

A Love That Multiplies: An Up-Close View of How They Make It Work Study Guide

A Love That Multiplies: An Up-Close View of How They Make It Work by Michelle Duggar

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Plot Summary

Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar were parents of nineteen children at the time they wrote the book. The children were all biologically their own and there were two sets of twins. Michelle had been using a contraceptive when she became pregnant with the couple's second child. The pregnancy ended in a miscarriage and the Duggars dedicated themselves to accepting as many children as God saw fit to give them. Their youngest child, Josie, was born several months premature and weighed in at less than one pound. Michelle was seriously ill, which led to Josie's premature birth. Michelle's illness and Josie's difficulties early in her life led the family to do what they had always done - pray and put their faith in God. After Josie was out of danger, Jim Bob and Michelle said the situation had led them to a new level of faith.

Jim Bob and Michelle had definite ideas on the topic of parenting although they said that they were constantly learning and denied that they were experts. The Duggars homeschooled the children, using computer software for some classes for the older children. Those who had already graduated helped monitor the progress of the younger children.

All children were assigned tasks with the difficulty of the job dependent on the age group. The youngest were taught to play quietly while the older children were studying. Some of the older girls loved to cook and took over that task for many of the family's meals. Children were paired so that an older child and younger child were together for trips and other daily events. The Duggars traveled often, making trips fit into the homeschool programs when possible. Each child studied an instrument and the family often performed in public. Ministry was a major part of their lives and they traveled to El Salvador several times on mission trips.

Each night, the entire family gathered to read a Bible passage and to discuss the events of the previous day and the plans for the coming day. Often, Jim Bob sought to catch the children's interest by teasing them about what he had planned for the next day.

The Duggar's oldest child, Josh, had married. He and his wife Anna had one daughter with a second on the way at the time Jim Bob and Michelle wrote the book. The Duggars said their children did not date in the typical sense of the word. They were encouraged to avoid physical relationships in favor of enhancing their relationships with God and preparing themselves for the mate God had in mind for them. As the book came to a close, the Duggars said they were open to another child, if God chose that for them.



Chapters 1 through 3

Chapters 1 through 3 Summary and Analysis

On December 9, 2009, the Duggar household included seventeen children living at home. By the writing of this book, Josh had married and was living away from home. The children were expecting the arrival of an Australian film crew as they got dressed and prepared for the day. There would be homeschool assignments and regular chores to be completed. The younger children had note cards to remind them of what they had to do that day. But Michelle, who was pregnant with their nineteenth child, began to experience pain. Jim Bob called the doctor who directed them to the hospital. Jim Bob and Michelle left for the hospital, leaving the older children and Grandma Duggar in charge.

In chapter one, the Duggars explained the purpose of writing the book was to explain their recent trials. They said they had endured some difficult times, including a "feeble" income, marital problems, and the death of Michelle's mother, but felt that nothing could come between them and God. However, they faced new challenges in 2009.

The Duggars live in a seven thousand-square-foot home that they built themselves. In 2008, the oldest son, Josh, married Anna Keller and Jim Bob's father was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor. By 2009, he was unable to speak. Also that winter, the family was left without power for nine days due to an ice storm. Michelle wrote that Jim Bob was constantly optimistic and happy throughout, a fact that made a difference to the children who were watching his reaction. They used a generator to help abate the cold but when a tree broke under the weight of the ice, the children were told to remain inside. They used the family's bus as a generator to power some additional appliances so the family could try to keep up with the laundry and have some indoor lights.

During the ice storm, the doctor faithfully arrived to check the declining health of Jim Bob's father. About that same time, six-week-old Jordyn began having trouble breathing and was hospitalized for a short time. When Jordyn was released, the family invited friends from Tennessee to visit. The Bates had sixteen children of their own and operated a tree-trimming service. When the families had cleared away the dangerous trees, Jim Bob retrieved signs from his unsuccessful bid for U.S. Senate and the children used them as sleds. On February 3, Grandpa Duggar celebrated his seventy-third birthday and the family gathered for the event, knowing it would be his last. During that party, with the TLC crew filming the event, Josh and Anna announced that Anna was expecting their first child.

In chapter two, Mackynzie Duggar was born October 8, 2009. Just prior to Mackynzie's birth, Michelle discovered that she was expecting their nineteenth child, though Jordyn was only six months old. Jim Bob noted that Michelle was nursing Jordyn which typically kept her from becoming pregnant. Jim Bob said that he has difficulty keeping good news to himself and told the rest of the family sooner than he'd planned.



The Duggars said their emotional ties to Josh remained strong after his marriage but the "apron strings were cut." Josh was expected to support his family and the Duggars said they'd done their best to prepare him for that role. He and Anna had pledged to allow God to choose how many children they would have and had promised to live debt-free. Josh operated a used car lot in Fayetteville, Arkansas, near the Duggar's Tontitown, Arkansas, home. The second-oldest son, Jon-David, operated a towing service. Anna went into labor a week early. The baby was delivered at home, as had been previously planned. Michelle was still pregnant with Josie, her own nineteenth grandchild.

