

WORKBOOK

Raising Disciples: A Christian Parenting Workbook for the Modern Family

*James Bell | Lead Pastor | Founder, Pastors Connection Network
Author & Speaker | LiveWell by James Bell*

RAISING DISCIPLES: A CHRISTIAN PARENTING WORKBOOK FOR T...

Raising Disciples: A Christian Parenting Workbook for the Modern Family

Introduction — The Most Important Discipleship Context You'll Ever Have

The most influential discipleship environment in any person's life is not the church. It is not the small group, the youth ministry, or the Sunday school class. It is the home. The theology that shapes how a person actually lives — not the theology they profess but the theology they practice — is formed primarily in the daily rhythms of family life: how conflict is handled, how money is spent and discussed, what is valued and what is sacrificed, how God is talked about (or not) around the dinner table, what happens when things go wrong, and what the adults do when they think no one is watching. The home is the primary formation environment, and the parent is the most important disciple-maker in any child's life.

This workbook is for parents who take this seriously — and who sometimes feel completely inadequate to the task. It is for the parent who wants to have genuine spiritual conversations with their child but doesn't know how to start. For the parent whose teenager is asking questions they don't know how to answer. For the parent trying to raise children of faith in a culture that is increasingly skeptical, relativistic, and hostile to Christian formation. For every parent who has prayed, "Lord, don't let me mess this up."

The good news is that God has not called parents to produce perfect children. He has called them to live faithfully, love genuinely, and trust him with the outcomes. The parent who does this — who lives an honest, searching, humble, grace-saturated faith in front of their children day after day — is doing the most important thing. Programs help. Curricula help. Youth groups help. But nothing substitutes for a parent who genuinely, visibly, imperfectly loves God and loves their children.

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

— Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Module 1: The Theology and Call of Christian Parenting

What God Says About Raising Children

PARENTING AS STEWARDSHIP, NOT OWNERSHIP. The most important theological reframing available to Christian parents is the shift from ownership to stewardship. Your children are not yours. They are God's, made in his image, entrusted to your care for a season with the specific purpose of being formed into fully human, fully redeemed, fully flourishing image-bearers of God. This reframing has profound practical implications. The parent who understands children as possessions tends toward control — attempting to manage outcomes, enforce compliance, and produce the child she envisioned. The parent who understands children as stewardship tends toward formation — attending to who the child is becoming, what they are learning about themselves and God, and what kind of person the daily rhythms of family life are forming.

The Deuteronomy 6 text — the Shema and its accompanying formation instructions — is the foundational parenting text of the Judeo-Christian tradition. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." This command addresses the parent first. The formation project begins with the parent's own heart. The parent who is genuinely, vigorously, authentically in love with God is doing the single most important thing available for his child's spiritual formation — not by instruction alone, but by demonstration. Children do not primarily learn their theology from what their parents say. They learn it from what their parents are.

The Formation Power of Daily Rhythms

Deuteronomy 6:7 describes faith formation as happening in the ordinary rhythms of daily life: "when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." This is not a description of a special family devotions program — it is a description of a life integrated around God's presence and word. The formation happens at dinner, in the car, at bedtime, in the morning. It is woven into the ordinary texture of family life rather than isolated in special sacred moments.

This text has enormous practical implications. It means that the parent who cannot maintain a structured family devotions program but who consistently talks about God, Scripture, and faith in the natural moments of everyday life is doing profound formation work. It also means that the parent whose "God talk" is confined to Sunday morning and family Bible time — while the rest of the week proceeds as though God were not present — is giving children a formation message: God is a special topic for special occasions, not the animating reality of ordinary life.

Module 2: Age-Specific Formation Strategies

Discipleship Through Every Stage of Childhood

Ages 0-5: Wonder, Security, and Foundation

The youngest children are in the most foundational developmental period of their lives. Erik Erikson's first developmental stage — "trust vs. mistrust" (birth to 18 months) — captures the central formation task of earliest childhood: the development of a basic sense that the world is safe, that needs will be met, and that the primary caregivers can be relied upon. This is pre-theological in the explicit sense, but it is not pre-spiritual. The parent who provides consistent, warm, responsive, attentive care is forming in the child the neurological substrate of trust — the psychological foundation for faith. The child who learns that her parents can be trusted will be more capable of trusting God. The one who learns that her cries are ignored, her needs met inconsistently, and her world unpredictable will face greater difficulty trusting anyone — including God.

Practical formation for ages 0-5: simple, repeated bedtime prayers that give the child language for talking to God; bedtime Scripture songs and lullabies that embed scriptural truth in the child's memory through music; simple stories about God's creation, God's love, and God's care; church participation as an experience of belonging and community; and above all, the parents' own evident relationship with God, visible in daily life, prayer before meals, and the general orientation of family life.

