

PRACTICAL
FAITH SERIES

The Heart of Parenting

SIX BIBLE STUDY LESSONS
FOR GROUP DISCIPLESHIP



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FOR GROUP DISCIPLESHIP



EVERY NATION
P R O D U C T I O N S

How to Use this Material

In Victory, the primary venue for discipleship happens in a small group. It is called a Victory group. We strongly encourage everyone to be involved since these groups are specifically designed to help disciples grow spiritually.

A Victory group meeting has three sections: **Connect**, **Word**, and **Prayer**, and ideally lasts from forty to sixty minutes.

CONNECT (5-10 minutes)

Victory group meetings begin with a time to relate with one another. Depending on the people who comprise the group, this can be done through a variety of ways:

- Fun—such as an icebreaker activity
- Answered prayers—sharing of testimonies and updates
- Questions—such as those provided in the material, learning each other’s personal stories, and sharing feedback from the weekly message

Effective Questions During the Connect Portion:

- Are deliberately friendly to first-timers
- Ask for opinion or experiences
- Require no Bible knowledge
- Have no right or wrong answer
- Are not controversial
- Are preferably connected to the meeting’s topic

THE HEART OF PARENTING

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email: productions@everynation.org.ph

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WORD (20-30 minutes)

Teach the truth and relevance of God's Word for life application. The Victory group meeting is not primarily a Bible study. Although teaching and explanation of Scripture is involved, the goal is to minister, not finish a material.

There is no need to teach all the points in a material.

Within this section, we look at what the Bible says, its relevance to us today, and its application in our lives.

What: *What does the Bible say?*

Communicate and impart biblical truth clearly and concisely.

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16,17

Tips for Sharing the Word Effectively

- Let the Bible speak for itself.
- Use illustrations and tell stories to explain Bible verses.
- When entertaining clarifications, be watchful not to allow the discussion to go off-tangent.
- The primary goal is to minister to the needs of the people, not to finish a Bible lesson.
- Be led by the Spirit when using the material.

So What: *What is the relevance of the Word to my life?*

Give participants the opportunity to discuss how the Word impacts the way they live.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

ROMANS 12:2

Now What: *How do I apply the Word to my life?*

Our primary reason for sharing the Bible is so that people will know who God is and what He has done. In doing so, the participants will begin to discover who they are and what they should do.

If it is a promise, teach them to claim it. If it is a command or a principle, encourage them to put it to action by God's grace. If it is a truth, let them embrace it willingly and not under compulsion. Allow God's grace and love to win them by the way you teach God's Word.

Encourage specific, measurable action steps that are consistent with the life change that the Scripture is bringing about. We do not command people, but we spur them on toward love and good deeds.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says. JAMES 1:22

Tips for Life-Changing Application

- You may choose one of the "So What" and "Now What" questions or you may add your own.
- An effective standby application question is: "What one action step are you going to take as a result of what you heard today?"
- Designate who will be the first to answer the question asked.
- Do not allow someone to argue or be critical of others.
- Remind everyone to apply the lesson to their own lives, not to someone else's.
- Ask God for wisdom to know when to balance or correct strange or unbiblical applications. Insensitive correction or criticism can kill the group, as can unchecked heresy.
- Remind everyone that transformation is God's work, not ours, and our obedience is a response to who He is and His love for us. It is God's grace that enables us to apply and obey His Word.

PRAY (15-20 minutes)

Prayer is the most important part of the Victory group meeting. Make sure you have plenty of time left so your prayer time is not rushed. This is not a “closing prayer,” but a time for everyone in the group to take specific requests to God. This is where the action is. The goal is to create a venue where people will see God move on their behalf.

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.” MATTHEW 18:19

Tips for Powerful Prayer

- Listen to the Holy Spirit carefully during the Connect and Word sections for things that may need prayer.
- Spend your time praying for one another, not sharing and discussing prayer requests.
- Keep your prayers simple, sincere, and short. Most non-believers have never heard an ordinary Christian just talk to God and will be touched by the sincerity and simplicity of the prayer.
- Pray, don’t preach. Pray in simple and short sentences, not long “sermon prayers.”
- Use conversational prayer, not complicated or profound, intercessory prayer.
- Expect God to answer your prayers.

