

## **The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have Small Group**

Our small group will discuss the 10 Priorities outlined in Laura and Malcolm Gauld's book, [The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have: The Hyde School Program for Character-based Parenting](#) (Scribner).

The Biggest Job's messages are straightforward: the way parents live their lives needs to be consistent with the way they raise their children; principles are a powerful force in raising children effectively; and parents need to focus on personal growth to allow their parenting instincts to emerge. Parents learn specific ways to strengthen family relationships, to set high expectations for their children and let go of outcomes, and how to establish honesty as a family priority.

The 10 Priorities have served as the compass for many parents and their families who sought to improve their parenting skills, create stronger family relationships, and even contribute to their own personal growth.

### **PRIORITY #1—TRUTH OVER HARMONY**

We all want honest families. We also want everyone to get along. Which do we want more? This priority calls upon parents to put the weight of their feet on the side of truth.

### **PRIORITY #2—PRINCIPLES OVER RULES**

We tend to apply rules when things are starting to spin out of control. (e.g., "There is no eating in THAT room, either!") Rules must be guided by deep principles.

### **PRIORITY #3—ATTITUDE OVER APTITUDE**

Schools, families, and society, in general, would be much healthier if we valued attitude over aptitude, effort over ability, and character over talent. Parents often send the message that successful outcomes are more important than honest efforts.

### **PRIORITY #4—SET HIGH EXPECTATIONS and LET GO OF THE OUTCOMES**

Discipline alone will not properly raise our children. We need to aim high with our expectations and resist "lowering the bar" when we sense that our children are having difficulty achieving success. Letting go of the outcome allows our children to take responsibility for their actions.

### **PRIORITY #5—VALUE SUCCESS AND FAILURE**

Today's parents have a hard time letting their children fail. Success is important, but failure can teach powerful lifelong lessons leading to profound personal growth.

## PRIORITY #6—ALLOWING OBSTACLES TO BECOME OPPORTUNITIES

We can get caught up in trying to “fix” our children’s problems (e.g., disagreements with their teachers, coaches, etc.) instead of seeing the potential for positive learning opportunities.

## PRIORITY #7—TAKING HOLD AND LETTING GO

It is hard to watch our children struggle with life’s challenges. When should we step in? When should we step away? This is one of the toughest parenting dilemmas.

## PRIORITY #8—CREATE A CHARACTER CULTURE

This priority can help parents create an atmosphere of character in the home through the application of a three-point plan: a daily job, a weekly family meeting, and a concept called “mandatory fun.”

## PRIORITY #9—HUMILITY TO ASK FOR AND RECEIVE HELP

While parents focus on helping their children, many avoid asking others for help. Consequently, they raise children who do not ask for help.

## PRIORITY #10—INSPIRATION: JOB #1

Regardless of what they might say or do, teens share a deep yearning to be inspired by their parents. Ironically, we will not inspire our children with our achievements. We best inspire them when we share our struggles, reach for our best, and model daily character.

We expect these principles to generate a lively and worthwhile discussion. Do these principles make sense? How can principles of faith contribute to our family life? How can we set positive examples for our children? What new tools can we take back to our family relationships?

Some videos and press releases about The Biggest Job are available at:  
<http://www.hyde.edu/page.wv?section=Press+Room&name=Press+Room>.

This group meets for 8 weeks, on Wednesday evenings from 7 to 8:30 beginning April 26, 2006 and is facilitated by Jim and Jenny Gettel (262/376-1342). Please let us know if you need babysitting and for how many children so that we can plan for space and supervision needs.

## **A Typical Meeting Outline**

*Greeting* one another (5 minutes) (7 p.m.)

*Prayer* (2 minutes) (read together Prayer Book prayer)

*Selected Readings* (reading each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings) *and Comments* (15-20 minutes)

*Large Group Breakout Exercise and/or Discussion* (15 minutes)

*Small Group discussion* with outline questions (30-35 minutes) (The discussion facilitator for each small group of 6 to 12 persons chooses the questions that are discussed. Generally, only about a third of the questions will be used. Facilitators are encouraged to include the Biblical or theological questions and to add questions.)

Identify *roles for next meeting* (facilitator, refreshments)

*Group Prayer* time (return to the larger group circle, ask what do we need to pray about and discuss before beginning prayers) (10-15 minutes)

*Social time/refreshments* (8:30 p.m.)

Babysitting is provided; children return during social time. People stay as they can for social time.

For more about small groups, see Jim Gettel's website at <http://www.middlevoice.com/groups/>.

## The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have

### Small Group Week 1

**Prayer:** Almighty God, heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, 829)

#### *Introductions*

Tell us something about yourself (and your children)?

As you participate in this small group, what is one thing you hope God will do in your life?

#### *Suggestions for maximizing this experience:*

- *Be open:* Make room for God to do something new in your life.
- *Be transparent:* As you openly share your hopes, fears, successes and failures, God will use your life experiences to build faith and courage in the lives of others.
- *Be available:* to God and to each other. Get to know other members of the group. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to encourage and pray for one another.
- *Create a safe environment:* where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgments or simple fixes) and keeping what is discussed confidential among group members.
- *Be Committed:* Take this opportunity and commit yourself to make your group life a priority by attending meetings and keeping up with weekly *readings* of The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have. Bring your book and Bible each week.
- *Invite and welcome newcomers:* Who isn't here that we'd like to invite?
- *Keep your focus on God and your faith:* Resist the temptation to make this a critical and intellectual theological enterprise; listen for what God is doing and wants to do in your life.
- *Keep your Bible handy:* Relate our discussions to the narrative and principles of the Bible and to your own life.
- *Consider becoming a small group leader* and trying your hand at facilitation.

#### *Meeting Plans*

What guidelines should we add?

What is an ideal group size for discussions? Shall we split into smaller groups as long as we can have at least six in each group?

Would anyone like to help (a) facilitate discussions or prayers, (b) keep up with those who miss meetings, or (c) bring refreshments? (*Use the attached sign up sheets for task signups and to collect email addresses for weekly communications.*)

Who else can we invite for next week?

### **Proposed Outline of Small Group Meetings**

<b>April 26</b>	Group Introduction, Small Group Plans, Books, Character exercises (pp 1-64)
<b>May 3</b>	<b>Priority 1: Truth Over Harmony (pp 65-94)</b>
<b>May 10</b>	<b>Priority 2: Principles Over Rules (pp 95-116)</b>
<b>May 17</b>	<b>Priority 3: Attitude Over Aptitude (pp 117-140)</b>
<b>May 24</b>	<b>Priority 4: Set High Expectations and Let Go of Outcomes (pp 141-170)</b>
<b>May 31</b>	<b>Priority 5: Value Success and Failure (pp 171-184)</b> <b>Priority 6: Allow Obstacles to Become Opportunities (pp 185-208)</b>
<b>June 7</b>	<b>Priority 7: Take Hold and Let Go (pp 209-226)</b> <b>Priority 8: Create a Character Culture (pp 227-244)</b>
<b>June 14</b>	<b>Priority 9: Humility to Ask for and Accept Help (pp 245-260)</b> <b>Priority 10: Inspiration: Job 1 (pp 261-279)</b> <b>Conclusion</b>

