

Intentional Parenting Conversations

WEEK 1 / SOIL WORK / WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE GROW?

Welcome.

Settle for a moment.
Take one slow breath.

Remember: I will remind you of this each week:
Especially as some of us are just transitioning from
bedtimes, dishes, work, hard conversations, let's settle
in to this reminder:

In our parenting:

*We cannot fully take the blame or the credit.
God gives the growth.*

*You cannot fully take the blame or the credit.
God gives the growth.*

Honest Conversation—

*One trait many parenting books share is the promise,
“If you do ____, your child will turn out great... you will*

have a loving relationship with them... they will listen to and love you... and God too.” This approach alienates those who have experienced failure even when they have shown faithfulness. And at worst, this approach can be predatory on a caring parent’s fears for their child’s well being.

Is there a more honest way to have conversations about intentional parenting that so many of us are desperate to have without the ‘over-promise and under-deliver’ dynamic?

*I think there is and with that in mind,
I want to invite us into*

Conversational Commitments—

The author and pastor Eugene Peterson in a parenting book we have been really enjoying writes,

“When I observe the families where parents seem to be doing a good job of living the Christian faith in relation to their children, it is readily apparent that actual practices vary widely. Particular rules, techniques of discipline, variations in strictness and permissiveness—they run the gamut. One

thing stands out: these parents seriously, honestly, joyfully follow the way of Christ themselves.”

I really appreciate this and would like to adopt a similar **charity** as a commitment in our conversations.

We’ll approach conversations with the assumption that every member of the group has Christ for their Shepherd, and is sincerely following Jesus as a brother or sister for whom Christ has laid down his life.

So charity is a conversational commitment,
but also **curiosity**:

When someone in a group shares, it can be our tendency to respond with advice. Giving advice relieves tension for the listener more often than it does for the one who shared. So when you feel ready to say something in response to what someone has shared, try asking yourself:

How would I ask this as a question?

Something I often ask my kids very often is
“How would you ask that as a question?”

Some other options to consider when responding:

- *Would you be willing to tell more about _____(whatever was just shared)_____*
- *An encouragement I received from what you shared is _____*
- *Or No response at all! Silence can allow for listening to the Holy Spirit, or for quiet prayer. It can also serve as an invitation for those who wait to speak, to enter into the conversation. Silence can feel awkward or unnatural! That's OK! This is a space to try it out. Approach this time in the spirit of confidence and prayer.*

*So we're hoping to have **an honest conversation** with these **commitments of charity and curiosity**,*

*But I also want to invite you into **an approach to this conversation**.*

A Cultivation Approach —

The agricultural imagery of the Bible provides a way to illustrate the central conflict of the Biblical story: What will God do with his beloved creatures whom he has made in his image, and yet— *have a hard heart toward Him?*

How will God tend to the hardness in *our* hearts and souls to grow the fruit he intends for us to enjoy?

It's a familiar situation when you are a parent.

How we will tend to our kids?

Especially in their hardness of heart!

Our stories are messy, like soil. We all come with our stories of how we have been parented and how we have struggled in parenting, and yet God invites us into the hard work of cultivating with Him, working hard with the grain of His wisdom, but hard as we work, it's always the case that God graciously is the one to bring the growth and the fruit (1 Cor. 3:6-9; Deuteronomy 11:14).

One experienced parent summarized this in a refreshing way:

*"With my kids,
I can not fully take the blame or the credit."*

The mysterious but practical agricultural imagery of the Scriptures frees us up: 1./ to enjoy the gift that our kids are and 2/ to celebrate the fruit God provides along the way.

We also hold to that tension that Dallas Willard captures so well: Grace is not opposed to earning. It is opposed to effort. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.

There is good work for us to do in our parenting, but it is never fully upon us. We cooperate with a God who has a long history of tending the Garden of His Creation and particularly, the heard hearts of humans to yet bring fruit and give growth.

*We cannot fully take the blame or the credit.
God gives the growth.*

A cultivation approach also means that it is never too late to begin again and cultivate growth in the season ahead.

Soil imagery assumes mess, seasons, waiting, and forces beyond our control.

What season does your family feel like right now?
(Planting? Pruning? Waiting? Harvesting? Winter?)

Where have you seen unexpected fruit that you know you didn't manufacture?

How does believing “God gives the growth” free you?
And what responsibility remains yours?

