READY TO LAUNCH

Jesus-centered parenting in a child-centered world

J.D. & VERONICA GREEAR
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curriculum developed by
David and Jen Thompson;
Will and Julie Toburen;
and Spence Shelton

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David and Jen Thompson: David is Lead Pastor for Executive Leadership at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, NC. He and his wife, Jen, both graduated from Wake Forest University. David completed his Masters of Divinity at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, NC and just recently finished his Doctorate of Ministry at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky. They have four children, Caroline, Ellie, James, and Cole.

Will and Julie Toburen: Will is Executive Pastor of Discipleship Ministries at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, NC. He and his wife, Julie, both graduated from NC State University. Will completed his Masters in Divinity at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. They have four children, Abby, Jackson, Blake, and Alex.

Spence Shelton is Small-Groups Pastor at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, NC. His first book, *The People of God*, co-authored with Trevor Joy, released in May 2014. Spence and his wife, Courtney, are the proud parents of Zeke, Ben, Ellie, and Haddie.
Letter from J.D.

As a parent of four children, I’m grateful for every bit of parenting advice the Bible gives. Perhaps most valuable is the vision for parenting God gives us through the pen of Solomon in Psalm 127:4-5: “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!”

For years I missed the importance of the imagery here. Solomon compares the children of Israel to a fist full of arrows. And what’s the purpose of an arrow? To be shot out in the battle!

See, before we can ask, “How should I raise these children?” we have to ask, “Why did God give me these kids?” If the purpose is to send them out into God’s battle—ultimately, to let them go—then that must undergird all we do in parenting.

Many of us, we fear, take the legitimate desire for our kids’ safety and magnify it into a dominating idol. Sure, we are responsible for our kids’ safety and must take that responsibility very seriously. But the ultimate point of an arrow is to fly on a mission. As Reggie Joiner writes in Parenting Beyond Your Capacity, “We’re fine if our children never climb a mountain as long as it guarantees they never get hurt. But what if your children were made for the mountains? ... The ultimate mission of the family is not to protect your children from all harm but to mobilize them for the mission of God. ... It is possible to hold on to our kids so tightly that we forget the ultimate goal of parenting is to let go.”

Furthermore, when we take children God created to be arrows and instead treat them like a piece of furniture that we plan to accentuate our lives—we not only stunt their development, we also keep them from knowing God at all! God made our kids to be adventurous. And there’s nothing more adventurous than loving and serving God. Our desire to saturate them in comfort and luxury actually does them the greatest harm.

So are you looking to keep your “arrows” safely in the quiver—unharmed, but ultimately useless? Or will you trustingly launch them out? Veronica and I are excited about this study for parents and how God will work in your lives as result of the truths revealed in Scripture about preparing our children for God’s mission. We’re glad you’re along for the journey. Now let’s get ... Ready to Launch.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to this seven-session experience in intentional parenting! We hope your group experience results in a greater understanding of God’s design for parents, as well as a deeper understanding of how the church community plays an important role in raising children.

To best make use of this study, let your first session together be an introduction. Plan to watch the introduction video and spend time getting to know one another. Make sure each group member receives a copy of the Bible study book so that they come prepared for the first group discussion.

The first page of each session should give you an introduction or a brief glimpse of the topic you’ll be discussing as a group. Read this section in preparation for your group time.

Each session will contain the following format:

**START:** These are questions your group leader may use to begin conversation before the Watch and Discuss sections. Some of these questions will ask you to reflect back on your activity from a previous session, which can also be a time for you to get ideas from other group members and encourage one another. Other questions may be used as an icebreaker to get discussion started.

**WATCH:** J.D. and Veronica Greear will lead a teaching time on the topic for each session. Watching the video together and taking notes will enrich your discussion and may provide additional insight into the session’s discussion questions.

**DISCUSS:** This time is designed to build on the lessons taught in the video by looking at a separate passage of Scripture. This works best when you work through the questions individually before gathering together. Come into the discussion ready to share what God showed you in your own study. If you’re stumped on a question, you can look forward to asking for insight from group members during your time together.
WRAP-UP: As you end your group time, key points are given that should have been highlighted in your time together. Use these points to reemphasize the overarching message of each session.

