

Q&A with Reggie Joiner & Carey Nieuwhof, authors of *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connect Your Family to a Wider Community*

Q: No one can argue that the #1 influence on a child's relationship with God is his or her parents. Is that true for better or for worse?

A: Yes, God's plan is for character and faith to be developed primarily in the context of a loving family. Parents *will* have spiritual influence in their kids' lives. Parents are spiritual leaders whether they want to be or not—that is their role. They will teach their kids about a relationship with God through their *own* relationship with God. Kids will form their opinions about who God is and how He works by observing the way their parents treat them. God knows this. That is why He uses the image of a Father to describe how He wants to relate to us. Think about the way your relationship with your parents affects your picture of God. If your earthly father was strong, accepting, and loving, you'll probably have an easier time seeing God that way. If your earthly father was distant, uninterested, or demanding, you might have difficulty understanding some aspects of God's character.

Ever wonder why you intuitively feel responsible for your children's character and faith? God designed you as a parent with a specific role. In fact, according to a study by Barna Research Group, 85% of parents believe they are primarily responsible for their children's spiritual development. Ninety-six percent feel responsible for their children's moral development. But the problem is this: most parents don't have a plan or strategy to develop the character and heart of their children. It's not that we don't want to, but we don't always have the capacity to do this on our own.

Q: Even so, you say that a healthy family isn't enough to develop healthy children?

A: Your present family will never be enough for your children. Even the best parenting in the best family will never alone be enough to develop relationally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy children. I am not trying to minimize your role, especially when we just finished elevating it. I'm trying to balance it with the polarity of two truths that coexist. The parent is an essential and primary influence. There are things no one can do as well as a parent. But there is another truth that is equally important: There are some things a parent cannot do as well as others.

Q: Describe how this book ties into the Orange series, and what that means.

A: We use orange to symbolize the partnership we believe can exist between parents and the church. When you combine the light from a faith community (yellow) with the heart of a caring family (red), you exponentially expand your potential to make a difference in the life of a child. These two combined influences will make a greater impact than either influence alone: orange. One of the reasons we're writing this book is to let you know that you don't have to parent alone.

One of the greatest ways you can impact the life of your child is to become intentional about partnering with others who can also have influence with your child. If you try to parent alone, you will just become increasingly aware of your built-in flaws, and you risk becoming discouraged and disillusioned with parenthood.

Q: So the answer is to reach out to the faith community, partnering with the church, to raise your children?

A: Absolutely. Most parents have so many demands on their time that they can't be the kind of parent they desire to be. They need to know the Orange Factor: two *combined* influences make a greater impact on kids than just two influences. Parents who partner with the faith community are the best way to bring the next generation into the family of God—and keep them there. The Orange Factor is what happens when churches and parents raise children together. Working on the same thing at the same time is not as effective as working on the same thing at the same time *with the same strategy*.

Q: You write in your book, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, that a parent's purpose is not to develop exceptional parenting skills. That comes as a welcome relief to many! What do you mean by this?

A: We need to remember that our influence has more to do with our relationships with our children than it does our skills as parents. If you establish unrealistic expectations for yourself, you may create an atmosphere where you become discouraged and children get disillusioned. If we are not careful in our zeal to win at parenting, we may actually create an unhealthy, paralyzing culture. It is critical to guard our mindsets and stay focused on the primary role of the family. Your role is not to impress your children or anyone else with your ability to parent; your role is to impress your children with the love and character of God.

We have to be intentional in telling children about the ongoing love story between God's people and Himself. We should understand that the primary purpose of the family is to show them God's love through that relationship and invite them to embrace their part in His story. Does that mean you don't attempt to sharpen and improve your parenting skills? Of course not! But it does mean you parent from the perspective of a bigger story, one that allows room for missteps and recognizes the limits of your human capacity.

Q: How important is it for parents to work on their own relationship with God, before they can have a positive spiritual influence on their children?

A: The most important thing that happens as a result of reading our book may not be what happens in the lives of your children, but what happens in the parent. When it comes to character and faith, your kids are watching you in a way they might not watch you in other pursuits. When it comes to spiritual and character formation, your journey impacts them deeply. If you want it to be in them, it needs to be in you. That's why parents need to let their kids see them struggle to grow. They need to see your authenticity and hear your transparency. Most of all, they need to observe up close that your spiritual, moral, and relational growth is a priority in your life. This is not about a perfect model, just an honest one. Whatever you want your children to become, you should honestly strive to become as well.

Q: So we model with our own spiritual lives first. But we should also seek healthy influences outside the family dynamic to impact our children?

A: Yes. When you learn to parent beyond your capacity, you tap into other influences that also have the potential to impact your children's future. You become intentional about modeling relational values. You exchange short-term outcomes for a long-term impact. The reality is, your children one day will seek affirmation and approval from adults other than you. Either you can become intentional about enlisting other trusted adults to influence your kids, or you can depend only on your limited capacity. You can leave them alone to discover random influences who will shape their character and faith, or you can help them proactively pursue strategic relationships for their lives.

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***Parenting Beyond Your Capacity:
Connect Your Family to a Wider Community***

By Reggie Joiner & Carey Nieuwhof

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