



Discipleship
Parenting



A Reader's Companion

Kim Cameron-Smith

DISCIPLESHIP PARENTING



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CHAPTER 1

LOVE



FROM THIS CHAPTER

“You see, we are never stuck. We do come to adulthood with a set of beliefs about how to handle anger, how lovable we are, and how trustworthy others are, but these beliefs can be revised over time through loving relationships with friends, our family, and God. They are revised when we challenge our assumptions and risk giving our hearts away. New, healthy relationships can change how you view yourself and others. You learn that others can really be trusted, you are worthy of love, and you are capable of loving with vulnerability and honesty.”

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways has God helped you “grow up” through your parenting?
2. When you’re hurting or fearful, do you feel you can turn to God as a refuge and a protector? Or do you experience God as distant, disinterested, or even cold? Write about what this is like for you.
3. Do you have anybody in your life who makes you feel loved and cherished as you are? Your spouse, a friend, or God? In writing, express your gratitude for this gift in your life.

Meditation

If you're living with an attachment wound, this will impact all your relationships, including your relationship with God. Your early experiences create a veil through which you perceive and experience God, especially his feelings about you and his interest in your life. You may struggle to feel loved, protected, and held in your relationship with God. The good news is that you don't have to know exactly why you feel this way in order to begin healing. God heals us in hidden and unexpected ways.

Read this scripture passage through twice slowly, pausing at any words that stand out to you.

Do not fear: I am with you;
do not be anxious: I am your God.
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. -Isaiah 41:10

Thank God for any insights and comfort he gave you through the Scripture passage. God's Word will bear fruit in our hearts, minds, and lives if we continue to listen to it.

Challenge

Think about each of your children. How do they like to connect to you? Think about the 6 ways of connecting: physical proximity, sameness, belonging, significance, emotional intimacy, and psychological intimacy.

Remember that some children may be too young to connect in some of the "higher" modes of attachment. For example, infants can only connect through physical proximity. A preschooler can connect with you through sameness, but she won't really be yearning yet to connect through psychological intimacy. On the following page you'll find a snapshot reminder of the stages of development and the modes of attachment.

No matter their developmental stage, our kids are all unique; they like to connect with us in different ways even if we're talking about the same attachment mode. When my son Dominic was a little guy, he didn't like to be cuddled very much, but he liked to wrestle and roughhouse; that was how he liked to get his need for physical contact met. My youngest loves cuddles, all day, every day!

So my challenge to you is to consider your own children, their personalities, their development, and their yearnings. Brainstorm some concrete ways to deepen your connection to them.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND MODES OF ATTACHMENT

Child's Age	Mode of Attachment
Birth to Age 1	Physical proximity (Any activity that places your child next to you: cuddling, wrestling, sitting close, hiking, playing games.)
Age 1 to 2	Sameness (Point out ways you are the same as your child: look the same, same interests, same values.)
Age 2 to 3	Belonging (The message: you're my child; you're part of the family. Remind child of shared family history.)
Age 3 to 4	Significance (The message: you're important; you matter; I'm so glad you're my kid. Remind child that he's still loved even during a conflict.)
Age 4 to 5	Emotional intimacy (Draw out feelings; honor emotions while guiding behavior.)
Age 5 to 6	Psychological intimacy (Express curiosity about child's opinions and thoughts.)

CHAPTER 2

BALANCE



FROM THIS CHAPTER

“Stress can become a lifestyle choice driven by good intentions.”

“We learn more about ourselves, our deepest purpose, our greatest gifts, and our hidden talents, when we follow God’s lead in how we spend our time.”

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you recognize any signs that your family is over-committed in any areas of your life together? Are you under-committed in other areas?
2. We always have enough time to do what God wills for us to do. What does this mean to you? Is something preventing you from turning your whole calendar over to God?

Meditation

Read this scripture passage through twice slowly, pausing at words that stand out to you.

You did not choose me, no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit,
fruit that will last; so that the Father will give you
anything you ask him in my name. -John 15:16

When we allow worldly values to guide our plans, we find that our lives ultimately become flat and empty. When you attach yourself to the True Vine, you’ll bear fruit that will last. Our plans are never as good as God’s plan for us. God chooses you. He calls you by name. You are irreplaceable in his vineyard.

Challenge

Here is the biggest challenge for many parents: Knowing when to say no.

God's desire for us and other people's expectations of us sometimes conflict. We yearn to live abundantly, but we fear what others will think of us if we don't go along, if we don't sign up, if we don't join in. Or maybe we think our life will feel full if our calendar is full, but we end up feeling depleted and empty. For some of us, we're not sure who we are if we aren't doing something "valuable" and productive.