Ages 6-12: Story, Questions, and Character Formation

Children in the primary school years are voracious consumers of story and are developing the cognitive capacities for genuine moral reasoning and beginning theological engagement. This is the prime window for biblical narrative — the sweep of Scripture as the greatest story ever told, not as a collection of moral lessons but as a unified, compelling, historically grounded narrative of God's pursuit of humanity and the coming of his kingdom. Parents who read and discuss the Bible with their children in these years — not just devotionals about the Bible but the actual text — are doing formation work of extraordinary long-term significance.

Ages 6-12 is also the period when questions begin to emerge in earnest: "Why do bad things happen?" "Why doesn't God answer every prayer?" "What happens when you die?" "Why do some people not believe in God?" The parent who treats these questions as threats — deflecting, shutting down, or providing pat answers that don't engage the question's genuine weight — teaches the child that faith and honest questioning are incompatible. The parent who treats them as invitations — engaging them with genuine curiosity, honesty about uncertainty, and the conviction that the Christian tradition has resources for engaging hard questions — teaches the child that faith is robust enough to hold honest inquiry.

Ages 13-18: Doubt, Ownership, and Individuation

Adolescence is the developmental period of faith individuation — the process by which the teenager moves from inherited faith (believing what her parents believe because they believe it) to owned faith (believing what she herself is genuinely convinced is true). This process is not comfortable, and it should not be. It involves genuine wrestling, real doubt, experimentation with alternative frameworks, and often some degree of rebellion against received tradition. Every healthy adult faith was once a teenager's anguished questioning — and the teenagers who had parents willing to stay in the questioning with them fared better than those whose parents required compliance as the price of belonging.

RAISING DISCIPLES: A CHRISTIAN PARENTING WORKBOOK FOR T...

The practical implications for parenting teenagers: maintain relationship as the absolute priority, ahead of behavioral compliance and theological agreement; engage questions and doubts with genuine intellectual respect rather than dismissal or alarm; model your own continuing engagement with faith questions — the parent who is still growing, still wrestling, still finding the faith alive and demanding is a more compelling formation influence than the one who has all the answers; and distinguish between the core convictions that define Christianity and the secondary positions that represent your tradition's particular interpretation.

Module 3: Hard Conversations Every Christian Parent Must Have

Navigating the Topics That Shape Worldview

Faith and Science

The perceived conflict between faith and science is one of the most significant drivers of younger generations' departure from the church — and it is, in large part, a manufactured conflict that does not reflect either the actual state of scientific knowledge or the breadth of Christian theological tradition. The parent who equips their child with the understanding that genuine Christian faith is compatible with rigorous science, that the vast majority of practicing scientists who are Christian find no fundamental incompatibility between their faith and their work, and that the Bible's claims are primarily theological and historical rather than scientific has given that child an enormous gift.

The specific conversations to have: the age of the universe and the diversity of legitimate Christian positions on creation and evolution; the relationship between miracles and the natural order; the philosophical underpinnings of scientific inquiry and their compatibility with Christian theism; and the lives of scientists throughout history who were devout Christians. The goal is not to predetermine what positions the child will hold — it is to equip her to think clearly and honestly about the relationship between faith and scientific knowledge, so that encountering the two in apparent conflict later does not feel like a choice between intellectual integrity and faith.

Sex, Identity, and the Body

If Christian parents do not talk to their children about sex, sexuality, and gender identity, the internet will — and it will not offer a biblical framework. The parent who avoids these conversations out of discomfort is not protecting his child from the questions; he is leaving them unequipped to navigate questions they are already encountering. Early, honest, age-appropriate, shame-free conversations about the body, sexuality, gender, and what the Bible teaches about each are among the most important formation investments a Christian parent can make.

The theological framework: human beings are embodied, sexed image-bearers of God — the body is not an afterthought but a central dimension of human identity and dignity. Sexuality is a gift designed for the context of covenant marriage between a man and a woman. This teaching is demanding and increasingly countercultural. It should be communicated not as a set of prohibitions but as a positive vision of the body's beauty and sexuality's proper context — a vision rich enough to be compelling, honest enough to be believable, and grace-full enough to receive those who have not fully lived up to it.

Race, Justice, and the Gospel

Children notice race at a very young age — research indicates that by age 3, children are aware of racial differences and beginning to assign meaning to them. The question is not whether your child will think about race. The question is what framework they will bring to that thinking. The Christian parent who provides no formation around race leaves the formation to the culture — which will provide frameworks that are often either falsely colorblind (pretending not to see what everyone sees) or racially deterministic (reducing people entirely to their racial identity). The gospel offers something better: the theological conviction that every human being is made in the image of God and is therefore of infinite dignity and worth, combined with honest engagement with the history and present reality of racial injustice.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

— Galatians 3:28

"You do not need a theology degree to disciple your children. You need a genuine, honest, ongoing relationship with God and the willingness to live it openly in front of them — including the parts where you fail, doubt, and get back up again. That living is the sermon they will remember." — James Bell

LiveWell by James Bell

Equipping Pastors. Strengthening Marriages. Building the Kingdom.

livewellbyjamesbell.com