Bob: Eryn Lynum remembers the day she and her husband realized that the choices you make say more about what you really believe than the things you say matter most to you.

Eryn: We went for a drive one day—it was raining. I just pulled out my journal, and we decided to write down what we wanted to be the core values of our family. We started thinking through what we wanted those foundational things to be—things like a deep faith, and generosity, and wonder, and awe. We started writing them out; and when we were finished, we looked at the list. We realized that what our life looked like was very much in contrast to that list.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, November 1st. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. We’ll hear today about how the Lynum family got their priorities to mesh together and how that changed the choices they were making. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us.

Dennis: Have you ever heard of a little, teeny house—teeny weeny house?

Bob: Are you talking about tiny houses?

Dennis: Yes; that’s what I was talking about.

Bob: Yes; one of my sons—he was showing me all of these tiny houses. I mean—you’ve seen them.

Dennis: Yes; right.

Bob: The design is pretty cool. You look at it and you go, “Yes; that could be fun for a week.”

Dennis: Two to three hundred—[Laughter]

Bob: And I’m not so sure. [Laughter]
Dennis: Yes; exactly—two to three hundred square feet. I think your son probably thought it was a great idea until he got married and thought about sharing it with his wife, and then soon-to-be children; right? [Laughter]

Bob: Right.

Dennis: No doubt about it.

Well, our guest on the broadcast, Eryn Lynum, has a husband—her only husband, by the way—

Eryn: Yes.

Dennis: —not a husband, but her only husband, who builds tiny houses.

Bob: I wondered what the tiny house connection was, because it’s nothing to do with the book she’s written; right?

Eryn: Well, I don’t know.

Dennis: Yes; there you go.

Welcome to the broadcast, anyway.

Eryn: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Dennis: Well, they live in Fort Collins, Colorado. She’s married to Grayson, who is the builder of tiny houses.

Eryn: Yes.

Dennis: And by the way, if you’re wondering what a tiny house is—

Bob: —you haven’t been watching—what network is it?—is it HGTV? I don’t know—one of those.

Eryn: They have one. There are a few now.

Bob: There are a bunch of shows on TV. You can Google® this stuff and find these tiny houses—they’re pretty interesting.

Dennis: They have wheels, which means they could move; but they’re not—

Bob: —mobile homes.
Dennis: No; and they’re not a recreational vehicle to be pulled up in the Rocky Mountains, where they live for a camping experience.

She is married to Grayson since 2009; they have four children. They do not have a tiny house. She has written a book called *936 Pennies: Discovering the Joy of Intentional Parenting*.

Bob: And I thought it would be good for her—you [Eryn] should know—one of Dennis’s children, when asked to describe his dad—

Dennis: —who’s no longer in the will, by the way, because of this—[Laughter]

Bob: Oh, no, no—he [was asked], “What’s a word that would describe your dad?” And the word was “intentional.” I think, in working with Dennis for awhile, that’s a pretty accurate description.

When I became a parent, I would say I was an in-the-moment parent as opposed to an intentional parent. Do you think that’s how most parents are today, in the moment, as opposed to intentional?

Eryn: You know, I could agree with that. I think maybe we could twist “in the moment”; because in the book, I talk a lot about being in the moment and not reacting in the moment.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: So it’s not bad to be in the moment?

Eryn: No; it’s good to be in the moment. It’s good to be present with your children and to be aware of those moments all around us so that, when we see them, we can grasp them and use them for intentional purposes.

Bob: But when I was talking about being in the moment, you know what I’m saying—I’m saying, “It’s just what matters—is the moment—without any thought of, ‘Where are we going?’” It’s kind of the difference between driving around and having a destination.

Eryn: Oh, yes; for sure. Yes; I think that’s a strong temptation for all of us parents.

Dennis: The concept for your book really came from your child’s dedication at church; right?

