Why Are We Doing This?

Guest: Shelly Wildman
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Bob: We all want kids who are well-behaved; right? That’s important; but Shelly Wildman says it’s not the most important thing for us to focus on, as parents.

Shelly: Our goal, as parents, shouldn’t be good behavior. Good behavior isn’t enough; and frankly, counting on our kids’ good behavior, you will be disappointed 99 percent of the time. [Laughter] But having hearts that are soft toward Jesus/having hearts that are receptive to the gospel—that’s what we want. We want hearts that are easily moldable, shaped by the gospel.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, September 4th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. As you’re raising your kids, are you focused more on their behavior or on what’s going on in their heart? How do you reach their heart? We’re going to talk more about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I want to know: “Did the 19-year-old Ann Barron and the 22-year-old Dave Wilson, when you were engaged and planning to get married, did you talk about how many kids you wanted to have? Do you remember a conversation like that?”

Ann: We knew that we wanted kids. I’m not sure we talked about the number, but we wanted to reach the world for Jesus; and if our kids could do that with us—like, “That’d be cool if they did that with us,” but I don’t think we had a number in mind.

Bob: I don’t remember us ever having a conversation.

Ann: Oh, you didn’t?

Bob: I don’t know if we had a conversation about: “Do you want kids?”

Ann: Okay.

Bob: I think we both assumed: “We grew up in families; we were kids. Sure, that’s what you do—you get married; you have kids.”
Part of the thinking about all of this for me is to think—when I think back on the whole parenting adventure for us, I think I had—not 0; but on a scale of 1-10, in terms of intentionality, I was down in the 1 to 2. Here was my paradigm for parenting—I spent five summers as a camp counselor at YMCA Camp Lakewood when I was in high school and in college. I loved being a camp counselor; I thought: “I'm ready for parenting. I've been a camp counselor.”

Ann: Well, that's way better than what we had.

Bob: You bring kids in; you show them a good time; you have fun; you put them to bed at night—bingo!—that's all you need. If you had asked me, “What’s your goal for your kids, and what’s your planning…” No!—I didn’t know! [Laughter]

Ann: We didn’t either.

Bob: “We were just going to have fun, and then they’re going to be grownups; and life will be good for them,”—that’s kind of my plan for parenting.

Then I came to FamilyLife® and spent a quarter of a century with Dennis Rainey, whose kids said his name was Mr. Intentional about everything—drove them crazy. I began to learn, “Oh, I guess you should actually have some strategies, or some plans, or some thinking.”

I bring this up because we have—

Dave: We have Mrs. Intentional!

Bob: Wait, we can’t say that. If Dennis is Mr. Intentional,—

Dave: Oh, that’s true.

Bob: —this can’t be Mrs. Intentional; because it’s not Barbara. [Laughter] But it is Shelly Wildman, who’s joining us on FamilyLife Today. Shelly, welcome to FamilyLife Today.

Shelly: Thank you so much.

Bob: You had somebody who defined you as being intentional about parenting; right?

Shelly: I did; in fact, I describe it in the book. I said I looked over my shoulder to see if somebody was standing behind me, because a friend of mine/a dear friend of mine said, “You are the most intentional parent I know.” I was like, “What are you even talking about?!” I had no idea what that meant, and I was far from it.

Bob: You mentioned the book—the book that Shelly has written is called First Ask Why: Raising Kids to Love God Through Intentional Discipleship.
Shelly was, for many years, a professor at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, and is the mother of three, now, adult children. This book is really about being purposeful. It’s the kind of book that somebody should have given me,—

**Ann:** —and us.

**Shelly:** —and me! [Laughter]

**Bob:** —back at the beginning, to know, “Okay; you do need to have some guiding principles that keep you focused on the big things,” because for me, as a parent, it was about today and, maybe, next week—not much beyond that.

**Shelly:** Yes, me, too. That’s really why I wrote it; because I understand that we spend most of our time, as parents, *reacting* rather than thinking ahead.

**Bob:** Do you think that’s true for most young parents today? Do you think they’re just flying on automatic pilot and not really paying attention to specific goals/big ideas?

