Bob: At some point in your child’s life, you’re probably going to have some kind of a conversation about the reality of death—either because a family member has died or someone they know has died. How do you have that conversation? Elyse Fitzpatrick says you paint a biblical picture of what death is all about.

Elyse: Death is a release from the body of sin. For the believer, who knows the Christ who has gone before him through death, it’s like Christian crossing the river to the Celestial City. There will be someone there, with us, who will walk with us to that celestial city.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, March 31st. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. If you’re a parent, there are some tough conversations that you’re going to have to have. We’re going to help get you ready for those today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. There are some topics—as you’re raising kids, some topics that can come up—either come up in the home or come up in the news/in the culture that, as a parent, you just go: “I would rather not have to deal with that right now. I’d rather not have to talk about that. I don’t know what to say!”

You felt like that when you were raising your kids; didn’t you?

Dennis: I did; and the Scriptures really warn us, as dads—but I think also moms—even though the Bible doesn’t have a mother’s name right there. It says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

I think what can make children angry is if their parents stick their head in the sand about issues that these kids are facing—as they go to school, as they play sports, as they’re watching the news—and not explain it. I remember when our youngest, Laura, was still at home. There was some national news around sex—that really demanded that we have to have a conversation with her, even though she was only—as I recall—13 or 14 years old. I would have preferred only to have had that conversation with her maybe before she got married; okay?
Bob: But when it’s on the evening news every night, you have to address it; don’t you?

Dennis: You do. You have to press into it, with sweaty palms and a shaking heart—not knowing all the answers and maybe not even knowing all of what you’re going to say before you say it. You can’t stick your head in the sand in this culture today and raise children. They demand more than that—and especially if you’re following the blueprints of Scripture because this is a gritty book—this isn’t about some kind of fairy tale.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: This is about the ugliness of humanity and our need for a Savior. We have a couple of authors with us today, who have written a book called, Answering Your Kids’ Toughest Questions. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson join us, again, on FamilyLife Today. Jessica, Elyse, welcome back.

Jessica: Thank you.

Elyse: Thanks so much.

Dennis: As mother and daughter, they have collaborated together to tackle some really tough issues. We’re not going to get to all of these today, but let me just list some of the issues we have to talk about today—natural disasters: “Why does God allow a hurricane, or a tsunami, or a tornado?” We lost a staff member, here at FamilyLife, less than a year ago, to a tornado—and two of his daughters/teenage daughters. “Why does God allow that?—terrorism—what about divorce, suicide, doubt?—or, as we talked about earlier, pornography?” How do you deal with these questions?

Ladies, I’m going to take you to one of the top issues that kids will ask about and that’s about death—maybe it’s a grandparent’s death, maybe it’s a child or a classmate at school. How do you handle the question when your child comes home, Jessica, and says, “Mom, what happens when people die?” or “Why was she allowed to die?”

Jessica: Yes; actually, as I was writing this chapter on death, both my grandparents had passed away within six weeks, I think, of each other. As I was writing this chapter, it was still very fresh for me. So, walking my kids through that was a very difficult thing.

I think one of the things that is hard for kids to understand is: “Well, you say that they go to heaven; but at a funeral I see them right there. How are they in heaven and right here?”

One thing that we want to talk to our kids about is—what it means to have a soul. This body is like our home. We’ll come home now—after we do this interview, we’ll fly home and I’ll go in my home. It’s the same thing—your soul is using your body as your home, right now—but then, when you die, your soul is in heaven with Christ, which is actually our true home. This is just a temporary dwelling place; but soon, we’ll be in our true
home—where there will be no more sadness, no more tears, no more death—we’ll stay there forever. Death takes you away from here but then you’re with Christ.

**Dennis:** That question and that answer can bring comfort, and it can bring hope. It can really minister to a child; but there’s another side to that, Elyse—and that’s the question, when a loved one / a friend, who was a person you really cared about, dies—they never went to church / didn’t give any profession of faith—and your child goes, “So, did Aunt Betty go to hell?”

**Elyse:** Yes. I don’t think that any of us can answer with complete assurance; however, yes, I do believe in a literal hell. I would say to a child: “What Jesus Christ has done is so beautiful, so magnificent / so glorious—that to refuse that gift, and to turn your back on His incarnation—His condescension in becoming a man and then living a perfect life in our place and dying our death, and then being resurrected—to spurn that is a sin that is so heinous it deserves punishment, eternally.”

**Bob:** This is important because you’re saying that before you can really talk about hell, you have to help your child have a different understanding of sin than most kids have.

