

Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength

Building Teens of Faith,
Character, and Ability

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Volume 1: Capacity,
Humanity, and Appetites

Stephanie Smith

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Bring the **First Great Commandment** to life!

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” Mark 12:29-30 ESV

How This Guide Works



You want to go deep with your children before they leave home. You know they'll need answers to the hard questions. Who am I? What do I want for my life? What difference does faith in God really make? The *Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength* series equips you to show your children how a life rooted in a love for God is the only one that ultimately fulfills and completes us.

Built on the First Great Commandment, this three-volume program respects teens' desire for depth without stuffiness. Parents are considered, too, because nobody wants a boring or intimidating resource. Everyone will value the series' richness, comprehensiveness, and real-world application. Humor is woven throughout because growth doesn't have to feel like a root canal.

Hop in as we complete a fly-over of the guide's structure.

Three Units Per Volume

Volume 1: Capacity, Humanity, Appetites

Four Lessons Per Unit + Final Recap

Recommended schedule: One Lesson Weekly

Five Elements in Each Lesson:

Activity, Story, Pivot, Bible Teaching, Life Application

Activity: More than a warm-up exercise, the activity captures attention and creates curiosity. The connection to the main content brings the lesson full circle, cementing it through full-body engagement.

Story: Stories stick. Intriguing selections introduce people, conditions, events, and concepts beyond the usual fare.

Pivot: Like a hinge that opens a door into a new room, this section opens the heart and mind to the vital Bible Teaching and Life Application sections. Each pivot presents a brief and memorable key insight. Don't be surprised if these statements find a permanent place in your family's vocabulary.





Bible Teaching: Content that’s interesting without being shallow and relevant without being trivial. A complete lesson that also whets the appetite to study more of the Bible so teens see that both the Old and New Testament are vital to growing in a knowledge of and love for God.

Life Application: Teens complete questions and exercises in a personal journal. Use this section for conversation starters. The primary purpose is for the teen to pursue honest reflection; spiritual and character growth; developing and stewarding practical and relational abilities. You may find value in completing this section for yourself.

Parent Plus

Each unit opens with an overview, mini-guidebook, and discussion prompts.

Bible Memory Verse

In addition to the First Great Commandment, each unit has a memory verse.

Unit Prayer

Written for the teen because sometimes it’s difficult to know what to say. Great to print and display in your home.

Dad & Mom Friendly

Equally appealing to moms and dads. Men won’t feel like they’ve been dropped into a field of flowers. Women won’t feel like they’re reading a power tool manual. (Sorry, I’ve resorted to stereotypes in these examples.) Both male and female teens will find the content engaging.

Open & Go

While some of the activities require a bit of planning ahead, you won’t need to go searching for obscure items like ostrich feathers. Reading the Scripture passages ahead of time provides the opportunity to add your insights, but this is not required. You can usually cover the Activity through the Bible Teaching in under 20 minutes.



Interactive

The goal is not transferring information but inspiring transformation. Discussion questions are only the start. Teens will be directed to do more than talk or reflect but to plan and take decisive actions. The journal questions and actions invite serious reflection, not regurgitating “right” answers.



Flexible

Designed to be used weekly to allow sufficient time to dig deeper into the Bible passages, continue the conversation beyond one session, and walk out the action steps. However, adapt as you see fit.

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**ACTUAL or
POTENTIAL ABILITY**



There is no heavier burden
than an unfulfilled potential.

CHARLES SCHULZ

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:29-31 ESV

CAPACITY UNIT

Bible Verse

Prayer

Parent Plus

Lesson 1:
Discovering Capacities

Lesson 2:
Developing “Who” Capacities

Lesson 3:
Developing “Do” Capacities

Lesson 4:
Dangers of Capacities

Capacity Recap

CAPACITY BIBLE VERSE

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (ESV)

Ephesians 2:10

CAPACITY PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you have given generously to everyone capacities for relationship with you and others; for meaningful work, whether paid or unpaid; for growing in knowledge, wisdom, skill, and influence. I thank you for the specific capacities you have given to me, and I humbly ask you to strengthen me all the days of my life to steward these abilities well.