Eryn: It did. Yes; he was a year-and-a-half old—this was our second child—and we were having him dedicated at our church. We were standing before God and our church family and vowing to raise this child to know and follow the Lord, by His grace, of course. At the end of the service, our pastor turned to us and the other parents on that
stage. He handed each parent a jar of 936 pennies. He gave it to us and he said, “In this jar, every penny represents one week that you have with your child between birth and 18.” You can imagine it felt a little heavier at that moment, with that visualization. He challenged us to take out a penny every week as a reminder that our days are limited.

Psalm 90:12 says, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” We took that little jar home; and honestly, I couldn’t do it for a couple of weeks. I kind of left it in the back of our car, rolling around—

**Bob:** You couldn’t take out a penny?

**Eryn:** I couldn’t—well, the problem was we had 72 pennies to take out, because our son was a year-and-a-half.

**Bob:** Oh.

**Eryn:** And so that was heavy on my heart. I think a lot of parents can relate to that feeling of, you know, “So much time has slipped away already, and what did we do with it?”

I got this idea; and what we did was—we set up a second jar. This is the jar now where we put a penny every week—because when we see that first jar going down, the temptation is to mourn the loss or to be overwhelmed with guilt, and regret, and shame—but instead, now, we see the other jar building up. It’s—

**Dennis:** —an investment.

**Eryn:** It’s an investment—exactly that; yes.

**Dennis:** So what prompted you to end up turning this into a book? Was it just watching those two jars, one empty out and the other one grow?

**Eryn:** You know—and actually, there were so many God-moments in this journey. When we were first given our jar, I was doing a little bit of blogging at the time. I more just did it so I could see my life and my motherhood a little clearer. I wrote a little story about the penny jar. I put it out there into the “WebSphere,” and God just ran with it. The next day, it had 10,000 hits; and for me, that was a massive—I thought the website was broken. [Laughter] We just kept watching; and within two months, it had over a million views and all of these comments and messages coming in from parents.

My husband and I—we had always thought, you know, “Maybe a book, at some point, would be neat to do”; but timing felt awful. I was newly-pregnant with number three, and he was working, and I was doing a bit of work from home. But God just kept laying it on
our hearts as those messages came in. I just felt like, “When am I going to have time to write a book on time?”

But God made it happen, and we just started praying about it. You know, we had no idea what it would entail to get a book into a bookstore—what the publishing process looked like—but all I knew was that God was calling me to show up at that writing desk. So that’s what we did. I just—my husband helped me make it happen—and we just kept writing, and He aligned all those details.

Bob: Eryn, what were the people who were reading your blog—what were they saying back to you that was resonating with you?

Eryn: That was resonating with me—a lot of them started with the fact that they were in tears reading it. You know, tears are a good sign that there’s an emotional connection there.

Dennis: Were they grieving?

Eryn: Some of them were—some of them were, for certain. Some of them were grieving because of guilt, because they felt like they had spent time they couldn’t get back; so I knew that was a strong aspect of the message. Some of them—and these were the hardest ones—they were grieving because they didn’t get to spend all their pennies. Those were the messages that were the most difficult for me—like: “What do I do with this? I can’t speak into these lives of parents who have lost children.”

The interesting thing was that, halfway through writing the book, my husband and I suffered a miscarriage. Not that I would say that that happened for the purpose of the book; but I would say that God used it, because suddenly I knew, to an extent, what those parents were going through. I knew how to write that into the book—and the truth about: “We are never guaranteed a full jar of pennies, so how does that change how we parent today? If we’re never guaranteed tomorrow, how does that change the words that we use today?—and how we choose to use the moments?—and whether we sit down and play with our child or have that conversation instead of picking up our phone?” That knowledge—that we never know how long we have—it changes how we parent our kids.

Dennis: You have four kids, as we mentioned earlier, three sons and a daughter.

Eryn: Yes.

Dennis: What are the ages?

Eryn: So, my oldest turns seven next month, and then we have a five-year-old boy, a three-year-old boy, and a four-month daughter.
Dennis: You are in the thick of it.

