

the stickyfaith guide for your family

Dr. Kara E. Powell

Author of Sticky Faith

OVER
100

Practical and Tested
Ideas to Build
Lasting
Faith in Kids



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The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

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Why Does Your Family Need a Sticky Faith Guide?

Tennis balls.

I had to get tennis balls.

They were on the packing guide from the childbirth preparation class, so that meant one thing: they were essential.

You might be wondering, Why would a woman in labor need tennis balls? Our teacher suggested that while we were waiting for our baby to be born, we could put a tennis ball in a clean tube sock and use it as a massage tool.

I guess I needed a clean tube sock also.

The list from the childbirth class was fairly lengthy. Its specificity and breadth might have scared off other soon-to-be moms, but not me. My strategy was to follow the guide's every recommendation down to the last syllable.

In case you're wondering, yes, this was my first child.

So I needed chapstick.

And massage oil. Just in case my shoulders were aching and Dave's hands were too dry.

A deck of cards, a few magazines, and some music—in case we got bored.

VHS tapes (yes, I'm dating myself) of a few movies to pass the time during labor.

A roll of quarters for the pay phone. Mind you, both Dave and I

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had cell phones (we might have been using VCRs, but at least we had phones—albeit bulky ones), but the guidebook also recommended a handful of quarters, so I chased down some.

All of the above plus a few changes of clothes and my regular toiletries were in my carry-on suitcase three weeks ahead of time, carefully positioned by our front door for us to grab when it was time.

At 10:00 p.m. on a Tuesday, I went into labor. As I staggered to the car, Dave grabbed the suitcase, tossed it in the trunk, and made sure it made it to my hospital room for the big night.

Where it sat. Unopened. For my entire ten hours of labor.

We did open the suitcase the next day for my toothbrush. And a second time two days later so I could change from my shapeless hospital gown into shorts and a T-shirt for the ride home.

At least no one could accuse us of not following the hospital's guidebook for our son's birth.

Planning Ahead

I'd be surprised if any of you reading this book didn't plan ahead for your first few days with your child.

If you adopted your child, you planned the setup of their bedroom and made a few changes to your home. But more important, you thought about how to attach and bond with your new child. You likely had to work through intensive guidebooks and required training courses to become adoptive parents. Ahead of time, you tried to simplify your life and secure time off from work to make sure you would have the days and hours you wanted—and needed—to cocoon with your child.

If you or your spouse gave birth, you might not have been as extreme as I was. (In fact, I hope you weren't.) But you almost certainly chose the location. You likely strategized your route there. You probably even figured out how you were going to contact your friends and family, and maybe even who you were going to notify first.

I'm guessing that when it comes to planning for your first few hours with your child, you'd receive an A. (I myself was apparently trying for an A plus.)

But then something happens. Or rather, lots of somethings happen.

Why Does Your Family Need a Sticky Faith Guide?

Our kids get older. We do too.

Our kids get busier. As do we.

Our kids seem to gain more energy. We seem to lose it.

If you're like me, you may have been proactive the first few days and even years of your kids' lives, but as your family's days become consumed by soccer practices and science tests, you become reactive. Instead of looking a few months or even years ahead, we consider ourselves lucky if we make it through the next few hours or days of our frenetic schedule.

At most, we devise plans for our children's education—both now and in the future. We think about schools they might want to attend and calculate the steps our kids (and we) need to take to boost their grades and extracurriculars. But that's often the only area of our family life where we have any long-term vision or goals.

For most families, faith tends to be more of an afterthought.

How Will a Sticky Faith Guide Help Your Family?

Let's get real: no part of parenting is easy. Whether we're responding to our fifteen-month-old's cries from the crib or our fifteen-year-old's texts from the mall, we're constantly improvising. Guessing. Hoping that what we're doing comes close to what's best for our kids.

Part of that is inevitable. Parenting will always be a messy (and often awkward) dance of art and science.

But what if there was research that removed at least some of the guesswork about what is best for our kids—both now and long-term? What if we could learn from proven tools and ideas that would help us create a plan for our families?

