

Stacy Bellward ([00:01](#)):

Hey friends. Welcome back. I'm Stacy Bellward, the host of the Connected Families Podcast. Welcome to our community. We are people committed to pursuing God's grace and truth for ourselves, and then daily working to pass that grace and truth onto our children. I'm so glad that you're here with us today. Well, I have a fun guest with me today, Ben Bevis. Ben is founder of an organization that's called Encircled, which presents a clear way for faith communities to encircle our kids and launch them with their faith intact. I love the concepts and I think that no matter what age your kids are, you will leave this podcast with some ideas about how you can encircle your kids no matter what season of life you're in, grandparents, you have a role, youth workers, you have a role. We all have a role to play. Before I invite Ben onto the show, I just wanted to take a quick second and let you know that the Discipline That Connects With Your Child's Heart online course is in full swing.

Stacy Bellward ([01:07](#)):

Hundreds are going through the course and learning to take hard parenting moments and think about how to approach them through the framework. One mom recently told me about how her and her husband sat down with the Framework because they were working through how to invite their middle school son to join a family meeting, which was something that he had typically resisted. After they sat down, their plan involved his favorite restaurant and meeting in the park. <laugh> The family meeting was not a ton out of 10, but she said it was big progress. I love that. You know, the Connected Families Framework is just that. It's a framework. We teach it to you, then you get to apply it in your own unique way. You know, you're probably wondering, why am I talking about this? Because Discipline That Connects course is now closed. Well, the reason is because small groups are always open, right? You can get a few people together and bam, you have a small group. Leading is really as easy as just pressing play. Okay, you guys, you can tap down to the show notes and check out all the information about the Discipline That Connect Small Group and all of our online courses, you can do a small group with all of 'em. Well, I just love the name Encircled and Ben, welcome to the podcast. We're glad to have you here.

Ben Bevis ([02:30](#)):

Thank you. I'm super excited to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

Stacy Bellward ([02:34](#)):

You are a longtime friend of Connected Families. I know that Jim and Lynn Jackson our Co-Founders were good friends of yours and I don't know, mentored you maybe as you started the organization Encircled.

Ben Bevis ([02:47](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I actually worked for Connected Families with their restorative division for, oh, how was it? Eight to 10 years as a therapist and, and worked with them. I even did one weekend retreat at Covenant Pines Bible Camp with a bunch of dads with their kids and used your Framework, which was a blast. So

Speaker 1 ([03:07](#)):

Awesome. Yeah, I know. We're really like kindred spirits with you and Encircled for sure. Well, why don't we start with you just introducing yourself.

Ben Bevis ([03:16](#)):

Yeah. My name is Ben Bevis and I am the current Executive Director of Encircled, and I am married to my wife, Sarah. 20 years. We just celebrated and we have three wonderful kids. We have Sophia, who's 17. We have Reed who is 15, and Samuel who is 12. So we're busy in the middle of it all. I'm also a licensed therapist and uh, got my degree a while back after working with teens for a while. I just felt God was calling me to, to be more equipped to work with the parents. Those are kind of some of my, my, my background. So yeah.

Stacy Bellward ([03:52](#)):

So we're gonna get into all of what Encircled is, but I just kind of wanna hit the ground running and ask you the question. Um, why the need to be intentional about our kids' faith journey?

Ben Bevis ([04:06](#)):

There is all sorts of research that's been done. Fuller Youth Institute and Barna has written books on this stuff. Unfortunately, the statistics aren't great for our high school Christian youth that live in the us. 60% of of high schoolers that have a faith that are part of a youth group, when they leave, they end up leaving their faith, um, by the time they're 30, 60%. So that's where deeper into that research, there's also some hope. Um, what they found was when youth have five or more intentional adults around them that are invested in them around faith, purpose and calling, they're more likely to sustain faith through those years of early adulthood. So that's where intentional, you know, adults investing in them and, and those can be parents, those can be grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, youth pastors, small group leaders and coaches. So there's a whole variety of intentional adults, but that's kind of the importance of having intentional adults in, in youth's lives around faith and around other things, obviously too.

Stacy Bellward ([05:12](#)):

So five adults that are all concentrated, uh, around feeding into our kids around the three areas of faith purpose and calling. And so I'm guessing some of this research is kind of the the foundational work Yeah. Around Encircled and how you Yes. Set it up. And I know you have sort of different tracks. Some for youth pastors or youth workers Yeah. And then also for parents. And we're gonna get to a lot more about the parents, but just tell us what is Encircled?

