



## THE PODCAST

### Discussion Guide

with Sissy Goff, LPC-MHSP,  
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[raisingboysandgirls.com](http://raisingboysandgirls.com)



# The Parenting Journey

## **Stirred to Love Parents of Kids of All Ages**

*Stir - to set up a great unrest, to fire up, or to cause a slight movement.*

Parenting is a stirring journey. From the very first moment your child enters your world, your heart will alternate between states of great unrest, slight movement, and all fired up. You will be stirred. That is a promise. And my guess is that you've been stirred listening to this podcast, and through the pages of this guide. You've likely been stirred to fear, to frustration, to sadness, or to joy. But our hope, through it all, is that you have been stirred to love and better understand this child that has been entrusted to you.

## At a Glance

Do you have your own memories of middle school dances? The awkwardness and the creative tactics to cover up the awkwardness...giggles, sarcasm, communal trips to the bathroom, throwing ice? And do you remember how fearful you were underneath all of that awkwardness? Take a minute to picture yourself there.

You wanted to be chosen. You wanted purpose. To connect. To avoid looking like a fool. You wanted all of the things you were fearful you weren't. And the fear of not being those things was stronger than the desire to take a risk and be yourself.

Parenting is really not that different. You want purpose...to connect...to feel chosen...to look like you have some semblance of an idea of what you're doing. But, more often than not, you don't. You're raising your child when you're not entirely sure you're finished being raised yourself. But here you are—as a parent—wanting to parent with all of the positives and none of the negatives that were a part of your own growing up. It is a stirring journey. It stirs up every emotion and fear that were a part of those awkward adolescent moments. And your fear of what you're not as a parent can often prevent you from being who you can be.

That's where we hope this podcast and study guide will help. God has chosen you. Before you were born, He knew the way your son would ask you a million questions, believing you truly knew the answers. He knew the way your daughter would take your hand and trust you to lead her anywhere. He knew your teenage son's eye rolling habit before your son's eyes opened for the first time. And he knew the knot you would have in your throat the day you walked your daughter down the aisle.

God has chosen you. You have, by His grace, all that you need to raise your son and/or your daughter. As you are stirred, through their lives and through this Raising Boys and Girls study guide, remember Hebrews 10:24 (ESV). May you be stirred to love... In the midst of all of the other stirrings, the stir to love can be strongest. It can be strongest because you have been chosen, and because the God who chose you is able to keep that which you have entrusted until the day you see Him face to face. (2 Timothy 1:12).

### ***Discussion Questions:***

*How did you cope with middle school dances? What were they like for you?*

*Do you see any similarities between the feelings then and the feelings you have today as a parent?*

*How do you escape now?*

*Based on Madeleine L'Engle's quote, "I am still every age that I have been,"<sup>1</sup> what age do you feel that you are? Why?*

*Which of the three degrees of stirred do you feel as this study begins: a slight movement, great unrest, or fired up? What area is stirring you the most?*

*How would your parenting be different today if you were to believe that*

- *God had specifically chosen you to be your child's parent?*
- *Love can be stronger than all of the other feelings being stirred in you?*
- *God is able to protect that which you have entrusted to him?*

## The Parent Perspective

"I'm afraid to have a little girl. I don't want to be the kind of mom to her that my mom was to me."

"I was terrified when my son was born. I knew that to raise a man I had to know how to be one—and I still didn't have it figured out."

"I loved playing with my kids when they were younger. But once they became teenagers, I didn't know how to play with them anymore. I didn't really even know how to talk to them. I remember how uncomfortable I was with myself when I was their age, and I think I became equally uncomfortable with them."

As Madeleine L'Engle said, "I am still every age that I have been."<sup>1</sup> You parent out of who you are today, but also who you have been through all of your growing up. Your past is just as much a part of your parenting as is your present. And both will be stirred.

We've already talked about the present stirring. Your son is bullied at school, and everything inside of you wants to do a little bullying yourself. Your daughter is the only one of her friends who isn't asked to prom and you hurt just as much as she does. As a parent, you will feel the heights of joy and depths of sorrow that your son or daughter goes through on a daily basis.

But then there will be other times. There will be times that maybe you feel a little more sorrow than your son does over a dropped pass on the football field or a little more desperation that your daughter be a part of a certain group. A mom who brought her daughter to Daystar talked about how sad she was to watch her daughter after school. "She doesn't talk to anyone. The other girls are laughing, walking arm in arm, making plans. She keeps her head down and walks straight to the car." It was clear that this mom was very outgoing. She spent her growing up years with friendships being her highest priority. Her daughter, however, sees things a little differently. "I have good friends I sit with at lunch and play with at recess. But, when school is over, I'm ready to go home. I just want to be in my room by myself." The daughter is obviously more introverted than her mom. She doesn't have the same need to connect that her mom had when she was her age.

So, what is happening in this case? Her mom is parenting out of her adult self, as well as her third grade self. It's a bit like the Disney movie, *The Kid*. (If you haven't seen it, we would suggest you watch it...it's a family friendly film, too, by the way.) If you've seen it, you know that Bruce Willis' character as an adult is still haunted by the chubby boy he was growing up. He lives with all of the same insecurities, hopes and fears. You will, too, as a parent. And you will be stirred on both levels—as a parent and as the eight, eleven, or fifteen year-old inside of you.

You are every age you've ever been. Andy Stanley says "It is when our hearts are stirred that we are most aware of what they contain."<sup>2</sup> Your heart contains a lifetime

of memories and feelings. You can't separate those memories and feelings out of who you are, just because you become a parent.

Every time we teach a parenting class and talk about development, at least one parent comes up to talk about him or herself. The comments range from "I think maybe I got stuck somewhere along the way" to "I couldn't help but think about how I never got that when I was growing up." These parents are listening with their twelve and twenty-something year-old selves. They are being stirred on both levels. As counselors, we love it when this happens. We love it because the hearts of these parents are coming to life in a way that can help them connect more deeply with themselves, their children and with God.

So, what do we want you to do with these stirrings...stirrings from the present and the past? We want you to listen. We want you to pay attention, to follow them to see where they lead. This section of the study guide, for each chapter, will give you an opportunity to dig a little deeper into your story. Your story, past and present, is a part of why God has chosen you to raise your son or daughter.

*"To cleave the truth of our own lives, to lift and look beneath our own stones, is to see glimmers at least of his life, of his life struggling to come alive in our lives, his story whispering like a song through the babble and drone of ours."*

*-Frederick Buechner<sup>3</sup>*

## Try It Out—For Parents of Girls

*"It's a girl,' the ultrasound nurse declared as she guided the gel-coated device across my belly. My heart skipped a beat. My firstborn had been a son, nearly two years before. So far, my only perception of my parenting self was as a boy-mom. I made boys. That's what I did.*

*This news of a daughter filled me with so much emotion that I couldn't let myself open up to it until I was outside the clinic, standing alone in the parking lot. Then my mind and my heart started to expand, and an unfamiliar and unexpected wave of wonder and relief and gratitude came rushing up from deep inside. I was carrying a baby girl who would one day become a woman. And that woman, if loved and respected, might someday become a friend with whom I could share the rest of my days."*

*-Amy Grant*

These words are the beginning of Amy's gracious introduction to our book, *Raising Girls*. We would guess that, at some point, you had a similar experience. Maybe it was at your ultrasound when you found out you were having a little girl. Maybe it was when you chose her name. Or maybe even the instant she was born. Your heart flooded with emotion and your imagination flooded with images. What would it be like to have a little girl? What did you picture in those moments?

A friend of ours who just had his first daughter after two sons said, "It's amazing how different it was from the moment I held her. She seemed so fragile. Something rose up in me that wanted to protect her."

What rose up in you? What did the idea of a daughter stir up in you then and what does the reality of a daughter, whatever her age, stir in you now? How is what you imagined different and similar to what life is like with a little girl?

The rest of our "try it out" sections in the book will give you suggestions as to how to connect with your daughter, at each stage of her development. But, for now, we want you to continue in this rhythm of stirring and listening. Your daughter has, from the first moment you knew about her, stirred you in ways that no one else ever will. What are those ways? And what do they say about you, about her, and about a God who has chosen you both to journey together?



## **Try it Out—For Parents of Boys**

I can still remember what I was wearing the day of our second ultrasound – jeans and a plaid button up.

I can still remember where I was sitting when the words were spoken. Actually, I was standing when we got the news, and I immediately had to sit down. I must have gone pale because the ultrasound technician stopped attending to my wife and began asking if I needed anything.

I had been a father for a little over a year to this delicate, gentle-natured, fair-skinned little blonde that was the spitting image of my wife. I was just beginning to wrap my mind around the unique blessing of parenting a little girl, when the technician announced that my wife was carrying twins . . . and both had the anatomy identifying them as boys.

I am still recovering from that news almost twenty years later.

My family, friends, and colleagues found it strange that my initial response to the news of sons involved more fear than joy. They all know me as someone who loves boys. My practice as a therapist involves working primarily with boys, adolescent males and young men. I've been teaching classes for years on nurturing boys. My world is boys, boys and more boys. So why the fear?

The fear comes from living in this world of boys. After seeing hundreds of them over the last two decades of my practice, I know how they think, what makes them tick, and all the confusing, impulsive, complicated things they say and do. Furthermore, every year I interact with hundreds of parents who are confused and bewildered by the journey of raising sons. That day in the OBGYN's office, I knew just enough to be frightened (actually terrified) by the news that my wife was carrying two of these strange creatures in her womb.

Equally, I feel this weighty responsibility to help contribute a few decent men to the world. My wife once commented about how many great women she'd had the opportunity to know, to work alongside and to journey with in friendship, and that she could count the really exceptional men she knew on two hands (many women in this world could count the number of exceptional men they know on one hand). I think there's a reason Flannery O'Connor titled her most famous work "A Good Man is Hard to Find."

I hope the conversations we'll have throughout the Try It Out's, will be a time to explore parenting these fascinating, confusing, imaginative, complicated, energetic, impulsive, sensitive, action-oriented creatures we know as boys. We'll keep studying who they are and paying attention to what they need. We'll experiment with a number of different ideas throughout this section as we try and get access to their hearts and minds. We'll journey together in the privilege we've been given to participate in contributing a few good men to this world.

## Stop and Look

*"Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of God appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up. Moses said, 'What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?' God saw that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush, 'Moses! Moses!'"*

*-Exodus 3:1-4, The Message*

Moses looked. The angel of God appeared to him and the text makes it a point to say those two words: He looked. We could say that he was stirred. He probably felt a lot when he saw the angel in the bush...fear, curiosity, wonder. But in the midst of those feelings, Moses stopped, turned away from his flock and took the time to look. And then "God saw that he had stopped to look." God met Moses near the burning bush when he stopped.

All of this stirring we're talking about can be a difficult thing. You have homework to help with and soccer games to watch. Work takes up most of your time. It's easier just to ignore the stirrings. Keep plodding through your day. Maybe there will be time to look later.

But the bush still burns. You still feel something flicker inside your chest as you watch your husband delight in your daughter when your dad never seemed to notice you. You feel intense pressure that your son make straight A's so that he has all of the opportunities you didn't.

Stop. Look. Pay attention to the stirring. When Moses stopped to look, God was right there in front of him. He is with us, too.

What do you notice this day as you stop and look? Take a minute to write about what God might be wanting to say to you.

## **Acting and Reacting**

Last night, I (Melissa) ran into a father who was quite stirred. I was parking my car at the movie theater when my dog, Blueberry, started growling. Before I saw the father, I heard him. Blueberry must have, too. He was standing beside his car, yelling loudly at his teenage son. The son just stared. "You're nothing but a lazy \_\_\_\_\_. You never listen to a thing I say." He yelled for a few more minutes when the son turned, and walked away without a word. The father yelled louder. "Get your \_\_\_\_\_ back here! I'm talking to you."

There is no telling what stirred this father, but something did. And the father reacted. He reacted to something his son had done and followed him, getting more and more angry with every step.

Let's go back to Moses. If we go a little further in the story in Exodus, Moses does some reacting of his own. At this point, God tells Moses that he wants him to go and speak to the Israelites. Moses' stirring turns to fear and he reacts. In Exodus 4:1, he says "They won't trust me. They won't listen to a word I say." Again, in Exodus 4:10, Moses says, "Master, please, I don't talk well. I've never been good with words, neither before nor after you spoke to me. I stutter and stammer."

Moses reacts out of his weakness. But God's response to Moses, in both times is "Go. Get going. I'll be right there with you." What God is asking Moses to do is to act rather than react. Choose. Decide. Make a conscious choice.

As we have been saying throughout this section, your children will stir you. They will stir you to joy, to fear and frustration. And in the more fearful or frustrating moments, it is easy to fall into the same trap that Moses and this movie theater dad did.

Your daughter calls her little sister "stupid". Your son fails his final exam. He or she pushes you right up to your limit...and then pushes again. The easiest thing in the world, in that kind of stirring, is to react and push back.

When you react, you are simply following your child into more frustration. You are following them. In other words, you turn all of the power in the situation over to your child. And you also hand over your power to choose.

But God says, "Go. Get going. I'll be right there with you." We still want you to listen to the stirrings. But when you react and follow your child, they do the choosing. And it is much harder to be stirred to love when someone else is choosing for you.

How have you found yourself in a cycle of reacting lately? Where are you following your child into him having too much power? What would it mean for you to be stirred to act, rather than react?

## Climbing Out of the Baggage

Dan Allender says, “You are the only you this world will ever know. And something about your life is meant to make something about God known in a way no one else can do.”<sup>4</sup> Dr. Seuss says, “Today you are You, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is you-er than you.”<sup>5</sup> We say, You are chosen. God has chosen you to parent Michelle. Or Sam. Emma or Parker. When you were a child, he knew who your child would be. He chose you specifically—because He knew there was none finer...

Much like another man that was chosen long ago. He was chosen to be a parent, too, and a King.

*“There was a man from the tribe of Benjamin named Kish...He had a son, Saul, a most handsome young man. There was none finer—he literally stood head and shoulders above the crowd...”*

After Samuel got all the tribes of Israel lined up, the Benjamin tribe was picked. Then he lined up the Benjamin tribe in family groups, and the family of Matri was picked. The family of Matri took its place in the lineup, and the name Saul, son of Kish, was picked.”

Saul was chosen. God picked him for a glorious purpose.

*“But when they went looking for him, he was nowhere to be found. Samuel went back to God, “Is he anywhere around?” God said, “Yes, he’s right over there—hidden in that pile of baggage.” They ran and got him. He took his place before everyone, standing tall—head and shoulders above them. Samuel then addressed the people, “Take a good look at whom God has chosen: the best! No one like him in the whole country!”*

*-1 Samuel 9:1-2, 10:20-24, The Message*

It can feel daunting to be chosen...quite stirring, actually. As we talk about how you have been specifically chosen to parent your child, it may make you want to disappear...just a little. It may make you want to look for your own baggage to hide in.

Actually, over the course of the next however many years it takes you to raise your child, there will be countless times that the baggage will have some appeal. You will get a call from the school principal to come in “to talk.” Your child will ask you about sex for the first time. Your child will lose a friend...or find a boy or girlfriend. Just like in The Parent Perspective, you may not feel ready to parent in those times. Or strong—or wise—or brave enough to handle the situation. But here you are. You have been chosen. And, as you are stirred, you have several options. One is that you can hide in the baggage, like our friend Saul. Or you can step out and step into God’s good and glorious purpose for you and your child. You are the only you. God has chosen you and you are the best parent possible for your child.

## Artistry

We have a dear friend who is an artist. We've had many moments with her of seeing a new painting she has created and not really having words to respond.

She recently gave a painting to a colleague and friend of ours as a Christmas gift. It was a painting of his two young sons that she'd created from a photograph of the two of them. He opened the gift and immediately tears began to run down his face. He's not the kind of guy who is moved to tears very often, but he simply couldn't respond in any other way in this moment. He just sat in silence looking at the picture of his boys and wept. We all watched him and were stirred ourselves.

I had this moment of imagining how often God is moved to tears at the wonder of His creation. Psalm 139: 13-16 says that "you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made: your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

I remember seeing my own children for the first time and being overwhelmed by emotion. To see evidence of these tiny beings who were formed in a secret place, and to be overwhelmed by the artistry of our God. There were no words fitting for that moment.

Pull out some of your earliest photographs of your children. Sit and look at those for some moments. If you have video footage of their birth, adoption footage or any early moments in their life, watch that again. Allow yourself to remember those first moments and what you experienced in meeting your son or daughter for the first time.

## Arrows and Warriors

*"Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate."*

*-Psalm 127:3-5*

Those words are a rich reminder that our children are a gift and we're blessed in receiving the gift. We believe those words also remind us to handle them with wisdom and care. In considering the words of sons being compared to "arrows in the hands of a warrior," and imagining that image, we are called to being intentional people in caring for these gifts. An arrow in the hands of a warrior has the potential for protection and provision. An arrow released without intention and precision has the potential for great harm.

When we release our children into the world without considering who they are, how they were designed and what they need, we are somewhat reckless in our approach to parenting. When we become students of our sons and daughters, we become more thoughtful in our approach to parenting and in turn, we release them into the world with greater precision and purpose.

Every day, young men and women are released into the world without the care and wisdom we're discussing, and we see the fruit of this. Girls who pursue unhealthy relationships desperately trying to meet a need or an ache that exists in them. Boys who have no purpose, who were never initiated into being a man and are recklessly seeking their own validation and purpose. Young men and women who seem to be wandering aimlessly through life without a clear sense of who they are and living fully out of who God made them to be.

We've been given a great privilege to release these young, formidable people into the world. We've been given these gifts to handle with care and are called to parent with wisdom and intention.

How would you define your child's temperament from being a student of your child? What are some specific ways that you can creatively work within their temperament rather than against it?

## A Note from Paul

Your sons and daughters are like arrows...arrows that are fearfully and wonderfully made. Arrows that have the potential to stir you to great movement or slight unrest. They are arrows that God has deliberately entrusted to you. You are chosen. And so was Paul.

*"And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I'm suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day."*

*-2 Timothy 1:11-12, NIV*

*"This is the Message I've been set apart to proclaim as preacher, emissary, and teacher. It's also the cause of all this trouble I'm in. But I have no regrets, I couldn't be more sure of my ground—the One I've trusted in can take care of what He's trusted me to do right to the end."*

*-2 Timothy 1:11-12, The Message*

We have talked a lot in this section about fear...the fear you have when you find out you are having a son—or a daughter. The fear you feel when faced with situations or questions you don't feel ready to tackle. The fear of walking across the gym floor, of not being chosen, of not having purpose.

We meet with parents every day in our counseling offices who are facing these kinds of fears. "How am I supposed to do this?" is the question that looms behind any and every situation that brings them to us.