PRAY: One way to describe prayer is to believe God on behalf of another person. As a group, spend time praying for one another as you begin this journey toward parenting God’s way. Use the points to help guide you.

FAMILY ACTION PLAN: For each session, we’ve provided a practical step to put into action what you’ve learned from God’s Word about parenting. Take time in the first few days after your study to work on this assignment. You’ll often need more than one sitting to complete it. Feel free to come back to certain sessions if you need to rework or reevaluate your answers. You will likely need to schedule time to discuss these scriptures, concepts and ideas with your spouse or family members. There is a chart on pages 110-111 for guidance while you’re participating in the study and for your reference afterwards.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Two devotions are included for each session. Take time to read and interact with these as you meet with God for the first days following your group time. The topics will address concepts you’ve just studied with your group, encouraging you to read additional Scripture passages and answer some reflection questions.

Let’s get started!
SESSION 1

LOVE IS NOT ENOUGH

PSALM 78:1-8
PROVERBS 2:1-10
“Desperate times call for desperate measures.”

Whoever coined that phrase must have been a parent. If they weren’t, surely they had a window into our home during one of those harrowing moments usually striking between the time school lets out and the time heads hit the pillow. If we’re honest, much of our parenting is a reaction to the messes and mistakes our children are making all around us. We never wanted to be reactionary parents, yet it feels like that’s all we have the energy to do. The great news is that God designed parenting to be a better, more fulfilling job than you may be experiencing right now.

God intends to send our children out like arrows. Psalm 127:4 describes it like “arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth.” We (David and Jen) recently gave our seven year old a Nerf® bow and arrow set. His first shot was hasty and clumsy, falling short of his intended target, which just so happened to be me. Thankfully the stakes are low with a foam-tip arrow in the front yard.

As the day went on, he took his time with each shot, lining up his arrow more carefully and choosing wisely where to shoot. In order to hit his target, he had to step back and prepare. Once he planted his feet, chose his target, and took aim, he hit doors, windows, and siblings with accuracy. Once he learned to prepare his shot, he became much more accurate.

This study is your preparation. By stepping back from the urgent call of spilled Cheerios, math tests, broken curfews or college applications, you can begin to seek the mind of God on how and where to shoot the arrows God has entrusted to you.
START

Name people you would call good parents. What makes you choose those people?

What areas of parenting do you hope this study addresses?

WATCH

GOAL: To clarify the purpose of our role as parents.

VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS:

1. Love is simply not enough when it comes to raising children.

2. Parenting comes with a weighty responsibility attached to it.

3. Scripture instructs fathers to be the spiritual leaders; discipline doesn’t just fall on mothers’ shoulders.

Watch Session 1: Love is Not Enough.
Use the notes page to record key quotes and ideas that stand out to you.
DISCUSS

The first books of the Old Testament recount the miraculous plight of Israel from captivity in Egypt to freedom in the promised land of Canaan. Israel’s journey from slavery to freedom is intended to be a picture of a greater spiritual reality. Just like Israel, we too were once slaves. Instead of being slaves to another nation, however, we were slaves to sin. Just as God delivered Israel, He also delivered us. The price of our deliverance from sin was death. He broke the shackles of sin by paying for our freedom in His own blood. He paid our ransom by sacrificing His Son’s life so we could be set free. Our freedom is secured by Jesus dying in our place, as a payment for our sin. Now Jesus has gone to prepare for us a greater promised land in heaven where He is our reward.

Psalm 78 was written to remind Israel, and us, to passionately tell the story of God’s deliverance and faithfulness to generation after generation. God designed this to happen primarily through the family, with fathers and mothers taking every opportunity to teach their children the mighty works of God.

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;*
*incline your ears to the words of my mouth!*
*I will open my mouth in a parable;*
*I will utter dark sayings from of old,*
*things we have heard and known,*
*that our fathers have told us.*
*We will not hide them from their children,*
*but tell to the coming generation* 
*the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,*
*and the wonders that he has done.*

**PSALM 78:1-4**
What does the psalmist have to say about the role of parents in this passage?

What steps are you currently taking to “tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done”?

Recognizing our lives are crowded, what competes for your attention in a way that keeps you from faithfully executing your role as a parent?