Ben Bevis ([05:41](#)):

So my work for the last 30 years has been invested in youth. And what I, what I did working with a place called Treehouse, which is where Jim and Chad, we all worked there together from Connected Families. What I experienced was, I was a mentor. I was speaking into these, these at-risk youth lives, and I found that it, it became overwhelming because I, I felt it was all on my shoulders. Many of these didn't have have fathers involved. And so kind of through those years of speaking into the youth, what I discovered was the youth that were doing really well were the ones that had more of a community outside of just me. As I shared, I, you know, started Encircled under Connected Families umbrella about four years ago. And I had all these experiences working in some social service realms where we got to get networks around families that were, that were struggling.

Ben Bevis ([06:34](#)):

And so thought of the idea of, of really taking some of the core things of, of working with, with youth and children in the system to working in faith communities. And it started for me with some of my good friends who had youth and adolescent age kids. And I said, Hey, I have this really cool new concept that

I've created. Would you mind if I started to create circles of support around your youth and help them live out who God created them to be? And they're like, yeah. So just had a few of those. And I remember the first one that I helped get a circle of support around was, was over four years ago. And I left that meeting and was just so charged up and could tell, I, I, I remember praying, I said, God, this was powerful. I wanna do more of this. Yeah. Will you show, will you show me the way? And so then it kind of started to, to organically grow where we started to create a model. Eventually, a few years ago, launched with my own board over the last few years have been really creating key resources to equip people that are on the battle lines, right? Or on the, on the front end of, of youth workers and parents and mentors so that they can do what they do best. And that's build relationship and speak into the next generation around faith. That's where Encircled kind of started.

Stacy Bellward ([07:53](#)):

So now you have different tracks. And just before we go that, I just wanna cast the vision for the parent that's at home listening Yeah. On their walk or in the car, whatever. And you told me that you have a ninth grader Yeah. And that you started, you know, as a parent, you've started to think about how to build an encircled community around your son. Did I get that right?

Ben Bevis ([08:16](#)):

Correct.

Stacy Bellward ([08:17](#)):

Can you Yeah. So cast that vision, like how did you do it and how could a parent start thinking about this?

Ben Bevis ([08:23](#)):

Yeah, for sure. So, yeah, so I have a ninth grader and his name's Reed. I always laugh 'cause he's, he's a, a young man that doesn't have much of a filter. He says what he thinks throws it out there. But he's an amazing young man. And so he was just confirmed this last spring. And I just came to this realization like, wow, my kids are growing up. I need to start to do the things that I've created with my own children. Yeah. And so literally a week after confirmation, I gathered together three other fathers of kids of, of Reed's friends. I just said, Hey, I've been reading this book called The Intentional Father. I gave them copies and I said, I would really love to start to get other intentional adults around my son. Would you wanna do this together? And kind of casted a vision for maybe we could meet once a month or once a quarter and just have some both fun milestone experiences where we could go on a hike together and talk about something that's important. Maybe it's around relationships or faith or career. And we could bring in other people that have other perspectives so that our sons can see this modeled with these intentional adults. And the hope is that by junior year or so, which is a great time to really gather a youth circle around them to start to get them ready to launch, is that we'll already have a circle in place that my son hopefully sees as people that have his back and wanna encourage him.

Stacy Bellward ([09:49](#)):

So what I'm hearing is you pick some, some specific adults that you felt like, you know, were were great people to feed into your son. Yeah. And in this case, you chose other dads who had, who had children, sons the same age, is that what I'm hearing? Yeah. Yep.

Ben Bevis ([10:05](#)):

Correct. Yeah.

Stacy Bellward ([10:07](#)):

And you set it up. So this is a long-term regular relationship with them. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. That's good. Yeah. And so does Encircled have curriculum that will help parents think through, you know, what they might wanna do as far as conversations with their kids throughout the seasons?

Ben Bevis ([10:24](#)):

Yeah, so we have some curriculum. We're just, we're launching a whole new subscription based model that I'll talk more about later. But one thing that we've created is we've created something called Parent Essentials, Grandparent Essentials and Mentor Essentials. And these are quick resources that really walk through this idea of the importance of getting a circle, getting mentors and helping them think through what are their God-given gifts, where is their identity in Christ lie versus their identity in things of this world. Helping them think of a vision for their future. And so it's gonna give parents, grandparents, and mentors some tangible activities, questions, and things that they can do to start to kind of plant this and to bring this up with their children all the way from early childhood through young adulthood. So that's something that we're really excited about. And then our two kind of bookends of our key programs is called our group journey-Encircled Group Journey.