How do I let my child go back to school when he's being bullied?

How do I help my children deal with a divorce that I can't deal with myself?

How do I keep them safe on the internet?

How do I keep them safe from harm?

Sometimes we believe that the opposite of fear is courage. We would say that it is not courage, but trust. Parenting would be an impossible task if it were ours alone. But it is not. You are not alone. You have been chosen by a God who is more than able. He is trustworthy. And, in the midst of all of the stirrings and feelings and fears, you can trust Him with your children. He loves them more than you could ever imagine. Just as He loves you. And He will keep and care for them—and you—until that great day when we see Him face to face.

## **Sabbath**

*"Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!"*  
-Romans 15:13

We want you to take this day as a Sabbath, every week. There will be 6 devotionals, and then a day to take a Sabbath. Sabbath literally means to rest from labor. Our prayer, today, is that you will find rest and refreshment through Christ. You are in the place He has chosen you to be. God is a god of hope, joy and peace. May He grant you that today and this week in your journey to Raising Boys and Girls.



## Notes

### Section 1

<sup>1</sup>Madeleine L'Engle, *A Circle of Quiet*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1972), 199.

<sup>2</sup>Andy Stanley, *Enemies of the Heart*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2006, 2011), 59.

<sup>3</sup>Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1984), 55.

<sup>4</sup>Dan Allender, *The Healing Path*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 1999), 189.

<sup>5</sup>Dr. Seuss, *Happy Birthday to You!* (New York: Random House Children's Books, 1959, 1987), Back Cover.





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# Stage 1

## **The Explorer, Boys, Ages Birth-4 The Discovery Years, Girls, Ages Birth-5**

“Relationships provide the backdrop for your daughter’s growing identity at every stage of her life.”

“Boys come out of the womb hard-wired for activity.” He begins and continues as an active, adventurous, curious, imaginative being who is an experiential learner.

Girls and boys are different. They learn differently. They relate differently. And they develop differently. It’s all part of God’s design and his plan to make your son and daughter into who He has uniquely called them to be. We’ll begin to explore the differences...who they are and what they need in these early, important years of your child’s life.

## At A Glance

She walked into my (Sissy's) office wearing jeans, an old t-shirt and converse tennis shoes that were green on one side and red and white-striped on the other. Her mom brought her to counseling because she wasn't being invited to any sleepovers or birthday parties. Her mom was worried. Izzy, on the other hand, was perplexed. She just couldn't understand why the other kids didn't like her. The more we talked about it, the more she realized that it was because she was different.

A few months later, Izzy had reconciled herself to being different...and was glad. "I've found a few friends who are different, too. And we can be ourselves together." That May, her class was given an assignment to needlepoint something for their moms for Mother's Day. Most of her classmates needlepointed statements like "I Love Mom," or "Best Mom in the World." Izzy's needlepoint simply said, "Difference is Beauty."

Now if a 4th grade boy had to needlepoint a gift for his mother (and can you just imagine the damage a 4th grade boy could do with knitting or needlepoint needles?), his would more likely say "Difference is Cool." And it is. Both things. Out of his infinite wisdom, God designed men and women, boys and girls to be different down to our very tiniest chromosomes.

Boys are wild and wooly, active and adventurous. Girls are engaging, intuitive and imaginative. In the words of the famous children's poem,

*What are little boys made of  
Snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails  
That's what little boys are made of.  
What are little girls made of  
Sugar and spice and all things nice  
That's what little girls are made of.*

### *Snips and Snails*

Before my (David) daughter was born, someone gave us one of those safety kits to child proof the house – outlet plugs, cabinet fasteners, etc. We mistakenly lost the kit in a move we made months before my daughter's birth. Years later, I accidentally found the kit while cleaning out our basement and storing some of her delicate, pink baby clothes, in preparation for her twin brothers. I kicked myself for being an irresponsible parent and never remembering to plug up the outlets and safeguard the cleaning supplies from consumption. The truth of the matter is that my daughter never really required that kind of safety plan. I'm not saying that girls don't do their fair share of exploring. They certainly do, but my daughter tended to find objects on the floor, hold them up to us and hand them over for safe-keeping. It never occurred to her to stick them up her nose, in her ear, or flush them down the toilet.

Her brothers, on the other hand, imagined every one of those scenarios (and then some). There was no safety kit that could have prevented the kind of damage my explorers would bring upon our house – blinds pulled off the windows, toilet lids shimmied off the seat, scaling furniture. I often say that boys are like puppies. If they are out of your sight and things get quiet, you should be greatly concerned.

Early on, he is a tactile, kinesthetic learner. He explores his world as much with his hands as with his eyes. Parenting an explorer involves creating a safe environment for him to move, explore, experience healthy risk and adventure, and to match his growing curiosity. Parenting an explorer involves paying attention to all the threads of his development – physical, emotional, relational, spiritual and cognitive. It requires us to pay attention to his unique wiring and to build our expectations, boundaries, responses, discipline and nurture around his design. We are guilty of parenting in opposition to his design. He needs us to study him and know him.

### *Sugar and Spice*

Girls are relational. You will hear that sentence throughout the podcast and this guide. They are relational in who they are and what they need from us. From her earliest moments, the wiring in your daughter's brain dictates her need to connect. She will connect in the way she looks at you, laughs with you and smiles. Once she can walk and talk, she will want you to come with her as she discovers the world around her. She will reach out of her little relational being to want to care for you, for friends, even for bugs that are hurt. And she will invite you to imagine with her as you play house, school and have tea parties. I recently spoke to a father who was concerned with his daughter's concern for her stuffed animals. When they picked her up from preschool to leave for a surprise trip to Disney World, she burst into tears. "I can't leave Fluffy and all of my other animals! How would you feel if I went on a trip and left you?"

Because of the importance of their relationship with you, your daughter will need much from you in these first five years. But probably the three most important things she can gain from you are boundaries, a sense of bravery and delight. She needs to have the freedom to explore the world...to wander away within the safety of your care. In that wandering, she needs to hear from you that she's brave. She needs you to point out her courage when you see it...to remind her that she is capable and strong. She'll need those reminders starting here, but often over the course of her growing up. She also needs to be told no, and then she needs to be told yes. As she wanders, she will develop the beginnings of self-confidence. As you stop her from wandering...or disobeying, or hitting her brother, she will develop even more confidence in you and your security. And, finally, you have the tremendous opportunity to delight in her in these years. She longs for you to notice and admire her...to think she's wonderful. She wants you to see her as beautiful and smart and funny and all things nice, as well as all things brave.

How do you see your daughter discovering? Your son as an explorer? How can you draw those characteristics out in them even more? These are just a few questions to

get you started in the process of loving these sugar and spice, snips and snails children through the first stage of their lives.

**Discussion Questions:**

*How can you tell that your daughter is wired for relationship? When does your son seem most himself?*

*How does she invite you to connect with her? How does he invite you to connect with him?*

*How do you respond?*

*How do you see her expressing emotion most often? What about him? How could you help her learn to express emotion more, or more appropriately? How could you express your emotions differently in front of her (or him)?*

*How do you see your daughter/son's imagination at work? Where could you step in and play more imaginatively with them or linger in play?*

*What kind of boundaries do you have for your daughter/son? Do you need to set stronger boundaries or relax them a little?*

*Do you let your daughter/son take safe risks? How could you do so more? What are some areas she has opportunity to have courage and he has the opportunity to feel risk?*

*How could you remind her of her bravery? What about his strength?*

*Do you take the time to delight in your daughter? Do you take time to enjoy your son?  
What makes it difficult? How could you do more of it?*

*What are you learning from being a student of your child that you didn't know months ago?*



## **The Parent Perspective**

I (Melissa) have an Explorer puppy. Actually we all do. In the last year and a half, all three of us have lost our old, sweet, calm, predictable dogs...and gotten puppies.

My puppy, Blueberry the Old English Sheepdog, doesn't look like a puppy anymore. She's a hopping 70 pounds—not whopping, but hopping because she hops on all fours. As a matter of fact, Blueberry's hopping wears me out to the point that she has an "aunt" (don't tell Blueberry that she's really a dog trainer) that she goes and has sleepovers with—often.

David's puppy, a yellow lab, is currently ten weeks old. Just last week, David said he was going to sit Owen on his sidewalk with a sign around his neck that says "Free Puppy". I think that was after Owen went to the bathroom in the office for the third time in one day and catapulted himself onto yet another parent that David was trying to counsel.

Sissy's puppy, Lucy, is a Havanese. She's only seven pounds and waves. Literally. She waves at the kids Sissy counsels. She waves at David. She waves at me. And the instant you stop petting, she starts waving again. With her little bitty paws, she is saying, "Attention makes me happy!"

If you haven't had a puppy in a while, you may not remember. You likely have the same kinds of responses we used to, "Oh, he's so cute. I miss having a puppy. They are so fun to have around." Ha!

Now, we really love our puppies. Don't get us wrong. But, if you've hung around the three of us any time recently, you've heard very different responses from those listed above. "He's wearing me out! Will she ever go to the bathroom outside? How do I make her stop hopping? What is with all of this energy? I'M SO TIRED!"

What happens for me, when I get tired with Blueberry is that I give in. We go for a walk and I get tired of "No, Blueberry. Stop. Sit. Come. Stay. No." So she ends up pulling me.

It's hard to have boundaries, give them freedom, be consistent and still have the energy to hold up your head to say goodnight. Oops! We're talking about dogs, not children. Actually, we would guess you feel pretty similar. When I hear David and Sissy talk about all of the things kids are and need in these years, I get tired.

Children in their explorer and discovery years are active, aggressive, curious, relational, caretaking and emotional. They need boundaries, open space, consistency, bravery and delight. You know they need these things, and you even know they will really help. But why is it so hard?

I would say it's hard for a lot of reasons, but there are two that I think are especially difficult in these years. First is the simple fact that you are tired. I met with a parent recently who said, "I know all of the things I'm supposed to be doing. But I work 10-hour days, 4 days a week. I just can't come home and sit and play with my son."

You may not work the same schedule. But you work hard. You work hard to love your child and meet the needs of him/her and the rest of your family. And there are just so many needs in these years. Laundry and boundaries and meals and delight and providing for your family and open space and errands and bravery. And then your child wants to stay up “just a few more minutes.” It’s exhausting.

There is also the happiness factor. If there is one sentence I hear most often from parents in my office, it’s “I just want my child to be happy.” He wants to stay up a little longer at bedtime. She wants a candy bar at the grocery. He wants a toy. She wants you to pick her up. And you want your child to feel loved. So, you say, “Okay, just one more,” or “This is the last time.”

Let’s go back to the bedtime scenario. It’s been a long day. You tell your son it’s time to go to bed. “Just one more minute, Mommy.” You give a few more minutes, to make him happy. You try again—five minutes later. “No!” His response this time is a little more aggressive than pleading. Five more minutes. “Okay, it really is time.” And then the tears come. He falls apart. And you’re caught between wanting him to be happy and being so exhausted yourself that it’s easier just to let him fall asleep on the couch and carry him upstairs.

We know. We’ve carried our puppies upstairs a few times ourselves. (Okay, maybe not in that scenario, but we do feel your pain—and exhaustion).

One of the things that sometimes happens when we become a parent is that we cease to be a person. You don’t get the rest you need. You don’t go to dinner with friends or take trips with your spouse. A mom told me a few years ago that she and her husband hadn’t taken a trip together in eight years, which was exactly how old their daughter was at the time. Your children need a lot of things, but they don’t need to be the center of your universe. That is actually too much attention, which we’ll talk about later. They need you to have a life outside of them so you can return to life with them a little more refreshed.

In an interview I once heard, Eugene Peterson said that “One of the most important things we can do as a parent is to be a person.” You are a person. You are a person who has a son. Or a daughter. Or both. But your son or daughter needs you to get together with friends from time to time. Send your child to their aunt’s for a sleepover, like Blueberry. Gain some perspective. Know that you are going to be tired. To fail. And that it’s okay to give in sometimes. But God gives rest to the weary (Jeremiah 31:25 and Matthew 11:28) and you are not being a bad parent to take that rest. It’s why we have the idea of Sabbath built in to this guide. You are a parent and a person. Give yourself room and grace to be both.

## Try It Out—For Parents of Girls

When we speak at different parenting seminars across the country, we like to ask parents if they think boys or girls are harder to raise? What would your answer be? The general consensus we hear is that boys are harder when they're younger and girls are harder once adolescence starts creeping—or flying into view.

You can probably guess the reasons. Boys, as David talks more about in his section, have a little more energy (and maybe mischief) in their younger ages. It's those snips and snails and puppy dog's tails. Girls, on the other hand are made of sugar and spice and everything nice—until adolescence, that is. Maybe that's when the spice takes a little more effect.

We don't want to scare you parents with girls in these discovery years who haven't yet felt the stirrings of teenagedom in your daughters' lives. We'll come to all of that later. But what we do want to do is prepare you. We want to use this section to start a conversation between you and your daughter that will continue throughout this study and hopefully throughout her life.

So, here's where we want you to start. One of the best things, as a parent, we believe you can do is become a student of your child. Get to know her. Obviously, you know more about her than probably anyone else on the planet. But do you really know her? Do you know what she's thinking about when she's quiet at the dinner table? Do you know what she worries about when she can't fall asleep? What brings her the most joy or the most sorrow in her life today? The older she gets, the less likely she volunteers this information. But it doesn't mean she doesn't want you to know. It just means you have to use a little more creativity to find out.

So here are a few questions you could start by asking her. We'll talk more in these sections about the context of your conversations at different ages. But, suffice it to say for now that sometimes these conversations flow easier in a relational context... whatever her age. So, for now, go for a walk with her. Play her favorite board game. Stay a little longer on the edge of her bed after you say prayers. If she's older, sit up for her to come in from the movie with friends. And then ask her a few of the following:

*How is it different being a girl today than you think it was when I was growing up?*

*What are your favorite parts of being a girl?*

*What do you think the hardest parts are?*

*Do you think boys have it easier or girls? Why?*

*What do you think most girls worry about? What do you worry about?*

Obviously, if your daughter isn't speaking yet, or speaking in coherent sentences, she can't answer these questions. But, as young as she can formulate thoughts, you can start the communication going.

As a side note, if she's an adolescent, you might flip ahead and try what we call "The Back Door." You may have to be a little more unpredictable in your question asking with her. But, regardless of her age and her response, we assure you she will be glad you asked.

## Try it Out—For Parents of Boys

It's equally important to become a student of your son. As a parent of twin boys, I am fascinated by the reality that I have these two creatures in my care who have the same genetic ingredients, share gender, were born within minutes of one another, have been raised in the same household, and yet the outcome couldn't look any more different. They are a daily reminder to me of the unique artistry of our God. He has created each of our kids with their own unique blueprint. And it's our job to study that blueprint throughout the course of their lives. Just when you think you have an idea about who he is, he will jump into the next stage of development, and evolve and change as a person. The young man you knew at five years of age will become a different boy at the age of ten. That's not to say that you won't begin to see trends within his temperament as he grows and matures. You will certainly begin to see evidence of his core temperament from the earliest moments of his life. And take note. Our job is to study his temperament and to "train him in the way he should go," as the scripture so wisely instructs us.

Getting access to his mind and heart is one of the greater challenges in the journey of parenting boys. Within this section of the guide, I'll suggest some questions for you to ask him throughout his development (hang on for some of those in the next chapter). You will need to be strategic in when you ask and how you go about asking. Boys almost have to be tricked into conversation at times. They don't come out of the womb hard-wired with a strong emotional vocabulary. We have to do a good amount of digging and searching. Getting access to a boy's mind and heart is a bit like an archeological dig. There is much evidence to support what we've long known to be true, that he typically isn't as verbal as she is. He has a more challenging journey of shaping, forming and using words. There are a number of obstacles to articulating the things he feels.

Your primary objective in this stage is studying him and beginning the long journey of knowing him. Pay attention to what he enjoys and when he seems most himself. Be willing to linger in play with him for long periods of time. Watch for opportunities to talk around a task (more on this as we go along) as he develops more of an ability to speak and use his words. Allow him to lead in his play, assigning a role to you as a character within his play. His play will be an expression of his heart in this stage.

Acknowledging the limitations in his ability to use his words also means that we want to assist him emotionally. The Explorer feels strong emotions but doesn't know what to do with the emotions, so he will instinctively act on them – hitting, biting, screaming, crying, throwing objects and melting down. He needs help redirecting his emotions to something useful. He needs us to go with him to a safe place we've set aside for him to take the physicality of his emotions. He needs to hit a pillow or inflatable object, to jump and yell, to lay down and kick. He needs a place to feel the feelings and then some help in putting some words around those strong emotions. (For more on this, check out the Emotional Milestones in the *Are My Kids on Track* podcast.)

He desperately needs us to assess our expectations and our approach to him. He needs the boundaries and our responses to be in tandem with his unique wiring. He needs us to set realistic and achievable expectations for him.

## Remember the Time

*"For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth."*

*-Psalm 71:5*

When I (Sissy) was in graduate school, one assignment they gave us was to write about our earliest memories. Their theory was that there is a reason that your earliest memory is indeed your earliest memory. It speaks to something about you... about who you were then, who you are now, and how the environment you grew up in shaped both.

I have two. One is of running in our driveway at an early birthday party and falling. We had one of those confounded aggregate driveways and somehow a rock came unglued and lodged itself in my knee. The next picture in my mind is of sitting on my kitchen counter with my mom bandaging me up.

The other is a scene from our spare bedroom...or from life growing up in the seventies, depending on your perspective. My cousin, Blair, had come over to play like he did often. One of our favorite activities was pushing the twin beds together in a V-shape, with each of us taking one bed, one hairbrush and belting out "I'm a little bit country, and I'm a little bit rock and roll" via Donny and Marie. And, if you're under the age of twenty, Donny and Marie had quite a career before Dancing With The Stars even existed.

Both memories are significant for me because they touch on two important pieces of my childhood. One is the comfort of my mom. The other is a sense of play. Both are still an important part of who I am today, although I'm a little more likely to sing and dance in my car than standing up on a bed with a hairbrush! (As a side note, however, David and I do often get compared to Donny and Marie when we're speaking together...and he's definitely a little bit rock and roll!)

What about you? What are your earliest memories? What kinds of emotions accompany those memories? What do they say about you? About your relationship with your parents? With others? And how do they affect the way you parent today?

I have a friend whose family didn't touch or say the words "I love you" while he was growing up. They definitely expressed love in other ways, such as through food and teasing each other. But there was no direct affection. As an adult, he would say it's much more difficult to express that kind of affection with his own family.