In chapter three, Michelle wrote that 2009 had gotten off to a "rocky start" with the death of his father, but the birth of their grandchild and Michelle's most recent pregnancy seemed an indication that it was going better. Around Thanksgiving, a virus swept through the family and Michelle thought there might be a case of strep in the family, though that turned out not to be the case though fifteen of the seventeen-member household were sick. She said there were many boxes of tissue and popsicles and that the adults had lost a lot of sleep before the situation was under control, just as it was time to begin preparing for Christmas. Several of the family members were planning to go to El Salvador to help with a Christmas program and Michelle took them shopping for gifts to distribute. On December 4, Michelle became ill with what she believed to be a kidney stone. She went to Mercy Hospital in nearby Rogers, Arkansas, and was admitted when doctors discovered a gallstone. Then Michelle went into labor which frightened her because she knew it was too early for the baby to be born. Doctors decided she needed to be moved to a hospital that could provide neo-natal intensive care and they opted for the University of Arkansas Medical Sciences in Little Rock, Arkansas. Michelle was taken by helicopter while Jim Bob drove with Jana.

Michelle's situation began to improve slightly and they faced a new decision. There were non-refundable tickets to El Salvador and the children there were counting on the Duggars' presence. Jim Bob had been slated to go with them but he and Michelle prayed about the situation and decided to let the group of children go alone. They were concerned because of the unrest and violence there but later learned that a military escort had been provided to help ensure the children's safety.

Michelle's condition worsened and the doctors told the Duggars they would have to deliver the baby. Michelle knew it was too soon because baby Josie was only at twenty-five weeks gestation. The doctors gave no option but the Duggars still asked for time to pray about it. They prayed that God would lower Michelle's blood pressure if it was His will to delay the delivery, but her blood pressure went even higher. They agreed to the delivery.

The Duggar family was the subject of a regular television series and they said they were often criticized for their large family. Some of the criticism comes from those who believe the Duggars are being irresponsible on several levels. But the Duggars said they were also told by some viewers that the Duggars' example had changed lives for the better. They were also told by some - including those who object to their choices - that the family was the epitome of a close-knit, loving family of well-behaved and

intelligent children. They end their explanation by saying that they hope to encourage readers to discover and remember the blessings in their own lives.

Michelle talked about Jim Bob's ability to have calm reactions to every situation. She said that she was blessed to have him and cited the fact that the children looked at him to see how he would handle specific situations, including their crisis when they were housebound because of the ice storm.

There was a huge amount of work associated with keeping the Duggar family running through an ordinary day. Michelle said that, during the ice storm, there were forty loads of laundry piled up by the time Jim Bob hooked the bus up to the house as a generator for the washing machine.



Chapters 4 through 6

Chapters 4 through 6 Summary and Analysis

In chapter four, Josie Brooklyn Duggar weighed twenty-two ounces when she was born on December 9. She was three and a half months premature. Michelle was allowed to briefly touch Josie's hand as the baby was wheeled away, but the Duggars were allowed no other contact because Josie's skin was so thin that touch caused her an agony of pain. Josie was touched only as much as was absolutely necessary for the first forty days of her life. Meanwhile, Michelle and Jim Bob continued to worry about Jordyn, just about to celebrate her first birthday, because of her continued breathing problems. On December 14, the family returned from El Salvador and drove the following day to Little Rock to see Michelle and the new baby. The family "rejoiced" with each of Josie's milestones but were warned that the preemie's life was "fragile" and not to trust any signs of advancement.

In chapter five, Josie, moved to Arkansas Children's Hospital where they were better equipped to handle her needs, was given her first few drops of breast milk through a feeding tube. Then she suffered a perforated bowel - a common problem for preemies - and the Duggars expected surgery. However, Josie's doctor, Robert Arrington, advised that they wait. They did and the bowel healed. The Duggars were separated for the holiday which was upsetting to the entire family. They prayed for a solution and decided they would move the family to Little Rock. A Little Rock resident contacted Michelle's doctor in Fayetteville, offering up her home to the Duggars for the holiday. The five-bedroom home would be available because the woman and her husband were leaving town for the holidays. The Duggars were thankful but hesitated to take advantage of such a generous offer. The woman arrived at the hospital a short time later, gave Jim Bob the key and alarm code, and told him when she'd be returning. She said God put the situation on her heart and that she hadn't questioned, only obeyed.

The family moved into the "gift home" in time to celebrate the birthdays of Jordyn, who had turned one while Michelle was hospitalized, and Jinger, who turned sixteen on December 21. The family endured another virus over the holiday but one of the older girls was always able to be with Josie when Michelle and Jim Bob were sick.

Realizing that Josie would be hospitalized for a long time, the family decided to rent a house for the duration. They rented the Cornish House, a historic home that had belonged to a woman who dedicated her life to encouraging birth control. The irony was not lost on the Duggars. Josie continued to have positive moves forward and to suffer setbacks. Josie eventually improved to the point that Michelle could regularly hold her. Then came the day when one of the feedings through the feeding tube would be replaced by a bottle feeding. The instructions were specifically designed to keep Josie from sucking milk into her lungs but Michelle said the instructions went against all her mothering instincts - to hold her close while feeding her. Josie was fed breast milk fortified with vitamins to increase the caloric count in an effort to help her gain weight



more quickly. Eventually, Michelle was given the opportunity to breast feed Josie. During the first feeding, Josie choked and got some milk in her lungs but didn't suffer a setback from it.

In chapter six, Michelle spent most of her waking hours at the hospital, leaving the daily chores to those at the Little Rock home. Then Josie was allowed to join the family. Everyone welcomed her home before she was moved upstairs to the bedroom Jim Bob and Michelle shared. She had oxygen and monitors and Jim Bob and Michelle were committed that one of them would be with her all the time. The plan was to remain in Little Rock another few weeks to be near the hospital, then to move back to Northwest Arkansas. Jim Bob took a group of the children back to Springdale where they were scheduled for testing with the homeschool group. Michelle and Josie remained in Little Rock with Jill, Jessa and Jinger. Jim Bob noted he was "confident" the entire family would soon be reunited, but he was wrong.

