



Is That Poop on My Arm? *Parenting While Christian* by Justin Lind-Ayres

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction

This discussion guide is intended to facilitate conversation and reflection. My hope is that you and your discussion group is to deepen your conversation and mutual learning by sharing your own experiences and insights into the messy yet joyful task of parenting in faith. Though we are not all parents, we all do parent the children in our lives. And as followers of Jesus, we are called to share the faith with others, especially the little ones that inhabit our lives. In sharing our faith, we learn to be better disciples of this God of unconditional grace. For children have an incredible knack for teaching us to believe bigger and trust more fully in the love of Jesus. I pray your discussions are fruitful as you listen to one another and to dear children in your lives. Thank you for reading; thank you for believing.

Justin Lind-Ayres

Questions to Consider before Reading

1. Who are the children in your life of faith? As you journey through these pages, these children sojourn with you. Take them with you, examine your memories and shared experiences, and then realize anew that this is holy, fertile ground for faith.
2. Is there a Bible passage or story that brings you back to your childhood? A formative text that continues to comfort or challenge you to this day? If so, who taught you the story? What associations do you make with this text and the people who shaped your faith?
3. How do you define faith? How do you practice faith? Who helps you practice?
4. What makes parenting challenging today, for you or for others you know?

Introduction: Parenting in Christian Faith

1. Poop is both a literal and figurative way to speak “about the messiness of parenthood in tandem with living a life of faith” (2). What is true for you about this statement using the poop image? Perhaps you would use another image to speak about this messiness. What might that image be?
2. Skim Hebrews 11:1–40. Notice or highlight every time the writer says, “by faith . . .” In this text, the writer is seeking to show how our spiritual ancestors acted out of faith. If you had to finish this sentence based on your own parenting experience, what would you write? “By faith, I . . .”
3. How is God creating faith within you?
4. The tension in our lives—amid joy and suffering—is where faith is found. How is this tension expressed in your life in these days?

Chapter 1: Poop

1. Every parent has a good poop story or two. What's yours?
2. The table of Holy Communion is front and center in this chapter. If you had to write a welcome or invitation to the table for your congregation, what would you write? What would be the most essential thing to say?
3. “When it comes to faith and parenting, there is no such thing as perfection” (12). Easy to say, yet difficult for many of us to embody. What would it mean for us to seek not perfection but wholeness in the journey of parenting in faith? What does wholeness look like?
4. Read Jesus's words about sin and forgiveness in Matthew 18:15–22.
 - a. Sin. Not a popular topic in our culture. But, we are called to name it in our journey of faith. If you had to name your “stickiest sin,” what might you say?
 - b. Forgiveness. Not an easy path in our culture. But, we are called to live it in our journey of faith. What does forgiveness feel like for you? How readily do you forgive others?
5. Wonder and mystery are essential parts of life lived in faith. And children are experts at both! Can you recall a time when a child was your guide into the mystery and wonder of God?

Chapter 2: Snack

1. Liturgy is the “work of the people.” As you worship, what work do you do for yourself? And what work do you do for the sake of others?
2. Read John 1:1–18. This text is often read during the Christmas season as it speaks of Jesus entering into the world as God’s gift of “grace upon grace.” Where do you see grace needed in our world? Where do you see grace needed in our culture around parenting practices?
3. How can parents and their squirmy children be fully welcomed in worship? What signals or messages can a worshipping community give to young families that can hinder or enhance this message of welcome?
4. Have you ever church-surfed before? If so, how was your experience? What was your greatest surprise?
5. When worship feels like a “disruptive and exhausting endeavor” (45) for people with small children, it is no wonder parents opt to stay home. In your opinion, what would make it easier for families to feel fully appreciated and empowered in worship?

Chapter 3: Preachy

1. Do you have a go-to “preachy voice” when parenting children in your lives? What are the pros and cons to using this voice?
2. When have you had your own identity—your own name—preached to you?
3. Read Isaiah 43:1–7. Hear the power of God’s persistent, preachy love for you! How can you speak and enact this love to the children and youth in your lives?
4. What have been some powerful household rituals for you (as an adult and/or child) that have preached God’s love for you and for the family?
5. Do you have a song of promise? A favorite hymn or spiritual that opens your heart?
6. Have you ever had an epiphany, a revelation, a God-call in your life? Have you shared it with others? How has it been received?
7. How would you describe your “baptismal vocation”?

Chapter 4: Maundy Thursday

1. Read John 13:1–17, 31–35. This passage situates Jesus’s teaching of love during the night of his betrayal. What memories, if any, do you have of this text?
2. On pages 76–78, I reflect (imperfectly) on the cross of Jesus. How do you make sense of the cross and the death of Jesus? Why do you think Christians persist in the centrality of the cross?
3. It has been said: “Suffering and pain are God’s way of testing us.” Reflect on the pitfalls of this theological claim.
4. Pregnancy loss and fertility issues take a toll on people that is often unseen in our society. What experience do you or people you love have with these gut-wrenching situations? And how might the church better support people dealing (perhaps silently) with their pain?
5. Have you ever had anyone speak Easter into your own tomb of pain? If so, what do you remember about that moment? How prepared/confident/willing are you to speak Easter onto others? What does Easter sound like coming from your own testimony?

Chapter 5: Tooth Fairy

1. How do you react to the word stewardship? What does it mean for you and for your family?
2. Read Matthew 19:16–30, the challenge Jesus gives about possessions and wealth. Now read verses 13–15. What might it mean that the story of Jesus blessing the children is next to this challenge regarding materialism? What is hard about this passage? What gives you hope?
3. On page 98, I ask a series of questions worth discussing with others. Here they are, somewhat adapted:
 - a. How do you practice stewardship together as family and weave it into the fabric of your daily routine?
 - b. How do you continue to grow in faith—in parenting or in other relationships—believing and teaching the truth of God’s abundance despite the deceptive contrary narrative at work in the world?
 - c. How do you make room for God’s compassionate love to inspire ways to open hearts to the challenge and joy of giving?
4. When have the children in your life shown you how to open your heart and give unto others?

Chapter 6: Graveside

1. Have you ever experienced a “good” funeral? If so, what made it good?
2. “Death and dying are tricky times to negotiate with family and friends, but I say, When in doubt, show up! Presence is everything” (110). When have you seen the community of the faithful (your church or worshipping community) show up for you or your loved ones at the time of death? When have you shown up for others?
3. How have you attempted to explain death to a child? How do you speak of the mystery of death in tandem with the promise of faith in Jesus? In other words, how do you parent in faith in the face of death?
4. In your experience, how are children welcomed or not welcomed at funerals?
5. Do you have a cemetery somewhere on this earth that is holy and precious to you? Can you describe it and articulate why it is special to you?
6. In John 20:1–18, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden (cemetery) after his resurrection. Read this passage with another person or as a group. What are the words of promise for us? How might this passage buoy us in times of grief and death?

Final Word

As I state at the outset of the conclusion, “There is no final word in parenting, because the work is never finished” (131). This is true; yet, here you are wrestling with what it means to not only parent but parent in the Christian faith! Thank you! Thanks be to God for you: for your witness, your struggles, your faith, and your unending work in tending to the little ones in our midst. For this messy, holy, and communal work, let us rejoice together, trusting in the God who makes all things new.