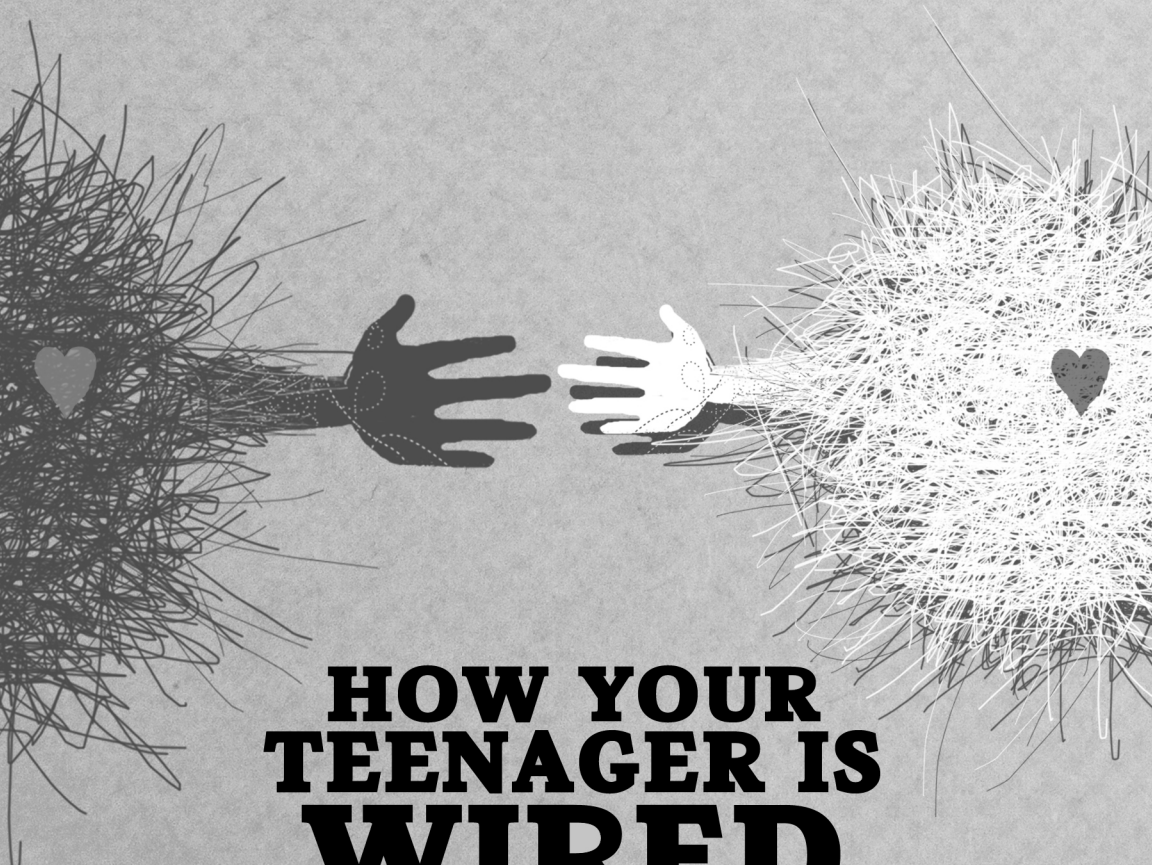


FOR PARENTS



HOW YOUR TEENAGER IS WIRED

discovering who GOD made
YOUR TEENAGER *to be*

Katie Brazelton

FOREWORD BY DOUG FIELDS

How Your Teenager Is Wired

Discovering Who God Made Your Teenager To Be

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The Lord replied to Jeremiah, “Don’t say, ‘I’m too young,’ for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you.”

—Jeremiah 1:7

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FOREWORD

DOUG FIELDS

After more than 30 years in youth ministry, I've figured out a few important lessons:

- I will never regain the “cool” status I held in the eyes of teenagers when I was 21.
- I should delegate all projects requiring technology to younger people.
- Teenage guys can drive all-you-can-eat pizzerias out of business.

More importantly, I've learned that my impact on a teenager's life is nowhere as potent as the impact you can have as a parent. Youth pastors and volunteer youth workers play *important* roles in your teenager's life—but you play the most *vital* and *important* role!

Some people talk about teenagers being the church of tomorrow. I don't believe that! I'm convinced that teenagers who are bold enough to follow Jesus are the church of *today*. They don't have to wait until they're older to do something big for God; they can do it now—and understanding their unique mission is a key step in accomplishing big things for God. And as a parent of three teenagers myself, I know that a parent's gentle tug, inspired motivation, and well-timed words of love and encouragement are so helpful toward a teenager taking a step toward God.

