

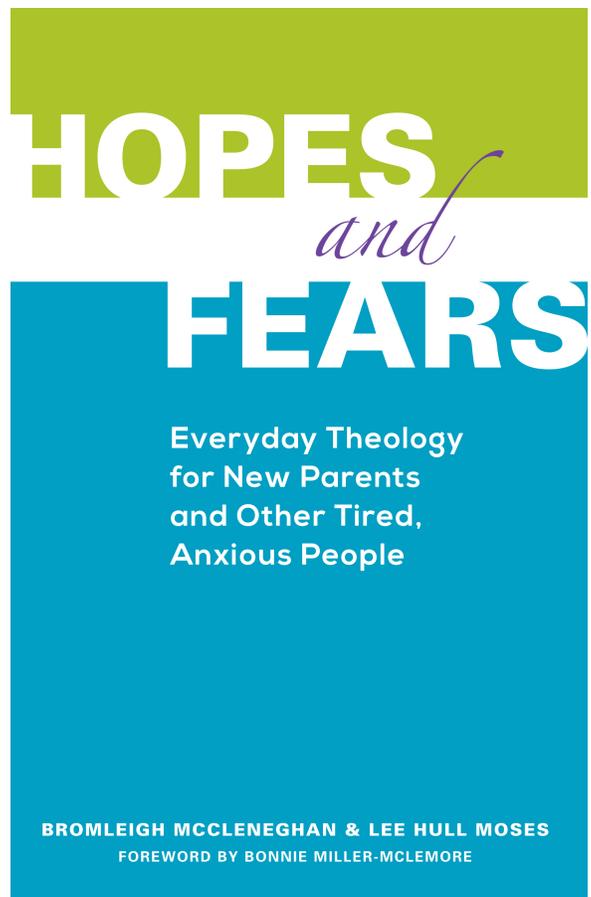
Hopes and Fears:
Everyday Theology for New Parents and
Other Tired, Anxious People
Bromleigh McCleneghan and Lee Hull Moses

Discussion Guide

Written with Sarah Kinney Gaventa

The following questions can be used or adapted in whatever way best suits the needs of your group. If the group meets weekly, you might read a chapter or two each week and then discuss. If it's a monthly or one-time session, you may want to read the entire book first and then talk about it all together.

These questions are designed to start conversation, not to limit it; you may find that the discussion veers in a different direction depending on the interests of the participants.



Introduction *The Hopes and Fears*

If this is the first meeting of the group, take some time for introductions. Share some family stories, talk about your kids, share what you love - or what you don't - about being a parent.

1. Bromleigh talks about the “pervasive cultural lie” (see page 5), which suggests that everybody else has it all “together.” Give some examples of where you see that lie played out in your experience.
2. Have you found support in conversation with other parents? How so?
3. When have you experienced a “means of grace” through friendship? Through parenting?

Chapter 1
Leap of Faith: On if, and when, and the will of God

1. What life choices have seemed to loom largest in your life? How did you decide them?
2. How did you decide to have children? How has the culture supported or challenged your decision?
3. What have you sacrificed by having children? What have you gained?
4. Lee's father passed on the message: "Make the best decision you can, and make the best of the decision you made." How do you relate to this statement? What messages did your family send about major decisions?
5. Lee states that she prefers the question, "How can I take part in the activity of God?" better than, "What is God's plan for my life?" How would you answer the first question?

Chapter 2
My Body, My Fault: On pregnancy, and anxiety, and hope

1. Share a time when you, as a parent, were anxious or afraid.
2. Bromleigh talks about Harold Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Take a look at her overview on pages 27-28 and discuss. Does Kushner's theology make sense to you?
3. How do you deal with the inevitable fears and anxieties of parenthood?
4. Read the passage from Deuteronomy on page 33 and Bromleigh's discussion following. How will you "choose life?"

Chapter 3
Called by Name: On names, and identity, and making a place in the world

1. How did your parents choose your name? How did you choose your child's name? Have you ever regretted either choice?
2. Does anyone in your family have nicknames? How did they come about?
3. Do you still have your original last name? If not, why?
4. How has your child growing up and moving away from you been a delight? How has it been a challenge? How does the idea that your child is both yours and God's settle with you?
5. What identity do you hope for your child?
6. How has your or your child's identity changed since baptism? Was baptism a meaningful experience for you?

Chapter 4
Bedtime: On Ferber, and freedom, and faith

1. What is bedtime like at your house? What works? What doesn't?
2. In what ways do you provide structure for your kids? In what ways do you provide freedom? How are the two related?
3. Read the section (starting on page 57) in which Bromleigh discusses Tillich and Luther and discuss.
4. What role does trust play in your parenting?

Chapter 5
Good Work: On rest, and work, and getting things done

1. What work most overwhelms you? What gives you joy?
2. Lee writes, "Must I really *finish* all the work before I rest?" as she reflects on God's command for us to take a sabbath. How can you rest knowing work is never finished? How do you find moments of tranquility, serenity, peace and repose?
3. Lee talks about the struggle of working and raising a family. What choices or sacrifices has your family made to make your life together possible?
4. What did you think about Thich Nhat Han's idea that if we do the tasks of every day life in a mindful way, we can participate in a "wondrous reality"?
6. How could we reframe our idea of work to think in terms of the God-ness of our work rather than the importance of the work being finished?

