

NO PERFECT

# Parents

DISCUSSION GUIDE



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# Real parents welcome.

## C'MON IN.

Does it feel like a “duh” to say this job is hard, frustrating, exhausting, and flat-out scary?

Maybe you feel like you're constantly ducking flying arrows (or toys), drowning in a sea of grape juice and pretzels, or battling over screens, yes, again.

### **YOU'RE NOT ALONE.**

Through this study, we hope to make you laugh, cry (just a little), and help you build a future generation that thrives and honors God.

The No Perfect Parents study hands you a five-session series to help you navigate whether you've got kids in the car seat phase or you're handing over the keys. These ideas work whether your kids are biological or not, whether you're married or flying solo, whether you're scraping by or just cleaned out Costco in your last grocery run.

This study can empower you in one of the hardest things you do: raising kids.

Based on our book, *No Perfect Parents* (Zondervan, 2021), the study in your hands equips you to

- Reflect on the good and bad parts of your own childhood and how it steers your parenting
- Create space to get real about our greatest fears—instead of them managing you
- Know what you're aiming for—your parenting bullseye

- Discover four keys to your kids' teenage years
- Equip you to speak life to and encourage your kids
- Understand why God chose you as your kids' parent or stepparent

After watching each video, we provide the questions so it's easy to facilitate real conversation with your spouse or a small group of parents.

## 3 TIPS FOR GROUP LEADERS

### 1. Set Expectations

Minimize surprises by explaining the format of this study and the length of each session. Respect people's time by keeping your group moving and ending on time. But plan at the outset for enough margin to cultivate genuine, thoughtful conversation (even for the introverts!).

- Break the ice and help everyone arrive with the provided Kickstarter question (about 5-10 minutes)
- Watch the video (about 30 minutes)
- Move through the "Let's Talk." feature to facilitate conversation (about 20-30 minutes)

### 2. Show Up

As with most things in life, you'll get out of this study what you put in. Encourage your group to stay committed and to trust the process—while remaining mindful of what makes this rewarding (...or demotivating) for them.

### 3. Explain and Maintain Healthy Ground Rules

Set your entire group up for success by laying wise ground rules. Here's what we recommend.

- 1. Be vulnerable.** Genuine connection heals and helps all of us.
- 2. What happens in our group stays in our group.** Trustworthiness makes rule #1 possible.
- 3. No tattling on a spouse.**
- 4. Remember why this course matters to you: Do the homework.**



# Session One:

## THE BULLSEYE

KICKSTARTER

How would you describe each of your kids in a few words?

What's one key to someone who would want to know what makes that child tick?

What one word best describes your family?

*We'll go first. We're Dave & Ann Wilson. Our three sons are in their 30s and married to incredible women. We have six grandkids who are the absolute joy of our lives.*

*One word to describe our family: Adventure-seekers!*



WATCH THE VIDEO

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“We believe there is a secret to parenting that most parents have never considered, and it is found in two key questions: *What are we trying to raise?* And *Who are we raising?*”

“When those two questions are answered, we can begin to develop a plan of *how* we're going to navigate these years of parenting, regardless of *where* the varying circumstances lead.”

**NO PERFECT PARENTS, PAGE 8**

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## LET'S TALK

- Let's talk expectations versus reality. What did you *think* parenting was going to be like? (Metaphors welcome.)
- What is parenting *actually* like? Share what's hilarious—and what's straight-up hard.
- *In the video, we shared that our parenting mission statement or bullseye is to “train and launch ‘L3 warriors (love others, lock arms, and live openhandedly)’ who make a dent where they’re sent.”*

Think about the target you're aiming for in parenting—whether intentionally, or less so. Take a few minutes and jot down what comes to mind, then share.

- From your own upbringing or childhood, what do you hope to pass on to your kids—and what do you hope to avoid?

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“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

JOSHUA 24:15, NIV

“You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

EXODUS 20:5-6

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*All Scripture verses are displayed in the English Standard Version.*



## HOMework

Before the next session, formulate a family mission statement. Don't be overwhelmed by this. It's really just a few lines that sum up what you want your family to represent. Unsure where to start? Try the activity below.

