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EQUIPPING FATHERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,  
SHERWOOD, ARKANSAS TO BE THE PRIMARY  
DISCIPLE MAKERS IN THEIR FAMILIES

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Toby Michael Havens  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING FATHERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,  
SHERWOOD, ARKANSAS TO BE THE PRIMARY  
DISCIPLE MAKERS IN THEIR FAMILIES

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
PREFACE .....	vii
Chapter	
1. PROJECT INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose .....	1
Goals .....	1
Context .....	3
Rationale .....	5
Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations .....	6
Research Methodology .....	8
2. GOD HAS CALLED AND EQUIPPED MEN TO LEAD THEIR FAMILIES TO TREASURE JESUS CHRIST .....	12
Context .....	14
Ephesians 5:21: A Husband’s Call to Lay Aside His Own Agenda in Submission to Christ .....	16
Ephesians 5:22-24: A Husband Leads His Wife .....	23
Ephesians 5:25-27: A Husband Sacrifices for His Wife .....	27
Ephesians 5:28-32: A Husband Nurtures His Wife .....	35
Ephesians 6:1-4: A Father Nurtures His Children .....	39
How Ephesians 5:21-6:4 Shapes this Project .....	42
Conclusion .....	44
3. HOW A MAN LEADS HIS FAMILY TO TREASURE JESUS CHRIST .....	45

Chapter	Page
Personal Life Practices.....	50
A Home Saturated with God’s Word.....	68
A Gospel-Centered Home.....	74
An Intentional Spiritual Growth Plan for the Family.....	84
Conclusion.....	97
How This Chapter Shapes the Project.....	98
<b>4. DETAILS OF THE PROJECT.....</b>	<b>100</b>
Phase 1: Six Weeks of Preparation.....	101
Phase 2: Five Weeks of Training.....	109
Phase 3: Four Weeks of Follow-Up.....	112
Conclusion.....	113
<b>5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT.....</b>	<b>114</b>
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose.....	114
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals.....	117
Strengths of the Project.....	123
Weaknesses of the Project.....	124
What I Would Do Differently.....	126
Theological Reflections.....	128
Personal Reflections.....	130
Key Takeaways.....	133
Next Steps.....	136
Conclusion.....	139
<b>Appendix</b>	
1. INITIAL FAITH-AT-HOME SURVEY OF ADULTS.....	141
2. INITIAL FAITH-AT-HOME SURVEY OF YOUTH.....	145
3. CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC.....	148

Appendix	Page
4. HOMEWORK EVALUATION RUBRIC .....	149
5. PRE- AND POST-SERIES SURVEY .....	150
6. POST-SERIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	156
7. SESSION 1 LESSON TRANSCRIPT .....	158
8. SESSION 1 STUDENT HANDOUT .....	163
9. SESSION 1 HOMEWORK.....	165
10. SESSION 2 LESSON TRANSCRIPT .....	166
11. SESSION 2 STUDENT HANDOUT .....	177
12. SESSION 2 HOMEWORK.....	180
13. SESSION 3 LESSON TRANSCRIPT .....	182
14. SESSION 3 STUDENT HANDOUT .....	191
15. SESSION 3 HOMEWORK.....	193
16. SESSION 4 LESSON TRANSCRIPT .....	195
17. SESSION 4 STUDENT HANDOUT .....	207
18. SESSION 4 HOMEWORK.....	210
19. SESSION 5 LESSON TRANSCRIPT .....	212
20. SESSION 5 STUDENT HANDOUT .....	225
21. SESSION 5 HOMEWORK.....	229
22. RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	230
23. SURVEY QUESTIONS ARRANGED BY INCREASE.....	231
24. DATA FROM INITIAL SURVEY OF FATHERS .....	234
25. DATA FROM INITIAL SURVEY OF YOUTH.....	236
26. FINAL INTERVIEW RESPONSES.....	237
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	240

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. t-Test: Paired two sample for means .....	114
2. Number of participants completing each stage of the faith-at-home course.....	115
3. Survey questions with the seven highest overall numerical increases from pre-test to post-test.....	116
4. Fathers' perspectives of frequency of selected faith-at-home practices.....	118
5. Student perceptions of frequency of selected faith-at-home practices.....	119
6. Percent of rubric evaluation indicators scored at sufficient or above for each lesson .....	141
7. Percent of rubric evaluation indicators scored at sufficient or above for each homework session .....	122
A1. Survey questions arranged by overall increase .....	141
A2. Complete data from initial survey of fathers .....	234
A3. Data from initial survey of youth.....	236

## PREFACE

Prior to having children, there was a moment early in my marriage when I sensed the conviction that I needed to begin praying with my wife regularly. When I shared this conviction with my wife, her response was simply, “I’m waiting on you.” Although those words stung, unfortunately I failed to act upon my said conviction. A few years later—with a new growing conviction of my need to be the spiritual leader in my own home—I again explained to my wife that I felt we needed to pray together regularly. Again, her reply was simple: “I’m waiting on you.”

It’s been over a decade, and yet somehow those words still ring in my heart today, ultimately leading me to design and implement this project. While specifically intended to meet a need in my local church, this project was cultivated from a need in my own life and family. I want to lead my family well, and I desire to avoid hearing those words again. Throughout every stage of this project I had my own family in mind, and I simply hoped to bring some men in my church along with me on this journey towards Christ-honoring spiritual leadership at home.

Thank you, Amber, Keeli, Gus, and Isla, for your patience and participation as we experience the joy and the frustrations of cultivating our spiritual lives together as a family. It is a delight to see you grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

Toby Havens

Sherwood, Arkansas

December 2016

CHAPTER 1  
PROJECT INTRODUCTION

**Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip fathers at First Baptist Church to understand and embrace their God-ordained role as the primary disciple makers of their family.

**Goals**

The first goal of this project was to assess the current family discipleship practices taking place in the homes of the families of First Baptist Church with children 18 years old and younger living in the home. Matched pairs of fathers and children were recruited to take a survey questioning the frequency of family prayer times, Scripture application in the home, and intentional faith discussions between fathers and children. A survey was developed for fathers who are members of one of the three young adult Sunday school classes at First Baptist Church, and a corresponding survey was developed for students who were between the ages of 12 and 18 whose parents were members of one of the young adult Sunday school classes at FBC.<sup>1</sup> The survey of the fathers and children occurred during the Sunday school hour at church on a designated Sunday. The aim was to have fifteen matched pairs of fathers and children complete the survey. The data was analyzed, yielding a clear picture of the current home discipleship practices and perception among young families at FBC.

The second goal of this project was to develop a five week training series that

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<sup>1</sup>See appendix 1 for the adult survey and appendix 2 for the student survey.

equipped men to be the primary disciple-maker in their homes. This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of three FBC staff members, using a rubric evaluating evaluate how well the material corresponds to the primary biblical passage of Ephesians 5:21-6:4, provided practical help for men in the home, and met the needs of the church as determined by the staff.<sup>2</sup> The development of the curriculum was successfully accomplished when 95 percent of the evaluation indicators on evaluation rubric for each session were scored at the sufficient or above levels.

The third goal of this project was to develop five weeks of faith-at-home activities corresponding to the five-week equipping series for fathers to utilize within the context of their own homes each week. An expert panel—consisting of three FBC staff members—measured this goal using a rubric that evaluated how well the homework tool correlated with the five-week training series, ease of use, and how well it provided practical help for fathers to spiritually lead their families.<sup>3</sup> This goal was successfully accomplished when 95 percent of the evaluation indicators were scored at the sufficient or above levels by the expert panel.

The fourth goal of this project was to recruit ten fathers who were members of FBC and who had children eighteen years old or under still living in the home to participate in the course. Recruitment was conducted through mail, church bulletin, from the pulpit, and through personal invitations. This goal was successfully accomplished when ten fathers signed-up to participate in the course.

The fifth goal of this project was to equip fathers in knowledge and in practice to be the primary disciple makers in their families. During the 5-week training series, each father was taught understand his God-ordained role as disciple-maker, encouraged to establish personal God-honoring habits, and begin conducting family-faith practices in

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix 3.

<sup>3</sup>See appendix 4.

the home. Ultimately, each man was encouraged to develop a long-term family spiritual growth plan to implement with his own family. This goal was measured through the use of a pretest survey along with a posttest survey, and an interview four weeks following the completion of the teaching series.<sup>4</sup> This goal was successfully accomplished when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre and post test scores, and when the follow-up interview revealed that 60 percent of the men demonstrated the continued execution of their family faith plan four weeks following the completion of the training series.

### **Context**

The goals of this project were completed at First Baptist Church of Sherwood, Arkansas, which averages 488 people in Sunday morning worship attendance. Of the 492 family units on the membership roll at First Baptist Church, only 90 family units had children ages 18 years of age and younger. Of these 90 family units with children, 31 were either single mother families, grandparents raising grandchildren, or homes where the father is not a member of First Baptist Church. This data indicated that only 59 family units with children 18 years old and younger were led by men. Not only is the population of young fathers within First Baptist Church small, but our programming tended to prohibit parent and child interaction rather than facilitate togetherness.

The current programming structure at FBC is segmented-programmatic,<sup>5</sup> meaning that our programming norm is to constantly separate by age group. The Sunday school small groups, the Wednesday night activities, and the Sunday evening discipleship groups are all age segregated. The Sunday morning worship service may be the only

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<sup>4</sup>See appendix 5 for the pre- and post-series survey and appendix 6 for interview questions.

<sup>5</sup>W. Ryan Steenburg with Timothy Paul Jones, "Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 156-57.

opportunity each week for children and parents to have a faith moment together, assuming the family sits together. Children in third grade and below, however, may never have any worship experience together with their parents if the parents elect to send the child to children's church. Clearly, our regular programming tends to encourage the separation of families at church rather than to encourage unity.

Although First Baptist Church has some good teachers and leaders who genuinely desire to nurture children at First Baptist Church in their faith, our programming unintentionally steers parents away from God's plan in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 where parents are instructed to be the primary disciple-maker in the lives of their children. Our programming has made it easy for parents, fathers specifically, to abdicate to the church the faith formation of their children. By programming in such a segregated manner with very little encouragement given to parents regarding the Christian formation of their children, the church has wholeheartedly embraced the role of primary disciple-maker of children. A proper grasp of Deuteronomy 6 and a strategic partnership between church and parents are both necessary.

Positive steps have been taken to become more family focused in our programming. The youth mission trip was transformed into a family mission trip over the past four summers with positive results, as some children and parents were able to serve together in Jesus' name. This coming year, several of the scheduled class party nights have been retooled to become family nights, where families will be encouraged to come together as a family and enjoy family friendly activities. Despite these positive steps, there is still very little intentional emphasis at First Baptist Church on men embracing the God-given roles of becoming the primary disciple-maker in their families. The scope of this project is not to solve all the problems regarding family discipleship at First Baptist Church, but rather to take a significant step in equipping and encouraging fathers to embrace their God-given role as the primary disciple-maker in their own families.

## **Rationale**

As described in the ministry context, despite good intentions, the programming at First Baptist Church fails to intentionally facilitate any form of equipping parents to disciple their own children, but instead places the focus of discipleship on age-segregated programming. Because ministry in this context is bent more towards programming that occurs on sight at church rather than equipping fathers to disciple their families at home, this project should serve as a catalyst within the church to help bring awareness to the need to equip parents, and this project will also function as a pragmatic step towards a cohesive family focused ministry. Therefore, the two main reasons for the completion of this project are to see our church begin a shift towards more intentional family equipping in general, and to see parents, particularly fathers, begin to practically embrace the spiritual leader that God has called them to be within their own families as laid out in Deuteronomy 6.

Clearly, Jesus gave the church the mandate to make disciples (Matt 28:18). First Baptist Church of Sherwood, Arkansas, has embraced that mission. Over the past few years, several mission teams have been sent to Serbia. Numerous youth and family mission trips have occurred in Georgia, Texas, Indiana, Wyoming, and Kansas. Local mission opportunities have been plenty, and a new church plant is being sponsored within a local apartment complex. We understand the need to go, but in the busyness of our going and programming, we have neglected one of the most fertile mission fields available to the church: leading parents to evangelize and disciple their own children.

