

PARENTING for Beginners II

"Making your home and your heart
a great environment for parenting"





In case you don't realize it, yet parenting is not easy. I hope you have come to realize that you don't exactly know what you are doing and that you do need help. The task of parenting is so much bigger than any of us. Think about it—you are so influential in your child's life. You will shape their world view. When they define love, they will use your definition. When they measure success, they will use the measuring stick that you gave them. Listen to this; when they think of God, their conception of Him will be shaped by you. WOW

In this book we have prepared a few lessons/activities for you to do that are designed to give you a better idea of what God had in mind when He created little ones and when He placed them with parents just like you. If you have not yet worked through the first book, I would suggest you get a copy from the church office. The first book gets to some of the foundational elements of God's design for parents and children. In this book we will go a step further and start getting into some more issues of formation for you as parents as you continue to adjust to your baby becoming a little girl or little boy. Our desire is that your home and your heart will be a great environment for your children to grow into God's beautiful design for their lives.

As I did in the previous book let me share three foundational elements that you will need to remember as you move through this workbook.

1. God has chosen you to parent your child, so you must walk this journey by faith. No one else can walk your journey for you. You must pay attention to the voice of God and the heart of your child.
2. You are not alone. While you are walking your journey of faith, you are not alone. We wrote this book because we want to help, and many others walk a similar path (similar not the same). So if you are feeling alone, please ask for help.

3. This will require time, just like parenting. This is not a workout video that requires only 8 minutes a day to achieve perfect abs. This will take prayer, thought, observation, planning, and lots of work. So make an effort with this workbook, spend time, give it thought, don't make it a task. Think of it as something you need, not because the book is so great but because your children are great.

We encourage you to start a journal as you go through this workbook. It is a great way to hang on to what God is telling you. Also, if you are going through this as a single parent, your journal will be a good place to write down your thoughts during the "TALK TOGETHER" sections of the chapter. One last encouragement, as you go through these chapters, pray over them, prepare yourself to hear from God.

May God bless you and may God bless your family.

Pastor Greg Hill
&
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Who Do You Think You Are?	7
“I Need Your Eyes”	21
The Heart of Relationships	27
A Dirty Word:	33
...Recovering the Beauty of Authority	
An Atmosphere of Training	40
Imperfect Parents & Immature Babies	46
...We are All in Process	
Baby Dedication Part 1: Set Apart	51
Baby Dedication Part 2: Covenant	54

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

Speaking Words of Identity



Have you ever been asked that question? Maybe you spoke out of turn and got mouthy with a parent, grandparent, or teacher. They looked you in the eye and said, “Who do you think you are, talking to me like that?” Usually the tone of voice in which these words are spoken gives you more information than the question itself. “My boss might talk to me like that or my close friends, but not you.” In other words you are not the kind of person that has the right to say what you said. You do not possess the right identity to speak to me that way. This sarcastic response exposes the big point of this chapter, “Who Do You Think You Are?” The issue is identity. Who are you? What you believe about your identity is a core belief that shapes your life. If you believe yourself to be insignificant, then your strategy might be to live not sharing your opinions. The problem would be that your true identity is not known to you. It is like the story of the ugly duckling. He was treated like a duck or a goose by his peers and forced into patterns of living for which he was not designed. The problem was that he did not know who he was either. There wasn’t anyone in the ugly duckling’s life that was able to rightly shape his identity.

Read Hans Christian Anderson’s, “The Ugly Duckling.” (located below)

It was lovely summer weather in the country, and the golden corn, the green oats, and the haystacks piled up in the meadows looked beautiful. The stork walking about on his long red legs chattered in the Egyptian language, which he had learnt from his mother. The corn-fields and meadows were surrounded by large forests, in the midst of which were deep pools. It was, indeed, delightful to walk about in the country.

In a sunny spot stood a pleasant old farm-house close by a deep river, and from the house down to the water side grew great burdock leaves, so high, that under the tallest of them a little child could stand upright. The spot was as wild as the centre of a thick wood.

In this snug retreat sat a duck on her nest, watching for her young brood to hatch; she was beginning to get tired of her task, for the little ones were a long time coming out of their shells, and she seldom had any visitors.

The other ducks liked much better to swim about in the river than to climb the slippery banks and sit under a burdock leaf to have a gossip with her. At length, one shell cracked, and then another, and from each egg came a living creature that lifted its head and cried, "Peep, peep." "Quack, quack," said the mother, and then they all quacked as well as they could, and looked about them on every side at the large green leaves.

Their mother allowed them to look as much as they liked, because green is good for the eyes. "How large the world is," said the young ducks, when they found how much more room they now had than while they were inside the egg-shell. "Do you imagine this is the whole world?" asked the mother; "Wait till you have seen the garden; it stretches far beyond that to the parson's field, but I have never ventured to such a distance. Are you all out?" she continued, rising; "No, I declare, the largest egg lies there still. I wonder how long this is to last; I am quite tired of it," and she seated herself again on the nest.

"Well, how are you getting on?" asked an old duck, who paid her a visit.

"One egg is not hatched yet," said the duck. "It will not break. But just look at all the others; are they not the prettiest little ducklings you ever saw? They are the image of their father, who is so unkind, he never comes to see."

