

Introduction/Chapter 1: No More Perfect Kids

Dig Deep

1. Jill offers snapshots of times when her parenting expectations clashed with the reality she faced (pp. 19–21). Can you identify a moment in your parenting experience when you were up against something you'd never expected?
2. In the situations described, how did you work through your own frustration or disappointment?
3. We've said that "attempts aren't failure; they are part of life." How can it be exasperating to cope with progress instead of perfection? How might it be a relief to embrace progress as an ideal rather than perfection?
4. What happens when goals for your children are set too low? too high? When have you struggled with setting expectations that are "just right"?
5. Does the Greener Grass Syndrome ever rob you of your contentment? When do you catch yourself comparing yourself, your home, your family with others? When have you been able to be content with life *as it is* and your kids *as they are*? What difference does it make?

Apply

6. Recall your own clashes between parenting expectations and reality. How do you feel about the way you handled those instances? If you are still berating yourself for past mistakes, remember that you are imperfect (just like your kids!) and let those old experiences go, asking God to help you in the future.
7. Try to identify a particular area of parenting struggle, maybe over an ongoing issue in which your expectations are not being met. Take another look at your expectation — and your child's unique personality. Could your expectation be too high? If the expectation is reasonable, how might you encourage your child's progress (baby steps!) toward meeting the expectation?
8. Quickly jot down a short list of things you like about your life *as it is* and your kids *as they are*. Use that list this week to pray your thanks to the Lord for the things that are going well for your family.

Pray

Thank God for His patient, understanding love for you, His imperfect child. Thank Him for the real kids that He purposely gave to you, the best parent for the job. Ask God to give you keen insight into your children, so that you discern how to set fair and appropriate goals. Ask God for the wisdom He promises to give (James 1:5).

Chapter 2: The Perfection Infection Collides with Parenting

Dig Deep

1. When do you most notice the inundation of perfection around you?
In what ways has perfectionism sneaked up to infiltrate your thinking and reactions?
2. Review the ten dangers of perfectionism covered on pp. 38–45. Some patterns in your parenting have grown out of your own experience as you grew up. When you were a child, did you tend to focus on your weaknesses? Did you feel criticized? Were you afraid to ask your parents and teachers for help?
3. When have you personally felt that you were loved unconditionally? How do you think that experience has helped you understand God's love for you?
4. What are the practical differences between excellence and perfection?

Apply

5. Either because life is so hectic or because we are natural “fixers,” it's easy to jump straight into solving problems as they arise. This week, when your child tells you about issues that have come up at school or at home, how might you create the time for listening and conveying empathy?

6. Four actions can increase your perception of your child's heart attitudes: Think, Engage, Listen, and Wait. When have you seen past your child's outward behaviors to the child's underlying feelings and attitudes? What difference did it make?
7. Create a short list of things you love and appreciate about your child. How might you communicate your joy in his or her uniqueness?
8. Revisit 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. How could this practical description of love help you communicate your unconditional love for your child?

Pray

Thank God for His unconditional love for you, even if it's hard for you to feel that love. Thank Him for loving your children, even more than you do! Ask God to help you enjoy the unique personality and gifts of your children. Ask Him to help you see past the surface behaviors to all-important heart issues. Ask God for his grace to help you pattern your love after 1 Corinthians 13.

Chapter 3: Do You Like Me?

Dig Deep

1. Even if we think we have set aside our earlier dreams of our future children, sometimes those dreams linger to affect our parenting. When have you caught yourself parenting the child you wish you had rather than the one you really were given?
2. When have you felt invisible? misunderstood? disrespected? What feelings accompanied those experiences?
3. When have your children totally surprised you with their hopes and dreams—that is, hopes and dreams very different from the ones you've held for them? How did you respond? Is there anything you want to do differently in the future?
4. In setting goals for your child, how have you balanced appropriate parental guidance and the child's expressed desires? Are there times when your good desires for your kids should become “ruling desires”? When? Why or why not?

Apply

5. How might you “grieve what isn't” in your family—that is, the dreams or expectations you held that have not been realized? What helps you give yourself grace as you let go of those old dreams?

6. Do you find it easy or difficult to be transparent with your kids about your own struggles? What would help you feel safe enough to be vulnerable with them?

7. What things about your child would you like to change? Categorize those issues. Are they really critical issues that must be changed for the child's ultimate well-being? Are they issues that bug you but really aren't worth clashing over? Are some of these personality traits or personal choices you can accept?