Undoubtedly, discipleship within the context of the home is God's intention in Deuteronomy 6 as He commands His people to pass along their faith to their children. Yet prior to instructing fathers to pass along God's Word to their children, God's first command to parents is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart" (Deut 6:5-6). There is great need in the church to lead parents to

faithfully live for the glory of Christ before expecting parents to lead their own children to display a vibrant faith in Christ. Studies plainly demonstrate that children will typically have a faith identical to that of their parent.<sup>6</sup> If we want to see younger generations passionate about their Savior, the best solution is to equip and lead parents to model and teach such faith. This project will begin to address this issue and help meet this need at First Baptist Church by encouraging fathers towards a deeper, authentic faith in Christ.

The church, however, would be remiss to simply lead parents to love Jesus more and expect them to pass along such faith to children without help, tools, encouragement, and instruction on how to disciple their own children. Along with God's command to parents in Deuteronomy 6 to love him above all, He gives practical instruction on passing such a faith on to one's children: "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut 6:7-9). Parents need help from the church in fulfilling this mandate. In order for Deuteronomy 6 to become a reality in the families of First Baptist Church, the church must partner with the families with practical help in family discipleship. This project helped meet this need by providing fathers with tools, encouragement, and accountability in discipling their families at home.

### **Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms were used in this ministry project for clarification:

*Family faith talk.* A faith talk is "a time set aside each week for families to

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<sup>6</sup>Christian Smith, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

gather around the Bible, its application to life, and the worship of Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

*Family Spiritual Growth Plan.* A Family Spiritual Growth Plan is a written plan of action outlining the intentional practices that a father will explicitly utilize in order to nurture the faith of his family as a whole, and each member individually. The plan may also include additional supporting activities that reinforce the basic practices.<sup>8</sup>

*Spiritual disciplines.* Spiritual disciplines are the “intentional practices, relationships, and experiences that give people space in their lives to ‘keep company’ with Jesus.”<sup>9</sup>

*Spiritual formation.* Spiritual formation refers to the “Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, it is the process whereby children and adolescents (and adults!) are being transformed into the image of Jesus. God’s ultimate end for his people is that they will be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). This also was Paul’s passion as he wrote to the Galatians, “My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (Gal 4:19). In another letter Paul writes, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col 1:28-29).

One potential limitation in this project was the perceived influence that the Associate Pastor of Students and Missions had regarding parents of students. Although

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<sup>7</sup>Brian Haynes, *The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting* (Nashville: Randall House, 2011), 45-50.

<sup>8</sup>John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner, eds., *Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children: Helping Your Child Develop a Personal Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2000).

<sup>9</sup>Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 17.

<sup>10</sup>Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 22.

he was acknowledged as an authority in the lives of their students, it remained to be seen whether parents would respond to the Associate Pastor as he spoke into their lives in this project. A second limitation in this project was the fifteen week time limit. In this project, the participants were evaluated four weeks following the teaching sessions to determine the percentage of participants still engaging in family worship. A better gauge of success would have been to evaluate beyond the fifteen week limit to determine long term success.

The project participants were delimited specifically to fathers who are members of FBC, members of one of the three young adult Sunday school classes, and who have children age 18 or under still living in the home.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology for this project included an initial assessment survey, two evaluation rubrics, a pre-series survey and identical post-series survey before and after the equipping series along with a semi-structured interview four weeks following the training series. Five goals determined the effectiveness of the project. The first goal of this project was to assess the current understanding and practice of discipleship in the homes of fathers at FBC. The assessment was conducted during the Sunday school hour on a designated Sunday, with fifteen matched pairs of fathers and children. The fathers were Members of FBC, and active in one of the church's young adult Sunday School classes. The father and child pairs were recruited to participate in the survey via formal letters to parents and through personal invitations. Each father and child pair was given a written assessment with matching codes in order to properly analyze the faith-nurturing practices in specific homes. The written assessment questioned each father's understanding of his biblical role in the spiritual formation of his family, as well as his understanding of the church's role in the spiritual formation of his children. The assessment also questioned the actual faith-nurturing practices occurring at

home including family worship, prayer, Bible reading, and faith-based conversations in formal and informal contexts. The fathers' assessment survey was The Family Discipleship and Practices Survey from the book *Family Ministry Field Guide*.<sup>11</sup>

Fifteen youth, aged 12 to 18, who were active in the youth group and whose fathers were participating in the assessment completed the student assessment questioning the same faith-nurturing practices occurring at home. The youth survey provided an alternative perspective with which to compare the father's perception of faith-nurturing practices at home. The first goal was successfully met when fifteen fathers from the young adult Sunday school classes along with their fifteen youth who are active in the youth group completed the survey, and the survey was analyzed, yielding a clearer understanding of the current faith-nurturing practices occurring in the homes among the younger families at FBC. The data gained from this survey helped inform the scope of the training series.

The second goal of this project was to develop a five-week training series that equips fathers to be the primary disciple-maker in their homes. Each one-hour session addressed topics such as God's call for men in the home, the father's personal discipleship, saturating the home in God's Word, making the home Gospel-centered, and how to create a spiritual growth plan for the faith-nurturing of one's family. This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of three FBC staff members (Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor of Education and Administration, and the Associate Pastor of Children and Preschool), using a rubric to evaluate how well the material conforms to the key biblical passages Ephesians 5:21-6:4, provided practical help with nurturing faith at home, and met the needs of the church as determined by the staff. Each session of the equipping curriculum was submitted to the expert panel for evaluation five weeks prior to

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<sup>11</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 201-4.

the teaching of that session. This goal was successfully accomplished when 95 percent of the evaluation indicators on the rubric were at the sufficient or above levels for each session of the curriculum.

The third goal of this project was to develop a five-week faith-at-home tool for fathers to utilize within the context of their own homes each week. The homework tool corresponded with the training series and provided practical help and guidance to fathers for leading faith-nurturing practices in the home at least three times each week during the equipping series. The tool encouraged fathers to lead family prayer times, follow up with the child's Sunday school lessons, conduct formal family faith talks, and intentionally look for informal opportunities to nurture a child's faith each week. An expert panel—consisting of three FBC staff members—measured this goal using a rubric that evaluated simplicity, practicality, and how well the homework tool correlated with the five-week training series. Each session of the faith-at-home homework was submitted to the expert panel for evaluation five weeks prior to its planned implementation. This goal was successfully accomplished when 95 percent of the evaluation indicators on the rubric were scored at the sufficient or above levels for each homework session

The fourth goal of this project was to recruit ten fathers who were members of FBC and who had children eighteen years old or under still living in the home to participate in all five sessions of the course. Recruitment was conducted through mail, church bulletin, from the pulpit, and through personal invitations. Participants were encouraged to sign up for the series online or by submitting a registration form to the church office. Each participant was asked to commit to attending every session in this series. The number of men who signed up to participate in the series was the measurement for this goal. This goal was successfully accomplished when ten men had signed up to participate in the five-week course.

The fifth goal of this project was to equip fathers in knowledge and in practice to be the primary disciple makers in their families. During the five-week training series,

each participant was taught to understand the roles and partnership of the church and parents in the spiritual formation of children. Each father was also equipped to live as a disciple of Jesus in personal practice, to lead formal faith nurturing-practices with his family in the home, to take advantage of informal faith-nurturing opportunities with his family in the home, and to create an intentional spiritual growth plan for the faith-nurturing of his own family.

This goal was measured through the use of a pre-series survey along with a post-series survey and interview four weeks following the completion of the teaching series. The pretest survey was handed out and conducted at the start of the first session. Each participant identified himself by selecting a six-digit number of his choice. The survey revealed the participants' understanding of their own role in the faith formation of their children, and showed the extent of actual in-home faith-nurturing practices among the participants.

Four weeks following the final session, participants met to take an identical survey and take part in a semi-structured interview. During the post-series survey the participants were asked to identify themselves using the same six digit number as used in the pre-series survey in order to correctly compare and analyze the data. The final semi-structured interview asked the fathers to discuss what changes have occurred since implementing faith-nurturing practices in their homes, what faith-nurturing practices were being maintained in the home, and were asked to give testimony to how they have observed God at work in the lives of the family member as a result of faith-nurturing practices. This goal was successfully accomplished when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post- survey scores, and when the follow-up interview revealed that 60 percent of the men demonstrate the continued execution of their family faith plan four weeks following the completion of the training series.

## CHAPTER 2

### GOD HAS CALLED AND EQUIPPED MEN TO LEAD THEIR FAMILIES TO TREASURE JESUS CHRIST

Current American culture is full of confusion and contradiction regarding the nature and roles of the male and female genders. Planned Parenthood explains on their website:

Clearly, society's categories for what is masculine and feminine are unrealistic. They may not capture how we truly feel, how we behave, or how we define ourselves. All men have some so-called feminine traits, and all women have some so-called masculine traits. And we may show different traits at different times. Our cultures teach women and men to be the opposite of each other in many ways. The truth is that we are more alike than different.<sup>1</sup>

Planned Parenthood, along with many other organizations and individuals desire to remove any distinctive gender roles in our culture in order to create a gender-neutral society in which men and women are identical in function and form.

Even within evangelicalism the notion of gender roles within marriage is currently debated. Scholars are divided over the issue of whether man and women can indeed be equal before God, and yet have distinct God-ordained roles placing husbands as head of their own wives. Scholars such as Wayne Grudem hold to a view called complementarianism, with the central tenet that men and women complement each other as they fulfil their distinct roles.<sup>2</sup> According to Grudem,

The biblical ideal is that the husband is to be both loving and humble in his leadership. The wife is to be both joyful and intelligent in her submission. Practically, this means that they will frequently talk about many decisions, both

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-info/sexual-orientation-gender/gender-gender-identity#sthash.eaMIXn41.dpuf>.

<sup>2</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2006), 13.

large and small. This also means that both the husband and wife will listen to the other's unique wisdom and insight related to the decision. Often, one will defer to the other in the decision; rarely will they differ greatly on the decision (for the Lord has made them "one flesh").

But in every decision that involves both the husband and wife, whether large or small, and whether they agree or not, the responsibility to make the decision rests with the husband. Therefore, male headship makes a difference every day in the marriage relationship. This is not because the husband is wiser or a better leader or a better decision maker, but because that headship is part of the God-given role for the husband. It is part of God's good design for the marriage relationship.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, scholars like Alan Padgett hold an egalitarian view in which men and women are not called to defined roles of headship and submission, but rather are called to submit to one another equally. Padgett writes,

Egalitarian scholars have argued for mutual submission between husband and wife in a Christian home as a vision of biblical equality. In such mutual submission, an ethic of submission is not so much rejected altogether (à la feminism) as it is limited by love, justice, and circumstance. Sometimes a husband will submit to his wife, or vice versa, depending on the context.<sup>4</sup>

Padgett goes so far as to describe the complementarian view as a "role hierarchy," and even declares that the values championed by complementarian scholars are "not biblical but patriarchal—including the submission of women to husbands/fathers/male senior pastors in the home and in church."<sup>5</sup> Padgett defines the issue from his perspective,

The real problem with complementarian views is their man-centered notion of authority. While the role of women may well include some areas of leadership, Christian women should continue to submit to the authority of some man: husband, father, and /or male senior pastor. Of course, men too will submit to proper authority; but the key problem is the gendered character of that authority in complementarian views. In the family, wives and daughters must submit to the 'spiritual headship' of the man (husband or father). In the church, women may indeed have some religious authority, but they must be under the 'spiritual headship' of the male senior pastor.

It is clear, therefore, that the ethics of this revisionist view are based on the notion of

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<sup>3</sup>Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 26.