**Elyse:** Right.

**Dennis:** And who God is, importantly.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Elyse:** Yes.

**Dennis:** He’s a God of justice.

**Elyse:** Yes.

**Dennis:** He’s a God of mercy. He does deal with people with loving kindness.

**Elyse:** Yes.

**Dennis:** You may not know—back to your point—you may not know what has taken place in the soul of that person; but you have a chance, in my opinion, at that point, to explain how that child can know Jesus Christ.

**Elyse:** Yes.

**Dennis:** Use that opportunity to explain how they can have a relationship with Him.

**Bob:** And to explain that we’re not simply talking about: “Did that person have good behavior or bad behavior in their lives?”
Elyse: Right.

Dennis: Exactly.

Jessica: Right.

Bob: —we’re talking about: “How did that person relate to or respond to the grace of God? Did they embrace it, or did they reject it?”

Elyse: Correct.

Bob: And that’s the essence of what keeps us out of hell—

Elyse: Yes.

Bob: —or what consigns us to hell.

Dennis: We ought to be looking for opportunities to introduce our children to God. That means explaining what Jesus Christ did on my behalf, as a parent, and on the child’s behalf, as a young person.

I want to take the issue of death one step further and talk about the issue of suicide. This is one that is occurring, increasingly, in our culture. When we’ve done broadcasts on suicide, I’m amazed to have the letters we get and how broad this is across our country. It seems that everybody is impacted around suicide.

Elyse: Yes.

Bob: Well, of course, back last summer, when Robin Williams committed suicide, there were a lot of parents, who were getting questions from their kids like: “How did he do it? Why did he do it? What’s going on?” So, did you handle—

Jessica: Absolutely! I sat and talked with my boys. I don’t think my daughter was there, at the time; but both of my boys asked: “Wait! What?” They know him from movies that they’ve seen—Night at the Museum, Jumanji—all these different movies. We talked about what comes with suicide—this hopelessness.

Now, you were saying that, in the conversation of death, we get to talk about Jesus Christ. Every conversation—it is like in Deuteronomy—“Talk about it when you walk by the way. Talk about it no matter what—when you go in / when you come out.” This is just another conversation, where we can talk to our children about: “This is what hopelessness leads to,”—this sort of realization that—“There's nothing left for me, and it's better for me now to take my life.”
We talked to our kids—we talked to both of our boys—about we, as Christians, don’t have to experience that hopelessness. Now, that’s not to say that there aren’t Christians who commit suicide.

I think that there are Christians who commit suicide—I think there is a serious issue of mental illness that needs to be addressed. We talk to our kids a little bit about that too: “What is mental illness?” The beauty is—for the Christian / for the true believer, even suicide doesn’t separate you from the love of Christ. Romans 8—“neither death nor life”—nothing separates you from His love.

**Dennis:** As you had this discussion—I just have to add—you have to use it as an opportunity to do two things with your kids. Number one, to instruct them—

**Jessica:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —about how they handle a friend who may be talking about suicide.

**All:** Yes.

**Dennis:** This can happen at some pretty young ages.

**Jessica:** Yes.

**Dennis:** It doesn’t just happen in the late teens and into the 20’s. This is happening at earlier—

**Jessica:** It is.

**Dennis:** —and earlier ages. Then—secondly—what to do if your child ever really has suicidal thoughts? Again, this is back to the issue we talked about earlier, pornography. As a parent, we’re afraid, by introducing the subject, that we’re going to introduce the possibility or the idea that it might happen.

**Bob:** We’re going to get them thinking about something they wouldn’t otherwise be thinking about—that’s our concern.

I remember—when I was a teenager, I didn’t have suicidal thoughts; but I remember listening to Blood, Sweat, and Tears; okay?—they’re a band from the 60’s. Here was David Clayton Thomas, lead singer, and he was singing, “… and when I die, and when I’m gone, there’ll be one child born in this world to carry on.” I remember thinking, “So, if I died, there’ll be a child to carry on.” Then I thought, “Then, if I died and I went to heaven, I’d be in a better place.” Then I thought, “Well, maybe the best thing for me…”

**Dennis:** Interesting.
Bob: You know, it's just the logical side of—

Dennis: Well, you took the words literally.

Bob: Sure!

Dennis: It's back to what Elyse talked to Jessica about—music, movies—

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: —all have a worldview.

Bob: A child is, at some point, likely to, at least, have that thought of: “I wonder what would happen. I wonder what it would feel like. I wonder, if I took these pills… I wonder what death would feel like.” They're going to have those thoughts. We ought to be having some kind of conversation with them about it.

