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HOME GROWN

Study Guide



Essentials for Christian Parenting

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Patricia Nederveld

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INTRODUCTION

This seven-session study is intended to be used with *Home Grown: Handbook for Christian Parenting* by Karen DeBoer. It offers your group of parents an opportunity to get together to share joys and challenges as you look for ways to nurture deeper, fuller faith in your children (and yourselves!).

We hope you'll find the handbook, along with this guide to discussing its key issues, a blessing and an encouragement to you as you follow Christ and invite your children to follow him too.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE


We suggest you set aside an hour for each of the seven sessions. You might also want to add an introductory session to get to know each other, learn a bit about everyone's family, and begin the habit of praying for each other. Also consider adding an extra session at the end to gather with your families for a meal, followed by a time of worship.


Each of the seven sessions in this guide corresponds to its chapter number in the handbook. You'll want to read the corresponding chapter *before* you gather so you can draw on its wisdom—and perhaps challenge some of its conclusions! Remember, no parenting guide is complete and infallible. The strength of this study will be your shared experiences and wisdom, complemented by the wise words of handbook author and mom of four, Karen DeBoer, and the


experts whose advice she's incorporated into the questions and answers in the handbook.


HOW THE SESSIONS WORK

This guide encourages shared leadership; however, you may wish to appoint an informal leader to keep everyone on task and to pace the group as you work through the questions that capture your attention and address issues that are most important to you. Regardless of your leadership method, you'll want to roughly follow the session plan each week. Here's the sequence:

 **Think About It** (10-15 minutes). Each session opens with a pointed question for parents. Check out how other parents have responded to the question (download video segments at www.HomeGrownParenting.org, or play them from the course DVD, sold separately). You'll also share your own responses to the same question during this opening step. Beginning with session 2, there will be time to look back over the previous week and talk about how you responded to the content of that session. And, in case the video option doesn't work for your group, there's an alternative suggestion for launching the session.

 **Talk About It** (30-35 minutes). This section is the heart of the session. It consists of questions that follow up on the handbook chapter the group has read at home. We suggest you always begin with question 1, reading and discussing the Scripture together. After that, however, we encourage you to skim through the questions and choose the ones that are most important to your group. Aim to wrap up this part of the session about ten minutes before you plan to dismiss.

 **Pray About It.** Notice that this step has no time frame—that's because the length of your prayer time may vary, and it shouldn't be rushed. As you get to know each other and the needs of each other's families, this will become a precious time. Don't hesitate to adjust the time given to discussion, leaving more time for prayer.

 **Live It** (on your own time). Each week we'll give you a few ideas for following up on what you've learned by *doing* something. You can keep your experiences private, or you may want to build them into your group process, making commitments and deciding to be accountable to each other.

TIPS FOR LEARNING AND GROWING TOGETHER

Here are a few guidelines for making the most of this study and your group experience:

- **Come prepared each week.** Read the handbook chapter and note the focus statement for that week's discussion. Read the Scripture passages that undergird the material. Watch the accompanying video segment and glance over the questions in this study guide, noting those that seem the most compelling to you.
- **Come prepared to participate too.** You may feel that you come as a learner, but you also come as a parent with experience! Be willing to share what you're thinking and feeling with the others in your group.
- **Honor each other by listening.** Remember that families are different, parenting styles are different, and there's no such thing as a perfect parent! Speak your opinions honestly and be a good listener, encouraging others to do so as well, as together you search for ways to relate to your children that are effective and faithful to God's Word.
- **Honor time frames.** Try not to dominate the conversation; leave time for everyone to contribute their feelings and ideas. Begin and end on time to honor the busy schedules of each family in your group.

May God bless your time together as you seek to nurture your children in God's ways!



SESSION 1

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 6; Luke 2:41-52

FOCUS

God calls parents to nurture the faith of their children.

THINK ABOUT IT (10-15 MINUTES)

What scares you most about being a Christian parent? That's the question parents in today's short video intro respond to—and it's a good one for us to think about as we begin this seven-week conversation.

If group members weren't able to watch the video prior to your meeting, watch it together now. Then take a few minutes to get to know each other by telling everyone a bit about who you are, who's in your family, and how you would answer this very personal question. (It's our hope that this study will help you support each other during the coming weeks—so get started today by sharing openly and offering encouragement to others from your own experience.)

We hope you've read chapter 1 of the handbook. It's all about God's call to Christian parents to nurture their kids' faith.

