baby years” are simply easier in so many ways so we forget what is exciting about what is to come. In addition, we begin to come to the realization that soon our kids will be moving forward and truly growing up.

2. What is your definition of the “parent fail?” What are you doing to get beyond this?

Make sure parents are not “stuck” in the issues, or feeling like they are failing. Reassure parents that we all have hard days, and we are all attempting to do our best.

3. How will affirming your child open up lines of communication?

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week:

Try connecting with your child today to tell them why you love them. They need to hear those words often during these tumultuous years. In addition, tell them something you find amazing about them. It helps both of you to remember why they're extraordinary.

If not, what DID you do?

REMINDER BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH CHAPTER 2:

Chapter 2 focuses in on establishing a mission, vision, and values statement for your family. Many times the question is asked, “What if I can’t get the other parent/spouse on board with these ideas?” First, if you need to skip this chapter, make the decision to move along to chapter 3. Second, if you do decide to tackle Chapter 2 remind your group it is meant to be a guideline to help, not hinder. If you can’t get a spouse on board, read Chapter 2 through the lens of what you CAN do?



Chapter 2

The Core of Your Family:

Standing Firm in Your Mission, Vision, and Values

Chapter Summary:

In order to realistically navigate this time in the lives of our family we need to know what guides us. Is Christ at the center of your family? Do you understand who your family is and how to be who you are? Do you have a family mission statement? If you were to meet your children in 20 years, who do you want to meet? What are the core values that guide your parenting? In this chapter, we figure this out together. Knowing not just that you love the Lord, but how you are passing this along, helps keep us on track with the way we guide our children through these years.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. Nature: Share three truths about your personality.
2. Share one event (good or bad) in your life that helped make you who you are today.
3. What are two choices you made that have affected your life?
4. Share your family mission statement (if you came up with one, or already had one).
5. Share your family core values.
6. Share your family Scripture passage. (If you have one.)
7. Share a brief summary of the vision God has given you for your children.

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. How do nature, choices, and development shape who we are?

Take some time to discuss who you are as a parent, how this shapes how you parent, and then if there are multiple children in the home how each of them is different.

2. The point of this chapter is to work through the central guiding forces of your family. What would you say those are?

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week:

This chapter required a lot of thinking and working as a family. But none of these steps will have any impact if you don't put them into action. Once you've listed your mission, vision, values, and Scripture in the

steps above, type them up and put them where your family can see them. Refer to them often and make sure your children know exactly what they mean. Your family needs to see you living out these values day by day.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 3

Opening Thoughts on Communicating with Our Kids

Chapter Summary:

I have one child who wants to share everything with me all the time. If they aren't connecting in talking, then we haven't related. I have two who keep their thoughts very close to their chest. It is like cracking a coconut with bare hands to get them to share. How do we navigate our children during this time? Learning more about their strengths and love languages all help us with the basics of communication at this age. If we have multiple children, learning the skill of learning how to listen and speak into the lives of our children individually is a necessity. This chapter helps us know ways to begin keeping lines of communication open based on who our kids are.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. What stands out to you about what the Bible says about communication with our children?
2. In what ways has your communication with your kids changed as they've matured?
3. Name a time you and your kids struggled to communicate. How did you respond?
4. Discuss what you figured out about the love languages of those in your home.

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What's the "countdown clock" look like in your mind's eye?

Talk about this idea of the "countdown clock" and what it might do to put pressure on you as a parent.

2. When is the last time you found it hard to be totally engaged in conversation with your kids? Why was it a challenge? What can you do differently next time?

Allow participants to discuss the biggest obstacles for communicating with their children. However, remember not to allow them to get "stuck" in a cycle of merely focusing on the negative. Ask the group to suggest ways they attempt to listen to their children or pay attention to ways their kids might hear them.

3. Do you have times when you disconnect from technology for the purpose of better communication? What would that look like in your family?

Talk about how it's easy to just stay over tuned to technology. Talk about the honest challenges to stay disconnected and connect face to face. Help each other with some practical ways you can disconnect from technology to better connect in real life.