Jessica: Absolutely—be proactive, please!—not just leave them to look to the internet for their answers. They have questions. I don't know if we think that they're too stupid or maybe they're not fully-developed enough. Kids have questions. I think that the most important thing is to create this environment where they feel like they can ask them.

Elyse: That they can ask anything.

Jessica: Anything at all. We said that to our kids, over and over—create the environment of— not this huge sort of judgment: “You're not my favorite kid if you ask that question or if you broach that topic with me,”—that, somehow—“My love for you is going to diminish,”—“If you ask me, ‘Is God real?’ my love for you won’t diminish. My love for you will actually probably increase because it will build relationship.”

Bob: And “I won’t freak out if you ask.”

Jessica: Yes.

Bob: Did you ever freak out when your kids asked questions that you were uncomfortable with?

Elyse: I don’t know that I actually freaked out simply because I thought that I was wanting to have answers. We always were that kind of family. But, I don’t think we really encouraged a lot of questions because we didn’t have the kind of context that Jessica is talking about, where we were very open about our own doubts and struggles. But, I think, as you were getting older, Jessica, we began to really practice confessing our sins. It became more of an atmosphere where we could talk about our sin, but I don’t know how much we actually talked about our own doubt.
Bob: Did you notice things changing as you got older?

Jessica: Well, I think, for sure. I mean—as probably late high school or right around in there—things definitely started changing. I think, even for my family, things have been changing even more dramatically. The more I’m willing to talk to my boys—when they say: “I go to church, and it doesn’t mean anything to me,”—instead of saying, “Oh, you just need to listen more and—

Elyse: —“take good notes!”

Jessica: —“take better notes!” I’ve been able to say to them: “There are weeks that I go, that my heart isn’t alive either—like I don’t feel quickened.” If we can stay centered on “Jesus Christ is the Author and Perfector of our faith,”—there—that’s where we can build confidence in our children.

Bob: You know, the faith issue is one of those issues that parents can have a tendency to freak out over.

Elyse: Yes.

Bob: A child asks a question like: “How can I trust God?” or “I don’t believe there is a God,” or something like that—they make those statements. We can get itchy about that. When you turn on the news, and there’s a question about 250,000 people dying in a natural disaster, and your child says, “Well why did God allow that or cause it?”—did God cause that to happen, Elyse?

Elyse: Right; you know, that’s where having built an understanding of what we would call a worldview paradigm, which is: creation, fall, redemption, consummation. We want to say: “When the world was first created, in its beauty and goodness, there would not have been tsunamis that killed 250,000 people—but, at the fall, not only did mankind fall into this bent state, but Romans 8 tells us that creation itself fell. The world is now groaning.”

Do I want to say, “Did God set out that day to kill 250,000 people?” I don’t think I want to say that—but what I do want to say is: “God is sovereign. He is ruling over this creation and part of what happens with sin is that the creation itself has fallen. We are waiting for the redemption of the creation, with a new heaven and a new earth, where these things will not happen anymore.”

Bob: Okay, I could see having that conversation with my 14-year-old.

Elyse: Right.
Bob: Now Jessica, how do you have that conversation with the six-year-old—who says, talking about creation being under the curse and groaning. Can you have that kind of conversation with a six year old?

Jessica: Yes; obviously, you would use different terms. I’ll go into that a little bit differently. I do think, though, that talking to them continually about this paradigm: “Okay, so listen, Sweetie—when God created the world, He created it perfect.” I think I like to use the term, “unnatural disasters,”—these actually aren’t the way they were intended to be: “God created the world so it would be perfect, but then you know what happened?—sin. Adam and Eve sinned. You know what? Where sin goes, tears go; where sin goes, death goes; unless Jesus Christ redeems it. One day—one day, it’ll be totally redeemed and we’ll be in a place where there will be no more unnatural disasters.”

Bob: “And in those disasters, there were some people who died who loved Jesus.”

Elyse: Yes.

Jessica: Yes.

Bob: “For them, that was the best day of their life.”

Jessica: Correct.

Bob: Right?

Jessica: Right.

Elyse: Because, for the believer, death is a release from the body of sin. I mean, what could be worse than living millennia after millennia in these sin-cursed bodies? So, for the believer—who knows the ultimate Resurrection and who knows the Christ, who has gone before him through death, and will take him through death to Himself—for the believer, as terrifying as death is, because we’ve never been there / we’ve never experienced it; it’s like Christian crossing the river to the Celestial City.

Bob: Right.

Elyse: There will be someone there, with us, who will walk us to that celestial city.