<sup>4</sup>Alan G. Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church: A Biblical Understanding of Leadership and Mutual Submission* (Colorado Springs: Baker Academic, 2011), 12.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 10.

gender roles for men and women.<sup>6</sup>

Even the names of these authors' works—*Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminists* and *As Christ Submits to the Church*—are certainly provocative in their own right. Despite the jabs from both sides, God has spoken clearly on the issue. God's design for the male and female sexes as they relate to each other is most clearly presented in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus (Eph 5:21-6:4). This chapter will explore Ephesians 5:21-6:4 and demonstrate that regardless of what contemporary society believes, and contrary to Alan Padgett's understanding of mutual submission, God has clearly established two genders with distinct roles of headship and submission. God's people are called to fulfill these roles within the marriage and family relationships in such a way as to honor Himself and to show the glory of Christ to a confused culture.

### **Context**

The church to which Paul addressed his letter was growing in the midst of one of the Roman Empire's largest and most significant cities.<sup>7</sup> Ephesus was home to the temple of the goddess Artemis, which was once known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The city of Ephesus also had a busy harbor, making it an ideal city for commerce, including a thriving fishing industry, merchant and slave trade. The commerce of the city was closely linked with the commerce of the temple.<sup>8</sup> The rise of Christianity in Ephesus, therefore, had a direct impact on commerce as some merchants felt their trade threatened, resulting in hostility towards the church (Acts 19:23ff.).

Though Paul never declared a specific occasion for writing his letter to the

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<sup>6</sup>Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church*, 32-33.

<sup>7</sup>C. E. Arnold, "Centers of Christianity," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup>Katherine A. Shaner, "Ephesus," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Archaeology*, ed. Daniel Master (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

church at Ephesus, it is possible that because of the increasing aversion towards the church from outsiders, Paul felt the need to issue a call to unity within the church, addressing both Jews and gentiles. After all, when the church is attacked from outsiders, the last thing the church needs is to be fractured within. One scholar stated, “The dominant note of the Epistle is not one of warning, but one of praise and thanksgiving. The writer’s mind is full of one great theme—the unity of the church in Christ, predestined from all eternity to all eternity, bound together in faith and love.”<sup>9</sup>

The first three chapters of Paul’s letter addressed the unity of the church, highlighting the truth that both Jews and Gentiles are now one body united by faith in Christ. The final three chapters of Paul’s letter addressed the unity of the church, with particular attention given to the conduct of the church members. It is within this second section that Paul writes his “household codes,” addressing the specific roles of men, women, and children within the family. His aim was to demonstrate that the unity of the church—both Jews and Gentiles—under the Lordship of Christ is not only pictured in the body of Christ as a whole, but the unity of the church in submission to Christ is also pictured on a smaller, familial level, specifically through the roles and responsibilities in which husbands and wives love one another. Paul’s letter is just as relevant to men and women today as it was to the church in Ephesus in the first century.

Although the Bible addresses both men and women in their roles as husband or a wife, for the purpose of this project, this chapter will focus primarily on the roles and expectations of men as husbands and fathers as they are revealed in Scripture. After all, God has both called and equipped men in their roles as husbands and fathers to lead their families with clarity to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ, even in the midst of a confused society.

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<sup>9</sup>L. W. Grensted, “Ephesians, Epistle to the,” in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, ed. James Hastings, John A Selbie, and John C. Lambert (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1916).

## **Ephesians 5:21: A Husband's Call to Lay Aside His Own Agenda in Submission to Christ**

Ephesians 5:21 describes how believers are to “submit to one another.”

Immediately following is the command for wives to submit to husbands, as to the Lord (v. 22). However, to throw down the hammer of the law regarding a volatile issue like submission within marriage without providing the context for such submission may either give license for men to lead their wives in a harsh manner or it may place an unbearable and repressive burden on wives to submit to an unloving husband. Yet when given the appropriate context of the Gospel, God's plan for husbands and wives is shown to be a demonstration of God's good wisdom regarding the marriage relationship and a reflection of the reality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women.

### **The Gospel**

Beginning in Ephesians 1, Paul explained with depth and clarity the good news of what God has done through Christ on behalf of believers. In fact, verses 3 through 14 in the Greek text are actually one significantly long sentence thought to be an early eulogy of praise pointing to God's eternal purpose and plan.<sup>10</sup> One scholar commented, “The Christian focus of this particular blessing is hard to miss since ‘in Christ’ or ‘in him’ is repeated in nearly every verse. Such repetition emphasizes that all that God has done for his people, which issues in their praise, has been done in Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

Paul declared that God has blessed believers “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). Such spiritual blessings include being chosen in Christ to stand before God as holy and blameless (1:4), being predestined for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ (1:5), receiving redemption and forgiveness through the blood of

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<sup>10</sup>Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 73.

<sup>11</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 11.

Jesus (1:6), being shown God’s wisdom, will, purpose and plan in Christ (1:8-10), given an inheritance (1:11), and upon hearing God’s truth and belief in Jesus Christ every believer has been sealed with the assurance of God’s Spirit (1:13-14). Not only has God blessed believers with such gifts, but these gifts have been “lavished” upon God’s people (1:8). God has clearly taken the initiative and acted first on behalf of his own people.

Paul made clear in Ephesians chapter two that apart from God’s saving activity through the cross of Christ there is no human being that is worthy of God’s presence, nor able to achieve such a relationship with God on his or her own merits. All men and women are spiritually dead in sin (2:2), chasing a false god (2:3), following selfish passions (2:3), under God’s wrath (2:3), separated from Christ (2:12), without hope and without God (2:13). Commenting on the phrase “children of wrath” in verse 3, Hoehner explained, “Unbelievers have a close relationship with God’s wrath rather than to God Himself.”<sup>12</sup> Such is a bleak outlook for mankind.

In the midst of describing such hopelessness in humanity, Paul pointed to the beautiful truth that God was willing to act in order to save sinners.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:4-10)

The mere fact that God loves such an unlovely people is a wonder, and the fact that God ‘lavishes’ such blessings as described in Ephesians 1 on those people is inconceivable. It is truly good news. The dead are made alive in Christ, and those under God’s wrath are saved through Christ. All of God’s work on behalf of sinners reveals “the immeasurable riches of his grace” (2:7). In Hoehner’s words, sinners who deserve

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<sup>12</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 324.

nothing but God's wrath "have become trophies of God's grace due to his gracious work of salvation."<sup>13</sup>

The well-known verses 8 and 9 point us to the truth that salvation is God's work and God's free gift. The good news is that one must simply believe that God has acted on his behalf in Christ, and receive, by faith, God's gift of salvation. O'Brien points out that here faith refers to the "human response by which God's salvation is received."<sup>14</sup>

Although Ephesians 2:8-9 is often quoted to support the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, verse 10 is frequently neglected. It is important to note that God has not simply saved his people from the eternal penalty of sin, but as part of God's grand plan, he has saved his people "for good works," and leads his people to "walk in them" (2:10). O'Brien adds,

His plan from old was not simply to introduce his sons and daughters into a relationship with himself through his Son, but to bring us fully to glory (cf. Heb. 2:10), and this included the intermediate steps by which we were to reach our final goal (cf. 2 Thess. 2:13-14). These embrace the good deeds he has marked out for us beforehand. Thus, once again the apostle stresses the absolute priority of divine grace.<sup>15</sup>

### **Walking Worthy of God's Call**

The result of God's redeeming work through Jesus Christ is a new orientation in the life of the believer. God creates his people for good works, and God both commands and leads his people to "walk in them" (2:10). This new direction in the life of a believer as a result of faith in Christ stands in direct opposition to the believer's former manner of life and purpose in which he once walked "following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the

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<sup>13</sup>Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 73.

<sup>14</sup>Peter T.O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 174.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 180.

sons of disobedience” (2:2). Paul used the verb περιπατέω, meaning *to go about* or *to walk*, in a figurative sense, pointing to the manner in which one conducts his life.<sup>16</sup> The word περιπατέω is found in verse 2 and likewise in verse 10, as Paul portrayed two distinct ways of life that stand in direct opposition to one another.<sup>17</sup> God rescues the believer from his former way of life and leads him towards a brand new way of life.

The believer’s life is ordered by a new reality, one in which the Spirit of Christ leads and the ego is abandoned. Throughout the letter to the Ephesians Paul continued to use the word περιπατέω. He explained that believers are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:1-3). Contrasting the old life apart from Christ and new life in Christ, the Ephesian Christians are urged to “no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds (4:17), but rather to put off the old self—the former manner of life—and to put on the new self, “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:22-23). Believers are exhorted to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (5:2). In addition, believers are commanded to “walk as children of light,” a direct contrast with the former manner of life dominated by walking in darkness (5:8). Finally, Paul instructed the Ephesians, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise” (5:15).

Paul’s instruction to walk in a new manner of life was not merely intended for individuals, but was likewise to be applied to the community of believers walking in faith together, because “redeemed sinners have been united with other believers into a corporate unity, in particular Jewish and gentile believers.”<sup>18</sup> This new unity of believers

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<sup>16</sup>Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), s.v. “περιπατέω.”

<sup>17</sup>Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, abridged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), s.v. “περιπατέω.”

<sup>18</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 73.

is the church, the body of Christ.

Clearly Paul's letter is permeated with the theme of believers walking—living in a new reality dominated by Christ's Spirit as a consequence of God's saving grace in the life of the believer and the life of the church. The link between the believer's walk and the influence of the Spirit is especially clear in Ephesians 5:15-18, whereby Paul connected the command to walk wisely with the need for believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The believer's new orientation in life is a result of God's saving work along with the Holy Spirit's continual influence and guidance.

Thielman notes that beginning in verse 18, Paul gave a series of participles all dependent on the command for believers to be filled with the Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph 5:18-21)

Some recent commentators, such as Clinton Arnold, argue that the five participles listed by Paul (speaking, singing and making melody to the Lord, giving thanks to God, and submitting to one another) are actually the means by which the believer achieves the fullness of the Spirit in his or her life.<sup>20</sup> Such a view, however, seems to contradict Paul's major emphasis on salvation being God's work in the life of a believer, received solely through faith. Although Paul clearly expected believers to exert every effort to walk in wisdom, such effort was only possible because of the presence of God's Spirit in the believer leading him to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord. God's people do not live a godly lifestyle in order to gain God's Spirit, but rather God gives his Spirit to his people so that they are able to live in such a manner that honors him.

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<sup>19</sup>Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 361-65.

<sup>20</sup>Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 351.

Ultimately, Paul’s prayer for the people was that they would be strengthened in their innermost being with power through God’s Spirit, leading to a life filled with the fullness of God (3:16-19). It is therefore best to understand the participles following Paul’s command to be filled with the Spirit as the “resultant characteristics of being filled with the Spirit” rather than a list of some means to gain additional portion of God’s Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

God’s Spirit within each believer leads and empowers God’s people to walk—live—differently than the surrounding culture. In direct contrast with the surrounding culture, God has established distinct roles for men and women within the marriage relationships, and these roles are only realized in the lives of husbands and wives as they believe and embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the source of and general context for the radical roles of husbands and wives within marriage. Because the gospel has redefined the lives of men and women within marriage, mutual submission becomes a key characteristic within the marriage.

### **Submission as Evidence of the Gospel**

The final participle in verse 21, “submitting to one another in the fear of the Lord,” completes the list of evidences of a life filled with the Holy Spirit, found in verses 19-21. However, there has been much debate and confusion regarding the nature and circumstances of submission. The word, ὑποτάσσω, to submit, literally means “to arrange under.”<sup>22</sup> The word appears to always indicate a sense of hierarchy, yet the context in which the word is used is necessary to determine whether the submission is voluntary or compulsory.<sup>23</sup> Regarding believers in the New Testament community, however, the word is always understood in terms of “reverent submission, seen as a self-offering.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 706.

<sup>22</sup>O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 399.

<sup>23</sup>Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “ὑποτάσσω.”

<sup>24</sup>Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), s.v. “ὑποτάσσω.”

Padgett rejects the idea that *ὑποτάσσω* always implies a relationship of submission to an authority.<sup>25</sup> According to Padgett, Jesus actually submitted to others when he washed the feet of his disciples and laid down his life for those he loved. With this type of submission there was no hierarchy of authority, but rather it was a voluntary submission towards his people out of humility, compassion, and love.<sup>26</sup> Padgett therefore suggests that the submission Paul had in mind here is to be mutual submission from one believer to another, patterned after the example of Jesus Christ who submitted himself to others. In this type of submission, there is no place for hierarchy, especially within the marriage relationship.