### **Some Introductory Concepts**

*Read each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings.*

This book . . . is designed to be especially helpful to those committed to the pursuit of personal and family excellence. (13)

Exceptional parenting is hard, is doable, is never too late. (13)

This book and its 10 Priorities . . . support our belief that, at any age, a person's character is more important than his or her innate abilities. Who we are is more important than what we can do. If asked, most people would agree that the right attitude and a commitment to principles are keys to a fulfilling life rich with achievement, strong personal relationships, and a sense of purpose. (13)

We don't pour character into our students; we summon it forth with value-forming challenges and experiences. With this view, character is a miracle that must be developed. Once developed, it must be maintained. (21)

Most books offer prescriptions for how parents might change behaviors in their children; we intend to help parents change behaviors and attitudes *in themselves*. Many of the parents we have worked with over the years have been so preoccupied with the behavior of their children that they have neglected to address their own character. (23; see also 28-29)

Some core beliefs of the Hyde School:

1. Every individual has a unique potential that defines his or her destiny.
2. The key to this destiny lies in developing character.
3. Character development requires a commitment to high principles—virtue as opposed to values.
4. Character development requires us to search for a deeper purpose in life.
5. Character development asks us to strive to leave the world a better place. (32)

We believe our nation's current educational system actually plays a major role in the very creation of "troubled teens," that the preoccupation with innate talent is so debilitating to adolescent morale that it fuels the negativity of the current youth culture. (37)

*We have created a system in which our students do not believe their best efforts will be respected.* (40)

*Ask: What strikes you about these ideas?*

### **Exercises: Who am I? (51-57)**

- A. Think about your kids. Visualize a picture of them in your head. Now picture them 20 years from now. What principles do you hope they will honor? What qualities do you want them to possess. What kind of people do you hope they will become? (Make a list of the answers on a flipchart.)
- B. When you think about the culture that surrounds us every day, where achievement and success reign supreme, what are some of the ways in which we are evaluated in that culture? (Make a list of the answers on a flipchart.)
- C. If we instead thought about a culture based on character, what are some of the ways in which we would be evaluated in that culture? (Make a list of the answers on a flipchart.)
- D. Review and compare the three lists. What do the Achievement culture and the Character culture say to you? How do we operate in our daily lives with these very different paradigms?
- E. Pair off with someone you don't know and take turns talking about yourselves for two minutes without referring to anything in the Achievement list. You cannot talk about what you do for a living, where you vacation, or what kind of schooling you've had. Most important, you cannot talk about your children. Things you can talk about:
  - Kid: What were you like as a child?
  - Strengths: What are your personal strengths?
  - Obstacles: What things hold you back, what things do you struggle with?

- Likes: What are the things you like to do? (So long as they're not included in the Achievement list.)
- Vision: What are your dreams about your life and future?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What did you experience in your two minute descriptions of yourselves? How does this compare with typical conversation at a party? Which do you prefer? Why?
2. Consider the statement, "Many of the parents we have worked with over the years have been so preoccupied with the behavior of their children that they have neglected to address their own character" (p. 23). Review the story and comments on pages 25-29. Does this happen? Are our parenting strategies more reactive than proactive?
3. Consider each of the four explanations for "Why Things Are the Way They Are" (Pages 39-45). Are these realistic explanations and how can we respond?
4. Do we recognize and focus on the unique potential of our children (pages 47-49)? How?
5. What responsibilities do we take for our children (or those of others) at their baptism?

### **Group Prayers**

Return to the larger group. Ask , "what do we need to pray about?" and discuss this before beginning prayers.

The prayer leader may offer prayers, leaving space for others to add petitions, and will make sure the petitions and thanksgivings discussed by the group are offered if someone else doesn't offer them.

This format will be used each week. Often prayers will end with the group saying together the Lord's Prayer.



## SMALL GROUP CALENDAR

<b>DATE</b>	<b>Discussion Co-Facilitators</b>	<b>Prayer Facilitator</b>	<b>Refreshments</b>	<b>Member Follow-up</b>
Week 2 May 3, 2006				
Week 3 May 10, 2006				
Week 4 May 17, 2006				
Week 5 May 24, 2006				
Week 6 May 31, 2006				
Week 7 June 7, 2006				
Week 8 June 14, 2006				

## **The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have**

### **Small Group Week 2**

**Prayer:** Almighty God, heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (BCP, 829)

#### **Priority 1: Truth Over Harmony (pp 65-94)**

*Read each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings.*

This book . . . is designed to be especially helpful to those committed to the pursuit of personal and family excellence. (13)

This book and its 10 Priorities . . . support our belief that, at any age, a person's character is more important than his or her innate abilities. Who we are is more important than what we can do. If asked, most people would agree that the right attitude and a commitment to principles are keys to a fulfilling life rich with achievement, strong personal relationships, and a sense of purpose. (13)

Most books offer prescriptions for how parents might change behaviors in their children; we intend to help parents change behaviors and attitudes *in themselves*. (23)

Harmony, rules and aptitude are not inherently bad objectives. We do, however, call upon parents to stand more firmly on truth, principles and attitude. (62)

The path of honesty is a lifelong challenge and journey. (65)

Many parents who believe they place their highest value on truth end up discovering that they work even harder to maintain a role as peacemaker in their families. (66)

One of our primary responsibilities as parents is to teach our kids that they are ultimately accountable to life, not to us. (68)

Today's parents are preoccupied with communication and rapport at the expense of truth and discipline. (68)

Sometimes families don't confront the truth, preferring instead to try to "live and let live" in order to keep peace in the home. (71)

First, we must want to know the truth. (71)

There is a difference between encouraging the best effort of our children and tiptoeing around their negative attitudes. (77)

The parent may unconsciously “lower the bar” of expectation and begin to convince him- or herself that the decline either is “not so bad” or will reverse itself. . . The gradual decline continues and the family dysfunction grows. (79)

Dysfunction is prevalent when a family (1) lacks a shared vision of its best, (2) lacks an objective measuring stick of its performance against that vision, or (3) loses truth as a priority and shifts to harmony. (84)

*Ask: What particularly stuck you about these ideas or the readings from this chapter?*

*Encourage use of Truth Over Harmony in My Life worksheets from Workbook*

### **Role Play Exercises**

Find a partner; act out the parent or child role in the first scenario; switch for the second scenario.

1. I am going to do errands in the car and want my child to come with me, as it's not safe to leave him/her home alone. My child wants to stay home, but "negotiates" with me by asking if he/she can stop by the toy store. I answer, "maybe. . .", but truthfully I have no intention of having the time to do so. As we are on our way home from the errands, my child spies the street where the toy store is and asks me why we are not stopping.
2. I am in the car with my child, having just come out of the grocery store. I notice that he/she is eating some candy, and I am sure I did not purchase this candy. It's late Friday afternoon; I have guests coming for dinner and much to do at home before they come.

### **Large Group Discussion**

1. What did you experience in the part of the parent or in the part of the child?
2. How important was the truth in each story?
3. What might have happened if I ignored the situation in favor of harmony?