**Shelly:** Well, yes; I mean, I think there are some who are very intentional, and that’s fantastic; but most of the young people I talk to—I mean, as I was—just trying to get through the day/just trying to make it to bedtime.

**Ann:** I think for Dave and I, too, we are first-generation believers. We didn’t have a model of what it looked like to pour into our kids spiritually. I think Barbara and Dennis were probably the first couple—

**Dave:** No, it was Bob and Mary Ann—that’s who it was. [Laughter] They were the intentional ones.

**Bob:** Well—

**Ann:** The title of your book, *First Ask Why*—why that title?

**Shelly:** Well, after my friend said that to me about being the most intentional parent she knew, I thought, “Well, you don’t know very many parents then.” I just got to thinking: “What actually does that *mean*? What is intentionality? Why is it important?” I realized that people I knew, who were intentional—they had a bigger picture about their kids, about their family, about parenting.

Really, this was 15 years in the making, you know. I thought about it and thought about it—kind of had to wait and see how the kids turned out. [Laughter]

**Bob:** Sure; right.
Shelly: But you know, as I thought and thought about what intentionality is, where you get to that big picture is by asking: “Why?” not “How?”

As my husband I were raising our girls, we read parenting books, as you do. You’re kind of in crisis most of the time; and we thought: “Okay; we have to figure this out! We have to know what to do.” [Laughter] We had a strong-willed child, let me tell you, so we went there.

A lot of parenting books we found told us how to have great kids. They made what I thought might be promises that: “Well, they don’t know my kid. How do they know I’m going to have a great kid if I do ‘x,’ ‘y,’ and ‘z’?” For me, there had to be more—there had to be more. As I thought about our family, I thought: “Well, why? Why are we doing what we’re doing?”

Bob: Yes, I’ve said it this way: “A lot of parents are just looking for the recipe.”

Shelly: Yes.

Bob: It’s like: “Okay; I know what I want is a good chocolate chip cookie; so tell me, ‘What are the ingredients? How long do I bake them?’” and “I would like a guarantee that, if I follow this recipe, that the kid’s going to turn out well.”

Shelly: Exactly.

Bob: “In fact, I will do anything if you can give me that guarantee.”

Ann: What do you think the outcome—what do most parents want their kids to become?

Bob: Well, I think most parents—I’d be interested in your thoughts—I think most parents are looking around, and they have lower-than-ideal goals. They want their kids to be functional adults. They want them to find somebody who they can do life with; you know, get married, have kids, have a good family for themselves; get a decent-paying job. It’s kind of like we want them to fit into the American ideal. If we do that, and they’re well-adjusted, and not in counseling and therapy twice a week, then we’ve done our job and we should feel good about that.

Ann: I first started thinking about that—I was with a group of pastors’ wives, and we were talking about that: “What do we want the outcome to be of our kids?” One woman said: “I just want my kids to be happy. I want them to be happy.” I remember going home to tell Dave: “I want my kids to have more than that, because happiness is fleeting. I want them to have a vision of what God has for them; I want them to know who they are. I want them to live on purpose for people and for God.”

Shelly: Yes.
Ann: I don’t think we even have that question in our mind, many times, as: “What do we want?”; but the “Why?”—that was really intriguing to me.

Dave: Well, let’s start there; you start your book there.

Shelly: Yes, I do.

Dave: I think every parent needs to do it; and again, one of the foundational verses that I’m guessing is where we start from is like: “Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are the children of one’s youth.” So that image of shooting an arrow—by the way, parents—you know this; right?—they’re supposed to be launched; they’re not supposed to stay in our house forever.

But when we launch them, the question most parents never ask is: “What’s the bullseye? What are we shooting for?—happy, popular kids, who don’t do drugs in high school, or is it something bigger?”

Shelly: Exactly.

Dave: You start there. Tell us what the goal is.

Shelly: Well, you know, I think that is the most important question: “Why are we here?”—not just for our kids—but I find so many families today—they are taking up space. You have however many people living under one roof together, and they don’t know why: “Why has God brought us together? What are we here for?” It has to be more than just, in my case, five people under one roof; because a lot of days, that’s just not enough to keep us going. It’s hard; it is hard living in a family. It’s hard raising kids; it’s hard being a parent.

