

THE APPROVAL TRAP — A 16-WEEK BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Helping Your Kids Find Identity in Christ, Not You

WEEK 1 — Introduction: The Weight of Being Your Child's God

Scriptures: Matthew 11:28–30; Colossians 1:17; Psalm 46:10

Core Idea: Parenting breaks when we try to be what only Christ can be.

Teaching Summary

We live in a culture where parents often try to be the emotional, spiritual, and psychological center of their child's world. This produces anxious parents and approval-dependent kids. The gospel frees us from carrying what only God can sustain.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do parents today “carry” what belongs to God?
2. How has Christian culture confused good parenting with being “everything” for your children?
3. What would parenting from *rest* instead of *role* look like for you?

Reflection Questions (Personal)

- Where do you feel the pressure to be perfect for your kids?
- What fears drive you to over-function as a parent?

At-Home Practice

Write a prayer: “Lord, here are the roles I’m carrying that belong to You.”

WEEK 2 — When Your Child's Success Becomes Your Identity (Chapter 1)

Scriptures: Matthew 6:1–4; 1 Corinthians 3:6–7

Core Idea: Parents can unintentionally make a child’s success their own spiritual or emotional identity.

Teaching Summary

Children feel the weight of our unhealed wounds when we root our significance in their achievements. We must separate our identity in Christ from our child’s outcomes.

Discussion Questions

1. What are ways parents need their children to make them feel valuable?
2. How does Matthew 6:1–4 expose the danger of performing for human approval?
3. What happens to a child who is raised as their parent’s “proof of success”?

Reflection

- What do you secretly hope your child’s achievements say about *you*?

At-Home Practice

Complete the “What Do I Need From My Child?” inventory. Pray over each item.

WEEK 3 — The Performance Trap in Christian Homes (Chapter 2)

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 16:7; Luke 11:39–42

Core Idea: Many Christian homes unintentionally reward outward compliance instead of heart transformation.

Teaching Summary

We may create Pharisees without realizing it—children who know how to look “good” but don’t know Christ personally. God looks at the heart; so should we.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the “good Christian kid” stereotype look like?
2. How does focusing on behavior over the heart distort discipleship?
3. When have you been tempted to present a “picture perfect” family?

Reflection

- Did you grow up in a home where performance mattered more than authenticity?

At-Home Practice

Watch for one situation this week when you focus on behavior instead of the heart. Practice a heart-first response.

WEEK 4 — Conditional Love Dressed as Discipline (Chapter 3)

Scriptures: Romans 5:8; Psalm 103:8–14

Core Idea: Children learn to perform when love feels conditional.

Teaching Summary

When consequences drift into shame, our children learn: “I’m only loved when I please you.” Gospel discipline says: “You are fully loved—and therefore I correct you.”

Discussion Questions

1. What’s the difference between consequences and punishment?
2. How does Romans 5:8 reshape our approach to discipline?
3. How do you communicate love during correction?

Reflection

- When did you feel love was conditional growing up?

At-Home Practice

Audit your language: identify 3 phrases rooted in shame or emotional withdrawal. Replace them with gospel-rooted alternatives.

WEEK 5 — The Enmeshed Parent & The Control Parent (Chapters 4–5)

Scriptures: Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 3:5–6

Core Idea: Love becomes unhealthy when boundaries disappear, or when control masquerades as concern.

Teaching Summary

Enmeshment blurs the God-given separation between parent and child. Control communicates “You can’t handle life without me.”

Discussion Questions

1. What are signs of emotional enmeshment in Christian homes?
2. What’s the difference between protecting and controlling?
3. Where do you tend to “over-help” out of fear?

Reflection

- Do your kids carry emotions that belong to you?

At-Home Practice

Pray Proverbs 3:5–6 over one area where you struggle to trust God with your child.

WEEK 6 — The Great Untruths (Part 1): Protecting vs. Preparing (Chapter 6–7)

Scriptures: 2 Timothy 2:3; James 1:2–4

Core Idea: The modern idea that children must be protected from discomfort creates fragile Christians.

Teaching Summary

We shield kids from doubt, struggle, and failure—but these are the very things Scripture uses to make faith strong.

Discussion Questions

1. What spiritual struggles were you *not* allowed to express growing up?
2. How has comfort become a Christian virtue in modern culture?
3. How do trials produce maturity according to James 1:2–4?

Reflection

- Do you rescue your child too quickly from difficulty?

At-Home Practice

Allow your child to struggle in one age-appropriate situation this week.

WEEK 7 — The Great Untruths (Part 2): “Always Trust Your Feelings” (Chapter 8)

Scriptures: Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 3:5–7; 1 John 4:1

Core Idea: We must teach children to test their feelings rather than equate them with God’s voice.

Teaching Summary

Feelings matter, but they are not the Holy Spirit. Discipleship involves testing emotions against God’s Word.

Discussion Questions

1. How has “follow your heart” infiltrated Christian parenting?
2. What’s the danger of equating emotions with divine guidance?
3. How do we help our children test impressions biblically?

Reflection

- When have you mistaken emotions for God’s leading?

At-Home Practice

Teach your children a simple 3-step discernment tool:

1. Does this align with Scripture?
 2. Does this reflect God's character?
 3. Does this lead to obedience?
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WEEK 8 — The Great Untruths (Part 3): “The World Is Against Us” (Chapter 9–10)

Scriptures: John 17:15–18; Matthew 5:13–16

Core Idea: Fear-based isolation produces anxious believers; Christ calls us to courageous presence.