"Let me see the egg that will not break," said the duck; "I have no doubt it is a turkey's egg. I was persuaded to hatch some once, and after all my care and trouble with the young ones, they were afraid of the water. I quacked and clucked, but all to no purpose. I could not get them to venture in. Let me look at the egg. Yes, that is a turkey's egg; take my advice, leave it where it is and teach the other children to swim."

"I think I will sit on it a little while longer," said the duck; "as I have sat so long already, a few days will be nothing."

"Please yourself," said the old duck, and she went away.

At last the large egg broke, and a young one crept forth crying, "Peep, peep." It was very large and ugly. The duck stared at it and exclaimed, "It is very large and not

at all like the others. I wonder if it really is a turkey. We shall soon find out, however, when we go to the water. It must go in, if I have to push it myself."

On the next day the weather was delightful, and the sun shone brightly on the green burdock leaves, so the mother duck took her young brood down to the water, and jumped in with a splash. "Quack, quack," cried she, and one after another the little ducklings jumped in. The water closed over their heads, but they came up again in an instant, and swam about quite prettily with their legs paddling under them as easily as possible, and the ugly duckling was also in the water swimming with them.

"Oh," said the mother, "that is not a turkey; how well he uses his legs, and how upright he holds himself! He is my own child, and he is not so very ugly after all if you look at him properly. Quack, quack! come with me now, I will take you into grand society, and introduce you to the farmyard, but you must keep close to me or you may be trodden upon; and, above all, beware of the cat."

When they reached the farmyard, there was a great disturbance. Two families were fighting for an eel's head, which, after all, was carried off by the cat. "See, children, that is the way of the world," said the mother duck, whetting her beak, for she would have liked the eel's head herself. "Come, now, use your legs, and let me see how well you can behave. You must bow your heads prettily to that old duck yonder; she is the highest born of them all and has Spanish blood; therefore, she is well off. Don't you see she has a red flag tied to her leg, which is something very grand, and a great honor for a duck; it shows that every one is anxious not to lose her, as she can be recognized both by man and beast. Come, now, don't turn your toes. A well-bred duckling spreads his feet wide apart, just like his father and mother, in this way; now bend your neck, and say 'quack.'"

The ducklings did as they were bid, but the other duck stared and said, "Look, here comes another brood, as if there were not enough of us already! and what a queer looking object one of them is; we don't want him here," and then one flew out and bit him in the neck.

"Let him alone," said the mother; "he is not doing any harm."

"Yes, but he is so big and ugly," said the spiteful duck "and therefore he must be turned out."

"The others are very pretty children," said the old duck, with the rag on her leg, "all but that one; I wish his mother could improve him a little."

"That is impossible, your grace," replied the mother; "he is not pretty; but he has a very good disposition, and swims as well or even better than the others. I think he

will grow up pretty, and perhaps be smaller; he has remained too long in the egg, and therefore his figure is not properly formed." And then she stroked his neck and smoothed the feathers, saying, "It is a drake, and therefore not of so much consequence. I think he will grow up strong, and able to take care of himself."

"The other ducklings are graceful enough," said the old duck. "Now make yourself at home, and if you can find an eel's head, you can bring it to me."

And so they made themselves comfortable; but the poor duckling, who had crept out of his shell last of all, and looked so ugly, was bitten and pushed and made fun of, not only by the ducks, but by all the poultry. "He is too big," they all said, and the turkey cock, who had been born into the world with spurs, and fancied himself really an emperor, puffed himself out like a vessel in full sail, and flew at the duckling, and became quite red in the head with passion, so that the poor little thing did not know where to go, and was quite miserable because he was so ugly and laughed at by the whole farmyard.

So it went on from day to day till it got worse and worse. The poor duckling was driven about by every one; even his brothers and sisters were unkind to him, and would say, "Ah, you ugly creature, I wish the cat would get you," and his mother said she wished he had never been born. The ducks pecked him, the chickens beat him, and the girl who fed the poultry kicked him with her feet. So at last he ran away, frightening the little birds in the hedge as he flew over the palings.

"They are afraid of me because I am ugly," he said. So he closed his eyes, and flew still farther, until he came out on a large moor, inhabited by wild ducks. Here he remained the whole night, feeling very tired and sorrowful.

In the morning, when the wild ducks rose in the air, they stared at their new comrade. "What sort of a duck are you?" they all said, coming round him.

He bowed to them, and was as polite as he could be, but he did not reply to their question. "You are exceedingly ugly," said the wild ducks, "but that will not matter if you do not want to marry one of our family."

Poor thing! He had no thoughts of marriage; all he wanted was permission to lie among the rushes, and drink some of the water on the moor. After he had been on the moor two days, there came two wild geese, or rather goslings, for they had not been out of the egg long, and were very saucy. "Listen, friend," said one of them to the duckling, "you are so ugly, that we like you very well. Will you go with us, and become a bird of passage? Not far from here is another moor, in which there are some pretty wild geese, all unmarried. It is a chance for you to get a wife; you may be lucky, ugly as you are."

"Pop, pop," sounded in the air, and the two wild geese fell dead among the rushes, and the water was tinged with blood. "Pop, pop," echoed far and wide in the distance, and whole flocks of wild geese rose up from the rushes. The sound continued from every direction, for the sportsmen surrounded the moor, and some were even seated on branches of trees, overlooking the rushes.

