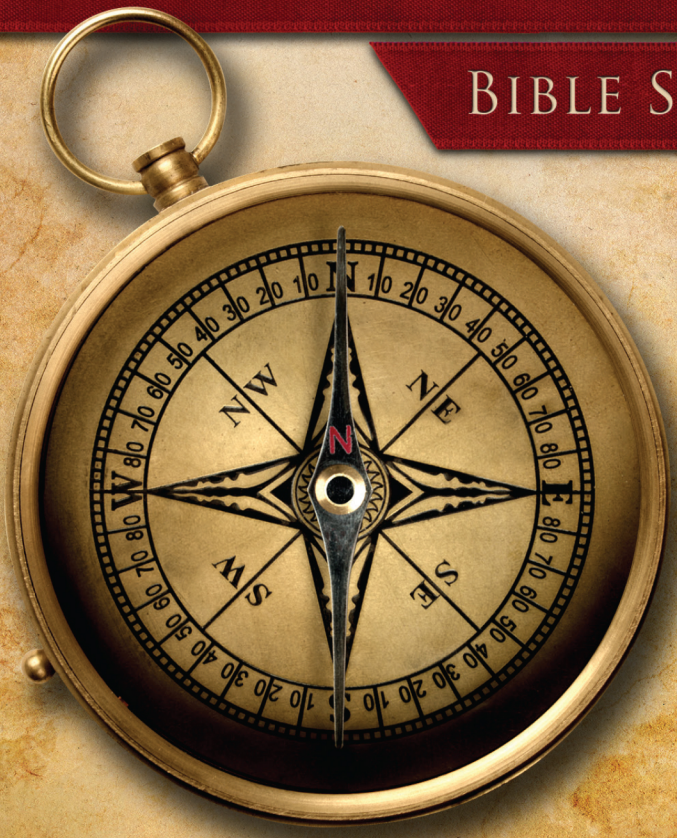
GROUP CURRICULUM

THE Love Dare

FOR PARENTS

BIBLE STUDY



SAMPLE

GROUP CURRICULUM

THE Love Dare

FOR PARENTS

BIBLE STUDY

STEPHEN KENDRICK
ALEX KENDRICK
As developed with TRAVIS AGNEW

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About the Authors

STEPHEN KENDRICK serves as senior associate pastor of preaching and prayer at Sherwood Church, in Albany, Georgia (*sherwoodbaptist.net*). He has served as co-writer and producer of Sherwood Pictures' movies. Stephen and his brother, Alex, co-wrote Courageous curriculum *Honor Begins at Home* and *Courageous Living Bible Study*. Fireproof resources include *The Love Dare Bible Study* and the *New York Times* bestseller *The Love Dare*.

Before joining Sherwood in 2001, Stephen served as a youth minister in Atlanta. He and his wife, Jill, live in Albany with their four children. One of Stephen's greatest joys is watching his kids continue to grow in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man.

ALEX KENDRICK has served as associate pastor of movie outreach at Sherwood Church and co-writer and director of Sherwood's movies. In addition, he is a speaker, author, and actor—filling the roles of Grant Taylor in Facing the Giants and Adam Mitchell in Courageous.

Before attending New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Alex was a Christian disc jockey for two radio stations and a minister to college students in Marietta, Georgia. He and his wife, Christina, have six children and live in Albany. His proudest moments involve seeing his children make godly decisions and grow in Christian character.

TRAVIS AGNEW worked alongside Stephen and Alex to develop *The Love Dare for Parents Bible Study*. His passion is to disciple people through preaching, teaching, writing, and worship. Travis has recorded worship projects, authored books, and frequently blogs about fatherhood, family, and faith (*travisagnew.org*). Married to Amanda, he is the proud father of two sons and one daughter. Travis is the worship pastor at North Side Baptist Church in Greenwood, South Carolina.

About this Study

The purpose of *The Love Dare for Parents Bible Study* is to equip parents to be all that God intended them to be by addressing key issues related to loving and training up strong, godly children. Parents will find scriptural support for how God has blessed them with children, for being a godly role model, for relating to each child based on his or her uniqueness, for preparing kids for life's difficulties, and for launching them well to start their own families and carry on a strong legacy for future generations.

Group sessions are designed for a minimum of one hour each week; feel free to add more interaction and discussion as your schedule allows. Your resources include this workbook, your group facilitator, and *The Love Dare for Parents* (encouraged, but optional). Be willing to participate with your group by sharing about yourself and your family, engaging in group discussions, and expressing your own joys and concerns about parenting.

