

# Called to Parent My Growing Child

## Baby No Longer

### Opening Prayer

*Holy God, you know the challenges we face raising our children in this world today. Jesus loved spending time with children and was full of compassion for all the parents he met. Guide this reflection so that I can see myself and my family with the same compassion that Jesus does. May your Holy Spirit inspire me to see where I am being called to grow as I try to raise my child(ren) with hearts full of love and goodness. Amen.*

### Scripture Theme

*Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3).*

### Introduction

As a parent, you grow as your child grows. You learn as your child learns. You grow in faith as your child grows in faith. Your calling shifts as your child's world expands. Now that your child is no longer a baby, how are *you* growing? How is *your* call shifting?

At certain times in your life you may have carried the assumption that God calls you *once*, for just one purpose. Don't miss the call, or you might spend the remainder of your days in meaningless mediocrity. In reality, it is safe to say that God calls us many times throughout the seasons of our lives, and each call challenges us to stretch further than we might have anticipated or imagined.

In the book *Families at the Center*, Jolene Roehlkepartain writes about what parents tend to experience as their child moves out of babyhood and into childhood.

When children begin to resist and explore limits, parents become tested themselves. How will they respond to these displays of power while treasuring their child from a faith perspective? Parents can talk with children about God, pray with them, take them to worship services, introduce children to people of faith, and love their children deeply while setting clear boundaries, all what children need for their faith journey (2 to 5 years) (p. 106).

Roehlkepartain goes on to sum up the next stage of childhood.

During the elementary-school years, parents support their child's spiritual and overall development, strengthening ties to other people and to important institutions, such as

church and school. When parents pray, eat together as a family, attend worship services, and have conversations about faith, they help strengthen their child's faith journey (6 to 10 years) (p. 106).

Congratulations! Your baby has become a child, and your call in parenting has shifted. As you respond to this call, your child will show you facets of God that you have not seen or experienced before and will surely astound you. Place your trust in God, say 'yes' to the call as best you can, and give it your all.

## What's Changing?

When your first child was born and you became a parent, you surely experienced significant change. As your baby becomes a child, the change is not so dramatic, but very real none the less. In his book *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges writes that transitions always start with an ending. Seems odd, yes, but he maintains that the first step toward a life change is identifying what you are losing and learning how to manage the losses.

### **Watch**

Watch the opening two and a half minutes of Jennifer Senior's TED Talk titled "For Parents, Happiness is a Very High Bar" (<https://www.dropbox.com/s/jg10q8w0z07pk6z/l3zhw-3wivo.mp4?dl=0>). Note: the video has been edited. You'll be invited to watch more of her talk later in this program.

### **Write and/or Discuss**

This short video concludes with a rather profound, if not disturbing, question: Why is it that so many mothers and fathers experience parenthood as a kind of crisis?

- ◆ What do you think Jennifer Senior means by 'crisis'?
- ◆ At this point in your parenting vocation, do you resonate? Is that your experience? Or not? Explain, or describe.

### **Reflect**

As your calling in parenthood shifts, the questions and worries that you had when your child was born are likely replaced with new ones.

- ◆ How do I fully embrace the unique personality of this child?
- ◆ How do I parent this child toward God's ideas for him or her, not just my own?
- ◆ How do I provide just the right kind of support and care, challenge and nurture?
- ◆ How do I insure my child's safety as she or he ventures into the world?
- ◆ How do I empower my child with wonder and curiosity?
- ◆ How do I teach my child to be a citizen of the world and make a difference in it?

What would you add to the list?

All these questions are normal. It's part of the shifting process. Acknowledge the anxieties, and recognize that God is present in them. And pray for trust that God will re-mold you into the authentic parent that your child needs and deserves.

### **Take Heart**

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matt 5:4-5).*

## What's Emerging in My Life?

Let's consider what might be emerging in your life as a result of these changes. As we do so, let us remember a few things that others have discovered about God's callings in their lives. We can say that responding to God's call will likely . . .