You are eager to empower the development of my unique abilities and stopping the enemy's plans to steal and destroy your gracious gifts. Grant me opportunities to explore my capacities; insight to recognize them; discipline to develop them; and a vision to employ them.

Grow my mental, emotional, and spiritual muscles through training so I will be a person of strength, "fighting the good fight of faith" for myself and others. May my capacities never lead me away from you, reduce my desire for you, or replace my dependence on you. May I not confuse laziness with a proper dependence on you or busyness as obedience to you.

Help me see when I begin boasting in my own strength or achievements and guide me back onto the path of grateful humility. Keep me from lost opportunities both because of ignorance and arrogance.

Prompt me to be an encourager to others through words and actions to fully develop their abilities for your glory. May I be a faithful participant in making your kingdom come and your will be done.

May each capacity I have be known, developed, and aligned with what reveals your glory -- the full redemption of each person, not only for salvation from sin but for transformation into Christ-likeness. Thank you for choosing to entrust me with capacities to build your kingdom!

CAPACITY: PARENT PLUS

Effective parents become their child's "student." We often focus on being our child's teacher but forget the best teachers are first students and retain a learner's mind-set. Think back over your child's life and make notes about the ways your child has seen and interacted with the world. This isn't just about who they are now. Kids often "try on" personas or adopt new ones as part of development stages or environment changes. Rather, look for ongoing behavioral patterns and note when these started to surface. Some may have been present since infancy. Others may have begun after a significant life event, such as moving, a sibling's birth, or involvement in a new activity or group.

Examples:

- * Is happiest when surrounded by lots of activity
- * Is happiest when surrounded by quiet
 - * Steps into new surroundings easily
 - * Steps into new surroundings with caution
 - * Can often be found reading a book
 - * Would turn our house into a zoo if possible
 - * Can often be found constructing/deconstructing something
 - * Loves creating art/music/recipes/stories
 - * Is empathetic with others
 - * Takes charge of situations
 - * Loves the outdoors
 - * Enjoys athletic challenges
 - * Enjoys thinking and analysis
- * Is significantly concerned about what is "fair"
- * Is significantly concerned about keeping the peace

Actions:

1. As you consider behavioral patterns, think about what capacities these might reveal. Designer. Creator. Encourager. Organizer. Writer. Team builder. Listener. Justice seeker. Peace keeper. Trail blazer. Support person. Write a letter or note to your child describing the capacities you see in them.

2. Write a separate capacity on a cardstock tag or note card or sticky note, date these items, and create a "capacity" scavenger hunt. Identify one ability you think your child has which they may not recognize (or see as valuable) and orchestrate exposing them to this to pique their interest. For example, attending a live performance, watching a movie, taking introductory lessons, talking to an expert, sharing a story. The more concrete the better. You can employ the subtle system ("Hey, I'm going to go try my hand at ____, and I've signed you up as my partner") or the direct approach ("I think you would really excel at ____, so I've signed you up for six lessons.") Use wisdom here; the goal is to encourage, not antagonize.



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Dashboard Warning Light:

As you go through these lessons, this is **not** the time to bring up your child's character flaw(s). Use this program as an opportunity to speak life into your child(ren). No matter what current behavior shows, they do possess God-given abilities they will need to identify and steward for a life of eternal significance. Don't weaponize this information, even if your heart is currently being torn apart by their behavior.

This isn't a time for schmoozing. "Ah, honey, you're the most talented musician I've ever heard," as you push the noise-cancelling earbuds further into your skull. Nope. It's also not the time to speak capacities into them you wish they had. Booming "You're going to be the NFL first-round draft pick for defensive tackle!" to your 108 pound son as he composes classical music is going to sound more like a ballad of disappointment than a tune of affirmation.