The blue smoke from the guns rose like clouds over the dark trees, and as it floated away across the water, a number of sporting dogs bounded in among the rushes, which bent beneath them wherever they went. How they terrified the poor duckling! He turned away his head to hide it under his wing, and at the same moment a large terrible dog passed quite near him. His jaws were open, his tongue hung from his mouth, and his eyes glared fearfully.

He thrust his nose close to the duckling, showing his sharp teeth, and then, "splash, splash," he went into the water without touching him. "Oh," sighed the duckling, "how thankful I am for being so ugly; even a dog will not bite me." And so he lay quite still, while the shot rattled through the rushes, and gun after gun was fired over him.

It was late in the day before all became quiet, but even then the poor young thing did not dare to move. He waited quietly for several hours, and then, after looking carefully around him, hastened away from the moor as fast as he could. He ran over field and meadow till a storm arose, and he could hardly struggle against it.

Towards evening, he reached a poor little cottage that seemed ready to fall, and only remained standing because it could not decide on which side to fall first. The storm continued so violent, that the duckling could go no farther; he sat down by the cottage, and then he noticed that the door was not quite closed in consequence of one of the hinges having given way. There was therefore a narrow opening near the bottom large enough for him to slip through, which he did very quietly, and got a shelter for the night.

A woman, a tom cat, and a hen lived in this cottage. The tom cat, whom the mistress called, "My little son," was a great favorite; he could raise his back, and purr, and could even throw out sparks from his fur if it were stroked the wrong way. The hen had very short legs, so she was called "Chickie short legs." She laid good eggs, and her mistress loved her as if she had been her own child. In the morning, the strange visitor was discovered, and the tom cat began to purr, and the hen to cluck. "What is that noise about?" said the old woman, looking round the room, but her sight was not very good; therefore, when she saw the duckling, she thought it must

be a fat duck, that had strayed from home. "Oh what a prize!" she exclaimed, "I hope it is not a drake, for then I shall have some duck's eggs. I must wait and see." So the duckling was allowed to remain on trial for three weeks, but there were no eggs. Now the tom cat was the master of the house, and the hen was mistress, and they always said, "We and the world," for they believed themselves to be half the world, and the better half too. The duckling thought that others might hold a different opinion on the subject, but the hen would not listen to such doubts.

"Can you lay eggs?" she asked. "No." "Then have the goodness to hold your tongue." "Can you raise your back, or purr, or throw out sparks?" said the tom cat. "No." "Then you have no right to express an opinion when sensible people are speaking." So the duckling sat in a corner, feeling very low spirited, till the sunshine and the fresh air came into the room through the open door, and then he began to feel such a great longing for a swim on the water, that he could not help telling the hen.

"What an absurd idea," said the hen. "You have nothing else to do, therefore you have foolish fancies. If you could purr or lay eggs, they would pass away."

"But it is so delightful to swim about on the water," said the duckling, "and so refreshing to feel it close over your head, while you dive down to the bottom."

"Delightful, indeed!" said the hen. "Why you must be crazy! Ask the cat, he is the cleverest animal I know; ask him how he would like to swim about on the water, or to dive under it, for I will not speak of my own opinion; ask our mistress, the old woman—there is no one in the world more clever than she is. Do you think she would like to swim or to let the water close over her head?"

"You don't understand me," said the duckling.

"We don't understand you? Who can understand you, I wonder? Do you consider yourself more clever than the cat or the old woman? I will say nothing of myself. Don't imagine such nonsense, child, and thank your good fortune that you have been received here. Are you not in a warm room, and in society from which you may learn something. But you are a chatterer, and your company is not very agreeable. Believe me, I speak only for your own good. I may tell you unpleasant truths, but that is a proof of my friendship. I advise you, therefore, to lay eggs, and learn to purr as quickly as possible."

"I believe I must go out into the world again," said the duckling.

"Yes, do," said the hen. So the duckling left the cottage, and soon found water on which it could swim and dive, but was avoided by all other animals, because of its ugly appearance.

Autumn came, and the leaves in the forest turned to orange and gold. Then, as winter approached, the wind caught them as they fell and whirled them in the cold air. The clouds, heavy with hail and snow-flakes, hung low in the sky, and the raven stood on the ferns crying, "Croak, croak." It made one shiver with cold to look at him.

All this was very sad for the poor little duckling. One evening, just as the sun set amid radiant clouds, there came a large flock of beautiful birds out of the bushes. The duckling had never seen any like them before. They were swans, and they curved their graceful necks, while their soft plumage shone with dazzling whiteness.

They uttered a singular cry, as they spread their glorious wings and flew away from those cold regions to warmer countries across the sea. As they mounted higher and higher in the air, the ugly little duckling felt quite a strange sensation as he watched them. He whirled himself in the water like a wheel, stretched out his neck towards them, and uttered a cry so strange that it frightened himself. Could he ever forget those beautiful, happy birds? And when at last they were out of his sight, he dove under the water, and rose again almost beside himself with excitement.

He knew not the names of these birds, nor where they had flown, but he felt towards them as he had never felt for any other bird in the world. He was not envious of these beautiful creatures, but wished to be as lovely as they. Poor ugly creature, how gladly he would have lived even with the ducks had they only given him encouragement.

The winter grew colder and colder; he was obliged to swim about on the water to keep it from freezing, but every night the space on which he swam became smaller and smaller. At length it froze so hard that the ice in the water crackled as he moved, and the duckling had to paddle with his legs as well as he could, to keep the space from closing up. He became exhausted at last, and lay still and helpless, frozen fast in the ice.

