



Mile Marker 1:
Birth and Toddler

To encourage parents to provide their children with a foundation for faith.

The sessions are designed to embolden parents to be intentional about faith formation, and to prioritize the souls of their children above all other competing priorities.



Scriptures for the Road Ahead

Embracing Holistic Discipleship (Faith as a Lifestyle)

4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **5** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. **6** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **7** You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. **8** You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. **9** You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Begin with the End in Mind

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

God Desires Mutual Love and Respect

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), **3** “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” **4** Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Ephesians 6:1-4



**You Get the
Privilege of
Teaching
Your Kids
about God**

Discipline as a Sign of Love

6 “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? **8** If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. **9** Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? **10** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **11** 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.

Hebrews 12:6-11

Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.

Proverbs 29:17

Notes

Start with Why...God's Purpose for Parenting

The Family is Designed with Discipleship in Mind:

"What is God's purpose for the family? God created the family to be a discipleship center! He created your family to be a spiritual-transformation center. It is the primary environment where faith and character are formed and shaped. God made your family so that you would help each other to love Him more. You are together so that you might help each other discover Christ together, grow in Him together, and together make a difference in the world for Him." - **Rob Rienow**

Parenting is about Faithfulness:

"When we realize that having children isn't about us but is rather about God, then the trials and sacrifices of parenting are more easily borne. We see the purpose behind the difficulty, and we remind ourselves, 'This isn't about me; it's about him.' The ultimate issue is no longer how proud my children make me, but how faithful I've been to discharge the duties God has given me." - **Gary Thomas**

Parenting is an Act of Stewardship:

"It's imperative to distinguish between your will and God's will. Every prayer, including your prayers for your children, must pass a twofold litmus test: your prayers must be in the will of God and for the glory of God.... Prayer is the way we take our hands off and place our children in the hands of God." - **Mark Batterson**

We May be Parents, but We are God's Children First:

"What does it mean to have a father in God and to be His child even as we are parents ourselves? Having a father and being His child comes with privilege and responsibility. At its core the Father and child relationship between God and His people can be described in one word: love." - **Brian Haynes**

It's All About the Story

Parents are Called to Align Their Kids with God's Story for Their Lives:

"Raising faithful children in today's world can only be done by offering them a different legitimating narrative for their lives. Only God's story will truly allow our children to live. Help them discover the beauty of the story. Help them dream about what God could release them to do with their lives." - **Earl Lavender**

Stories are an Essential Tool in Faith Formation:

4 Key Functions of Stories

- 1) Transmit Values
- 2) Shape Identity
- 3) Move People to Action
- 4) Preserve Memory

"An abundant and growing body of evidence shows that stories have a unique capacity to transmit values, shape identity, move people to action, and preserve memory. For this reason, people who care about the next generation will be experts at telling the community's story. They will preserve and celebrate the stories that develop character, transmit the community's beliefs, and inspire the young to understand their connection to the community. They will give the next generation good stories to live by, and they will fiercely protect their young against toxic narratives that poison and weaken us." -

Darryl Tippens

Stories have a Deep Connection with Behavior:

"Narrative is the 'central function...of the human mind.' We turn everything into a story to make sense of life. We 'dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative.' In fact, we cannot avoid it. We are storied creatures. Our stories help us to navigate our world, to understand right and wrong, and to provide meaning (So the moral of the story is...)...We are shaped by our stories. In fact, our stories, once in place, determine much of our behavior without regard to their accuracy or helpfulness." - **James Bryan Smith**

Parents are Guides Tasked with Helping Their Children Write Their Own Faith Story:

“Parents ought not simply pass on their faith; rather, they should seek to cultivate the unique faith of their children as they invite their children to merge their story with God’s story.” –

Steven Bonner

Parents Must Not Abandon their Own Story while Raising their Children:

“It’s a terrible myth to believe that once we have children, our journey ends and theirs begins. For many of us, the most interesting and productive times in our lives come after we have children. For the majority of us, the greatest challenges and struggles also come in midlife and later. Wholehearted parenting is not having it all figured out and passing it down - it’s learning and exploring together.” – **Brene Brown**



***Parents
are Called
to Be
Story Guides***

You are Your Children's Primary Influence

No One Else Can Do Your Job:

“Your role is not to impress your children or anyone else with your ability to parent; your role is to impress your children with the love and nature of God. The fact that no one has more potential to influence your child than you do implies that you have a natural God-given advantage to love and lead your children. Does that mean that you don't attempt to sharpen your parenting skills? Of course not. But it does mean that you parent from the perspective of a relationship, not from your competence or abilities. Put another way, this is the reason a mother or father who may not be an expert at communication or a genius in child psychology can be an exceptional parent. Your relationship gives you the potential to influence in a way that others cannot. You are a mother. You are a father. No one else can do what you do.” -

Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof

Faith Development Cannot be Outsourced:

“We live in a service-based economy. We outsource many of our responsibilities like laundry, lawn care, and window washing. Increasingly, many parents treat the faith development of their children like a trip to the dry cleaner. They deliver their children through the drive-thru window to get them cleaned, pressed, and made presentable. They return later to pick them up, believing the job is done. This works well for cleaning clothes but not for nurturing faith in kids. This drop-off approach might keep kids busy in church for a few years, but it doesn't necessarily lead to any kind of lasting faith in their adult years. We can't outsource spiritual formation for our children. Parents are more influential than anyone else in a child's life.” - **Johnny Markham**

Other People or Groups Want Your Job:

“All children are guided by someone. If you as their parents are not their primary guides, then other influences and individuals assume that role—school, media, the culture, other adults, or peers who are getting their guidance from someone else.” -

Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell

Children Need Parents to Help Them Begin to Understand Unconditional Love:

“Every child has an emotional tank, a place of emotional strength that can fuel him through the challenging days of childhood and adolescence. Just as cars are powered by reserves in the gas tank, our children are fueled from their emotional tanks. We must fill our children’s emotional tanks for them to operate as they should and reach their potential....We need to fill our children’s emotional tanks with unconditional love, because real love is always unconditional. Unconditional love is a full love that accepts and affirms a child for who he is, not for what he does. No matter what he does (or does not do), the parent still loves him.” –

Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell

Parents are Called to Provide Holistic and Personalized Love:

“Every child has a special way of perceiving love. There are five ways children (indeed, all people) speak and understand emotional love. They are physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, and acts of service. If you have several children in your family, chances are they speak different languages, for just as children often have different personalities, they may hear in different love languages. Typically, two children need to be loved in different ways.” –

Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell



Time is of the Essence

Embrace the 1,000 Week Mindset:

“The average parent has less than a 1,000 weeks from the time their kids are born until they move out of the house.” - **Reggie Joiner and Kristen Ivy**

Marble Jar Exercise

(Adapted from *Don't Miss It* - by Reggie Joiner and Kristen Ivy)

“Try creating a visual countdown clock. Start with a jar of 936 marbles. Why 936? Because that is the estimated number of weeks between birth and high school graduation. Then reduce the number of marbles in your jar to match the actual number of weeks you have left with each child. Then start a simple ritual: Remove one marble every week. Over time, the practice of losing marbles can have a meaningful effect. It will remind you to value your time. It will make each week matter a little more. It will reinforce a simple principle: When you see how much time you have left, you tend to do more with the time you have now.”

Each Life-Stage is an Opportunity and a Blessing:

“You will only get 365 days to know your three-year-old as a three-year-old, and then they will be four. And you will never know them again as a three-year-old.... So don't hurry through the present phase of your kid's life just so you can move on to whatever is next. Don't embrace an attitude that says, “This is just a phase I need to get through as soon as possible.” Instead, inspire your family to believe, “This is just a phase, and I don't want to miss it.”” - **Reggie Joiner and Kristen Ivy**

Kids Will Always Spend More Time at Home than at Church:

“There are 168 hours in a week. Let's assume that a child is at church two hours each week. It is unreasonable to think that in only two hours a week, a child can receive all the training necessary to develop a vibrant, genuine, informed, tested faith in God. Something has to happen in the other 166 hours for that faith development to have a chance of succeeding.” - **Johnny Markham**

Intentional Parenting Doesn't Happen by Accident:

Each Time Slot is an Opportunity

(Adapted from *Don't Miss It* - by Reggie Joiner and Kristen Ivy)

“When you share a **MEAL TIME**, you can establish values with intentional conversations while you eat.”

“When you pause at **BED TIME**, you strengthen your relationship through heart conversations.”

“When you leverage **DRIVE TIME**, you can interpret life during informal conversations as you travel.”

“When you connect positively in the **MORNING TIME**, you can instill purpose and give fuel for their day.”

How Are You Using Your Time?