4. How are each of your children different in how they communicate?

Taking the time to look at differences between children, or maybe in the way you like to communicate, more than the way they like to communicate, will help open doors between you and your kids. Some need to process, others want to blurt out everything. Talk about ways you might be able to meet your kids where they are.

Accountability:

Did you try the "One Bite for Today" this week?

Remember that continuing to try is vital. Invite your kids to sit with you and begin by asking about their days. Tell them you love them in a way that matters to them.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 4

My Life as a Chauffeur:

Minivans Happen to the Best of Us

Chapter Summary:

You may or may not remember the day you traded in your cool car for the family vehicle. Sure they offer more space, storage, and accessibility, but minivans are also the ultimate symbol of being a family with kids. Life is busy and the older our kids get the more activities they enjoy. The more our kids are involved in, the more time we spend in that minivan (or SUV if you are a hip parent.) There is no better time to have your child's undivided attention than when they are strapped into a moving vehicle. Whether the ride is five or fifty minutes these are perfect spaces to talk to our kids about so many things. We usually get the most out of our children in how they are really feeling about life when we are in the car. This chapter explores ways to create time in the car as a way to talk, discuss sticky topics, and just genuinely hear your child's heart.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. Discuss the most fun you've ever had in the family car?
2. Name one "Big Dorito" moment in your car ride.
3. What are three silly questions that might help you get to know your kids better. (Example: "If you were a kitchen utensil, what would you be and why?")

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What's one "unscripted" conversation you have had with your kids in the car that you are glad happened?

Take some time to really talk through the way you can even take the car back as a communication point. Think back to the last chapter and the way you opened some lines of communication. Both scripted and unscripted times in the car can be really helpful. If you have members of the group that already feel like they "do this well," discuss what are some ways car time could be even more productive.

2. What's one "question" you can spend some time prepping for if it might come up in the car?

Talk through things you wish you knew about your kids.

3. What's one "planned" conversation you would like to have in the car this week? Can you invite one of your kids to run an errand with you?

Point out how a car conversation can be short, it doesn't have to be long. Yes, it might feel awkward to start this for both of you, but encourage parents to work through the "feelings," and go for it. If they gave this a try, talk about what went well and what did not go well. What could they do differently next time?

Accountability:

Did you try the "One Bite for Today" this week?

This week, take the time to have one unscripted and one scripted conversation with each of your children. In the unscripted one, pay attention to a conversation that gets started in the car and jump in. For the scripted one, plan out one conversation you would like to have with your child this week. It doesn't have to be a tough topic. Just think about something you might like to know and ask some questions.

Please note: If you haven't made these practices part of your everyday relationship quite yet, it may feel awkward. That's all right. Let your kids stare. Just start talking and don't be afraid of strange pauses. The momentum will build. Just keep trying.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 5

Daily Rituals:

Using Everyday Moments for Deeper Communication

Chapter Summary:

As our children enter adolescence the tendency is for them to act like they don't really need parenting anymore. At the same time, they are struggling with insecurity, conformity, a search for independence, and understanding the meaning of love. Being able to talk with our kids is the key to navigating communication. This is also the time of life parents tend to abandon rituals at bedtime and meals due to busy schedules. In this chapter, we discuss some practical ways you can create some day-to-day interactions and perhaps take back a couple of rituals that have been lost.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. What are the daily rituals and routines in your family's life?
2. Pick two of these and write out ideas for how you could better use those to connect with your kids.
3. Name something you might like to talk to your kids about at bedtime tonight.
4. Describe to other members of the group the legacy of connection you would like to create in your home.

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What are your thoughts about the importance of having a meal together as a family?

Remember the point isn't "dinner" it's about having a point of communication and connection.

2. What do you do as a family to connect? What could you do?

Take the time to explore and learn from each other. What are some things your family does that might seem mundane, but actually helps you all hang out together and connect? What could you try?

3. What helps your family talk about God? If you do not do this regularly, do you want to?

Different families approach this idea of family devotions or time talking about the Lord differently. You may have some people in your group that do not see this as a daily priority. Avoid placing judgment on this, instead find ways you can learn from each other.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

Remember that connecting with your kids is more important than the specific topic of conversation. Pick one daily routine today and use it to listen to your children and learn a little bit more about who they really are.