Early in the morning, a peasant, who was passing by, saw what had happened. He broke the ice in pieces with his wooden shoe and carried the duckling home to his wife. The warmth revived the poor little creature, but when the children wanted to play with him, the duckling thought they would do him some harm, so he started up in terror, fluttered into the milk-pan, and splashed the milk about the room.

Then the woman clapped her hands, which frightened him still more. He flew first into the butter-cask, then into the meal-tub, and out again. What a condition he was in! The woman screamed, and struck at him with the tongs; the children

laughed and screamed and tumbled over each other, in their efforts to catch him; but luckily he escaped. The door stood open; the poor creature could just manage to slip out among the bushes, and lie down quite exhausted in the newly fallen snow. It would be very sad, were I to relate all the misery and privations which the poor little duckling endured during the hard winter; but when it had passed, he found himself lying one morning in a moor, amongst the rushes. He felt the warm sun shining, and heard the lark singing, and saw that all around was beautiful spring. Then the young bird felt that his wings were strong, as he flapped them against his sides, and rose high into the air. They bore him onwards, until he found himself in a large garden, before he well knew how it had happened. The apple-trees were in full blossom, and the fragrant elders bent their long green branches down to the stream which wound round a smooth lawn. Everything looked beautiful, in the freshness of early spring. From a thicket close by came three beautiful white swans, rustling their feathers, and swimming lightly over the smooth water. The duckling remembered the lovely birds, and felt more strangely unhappy than ever. "I will fly to those royal birds," he exclaimed, "and they will kill me, because I am so ugly, and dare to approach them; but it does not matter: better be killed by them than pecked by the ducks, beaten by the hens, pushed about by the maiden who feeds the poultry, or starved with hunger in the winter." Then he flew to the water, and swam towards the beautiful swans. The moment they espied the stranger, they rushed to meet him with outstretched wings. "Kill me," said the poor bird; and he bent his head down to the surface of the water, and awaited death. But what did he see in the clear stream below? His own image; no longer a dark, gray bird, ugly and disagreeable to look at, but a graceful and beautiful swan. To be born in a duck's nest, in a farmyard, is of no consequence to a bird, if it is hatched from a swan's egg. He now felt glad at having suffered sorrow and trouble, because it enabled him to enjoy so much better all the pleasure and happiness around him; for the great swans swam round the new-comer, and stroked his neck with their beaks, as a welcome. Into the garden presently came some little children, and threw bread and cake into the water. "See," cried the youngest, "there is a new one;" and the rest were delighted, and ran to their father and mother, dancing and clapping their hands, and shouting joyously, "There is another swan come; a new one has arrived."

Then they threw more bread and cake into the water, and said, "The new one is the most beautiful of all; he is so young and pretty." And the old swans bowed their heads before him.

Then he felt quite ashamed, and hid his head under his wing; for he did not know what to do, he was so happy, and yet not at all proud. He had been persecuted and despised for his ugliness, and now he heard them say he was the most beautiful of all the birds. Even the elder-tree bent down its bows into the water before him, and the sun shone warm and bright. Then he rustled his feathers, curved his slender neck, and cried joyfully, from the depths of his heart, "I never dreamed of such happiness as this, while I was an ugly duckling."

The End

TALK TOGETHER

.....

Not knowing who he is the ugly duckling is vulnerable and finds himself in difficult circumstances. What difficult circumstances does he face because he does not know his true identity?

Can you think of any other stories of people who are vulnerable and in difficult circumstances because they too don't know who they are?

What are some ways that your child may be vulnerable if they grow up not knowing their identity?

Perhaps as you are reading this you might be thinking that this sounds a lot more like popular psychology or an after-school special than God's design for parenting. I want to show you that the shaping of identity was God's idea. In fact, shaping identity is one of the foundational things that God does in transforming lives.

Read through the following verses and write down the words of identity that God is speaking to His Son and to His children.

- Matthew 3:17

- Mark 9:7

- Isaiah 43:1

- Isaiah 49:14,15

- Malachi 1:2a

- John 1:12

- John 15:15

- 1 Corinthians 6:17

- 1 Corinthians 6:19,20

- Ephesians 1:3-6

You do not determine the identity of a child, but you get the privilege of creating an environment for them that points them to understanding who they are. As you have read through the list above and as you think about your child, what are some of the truths about their identity that you would want to make sure they understand?

I keep using the word “environment” because it is more than just one thing that communicates truth. Shaping identity requires more than just words. What are some non-verbal ways that you can communicate the truth of your child’s identity?

Unfortunately, we do not get a free ride. There are many obstacles that stand in the way of being part of the formation of our child's identity. What are some environmental things that might challenge the truth about their identity that you are seeking to communicate?

As is always the case, this truth is not just for your child. It requires you to understand who you are in order for you to train your child in who they are. Go through the following verses and make a list of who you are in Christ. Start your list like this: Because of Jesus I am....

- Isaiah 43:1

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- Isaiah 49:14,15

-
- Malachi 1:2a

-
- John 1:12

-
- John 15:15

-
- 1 Corinthians 6:17

-
- 1 Corinthians 6:19,20

-
- Ephesians 1:3-6
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Again, there is no free ride. This is the kind of truth you have to fight for, so pay attention to the lies that tell you that who you are in Christ is something less than what the Bible says. Ask God to preserve the truth in your heart so that you will always know who you are.



