

Vicki
Courtney

REVISED AND EXPANDED

5 conversations you must have

with
your

Son



5
conversations
you must have
with
your *Son*

Vicki
Courtney

REVISED AND EXPANDED

5
conversations
you must have

with
your *Son*



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Copyright © 2019 by Vicki Courtney
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America

978-1-4627-9630-4

Published by B&H Publishing Group
Nashville, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 306.874
Subject Heading: BOYS \ PARENT AND CHILD \
PARENTING

Cover design by Jennifer Allison of Studio Nth.
Cover photo © Westend61 / getty.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Other versions include: New Living Translation (NLT), copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.; English Standard Version (ESV), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a ministry of the Good News Publishers of Wheaton, IL; New American Standard Bible (NASB), copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation; Christian Standard Bible (CSB), copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible®, and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers, all rights reserved.; and The King James Version (KJV).

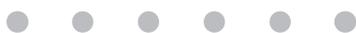
To my sons, Ryan and Hayden—

Thank you for patiently enduring the conversations contained in this book (or at least pretending to!). One of my greatest joys in life has been watching you grow in your faith and become the godly young men you are today.

And to my grandsons, Walker, Micah, Fletcher,
Nicky, and baby boy McMichen who is due
shortly after this book releases—

May you follow the God of your parents and grandparents
and make Him your absolute everything.

Acknowledgments



Keith, I continue to acknowledge and thank you in every book, but it bears repeating: I could not do what I do were it not for you picking up the slack. As I read through the final manuscript, I was struck with how intentional you have been in discipling our sons over the years. Truly you should be the one writing this book . . . or at least, one to follow for dads, perhaps? Our sons (and daughter) have been so very blessed to have you for a dad. What a reward to be on the other side of this parenting journey and see the reward for your faithfulness—the biggest of which is our fast growing brood of grandchildren!

To my sons, Ryan and Hayden: when you were little, I would often tell you, while tucking you in at night during our bedtime prayers: *“I’m so glad God picked me to be your mama.”* I mean it more today than ever before. I’m so glad God picked me to be your mom! I couldn’t be more proud of the godly young men you’ve become. It is such a joy to watch you embark on your own parenting journey and raise your sons with a firm foundation of faith.

To my son-in-law, Matt: You far exceeded anything I could have imagined when I prayed for my daughter’s future spouse all those

years. Even though I didn't get the privilege of raising you, I count you as my own. You are an amazing father to Molly and I am beyond excited that you are about to experience the joys of having a son.

To my publisher, B&H: thank you so much for partnering with me to get this message out to moms with sons.

To the many moms of sons who encouraged me to write this book and shared your own parenting journeys with me: Thank you so much for your support. Your sons are blessed to have such caring and concerned mothers.

And last of all, the acknowledgments would not be complete without giving thanks to the one who enables me to write, speak, live, breathe, and love. I pray this book will bring glory and honor to my Savior, Jesus Christ.

Contents



Introduction / 1

Conversation 1: Don't let the culture define you. / 7

Chapter 1: A Time for Everything / 9

Chapter 2: Wired for Adventure / 22

Chapter 3: Masculinity Redefined / 42

Conversation 2: Guard your heart. / 57

Chapter 4: The Tech Natives Are Restless / 59

Chapter 5: Porn: A Virtual Reality / 80

Chapter 6: Raising a Wise Guy / 101

Conversation 3: Have a little sex respect. / 115

Chapter 7: Beyond the Birds and Bees / 117

Chapter 8: Play Now, Pay Later / 130

Chapter 9: A New and Improved Sex Talk / 144

Conversation 4: Childhood is only for a season. / 161

Chapter 10: Real Man or Peter Pan? / 163

Chapter 11: Ready, Set, Launch / 179

Chapter 12: Family Man: An Endangered Species / 195

Conversation 5: You are who you've been becoming. / 215

Chapter 13: Raising Up a Gentleman / 217

Chapter 14: Grounded for Life / 235

Chapter 15: The Heart of the Matter / 251

Appendix: Talk Sheets / 265

Notes / 281

Introduction



When my publisher approached me about updating this book, I eagerly accepted the challenge. Many of the conversations I had presented in the original book had proven relevant to a generation of children growing up in a rapidly changing culture. In the nearly decade that has since passed, new challenges have emerged requiring a tune-up to the original conversations, or in some cases brand new conversations. When I wrote the original book, my older son was wrapping up his final semester of college and engaged to be married. My daughter was halfway through college and also engaged to be married. My youngest son was months shy of graduating from high school and preparing to move out for college. I was nearing the end of my parenting journey and about to enter a new season of life.