Teaching Summary

When children grow up believing the world is their enemy, they cannot engage it with the compassion of Christ. Fear becomes their identity.

Discussion Questions

1. How does bubble culture weaken kids spiritually?
2. What's the difference between guarding hearts and isolating them?
3. How do salt and light function *in* the world, not away from it?

Reflection

- What fears keep you from allowing your children appropriate exposure to the real world?

At-Home Practice

Plan one activity that engages your family with people who think/believe differently.

WEEK 9 — Antifragile Faith: Strength Through Struggle (Chapter 11)

Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:6–7; Romans 5:3–5

Core Idea: Faith grows stronger through pressure, not protection.

Teaching Summary

God uses struggle to develop endurance, character, and hope. Children must experience challenge to gain spiritual resilience.

Discussion Questions

1. What struggles shaped your faith the most?
2. How does Scripture treat trials as formative, not destructive?
3. How can we offer children “controlled exposure” to challenge?

At-Home Practice

Create one age-appropriate challenge for your child that develops resilience (spiritual, emotional, or practical).

WEEK 10 — Teaching Them to Think (Not What to Think) (Chapter 12)

Scriptures: Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Core Idea: Healthy faith welcomes questions and cultivates discernment.

Teaching Summary

When kids are punished for thinking, they will eventually reject the faith that silenced them. God invites examination of truth.

Discussion Questions

1. Why are Christian parents often afraid of their kids’ questions?
2. What does the Berean example teach us about spiritual thinking?
3. What questions do you hope your child never asks...and why?

At-Home Practice

Invite your child to ask *any one hard question* about faith, doubt, or the world.

WEEK 11 — Parent Healing: Your Approval Addiction (Chapters 13–15)

Scriptures: Exodus 20:5–6; Galatians 2:20

Core Idea: You cannot free your children from approval addiction if you are still bound to it.

Teaching Summary

Parents must confront their own wounds, patterns, and identity struggles. Gospel-centered parenting starts with gospel-centered identity.

Discussion Questions

1. What approval patterns run in your family history?
2. How does your identity impact the way you parent?
3. What idols of parenting (image, control, success) do you see in yourself?

Reflection

- Where are you still seeking approval from others?
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WEEK 12 — The Gospel We Model (Not Just Preach) (Chapter 16)

Scripture: James 1:22–25

Core Idea: Children imitate what they see. Authenticity forms identity.

Teaching Summary

Repentance, humility, and grace shape children far more than perfect rule-keeping.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it look like to model repentance to your children?

2. How does James 1:22–25 invite integrity?
3. What hidden “curriculum” does your home teach?

At-Home Practice

Apologize to your child for one thing this week.

WEEK 13 — Christ at the Center: Belonging to God (Chapters 17–20)

Scriptures: Psalm 127:3; Ephesians 1:3–6; Hebrews 13:5

Core Idea: Children belong to God before they belong to their parents.

Teaching Summary

When we understand stewardship (not ownership), we release control and cultivate identity in Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean that children are a heritage from the Lord?
2. How do we teach children they are “accepted in the Beloved”?
3. How do we prepare children to rely on Christ when we are no longer present?

At-Home Practice

Pray a “Surrender Prayer” over each of your children by name.

WEEK 14 — Raising Free Children (Chapters 21–25)

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 3; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; Romans 8:28; Mark 9:24

Core Idea: Freedom in Christ is developed through listening, identity, failure, honesty, and launch readiness.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it look like to give children space to hear God?

2. How do you affirm a child's unique wiring?
3. How do you respond to your child's failures—with shame or with grace?

At-Home Practice

Affirm one unique God-given trait in each child.

WEEK 15 — When the Damage Is Already Done (Chapters 26–29)

Scriptures: Matthew 5:23–24; Galatians 5:1; 1 Corinthians 3:11

Core Idea: There is hope and healing even when patterns have already been formed.

Teaching Summary

Through repentance, grace, and intentional change, parents can repair identity confusion and set new foundations.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is repentance a powerful parenting tool?
2. How do you rebuild trust with children (young or adult)?
3. What does “standing fast in liberty” look like for family systems?

At-Home Practice

Begin the 90-Day Reset Plan (create 1–2 small steps per week).

WEEK 16 — The Abundant Life: Generational Freedom (Chapters 30–32)

Scriptures: Philippians 4:11–13; Proverbs 22:6; Psalm 78:4–7

Core Idea: The goal isn't perfect kids—it's a legacy of freedom, surrender, and identity in Christ.

Teaching Summary

God calls us to long obedience, consistency, grace, and trust. Parenting is planting for generations.

Discussion Questions

1. How can we parent from rest instead of anxiety?
2. What does it look like to trust God with the outcomes?
3. What legacy do you want future generations to inherit?

At-Home Practice

Write a one-page “Family Legacy Vision”—what you want your grandchildren to receive spiritually.

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITIES

- **Enmeshment Checklist** (Week 5)
- **Great Untruths Family Audit** (Week 8)
- **Identity in Christ Memory Verses** (Weeks 13–14)
- **Family Blessing Ceremony** (Week 16)