8. What do you love about your child? Does your child see those rich gifts in himself or herself? How might you help your child identify what's great about him or her? What difference might it make?

Pray

Thank God for the dreams and hopes you have for your child—and thank Him for the ones you've had to let go, too. Thank Him for His grace and compassion toward you. Ask God to help you absorb His grace so that you can communicate similar love and acceptance to your children. Ask God to help you “love without stopping” even when you are frustrated or angry.

Chapter 4: Am I Important to You?

Dig Deep

1. How have your own feelings of importance (or lack of them) affected your behavior and choices?
2. What factors make children (and later, adults) feel unimportant? When have you felt most known and valued by others? How did this affect you?
3. If every person's core needs are security, identity, belonging, purpose, and competence, why is it a problem to look for fulfillment of these needs in parenting?

Apply

4. "Children can feel like projects their parents are trying to finish or problems they're trying to solve—instead of children in the process of becoming." What aspects of parenting are very much like working on projects and solving problems? What can help our children realize that, even in the practical nitty-gritty of preparing them for life, we love them and value their growing-up journeys?
5. What are practical differences between teaching a child to change and telling the child to change?

6. In heavily scheduled family life, it can be a challenge to get past the urgent demands of work, school, and housekeeping to make time just to be together with your child with no other agenda. How might you work in time to play or relax together this week? Why is this worth doing?

7. Without letting your child direct the activities and atmosphere of your family life, how might you enlarge his or her importance in family conversation and decision making?

Pray

Thank God for making you in His own image (Genesis 1:26–27), for creating you (Psalm 139), and for loving you and providing for your salvation (Romans 5:8). Thank Him for giving you security, identity, and belonging in relationship with Him. Ask God to help you see, value, and affirm your child’s importance in your family and in the world.

Chapter 5: Is It Okay I'm Unique?

Dig Deep

1. Was there some aspect of your own personality or appearance that you disliked when you were a child? How did you come to accept that trait or realize why God might've made you just the way He did?
2. Check out the chart on p. 120. As you sort out your own characteristics, what kinds of "smart" are you? How have you been able to accept that not EVERY kind of smart is a strength?
3. Reread 1 Corinthians 12:4–27 (printed on pp. 122–23). What has been your experience of "body life" with other Christians? In what ways have you been able to work together and support each other?

Apply

4. Jot your children's names on a sheet of paper, followed by the types of smart you think each might be. How might you reinforce and encourage each child's natural "bent"?
5. As you identify your children's smarts, do you feel any disappointment or frustration because their gifts are so different from your own or because their gifts are not the ones you'd hoped for them? How can you give yourself some grace as you grieve and move on? Why is this worth doing?

6. Since children “catch” so much from watching the example of their parents, how might you bring up your own strengths and weaknesses with your kids this week? What stories from your own struggle might encourage them in their process of becoming?

7. The family is the first place we live out the “one-another” commands of Scripture that build the church as the interconnected, interdependent body. Consider the varied strengths and weaknesses represented in your immediate family. Can you see in that mix of gifts any opportunities for building the support and interdependence of a body?

Pray

Thank God for His wisdom and sovereignty over the unique characteristics of you and of your children. Thank him specifically for the smarts you see represented in your family. Ask God to give you wisdom for helping your children grow in their areas of giftedness. Ask God to help you strengthen each member of your family for healthy “body life” within your immediate family and within the family of God.

Chapter 6: Who Am I?

Dig Deep

1. What labels/nicknames have you carried in the past?: (See the list from pp. 134–35. “Oldest, youngest, middle child. Adopted. ADHD. Anxious. Prodigal. Smart. Thinker. Feeler. Introvert. Extrovert. Talker. Quiet. Verbal. Funny,” etc.) Were some of the labels helpful or positive? Which ones have stuck with you the longest? Why?
2. Which of the labels were “doing” labels—that is, based on things you do or achieve? Which of them were “being” labels—based on character, who you are?
3. How do you think your own relationship with your dad influenced your beliefs, choices, and personality?
4. When has another person’s affirmation been life-changing for you?

Apply

5. Think about each of your children. Do you think they see themselves as mistakes or as unique, one-of-a-kind, unrepeatably miracles? What affects the way they see themselves?
6. Review the description of the three-prong affirmation (p. 140). Brainstorm, and map out a way you might affirm one positive character

trait for each of your kids using the formula (verbalize a specific positive quality, provide evidence to back up your assertion, and give the reason you're so glad about it).