The reality of that new season hit me in full force when I returned home after moving my youngest son into his college dorm. The house was eerily quiet. My children's rooms stayed miraculously clean. My driveway no longer looked like a used car lot. There were blank spaces in my calendar. Weekends that had once been reserved for sporting events were free. For the most part, the hard work was behind me. I was done with staying on top

of homework assignments, worrying about grades, and shuttling my children to their many extracurricular activities. I was done with curfews, managing screen time, and monitoring my children's peer groups. I was done with arguing with my sons about haircuts, hygiene, and messy rooms. I was done with training them in regard to finances, manners, and self-discipline. I was finally done. In the immediate aftermath of my last child leaving, it was hard to know whether or not to mourn or celebrate. (For the record, I did both.) In the months that followed, I adjusted to this new normal where my role as a mother took on a completely different identity. My children needed me every now and then, but overall, they were on their way to becoming independent, self-sufficient young adults. Or so I hoped!

In the years that followed my children's launch out of the nest, I held my breath to see if they would successfully make the transition into adulthood and most importantly, carry their faith with them. There were some bumps along the way, but that was to be expected. And yes, there were times when I wondered if they had paid any attention to the conversations we had had along the way, especially when some of their choices indicated otherwise. In those moments, God was faithful to remind me that my ultimate calling was to make "holy deposits" in their lives and trust Him for the results.

Today, all three of my children are grown adults who are now married and have embarked on their own parenting journeys. They all have a deep faith and are committed to raising their children to know and love God. My empty nest has transitioned into a full nest of a half dozen grandchildren and counting. My husband and I feel extremely blessed that our children live nearby and we see them often. In fact, my youngest son's bedroom has been converted into a nursery where my grandchildren nap on occasion in the same crib

that my children once slept in. I love this season of life and wouldn't trade it for anything. I often joke with my friends that "if I'd known how awesome it was to be a grandmother, I would have started with grandkids first!"

All this to say, I have enjoyed being somewhat ignorant regarding the challenges facing children today. Updating this book required me to reenter the parenting fray and get back into the trenches, so to speak. In doing so, it didn't take me long to realize that a great deal has changed since the original book released. A whole new generation (iGen or Generation Z) has emerged in place of the millennials that had been the focus of the previous book. This new generation has some similarities to millennials, but overall, they are very different. Ironically many of the young parents who will pick up this book (including my own children), are now millennial parents raising iGen or Generation Z children. Essentially, I was faced with the challenge of writing to a brand-new audience of parents raising a brand-new audience of children who are facing a brand-new set of challenges. In an effort to better understand this new generation, I immersed myself into researching what makes this generation tick. I read countless books and articles focused on iGen or Generation Z children, as well as participated in an online training geared to those who work with this current generation.

Needless to say, I was caught off guard by much of what I discovered related to this emerging generation—record levels of mental illness, depression, loneliness, gender confusion, a lack of identity and purpose, a decreasing interest in marriage and parenthood as future goals, a detachment from the God of the Bible and a rebellion toward His standards and principles, and the list goes on. I would be lying if I told you it didn't take an emotional toll on me at times. My grandchildren are in this generation, so it was

personal. I have skin in this game. There were days when I had to take a break from my research and immerse myself in God's Word to be reminded that there is hope. Fortunately, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever and none of this has caught Him off guard. His Word never changes and His principles are true for all times. The generation of children today may be growing up in a culture that is resistant to that answer, but that doesn't mean we throw in the towel and give up. God has tasked us with the awesome responsibility to "train up [our] children in the way [they] should go" (Prov. 22:6 ESV), and He never intended that we go it alone.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "It's not the destination, it's the journey." I'm not sure I fully understood that beautiful truth when I wrote the original book. Truth be told, at some level I bought into the naïve belief that if a parent invested enough time and heartache into the rearing of their children, they were guaranteed to arrive safely at the ultimate destination. The problem was, I had the destination all wrong. The destination wasn't an end goal of raising obedient children who have an unblemished track record of devotion to God coupled with a long list of good deeds. Rather, it's about a journey that, much like ours, includes poor choices, many missteps along the way, and hard life lessons that hopefully lead to a better understanding of God's love, patience, and forgiveness.