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. Which holds a higher value in your family: truth, dealing honestly with each other, or harmony, getting along with each other? Why?
2. Do you agree with the statement on page 68 that “today’s parents are preoccupied with communication and rapport at the expense of truth and discipline”? When does this happen and why?
3. Who set examples for you of truth and honesty?
4. What Bible stories or sayings do you think of when you think of truth over harmony?

5. Describe an event when you or one of your children learned the importance of truth.
6. How does “more truth tend to result in better communication” (page 84)? Have you experienced this?
7. What gets in the way of being totally honest with each other?
8. Why is confrontation hard? Why is it important to any relationship?
9. If I had a major life issue, would I tend to share it or keep it from my children? Explain.
10. When have you shared your struggles with your children? What happened?
11. Do I tend to make a distinction between major dishonesties and “little white lies”?
12. What is one specific action I could take to improve my personal level of honesty?
13. How could we bring more honesty into the family?
14. Where have I been inspired by the honesty of my family members?
15. Consider each of the four explanations for “Why Things Are the Way They Are” (Pages 39-45). Are these realistic explanations and how can we respond?

### **Group Prayers**

Return to the larger group. Ask , “what do we need to pray about?” and discuss this before beginning prayers.

The prayer leader may offer prayers, leaving space for others to add petitions, and will make sure the petitions and thanksgivings discussed by the group are offered if someone else doesn't offer them.

This format will be used each week. Often prayers will end with the group saying together the Lord's Prayer.

## **The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have**

### **Small Group Week 3**

**Prayer:** God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, 829)

#### **Priority 2: Principles Over Rules (pp 95-116)**

*Read each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings.*

This book . . . is designed to be especially helpful to those committed to the pursuit of personal and family excellence. (13)

This book and its 10 Priorities . . . support our belief that, at any age, a person's character is more important than his or her innate abilities. Who we are is more important than what we can do. If asked, most people would agree that the right attitude and a commitment to principles are keys to a fulfilling life rich with achievement, strong personal relationships, and a sense of purpose. (13)

Harmony, rules and aptitude are not inherently bad objectives. We do, however, call upon parents to stand more firmly on truth, principles and attitude. (62)

Centering our family around agreed upon principles gives us a moral core that sustains the family and helps us reorient when we get off track. It is easy to get caught up in the busy details of our lives and assume that our principles are clear and understood by our children. (Workbook)

Rules and control will not solve the issues in our family when things start to slide out of control. It is our principles that will guide us and assist us in making the everyday, as well as the difficult, parenting decisions. (Workbook)

A principle-oriented family returns the family to its real purpose. This maximizes the development of leadership and character in children; it also provides parents continual opportunities to inspire growth in their children by example. We set a vision with our principles and then spend the rest of our lives trying to live up to them. (Workbook)

We can raise our children to prepare for a higher purpose in their lives. We can instill in them a sense of principles. We can inspire our children to commit to a life based on their highest ideals. (95)

A total focus on rules . . . can move us away from the importance of individuals in the family taking responsibility for the solutions. (96)

Principles can be a powerful tool for parents who are trying to teach the deeper lessons of life through the daily lessons of life. (101)

Allowing our children to handle as many of their problems as possible gives them the opportunity to learn indelible lessons. Putting principles at the center acts as a constant reminder that all moments can be learning opportunities, from the small, relatively benign incidents of daily life to the larger “big holes” into which kids can fall. (103)

We start to shift to a position where we are keeping the family from its worst rather than focusing on and pushing for its best. (104)

It’s hard to establish our own principles without first exploring those that we learned, consciously or unconsciously, while growing up. (104)

Our families will not live principle-centered lives if we are vague about the principles we hope to honor. (105)

As long as our motivation to keep things from getting worse outweighs our desire to make them better, we may never discover the courage to discover our greatness as a family. (110)

We believe that working on the daily moments prepares us for the “biggies.” The major moments are never scheduled. They have their own timetable and we cannot control when and from where they come. We need to be ready to face them with our best. (114)

*Ask: What particularly stuck you about these ideas or the readings from this chapter?*

### **Mingle Exercise**

A mingle is done by answering the questions, one at a time, with as many people as you can in the allotted time. It is not a conversation; one person answers the question, the other person answers the question, then each moves to another person. We will allow a certain amount of time for each question (4 -5 minutes) and then we will stop mingling, read the next question, and mingle again for 4 to 5 minutes:

1. What was important to my family during my upbringing?
2. What seemed positive? What did not seem positive in my upbringing?
3. What is important to my current family?

### **Large Group Discussion: Weekly Family Meetings (pages 233-235)**

There should be four parts to the weekly family meeting:

*Clear the Decks:* This is a nautical term that calls for sailors to keep the ship's deck clear to avoid injury. We need to deal with festering issues within the family in order to prevent anger and resentment from building up. This calls upon each family member to share the issues

that have been churning within during the previous week. After someone clears the decks, there should be no response. This can always be talked about later, but for now it is important to listen and think about what the person is saying.

*Review the Week:* During this part of the meeting we go around the room and talk about the week just completed. How did it go for us? What were the highs and the lows? What did we learn about ourselves? What did we learn about ourselves? What did we get excited about? Again, when we are talking about our weeks, there does not need to be any response from family members unless someone wants to comment.

*Set Goals:* Here we look ahead to the coming weeks and think about what we would like to improve upon. By setting one specific action step, we give ourselves something to take forth from the meeting. This also sets up next week's "Review the week."

*Add traditions:* You may take one of the family principles and talk about that each week. Or try something like Faith Talk With Children.

Pass around the responsibility of running the meeting so that it's not always the same person dragging everyone together.

Do you have regular family meetings? Would it be helpful? Why?

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. Personal or family questions:
  - a. What is at the center of my family? A person? A set of principles? Do I know?
  - b. What is important to me? What am I all about?
  - c. Do my children know what I stand for? What our family stands for?
  - d. Do they know the difference between a principle and a rule?
2. What gets in the way of placing principles at the centers of our families?
3. If there is a person at the center of the family, what steps do we need to take to move that person or persons out and principles in?
4. How much of a role do principles play in your life? When do you use your principles?
5. When do you stand up for your principles? When do you compromise your principles?
6. Does the raft analogy (page 99) make sense? Do you see family members in the roles of primary raft balancer, secondary balancer, bystander, etc.? Or do you relate to the "flying wedge" analogy (page 109)? What roles would you like each person to have?
7. What would Jesus say about principle-centered families? How did he treat his disciples?
8. What Bible stories or sayings do you think of when you think of principles over rules?

9. How do we change our roles or the roles of others in our families?
10. What are the principles that you want at the center of your family? Would putting these principles in place take people out of their roles? How?
11. How do we decide on our family principles?
12. What are some principles of our faith that we would like to instill in our families?
13. How do we evaluate our progress in adhering to our family principles?

### **Group Prayers**

Return to the larger group. Ask , “what do we need to pray about?” and discuss this before beginning prayers.

The prayer leader may offer prayers, leaving space for others to add petitions, and will make sure the petitions and thanksgivings discussed by the group are offered if someone else doesn't offer them.