REFLECT, **RETHINK**, and **RENEW** are the three basic elements of each group discussion. **REFLECT** starts the group process by helping parents get acquainted and identify some aspect of their family roles or experiences. **RETHINK** points the group to some aspect of God's plan for the home—and redirects the group for any new ways of thinking that might be insightful or helpful. **RENEW** offers application, done either during the group time or at home between sessions.

Those who include reading and doing *The Love Dare for Parents* with their Bible study will have rich parenting insights to share with their group. (See pp. 86-87 for an overview.)

Group Guidelines

When parents know that others are supporting, encouraging, and praying for them, it encourages them on their journey with God. No one is able to walk this parenting path alone. It is vital to covenant together and agree on principles that guide your group process, launching you into growth and Christian community.

SEVEN COMMITMENTS FOR GROUP SUCCESS

Priority: We will give high priority to group meetings and to the commitments we need to make to our families, especially as we parent our children.

Preparation and Participation: We will participate without dominating. We will strive to come to group having read through the study material, ready to discuss it.

Respect: Our group will provide a safe place to share our hearts openly without fear of judgment or ridicule. Scripture teaches us to be quick to listen and slow to speak (Jas. 1:19). We will speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and value one another's opinions, while allowing the Scripture to help us come to godly conclusions.

Confidentiality: In sharing thoughts and feelings related to our home, marriage, and relationship with God, we will keep all information in the strictest confidence. What happens in group time stays in group time. However, no one will be required to share.

Life Change: In each session we will identify aspects that need attention in our walk as a believer, parent, spouse, and friend.

Care and Support: We agree to provide care and encouragement for every member, praying for each other. (Some group members may also want to enlist support from prayer warriors not in the study, *being careful not to give anything shared in confidence.*)

Accountability: We agree to let the members of the group hold us accountable to the commitments we make in whatever loving ways we mutually decide. As a group, we choose to commit to the accountability that is necessary to stay the course.

When parents unconditionally love their children and children delight in their parents, the world gets a glimpse of the gospel: a Heavenly Father's deep love for His Son in whom He is well pleased and a loyal Son's deep love for, honor toward, and delight in His Father.

The more that this incredible dynamic is modeled and experienced in our homes, the more it powerfully attracts the people of this world to the gospel and to the heart of our Heavenly Father and to His Son. It awakens in our hearts the desire to know this loving God intimately (John 17:20-24).

Signed,

_____

Date: _____

Session 1

Sacred Trust

Children are a blessing
and a gift from God.

REFLECT

"WE'RE EXCITED!"

Do you remember what it felt like when you and your mate found out you were expecting? Or when you received the news you had been matched with a child through adoption? Relive this special time in your life. If your spouse is with you, do this activity together.

How did you find out?

What were you feeling?

Who did you tell?

How did you prepare?

However the news first reached you that you were to become a parent, nothing would ever be the same. Nothing *could* ever be the same. God was entrusting the care of a new life into your hands.

Share some of the details of that day with your group. What similarities do you see in everyone's story?

Along with increasing nervousness, you no doubt experienced immense joy at the impending arrival of your first child. When that child finally arrived, you were forever changed. He stole your heart. She introduced daily wonder and adventure. You would do anything for your children.

FAST-FORWARD TO TODAY

Let's be honest: Parenting is a demanding endeavor. You never clock out. Whenever you feel like you have made it through one set of challenges, something else looms around the corner, waiting to launch you on a new adventure or stop you in your tracks.

What word or phrase best describes last week for you as a parent?

If "I'm exhausted!" popped out of your mouth, you are not alone. While you still love your children, the hectic pace of life sometimes robs you of the time to be intentional in your parenting. Instead of joy filling your heart, anxiousness may be taking over. Where excitement once abounded in your relationship with your children, stress and friction sometimes are more apparent.

How do you feel about your parenting at this time?

How do you talk about your children around others?

Exhaustion is not every parent's modus operandi, of course. You may be in a sweet spot with your children, but still know how easy it is to slip back into a frenetic pace. *The Love Dare for Parents* journey is a look at parenting as Scripture describes it—at loving our children the way God does. It's about walking in a relationship with the One who created us and entrusted our kids to us. This relational walk may result in conviction and in needed change in perspective and action. So what are we waiting for?

