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“ ... do not exasperate your children that they may not lose heart ... but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

(Colossians 3:21/Ephesians 6:4)



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Greetings! This is the third “Friday with the Ferrells,” a series of conversations that I, Lisa Kawata, am having with Tim and Amy Ferrell about their role with The Navigators’ Church Discipleship Ministry. In this letter, Amy talks about her parenting curriculum, ‘Parenting with Purpose,’ which she has been teaching in the community for about nine years.

Amy, what happened in your life that led you to want to develop your own parenting course?

I’m sure it began with my own parenting struggles and frustrations. I wanted to better understand my own struggles as well as grow in a deeper understanding of how God, our Father, parents us. This put me on a journey. And I found I just had a heart for those who were going through similar difficulties. I wanted to be part of a positive solution.

Nine years ago, I began working with Tim Siemens, a pastor at Grace Community Church, on a curriculum that could resource parents and equip families as well as reach out to our community. I later met a Christian psychiatrist who asked me to offer the course through his counseling center.

What is different about your course from what is already out there?

There are so many excellent resources available today. What is unique about what I do is that the materials are developed for a process of growth, interaction, and discovery. Learning in a small group setting with others and being able to ask questions for specific, personal applications are critical. Each family is unique. I work with parents on everything from learning to play with your child, communicating, using ‘time-outs,’ motivating, solving problems, determining values, nurturing yourself as a parent, understanding the ‘big picture,’ and more.

What are some of the resources you use?

Boundaries by Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend is the first resource I use. This covers several important issues in parenting such as what are and are not my responsibilities as a parent.

The Parents Handbook by Don Dinkmeyer is like a condensed version of Rudolph Driekur’s classic book, *Children the Challenge*. It is excellent for strengthening the parent-child relationship through good communication and an understanding of why children misbehave.

1-2-3 Magic by Dr. Thomas Phelan helps parents in practical ways learn to set boundaries for themselves and teach children boundaries through self-discipline.

Two other books I recommend are *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families* by Dr. Stephen Covey and *How to Really Love your Child* by Dr. Ross Campbell. Campbell’s book is strong in parent-child nurturing.

How do you keep the program fluid and adaptable?

I am constantly reading, gathering, and adapting new and relevant information. The very essence of what we work on together is problem-solving for your child and that relationship. Since my course is interactive, there is great room to adapt to specific needs. Bringing the puzzle pieces together of relationships, teaching parents how to make observations, learning how to solve problems and instituting change are my goals.

What do you hear are the most prevalent challenges parents are facing today?

One key area is helping parents learn to set limits effectively. Our society lives in excess in almost every area of life. Determining what are appropriate limits, learning how to set them, and then teaching our children to do the same is important. The longer I work with families I realize that making sense out of your own life -- learning to 'tell your story' -- is critical for being able to understand why you respond the way you do to your children. Understanding that story can help you make better decisions and better choices about what your children need.

You talk about understanding your own story. If your story is negative, how do you break out of that so you don't pass it on to your children?

What I share with people is a story of hope -- a story that longs to break free from the past, to embrace a future that can change the present. I teach parents how to become change agents in the family with a vision for what they want their family to become. That high calling can motivate us to make changes in our lives in which the past is literally pushed out.

What has changed most in the 20 years that Tim and you have been parenting your six children?

We have recognized our controlling natures and sought to become parents who equip and empower our children. We were very concerned with outward behavior. Of course, we were concerned for their hearts as well but we tried to control their hearts by monitoring their outer behavior. We have changed in that now we give each of our children room to make real choices with appropriate consequences. We have very much moved from authoritarian to authoritative -- from 'control-parenting' to parenting that teaches children to discipline themselves from the inside out.