This format will be used each week. Often prayers will end with the group saying together the Lord's Prayer.

## **The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have**

### **Small Group Week 4**

**Prayer:** God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, 829)

#### **Priority 3: Attitude Over Aptitude (pp 117-140)**

*Read each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings.*

This book and its 10 Priorities . . . support our belief that, at any age, a person's character is more important than his or her innate abilities. Who we are is more important than what we can do. If asked, most people would agree that the right attitude and a commitment to principles are keys to a fulfilling life rich with achievement, strong personal relationships, and a sense of purpose. (13)

Harmony, rules and aptitude are not inherently bad objectives. We do, however, call upon parents to stand more firmly on truth, principles and attitude. (62)

Nothing can stop the person with the right attitude; nothing can help the person with the wrong one. (117)

Yet many of today's schools and families actually operate as though they value aptitude more than attitude, whether they intend to or not. . . The bright kids know they don't really need to work hard, and the average to below-average ones don't believe their efforts will be rewarded in any significant way. . . How could we possibly believe that we can inspire genuine learning or character development in a system where our students do not believe that their best efforts will be respected? (123)

Those with high aptitude have received gifted-and-talented programs, while those with low aptitude have received specialized extra attention. Yet those with average aptitude often don't even receive average attention. (125)

In many of these cases it has been the adults. . . who have encouraged the student to drop the course. . . GPA is more important than the development of character that might occur as a result of struggling through the challenge of such a course. No matter what we tell students about the virtues of "best effort" and "character," they usually know quite clearly where we really stand. (126)

The combination of ability and success can often camouflage our perceptions of the attitudes in our families. We end up focusing on attitude only when the behavior is bad or the performance is low. (127)

Although we can't always insist on positive outcomes, we owe it to our kids to insist on positive attitudes. (128)

Never negotiate with a terrorist! . . . Terrorist activity . . . involves tone of voice, body language and level of respect. When a child displays this attitude . . . we need to take some action that communicates the message, "Your attitude is unacceptable and I will not continue this conversation until it changes."(129)

The Building Blocks of Attitude consists of three phases:

- Motions: The individual follows the motions of responsible behavior.
- Effort: The individual begins to take pride in meeting his or her given challenges.
- Excellence: The individual begins to pursue his or her best. (129-131)

Make the consequences of failing to follow the "motions" of a responsible [person] more distasteful than those from following them. (133)

The one variable we cannot control is the timetable of our students' growth. All of us progress through the curriculum at different rates of speed. (136)

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company. . . a church. . . a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past . . . we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have and that is our attitude . . . I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you . . . we are in charge of our ATTITUDES. - Charles Swindoll (136-137)

Our culture is preoccupied with aptitude. An aptitude-focused culture does not understand that every child wants to be somebody. A total focus on talent and ability sets up a pecking order that pits students against each other and perpetuates a cycle of bullying and intolerance. (Workbook)

Life presents ups and downs, and it is our attitude that will guide us more than our abilities and talents through the challenges. We do not want to give the message that struggles ought to be avoided if they interfere with success. (Workbook)

In the world of aptitude, there is always a faster time, a higher grade, a better example. In the world of attitude, each student must learn to struggle with their own best effort. In the best schools, homes and organizations, who you are is more important than what you can do. (Workbook)

Achievement is important. We want our children to achieve and maximize their full potential. When they develop their productive attitudes and let go of the unproductive ones, they will open the doors for meaningful achievement. (Workbook)

We can control our effort and character; we cannot control our talent and ability. (Workbook)

When we categorize our kids, we limit them. (Workbook)

*Ask: What particularly stuck you about these ideas or the readings from this chapter?*

### **Breakout Exercise**

With a partner:

1. Look at the following examples of attitudes we can carry

Productive	Unproductive
Caring, concern	Selfishness
Helping others	Dishonest
Hard worker	Chip on shoulder
Truthful	Quitter
Optimistic	Leave me alone
I Willingness	Don't notice me
Perseverance	I don't care
Asking for help	I can't do this
Sharing struggles	I will not do this
Risk taker	I'm too tired
Let go of outcomes	I'll do it tomorrow
Can do spirit	I'm too busy
Responsible learner	Taking it personally

Circle the attitudes above – both productive and unproductive – that apply to you. Is there one from each column that carries the most emotion for you. Tell about it.

2. Choose a deep attitude or emotional disposition. How does it connect to your upbringing? Where has this emotional disposition been a stumbling block in your life? Examples are:

Taking too much responsibility  
Fear of conflict  
Fear of looking weak  
Lack of trust  
Fear of success  
Fear of failure  
Keeping anger and negative attitudes inside  
If you're not there for me, I'm outta here.  
It's all up to me.  
I'll take what's left.

Be humble  
Fear of looking incompetent  
I'm fine.  
I can absorb what I need to.  
I can run my own show.  
I want people to understand and approve.  
How dare you!  
Don't notice me.

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. What especially stuck you about the discussion of attitude in this chapter?
2. What does Jesus say about attitude? What Biblical stories or sayings deal with this?
3. How would you describe your overall attitude toward life? Does your Christian faith affect this?
4. Do you believe that your attitude is really more important than your aptitude? When have you found this to be true? In what areas of your life do you question this? What personal stories could you share with your children?
5. Who are people in your life with a positive attitude? How does it serve them?
6. What situations or people bring out your worst attitudes? How do you deal with them? Have there been situations where you let your attitude control you?
7. How conscious are you of controlling your attitudes? Do you feel people can be effective at this?
8. When you have an "off-track" attitude, who sees it? Are there people who help you get back on track? How?
9. When and under what circumstances do you see your children struggle with their attitudes? How do you respond?
10. Describe an incident in which you were proud of the attitude you saw in someone in your family.
11. How do we encourage others to have their best attitudes?
12. What family principles could help support positive attitudes?

**Group Prayers** (in usual format)

## **The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have**

### **Small Group Week 5**

**Prayer:** Almighty God, heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (BCP, 829)

#### **Priority 4: Set High Expectations and Let Go of Outcomes (pp 141-171)**

*Read each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings.*

This book and its 10 Priorities . . . support our belief that, at any age, a person's character is more important than his or her innate abilities. Who we are is more important than what we can do. If asked, most people would agree that the right attitude and a commitment to principles are keys to a fulfilling life rich with achievement, strong personal relationships, and a sense of purpose. (13)

Aim higher than you think you can reach. If our children give their best, they will ultimately feel good about the outcome whether or not they actually accomplish their intended goals. (141 & 144)

High expectations are essential to developing one's best; discipline alone will not raise our children to be people of character. (Workbook)

Along with high expectations, there will be obstacles. In order to open up a world of dreams and goals for our children, we need to deal with the tension between setting the expectations high and then letting go of the outcome. Kids need to aim high in order to experience accomplishment, and we cannot help them with this if we are always focused on the bottom line: I don't want you to do this. . . I don't want you to see him. . . I don't want you to go there. . there will be no smoking or drinking. . . ." (Workbook)

The goal of character development is not to keep people out of the gutter. The goal is to reach for the stars. (142)