I really delve first, in the book, into: “Why are we here, as a family? What is God’s purpose for us, as a family?” As you turn to Scripture, and if you read Scripture through that lens of: “What is God’s purpose for me, as an individual?”; but He has so much to say about families. One of the verses that I came across is Philippians 2:15—[verses] 14 and 15, really. It talks about: “Do not grumble; do not argue,” because in this “twisted and crooked generation you are to shine as stars.”

I thought, “You know, God has a reason for us to be here. We, as believers, we have a much bigger purpose and that is to shine the light of Christ wherever we are.” For me, that just says: “Okay; then how are we going to do that, as a family?” and “What tools can I give my children so that they will go out and also be those stars that shine?”

Bob: I need to tell—you know, we already admitted we started, both of us, with no plan for parenting; but somewhere along the way, you guys, Dave and Ann, you developed a mission statement for your family. What prompted you to move from, “Okay; we’re just
focused on them being happy and healthy today,” to going, “No, this is about something bigger”? Do you remember?

**Dave:** It’s what we just sort of jumped into. It’s like, “Well, the Word of God is our guiding Scripture, and it wasn’t just ‘have kids.’” I have to be honest; the first time we ever considered something bigger than, “Let’s have happy kids,” was the *Weekend to Remember®* as an engaged couple—the last talk—that we now do; for 30 years, we give that talk [as speakers].

We’re sitting there, as a 22-year-old/19-year-old, immature, ready to get married, never thinking, “Marriage is bigger than us being happy,”—we learned that Friday/Saturday. Then on Sunday, I heard this whole talk about legacy—and a godly legacy—because everybody’s leaving a legacy; what kind of legacy?

You know, I’m sitting there; that’s the first time I ever thought, “I can change what was handed to me from an alcoholic—adultery. I can start something new for the Wilson name.” That meant it’s going to be somebody to outlast us—it’s going to be generations. That was the first discussion we ever had—we weren’t even married yet.

Many discussions after that—like: “What are we going to raise?” You don’t just have kids and just, “Hey, let’s get them in sports, and get them in school; and they’re going to…” No, it has to be intentional! We’re not the most intentional people in the world, but man oh man, we sat down and said, “Okay; what’s the bullseye?” I tell you what—I don’t know if our kids could articulate it, but we had this statement in our head: “We wanted to raise L3 warriors that impact the world for the kingdom of God.”

**Bob:** L3?

**Dave:** L3 was the three values of our church—that we said, “Okay; here’s what we’re trying to make, as disciples, at Kensington Church.” I bet nobody at our church could tell you what this was; but it was: “Love, Lock, Live: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind—and love others as well; Lock was lock arms in community; and then Live was live, open-handedly with your time, talent, and treasure.”

It was this model of: Okay, if our sons grow up, and they are actually in love with God and others: the first commandment—they’re in community and doing life with other people, because they realize they can’t do it alone; so they’re in a church, and they’re part of the church—and then they’re living their life—like: ‘It’s not about me; it’s about: “How does God want to use my talent, time, and treasure to bless others?”’

Again, I’m not saying it’s a perfect bullseye; but it gave us something to shoot at—like: “Okay; if that’s the bullseye, now let’s walk back and say, ‘What’s that mean for a week or for a day?’ or ‘How do we get to that?’”
Bob: Yes, that’s the point—now, daily decisions can be made, knowing, “That’s what we’re aiming for.”

Shelly: Exactly.

Bob: So, did you come to a point in your parenting, where you developed that kind of a bullseye for your family?—or was it, after you were done, when you said, “Oh, you should be intentional about this!”?

Shelly: Yes, we more fell into it than you guys did. I really encourage people, at the end of the book, to do that—to write a mission statement to really think about what you/your unique family is going to be intentional about.

I think one of the really important ideas about finding God’s purpose is that we are all different. How-to parenting books kind of assume that your family is this cookie-cutter family; but I look around and I think: “You know, my family, with my three children, had different challenges than my friend down the street. Their family looks nothing like my family.”

There are some values that we should all share, obviously, and there are definite principles in Scripture that I think God clearly wants us to follow; but there are some things that, you know, we are all so different. I just really encourage families to figure out: “What makes them unique? What challenges lie ahead of them? What strengths do they have? What are they really good at?”