Josie made the first day fine but was obviously in distress by the time for the 2 a.m. feeding the following morning. The heart monitors showed her heart rate dropping and she was taken by ambulance back to ACH. The doctors began a series of tests in an effort to find out what was causing the problem. After exhausting a great many possibilities, they tried Josie on a lactose-free milk replacement and she quickly began to recover.

The Duggars wrote that they were certain in their faith that God could instantly heal Josie of all her health issues if He chose to do so, but that He had something else in mind for her and for her family. Their faith on this point was unshakable and they continued to pray but accepted God's will. They later write that they learned empathy for parents of children with health issues because of their time with Josie. The Duggars also talked about seeing other parents in the halls of the Arkansas Children's Hospital. They said it was often evident whether a child had taken a turn for the worse or was showing signs of improvement. Three babies died in Josie's "pod" at ACH during Josie's stay. The Duggars realized a deeper compassion for those families because they knew that Josie could also die at any time.

Michelle said that it was important for the family to have gifts for Christmas though they also sought to keep the children focused on the true meaning of Christmas. She said that just a day before Christmas, Jim Bob was out shopping for their large family.



Chapters 7 through 9

Chapters 7 through 9 Summary and Analysis

In chapter seven, Jim Bob had taken several of the children on a trip that included a stop in Nashville when one of the youngsters, Johanna, complained of an itchy back. When Jill lifted the little girl's shirt to see why she was itching, she discovered chicken pox. The older children had had chicken pox years earlier and it swept through the younger ones as they completed their trip and returned home. Meanwhile, Josie was released from the hospital. Michelle and her longtime friend, Cindy Pascoe, were alone with Josie when the older children discovered chicken pox. Michelle and Josie remained in Little Rock waiting for the epidemic to complete its course through the rest of the family in order to keep Josie from being exposed. In total, twelve of the children contracted chicken pox. Michelle said it was difficult for Jim Bob, Grandma Duggar and several of the older children to deal with those who had chicken pox, but that it meant Michelle and Josie could more quickly return to Springdale. On June 21, 2010, when Josie was six months old, the family was united for the first time in their Tontitown home.

Jim Bob Duggar wrote a segment of the book in an effort to explain why he and Michelle had such a large family. They married in 1984. Jim Bob said he and Michelle had planned for up to three children. Michelle been using an oral contraceptive for the first three years of their marriage before deciding it was time for a child. After Josh's birth, Michelle returned to using the contraceptive but became pregnant anyway. That pregnancy ended in a miscarriage and it was about this time they read the Biblical passage that children are a blessing and decided to allow God to choose how many children and when they would be conceived. They were initially afraid Michelle might not be able to carry another child to term but were soon the parents of their second and third children, twins Jon-David and Jana, who turned twenty-one shortly before the writing of this book.

Jim Bob wrote that they soon had seven children and were feeling "outnumbered." He said they were sometimes criticized but more often encouraged as he and Michelle dedicated their lives to serving God. Jim Bob and Michelle also determined they would live debt-free and operated a home-based real estate service. In 1997 he won a bid for the Arkansas Legislature after watching an anti-abortion rally on the steps of the state capitol. He later made a bid for the U.S. Senate and he and Michelle decided to pour \$110,000 from a recent real estate transaction into the race. He lost but said he was prepared to see what God had planned for him next. He then explained the process that brought the family to the point of being a regular television series, appearing in several magazines and becoming famous.

In chapter eight, the family was visiting friends, the Bates family, in Tennessee when Michelle went for "snacks" at a local fast food restaurant. The worker recognized her voice through the drive-through intercom though Michelle said the fact that she ordered "umpteens sandwiches" could have been a clue. Michelle said that once the family



became part of a weekly television series on TLC, many people recognized them and some could even name all the children. She said the television crew came to be "like family" and the family uses the opportunity to minister in an even larger way. One result of the fame is that the family has had to set stricter limits on guests who would otherwise keep the family's routine disrupted. The Duggars said that opening their home to media attention from around the world increased their opportunities to minister, and they used that.

The children were not taught that men were superior to women, but that each had important qualities and weakness. Boys were taught to open doors for women and to treat all women with respect. The girls were offered the opportunity to further their education through home-based programs and were taught that it was acceptable to begin businesses of their own, in keeping with the Proverbs definition of a "virtuous woman." In addition, there were efforts to make children aware of the needs of others and to reach out to fill those needs.

The Duggars taught their children the importance of "an enthusiastic greeting." They encouraged children to overcome shyness and that it wasn't polite or cute to hide when someone talked to them. The goal was to move children away from the natural tendency to be self-centered. At the same time, they have taught children to be aware that there were dangers out there and that they were to immediately speak out if they felt the need.

One rule was that the older children get to choose their seats in the van. The purpose was to make the younger children aware of the need to show respect because it was more difficult for them to climb over the seats. Jim Bob said there were occasionally disputes anyway. The girls of the family were taught to dress modestly but were allowed to choose and buy their own clothes when they are older. The girls still chose to dress modestly.