I repeat that phrase over and over to my buddy Jude. At four years old, it is all he can do sometimes to focus on me, but I know it is worth it. Because if I do not have his eyes, then I know I do not have his attention. Sometimes, to help him focus, I put my hands up next to his temples and I get in nice and tight. I do this not because Jude is in trouble, but because I have things I want to share with him, and, unless I go through this process, sometimes we aren't able to connect. Even with my hands like blinders on a horse's eyes and my nose about an inch from his, he can still roll those blue eyes all over. But usually, at this point, I have his attention; I have his eyes so we can talk. All this work is just to get him to pay attention. I haven't even started talking yet.

I think God does the same thing with us. He wants to connect with us—God wants our eyes. God wants our attention. He wants our attention because He wants to connect with us. Just as I want to share with Jude, God wants to share Himself with us.

I believe that God has designed us as parents to be the ones who love God and then walk alongside our children helping them learn to do the same, just as it says in Deuteronomy 6:5-7. God wants us as parents to go first. Before we can teach our children, we need to receive direction from God first. So this lesson is about giving God our eyes and learning to connect with Him throughout the day. In doing so, we will be getting ready to teach our children someday to do the same.

TALK TOGETHER

What things help you individually connect with God?

In what ways do you think learning to connect with God will bless your role as a parent?

ON YOUR OWN

Below we have given you a daily exercise to use to connect with God. Take time to do it on your own. Set aside a short time each day where the two of you can share what your time of meditation was like and the truths you learned. End your sharing time together praying those truths over you and over your baby.

Read over Psalm 139:1-17 by section.

- Write a short sentence about what it says about God.
- Write one thing you think would change in your life if you really believed it about God.
- Write a short prayer response back to God about that truth.

Monday: Psalm 139: 1-4

Tuesday: Psalm 139: 5-6

Wednesday: Psalm 139:7-12

Thursday: Psalm 139: 13-15

Friday: Psalm 139: 16

Saturday: Psalm 139:17

AT THE END OF THE WEEK

Talk about ways that as a couple or individually you could use some of your free time to invest in getting to know God better. Talk about practical things you can do. Here are a few suggestions:

- Decide together as a couple that you want to make time with God a priority.
- Learn to plan out your day/week. Set aside a regular time each day to be alone with God.
- Speak truth to each other...share with each other what you are learning in your quiet times.
- Have time in the home when it is quiet, or listen to worship music.
- Take walks alone and together to talk to God and let Him speak to you about His creation.
- Don't fill up your schedule with too many things.
- Share together over meals/use a night together to listen to a sermon or video.
- Be committed to getting together with others who love God. Have in your schedule regular times with God and His people (Sunday, Life Groups, other conferences or gatherings).

How was your week? Did you feel as if God "had your eyes?" Did you see how spending time connected with God affects the environment of your home? Talk together about how you can see that taking time to invest in your relationship with God will help you better shepherd your child. What are some of your obstacles to connecting with God? Pray and ask God to help you establish connection with God as a priority in your home.

The Heart of RELATIONSHIPS

What do you think of when you hear the word *heart*? Does your mind go to the thing beating in your chest, poetry, or to 70's rock music? The term *heart* can mean so many different things. To entitle this chapter "the heart of relationships" I run the risk of losing you to thoughts of many things. So to bring some clarity to our discussion, let me tell you what we mean by "heart."

The heart is like the command center of your life. It thinks, believes, desires, hopes, and strategizes. It is the central point which determines the direction of your life. The book of Proverbs calls people to fight, to guard their heart because it is such an important aspect of who they are. It says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" Proverbs 4:23. Out of your heart flows all of the issues of life.

Our desire for you in this chapter is to help you develop a relationship with your spouse that makes knowing each other's heart a top priority. If Proverbs is right about the heart being such an important place, then in order to have a close relationship with someone, you will have to know their heart. To not know their heart would mean you only know part of them and intimacy demands much more than that. If you do not know their heart, you will not know the central things that directs their life.

I remember when my wife and I were looking at a house that we were

thinking of buying and the owner told us we could not enter a particular room in the house. This seemed absurd to us...how could we purchase a home we did not know because it had rooms that we could not enter? The same is true in relationships. How can we love unless we know the central themes of a person's life. In order to love well, we will have to enter the closed off rooms of the heart. It is the place that determines the course of your spouse's life.

I encourage you to do everything you can to know your spouse. I must warn you—it is not easy and will require work, patience, and vulnerability. But knowing them will allow you to love them more deeply. And loving at that level of intimacy is worth it.

Not only is connecting at the level of your heart good for your relationship, it will also be essential in parenting. You will be creating an environment where hearts are important. Your child will get to see first hand the benefits of sharing their heart with you. Not only will they have a model, but they will feel the love and safety that is created by your relationship. Let me say it again—getting to know each other's heart and getting to know your child's heart is a long, difficult path, but it is a journey worth taking. The point of this chapter is to help you take some steps along the way.

TALK TOGETHER

What are some things about your spouse that make you want to be open with them and share your heart with them? What are some things about your spouse that make you **NOT** want to open up with them and share your heart with them?