For some of us, following a plan is a joy. We are the type of folks who love making lists and identifying next steps.

For others of us, the term “plan” is a four-letter word. (Well, actually, it *is* a four-letter word for all of us, but you know what I mean.) We cringe at the thought of tying ourselves down to specific goals and tasks.

Regardless of whether you love or hate plans in other areas of your

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life, we at the Fuller Youth Institute hope you're willing to use this guide to map a spiritual course for your family.

Without a guide, without intentionality, your family is likely to drift. So is your kids' faith.

Multiple studies indicate that 40–50 percent of young people—like your kids—who graduate from a church or a youth group—probably a lot like your congregation or your kids' youth group—will leave their faith and the church after they head to college.¹

To help that sink in, please take a moment to visualize a photograph of your kids and their Christian friends. Now imagine holding a red pen and drawing an X through almost 50 percent of their faces, because that many will fall away from the faith as young adults.²

As a mom, a leader, and a follower of Jesus, I'm not satisfied with that. I bet you aren't either.

As we at the Fuller Youth Institute have spent time with families who beat those odds—who are more successful than average at encouraging long-term faith—it's clear that those parents usually have a strategy that guides how they nourish their family's faith. It isn't that they are trying to control their children's future. Nor do they view following a guide as a foolproof guarantee for success. They hold the guide loosely, knowing that even their best-laid plans sometimes need to be tossed aside.

But these parents know that the things they care about—including their children's spiritual growth—stand a much better chance of becoming reality if they think in advance about what is important to them and how to make time for those priorities.

These parents know that their kids' spiritual roots won't grow deep by accident. God is the ultimate gardener, but he often works through parents to prepare the soil, remove creeping weeds, and make sure kids have the spiritual nutrients they need to flourish.

Families who manage to beat the 50 percent statistic also helped our team confirm that it's never too early to start nurturing Sticky Faith. My husband and

The mission of the Fuller Youth Institute is to equip teenagers with the lifelong faith they need. To find out more about how we leverage research into resources to help your family and church, and to access free Sticky Faith resources and subscribe to our free e-journal, visit stickyfaith.org.

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I began implementing some of the ideas in this guide when our youngest was three years old. By starting when your kids are young, you can weave these research-based principles into the fiber of your family.

An important corollary is that it's also never too *late* to start nurturing Sticky Faith. During the course of our research and discussions with parents, we've heard countless stories of our loving God nudging a prodigal son or daughter back to their faith home. Sometimes the parent plays a visible role in this process.

More often, the parent plays a less visible role by praying—and praying hard—for their young-adult child to be overwhelmed with a sense of God's grace and mercy. Sometimes God uses challenges and crises to pull young people back to the faith; other times God works through a powerful experience of community or serving alongside others. Whatever the magnet, it's comforting to realize that faith development is a lifelong process for all of us, regardless of our age or faith leanings.

Our son's legal problems started in middle school, but they exploded right after he graduated from high school. But during college the Lord drew him back into faith and the church. My son now is a junior-high leader at a church. I marvel at how God has brought him 180 degrees back to him, to serve other kids so that maybe he can help spare them the heartache that he went through.

—Dawn

Findings and Ideas: A Dynamic Duo

I'm a researcher who's married to an engineer. To say that our family values data is an enormous understatement. Dave and I never met a spreadsheet we didn't like.

As much as I applaud data, I cheer even more enthusiastically when data is translated into practical resources. It's the application of data that guides you and me toward a strategy that fits our unique parenting styles. It's the pairing of research with proven ideas that empowers families to walk forward in their pursuit of relationship with Jesus and each other.

In every chapter of this book, you'll get a front row seat to research-derived findings that can help you develop lasting faith as a

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family. While we could have deluged you with statistics and trends, we ruthlessly mined the data to unearth the handful of insights essential to your family's strategy.