In chapter nine, Michelle offered some suggestions to create a servant's heart in children. She said a family could bake some bread or some other treat and give it to the local firefighters, "a tired mom" or anyone who needed encouragement. The children occasionally performed their music at nursing homes and their parents teach them how important their actions were to the residents. She also suggested asking at church for ministry ideas and considering those mentioned during prayer requests. The children sometimes wrote notes to those who help in the community and the parents made a point of attending important community meetings, such as right-to-life rallies. They also taught the children how to withstand the criticism that always accompanies taking a stand.

It should be noted that Jim Bob and Michelle talked about their home in Springdale and in Tontitown. Tontitown was a small town outside Springdale and was actually nearer the family's home. Tontitown was very near the tri-city area of Fayetteville, Springdale, and Rogers.



Michelle said that emerging from the difficult times had made the entire family more understanding of the sufferings of others, including Jesus Christ who died on the cross. She said the family could have taken the stand that God had made a mistake by allowing Josie to be born prematurely, and could have become bitter. Instead, they "chose" to use the situation as a means of drawing closer to God and to their faith. This was one of the themes of the book and it recurred in many scenes and situations.



Chapters 10 through 12

Chapters 10 through 12 Summary and Analysis

In chapter ten, the family ended each day with Bible time, a time when Jim Bob read a Bible passage and the family discussed the meaning. The time was also used to discuss the day's events and share praises for each other. Someone might, for example, say that one of the boys had helped his brother take out the trash, even though it wasn't his job and he hadn't been asked to help. They might also thank those who had helped prepare meals that day, tell funny stories or talk about the name for a new baby. Jim Bob said he often kept children guessing about events for upcoming days.

Jim Bob said he also uses the Bible time to discuss life lessons, relating to the children that his family was very poor and had lost their home. Later, they were able to buy a different house that put them in a position to know about a development plan so they were able to handle the real estate deals.

The children sometimes recreated the Nativity during the holiday season and one year participated in a Christmas parade, complete with a borrowed camel. They were often heard playing musical instruments and singing, sometimes for required practice time but more often because they enjoyed it. They didn't have television but enjoyed watching home movies. With all the children, there are often pranks. The Duggars related a time they'd appeared on Mike Huckabee's television show and he had challenged them to name each of their children as they stepped on stage. The Duggars did so until Jessa stepped on stage carrying a baby. Both adult Duggars had hesitated only to learn that the child wasn't theirs. Huckabee had "borrowed" the daughter of a staff member to play a prank on the Duggars.

Jim Bob said he was in church from the time he was a week old and made a profession of faith when he was seven. He later doubted his conversion but was told that was typical of a person who accepted Christ as a young child and never again doubted.

Jim Bob and Michelle presented ideas to their children from the time they are infants, knowing they didn't immediately understand but knowing that they would someday realize the importance of the lessons they were being taught.

In chapter eleven, the basics of homeschooling were explained. One of the advantages of homeschooling was the opportunity to "incorporate faith" into the daily lessons. Michelle and Jim Bob were faced with the challenge of making children want to learn and often incorporated trips into their lessons. They encouraged the children to practice kindness, even when no one else saw it.



Children in grades three and up did daily lessons on the computer. The younger children began their day with Michelle as their primary teacher. The Duggars held classes year round but took a break from computer work whenever they were traveling.

In chapter twelve, the Duggars outlined the goals they had for their children. The Duggars believed that children who met these goals would be successful in life. Toward plans for a career, the children were encouraged to explore paths they felt God was opening to them. Their philosophy is that a child can "waste years" studying for a career for which they are not suited or will come to hate. Jim Bob began his career in real estate from watching his parents though he also had a used car lot and towing business before the rental properties began showing a return sufficient for the family to live on. He said he'd once bought a convenience store without considering whether it fit into God's plans for his life and was miserable throughout the experience.

While the roles of the girls in the family were often different from that of the boys, the girls were encouraged to do what they felt led to. Jill and Jana joined Jon-David when he went through firefighter training and sometimes responded to accidents or medical emergencies. The girls were accomplished musicians, were qualified to teach music and learned the skills that could be used for any food-related business. The hope for the older girls was that they would someday turn their attention to their own families. Several of the older children were involved in an online college program, studying toward degrees.

The story of "Josh the Entrepreneur" was included. Jim Bob had promised the children one hundred dollars to anyone who could go without sodas for a year. He said he believed he would get the return in the cost of dental work. Josh was on board and completed the challenge. Jim Bob offered him the money or a car and Josh took the car, worked on it (often with the help of his dad, grandfather) and restored the car. Meanwhile, he bought old bikes at garage sales and fixed them up, putting them outside the family home with "for sale" signs. Jim Bob said the trips to get parts for the bikes was often more expensive than Josh's earnings, but they felt he was learning valuable skills. Then Josh had some money saved and came across more than one hundred of the "Billy Bigmouth" fish that were popular gag gifts at the time. He bought them all at a dollar each and sold them, many for ten dollars and the remainder at three dollars each. Jim Bob said no one in the family could forget the song played by the Billy Bigmouth. Jon-David similarly began a towing business and is the person called on whenever something needs to be fixed.

Jim Bob said he has told the children about the personal benefit of Bible time. He said he had academic problems as a youngster and had trouble reading. The time he spent reading Bible passages to the family has honed that skill. He ended the story by saying that many readers probably believe they are too busy to have an hour of Bible time each night. He encouraged those readers to "rethink your priorities."