MAKE A PLAN

Plan at least three separate times this week where you can relax and focus on each other- a mini-date. During these mini-dates, talk through one of the sets of questions designed to train you in having heart focused conversations. Pray together and ask God to help you as you plan your week finding the heart of your relationship.

How motivated are you in wanting to know your child's heart? In the shepherding process, why would it be important for there to be a safe place for children to open up about what they are going through?

A week of HEART conversations with your spouse.

Day One

- What was a highlight of your day and why?

- What are some of the positive memories you have as a child? Teen?

- What is a childhood memory you wish you didn't have?

Day Two:

- What is one emotion you remember having today and why do you think you felt it? (anger, frustration, guilt, anxiety, fear, joy, excitement, relief, etc...)

- When you were a child, what heart issues do you remember discussing with an adult or parent?

- Do you remember having things that you never talked to anyone about? What were they? What long term effects did it have on you not to talk to anyone about that? What do you think would have been different if you would have talked to someone about it?

Day Three:

- What is one thing you think God is teaching you these days?

- If God were here, what one question would you ask Him?

- What things do you like about how you were parented?

- In your parenting, what would you like to do different from your parents?

Day Four:

- What is one desire you have for your relationship?

- In what ways am I a safe place for your heart and safe place for you to bring your feelings and emotions?

- In what ways am I not a safe place for your heart's thoughts and feelings?

- What is one way I can support you in prayer today?

Day Five:

- What is one thing I can do to serve you or let you know that I care about you?

- What is one way I have disappointed you lately?

- What is one way I have made you feel loved today?

Day Six:

- What lies, fears, or concerns are on your mind today?

- List ways in which each of your children feels loved that are specific to them as an individual.

- Discuss one heart issue for each of your children, specific to them individually, that is a concern to you.

A DIRTY WORD:

Recovering the Beauty of Authority



I have this hunch that if you are anything like me, you are a human being, a person, an individual. Again, this is just a hunch, but if I am right, you and I as individuals share a common problem. We, as individuals, like our individuality. We like to make our own decisions. We like the pursuit of happiness on our terms. And what we don't like is when someone else wants to make those decisions for us. This is our problem—we don't like authority. We do not like it because the bottom line is that an authority has the ability to tell us no. We want to pursue happiness our way, and we don't like the fact that an authority could lead us in a different direction. Authority has become for us a dirty word. Think about the last time you heard "no." What was that like for you? Did you say, "Thank you for saying no; I am so appreciative of the fact that while I desire one thing, you in your wisdom will be leading me into a different path." Of course not, we squirm under the weight of authority. We want life to be like Burger King "our way, right away."

The reason I said we share a common problem is that we bring our struggles with authority into every area of life. We struggle at work with our boss, with friends wanting to impose their agenda; we struggle with our parents not giving us space; we struggle with police enforcing speed limit laws. This dirty word of authority creeps into every area of life. So the

problem is simply this: our relationship with God is hindered by this battle over authority. We bring our distaste for authority into our parenting. We want to bring good authority to our children, but we face a conflict because we ourselves don't really like the whole concept of authority.

Here is what we need to be convinced of: authority isn't always bad. In fact, authority can be quite beautiful. As you will see, authority can lead you into great places you would never have gone on your own. The point of this lesson is to start a process of recovering the beauty of God's authority and to also recover the necessity of our authority as parents.

TALK TOGETHER

What are some of your negative experiences with authority?

In what ways do you think your negative experiences with authority have impacted your relationship with God?

Can you identify any ways that you struggle with bringing good authority to your children?

How important is it to you that your children learn to follow authority with a good attitude?

ON YOUR OWN

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Look together at the following passages that talk about authority. Write next to them something you learn from each one.

- Romans 13:1

- Daniel 2:21

- I Peter 2:13

- Matthew 28:18

- Mark 8:34

- Colossians 2:8-10

TALK TOGETHER

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...about God's authority.

Can you think of reasons why authority would be so important to God?

Why do you think it is important that you recover the beauty of authority in your relationship with God?

What obstacles or questions arise when you think about coming under God's authority?

What is your attitude like when you do follow God's authority?

TALKING TOGETHER
(ABOUT BRINGING AUTHORITY TO YOUR CHILDREN)

Why would it be so important that your children come under your authority?

What do you think could happen if your child does not learn to follow your authority?

Do you have any fears or concerns about you bringing negative authority to your children? What do you do to be sure that your authority is good and not ugly?

What are some things that you will do to help your child learn to follow your authority?

PRAY

Ask God to help you learn to love His authority and pray for each other that God would give you the wisdom and grace to lead you into the blessing of good authority.

An Atmosphere of **TRAINING**

“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Discipline has this way of training us. This is what Hebrews 12:11 is talking about. It is describing our training process where the Father is leading us into better places and He trains us along the way. Life is about training. We are being prepared to meet our King, to join Him on a great adventure where we reign with Him throughout eternity. He is preparing us, like in 1 John 3:1 where it says that we are His children now but what we will be is not yet made known but it will be. The Father is training you. I hope that as you move through this chapter, you remember that the Father is training you as His beloved son or daughter and understand why we needed to spend time on authority in the last chapter. Training requires a strong leader—because in training, you lead someone into places they do not go by themselves. That takes lots of work and a clear focus on training.