- ◆ Lead to happiness in the long run. If it makes you depressed, it's likely not God's call. Although it won't make you immune to all other emotions such as sadness, frustration, resentment, guilt, etc. But if there is no happiness whatsoever, somehow you are not aligned with God's desire.
- ◆ Not be easy. It will probably stretch you toward something you never thought you could do or be. But you can do it, especially if you have some help.
- ◆ Benefit others besides yourself. If it only involves you, it's not God's call. This is baked-in to parenting at all stages.
- ◆ Not be overly complicated. You'll be able to explain it to others in just a few words.

### **Consider**

Let's focus on the first bullet point: lead to happiness. The authenticity of your call is found in those moments, however fleeting, of pure joy and delight that you experience from your child, as well as the moments of pure joy and delight that you observe in your child. Your call is validated by the intense intimacy and love that wells up in you at times and brings tears to your eyes. Your call is validated by your fierce desire to want the best for your child in any given circumstance. This is the kind of love God has for you and for all persons. On occasion, parents are privileged to love in exactly the same way.

### **Watch**

Watch the last six minutes of Jennifer Senior's TED Talk, "For Parents, Happiness is a Very High Bar" (<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ndlt5ux864kvjf7/jlcz-i9hj.mp4?dl=0>). Note: the video has been edited. You can view the entire TED talk at [https://www.ted.com/talks/jennifer\\_senior\\_for\\_parents\\_happiness\\_is\\_a\\_very\\_high\\_bar](https://www.ted.com/talks/jennifer_senior_for_parents_happiness_is_a_very_high_bar).)

### **Write and/or Discuss**

In the video Senior says that happiness is an elusive goal for your child, and a very unfair burden to place on a parent. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Instead of focusing on happiness, Senior advises you to try hard to do no harm (Hippocratic Oath). She maintains that this is a much more realistic goal. Do you agree? Why or why not?

### **Take Heart**

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (Matt 5:7-9).*

## How Should I Live?

Now we seek to turn the corner and fully embrace the call as parents. We seek to develop fruitful patterns of behavior and action that bring fulfillment and grace to parents, children, and the family as a whole.

### Consider

Every parent struggles, and every parent is stretched seemingly to the limit. So it is important to look honestly at what is going well, and get support and encouragement for the things that need changing.

The Gospel challenges us in two ways: 1) to continually grow and lean into this call, this important vocation, and 2) lend support and encouragement to one another, for it's not an easy calling.

In their program *Parenting With Joy*, Ann Naffziger and Paul Canavese offer these insights and challenges for parents (The Pastoral Center, PastoralCenter.com).

How do we foster goodness in our children? It begins with the hard work of cultivating good habits in ourselves. Our children watch us so closely that our words and actions carry more weight than anyone else—at least until they reach adolescence.

If we want our children to be sensitive and accepting of others, do we model that in our relationships? Are we sensitive and accepting of others (children and adults)? Do our kids hear us assume the goodwill of others and speak non-judgmentally, or do they overhear criticism? Do we sometimes resort to “Do as I say and not as I do?” If so, how might we be called to greater maturity? Considering the values we want to impart to our children is a good challenge for us to practice such values ourselves.

Developing and practicing moral virtues is like exercise. If you're not in the habit to begin with, it can be very hard to get started even though you know intellectually that exercise is a good thing. Once you develop a routine of regular exercise, it becomes easier to continue. Then if you miss a day, it is easier to get back on track than if you don't have the routine to begin with.

It's the same when it comes to developing our moral habits and values. The more we make the right choice, the more it becomes a habit and the stronger our moral muscles become. At some point, after we have practiced a particular habit enough it becomes our natural inclination and our children experience it as normal and natural.

What are those values we want our children to grow up experiencing as natural? What do we need to do to better to live out those values ourselves? Are we asking things of them that we don't do ourselves?

### **Write and/or Discuss**

- ◆ What are you most enjoying about your child(ren) at this point in their lives?
- ◆ What are you pleased about with your parenting at this point in your lives? What is going well or smoothly?
- ◆ What is a challenge for you now in parenting?
- ◆ What is a particular area of your parenting in which you would like to grow?