The four goals outlined by the Duggars for their children were: "1. They keep a close relationship with God. 2. They learn to listen to God's still, small voice and follow His plan for their lives. 3. When they make mistakes they humbly confess those things to

God and to whomever they have wronged and maintain a clear conscience. and 4. They would look for ways to serve others and express gratefulness for what others have done for them." It was noteworthy that their relationship with God was first on that list.



Chapters 13 through 15

Chapters 13 through 15 Summary and Analysis

In chapter thirteen, Michelle outlined her goals for keeping the household running smoothly. She said that flexibility was vital and there was no such thing as an "ordinary" day at the Duggar home. She also said that perfectionism wasn't part of her plan and that a good day was one that had been busy, productive, and happy. One of the tips that she offered was that children "learn by doing" and that the younger children were encouraged to be part of the kitchen activities when meals were being planned. Michelle said the older girls came up with inventive ways to allow the younger ones to help, including providing a pair of kitchen shears used for cutting up beans or celery. All the children who were old enough for the responsibility had a "jurisdiction" over some task.

Jim Bob said that he taught the children to do some of the simpler carpentry tasks as they were building their house, taught them to change the oil and change a tire, and kept them nearby as he did those things even though doing it alone would have usually been faster. He said that Michelle cringed each time a new child took off on the riding lawn mower for the first time and that it was also important that the children knew they were expected to accomplish their tasks. Michelle said that a clean house wasn't a top priority but that children who were assigned a task were checked on to make sure they did it, and did it well. An important part of this, according to the Duggars, was teaching self-control. That meant that a child who was assigned a task was expected to stick with it and would be praised for a job well done. It also meant that even the youngest children were expected to learn self-control, playing by themselves while the older children were involved in lessons. Praise was given in front of the family but chastisement was done in private, though the wrongdoer was required to seek the forgiveness of the person he'd hurt. Children were required to make an effort to solve problems themselves, taking only major issues to the adults.

In chapter fourteen, the Duggars said they viewed life as a classroom and encouraged the children to be curious about all kinds of things. As an example, Jim Bob questioned the children about methods of building the Chesapeake Bay Tunnel and they came up with "some clever speculation." The objective was to make the children become life-long learners. The parents played an important role in this, not only by helping create the enthusiasm but also by listening and praising the children who participate, even when someone had a story they were trying to tell during a busy moment.

The top two lessons, according to the Duggars, was to teach the children to love God and to love others. They sought to give the children opportunities to experience ministry opportunities so they learned that there were many ways to serve. The Duggars made several mission trips to El Salvador, taking various of the older children with them for those trips. In 2009, some of the Duggar children helped clear debris and do repairs to a village devastated by a mud slide. The children also bought a large number of gifts for the Salvadorian children prior to that trip and wrapped them, though they faced the



possibility that they might have to unwrap the gifts for customs agents. They made it through with the gifts wrapped.

In chapter fifteen, Jim Bob talked about the experience of dealing with his father's impending death, the day of the death, the funeral and the days following. Michelle's father died while she was in Little Rock with Josie. A neo-natal intensive care nurse stayed with Josie while Michelle went to Ohio to her father's funeral. They ended the chapter by saying they had come through the tests by continually praying.

There was an entire section dedicated to how the family packed for trips, leaving the majority of the packing to Jessa and Jinger who were touted as the "organization experts." The girls had developed a method of packing so that all the younger boys' pants were in a single grocery bag, their shirts in another, and underwear and socks in another. By taking out the three bags, the boys had all the clothing they needed for any given day. They similarly packed for the younger girls, including all the necessities right down to hair bows. Michelle talked several times about the choices to wear "modest" clothing. She said the girls started a line of clothing that includes skirts that came below their knees and non-sleeveless tops. Their goal, according to Michelle, was to wear cute clothes but remain modest. This seemed to be a focus of the family and Michelle said the purpose was to encourage people to see the countenance of the children rather than judge by their outward appearance.



Chapters 16 through PS

Chapters 16 through PS Summary and Analysis

In chapter sixteen, Michelle talked about the need to encourage other moms and that she had received encouragement herself, often when she needed it most. She talked about the need for consistency when dealing with the children and the need to make sure children understand the need to obey the first time they're told to do - or not to do - something. They related that their decision to homeschool was made to allow God and Biblical practices to be incorporated into the curriculum and so the children could avoid negative peer pressure. They also wanted to avoid theories of evolution and atheism, and felt homeschooling would make their children best friends with each other, knitting the family closer together. Jim Bob and Michelle listened to a recording of the King James version of the Bible as they fell asleep at night. They limited Internet use to seventy-five pre-selected sites and research that requires search engines was allowed only with a password known only to Michelle and a couple of the older girls. Children who were surfing in order to do research were paired with "an accountability partner," a sibling who would help ensure that they didn't go to unsuitable websites. Internet-capable phones were similarly limited and the children did not participate in social media, though there was a Duggar Family website related to their television shows. The Duggars also talked about the need for open communication. Michelle talked with the girls about their changing bodies and what that means. Jim Bob did the same with the boys. Jim Bob used an analogy of having one hundred people in a room and each of the first ninety-nine people spitting into a cup while the last person was asked to drink from it. Jim Bob compared this to physical relationships outside wedlock, pointing out that the likelihood of venereal diseases and more.

In chapter seventeen, Jim Bob talked at length about the family's financial practices, the need to pray before making financial decisions, and the necessity of saving toward a purchase, which eliminated a great deal of impulse buying. He said the family had good medical insurance which meant they didn't need government help for medical crises, even when Josie was born. He worked from home so that he was available to help around the house even when conducting his real estate business. When he went to repair a property or consider a new purchase, he often took a child or two along. He cited the need for communication - especially the ability to listen - as necessary for a good marriage.