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¹Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. EPHESIANS 5:1,2

WHAT

Love is a word used so often, but it’s also a concept that is so hard to explain. The greatest regrets most people have in life have to do with their relationships. Living for what matters necessitates learning how to love in every sense of the word. God, who is Himself the author and source of love, demonstrated true love for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Following are three ways God demonstrated His love for us and exemplified how we are to love others. As parents, we will look at how this applies specifically in our homes.

1 Love unconditionally.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ROMANS 5:8

God loves us unconditionally—even when we were at our worst. He pursued us and loves us back into a relationship with Him. When we have experienced His love, we will be able to love others truly.

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How does 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 describe love? Share how God’s love drew you into a relationship with Him.

2 Serve sacrificially.

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” JOHN 15:13 (SEE ALSO 1 JOHN 3:16,18.)

God loved us first and exemplified the sacrificial love we are to have for one another. Serving at the expense of self, considering the needs of others over your own—these actions reflect a loving and selfless heart.

Share of a time when you laid down your own interest for the sake of others. How did that enrich your relationships?

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3 Forgive completely.

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” ²²Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” MATTHEW 18:21,22 (SEE ALSO LUKE 7:47.)

If we are to love others, we will need to forgive. Forgiveness is a decision we will need to make continuously. Jesus taught that our ability to love is in direct proportion to how much we understand God’s love and forgiveness in our lives. We exemplify God’s love when we choose to forgive.

What does it mean to forgive up to seventy-seven times?

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³Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. ⁴Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. ⁵Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate. PSALM 127:3-5

WHAT

Before we can be successful parents, we must understand God's heart for our children by seeing what His Word says. Some parents have accepted an unbiblical view of children based on family or cultural traditions that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Some cultures and families live as if children are the center of the universe. Others treat them as a distraction.

If we base our parenting on family and culture, we will miss God's best. Like all of life, we must base what we do on Scripture. Psalm 127 describes children as a heritage, a reward, a blessing, and arrows. The starting point of being a good parent is to see our children as God sees them.

1 Children are a heritage.

Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. PSALM 127:3

Our children have value because God gave them to us, whether or not anyone else outside the family values them as we do.

What is a "heritage"?

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2 Children are a reward and a blessing.

³Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. ⁴Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. ⁵Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate. PSALM 127:3-5

Don't you see that children are God's best gift? the fruit of the womb his generous legacy? PSALM 127:3 (THE MESSAGE)

To have God's heart for children, we must see them as a reward and blessing, not as a punishment or problem. The Message Bible even says that children are God's best gift.

Why are children God's best gift to us? In what ways is your child a blessing to you?

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3 Children are like arrows.

Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. PSALM 127:4

Arrows are made to shoot at a target, not stay in the quiver. In order to hit the target, an arrow must be made properly. The writer of this psalm was probably familiar with the ancient process of making an arrow out of a piece of wood—from stripping off twigs and leaves, straightening the pegs, and sanding to smoothen it, to sharpening it, and finally, shooting it.

How are you preparing your child to one day be released from your quiver?

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SO WHAT

- How is God’s heart for children different from the way your culture and family views them?
- How should we treat something of great value? How does God’s Word tell us to treat our family?
- How is the process of making an arrow applicable to raising a child? In what areas do children need straightening, sanding, and sharpening? Finally, how are children released like arrows?

NOW WHAT

- Do you see your child the way God sees him/her? How can you see your child the way God does starting this week?
- How can you show your child that s/he is one of God’s best gifts to you?
- How can you prepare your child to be a well-made arrow that will one day be released from your quiver to hit God’s target for his/her life?

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- Thank God for His blessings and grace for your family.
 - Pray that you would value your child every day and that you would help your family walk in God’s ways.
 - Ask God for wisdom and strength to prepare your child like an arrow and to one day release him/her from your quiver.

3

The Parent’s Heart

CONNECT

- What do you absolutely love about being a parent? Why?
- What is one thing you’re grateful to your parents for?
- What can you learn from the mistakes of your parents?

¹Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. ²In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves.

PSALM 127:1,2

WHAT

Most professionals have a good idea of what is expected of them at work because they have been trained for the job and they have a written job description. Many parents do not know what to do at home because they have not been properly trained and they have never seen their job description. Psalm 127 presents a three-fold job description of parents as builders, watchmen, and providers. None of these jobs can be accomplished without God’s help and His presence in the home.