*He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn,*
and arise and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;
and that they should not be like their fathers,
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
whose spirit was not faithful to God.

**PSALM 78:5-8**

With this passage as your guide, what are the benefits of faithfully teaching your children about the greatness of God and His power to save?

If applicable, describe a time within your own family that you have seen this type of heritage of faith: where the glorious truth of God was taught and children set their hope in Him.
Raising a generation that will “set their hope in God” will require much more than just a commitment to love our children. It requires tremendous wisdom. We need wisdom to know how to shape their affections, draw boundaries, encourage and listen, discipline appropriately, and so much more. Proverbs 2 reminds us where to find wisdom as well as wisdom’s many benefits.

*My son, if you receive my words*
*and treasure up my commandments with you,*
*making your ear attentive to wisdom*
*and inclining your heart to understanding;*
*yes, if you call out for insight*
*and raise your voice for understanding,*
*if you seek it like silver*
*and search for it as for hidden treasures,*
*then you will understand the fear of the Lord*
*and find the knowledge of God.*

*For the Lord gives wisdom;*
*from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;*
*he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;*
*he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,*
*guarding the paths of justice*
*and watching over the way of his saints.*

Then you will understand righteousness and justice
*and equity, every good path;*
*for wisdom will come into your heart,*
*and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.*

**PROVERBS 2:1-10**
What specific circumstances are you currently facing with your children where you are in desperate need of wisdom?

Solomon assures us that the Lord will graciously supply all the wisdom we need to live which of course includes wisdom in parenting. However, we must passionately seek after wisdom like we would search after something of tremendous worth.

When it comes to parenting, in what ways are you actively pursuing or need to begin pursuing wisdom?
WRAP-UP

1. Parents bear the primary responsibility for the discipleship of their children.

2. The goal for parents is to lead their children to set their hope in God and proclaim the gospel to the next generation.

3. Parenting requires more than love, it takes wisdom.

4. Wisdom must be pursued with great tenacity.

PRAY

Spend the next few minutes praying with and for one another. Use the points below for guidance.

- Thank God for promising to give you everything you need to faithfully fulfill your role as a parent.

- Pray that each of your children will set their hope in God and delight in Him above all else.

- Ask God to give you wisdom to navigate all the challenges and pressures of parenting.
THE FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT

Part of stepping back and preparing to launch can be creating a family mission statement. Stephen Covey describes a family mission statement as “a combined, unified expression from all family members of what your family is all about—what it is you really want to do and be—and the principles you choose to govern your family life.” So, a family mission statement can be a tool to help your children remember and reflect on the core values and goals you’ve established as a family.

Here are five practical steps to help develop a family mission statement:

**STEP #1: ENGAGE THE WHOLE FAMILY.**
This is a great exercise for the entire family. Set aside a specific time to cast vision with your children for why a family mission statement is important. The more your children feel a part of the process the more likely they’ll embrace it. Here are a few questions to begin the process:

- What do we want to characterize our family for generations to come?
- How would we want others to describe our family?
- How can we best use our talents and gifts to share Jesus with others?

**STEP #2: IDENTIFY SPECIFIC GOALS AND VALUES BASED ON SCRIPTURE.**
As you talk with your children about God’s purpose for their lives, take time to discuss specific values and goals you have for the family. Also let your children speak into the process by sharing specific things God is putting on their hearts.

**STEP #3: WORK TOGETHER TO CRAFT A STATEMENT.**
Here’s where you can get really creative. There’s no one format that your family mission statement needs to take. It may take the form of a “motto,” be an acrostic using your family’s last name, or take on some other creative form. No one size fits all. With young children, you’ll be doing the work. With older children or teenagers, this is a great opportunity to let their voices be heard.
STEP #4: CREATIVELY DISPLAY AND REINFORCE YOUR FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT.
In order to keep the family mission statement in front of your family, look for ways to prominently display it in your home. Also try and celebrate when a family member honors a value or accomplishes a goal that’s been identified. Reinforcement is the key to your mission statement taking root.

STEP #5: EVALUATE PERIODICALLY.
You may find as your children grow and mature that your family ministry statement needs to be modified. Evaluating periodically will allow you to adjust for the different seasons of life your family will go through. If intentional parenting is new to you or to them, be encouraged that this will always be a work in progress.

