

**Book Club Study Guide**

**OSV**

Be a  
**Happier**  
Parent

or  
**Laugh**  
Trying

**Betsy  
Kerekes**



# Introduction

1. Have you found yourself guilty of comparing your children to other children, like at what age your baby crawls or walks compared to other babies, or perhaps even your older children?
2. If this is something you struggle with, how might you improve? What are some things you can do to help yourself relax and be OK with your child taking his or her sweet time to develop?
3. When you're stressed out with a newborn, what are some ways you can calm yourself?
4. Where is your happy place?

## Chapter 1

# Being a Happy Parent

1. Close your eyes for a moment and think about how God loves you. Now think about how you love your child(ren). Did you notice any similarities? Do you sometimes behave toward God the way your children behave toward you (though hopefully with fewer tantrums)?
2. Are you a milk-bottle-is-half-empty person? If so, how can you remind yourself to focus on the happy aspects of parenting, so you don't get pulled into the parenting pits? Share your ideas.
3. What aspects of being a mom or a homemaker are the most difficult for you? Perhaps make a list, then brainstorm ideas for making those areas easier. When it comes to chores, could you enlist help from your kids? Invest in a better dishwasher? Teach your children to do their own laundry? How can you delegate, prioritize, or seek help, if needed?
4. Are you a perfectionist? Do you get overly concerned about your children's nutrition or maintaining a spotless home? If so, how might you tone down those feelings to make you happier and less stressed? What can you let go of to make yourself happier overall?
5. Think about something sweet, kind, or loving that one of your children did recently. Every time you feel like things are rough, stop and think of this thing. Write it down or make a note in your phone. Every once in a while, reread what you've written. Share it with your spouse, and maybe even your children.
6. What's your favorite way to start the day? Do you take a moment to say a prayer? Perhaps sneak a peek at some inspirational writing? What other ways can you start your morning to help you have a super-charged day? Likewise, throughout the day, when you feel yourself being pulled into the parenting pits, what are some ways you can pull yourself back out again?
7. Discuss different ways to keep your patience, such as taking deep breaths, giving yourself a time-out, or pulling a child aside to deal with one-on-one without other distractions.
8. Would being more organized help you be a happier parent? Do you have a schedule for cleaning and other necessary activities? Can you break down your duties into manageable chunks each day so that they don't overwhelm you?
9. When was the last time you and your husband went on a date or got together with friends? Is it time to do that again? What would be your ideal date night? Can you make it happen?
10. In what areas of your life might you need to anticipate hardships? Remember that sometimes your attitude is the only thing you have the power to change. How you choose to react in a given situation will make all the difference for your personal happiness.
11. Can you form a support group with the other members of this book club? Keep an email chain or a Signal group to keep in touch, ask each other for prayers, share your struggles, share the goofy thing your kid just did, and hold each other accountable to be stronger, holier, and happier.
12. Consider the example you might be setting for your children by your attitude. Do you fly off the handle easily? Do you notice your children behaving the same way? Do you like their behavior? Do you need to change something in order to help them change?
13. Think of something funny or sweet or loving or unexpected that one of your children did recently and share that with the group.
14. Do you find yourself always looking forward to the next thing? Or are you able to enjoy your time as a parent at this stage with your kids at this age right now?