We’re going to break out rooms for a few minutes and
I want you to as you introduce yourselves to one
another, answer the question:

What season does your family feel like right now?

[BREAK OUTS]

Overview—

So over the month of March we will cover in

Week 1 | Soil Work: What Do I Want to See Grow?

With an outcome of getting a goal for your parenting
and supporting values on paper.

Week 2 | Fertilizer: Learning the Language of Encouragement + Blessing

With an outcome of having specific phrases you want
to begin using with your child to encourage them.

Week 3 | Pruning: Discipline + Practicing Patient Instruction as Disciples

With an outcome of criteria you want to hold to for discipline and some situational resources.

Week 4 | Ecosystem: Thinking Situationally About Parenting

With an outcome of holistically seeing what your child might benefit from to align their environment to your goal and values around parenting.

So let's get into it.

Week 1 | Soil Work: What do you want to see grow and how does the soil affect that?

Some of you may have been able to reflect on the questions, what is in the soil of your parenting— how your experience of being parented has shaped how you parent...

Maybe you react to the way you are parenting...

Maybe there are things that have come online for you that you are surprised by... patterns your parents had... that you now just do almost by default, It's amazing how hard wired these things can be.

But in that soil of your parenting, what do you want to see grow?

And particularly, here's a big question:

How do we root our children in relationship to God?
How do we root our children in relationship to God?

And do we even want to?

What do we actually want for our kids?
Good life / "successful" / happy ...

Christian Smith: American sociologist found
"We 'teach' young people baseball, but we 'expose' them to faith. We provide coaching and opportunities for youth to develop and improve their pitches and their SAT scores, but we blithely assume that religious identity will happen by osmosis...

Have we taught them a faith that isn't worth it?

Eugene Peterson: Growing children hear not only their parents words, they hear the intentions, the attitudes behind those words. Above all kids learn what their parents ***really admire. Really despise.***

In a way, our child's attention on our life as a parent—
is how kids help to raise *us*.

Parenting reveals what we *really* value to our children
— and to us!

What is the good life to us *really*?

We might be surprised that our living answer doesn't
match what we'd say. And our kids can tell.

In Matthew 22, Jesus has just wowed a crowd of the
most successful leaders in his community with his
teaching and answers to questions when a man
comes to him asking him essentially what is the good
life?

What is the greatest commandment that gets us
there?

And Jesus, teaching about “life to the full” says this

The Shema!

37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Now I want to take some time here and unpack this with you.

There are some great videos from The Bible Project you can watch with your family or for yourself —

And their series on [THE SHEMA](#) says a lot in a short time so let’s take a video and then discuss it starting with what the word SHEMA or HEAR means:

[Watch Video: “Shema/Listen”]

Group Discuss + Use Chat for following question:

- What tends to drown out your ability to truly hear — busyness, anxiety, fixing, distraction?

[Watch Video: “Love”]

Group Discuss + Use Chat for following questions:

- What would it mean to aim not just for behavior management, but heart formation — yours and theirs?
- How do you respond when your child's desires clash with yours?
- Where might you be trying to control outcomes instead of cultivating trust?
- **How does our pace of life prevent us from moving at the speed of love?** Call out to Jordan Griesbeck's talk on raising an autistic son as a priest in the Church, **The Speed of Love in The Age of Efficiency**

[Watch Video: "Heart"]

There's is a beautiful image here of the two tablets of the 10 Commandments forming a heart, it's the outline of one of those valentine's cartoon versions of a heart — but I think it is saying something powerful. In Jeremiah 31 we are promised that God will write his life-giving ways, inscribe them if you will, upon our hearts. And God by the Holy Spirit's indwelling in us, for all who are baptized and have received His Spirit, we are becoming these people of life giving ways. And you know sometimes it doesn't seem like especially when parenting stretches us and reveals things about us that are unloving— but if you are

asking questions about your parenting, if you are showing up to something called intentional parenting conversations, I think that is a part of that promise being delivered. God is at work, I want to encourage you in this, that God is at work by His Spirit putting new ways into our hearts, ways of His love that lead to life.

Group discussion:

Soil must be softened before seeds can take root.

- What softens your heart toward your child when it grows hard?
- What practices (confession, apology, blessing, prayer) cultivate humility and tenderness in your home?
- If fruit takes time, how might patience be a bold act of faith rather than passivity?