Eryn: We are in the thick of it! [Laughter]

Dennis: And do you have four sets of these two jars?

Eryn: We do!—up on our mantel; yes.

Dennis: That undoubtedly has some conversations that are created when friends come to your house.

Eryn: Yes; yes. One of the reasons we moved to Colorado, two years ago, was to build community. We do have a lot of people over to our home. A lot of them are familiar with what we’ve been going through with writing the book, so a lot of them come in and they understand the concept of it. But I do wonder, because we have a big front window in our house—and I know that, as you drive by at night, you can see all the jars of pennies up on the top mantel—so I do wonder about that—what people are thinking.

Bob: Has this had an impact on how you and Grayson think about parenting?—just seeing those jars regularly?

Eryn: Oh, yes. Oh, certainly. And I would say, in the deepest way, it impacts how we see ourselves and our own relationships with the Lord. I mention in the book—one day, I was walking by the jars; and I was kind of just in a rut. I was tired, as many parents with young children are; and it’s easy to have negative attitudes in that realm. I was just having one of those days, and I walked by them. I just got this sudden thought that: “Those are not only 936 weeks of my children’s lives, but they’re 936 weeks of my own life and my marriage.”

I would say the biggest way they’ve impacted me is realizing how God wants to chisel me during that time and how He wants to work in my own heart so that I can minister to the hearts of my children.

Bob: And what has been, for you, the way that parenting has caused you to grow more in your understanding of who God is?—and in your understanding of who you are as an adult?

Eryn: First and foremost, it has brought me to my knees and on my face. Parenting is so humbling if you let it be and if you let God work in your heart through the process. My whole goal, especially with the book, was—I don’t want to give parents a to-do list—that’s the last thing we need. Going through this process, God brought me to Himself in whole new ways. Writing about motherhood is terrifying; because it does bring you to your biggest fears, and insecurities, and questions. Satan just has so many strategies to try to uproot our peace and cause us to question our calling as parents.
I was writing through those things with my own stories; God just brought me to His Word in a whole new light. He helped me to see His Word in the context of parenting—but there aren’t just a few great verses in there that mention mothers, and fathers, and children—but the whole of His gospel / the whole of His Word is about parenting, because it’s how He relates to our hearts as His children and how He calls us to relate to the hearts of our own children.

**Dennis:** If I could ask you to do something that will be very hard—and Bob’s going to tell you this will be very hard to do—

**Bob:** Oh, here we go; here we go.

**Dennis:** I’m going to ask you to just look at those sets of four jars. Are there a couple of pennies that are just choice moments that you are so glad you experienced with your children?

**Eryn:** Oh, yes!

**Dennis:** Can you share a couple?

**Eryn:** Actually, last year, there were many of those pennies. We sold our house in Colorado, because we wanted to move closer to our church. After we sold our house, we decided to go on a whirlwind trip. We bought a tiny little travel trailer, and we took our kids—we had three at the time; I was pregnant with number four—we took them on a two-month road trip to the Pacific Northwest.

It was a trip we had always talked about taking. We saw our opportunity after we sold our home and my husband left his job. That was just one of those times, you know—it takes a lot to go on a trip like that with young kids and when you’re pregnant, but God just blessed it. We got to the Oregon coast just in time for the eclipse.

Our first few nights were in the camper, on the beach, hearing the sea lions—and then taking our boys up on a sandy hill and watching that eclipse, and just thinking about how that impacts—yes, me—but their little hearts: “Your Creator did that, and He made you, and He says that you are more special than even that,”—just so many of those moments on that trip—and our move to Colorado was all about that. We just wanted to not fabricate and not create these momentous moments, but just put ourselves in an area where we would be more attuned to them; because I think those moments are all around us, and we don’t have to make them. Of course, special events and occasions are important, but just becoming more attuned to the opportunities already around us.

