



Open When . . .

Parenting through Everyday Moments

WHERE BIBLICAL WISDOM
MEETS MODERN PARENTING

Open When . . .

Parenting through Everyday Moments

General Editor Ashley Grant

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RESOURCES

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Introduction

The year was 2019. Overnight, I had become a single mother to four children. There were a myriad of concerns, doubts, and fears swirling around in my head. I began to resign myself to the fact that I now carried the sole responsibility for guiding four tiny humans into functioning and productive members of society. Aside from the fact that I was grossly outnumbered by the group, which was comprised of two kindergarteners, a toddler, and a newborn, I also bore the added weight of numerous therapeutic appointments. However helpful they were intended to be, the appointments needed to support that group's unique needs were simply overwhelming. Those needs included autism, Tourette's syndrome, low-cognitive functioning, post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and severe muscle hypertension. In those first months, Google and social media became my co-parents.

Even with all my counseling and child development knowledge, I felt so inadequate when it came to parenting in real life. Survival was the goal. If I could find any tip or trick to get me through that day, I consumed it like a starving animal. I had no time to add any kind of spirituality to my parenting, except for the hundreds of "Why, God, why?" pseudo-prayers I prayed throughout the day. The exhausted nighttime prayers I recited over the children were more ritualistic than spiritual.

Just when I thought I couldn't make it through one more day, one more meltdown, one more parenting challenge, God began to move. An army of friends and family stood with me and supported me when I was too weak to

even ask for help. Five years later, I now realize how truly blessed I was (and still am) to have such incredible men and women coaching me and cheering me on in my parenting journey.

Those months summated to the hardest, darkest, and most desperate time of my life. Some nights I thought, *If I ever make it to the other side of this valley, I want to be the coach, the cheerleader, the support for as many parents/caregivers as possible.* Not everyone has such rock-solid support as parents and caregivers, but everyone deserves a group of people in their corner, providing guidance and a sense of community when life gets tough. Thus, the *Open When* series was born.

What This Book Is

If you are a parent, caregiver, or anyone else who's responsible for the physical, spiritual, and emotional development of a child, this series is for you. Research has shown that parents and caregivers are the single-most important influence in a child's life when it comes to the formation of their faith and values. Fostering Faith in Families, a parenting initiative and resource collection from the General Council of the Assemblies of God, exists to equip and empower parents and caregivers to effectively transmit their faith to the next generation through fun and memorable moments.

However, life isn't always fun, and there are things we wish weren't memorable. In our fallen world, sometimes life is just plain hard. When this happens, the *Open When* series is here to help.

These books are intended to be a quick-reference guide to some of the most challenging issues children face today. While the Internet can be a great resource, parents and caregivers are often torn between reading advice from an academic/clinical perspective or a biblical one. Much of the research found in modern-day child development and psychology focuses on raising

children who are resilient and adaptable. We believe that biblical principles aid in that goal. The *Open When* series provides practical, clinically informed, and biblically founded principles for parents and caregivers.

Although this is only a bird's-eye view of each topic, further resources for a deeper look at these issues are presented on the Ignite Parenting website: IgniteParenting.com. Parents and caregivers will now have a source they can trust and a place to turn when they're hit with life's challenges.

What This Book Is *Not*

First and foremost, this content is for *informational* purposes only. It should not be construed as medical, professional, or legal advice. The content is not intended to replace the services of a trained medical health professional or lawyer.

Secondly, this book is not intended to replace a parent or caregiver's responsibility to diligently study the Word of God and seek out His will for each situation. This book aims to offer a supportive word in the right direction, not to take over your responsibility as either a caregiver or a follower of Jesus. As you study God's Word for direction and discipleship, that study itself is shaping you into a biblically formed person who can make healthy decisions for the good of your family.