I couldn't be more proud of where my children are today, but I'm not naïve enough to believe it's because I devoted myself to the conversations contained in this book. I've always said there are no foolproof parenting formulas when it comes to raising children. The conversations in this book are simply a tool to better aid you in the journey. Nothing more and nothing less. My children knew that nothing was off limits to talk about—whether they wanted to discuss it or not! The conversations we had over the years encouraged

a healthier pattern of communication that has contributed to the deep friendship I have with each of my children today. For that I am extremely thankful. My children are where they are today because somewhere along the way, they concluded for themselves that the ultimate destination in this journey is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Now, as they are faced with the task of raising their own children, my prayer is that they would set their coordinates on that same destination and point them to Jesus in these uncertain times. He alone is the answer.

And that, my friend, is my prayer for you as well. I won't promise you it will be an easy task. There will be days when you'll want to give up. Fortunately, God never gave up on us! Point your children to Jesus. Model to them that He is your absolute everything. And whatever you do, don't forget to enjoy the journey. It goes by quicker than you think.

Conversation 1

Don't let the culture define you.

Chapter 1

A Time for Everything



“I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.” (1 Sam. 1:27–28)

Most every mother remembers an incident beyond the “It’s a boy!” announcement that marked their sudden induction into the Boy Mama Club. For me initiation day began with special instructions from a nurse in the hospital on how to clean the navel area and (ahem) . . . you know, “it.” When I tried to follow her instructions, I was awarded with a golden waterworks display and a chuckle from the nurse who responded to the show with, “Welcome to the wonderful world of boys!” It was almost as if my new son was sending out an advance warning: “Get ready, lady! You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!” And bless my heart, I hadn’t. I didn’t have a clue about the world of boys until I found myself smack-dab in the middle of raising my own little bundle of testosterone. And I wouldn’t trade

the experience of raising my two boys for anything. In fact, they both captured my heart from day one.

Nothing compares to raising boys. Recently I was going through a box of keepsake items and stumbled upon a letter I received from my youngest son, Hayden, when he was away at camp for a week. He was nine years old at the time, and it was his first summer camp experience. He had begged to go to summer camp like his two older siblings, and finally I relented and signed the boy up. His older brother and sister had been two years older when they experienced their first summer camp, so I went back and forth after turning the paperwork in, wondering if I had made the right decision. When the time came to drop him off, I could hardly tear myself away. He looked so small next to some of the older campers! Of course, he was excited and could hardly wait for his father and me to leave. I had packed paper and self-addressed, stamped envelopes in his trunk and given him strict instructions to write home at least every other day (yes, to assuage my own worries!).

I worried myself sick during the week that followed and checked the mailbox daily hoping for a letter from him. I waited. And I waited. And I waited. Finally, toward the end of the week, I received the one and only camp letter I would ever receive from my son during all his camp years combined. Mind you, I discovered this rare camp letter from my son in the keepsake box that contained a sea of camp letters from my daughter. In her letters she provided detailed descriptions of her days and full-length bios on each new friend made. As a bonus she often added stickers or doodle drawings to jazz up her letters. Needless to say, Hayden's camp letter did not follow his sister's previously established protocol.

Following is a transcript of my much-anticipated camp letter from Hayden:

Dear parents,

We had bean burritos for lunch today and Andrew and I couldn't stop tooting so we started a tooting contest in our cabin during bunk time. I won. Camp is fun.

Love,
Hayden

That's it. No details about canoeing, horseback riding, or roasting marshmallows by a campfire. Just tooting. Which for the record, he could have done at home, for free. On the upside, at least the letter brought an end to my worry. Clearly the little lad wasn't *crying* himself to sleep each night. *Tooting* himself to sleep maybe but not crying. For the record, on pickup day, I raced toward him and was greeted with, "*Mommy, I love camp! Can I go for two weeks next summer?*" When we returned home, I opened his trunk to begin the post-camp laundry washathon, and to my absolute horror found an unused bar of soap along with five of the seven prematched and neatly folded outfits still prematched and **neatly folded!** On the upside, I didn't have much wash to do.

Welcome to the world of boys where post-burrito flatulence is considered a competitive sport and hygiene, much to a mother's dismay, is optional. In this chapter we are going to discuss some factors that make our boys unique (beyond hygiene and flatulence issues). We will also discuss the unique role we, as mothers, play when it comes to communicating with our sons in order that we might set a proper foundation for the conversations to come. Somewhere at the top of our list should be an ongoing pep talk on proper hygiene, including instructions on raising the toilet seat and putting it back