Morning Time -

Drive Time -

Meal Time -

Bed Time -

Building a Parenting Tool Box

Prayer is a Parent's Most Important Responsibility:

"You don't have to do everything right as a parent, but there is one thing you cannot afford to get wrong. That one thing is prayer. You'll never be a perfect parent, but you can be a praying parent. Prayer is your highest privilege as a parent. There is nothing you can do that will have a higher return on investment. In fact, the dividends are eternal." - **Mark Batterson**

Preparation is Crucial to Intentional Parenting:

"The worst time to try to come up with a parenting plan of action is when you need it. To help illustrate that statement, think about the place you work. The same thing is absolutely true there as well. The worst time to come up with a policy for something is after you need it." - **John Trent**

Choosing the Right Approach is Critical (Embrace a Biblical Philosophy):

"Flawed philosophy creates a flawed strategy, which leads people to embrace flawed tactics." - **Tim Kimmel**

Create a Plan of Action that is Tailored to Your Family:

"Many of us discovered soon after our children were born that our parenting toolboxes were missing some of the tools we needed to be effective at the job. Many times we found that we had been handed tools from our own parents that we automatically tried to use on our children. It is quite ironic that we will use phrases or techniques that our parents used on us, even though those approaches didn't work on us any better than they work on our kids." - **Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof**

Parent's Must Strive for Clarity in their Messaging:

“Not long after we’re born we discover that the world we live in is based on performance. Our parents begin molding and shaping our behavior from an early age. Some of the very first words we learn are good and bad. We hear thing like ‘Oh, you ate all of your peas – good girl’ or ‘Do not write on the wall with your crayon – bad boy.’ Before we can speak, we become aware that acceptance hinges on our behavior, which produces a decidedly unstable world of highly conditional love... Parents must be careful to make sure when teaching right and wrong to: make it clear that their actions not their identity is being evaluated.” -

James Bryan Smith

What Do You Consider Your Parenting Strengths?

What Do You Consider Your Opportunities for Growth as a Parent?

Avoid the Perfect Family Trap

It is Important to Set Healthy Parenting Expectations:

“Your purpose as a parent is not to develop exceptional parenting skills. If you establish unrealistic expectations for yourself, you may create an atmosphere where you become discouraged and frustrate your children. If you are not careful in your zeal to “win” at parenting, you may actually create an unhealthy culture. It is vital to guard your mindset and stay focused on the primary role of parenting.” - **Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof**

Positive Parenting Begins with a Healthy Self-Image:

“The uncertainty of parenting can bring up feelings in us that range from frustration to terror....parenting is a shame and judgement minefield precisely because most of us are wading through uncertainty and self-doubt when it comes to raising our children.” - **Brene Brown**

Our Parenting Approach is Shaped by Our Image of Family:

“We all have an image of family. You learned it from the pictures around you, and you are holding a mental impression of what you think your family should look like. You are confronted with images in the mall and movie theater, on church brochures and billboards at the doctors’ and dentists’ offices. Everywhere you go, you are reminded of how ideal families dress and act.” – **Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof**

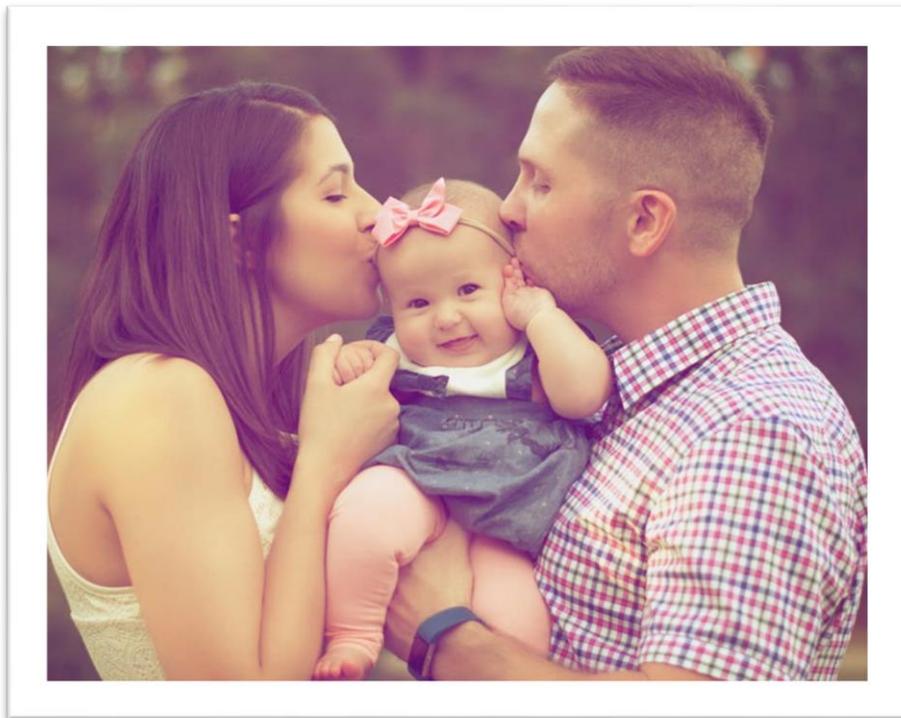
We Can Find Encouragement by Looking at Families in the Bible:

