



THE PODCAST

Discussion Guide

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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,"¹ 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.”¹ 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.”² 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 Buechner³

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.”⁴ Dr. Seuss says, “Today you are You, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is you-er than you.”⁵ 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

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

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

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

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

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