We call them “findings” because they have emerged from valid and reliable research. Yet we need to be clear in the early pages of this guide that there is no formula for building Sticky Faith. Much of the research we share is correlational in nature—meaning that the more families adopt certain practices, the more their kids *tend* to have lasting faith. Other findings have grown out of qualitative research, where we've interviewed fifty parents like you and looked for common practices. So while it makes sense to adopt those practices, there is no golden blueprint that will yield unwavering faith.

After all, we try hard as parents, but ultimately it's the Holy Spirit's job to build deep faith in our kids. (I hope you sighed in relief after you read that sentence. I did after I wrote it.) Because God is the one who ultimately sticks with us and our kids, we can trust him to walk with our families no matter what we face.

After we run through some foundational findings in each chapter, ideas from families we've studied will take the field. Like you and me, these parents are regular folks who love their kids and want the best for them. They are not perfect, but they have raced, walked, and sometimes stumbled toward being a faith-pursuing family. Along the way, they've picked up some bumps and bruises, as well as a lot of wisdom that can help us.

Some of these ideas are blatantly connected to prayer and Scripture and feel very “spiritual.” Others are more tied to meals or miniature golf and feel more “fun” or “relational.” The reality is that the family bonding during car trips and card games is indeed very spiritual. Similarly, exchanging prayer requests in your family and adopting a family Bible verse are activities that tighten your family's relationships with each other. So we present both relational and spiritual ideas, praying that the Holy Spirit will help you sort out which hold the most promise for your family's road map.

No longer do the finest faith-building ideas need to remain hidden from view, practiced privately by scattered families. They are now gathered in your hand, on your coffee table, and across your screen.

The Sources for the Sticky Findings and Ideas

Most of the findings and ideas to help your family develop lasting faith come from three sources. The first data stream flowing through this guide is six years of research we at the Fuller Youth Institute conducted with more than five hundred youth group graduates from churches nationwide. Our team's goal was to follow these students during their first three years of college to discover the steps that churches and families could take to help set young people on a trajectory of lasting faith.

As we have shared the results of that study with parents nationwide through presentations and our first book, *Sticky Faith*, they have begged us for more practical ideas, ideas we knew we could best glean from families themselves. So the second data stream running through this guide is fifty interviews the Fuller Youth Institute team

conducted during 2012–13 with parents across the United States. Nominated by church leaders, these parents are of different geographical regions and denominations, various marital situations (while the majority are married, some are single parents, and others are remarried), and diverse ages and ethnicities.³ What they share is a commitment to deepen their kids' faith, and a

For more information about the research methodologies we followed as we interviewed five hundred youth group graduates and fifty parents, see appendixes 1 and 2.

recognized effectiveness in doing so. These parents are far from flawless, but they are willing to share what seems to have helped their kids keep the faith.⁴ To our delight, their experiences both confirmed what we had learned from our first data stream of five hundred young people and opened our eyes to new tributaries of insights and ideas that help families build enduring faith.

While these two studies yielded a treasure trove of insights, we also appreciate the studies conducted every day by fellow researchers around the country, and these studies are the third and final stream contributing to this guide. Our team extensively reviewed the top research on faith development and family dynamics to showcase the best for you.

This guide thus brings to your kitchen table the top voices in the country on Sticky Faith families. You get to pull up a seat also.

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These three streams of research (our two studies and our review of other research) form a river that flows through my own parenting. Every day, my husband and I parent differently—and better—because of the findings and ideas we’ve garnered from other families.

In some ways, the findings comprise the “head” of Sticky Faith families, while the ideas are the beating “heart.” Findings without ideas lead to irrelevant rationalism. Ideas without findings degenerate into empty emotionalism. But together, they allow you to understand not only *why* your family needs to make some strategic changes but also *how* to get there.

How Is This Book Different from *Sticky Faith*?

What began as a study of five hundred young people became the first Sticky Faith book, *Sticky Faith*.

That first book, as well as additional resources for families and churches, has become a Sticky Faith movement, a divinely fueled coalition of leaders and parents from all fifty of the United States and from sixty other nations committed to loving and serving young people differently.