In our book, *Raising Girls*, we outline the importance of affection in a little girl's life. It also holds true for boys. "Study after study has outlined a baby's profound need for affection. In fact, they don't just need affection, they thrive, physically and emotionally, as a result of the physical care of their primary caregivers. As studies have also shown, babies who are not given this kind of affection are stunted in their development. Both the emotional lives and the future ability to caretake themselves is profoundly affected by the amount of nurturing given these infants. Toddlers need affection, too, but in shorter spurts..."<sup>1</sup>

How was love expressed in your home growing up? And how did that expression affect the way you love your own son or daughter? As Melissa has reminded us, who you were then has a profound affect on who you are now, both as a parent and as a person. But it doesn't have to define you. We remember so that we can understand ourselves better, and also so that we can see God's faithfulness in the midst of whatever those early memories were. He was with you then—and He is with you now. And He is a God who redeems every memory, every pain of your past and turns it to good...for you and your child.



## A God who Delights

*"The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."*  
-Zephaniah 3:17

I (Sissy) am not an art therapist. I'm not even an art-ist. I can draw stick figures, and that's about it. But I love art and have learned about it and how it can be a great tool in therapy from my godmother, who is a very talented art therapist. It is amazing to me the vast stores of information that can be gleaned with crayons.

Let's take a drawing of a family, for instance. I ask many girls to draw their family on one of their first visits to my office. The things to pay attention to are: size of each family member, placement of each family member, facial expressions, which body parts are included (if they don't have arms they feel powerless) and so on. Now, there are times when it might be easy to read too much into a child's drawing. But, over the years, there have been a few times when the meaning was obvious.

For example, one eight year-old boy drew his family in the center of the drawing playing a game together. He was sitting by a tree in the upper right hand corner. What would you guess this fellow was feeling? You guessed it...like an outsider with his family. He didn't fit and didn't feel like he was loved or wanted.

But there is one drawing that has particularly stood out to me over the years. It was of a twelve year-old girl who felt just the opposite. She drew a picture of her family gathered around the Christmas tree decorating it. They were smiling and all there in a circle around the tree...except for her. She was standing on top of the mantle with her arms outstretched upward, like "Here I am!"

If there was a word that I would use to describe how this girl felt within her family, it would be delighted in. Her parents did a fantastic job—maybe too good, according to the picture, of making her feel important.

It would be interesting to have your children draw pictures of your family. And it would be interesting, in fitting with the direction a lot of this picture takes, to see what you would have drawn of your own family growing up.

But I want us to go back to the verse in Zephaniah. I want to know where you would draw a picture of yourself in God's family. Really. Take a couple of minutes to think about it.

He would draw you as the one on the mantle. He wants you to feel so loved and delighted in that you would throw your arms up in front of everyone and say, "Here I am!"

God delights in you. He rejoices over you with singing. Take the moment that you saw your child smile for the first time, or heard him laugh, or saw her in her first dance recital. Remember the joy that bubbled up inside of you? That is delight. And that is what God feels in you every moment. He delights in you.

With all of this talk about delighting in your child, it may be hard at times. When he throws up all over your suit before work, when she flings herself on the floor screaming and crying at your parents' house for Thanksgiving, when he hits his baby sister...you could continue to fill in the blank. But just as 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us." You can delight in your child because Christ delights in you. You are loved deeply, in a stand up on the mantle sort of way.

## **Discipline**

We are asked questions about discipline daily within our work with parents and about every time we speak. The topic of discipline drives a number of questions, a range of emotions, and a variety of opinions. As we talk within this stage about setting realistic expectations, defining boundaries and allowing kids to wander away and return to us, it seems important to begin addressing discipline within our conversation about raising boys and girls.

Perhaps the most common scripture used within conversations about discipline involves the rod and spoiling. That scripture stirs the questions, emotions and opinions we experience when talking with parents around the topic of discipline. The questions stir emotions which give way to opinions about spanking, methods of discipline, and the mechanics of implementing discipline.

We tend to miss the rich instruction about the purpose of discipline that defines the how, when and why of discipline. The Message translates Prov. 13:24 this way, "A refusal to correct is a refusal to love; love your children by disciplining them." The purpose of disciplining our children is to teach them as a means of loving them. And if it is designed as a means of loving our children, our posture in discipline should be one of love, not of anger.

We talk as much with parents about the importance of them taking time-outs as we do about giving time-outs to their kids. Unless we are in a place to discipline in love (and often times our kids' behavior stirs everything but love in us), then we should do whatever we need to do so that discipline can be about teaching, about shaping and about loving our kids.

A mom I respect said, "I rarely ever discipline without giving myself at least a five minute 'time out' to really think about what I want to say, pay attention to what's going on inside of me, and pray for wisdom. And let's be honest, sometimes five minutes doesn't touch it!"

That's parenting in love with wisdom.

## **Loving and Leading**

*"Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master."*

*-Ephesians 6:4, The Message*

I (Melissa) have heard a lot of parents yelling lately. I may write a book called "Parking Lot Parenting," because it all seems to be in public places. The father grabs his son by the arm and jerks him out of the car. The mother yells at her daughter all the way in to the grocery store. These parents are not so well-acquainted with Paul's words to parents.

Don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Don't yell at them in parking lots. Don't jerk them. Don't give excessive punishment or consequences. Don't put your child down with sarcasm. I know a fifty year-old whose father would yell at her as she was learning to tie her shoes. "You're not doing it fast enough! Are you stupid?" To this day, her hands still shake when she ties her shoes in a hurry.

Don't get me wrong. I know it's easy to get frustrated. Children in these years don't seem to understand the meaning of the word "Hurry" and the word "No" is questionable. But, God (and Paul) still say not to come down hard on them. Fortunately, God doesn't stop there.

I don't know about you, but I'm much more of a tell me what I can do, rather than just what not to do. If you only tell me what not to do, I focus on it and end up doing it more. Paul must have known a few folks like me. So, he gives us more....actually, two more things to help us in raising our sons and daughters.

1. Take them by the hand. John Calvin says "Let them be kindly cherished." God is telling us to have nurturing, intimate, loving relationships with our children. Hug your son. Take your daughter by the hand. Share the kind of affection, both physically and emotionally, that Sissy talked about in Remember the Time.
2. Lead them in the way of the Master. Lead them. To parent is to have strength...to be bigger than your child...to be an authority. You are to lead your child.

In these years, you teach your son and daughter who Jesus is. You impart your faith to them. You teach them how He lived and how they can live their lives in response. As you lead them in the way of the Master, you teach them what that way is.

Don't exasperate your children, but love them and guide them into a relationship with Jesus. You teach your son, your daughter who Jesus is as you reflect the way that He loves. To put it simply, you teach the way He loves by the way you love and lead them.

## Opportunity

We are given so many opportunities in parenting. We began our conversation with Melissa introducing parenting as an opportunity to be stirred and to tap into our own stories. Our friend Dan Allender wrote a book called *How Children Raise Parents*. He discusses parenting as an opportunity for us to grow up as people, to be changed and transformed. Anne Lamott, an author whose work we enjoy, jokingly talks about parenting as an opportunity to connect with our insanity and rage.<sup>2</sup>

We'd say it's all of the above. It's also an opportunity to live the truth of the Gospel in front of our kids. Titus 3:4-5 says that "when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy." We're given a daily opportunity, in the lives of the kids we love, to live out the truth of that scripture, to love our kids for who they are. We're called to love them not for what they do, not how they perform academically or athletically, not for how well they behave or what choices they make, but simply for who they are. That's the kind of love and kindness that has been extended to us and how we're called to love. We weren't saved because of great choices we'd made or how we performed as people. In fact, we got the opposite of what we really deserved. We were saved because of His mercy. We have the great privilege of making that scripture real to our kids when we seek to love and enjoy them for who they are.

Surprise your son or daughter by leaving them a note under their pillow tonight. Write a note reminding them about how grateful you are for the gift of them. Let them discover the note and then read it aloud to them before bed.

## Being Small

*At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children."* -Luke 10:21

When we teach parenting classes, the parents who ask the most questions are always from the same population. They are parents of children in Stage 1—boys or girls.

As a parent of a young boy or girl, you most likely have a lot of questions. Do you take a list when you go to the pediatrician's office? Do you call your mom or friends and say, "When did your daughter start \_\_\_\_\_?" You are hungry for any information that will help you parent your child better. And, honestly, we're glad. It's why you're listening to this podcast and why you've downloaded this study. Your children will be glad, too. Information will help you be a better parent.

Information, however, can also make you very overwhelmed. And this is an overwhelming time as a parent. There is so much to learn and remember. There is so much for them to learn and remember. As we said before, there are just so many needs they have in these first few years. Their brains and bodies are changing rapidly. And your life has changed just as rapidly.

A mom of a newborn recently said, "I just can't do the things I used to. I don't have time to go to all of the Bible studies and book clubs. I'm too tired at night to stay up and read my Bible and my son is standing at the foot of my bed before I can even think of getting up in the morning for my quiet time. I just don't have time to study like I used to, but I sure know how desperately dependent I am on God."

What Jesus is saying in this verse from Luke is that we can be too wise at times. It is possible to be too big for God, but never to be too small. Understanding and information can, at times, lead to pride...to a puffed up sense that you've got it figured out. You know how to parent your child right. Don't, in your desire to get it right, neglect to receive from God.

God reveals things to little children...humble, receptive, dependent little children. So, rather than putting pressure on yourself to get it right, allow yourself to be dependent. You may be surprised at how God reveals himself to you right where you are. As you're reading your son the story of Noah's ark, God reminds you of a promise He still intends to keep. As you pray with your daughter, a co-worker comes to mind who needs your prayer, too. God speaks. He speaks into the heart of a child, no matter what that child's age. He needs our dependence more than He needs our wisdom. It's really His wisdom, after all.

## **Sabbath**

*"Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!"*  
*-Romans 15:13*

We want you to take this day as a Sabbath, every week. There will be 6 devotionals, and then a day to take a Sabbath. Sabbath literally means to rest from labor. Our prayer, today, is that you will find rest and refreshment through Christ. You are in the place He has chosen you to be. God is a god of hope, joy and peace. May He grant you that today and this week in your journey to Raising Boys and Girls.

## Books & Movies

*In the preschool years, we'll simply recommend some children's authors we love, who've written multiple books for children of both genders. Please explore these authors and these series.*

### Books:

1. *Anything by Cynthia Rylant*
2. *Anything by Kevin Henkes*
3. *Anything by Eric Carle*
4. *Anything by Ezra Jack Keats*
5. *The Beatrix Potter Peter Rabbit Series*
6. *The Crockett Johnson Harold Series*
7. *The Arnold Lobel Frog & Toad Series*
8. *The Ludwig Bemelmans Madeline Series*
9. *The Don Freeman Corduroy Series*
10. *The A.A. Milne Complete Tales & Poems of Winnie-the-Pooh Series*

### Movies:

*For preschoolers, we'd recommend exploring the animated versions of the books recommended above. Many classic works of literature have now been made into films using the illustrations from the work. Certain preschoolers and early elementary aged children will be ready to explore some more advanced films. You'll know your individual child's readiness for those animated movies.*

1. *The Toy Story movies*



2. *Wall-E*
3. *Charlotte's Web*
4. *Finding Nemo*
5. *Inside Out*
6. *Frozen*
7. *Cars*
8. *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*
9. *A Charlie Brown Christmas*
10. *The Tale of Despereaux*

## Notes

### Stage 1

<sup>1</sup>Melissa Trevathan and Sissy Goff, *Raising Girls*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 29.

<sup>2</sup>Anne Lamott, *Operating Instructions*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 37.



## THE PODCAST

### Discussion Guide

with Sissy Goff, LPC-MHSP,  
David Thomas, LMSW  
and Melissa Trevathan, MRE  
[raisingboysandgirls.com](http://raisingboysandgirls.com)

# Stage 2

## **The Adventurous Years, Girls, Ages 6-10** **The Lover, Boys, Ages 5-8**

“Girls have a lack of self-consciousness and a sense of freedom that characterizes these years.”

“Boys are full of some their best stuff in this bracket of development.”

The differences we identified from the earliest moments of their lives are accelerated as they grow and develop. Within this next stage of development, we see even more evidence of their growing hearts and minds. During this stage, they begin the elementary school experience. Their cognitive, emotional, and relational worlds become larger and more expansive. Within this stage, we continue to pay attention to who they are and what they need from us. They are absorbing the world around them.

## At A Glance

*A Christmas Story* is a film about a young boy growing up in the 1940's, dreaming of owning a Red Ryder BB gun. There's a classic scene where Ralphie and his friends are gathered around a flag pole during recess when a dare is extended. Not just a dare, but a triple dog dare. We watch as Flick accepts the dare, places his tongue on the cold pole and the boys stand in amazement as it sticks. The bell rings and the boys race to class hoping the situation will magically resolve itself, and the teacher won't notice Flick is missing. It's just a matter of moments before Esther Jean, a little girl seated in the front of the classroom, points to a window overseeing the playground and revealing the scene of the crime.

This scene illustrates well the competitive nature of boys. No boy wants to back down from a triple dog dare in the company of his buddies. The exchange also illustrates boys as experiential learners. The boys weren't satisfied with simply wondering whether a tongue would actually stick, they needed to test that hypothesis. As we discussed earlier, boys tend to act first and think later?

Girls typically don't have that need. They are content to follow a more logical process of thinking first and acting second. Girls would be strongly affected by a circle of peers, but they wouldn't be driven by a need to compete or to experiment with sticking their tongues to a pole.

Esther Jean represents the role girls might likely play in the face of this fiasco. She would be talking about what had happened and reporting the information to others. (Esther Jean is also a reminder that if you want to know what really happened at school during your son's day, call the parents of a girl in your son's classroom).

While some of the emotional and relational needs of boys and girls mirror one another, many are different. We will continue to discuss the hunger that stirs in them, how it is within God's very design for the masculine and feminine heart, and how we can attend to that hunger.

### *A Girl's Hunger*

Let's go back to our friend, Esther Jean. Just why is it that Esther Jean was the one who told on Flick? When the teacher tried to find out what happened, the boys just stared straight ahead, trying to look invisible in their desks. But brave and adventurous Esther Jean raised her hand. Why? Because the relationship Esther Jean had with her teacher mattered more to her than being considered a tattletale by the boys.

Girls are adventurous in these years. They lack a self-consciousness that will be a constant companion in the next stage of development. In what we call the Narcissistic Years, she won't raise her hand as often. She won't volunteer information that might make others dislike or even notice her. But, we're getting ahead of ourselves...and ahead of our girls.

If you were to walk upstairs to your daughter's room at this moment, she would likely be drawing her teacher a picture. She might be giving her dog a dance lesson. She could be outside riding bikes with a friend, or in the kitchen making a "surprise" for her dad's birthday. But, more than likely, she is thick in the middle of one activity with two objectives—one involving adventure and one involving relationship.

We could just as easily call these years the sugar and spice years as we could adventurous. She is living out both characteristics. Your daughter is sweet at this age, much like the Lover stage in a boy's development. She is tender-hearted, intuitive and compassionate. She longs to connect, especially to connect with those she values. She crawls up in her dad's lap to watch a movie. She wants to help her mom make dinner. She draws pictures for her teacher and is just as likely to want a candy bar for her best friend at the grocery as she is for herself. And she does desperately want a best friend. To be invited to a sleep-over makes her heart sing and to be left out of a birthday party is a crushing blow. As in other stages, relationships provide the backdrop for who she believes she is in these adventurous years.

She is also as spice-y as she is sweet. She will race a boy in gym class just as easily as she'll climb a tree. Her spirit is as free as her legs in these six to ten years of a girl's life. She is unhindered by fear of what other's think. She follows her great big heart to new adventures and relationships.

Her spicey-ness can get her into a little trouble in these years, as well. She will struggle with sassiness from time to time. She will toss her head, put her hands on her hips and try on a little disrespect. Or, she will bat her eyes, sidle up to you and do her best to work her feminine little wiles into the beginnings of manipulation. The adventurous years are a time for her to test her strengths and her will, in some of the same ways her brother would and some that are quite different. But all of her tests come out of the courage and compassion, sugar and spice, adventurousness and relational-ness that characterize these years.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Where have you noticed your daughter's hunger for relationship?*

*When has she gotten her feelings hurt by someone she loves? In those times, she needs you to sit with her and listen. In doing so, you will validate her hunger for relationship and help her know that what she feels is important.*

*How could you encourage her compassion?*

*How can you empower her to take more risks? Where is she taking risks already?*

*How can you help her know that you see her as brave, even if you have a daughter who is shy?*

Watch again for opportunities to tell her she's been brave or courageous... compassionate or loving. Every girl continues to want to know that she is delighted in. She hungers for adventure and relationship. She needs you to remind her that she matters and is delighted in by you and by a God who has big, adventurous things in store.

### *A Boy's Hunger*

Along with millions of others across the country, I caught a glimpse of a new Volkswagen commercial during the Super Bowl of 2011. The story follows a little boy, dressed as Darth Vader, attempting to use "the force" around his house. He makes his best attempt at moving the family treadmill, elevating his sister's baby doll, levitating the family dog, the washer and dryer, and a pbj sandwich. Upon hearing his father pull in from work, he races outside committed to using his "powers" on his dad's new Volkswagen. As he waves his hands at the parked car, it suddenly starts with the roar of an engine and the lights illuminating. The young boy is jolted in satisfaction and amazement at his abilities. From the kitchen inside, we see his parents smiling at one another as the dad holds the remote that activated the "force."

This commercial brilliantly depicts some truths about the Lover. He is an imaginative, deeply creative, adventuresome little creature. He is tender and full of wonder and amazement at the world around him. It's common to find him in costume or acting on the playful, adventure-based scripts within his growing mind. Boys at this stage of development benefit from having space and freedom to explore in the outdoors, the safety of their own backyards, and in the castles, forts, clubhouses, and hideaways they will build in their own rooms.

The boy from the commercial, in his desperate attempts to move everything from the family dog to his dad's car, remind us that a boy has a great hunger for power and purpose. The Lover's play will often center around his playing the hero, the all-

star, or whoever holds the most power in the scripts of his mind. He wants to feel powerful and that he has great purpose in the scheme of things.

Our journey of stewarding him will involve assessing the number of healthy opportunities he has to feel purpose and power. We will want to revisit this question again and again. I've long believed that when boys don't have enough healthy outlets, to feel purpose and power, they will seek out destructive ways to accomplish that task. We'll talk later about attending to this need in his adolescence.