Contrary to Padgett, O'Brien asserts that here submission to be must only be on the part of the subordinate, because after all, how can a husband submit to the wife, who is specifically commanded to submit to him in the following verse? According to O'Brien, the idea of submission is introduced in general in verse 21, followed by a description of how submission should be practiced by wives, children, and servants.<sup>27</sup> Mutual submission is not in view, but rather the submission only to the appropriate authorities including husbands, parents, and masters.

However, the grammatical structure of verses 21 and 22 indicate that the idea of mutual submission in some way carries over into the marriage relationship. Most English translations end verse 21 with a period, and restate the verb in verse 22 instructing wives to submit to husbands. In the Greek text, however, verses 21 and 22 are actually part of the same sentence with only one verb supplied. Both verse 21 and 22 are dependent on the same instance of *ὑποτάσσω*. Because the specific command in verse 22 for wives to submit to their husbands hangs on the verb in verse 21, verse 21 functions as

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<sup>25</sup>Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church*, 39.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 401.

a “hinge verse” to the following section that outlines the specific roles of men and women within marriage.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the idea of submitting to one another—mutual submission—is the immediate context in which Paul established the roles of husbands and wives in the marriage relationship. However, the idea of mutual submission within marriage cannot mean that husbands are to sometimes submit to the leadership or authority of their own wives, because such an idea is clearly contrary to the roles to which God has called husbands and wives. Mutual submission is best expressed by Lloyd-Jones as he explains that husbands and wives “must cease to be self-assertive” in their relationship.<sup>29</sup> One theological dictionary explains further,

Just as husbands are called to love their wives with a self-sacrificing love (5:25-28), so wives are called to put aside their own agendas in submission to their husbands. The ideal, of course, is that this will be mutually voluntary. Only then will the Christian home function as God wants it to.<sup>30</sup>

Such submission is evidence of God’s Spirit within the believer, as God leads husbands and wives to walk in love just as Christ loved his own people by sacrificing himself (5:2). The idea of mutual submission also makes sense in light of the fact that Paul clearly proclaims in chapter 1 that God has placed all things in submission under Christ (1:22). Here in chapter 5 the emphasis of mutual submission is grounded in the fear of Christ, or reverence for Christ. Because of the authority of Christ in the life of the believer, he or she is to give preference to one another, especially regarding their gender roles within the marriage relationship.

### **Ephesians 5:22-24: A Husband Leads His Wife**

Paul began his outline of the marriage relationship with specific instructions to wives to be submissive to their own husbands.

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<sup>28</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 719.

<sup>29</sup>D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home, and Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18-6:9* (Chatham, England: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 59.

<sup>30</sup>Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “ὑποτάσσω.”

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (Eph 5:22-24)

### **Submit As to the Lord**

Such submission to husbands is to be done “as to the Lord.” Or, as one commentator states, “As she submits to her husband she also submits to the Lord.”<sup>31</sup> The woman’s submission to her husband in one sense is a way to honor the Lord.

Nevertheless, submission to husbands is not merely a matter of obedience to the Lord, but rather the ultimate reason for submission is rooted in the nature and work of Jesus Christ on behalf of his church, with the husband/wife relationship serving as a living picture of Christ and his church. This living picture of the gospel, as played out in the roles and relationship between husbands and wives is fleshed out throughout the remainder of chapter 5. Through her willing submission to her own husband, the Christian wife is acting her part as a living presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Husband as Head**

Paul explained that the husband is head of his wife in the same way that Christ is head of the church. The word, κεφαλή, meaning head, is found in two previous instances in the epistle, both times referring to Christ.

And [God] put all things under [Christ’s] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church. (Eph 1:22 ESV)

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:15-16 ESV)

Considering these verses, it is best to view Paul’s description of husband as head over his wife in 5:23 with a dual emphasis of leadership and provision.<sup>32</sup> As the

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<sup>31</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 738.

<sup>32</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 382

husband is head over his wife, he is to provide leadership and provision, meeting both the spiritual and physical needs of his wife. This head and body picture of Christ and his church is to likewise be the pattern of the husband and wife relationship, and because marriage is to picture the gospel of Jesus Christ, women are instructed to submit to their own husbands, who serve as head of their marriage.

The idea of husbands serving as the head, or authority, over wives is not without controversy. Padgett argues against the notion of authority of the husband over his wife, explaining that κεφαλή has a range of meanings beyond “authority,” including “source,” or “origin.”<sup>33</sup> Although Padgett affirms that Paul used κεφαλῆ to mean authority in 1:22, Paul’s use of the word in 4:15-16 indeed conveys the idea of source, as Christ is the source of the unified body. Likewise, Paul’s use of κεφαλῆ in 5:23 does not indicate authority. Padgett explains,

In any case kephalē, in Ephesians 5:21-33 most certainly does not mean “lordship” in any plain and simple sense. In this passage, Jesus is the head of the church by taking care of his bride, not by lording over her. Jesus takes the lead (kephalē) in being a servant, and his headship is not a role-hierarchy. This lord is also a servant, and this servant is also the Lord. Christians do indeed submit to Jesus, just as wives should submit to husbands; but Jesus has also submitted to us in love and taken up the role of a slave for us in the economy of salvation history. Husbands should do likewise in relation to their wives. Free, loving, and mutual submission is the way of following after Jesus in true discipleship.

It should be questioned whether Christ actually submitted to the church as he served her, as Padgett seems to believe. After all, it is a stretch to declare that service towards another is the same thing as submission to another. Furthermore, the idea that κεφαλῆ has a range of meaning apart from the notion of authority, such as source or origin, has been questioned by some scholars altogether.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Hoehner observes that there may indeed be a range of meaning for κεφαλῆ, but declares it best to understand the word “without inherently denoting either authority or source, but rather

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<sup>33</sup>Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church*, 66-67.

<sup>34</sup>Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 121-26.

‘preeminence’ or ‘prominence’ with the context emphasizing either authority or source.’<sup>35</sup> Hoehner also agrees with Padgett’s understanding of the use of κεφαλή as authority in 1:22, and as source in 4:15-16, but disagrees with Padgett on 5:23. Hoehner explains,

In the present context Christ’s headship is like that of 1:22 where he is the “ruler” or has “authority over” the church. This is substantiated in 5:24 where the wife’s subjection to her husband is compared with the church’s subjection to Christ. Likewise, the husband is not the “source” of the wife, but the “head” over his wife.<sup>36</sup>

Christ is head of his church by virtue of his saving work on the Cross. Paul clearly points to this truth in verse 24 by stating that Jesus is the savior of the body. Here, body is a reference to his corporate body of believers, the church. Some commentators suggest that this statement regarding Christ as savior is merely an aside meant only to elucidate the work of Christ rather than provide an analogous role to which the husbands must strive to meet.<sup>37</sup> After all, Christ alone is Savior. Such a role is impossible for husbands to accomplish. Other theologians point out that the description of Jesus as savior of the body demonstrates how Christ saved the body (church) from eternal damnation. In this way, Christ was protector of his church.<sup>38</sup> Paul’s statement, therefore, regarding Christ as savior of the body demonstrated that the husband’s authority over his wife includes a “protective quality, which is exemplified in Christ.”<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the best explanation is simply that as Savior, Christ used his authority and power for the church’s benefit.<sup>40</sup> This explanation also makes sense in light of Paul’s statements declaring that God has placed all things under Christ, and given Christ as head of the

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<sup>35</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 524.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 739-40.

<sup>37</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 382.

<sup>38</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 744.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 379.

church (Eph 1:22-23) with the purpose of the building up of his body, the church (Eph 4:12). Husbands, then, are to use the authority given them to benefit their wives. This picture of authority as exemplified in Christ is certainly one that husbands can embrace. Such authority is also that to which wives can confidently submit, knowing that their husband has their best in mind.

Husbands have headship over their wives within the marriage relationship by God's design. Yet such authority cannot be taken lightly, nor selfishly, because of the example of Christ, who as Savior of the church used his authority for the good of the church. Husbands are given the status as head of households, but must exercise the authority in a manner that elevates his subordinate wife above himself.

### **Ephesians 5:25-27: A Husband Sacrifices for His Wife**

Up to this point in Paul's argument, the submission of wives to husbands and the headship of husbands over wives have been discussed only in terms of God given roles and nature of Christ's authority over the church. Interestingly, beginning in verse 25, Paul's instruction was not for husbands to exercise authority over their wives, but rather to love their wives.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:25-27)

Paul gave neither an abstract, nor ephemeral command to husbands to love their wives, but instead directed husbands to a concrete standard of love as exemplified in the way in which Christ loved his church specifically by giving his life for the church. In a Christ-like manner, a husband by God's design is to provide sacrificial leadership to his wife and family.

### **Love Your Wives**

Most often in the New Testament, the word *ἀγαπάω*, to love, is used in

reference to God’s relationship with his people.<sup>41</sup> Such love is an act of the will. One commentator describes it as a “love irrespective of merit, even to the undeserving.”<sup>42</sup> Clearly God has chosen to set his affection on his people, despite the fact that humanity is completely undeserving (Eph 2:1-5). This unearned love is the nature of God’s love towards his chosen people, and this type of unwarranted love is also to be the nature of a husband’s love toward his own bride. For Paul, ἀγαπάω was “electing love.”<sup>43</sup> Paul intended for husbands to choose to love their wives regardless of whether the love is merited. The word ἀγαπάω was used six times in verses 25, 28, and 33, highlighting the centrality of this theme in the role of the husband within marriage.<sup>44</sup>

### **As Christ Loved the Church and Gave Himself Up for Her**

God’s unmerited love for his people is displayed specifically through the cross where Jesus willingly laid down his own life in order to save his church. Jesus unmistakably declared that the greatest love is to lay one’s life down for another (John 15:13). The hallmark of God’s love lies in the self-sacrifice of Christ on behalf of others, and likewise the trademark of a husband’s love for his wife involves laying down his own life for his wife. Jesus demonstrated his love for his church specifically by giving up his own life for the good of the church. In Paul’s day, a husband who served his own wife by sacrificing his personal gain stood in direct contrast to the cultural norm. Women were expected to “manage the household well in order to free the husband from domestic concerns and enhance his social prestige.”<sup>45</sup> Paul pressed his readers to understand that a

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<sup>41</sup>Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “ἀγαπάω.”

<sup>42</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 747

<sup>43</sup>Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “ἀγαπάω.”

<sup>44</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 747.

<sup>45</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 382.

husband's love for his wife involves sacrificing his social prestige in order to serve his wife. Obviously, in a first world context of marriage today, the laying down of one's life for his wife will rarely involve physical death as demonstrated by Christ, but it does still include the sacrifice of personal gain and personal preferences in favor of all that benefits one's wife. A husband is to love his wife by displaying sacrificial leadership.

### **So That He Might Sanctify Her**

After establishing the fact that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church by giving himself up for her, Paul presented three purpose clauses, each beginning with the words "that" or "so that." Each purpose clause seems to build upon one another. The first purpose clause states that Christ laid down his life for his church "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (5:26). The word sanctify, expresses "the idea of being set aside or consecrated to God or God's service."<sup>46</sup> Christ's sacrifice was made in order to separate the church from the world for the purposes of God. If Christ died to transform sinners into saints, then obviously a significant change has taken place in the life of the new believer, enabling him to be set apart. This change is exactly what Paul alluded to as he referenced a cleansing.

According to one commentator, the two acts of being sanctified and being cleansed from sin are two separate events, yet both occur simultaneously, which explains why sanctification must also involve cleansing. "Cleansing deals with the negative aspect, that of being cleansed from defilement of sin, whereas sanctification is the positive aspect, that of being set apart to God. They are two sides of the same coin."<sup>47</sup>

If Christ has died in order to sanctify sinners and to offer a cleansing from sin,

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<sup>46</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 751.