Ben Bevis ([11:19](#)):

And this is a great curriculum for those of you that have our part of a faith community with a youth group. Or maybe you have a, a smaller community of house churches together or, uh, whatever. But it's a great four week curriculum that has everything that you need to really launch and Encircled in your faith community so that the youth can really get grounded in their identity in Christ their gift that God's given them, creating them a vision for living those gifts out and then inviting their actual circle around them. So that's the group journey. And then our last bookend is that milestone experience called the Personal Journey. And that's what I told you is a good time. Junior year is a great time to do this, where the, the youth has a guide, an Encircled guide that walks them through these two meetings to culminate and gather in their circle in person to speak into their strengths gifts, and to commit to ways they're gonna journey with them. So those are our products and our offerings. Yeah,

Stacy Bellward ([12:16](#)):

That's good. I wasn't very aware of everything that you have done over the years, but I did know of it. Mm-hmm. And, and, and so I took the concept just this year. Well, actually I did it both years with both my girls. And so as they were graduating from high school, what I did was, this is how I adapted. Yeah. all that you do, Ben.

Ben Bevis ([12:36](#)):

I'm excited to hear

Stacy Bellward ([12:38](#)):

I had been kind of behind the ball. I guess I, they were already almost graduated when, when I really started thinking about it. But when they were graduating, I invited people that cared about them, aunts, uncles, youth workers, just various people. And I invited them to write a letter to each one of my girls, and I put it into a book and it was a gift at their graduation party. Wow. And then some of those people

got to read to them. So it was a similar idea. Yeah. But it wasn't over time. It was just a one-time thing. And it was so meaningful to them. Yeah.

Stacy Bellward ([13:11](#)):

It was very, it was, it was a beautiful moment.

Ben Bevis ([13:14](#)):

What, what did you notice in kind of your, your daughter's responses to those experiences? What did you see in them that told you it was meaningful?

Stacy Bellward ([13:22](#)):

Well, they just, first of all felt so loved. Yeah. So launched. It's like, it just feeds a kid's soul, doesn't it? Yeah. When adults speak into them and say, I see this in you, you know, and then when they wrote their prayers for the girls mm-hmm. And to launch them into the future too. So that's cool. And that leads me to a question that I wanted to ask.

Ben Bevis ([13:42](#)):

Amazing. Yeah. Thanks for sharing. That's exciting.

Stacy Bellward ([13:46](#)):

Yeah. When caring adults have come around a child with this Encircled way.

Ben Bevis ([13:51](#)):

Yeah.

Stacy Bellward ([13:52](#)):

What have you seen as a result?

Ben Bevis ([13:54](#)):

Oh man, I have so many stories. So I would say what's really fun about each of these, especially this personal journey, right? It's this amazing similar to what you did, right? You brought like it's very real and in person. And that's where I see the Holy Spirit work the most. Yeah. We have great resources, but the power is through the, the mentor circle, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, that's where God uses these intentional people that wanna love on their youth. And so I would say, I have seen, there was a, a young man who was a part of, he had a smaller circle. He had three adults they invited and one of them was his mom. And what was so powerful, not just for the youth, 'cause he lit up, you could just see his disposition went from kind of like, uh, I don't know how this is gonna go to like engaging and like, wow, thank you.

Stacy Bellward ([14:43](#)):

And you could just tell he appreciated. But his mom also, you could tell she just felt this absolute joy knowing that it wasn't all on her shoulders. So there's other intentional adults that are, that are gonna have conversations with my son. They're not going away. They're speaking life into him. And for these young people, I've heard lots of young people that have shared, that have gone through Encircled. I know that I have a circle now. I'm not on my own. I know I can reach out to people, uh, when I'm feeling

lonely or scared at college or in my first job, I know that I have people praying for me. And, uh, we had a young man Bill, one of my first young men that went through Encircled, and literally his parents said after the encircled meeting, they're like, Bill's teacher emailed us. And she said, what happened in the last week with Bill?