In this tender stage, we want to flood him with opportunities where he feels his strength and feels a sense of purpose. Activities like scouting, outdoor adventures, sports (that are more about having, fun, being active and developing skills rather than highly competitive), opportunities to volunteer and serve alongside his family where he experiences that he matters and has something to offer others.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*How much time does your son have to engage in play? How often is he given the opportunity to build, create within his room, romp in the outdoors, and use his imagination?*

*In this stage of his development, where do you see him experience a sense of purpose?*

*What activities allow him to test his strength, to be active, and to experience validation for his abilities?*

*If he plays sports, what are the objectives for the league and for his individual coach?*

*What opportunities for service and outreach could you explore as a family?*

*How could you expand his opportunities within these areas?*



## **The Parent Perspective**

It's a whole new world. These are the years that your child moves from the safety of home...the predictability and the consistency that you have created. And he or she enters the world of school.

School is a transition for so many reasons. There different types of people, different rules, different games, and so many different things to learn—right off the bat. Many kids enter school with a sense of excitement of all that is to come. But, for some, that excitement can quickly transition into fear or even shame. School also is the first time your child will be measured...by someone else. He is given feedback—positive or negative. She is instructed, and sometimes criticized. He is graded, even if those grades are smiley or frowny faces. And as YOUR child is being graded for the first time, it can often feel like you're being graded, as well.

Throughout their growing up, your children will feel, at times, like they are an extension of you. You will have trouble differentiating what you feel from what they feel. Their failures will feel like your own, their hurts, disappointments, and their successes. It's a normal part of parenting. But it is also a part that can make things difficult during these elementary school years.

Even the brightest, strongest, kindest children will struggle as they start school. It might be that she doesn't understand a homework assignment. It may be that he is the first to sit down during a spelling quiz while everyone else is still standing. I (Melissa), spent a good amount of time in the coat room for talking in class, myself. Every child will bump up against difficulty and possibly even shame.

Their shame will often take you back to your own. I have seen many parents react to their children from what is obviously their own experience. A father takes his son to the park. The boys are shooting baskets while his son tries to balance on the bench —by himself. This father reacts, yelling at his son to stop excluding himself and play with the other boys. He was a boy once, himself, who felt left out. A mother whose daughter is taller than the other girls is embarrassed that her daughter is seen as less cute or even lovable and feels her own sense of girl-hood shame rise up.

You will have feelings rise up when your child starts school—and throughout these elementary years. Again, we would pay attention to them. If your reaction feels stronger than the situation warrants, it is a signal that it's more about you than it is about them. And here's what we want you to do:

1. Be aware of your feelings and that they are your feelings, rather than your child's.
2. If you have reacted out of them and gotten angry at your child, apologize. You can even tell him or her that you felt left out when you were growing up. They don't need to hear the whole story, but it can help them to know that you struggled, too.
3. Talk to someone you trust—your spouse or a friend or even a counselor, if you feel it might be warranted.

4. Remember that you are no longer that person. You don't have to feel the spelling test shame or coat room embarrassment any longer. Those experiences don't define you, but God uses them all for His continued glory—in and through you. He can use them to give you an even more compassionate heart for your child in these elementary years.

### **Try it Out—For Parents of Girls**

Several years ago, I was teaching a parenting class on Raising Girls. In it, I talked about the Disney princess syndrome. Now, I am a huge fan of Disney, don't get me wrong. It's actually my favorite vacation spot—still. But, I do have some concerns over the fairy tale ending that takes place in almost every story. Think about it. Cinderella finds her prince. Sleeping Beauty is awakened by a kiss. Ariel gives up her family and fins and everything she knows for hunky Eric. Happily ever after is found solely in her finding the man of her dreams.

There is a precious book called Princess Bubble that takes the traditional fairy tale to task. The gist of the story is that happy ever after's are found in being confident in who God has made you to be and in loving other people. Sounds more like the Gospel than a fairy tale, doesn't it?

When I was teaching on this idea and the importance of our girls gaining confidence in their identity in Christ, rather than a specific relationship or hope for one in the future, one mom in the audience raised her hand. She told me her version—or her husband's version, of Cinderella. These are her words:

"My daughter was going to bed a few months ago. She and her dad had been reading the story of Cinderella together. Night after night, I heard them talking over the baby monitor that sat by her sister's crib. On the night they finished the story, I heard my husband creatively tweak the ending. 'Cinderella met the Prince. They became very good friends. They got to know each other very well and eventually came to love each other very much. They had a royal wedding, with all of their friends. For their honeymoon, Cinderella traded her glass slippers in for hiking boots so they could hike all of the mountains in their beautiful kingdom.' My guess is that he went on to say that Cinderella didn't give up her family but used those hiking boots to visit her mom and dad quite often.

This wise father knew the importance of adventure and relationship in his daughter's life. He spoke to and validated both with his version of an age-old story. He reminded her of the strengths and gifts God has uniquely placed inside of girls.

*How can you remind your daughter of those gifts?*

*How can you continue to encourage her courage and compassion?*

Here are just a few ideas...

Take a day trip somewhere she can learn a new activity. Take her fishing. Teach her to water or snow-ski. Go rock climbing or hiking and tell her, in the midst of the adventure, how you have watched her love and give of herself to others. Remind her of how brave she is, both in her actions and the way she cares.

In terms of relationship, give her opportunities to show kindness to others. Bake a cake together for a new neighbor. Take a meal to a friend who is sick. Have everyone in your family write a note on a holiday to someone whom they think might be sad. Rake leaves for a grandparent. Let her not only be involved, but even take the lead in to whom and how she can give.

Your daughter wants to know she is loved and delighted in. She wants you to see her as brave and courageous. As you give her opportunities to stretch these strengths that God has already placed inside of her, she will continue to gain confidence in who she is and all that she has to offer...and that will continue well beyond these adventurous years.

### **Try it Out—For Parents of Boys**

I have been meeting with a young man named Joseph for several months now. Joseph, a first grader, was bullied by a boy at his school and sometimes finds it difficult to navigate the “triple dog dare” world of boys. Joseph is a great student, has a tender heart and loves reptiles and amphibians of every kind. He lives to visit his grandfather’s farm where he typically finds two to three frogs, a snake and (if he’s lucky) a lizard.

I never know who will accompany Joseph when he comes for our appointments. One week it was a frog named Ollie, and one week a lizard named Eddie. He almost always brings an aquarium of frogs and a bag of crickets. While we talk about his experiences at school, we feed crickets to Ollie and his roommates. Although Joseph does well in school, he’d just as soon spend his days with Ollie, Eddie and the gang, stomping in a creek or exploring at his grandfather’s farm. He is everything I love about most boys at this age – tender, curious, adventurous, imaginative, compassionate, engaging and kind-hearted.

Joseph, like many boys his age, can’t self-regulate well and requires a good amount of redirection. He gets lost in a world of imagination and exploration more than he remembers to write his name on his spelling test, finish his chores, comb his hair or lift the lid. When boys are mean to him at school, he is confused and hurt by their words and actions. He feels things deeply.

He is in the game of life for the fun and adventure. He loves to run and play basketball with his dad. He is fascinated by small things, still loves to read a chapter book with his mom, and he believes his grandfather is one of the most extraordinary men who ever walked the earth. I remind his parents often that, despite the challenges that come with raising boys in this stage, this is about as good as it gets.

As I mentioned before, getting access to a boy’s mind and heart is one of the greater ongoing challenges in the journey of parenting boys. I’d continue to recommend the idea of talking around a task. Boys are spatially strong and typically advanced in their gross motor skills. A wise move is to play to these strengths when you engage him in conversation. If you can talk while creating with Legos, feeding crickets to a frog, building a model plane, shooting hoops or passing a football, he will be utilizing his gifts and talking at times without realizing he is talking. I love to hear moms share stories of having rich conversations with boys while walking the family dog, while later getting access to him over a game of tennis. Dads share stories with me of learning about the things their son is dealing with while throwing a Frisbee at a park or having their son assist them while building or repairing something around the house. These wise parents understand the benefit of talking around a task and avoiding the trap of simply asking questions in the car and getting one-word answers.

*What are the things you think about the most?*

*Who is the friend who has been the most loyal to you?*

*What are the hardest things about being a boy?*

*What do you love the most about being a boy?*

*If you could have one superhero power, what would it be and how would you use it?*

*Has there been a time that you were courageous enough to stand up for a friend who was being teased?*

## Like a Child

*"For an answer Jesus called over a child, whom he stood in the middle of the room, and said, 'I'm telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God's kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me.'"*  
-Matthew 18:2-4, The Message

Caroline and Ashley wear tutus when they come to counseling. One is black and one is pink. Sometimes they have on flats with their tutus and sometimes tennis shoes. I (Sissy) have learned that the rest of the outfit really doesn't matter...it's the tutus that tell the story.

These adorable sisters are both in the adventurous years. Girls in their narcissistic years wouldn't wear tutus on a double—or even triple dog dare. When I walk downstairs, they've typically drawn pictures of either me or my little dog, Lucy. For Christmas, they went to a pottery painting place and made her dog bowls that said "Woff Woff" around the edges. (They also gave her a bejeweled, pink satin coat which she has yet to agree to). They are everything sweet and spicy about this age in a little girl's development. They both have a way of making everyone that encounters them feel loved, mostly because they are so hungry to be loved and enjoyed themselves.

I think that's the simple and elemental part that strikes me about children. They are hungry and there is no question that they are. Sometimes, when I see Caroline or Ashley, they run up to me and jump for me to catch them in a hug. I can't even imagine having the confidence or trust to run and jump toward someone in that way.

I also have a hard time imagining myself in this story in Matthew. "Jesus called over a child whom he stood in the middle of the room." Picture the scene with me for a second. A group is gathered around Jesus listening to his wise words. Adults are craning their necks to get the best view. Children are pushing their way to the front, to see what all the fuss is about. Jesus spots one of those children and calls him to the front of the crowd. What is not said in the text is what happened next. The child came. Jesus called the child and the child walked to the front of the crowd.

When I picture myself in the same situation, I'm honestly not sure I would come. I picture myself looking behind me to see who in the world he could be calling...surely not me. I would get embarrassed, my face would turn red and I would unconsciously step backward rather than forward. My response would be anything but simple and elemental. But he called the child and the child came. Caroline and Ashley would do the same thing.

There is so much that we can learn from the responsiveness of children in these years. There is so much we can learn from their hunger and their openness to Jesus. I remember watching one girl at 2nd-4th session at Hopetown weep as we sang worship songs. Oh, how I hunger for that kind of hunger for Jesus.

Listen to your son talk about what he's learning about God. Watch your daughter as she worships. Ask them why they love Jesus and who He is to them. Have them draw pictures of God or write poems about Him.

In Isaiah 11:6, it gives a picture of heaven and the peace that will govern all who live there. The verse ends with "and a little child will lead them."

Where can your child lead you today? How can you learn from his or her faith? How can you get back to a childlike place in your own faith? To the simple and elemental responsiveness that Jesus calls us to? He is calling you...



## Spilt Milk

Last night, we were at dinner with friends who have a son that is a Lover. He is also a burgeoning perfectionist. They told us a story about how angry he got with himself for not being able to kick a soccer ball through a goal the very first time he tried. He yelled and cried and blamed it on everyone standing in close proximity.

As we talked about how to encourage him, his mom said “I literally remember when I would spill milk at the table when I was growing up. It just wasn’t okay. And it’s my instinct to respond exactly the same way—even though I know better.”

We talked about grace as a need for girls in this stage of development. It is undoubtedly a need for boys, as well. They start to become aware of their failure in these years. We need to talk about that failure. Make it a normal topic around the dinner table. Get ice cream when his soccer team wins or loses. Say “oh, well” over spilled milk. But first, we have to say “oh well” to our own.

Easier said than done, we know. You have gotten as far as you have in the business world because you know how to push yourself. You have close friends because you work hard at keeping them. You want your children to grow up to be responsible just like you have. Your parents expected a lot out of you. And you naturally expect a lot out of your children.

But how are you when you fail? Do you beat yourself up? Are you hard on yourself? Critical of yourself? A friend once told me (Sissy) about a youtube video of a professional pommel horse gymnast. He ran to place his hands on the horse and missed. Instead, he hit it square in the chest. He slowly picked himself up off the floor, walked back to the end of the line and picked up a nearby folding chair and broke it over his own head. My friend told me this because it is, in essence, what I do to myself often. I would guess you might from time to time, as well.

At Hopetown several years ago, Melissa said, “Jesus doesn’t ask us to try harder. Instead, He makes us new.” His mercies are new every morning...every mistake...and every spilt milk.

Your son and daughter cannot learn those mercies—that sense of forgiveness and grace until you learn it yourself. He or she might hear your words but will see something different in the way you treat yourself.

What is an area in your life that you need to accept Christ’s forgiveness? He is a God who is rich in mercy and mighty to save. Period. We would encourage you to pray to know His mercies on a daily basis...for yourself and for your child.

*“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”  
-Ephesians 2:4-5*

## A Marky Challenge

*"What a wildly wonderful world, God! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side, made earth overflow with your wonderful creations."*

*-Psalm 104:24, The Message*

"We are on a grand adventure." Marky said these words just after she had been admitted to the hospital for a headache and slurred speech. Who is Marky? You might be wondering. She is a friend of ours who has loved all three of us, our families and our dogs for over ten years. And, just a few short days after the adventure began, Marky was diagnosed with a Stage 4, malignant, aggressive, inoperable brain tumor.

All of us who know Marky are devastated. Prayers and encouragement have come to Marky by email, social media message and regular mail, like letters shooting out of the Dursley's chimney in Harry Potter. She has been flooded with love and sympathy from those around her.

But Marky is still on her adventure. On her Caring Bridge site, she posted a picture the next day—the day after she found out about this tumor—of her in the snow. "I had a wonderful walk in the snow last night. I was enthralled by the crystal quality of the snow. The cold air made me feel alive." Marky was diagnosed with cancer and went for a walk in the snow.

Marky's youngest daughter, Amanda, has been by her side constantly. Marky and Amanda are two who have enjoyed each other immensely over the years. As a matter of fact, the story Sissy tells about the mom and daughter dancing in the grocery store is about the two of them. Amanda is now in her early twenties and has also been writing on her mom's website.

"Take an opportunity to do something Mom would do this weekend...a Marky challenge, if you will. It can be anything. Be adventurous and try something new, show someone kindness, be silly."

In these Lover and Adventurous years, your children live this way quite naturally. We enjoy watching them and the spontaneity they so naturally have. But as we get older, we lose that sense of playfulness. We get too weighted down to live in that kind of freedom. Let's learn from our lovers and adventurers...and from Marky. It is a wildly wonderful world He has made, after all. Maybe we can all use a Marky challenge.

## Dancing

*"You've turned my mourning into dancing. You've taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy."*  
-Psalm 30:11

One of my (Melissa's) favorite memories with my mom and brother is dancing. We would all be doing something in the living room—I can't really remember what. But all of a sudden there was music. It didn't matter if it was real or imagined. And we would find ourselves dancing. Dancing and leaping and running in a circle. There was no form. There was no right way to do it. We were just dancing with joy and freedom.

Flash forward to my twelve year-old self. I was in the midst of those narcissistic years that Sissy mentioned earlier. My parents made me take dancing lessons. I can still hear Elvis Presley's voice singing over and over again, "It's Now or Never" and trying to get those steps right. I still hate that song today.

But when I was a girl, dancing wasn't about steps or form. It was an expression of joy. In the Bible, dancing is symbolic of joy, as well. When David dances before the Lord, he is expressing his joy.

When was the last time you felt joy? When was the last time you danced? Even laughed from deep inside? Several years ago, I met with a woman who is a trusted spiritual director in our community. We talked for a long time about counseling and it being a helping profession. She said to me, "Melissa you are giving of yourself every day. You hear sorrow so often that it is imperative that you pray for joy."

You are in a helping profession, as well, as a parent. And you are the primary receptacle for your family's sorrow. They come to you with their hurt, disappointment and their anger. It is hard to feel joy in the midst of carrying such a heavy load. But God wants you to experience freedom. He wants to be the lifter of your head. He wants you to feel joy.

In fact, he wants to turn your sorrow into joy. He wants you to experience that same kind of freedom your son and daughter do as they twirl and run and leap. Pray for joy today. Pray that you can find your joy in Him. You don't have to get the steps right or learn the right moves. You can be free to dance and sing and laugh, as a child of a God who loves you immensely.

## **The Practice of Presence**

*"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."*

*Romans 12: 15, NIV*

Years ago, I co-authored a book called *Becoming a Dad: A Spiritual, Emotional and Practical Guide*. It was a book for new and expectant fathers. The book was designed to serve as a sort of road map to guide new fathers along the journey of stepping into parenthood. One of the realities for dads is that we, as males, are wired for activity. We are action-oriented creatures, where women tend to be more process-oriented. There are many different ways that we parent from these strengths within our design as mothers and fathers, and ways in which this wiring works against us.

One of the hurdles for many fathers is the practice of presence - simply sitting with our kids in all the moments of life. We tend to embrace the moments of celebration. It's being with our kids in the heartache of life that it gets complicated and begins to feel like unfamiliar territory - when our daughters don't get asked to a dance, when our sons aren't chosen for a team, when our kids experience disappointment, rejection and failure.

Our kids need us to rejoice with them and to mourn with them. There will be moments of both throughout the journey of parenting. Many times they don't need us to do or fix anything. They simply want us to be in it with them.

So often we see their disappointment, failure or heartache as an invitation to intervene. Intervening often communicates to kids that we don't believe they are capable of solving a problem, or the pain of dealing with it would be too great for them. Either way, there is a hidden message of "I don't believe in you enough to let you navigate this on your own."

We believe that struggle builds resilience in our kids. Resilience is like a muscle. It's a weaker muscle in some kids. It's a muscle that needs to be utilized and strengthened.

Be willing to mourn with your kids. Celebrate with them when it's time to celebrate. Be in all moments of life with them. Practice the art of being present.

Consider one area where you could take a step back and allow your kids to problem-solve in ways that might bring about growth and maturity.

## **Does it Hurt?**

Like many Christian parents, my wife and I have prayed from the moment our children were born that they would grow into an understanding of what it means to live a life of faith, to embrace the rich truth of the scriptures, and to have an intimate, authentic relationship with Christ. As my boys graduated into becoming Lovers, it became evident to me that this supernatural work was stirring in their hearts. One of my sons began asking deeper questions and contemplating this truth he had been introduced to early on. Conversations about faith became more frequent and more detailed. One sacred day, our conversation looked like this.

My son: "Dad, I need to ask you some questions. If Jesus lives in me will he stay for my whole life?"

Me: "Yes, he doesn't come and go. He lives with you forever and promises to never leave you."

My son: "Remember when you talked about the other one - the Holy Spirit one? If He comes inside of me, like you said, is it going to hurt?"

My little guy's question about "the other one" is an accurate picture of where he is in his cognitive development. He's a concrete thinker. The world is very black and white. He thinks in concrete terms. In that moment, he wanted to understand the physicality of what was meant in John 14:15-17 (NIV), when Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with and will be in you."