### **Consider**

Here are links to helpful practices and strategies for responding to the call of parenthood.

- ◆ *Expanding Their Worlds – Ages 3-5*, Keep Connected Parenting Resources, <https://keepconnected.searchinstitute.org/understanding-ages-and-stages/ages-3-5/>. Preschool age is an important time for children's development in which fathers, mothers, other caregivers, extended family, and many other people guide the child as they develop all parts of themselves. When we have a better sense of how they're developing, we're better able to respond and support them in positive ways.
- ◆ *Bringing Developmental Relationships Home: Tips and Relationship Builders for Families*. Search Institute. <https://keepconnected.searchinstitute.org/DR-home>. Every family can build relationships that guide children on a path of self-fulfillment and success in life. Search Institute has developed this research-based booklet for parenting adults to provide tips and activities families can use to be more intentional in building developmental relationships. Doing so not only can help your children learn and thrive, but it can also be fun!
- ◆ *Family Dinner Toolkit*. Keep Connected Parenting Resources. <http://page.searchinstitute.org/KC-meal-planner-landing>. Gathering for a meal is more than just eating—it's a time when everyone can gather to talk about what's going on in their lives. This Family Dinner Toolkit can help you make the time you spend together count!
- ◆ *Parents Passing on the Faith*. Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Life Department. A helpful brochure with lots of practical ideas. [http://www.acmfc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ACMFC\\_passingonfaith%204.0.pdf](http://www.acmfc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ACMFC_passingonfaith%204.0.pdf).
- ◆ Traci Smith Blog on Parenting. <http://www.traci-smith.com/category/parenting/>. Provocative insights on all the day-to-day issues for parents of young children.
- ◆ "The Rule of Family Faith: Practicing the Presence of God in Our Outward Lives." Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Ph.D. [http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/the\\_rule\\_of\\_family\\_faith\\_-\\_miller-mclemore.pdf](http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/the_rule_of_family_faith_-_miller-mclemore.pdf). Family spirituality does not always look like "spirituality" as many people understand it. The author seeks to enrich the active practice of faith already percolating in families and congregations by exploring the peculiar character of the rule of family faith.

### **Take Heart**

*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).*

# Blessing for Parents of Children

*This blessing may be used with a small group or with the entire congregation.*

## **To the Parents:**

Dear parents, your babies have become children. They are developing personalities separate from you. Their range of curiosity and discovery is growing the limits of your home and, to some extent, your control. As they grow and change, you are called to grow and change. As they discover God's ideas for them, you are called to let go just a bit, and trust in the nurture you have provided them. Today, we bless you and pledge our prayers and support.

## **To the Community gathered:**

Please extend your hand in blessing over these parents. We thank God for them, for all the ways they model God's unconditional love for us. Please respond with "Amen" to each blessing.

## **To the Parents:**

As you witness your child's curiosity and wonder, may you also experience the blessing of your own growth, maturity, wisdom, and wonder.

All: Amen.

As you relinquish some control over your child's experiences and care, may you trust you're your child remains in the palm of God's hand.

All: Amen.

As you take on new parenting duties and responsibilities like managing play dates, soothing bruised knees, and juggling schedules, may you be blessed with compassion, sustained energy, and the gift of multi-tasking.

All: Amen.

As your child discovers God and God's love, may you find authentic, faith-filled role models who inspire and call you forward in your own journey of faith.

All: Amen.

As you seek to collaborate with teachers and caregivers and all the adults who will impact your child's life, may you partner with them toward God's ideals for your child.

All: Amen.

May God bless you with every heavenly blessing, and keep you safe and strong. Know that we carry you in our hearts each and every day. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

## **Closing Prayer**

O God, we are not perfect parents, but we wish to follow you. Through your love and compassion, help us overcome our limits and respond to your loving invitation to grow. Let your Holy Spirit come upon us to know how to best use our limited time, energy, and money so that we can cooperate in building your Kingdom. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.