

PARENTING

STUDY QUESTIONS



INTRODUCTION

Principle: Our children don't belong to us but to God. Parenting is about what God has planned to do in our children through us. As God's ambassadors, we must consider the big picture of what God is inviting us to be a part of as he works in the hearts and lives of our children.

1. What goals are you working for or building toward in your parenting? Describe how these goals sometimes get swallowed up into the daily grind of parenting.
2. In what ways does an "effective strategies" list fall short as you approach your task as parents?
3. Consider what it means to be given a new way of thinking about and responding to everything that comes your way in your role as a parent. Pray that the Lord would renew your vision, give you motivation and strength, and help your eyes to see the big, gospel picture of the task to which he has called you.
4. Why is your method of parenting in the repeated cycle of little unplanned moments so important?
5. Do you tend to approach parenting more often as an owner or as an ambassador? Which of the four areas that parents deal with (see pages 17–20) do you think will challenge you most as you consider God's invitation to be his ambassador?

CHAPTER 1: CALLING

Principle: Nothing is more important in your life than being one of God's tools to form a human soul.

1. I gave three examples of things that compete to replace parenting as the highest treasure of our hearts: physical possessions, career success, and commitment to ministry. Which of these examples causes you to be less than faithful to your calling as a parent in the way you manage your time and energy?
2. Consider humbly and prayerfully asking your children and spouse for their perspectives on how you can make parenting a higher priority in your life (e.g., help with school work, be present for the bedtime routine, attend sporting events, play with your kids while your spouse makes dinner or goes shopping, etc.). What changes will you need to make in your career or ministry life to accomplish these things on a consistent basis?
3. Explain the importance of fostering God-consciousness and God-submission in your children. According to Deuteronomy 6:4–9, this is primarily the parents' responsibility. Are there ways in which you have allowed the church, government, or school to replace you in this task? If so, what will you do to reclaim your role and relegate these other entities to their proper supporting roles?
4. Deuteronomy 6 helps us see that we need to connect everything we require of our children to the story of redemption. How can you speak redemptively to your children even amid their failures and go beyond exercising your authority to point your children to God's grace?

5. Have you thought lately about the wonder of God's creation? Think of some ways you can point your children to the awe-inspiring work of God in everyday life. Consider the makeup of an egg; the colors of fruits, vegetables, and flowers; the flight of a bird; the shape of a snowflake. Don't let a day go by without helping to open the eyes of your children to God's presence and glory.

CHAPTER 2: GRACE

Principle: God never calls you to a task without giving you what you need to do it. He never sends you without going with you.

1. Have you ever thought of grace in terms of past grace, present grace, and future grace? What difference would it make in your day-to-day parenting if you understood and practiced present grace?
2. God doesn't call people to be parents because they are able. How are our inability and inadequacy part of God's good and perfect plan?
3. God never calls us to a task without giving us what we need to do it. Our parenting struggles are no surprise to God. What has he given to us that gives us hope and makes parenting possible? Will you commit to reminding yourself of this reality amid the difficulties?
4. How does seeing ourselves accurately as parents by God's grace change the way we approach our children?
5. Think about a recent unpleasant interaction with your child or children. What would you do differently after studying this chapter?

CHAPTER 3: LAW

Principle: Your children need God's law, but you cannot ask the law to do what only grace can accomplish.

1. Before reading this chapter, what primary tool were you relying on to change the heart and life of your child? How did this shape the way you were parenting in the formational, mundane, and not-so-mundane moments that shape who he or she will become?
2. What important part does the law play in raising our children? What is the law's weakness? How can you use the law for good in teaching your children?
3. In addition to teaching our children God's law, we are called to constantly exhibit and teach God's grace to them as well. Constantly. In everything we do. What are some of the opportunities in the life of your family in which you can begin to point your children to the presence and promises of God's grace?
4. In the midst of the stresses of life, do you sometimes find yourself wanting your children to just buck up, do what they're told, and behave in public? What would it take for you to long for much, much more than this?
5. I finish this chapter by reminding us of our role as ambassadors (see the introduction) and how we are called not only to preach grace, but also to live and model it for our children every day. This will no doubt require much humility and confession on our part. Consider some areas of sin that you may need to confess and admit your need for the Father's help.

CHAPTER 4: INABILITY

Principle: Recognizing what you are unable to do is essential to good parenting.

1. Think about the differences between trying to create change in our children as opposed to being

humble and willing instruments of change in the hands of God. How does this shed light on the owner/ambassador discussion from the introduction?

