

EDUCATION
BY DESIGN,
NOT DEFAULT

HOW BRAVE LOVE
CREATES FEARLESS LEARNING



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BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE



A study guide for couples and small groups

Education by Design, Not Default

How Brave Love Creates Fearless Learning

By Janet Newberry

Use this study guide to [have conversations about the big ideas in my book](#). Consider these suggestions to help create safety while connecting in vulnerable conversations:

- Let each person choose 1 or 2 questions to discuss in each chapter, instead of answering all 3. (There are 3 questions each for chapters 1-10, and Appendix C. Chapters 11, 12, and Appendix A and B each have 1 question to discuss.)
- Listen to understand each other, rather than needing to agree. Relational intimacy doesn't require agreement; intimacy is a safe place to be seen and heard.
- Respond to each other's sharing in ways that indicate you're listening and learning—instead of evaluating or judging. Some of these suggestions may be helpful to get started: "Wow—I never thought of that." "That's important to you, isn't it?" "Tell me more—I want to better understand." "I'm sorry that was so painful for you." "I disagree, and I respect your thoughts, too."

CHAPTER ONE – REDEEMING CHILDHOOD

1. What part of Janet's story resonates with you? Janet wrote about wearing a "good enough" mask in childhood. Do you remember wearing a mask? What would you have called your mask? Share the parts of your own story that may have convinced you to pretend or hide behind a mask.
2. What is your response to struggle in your own life? (fear, frustration, shame, blame, denial, hope...) What is your response to struggle in your child's life? Share your thoughts about how the connection has been formed in your life between struggle and _____ (fear, frustration, shame, blame, denial, hope...).
3. What are your thoughts about this idea: "What if struggle is a gift—by design?"

CHAPTER TWO – TRANSFORMED BY DESIGN

1. What are your considerations and questions about this idea: "We convince our children they are the god of their future, and if they create enough worth for themselves, they'll create enough life for themselves." (p. 9)
2. Which way of relating is more prevalent in relationships at your home? (in your marriage, in your parent/child relationships, in the relationships your children have with each other)
 - a. transactional relationships: I get because I do/earn/perform. You get from me because you do/earn/perform. We "keep score" in relationship. OR...

b. transformational relationships: I get because I have a real need. You get from me because you have a real need. We trust each other because we don't keep score.

3. This idea is on p. 14: "Significance isn't found in our moments of independent perfection. Significance is experienced in a story bigger than ourselves." Talk about how your children experience significance in your home—and/or how your children can begin to experience significance.

CHAPTER THREE – LOVE, NOT FEAR

1. What ideas about oxytocin offer you the most encouragement? What ideas about cortisol are new to you?

2. "There is always a gap." (p. 19) "Education is exhausting because it is about helping children grow up. By nature, children are immature and weak. Education is exhausting by nature, not mistake." (p. 21) Talk about these ideas. How are these ideas helpful for you as a parent and/or a homeschooling teacher?

3. "Learning, by design, is not a way of earning—for a child." (p. 27) "Learning is transformational, not transactional. So is maturity." (p. 28) Talk about these ideas. What 1 or 2 practical changes can I/we make in our home/homeschooling to support real learning and maturity?

CHAPTER FOUR – WHAT IF STRUGGLE IS A GIFT?

1. Janet and Mary spent three or four months playing Uno and writing number patterns on dry-erase boards, and Mary still completed two and a half years of Math curriculum in just nine months. What does this offer you about the power of trusting relationships and the benefits of oxytocin/love?

2. "As parents, are we making our children's world so small so they can get it all right? Or so they don't have to struggle?" (p. 35) Talk about your family's approach to letting your children experience struggle... or not.