In chapter eighteen, Michelle said the children did not date. The older children had created lists of goals for themselves and for their potential partners. A boy in the family who was interested in a girl would approach that girl's father. The idea was that the girl could more honestly confess her true feelings to her father. The Duggar girls would wait for a young man to contact their father. If the Duggar children were interested, they would then create a ministry event that included the potential mate so the young people could become better acquainted while surrounded by the Duggar family. The next step would be to interact with the entire family. The ultimate goal is for the Duggar children to



keep their hearts intact while they wait for the mate God has chosen for them. Jim Bob and Michelle then discussed some of the ways they kept their own marriage alive, including times of abstinence.

In the "PS" section of the book, the Duggars answered the question, would they have more children. Their answer was that they would, if that's what God had in store for them.

Michelle related the story of a time when she had about eleven children and they were under age eleven. One of the younger had asked for pineapple that was left in a large bowl on the counter. Michelle told him to wait but when she returned from taking care of an infant, the bowl had been dropped on the floor. Remembering a lesson from earlier that day about speaking calmly and keeping her anger in check, she spoke quietly to the child. The result was that he cried and related what he'd been told to do. Michelle said that she doesn't yell at the children and that they all know when she speaks in an even quieter tone, she's very serious.



Characters

Michelle Duggar

Michelle was the mother of 19 children and the wife of Jim Bob Duggar. Her priorities were her faith in God, her family, and service to others. She accepted Christ as a teenager and married Jim Bob soon after graduating. They began their lives as a typical young couple but came to realize that they wanted to put God first and to make some specific priorities. They were using contraceptives when Michelle became pregnant with their second child. That pregnancy ended in a miscarriage and Michelle, along with her husband, decided to avoid contraceptives from that point and to accept as many children as God gave them. Michelle was somewhat more serious than her husband. She took the lead most of the time with homeschooling activities and taking care of sick children. She remained in Little Rock for weeks after their youngest child, Josie was released from the hospital. She remained Josie's primary caregiver while the baby was still on oxygen and other medical devices. Michelle instilled some basic principles and ideas into her children. She said that the older girls choose their own clothes and choose to dress modestly. She said all the children have tasks for which they are responsible with the difficulty of the task commiserate with their age. Michelle was in her early 40s at the time she wrote the book with Jim Bob. She was already a grandmother of one with a granddaughter on the way.

Jim Bob Duggar

Husband of Michelle and father of 19 as of the time the book was written, Jim Bob was vocal about the fact that he did not believe in birth control. Jim Bob sold real estate and has rental properties, a vocation he chose in order to give himself more time with his family. He spent part of everyday at home. Jim Bob spent time with the entire family each night, reading the Bible, talking about the day and making plans for the coming day. He often created ways for the children to have fun, such as building an impromptu water slide on the property. Another time, he arranged for a very high swing and noted that it was a good thing Michelle wasn't at home to see it. Jim Bob was saved at an early age and said he later doubted his faith. He was worried until someone told him that it was typical of children who were saved very young. He said he accepted that and never again doubted. Jim Bob was very involved in the lives of the children. He took care of the majority of the children when several came down with chicken pox about the time the youngest child, Josie, was to be released from the hospital. Josie wasn't allowed to come in contact with the children with chicken pox so Michelle remained in Little Rock with her while Jim Bob took the lead taking care of the children at home. Jim Bob said living debt-free is vital and that it's important to teach children to be self-sufficient. Toward that end, he always had one of the boys with him when he was working on cars or doing carpentry projects.



Josh Duggar

The oldest of the Duggar family, he married Anna and included the promise to allow God to determine how many children they have in his wedding vows. Josh had one child, a daughter, and a son on the way at the time the book was written.

Josie Duggar

This was the youngest of the Duggar children at the time the book was written. Josie was born December 10, 2009. She was premature and weighed just more than a pound. She spent several months in the Arkansas Children's Hospital in Little Rock.

Jon-David Duggar

The second child of the Duggar family, he was a twin. Jon-David started a towing business and worked on cars. He was often called on to work on vehicles by the family, including Josh's used car lot.

Dr. Robert Arrington

This was one of the physicians in charge of Josie's care during her stay at the Arkansas Children's Hospital in Little Rock.

Jordyn Duggar

This was the youngest child of the family until Josie's premature birth, Jordyn suffered with breathing problems during an ice storm and was hospitalized before her first birthday. She celebrated her first birthday after Josie's birth.

Jill Duggar

One of the older girls, she was the one to discover that her little sister had chicken pox while the family was on a trip after Josie's birth.

Johanna Duggar

This was the first of the Duggar children to come down with chicken pox after Josie's birth.



Jinger Duggar

One of the older girls, she turned sixteen soon after Josie's birth. She loved to cook and was one of the two girls who often packed for the younger children.



Objects/Places

Tontitown, Arkansas

This is the town where Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar lived with their family.

Fayetteville, Arkansas

This is the large town near Tontitown where Josh had a car lot.

Springdale, Arkansas

This is the Arkansas city near Tontitown. Michelle and Jim Bob often referred to this as their home town.

Mercy Hospital

This is the hospital in Rogers near the Duggar's home where Michelle was initially taken when she encountered problems during her pregnancy with Josie.