While we will make these kinds of statements, it is also important to voice our highest hopes and expectations: Is this your best effort? . . . What are you hoping for? . . . When I was your age, my dream was to be . . . What would excellence look like here? . . . Let's represent the best in the family. . . ." (Workbook)

The problem with [lists of house rules] is that they tend to center on minimum acceptable behavior and families end up descending to the lowest common denominator. To the kid, it looks like: "You don't have to be a winner, just don't be a loser." (142)

Another problem with an obsession with discipline is that our children will fail to take ownership of their own goals. (142)

Sometimes we are afraid to set high goals for our children because we fear the inevitable letdown should they not achieve their goals. (143)

Sometimes parents are tempted to intervene to “lower the bar” when they see their children struggling. (143)

Academics, sports, and performing arts offer especially valuable opportunities pertaining to high expectations. . . As teachers and parents we must call for the highest standards of attitude, effort, skills, and sportsmanship (144-146)

There is a fine line between aiming high and becoming obsessed with achievement. That is why we, as parents or teachers, must pay attention to the subtle distinctions in demanding high expectations as we let go of outcomes. (151)

Letting go of the outcome gives us permission to also let go of perfection and instead focus on excellence. (Workbook)

When we aim high, there are no guarantees that we will attain our goals. Yet, more often than not, we will end up in appealing destinations. (153)

Connecting with our inner hopes and expectations also connects us with a deeper motivation to draw out our best efforts. (Workbook)

Take the risk of setting high expectations; be honest about self-doubt or unproductive attitudes if they are there. (Workbook)

We don't know how fragile kids are, but we would bet the house that they are less fragile than their parents believe. By “fragile,” we are not referring exclusively to their physical health. We also mean their emotional well-being. Kids are amazingly resilient, capable of bouncing back from setbacks and failures. Parents need not fear the notion of their children aiming high.

We all need help to let go of outcomes. (Workbook)

*Ask: What particularly stuck you about these ideas or the readings from this chapter?*

### **Breakout Exercise**

With a partner (may be a spouse), discuss:

Think about the things you were committed to as a child or teen (preferably the age your child is now). Why were you committed to this?

Was there a parent or adult in your life that "made" you do it?

Now think about the things you wish your student was committed to today.

## Large Group Question

What came out of this exercise for you?

## Small Group Discussion Questions

1. What especially stuck you about the discussion of expectations and outcomes in this chapter?
2. Does Jesus have expectations for his disciples? What Biblical stories or sayings deal with this?
3. What were the expectations that you felt as a child growing up? Are your expectations for your child similar or different?
4. Who were the people in your life who demanded your best? How did you feel then, and how do you feel today about them?
5. Was there a time when you were growing up when you set high expectations and went after something. What happened?
6. Was there ever a time when you were growing up when you quit on something? What would you want to share with your children about that?
7. What are the expectations in my family today? How much do we hold each other to our best?
8. Is there any difference in the degree to which you hold outside people in your life (coworkers, friends, etc.) to their best and in the degree to which you demand the best from your family?
9. How difficult is it for you to let go of "outcomes" in yourself? In your children?
10. Describe a time when you "raised the bar" on either yourself or someone else. What happened? How did you feel?
11. What is your greatest fear about your own high expectations?
12. When have you been inspired by the commitment to high expectations?
13. This chapter suggests three tools in setting and managing expectations. How could they help?
  - a. A concept which can help us to aim high is "The One Thing" (pages 157-159). In setting high expectations for ourselves, our families or others, most of us settle for a vague commitment: "We'll spend more time together", or "I'm going to lose weight." We need to be specific in order to keep ourselves on track. The One Thing enables us to take control of our progress. It also helps us to visualize specific steps that can begin

to take us to our goal, rather than focusing on the obstacles that might be in the way. Ask, "What is one thing I want to change or improve in my life?" (This must concern something I have control over). Then ask, "What is the one thing I can do each day to make that goal happen?" Write your goal down and give it to someone to hold you accountable.

b. A concept which can release us from undue worry about the outcome of our efforts is "The Effort Savings Bank" (pages 159-166). If we try something and fail, we try to imagine that our efforts will materialize on some future endeavor. If we succeed, we try to recognize that success may be due in part to efforts on past endeavors. The idea is that: "Any effort I expend toward my best or toward helping others toward their best goes into an imaginary savings bank where it accrues interest and will be returned to me in the future."

c. An IPSES self-assessment can help us become consciously aware of the need for overall personal growth (pages 148-149). We score ourselves in the five dimensions of Intellectual, Physical, Spiritual, Emotional and Social and discuss our progress with others.

Will these tools work? Why? How do we share them with our children?

14. Imagine this situation and decide what advice you might have for your child. Your child is trying out for the school play and seeks your advice. The teacher has given each child a list of the roles:

*Starring role:* Has the most lines to memorize and is on stage during the entire play. Also has the most elaborate costume.

*Supporting role:* Has the second-most amount of lines and is on stage during 3/4 of the play.

*Group role:* Has a few lines in each scene, but blends into the larger group of students on stage.

*Background role:* Has no lines and merely creates the mood and background in which the other actors say their lines. The costumes are not exciting.

Your child is not confident in his or her actions or abilities, and doesn't know which part(s) to practice for the try-outs.

How important is it to ask the child how he or she feels about the play? Would you encourage the child into the starring role?

**Group Prayers** (in usual format)

## **The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have**

### **Small Group Week 6**

**Prayer:** God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, 829)

### **Touching Base**

We're 5/8 through this study. How are our group times going? Have the discussions been helpful? How are we doing with our start and finish times? Is everyone as involved as they'd like to be? Anything we should do differently?

### **Priority 5: Value Success and Failure**

*Read each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings.*

Even if you go after your dreams with your very best effort, there is no guarantee you will attain them. There is the guarantee that you will experience failure along the way. However, you can trust that these failures will lead you to destinations you will be very excited about. You will lead an exciting, fulfilling life. . . if you work hard, you will maximize your chances of connecting with your destiny and of discovering a deeper purpose in life. (179)

Learning to value failure as well as success will help us with the previous Priority, Set High Expectations and Let Go of the Outcome. If we have a hard time seeing our kids fail, it will be very hard to let go of outcomes once the bar has been raised. (Workbook)

That's not to say that failure is something we should seek; the initial reaction to failure is usually one of sadness or discouragement. But it is important to learn from our failures and to understand the value in them. (Workbook)

While failure may not be an intended goal for anyone, it ought to be a fairly regular outcome for everyone, especially for students. It is our failures that lead to our deepest growth. (Workbook)

We do learn more from our failures than our successes. (173)

Failure allows us to dust ourselves off and get back into the arena. (Workbook)

Failure opens a window into our character and we learn that the journey is more important than any destination. (Workbook)

Valuing failure can liberate us from perfection and move us towards excellence. (Workbook)

If self-esteem can be easily given, it can just as easily be taken away. On the other hand, when self-esteem is earned through one's actions, it may be harder to gain, but it can never be taken away. (180)

We need to let our children experience their own success and not use their triumphs to fill our trophy case. (Workbook)

Far too many students are encouraged to avoid any circumstances where failure might result. (175)