Because parents who have joined the movement have asked us for even more research-based ideas, we developed this book. While most of the findings are brand-new, since not everyone who reads this book will have read the first Sticky Faith book, a handful of pages in this book review material presented in that first book. Because every single idea is new, and since we have emphasized ideas even more in this book than in previous resources, fans of *Sticky Faith* will have plenty of new tips and tricks to try at home.

How Your Family Can Get the Most out of This Guide

When we sifted through the most eye-opening findings and ideas, eleven themes emerged, each of which is described in its own chapter.

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As you work your way through the findings and ideas in each theme, we're hoping you're going to want to be a better parent.

But if you're like me, these insights may cause your "I've already failed as a parent" dial to click a few extra notches higher.

Or maybe these ideas will add a few more pounds to your "I'm not as good as other parents" scale.

I remember the Monday I conducted five consecutive one-hour interviews with Sticky Faith parents. By the end, I could barely stand myself as a parent. I felt more insecure than inspired. The stories and ideas I heard felt more like a punch in the gut than a shot in the arm.

One parent was amazing at involving his kids in serving others. Another excelled at making memories. Still another was a genius at making their home the go-to place for their kids' friends.

I felt like a munchkin surrounded by parenting giants.

You might feel the same as you flip through this guide.

Peaks and Pits

The problem is that we compare the *worst* of what we know about ourselves with the *best* of what we have heard from other parents. On my Monday marathon of interviews, I had temporarily forgotten two truths: first, that even these "successful" parents experience failure after failure. The great ideas that we're sharing in this guide often emerged out of a messy process in which parents' ideas fell flat. Like the great baseball hero Babe Ruth, the parents we are profiling hit a lot of home runs, but they also strike out a lot.

While the majority of this book focuses on great ideas, we know you will be encouraged by hearing about not just parental triumphs but also parental tragedies. We've sprinkled throughout this guide quotes of parents and students describing their family peaks and pits (to quote one of those parents). We've also added a dozen sidebars with research-based tips to tackle your toughest "what if" questions. We hope these sidebars give you a courtside view of families who've been playing the parenting game longer than you. They are banged up, but they are savoring the joy of continuing to point their families toward Jesus.

Not only that, but we've devoted an entire chapter to how to respond

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to mistakes, both your kids' mistakes and your own. On the journey to Sticky Faith, our mistakes can actually be a gas pedal toward our family's faith development, if we handle them wisely.

Pick and Choose

The second truth that I had forgotten is that no one family is capable of embracing every great parenting strategy.

Every family picks and chooses.

You too have to pick and choose what's best for your family.

I recommend that on your first time through this guide, you choose no more than five ideas to try. Five (or fewer) ideas are doable. More than that and you'll likely try to accomplish too much too quickly. As any runner knows, the journey of a marathon starts with the first few steps.

Note that I wrote "your first time through this guide." We've designed this guide to be like a recipe book or a playbook for your favorite sport. We hope you return to it again and again, sometimes skimming from the first page to the last, and other times doing a deep dive into the one chapter most vital to your family in that season.

To help your family best use this Sticky Faith guide, we are providing the following tools and suggestions.

1. *At the end of each idea*, we give you a chance to quickly reflect on how, if at all, this idea would guide your family toward long-term faith.
2. *At the end of every chapter*, we invite you to take a short quiz to rank how your family aligns with the findings and to reflect on which ideas might be most beneficial for your family. If you are reading this guide with friends or your small group, those questions are a great springboard for face-to-face discussions.
3. *At the end of the guide*, we provide a final chapter to help you flip through the quizzes at the end of each chapter and design a strategy to implement your five favorite Sticky Faith ideas.
4. *The day you finish the guide*, we encourage you to post your five favorite ideas in a public place—such as on your bathroom

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mirror or on your kitchen whiteboard—or in your favorite note-taking app.

5. *The week you finish the guide*, we hope you pick up the phone and call or meet face-to-face with a friend who can hold you accountable for making headway on those five ideas. Even if they haven't read the guide yet, they can still periodically ask you how you are doing and strategize with you how to move forward at a pace that fits your family.