RETHINK

RUNNING RAGGED

In today's society, parents can easily become distracted and obsessed with the relentless pursuit of worthless things, much like the ancient builders of the tower of Babel: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let us make a name for ourselves" (Gen. 11:4). Their efforts proved vain. God humbled their taxing, misguided attempt. Seeking after bigger and better "towers" can still happen when we are least aware.

With good intentions, many parents believe that the best way to show their children love is through provision. Others feel that the most loving action is to equip their children for worldly applause and financial success. While these may be good pursuits, they are not necessarily the best.

Psalm 127, a worship song, is attributed to Solomon. Let's see what this wise king had to say about God's rightful place in the home.

Read Psalm 127:1-2.

Unless the LORD *builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain; unless the* LORD *watches over a city, the watchman stays alert in vain. In vain you get up early and stay up late, working hard to have enough food—yes, He gives sleep to the one He loves.*

The word *vain* means "empty" or "worthless."

Do some of your parental pursuits seem empty or worthless? What might need to change?

Many parents recognize themselves in verse 2—getting up early, staying up late, and frantic in between. At the same time, they should be encouraged and refreshed that God "gives sleep," or true rest (see Prov. 3:24). Solomon provides this dual reminder of the need for God to be central in the home and the caution to avoid chasing the wrong prizes and setting the wrong priorities.

Psalm 127:2 is a call for dependence on God as well as a commitment to family. It is not an excuse for laziness. Scripture is clear concerning the value of hard work (Prov. 6:6-11; 10:26; 13:4; 19:24; 24:30; 26:14-16).

REAL REWARDS

"A house is built by wisdom, and it is established by understanding; by knowledge the rooms are filled with every precious and beautiful treasure" (Prov. 24:3-4). God is the architect of the home and parents are laborers with Him. A foundation established on His Word is strong and lasting, in contrast to a flashy tower meant to glorify ourselves or satisfy worldly desires.

In Psalm 127:1 the term *watchman* describes a sentinel guarding the walls of an ancient city. Instead of being under the care of an impersonal guard, we have the opportunity to know God personally and partner with Him. We can wear ourselves out striving and worrying about our children, but if God is not involved in the building and protection of them, our efforts are in vain.

As we learn more of Him through His Word and intentionally make Him the head of our home, He gives rest and direction. Instead of anxious toil without God's leading, true joy can be found in our homes and earthly pursuits by walking in a holy relationship with Him. (See Ps. 128:1-4; 1 Cor. 3:9-11.)

Read Psalm 127:3.

Sons are indeed a heritage from the LORD, *children, a reward.*

Unlike our tendency to build things in our own strength (Gen. 11:1-8), God's desires to bless and use us greatly are often fulfilled through His gift of children. Consider this verse from Genesis 11:27—"These are the family records of Terah. Terah fathered Abram…" from whom many nations and God's covenant people would come.

In these examples, underline words describing God's blessing and circle words reflecting the parent's view.

Sarah: "By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the One who had promised was faithful" (Heb. 11:11).

Rachel: "Then God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, 'God has taken away my shame.' She named him Joseph: 'May the LORD add another son to me'" (Gen. 30:22-24).

Manoah (Samson's father): "Then Manoah asked, 'When Your words come true, what will the boy's responsibilities and mission be?'" (Judg. 13:12).

Hannah: "I prayed for this boy, and since the LORD gave me what I asked Him for, I now give the boy to the LORD. For as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD" (1 Sam. 1:27-28).

Zechariah: "But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth'" (Luke 1:13-14).

Did you notice how those who had the hardest time having a child were often more grateful to God for His great gift?

Describe parental behaviors and attitudes that portray children as either a burden or as a blessing.

BURDEN **BLESSING**

Follow up by asking yourself some questions—and taking action:

- *Have I been praying, explaining, and training my children to avoid misbehaviors? What is working well? What still needs attention?*

- *What are my words, tone of voice, and facial expressions communicating—that my kids are a serious burden or a significant blessing?*

- *How does God view it when I act as if my children are a burden?*

A FAMILY'S BLESSING AND FUTURE

Children are a huge responsibility, but are not intended to be viewed as a burden. They are priceless, desirable, and unique treasures. God made them in His image, created them with a purpose, loves them without limitation, and places them in our care. They are both our inheritance and legacy.

Read Psalm 127:4-5.

> *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one's youth. Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them. Such men will never be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the city gate.*

No arrow is initially ready for battle. Each must be shaped and sharpened to be effective.