[Watch Video: “Soul”]

The Hebrew idea of “soul” points to our whole embodied life.

- How can faith become something your children see embodied rather than just hear explained?
- Where might your kids be learning more from your reactions than your words?
- What rhythms already exist in your family that could become spiritual touchpoints?

[Watch Video: “Strength”]

Strength means **MUCHNESS** — I want to think about that for a second especially as a vision for you, your parenting, and how that connects with God’s plans to cultivate this flourishing garden city with his hard hearted image bearers in a broken but beautiful world.

SALT— AN AGENT OF MUCHNESS

Some of you have heard me say this before:
In seasons where I am stressed,
 I tend to read cookbooks before bed,
They are relaxing and reset me mentally.

And one of my favorite cook books is a book called Grains for Every Season by Joshua McFadden.

And in his section about cool stuff to stock in your larder— which now I know is a fancy word for pantry— he writes about the necessity of salt and I think he helped me understand what Jesus means for his followers when he invites us to be salt and light.

“The point of salt,” McFadden writes,

*“is not to make food taste salty,
but to make it taste— more of itself.”*

*“Whether it’s a tomato,
a slice of ripe melon,
a bowl of buttered noodles, or a steak,
your dish wants salt to dial in the natural flavors,
heightening their best qualities,
muting the more acerbic ones,
and making the whole thing taste better.”*

Salt, in other words draws out the best in food while helping to neutralize the worst of it, in turn

“Making the whole thing”
the whole dish,
the whole meal,
the experience...
taste better.

Salt, as Jesus understands it and explains in the Matthew 5 is what you and I are called to be as an expression and extension of what Jesus has done for us and is doing in the world. Causing us to shine and flourish. To be more ourselves. For this creation to be what it is meant to be bearing fruit as a garden city.

Loving God with our strength,

With our muchness,
Leads to muchness in the world and relationships
around us.

Now, I think this is a powerful goal for us as parents.
The Jesus Creed as Scott McKnight calls it.

The Shema—
To love the Lord your God with all your heart
With all your soul
With all your might, is the way we sign it in our house
and we have hand gestures to boot.

We flex when we say might.

I sing this to my kids every night
And there are times when I am thinking about the pile
of dishes
And the bills,
And the emails,
The ten other things I want to be doing, but come
back to what it means to be a parent,
What it means to be a child of God, called again and
again into loving God as I have been loved and loving
this person that God has put in front of me and I am to
put to bed.

So, here's an assignment to close. Something to work on this week:

Try to come up with a goal for your parenting.

What do you want to see grow?

And what are some values, things that you will sacrifice a lot for...

What are some values you have and already sacrifice a lot for— how do they fit with this goal?

If you have a spouse, try to answer this for yourself first and then compare notes with your spouse.

There may be some disagreement and that is OK, that's great. You might be willing to sacrifice sleep like me, so that when you wake up in the morning the kitchen looks and feels a certain way. A value for cleanliness though may not be shared by your spouse. They may be more fun than that. They may be planning the next adventure you will go on as they lie in bed and fall asleep. They may work hard to ensure your family has these formative experiences.

That's another value. Good work out how those go together with a common goal for your parentings.

What do you want to see grow?

To help here is a prompt:

PROMPT

Imagine your child at age 25 or 30.

Not their career.

Not their achievements.

Not how others describe them.

Who are they becoming?

Sit with these prompts:

- When my child leaves my home, I hope they are the kind of person who ____ (fill it in) ____ ...
- The kind of relationship I hope we have is...
- If they walk away with only three deep convictions from our home, I pray they would be...

Now ask:

- Are my daily reactions aligned with that long-term hope?
- Where do my anxieties distort my true goal?

The Shema begins with loving God with heart, soul, and strength. A strong formation begins with clarity.

Is this is a goal you want to adopt for your family?

If not, what is?

What is gained by considering the Shema?

Or how might you phrase the Shema?

And what values do you hold?

How do they support your goal and what you hope to see grow?

Or don't?

Lent is a time of self-reflection and asking God to illuminate things about us that currently may feel dark.

It's OK if you feel that.

God is committed to us and will bring the growth.

If you need some ideas for values you can write your own or circle values you most want to shape your home:

Try to write 5-7.

Examples (add your own):

Trust in God

Honesty

Curiosity

Humility

Resilience

Compassion

Courage

Repentance & forgiveness

Hospitality

[PRAY]