In case you've ever wondered about the relationship of your role as a parent and the role of the church in nurturing your child's faith, you'll be interested in a study done by the Search Institute to determine the influence of congregational

life and religious education on the faith maturity of members (see p. 11 of the handbook).

The study discovered that the family's influence on the faith development of children and adolescents is greater than that of the religious education children and adolescents receive by being part of congregational life. That's statistical affirmation of God's call to us as Christian parents!

Twenty years have passed since this study was done by the Search Institute. What trends have you seen in our culture since 1990 that increase the urgency and importance of parents' role in nurturing the faith of their children?

For more research in this area, check out www.search-institute.org.

Of the two strongest connections to faith maturity, family religiousness is slightly more important than lifetime exposure to Christian education. The particular family experiences most tied to greater faith maturity are the frequency with which an adolescent talked with mother and father about faith, the frequency of family devotions, and the frequency with which parents and children together were involved in efforts, formal or informal, to help other people.

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TALK ABOUT IT (30-35 MINUTES)

Read Deuteronomy 6 together (we suggest you read it from *The Message*). Then discuss the following questions. If your time is limited, choose the questions that are most important to your group.

1. What do these words from God suggest about our role as godly parents? Where does the joy in Christian parenting come from?

2. How has the meaning of your baptism deepened for you over the years? How have you explained the meaning and significance of your child's baptism to him or her? Share some ways you help your family understand, remember, and celebrate their baptisms.

In baptism God is making a public declaration that the child being baptized is loved by him, belongs to him, and is part of the community of faith. In essence, God is giving this child his/her primary identity.

—Joyce Berger

3. How do you react to Proverbs 22:6 (“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” [NIV])? How do Bob De Moor’s comments (see question 8 in the handbook) help you understand the verse as it relates to your role as a Christian parent?
4. Share something of your own faith development with the group. How does your own “faith biography” shape how you parent? If you came to faith later in life, what advantages might that have for how you nurture your child’s faith? What challenges does it pose?

5. Think back over your own growing-up years and recall someone who intentionally “blessed” you. What did that blessing mean to you and to your emerging faith? How can we be more intentional about “blessing” our children?

6. In her book *Real Kids, Real Faith* (p. 10), Karen Marie Yust points out that faith is a gift from God, not a set of beliefs parents impart to their children. The spirituality of very young children, however, is shaped by perceptions, relationships, and experiences within their families. Suggest some ways that families can become more intentional about nurturing and shaping the faith of their little ones, beginning at birth.

Faith is a gift from God that lies dormant in children unless and until it is stirred up in them. It is like the yeast that bakers mix into bread: inactive until the baker adds a little warm water and begins kneading to spread the yeast throughout the dough. As parents, we can provide children with a rich spiritual environment that activates their faith and mixes it into their everyday lives.

—Karen-Marie Yust

7. Have you ever heard a parent say, “I’m not going to impose my faith on my kids. When they’re old enough, they should be able to decide for themselves what they believe”? How would you respond to a friend who takes that point of view?

8. All families live by their own (often unwritten, even unacknowledged) mission statements. How would you summarize the “mission statement” of the family you grew up in? How would you edit or rewrite it to make it just right for your own family today?

9. In what ways do you hope this study and conversation with other parents will help you in your own faith—and in nurturing the faith of your children?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Set aside enough time to pray with and for each other at the end of each session. Be sure to pray in a general way for all of the parents and children represented in your group; but encourage everyone to share particular needs too. Keep everything said in your group confidential—only God needs to know each issue and challenge you're facing as you seek to become more godly in your parenting!

LIVE IT

Here are a few suggestions for things you might do this week to follow up on the challenges and new insights you've received in your group session:

Talk about baptism

Do a little family research and set aside some time (at a meal, at bedtime) to tell your children the story of their baptisms if they've been baptized. Mark the dates on a family calendar and covenant together to celebrate each baptism on its anniversary date in the year ahead. Talk about what it means to be a child of God and a part of God's family.

Create a family mission statement

If you have older children who will understand the purpose and meaning of a family mission statement, take a half-hour after dinner or before bedtime to develop a simple statement that reflects your family's faith and purpose in God's world.

Find a family life verse

Invite your children to share favorite verses from Scripture that might serve as a family (or individual) guiding verse. Write out the verse(s) you decide on together and tuck them in your family Bible or post them on the refrigerator.