I went on to assure him there's no physical pain involved in the Holy Spirit entering the body. It doesn't involve a surgical procedure of any kind.

The truth of the matter is that once my son develops abstract thinking, he will begin to understand it did involve surgery. In order for the Holy Spirit to establish residency in me, it required open heart surgery. I needed a new heart.

And in order for Him to live in me, it means it will hurt. I have hurt more since that heart surgery took place in my life than ever. His presence in me means that my heart breaks and aches over the things I see and experience around me. Because He lives in me, when I see hunger, injustice, or oppression, it grieves me and the Spirit in me. And truthfully, I want to hurt in this way. As believers, we want our hearts to be grieved when we taste the heartache of living in a fallen world.

My son feels that ache already. He has tasted the reality that not all things will be made right this side of Heaven. My job is to walk with him and demonstrate what a life of faith looks like on a grown up. That's a weighty responsibility.

Consider today what your son or daughter sees when he or she observes a life of faith on you as an adult. How would they define what it means by watching you, not listening to your words, but listening to your life?

## **Sabbath**

*"Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!"*  
*-Romans 15:13*

We want you to take this day as a Sabbath, every week. There will be 6 devotionals, and then a day to take a Sabbath. Sabbath literally means to rest from labor. Our prayer, today, is that you will find rest and refreshment through Christ. You are in the place He has chosen you to be. God is a god of hope, joy and peace. May He grant you that today and this week in your journey to Raising Boys and Girls.

# Books & Movies

## **Books:**

1. *Anything by C.S. Lewis*
2. *Anything by E.B. White*
3. *Anything by Shel Silverstein*
4. *Anything by Beverly Cleary*
5. *Anything by Roald Dahl*
6. *Anything by Katherine Paterson*
7. *The L.M. Montgomery Anne of Green Gables Series*
8. *The Lemony Snicket A Series of Unfortunate Events Series*
9. *The Madeleine L'Engle Time Quintet*
10. *The Rick Riordan Percy Jackson Series*

## **Movies:**

1. *Babe*
2. *Dolphin Tale*
3. *The BFG*
4. *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial*
5. *Up*
6. *Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey*
7. *Akeelah and The Bee*
8. *Mary Poppins*
9. *The Sound of Music*



10. *The Wizard of Oz*
11. *The Lego Movies*
12. *The Iron Giant*
13. *Fly Away Home*
14. *Hugo*
15. *It's a Wonderful Life*
16. *October Sky*
17. *Whale Rider*
18. *Remember the Titans*
19. *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope*
20. *Million Dollar Arm*
21. *McFarland USA*
22. *Chariots of Fire*
23. *Soul Surfer*
24. *The Miracle Season*
25. *Hidden Figures*



# Stage 3

## **The Narcissistic Years, Girls, Ages 11-14 The Individual, Boys, Ages 9-12**

*"This episode of life has been called the most frightening episode of life a girl will experience. We would say that it is also the most frightening a parent of a girl will experience, as well."*

*"Boys will begin experimenting with breaking the rules in this stage. You want to function like the Department of Homeland Security. He needs us to be invested, involved, engaged and aware."*

It has been said, for many years, that girls mature faster than boys. This is the session when it becomes most obvious. Boys are still coming down from The Lover stage. They are seeking to understand themselves and engage in the world around them, but want and trust you to help guide them in the process. They are individuating, but want to individuate while still being connected to you, as their parents. Girls have taken their adventurousness and run with it—and are often, it feels like, running as far away as possible from you and from who they were just a few short years (or months...maybe days?) ago.

## At A Glance

They sat on the couch opposite us. David and I each were in chairs, armed with all of the wisdom we hoped to offer this brother and sister who were once again at odds... and at very loud odds, we should say.

Their mom asked us to meet with them together. We had done so several times over the past few years, since their parents' divorce. We had gone over ways to help them get along better, code words they could use to take a break when one or the other was escalating, and activities they could do together to strengthen their relationships. But here we were in the midst of their fighting—all over again.

We do need to include the fact that Josh is in the Individual stage. He is funny, a little subversive with his sister, and wiggly at 11 years old. Jennifer is in all of her narcissistic glory at 13. She feels awkward in her own skin and that awkwardness comes out in the way she sits, the way she talks and at the way she regularly rolls her eyes at her brother.

As we talked through their last argument, Josh was quick to say, "Jennifer stops before I do. She knows how to walk away." (Still the sweetness of the lover stage bleeding through.)

"Yes, I do," said the all-knowing Jennifer.

As she added her mental points to the scoreboard, he spoke out to say, "but she won't wake up on time and makes me late for school. She spends hours in front of the mirror. And then I get mad. She thinks everyone's supposed to do what she wants."

"No I don't," Jennifer interrupted. "It takes girls longer to get ready. I don't expect someone who barely combs their hair to understand that."

We decide to hit the pause button before World War III ensued. It's easy to see how these two could get stuck, each defending their position.

Through Josh's words, you can hear him wanting to assert himself. He wants to be respected. He is growing in strength, but still has enough kindness to see his part in the conflict. He has stepped out of the Lover stage and into the Individual. There is evidence still of where he's been. We see lingering elements of the tender, obedient, relational little guy we knew, while witnessing evidence of a young man in search of his identity, and attempting to find his voice.

This next stage of his development involves him wrestling with his sense of himself. By nine to ten, a boy's brain is beginning to look deeply into what it means to be a man. He is curious about all things masculine in ways he simply couldn't be before. He is evolving and beginning to change. While girls continue ahead in the development race, and will begin experiencing changes in their bodies earlier and at a more advanced pace, he will trail behind with a slower, more gradual evolution.

He will experiment more with breaking the rules outside of home and needs us to be invested, involved and aware. This is the most common window for a boy to have his first exposure to internet pornography. He needs safeguards on the technology he has access to within our home and beyond. Equally so, he needs us to be strategic and diligent in our parenting, asking great questions when he spends time at other homes, and working to safeguard his heart and mind.

He needs us to flood him with information about his changing body, and the emotions that accompany those changes. As he edges toward adolescence, we want the Individual to feel armed and informed. We don't wait on the changes to take place and then give information. We want to stay a step ahead of his development. Puberty needs to be put in a physical, emotional and spiritual context.

Equally important is that he have experiences in relationship with us where we are simply enjoying him for him. We aren't just celebrating good grades (achievements) or game victories (performances), but simply celebrating the way God made him and participating in the things he loves to do. We want times with the Individual that are void of instruction, discipline, teaching or shaping. Those are all important ingredients, but he needs time with us that don't involve those elements.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Are you having an ongoing conversation with him about his growing body, his developing emotions, and understanding relationships with the opposite sex?*

*What safeguards do you have in place within your home to safeguard his mind and heart? What are your family rules on media and technology?*

*What are two to three things your son enjoys within this season of his development? Set aside time to be about those things with him. Let him teach you something about one of these areas of enjoyment – play a video game with him, inquire about a book he is reading, have him show you a new skill or move he's learned in a sport he loves, listen to some music he's enjoying or teach you a new guitar lick.*

*What outlets exist for the individual to test his strength, stretch his mind, and provide opportunities for risk and adventure?*

*How are you as a family modeling outreach, service and giving? What opportunities exist for him to feel a sense of purpose?*

*Identify an area (academic, athletic, chores) where you can take a step back, creating more opportunity for him to develop responsibility or strengthen his resilience, and allowing you be less involved?*

Jennifer doesn't quite know what to do with herself. She has one foot tentatively placed in childhood and is doing her best to stomp her other into adulthood. She doesn't know who she is and sure doesn't know who to be. The hours she spends in front of the mirror are just a reflection of the insecurity she feels in not only the way she looks on the outside, but also in who she is on the inside.

Girls, in these years, are emotionally all over the map. We often compare them to the Tasmanian Devil from the Warner Brothers cartoons. They have hormones surging through their brains and bodies. They have the hiccups in confidence that we talked about in the podcast. Her brain is growing at such an accelerated pace that it actually malfunctions. And when it does, it primarily affects two things: her memory and her confidence. The Tasmanian Devil. She comes into most rooms spinning and takes everything and everyone up in the swirling process. Girls in their Narcissistic Years have a lot working against them. And so what do they do with all of the chaos and confusion they're feeling? You already know the answer, if you have a daughter in these years. They often take it out on you, as their parents.

We have had countless—literally countless parents over the years say some version of the same comment, “I don't know what happened. Yesterday, she was all smiles and would crawl up on my lap to watch a show. Today, she doesn't want to be seen with me. She is angry at us and embarrassed by us constantly. It's like a switch flipped and she changed overnight.”

It is the most frightening episode of life you and she will experience. But she needs you to hang in there with her. She will push against you with all of the strength that she has in her little ambivalent self. But she is pushing against you because she wants to know that you won't move. She needs your consistency. With wisdom and unpredictability, she needs you to hold tight to boundaries but not get swept up in the drama that is often swirling around her. She needs your voice speaking into who she is, how she's changing emotionally, socially and spiritually. She needs you to help her navigate the pressure she feels in real time and on social media. She needs your kindness and your belief in her even when she is being the worst version of herself.

She needs you to enjoy her. And she needs you to continue to delight in her so that you and she can both remember that there is something delightful in her—even when it feels difficult to see.

**Discussion Questions:**

*If your daughter has already moved into the narcissistic years, what was the transition like for you? For her?*

*Where do you see her insecurity?*

*What are some characteristics you see in her (even in her narcissism) that you could remind her of?*

*What does she enjoy?*

*How could you enjoy some of those things with her?*

*Where do you need to be more consistent?*

*Where and to whom are you able to talk when things get hard with your daughter?*

## **The Parent Perspective**

What music genre is your favorite? Over the years, mine has gradually moved from Top 40 to Easy Listening to now the dreaded “Oldies.” I like oldies, although I don’t particularly appreciate the word “oldies.”

Recently, I’ve started listening to XM Radio. XM is much more gracious to aging music...and aging people. Instead of an “Oldies” station, they name their stations by decades. The 40’s is simply called the 40’s...not uber-oldies or anything like that. The decades run all the way up to the 90’s. Soon, they’ll probably have a 00’s, for all of that generation that is already starting to make the oldies progression. My favorite happens to be the 60’s. I turn on the radio and immediately start tapping my toes. The music just makes me feel good.

A song comes on and I am transported. The other day, I heard the beginning strains of “dee doody doom doom” and was sitting, not in my car, but in my friend’s aunt’s car on the way to Florida. I was 12 all over again, with my three friends singing as loudly as we can, “Seven little girls sittin’ in the backseat huggin’ and a ‘kissin’ with Fred.” Not that we were kissing Fred, or even knew anything about Fred, or kissin’ for that matter, but we sang that song with all of the emotion our stage 4 little selves could muster.

I would guess music does the same for you. It takes you back. You may not be able to remember which President was in office or which history class you took in 6th grade, but you can remember every word to a particular song. You hear the opening notes and your mind is flooded with memories...where you were, who you were with, even what you had on.

Since being reminded of Fred and the girls in the backseat (which is, now that I think about it, a little concerning), I’ve been wondering why it is that our memories are so vividly tied to music—and particularly to music from early adolescence. The answer that makes the most sense to me is emotion.

Our early teenage years are undoubtedly one of the most emotional times of our lives. We’re beginning to be more self-aware. Girls are more self-absorbed and narcissistic. Boys are becoming aware of the world around them and their impact on it. In these years, we felt every bit of the heights of joy and the depths of extreme sorrow. You can see it in your children today. A mom of twelve year old twins brought them in for their first counseling session and said, “Well, their names are Allison and Catherine, but we call them Trauma and Drama.”

And they are. Boys and girls are dramatic and experiencing trauma, each in their own way. We were, too. And it takes only a few bars of our favorite songs of those times to take us back.

But we can also be taken back in other ways. Your daughter is getting ready to try out for cheerleading. You seem to be more invested in her getting her round-off



back-handspring than she is. Maybe it's because you still remember the pain you felt when you tried out and didn't make it.

As a kid, you never felt your dad's approval. No matter how poorly or well you played in a basketball game, your dad had something negative to say. And, now, you have a son with a lot of talent. You push him—sometimes too hard, but it's just because you don't want others to criticize him the way you were criticized. A memory, a flash, a failure, and you're taken right back.

We remember the joy and the pain of our early teenage years...maybe especially the pain. Pain is like that. When you feel it, all of your attention is immediately drawn there—even if it's just a stubbed toe. It's hard to think about anything else. Emotional pain can do the same thing to us. When, as an eleven year-old, you were left out of every birthday party and sleepover, it's hard to not become an adult who is hyper-sensitive to rejection. It's that whole idea again that we are every age we've ever been. And this age probably stirs up more of our pain than any other.

As a parent, these are the years that can really challenge your perspective the most. Because your past can color that perspective. It can make you push...or protect your child more than you would have because of your experiences when you were his or her age.

What memories are being stirred up in you in these years? What songs take you back and what do they take you back to? How do you move on from a past that was so painful that it feels like yesterday, rather than fifteen, twenty, or even thirty years ago?

One of the primary differences in you and your child is your ability to act. They are often, in these years, simply reacting. They're often not really in control—of their emotions or their decisions. Someone hurts them and they hit or hurt back. You ground them and they roll their eyes. They are impulsive and reactionary as a part of their makeup as teenagers.

But you don't have to be. You are an adult now, even though you may still be living with pain from those years. But you are no longer bound by that impulsivity. You don't have to react out of the pain of your past. You can choose to act. You can choose to parent them differently than you were parented. You can treat them differently than you were treated. And we have a few suggestions that might help:

1. Pay attention to the memories that are stirred in you.
2. Identify and talk about the feelings with someone you trust.
3. Pray that God will help you see yourself as you are now...as a parent armed with God's wisdom and truth—who is free to love and act, rather than simply react.

## Try It Out—For Parents of Girls

*"To the degree that kids can predict you, they'll dismiss you."*

These words are the first sentence in Melissa and my book, *The Back Door to Your Teen's Heart*. They're also the first words that describe the conversations in countless cars across the country every afternoon.

You pick your twelve year-old daughter up from school. "How was your day," you congenially ask.

"Fine," she grunts.

"What did you do in school today?"

"Nothing," another grunt.

And there you have it. You're not only dismissed but left with silence for the entire car ride home.

With teenagers, that's what happens when you come through the front door. (These same ideas will hold true for boys in the next stage of their development.)

Figuratively and sometimes literally, you get the door slammed in your face. More examples of the front door involve statements such as, "Let's spend some quality time together." "We haven't talked in a while. Tell me what's going on in your life." You get the picture.

So let's think about coming in through the back door. We gave one example in the podcast involving coffee. Teenage girls think coffee is cool. Another example, for girls, could have to do with anything else they love...clothes, cell phones, social media, cell phones, friends, cell phones.

Choose something she loves and feels like she knows a lot about. Tell her how much you value her opinion (even if it's mostly just in this area). You can have her help you go through your closet and get rid of old clothes, if she loves fashion. She could teach you how to use a certain feature on your cell phone. She could help you set up or update your social media account.

If you ask her to help you, she will feel a little power and a little respect, two things she's craving in this stage of life. And she will also feel important...something she doesn't feel very often in these years. (We promise she doesn't, even though she acts as if the world revolves around her.) Then, as you're going through the closet, you can ask her about the party she went to the night before. =Or, sitting at the computer together, you can ask her how it's going with a friend she was having trouble with. And, all of a sudden, she finds herself talking to you because she doesn't think she's supposed to. That's the back door.

What does it look like for you to connect to your daughter in a way that is both unpredictable and relational? For me, Sissy, the back door doesn't come naturally.

I'm much more of a front door, Type A kind of person—which is why Melissa came up with this back door concept, rather than me. For me to connect with girls in this way requires a strong foundation of prayer and good dose of creativity. And time. It takes forethought on my part. It might on yours, too. And, by the way, unpredictability doesn't equal inconsistency in your parenting style. You can still be direct and concrete in her discipline. She needs you to be. She needs predictability in her consequences and your strength as a parent. But you invite a different kind of both conversation and relationship when you wander unpredictably through the back door.

## **Try it Out—For Parents of Boys**

I (David) have vivid memories of my son's playing years of basketball. The season ended with a tournament - a local version of March Madness. It was always a double elimination tournament and one year our team had made it to day three with only one loss. We'd either be eliminated or crowned the champions. Needless to say, adrenaline and testosterone permeated my home. My wife could hardly wait for this event (she agrees with the "Madness" part of the title) to come to a close.

We stepped into the gymnasium on day three and the place smelled of basketballs, bleachers, sweat and all things boy. The room was full of young athletes, racing up and down the court, fighting for a victory. The bleachers were filled with parents, grandparents, siblings, friends and fans who'd devoted their weekend to the young men on the court. Some of the adults came to cheer, some of them came to celebrate, some came to support, and most came with cameras. Everyone seemed hopeful for a victory for their team - a chance to advance on to the next bracket.

Any time I'm trapped inside an athletic arena with boys and adults, there's always much to observe. Quite honestly, I think most of us expose ourselves in this context. We show up for who we really are. The best and the worst of who we are seems to seep out in athletic arenas involving kids. Men, in particular, tend to expose themselves in this context.

We arrived early to meet up with our team and I had a chance to watch while my boys talked strategy with their coaches and teammates. The teams playing before us were of the same age, but more advanced in their skill and ability. Their parents appeared to be more advanced in their skill and ability as well. I say this because despite each team being equipped with coaches, this group of parents (as is often the case) felt a need to coach from the sidelines. They were yelling commands, ideas, strategies, and recommendations from the sidelines. While the coaches were calling out plays from one side of the court, the parents were doing the same from the other side. One young man looked distressed as his coach yelled to him from the east side while his dad leaped off the bleachers and combed the boundary yelling at him from the west side. His dad was pounding his fist in the air while the veins on the side of his neck pulsated and flexed.

When the referee called a foul on one of his teammates, this dad started stomping and screaming at the referee (who I'm guessing to be 15 years old). The coach began harmonizing as this young referee got a taste of what this boy had been experiencing - two adult males yelling at him from either side. I couldn't understand what the father was yelling, but it didn't sound favorable by the color of his neck and face.

Sadly we could duplicate this scene in a thousand cities across the U.S. It might involve a basketball, a soccer ball, a football, or a baseball. Wherever boys are playing a sport and parents are watching, this scene could unfold.

I once counseled a young man who experienced his own version of the scene I just described. He was dribbling near the sidelines, trying to remember the play, identify

which teammate was open, dribble the ball despite a full court press, all while his coach yelled from one side and his dad from another. The intensity became too great and this 3rd grader stopped dribbling, held the ball and screamed, “will everyone please stop yelling at me? I’m trying to think!!!”