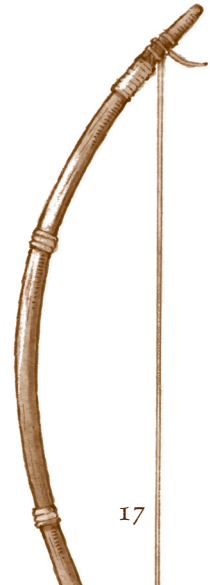
How does God use parents to shape and sharpen their children? How do our children shape and sharpen us?

We lovingly sharpen them by teaching them, protecting them, guiding them, and releasing them. Not only do we sharpen them, they also sharpen us.

They teach us how to stop being selfish and instead love and give sacrificially. They expose our rough edges, showing us what to work on. God uses our children to help conform us to the image of Christ as we learn patience, kindness, love, joy, and faith (see Rom. 12:2; Eph. 2:10). They stretch us, deepen our prayer life, quicken our consciences with their innocence, and teach us about the Word as we explain it to them.

On the archer's battlefield, arrows hit targets far beyond his physical reach. In a similar way, our children can extend the influence and impact of our lives and do more for God's kingdom than we can accomplish in our lifetime. God uses our children to help us fulfill His eternal purposes for our lives in this world.

Our children are like prized, life-preserving arrows in the hands of a warrior, uniquely formed to be launched to make a powerful impact on the world. We have been invited to partner with God to shape and mold our children into mighty instruments for the kingdom of God. What a privilege! What a gift!



RENEW

We benefit our children by applying—not just discussing—biblical truths. This section is an opportunity to put biblical truths into practice each week. You can do these actions as a group or as homework if time does not permit.

GET SPECIFIC

1. **REFLECT** by making this statement personal: "Children are a blessing and a gift from God." Write this sentence and replace "children" with the name of each child ("John is a blessing and a gift from God"). Record three ways that child is a blessing to you.

2. **READ** Psalm 112, a foundational passage for this Bible study. Either in class or in your quiet time, think deeply about what verses 1-2 say about how your children are blessed by your spiritual walk with God.

> *Hallelujah! Happy is the man who fears the* LORD,
> *taking great delight in His commands.*
> *His descendants will be powerful in the land; the*
> *generation of the upright will be blessed.*

3. **PRAY** for each child by name every day this week. Thank God for the specific ways he or she is a blessing to you. One goal of this study is to learn how to pray more intentionally for our children, and pages 88-89, "How to Pray for Your Children," are filled with great ideas to get started. You may want to establish groups of 3-4 to pray together for each other's families and children by name, so that by the end of the study, the entire group has prayed for every family.

4. **SURVEY** a few parents whose children are no longer living at home and ask these empty nesters two questions: What is one thing you wish you had done (or done more of) while the kids were still at home? What is the best advice you would give parents for enjoying and training their children? Be ready to share their answers next week.

5. **DARE** to "communicate to your children that they are a treasure to you. In your own words, say, 'You are a priceless gift to me, and I am grateful you are in my life.' Then thank God for them and for the chance He has given you to daily love and value them."—*The Love Dare for Parents*, day 4

6. **OPTION:** Your group members may want to consider using *The Love Dare for Parents* as you go through this study. This exciting 40-day journey highlights powerful biblical principles of parenting while giving moms and dads a daily dare or challenge to help them better express God's love to their children.

You don't have to read *The Love Dare for Parents* to do this Bible study, but reading and doing the dares will give you more ways to love and bless your children. Doing so will also help you come to your small group ready to share rich insights.

Supporting this week's Bible study are days 1-7 of *The Love Dare for Parents*: *Love blooms*; *Love is patient*, *Love is kind*, *Love values*, *Love is wonderful*, *Love is not selfish*, and *Love is not irritable*. (Also see pp. 86-87.)

When parents unconditionally love their children and children delight in their parents, the world gets a glimpse of the gospel.

The Love Dare for Parents Bible Study looks at parenting the way Scripture describes it. It is about walking in relationship with the One who created us and entrusted our children to us.

This six-session group study will inspire and challenge busy parents to walk more closely with God and fully cherish and enjoy their children during each season of their lives. Parents will engage in these topics:

- Sacred Trust
- Special Masterpiece
- Secure Boundaries
- Serious Responsibility
- Shared Path
- Steadfast Commitment

Written by Stephen and Alex Kendrick, authors of *The Love Dare* and *The Love Dare for Parents*, this study addresses key issues related to loving and training up strong, godly children. *The Love Dare for Parents* may be used as a companion resource.

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