**Dennis:** You seem to kind of thrive on experiences that are kind of out of the ordinary.

**Eryn:** Yes!
**Dennis:** One of the things you wrote about in your book was a night when your husband invited you to go camping—and not just any night—it was what?

**Eryn:** The argument night. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Well, is that the night where it was one of the coldest nights in Wisconsin?

**Eryn:** Yes; in Wisconsin.

**Dennis:** And you camped outdoors?

**Eryn:** I did not! [Laughter] That was where the argument came in. This was known as our argument. Thankfully, we don’t argue too much in our marriage; and we aren’t yellers. This went down in the book as *the* argument; and it was when we were dating, and you know, I was still kind of trying to woo him / trying to impress him; you know, you kind of go through that as you’re getting ready for engagement and marriage.

He mentioned to me that he had this tradition—that on the coldest night of the year in Wisconsin—and that is cold—every year, he would go camping with some friends, in a tent, in the snow. You know, I’m trying to impress him; so I say: “Oh, yes; yes.” This is probably in the fall—so: “Yes; I’ll do that. I’ll go.” And then the weather starts getting colder; and as I mentioned, that is pretty severe in Wisconsin; and so the night came.

He says, “Hey, we’re heading out camping tonight.” I was like: “No! I’m not going.” You can assume he was pretty struck by that—you know, I had kind of painted this picture of me as being outdoorsy and adventurous. Later on, I would be because of his influence; but at that point, I just was not. So yes; there was a bit of a lie there and a bit of stuff we needed to work on in our premarital counseling. [Laughter]

**Bob:** So, how did that manifest itself? When you said, “I’m not going,” what did he do?

**Eryn:** Oh, he was just *shocked* and angry. And when my husband gets angry—for both of us—it’s just that silent—like I said, we don’t really yell; it’s just that silence. I didn’t go camping, and I probably still owe him that camping trip. [Laughter]

**Bob:** Eryn, you were telling me that part of your intentionality came from something you read that Dennis had written; is that right?

**Eryn:** Yes; yes, for certain. This was actually recently—I was reading through *Growing a Spiritually Strong Family*. Your section in there on setting the course very much struck a chord with me. It gave more context to something my husband and I have been practicing for the past few years. When we were pregnant with number three, we took a “Baby-moon.” We had three days to ourselves—my parents took the other two kids.
We went for a drive one day—it was here in Arkansas, actually—and it was raining. I just pulled out my journal, and we decided to write down what we wanted to be the core values of our family. We started thinking through what we wanted those foundational things to be—things like a deep faith, and generosity, and wonder, and awe. We started writing them out; and when we were finished, we looked at the list. We realized that what our life looked like was very much in contrast to that list and that we weren’t living a life that was very conducive to it.

**Dennis:** Meaning what? What characterized your life at that point?

**Eryn:** Well, for one, we were not being very intentional, especially in the faith realm. We were attending church with our kids but we really felt a lack there. The biggest one for us was—really, we wanted our children to live in an area where they could connect with God as their Creator. We were living in Kansas City at that time. Certainly, you can raise your children well in that environment to know and love their Lord—you can do that anywhere—but for us, we wanted that to be deeper. That was very much a core value to us.

Ultimately, it led to our move to Colorado. It actually led us to uproot, because we wanted to set our roots down deep somewhere where we could raise our children in those values. It led to our decision, for now, to homeschool; because a lot of those values were based around education and raising our children with a biblical foundation.

**Bob:** And when you were done with that list, did you have 30/40 things on it?—or were you able to narrow it down to—as Dennis often encourages us to do—get your top five or top six; because if the list is too long, it can be cumbersome and unachievable.

**Eryn:** Yes; yes, for certain. It probably had about 15 items on it to begin—that was enough to start redirecting us—but it’s something, and I know you mention this in the book too, you have to revisit it; because there’s different seasons / there’s different needs in your life, and the Lord works in your heart, as a parent, and in your marriage.