## Chapter 2

# Being a Good Parent

1. Who are your favorite saints or modern life examples whom you want to be more like? What characteristics do you want to strive for? What can you learn from Alice of Montbar (on page 21)?
2. What are some ways you can demonstrate virtues for your children, like generosity and charity?
3. Are you guilty of not really paying attention when your kids are talking to you? Do you feel that's justified, or is it something you need to work on?
4. Have you noticed one of your children seeming to need more attention, or falling through the cracks? Might you need to schedule some special one-on-one time, perhaps lunch or shopping with each child individually? Can your spouse help you with this too?
5. Is "practice makes progress" good advice? Where do you strike the balance between realistic expectations and wanting your kids to be and have everything their heart desires?
6. What methods work for you when encouraging a discouraged child?
7. Is family dinner the norm at your house? If not, how can you make it more regular?
8. What can you and your children discuss at dinnertime to help build the familial bond?
9. Think about Gary Chapman's Five Love Languages: physical touch, words of encouragement, quality time, gift-giving, and works of service. Since Chapman says these apply to children as well, can you figure out which applies to each of your children? How might you show that child your love in his or her individual way? Discuss ideas for doing so.
10. Do your kids tend to overreact? What are some ways you can help them calm down and not make a mountain out of a mole hill?
11. What's your attitude toward sharing? Should it always be done, or is it OK to let your kid play with a toy or keep the swing longer?
12. What's the best way to deal with kids fighting over the same toy?
13. What benchmark will make you feel like you've done a good job as a parent? Is it enough for you to know that you've done your best each day? At night, do you do an examination of conscience for your parenting that day? Consider what you might have done better and how you could improve tomorrow.

## Chapter 3

# Having Fun with Children ... Even Your Own!

1. When's the last time you had a fun family trip, even just a short one? Have you ever said, "Forget the dishes. Let's go for a hike!" Or, "We can skip vegetables tonight. Let's make pizza!" In other words, when did you last surprise your kids with something spontaneous or uncharacteristic?
2. What activities or silly quirks belong to your family alone? Do you cherish those quirks?
3. What aspects of their childhood do you think your kids are most likely to remember? Will their overall impression be that of a happy childhood?
4. Do you need to add more activities for your children? Take some away? Do your kids have enough time to just enjoy being a kid?
5. Any recommendations for family-friendly, age-appropriate books?
6. What are your family's favorite games to play? When's the last time you did a family game night? Or maybe a movie night, backyard camping, indoor s'mores, or a dance party? What other fun ideas can you share with the group?
7. Read the paragraph on page 37 about Britain's Royal Horticultural Society study on the benefits of gardening. Is gardening an option where you live? If not in an actual garden, then in pots on the patio or deck? Consider this as an activity to do with your kids.

## Chapter 4

# Tears and Temper Tantrums - What to Do When Your Kids are Crying Too

1. Take note of the St. John Bosco quote at the start of this chapter on page 39. Make a point of remembering this should you need it.
2. How do you handle your kids' tears and temper tantrums? Or rather, do you handle them?
3. Does it surprise you to read that it takes years for children to be able to explain why they feel the way they feel? And that even boys, as teenagers, don't have the brain capability to connect words to the feelings part of their brain? (Or does it all make perfect sense now? ) Does knowing this help you understand what they might be going through, or at least help you relax when you're struggling to figure out what's wrong with your child?
4. Which is more likely to be true of each of your children: cranky when hungry, or cranky when tired? If one is the tired type, but a nap isn't an option, what strategies can you devise to help them make it to bedtime?
5. Do you sing a little song when your child doesn't want to get dressed, have his diaper changed, or brush his teeth? What works for you to calm your child enough to do these or other difficult activities?
6. How do you react when a child stomps off to his room and slams the door? Do you discipline further, or do you just let it go? What do you think works better to calm your child down sooner?
7. How difficult is it for you to empathize with your crying child? Do you find that it helps both of you when you validate your child's feelings and acknowledge that they are upset?
8. Do you find that, after doing a fun activity with your children, they whine and complain? Did you assume they were being ungrateful, or could it be that they were just upset it was over? How do you help them over this hurdle?
9. What do you do when your child is throwing a temper tantrum in public? Do you worry about onlookers? Does your child know this and take advantage? What's your game plan if your child gets out of control in public?