That's why I'm so excited about this book. I've known Katie Brazelton since 1992, and I had the privilege of serving as youth pastor to her son and daughter. She's the real deal! She has sought and discovered God's incredible purpose for her life, and she's turned her passion into her living. For many years now, Katie's primary focus has been to help people discover God's unique mission for their lives. Now she wants to help you help your son/daughter.

This book reflects Katie's passionate commitment to her calling. Her insights will guide you as discover your unique life purpose and will inspire you as you accompany your teenager on that same path.

As a parent, I love seeing my children discover God's mission for their lives, and I value my own unique purpose, too. While working through this book with your teenager, commit to praying for God's leading, take time to ask good questions, and remember to listen and truly hear your child's heart. Every moment you spend helping your child discover their unique purpose will be time well spent.

If you haven't gone through the adventure of finding your unique life purpose, consider meeting with some other adults to discover what God has created each of you to do—even as you walk with your teenager on this journey.

I pray that you and your teenager experience a deeper relationship and incredible discoveries as you pursue God's best for your life!

Doug Fields

INTRODUCTION

When my son and daughter were teenagers in the 1990s, I filled out a fun parental quiz (lightly in pencil) about their likes and dislikes. It asked about their favorite school subject, teacher, and friend, as well as their favorite pet, color, meal, dessert, hobby, car, song, book, movie, and TV show—among a slew of other things. Frankly, I struggled with many of the questions, not having a clue how my kids would answer. Before you conclude that I was a terrible mother, I challenge you to try such a quiz yourself!

The point of the exercise was for parents to open a line of communication with their teenagers by discussing the quiz. As I shared my answers with my kids, we were all shocked to discover that I knew very little about them. My combined score for both of them was a measly 23 percent, and I did a lot of erasing that day—to replace my wrong answers with their correct ones! How could this be? I was a good mom; some even said that I was a great mom. My entire life revolved around my kids. In fact, with my teacher's schedule, I was home when they were home after school, on holidays, and for the entire summer. How could I not know everything about them? What had we been talking about all those years, if not discovering more about one another?

Fast-forward to present day: My two married kids and their families came to visit me in Maui, where I was living for one year to write this book series. Halfway through our time together, I realized that we hadn't talked about anything of substance. Oh, sure, we had discussed dinner plans, kids' naps, the weather, fun outings, snorkeling equipment, the most recent movies we'd seen, or their latest sports injury. And yes, we had snapped tons of pictures, laughed, hugged, explored, shopped, watched hula shows, searched out yogurt shops, and enjoyed sunsets together—but not one word had been uttered about...

- *How's your small group going at church?*
- *Have you made any Christian friends in your new neighborhood?*
- *Are you being a good husband and spiritual leader of your household?*
- *What do you enjoy most about being a wife and mother?*
- *What latest miracle has God performed in your life?*
- *How can I pray for you?*

I was mortified when that realization hit me. How could I be ignoring the really important side of my kids' lives—their *insides*, their heart and soul? It was one level of neglect not to know their favorite song or book, but this was an all-new low for me not to have checked how they were doing in the Lord.

I wish something like this book had been available to me when I was a young married mom; and later a middle-aged, single mom; and now a spry grandmother of two. What a gift it would've been for me if only someone would've reminded me to engage in meaningful conversations with my kids about God's unique plan for their lives, based on how they've been wired. Other than the topic of salvation, is there any more important conversation we can have with our teenagers than the one about their personal surrender to God's will for their life? The bottom line is no. Nothing is more important in our parenting role.

And what a gift it'll be for me in the future to talk with each of my grandchildren about the awesome and bold purpose God has in mind for them.

You're about to embark on a life-changing journey with your teenager. Enjoy it to the hilt! Don't let a decade or two fly by. Now is the time.

Blessings,

Katie Brazelton

PART 1

PREPARING FOR CHANGE

CHAPTER 1

HOW TO HAVE THE BEST POSSIBLE PARENT-TEENAGER RELATIONSHIP

For the Lord is the one who shaped the mountains, stirs up the winds, and reveals his thoughts to mankind. He turns the light of dawn into darkness and treads on the heights of the earth. The Lord God of Heaven's Armies is his name! (Amos 4:13).

Life purpose is a never-ending cry of the human heart. Our teenagers' minds are filled with questions:

- *Why was I born?*
- *Where do I fit in this world?*
- *What does God want me to do after high school?*
- *What major should I declare in college?*
- *What should I be when I grow up?*
- *Will my dreams ever come true?*
- *Is this all there is to life?*
- *What on earth am I here for?*

In response to this cry, parents pray for some process or some person to come along to encourage their teenagers to lead more abundantly blessed

lives of purpose and significance—to live the lives they were meant to live. They want their children to know Christ as their Savior and to be joyful, peaceful, holy, healthy, wise, and fulfilled doing God’s will. They want them to have a rewarding vocation and career in or outside their home—and to become independent and self-sufficient.