Dave: What’d you guys find out about the Wildman family? I know I just heard your license plate is “WILDFAM.”

Shelly: Yes, it is! Oh, thank you! [Laughter]

Dave: So you must have been a wild fam. [Laughter]

Bob: If you’re driving up at Wheaton, and you see the van with the “WILDFAM”—

Shelly: That’s me; everybody knows.

Dave: But even when you said that, I thought, “Okay; there’s a personality to the Wildmans that is unique to you.” What is it?

Shelly: Yes, very unique. Well, we love to have fun. We laugh all the time. I think my Twitter description says, “Dinner at my house will involve laughter.” We have a great time together.

We discovered some of our family personality, basically, through my husband’s and my givings. I have the gift of hospitality; I love to have people in my home. We told our kids,
“You’re going to have to give up your room every now and then if a missionary comes into town,”—or whoever; you know, if somebody needs a bed, we are going to be there; and we are going to provide a home and a warm welcome for people. My girls have kind of caught that, I think; they’re wonderful, warm, welcoming kids.

Another value that my husband, especially—he’s gifted in generosity. He loves to give money away. We’ve incorporated that into part of our family mission. I describe, in the chapter on money in the book, part of how we taught our girls about stewardship was—we sat down with them, a few years ago, and showed them exactly where we gave all of our money to for the past year. We explained why we gave money to those particular ministries or charities.

We said: “Now, this year, you guys are getting a chunk of money. You need to come back at Thanksgiving. You do your research; you come back; you give a report to the family. We’re all going to say, ‘Yea,’ or ‘Nay,’ and then Dad and I will give the money in your name.” We’ve just tried to help them become good stewards.

It wasn’t necessarily where our kids were gifted, but my husband and I just tried to bring our kids along with what we felt like God wanted us to do.

Ann: Beautiful! I think, too, with our kids—because our kids catch what we’re passionate about and what our gifts are—I remember, when our boys were little, probably starting at four—so they’d be anywhere from four to nine—but I remember laying in bed with them and saying, “I can’t wait to see the gifts that God put into you.”

I remember them saying, "Is it a present?" I said, “It is kind of a present—because when you discover the gifts, the talents, what you’re good at—when you discover that, it’s like a present; because you realize you’re here on purpose for a purpose.” I remember they were little, and they didn’t really get it—but kind of reiterating that—and even saying, “And CJ’s really different than Austin; isn’t that cool?—because Austin’s going to do something different.” It made them anticipate, “God has something for me.”

I think all of us, at some time or some point, wonder, “Why am I here?” Kids, especially, need to know that.

Bob: Yes; in fact, you make the point in the book—and this was something I wish somebody had told us on the front-end—you say the vision for your kids should not be to raise good kids.

Shelly: Yes.

Bob: I think, for us, that was so consuming—we wanted our kids to be well-behaved; and we wanted our kids to act right and be right, maybe to the point that we lost sight of the bigger picture about: “Who has God made you?” and “What mission are you on?”
Now, you’re not saying it doesn’t matter whether your kids are good kids or not.

**Shelly:** No, because there is a chapter on self-discipline. [Laughter]

**Bob:** But there’s a difference between a parent, who is focused on raising good kids and a parent, who’s focused on raising missional kids.

**Shelly:** Yes, and I’m glad you brought that up, Bob; because our goal, as parents, shouldn’t be good behavior. Good behavior isn’t enough. Frankly, counting on our kids’ good behavior, you will be disappointed 99 percent of the time. [Laughter]

**Ann:** Exactly!

**Shelly:** But having hearts that are soft toward Jesus/having hearts that are receptive to the gospel, *that’s* what we want. We want hearts that are easily moldable, shaped by the gospel.

**Dave:** As you said, it’s so easy to focus sort of on the external behavior, not the internal.

I’ll tell you another pastor I heard articulate their vision for their kids. He had six kids; and he said this, “Our bullseye/our goal was single-minded, Christ-centered, biblically-anchored world changers.” It was really interesting—as I heard him articulate that, the single-minded is what we’ve just been talking about. He said each child is uniquely different. So many parents say, “I want my kid to be well-rounded and do every sport and everything”; and he goes: “Why? I don’t look for employees that are well-rounded; I look for employees who are gifted in one specific area. So find out what that is and nurture that/fan that.”