Ben Bevis ([15:37](#)):

And she's like, well, he went through this encircled thing and she's like, he's a different kid. He's more talkative. He is asking questions in class. And this is the same kid that also loved music and playing music. He played his guitar at the Encircled gathering and these people are like, who? We didn't know you were this good. Yeah. And so he started to play it like open mics and all these different things, <laugh>. And he joined a band. So you just see these kids just come out of their shell and they step into who God created them to be because they know they have people that are cheering them on and walking with them. So those are just a few examples, but,

Stacy Bellward ([16:12](#)):

Well, I have this little burning question and then I wanna get to the Encircled thing that you just referred to, like the meeting or what, what is that thing? Yeah. And I, you know, we have a lot of parents that have smaller kids. Yep. Maybe even preschoolers, but certainly elementary. At what age can a parent start thinking about putting this together?

Ben Bevis ([16:33](#)):

I think you can start as early as, as, um, when they're born, like with your, with your spouse to be praying for who are those people that God's putting on your heart That could be intentional mentor circle members with this child's future. I would say be praying for that. Also, start to notice as they're a small child, what are some of the gifts? I know Connected Families, you call it sometimes misbehavior, there's the gift gone awry, right? Yeah. But starting to notice what are their God-given gifts? What are the characteristics that are coming out and start to call that out. We love to talk about the verse 1st Peter 4:10, which says, use whatever gifts you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in various forms. So the more that us as parents can call out the gifts that we see in our, in our children, in our youth, and start to give them opportunities to use those to bless others, but we can also do some and model that, right?

Ben Bevis ([17:30](#)):

So how can we as parents model the gifts that God's given us to bless others and to, and to have our, our kids join in on those experiences to bless a neighbor. You know, I remember taking my, actually my now ninth grader who was six, there's a big snow storm. And he said, dad, we should go, we should go shovel our neighbor's driveway. I'm like, well, I gotta get to work, but okay. So we went and shoveled and then my son got to experience this like gratitude from a neighbor. And I said, wow, Reed, thanks so much for using your gift to service to others and calling me into that. So I, I would say the more we can speak into their gifts, be praying and starting to get those intentional people around them, maybe that's your life group or small groups at church.

Ben Bevis ([18:15](#)):

And then helping them create a vision for the future. A lot of times we talk about this Ephesians 2:10 verse mm-hmm. About we are God's hand work creating Christ Jesus to do good work. Right. Which God prepared in advance for us to do. So the more that we can help them start to dream and imagine and

vision how God might use them in the world. And you can start that at a really early age. So, so, and that's part of our Parent Essentials where there's some possible questions and things that they can use mm-hmm. <affirmative> to look into some of these ideas.

Stacy Bellward ([18:47](#)):

So Ben, as a parent, my child's just born and they're growing. Yeah. And it's getting to a stage where I really do wanna kind of try to facilitate a more formal relationship with a mentor and ask someone if they would mentor my child. Tell us about that. How do you do that?

Ben Bevis ([19:04](#)):

And how old did you, did you say your child would be?

Stacy Bellward ([19:07](#)):

I don't know, maybe, you know, maybe they're eight, maybe they're 12. I'm not sure.

Ben Bevis ([19:11](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Well, I think obviously you wanna do it in a safe sort of way. You want it to be somebody that you feel safe with, you would trust with your child. And I would say initially it might be doing things as a group at a younger age, unless it's a grandparent or somebody that's really connected, what I would encourage them to do is, is as I think of what it means even to be a mentor, right? And I was just doing some thinking about that. And I put down someone that is prayerfully modeling faith through how they live and inviting the mentee to join in that journey through support and uh, being an advocate and a trusted advisor. So I would say, you know, inviting people that your, your son or daughter gravitates towards feels comfortable with and maybe doing some, some shared experiences together to go serve together and see if it seems like a good fit. And then if they're open and willing as that child gets older, I love when my son or daughter gets invited by our youth pastor or a small group leader to go grab coffee and to talk about relationships or whatever it is. But to kind of working slowly into the one-to-one situations outside of parents or grandparents and just making sure your child is comfortable with that.

Stacy Bellward ([20:28](#)):

That's good. Okay. So then back to that question. You, you told the story of the, the boy who did the first meeting, you said something like that. And then he, he just came out of his shell. He just became more confident and was able to play the guitar and all of that. Explain to us what is that first meeting

Ben Bevis ([20:46](#)):

Through our personal journey, which is that Milestone Experience that I talked about. And usually it's good for a youth that's around 16 to 18 to go through that. So there's two different meetings and a guide can lead that, that we can equip them with all the tools to do that through a church. Or it could be you as a parent. And in the first meeting, it's really about discovering their gifts. We encourage them to take a gift inventory that we found a great gift inventory. It's called VIA, it's free, which I love. So they take the gift inventory and then they process, what were some of those, their top five gifts, their character traits. And then the guide walks through the process of Encircled, why we go through Encircled, why, what is important about having a mentor circle. And then helps them create this vision, which is the importance of creating some dreams and goals for how they wanna live out their gifts in the future. And then the last thing in that first meeting is really just culminating all doing all the things that they need to do to prepare for their Encircle Your Life Meeting. And that's that, that meeting with their

mentor circle. So they help that youth develop what are their key life areas. Hopefully one of their key life areas is faith. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> one might be school education, one might be work slash career, one might be relationships, one might be video games.

