COHORT RECAP · CHAPTER 1

Stop Asking Why

Tonight we looked at the question that keeps so many parents up at night, and where to set it down. Here's what we covered, so you can come back to it this week.

Dear friend,

You've been asking the same question for weeks. Maybe months. Maybe longer. Why did they leave? You've gone back through holidays, birthdays, phone calls and text messages, looking for the moment it all went wrong.

Underneath all that searching sits one belief: if I find the reason, I can fix it. That belief makes sense. You're a parent. For years you fixed scraped knees, flat tires and broken hearts.

So ask yourself this. If the reason showed up tomorrow in a letter, could you fix it? Most of the time the answer is no. Fixing it still takes your child's choice, and that part belongs to them and to God.

The search for why is a search for control. Naming that is the first step toward setting it down.

WHY WE CAN'T STOP

Stuck in the sand

Psychologists call this rumination. The word comes from the Latin *ruminari*: a cow chews, swallows, brings it back up and chews again. Your mind does that with "why."

Picture your truck stuck in soft sand at the beach. You hit the gas. The tires spin, the engine roars, sand flies everywhere. It feels like you're doing something, and every press of the pedal digs you in deeper.

A 2020 study in *Behavior Research and Therapy* found rumination raises your risk of anxiety and depression, hurts your sleep, makes impulsive choices more likely, and makes your body's stress response worse. A University of Liverpool study found the single biggest predictor of depression and anxiety was dwelling on negative events.

Read that again. The loop of why may be hurting your health more than the silence on the other end of the phone. And the loop is something you can work on starting today.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR BRAIN

Your brain heard smoke

The smoke detector in your kitchen screams the same way for burnt toast and a house fire. It hears smoke and does its job. When your child went silent, the amygdala, the part of your brain that watches for threats, heard smoke. It floods your body with cortisol and adrenaline so you can fight or run. With nothing to fight and nowhere to run, it searches, scans and replays.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman called this an amygdala hijack. The alarm shuts down the part of your brain that reasons, plans and makes wise decisions. That's where the 2am text comes from. The long voicemail. The guilt trip that sounds like love.

If you've sent one of those, give yourself some grace. Your brain was trying to stop the pain. From here on, try one rule: nothing gets sent after 9pm. Write it in a notebook and read it again in two days.

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT THE SEARCH

Where to lean

> **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."**
>
> PROVERBS 3:5–6

You lean on things that can hold you, like a porch railing or a friend's shoulder. You've been leaning your full weight on your own understanding, and it was never built to carry that much. God asks you to hand Him the part you can't figure out. His promise is a straight path.

> **"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."**
>
> ISAIAH 26:3

Every pilot learns this. Fly into clouds and you lose sight of the ground, and your body starts telling you the plane is turning when it's flying level. Pilots are trained to trust their instruments. A steadfast mind decides ahead of time where it will rest and keeps coming back there.

For a lot of us, our minds rest on the phone. When it buzzes, we feel okay for a minute. When it stays quiet, we spiral. God offers a place to rest that holds steady whether the phone rings or not.

LETTING GO OF THE ANSWER

You may never get the full explanation

That's the hardest sentence in this chapter. Your child may never sit down and walk you through why. They may not fully understand it themselves. Acceptance means you stop requiring an answer before you're willing to move forward. You can keep caring, praying and hoping the whole time.

Miss a turn and your GPS says one word: recalculating. It looks at where you are right now and finds the next road.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge, through the Stand-Alone project led by Lucy Blake, found estrangements last anywhere from under six months to more than 30 years. The people who made it through learned to live without the answer. Dr. Karl Pillemer at Cornell found that people who reconciled almost all gave up needing the other person to agree with their version of the past.

Nobody reconciles by winning the replay.

So the question that matters now is: what do I do next? That question belongs to you, and you can answer it today.

> **"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps."**
>
> PROVERBS 16:9

BREAKING THE LOOP

Four moves for when the loop starts

1

Move your body

Stand up, take a walk, or run cold water over your hands. Or breathe in for four, hold for four and out for four, ten times. It takes about six seconds for the stress chemicals to start fading.

2

Write it down

On a card, write **"Why did they leave?"** Underneath it, write **"I do not know the full answer. And I do not need it in order to take the next right step."** Put it on your fridge and read it every morning.

3

Talk to one person

One trusted friend, counselor or coach. Going over the same pain with a crowd leads to co-rumination, where everybody chews on the same problem and walks away feeling worse.

4

Pray

Pray it in the car, at the kitchen sink, at 3am. It's short enough for the nights you're worn out.

THE PRAYER OF A STEADFAST MIND

"I do not understand this. But I trust You. Help me take the next step."

It names what you don't understand. It gives God your trust. It asks for one step. That's this whole chapter in three lines.

ONE THING TO TRY THIS WEEK

Pick one of the four moves and start small. Count how many times you catch the loop this week. Catching it once is a win.

FOR YOUR JOURNAL

Questions to sit with

Take one a day. Write whatever comes, and bring a sentence to the group if you'd like.

- **If the answer showed up tonight, what would it give you?**
- **Where does your loop usually start?**
- **What have you put on hold until you get the answer?**
- **If you knew the two of you would never agree on what happened, what would you still want with your child?**
- **Where does your mind rest right now?**

THE ROAD AHEAD

The 10 Rules

We take one rule each Tuesday. Here's the whole path.

1 **Stop Asking Why** — THIS WEEK
Ask what now.

2 **Do Not Plead** — NEXT WEEK
Be still.

3 **Drop the "You're Disrespecting Me" Speech**
Earn respect through steadiness.

4 **Stop the Guilt Trip**
Let your love stand clean.

5 **Own What Is Yours**
Without conditions.

6 **Do Not Recruit Allies**
Guard your mouth.

7 **Do Not Use the Grandchildren**
Honor the boundary.

8 **Prepare for the Long Game**
Build while you wait.

9 **Keep One Door Cracked**
Leave the light on.

10 **Decide What You Are Building**
Then build it.

BEFORE YOU SEND THAT TEXT

Five questions to answer first

Thinking about reaching out? Before you type a single word, answer the five questions I walk through with every parent I coach. They're in the free Digital Emergency Kit, along with the printable 10 Rules checklist and a five-minute guided meditation for the moments your chest gets tight.

Get the free kit →

bit.ly/10RulesKit

You've asked why long enough. Put that question down for now, and take the next right step. I'll see you next Tuesday for Rule 2, Do Not Plead.



Desi Nájera Jr. · Christian Family Mediator & Estrangement Coach

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STAY CONNECTED

You don't have to walk this alone

ONE-ON-ONE

Book a free discovery call

Private and online, in English or Spanish. We'll look at where you are and your next step. I also review messages before you send them to your child.

Book a one-on-one →

FREE · TUESDAYS 9PM CENTRAL

Save your seat

Twenty minutes of teaching and twenty minutes of your questions on Google Meet.

Save my Tuesday seat →

FREE RESOURCES

More tools

Guides and resources for estranged parents and grandparents.

Browse the resources →

THE BOOK

When Your Adult Child Goes Silent

All 10 Rules in one place. Paperback $15.99 · Ebook $9.99.

Get the book →

A FREE WEEKLY LETTER

The Porch Light

One story, one biblical truth and one thing to try, every week.

Read The Porch Light →

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If you are in crisis or thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) right now. This recap offers general information and encouragement. It is not counseling, therapy, medical or legal advice.

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