University of Arkansas Medical Sciences Hospital

This is the hospital where Michelle Duggar was taken when her situation prior to Josie's birth became critical.

Arkansas Children's Hospital

This is the Little Rock Hospital where Josie Duggar spent several months of her life until she was strong enough to go home.

The Cornish House

This is the historic home Jim Bob and Michelle rented during Josie's stay at Arkansas Children's Hospital in Little Rock.

Ohio

This is where Michelle attended her father's funeral.



Nashville

This is one of the stops on the Duggar family trip when several of the children came down with chicken pox.

Tennessee

This is where the Bates family lives.



Themes

Children are a blessing

Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar believed children are a blessing and decided they would allow God to decide how many children they should have. Toward that end, they eliminated the use of contraceptives and Michelle delivered a child roughly every eighteen months of their marriage. The Duggars passed this philosophy down to at least one of their children. Their oldest son, Josh, included the promise to allow God to decide the number of children in his family as part of his wedding vows. The story opened with an acknowledgement from Michelle and Jim Bob. In that section, the couple thanked their children for being "a blessing from the Lord."

They went on to write that they were grateful because the children were "seeking God's will for your lives, working together and for being each other's best friends." Michelle admitted that there were times of trouble when she wasn't certain she had made the right decisions. She cited a time when she'd been up until two in the morning doing laundry and had cried out to God that she couldn't handle the duties of being a mother to so many. She had been reassured by her prayers that night and the following day, a woman had volunteered to help with the laundry. That woman had done laundry for Michelle a couple of days each week for years. In this and many other ways, Michelle was reassured that her choices were correct and that she was immeasurably blessed.

The book ended with a "P.S." from the Duggars in which they said they were willing to have more children if that's what God had in mind for them. The Duggar children were Josh, Jon-David, Jessa, Jill, Joy-Anna, Jordyn, Josie, Jackson, Jedidiah, Jeremiah, Jinger, Josiah, Johanna, Jason, James, Joseph, Jennifer, Justin and Jana.

Faith in God

Faith in God was an overriding theme seen throughout the book. Jim Bob Duggar said he had accepted God at a very young age. Later in life, he questioned his decision and doubted his faith until someone told him that was a natural reaction for children who had dedicated their lives to God. Jim Bob said he'd accepted that explanation and never again doubted his faith. The faith that God was in control led the Duggars to pray, especially in times of trouble. When Michelle was in distress and headed to a Little Rock hospital, the family gathered to pray for both Michelle and her unborn child, Josie. When Josie was born very premature and her survival was in question, the family prayed. The Duggars believed their faith in God was exemplified in service to others. Toward that end, they traveled often to El Salvador to minister to the people there. They took dozens of gifts at Christmas. Some of the children spent days working to help people recover from a mudslide that had destroyed lives and homes. Their faith was also seen in their studious attitude. Jim Bob read Bible stories to the entire family each night. This time together was used to study God's word and to enrich the faith of each family member.



Their faith in God was perhaps most clearly seen in the decision of Jim Bob and Michelle to have God decide how many children they should have.

Teamwork

The family was the epitome of teamwork and it was seen in all aspects of their daily lives. The older girls, though they had already completed their own studies, watched over the lessons of their younger siblings. Michelle said that she always returned to her duties teaching the children in their homeschool setting about two weeks after the birth of a child, but that she was sometimes very tired for those first few weeks and Jim Bob or some of the older children would step in to give her time for a nap. This teamwork had some specific components such as the need for children to work out their own problems, if at all possible. She said children were urged to figure out a way to work out disagreements without bringing one of the adults into the situation. She also pointed out that as the mother, she had a crucial role in the teamwork.

Michelle gave a hypothetical situation in which one of the children had done something wrong, been reprimanded halfheartedly, and gone on to do something else until Michelle realized that he was acting out. In that situation, she said she took the child aside, acknowledged that she should have done a better job controlling the situation, then sought out the root of the problem. Another important part of the teamwork was teaching children to live up to their expectations. She cited an example in which one of the boys was called on to do a chore that was bigger than he usually performed. Michelle returned for several inspections before the job was finished. She said this made the youngster feel a sense of accomplishment and also reinforced the idea that he couldn't skip the task because the family was depending on him.

Style

Perspective

The book was written by Michelle and Jim Bob Duggar from the limited perspectives of the authors. The book was written in first person, typically referring to the author as "I" or "me," or sometimes as "we." When first person singular was used, there was often a name indicating which of the authors was writing that section. For example, chapter two's opening was written by Jim Bob. On the first page of that chapter, he wrote, "Michelle asked me (Jim Bob)..." This method of distinguishing which of the Duggars was writing was fairly effective, though it was impossible to tell who had written some sections. Because they seemed to agree, it didn't really matter which of them had written all parts of the book but this may be a minor source of distraction for some readers. The limited perspective was not overly limiting because of the subject matter. The reader should keep in mind that the Duggars presented themselves and their family from their own perspectives. Toward that end, the information related in the book could be skewed to the writer. For example, Michelle talked about the need for the adults to avoid showing signs of anger when the children had made mistakes. She said she realized that she had been guilty of yelling and that she stopped yelling at them at all. The reader should evaluate that statement, considering the source. It should also be kept in mind that the children were not heard from in the book and the information, stories and advice are strictly from the perspectives of the parents.