Sometimes God just wants us to rest and exist in his care. Using our talents is part of the discipleship life, but sometimes God wants us to step back and allow others to take the lead. If we always have to be the one serving, if we can never allow others to serve us, then we are getting in the way of somebody else's growth as a disciple.

So, practice saying no. Begin to work on discerning God's lead. What is his dream for you and your family? Remember that saying no now leaves room for a yes later.

CHAPTER 3

PLAY



FROM THIS CHAPTER

“Because we tend to measure ‘happiness’ by competitive success, not interior fulfillment, we often don’t have much use for play.”

“The imprint of God’s play is all around us, reminding us of his creativity and delight in his creation. And that imprint is on us, too, when *we* play.”

Questions for Reflection

1. What are some of your favorite ways to play? Can you set aside some time this week to engage in play?
2. What are some of your family’s favorite play rituals? Can you think of any new ways you can play together?
3. When we play, God’s joyful nature moves towards us. Like any friend, God likes to play with us, sharing our interests, hobbies, and even some inside jokes. How do you imagine and notice God playing with you?

Meditation

Read the scripture passage through twice slowly, pausing at words that stand out to you.

And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.”
Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them. -Mark 10:13-16

May we be more like children in our faith and trust in God! Thank God for any insights he has given you about yourself, your children, or your faith as you read this passage.

Activity

Adults can learn a lot about how to relate to God by watching children play. Watch your children playing alone or together. Notice their trust, openness, and sense of wonder. Notice their ability to suspend judgment and to imagine a reality beyond the material world.

CHAPTER 4

MERCIFUL DISCIPLINE



FROM THIS CHAPTER

“If mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of another, then parents have many opportunities to practice mercy with their children. We understand chaos! As merciful Catholic parents, discipline is about bringing order to the chaos of immaturity.”

Questions for Reflection

1. How were you disciplined as a child? Was it consistent, or were you unsure what to expect? Did it feel fair and respectful? Did you feel loved, even when you made a mistake? Did you feel like your parents love for you was contingent upon your good behavior in any way? Were you spanked or threatened into compliance?

2. If you were raised with compassion and enjoy a secure adult attachment disposition, you probably have a good idea how you want to handle problem behavior in your home. If you have any kind of attachment wounds, instead of operating on auto-pilot, how do you want to discipline your children? What principles are non-negotiable for you, even if they challenge you as a parent?

Meditation

Read the scripture passage through twice slowly, pausing at words that stand out to you.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his Name's sake.
Though I walk through valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil; for you are with me;
Your rod and your staff they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life.
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. -Psalm 23

Praise God for his care for you! You are never alone. Even in the darkest moments of life, you are cherished and protected. You will make it through those valleys of pain, disillusionment, and loss to sit with the Lord at his table. Christ has a seat reserved just for you.

Activity

Can you become the gentle shepherd for your children, guiding them through the valleys of their inner chaos, frustrations, and fears? Can you serve as an image of the joyful host, preparing a table of plenty for them?

Prayerfully rewrite Psalm 23 as a message of love to your child. For example: "My dear child, I am your shepherd, I will provide what you need. You can rest in my care like a lamb lying down in green pastures." Compose your psalm from a place of rest and freedom; don't worry about being perfect. Let your creativity and love flow. You might decorate your psalm with illuminated letters and personal art, and then frame it for your child.

CHAPTER 5

EMPATHY



FROM THIS CHAPTER

“It’s important that we put as much emphasis on extending to our children lessons in compassion and kindness as we do in algebra and Mozart. Lessons of the heart are learned primarily through relationships, particularly our first relationships in the family.”

“The most powerful way we can model empathy for a child is *to treat her with empathy*. . . We empathize with our children when we affirm their experiences and fears and express curiosity about their opinions. We empathize by simply putting ourselves in their shoes and trying to see things from their perspective.”

Questions for Reflection

1. In this chapter, I explain why it’s better to meet your child’s attachment needs before he starts expressing the need. You can get ahead of a child’s yearning, anticipating the need. This will keep his attachment cup filled so he doesn’t panic when it’s nearing empty. How does your child most often signal that he needs attention or connection with you? How can you creatively meet that need long before he expresses it?
2. Off the top of your head, how many emotions can you name? Are you comfortable when people express their emotions around you? Are there any emotions that make you feel uneasy, irritable, or angry?

Meditation

Read the scripture passage through twice slowly, pausing at words that stand out to you.

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others. -Philippians 2:1-4

Compassion, tender care, and your shared faith can dissolve disunity and tension in your family. Thank God for the hope he gives us in his Word!

Activity

Set aside a week (or a month) to become more intentional in helping your child exercise her caring brain. Put it on your calendar.