1 Parents are builders.

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. . . . PSALM 127:1

Parents have to partner with God to build a godly home. No one can build a home on human ability alone, and no one can build it overnight. Building properly takes time and requires much help. Parents must build spiritual foundations in children, following the biblical blueprint. And sometimes, parents must get the help of “subcontractors,” such as teachers, kids pastors, youth pastors, Victory group leaders, and church leaders to help build their kids.

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Who are some of your spiritual subcontractors who have helped you build up your children?

2 Parents are watchmen.

. . . Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. PSALM 127:1

The watchmen who stand guard in Psalm 127 are the parents. As watchmen, parents must watch and guard the hearts of their children, and be aware of dangerous influences and relationships that could harm them. Parents must be attentive and discerning, especially regarding friends, music, and entertainment.

What is the job of a watchman? What happens when watchmen don't do their jobs?

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3 Parents are providers.

In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves. PSALM 127:2

The footnote in the 1984 NIV Bible translation gives an alternative translation for this verse: for while they sleep he provides for those he loves. While it is the parent’s job to provide for his/her children, this verse promises that provision is not simply the result of hard work. After we work, God provides while we sleep. Provision is the blessing of God. And to attempt to provide for a family without God’s blessing is in vain.

How has God provided for you and your family?

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SO WHAT

- Why are spiritual subcontractors important in building a godly home? What is their role and what is ours?
- Why is it important for parents to be involved in selecting appropriate entertainment for children?
- Besides money, food, and shelter, what else should parents provide?

NOW WHAT

- What kind of a home do you want to build? How can you become a better builder and provider this week?
- Who are some spiritual subcontractors who can help you build your children? How can you enlist for their help in this season?
- Are you aware of the music, videos, and games your children listen to, watch, and play? How can you be a better watchman this week?

- Thank God for His Word and how it guides you to become who God wants you to be.
- Pray that you would fulfill the role of a parent to your child. Ask God for wisdom, discernment, and faith.
- Ask God to turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents. Pray for God to bless your child with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

4

Training a Child (Part 1)

CONNECT

- What do you want your children to be remembered for?
- What are your goals for your children?
- What is your greatest challenge as a parent? What's the most difficult situation you have faced?

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. PROVERBS 22:6

WHAT

This proverb is both a promise that God gives hope, and a principle that explains reality. The promise is that if we train our children properly, they will not turn away from God. The reality, sadly, is that if our children have turned from God, there was probably something wrong with the training. In this lesson, we will look at why we need to train our child and who is responsible for this training.

1 Why does my child need training?

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him. PROVERBS 22:15

The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother. PROVERBS 29:15

Children, no matter how cute, are guided by a fallen sin nature, or folly, in the heart. Because of the sin nature, a child left to himself/herself without discipline will be a disgrace to the parents.

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What is training?
 Why do doctors,
 accountants,
 and athletes
 need training?
 What would happen
 if they had
 no training
 or inadequate
 training?

2 Who is responsible to train my child?

¹²*“At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them.”*

1 SAMUEL 3:12,13

When Eli’s sons rebelled, God held Eli responsible. Notice that Eli was not judged because his sons had sinned, but because he knew about their sin and did nothing to restrain them. We are never judged because of the sins of others, but because of our response or the lack of it.

There are many who help in the child training process: school teachers, youth pastors, Victory group leaders, and family members. But the ultimate responsibility to train children is on the shoulders of the parents, especially the fathers.

What does “restrain” mean?

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Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. PROVERBS 22:6

WHAT

Training a child is the parent's responsibility, and we can trust that as we do this, our children will walk in God's ways. Parents are always training children, for better or worse. We set acceptable standards by what we expect, excuse, or ignore. If a child is respectable or rude, it is because s/he has been trained to be so. If a child is disciplined or lazy, it is because of parental training.

Training can be positive or negative. Negative training happens when children are allowed to disobey with no consequence; obey selectively, partially, with a bad attitude, or on their own timetable; make excuses for disobedience; argue and negotiate. On the other hand, positive training involves control and teaching. As a child grows older and more mature, parents exert less control (telling the child what to do) and teach more (explaining to the child why we do something).

Ultimately, though, we don't want to raise children who follow rules, get good grades, or have good manners, but whose hearts are far from God. In this lesson, we will look at what we want to train our children towards: loving God, obeying Him, and living to please Him all the days of their lives.

1 Love God.

⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. DEUTERONOMY 6:5-7

Loving God is the greatest thing we can do, and the Bible commands us to teach and train our children to do the same. We are not merely after changing the behavior of a child. Rather, we desire to see the child know, love, and walk with the Lord.