Stacy Bellward ([22:05](#)):

<laugh>

New Speaker ([22:05](#)):

We, we try to

Speaker 2 ([22:07](#)):

Yeah, I know. I know. I might get in trouble for that one. But, but the reality is we want it to be something that the youth or the child feels like they're driving the bus. This is their life. So we wanna give them choices. We wanna let them choose what are those areas. And then they also get to choose who do they wanna be a part of their mentor circle, right? So that, that second meeting, then their mentor circle comes together where the guide leads this time and it specifically walks through different key steps to help the, the circle better understand the youth's gifts, what's their vision. And then it gives them opportunity to speak into this youth's life around their key life areas of faith, of career, of school relationships. And that's where they's, where they give tangible support for what they're gonna do moving forward.

Ben Bevis ([23:00](#)):

And maybe that's, grandpa wants to take Johnny out fishing once a month and have conversations about faith. Maybe uncle wants to have breakfast with his, his nephew once a quarter because that's what works with his schedule and just have intentional conversations around career or whatever he might be passionate about. And it culminates in this time of blessing, which is really powerful, where the circle literally in circles or surrounds this youth and praise prayers of faith of biblical verses that they've brought that are meaningful to them and to the youth. And then the youth gets a recording of that, an audio recording of this blessing. And it's super powerful because then that youth can listen to it later in life.

Stacy Bellward ([23:44](#)):

I just love this because you know, some of us struggle with being intentional. Yeah. And then struggle with, okay, but now what? Like, you know, I would love some more meaningful, deep conversations. Yeah. I'm the mom, this is my son. Do I need, you know, find men. It can be mixed. So we've kind of covered all of that. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And what I love about what you're doing in Encircled is that you, you create these pathways Yes. For people to grab this curriculum and to think through some of these, you know, conversations and topics mm-hmm. <affirmative> and areas of their children's life where they do wanna be intentional and bring people in. And that starts from when your child is born. And the relationships will change over the years with our kids. But it's just, it's a beautiful time to launch our kids with intentionality mm-hmm. <affirmative> and think about their faith journey like this. It's so good. Yeah.

Ben Bevis ([24:39](#)):

Yeah. Exactly.

Stacy Bellward ([24:40](#)):

Ben, how parents get in contact with you or start to access encircled resources?

Ben Bevis ([24:48](#)):

Yeah, great question. So we're super excited 'cause we've launched this new subscription-based model. So for you parents that are involved in a church community or faith community that might have a youth pastor volunteer full-time, you can initially send them to [encircle.org](#) and they can check out our, our great subscription model that gives all the resources for that church to use. And we're actually giving a, a great promo code for you all, and it's CF50, so 50% off this big launch. And so pretty reasonable. But if you're not a part of a faith community and you're just really excited and interested in this, you can also go to [encircle.org/parents](#) with an S at the end. And there will be a parent kind of page that you can check out. Uh, you can buy this resource for your, your family or maybe your small group. And to be able to, to utilize and equip you all with some of the tools to, to make it your own. Because I, I know that not everyone works the same, but we just wanna provide as many resources as we can to creatively make it your own as a parent, as you're figuring out what it means to, to launch your child or your youth into adulthood with faith in tactic. So

Stacy Bellward ([26:03](#)):

With faith in tactic. That's great. Wow. Those are generous coupon codes. The code that you mentioned, and we'll have that in the shownotes, everyone, the website address and the coupon code and all that you need to tap through and connect with Ben at Encircled. Yes, Ben, thanks for being on the show today. It was great to have you .

Speaker 2 ([26:25](#)):

Oh, thanks for having me. It was amazing. I'm, yeah, I'm excited to be a part of what you're doing with Connected Families.

Stacy Bellward ([26:31](#)):

We're great to have kindred spirits with you.

Ben Bevis ([26:34](#)):

Yeah, thank you so much.

Stacy Bellward ([26:35](#)):

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