<sup>47</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 752.

then what entails such a cleansing? Paul explained that the cleansing comes as a result of the “washing of water with the word.” Some commentators argue that the “washing of water” is meant to point us to water baptism. Lincoln affirms such a view, declaring that “baptism is the point at which the church experiences Christ’s continuing purifying love for her as his bride.”<sup>48</sup> This view would certainly make sense to many lifelong church-attenders, because after all, baptism is the most visible symbol of salvation in the church. However, one major problem with this water baptism understanding of this verse is that faith and grace are both undermined by the work of physical, water baptism. If water baptism is the means of cleansing and sanctification in the life of the believer, then Paul’s emphasis in chapters 1 and 2 on Salvation being solely a work of God has been negated.

Another problem with the water baptism view is that there is a common word for baptism used in the New Testament—*βαπτίζω*. If Paul did have in mind the idea that water baptism cleanses the believer and sets him or her apart for the work of God, then Paul would likely have used that specific word for baptism. Instead, in this verse Paul used the word *λουτρόν*, meaning *bath* or *washing*. Paul explained that Christ has laid down his own life in order to set apart his bride and cleanse her by washing her. Cleansing as with water is implied, but not in the physical sense of baptism. The cleansing Paul wrote about here was figurative, as being washed clean of one’s sin. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the apostle John clearly asserted that it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7). Only Christ transforms a sinner into a saint, by cleansing from sin and setting him or her apart for the work of God.

The word *λουτρόν* is only used once more in the New Testament in Titus 3:5, where Paul explains that “God saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and

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<sup>48</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 375.

renewal of the Holy Spirit.” In this verse Paul likewise writes of a metaphorical washing of the believer as a work of God, rather than as a result of works done by the individual. God cleanses the sinner by washing away the sin and the old sinful nature, establishing the believer as a saint with a new nature. It is therefore best to understand the cleansing that Paul had in mind in Ephesians 5 as “referring to an inward form of cleansing that has been applied by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>49</sup> By virtue of being cleansed from sin, believers are set apart—sanctified—for God’s work.

Paul included one more qualifier to his statement as he described believers as being washed “with the word.” It is possible that Paul referred here to a testimony spoken by the believer placing his faith in Christ just before baptism. After all, salvation does involve the believer’s confession of Christ as Lord of one’s life (Romans 10:9-10). However, there is no precedence in the New Testament for this phrase to be used as referring to a baptismal confession of faith.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, in the Greek language, the two most common words translated as “words” are *λόγος* and *ῥήμα*. In this passage, Paul used the word *ῥήμα*, which he typically uses in reference to words that proceed from God or Christ.<sup>51</sup> Because *ῥήμα* rather than *λόγος* is used here, it is most likely a reference to “the message or Word from God in which one places his or her trust.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, as Paul described a cleansing that comes from a washing in the word, he is referring to “the cleansing power of the gospel.”<sup>53</sup> Sanctification and cleansing come by hearing and receiving God’s message of God’s Messiah. Jesus himself, in his prayer to the Father, prayed, “Sanctify [the disciples] in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). The word

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<sup>49</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 388.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 389.

<sup>51</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 755.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 755.

<sup>53</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 384.

of God, the Gospel—sanctifies anyone willing to believe. As the proclamation of God’s good news is believed and received, the believer is washed clean from the stain of sin, and set apart for God. The reason Christ laid down his own life for his bride was to sanctify her, by means of thoroughly cleansing her with the message of hope and new life found in his death, burial and resurrection. This message is to be taken to all people, even to the ends of the earth, so that all may have the opportunity to hear, believe, and receive the cleansing and sanctification offered by Christ.

One nuance noticed by Clinton Arnold is the fact that sanctification involves both a definitive event as well as a process. He states, “Sanctification is here presented as both ‘already’ and ‘not yet.’”<sup>54</sup> Christ died in order to sanctify his bride as a definitive event, which is why Paul described believers as saints. The believer has a new identity in Christ and because of Christ’s work. The new believer is sanctified forever standing holy and blameless before God (Eph 1:9). However, the process of sanctification is also a lifelong process whereby the believer is being made more and more into the image of Christ (Col 1:28-29; Gal 4:19; Rom 8:29). It is not only important for sinners to hear and believe the Gospel in order to be cleansed and sanctified, but it is equally important for saints to continually hear and apply the Gospel message in daily life.

The implication for husbands in light of this “already and not yet” aspect of sanctification is significant. A husband is to set aside his own agenda in order to ensure that his wife hears the Gospel with opportunity to respond in saving faith. Yet, because of the ongoing nature of sanctification, a husband is also to continually saturate his life, home, and marriage with the message of the gospel. It is the gospel truth received by faith that sets one apart for God, but it is the gospel truth constantly applied that enables one to continue living a “set apart” lifestyle that honors God.

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<sup>54</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 386-87.

## **So That He Might Present Her to Himself in Splendor**

Paul declared that the initial reason Jesus laid down his life was to sanctify his church, having cleansed her with the washing in the word. Paul followed this declaration with a second purpose for which Jesus Christ laid down his own life for his bride: “so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph 5:27). This second purpose appears to be built on the first reason, pointing to the fact that one reason Christ sanctified his bride was in order to present her to himself in splendor.<sup>55</sup> It is interesting to note that within the marriage imagery presented by Paul, Christ not only is the one who sanctifies the bride, but he is also the one who presents her at the wedding, and he himself also stands as the bridegroom to receive his bride. Such imagery reinforces the unmerited nature of Christ’s sacrificial love for his bride, and underscores the nature of God’s grace towards his chosen people.

The word for splendor, ἐνδοξος, used here by Paul has a range of meanings including reputation, honor, and radiance or glory.<sup>56</sup> Here Paul used the word in the latter sense, with the idea that Jesus has cleansed his bride in order that she may be presented as radiant, or glorious. O’Brien suggests that here Paul has alluded to the imagery from Ezekiel 16:10-14 whereby God himself has clothed his bride, the people of Israel, with all the finest adornments and clothing, declaring his people beautiful because they have been adorned with God’s own splendor.<sup>57</sup> If this is the case, then the splendor of the Church that Paul had in mind here in Ephesians 5 is not her own, but rather it ultimately comes from Christ, who makes her radiant by virtue of having cleansed her. Because of Christ, the bride is “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” Christ’s Bride is perfect precisely because Christ has made her perfect. On account of the work of Christ in

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<sup>55</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 389.

<sup>56</sup>Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “ἐνδοξος.”

<sup>57</sup>O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 424.

preparing and presenting his bride, the glory on display is ultimately Christ's glory radiating through his bride, the church.

O'Brien also suggests that "it is better to understand 'glorious' of the eschatological radiance and brightness of God's presence on the final day, than the glory in which the church currently participates."<sup>58</sup> This future presentation of the bride clothed in splendor seems reasonable. However, it is also plausible that Christ's bride at least reflect some of Christ's glory in the world today, because after all, Paul had already commented on God's glory in the church and in Christ being on display to all generations because of God's power within us (Eph 3:20-21). With Christ's purpose for his bride in mind, the believing husband is challenged to sacrifice his own agenda and lead within his own house in such a manner as to see evidence of the glory of Christ on display in his own life, his own wife, and their marriage relationship together.

### **So That She Might Be Holy and Blameless**

Paul gave a final reason for which Christ died for his bride: "that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). In one sense, holy and blameless is a restatement and reinforcement of the image of the bride as being without spot or wrinkle. Yet this phrase also provides an ethical reason for which Christ sanctifies, prepares, and presents to himself a glorious bride—that she live as one who is holy and blameless. Paul has already made clear in Ephesians 1:4 that believers have been elected in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that they will stand holy and blameless before God. Now in 5:27, it is revealed that it is the work of Christ that enables the church to stand in God's presence as holy and blameless, and to reflect such holiness in all of life.

Hoehner also points out the reality that at the present time, Christ's living church does not appear to be without spot nor wrinkle, therefore it is best to understand

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<sup>58</sup>O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 434.

this glorious presentation of the church in all her splendor to be future, at the day of Christ's return.<sup>59</sup> In support, Hoehner explains that whenever the presentation of the bride is pictured in the Bible, it always speaks of the future (e.g., Matt 22:1-10; 25:1-13; Rev 19:7-10; 21:9). Despite the fact that the bride will only be perfectly holy and blameless, without spot or wrinkle at the future coming of Christ, there is implicit in the picture of the glorious bride a "call to live in such a way that is consistent with this status."<sup>60</sup> Saints are called to aggressively live out what God has already declared true of them. Even with a future focus, this phrase still provides present ethical implications of a Gospel centered home, as husbands are called to lead their wives and homes to "walk" in a manner worthy of Christ (Phil 1:27; Col 1:9-10; 1 Thess 2:12).

In summary, the entire picture of Christ and the church in verses 25-27 points to the reality that through sacrificial love and leadership a husband is to intentionally lead his family to live morally consistent with the nature of Christ by constantly bathing his family in the truth of the gospel. In this manner the glory of Christ will be on display within the household.

### **Ephesians 5:28-32: A Husband Nurtures His Wife**

Following his assertion of the nature of a husband's sacrificial leadership, Paul directed his readers towards a more practical aspect of a husband's headship over his wife with specific instruction regarding her care. Paul elaborated,

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:28-33)

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<sup>59</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 761.

<sup>60</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 387.

## **Husbands Should Love Their Wives as Their Own Bodies**

In verse 25 Paul previously commanded husbands to love their wives. Here in verse 28, the command for husbands to love their wives is repeated, pointing husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church. However in this verse, Paul introduces a new word—*ὀφείλω*—meaning “one must, one ought.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, Paul not only commanded husbands to love their wives, but added that husbands are obligated, *ὀφείλουσιν*, to such love. Some English translations tend to tone down Paul’s rhetoric here by stating that husbands “should” (ESV) or “ought” (NIV, NASB) to love their wives. Paul, however, made clear that a husband’s love for his wife is a requirement, rather than an option. Hoehner points out that the command to love one’s wife stands regardless of whether she is acting submissive or not. “It is not the duty of the wife to tell him to love her. It is his duty to the Lord to love her.”<sup>62</sup> Here the command to love one’s wife also “applies the second great commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Lev. 19:18), in a direct way to the love which the husband should have for his nearest and dearest neighbor, namely, his wife.”<sup>63</sup>

Another reason for such obligation is that the husband and wife exist as one flesh (Eph 5:31-32; Gen 2:24). Because a husband and wife are one flesh in God’s eyes, any husband who neglects to love his own wife does not love himself. It would be absurd to hate one’s own body. Just as it is natural for a man to care for his own body, it should likewise be natural for a husband to care for his own wife. Therefore, husbands are obligated to love their wives just as they love their own bodies because the wife is indeed one flesh with the husband. “The husband’s obligation to love his wife as his own body is not simply a matter of loving someone else just like he loves himself. It is, in fact, to

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<sup>61</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 764.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 764.

<sup>63</sup>O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 426.

love himself.”<sup>64</sup> Notably, Paul changed the imagery from Christ and his bride (Eph 5:22-27) to Christ and his body (Eph 5:28-32) in order to make his point. Paul also shifted into the first person for emphasis, declaring, “We are members of [Christ’s] body” (Eph 5:30). Just as Christ loves his body, so husbands are to love their wives.

### **Nourish and Cherish**

Paul explains that a normal man both nourishes and cherishes his own body, two practical descriptions of what love involves. The word nourish, ἐκτρέφω, means “to bring up.”<sup>65</sup> Included is the idea of raising one up from childhood into maturity. The only other use of this word in the New Testament comes in Ephesians 6:4 describing how fathers are to nourish, or raise up, children. The same type of nurturing a father gives to his child is meant to be carried over into the way a husband cares for his wife.<sup>66</sup> Such is the example of Christ, who cares for his body, the church, in such a way as to nurture her physical needs (Matt 25:36) and also ensure that the body grows up into spiritual maturity (Eph 4:16; Col 2:19). Likewise, a husband is to love his own wife in such a way as to care for her physical needs and encourage her spiritual growth.