This boy put words to what I believe thousands of boys would like to scream out from the court or field at sporting events. It really doesn’t take much to overload or flood the male brain. Moms do it every day when they call out multi-step instructions as a boy crosses the threshold of his home after school.

“Leave your muddy shoes on the front porch.”

“Jump on your homework because we’ve got dinner in an hour and you have a math test tomorrow.”

“Grab a quick shower because we’re going to call your aunt tonight – it’s her birthday.”

“Let the dog out before you get your books out. He hasn’t been out in hours.”

Hearing this sequence of requests often leaves a boy meandering about the house, trying to remember the first one. Dads often flood a boy’s brain with instruction around his performance, much like the above mentioned examples. Three rules to keep in mind.

1. If we turn our sons over to capable coaches and educators, it’s our job to become cheerleaders. He needs enjoyment and support, not to be flooded with instruction. He has a coach/teacher, your job is to be a parent.
2. We can’t pay enough attention to ourselves when boys compete. Athletic experiences are designed to teach boys skills, encourage sportsmanship, keep boys active, and to provide a context for problem-solving, experiencing victory and defeat, being a part of a team, and most importantly to have fun. It’s about him and not about us.
3. One of our objectives is to teach boys to disagree with others with respect. When we rail against referees and coaches from the sidelines, or a teacher in the hallway, we’re modeling something different than we are asking of boys.

A courageous parent is willing to ask a boy questions like “how am I doing as a spectator when I come to your games? What could I do more or less of when I’m sitting on the sidelines? How could I support you more?”

Ask questions of this nature regarding his academic journey. “How can I best support you as a student? Where would you like me to be less involved? Where would you like me to be more involved?”

We will straddle the fence of involvement/independence over the next two stages of his development. He will desperately need us to provide opportunities for independence as we stay involved and invested with the Individual.

## Sheep Among Wolves

*"Stay alert. This is hazardous work I'm assigning you. You're going to be like sheep running through a wolf pack, so don't call attention to yourselves. Be as cunning as a snake, inoffensive as a dove."*  
-Matthew 10:16, *The Message*

Matthew 10:16 is the verse with which we start off our book, *The Back Door to Your Teen's Heart*. It explains the concept—in very different terms. Rather than Jesus sending out the disciples, it is our version of sending you out...right back into your homes. One of you is the sheep and one of you is the wolf. Guess which is which?

You guessed it. You are the sheep running through a wolf pack. Tweens, pre-teens and teens all have several things in common with wolf packs. They stick together. They often don't think for themselves but follow each other into whatever the alpha/mean girl/cool guy says. They can be snarly and snippy whenever they want.

As for you, we do know you're much smarter than a sheep. But we're also sure you have some sheep-y moments as a parent. "Why is he being so rude to me?" "She never appreciates me." You don't understand why, but the wolves just keep snarling and circling.

So what's a sheep—or parent to do?

1. Don't call attention to yourselves. To come through the front door is to call attention to yourself. "We need to spend some quality time together." Nope. Doesn't go over so well. Think again about that back door concept.
2. Be as cunning as a snake, inoffensive as a dove.

I (Melissa) had a pretty amazing grandmother. She lived to be over 103 years old. She also was a dyed-in-the-wool Baptist. At 100, she told me that she had just learned something new from her cleaning lady. She learned that other people were going to Heaven if they believed in Jesus, not just the Baptists. She taught me lots of truths over the years—

One truth she taught me without ever saying much. It was at her 100th birthday party. All of her family and friends were gathered around and she was laying on the couch by the fire. I heard my name clearly over the noise of the crowd, "LIS." And when my grandmother called, I came. I walked over to her. She grabbed my hand and squeezed tight. "I pray for you every day." Then, with her other hand, she stretched her crooked finger right up into my face and said, "Now you be good." By the way, I was well into my 40's at the time.

We have a whole section of our book called "Holding their Hands and Pointing your Finger." That idea goes with the verse in Matthew. As a parent of a child in these years, it is important to hold their hands. You want to be inoffensive, dove-like, tender, connected, relational—as much as they'll let you.

But then, they need you to be cunning. They need you to hold up your crooked finger and be the parent. Give them consequences. "I will not let you talk to your mother that way because I believe that you are a much kinder, respectful young man than you're acting right now." "You will make up your little brother's bed for a week, since you seem to want to be his mother already." Parent in ways that are as cunning as a snake. Be unpredictable. But be relational at the same time.

Hold his hand. Point your finger. Be as wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove. Love her through the back door and all the way through the chaos of these tween/pre-teen/teenage years.



## Unity

Many years ago, I (David) took my sons to a camp in North Carolina hosting a Father/Son weekend. It's a camp for boys in the beautiful mountains of Tuxedo, North Carolina. As you step onto the campus of this refuge for boys, there is a sign hanging over the main hall that reads "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity." The words are from Psalm 133:1. I love those words and I want to consider all of what is meant in the truth of those words.

My wife took an art class years ago and took that scripture and created this beautiful piece of art that hangs in my son's room. The art was created with paint, old vintage pieces from our family's history and those rich words.

In case you are wondering, my boys don't always live in unity with one another. In fact, some days there is little evidence of unity in their relationship. Boys (males of all ages) struggle with collaborating when they are instinctively wired to compete. Regardless, we continue to pray those words over their room, over our home and over the people who share life within that space. We are hoping to live with an awareness of what it means to model unity for our children.

For my wife and for me, unity means that we have a common spirit. We want the same things. Because of the differences that exist in us because of our gender, our temperaments, and our styles, the execution of parenting looks different. Some days not all that different, some days very different. But what we hope our children experience is that we share the same values, core beliefs and desires for our marriage and our family.

We are hoping to model what it means to disagree with respect, to respond with kindness, compassion, humility, self-control, patience and gentleness. Unity for us means that we can come at something with a completely different perspective, and somehow manage to honor, celebrate and support the other person. It means we can disagree and come back together if we need to apologize, take ownership for our part and do whatever is needed to repair the relationship.

Anne Lamott once said "you can practice being right or you can practice being kind."<sup>1</sup> In the end, I'd rather be known as someone who gave his best shot at being kind rather than someone who always had to be right.

Define unity with your kids at some point this week. Consider writing a mission statement for your family, identifying the core beliefs of your family, the principles you prioritize and what defines you as people who share life together.

## The Power of Like

*"Three things amaze me, no, four things I'll never understand—how an eagle flies so high in the sky, how a snake glides over a rock, how a ship navigates the ocean, why adolescents act the way they do."*  
-Proverbs 30:18, *The Message*

"What was he thinking?"

"I can't imagine what's gotten into her head!"

"Why in the world...?"

Have you found yourself asking any of these questions in the last few days/months/years—basically since your child has been moving toward teenagedom? We would guess the answer would be a resounding "YES!"

The writer of Proverbs wondered the same thing. The title of the section in *The Message* is called "Four Mysteries." And boy, are they a mystery! Often, as David says, when you're wondering what they're thinking, the answer is that they're not.

We've already outlined that girls and boys in this stage are searching, evolving, experimenting, insecure, and ambivalent. They're relational, but not particularly with you, as their parent. And then we tell you to enjoy them.

Now you may be asking "What in the world are we thinking?"

The answer is that we actually are. Girls in this stage and boys, beginning now and moving into the next stage, will have some of their very least enjoyable moments. It will be profoundly difficult to connect to them. He gives one-word answers. You walk up the stairs to talk and, just as you reach the top stair, she shuts her door. You can't go see movies together because he doesn't want to be seen in the same 50-foot radius as you. You can't watch television with her because you're just not particularly interested in binge-watching any show that outlines life as a teenager today. You've got enough of that life living under your roof.

And we still say enjoy them.

It doesn't mean you have to understand them. Donald Miller, in *Blue Like Jazz*, says "No one will listen to you unless they sense that you like them."<sup>2</sup> So, enjoying them really accomplishes two purposes with teenagers.

1. It fosters a relationship that is often tenuous.
2. It makes them a little more willing to listen.

And, as the old saying goes, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." You may find nothing in these years that you would naturally enjoy together. The music they pick. The movies they watch. The video games they play. None are really what you would choose in your free time. It doesn't matter. They need you to enter their world, because they are narcissistic enough not to dream of entering yours.

*What does your son love?*

*What does your daughter do when she has free time?*

If she loves a certain band, have her play you some of her favorite songs and tell you what she loves about them or the lyrics. If your son loves a certain video game, play it with him and find out what draws him to it. If you learn about anything they love, in these years, you learn about them. You may not learn to understand them, but you can maybe communicate a little of how much you like—and love them in the process.

## Fear and Courage

*"God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."  
-1 Timothy 1:7*

Melissa Trevathan, among her many gifts, has the gift of creativity. She has this remarkable ability to make the truths of scripture so real and digestable for people of all ages. For as long as I've (David) known her, I've watched her wander in front of a group of kids, teenagers or adults, carrying some random object – a rock, a suitcase, a rotted piece of fruit, a glass of water, a plate of pancakes – and wonder where will she be taking us in making the scriptures real today.

She's a great storyteller as well. She'll begin with some story about stealing candy bars, getting a tooth knocked out, or sitting in a tree with her baby dolls and help us find our way to some great truth.

After spending a first summer at our Daystar camps, my own daughter came home with some rich truth wrapped around her mind. My daughter was moving schools that fall, weeks after her experience at camp. We talked often about how she was feeling about her first day at an unfamiliar place. Our conversations about this new chapter changed after camp. She'd say things like "Miss Melissa said courage isn't the absence of fear, but the presence of fear. Being afraid isn't so bad if it means I have a chance to be courageous."

She begin to think differently about starting a brand new school, speaking in front of a group of people, trying something new for the first time. She still feels nervous, timid, afraid, and sometimes even terrified in the face of those opportunities. But she understands fear presents the opportunity for courage. And that God hasn't given her a spirit of fear or of timidity, but one of courage. She is growing in an understanding that those feelings don't define her, they are just that . . . feelings.

And she can offer those feelings, and all the ideas that accompany them to a God who cares about the way she feels and the intimate details of her life.

She was invited to take it a step farther. The last part of that verse is something Melissa speaks to on many occasions. It's part of what she wove into the fabric of Daystar – that we have a spirit of power and love. Melissa rooted Daystar in the belief that one life touches another, and that nothing has taken place in our lives that is so painful that we can't give.

Melissa challenges parents often to parent out of love and not out of fear. That takes a great amount of courage. We are calling kids and families to love every day in the work that happens in that little yellow house we call Daystar. We are calling kids and families to courage, to love and to give. We've all been given a spirit of power and love.

Take advantage to have a dinner conversation around courage. Ask every family member to identify a time they felt courageous in the face of fear.

Consider having everyone identify a particular struggle or challenge they have faced and how it gave way to some opportunity to give to someone else.

## Coming Alongside

*"All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us."*

*-2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

Pick one popular song from your individual or narcissistic years. What is the first song you learned to dance to? That you remember listening to with a group of friends singing? Playing on the radio when your dad took you fishing? Find that song. Either listen to it or sing as much of it as you can remember out loud. (We apologize to your kids if they are sitting nearby). What memories are associated with it? What were you doing? Who were you with?

As you think back, allow yourself to remember some of the other happy memories you have of that time. Who were they with? What sounds and pictures—even smells go along with them?

What are some of the more painful memories? Do you remember feeling left out? Betrayed? Hurt? Insignificant? Maybe even invisible? As you think back on those times and all of the emotion that was inside of you, where was God in it? How did he come alongside you in those years, in that pain? Who did he use, how did he comfort you, how did he speak truth into your heart? How has that truth impacted who you are today?

Today, you know the Father of all mercy. If you don't, it's as simple as talking to him. He longs to bring healing to the places that still hurt. He has been coming alongside you since the day you were born and will continue to in His great mercy. He loves you and longs to be the God of all comfort to you. Then you, in turn, can come alongside your son who feels like a failure. You can walk with your daughter who wants so desperately to feel that she matters.

He comes alongside you so that you can come alongside them...even if it's in a back door way. He is the God of all mercy, all comfort, and He is a God of hope. Always. Whether we're thirteen or thirty...or a thirty year-old who still, on some days, feels thirteen.

## **An Opportunity to Grow**

*"Growth is the delight of the child and the agony of youth, but it is not natural to the middle aged."*  
-Eugene Peterson<sup>3</sup>

This growing up process is not natural...at least it's not for you. Children, tweens and even teenagers are always looking toward something.

"I can't wait to be double digits."

"Well when I turn 13...or 16, 17, 18."

We, on the other hand, are not looking toward so much anymore. We may be looking back. We're hopefully looking here...at what's right in front of us. But we don't have quite the excitement about growing older that our children do. And you may not really even be looking forward to their growing up. At best, it's bittersweet. You wouldn't want them to have to live in this pre-adolescent awkwardness forever. But you were really hoping this stage would hold off for as long as possible.

In the beginning of this section, we talked about this being the most frightening episode of life for a girl and her parents. For boys, the frightening part is just starting to raise its head—and your heartrate in these years.

Growing? They're growing in front of our eyes, but this time seems much more about their growth than yours. When we talked about what we wanted to name the seminar that goes along with the material from this study, Grow is one of the names we talked about the most. Raising boys and girls is about their growth—and yours. And in these years, particularly, you have a tremendous opportunity for growth.

Eugene Peterson goes on to call adolescence a gift in the life of a parent. It may not feel that way right now. The idea of adolescence may be met with much more trepidation than excitement for you. But we promise there can be good gifts along the way. God can use this time, while He is growing your son or daughter, as an opportunity to grow you, as well.

What does or could that growth look like in your life today?

Father, we pray that you would be near to the parents who are reading and working through this curriculum today. Bless their children with the knowledge of your grace and boundless love for each of them. And open their dad's and mom's eyes to how you specifically, lovingly want to be growing them, too—as parents and as people. Amen.

Write about what comes to mind as you pray and listen.

## **Sabbath**

*"Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!"*  
*-Romans 15:13*

We want you to take this day as a Sabbath, every week. There will be 6 devotionals, and then a day to take a Sabbath. Sabbath literally means to rest from labor. Our prayer, today, is that you will find rest and refreshment through Christ. You are in the place He has chosen you to be. God is a god of hope, joy and peace. May He grant you that today and this week in your journey to Raising Boys and Girls.



# Books & Movies

## **Books:**

1. *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio
2. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank
3. *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan
4. *I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World* by Malala Yousafzai & Patrician McCormick
5. *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George
6. *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls
7. *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis
8. *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
9. *The Giver* by Lois Lowry
10. *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

## **Movies:**

1. *Unbroken*
2. *The Pursuit of Happiness*
3. *Rudy*
4. *Selma*
5. *Simon Birch*
6. *We are Marshall*
7. *Pride & Prejudice*
8. *Sense & Sensibility*
9. *Little Women*

10. *Cheaper by the Dozen*
11. *A River Runs Through It*
12. *Napoleon Dynamite*
13. *Wonder Woman*
14. *Man of Steel*
15. *Captain America: The First Avenger*
16. *When the Game Stands Tall*
17. *We Bought a Zoo*
18. *Bend it Like Beckham*
19. *Little Boy*
20. *Pay it Forward*
21. *Cinderella Man*
22. *42: The Jackie Robinson Story*
23. *Belle*
24. *The Young Victoria*
25. *The Ultimate Gift*
26. *Woodlawn*
27. *Race*
28. *Apollo 13*
29. *The Book Thief*
30. *My All American*

## Notes

### Stage 3

<sup>1</sup>Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 220.

<sup>2</sup>Anne Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), 94.

<sup>3</sup>Eugene Peterson, *Like Dew Your Youth*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976, 1994), 7.



# Stage 4

## **The Autonomous Years, Girls, Ages 15 to 19** **The Wanderer, Boys, Ages 13 to 17**

*"What we want for every girl, in these years, is to discover and gain confidence in her own voice: who she is and what she uniquely has to offer the world."*

*"As boys in the Lover Stage are full of some of their best stuff, the Wanderer will be the worst version of himself. He needs a great deal of mercy and understanding in this stage."*

The gap is widening. The girls, in this stage of their development, have basically lapped the boys. They are leaving the self-absorption of the teenage years behind, while the boys are thick in the middle of it. Boys are wandering. Girls are arriving... or at least arriving at the beginnings of their adulthood. The wandering that boys will take, in these years, will be somewhat difficult to watch. But let the girls serve as a reminder. He will get there...it just takes a little more time...and maybe a lot more patience.

## At A Glance

Kids impact each other more than we often can as adults. They hear each other's voices the loudest...especially in these adolescent years. That idea is predominantly the reason we have group counseling at Daystar Counseling Ministries, where we all work. As a matter of fact, we have 20-25 groups per week at Daystar, based around age levels and gender—the girls' 2nd-4th grade group, the boys' 2nd-4th grade group, the girls' 5th-6th grade group, and so on, all the way up through high school.

Traditionally, we have kept the boys' and girls' groups meeting separately, except on the rare occasion when we gather to discuss something like "Why in the world boys/girls act the way they do." But, one year, several years ago, the three of us decided to try something different. We wanted to try a co-ed leadership group. This group would be made up of some of our most mature high school boys and girls. They were a part of our "leadership team" at Daystar—a group of kids we hand pick to help lead our younger kids' groups and camps. This leadership group would meet every Thursday night from 7:00 to 8:45 at Melissa's house, rather than the office. We wanted these kids to not only feel honored to be included, but to know they had a unique opportunity to learn from each other.

So, one Thursday night in September, we had our first group. It was made up of five girls and four guys. That first week, the guys were obviously the most nervous. Their feet shuffled and eyes shifted around the room uncomfortably. The girls, as you could guess, were a little freer. They laughed easily with each other, having been in group together for some years. They tried their best to make the boys feel comfortable, asking them questions to draw them out. It didn't really work. After group, the three of us talked for a few minutes. We chalked the girls' talkativeness and boys lack thereof up to first week jitters.

Thursday rolled around again. Week two, the boys seemed a little more sure of themselves walking into Melissa's living room. The girls were, characteristically, ready to enjoy the boys and each other. The same thing happened. The girls dominated and the boys gave a few grunts here and there.

The next Thursday. Same time. Same channel. Same scenario. But, this time, David tried a little prompting with the boys. "Guys, the girls would really love to hear you all talk. I want you to do your best to ask questions and get to know the girls." I (Sissy) tried to convince the girls to give the guys a chance...that maybe if they didn't fill every bit of silence for them, the boys might be more likely to step up. That week, the boys increased from grunts to a total of probably three questions. The fact that the girls had lapped them in development was starting to become painfully clear.

