

RETURN

HOW TO DRAW YOUR CHILD BACK TO THE CHURCH

Book Discussion Guide

BRANDON VOGT & PEGGY PANDALEON

RETURN: HOW TO DRAW YOUR CHILD BACK TO THE CHURCH

SESSION 1: *Understanding Why They Leave* (Chapters 1–3; Pages 1–32)

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’”

– Luke 15:11–24

Study Questions

1. Where does your teenager or young adult child(ren) stand on the issue of identifying as Catholic and/or practicing the faith? As best as you can ascertain, what is your child’s reason for their lack of connection with the Church? (You can refer to the most common reasons listed on page 6.)
2. If your child does not identify as “Catholic,” how does he identify in terms of religious affiliation? (see pgs. 14–16)
3. What type of fallen-away Catholic is your child? (see pgs. 16–23)
4. How would your child define God? How personal is your child’s relationship with God and how/when has he encountered him? (If you can’t answer this about your child, you can revisit the question during the dialogue part of the book.)
5. How would you define God? How personal is your relationship with God and how/when have you encountered him?
6. Which of the five myths of why your child won’t return to the Church are you most prone to believe? What do you need to help you stop believing in that myth?
7. Who is ultimately responsible for your child’s faith? What is your role and what is God’s role?
8. How, specifically, would you define success with respect to the return of your loved one?

RETURN: HOW TO DRAW YOUR CHILD BACK TO THE CHURCH

SESSION 2: *Equip Yourself* (Chapters 4–6; Pages 33–78)

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.”

– Luke 18:1–8

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

– Matthew 7:7

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.

– 1 Peter 3:15

Study Questions

1. What has been your “policy” for Mass attendance as your children were growing up? What about older teens and young adults who are visiting or living with you? Do you think your older children ever feel forced or nagged about attending Mass or receiving the sacraments? If so, how can you change to avoid nagging or forcing them?
2. Do you disagree with some of your child’s major moral decisions? Have you discussed these decisions with them? How have these discussions affected your relationship with your child?
3. What do you do when your child raises objections about the Church, Catholic beliefs, morality, going to Mass, or receiving the sacraments? What do you think is the right way to handle these objections?
4. What do you do if you cannot answer a question from your child about the faith? How will you take steps to prevent falling into the category of “you can’t give what you don’t know”?
5. How have you prayed for your child’s return to the faith? What is your prayer plan going forward?
6. How will fasting and sacrifice play a part in your game plan for your child?
7. What is your testimony or story that answers the question “Why are you Catholic and what are the benefits?” Write down an outline of your testimony and pray over it, asking the Lord how to share it with your child at the appropriate time. (see pgs. 74–77)
8. Have you given up control of your children to God? If yes, how and when did you do this?

RETURN: HOW TO DRAW YOUR CHILD BACK TO THE CHURCH

SESSION 3: *Plant the Seeds and Start Conversation*

(Chapters 7–8; Pages 79–103)

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

– Matthew 13:31–32

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

– 1 Corinthians 13:1–2

Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.”

– Luke 4:24

Study Questions

1. “The great danger for any parent,” says Rob Parsons in *Bringing Home the Prodigals*, “is that the desire to let a child know how strongly we disapprove will be greater than the impulse that lets him know, no matter what he has done, he is still loved.” Why is unconditional love so crucial in a relationship? What can you do this week to express your unconditional love to your child?
2. What things have you done or said to your child regarding his attitudes or behavior that have upset him? Do you need to ask your child’s forgiveness for any of these things?
3. How can you get closer to your child by sharing something he loves, so you will be fortifying a foundation of trust and building your relationship with him?
4. Have you ever planted “seed gifts” in your child’s life? If so, how did they work? If not, what are some possible gifts that would especially help your child?
5. What has happened when you’ve started conversations with your child about faith or religion? What have you learned from those experiences?
6. What are your biggest worries or fears about having a spiritual dialogue with your child? Describe the worst-case scenario. Is there some way to avoid or recover from that scenario?
7. If you could ask your child any three questions about God or faith, and be guaranteed thoughtful answers, what would you ask?
8. How will you respond if your child’s answers to your questions contain criticisms of God or the Church and its beliefs?