I actually just took out the list a few weeks ago—we were up in the mountains having a picnic with our kids—and we just visited it. There were some new things on it—community being one that we hadn’t had on our original list but that we really felt God putting on our heart. So that revisiting and checking in with our hearts and our values to make sure that we’re still on the right course.

**Bob:** And what would you guys say today are the three or four values that are driving your intentionality as you’re raising your kids?

**Eryn:** Time together as a family. That was what led my husband to leave his job so that he could be self-employed. There are certainly struggles with that, but the fact that it’s opened up so much opportunity for us to go on trips as a family—so that element of spending together.
Generosity is one we’re working towards. We want to raise our children to have loose hands, when it comes to their money, but also be willing to spend their time for people. We’re working to get out of debt so we can increase our giving to ministries we believe in, and we want to model that to our children also—find a way to live generously that your children can see. It’s a lot more difficult—so that’s another one we’re working towards—generosity and our time together—and our marriage being number one.

Dennis: There’s another reason why I think it’s important to revisit our core values. Human beings have a way of drifting; and we also have a way of conforming—conforming to our peers. I know a lot of young families—and Barbara and I really felt this in our young family, when it was growing—there’s a comparison that takes place—that you wonder if you’re doing the right thing around education; around activities like soccer, Little League ball, dance classes—

Bob: “Their kids are in ballet, and do we need to get our kids in ballet?”—right; right.

Dennis: On and on it goes. If you’re not careful—if you don’t know what you stand for—you’re going to drift. You’re going to need to know, as a couple: “What exactly do you want to build into the lives of these little human sponges?”—because they are soaking up, not only what you teach them, but maybe more importantly, they’re soaking up what you’re modeling for them as well.

Bob: Well, and the core values project that you talked about is something you’ve included in your new book, The Art of Parenting, the book that you and Barbara wrote. It’s a book that we have in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. It’s a great project for moms and dads to go through together, so they can be on the same page and be pulling the same direction. You can find out more about The Art of Parenting when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com. We also have information on Eryn’s book, which is called 936 Pennies: Discovering the Joy of Intentional Parenting. Again, it’s written by our guest today, Eryn Lynum. You can order it from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order at 1-800-FL-TODAY.

And let me just also mention—if you’ve not thought about inviting four or five couples into your home for an evening and talking about maybe going through FamilyLife’s Art of Parenting® small group video series, think about doing that. Think about the investment that you could make in the lives of some new moms and dads—or maybe some moms and dads who just need a little help at this stage in their parenting. You could be a valuable resource by inviting them in. If you’re still raising your own kids, get together with some other couples and go through this content—it’ll help you out as well. Find out more about the Art of Parenting video series when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order any of these resources: 1-800-FLTODAY is our number—1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”
Now, a quick word of thanks to those of you who make all that we do, here, at FamilyLife® possible. We’re a listener-supported ministry; and more than 60 percent of the revenue that we need to operate as a ministry comes from listeners, like you, who believe in the mission of FamilyLife. We’re grateful for that partnership—you help us extend the reach and, in a very real sense, this program would not exist / would not be heard in your community if it weren’t for listeners like you making it possible. So, again, we want to say, “Thank you.”

Here, in the month of November, with Thanksgiving on our minds, if you’re able to help with a donation today, we’d like to say, “Thank you,” to you by sending you the dramatized audio book from Barbara Rainey—Thanksgiving: A Time to Remember. This is nearly an hour long. It includes music, and sound effects, and dramatic recreation of the story of the first Thanksgiving. It’s something that would be great for your family to listen to if you’re doing any Thanksgiving traveling. Again, the audio book is our gift to you when you help support the ministry with a donation of any amount. You can donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. Or you can mail your donation to FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223. Be sure to ask for the audio book when you get in touch with us.

Tomorrow, we’re going to talk more about what intentional parenting looks like. Eryn Lynum will be back with us. I hope you can be back as well.

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.

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