The next week rolled around. The girls tried this time. "Guys, your voices matter a lot to us. We'd really like to know what you think." Maybe a sentence or two more than the week before, but the fact was that it just wasn't going to work. The wandering boys were awkward and rendered almost speechless by the presence of these mature, expressive, autonomous girls. And that was the end of our co-ed counseling groups at Daystar.

The girls were disappointed in group in general and in the guys in particular. They are at an age where the longing to connect has intensified. They want intimacy—want to relate in ways that make them feel loved and known. This particular group of girls was committed, because of their faith, to stay away from sexual intimacy. And so their hope was that this group would give them a safe, non-threatening place to have a sense of emotional and spiritual intimacy with a mature group of guys.

The guys may have wanted some of the same, but just didn't quite know how to pursue that kind of intimacy specifically, or the girls in general.

He desperately wants to feel comfortable in his own skin, but he just doesn't. This stretch of development is plagued with physical, emotional and relational change. He will be the worst version of himself at some point (if not in many moments) of this stage of his development.

I (David) believe the young men from the group wanted to offer more to the group, but they couldn't quite get past themselves. As boys in this stage wrestle with their sense of identity, they are trapped in insecurity. He tends to mask that insecurity with arrogance and bravado. He is a man of extremes in this stage. He will swing from one end of the spectrum to the other. His insecurity will present as silence, brooding and sullenness in one moment and being irritable, volatile and argumentative in the next.

We won't always be able to predict the extremes, but we can certainly be aware of what is happening with him—and much like our toddler boys needed help, he'll need support in taking the insecurity (and all that comes with it) to something constructive. He'll need a safe place to take the emotion, as well as the outlets we discussed to feel his strength and to feel purpose.

He will be extreme in his words. When he does speak, he's vulnerable to saying things like

You always make me . . .

You never let me . . .

You are the only parent who . . .

We'll spend a great amount of time saying "try again" to him in this stage. He will need to rephrase, rework, rethink, retry, and redeem his words and responses throughout this stage. He will be so consumed with himself one moment and completely unaware of himself in another. It will seem puzzling that a young man who is so acutely aware of how he looks can be so clueless about how harsh he just sounded.

As he hits the mark and (more often times) misses the mark, he will need mercy and understanding. You will never have as great an opportunity to reflect the mercy of our God to your son as you will in parenting an adolescent boy. You will have the opportunity to live out the truth of His mercies being new every morning. Your son

will need you to extend new mercy to him each day as he is stumbling, struggling and steadying himself in his adolescence. It's a bumpy stretch of the road. As much pushing away, separating out and individuating as is taking place, it would be easy to leave him to himself much of the time, but he desperately needs your input, involvement and investment. (I will make some suggestions on how to do this in the Try it Out section).

You will want to become more creative and strategic in how you engage him. Keep considering the Back Door approach we've introduced in how to connect and communicate with him.

**Discussion Questions:**

*Identify three strengths you see in him and call those out with regularity.*

*Read the chapter in Wild Things on Ceremonies and Rites of Passage. Consider celebrating your son and calling out who God is making him to be.*

*Reassess his outlets for testing his strength and mind, and experiencing risk, adventure and purpose.*

*Reread the story of the Prodigal Son and how a young man who wandered was received following a mistake.*

In the last stage of their development, we want to help girls find their place in the world. "Want to help" is the operative phrase here. As parents, as adults who love these girls, we can no longer do it for them. Most often, they are making the choices now. We can't choose their friends any longer. We can't shelter them and keep them away from all potentially dangerous situations. We actually never could. But what we can do, in these important, autonomous years is help.

You can point out the characteristics and strengths that God is growing inside of your daughter. She is great with people, an amazing artist, etc. You can give her room to make mistakes and then help her pick up the pieces, or give her consequences



when need be. With every year, she needs more freedom and more privileges. You can offer opportunities for her to connect and relate in ways that bring life and hope. Make volunteering mandatory, but give her options as to where so that she can actually experience making a difference. You can help her gain confidence in her and your readiness for her to leave home and enter the world.

Your daughter is becoming her own person in these years. Just last week, I sat with a senior in high school named Lizzie who talked about how she was ready to move on to college and make new friends who really liked her. My response was that what mattered the most right now is that she liked herself. Lizzie's response was, "I think I actually do...or at least I do some of the time." Some of the time is honestly good enough in the life of a girl—at least this side of heaven. It is something to pray for in every stage of your daughter's life, but maybe particularly in this one. My next question to Lizzie was "Why? What is it that you like about yourself?" And then I had the tremendous honor of agreeing with all that she saw and said.

How would your daughter answer that question? It might be worth asking. And it is more than worth an opportunity for her to use her voice to begin to name the gifts God has placed inside of her. Then, it's your turn to have the honor of agreeing. In this stage of her life, you want her to find her voice...to gain confidence...to like herself...to have healthy, supportive relationships...and to develop her own sense of intimacy with a God who likes and loves her far more than she could imagine—all of the time.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*How do you see your daughter emerging from the narcissistic years?*

*Where do you see her confidence?*

*Where do you see her questioning herself?*

*What do you like about your daughter?*

*How could you help her see those things in herself?*

*What are three strengths you see in her that you could tell her about today?*

## **The Parent Perspective**

"I've figured out what's wrong with all of the kids I know and their relationships with their parents," said a high school senior after school one day to her mom.

"Really....I'd love to know what you think the problem is," her mom said with amused interest.

"Their parents are trying to make the kids into who they think they should be rather than who they are."

Hmmmm. Does that statement stir anything inside of you? Frustration? Irritation? Even a little fear? A father once said in my (Melissa's) counseling office, "I've realized that all of the things I don't like in my son are the very things I don't like about myself."

Children and parents. This stage in a child's life, for a boy, is largely about extricating himself from his parents. For a girl, it is about discovering herself on her own. Both have to do with you. Both have to do with separation. And separation is never easy.

Often, as you are raising your child, it's hard to know where they end and you begin. From the very earliest stages of his life, you sleep when he sleeps and wake up when he cries in the night. When she's in grade school, you are as excited as she is—or maybe even more—when she brings home her first smiley face on a report card. You hurt when he hurts...emotionally and even sometimes, physically. You are her caretaker, provider, hero, and often her best friend. Weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice feel like second nature as a parent of children in stages 1-3.

Then adolescence hits—and hits hard.

You have been all of these things and more to your son and your daughter. And, in some ways, they have become an extension of you. Your identities are so closely linked as parent and child that sometimes they're indistinguishable. But now, you have hit a stage where, in order for your son and daughter to continue to mature, they have to be distinguished. They have to separate. You have to let go. Ouch.

It is my experience that moms, in these years, are often harder on their daughters and fathers are harder on their sons. I have spoken to several mothers whose daughters have chosen a career path that is "just not an option." The way their daughters dress, their manner of relating, their commitment to detail is different than their mother's—and therefore not okay.

For dads', it is often a lack of interest in the same interests. Boys who won't play sports, who aren't as motivated academically, who aren't dating as much as their fathers did. These boys have an ability to embarrass their dads that seems to be more about the dads than it really is about the sons.

I know I'm hitting below the belt here. But I have been assigned this wonderful section, in every chapter, about how your child brings up issues in your own life. And, to be honest, I think that this idea of your child as an extension of you is one of the main issues this stage in your son or daughter's life brings up.

I was teaching a parenting class recently and a very sweet mother came up to me and said, "I'm afraid I'm being overly critical of my daughter. She is just so different than I was or even am. I was quiet as a little girl, where she's loud. I was always on the outside. She likes to be the center of attention. I don't want to squash her. But I can't seem to find the line between being critical and helping her grow."

That line is hard to find...for every one of us. Your daughter may remind you of yourself when she was your age. Or your son may be completely different. Her weaknesses bother you because you struggle in the same ways. He frustrates you because he is just so different than you were. And you thought he would want to follow in your footsteps.

As a parent, you have goals for your child—spoken and unspoken. You have dreams. Hopes. Prayers that you talk to God about on a daily basis. You pray that he will find just one friend to help him get through middle school. You pray that her purity will be protected. You pray that he will pursue Jesus. You pray that she will be kind and responsible. Maybe you pray that she'll make cheerleading or that he'll one day decide to marry the precious girl he's been dating for a few years.

But he doesn't marry her. She is kind, but not as responsible as you had hoped. He doesn't follow in your footsteps. And you had things planned out so nicely...

It's hard to find the line...at least without a great deal of prayer. My hope for you, all three of our hope for you, as a parent, is that you would be committed to praying for God's plan for your son or daughter's life. His plan may be different than yours. Actually, His plan will probably be different than yours. It will involve smiley faces, rejoicing, and some failures along the way, too. But your son's failures are your son's failures. Not yours. Your daughter will make choices that are entirely different than those you would make yourself or even those you would make for her. They're her choices, as she moves into adulthood. Keep praying. Pray that God would continue to reveal His will, His plan. Your job as a parent, and especially a stage four parent, is to help your child become who God has created them to be. Your job is to help. Their job is to become. And God's job...His wise, perfect, omnipotent job is to come up with the plan.

## Try It Out—For Parents of Girls

I (Sissy) do a lot of convincing in my job. I try to convince girls that they are okay, or that they are going to be okay. I try to convince them that they are likable and that anyone who wouldn't want to be their friend is just plain dumb. I try to convince them that their heart matters so much more than the size of their jeans. Most importantly, I hope to convince them that God really does want their good—and that He is trustworthy.

For parents of girls in The Autonomous Years, I guess I do try to convince some of these things, too—although they're not typically as worried about their friends. But I also do a lot of silly, practical convincing. I lobby for social media, for cell phones, for later curfews. I even tried to convince one set of parents to let their daughter watch horror movies. And I hate horror movies, by the way.

So, what's with all of the being on their side, you may be wondering? Why am I trying to convince parents to let their children do the very things that could expose them to this fast-paced, materialistic, mean-girl, appearance-worshipping world? Because they'll get there soon enough on their own.

Especially in these years, they are either being introduced or about to be introduced to a plethora of outside influences—influences really being too subtle of a word. Pressure, or even demands, does more to describe the force they will feel of the world pushing in on them. However, for some kids, it will be more of a pull than a push. And that pull has a great deal of mystery and allure.

You can no longer protect your daughter when she leaves the safety of your roof. But you can be very strategic in gradually giving her a taste of what's to come. And that taste can help ward off the force and the allure.

This is where that idea of “increasing by increments” comes in. You want to be very strategic in these last few years of your daughter's development. We really believe it's important to come up with a game plan today—no matter how old your daughter is. Think about her bedtime if she's younger, her curfew if she's later. Think about the movies you allow her to watch and privileges she has access to from a technological standpoint. Each of those freedoms needs to be increasing with every year. You want her boundaries to widen gradually for two reasons:

1. Your daughter will mess up. And you'd much rather her mess up when she's living in the safety of home. You can help pick up the pieces and offer consequences when called for. You live in the balance between letting the rope out and pulling it right back in when she's gone too far.
2. You want the differences in her freedoms to be barely noticeable when she leaves home so that you can hopefully prevent the “WOO HOO! FREE AT LAST!” phenomenon that so many kids—and so many of us potentially experienced in college.

Let's go back to the girl and the horror movies. I had been meeting with her for a year. She was sixteen years-old and her parents would not allow her to watch horror movies. (For whatever reason, girls in their teenage years go through a phase where they LOVE horror movies). I agree that they can be scary spiritually and introduce images you don't really want bouncing around in your daughter's head. That's why I don't watch them myself. But Sarah was desperate to—and felt like the fact that she didn't made her look silly in front of her other sixteen year-old friends. (Notice that Sarah is sixteen, not thirteen).

Sarah begged and begged to be able to watch them. So, I finally did my convincing bit and her parents relented. Just a few months later, Sarah came into my office and said, "Okay, I get why my parents didn't want me to watch those movies. They really scare me and give me nightmares." Lesson learned—but learned with Sarah having a little control in the process.

Teenagers want control. Girls especially do in these final teenage years. And the more we choose our battles and give them control in small, safe doses, the less they'll push for it in reckless ways.

Please know that we're not advocating that teenagers should be allowed to do anything underage or illegal, since they'll "be exposed to it soon". What concerns me is when a seventeen year-old can't watch PG-13 movies, even though PG-13 today is what R was when we were growing up. Or when an 18 year-old is just now getting her license because her parents haven't felt she was ready. Or when a sixteen year-old has a curfew that's still 10:30 on weekends or a senior in high school has to be in at 11:00 after prom.

The complaints I probably hear the most about these issues are from the girls who are making wise, good (at least in terms of major teenager) choices. They're not drinking, using drugs, sneaking out, or sleeping with their boyfriends. Their comments to me are along the lines of "I'm a good kid and I have no idea why my parents won't trust me. It's not fair when the wild kids are the ones who are getting to stay out late." And, honestly, I agree.

If your daughter has worked hard to earn your trust, give it to her. If she acts responsibly and makes good choices, reward her with your trust...not "Sure, stay out all night" kind of trust. But stretch the limits of your comfort zone. I believe that girls still, in these years, really want to please you, as their parents. They will often rise to the level of trust you place in them. And, the more you give, the more leverage you have when you pull it back, if she gets in trouble.

Give them roots and wings, as they say. You have given her roots for so many years, in the truths you have taught and the ways you have loved and delighted in her. Now, is when you have an opportunity to help her try out those wings.

*Where can you loosen your boundaries with your daughter?*

*How can you help her know she is earning your trust and respect?*

*What are three things you see in her that you can remind her of today?*

## **Try it Out—For Parents of Boys**

As Melissa mentioned, at one point, we are all three training puppies. If you'd walked into the Daystar office, you'd be tempted to say that Melissa and Sissy were succeeding at this task, and you'd have struggled to say something positive about my efforts in this category.

Every Saturday, I piled my children and Owen into the car and we'd head to Puppy School. During one class, I asked our instructor if she ever trained puppies who were on the long journey to become therapy dogs and thought "I don't know that this one is cut out for this line of work." She laughed and commented that she had observed puppies who didn't have the temperament to become therapy dogs. I got up the courage to ask if she was having those thoughts when she watched Owen. She assured me she wasn't and that my frustrations with him were on target for a dog who was only 16 weeks old and still learning.

During class that day, while the other dogs were heeling, sitting, laying in a down position and staying for extended periods of time, Owen was growling, wandering around my legs and tangling us both in a web of leash. Every time I gave the command he'd look at me grumpily, half follow through, make this grumbling, growling sound and reach for the treat. She walked over to Owen and said, "feeling a little snarky, are we?" She was spot on with that word. It well described Owen and a number of other snarky creatures I spend time with regularly.

I went home and looked up the definition of "snarky" and found everything from snide and sarcastic, to testy and irritable, growly and reactive. I even ran across a dog trainer/vet in Connecticut offering "Snarky Dog Classes." They advertise the class for "dogs who act inappropriately in public. They may react to people, dogs or distractions in general. The goal of the Snarky Dog class is to help you better read your dog to prevent the inappropriate behavior, and to teach and encourage your dog to do the right thing."

I think adolescent boys are snarky. They are snide and sarcastic, testy and irritable, growly and reactive. I'm thinking of offering Puppy School for Teenage Boys. I'm going to use the same class description and just replace "puppy" with "son." The descriptions reads - "This is class is for boys who act inappropriately in public or at home. They may react to people and get distracted. The goal is to help you better understand your son to prevent the inappropriate behavior and to teach your son to do the right thing."

The truth is that our snarky boys do need us to understand them better. They need us to take a deeper look at the biological chaos that plagues them, the arrogance and insecurity, why he's so argumentative and his need to individuate. This young man needs other voices, mercy and forgiveness, and the outlets we've discussed.

We train snarky dogs with treats and affirmation. A snarky teenage boy loves food and needs a lot of affirmation as well. Work hard to catch him in some good



moments. Release him to other trusted, positive, adult voices. Adolescent boys have an ability to hear from them differently.

Plan a day trip or weekend trip to a place he'd love. Camp, hike, fish, travel to an out of town stadium for a game, find a band he loves on tour and go to that city, google the world's fastest roller-coasters, try out a water park. Choose an opportunity to spend time with him with the primary focus being enjoyment rather than instruction.

Check out the 50 movies we recommend at the end of this document for more suggestions. Identify a family you enjoy, share values with and have an adolescent son your son's age. Sign up together to build a Habitat for Humanity house, serve in a soup kitchen, go on a short term missions trip, or volunteer to serve at a camp for inner-city kids. He needs the outlet to feel purpose and will likely enjoy the experience differently with a friend.

Choose a book to read with him about his journey to become a man. Read a chapter a week and go to a local donut or coffee shop to have a conversation with him about it. Consider partnering with some other fathers and sons to experience this.

For early adolescent boys, I'd recommend:

*Flight Plan: Your Mission to Become a Man* by Lee Burns and Braxton Brady

*Guy Stuff: The Body Book for Boys* by Dr. Cara Natterson

For mid to late adolescent boys, I'd recommend:

*Wild at Heart* by John Eldredge

*Killing Lions* by John & Sam Eldredge

## Driving toward Confidence

*"For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth."*

*-Psalm 71:5*

Do you remember the first time you got behind a wheel? Your mom or dad was in the passenger seat. Your heart was racing, palms were sweaty as you tightly gripped the wheel and pulled the gear shift into drive...

For both boys and girls, this stage is when they learn to drive (unless you live in one of the crazier states where they let narcissistic age girls and boys behind the wheel). But, for most kids, they will find themselves in these years, sitting beside you. Heart racing, palms sweaty...and we haven't even started talking about them yet.

Instilling confidence is one of the chapters Sissy and I included in our book, *Modern Parents, Vintage Values*. Your child, in these years, feels anything but confident. She is finding her voice, but is still insecure, maybe particularly about the way she looks. He is insecure about most everything. But neither one of them is likely to admit it. You'll only pick up on it in slight glimpses. He overcompensates with a sense of bravado, when you secretly know he is terrified to ask a girl to homecoming. She lingers a little longer in the kitchen with you before she leaves for a party, suddenly wanting to talk. These are the cracks in the confidence they are so wanting to have, yet are so profoundly lacking in these autonomous and wanderer years.

It's funny how many teenagers will tell me their favorite verse is Philippians 4:13—I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I think that's for a reason. I think guys and girls cling to this verse as an answer to their insecurity...as hope for who they can be.

It's easy to forget how important driving was in the beginning. Now, it feels more like a hassle. But think back again to the first time that you drove your own car...to your first car. How proud were you of it? Do you remember some of the songs that played on your radio? Even the sound of the blinker? The confidence you felt driving your very own car?

When your son or daughter drives out of your driveway for the first time without you, you will have that same heart-racing experience. You will check your watch every thirty...or five minutes, worried about them coming home in one piece. You may even track them on your phone—not because you don't trust them, but just to make sure they're okay.

