

Author will sign books at local church April 14th

Jeannie Cunnion talks about faith, parenting

Parenting the Wholehearted Child offers advice to parents

By David R. Altman
Books & Writers Editor

"Some days are easier than others." That's the first line of Jeannie Cunnion's highly anticipated new book, *Parenting the Wholehearted Child*, which is being released this week.

Cunnion, mother of three young sons and daughter of a retired local minister and his wife, has written a book that deals with the both the complexities and simplicity of raising children who "grow up with a keen awareness of just how wholly dependent they are on Jesus' wholehearted love for them."

The book is already receiving widespread praise with Kathie Lee Gifford calling it "a book I wish I'd written" and Elisabeth Hasselbeck, who wrote the book's forward, noting the author's "ability to recount an ordinary moment and use it to explore an extraordinary truth about how we are called to parent leaves me feeling renewed. In every bit of Jeannie's book is every parent."

Cunnion, whose parents George and Bonnie Callahan reside in Tate, and whose oldest sister Patti Callahan Henry is a *New York Times* bestselling author, says she feels blessed by the encouragement she's received from her family and friends on her first book.

"My parents are so gracious, and my sisters Barbi and Patti have been so encouraging, it's been such a blessing," said Cunnion in an interview last week preparing for the launch of her book. The author, who did most of her growing up in Florida, said the book's inspiration came from her own faith and the role it has played in the raising her three young sons.

The book's opening section deals with the issue of perfection, and how many parents' own drive for perfection can create chaos in the family. Cunnion discusses her own obsession with being a perfect parent raising perfect children and her own spiritual journey that ultimately allowed her to "exchange the burden, the angst, the striving...



Author Jeannie Cunnion, whose new book *Parenting the Wholehearted Child* was released on April 8 by Zondervan books. Her first book tour stop will be at Trinity Church in Marble Hill Monday, April 14, at 10 a.m.

for joy, for hope, for peace."

"God's grace began to transform my parenting," said writes. "Gradually my quest to raise perfect children was transformed into a desire to raise "wholehearted children" - children who live from the freedom found in being wholeheartedly and unconditionally loved (and liked!) by God in Jesus Christ.

"I think one of the best things we can do is recognize that, as parents, we are not perfect," said Cunnion. "Mike [her husband] and I can say, when we get it wrong, 'hey, I'm not where I want to be where I want to be today, will you forgive me?'"

Cunnion grew up as a "preacher's kid" as her father, Dr. George Callahan, built ministries in Pennsylvania, Florida and Georgia and continues to work in Christian ministries around the world and now has a counseling business in Tate. George and Jeannie's mother Bonnie, whom she calls "a saint," were guiding forces in her life.

"I couldn't have written this book if my parents hadn't raised me the way they had," said Cunnion. She said her parents gave her a "profound gift" by helping her understand that it was not religion that mattered the most, but one's "personal relationship" with God.

Cunnion says talking with your kids about God, if you haven't been raised that way, "doesn't always come naturally.

"I'm trying [in the book] to talk about what prayer is and

how you can incorporate it into your life," she said. "We can teach our kids that scripture is actually an amazing way to channel the good power of God's spirit."

Cunnion said her goal was to take parents "by the hand and walk through simple and practical ways" that you can raise your child to have a friendship with God.

The book, which is as confessional and candid as it is spiritual, came from Cunnion's own faith journey which she said started at age 8 when her mother took her to see the Billy Graham film, *The Prodigal*. She said she knew on that day that her life would be given to Christ.

"My passion has always been adoption work," said Cunnion, "but about three years ago I felt God nudging me toward this book." Cunnion said she never thought of herself as a writer, but she's kept a journal since she was 10 years old. "I love writing, as it helps me figure out how I feel."

In a chapter entitled "Experiencing Jesus," Cunnion offers encouragement (as she does throughout the book) to parents. She writes, "Dear Mom and Dad, are you worn out? Are you worried? Go to God. He longs to be gracious to you! He is with you in the trenches. He will show you compassion. Lean into him!"

Later in the book, Cunnion talks about "growing in Christ-like character" including talking with your kids about the issues of respect, self-control and kindness. In a section on "leading with love unconditional," she writes "...fear and guilt are not substantial motivators. They don't change the heart, and they don't bring transformation. Only the love of Jesus, infused into our parenting, does that."

Cunnion's book concludes with some practical tips on "training and instruction," using (sometimes humorous) examples from her own household, including the importance for parents of modeling good behavior and rewarding it in the simplest of ways. "We must be careful that rewards do not become the motivation for our children's behavior," she writes. "It's important to make sure the kids don't come to expect tangible rewards for the wise choices they make."

Cunnion, who holds a Master's degree in Social Work, has

been active in speaking about parenting and adoption issues for organizations such as Bethany Christian Services and the National Council for Adoption. She serves as the Council Co-Chairman at Trinity Church in Greenwich, Ct., and is actively involved in the activities of her three sons.

Cunnion will be signing books at Trinity Church in Marble Hill this coming Monday, April 14, between 10 and 11:30 a.m. (free babysitting will be provided).