### Ideas to get you started:

1. **Pray** about who you think *God* wants your family to be.
2. Complete a “**brain dump**” list of your family's values.
3. From your list, select **three to five values** that take priority or incorporate others (for example, “love” could express values of empathy or generosity). As you're thinking and prioritizing, consider
  - Who you want to be
  - What you want to do
  - Where you want to go
4. Think: What does “**success**” for your kids look like? (The Wilsons' mission statement, for example, focuses largely on *impact* for the kingdom of God. Do you share this ultimate goal?)
5. What **Bible verses** sum up your life goals as individuals, and for your family?
6. What's the “**elevator pitch**” (30 seconds or less) that sums up your driving motivations as parents? Refine this as your mission statement, making it concise and memorable. Chew on it for a few days, listening to God.
7. Consider grabbing some snacks and **pitching your mission statement to your family**. Encourage discussion from your kids and even pushback.
8. **Display** your mission statement somewhere where it can encourage your family. You might even have your family sign their names at the bottom.



# Session Two:

## THE MINIVAN DAYS (AGES 0-12)

### KICKSTARTER

In the last session, we challenged you to create a family mission statement. Let's hear it! Share your parenting bullseye.



**WATCH THE VIDEO**

“I used to look at the Bible as a set of rules to keep me from having fun, but now I can see that God sets boundaries because he loves us and wants to protect us, leading us to the life we feel instinctively wired to pursue.

“In fact, this concept is actually a lot easier to accept when you have little ones of your own because you know that you do the same for your kids, even if they don't understand or like it.”

*NO PERFECT PARENTS, PAGE 89*



## LET'S TALK

- We talked about setting and enforcing boundaries to make your kids feel loved and secure. How confident are you in your discipline? Is it something you struggle with, or do you feel like you're hitting the target?
- We shared the important distinction between training and punishment when it comes to discipline. Share a time where you've done it right (training) and an epic fail (punishment).

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7.

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Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

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What challenges do you personally face when loving God with all your heart, soul, and strength at this stage in your life? (If you haven't personally committed your life to God—what are ways in which you, too, encounter obstacles and weaknesses to the person you want to be?)

- If you have kids older than 12, what's the best advice you can offer to those in the exhausting minivan days? What would you have told a younger version of yourself?

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Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

**EPHESIANS 6:4**

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O Lord, you have searched me and known me!  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is high; I cannot attain it.  
Where shall I go from your Spirit?  
Or where shall I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!  
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light about me be night,"  
even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light with you.  
For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them...  
I awake, and I am still with you.  
Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting!

PSALM 139:1-16, 23-24

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## HOMEWORK

God made your children on purpose and for a purpose. Share that with truth them before your next session.



# Session Three:

## THE TEENAGE YEARS

### KICKSTARTER

In the last session, we asked you to share with your children how God made them on purpose and for a purpose. How did your kids respond?



**WATCH THE VIDEO**

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“The key to raising great teens (not perfect ones, but ones who see the value of your building blocks and may choose to use some of them in their own adulthood) comes down to one key word: relationship. Even though they are instinctively pulling away, deep down they still need—and want—a relationship with their parents.”

*NO PERFECT PARENTS, PAGES 154-155*

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## LET'S TALK

- Do you have a “snowbank moment” that was humiliating and downright infuriating—one on which you can look back now and laugh?
- We shared four keys to the teenage years: praying, pursuing, listening, and modeling. In which do you sense your greatest need to grow?
- In the last session, we read Deuteronomy 6:7: “Impress [God’s commands] 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.”
  - What are ways you already incorporate talking to your kids about God in your daily routine at home?
  - What’s one recurring situation where you could naturally work God’s ways into conversation?
- Reflect on your words throughout the last few days to your kids. Did those words build them up or tear them down? (Check out Ephesians 4:29 for some great guidelines on what’s allowed out of our mouths.)