Chapter 6
Cuddling, and Other Not-As-Precious Things about Incarnation

1. Name some ways that parenting is a full-body experience. (Think swollen ankles, dirty diapers, snuggles, baby kisses...)
2. Read page 77. What does it mean to say you are created in the image of God? What does it mean to say your kids are created in God's image?
3. In what ways do you practice your faith with your bodies? (See the last paragraph on page 79 and following.)
4. Bromleigh says that one of the things about being human is that we sin, and sometimes we sin with our bodies. Do you agree? In what ways can our bodies be a means of grace?

Chapter 7
Saying Grace: On stories, and songs, and nurturing faith

1. Lee would sing hymns to her children as she rocked them to sleep. How would your parents soothe you as a child? How did you soothe your children?
2. How do you cultivate gratitude in your household? What rituals do you have around meals in your home?
3. Lee wonders, "Where do I start? . . .How do you tell this story to someone who has never heard it?" when considering telling her children the stories of God. Where would you start?
4. Lee reflects on the tensions of having others teach her child about God. Who in your child's life teaches them about God? What would you like them to teach him/her?

Chapter 8
I'm the Mommy, That's Why: On authority, and experts, and looking for truth

1. Tell about a time in your experience as a parent when you didn't know what to do. Tell about a time when you trusted your authority as a parent (over and against, perhaps, the advice of others).
2. Where do you look for wisdom and authority in parenting?
3. Read about the "quadrilateral" on page 111. Use it to think through a question with which you've been struggling. Is it helpful?
4. What is the relationship between power and authority? Respond to Bromleigh's story on page 117-118.

Chapter 9
Washing the Diapers: On gratitude, and justice, and living in a broken world

1. How would you answer the questions with which Lee opens the chapter? (see page 120)
2. Which people in your community "fall through the cracks?" How do you respond when you come face to face with them, like Lee came face to face with the homeless woman on her commute?
3. Lee talked about the possibility of sharing the pictures from "Where children sleep" with her daughter to teach her about economic diversity. What are ways you can bring other parts of the world to your children?
4. What issues of justice come into play in the everyday decisions made in your household?
5. Lee talks about bringing Harper on a CROP walk and buying canned goods for food drives with her child. How are ways we can teach our children compassion and justice?

Chapter 10

The Rage: On marriage, and anger, and the nature of love

1. How has having children changed your relationship with your spouse?
2. How have you dealt with the roller coaster emotions that are inevitable to parenting?
3. Respond to what Bromleigh says on page 140: "God stands against anything that stands against love - and that includes sin and terribleness, and my anger at my husband... As we experience that salvation, we will understand God not as raging against us anymore but rather as helping us to overcome sin and terribleness and rage, anything that stands in the way of Love." How have you experienced God's grace in the midst of anger?
4. What do you think makes for a healthy marriage?

Chapter 11

Birthdays and Baby Books: On blessings, and festivals, and ordinary time

1. What was your child's first haircut like? How did it make you feel? What other milestones do you remember feeling significant to you?
2. What is your favorite liturgical or "church" season? What are your favorite ways of marking your family's changing seasons?
3. Lee talks about her tradition of writing an annual letter to her children. She shares MaryAnn McKibben Dana's tradition of writing a one sentence journal entry every day. How do you preserve your family's history?
4. What rhythms of your family's life do you experience as holy?
5. How might you participate in the "practice of paying attention" in your life?

Chapter 12

When Christian Feminists Give Birth to Princesses: On boys, and girls, and Galatians 3

1. Are your kids boys or girls? As you watch your children's personalities emerge, what role does their gender play? What gender characteristics do you think are culturally imposed, and which are innate?
2. Do you try to counter the messages about gender your children get from the wider culture? If so, how? What do you hope influences your child's gender identity?
3. How do you make sense of biblical passages (like 1 Timothy 2:11-15) that relegate girls and women to a lesser status? In what way does contemporary Christianity influence how we talk about gender with our children? (see page 172 and 173)
4. Bromleigh talks mostly about girls; what gender dynamics are in play when raising boys?

Chapter 13

Move, Mommy, Move: On sharing, and living in a family, and making room without getting crowded out

1. What has it been like to move from being single to married? From being married to having a child and then children? How have you had to share in new ways?
2. Are there ways in which these changes have made you lose more of your identity than makes you comfortable? What would you like to reclaim?
3. How did you respond to Miller-McLemore's quote about the importance of NOT loving your children with the self-sacrificing love that Christianity esteems as the ideal? What would an appropriate amount of sacrifice look like?
4. How can our children learn to share and participate fully in the lives of our households? How can we help them with this?
5. How have you experienced Lee's thought of there being enough of her to "go around" once her youngest was born? How is "love a miracle" in your life?

Chapter 14

Dancing with Her Daddy on a Saturday Morning: On vocation, and praise, and becoming who we are

1. When you were young, what did you want to be when you grew up? What do your kids want to be?
2. Bromleigh points out the tricky balance between praising a child for who she is and encouraging her to get better at a particular skill. How do you navigate this with your own children?
3. Look at Frederick Buechner's definition of vocation on page 199. How will you help your children find their "deep gladness"?
4. Bromleigh says, "[My girls] are beloved; I want that knowledge to one day give them the courage they need to go out and find their callings. In theological terms, we call this the assurance of grace." What do you hope for your children?

Conclusion Of All the Years

1. Lee tells a story of having to let go of Harper's hand to give her courage to get in the pool. How have you had to let go of your children?
2. What rituals do you have in your family to convey your love and confidence in your children?
3. How do we remind ourselves of God's love for us and our children in the midst of our fleeting lives?