Even if (when?) you feel your child's heart has become deaf to your words, it hasn't! Be your child's student as you **are** their most influential teacher. Finding abilities takes work. Developing abilities takes work. Using abilities takes work. And it's not just on your child's part – yep, it means you're on the duty roster as well. Here's the good news: your child isn't going to discover and refine every one of their abilities during the first 18 years of life. Whew! You can relax a little – but just a little.

Your goal can't be to ensure your child has a completed "Abilities Resume" by graduation. Rather, focus on making the process of exploring, recognizing, and developing abilities a life habit. Some things a person can't learn about themselves until adulthood when they experience people, expectations, and situations childhood can't possibly create. If your child realizes their junior year of college they absolutely love administering first-aid (hopefully resulting from a class in the subject and not a series of accidents) and your response is "Oh my, I failed. If I'd only known that in high school, they'd be on track for med school right now," relax. It's okay. The specific interests they develop as a child and teenager are important, but what's crucial is experiencing the process of ability-cultivation.

Record thoughts on your own capacities and those you see in your child(ren). Use your notes to encourage your child(ren), share from your experience, and see where you want to grow. Remember, modeling remains the most effective teacher.

Discussion Prompts:

Lesson 1. Share about the capacities you have. When and how did you recognize these?

Lesson 2. Have you had an experience when someone saw a capacity in you, and it changed how you thought about yourself and even how you directed or re-directed your life in some way?

Lesson 3: What capacities tend to run in your family? How have people stewarded these?

Lesson 4: Share a time you started poorly (like Saul) but finished well. What made the difference? What did you learn from this?

CAPACITY: PARENT PLUS (Continued)

Record thoughts on your own capacities and those you see in your child(ren). Use your notes to encourage your child(ren), share from your experience, and see where you want to grow. Remember, modeling remains the most effective teacher.

LESSON 4: DANGERS OF CAPACITIES

ACTIVITY

Goldilocks and the Three Bags of Popcorn

Supplies:

1. Microwave
2. Three (3) bags of microwaveable popcorn
3. Three slips of paper with one of the following phrases written on each slip: "Too little," "just right," "too long."



Ask if your child(ren) remember the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Ask what Goldilocks' reaction was to Papa Bear's bowl of porridge (cereal) -- "Too hot;" with Mama Bear's bowl -- "Too cold;" and with Baby Bear's bowl -- "Just right." For the "Too little" slip, cook the popcorn but only long enough for a few of the kernels to pop. For the "too long" slip, overcook the popcorn so it burrs. (Just don't start a fire in the microwave!) For the "just right" slip, cook the popcorn properly. Ask which bag of popcorn your child(ren) want: "too little," "too long," or "just right."

STORY

Too Cold to Launch

On January 28, 1986, thousands of teachers in the United States stopped their regular lesson and directed millions of students towards the television screen. Several million adults paused their daily activities to tune into the live broadcast from Cape Canaveral, Florida. NASA's Space Shuttle Challenger was set to launch into space carrying seven crew members: five astronauts, one payload specialist, and -- for the first time in history -- a civilian. The civilian was a social studies teacher from New Hampshire -- a wife and mother of two children, ages 9 and 6.

At launch the rocket boosters and shuttle weighed over four million pounds and was constructed of thousands of parts. Four of these pieces, o-rings, were about 38' in circumference, like a hula-hoop, and about 1/4" thick, about the same thickness as a pencil. The o-rings were seals designed to keep hot gas and flames inside the rocket boosters. Tragically, these gaskets failed, and escaping gas and flames burned a hole into the external fuel tank, triggering a massive explosion blowing the space shuttle apart. Everyone aboard perished. The space shuttle program was halted for over two years.

Why did these o-rings fail? The cold temperatures exceeded the o-rings capacity to function properly. Engineers had warned the o-rings weren't designed to withstand the cold temperatures present on the morning of the fatal launch. Others claimed the engineers were overreacting. The launch had been postponed on other occasions, and the pressure was on to not reschedule again.