Training your child is exhausting work, but I believe the rewards are without end and eternal. Previously, I used the word atmosphere because it carries with it the expansiveness that training requires. You see, training doesn’t happen in nice, neat five minute blocks of time. Training occurs constantly...like breathing. So I chose a word like atmosphere because it is always there, just like training a child- it’s always there, always happening whether you know it or not. So let’s spend some time looking at how, in your home, you can create an atmosphere of training.

TALK TOGETHER

Why did I use the word “atmosphere?” What does that tell you about training?

As a couple, make a list of things you like about your family and the atmosphere in your home.

Our homes are constant places of learning. Our children are watching our life, words, attitudes, and priorities to learn how to live. We are teaching and training them everyday whether we are aware of it or not. Please make a list of some good and some bad things that your children might possibly learn from watching you.

ON YOUR OWN

The goal of our training is to lead our children to good places where, when left alone, they probably would not go. These are the places that might not immediately feel fun or feel good, but they are places where

true joy lasts. Do the following study together to see what kind of training will make your child feel truly happy and blessed.

Please look at the following verses as a couple. What do they say will make our children “blessed or happy”?

- Joshua 1:8

- Psalm 1:1-2

- Psalm 119:1-2

- Psalm 128: 1-2

- Deuteronomy 28: 1-2

In the following verses, what are some specific “ways of God” that we can train our children in that will lead to blessings in their lives?

- Proverbs 14:21

- Matthew 5:9

- Ephesians 6:1-3

- Philippians 4:6-7

- Romans 13:1-2

- Ephesians 4:29

- Ephesians 4:32

TALK TOGETHER

Are the things God considers as places of happiness something you would want to train your children in? If yes, what are some ways to do that?

What are some specific areas of training that would be appropriate for your child? What are some possible areas of training even for infants and toddlers?

What does it teach a child about their worth and what you think about them when you are willing to consistently train them?

Do you like the truth that God is teaching you? Why/Why not? What are some areas He is training you in right now?

IMPERFECT PARENTS & IMMATURE BABIES:



We are All in Process

Have you ever had one of those moments when you are very embarrassed by your child's behavior? Your child is screaming up and down every aisle of the grocery store. Just when you have exercised your best leadership skills, your child decides to throw a tantrum right in front of someone you respect. Sometimes I have this expectation that because I bring leadership, my children should follow it. I have this expectation that because we covered it once, they should now get it. I have this expectation that my children should act mature. Isn't that crazy? Why would I carry an expectation that my child would act mature? My child is a child—they are not supposed to be mature. I am not saying they should not be moving towards maturity, but I must not expect them to be instantly mature.

I remember when this struck me at the grocery store. It was in the middle of the produce aisle, while wrestling children and quieting screams, that something shifted in me. My goal was that they would act right in the grocery store, and as soon as they did not, our trip was ruined. We all suffered the consequence of another frustrating, failed trip to ShopRite. However, that day, a new perspective came over me. The perspective was this: learning to come under my authority and to behave appropriately is something that they needed training in and is a process. So the grocery store became a training ground for learning to obey in public, learning to obey my voice, and learning patience (no free cookie until aisle 7). There is a lot to be trained in at the grocery store.

Perhaps the grocery store is not a good example for you, but embracing training as a process is something to grab hold of. Think about the number of skills required to write a sentence. An infant has not even discovered their hand, let alone taught it to pick up a pen. That little baby does not possess the fine motor skills to form letters. I was holding a 12 hour old baby that was having trouble getting her eyes to both move in the same direction. She was unable to focus on anything past a few inches from her little face. If you do not embrace the process, then little ones will have a very painful time learning to write a sentence. Not only do they need to develop motor skills, they also need to understand words, letters, and sentence structure. I think you get the point. Training must be a process. When I turned the corner from viewing successful training as having obedient children in a grocery store to instead viewing it as another place for training, my whole experience changed. I was embracing the process.

TALK TOGETHER

What is the difference between a home that emphasizes perfection and a home that allows for process?

What obstacles may occur when you allow for process?

What are some practical ways in which embracing process will change your parenting?

ON YOUR OWN

What does Matthew 12:18-20 teach us about the kind of leader Jesus is?
How does Jesus deal with damaged, immature people?

What do these verses teach you about God? Is God a God who demands instant perfection or is He a God who embraces process?

- John 18:15-27 & 21:1-19

- Galatians 6:1

- Philippians 3:12-14

- 1 John 2:1

- 1 John 3:1-3

Do you have trouble believing that God is willing to have you walk in a process that leads to your maturity?

How is that different from how you would usually view God?

TALK TOGETHER

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Talk together about what God is teaching you about being in process.

If you are not perfect, then you must not demand anyone else to be perfect. In what ways do you think you demand or expect perfection from yourself or your spouse?

What do you believe about yourself or your spouse when one of you fails and is not perfect?

Pray together that your home would be a home filled with grace where people can be in process.

DEDICATION I



Setting Apart

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." Deuteronomy 6: 5-7

Often times people are surprised when they here me say that baby dedication is not in the Bible. You cannot look up in the book of Romans and learn how to properly dedicate a child to God. So why do we do baby dedications? While baby dedications are not in Scripture, there is a beautiful divine pattern of setting things apart. It goes all the way back to Genesis and runs all the way through to the book of Revelation.