Paul also declared that a man is to cherish, φάλλω, his wife. The Greek word literally means to “reheat, keep hot,” such as a hen who tenderly keeps her eggs warm.<sup>67</sup> The only other use of this word in the New Testament is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 where Paul described how a nursing mother cherishes her baby. Likewise, a husband is to demonstrate a “tender attachment” as he provides emotional care and concern for his own wife.<sup>68</sup> It is virtually impossible for a husband to provide physical and spiritual

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<sup>64</sup>O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 427.

<sup>65</sup>Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “ἐκτρέφω.”

<sup>66</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 767.

<sup>67</sup>Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), s.v. “φάλλω.”

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

nurture to wives while emotionally detached. Because Christ nurtures and cherishes his own body, “husbands are to care for their wives physically and emotionally as well as, or better than, they care for themselves.”<sup>69</sup> It is also worth noting that such care for one’s wife is meant to be a continual action. Just as Christ continues to do this work in the life of his church, Paul intended to show how husbands are to continue to nourish and care for their wives for the duration of the marriage.

### **Mystery**

In support of his argument for the obligation of husbands to care for their wives, Paul referenced Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Most of Paul’s readers would have been familiar with the Genesis passage to understand that marriage involves the creation of a one flesh union between the husband and wife.<sup>70</sup> Paul’s appeal to logic makes sense. However, Paul continued, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32). The union between a husband and wife is a living representation the union between Christ and his body, the church. The love a husband shows his wife is not merely established by the logic of a one-flesh union, but a husband’s love finds a theological foundation in Christ’s relationship with his body, the church.

Paul used the term “mystery” in describing the union between husband and wife and the union between Christ and his body. In most cases in the New Testament, this word is used in conjunction with verbs noting revelation or proclamation.<sup>71</sup> “In a sense, it is no longer secret, for it is now being revealed; it may have been hidden in the

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<sup>69</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 388.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “μυστήριον.”

past, but today it is something dynamic and compelling.”<sup>72</sup> The mystery here is that the “deeper” meaning of Genesis 2:24 has been revealed, highlighting how the marriage union is designed by God to be a reflection of Christ’s union with his people.<sup>73</sup> This was God’s plan before the foundation of the world (Eph 3:9; 1:9). In a great display of his mercy and grace, God has always intended to bring an undeserving people into a saving relationship with himself. A people who were far off have been brought near in Christ (Eph 2:13). Paul, in proclaiming the gospel, is revealing God’s glorious mystery to the world (Eph 3:8-9). When husbands and wives fulfill their God-ordained roles in marriage, they too are revealing God’s mystery for all to see.

Paul closed with a summary statement reminding husbands of their duty: “However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph 5:33). Because of the logical nature of the one flesh union between a husband and wife, and because of the theological nature of the one flesh union as a spiritual picture of Christ and his bride, the husband is to lose his own life in order to nurture and cherish his own wife, physically and emotionally, to the glory of Christ, thus revealing God’s mystery to the world.

### **Ephesians 6:1-4: A Father Nurtures His Children**

Paul shifted his focus from the marriage relationship to the relationship between fathers and children. Just as wives are commanded to submit to their own husbands, so also are children to submit to the authority of their parents. Paul explained, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’” However, for the sake of this project, the focus of this

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<sup>72</sup>Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “μυστήριον.”

<sup>73</sup>Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “μυστήριον.”

section will be on God’s instructions to fathers found in Ephesians 6:4. Paul penned these words, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” It is interesting to note that although children are instructed to obey both parents (6:1) and to honor both parents (6:2), Paul’s instructions regarding parenting is written only to fathers. There is no mention of maternal responsibility. Lincoln explains that Paul’s first century audience would have been “heavily influenced by traditional Roman notions of family life and education.”<sup>74</sup> Even in the Jewish culture were fathers the chief authority.<sup>75</sup> Hoehner suggests that “in light of the hierarchical structures, the father is responsible for his whole family.”<sup>76</sup> A father typically had absolute authority in his home, and could exercise his authority in any manner, whether harsh or compassionate. Paul, however, places parameters on the way fathers use their authority.

### **Do Not Provoke Your Children to Anger**

The first instruction Paul provided to fathers was an explanation of what not to do. Fathers are not to provoke their children to anger. Paul previously urged his readers to deal with anger quickly before it becomes sinful (Eph 4:26), and to put away all sinful anger (Eph 4:31). However, anger itself is not the issue here, but rather the provoking a child to the point of anger is what Paul is condemning. Paul made a similar statement in another letter, stating, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col 3:21). To provoke a child to anger is to parent in such a manner as to lead the child to harbor bitterness or resentment. There are many ways fathers provoke children to anger. Lincoln explains,

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<sup>74</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 398.

<sup>75</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401.

<sup>76</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 794.

This involves avoiding attitudes, words, and actions which would drive a child to angry exasperation or resentment and thus rules out excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child's needs and sensibilities.<sup>77</sup>

Ultimately, "Paul instructs the male head of the household to conduct himself toward those under his authority with restraint and for their good."<sup>78</sup> Plummer explains,

Apart from the renewing work of God's Spirit, sinful fathers are likely to leave a legacy of emotionally abused and resentful children. Empowered by God's Spirit, however, not only can Christian fathers not provoke their children, but they can even "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."<sup>79</sup>

### **Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord**

Rather than parenting in an unreasonable manner leading to bitterness, fathers are commanded instead to bring up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). The instruction to bring them up, ἐκτρέφω, is the same word Paul used in 5:29 to describe a husband's responsibility to nourish or nurture his wife. Included is the idea of raising one up from childhood into maturity. Paul used two similar words that describe how a father is to raise his children to maturity: discipline (παιδεία), and instruction (νουθεσία). The word translated as *discipline* here includes the idea of education or training that comes from discipline.<sup>80</sup> In the process of discipline, the focus is more on the lesson learned than the punishment. The word *νουθεσία*, here translated as *instruction*, means "admonition" or "warning."<sup>81</sup> Paul had in mind a father's verbal instruction to his children with a hint of admonition.<sup>82</sup> Fathers are to be involved in

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<sup>77</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 406.

<sup>78</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401.

<sup>79</sup>Robert L. Plummer, "Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 1, no. 1 (2011), accessed October 13, 2012, <http://www.sbts.edu/family/blog/bring-them-up-in-the-discipline-and-instruction-of-the-lord-by-robert-plummer/>.

<sup>80</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 797.

<sup>81</sup>Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "νουθεσία."

<sup>82</sup>Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "νουθεσία."

teaching their children, offering correction as necessary.

The discipline and instruction that a father provides for his children is to be “of the Lord.” In other words, “the education that goes on in the household has a new orientation.”<sup>83</sup> When the need for discipline arises, it is to be done with the gospel in mind. When the opportunity for instruction presents itself, it is to be done with an intentional focus on Christ. Fathers not only teach their children the truths of Scripture and of the gospel, but fathers also seek to help shape the lives of their children according to God’s Word, leading children to understand what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

### **How Ephesians 5:21-6:4 Shapes this Project**

Altogether, the passage of Ephesians 5:19-6:4 provides the big picture of God’s design for families, set within in the broader context of God’s great plan for his redeemed church to magnify Christ. God’s plan includes God’s specific design for men in their roles as husbands and fathers. In this passage there are five major areas in which every husband and father must align his life to the glory of Christ: A man is called to live in submission to Christ (5:19-21); a man must understand his role as head over his own wife (5:22-24); a man is called to demonstrate sacrificial leadership (5:25-27); a man is called to nurture his wife towards spiritual maturity (5:28-32); and, a man is called to nurture his children towards spiritual maturity (6:1-4).

Christ-like leadership must be intentionally fulfilled, and many men need a useful plan to intentionally lead their own families towards spiritual maturity. This project will help men align their lives with God’s purpose by equipping them over the course of several weeks to develop an intentional spiritual growth plan for their own families that embrace these areas.

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<sup>83</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 408.

Because men are called to live in submission to Christ (5:19-21), this project will first challenge men towards submission to Christ by implementing the habit of consistent personal disciplines such as daily time in Scripture and prayer. As a man submits his life to Christ through spiritual disciplines, he will find that his self-centered nature must die, and it must be replaced with Christ-like attitudes and actions in the home.

Next, because a man is called to be the spiritual leader in his home (5:22-24), this project will lead the participant to understand the nature of spiritual headship and authority. Specifically, because Jesus Christ used his authority to the benefit of the church, men must likewise use their authority to the benefit of their wives and children. Christ like authority and headship are never self-seeking, but rather seeks to lead others towards spiritual maturity.

Because a man is called to demonstrate sacrificial leadership (5:25-27), this project will help the participant evaluate his life and busyness, and identify the distractions that hinder the pursuit of spiritual growth for his family. The project will also lead men to recognize sacrifices that must be made in order to lead their families towards spiritual maturity. Such leadership may involve forfeiting comforts, work, status, or hobbies in order to intentionally teach and apply the Word of God and the truth of the gospel in his home, with his wife and family. This type of sacrifice is a lifelong calling for every husband and father, with the ultimate goal of leading his family to walk in a manner worthy of Christ.

Because a man is called to nurture his wife towards spiritual maturity (5:28-32), and nurture his children towards spiritual maturity (6:1-4), this project will lead the participant to identify and implement practices and habits beneficial to the spiritual growth of his family. Participants will be led to develop a useful spiritual growth plan for their families. To leave such an important calling as the spiritual nurture of one's wife and children to chance is an affront to the Gospel. After all, rather than approaching life

haphazardly, Jesus Christ had his sight set on the Cross and the glory that awaited him (Mark 10:45; Phil 2:3-11; Heb 12:1-3). By virtue of God's call on his life, a man must plan to intentionally lead his family to spiritual maturity. In light of Paul's instruction to the Ephesian church, the family spiritual growth plan developed by each man through this project will be a tool that helps them regularly incorporate God's Word and gospel application into their family routine.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it must be noted that a husband's call to sacrificially lead his wife by laying aside his own priorities in order to saturate her life with the gospel of Christ is not easy. To live with the priority of meeting the physical and emotional needs of one's wife above meeting one's own selfish needs is difficult. A father's intentional nurture of his children through constant exposure to God's Word is challenging. Implementing any spiritual growth plan with one's family will be trying. Apart from God's grace, such responsibility would be impossible. Nevertheless, God has both called and equipped husbands and fathers for this task. God's grace is sufficient for every husband or father who struggles to purposefully lead his family (2 Cor 12:9). Men must first remember to bathe daily in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Eph 5:26), and then to hold tightly to the truth of Paul's prayer:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:20-21)

CHAPTER 3  
HOW A MAN LEADS HIS FAMILY TO TREASURE  
JESUS CHRIST

In his work on biblical equality, *As Christ Submits to the Church*, Alan Padgett contends that a hierarchical understanding of marriage with husband serving as head over his wife is unbiblical. He argues, rather, that husbands and wives share headship, with each individual submitting to the leadership of the other at various moments within the relationship. One major question, however, that was inadequately answered by Padgett is, “Towards what end are husbands and wives to lead one another together?” For Padgett, his final chapter attempts to provide an answer, albeit insufficient at best. The ultimate end towards which mutual leadership and submission lead within marriage is nothing more than equality and justice. Padgett writes,

The important point for the use of power in Christian relationships is this: that those in power use that gift to empower others, especially those who are weak. This is what Jesus commands, what he demonstrated in his own ministry, and what Christian submission is about when rightly understood.<sup>1</sup>

For Padgett, the main objective of shared leadership within marriage is not to lead the marriage in a specific direction, but rather to ensure a level playing field between the sexes. In his attempts to eliminate male headship within marriage in favor of a shared leadership, Padgett has overlooked a vital tenet of leadership demonstrated by Christ, namely the purpose of intentionally and sacrificially leading his bride, the church, towards a specific end: holiness. In this regard, Padgett falls well short of providing a valid framework for leadership within marriage. Consider Paul’s word to the Ephesian church:

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 127.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:25-27)

Kent Hughes brilliantly comments on this passage,

The emphasis in the Scriptures is on the responsibility of a husband's love for his wife: "to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (vv. 26, 27). This is what Christ will do through our divine marriage to Him, for at His return the washed and regenerated Church will be presented to Him in absolute perfection. This is the sealing of the romance of the ages.