Everything -- and everyone -- has limits. Ignoring these limits can result in deaths. Not only of people, but of relationships, opportunities, careers, effectiveness, abilities, and health.

Handling capacities wisely means discovering and developing these. Wisdom requires understanding, accepting, and dealing with the dangers when we're tempted to ignore limits.

PIVOT

Too hot, too cold, just right

Capacities are like bags of popcorn. The instructions on popcorn are there to enable you to enjoy a delicious treat, not leave you with lots of useless kernels or running for the smoke alarm because the popcorn is overcooked. Self-limiting beliefs are like bags pulled from the microwave too early, leaving you with unfulfilled possibilities. Pride-based beliefs are like bags kept in the microwave too long, burning your opportunities. Humility leads to “just right” outcomes.

NASA had engineers warning about o-ring failure due to cold temperatures, while others advised the o-rings would be fine, and the scheduled launch should continue. The warnings weren't heeded. The choice to wait until a later date when all the engineers would be in agreement wasn't made. The results were tragic.

How can you make decisions when you hear contradictory messages? That answer isn't always simple, but there are some key guidelines which can be followed.

BIBLE TEACHING

1 Samuel 13:8-18

Wait! No, Don't!

Tragically, in 1 Samuel 13:8-14 we read how Saul overreaches his capacity with dire consequences for himself, his family, and the nation of Israel. Saul is still being motivated by fear, although he responds differently than he did when first anointed king. Instead of hiding behind baggage, he's stepping into the spotlight and taking on a responsibility which isn't his. Only the prophets and priests were allowed to offer certain sacrifices according to God's commandments. The prophet Samuel had promised to come and offer the sacrifices before Saul and the army went into yet another battle against the Philistines.

When Samuel is late, Saul panics and decides to act as a priest instead of a king and offers the sacrifices himself. Since we're no longer slaughtering sheep or cows to receive God's forgiveness, this can seem like no big deal. But it was. Huge, actually. A direct violation of God's clear command which had been established since the exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt. This wasn't some obscure technicality of ceremonial law Saul didn't know. He knew better!

The consequence of Saul's act is equal to its significance: the kingship of Israel would not be passed down through his family. (You can read all about how costly this was in 2 Samuel.)

Instead of waiting on Samuel -- which required trusting God -- Saul declares, “Time's up! Things aren't looking good here, and I'm taking matters into my own hands.” This isn't living empowered; it's living arrogant. And arrogance and faith do not co-exist. Faith is rooted in humility -- understanding, accepting, and working within our limits while being responsible for identifying, growing, and applying our abilities. From the first unit, we don't want to self-limit because of false beliefs like “I'm not smart enough to do _____.” Yet the antidote to destructive self-limiting beliefs is humility, not arrogance.

One of the greatest dangers as we grow in capacities and confidence is to begin moving into roles which aren't ours. “I handled that so well, I'm certainly capable of doing this other thing.” And what makes this so difficult is the truth that confidence in one area can build confidence in another area and help us

BIBLE TEACHING (Continued)

to see all of our capacities. So how does a person know if they are operating in self-limiting beliefs, the “sweet spot,” or arrogance? The question is, “Am I doing anything which is against one or more of God’s commands?” Whether one understands the command or not is not the issue. It’s whether one follows the command or not.

The consequence for Saul’s action can seem extreme. His family will not be where future kings come from? Really? I mean, maybe lose a battle. Or two. But an entire kingdom? From this we can learn a powerful lesson. When we assume responsibilities that belong to others and we presume that our role, position, capacity, intelligence, social standing, wealth, whatever... excuses or justifies us, we never know how costly that may be -- for us, our family, our community, church, nation, business, or the world.

KEY INSIGHT

HUMILITY PROTECTS CAPACITIES

Humility focuses on the right priority.

Humility waits for guidance.

Humility follows wise instructions.