Christ-centered is not church-centered; it’s *Christ*-centered—like He’s the center of the life. Biblically-anchored is: “This is our source of truth”; and world-changers is—you know. I just thought, “Wow, what—another way to articulate what you’ve just said in your book: “Ask, ‘Why?’ and then shoot for that.”

I would say, “Man, one of the things listeners could do, right now, is say, ‘Okay; what’s ours?’” Sit down tonight and have a conversation and say, “Let’s write something down that will be uniquely the Wilsons’, the Wildmans’, the Lepines’—that’s still biblical—but what are we going to shoot at?”

One of the things we did that was real interesting—you talk about a scary thing—we asked our kids, at one point, “What are the Wilsons about?” Man, that was a scary answer!

**Ann:** It was terrible—I’m just going to say.

**Bob:** “What does it mean to be a Wilson?”
Dave: “What matters to us?”

Ann: “What do you think matters to us?”

Shelly: I think we’ve asked that question, too.

Ann: “What do you think are our values?” You know what the number-one answer was?—“Sports!”

Shelly: Yes.

Ann: It was *convicting*.

Dave: I don’t know where they got that, Bob. [Laughter]

Shelly: But you know what?—that’s not a terrible thing! I mean, God *uses* that. I have a couple good friends, whose kids have made it—one just got drafted into the NFL, and they are using sports to the glory of God.

Bob: Right.

Shelly: But it’s that idea that we are here for so much more.

Bob: Well, and your point is: “The glory of God is what’s driving it, not the NFL.”

Shelly: Yes; yes; absolutely.

Bob: So if they think sports is the number-one thing, then getting drafted into the NFL is the end of the game; but if they think the glory of God is the number-one thing, now the NFL is just a means to that end.

I think your challenge, Dave, is a great challenge. In fact, I think this book—you might say, “We couldn’t do that; wouldn’t know where to start.” Okay; get a copy of *First Ask Why*—read through it together; highlight stuff as you go through it—then do the exercise of saying, “Okay; let’s identify, ‘What is it that we are going to be pointing toward so that the decisions we face about, ‘Should our kids do soccer or drama?’ or ‘Should they take the clarinet lesson?’ or ‘Should they do…”—all of that can be driven by, “Why?””

Ann: And for a single parent, pull in your friends.

Shelly: Absolutely.

Ann: Ask some other people; get around them and kind of hash through what that could look like for you.
Bob: You can get a copy of Shelly’s book—it’s called First Ask Why—when you go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com. You can order it from us online, or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the title of the book is First Ask Why: Raising Kids to Love God Through Intentional Discipleship. The author is Shelly Wildman. Order online at FamilyLifeToday.com, or 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, this issue of intentional discipleship is something that we’re passionate about, here, at FamilyLife. It’s the reason that we produced the video series the Art of Parenting® as a companion to Dennis and Barbara’s book by that same title. We’re thrilled at how small groups and churches are starting to use this content in classes at their church. We’re also excited to see how it’s being used in Central and South America, as it’s been translated into Spanish.

Because of all of you guys—those of you who responded during the month of August to the matching-gift challenge that was in front of us, because we were able to take full advantage of that match, we’re able to move forward with plans to translate the Art of Parenting into Arabic and into Mandarin. I mean, just imagine the impact of parents learning how to, intentionally, disciple their children by going through the Art of Parenting.

Thanks for making that happen—those of you who donated during the month of August—and thanks to those of you who regularly remember the financial needs of FamilyLife®. We’re listener-supported. Every day that we are on the air, we’re here because somebody, who’s a listener, just like you, has made that possible through their donations. If you’d like to support this ministry and see the reach extended and expanded, you can make a donation today, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. Thanks for partnering with us in this ministry. We appreciate you.

We hope you can be back with us tomorrow as we continue to talk about how we raise kids who can stand for Jesus when we’re not there to help hold them up. Shelly Wildman joins us, again, tomorrow. We hope you can join us as well.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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