Meanwhile, these divine nuptials are a parable of what ought to be the loving husband's elevating effect on his wife. He is to be a man of the Word who lives a godly life, praying and sacrificing for his wife. His authentic spirituality is meant to buoy her onward and upward toward the image of Christ. The man who sanctifies his wife understands that this is his divinely ordained responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

The difference between Padgett's views on leadership within marriage and the biblical understanding of headship is crucial. Padgett's notion of shared leadership within marriage leads the relationship nowhere.

God's desire is for men to lead their families towards a distinctive goal. The Apostle Paul's exhortation of marriage as a picture of Christ and the church is a clear call for men to lead their wives towards the beauty of Christ-like holiness. Such a call is also implied towards leading his children, as men are instructed to nurture both wives (Eph 5:29) and children (Eph 6:4) in their faith. As head of his household, a Christian husband and father is to specifically lead his family to treasure and reflect Jesus Christ.

This chapter addresses four areas that every man must embrace in order to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, including Christ-honoring personal practices, a home saturated in God's Word, a home that is Gospel-centered, and an intentional plan for leading his family. Embracing these four fundamentals will not guarantee a family that loves Jesus, but these do offer a helpful foundation from which a man can lead his family

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<sup>2</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 37.

to treasure Jesus Christ.

The first foundational task for men outlined in this chapter is that of personal spiritual disciplines. Citing numerous research works, Christian Smith explains, “Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents.”<sup>3</sup> It is evident that for a man to lead his family to love Jesus, he must himself model such love for Jesus, especially through basic personal spiritual practices of Bible intake, prayer, and worship. A variety of options available for Bible intake will be highlighted in this chapter, including hearing the Word taught at church, personal devotional reading, studying Scripture in depth, meditating on God’s Word, and Scripture memorization. This chapter will also expound on the nature of continual prayer, private prayer, praying for one’s family, and even fasting. Finally, the personal discipline of worship will be explained in terms of personal worship and public worship. Although many men have neglected these personal disciplines, it is worth noting that God, in His own time and manner, rewards the man who seeks Him personally (Heb 11:6; Matt 6:4, 6, 18).

A second foundation this chapter will emphasize is the need for a man to saturate his home with Scripture. Based on the data collected from the National Study of Youth and Religion, Christian Smith observes,

At the level of subjective consciousness, adolescent religious and spiritual understanding and concern seem to be generally very weak. Most U.S. teens have a difficult to impossible time explaining what they believe, what it means, and what the implications of their beliefs are for their lives. Many say they simply have no religious beliefs. Others can articulate little more than what seem to be the most paltry, trivial, or tangential beliefs. And others express beliefs that are, from the official perspectives of their own religious traditions at least, positively erroneous. Religion seems very much a part of the lives of many U.S. teenagers, but for most of them it is in ways that seem quite unfocused, implicit, in the background, just part of the furniture. For very many U.S. teens, religion is important but not a priority,

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<sup>3</sup>Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

valued but not much invested in, praised but not very describable. Our distinct impression is that very many religious congregations and communities of faith in the United States are failing rather badly in religiously engaging and educating their youth.<sup>4</sup>

Christian Smith’s description of the religious life of contemporary youth as “just part of the furniture” is far removed from the description of one who meditates on (Ps 119:15), delights in (Ps 119:16), longs for (Ps 119:20), and clings to God’s word (Ps 119:31). “Part of cultivating a thoughtful faith,” asserts Jonathan Morrow, “means learning how to take the Bible seriously and then being able to teach others to as well (see 2 Timothy 2:15).”<sup>5</sup> It is imperative for a man to take the Bible seriously in his own home and lead his family to know and understand the Bible as fundamental to a vibrant faith. This chapter will explore both formal and informal means of grounding one’s family in God’s Word. Formal means of Scripture use in the home include the practices of catechism and family faith talks. Informal means of Scripture usage include teachable moments, times of discipline, and everyday talk.

A third foundation for a man seeking to lead his family to treasure Jesus is to establish a gospel-centered home. Also in response to the data from the National Study of Youth and Religion, Kendra Creasy Dean notes,

Highly devoted young people seem adept at using at least four cultural tools in ways that mark them as members of their traditions: (1) they confess their tradition’s creed, or God-story; (2) they belong to a community that enacts the God-story; (3) they feel called by this story to contribute to a larger purpose; and (4) they have hope for the future promised by this story. In addition, these youth seem to have families and churches that model—convincingly—that these tools do matter: something is at stake in using these cultural tools “as we do,” and something is lost in not using them at all.<sup>6</sup>

If Kendra Dean’s observation that highly devoted religious teens are the ones who get the big picture story correct, then it follows that fostering a gospel-centered

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<sup>4</sup>Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 262.

<sup>5</sup>Jonathan Morrow, *Think Christianly: Looking at the Intersection of Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 162.

<sup>6</sup>Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 49.

home must be a priority. To establish a home environment that is Gospel-centered allows the family to understand the grand metanarrative of Scripture and to understand the family's place and purpose within God's story. Perceiving the constant attack on Christianity by contemporary culture, Albert Mohler declares there is now "great relevance and urgency in thinking about the metanarrative of Scripture."<sup>7</sup> This chapter will explore the Christ-centered, cross-centered, and grace-centered nature of the gospel story. The need for constant repetition of the gospel within the home along with practical means of rehearsing the story will be also be underscored. Finally, several ways to apply the story to daily life will be addressed.

The final foundation necessary for a man to lead his family is to develop an intentional plan. Dallas Willard notes that for spiritual transformation to occur there must be more than vision. There must be "intention."<sup>8</sup> He explains, "Projects of personal transformation rarely if ever succeed by accident, drift, or imposition. Indeed, where accident, drift, and imposition dominate—as they usually do, quite frankly, in the lives of professing Christians—very little of any human value transpires."<sup>9</sup> According to Willard, what is necessary for substantial spiritual change in the life of an individual—or family for that matter—is "effective action."<sup>10</sup> The effective action necessary for a man to lead his family is to develop an intentional plan for guiding the family to treasure Jesus Christ. This chapter will explore the need for a man to have a clear understanding of the end towards which he will lead the family. The importance of knowing the spiritual condition of each family member will be addressed, along with how to develop an

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<sup>7</sup>R. Albert Mohler, "Studying the Scriptures and Finding Jesus," in *The Scriptures Testify about Me: Jesus and the Gospel in the Old Testament*, ed. D. A. Carson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 13.

<sup>8</sup>Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 83.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

intentional spiritual growth plan for the family as a whole and for each individual member.

These four areas that every man must embrace in order to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ—Christ-honoring personal practices, a home saturated in God’s Word, a home that is Gospel-centered, and an intentional plan for leading his family—will each be given a specific session during the teaching phase of the project, offering practical guidance and direction for the men participating in the project.

### **Personal Life Practices**

In order to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, a man must himself treasure Christ through everyday practices. Certainly men are to treasure Christ during mundane work tasks, chores at home, and even in the midst of vacation adventures. However, the everyday faith activities a man must incorporate in his life are commonly called spiritual disciplines. In the simplest sense, spiritual disciplines are activities that allow us to “keep company” with Jesus.<sup>11</sup> More specifically, Donald Whitney defines spiritual disciplines as “those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.”<sup>12</sup>

Although the spiritual disciplines are important biblical practices, there is little consensus as to how many particular practices constitute spiritual disciplines. On one extreme, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun lists sixty-two practices she describes as “spiritual disciplines and desires.”<sup>13</sup> Her collection, however, may be grouped into seven general categories of disciplines including worship, opening oneself to God, relinquishing the

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<sup>11</sup>Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 15.

<sup>12</sup>Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 4.

<sup>13</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 11-13.

false self, sharing one's life with others, incarnating the love of Christ, and prayer. Patrick Morley lists twelve habits consisting of enjoying God's creation, prayer, worship, Sabbath rest, fellowship, counsel, fasting, spiritual warfare, stewardship, service, and evangelism.<sup>14</sup> R. Kent Hughes offers seventeen disciplines, comprising of purity, marriage, fatherhood, friendship, mind, devotion, prayer, worship, integrity, tongue, work, perseverance, church, leadership, giving, witness, and ministry.<sup>15</sup> The practices, attitudes, and categories these authors have labeled as spiritual disciplines are both varied and broad. For the purposes of this project, a much narrower definition of spiritual disciplines is necessary. Perhaps Whitney offers the best description of what should be considered a spiritual discipline. He clarifies,

Spiritual Disciplines are activities, not attitudes. Disciplines are practices, not character qualities, graces, or “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23). Disciplines are things you do—such as read, meditate, pray, fast, worship, serve, learn, and so on. The goal of practicing a given Discipline, of course, is not about doing as much as it is about being, that is, being like Jesus. But the biblical way to grow in being more like Jesus is through the rightly motivated doing of the biblical Spiritual Disciplines.<sup>16</sup>

Though Whitney presents ten personal activities in his work on spiritual disciplines, three provide an excellent essential core of spiritual practices that every man should incorporate into his life, including Bible intake, prayer, and worship.

### **Bible Intake**

Peter Lewis declares, “God is a speaking God—and a speaking God calls for a listening people.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed God continues to speak even today, and the starting point for God's communication to us is through His Word. As Calhoun articulates, the disciplines

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<sup>14</sup>Patrick Morley, *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines: 12 Habits to Strengthen Your Walk with Christ* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 16-18.

<sup>15</sup>Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, v.

<sup>16</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 6.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Lewis, *The Message of the Living God: His Glory, His People, His World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 25.

of Bible intake “address our need and desire to hear a word from God.”<sup>18</sup>

The Psalms are full of declarations of the joy and necessity of time in God’s Word. The first chapter in Psalms sets the stage, introducing the theme of delighting in God’s Word. The psalmist wrote, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). In this Psalm, the law of the Lord stands in direct contrast to other influences in the life of a man. Commenting on this passage, Derek Kidner points out that “whatever really shapes a man’s thinking shapes his life.”<sup>19</sup> Such delight in and meditation upon God’s Word is fundamental to a life that both honors God and is blessed by God.

James Sire observes how a consistent biblical influence has waned in recent years in the life of young people.

Consider the problem of growing up today. Baby Jane, a twentieth-and twenty-first-century child of the Western World, often gets reality defined in two widely divergent forms—her mother’s and father’s. Then if the family breaks apart, the court may enter with a third definition of human reality. This poses a distinct problem for deciding what the shape of the world actually is.

Baby John, a child of the seventeenth century, was cradled in a cultural consensus that gave a sense of place. The world around was really there—created to be there by God. As God’s vice regent, young John sensed that he and other human beings had been given dominion over the world. He was required to worship God, but God was eminently worthy of worship. He was required to obey God, but then obedience to God was true freedom since that was what people were made for. Besides, God’s yoke was easy and his burden light. Furthermore, God’s rules were seen as primarily moral, and people were free to be creative over the external universe, free to learn its secrets, free to shape and fashion it as God’s stewards cultivating God’s garden and offering up their work as true worship before a God who honors his creation with freedom and dignity.

There was a basis for both meaning and morality and also for the question of identity. The apostles of absurdity were yet to arrive.<sup>20</sup>

Because the influence of the “apostles of absurdity” is now legion, a man must

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<sup>18</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 163.

<sup>19</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 48.

<sup>20</sup>James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 26-27.

ensure his own life is shaped by God's Word in order to adequately lead his own family to treasure Jesus.

Paul's instruction to the young man, Timothy, is certainly applicable to all men here. Paul wrote, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). The word translated as "rightly handling" is ὀρθοτομέω, which literally means "to cut in the right direction, divide correctly."<sup>21</sup> One reference work indicates that this verse implies that Timothy is to "dispense the word of truth correctly."<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, another dictionary explains,

As distinct from those who engage in useless theological chatter, Timothy is to do what is right relative to the word of truth. Other possible meanings, e.g., "to cut," "to handle," or "to deliver," do not fit the context or agree with the parallel expression in Gal 2:14. The real meaning seems to be that Timothy should speak the word of truth in his conduct, i.e., follow it. When he does this, he need not be ashamed, for, unlike the false teachers, he will present the word legitimately, confirming it in his life.<sup>23</sup>

Truthfully, a man is called both to correctly speak the Word within his home and to rightly live the Word within his home. His life, therefore, must be saturated with a healthy intake of God's Word. To be a godly man, personal time in God's Word is paramount.