3. What lies can you trade for truths about the benefits of struggle?

CHAPTER FIVE – EDUCATION BY DEFAULT

1. "Traditions are life-giving when they offer rituals rooted in truth and ways of relating that build strength. Many of the traditions offered to the generations born after World War II have been rooted in response to emergencies—not truth. Many of the new ways of relating have left children vulnerable, instead of protected and growing stronger. False traditions are rituals and norms of society that are formed when wisdom is ignored in favor of efficiency, unsettled emotions, or control." (p. 39) What current events are forming false traditions for the next generation? How can we course-correct false traditions for our children—and offer the next generation truth instead of simply what seems efficient? Or what doesn't trigger unpleasant emotions? Or cause us to potentially lose control?

2. What considerations and questions do you have about education by design aiming at the target of maturity? (p. 42 and p. 50)

3. By design, children are created to grow up to become young adults, not adolescents. What 1 or 2 changes could you make in your home to help your children grow up, instead of simply measure up?

CHAPTER SIX – IMAGINE EDUCATION TRANSFORMED

1. “Learning happens in a trusting posture of submission.” “Vulnerability is vital as a learner.” (p. 53) What are your thoughts about trusting submission and vulnerability? How are these truths present (or absent) in your home/homeschooling atmosphere?

2. So many times our children are overwhelmed with choices—and underwhelmed with life. In chapter six, we read, “When children trust and receive trinkets and prizes and marbles in jars, they become addicted to the many ways they must continually work to pay for more of them.” (p. 55) Share 1 or 2 ideas for offering your children transformational—instead of transactional—relationships at home.

3. “Disconnecting struggle from truth never offers relief from shame.” (p. 60) How does our culture disconnect struggle from truth? What is the evidence that shame is still present in our culture—because we’re unplugging struggle from truth?

CHAPTER SEVEN – WHERE DO WE BEGIN WITH YOUNG CHILDREN?

1. “We all wake up with God-given needs for affirmation, acceptance, and servant love. When children start the day having these needs met, and meeting these needs for others, they’re starting their day with integrity rather than as slaves to their emotions.” (p. 63) How is a life of integrity different than a life lived as a slave to our emotions? Talk about how you can begin to teach the freedom of a life of integrity to your children.

2. By design, childhood is the journey to becoming a young adult—not a stage before a decade spent in adolescence. Do your children know that they are becoming young adults? What real jobs and skills does your child need to learn to do so they can grow up? How can you include this kind of learning in your homeschool day?

3. “Skill is habit well formed. Attention is similar to catching and throwing. When we help children, the habit will develop naturally. This work is personal, more than clinical.... When we begin this work when our children are young, the immature habit has not yet formed a deep a formidable rut.” (p. 69) What hope do you find in this approach to what often gets labeled as “attention deficit disorder”—even in very young children? Have you ever considered the idea that none of us have a real “deficit” of attention? We are always giving our attention to something. How can you begin to help your child trust the truth about themselves and learn the habit of giving focused attention to what is needed—rather than focused attention to video games or screen time?

CHAPTER EIGHT – WHERE DO WE BEGIN WITH OLDER CHILDREN?

1. Isaiah’s story is one of true transformation. What about Isaiah’s story encouraged you? Or surprised you? What can you learn from the way Janet helped him learn to struggle well in a way that untangled his brain?

2. “In this life, time is a finite gift. Unlike money, we don’t have an opportunity to make more time if we waste it. I wonder why we are greatly offended when our kids waste money, and we almost don’t seem to notice when they waste time.” (p. 77) Do your own children waste money or time? How can you help your children struggle well and learn to spend both time and money wisely?

3. "Mature relationships protect our children's hope to live free from the tyranny of their own immaturity." (p. 82) Relationships with more than same-aged peers is vital in supporting maturity for our children. What safe and trusting relationships do your children have with older persons who are wise in the ways of helping them grow up? How can you encourage this kind of relationships?