### **Priority 6: Allow Obstacles to Become Opportunities**

In the face of hard times, we often tend to wish for a different set of circumstances. This Priority suggests that instead we should wish for a different set of attitudes. (185)

The word "obstacle" is generally seen as a negative and the word "opportunity" as more of a positive. If we get out of the way and let our children and family members deal with their own challenges, obstacles will become an opportunity for new growth. This is not easy and we need the help of others to separate what is ours to tackle and where we need to step back. (Workbook)

Our initial attitude toward an obstacle may prevent us from seeing what obstacles have to offer us - a means of discovering our capabilities. We need to take responsibility for our own attitude, and we need to learn to value effort and attitude - those things we can control. Once we free ourselves from controlling the outcome, we can trust our character to guide and lead us. (Workbook)

Some obstacles hit like a tidal wave, sweeping us in a storm of feelings, emotions, and physical demands. It is difficult to find our feet as we struggle to get through each day. Summoning the courage to look for opportunities may begin only after we decide to move forward, step by painful step. (190)

Obstacles come as a result of high expectations; let go of the myth that problems are a sign of weakness. (Workbook)

Asking for help is an important action step. (191)

Removing obstacles from our children's paths in order to make life easier for them does them no favors. (Workbook)

Children need to have their own opportunities to learn from their dilemmas. (Workbook)

Far too many people hear labels and lower the bar. A career of working with kids has shown us that labels are well-meaning but do not speak to the power of one's Unique Potential. (196)

As Bruce Springsteen sings, "You've got to learn to live with what you can't rise above." We are still rising above. Perhaps we always will be. (197)

Let go of the fantasy vision of what family life is supposed to be like. (Workbook)

It can be helpful to write down or tell someone your hopes and fears for your children. . . Give as much responsibility as you can to your children to face their own dilemmas and work out their solutions. (200)

You may even need to physically move away from your children so that you will not be tempted to step in and give advice. That doesn't mean that help and advice cannot be given, but the simple challenge of having to ask for help can reinforce in them the importance of gaining ownership of their own obstacles. (200)

Can you accept the notion that obstacles can actually represent opportunities? In order to embrace this, you must accept the idea that we are in this life for the long run and that we need to be able to work through tough issues in order to fulfill our own potential. (202)

Whenever you see someone who is creating obstacles for your child by demanding their best, step back first and think: "Is this going to help my child?" If your instincts say yes, then you need to allow it to happen. (205)

*Ask: What particularly stuck you about these ideas or the readings from these chapters?*

### **Exercise 1: Three Question Mingle**

A mingle is done by answering the questions, one at a time, with as many people as you can in the allotted time. It is not a conversation; one person answers the question, the other person answers the question, then each moves to another person. Allow a certain amount of time for each question (4 -5 minutes). Then ask the group to stop mingling, read question 2, and mingle again for 4 - 5 minutes.

How were success and failure handled in my upbringing?

Was there an obstacle in your life when you were at your child's age? How was it handled? Does it carry over to your life today?

How do I deal with the struggles/failures of my children?

### **Large Group Discussion**

*Your Children are not Your Children*  
By Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet*

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself.  
They come through you, but not from you.

And though they are with you, they belong not to you.

You may give them your love, but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies, but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them  
But seek not to make them like you,  
For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children  
As living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the universe  
And he bends you with his might  
That his arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness,  
For even as he loves the arrow that flies,  
So he loves also the bow that is stable.

*Discuss as a group:*

What particular phrases or words jump out at you or hold emotion for you?

Does the poem help you understand the importance of allowing obstacles to become opportunities?

Does it help you to let go of issues that are not yours?

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. What gets in the way of seeing your children's obstacles as potential learning experiences?
2. What steps could you take to allow your children's obstacles to become opportunities? (Think of specific challenges such as anger, school work, negative friends, dishonesty.)
3. Do you ever connect your children's obstacles to yourself in some way?
4. What Biblical stories make you think about dealing with obstacles as opportunities?
5. Have you ever tried to manipulate the outcome of one of your children's potential "failures?"
6. Have your children ever seen you fail at anything? Explain.
7. How could we help our families understand the long-term view of both "success" and "failure?"

8. What attitudes about obstacles do you think you are passing on to you children?
9. Are your expectations for yourself and your children high enough to present obstacles?
10. Write down one word which describes your child's greatest strength and their greatest obstacle. Now do the same for yourself. Look at the four words (or more) you have written. Are there any connections between your words and those you attributed to your child? Looking at the obstacles, do you see opportunities?

**Group Prayers** (in usual format)

## **The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have**

### **Small Group Week 7**

**Prayer:** Almighty God, heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (BCP, 829)

#### **Priority 7: Take Hold and Let Go (pp 209-225)**

*Read each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings.*

There is tension between Taking Hold and Letting Go. When do we do each? Our instincts can fool us. We may want to step in, but may need step back. We may want to step back, but may need to step in. (Workbook)

Children need to learn to take hold and assume responsibility for their actions and potential, leaving fears and doubts behind. We can help them do this by setting an example of working on this ourselves. (Workbook)

Taking hold and letting go [are] not separate actions; rather, they [work] in concert with each other as a guide to bring out the best instincts in us. (212-3) In order to let go, we need to reach out and take hold of something else. Taking hold of this new challenge forces us to release our grasp on whatever we once felt required our control. (216-217) Rather than seeing them as separate actions, view them as fluid and connected. The energy that it takes to reach out and take hold of something will help you loosen your grip on the very thing you believe cannot work without you. (222)

Perfection is a word, a state of mind, an image of family life that seems to get in the way so often that some of us need to constantly let go of its seductive veneer. As one mother said so well, "Perfection is just another form of dishonesty." (215)

Kids are far more resilient than their parents think they are. Therefore, most parents could stand to improve on letting go. (215)

I have learned that letting go doesn't mean not caring. It means caring enough to give my child the freedom to fail or fly. His triumphs are sweeter when he knows he alone is responsible for them and his problems are also his own to deal with and not to blame on anyone else. (216)

There will be times when we will "let go" of the thing or things we don't want to deal with, and we will need to call ourselves on this or allow others to call us on it. (Workbook)

We must also be aware of whether we are taking hold in an attempt to control the agenda: "If I don't step in, there will be a real problem." (Workbook)

We often take hold of our children when we are afraid of the next step in their lives. We may not feel confident of the job we have done so far. We may be waiting for evidence that our child will pick up the ball once we have let go. It doesn't work that way. Our decision to step away is not contingent on the reaction of our child; it is our job. (Workbook)

Allowing Obstacles to Become Opportunities will help us when we need to let go. (Workbook)

Focusing on our attitude and effort can free us from focusing on the outcome and results. (Workbook)

We have all been profoundly affected by our own parents, sometimes making it difficult to "let go" of our parents. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Our upbringing may lead us to try to give to our children what we feel our own parents did not give to us. If we haven't "let go," this will be unsuccessful. We are not our children; they live in a different time, with different potentials and different dreams. Nor can we pass on to our children the values and purposes of our own parents if we have not really tested and forged them for ourselves. In essence, we must take hold of the strengths our parents passed on to us, and let go of what they were unable to give us. Thus we can truly understand and pass on the very best of our own values and sense of purpose in life. (Workbook)

"Taking Hold and Letting Go" will also release us to become the kind of spiritual guardian who is truly sensitive to the uniqueness in our children. (Workbook)

### **Priority 8: Create a Character Culture (pp 227-243)**

A character culture is an atmosphere that fosters the unique potential of its members and is connected with three important tenets:

- Shared belief - We are all gifted with a unique potential that defines our destiny.
- Shared principles - We talk about, live, breathe, etc. the principles that define us.
- Shared experiences - There are actions and reflections that we all do together.