If not, what DID you do?

REMEMBER! The next chapter explores ways to connect to our kids through school. You may have a variety of school choices represented in your group. Some may send their children to public school while others are home schooling. Be aware of ways you can make sure no one in the group feels alienated.



Chapter 6

School Projects: Life Lessons on Poster Board

Chapter Summary:

I really thought the era of the diorama would end when my children left elementary school. Instead now we have PowerPoint presentations, science fairs, and interactive English projects. With three children all in middle and high school, our home is a hot bed of activity at any given time. Somehow this past year I even sat with my 22 year old helping them with a paper. To be honest, I hate these projects. One of my children is a perfectionist, two are procrastinators, and one would cut corners if possible. These are wonderful opportunities though to coach our kids on life lessons like responsibility, time management, and giving your all. This chapter talks about practical ways to reach our kids through school and extracurricular activities.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. Discuss the last time your child had to do a school project, and how it affected your family?
2. Discuss ways you might help your children learn to be proactive with their next school project?
3. Thinking of the last school project your child did, share the biggest lesson they learned?
4. How can we instill a love of learning in our children?

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. How do your kids respond when a difficult project comes along, or when they “forget” something about school? How do you respond?

Discuss ways as a group that your children respond to learning and what you might be able to do to help them grow. Again, different families have a different philosophy of approach. Respect different points of view.

2. How do your own high school experiences shape how you help your children with projects or school work in general?

Help each other with the realization that often positive and negative experiences are what shape the way we approach our own children.

3. In what ways do you see your children “stuck” by what they can’t do rather than focusing on what they can do? How can you help your kids focus on finding solutions more than on the problems?

Different kids have different approaches to school work or hard work in general. Sometimes, we have kids who just shut down and give up. This can be especially true of those in high school. Discuss ways you can spur on your kids to give their best efforts, genuinely.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

Have you heard rumors about an upcoming school project? What is one life lesson you would like your child to learn in the midst of it? Help them focus and remind them that you notice when they give their best.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 7

Butting Heads: When Everything Feels Like a Standoff

Chapter Summary:

Our children are navigating the transition into independence. On the one hand, it can feel like they want to make all of their own decisions when it comes to socializing and on the other hand, they are avoiding responsibility. This can cause conflict at home. In some ways they want more control of their lives and yet, they seem to ignore the areas where we would love for them to be proactive. How do we avoid every situation becoming a power struggle? How do we navigate the constant need to coach our children through what it means to learn to “grow up?” In this chapter, we explore ways to keep order while coaching them forward.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. What are three things you wish your children could remember to do the first time you ask them? (We like to say, “All the way, right away, with a happy heart.”)
2. What are the boundaries and details you came up with for your family?
3. Discuss a recent confrontation with one or more of your children. What’s one “next time” statement you could have made? Try to find a time when you can apply this coaching technique.
4. Was there something for which you need to apologize to your children? What happened when you did that?

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. Can you identify some of your personal hot buttons with your kids?

It’s important for us to know the things with our kids that push our buttons and set us off. Help identify some of these with each other and then talk through ways you can be aware for the next time things happen.

2. What is one creative approach of discipline you might try with your children?

Discuss some ways you could try some creative things. Share things you have done that have worked, or have failed, and why.

3. Talk about a time you have tried “coaching” that went well, and made a difference.

Making eye contact with your kids can disarm so many difficult situations. Talk about ways you have taken a moment in your parenting in a difficult situation to coach.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

I can't express enough how much you need to keep doing what you're already doing. Your kids will experience whiplash if you change everything overnight. This chapter is meant to help you shift your philosophy to keep the end in sight. Clarify, take a deep breath, and only put into action what you know you can and will follow through on. Avoid threats.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 8

When They Doubt: “But I Thought Their Faith Was Strong!”