2. Being tools of change in the hands of God is often hard, exhausting, and discouraging work. In what ways is it worth the effort?
3. Which of the temporarily effective parental power tools—fear/threats, reward, or shame/guilt do you default to when you try to control your kids? Rather than reap the sad legacy of these methods, are you willing to give yourself to the hard process of heart change in your children?
4. Put this statement in your own words: “Good parenting lives at the intersection of a humble admission of personal powerlessness and a confident rest in the power and grace of God” (p. 69–70).
5. Will you commit to surrender everything that you will do and say to the God of change who has sent you to be his representative each morning?

CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY

Principle: If you are not resting as a parent in your identity in Christ, you will look for identity in your children.

1. The situation between Sally and Jamie at the beginning of this chapter may sound extreme, but most parents fall into identity amnesia at some point in their parenting journeys. Describe a time when you looked to your children for too much of your meaning and purpose.
2. Trying to get your identity from your children is a natural thing to do. What are the effects on both the parent and the child when the parent falls into this trap?
3. Which of the five indications of identity replacement (see pages 80–83) best describes your tendencies? Think of specific examples. What is your motivation in this particular area?
4. Which of the encouragements in the final paragraph of this chapter do you need to remind yourself of daily so that you are freed from asking your children to give you what they will never be able to give?

CHAPTER 6: PROCESS

Principle: You must be committed as a parent to long-view parenting because change is a process and not an event.

1. Explain this quote: “Spiritual blindness happens at the intersection of deceptiveness of sin and the delusion of self-knowledge” (p. 89).
2. Have you ever gone into a time of correction with the expectation of a one-conversation turnaround? How did you feel when you had to repeat the correction at a later time? How does realizing that we are more like our children than unlike them help us deal with them in mercy and grace by not demanding instantaneous change?
3. Explain why it is important to view parenting as a life-long connected process, rather than a series of unrelated corrective encounters.
4. Have you ever considered a child’s frequent need for correction to be interruptions or hassles? Would you be open, instead, to considering these moments as opportunities to be used by God in transforming the hearts and lives of your children? How would this change your attitude toward your children in these moments?
5. Identify one way your character gets in the way of parenting. How might your parenting change as you realize that you, as a parent, are being progressively transformed by God’s grace, so that you will have what you need as part of his process of grace in the lives of your children?

CHAPTER 7: LOST

Principle: As a parent you're not dealing just with bad behavior but a condition that causes bad behavior.

1. Have you been content to settle for surface victories and surface solutions, parenting methods that merely alleviate the symptoms but don't get to the root condition? How will understanding the focus of the three parables in Luke 15 help you to parent with a bigger sense of purpose and direction?
2. Explain the statement, "Parenting is a moment-by-moment, day-by-day rescue mission" (p. 104). Do you find yourself resenting moments when rescue is necessary? How can you remind yourself that it is God's high calling for us to rescue our children again and again?
3. In what ways do you need to be more like the father in the parable of the lost son as you seek to rescue your lost children?
4. Which idea in the list of things that lost children need (see pages 108–9) is most eye-opening to you in your current parenting situation? Why?
5. All of our efforts to address heart issues in our children must be steeped in prayer. Will you commit to praying daily that God will open your eyes to every opportunity to address your children's heart issues, that he will empower your work as a parent, and that he will work the heart change in your children that only he can accomplish?

CHAPTER 8: AUTHORITY

Principle: One of the foundational heart issues in the life of every child is authority. Teaching and modeling the protective beauty of authority is one of the foundations of good parenting.

1. What makes submission to authority the central heart issue?
2. What is your responsibility as God's ambassador in matters of authority? If you are the look of God's face, the touch of his hand, and the tone of his voice, what does God's authority look like to your children?
3. Why is it crucial to follow discipline with a brief time of instruction? What keeps you from doing this on a consistent basis and how can you improve?
4. Is it a new idea for you to consider the little moments of resistance to your authority as God's grace rather than as hassles and interruptions? How can reminding yourself of his transforming grace help you to be thankful during those times?
5. What attitudes or actions concerning your use of authority do you need to confess in order to joyfully and consistently give grace to your children and point them to the hope of the cross?

CHAPTER 9: FOOLISHNESS

Principle: The foolishness inside your children is more dangerous to them than the temptation outside of them. Only God's grace has the power to rescue fools.

1. It is common for Christian parents to think that their job is to control their children's behavior. But I have reminded us again and again that children's behavior problems are heart problems, and that we parents are the tools God uses to work change in the hearts of our children. What steps have you recently begun to take during times of correction to get at issues of the heart with your children?
2. When your child's misbehavior gives you a picture of what controls his heart, are you willing to invest the time it takes to see this as an opportunity for heart instruction? Why is this more beneficial than the quick-fix of simply trying to control his behavior?