7. Think back to your interaction with your kids in the past week, which probably included some “doing labels” or “being labels.” Give yourself some grace if you feel now that there were negative labels in that mix. Think ahead to situations that might come up in the next few days and choose affirming ways to communicate.

Pray

Thank God for His grace and mercy, fresh for you every day (new every morning). Thank God for creating your children and creating you as unrepeatable miracles. Ask God to help you increasingly see and celebrate the goodness of His work in creating each member of your family—and in putting you together.

Chapter 7: Am I a Failure?

Dig Deep

1. When does perfectionism keep you from relaxing in the knowledge that you are being perfected by God, in His timing?
2. Are you especially hard on yourself when you make mistakes? Do you find it hard to forgive yourself, to give yourself some compassion and grace? Are there reasons that would be worth discovering?
3. Review the reasons given on pp. 156–59 about why kids make mistakes. Could some of these be the same reasons *you* make mistakes? What might help you cut yourself some slack and move forward?
4. Would you characterize yourself as more optimistic or pessimistic? How might you practice “spin doctoring” experiences toward taking the most hopeful view and expecting the best outcomes?
5. Who are the people in your life that you respect because they have overcome struggles or difficult situations? How did their challenges help make them who they are?

Apply

6. Do you think your kids feel safe making mistakes at your house? What might help them share more freely when things go wrong for them?

7. Life can get so busy that it's hard to find time to get past the logistics of family schedules to talk with our kids about their feelings. Think about the week ahead. When are some times when you might snatch a chance to talk one-on-one with each of your kids? How do you think they'll respond to this idea?

8. Regularly sharing relaxed moments together builds a nice foundation for the times when you've got to share struggles and disappointments as a family. If it's been awhile since your family scheduled some shared downtime, look for a place to get fun into the calendar in the week ahead.

Pray

Thank God for His gracious forgiveness for you. Thank Him for giving you strength and courage and wisdom in your parenting. Ask Him to give you grace as you handle mistakes in your family (yours and your kids').

Chapter 8: What's My Purpose?

Dig Deep

1. What activities excite and fulfill you most? How are these activities connected with the purposes you feel God has given you?
2. Ephesians 2:10 suggests that God has prepared in advance “good works” for us to do. What are some of the “good works” God has already given you to do, past or present? How do you feel when using them?
3. At what times and during which activities do you sense that you are glorifying God in your actions?
4. What is your favorite way to serve others? Why?

Apply

5. What are some ways you praise God as a family? How can everyday tasks be acts of worship? (Romans 12:1)
6. How do you and your family members cope with boredom? If “screen time” has become a default escape, how could you incorporate more productive and interpersonal pastimes?
7. Begin brainstorming a quick survey of your children. What things

do they do well? What do they get excited about? What dreams do they have?

8. How might your kids' particular interests and gifts lend themselves to some outlet for serving others? Are these projects you might tackle as a family?

Pray

Thank God for His plans for you and for your individual children. Thank Him for creating good works in advance for you to do. Ask God for wisdom in supervising your own time and your children's use of their time. Ask God to bring you opportunities to put to service the range of gifts represented in your family.

Chapter 9: Will You Help Me Change?

Dig Deep

1. Who are the people in your life who have invested in helping you grow to maturity? Who have been good truth-tellers for you, helping correct your misconceptions about yourself or the world around you or shedding the light of God's Word on issues that have come up in your life? How did this matter to you?
2. Are there any lies a child might be believing about him or herself? How might you be able to speak truth into that lie? What might convince your child you are correct?
3. As an adult, how do you feel about change? Do you find it challenging—or even nearly impossible? Do you feel hopeful about it? Why or why not?

Apply

4. Healthy family communication is positive, honest, complete, and calm (p. 198). How would you rate your interactions with your kids in these four areas? Is there one area that you would choose to focus on improving in the week ahead?
5. Some children are harder to draw out in conversation. During what activities and at what times of day do your best conversations with

your kids come up? How might you capitalize on that knowledge and help to create time and space for good talks?

6. How do you see the differences between *teaching* and *telling* (p. 201) and between *correcting* and *criticizing* (p. 203)?

7. Can you identify a specific challenge your child faces right now? Which of your child's strengths and smarts might help him or her overcome that problem? How might you help your child identify those gifts and possible solutions?

Pray

Thank God that He has promised His grace to be sufficient in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:8–12). Thank Him for making you more and more like Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17–18; Ephesians 4:23–25). Trust Him with the maturing process of your individual children. Ask God to give you special discernment in coming alongside your children in their work to grow in Christ.