## Chapter 5

# The Dreaded “D” Word – Discipline

1. How would you rate your level of discipline on a scale of 1 to 10?
2. Do your children understand that no means no, or do they try to negotiate with you?
3. Do your kids know exactly how much screen time they're allowed? How many snacks? When their bedtimes are?
4. Do your rules stay put?
5. Do you often fall into the trap of ending your commands with, “OK?”
6. Do you make sure your children have heard you by having them respond, “Yes, Mommy” or “Yes, Daddy”?
7. Do you use as few words as possible when asking a child to do a task? Are any of those words negative? Can you ever just say the child's name and point to what needs to be done?
8. What tricks of the trade have worked for you when trying to get your kids to do something they don't want to do? Do certain methods work better for one child than another?
9. What consequences do you give your children for not doing what's asked?
10. Reread the paragraph in the middle of page 56 about guilt vs. shame. Note that you want your children to feel guilty, not shameful, which means you need to show disappointment when they mess up, not anger. Does this seem logical or helpful for you?
11. How are you at balancing discipline and affection? Don't forget to hug your child for at least six seconds after you've had a squabble, so that a chemical in their brain can be released letting them know that everything is OK again.

## Chapter 6

# Cleaning Up

1. How good are your kids at cleaning up after themselves? Are your expectations for their level of cleanliness reasonable for their age?
2. How young do your kids start doing chores? What are some age-appropriate chores that you find work well for you and your family?
3. What tasks are you doing yourself rather than going to the trouble of teaching your child to do correctly? What tasks might your children be ready to learn now? Do you fix a poorly done chore, or do you teach them to do it better?
4. What are some fun ways you've come up with to get your kids to do chores? Have you tried the Noah's Ark theme where all the animals need to be picked up off the floor before the flood comes? (As long as this won't scar your child for fear of drowning stuffed animals.) How about trying the method of writing things down on pieces of paper and putting them in a hat?
5. Would it be easier on you and your children if you gave them chores in bite-size chunks?
6. What positive incentives motivate your children to do their chores?
7. If cleaning up is an overwhelming task, look at how many toys are lying around. Would it be helpful to put some away and rotate them to keep them fresh?



## Chapter 7

# Teenagers

1. Getting your teenagers to do what you want is a little different than it is with younger children. What methods have worked well for you?
2. Do you sometimes need to step back and let your teen puzzle through a difficult situation on their own before you step in and help? Do you rush in, or do you wait for them to come to you?
3. Take special note of the story about my friend Jenny on page 69. Is there anything you're encouraging your teen to do that may be preventing them from doing it because they want it to be their idea alone?
4. Can you think of any good quotes or prayers that would be helpful to post someplace visible as a reminder for your teen and your whole family?
5. What words of wisdom do you wish you'd had as a teenager? Can you find a good quote, perhaps from a saint, to illustrate it? Can you post it on a mirror or the fridge?
6. Have your kids encountered bullies? What strategies can you share with the group to help them deal with this issue, should it come up? Likewise, peer pressure. What methods have worked for you?
7. Are any of your child's friends concerning to you? Do you need to step in? How might you best handle that?
8. Does your teen know how to respond if a friend asks them to do something they know is wrong?
9. When your teenager is upset about something, what methods work well for calming him or her down? Are there any phrases you keep in your back pocket that are particularly effective?
10. Does your family know about Bl. Carlo Acutis, who died in 2006 at age 15? The example of this (soon-to-be) Millennial saint may be helpful for your teenagers. Consider buying one of his many biographies for your home.