CHAPTER NINE – TRADITIONS BY DESIGN

1. Grade levels are a tradition started in the late 1950's and early 1960's as a response to the baby boom. Standardized education is not serving our children very well. "The immaturity crisis our nation is experiencing—along with staggering statistics about young people crippled with addiction, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and suicide—leaves us no choice but to "hire a moving crew" and put schools together again in a way that serves children by design, not default." (p. 87) How are your children personally affected by the false traditions of standardized education?

2. John 15 Academy offers five Schools instead of standardized grade levels. Children have time to grow and learn—without feeling behind or needing to be ahead. What benefits do you see of this intentional way of organizing children in multi-age groups that eliminates the regimen of grade levels? What are your concerns about organizing education in a new way?

3. "The healing power of 'with'" (pp. 92-94) and "Good questions pair well with great books" (pp. 94-96) make it clear that transformational education is often experienced in mature relationships instead of primarily in independent practice. What are your considerations and questions about these ideas? What one subject could you begin to offer in your homeschool schedule in a way that your children work *with* you instead of working independently?

CHAPTER TEN – CURRICULUM BY DESIGN

1. Pages 98-99 offer a brief history of education in America. After reading those pages, what are your considerations and questions? What are your concerns? Often homeschool education is patterned after the traditions in public education. What is the purpose of your homeschooling efforts?

2. Curriculum selections in a John 15 Academy education are often more rigorous than traditional education because transformational education is aiming at the target of maturity—and because it's ok for children to need help. Consider the ideas in "new criteria for curriculum" (beginning on page 101.) What curriculum are you using now that meets these new criteria? What changes can you make to offer your children the power of inspiration?

3. "Every book and assignment we choose can offer each child a true identity. Children learn who they are in relation to those they trust—and what we give them." (p. 103) Talk about the connection between the things we give our children (gifts, books, food, habits, manners, entertainment...) and the power of those things to convey a message of identity to your children. How are the things you're giving your children helping them grow up?

CHAPTER ELEVEN – WE CAN'T UNSEE

1. Which section of this chapter was most inspiring to you—and why?

CHAPTER TWELVE – LIFE BY DESIGN

1. Look again at the “What Do We Do Now?” section on pages 117–120. Which one step will you take now? Who will help you stick to your commitment? Who can you help stick to their commitment, too?

APPENDIX A – THE JOHN 15 ACADEMY COMMUNITY

Since this book has been published, we have launched a brand new website dedicated specifically to John 15 Academy. If your book references janetnewberry.com at the end of Appendix A, please remember to visit john15academy.com instead.

1. Have you considered joining John 15 Academy? Who can you invite to join you on this transformational journey?

APPENDIX B – EDUCATION BY DESIGN—FIVE SCHOOLS

1. There is more than a list of subjects for each other five Schools in Appendix B. There is also several paragraphs offering details about the maturity development that is important for each age group. How can you adjust your homeschool schedule to make sure you're intentionally supporting your child's growth and maturity—as well as their mastery in subject matter?

APPENDIX C – A NEW WORLDVIEW

1. Good news! Our purpose is no longer to strive to earn an identity, but instead to keep trusting the God who loved us enough to offer us the identity of His Son! Think about the difference between striving and trusting. Both include work. Striving requires working to earn. Trusting invites us to work in response to the truth of who God says we already are. How would one day in your life change if you trusted that your identity was already settled with Father God—and that there's nothing you can do to make Him love you more, and there's nothing you can do to make Him love you less? How would one day in your children's life change?

2. “We believe sin is a force—whose motive is to work against God's perfect design. Sin damages and kills. This damage and death is the punishment of sin—not God.” (p. 135) How does this truth change the way you think about punishment?

3. Which two or three bullet points are the most encouraging in this New Worldview? What ideas inspire you? What ideas do you want to learn more about?

Congratulations! You've completed some great work as you've wrestled with some big ideas in the process of completing this study guide. I'm eager to hear from you and to know what steps you're planning next as you continue trusting God and embracing life by design for yourself and with your family. Send an email to janet@john15academy.com and let's stay in touch. THERE IS GREAT HOPE!