3. "It's . . . the propensity of our children to make their happiness the most important thing in the universe" (p. 131). They prefer to set themselves up as gods and resist your authority. How can you begin to use the key words *glory*, *wisdom*, *story*, and *welcome* in an age-appropriate way to parent the heart of your child?
4. Have you found ways to instill in your child an awe of the glory of God as mentioned in chapter 1? If not, use one of the examples given in the glory section of this chapter to begin naturally talking about God to your children.
5. Have you ever turned moments of ministry into moments of anger or personalized what is not personal? Take time today to confess and recognize your daily need for God's rescue and forgiveness.

CHAPTER 10: CHARACTER

Principle: Not all of the wrong your children do is a direct rebellion to authority; much of the wrong is the result of a lack of character.

1. Think of a time when your kids weren't doing what they should have been doing. Could their actions be the result of a lack of character, rather than direct disobedience? How did you handle the situation?
2. How does proper handling of these kinds of situations always begin? When was the last time you confessed before dealing with a character struggle?
3. In summary, "If you deal with a lack of character with a lack of character, you will not accomplish what God has given you to accomplish in the hearts of your children" (p. 139). List some steps you can begin to take to be able to see these frustrating moments not as anger-producing irritants but as moments of God-given grace.
4. Romans 1 connects character issues to worship of whatever rules the heart of your child. As you study the hearts and actions of your children, can you identify the thing(s) they have become enslaved to (e.g., control, the desire to be right or accepted, material possessions, independence, etc.)?
5. Do you need to plan a conversation with your child about heart and worship connections? Pray for God to reveal to you what your children don't understand so you can graciously show them and allow God's Spirit to do his work in their hearts.

CHAPTER 11: FALSE GODS

Principle: You are parenting a worshiper, so it's important to remember that what rules your child's heart will control his behavior.

1. Explain the assertion, "Every day of our lives is a war of worship" (p. 156).
2. Identify ways you may be prone to separate Christianity from everyday life, controlling behaviors rather than focusing on what rules the heart.
3. The most important question parents can ask themselves is, "What right now does God want my child to see . . . and how can I help him see it?" (p.159).
4. Think about ways you have been tempted to confess for your children with words like, "This is what you did! And this is why you did it!" What words could you use instead to help them to examine their choices and lead them to confession?
5. Once again, this chapter ends with the need to realize and confess that we as parents also have worship struggles. List ways in which you could begin to be less judgmental and more compassionate.

CHAPTER 12: CONTROL

Principle: The goal of parenting is not control of behavior but rather heart and life change.

1. How are all of the good and needed things you work to provide for your children not enough? In what ways have you become distracted and sidetracked or satisfied with a job partially done?
2. Do you ever find your child being blinded by his or her sin? Explain why it is not negative and condemning to lovingly and humbly talk to your children about their sin.
3. What is insufficient about making your children's sin just about you? When your child sins, who is in the center of his or her world? What is your child refusing to acknowledge about God when he or she chooses to sin? Think about ways you can explain this to your child in an age-appropriate way.
4. What is the difference between a child confessing that they sometimes do what is wrong and confessing that wrong lives inside them?
5. The doorway to hope is hopelessness. Explain why helping your children to understand their hopelessness is not a process of condemnation but of rescue.

CHAPTER 13: REST

Principle: It is only rest in God's presence and grace that will make you a joyful and patient parent.

1. Do you ever tend to be God-forgetful, spending your mental and spiritual time meditating on the struggle and not meditating on the Lord? Commit now to memorizing Matthew 28:18–20, and in doing so, remember the one who sent you and learn to rest in him.
2. As we near the end of this book, what would you say is the ultimate job of a parent? How has your answer changed since you began studying this book?
3. What deeper goal, beyond teaching your children what to do and what not to do, are you called to as a parent? Is this an impossible task? Where is your hope as a parent found?
4. "God will expose your weaknesses so that you will run to him . . ." (p. 192). Why is this something to rejoice in rather than fear?
5. Describe how your heart can rest, knowing that God simply calls you to be faithful and not to do what only he can do.

CHAPTER 14: MERCY

Principle: No parent gives mercy better than one who is convinced that he desperately needs it himself.

1. What is mercy? What is mercy not? As you seek to be God's ambassador to your children, representing his character to them, take a moment to remember and list the daily mercies you receive from the Father's hands.
2. In what ways is God working on you through your children so that he can work through you for your children? Stated another way, what sin of yours are you being confronted with, exposing your own need for mercy?
3. In talking with your children about a particular behavior, what age-appropriate questions can you ask them to help them grow in heart awareness?
4. Why is it good for children to hear you confess when you've blown it?
5. Do you pray without ceasing for your children? What does prayer require you to recognize? Will you commit to covering every moment of your child's day in prayer for God's grace for them and for you?