RETURN: HOW TO DRAW YOUR CHILD BACK TO THE CHURCH

SESSION 4: *Move Forward and Close the Loop* (Chapters 9–11; Pages 104–140)

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

– Acts 17:22–23

Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

– Matthew 16:24

Study Questions

1. What are some important things to remember about your own behavior when you are discussing faith and religion with your child?
2. Do you express joy in your faith? Or is there another adjective that better describes how you live your faith?
3. How should you handle what you think might be a misconception about the Church or something that you cannot answer yourself?
4. After you have started a dialogue, what did you learn are your child’s objections to the faith or to the Church?
5. How can you improve your dialogue with your child by looking for the “positive intention” in his objections?
6. What “shoe pebble” questions can you ask your child?
7. Who or what activities can you suggest to help your child explore a Catholic community? Think of at least three (as some may be rejected).
8. What are some possible “close the loop” questions that would be authentic for you to ask and for your child to consider and take seriously?

RETURN: HOW TO DRAW YOUR CHILD BACK TO THE CHURCH

SESSION 5: *Personal and Moral Objections*

(Chapters 12–13; Pages 141–176)

When many of his disciples heard it [see John 6:25–59], they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

– John 6:60, 66–69

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

– Romans 3:23

Personal Objections

1. Why doesn't your child value attending Mass? What is your own reason for attending Mass regularly? How can you help your child understand what the Mass truly is?
2. Are there certain rules in the Church to which your child objects? How would you explain the reason for these rules?
3. Many Catholics have had bad experiences with a priest or a fellow parishioner. Catholics around the country have been shocked by and abhor the sexual abuse scandal that surfaced in the late 1990s. What are some of the differences between those who remain Catholic in the face of these bad experiences and those who leave the Church?

Moral Objections

4. What are the two meanings of “judging”? Which type of judgment should be avoided and which is permissible?
5. What is the Church's teaching on homosexuality (CCC 2357–2359)? What is the Church's teaching about heterosexual promiscuity or fornication (CCC 1852, 2353)? How do both of these teachings flow from the Catholic belief that sexual relations should occur only within marriage (CCC 2361)?
6. How would you respond to the objection that the Catholic Church oppresses women?
7. Are you familiar with the Church's position on cohabitation, contraception, abortion, and divorce and remarriage? How would you explain the teaching on each one of these moral issues? What resources could you use to help you in your explanation?

RETURN: HOW TO DRAW YOUR CHILD BACK TO THE CHURCH

SESSION 6: *Theological Objections and Conclusion*

(Chapter 14 & Conclusion; Pages 177–196)

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good,
in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.

– Genesis 50:20

For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not sojourn with you.

– Psalms 5:4

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God,
who are called according to his purpose.

– Romans 8:28

For nothing will be impossible with God.

– Luke 1:37

Theological Objections

1. What is the difference between subjective and objective reasons for believing in God? Which should you emphasize with someone who is an atheist? What evidence for God's existence can you share with an atheist?
2. Is science the only key to unlocking the answers to all of our questions and problems? What does science study?
3. Can religion be explained or refuted by science? What are the tools or ways that we explore and understand religion?
4. How can you or your child have a personal encounter with God through the Catholic faith?
5. How biblical is the Catholic Church? Where do you see the connection between the Bible and the Church?
6. How can you shed light on the mystery that evil and suffering exist even though God is all-loving and all-good?
7. What will you do differently in your faith life and family relationships after going through this book? What is your first step this week?
8. How will you manage the ups and downs of drawing your child into a deeper connection with Jesus in the Church?