(Workbook)

Without a strong character based environment, our children are prey to the "youth culture" that fosters secrecy, sullenness, gratification through drugs and sex, along with a desire to keep adults out on the periphery. By building a character culture in our homes, family members are all provided with the foundation for growth based on words and principles that the family has established as being at the center of the group. (Workbook)

The approaches offered in this chapter are simple, but they require follow-through. They help create a pattern, a routine, a tone, and a spirit that might not promise an immediate return but can give birth to a new dynamic culture in your home or wherever you gather with your family. (227)

Sow an Act and you reap a Habit;  
Sow a Habit and you Reap a Character;  
Sow a Character and you Reap a Destiny. -Charles Reade (227)

There are three important ingredients for building a character culture in our homes:

- Get a job - Everyone needs to learn how to work. A job not only contributes useful work, but also instills a sense of accomplishment.
- Weekly Family Meetings - Getting together once a week will benefit everyone. Set a reasonable time limit and include everyone in the household.
- Mandatory Fun - The premise is simple: Everyone must go along and we will have fun as a family. Each family member should get a chance to plan the outing. (Workbook)

In raising our own children, we know we need to take more of the same approach that we hated as children. Whenever we work with them and show them how to work, our home operates better for all. Also, when we follow through and expect the work to be done properly, everyone benefits and our children emerge with a sense of pride. (231)

There should be four parts to the weekly family meeting (pages 233-235).

*Clear the Decks:* Clear the Decks is an activity to bring forth hidden agendas, to replace private conversations, and to voice nonproductive nagging worries. Like the clutter on sailing ships, these issues are all obstacles or symptoms of obstacles that we could otherwise trip over on the path of personal growth. Clear the Decks issues arise from conscience and if we speak from our conscience, the issues are not debatable on that level. Thus, clearing the decks before a family meeting is never a time for dialogue. Clear the Decks issues may give rise to emotional responses, but no time is allowed for responses. Any discussion or follow-up to a Clear the Decks item may be talked about after the family meeting. (Workbook)

*Review the Week:* During this part of the meeting we go around the room and talk about the week just completed. How did it go for us? What were the highs and the lows? What did we learn about ourselves? What did we learn about ourselves? What did we get excited about? Again, when we are talking about our weeks, there does not need to be any response from family members unless someone wants to comment.

*Set Goals:* Here we look ahead to the coming weeks and think about what we would like to improve upon. By setting one specific action step, we give ourselves something to take forth from the meeting. This also sets up next week's "Review the week."

*Add traditions:* You may take one of the family principles and talk about that each week.

Pass around the responsibility of running the meeting so that it's not always the same person dragging everyone together.

Mandatory fun means that the activity is mandatory for everyone. It may not be fun for everyone, but ask participants to look at their attitude about doing something when they don't want to, or when they think they are not very good at something. It is shared time together, especially when done in families. (Workbook)

We get hung up on wanting everyone to want to be together as a family. We want that relationship so much, we end up lowering the bar and demanding little from the family when it comes to being together. We end up doing nothing together. (237)

Along with jobs, family meetings, and mandatory fun, you may also want to give back to your community as a family. (239)

The responsibility for making a character-based family run does not rest with one individual. Instead, decisions are based on a set of principles which become the accepted norm, almost a habit, and the vehicle for accountability. It becomes a lens we apply to all situations and interactions, a context we use to understand our family, our school, ourselves. We begin to control less and trust more. (Workbook)

*Ask: What particularly stuck you about these ideas or the readings from these chapters?*

### **Partner Exercise**

Discuss each topic below with a partner (may be a spouse) in relation to how it affected me when I was the age of my child:

Peer pressure at school In-crowd/out-crowd Books/Movies Church/Faith Authority figures Sports	Grades Media images Grandparents/Parents' work Birthday parties
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### **The Butterfly**

One day a man found a cocoon of a butterfly. When a small opening appeared, he sat and watched the butterfly for several hours through the tiny hole. Then it seemed to stop making progress. It had gotten as far as it could and could go no farther. So the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly now emerged easily.

But it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand, to be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened. In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly.

What the man, in his kindness and haste, did not understand, was that the restricting cocoon, and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening, were nature's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved freedom from the cocoon. Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. If we were allowed to go through life without any obstacles, it would cripple us. We would not be as strong as we could have been. And we would never be able to fly.

The powerful lesson of nature's cocoon is this: We humans were meant to seek and struggle in life; this may be why we are continually exposed to such striking opposites as pain and joy,

good and evil and so on. We must teach this truth to our children, not with words, but by helping them experience it.

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. When you think about the term "taking hold," what comes to mind?
2. What does Jesus say about taking hold and letting go? What Biblical stories or sayings deal with this?
3. How does God give us the "freedom to fail or fly"?
4. What can prevent us from "taking hold" of what is important and what may need to be done in our lives?
5. How does forgiveness work in your family?
6. Where do you see your parents in yourself? How do you feel about this? Have you taken hold of certain things and let go of others? Have you acknowledged your parents' strengths and forgiven them for the things they were unable to do?
7. How does your family treat chores/jobs? Is this different from what was expected in your family while you were growing up?
8. How do you feel about the work ethic of your children? What steps could we take to bring a better work ethic into the family?
9. Who taught you how to work? What other lessons did you learn from them? How do you share these lessons?
10. What are some reasons to have family meetings?
11. Who takes on the role of pulling together for a meeting in our family? How could we spread this responsibility around?
12. Why does clearing the decks work in family meetings?
13. What were some of the "fun" times that you had as a kid that maybe you didn't think were so much fun at the time?
14. Does your family have mandatory fun? Does it need to?
15. What have you done as a family that you would recommend as mandatory fun?