While you're watching a movie or reading a book with your child, look for signs of empathy (or a lack of empathy) in the characters and point these out to your child. How did the character's actions impact other characters? Ask your child what she imagines characters are feeling in the stories you read with her. When your child has a conflict with a sibling or a peer, help her practice considering the viewpoint of the other child.

Know that small children (preschool age and younger) have a hard time seeing the perspectives of other people, but you can still practice with them. Wonder with the small child. "I wonder how Jimmy feels when he's called 'dummy'." "I wonder what it feels like to watch other children play without being invited to join in." A book you might read with a preschooler: *Teach Your Dragon Empathy* in which Digory the Dragon does and says things to hurt other people's feelings without realizing it, until his owner teaches him about empathy. (Some Catholic parents don't like dragons, but Digory is more like a pet dog than a dragon.)

CHAPTER 6

RADIANT FAITH



FROM THIS CHAPTER

“It’s true that culture alone isn’t enough to bring us to the summit of mature faith, but without culture, faith won’t survive.”

“We don’t want our children to know only the *message* of the Church; we also want them to inherit a *way of life* that can nourish and sustain their faith.”

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you believe having a family faith culture apart from your parish is important? Why or why not? Clarify this for yourself.

2. Do you pray daily with your children? Do they see you praying?

Meditation

Do you have any obstacles in your life that keep you from passing on the Faith to your kids? Do you have family members whose lifestyle conflicts with our Faith? Does a family member resist or interfere in your efforts to teach your children Catholic values? Does your spouse join in family prayer?

Read the scripture passage through twice slowly, pausing at words that stand out to you.

And I will give them another heart and a new spirit I will put within them. From their bodies I will remove the hearts of stone, and give them hearts of flesh, so that they walk according to my statutes, taking care to keep my ordinances. Thus they will be my people, and I will be their God. -Ezekiel 11:19-20

It can be discouraging when a family member seems to place stumbling blocks in our child's path toward discipleship. The culture in which we're raising our children is superficial and hyper-secular, devoid of appreciation for the Transcendent.

When we try to grapple with the powers of darkness by our own efforts, we will stumble and become discouraged. We can't manage this battle on our own; it's too big for us. But God did not leave us alone to raise our children. Our companions are the Holy Spirit and our Blessed Mother who accompany us as we teach and guide our children. Entrust your children, your spouse, and other family members to Mary's care.

Remember that Christ already crushed Satan on the cross! Yes!

Challenge

Building a beautiful Catholic home culture is your best tool for evangelizing your children. It can feel overwhelming, but a slow and simple approach is actually more effective when you are trying to lead children in the faith.

In this chapter, I offer ideas for introducing children to Catholic art and sacred music, developing a family prayer routine, and observing the liturgical calendar with your kids. Which ideas most appealed to you? Start with what feels comfortable to you. Introduce one new practice at a time until you have a family faith routine that works for you and that reflects your unique family. One small thing, a little at a time, is all that's needed to get your "little seminary" going!

CHAPTER 7

A STRONG MARRIAGE



FROM THIS CHAPTER

“How can you serve as a sign for the Church when you’re busy raising children and paying down a mortgage? That’s part of the point, though. Jesus lived an ordinary human life for thirty years, hidden away, doing all the normal things a poor Jewish boy or man would do back then, including hard work, gathering with family and friends in celebration and mourning, and working through squabbles with neighbors. He entered the messiness of human experience to redeem these activities, to help us understand the role they play in the story of our personal salvation. For Catholic couples, our real, everyday experiences matter because that’s where God reveals the whole truth about marriage, and it’s where we work out our own salvations.”

Questions for Reflection

- 1) The 4 deadly habits of communicating during an argument are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Do you notice any of these habits in your relationship with your spouse?

- 2) What was your “original vision” of your spouse? What made you fall in love with him or her? What was different and special about him or her?

Meditation

You and your spouse bring to your marriage your talents, aspirations, and dreams. Yet none of these can top the importance of real love. Read the scripture passage through twice slowly, pausing at words that stand out to you.

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

-1 Corinthians 13:1-8(a)

This is one of the most well-known Scripture passages. Paul was writing to the Corinthians urging them to love one another despite their differences. We can have great talents and gifts, but if we aren't exercising them with love, they're worthless.

Activity

Do this activity with your spouse if he or she is willing. How does your spouse like to connect with you, and how do you like to connect with your spouse? Think about the 6 modes of attachment: physical proximity, sameness, belonging, significance, emotional intimacy, and psychological intimacy. Are you both comfortable with emotional and psychological intimacy? Are you more comfortable in some modes and your spouse in others? Brainstorm some concrete ways that you can connect more deeply with each other.