God determined there would be seven days and one of those days would be set apart as the Sabbath. God had made all the people of the earth, but He set apart a particular group, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be His own. These descendants were circumcised as a sign of their being set apart to God. Jacob had twelve sons, and these sons represented the twelve tribes that made up the nation of Israel. One of those tribes, the tribe of Levi, was set apart as a priestly tribe to serve the people before God. In the early part of Israel's history, judges were set apart to deliver God's people, prophets were set apart to speak God's words to

the people, and kings were anointed with oil and set apart to lead. And all throughout the Biblical story you can see people, animals, pieces of land, mountains, and all sorts of articles of clothing, food and other items getting set apart for God. This act of setting apart is an act of dedication. Those things, these people, that gold, and this moment belongs to God. Do you get the picture in your mind of God saying and people agreeing that this belongs to God and it is offered to God for His purposes? Certainly all things already belong to God, but in dedication we stand with God in recognizing that this specific thing belongs to Him. We do not exercise ultimate authority over what is dedicated; God does, and the leadership that we offer is in response to His voice. What He says goes because this has been set apart/dedicated to God. So, in baby dedication we stand in the long tradition of setting things apart for God—making the bold declaration that this child belongs to God.

ON YOUR OWN

I would like you to read over these stories from Scripture and think about them. They give us various glimpses into setting your child apart for God. So, what do you learn from the following stories about the role of a parent and the character of God?

- Matthew 19:13-15
- I Samuel 1 & 2
- Deuteronomy 6:1-9

As you have read through Scripture and as you have been parenting your child, what are some of the things that are on your heart as a parent? When you think of your child, what are some of the things that are most valuable to you that you would want to offer them as their Mom or Dad?

TALK TOGETHER

While we have been talking about dedication, I want you to know that what God has done is actually dedicate you. He has set you apart as the parent of this child. Of all the people in the world, you are this child's parent. So in many ways, dedication is about you. You are God's primary shepherd for this child. So talk together about:

- What does baby dedication mean to you?
- Why do you want to do this?
- How does what God is teaching you about Himself influence the way you parent?
- Knowing what God is like, why does that compel you to dedicate your child to God and dedicate yourself to helping them know God?

Pray for each other about your fears as a parent.

DEDICATION II

The Covenant



"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." Deuteronomy 6: 5-7

I'm sure you have heard something like this many times: "The time goes so fast, in a blink of an eye they will be out of the house and you will be wishing for these moments back." On your hardest days you might think, "What are you crazy? Don't you remember how hard this is?" It is hard, and I know that the reality of parenting is not as "romantic" as many remember. However, I do think their bit of nostalgic caution might be worth hearing because, while there are difficult days, they are in fact coming to an end. Your parenting days at these formative stages have a short shelf-life; they are coming to an end. So let us be careful not to wish this season of life away even though it is hard. We must be careful not to "just" survive this hard season of life. I believe God has something for us here, at this stage of parenting. I believe that God is calling us to embrace this season of parenting, to embrace our God-given role as Mommy or Daddy.

ON YOUR OWN

So, in order to do that I want to lay out for you our Baby Dedication Covenant. Covenants are promises that give direction, vows that give shape to the decisions we make. The covenant stands as a marker that we are not going to let parenting pass us by, but we will parent on purpose, according to God's design. Much like a wedding ceremony, these vows are designed to be covenant promises made from parent to child in the presence of God and your church body. So take some time and read through these, meditate on them over a couple of days, come to a point of ownership for every word. Circle the things that you really like and underline the things you have questions about.

Baby Dedication Covenant

Is it your desire to publicly acknowledge that (child's name) is a gift from God and to give HIM the thanks for this blessing?

Recognizing that (child's name) was created by God and for God and His glory, is it your desire to publicly dedicate (him/her) back to God for HIS purposes for (him/her)?

Realizing that (child's name) will experience REAL LIFE (Ps 16:11) only as they learn to love God and to walk in His ways, do you pledge with God's Fatherly help, to take your place as the earthly shepherds for this life?

Will you give yourselves diligently to learn to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Will you make it a personal priority in your weekly schedule to have times to study God's Word and to pray on your own? Will you make every reasonable effort to participate as parents not just in Sunday Services but in *life groups* that this Church Body has designed for your spiritual growth?

Will you bring up your child in the “instruction” of the Lord? Will you commit yourselves to make every reasonable effort to walk along side them using daily real life experiences as training moments to teach them to interpret all situations through what God says? Will you, with patience and love, build the Word of God, the character of Christ, and the joy of the Lord in their life? Will you make every possible effort to have them participate in the Children’s Ministries made available to assist you in this training process? (Please see Children’s Ministry brochures)

Will you, with God’s help, pray regularly that by God’s grace (child’s name) will come to trust in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins and for the fulfillment of all His promises to them, even eternal life, and in their faith follow Jesus as Lord and obey His teachings?

Do you promise to provide, through God’s blessing, for the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of your child, looking to your own heavenly Father for the wisdom, love, and strength to serve your child and not “use” him or her (to meet your own longings and needs)?

TALK TOGETHER

After you come to a point of ownership of this material, I want you to do three things.

1. Talk together about the things you circled and underlined. Pray for each other that God would grant you the strength, perseverance, and grace for this season of parenting.
2. Contact the church office to make an appointment with one of the pastors to discuss baby dedication.
3. Read or talk through the covenant with your child. Tell them what you are promising to do. They may have no idea what you are talking about, but that is ok; it is good for both of you to share these promises together.



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