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If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

JAMES 1:5

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

PROVERBS 18:2

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

JOHN 8:36



## HOMEWORK

Put into action one or two ideas generated from your discussion about Deuteronomy 6:4-7. What are a couple of new ways you’ll weave talking about God’s ways into your family’s routine?



# Session Four:

## MAKE YOUR HOME A HAVEN

### KICKSTARTER

Using weather terms, how would your kids best describe the environment of your home?

- A haven from the storm
- A tornado warning
- Partly cloudy
- Low temperatures likely



### WATCH THE VIDEO

“I began to believe that God designed me knowing the kids I would have under my roof. He had already equipped me with passions, talents, ideas, and a personality that our kids needed. I didn’t have to feel out of place in my own home or even in my own skin.”

*NO PERFECT PARENTS, PAGE 126*



## LET'S TALK

- God chose *you* as the parent or stepparent of your kids. What has God uniquely put in you that your kids need?
- In the areas you fall short, how do your spouse or other people in your life show up for your kids or step in?
- Dallas Willard once described joy as a “pervasive and constant sense of well being.” Still, joy isn’t a feeling. It comes from deliberately journeying with God (see John 15:1-11).
  - When has joy been difficult for you?
  - What tends to stand in the way of your joy? (Maybe fear/lack of trust, looking to circumstances for your well-being, complaining...)
  - When is joy easy to choose in your family?
- Our son Cody describes Dave’s reaction to wrecking the car as the “embrace of grace.”
  - How have you experienced undeserved, generous kindness from God in the areas of your parenting where you sense weakness or failure?
  - If you can’t think of a time, in what situation do you think God might long to extend that kind of embrace?
  - Is there a situation in your home right now that could use undeserved, generous kindness? As it’s appropriate and comfortable, share what that “embrace” could look like.

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Rejoice in the Lord  
always; again I will  
say, rejoice.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4

Then [Nehemiah] said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

NEHEMIAH 8:10



## HOMework

Relationships, and a home that’s a haven, are built around fun! Plan something fun with your kids before the next session.



# Session Five:

## OUR PARENTING MISTAKES

### KICKSTARTER

Did you attempt anything fun with your kids since our last session? Share how it went!



### WATCH THE VIDEO

“At times, I just needed my dad to sit down with me, look me in the eyes and ask, ‘How are you?’ When I messed up in high school, I needed my dad to be present and speak into my life with love and wisdom. I needed him to be able to go out to eat with me and ask questions without it being awkward. It’s not your kid’s responsibility to drive the conversation. Ask them questions, and don’t put pressure on them to ask you the right questions.”

REFLECTIONS FROM THIRD SON, CODY, IN *NO PERFECT PARENTS*, PAGE 203



## LET'S TALK

- Dave describes his habit of “turning off” when he got home from work as “leaving my soul at my job.” What distracts you from being fully present with your kids? Have your kids ever called you out on it?
- In the book, Cody shared, “I think Dad finds it easier to share his life as he looks at thousands of heads rather than when he looks deep into one pair of eyes.”
  - Why is vulnerability sometimes with friends, social media, coworkers, or an audience than with those in our homes?
  - What’s one step you could take toward vulnerability and authentic connection with your kids?
- During the teenage years, we sometimes parent out of fear because of the temptations and pressures teens face. What are your fears about this season in your family?
- Ann challenges us to focus, rather than on our kids’ actions, on their hearts and what’s influencing those actions. Think about a time recently where your son or daughter messed up. What do you think was going on in their heart?
- Have you ever considered that God cares about your kids more than you do? How can this potentially change your parenting?

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Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

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## HOMEWORK

Write down what’s worrying you or provoking anxiety in your family. What truth from God’s Word specifically addresses those worries?

Take time in prayer, reflecting on God’s truth, compassion, and profound love for your family. Ask His help to continue to release your hold on these fears.

# Where do we go from here?

When dirty dishes are overcoming the countertops, foam darts are whizzing by your ear, and one of your kids sports a wicked grin, remember these words from Andy Stanley: “Your greatest contribution to the kingdom of God may not be something you do but someone you raise.”

## HUNGRY FOR MORE?

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