“The wonderful thing about the Bible is the brutal honesty it reveals about humanity. The characters aren’t airbrushed so that we see a sanitized version of faith or family. After looking at these families in the Bible, one might feel that one’s own family is not that bad in comparison. The Bible helps us understand that most families dealt with some dysfunction, yet God was able to work through these flawed families to accomplish holy purposes.” - **Robert Oglesby Jr.**

Salvation for Our Children Can Come from God and God Alone:

“None of us can be such good parents that God becomes obligated to save our children’s souls. On the more encouraging end, none of us can mess up so badly that our children somehow extend beyond the reach of God’s mercy.” –

Gary Thomas



***Real Life is Not Instagram Worthy.
God Looks at the Heart.***

Parent in Community

Parents Are Not the Only Adult Faith Influences Your Children Need:

“Here is a sobering thought: Your present family will never be enough for your children. Even the best parenting in the best family will never alone be enough to develop relationally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy children....You are not the only influence your children need.” - **Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof**

God’s Plan for Faith Formation Includes the Home and the Church:

“Spiritual formation begins at home, but it does not end there. The home cannot be the church any more than the church can be the home. Christianity is a communal faith to be experienced through corporate worship, under pastoral leadership and amid what many call ‘doing life’ with other believers. God never intended a family’s faith to occur apart from local church engagement. But neither did He design the church to replace the home.” - **Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope**

Community Parenting Creates Intentional Positive Faith Influences:

“Your children one day will seek affirmation and approval from adults other than you. Either you can become intentional about enlisting other trusted adults to influence your kids, or you can depend only on your limited capacity. You can leave them alone to discover random influences who will shape their character and faith, or you can help them proactively pursue strategic relationships for their lives.” - **Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof**



*Parenting is a
Team Sport*

Be the Adult You Want Your Child to Grow Up to Be

The Principle of “Leading by Example” is Foundational to Parenting:

“What we are teaches the child more than what we say, so we must be what we want our children to become.” - **Joseph Chilton Pearce**

Parents are Called to Be the Adults that they Desire their Children to Be:

“Who we are and how we engage with the world are much stronger predictors of how our children will do than what we know about parenting....the question isn't so much ‘Are you parenting the right way?’ As it is: ‘Are you the adult you want your child to grow up to be?’” - **Brene Brown**

Children Learn Spiritual Practices By Watching their Parents:

“Children need to see their parents make relational, emotional and spiritual growth a priority. If parents don't make it personal, it may never be personal for their kids.” - **Reggie Joiner**

Children Learn Healthy Self-Image from their Parents:

“...if we want our children to love and accept who they are, our job is to love and accept who we are.” - **Brene Brown**

Our Spouses and Children are Gifts from God, but they Cannot take His Place:

“...our own spiritual quest must drive our parenting. Unfinished or neglected spiritual business inevitably works its way out through our relationships in a negative fashion: we become more demanding, more controlling, more intolerant, more resentful. Our spouses and our children cannot quench the God-given spiritual hunger in our souls. When we neglect God, we ask our marriage and our parenting to become stand-ins for God—something they were never designed to do.” - **Gary Thomas**

Children are Active Participants in the Faith Formation Process

Children are Active Participants in the Faith Formation Process:

“...spiritual formation of children does not occur *to* or *for* children but *with* children... As those created in the image of God, children are not merely blank slates, sponges, or empty vessels that come to us ready to be filled as passive recipients of spiritual information. Children are born to us as active makers of spiritual meaning. They make meaning in unique and personalized ways. When we engage children as passive recipients, we deny their agency as those created in the image of God. We depersonalize them and make them and make them into something less than what they were created to be.” - **Steven Bonner**

Christian Families are Called to Pursue a Shared Spirituality:

“The transformation of our children ought to deepen our own spirituality because growth in faith is co-developmental and comes more from experience than the ‘language of instruction.’ Shared spiritually formative practices prepare children and parents to cope with a challenging world, and to stay connected with God and one another.” - **Ron Bruner**

Change is an Integral Part of the Faith Formation Process:

“The first thing parents must remember is that moving from childhood to adulthood can be described in a single word: change. Change is inevitable and necessary. Your growing child will change, and change often. Sometimes you’ll notice, but mostly you won’t. It is as if one day you wake up to realize that who your child “is” is not the same person they were a while ago. Generally, change means that something is happening in your child, and that is a good and important thing. Your child’s movement toward maturity, exploring who he or she is, and learning how to navigate the various experiences and expectations in life will help your child settle into their own faith that lasts.” - **Kara Powell and Chap Clark**