Of course, we hope you're engaged with a congregation or community of fellow believers. If appropriate, share your five favorite ideas with your children's pastor, youth pastor, or small group leader. In their interactions with your children, they can help water the seeds that you are planting at home.

6. *A month or two after you finish this guide*, we invite you to evaluate your top five ideas list, noting which ideas seem to be working, which should be tweaked, and which should be replaced by new ideas that would better fit your family. Often the parents we interviewed found they had to do several experiments before landing on what worked best for their families. If you find yourself discouraged or in need of fresh ideas, you'll probably benefit from rereading a few chapters to refresh your enthusiasm and vision for what God wants to do in and through your family.

Suzanne's Story

My interest in developing a Sticky Faith family myself—and helping you do likewise—is partially fueled by Suzanne. For Suzanne and her three sons, the hopeful and practical message of this Sticky Faith guide came at just the right time. Suzanne had always believed in one of our core research-based practices, which we share in chapter 6: she surrounded her kids with a team of caring adults. But when, at a weekend family camp, Suzanne heard some of the facts and ideas behind that practice, she finally understood both why a team of invested adults is so important and how to build it.

Over the next few months, Suzanne and her husband asked her boys which adults they'd like to get to know better. Next Suzanne and her

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husband invited those adults to care for their boys. Across the board, those adults felt honored by the invitation to join the web of adults that surrounds each boy.

The need for a caring team of adults climaxed a year later when Suzanne was diagnosed with colon cancer. Convinced of the importance of encircling her sons with support, Suzanne continues to enlist men and women to come alongside her three boys as she battles cancer. If the Lord chooses not to heal Suzanne physically, these adults will likely walk with her sons for years to come.

We could stop Suzanne's story there and be inspired, but the story continues.

Suzanne isn't just building long-term faith in her own sons. On days she is physically able, she also invites neighborhood kids into her home so that those kids and their parents can get glimpses of a family transformed by Christ. Motivated by the thought of the role she can play in other kids' faith, Suzanne shares, "I'm excited to see how God is going to work through our family to reach the families in our neighborhood."

Not only has Suzanne developed a pathway for her own family; she's become part of other families' faith journeys. Just like you, she is part of the Sticky Faith movement rolling forward and changing the world one kid at a time.

As you join this growing team of parents, the last thing you need is a book that showers you with feelings of guilt for all you're not doing.

The first thing you need is a book that plants seeds of hope and strategy, enabling you to prayerfully point your family toward Jesus.

We hope and pray this guide is that first thing.

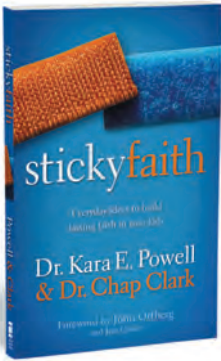
Sticky Ideas

- 1|** What are you already doing that is helping you model faith in front of your kids?

- 2|** In what ways are you and your children already benefiting from a supportive marriage or friendships?

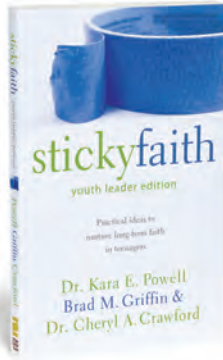
- 3|** Given your ranking of the findings in the previous section, as well as the ideas you've read in this chapter, what one or two changes might you want to make in your family?

- 4|** What can you do in the next few weeks or month to move toward these changes?



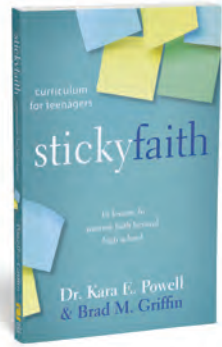
Sticky Faith

Everyday Ideas to
Build Lasting Faith
in Your Kids



Sticky Faith

Youth Worker
Edition



Sticky Faith

Teen Curriculum
with DVD



Sticky Faith Launch Kit

Your Next 180 Days
Toward Sticky Faith



Can I Ask That

8 Hard Questions
about God & Faith