Chapter Summary:

These are the years our children really begin to take ownership of their faith. As they move toward understanding what it means to know Christ better, it is natural they will have some doubts. There will be a lot of questions they start not only to ask, but also to hang onto. This is a time it is vital to know where we stand in our relationship with Jesus. We don't have to know all the answers, but we do need to be willing to show up in the struggle. In this chapter, we discuss ways to handle the hard questions about doubt and faith.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. What doubts or hard questions about faith has your child expressed?
2. How do you feel when these questions or expressions of doubt arise?
3. Do you ever find yourself avoiding your children's struggles with faith because of your own?
4. Discuss two things you can do to help your kids spend time daily getting to know God.

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What do you see God working on in your own heart and life?

Discussing the idea of doubting our faith can be overwhelming because we see things in our own heart that we don't like to admit. Take the time to discuss those things in your heart that God is working on. In order to talk to our children about doubt, we have to stop and be honest with God about where we are.

2. Do you feel comfortable sharing with your children about your own faith struggles? Why or why not?

We do not have to be perfect in our faith to have discussions with our children. Sometimes we aren't sure what to share. Other times we just go through our day and don't think about it. Discuss ways we can convey our struggles with our kids in a way that doesn't pressure them, but opens them up to share with us about their own struggles.

Does busyness get in the way of really talking about faith regularly with your kids?

There are times when it isn't even about doubt, it's about getting stuck in the everyday that draws us

away from the Lord. Talk about ways you can bring faith conversations into everyday moments. How can you use the car for these times, or breaks in the day you do have?

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

Today, have an honest conversation with your kids about their relationship with the Lord. Let them talk openly so you can see the areas in which they are struggling and know how to pray.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 9

“They’re So Insecure!”: When They Forget Their True Identity

Chapter Summary:

Ask any child when they are small what they are good at and they will tell you, “EVERYTHING!” As they enter puberty when you ask the same question they tend to answer, “NOTHING!” Where did that confident child go? We may know this angst is a natural part of the growing pains; however, it doesn’t help as we seem to be reaffirming our children hour by hour. What would happen if our children took Psalm 139 to heart? This chapter gives practical tips on words and actions to help our children know their identity lies in Christ alone.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. In what ways have you seen insecurity affect your children?
2. Who did your children say are their biggest influencers?
3. What are your children’s various friend relationships? How do these affect them?
4. Has your child dealt with bullies? How did it affect them?
5. What are the two things you can do to help your kids navigate relationships in a healthier way?

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What are the circular conversations you have with your own children? How can you help them get “unstuck” from this place?

Often our kids get hyper focused on whatever that “thing” is they don’t like about themselves. This is true of both boys and girls. Some kids are more vocal about it than others. You may have to help the people in your group stop for a moment and think about things their kids “laugh off” about themselves. What are the subtle things they say over and again? How can you help them focus more outward than inward?

2. What are some ways you can actively take advantage of moments when your kids are sure of themselves?

Sometimes we have to actively listen for those times when our kids mention something they are proud of in themselves. Instead of just laughing it off, talk about ways you can really use these to your advantage?

3. Sometimes we are the only people our kids feel safe sharing their true selves with. Other times it feels like all they do is brood and disengage. How can we keep ourselves engaged when we get tired of “dealing” with these issues?

Be honest about how it can be easier to disconnect or be overbearing when our kids keep going back to their insecurities. Sometimes our kids don't express their insecurities with articulation. Instead, it comes out as a bad mood or poor behavior. Talk through ways to stay in touch with our kids and point them to their true identity in Christ. Share ideas about how to keep connected with our kids during these difficult times.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

If you don't know who spends the most time speaking into your children's lives, don't be afraid to find out. In addition, start leaving sticky notes all over the house today that share small thoughts about the way you and Jesus feel about them. Never be afraid to oversaturate them with truth.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 10

Avoiding the Avalanche: So Many Parenting Decisions at Once

Chapter Summary:

There are many ways of engaging culture our kids navigate at these impressionable ages: phones, music, media, technology, video games, dress, friends, and the list goes on and on. Wouldn't it be awesome if we could stop time, breathe, and figure out what to do? However, everything seems to be coming fast and furious and the world constantly changes all around us. In this chapter, we discuss ways to guide our kids through all of these decisions. Our tendency can be to either ignore what's out there or become so fearful we isolate our kids. Let's figure out some practical ways we can show our children how to live in the world while not being absorbed by it.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. How have you seen the rise of social media affect your kids?
2. What is most popular with your kids right now in the following areas: television shows, movies, music, and social media?
3. What are the policies in your home for you and your children's digital usage?
4. How do you hold your kids accountable to staying pure with online usage?