Don’t parents dream that their teenagers will discover how they’ve been wired with unique, God-given giftedness? That they’ll understand who they were made to be and how they’ve been readied to answer God’s call on their life? That they’ll launch successfully into God’s distinct plan?

Well, don’t worry about trying to do all that ultra-parenting alone. You have the right resource in your hand. Let’s get your teenager raised—on purpose, with a passionate purpose. Your reward for lovingly serving your young adult in this way will be a relational bond like none other.

As we begin, it’s important to point out that you’ll have the unparalleled privilege of discussing God’s three purposes for your teenager’s life. And it’s most effective to do this in true *trifecta* fashion—with all three purposes working together in perfect harmony to unleash God’s best!

Biblical Purpose Trifecta: 1-2-3

1. Universal Purpose: Love God by belonging to Christ.

Your purpose is to love God by choosing to be transformed into a new person in the image of Christ. This happens by reading God’s Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you to surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. This means that, with the help of your church family (including prayer partners, accountability partners, and mentors), you’re committed to a life of holiness, integrity, right motives, peace, and worshipping your Creator—and helping others to do the same.

Scriptural Basis

- *Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38).*
- *Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:2).*
- *Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).*

2. Universal Purpose: Love God by loving others.

Your purpose is to love God by doing today—with love—what matters today in the responsibilities, daily tasks, and major roles God has assigned you. This includes honoring your Maker by serving with Christ-like love in all your life domains: personal, family, relationships, school, job, ministry, and community. This means that you trust in the Lord for strength and power to fulfill your commitments and meet the challenges that drive your day at home, school, work, and church, and in your neighborhood and ministry setting, and on your mission field.

Scriptural Basis

- *Jesus added, “A second [commandment] is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:39).*
- *This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another (1 John 3:11).*
- *No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us (1 John 4:12).*

3. Unique Purpose: Glorify God by fulfilling your “This I Must Do” Dream.

Your purpose is to glorify God by doing the “One Big Thing” God commissioned you—and you alone—to do to help build the kingdom. This unique, individual, significant purpose directs you to pursue your God-designed life mission with pure joy and to deliver your God-inspired life message to those you’re eager to serve. This purpose is God’s personalized gift to you, and it’s a dream that reflects your passionate ache, your Divine Urge, your heart’s desire, and the fascination that was planted in your soul before you were even born. It’s what drives your life—what you feel you must do. It’s what you’re called to do—what you feel you *can’t not do*! But you must decide if you’ll actually take on this huge commitment to make this eternal contribution that’s obviously impossible to do without God’s help.

Scriptural Basis

- *“I [Jesus] brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4).*
- *“In the same way that you gave me [Jesus] a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world” (John 17:18 The Message).*
- *Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires (Psalm 37:4).*

This third purpose—an individual’s unique, “This I Must Do” dream—is the focus of this book.

Fulfill Your God-Given, “This I Must Do” Dream

God is famous for planting *must-do* assignments in people’s hearts. Consider these life-changing ones:

- **Noah**, build an ark before the great flood. (Genesis 6:13-21)
- **Abram**, go to the land I’ll show you—without knowing any specifics. (Genesis 12:1-3)
- **Sarah**, you’ll be the mother of nations at the age of 90. (Genesis 17:15-16)
- **Moses**, go to Pharaoh and demand the release of my people. (Exodus 3:10, 20)
- **Gideon**, go with the strength you have and rescue Israel from the Midianites. (Judges 6:12-16)
- **Samuel**, anoint David king (in spite of ensuing turmoil). (1 Samuel 16:12-13)
- **John the Baptist**, prepare the way for me. (Luke 1:13-17)
- **Mary**, you’re a virgin but you’ll give birth to a Son who will reign with an everlasting kingdom. (Luke 1:28-38)
- **Peter**, feed my lambs. (John 21:15-17)
- **Paul**, proclaim the good news to the Gentiles. (Galatians 1:13-16)

The list goes on and on—moments when God commissions ordinary people to do extraordinary things that take a lifetime to see to final completion or when God calls ordinary people to complete an impossible task that defines and shapes the rest of their lives. Why would you or your teenager be an exception to that pattern of the ordinary person being used to do the extraordinary? God is glorified when we’re stretched beyond our personal ability to complete an impossible task.

What about God's call on your life?