## Chapter 8

# Keeping the Faith

1. Are there particular saints you ask to intercede for your children, perhaps their patron saints, if they have them? Have you taught your children the value of doing so?
2. Have you adopted St. Zélie Martin's prayer for her children: "Lord, grant me the grace that this child may be consecrated to you, and that nothing may tarnish the purity of [his or her] soul"?
3. Do you/can you say family prayers and invite your children to list their own petitions? Have you ever ended family prayers by letting everyone say something they're grateful for?
4. How do you handle a child who doesn't get the answer to a prayer he or she was hoping for? How do you console the disappointed child?
5. How do you remind your children to pray? Do you say a morning offering with them? Are there any short prayers that can be said throughout the day that you can teach them?
6. Here's a tough one: What bad examples are we setting for our children? Are we talking behind other people's backs and gossiping? Are our children picking up on that? Are we complaining too much? Being too impatient while driving or shopping?
7. Could you create more peace in your home by talking less? Is there some other way you could make your home more peaceful?
8. What are some ways your family can practice detachment and charity? We spend New Year's Eve going through all the closets and drawers, finding things we no longer need and donating them. Getting rid of stuff feels great and declutters our lives. You can remind your children that donating toys and clothes means people less fortunate than ourselves can get them more affordably. Hopefully this practice will also make your children appreciate what they have.
9. Have you taught your children about spending, saving, and giving? Do they have a method for separating their money accordingly? What methods work best for you?
10. Are you helping to instill virtues in your children by the way you praise their good behavior? Remember that you want to recognize quality of character. Look at the examples on the bottom of page 84 and the top of page 85. Let this be a reminder of how we should talk to our children, so they might learn these good behaviors naturally.
11. If you notice your children becoming prideful, vain, greedy, etc., how do you gently correct them?
12. Are you able to keep track of the media your children consume? Can anyone recommend a good means for doing so?
13. Do you worry about your child's time on a computer or phone? Do you have a plan of action for when/if they come across something questionable or inappropriate? What preventative measures do you have in place that you can recommend to others?
14. Have you needed to have a difficult or awkward conversation with a child? What has worked well for you to deal with sensitive issues?

## Chapter 9

# Children at Church

1. What methods work or don't work for keeping your kids quiet and happy at Mass?
2. What are the pros and cons of different Mass times or different areas of the church to sit in?
3. Do you bring anything with you to keep your children entertained?
4. What helps your kids be more engaged in the Mass?
5. What funny stories can you share of crazy things your kids have done at Mass?
6. Do you have a way of rewarding good behavior? Are there consequences for bad behavior?
7. How do you keep the Sabbath holy as a family? Are you able to avoid work and shopping? Can your children get their schoolwork done by Sunday? Do you have any meals, games, or other activities that keep Sunday a special family day and one reserved for the Lord?

## Chapter 10

# On Intercession and Happiness

1. Do you invoke particular saints to intercede for you for certain causes? Have you taught your children to do the same?
2. When you're going through a difficult time, does it help to consider others who have had rough lives? Do you and your children understand the value of redemptive suffering?
3. When you're in the parenting pits, are you able to focus on something positive that happened during your day? Do you truly relish the fun, silly things that your kids do? Perhaps it would be helpful to recall something positive that happened that day when you're lying in bed at night.
4. Are you setting a good example for your children by your overall demeanor and happiness? Do you feel that your kids are happy when you're happy—or when you're sad that reflects on your children as well? Even in the more difficult times, can you find a way to keep a stiff upper lip for your children's sake?
5. Do you think saints who are priests or nuns had an easier time becoming saints? Or do you think maybe we, as parents, have a better shot at it for all the challenges that our children bring?
6. Do you believe that our path to heaven is by loving our children?
7. What, in a word or two, makes you a happy parent?

**Bonus  
Discussion  
Topic**

## **Appendix 1**

# **On Miscarriage**

1. Have you experienced a miscarriage? If so, how did you handle it? If a friend had a miscarriage, how did you comfort her?
2. If you have children in heaven, do you ask for their intercession?
3. How have you explained miscarriages to your children?

## **Appendix 2**

# **On Infertility and Impaired Fertility**

1. Have you noticed Catholics judging each other over family size? How does that make you feel? Have you found yourself being judged or doing the judging?
2. What challenges are faithful Catholics up against in the world today? How might we band together with like-minded non-Catholics?
3. What can you do in your home, community, or broader area to bolster a community for Christ?
4. And finally, what's one thing you can do today, and each day, to help you be a happier parent?