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What guidelines have you set for yourself regarding what you view online, listen to, and your use of social media? How does this affect decisions you make for your kids?

Each person in the room is going to have different opinions about this. Please avoid judging or allowing others to judge parenting decisions. Instead, help parents understand the best case scenario for their family is honesty and a realization of what does affect their hearts and minds.

2. What are some of the challenges involved with helping your kids make wise decisions about what they watch, their online usage, and what they listen to?

Discuss the challenges of how to help our kids navigate these issues. Some parents may feel guilty they allow their kids to "do whatever," while others may be at an extreme of not allowing their kids to be exposed to anything that's not rated G. Discuss ways we can be aware but not afraid. Help parents understand this is another connecting point to their children.

3. Have you ever thought about the idea that teaching our kids accountability is a life lesson? Why or why not?

The deeper issue to what we watch or listen to is a lifelong idea of how our hearts are affected by the world around us. The goal is not to put in rules for today that change behavior with our kids, but to see a heart transformation that can last a life time. Truly we are helping them learn how to engage the world for a lifetime.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

This time, I'm going to leave you with two bites. First, have a discussion with your kids about accountability and expectations for technology use. Find out from them what they like and why. Second, clearly post your expectations for what they watch, hear, and do online. Don't react out of fear. Remember, this is just one more step in helping them grow into amazing adults.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 11

Too Busy or Not Busy Enough?

Figuring out a Schedule That Fits Your Family

Chapter Summary:

Our kids are involved in so much these days. Things they used to do for “fun” have now become competitive and time consuming. How much do we allow our children to stay involved in? Our over achiever wants to do everything and our underachiever wants to sit on the couch. How do we make a schedule that doesn't wear our family out, but instead helps bring them energy? In this chapter, we discuss ways to come up with an agenda that fits your family, place in life, and values.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. What activities did you enjoy as a child? How have those affected your family's current choices?
2. Do you think your kids are overextended? Why or why not?
3. Share the list of all the activities in which your family participates. Include work, school, church, sports, lessons, and other extracurricular activities. What are the have to's? What are the want to's?
4. Did you cross anything off of your list? Why or why not?
5. What do you do intentionally to stay connected as a family?

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What type of pace does each of your children need? What pace in life do you need?

Try to have each person in the group share the pace of life they need. Make sure they don't get caught up in comparing themselves to others around them. Each of us can handle different things. Some are go, go, go and it's a good thing. Others need time at home.

2. Do you ever feel guilty about what your kids do or don't do? Do you find yourselves often wondering if there should be more or less in your lives?

Discuss how the world can press us to do the things that “seem” right without really stopping to see where our hearts are. Make sure that each person in the group is sharing honestly with where they are, and help them to see what CAN be changed if it is needed.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

Never be afraid to continually look over your schedules and make adjustments. Make that list of “Have To” and “Want To” and then figure out as a family what might need to change.

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 12

“Hey, There’s Life Past the End of My Nose?”

Helping Our Kids See Beyond Themselves

Chapter Summary:

Teen years can be very self-focused for our kids. Whether it’s the inability to notice the pile of dirty dishes in the sink, a neighbor in need, or the world at large they can only seem to see themselves and their problems. It can be our tendency to find a “project” for our kids to do on a Saturday to get them to “care” about someone that isn’t themselves. Service and loving your neighbor as yourself has to become a lifestyle more than a one-time event. In this chapter, we explore practical ways we can begin to help our children both notice and respond to the world beyond the end of their nose.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. Who are the one or two people in your own life who exemplify the word servant.
2. What does “Be the Pig” mean to you?
3. What is one thing your family can do to serve someone today?
4. How can you mobilize your kids to see the world through the eyes of serving?

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. Do you see yourself with a servant’s heart? Why or why not?

Help each person discuss ways they can be a servant right from where they are. Sometimes the first way we have to start is an honest assessment of who we are.