Finally, this book is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Children and families are as different and unique as each star in the sky. God, in His infinite wisdom, designed us that way. The opinions and views expressed in this book are based on the authors' best knowledge of, experience with, and research on each topic. There will be times when the tips in this series are not applicable to certain situations. Each situation should be approached with godly wisdom and sound biblical counsel of others whom God has placed in your life.

Spiritual Disclaimer

The biblical application sections of this series are based on Scriptures and proverbial statements found in the Bible. It is important to keep in mind that proverbs should not be interpreted as direct promises. Instead, we should take proverbial sayings (identified in Scripture as such) as biblical principles and wise instruction that guide rather than guarantee. The wisdom of Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV) “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” does not give certainty that every child will lose their free will and be forced to become a faithful Christian as an adult if raised in the right way. It does mean that raising a child in the right way will give them the direction and foundation for becoming a faithful Christian should they choose to follow Christ.

God has designed each person with free will, even the children and youth we care for. No matter how many “right things” we do, our children, as well as everyone else in our life, are ultimately free to make their own choices. Their decisions aren’t prescriptive of upbringing, but instead, *typically* reflective of authentic faith being modeled in the home. While the likelihood of a life that is healthy, healed, and whole increases with biblical, intentional, and prayer-soaked parenting, no magic formula will override decisions made of free will.

The parental responsibilities of raising a child include loving the child, meeting the child’s needs, making the child feel secure and safe, disciplining the child in appropriate and healthy ways, raising the child in a community of faith, and modeling a faithful life before that child. Parents don’t have the responsibility to force a child to choose to follow Christ because no such decision can be genuine if forced. All that can be done in that instance is show them what a good choice that has been for their caregivers by the way that they are raised in a loving and godly home.

The Issue of Forgiveness for Children

One of the biggest issues caregivers and parents will walk through with the children they're caring for is forgiveness. While these resources will encourage caregivers to lead their children down paths of forgiveness, the length of that journey must remain realistic and age appropriate. As caregivers, it's often easy to burden children with the responsibility of relational restoration. That kind of emotional responsibility is neither healthy nor age-appropriate for children. As you read each topic, remember that forgiveness does not automatically mean restoration of a relationship. Sometimes, forgiveness simply means choosing not to continue hating someone. The authors and editors of this book don't believe that children should be made to feel responsible for the relationships that adults in their life have broken. However, letting go of hate and bitterness allows for health and healing in children, and sometimes, that is as far as we can ask them to go in their forgiveness journey.

There are areas of children's lives that will require more than what parents or caregivers can provide on their own. When they are sick, we take them to doctors. When they are traumatized, we can rely on qualified counselors. When it comes to matters of spiritual development, we can cooperate with our church in all the resources it offers. And when it comes to those areas of life that no one can reach except God, we must continue to trust the Holy Spirit to do that work.

When raising a child, parents are not expected to do everything by themselves. One purpose for this book is so that you'll know you're not alone in the sacred calling of parenting. This book was written for you!

Ashley Grant
General Editor

You Need to Know How to Start Discipling Your Children

Melissa Alfaro

Academic/Clinical Response

Of all the titles we hold, the one most treasured by many is *parent*. Being a parent comes with great responsibility. Helping a child grow and develop is both overwhelming and rewarding. Most parents make sure their child receives a good education, is emotionally and mentally healthy, is properly developing physically, and has a firm foundation of faith on which to build their spiritual life.

While each aspect is crucial to the holistic development of children, parents are often least prepared for the discipleship of their children into young men and women of faith. Being a discipler of children is the most important role parents will ever have in the life of their child.

Research shows that parents are the primary influence on their child's spiritual development and personal faith.¹ It's not the "religiousness" of parents that influences a child's faith and values. It's the intentional integration of faith into everyday life and conversations that helps this faith transmission take place. Additionally, parents who approach the transmission of faith in a warm, gentle, and engaging way are more successful than those who are ambivalent about their faith or those who put religion in a box only to be addressed on "church days."²

This means that, as parents, our faith can't be just an accessory to our lives. It can't be something we take off the shelf and only "do" when we need it on Sundays. Faith must be an integral part of all that we say, all that we do, and all that we are. In the everyday moments we spend with our children, we have to be filling them with the spiritual values we want to instill in them.

