

Forward to Pro-Active Parent Coaching: Capturing the Heart of Your Child

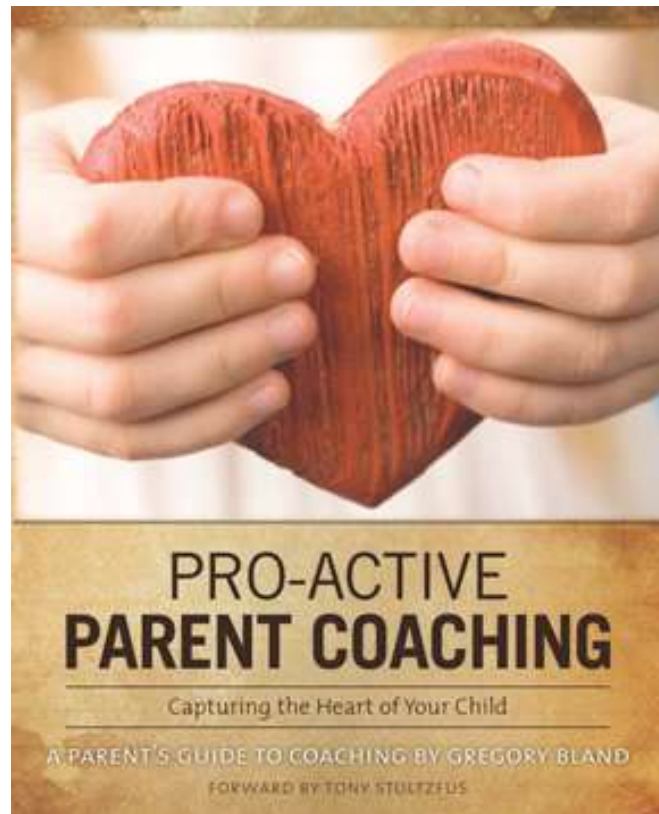
Written by Tony Stoltzfus, Master Coach and author of Leadership Coaching and Coaching Questions

Taking the risk to decide together as a family on a new church was a turning point in our family life. My wife and I felt God was saying that our next season of church involvement was going to be about the kids, and that we needed to find a place that worked for them whether or not it did for us. Since their growth was the focus, we stuck our necks out and decided to believe God could speak to all four of us about where we should go.

“We’re going to visit several different churches, pray about each one, and I believe that God will speak to both of you as well as mom and I about what the right choice is,” I announced in a family meeting. “What else do you want to know about this?” As usual, our vocal ten-year-old had a bunch of questions. “Where will we visit? How will we know which one is right? What will we get to do there?” As we patiently explained the process, our eight-year-old son sat quietly, a sober look on his face as he took it all in. He didn’t have any questions, and we weren’t quite sure what was going on in his head that evening.

The choice came down to two churches. One had a solid youth program with good leadership and a healthy congregation, and kept the kids in the sanctuary to experience worship up until the sermon time. The second one had candy, soda, puppet shows and videos for the kids while the adults were in worship.

That’s when I started to get a little nervous about my discernment plan. Were they really going to hear God speak, or would they just pick the place with the candy and movies? My wife and I were leaning pretty strongly toward the first congregation—what would we do if we had a split decision? And how would I deal with telling them God would speak to them if they didn’t hear anything.



After our second visit to the final church, we had another family meeting in the car on the way home. I started by asking our ten-year-old what she was sensing. She announced that the “spiritual atmosphere” was better in the first church, and she thought we should go there. Our quiet eight-year-old said he liked the candy, but that he didn’t learn anything there, so he thought we should go to the place where he could learn more about God. My wife and I were blown away: God really had spoken to our kids, and we were all in agreement

That launched a family pattern of hearing God together on important decisions. Seven years later, Kathy and I began to feel a stirring to relocate— while our kids were still in High School. We submitted the decision to the family like usual, and found that God had already spoken to them: in spite of their connections and school and with friends, they were ready to move all the way across the country. The place we ended up going to was in our daughter’s heart first. I never would have thought of coming to the place that will probably result in the fulfillment my life call if I hadn’t been listening to God speak through my children.

I’ve been looking forward to the publishing of this book for years (and actively prodded Greg to write it!), because I believe the application of coaching to parenting will lead to an enormous breakthrough in our ability to raise world-changing sons and daughters. We know how to care for babies; we know how to mentor and instruct young children, but so often parents are at a total loss for what to do with their teens. We’re aware we should be preparing them to live on their own as adults, but there is nothing in our parenting toolkit that seems to fit the task. Coaching fills that void, because it gives us practical handles on how to give kids responsibility (which is the only way they’ll really learn to handle it) while still influencing them.

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The cry of many a teenager’s heart is to be heard, to be believed in, to be trusted. This book shows you how to do that. The anguish of many parents’ hearts is feeling like their kids are becoming more and more distant, and not knowing how to bridge the gap. This book shows you how to love them in a way that they want to receive, while at the same time helping them be more responsible and not less. I don’t know a better way to build a truly interdependent relationship with those you parent.

Greg has taken coaching concepts that I stumbled around implementing in my own family and gone much farther with them than I ever could. And after coaching him for several years, I can vouch that this comes out of his life. I am amazed by the faith journey his family is on, and by how he and Lynn have empowered their kids in the midst of it.

By offering a simple coaching model and beautifully illustrating how to use it with real-life dialogs, this book makes parent coaching something anyone can do. It works with kids of any age—in fact, starting early like we did in our home is the best way to implement it.

But while the concepts here are simple, changing the way you parent isn't always easily. Something as rudimentary as asking open questions may require changing the conversational habits of a lifetime. As you try to honor your kids desires and hear their hearts, it will probably bring some of your own junk to the surface. That's hard work. But the payoff is enormous. The same relational approach that makes your kids feel honored and believed in will do the same for your husband, your wife, your friends, your coworkers—everyone you know.

Coaching at its heart is a disciplined way of communicating that you believe in people. It's faith that God is already present, already speaking, already at work in the ones you love. I believed my kids could hear the voice of God, and they rose to it—and eventually their ability to hear had a big influence on my journey. Believing in them and sharing responsibility made them peers and not just kids. That's a relationship we'll enjoy for the rest of our lives.

I believe Jesus' church can be the world leaders in bringing coaching to the parenting arena. We can be the model everyone turns to for consistently producing healthy, secure, interdependent kids who still love to hang out with their parents even when they're in High School. And I believe this book can be a big part of making that happen.

Tony Stoltzfus