2. What does it mean to you that service can be a lifestyle?

Discuss ways each person in your family can move away from merely trying to serve in activities, but truly knowing what it means to become a “servant.”

3. Does the selfishness you sometimes see in your child bother you? Why or why not?

Sometimes we just want our kids to remember to clean their room, and the constant refocusing away from themselves can be exhausting. We have to make the decision to see our kids for who they are turning into, not who we see today.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

How can you go on a random act of kindness campaign this week? Start small. Are there ways each family member can all do random things for the others and then extend that? Try going outside your home for a few days to see how you can bless people. Brainstorm ideas with your kids. Can you leave sticky notes in every public bathroom for a few miles? Carry groceries from the supermarket to people's cars for an hour? Be creative!

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 13

A Different Set of Milestones and Rites of Passage: Moving Our Kids Toward Adulthood

Chapter Summary:

We believe the goal in raising our children is to help them leave home and then they will be “OK.” Our role as a parent may change, but it doesn’t come to an end. There are all sorts of milestones and rites of passage we can lead our children through to help them arrive at adulthood. Everyone seems to have a different opinion on what is “right.” This chapter explores ways to figure out some milestones and rites of passage that will work for each of your children and your personal household.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. What are all the major milestones you saw in your children before age ten?
2. Did your children struggle with growing up as they hit the tween years? If so, how?
3. At what ages and for what accomplishments might you want to have special celebrations with your children?
4. Describe some ideas of ways you could celebrate, keeping each child’s love language in mind.
5. What is your list of life skills your children will need before leaving home?

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

1. What are some ways you might be able to daily help your kids grow up well?

Discuss as a group some ideas, beyond merely milestones and celebrations, you can put into daily activities. How can you stop and notice the moments your children may need to learn a skill or take the time to understand a life lesson?

2. Who do you want to see your child become when they “grow up?” How can coaching and celebrations help this?

Sometimes we just simply have to stop and look at who we want our children to grow up to be. This helps us to stop in the midst of all that is going on and take time to pour into them. Discuss this.

3. Why is it hard for us to sometimes remember our kids are still growing up and they may need our help?

Take some time to discuss.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

Make a timeline for your children from now until they leave your home. At appropriate ages, place the markers and skills you want to see them have before they walk out the door. What can you start to plan right now?

If not, what DID you do?



Chapter 14

Pure Exhaustion: When You're Tired of Parenting

Chapter Summary:

These years can feel even more exhausting than when our children were babies or toddlers. Many of us would trade those days of physical exhaustion for these days full of emotional exhaustion in a heartbeat. We are caught between a feeling of wanting this season to end and the fear that it will end too soon. We must remember we are not merely helping our kids “cross the finish line” of getting to adulthood. Our vision is in the legacy of our children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren living vibrant lives for Christ. This final chapter is a charge for parents to keep going and not “pass the parenting” to others, while inviting others to partner with us to add strength to our families.

Discussion Starter:

Begin with answering these questions together from the end of the chapter.

1. Look again at what it means to you to belong to Christ. Share your summary here.
2. Share about three people in your life who helped shape you.
3. Share about three people who come alongside you in your children's lives. If you have several children, you may want to list more than three.
4. Share one thing you will do today to keep showing up in your kids' lives.

Once you have shared the topics from the end of the chapter, explore areas the group highlighted. Follow with these thoughts:

Finish your last session together discussing ways to stay focused in parenting your children through these years. Share practical ways to “keep showing up” even when we honestly would rather just let them float through life. It's so easy to have the attitude that our kids will “come back around” someday, instead of really focusing on the impact we have in their lives today. Take time to come up with ways you can check in with each other after this group has ended and truly help each other for the long haul. Sometimes we merely need to be reminded we are not alone.

Accountability:

Did you try the “One Bite for Today” this week?

Feel free to go back through this book often. Use it as a guide when you need to approach your children from a new angle. Take the time to put the beauty into action, and often. Our first “bite” was a charge to tell your children you love them. Find ways every day to communicate this same message in words and actions. Your love will add momentum to their seeing and understanding the unconditional love of Christ.

If not, what DID you do?

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