So, you want your teenager to answer God's call and travel boldly down the pathway to purpose, but have you lost sight of your own big dreams, secret hopes, and deepest longings? You want to bring more glory to God with your life, but are you carrying such heavy weights of exhaustion, fear, doubt, regrets, hopelessness, boredom, loneliness, or sin that you've forgotten how to sing, play, laugh, and pray to unleash your own creativity and dreams—let alone help your teenager do so? An underlying premise of this book is that you can't expect to help your teenager discover and fulfill God's all-encompassing, best plan if you yourself haven't given serious thought to your own purpose for the second half of your life—AK (After Kids) and WG (While Grandparenting).

Worshipping God through parenting

You may say, "I worship God with my life by being a great parent!" I couldn't agree more that parenting is an incredible way to worship and bring glory to God. I was a single mom for most of my kids' lives (after my young husband had two heart attacks/surgeries, left our marriage as he struggled with a fear of dying, and then died soon after) so I know it's a huge job to parent. In fact, I know it's one of God's most precious ordinations into ministry—the ministry of parenting. We certainly have to be called and blessed to walk that walk with grace.

As children and teenagers begin to learn to love others, share Jesus, connect with people, grow in their faith, serve others, and worship God, somebody must model those universal life-purpose principles for them and love them unconditionally when they fall short. They can't just raise themselves into Christ-likeness. And in the meantime, they have constant human needs for food, shelter, and clothing—and also human desires for safety, security, love, belonging, happiness, self-esteem, respect, and creativity. The job and joy of a parent is to raise God's kids, who are

simply on loan to us! And we're to be the wind beneath their wings as they learn to soar into the lifetime dream God has reserved for them.

Some BIG dreams are common to many

Allow me to clarify something. Certain *big* dreams are common to many people. For example, God gives some generalized lifetime dreams that revolve around spiritual growth, life roles, and seasonal purposes:

- Worship God and serve in fellowship with others who love Jesus
- Be accountable to a few spiritually mature friends who help me grow in my faith
- Get a good education that allows me to work in my area of God-given passion
- Be happily married to a faithful, Christ-following spouse
- Raise healthy, kind, and smart children who love Jesus
- Bless my family with financial security, a safe environment, and great memories
- Be lovingly available to my grandchildren and aging parents

I'm the first to applaud each of these dreams, goals, and purposes as being richly significant. They certainly cause countless people to lead fruitful and blessed lives. Because these big dreams are common to so many people, they're listed at this point to acknowledge the importance of them as assignments from God. These mutual dreams won't be the focus of this book, though, because they're not exclusive to one person; they're an incredible blessing for many Christ-followers.

Interestingly, the Bible is clear that we all have specific, unique, broad-reaching, kingdom-building work to do that was entrusted to us alone. That work is different from our intense seasonal roles, such as parenting

or grandparenting. If our life mission were limited to parenting only, for example, notice how the meaning of these two verses would narrow tremendously:

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago [in our own households] (Ephesians 2:10).

Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do [as a good parent to your children] (Ephesians 5:17).

God didn't tell us to continue to limit our lifetime dream, our role in this world, our mission on earth to only our own families, even after our children are adults. Our parenting days are not only a gift to us, but they're also a boot camp and a serious training ground for us to have more influence in a wider arena later on.

Your unique purpose...beyond parenting

Let's turn our focus to your most far-reaching, lifetime dream. Perhaps you've been able to pursue this dream as you've been parenting your children, but I know that many adults discover or rediscover that dream as parenting days wind to a close. It's OK to admit that you, a fabulously wonderful parent, may be asking God these questions:

- What about me? I love my children, but I also long to make a difference in the world. You gave me this passionate ache in my heart.
- My teenagers won't always be at home. What purpose will I have after they're raised? I'd love to rediscover the fascination in my soul that you orchestrated specifically for me!
- When I was young, I felt like you'd given me such lofty dreams, in addition to parenting. What happened to my other Divine Urge?

We're God's Ambassador to the World

Our “This I Must Do” mission is to tell others about Jesus in the individualized way God designed us to do it! Just for fun, try to insert into these passages a limiting parental phrase like these: *within your family, in my household, or as a good parent to my children.*

- **Isaiah's Answer to God's Call.** *Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?” I [Isaiah] said, “Here I am. Send me” (Isaiah 6:8).*
- **Produce Lasting Fruit.** *“You didn't choose me. I [Jesus] chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name” (John 15:16).*
- **I'm Bound by the Spirit to Go.** *“But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God” (Acts 20:24).*
- **God Equips Christians With Spiritual Gifts.** *In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well (Romans 12:6).*
- **Christ's Representatives.** *And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him (2 Corinthians 5:18).*
- **God's Mighty Power.** *Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).*
- **Encouragement for Christians.** *So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do (2 Thessalonians 1:11).*