Dennis: You know, what we’re talking about here really is faith.

Elyse: Yes.

Dennis: It’s: “Who do you trust?” and “What story are you going to believe?” What I’d like to say, here, to that parent who has to have all the answers, let me tell you—this
world is going to throw enough stuff at you—you’re simply not going to be able to make practical sense out of everything you see happening. I don’t think God wants us to figure it out. I think He’s up to something far beyond our own imagination—He’s at work. I mean, we lost a granddaughter, who lived seven days. Now, how do you explain to that little girl—Molly’s cousins—what that is all about?

But I look at the Book and I ask this question: “Show me a better book, other than the Bible, that explains what’s happened here on the planet?” That yes, it is broken—it groans because of its desire for redemption. He’s coming back—there’s hope. He’s going to take us out of here, and there is a place called heaven where there will not be those tears anymore. There won’t be any unanswered questions because we’re going to see the answer, face to face.

Bob: I think this is important because I think a lot of people are looking for the air-tight case for Christianity—

Dennis: I think you’re right, Bob.

Bob: —that leaves no questions unanswered—and that the truth is—we’re not going to make that case.

Dennis: If you could answer them all,—

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: —you’d be God.

Bob: That’s right.

Dennis: Okay. I just say—to the parent: “It’s okay not to know.”

Jessica: Absolutely.

Dennis: “It is okay not to know”; but it is, I think, important to say to your child: “You know, as we look at these things, we are going to doubt / we are going to struggle. We are going to have unanswered questions—

Bob: But the preponderance of evidence—

Dennis: It’s back to my statement that I have quoted Tom Skinner—

Bob: Tom Skinner; yes.

Dennis: —Tom Skinner on, years ago. This is really one of the key statements that turned my faith in the right direction when I was in college as well—Jessica, as you
shared earlier. He said this—he said: “I spent a long time trying to come to grips with my doubts when, suddenly, I realized I’d better come to grips with what I believe. I have since moved from the agony of questions that I cannot answer to the reality of answers that I cannot escape. And that is a great relief!”

Jessica: Yes.

Bob: It’s that kind of understanding that you’re trying to help moms, dads, and kids come to as they battle with hard questions. These are legitimately hard questions that you’re tackling, here, in your book. There are issues like homosexuality, pornography, violence in the home, abuse, war, terror—all of the issues that we’re facing in our culture today. It’s legitimate for kids to have questions about that; and parents need to have a thoughtful response, even if it doesn’t answer the question completely. At least, show that you’ve thought about this and that you’ve found a way to trust in God in a broken world.

We’ve got copies of Elyse and Jessica’s book, Answering Your Kids’ Toughest Questions: Helping Them Understand Loss, Sin, Tragedies, and Other Hard Topics. The book is in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper left-hand corner of the screen that says “GO DEEPER.” You can order a copy of the book from us, online. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com. The title of the book is Answering Your Kids’ Toughest Questions by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson. You can also call to order: 1-800-FL-TODAY, 1-800-358-6329. That’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY.”

You know, I had lunch with a friend of mine, not long ago. We were talking about issues that he’s facing in his life and in his marriage. He’s a new dad—his wife’s expecting. They’ve been married for about five years, and they’re experiencing some financial pressure in their family. As we talked about the issues, we realized the financial pressure was not the root issue—that there were relationship issues that need to be addressed. I had the opportunity to offer him some counsel but, also, to point him and his wife to one of our Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways. In fact, I know the church that this guy goes to; and I knew that their church would be willing to scholarship this couple to attend the getaway.

I drove away from that lunch, thinking to myself: “What would I do in situations like that if I didn’t have FamilyLife to point people to? If I didn’t have articles, resources, books, this radio program—if I didn’t have that kind of help—what would I do?” Honestly, it made me grateful for those of you, as listeners, who join with Dennis and me in helping to financially contribute to the ministry of FamilyLife Today. Both of us—Dennis and I—are both Legacy Partners. We want to thank those of you, who are supporters of this ministry, as well. You help make this daily radio program possible, and we’re grateful for your partnership with us.
If you’d like to join the team of Legacy Partners, who help make FamilyLife Today possible, I encourage you to go to our website: FamilyLifeToday.com/Legacy. The information you need is available there. You can sign up, online. We’d love to have you join the team. Again, it's FamilyLifeToday.com/Legacy. Thanks, in advance, for locking arms with us and being a part of this ministry.

Now, I hope you can join us back tomorrow when we’re going to talk about homosexuality and same-sex marriage and how we engage with our kids around that subject and more.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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