Developmental Insights

Birth – 1 Year

Children Need and Understand Love Even When They are Not Verbal:

“Long before they can understand the meanings of words, children receive emotional messages. The tone of voice, the gentleness of mood, the sense of caring all communicate emotional warmth and love. All parents talk to their infants, and what the babies understand is the look on the face and the affectionate sounds, combined with physical closeness. Because young children grow gradually in their ability to use words and concepts, they will not always know what we mean by our words, even when we say, ‘I love you.’ Love is an abstract concept. They can’t see love as they can see a toy or a book. Because children tend to think concretely, we need to help them understand what we mean when we express our love. The words ‘I love you’ take on greater meaning when the child can associate them with your affectionate feelings, and often this means physical closeness.” –

Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell

Don’t Underestimate What Your Children Are Learning at a Young Age:

“Never underestimate what young children can remember and learn.... A child’s ability to learn basic cause and effect begins during the first weeks of life.” -

Jim Fay and Charles Fay

The Parental Bond is Crucial to Child-Development:

“During the first year of life infants are bonding with their mother and father and establishing basic trust, so boundaries at this stage should be very minimal. Infants do not have enough love or structure within them to tolerate a great deal of frustration. During this time of learning, the mother needs to protect and nurture and meet the baby’s needs for comfort and love.” -

John Townsend and Henry Cloud

What Adults Consider Basic has a Major Impact on Infants:

“Every time an infant’s basic needs are met, a seed of trust and kindness is planted in that child’s mind and heart.” - **Jim Fay and Charles Fay**

Physical Touch is Essential for Communicating Unconditional Love:

“Studies indicate that many parents touch their children only when it is necessary: when they are dressing or undressing them, putting them in the car, or carrying them to bed. It seems that many parents are unaware of how much their children need to be touched and how easily they can use this means to keep their children’s emotional tanks filled with unconditional love.” – **Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell**



Each Phase of a Child’s Life is a Unique Opportunity and Blessing.

Developmental Insights

1 – 3 Years

Children Learn to Love Based on their Experiences of Love:

“A child’s ability to love and respect oneself and others is primarily determined by how well that child’s basic needs were met during the first two years of life.” –

Jim Fay and Charles Fay

Children Increase Greatly in their Ability to Understand Consequences:

“Children at this age can learn to respond to the word no and can understand the consequences of their disobedience. This can apply to dangerous situations, tantrums, violence, and more. They may not be able to understand your logic, but they generally understand that obeying your no brings good things and ignoring your no brings discomfort.” - **John Townsend and Henry Cloud**

Limits/Boundaries Work Best When Established During Early Childhood:

“Many parents set few limits when their kids are toddlers. They attempt to enforce them later when their children are adolescents. By that time, it’s too late.”

-

Jim Fay and Charles Fay

The Home is the Primary Training Ground for Children:

“Wise parents know that the first step toward getting their toddlers to behave in public is getting them to behave at home. - **Jim Fay and Charles Fay**

A Child’s Need for Physical Touch Does Not Lessen Post-Infancy:

“As a baby grows and becomes more active, the need for touch does not lessen. Hugs and kisses, wrestling on the floor, riding piggyback, and other playful loving touches are vital to the child’s emotional development. Children need many meaningful touches every day, and parents should make every effort to provide these expressions of love.” - **Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell**

Sources Referenced

Rob Rienow – *Visionary Parenting*

Gary Thomas – *Sacred Parenting*

Mark Batterson – *Praying Circles around your Children*

Brian Haynes – *The Legacy Path*

Earl Lavender – *Owning Faith*

Darryl Tippens – *Pilgrim Heart*

James Bryan Smith – *The Good and Beautiful God*

Steven Bonner – *Along the Way*

Brene Brown – *Daring Greatly*

Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof – *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*

Johnny Markham – *Owning Faith*

Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell – *The 5 Love Languages of Children*

Reggie Joiner and Kristen Ivy – *Don't Miss It*

John Trent – *Parenting from Your Strengths*

Tim Kimmel – *Connecting Church and Home*

Robert Oglesby Jr. – *Owning Faith*

Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope – *It Starts at Home*

Joseph Chilton Pearce – *Daring Greatly*

Reggie Joiner – *Think Orange*

Ron Bruner – *Along the Way*

Kara Powell and Chap Clark – *Sticky Faith*

Jim Fay and Charles Fay – *Love and Logic Magic for Early Childhood*

John Townsend and Henry Cloud – *Boundaries with Kids*



Connecting and Equipping All Generations on Life's Eternal Journey