**Group Prayers** (in the usual format)

## **The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have**

### **Small Group Week 8**

**Prayer:** God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, 829)

#### **Priority 9: Humility to Ask for and Accept Help**

*Read each quotation around the circle, with a brief pause between readings.*

Although this book has focused on parenting and families, it has hopefully offered a map and compass to help us navigate a journey that we are all experiencing. We all have dignity and worth. Taking the responsibility to work on our character can connect us to our destiny. (284)

Learning to let our children own their own obstacles is an ongoing challenge no matter what their age. (279)

We need to remember that we are always teaching, whether we intend to or not. Whatever we choose to pay attention to (or not pay attention to) will speak loudly to our children. (256)

Humility is probably the most essential ingredient in exceptional parenting. It asks us to see our parenting growth through our learning as opposed to our knowing. Recognizing that we need help with our parenting is not a failure. It is a step of courage and of conscience. In a competitive culture, asking for help and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable is often very difficult. Yet this example will be the most powerful gift we can give to our children. (Workbook)

Asking for help ought to be seen as a sign of strength. We should welcome the help of others as a way to move us and our children forward. We should regard obstacles as catalysts for our own personal growth. (246)

For most of us, accepting help is uncomfortable and difficult. If we "take our job seriously and not ourselves", we are reminded to humbly focus on the task of uncovering our deeper purpose in life and allowing others to help us with that journey. (Workbook)

Allowing honesty to flow within the family is the first step toward making this happen. When truth is established as more important than anything else, we give our children permission to help us. If we become better at this, our children will trust us at a deeper level and begin to use us as a resource in their lives. (Workbook)

Allow others to enter the lives of your children and teach them. (Workbook)

Some of the most important things we want our children to learn, we ourselves cannot teach them. We can, however, get out of the way and allow others to affect them. This takes humility. (250)

Learn to admit mistakes with enthusiasm. (Workbook)

Effective parenting does not mean always being right. Our job is to try and do our best as consistently as we can. . . It also means learning to laugh at ourselves in order to restore humility to our parenting base. (287)

We often get caught up in the idea that showing our strengths and achievements will inspire our children to be the best they can be. Usually, it's when we show our children our ability to admit mistakes and move forward that they truly respect us. The bottom line is this: We will never reach our full greatness without the help of others. The same is true for our children. (Workbook)

### **Priority 10: Inspiration: Job # 1**

We believe that the deepest yearnings of children are to be inspired by their parents and teachers. It is probably the biggest hope that they have. We tend to hide the struggles, and the chinks in the armor in ourselves, believing that this will surely send the wrong message to our kids. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our kids are constantly feeling that they fall short of their expectations. If all they see from us is a lack of struggle, then it will be hard for them to truly trust and use us as a resource. (Workbook)

Our successes and accomplishments from the achievement culture are not always a source of inspiration for our children. In fact, they can form a barrier between us and our children. These achievements sometimes bring doubts into the minds of our children about their ability to attain those heights, and it is hard for them to share these doubts with us. Our children need to know what our convictions or principles are, and how we struggle with these as well as how we continue to improve ourselves as people. (Workbook)

When our children see us face difficult truths, allow vulnerability, express concern and commitment to others, practice humility, live lives of conscience, we provide a compelling example. We know that we are doing the right thing, that a deeper purpose in our lives is more likely to guide us and that, too, sends a powerful message to our children. (Workbook)

- We will not inspire our kids through our image and achievements.
- We will not inspire them if our achievements do not come through our character.
- We will inspire them when we are real and share our struggles.
- We will inspire them when we take risks to grow and change.
- We will inspire them when we get up and try to model character on a daily basis. (Workbook)

Our children are most inspired when they see us try to improve ourselves as people, when they see us strive to develop our own character, when they see us strive to practice what we preach, when they see us [follow the 10 principles.] (263)

We inspire our children . . . when we share our struggles and feelings . . . when our reach exceeds our grasp . . . when we model daily character. (263-6)

Stop yearning for happiness, but believe it will find you in moments and times when you least expect it. (288)

“When we do the right thing, we raise ourselves in our own eyes.” Eugene Delacroix (289)

“Our chief want in life is someone who will make us do what we can. ” Ralph Waldo Emerson (289)

*Ask: What particularly stuck you about these ideas or the readings from these chapters?*

## **Readings and Discussion**

### ***The Lobster Story***

I met an oceanographer who asked if I knew how a lobster was able to grow bigger when its shell was so hard. I had to admit that learning how lobsters grow had never been high on my list of priorities. But now that he had mentioned it, how in the world could a lobster grow?

The only way, he explained, is for the lobster to shed its shell at regular intervals. When its body begins to feel cramped inside the shell, the lobster instinctively looks for a reasonably safe spot to rest while the hard shell comes off and the pink membrane just inside forms the basis of the next shell. But no matter where a lobster goes for this shedding process, it is very vulnerable. It can get tossed against a reef or eaten by a fish. In other words, a lobster has to risk its life in order to grow...

We all know when our shells have gotten too tight. We feel angry or depressed or frightened because life is no longer exciting or challenging. We are doing the same old things and beginning to feel bored. Or we are doing things we hate to do and are feeling stifled in our shells.

Some of us continue to smother in old shells that are no longer useful or productive. That way we can at least feel safe - nothing can happen to us. Others are luckier: even though we know we will be vulnerable – that there are dangers ahead – we realize that we must take risks or suffocate.

Eda J. LeShan

### ***Our Greatest Fear***

Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant,  
Gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world.  
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking  
So that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.  
It is not just in some; it is in everyone.

As we let our own light shine, we consciously give  
Other people permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our fear,  
Our presence automatically liberates others.

Marianne Williamson

### **Questions**

What strikes you about either of these readings?  
What do they say about the way God has made us?  
How do humility and confidence go together?  
How can we approach issues in our lives when we know we need to change and grow and are fearful to become vulnerable?  
How can we let our light shine?

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. What does the word humility mean to you?
2. What Biblical stories or sayings deal with asking for help, humility or inspiration?
3. When in your life have you needed help and asked for it? What happened?
4. When in your life has it been difficult to ask for help?
5. Where can we or do we need to ask for help with our children?
6. Who is an inspiration in your life right now?
7. Who in your life was an inspiration as you were growing up? How did they inspire you?
8. Do your children know the things you struggle with, any fears you have or failures you have had in your life? Explain.

9. How does your child inspire you? How do you think you inspire your child?
10. What was an "aha" moment you have had from these parent meetings or reading The Biggest Job? How has or will this "aha" moment change your parenting?
11. Would we like to plan mandatory fun, a service project or a celebration as a group?

**Group Prayers** (in the usual format)

## Review Questions

*Write down your answers and/or discuss them with your spouse:*

1. What are your deepest dreams and vision for yourself? For your children/family?
2. Think about what's happening in your life right now (what you're in to, what you're about) and share where you are in the area of Truth over Harmony. (This may be with your children, at work, with your family of origin, in your relationships, etc.)
3. How are your core principles leading you in your life right now? Where might you not be following them?
4. Do you really believe that attitude is more important than aptitude? Where does your attitude get in the way of your best effort?
5. Where in your life have you set high expectations and not been able to let go of the outcome? Do you allow others to set high expectations for you?
6. Do you really believe you can learn from failure? Do you allow yourself to fail? Is it hard for you to see your kids fail?
7. When or where in your life have you allowed obstacles to become opportunities?
8. What is something in your life that is occupying your thoughts and concerns right now? What do you need to take hold of? What do you need to let go of?
9. What are you personally doing to create a character culture in your family? If you don't know, what could you be doing?
10. Where are you getting help in your life? Is it hard for you to ask for help?
11. Who in your life is inspiring you right now? Where are you inspiring someone else?
12. What does your family mean to you? Does anything prevent you from sharing this with them?
13. What specific action step could you take to honor the highest vision of your family?
14. What responsibilities do we take for our children (or those of others) at their baptism?