How does Deuteronomy 6:5-7 tell us to teach our children?

2 Obey God.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." MATTHEW 7:24 (SEE ALSO MATTHEW 7:25-27.)

³²So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. ³³Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

DEUTERONOMY 5:32,33

Though our children may grow up obeying us, we want to train them to obey God above anyone or anything else. Their obedience to Christ is more important than their obedience to us. If they obey Christ, they will honor us in obedience to Him (Exodus 20:12).

How can we teach our children to obey God?

3 Please and honor God.

So we make it our goal to please him . . . 2 CORINTHIANS 5:9

As parents live to please God, children will see and follow our example. When success eventually comes, who will get the glory? Does the child do something to please people or to honor God? We don't want to raise children who live to please and honor themselves, us, their friends, or anything or anyone else. Rather, the glory and honor should always be Christ's.

How can we model this principle at home?

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SO WHAT

- What do you think would happen if we control the child when we should teach, and teach when we should control?
- How is the example of a parent vital in the child's life? How can your example help your child walk with God?
- How can our children not grow up pleasing people? How can we safeguard against this?

NOW WHAT

- How can you, as a family, love God and seek Him every day?
- Are you training your child to love, obey, and honor the Lord? How can you apply what you learned today in your home this week?
- Do you think you are better at controlling or teaching your child? In what ways do you think adjustments need to be made in your approach?

PRAYER

- Thank God for each member of your family. Commit your child to the Lord.
- Pray that your child would grow up loving God and serving Him.
- Ask God to make you a good example for your child. Pray that grace, love, and peace will abound in your home.

6

Leave a Legacy

CONNECT

- What's the most recent fun thing you did as a family? Tell us about it.
- Did you have a childhood nickname? Why did your family or friends call you by that name?
- Name a historical figure whose life serves as an inspiration to you. What about that person inspires you?

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 JOHN 2:17

WHAT

Whether we realize it or not, we will leave a legacy for the generations after us. But what kind of legacy will that be? Following are three exhortations from Scripture on the kind of legacy we are to leave behind for our children, their children, and their children’s children.

1 Live for a good name.

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. PROVERBS 22:1

(SEE ALSO PROVERBS 3:3,4.)

Many times we think that the only kind of inheritance we can leave behind is wealth, but the Bible teaches us that a good name is of greater importance than wealth. Our character, how we live, what we stand for—these will outlive us and will mark the lives of those around us.

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2 Live for the next generation.

¹³Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. ¹⁴Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder

them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” MATTHEW 19:13,14

The disciples of Jesus saw children as a disturbance. Jesus, however, corrected them and taught them to value the next generation.

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How did Jesus interact with the little children?

3 Live for eternity.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” MATTHEW 6:19,20

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 CORINTHIANS 4:18

Again and again, Scripture teaches us to invest not in what is temporary, but in what is eternal. We entered this earth empty-handed, and so shall we leave it. Having a heavenward perspective helps us be more deliberate in how we live our lives. We should make decisions in light of lasting and eternal rewards.

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What are “treasures on earth”?

What are “treasures in heaven”?

What is “a good name”? What does it mean “to be esteemed”?
According to James 2:26, what is the mark of faith?
Why is being idle not a sign of faith?

SO WHAT

- How does one establish and maintain a good name?
- What do you think it means to live for the next generation? How did Jesus do this?
- How do we store up treasures on earth? How can we store up treasures in heaven? How is the world's perspective of treasures different from the Word's?

NOW WHAT

- Do you know that you will be spending eternity with Jesus? If not, would you like to know for sure and receive Him as your Lord and Savior today?
- What kind of legacy would you like to leave for the next generation? What kind of name do you want to leave for your children? What can you start doing about it today?
- How can you live in light of eternity starting this week?

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- Thank God for the gift of eternal life.
 - Pray that you would live with wisdom and in light of eternity.
 - Speak a blessing over your spouse and children. Ask God to help you value them every day.

³Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. ⁴Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. ⁵Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. . . .

PSALM 127:3-5

The Heart of Parenting is a series of six materials for group discipleship designed to help parents raise their children in a way that honors God.

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- A Life Lived with Love
- God's Heart for Children
- The Parent's Heart
- Training a Child (Part 1)
- Training a Child (Part 2)
- Leave a Legacy



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