But, as Sissy and David have been talking about, it is important that they pull out of that driveway. Driving is just one way that they have an opportunity to move away from you and toward their own identity, their own sense of confidence. You will be terrified they'll make mistakes—fail—wreck themselves and their cars. And, quite possibly, they will. It will be hard for you to watch. But they need the experience of living, which includes the experience of making mistakes.

For your son to learn to walk, you had to stand at a distance and let him walk toward—or away from you. He would toddle a few steps and then fall flat on his bottom. You were his safety net to explore the world, as we talked about in Stage One. You are still that safety net today. Now, instead of toddling away, he's driving. He is driving toward becoming a confident man. She is driving toward a confidence in who she is and what she has to offer. But we've got to let them drive. They can do all things with Christ who strengthens them. And so can you—including letting them back down your driveway.

## **The Power of Encouragement**

*"For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."  
-1 Thessalonians 2:11-12*

Every year, we have a fundraiser called The Bike Thing. I (Melissa) named it that myself. For several years, I may have had a lapse in creativity. Everything we did at Daystar was called The \_\_\_\_\_ Thing. Monday night thing, the Bike Thing, and so on. But, anyway, the Bike Thing is the one "Thing" at Daystar that is left over from my creatively challenged days. We're now celebrating our 25th Annual Bike Thing. What is the Bike Thing, you're probably wondering at this point. It's a bike ride along the historic Natchez Trace to raise money for Daystar. The trek is either 20 or 40 miles, with what we call "Sag Wagons" spaced every so often with water and snacks. It's not a professional bike ride. It's what we call a "family friendly" bike ride, which means our riders range in age from typically six or seven to sixty-something (which is me). It's a wonderful day...late fall, typically a blue sky, riding through the hills of Tennessee seeing the fall foliage turn, and ending with an old-fashioned picnic on quilts.

I'm making it sound really glorious, but even the 20 mile version is no small feat. Several years ago, I remember riding behind a seventeen year-old girl and her dad. She was not a regular exerciser...her parents used the "lazy" word about her from time to time, but she still wanted to show up for the event to raise money for Daystar. And we were more than grateful. But the last few miles had proved to be a challenge. At mile 18, there is one giant of a hill—a slow, progressing incline that spans almost a mile and seems to stretch beyond the next curve—and the next. Then, you're lulled into thinking you're done with a downhill that is nice and quick. But, then, there's this roller-coaster kind of section. It's in the last half mile, and it's like the portion of the roller coaster where they need to advance you on the track but don't have space for a big hill, so they send you on five quick ups and downs.

So, back to Grace and her dad. They were on these little, irritating, laborious hills. She was bent over the handle bars of her bike, pedaling hard. Her dad must have seen the effort it was taking her at the end. He quietly rode up beside her, put his hand on her back, and pushed. I think he pushed her all of the way to the finish line, or at least until the people standing at the finish line would have seen his hand on her back. Then he let her cross on her own.

When I think about this verse in 1 Thessalonians, I think the easiest parts to master in parenting teenagers are the urging and comforting. We naturally teach them. I remember a divorced dad saying to me about his daughter, "I just have so little time with her. I want to teach her everything I can when I'm with her." Urging. But, at this age, they have heard most of the teaching we have to offer. We're more frequently now, just repeating ourselves. And you know how that goes over with a teenager...

The comforting comes naturally, too. You see your son hurting over a bad loss in basketball and make his favorite dinner. You sit on your daughter's bed as the tears flow over her breakup. They hurt and we comfort—if they'll let us.

But it's so often the encouragement they need the most, in these years. As we have said over and over, teenagers don't really like themselves. They may not show it, but they are terribly insecure individuals. They need our encouragement. And the kind of encouragement they need is no longer the running in front of them as they learn to ride their bike shouting "You can do it!" that we did in their younger years. It's the quietly riding up beside them and placing our hand on their back. And then removing it just in time for them to feel like they are the ones who really can do it.

Larry Crabb and Dan Allender, in their book called *Encouragement*, talk about speaking words to someone's unspoken fears. Your teenagers are battling so many fears. Are they capable? Are they enough? Would someone still care about them if they really knew them? Can they do it? We hear these questions and so many more from them in the quietness of our counseling offices.

You have an opportunity to encourage them, to answer these questions, speak to these fears—even when they are unspoken. The trick with teenagers is answering them in a way where you offer just enough encouragement to encourage, but not so much that they feel like they've done it because of your encouragement.

Think back on the wolfpack verse from the last chapter. "Don't draw attention to yourselves." Put your hand on his back, and then remove it. When you hear her talking down about herself, you can simply say "That's sure not the person I see." Saying just one comment...one compliment...one sentence of encouragement can be enough. Slip a note in his lunch telling him how proud you are of him. Write a sentence on her bathroom mirror about how beautiful she is—inside and out. Keep urging and comforting, but don't forget the power of encouragement. It doesn't take a lot, but just enough to get them past those last few years—and hills of their development.

*How could you encourage your son today?*

*Where does your daughter need your support?*

*How can you come alongside him or her in a way that helps him feel like you're there with him, but he is the one who can do it?*

## Food Fights

*"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*

*-John 8:36*

"Food and I just don't get along," a high school girl said to me (Sissy) a few years back. It usually is a love/hate kind of thing for us girls and our food. And I honestly have to say I think it's becoming worse. I remember years ago, a mom at a Raising Girls seminar said to me "I've taught my ten year-old daughter all about unsaturated and saturated fats. That way, when she's in the lunch line as a teenager, she can say 'No, thank you. I don't eat those kinds of fats.'" I walked away from that seminar with that mom's face in my mind thinking "Uh oh."

Just last year, her fifteen year-old daughter came in for counseling with an eating disorder. She had learned the differences between fats, but she had also learned to obsess over food.

Let me say right here...I am not the healthiest eater. If I were marooned on a desert island, the food I would most want to have with me would be queso and chips. And, honestly, I have no clue which kind of fat is in queso—but I do know enough to know that it's probably not a good kind. I think, this is in part, because I'm a little rebellious. It's not that I don't care about my body. I just have been around too many people who care too much. Another teenager said to me, "I have given myself over to this god of thinness." I feel strongly that our bodies and diets have taken on entirely too much importance in our culture, much to the detriment of young girls.

I do advocate healthy eating for the girls and families with whom I work (and am trying to do a little better myself). I know the rewards healthy nutrition have on our physical and emotional state of mind. I think it's important to teach girls to make wise, nutritious choices and to model those as a family. Where I get concerned is when those choices become too important.

I have a growing number of girls who are choosing to be either vegan or vegetarian. I have noticed that, as more and more girls are making this choice, they are often the same types of girls who end up with eating disorders. They are typically hard on themselves and have control issues. An article in Psychology Today quoted a study reporting that women suffering from eating disorders are four times more likely to be vegetarian than women who don't have eating disorders.<sup>1</sup> It is not always the case, by any means, but some co-occurrence makes sense to me. So much of an eating disorder begins with what counselors call "disordered eating", which is centered in an obsession with food. Vegetarianism or veganism can cause more focus on food, simply because a vegetarian has to put more thought into their choices than others.

I know physically and emotionally healthy vegetarians and vegans, as well, who really do change their diets because of animal cruelty or health concerns. I applaud

these folks who are much more disciplined than my queso-eating self. But I worry about girls. I particularly worry about girls and our love/hate relationship with food. And if there's ever an age that it kicks in, it's this one. They want more control over their lives. They are expecting a lot out of themselves. And, as we said in the podcasts, their hormones slow down after puberty and cause them to become curvier.

Eating disorders are hands down the most difficult issue I ever have to walk through with girls. They are enslaving and profoundly addictive—you can stay away from a bar for the rest of your life, but you can't stay away from food.

We devoted a section in the book *Raising Girls* to eating disorders—to understanding the why's and how you can help, if you suspect your daughter is in danger of either an eating disorder or disordered eating.

In seminars, we often tell parents, "If you have issues with food, your daughter most likely will, too." I believe the mom who was concerned about her daughter's knowledge of fats was even more concerned about her own body image. In *The Back Door to Your Teen's Heart*, we talked about those crazy fun house mirrors. We look in them and see ourselves as taller or shorter or fatter than we really are. You are a mirror for your daughter's growing identity. You hold it up for her. And when your image is distorted, you will reflect a distorted image right back to her. I remember another girl who once said, "I weight more than my mom. If she really believes she's as overweight as she talks about, I can't even imagine what she thinks about me."

I have walked with countless women who have struggled with eating issues. You can be free. With Jesus and the wise counsel of a trusted friend and/or professional as guides, you can experience a freedom from this love/hate relationship with food. You can live life confident that you are much more than the sum of your body parts. God has given you a hope and a future that doesn't have to be defined by the way you look.

## **Dignity and Respect**

*"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."*

*-Colossians 3:21*

I (David) met with a family this week that moved from out of state when the father's company transferred him. The move has been difficult for everyone, and in particular their 16 year old son. He liked his old school, his old friends, his old house, and according to him "everything about my old life." He's struggling to let go of the "old" and reconcile himself to the "new." He has become more sullen, withdrawn and in turn, depressed.

His mother brought him to counseling after a teacher emailed that he seemed depressed every time she tried to engage him. In our first conversation the mom said, "we are all struggling with this move, but we're figuring out how to deal with it. He's the only one refusing to move forward." I reminded this well-intentioned mom that the move took place while this young man was in the middle of all the developmental tasks we've been discussing – individuating, finding his voice, and struggling with his identity. I also reminded her that she'd reported to me that he was somewhat withdrawn and sullen before the move, and this transition had simply exaggerated what was already there.

With the boy's stamp of approval, I recommended that her husband come in for a family session to give us a chance to talk together. The first time the three of them entered the room, you could have cut the tension with a knife. The father was an intense, driven, highly successful man. Counseling can be particularly difficult for this type of man.

At an honest point in the conversation, the boy admitted to withholding to punish his parents for the move. He knew they were concerned and wanting information about his life. He felt their desperation and said "conversations with the two of you start to feel like an interrogation by the Counter-Terrorist Unit. Sometimes I just don't want to talk, especially when you force me to do it."

I asked the parents what they were hearing and how they wanted to respond. The mom teared up and said she realized the more afraid she felt for him, the more demanding she became in getting access to what was going on inside of him. She offered to give him some space, permission to say he didn't want to talk and a chance to negotiate a time to talk at some point later. The boy looked mildly relieved.

I affirmed her decision to honor his need for some space and avoid a CTU interrogation. The father looked at me like I'd just recommended they buy him a sports car and let him quit school. He moved up to the edge of his seat, pointed his finger at me and exclaimed "not you or any other yahoo is gonna tell me when I can and can't ask my son questions. I don't need permission to be a parent. I'll ask questions when I want answers, and it doesn't concern me whether it's good timing for him or not." His face was fiery red and he finished with "I put a roof over his head, clothes on his back and he'll talk when I say it's time to talk."



I made sure he was done with his rant, and then chose my words carefully.

“You don’t need permission to be a parent. You are a parent. You provide all the things you just acknowledged and more. I don’t think anyone present is challenging that. You can ask him questions whenever you want. I’d hope you’d always do that with respect and dignity. The kind of respect you talked earlier about wanting yourself.”

I went on to say “I believe you are afraid. You love this kid so much and you know he’s struggling. I imagine you feel guilty that the move happened because of your job and everyone in your household is feeling the residual effects of that.” At that point, he looked as if I’d shot him in the gut with an air soft gun.

I finished by saying, “it’s ok to feel scared. It’s part of what comes with parenting. We love our kids so much and it pulls at every part of us when we know they are hurting. As men, we are wired for action. We want to fix it, and sometimes we just can’t. You aren’t resolving anything when you demand he talk to you. I would imagine your son feels what I felt when you started pointing your finger at me, screaming about what you will and won’t do. There’s no dignity in demanding someone speak to you on your terms. So you can keep trying to force him to talk to you if that makes you feel more in control, or you can try something more honoring to your son who is struggling.”

He then scowled like he’d prefer to shoot me with an air soft gun. Fortunately he backed down a step. It created enough space for him to look at his son - to look through this boy’s anger and resistance to see his hurt and his ache. This family has a long way to go, but they took some small steps in the right direction that day.

As you require respect with your children, are you equally focused on parenting them with respect and dignity?

## Designed for the Job at Hand

*"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."*  
-Matthew 11:28-30, The Message

I (David) love these words. I need these words. I forget these words. I've read them more times than I could count, and I need to hear them again and again. I live more days than I care to admit as if I've never heard these words before. I know the place to go with my weariness, my anxiety, and my fear. And yet I live like I've no clue what to do.

I reread those words a couple of years ago and began reconsidering the words of "I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you." I started thinking about all the things that burden me, how much I carry, all the things I fear and hold on to.

I think about moments in my own journey of parenting when I've lost sleep over something taking place with one of my children - their health, their struggles, their relationships. I worry about my role in it – am I doing enough or am I doing too much? I worry about the outcome – how will this affect them in the short and long term? I worry if they have enough resilience to make their way through a particular challenge or struggle?

There are moments where it just feels like too much - more than I am capable of handling. Then I remember this promise. Nothing I'm given in my journey will be too heavy or ill-fitting. There are plenty of challenges that exist within my parenting that feel better suited for someone else, but the reality is that it all fits on me. As Melissa said earlier, I'm designed to be the father to my three children. And you are designed to be the parent to yours. That was written before time began. Nothing we come up against in our journey of parenting is ill-fitting. It may feel that way in many moments, but it's exactly as God intended it to be.

*Where are some particular areas of parenting that feel ill-fitting right now?*

*Is there a particular struggle you are carrying that may cause you to parent more out of fear than out of love?*

## Keeping Your Eye on the Path

*“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” -Philippians 4:8*

Sissy and I went mountain biking a few years back with our friend Pace. None of the three of us had ever been mountain biking. But how hard could it be? You ride up the ski lift and have those wide, green, ski runs to come down. You can probably even choose between green, blue, or black runs. We felt a little daring and thought we could probably handle the blues.

If you’ve ever been mountain biking, you’re probably chuckling to yourself right about now. If you haven’t been...well, let me tell you about it. This is not the way it works—at all.

They drive you up this windy mountain and put you on the “back side” of the ski area. No green slopes in sight. You are biking more on gravel and through rocks and trees, with most of the path dropping off completely on one side of you or the other. And by dropping off I mean scary-rocks-tumbling-down cliff types of things.

So, here Sissy and Pace and I were somewhere in Utah—on mountain bikes on this trail that we had no business being on. Pace, being athletic and adventurous, took the lead. Sissy has this way of calmly doing things—going at a steady, quick pace, and doing things well. Me, not so much.

I had a bike accident a few years back that continues to affect my balance—or you could just cut to the chase and say my brain. But I still love to ride bikes (although mountain bikes no longer make the list). But I have this problem. When the man dropped us off, his last words were “Don’t worry about the obstacles. Just focus on the path and you’ll do fine.”

Obstacles. The obstacles on our path were trees and big boulder-type rocks. I hit most of them on the way down. I would start going and think “Don’t look at the rock, don’t look at the rock” and Bam! I’d hit the rock. “Forget about the tree, forget about the tree, Melissa” and soon I’d have pine needles sticking out of my socks. Sissy and Pace laughed that every time I caught up to them (stopped and waiting), I’d have a new trickle of blood running down my leg.

Toward the end, however, I learned to focus on the path. When I kept my eyes fixed on where I was going, rather than the obstacles around me, my ride was actually easier—with much less bumps and accidents along the way.

Is this starting to sound a little familiar?

There are a whole lot of obstacles in these last few years of raising your boys and girls. There are cars and boys, drama and girls, being invited to parties, not being invited to parties, social media, arguing, power struggles, breakups and heartaches

and a whole host of other hiccups your children will hit in these years. You could be swallowed up in fear if you focus too long.

But Paul, in his letter to the Philippians says his version of “Focus on the path”. And we would echo his words to you.

Finally, dads and moms, grandparents and godparents, aunts and uncles, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable (and they so want to be admired by you)—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

We’re going to talk, in the next section, about what fear can do to you as a parent. But, for now, let’s suffice it to say it will run you and your teenager into the very obstacles you’re trying to avoid.

Instead, think about what is excellent in your son. Tell your daughter what is praiseworthy about her. Give thanks for the true and right and pure things about your child. We promise they are there. God has placed so much good inside your son and your daughter, even in these autonomous and wandering years. Think about such things.

## **Sabbath**

*"Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!"*  
-Romans 15:13

We want you to take this day as a Sabbath, every week. There will be 6 devotionals, and then a day to take a Sabbath. Sabbath literally means to rest from labor. Our prayer, today, is that you will find rest and refreshment through Christ. You are in the place He has chosen you to be. God is a god of hope, joy and peace. May He grant you that today and this week in your journey to Raising Boys and Girls.

# Books & Movies

## Books:

1. *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
2. *The Hunger Games Series* by Suzanne Collins
3. *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
4. *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton
5. *Animal Farm* by George Orwell
6. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini
7. *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* by Make Angelou
8. *Night* by Elie Wiesel
9. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot
10. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding

## Movies:

1. *Forrest Gump*
2. *In America*
3. *Catch Me if You Can*
4. *On the Basis of Sex*
5. *Green Book*
6. *The Blind Side*
7. *The King's Speech*
8. *Les Miserables*

9. *The Good Lie*
10. *Iron Lady*
11. *Radio*
12. *Hotel Rwanda*
13. *Good Will Hunting*
14. *The Help*
15. *12 Years a Slave*
16. *The Butler*
17. *Slumdog Millionaire*
18. *The Namesake*
19. *Lion*
20. *Lincoln*
21. *Dead Poet's Society*
22. *Spotlight*
23. *Life is Beautiful*
24. *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*
25. *He Named Me Malala*
26. *The Color Purple*
27. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*
28. *The Truman Show*
29. *A Brave Heart: The Lizzie Velasquez Story*
30. *Denial*
31. *The Hate U Give*
32. *The Kite Runner*
33. *Suffragette*
34. *Million Dollar Baby*
35. *Philomena*

36. *Dances with Wolves*
37. *The Founder*
38. *The Theory of Everything*
39. *Big Eyes*
40. *The Devil Wears Prada*
41. *Free State of Jones*
42. *Miss Representation*
43. *The Mask You Live In*
44. *Erin Brokovich*
45. *Saving Private Ryan*
46. *Mona Lisa Smile*
47. *Driving Miss Daisy*
48. *Woman in Gold*
49. *A Beautiful Mind*
50. *The Post*



## Notes

### Stage 4

<sup>1</sup>Carolyn C. Ross, Vegetarianism and Eating Disorders, Psychology Today, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/real-healing/201211/vegetarianism-and-eating-disorders>