Biblical Response

The discipleship of our children is not something we can delegate to anyone else. It's a mantle of responsibility that God has placed on us as parents and something that we have to carefully prioritize and intentionally steward. Deuteronomy 4:9 commands parents to teach the things they have seen and learned to their children and their grandchildren.

Sometimes, finding a place to start can be an overwhelming thought for parents. For those struggling to understand what family discipleship looks like, here is an overview of intentional discipleship in the home. It will look different for every family. Factors such as the ages of children, preexisting spiritual knowledge or practices that have already been implemented in the home, and the needs and personalities of the children all play a part in shaping what a family's devotion time will look like. However, incorporating these three things will ensure that a firm foundation of faith is laid.

1. BE A PROPONENT OF BIBLICAL LITERACY.

Put God's Word first. No matter what, always point back to the Bible. Be sure to provide an age-appropriate Bible to each child. Allow them to look at the pictures, read from it, and even look up Bible verses if they are reading. As you share Bible stories and discuss familiar passages, always remember to go back to Scripture and show your child where to go to find in-text support

for what they are learning. God's Word has to inform everything parents say and teach. Parents must be diligent in showing children how to support what they are learning with actual Scripture.

2. TEACH CHILDREN TO PRAY.

It's important to teach our children that there's more to prayer than giving God a list of needs and wants. Prayer is a biblical principle of presenting our requests humbly to the Lord. Children also need to be taught that expressing gratitude to God and honoring who He is and what He has done is just as important. As you start introducing regular prayer time, begin by having your children repeat simple, age-appropriate prayers. From there, encourage them to add to these prayers with their own words as they feel comfortable. Additionally, teach your children that another component of prayer is listening to God. Encourage them to take time to listen to what God has to say. Let them know that God may not say something to them every time they pray, but the discipline of sitting quietly in the Lord's presence with an open heart is what we want to develop.

3. MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE TOGETHER.

As a family, commit to memorizing at least one Bible verse a month. During that month, incorporate the truths of the verse into conversation. Create actions, incorporate the words into a catchy tune, or do whatever it takes to help your child memorize the verse and understand the truth behind the words. If families memorize just one verse a month with their child, starting around two years old, the child will leave the home knowing more than two hundred verses by heart.

Endnotes

¹ Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk, *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 218.

² Vern L. Bengtson, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 186.

My Response

It's never too early or too late to start discipling your children. Even as you are still figuring out what devotion time looks like for your family, here are five steps you can take with your children today:

- Say a quick prayer over your children as they leave for school each morning.
- Find five minutes to read a Scripture together either during breakfast, dinner, or at bedtime.
- Model prayer and the importance of personal devotions for your children. Let them see and hear you praying and reading your Bible.
- Ask the children's pastor what they are learning in kids church and reinforce it at home during the week.
- Above all, be faithful and consistent. Anything worth building will take time. Don't be intimidated, and don't give up!



In Open When . . . Parenting through Everyday Moments, child development professionals and Christian education experts discussing the most common parenting scenarios faced by families today. By addressing scenarios faced by most parents and caregivers, readers will be empowered with knowledge, tools, and strategies for navigating the complexities of each issue while also nurturing the child's spirit through Scriptural application.

Open When . . . is a parenting book series authored by academic professionals and biblical theologians that offers valuable insights and guidance for parents seeking to transmit their faith and values to the next generation. Parenting has moments of joy and laughter, but also moments of concern and apprehension, often as a result of new milestones in a child's life. By blending current, evidence-based research with the timeless truths found in Scripture, parents are offered guidance for life's most common parenting scenarios.

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