What we focus on, wait for, and follow will develop, diminish, or destroy our capacities. Saul focused on fear. He saw the enemy’s power and his army’s perplexity. His focus became his immediate desire to rally his troops rather than a long-term vision to lead his people in righteousness.



Saul didn’t wait on Samuel which meant not waiting for God. Waiting can sometimes be the hardest action of all. Had Saul waited for Samuel; had NASA waited until all its team agreed to “Launch!,” who knows how differently not only the battle and mission would have turned out, but the lives of all those affected.

Saul leaned on -- followed -- his own understanding. He placed his opinions above God’s commands. He didn’t ask for help from those around him to do the right thing. Today, we don’t wait for prophets to declare God’s instructions. We have Scripture and the example of Jesus. Most of the world will declare the Bible to be irrelevant, outdated, and faulty -- even dangerous. They will judge those believing it to be the only divinely inspired guide to life to be intellectually wimpy, emotionally weak, and perhaps even culturally dangerous. However, its teachings have been proven over thousands of years in radically diverse cultures covering every area of the globe.

Focusing on, waiting for, and following God requires humility. When we focus elsewhere; plunge ahead ignoring cautions from our conscience, others, or Scripture; and place our own or other’s opinions above God’s instructions, we jeopardize our capacities -- and those of countless others.

LIFE APPLICATION

1. Think about a recent situation where you became focused on the wrong priority and made a poor decision. What were you focused on at the time, and what would have been a better focus?

2. What was motivating your focus? Think about the thoughts and emotions you were experiencing. We can have many motivations when making poor decisions. Some of these include: fear, a desire to gain someone's attention or affection, stubbornness, retaliating to "pay back" someone who hurt us, a desire to appear smart, to relieve pain, to be accepted in a group, to avoid confrontation. The goal is honesty and growing your self-awareness, not to condemn, excuse, or glorify yourself.

3. When is it most difficult for you to wait?

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4. What is one action you could take to help you wait when it's hard? Ideas include:

- *Ask a person for help.
- *Discuss options with a wise person
- *Get involved in an activity which focuses your mind in a positive direction.
- *Commit to wait for a specific amount of time before making a decision.
- *Pray and read Scripture.
- *Write your values and long-term goals and how rushing to act might compromise these

LIFE APPLICATION (Continued)

5. What do you rely on to make decisions about which instructions to follow? Do you think about decisions carefully or tend to act “without thinking?”

6. How do you know if you make decisions which align with God’s instructions in the Bible? Do you study the Bible for yourself or only rely on others to tell you what’s in the Bible?

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7. How can you make wise decisions about matters which aren’t clearly specified in Scripture?

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

CAPACITY RE-CAP

CAPACITY IS NOT DEPENDENT ON
OR DETERMINED BY CONFIDENCE

NO WORK = RAW AND WASTED ABILITIES

DO REVEALS WHO

HUMILITY PROTECTS CAPACITIES

CAN YOU RECALL?

1. What is the name for beliefs which impose artificial restrictions on your abilities and opportunities?
 2. Everyone has this and can be tempted to hide behind it.
 3. Getting from “raw” talent to useful skills requires what?
4. “Do” capacities are about your abilities while “who” capacities are about what?
5. What is required to safeguard your capacities from becoming destructive?

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ONLY
CHECKING IN

How are you progressing on intentionally growing a “who” capacity from Lesson 2?

How is your action plan for developing a “do” capacity from Lesson 3 coming?
What is one or more steps you can take now to prepare to pass your next “Wait” test from Lesson 4?

CLOSING THOUGHT

“No one has ever had to work at limiting their capacity. That happens naturally. The world tries to talk us out of working hard. We convince ourselves that we can’t get ahead. We feel down, and we watch our lives go downhill. There are even people who will tell you that others have put you there, that the system is rigged, that successful people have pushed you down and have gotten to the top by stepping on you. Well, I have good news for you ... Your production capacity is within your own control.”

From No Limits: Blowing the Cap Off Your Capacity by John C. Maxwell