- **Offer Your Life to God.** *But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you (2 Timothy 4:5).*
- **Paul's Assignment.** *I [Paul] have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives....It is by the command of God our Savior that I have been entrusted with this work for him (Titus 1:1, 3).*

- I'm so exhausted from raising my children. Will you ever renew my passion for the burden you placed on my heart for the world?
- Being a parent is a privilege; in fact, it's one of the finest gifts you've ever given me. But what about the other distinct life mission you gave me that will allow me to make a significant contribution to the kingdom-at-large?

God speaks. We listen.

The Bible tells us in Amos 4:13 that the Lord God Almighty reveals his thoughts to mankind. Yes, it really does say that we can expect to hear, see, or somehow understand God's thoughts. Scripture tells us to expect revelation!

And by the way, it's natural to have a strange reaction to the hard-to-comprehend idea that you've got a fascinating, custom-made purpose assigned by God. For example, you may feel...

- "I'm not worthy enough, smart enough, or holy enough to shoulder the responsibility of a personalized, impassioned life mission that God will reveal to me—besides parenting."
- "The dream I'm sensing must be of my own making because of prideful and selfish desires I have—and besides, I really need to stay focused on my family."
- "God, you're a taskmaster, and I know you'll assign me something too difficult and too unappealing—and I won't want to do it, after I finish raising my children. Frankly, I don't really want to know what my mission is, because I don't want to end up as an overseas missionary."
- "I don't have the right motives, spiritual gifts, or character traits to complete the new task—and, anyway, I'm comfortable in the current role you delegated to me. I love being a spouse and parent!"

The list of reactions to God's call is endless. The truth is that none of us is good enough to measure up to the precious task of parenting or of doing something else equally magnificent for God beyond parenting. And we all have tons of doubts, concerns, and fears. Fortunately, it's only by the grace and power of God that we'll be able to answer the long-term call on our lives so we can't ever boast that it's of our own doing.

Just like Moses, who begged God in Exodus 4 to send someone else to talk to Pharaoh, you may be praying at this point that God would please take back your revealed life purpose. Have you ever wished that you could hide in your comfort zone as a parent by leaving your apron strings tied to your teenager a tad bit longer?

Please hear my heart on this, when I urge you to move the focus off yourself and onto a passionate God, who has entrusted you with purpose-filled daydreams and elaborate imaginings, most probably for your post-child-rearing days. God has designed a perfect "second-half-of-life" purpose for you, and God wants you to prepare yourself now to follow hard after your vision to further the kingdom. And if you've already been pursuing God's wonderfully unique purpose for you, your influence and impact can grow as your teenagers enter their young adult years.

I wish that someone had written words of encouragement like this for me when I was a young mom! It would've saved me years of tears, wrong turns, and frustrations by helping me be calm and God-confident enough to capture an inkling of the lifetime dream that God had laid out for me—in its own season. I wish I had known that God had reserved a "This I Must Do" purpose for me to enjoy when the timing was right—one that would cause me to become more like Jesus Christ. But I didn't sit still long enough to know that I'd been called to...

- humbly serve those who were seeking their life purpose
- unleash my passion for discipling others
- lean into my spiritual gifts of teaching, encouragement, and leadership

And what about all the other insights I might have learned about my motives, relationships, values, opportunities, and other great stuff? I could've gotten a decade-long jump on living out the passion-mission-vision that God orchestrated solely for me, after my kids were grown, married, and transferred out-of-state by their employers—without my consent!

True, even if I had received a monumental vision from God...

- sin would've still blocked me time and time again from moving forward
- circumstances would've still thrown up roadblocks every time I turned around
- my own doubts and fears would've still sabotaged my progress
- people would've still disappointed me over and over again in ministry

But you know what? I would have...

- learned sooner about the importance of trusting and obeying God
- caused less harm to others, because I'd have been focused on the truth and goodness and significance assigned to my life—as a parent and also as an ambassador for God to the world
- experienced joy in knowing that my life mattered in the greater design of God's plan—even after parenting

Keep that background in mind—you have a distinct, passionate, individualized purpose on earth (beyond those holy, irreplaceable, significance-filled purposes common to many, like parenting). It's time to dig in. In the next chapter, I'll give you our plan of attack—how you're going to help your teenager discover how he or she has been wired by God to fulfill a unique life purpose—after you, first, put on your own life mission oxygen mask. Bottom line, you are being asked to invite God to reveal your own “This I Must Do” purpose, too!