Use the space below to jot down some ideas. Then start to formulate an initial draft of your Family Mission Statement.

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PERSONAL REFLECTION

Do Not Labor in Vain

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

PSALM 127:1

For many mothers, the word labor quickly conjures up memories of childbirth. It does for me (Jen). I remember the first moments of labor contractions with our first child, hoping they were real—but fearing they might be false labor. My husband was ready to drive to the hospital after watching me dramatically curl up on the floor, while claiming this really wasn’t the real thing. He had given up medical school for a religion degree and had no intentions of delivering a baby. I, however, definitely did not want to drive to the hospital with my bags packed, get our family all whipped up, and then be sent back home. I was determined not to make a misdiagnosis of labor. My pride was on the line.

I wanted it to be the real labor that would give us our sweet daughter, Caroline. And thankfully, it was. I feel the same way at times about parenting. I don’t want my labor to be in vain, and I definitely don’t want to be embarrassed by my mistakes. I’d love to see immediate results as my kids bound in the door after school this afternoon, talking about how God worked through their math test, declaring their deep love for being with our family, and jumping right in to share the load of household chores.

But since we’re not there yet, I know Psalm 127 must be true. Our family desperately needs the Lord to build our family and our home. We have a house and a literal roof over our heads, but we need so much more.

We need to create an environment where our children don’t admire our righteousness and excellent parenting techniques, but instead adore our Savior. We need a house where our children can be assured grace is present and bountifully handed out, even if it’s alongside consequences. We need to believe the gospel so deeply that we tell it over and over again to our children.
What makes it hard for you to give grace to your children?

Even if one particular afternoon routine was gloriously grace-filled, you can be sure the next day is going to bring chaos or strife. It’s the nature of how much we need Jesus.

**On a good day, what are you tempted to take credit for that God really deserves?**

What is one way you believe God wants to build your house through this study?
PERSONAL REFLECTION

Prioritize Your Vertical Relationship

_Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, this shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord._

**PSALM 128:1-3**

Charles Spurgeon, a well-known pastor in England in the 19th century, wrote, “The fear of God is the corner-stone of all blessedness. We must reverence the ever-blessed God before we can be blessed ourselves.” His point is really quite simple: our willingness to delight in Christ above all else is the beginning point to gaining wisdom for every area of our lives—including parenting. In other words, our vertical connection to God leads to horizontal effectiveness in parenting.

As parents (Will and Julie) we long to see our children use their gifts and abilities to glorify God and engage in His mission for the church. We recognize, however, that their preparation begins with our lives being fully surrendered to Christ. The author of Hebrews exhorts us:

_Lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God._

**HEBREWS 12:1-2**
The challenge is clear: we need to constantly look to Jesus and prioritize our walk with Him above all else. But we all know at times that’s easier said than done. Our lives can become chaotic and we often find ourselves living in the “tyranny of the urgent.” Lunches need to be made, homework assignments completed, schedules to be kept—and that’s just the kids! Often the first thing that falls to the wayside when our lives become busy is the space we give ourselves to spend time with God. When our vertical relationship isn’t prioritized the consequences are felt all around—including with our kids.

**What could you do to improve the quality of time you spend with God?**

**What is the single biggest time-waster in your life and what can you do to change this?**

**What one step could you take to improve your prayer life?**

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Preparing your kids for God’s mission

Most of us start out with great intentions for parenting our kids—especially in the area of spiritual development—only to discover that life with kids is anything but a formula. Once immersed in the messiness of our days, we often realize that our best plans and pre-fabricated answers are not enough.

**Catch a vision for how the gospel can shape our approach to parenting.**

In this seven-session study, J.D. and Veronica Greer mine Psalm 127 for guidance on topics such as discipline, prioritizing time, balancing a schedule, the importance of church as a second family, and preparing our kids to leave the home and carry on the mission of God.

**Also Available**

*Ready to Launch Bible Study Kit* includes resources for leading a seven-session group study: one Bible study book and one DVD with video sessions featuring J.D. and Veronica, content for promotion sharing on social media, session-teaser clips, and other leader helps. **Digital Resources:** E-book, video sessions, promotional content, and sharable social media content available at lifeway.com/readytolaunch