Tone

The overall tone of the book was very upbeat with a focus on family and Christian values. The book was written in a straight-forward and apparently honest manner. A reader with an average vocabulary will not have trouble understanding the story or the message behind it. Some readers may be skeptical that the advice given can be put into practice and some may find aspects of the book to be outdated, old-fashioned and impractical. However, the Duggars' beliefs were prevalent throughout the book. Their manner of dressing, their decision to homeschool, their attitudes toward child-rearing and other aspects of their lives seemed to be in keeping with those beliefs. The reader who expected to learn intimate details about the family may be disappointed. While there were stories about individuals included in the book, the book focused on the overall workings of the large family. The stories related were very general in nature, such as a squabble between two boys over a bicycle. The exception was a fairly detailed examination of the trials the Duggars faced during the premature birth of their nineteenth daughter, Josie. There were some details offered about the situation that led to the early delivery and Josie's medical condition following her birth. Jim Bob presented information about the family's financial decision-making process and their determination to live debt-free, possible through his home-based real estate business. There were also mentions of their personal abstinence rules, which followed Biblical dictates following a menstrual cycle and the birth of a child.

Structure

The book was divided into four parts. Each part was further divided into chapters which were also divided into sections that varied in length. Part One was titled Little Baby, Big Challenges. It included six chapters, Little Eyes Watching, More Babies on the Way, A Surprising Test Begins, Miracles and Milestones, and Difficult Priorities. Part Two, Shaping Hearts and Minds, included four chapters, Living Under the Microscope, Opportunities to Reach Out to Others, Developing a Servant Heart, and Making Faith Fun. Part Three, Big Hope for Our Children's Future, included Homeschool, Duggar Style; Vocations, Goals and Roles; Daily Training, Tips, and Practicalities; and Life Is a Classroom. Chapters fifteen through eighteen were in Part Four. The titles of those chapters were Protecting and Cherishing Our Relationships, Michelle's Heart for Children and Moms, Jim Bob's Lifelong Hobby, and Do the Duggars Date. The book opened with an acknowledgements section followed by a brief chapter titled, "Our Biggest Test Begins." The final chapter was followed by "P.S. Answering the Big Question." The book also included a section of resources, offering contact information for the companies the Duggars use for homeschool materials, clothing and more. The book was not presented in chronological order but followed themes. For example, the death of Jim Bob's father, the death of Michelle's father, and the medical problems Josie faced were mentioned early in the book. Much later, the details about the two deaths were given though Josie's medical situation appeared as the opening chapters of the book and the three events happened over the same time period.



Quotes

"And yet the majority of the letters - even from those whose beliefs are different from ours - also tell us that they like the end product of what we do and believe: a close-knit, love-filled family bustling with well-behaved, respectful, fun-loving, adventurous, and smart children who cherish their parents and siblings and how courtesy and kindness to those they meet." Chapter 1, Page 4

"A historic house built by one of the biggest advocates of birth control was about to be occupied, many years later, by one of America's biggest families with a personal conviction against birth control." Chapter 5, Page 56

"Inevitably whenever I left the house during the day to go back to the hospital, a little one cried, seeing me go. I longed for the day our whole family could be together again under one roof." Chapter 6, page 66

"I (Michelle) certainly wouldn't have chosen to experience the agony and pain of preeclampsia, but on this side of the situation, I see how my own suffering helped me understand more personally the tremendous suffering Jesus went through when he died an agonizing death through crucifixion." Chapter 7, Page 77

"We teach our sons to open doors for ladies and, when possible, to lend a hand when they see a woman carrying something heavy. We teach them to treat women with respect, just as they want others to treat their mom or sisters respectfully." Chapter 8, Page 92

"Sometimes I just open the Bible and read wherever it opens. It's amazing the insights we've found 'by accident.'" Chapter 9, Page 116

"Then, gradually, as these children mature, the ideas they have heard start melting and soaking into their hearts and minds, and they begin comprehending." Chapter 10, Page 129

"Once they're married and having babies, though, we hope they will make their families their number-one priority and will stay home to nurture their children." Chapter 12, Page 156

"Sometimes it seems half the family, especially that middle group of kids, can backslide into whining, arguing, and bickering, and it may continue awhile before we realize it's happening." Chapter 13, Page 179

"Someone always has an exciting story to tell Mama and Daddy about something that happened or something that was lost or found or eaten or spilled or broken or stuck in someone's hair or found in the freezer beside the popsicles." Chapter 14, Page 187



"I was the happiest guy in the world, having a girl like Michelle accept my marriage proposal. But most people back then probably thought I didn't have a lot going for me."
Chapter 17, Page 238

"So to answer the question 'Are the Duggars going to have any more children?' we say, 'If that is God's will for us, we would love to have more!'" P.S., Page 274



Topics for Discussion

Describe the Duggar family. What are the parents' goals for the children? How do they seek to achieve these goals?

Describe Josie's birth and her medical problems following her birth. What were some of the obstacles that kept her from returning home as early as Michelle and Jim Bob had hoped? Describe at least two of the other Duggar children.

Describe an "ordinary" day at the Duggar house. How do the Duggars accomplish some of the typical tasks of any given day? What are some of the rules of the Duggar household?

What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the large household? Are the Duggars' ideas and practices practical for an average family? Why or why not?

Describe Michelle's attitude toward children and other moms. What are some of the things that she believes are important with regard to raising children? Why are these things important to her?

What are the Duggars' ideas about God and faith? How do they seek to make their children open to serving God and others? Are they successful?

What do the Duggars believe about teaching and learning? How do they put these ideas into practice? Are they successful?