Donald Whitney unapologetically declares, "No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), s.v. "ὀρθοτομέω."

<sup>22</sup>Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. by James D Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), s.v. "ὀρθοτομέω."

<sup>23</sup>Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), s.v. "ὀρθοτομέω."

<sup>24</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 22.

Acknowledging that Bible intake is a broad discipline, Whitney identifies five “subdisciplines” of Bible intake that are certainly worth pursuing: hearing, reading, studying, meditating, and memorizing.<sup>25</sup>

**Hearing.** Although hearing God’s word taught or preached may not seem like an active discipline, Whitney argues for its place among the spiritual disciplines. He explains,

If we don’t discipline ourselves to hear God’s Word regularly, we may hear it only accidentally, just when we feel like it, or never hear it at all. For most of us, disciplining ourselves to hear God’s Word means primarily developing the practice of steadfastly attending a Bible-believing church where the Word of God is faithfully preached.<sup>26</sup>

Whitney is absolutely right. If a man is to lead his family to treasure Jesus, he must discipline himself to receive the Word in a church, and lead his family to do the same. Hearing God’s word is also possible through other means such as audio Bible recordings, or even Scripture-based songs like those recorded by Seeds Family Worship.<sup>27</sup> However, receiving the Word through the preaching ministry of a local church is the most important means of hearing the Word, as God has gifted pastors and teachers to proclaim His Word to the church (Eph 4:11-14), and Scripture exhorts believers not to forsake the gathering of the church (Heb 10:25).

**Reading.** The Apostle Peter wrote to believers scattered abroad, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (1 Pet 2:2). In this passage “pure spiritual milk” is a reference to the Word of God. The Greek verb *to long for*—ἐπιποθέω— “connotes not only eagerness, but anxiety and sometimes fear, and in any case the dissatisfaction proper to desire, which aims at

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<sup>25</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 23.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>See [www.seedsfamilyworship.com](http://www.seedsfamilyworship.com).

acquiring that which it does not yet possess, the lack of which causes it to suffer.”<sup>28</sup> God calls His people to desire and pursue Him through His Word, because humanity is in desperate need of Him.

Scripture is replete with references to spending consistent time in God’s Word, and there is perhaps no more thorough passage in the Bible on the need for God’s Word than Psalm 119. Consider a few highlights as the psalmist declared, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Ps 119:18); “My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times” (Ps 119:20); “Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors” (Ps 119:24); “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Ps 119:103); “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105); “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple” (Ps 119:130); “I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words” (Ps 119:147); and “Let my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word!” (Ps 119:169).

Additionally, God’s clear instruction to Hebrew parents regarding handing down the faith to the next generation was preceded by the call to internalize God’s word themselves. “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” (Deut 6:6). In order to pass along God’s Word to the next generation, God expected parents to know His Word intimately. Such knowledge requires, among other disciplines, consistently reading the Word.

Turning to the New Testament, Donald Whitney demonstrates how Scripture reading is also expected.

Jesus often asked questions about people’s understanding of the Scriptures, sometimes beginning with the words, “Have you not read...?” (Matthew 19:4; Mark 12:10). He assumed that those claiming to be the people of God would have read the Word of God. And a case can be made that this question implies a familiarity with the entire Word of God.

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<sup>28</sup>Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “ἐπιποθέω.”

When Jesus says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4), surely He intended at the very least for us to read ‘every word,’ for how can we “live...by every word that comes from the mouth of God” if we’ve never even read “every word that comes from the mouth of God”?

Since “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16), shouldn’t we read it?<sup>29</sup>

The most basic method of personal Bible intake is simply to spend consistent time reading God’s Word in order to grow in one’s faith. Adele Calhoun explains, “Devotional reading...requires an open, reflective, listening posture alert to the voice of God. This type of reading is aimed more at growing a relationship with God than gathering information about God.”<sup>30</sup> For a husband and father to be the spiritual leader of his family, establishing a consistent personal devotional time with a plan to read through the Bible is of prime importance.

**Studying.** For many, the idea of personal Bible study may seem daunting. After all, churches have paid professionals to lead such studies each week at church. Pastor-led studies are certainly beneficial, yet the need for men to study the Bible on their own is imperative. In order to lead their families to treasure Jesus more deeply, they must learn to seek him deeper in his Word.

Adele Calhoun explains, “Bible study involves engaging the mind and focusing attention on Scripture in an attempt to understand and apply truth to every part of my life.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Patrick Morley writes,

Bible reading is always a good habit. But Bible study implies something very different. It indicates we aren’t flying through the Bible so we can check off a list that says we’ve read so many chapters in so many days. Rather, we read and ‘dissect’ the teaching—mull it over—so we can apply it to our lives.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 27.

<sup>30</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Discipline Handbook*, 67.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>32</sup>Morley, *A Man’s Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*, 16.

Although the idea of Bible study may on the surface seem much more complicated than simply reading through the Bible, Don Whitney observes, “The basic difference between Bible reading and Bible study is simply a pen and paper (or some other means of preserving your thoughts).<sup>33</sup> Whitney elaborates on the general nature of personal Bible study:

Write down observations about the text as you read, and record questions that come to your mind. If your Bible has cross-references, look up the ones that relate to the verses that prompt your questions, then record your insights. Find a key word in your reading and use the concordance found in the back of most Bibles to review the other references that use the word, and again note your findings. Another way to begin is to outline a chapter, one paragraph at a time. When you finish that chapter, move on to the next until you’ve outlined the entire book. Before long you’ll have a far stronger grasp on a section of Scripture than you had by just reading it.

As you advance in the study of the Book of God, you will learn the value of in-depth word studies, character studies, topical studies, and book studies. You’ll discover a new richness in the Scripture as your understanding grows of how the grammar, history, culture, and geography surrounding a text factor into its interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly, Bible study can be as simple or as complex as the student wishes to make it, depending on the amount of available resources. Nevertheless, the Apostle Peter’s exhortation to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” is an exhortation to dig deeper into God’s Word beyond simple devotional reading (2 Pet 3:18). In order to lead their families to grow in their faith towards Christ-like holiness, men need to be growing in their own knowledge of Jesus through the personal study of His Word.

**Meditating.** Although the idea of meditating may cause some to think of eastern religious ritual, the Bible is full of references to meditating upon God’s Word. However, the practice of meditation is still dubious, even among Christians. Adele

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<sup>33</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 32.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 32-33.

Ahlberg Calhoun's explanation of Christian meditation borders on mysticism enough to make many believers uncomfortable. She writes,

Meditation is not about emptying the mind so there is nothing there. Christian meditation opens us to the mind of God and to his world and presence in the world. As we enter times of meditation, it is important to let go of our preoccupations so we can focus our minds and become present to God. Our minds are naturally designed to make associations and follow tangents. Meditation is a way we train the mind to stay put so it can explore appropriate associations. Simple physical exercises like stretching, sitting comfortably and breathing deeply can help us pay attention, listen deeply and even curb our distractibility. These exercises are not an end in themselves. They simply seek to put body, mind and spirit on the same page so we can better pay attention to God and treasure what he reveals.<sup>35</sup>

Biblical meditation, however, is less concerned with feelings or relaxation, and more concerned with focusing specifically on God's Word. Whitney describes biblical meditation as "letting the Bible brew in the brain."<sup>36</sup> He defines meditation as "deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application and prayer."<sup>37</sup>

Whitney's explanation of meditation as merely thinking deeply and intently upon specific Scriptures is quite helpful.

Commenting on the role of thinking in the life of a believer, Dallas Willard writes,

And so we must apply our thinking to and with the Word of God. We must thoughtfully take that Word in, dwell upon it, ponder its meaning, explore its implications—especially as it relates to our own lives. What are we to do in the light of the facts of the gospel and the revelation of God and of human destiny contained in the Bible? We must "pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it" (Hebrews 2:1, NRSV). We must thoughtfully put it into practice.

We must seek the Lord by devoting our powers of thinking to understanding the facts and information of the gospel. This is the primary way of focusing our mind on him, setting him before us. When we do so we will be assisted by God's grace in ways far beyond anything we can understand on our own; and the ideas and images that governed the life of Christ through his thought life will possess us.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 173.

<sup>36</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 47.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>38</sup>Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado

What Willard describes here as thinking is not unlike the biblical practice of meditation.

Worth noting is Donald Whitney’s advice: “Read big, meditate small.”<sup>39</sup> He explains, “The general rule, then, in your personal, daily intake of Scripture is to both read and meditate. Read at length—such as a chapter or more, then go back over what you’ve read and select something specific from that as the focus of your meditation.”<sup>40</sup> For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, he must spend time meditating upon God’s Word, seeking to know and love Christ more.

**Memorizing.** A final method of Bible intake helpful to any man seeking to shepherd his family is the memorization of Scripture. The importance of Scripture memory is well stated by Caroline Boykin:

As technology and communication have boomed over the decades, we’ve become much less dependent on recalling information, and more reliant on efficient ways to access the information we need. But the Bible isn’t just more data for us to access or more information for us to manage. Deuteronomy 32:47 explains, “These are not just idle words for you—they are your life.”<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, memorizing God’s Word equips a man to apply and teach God’s Word consistently. Donald Whitney explains,

When Scripture is stored in your mind, it is available for the Holy Spirit to bring to your attention when you need it most. That’s why the author of Psalm 119 wrote, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (verse 11). It’s one thing, for instance, to be watching or thinking about something when you know you shouldn’t, but there’s added power against the temptation when a specific verse can be brought to your mind like Colossians 3:2: “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”<sup>42</sup>

Certainly Scripture stored in the heart is an aid against sin in the life of a man

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Springs: NavPress, 2002), 106-7.

<sup>39</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 56.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>41</sup>Caroline Boykin, *The Well-Versed Family: Raising Kids of Faith through (Do-able) Scripture Memory* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2007), 29.

<sup>42</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 39.

(Ps 119: 11). In addition, hiding God’s Word in one’s heart helps prepare a man for the opportunities of evangelism, counseling, or disciplining children that arise every day. “Until the verses are hidden in the hart, they aren’t available to use with the mouth,” states Whitney.<sup>43</sup> Scripture memory is an excellent means for a man to ensure that God’s Word is central to his own life and available for use in nurturing the faith of his family.

## **Prayer**

Although 1 Thessalonians 5:17 consists of only three words, those three words directly convey the important place that prayer is to occupy in the life of a believer: “Pray without ceasing.” Richard Foster says of prayer,

Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father. Meditation introduces us to the inner life, fasting is an accompanying means, study transforms our minds, but it is the Discipline of prayer that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing. ‘Prayer—secret, fervent, believing prayer—lies at the root of all personal godliness,’ writes William Carey.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, prayer is work. Yet prayer is more than mere work. It is one of the means by which we have communion with God. In the words of Patrick Morley, prayer is “the conversation that turns salvation into a close personal relationship with God.”<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes, “Prayer is a word that describes a relationship. Disciplines of prayer provide patterns for attending to God throughout the day.”<sup>46</sup> How many husbands and fathers claim to follow Jesus, yet show no spiritual heartbeat due to a lack of prayer? “When faith ceases to pray,” declared E.M. Bounds, “It ceases to live.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 41.

<sup>44</sup>Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 33.

<sup>45</sup>Morley, *A Man’s Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*, 50.

<sup>46</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 203.

<sup>47</sup>E. M. Bounds, “The Necessity of Prayer,” in *The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds on Prayer*

For a man to lead his family he must learn to maintain an attitude of continual prayer, discipline himself for specific times of personal prayer, and consistently lift up his family in prayer.

**Continual prayer.** The command to “pray without ceasing” may be confusing to some. R. Kent Hughes explains, “Is continual prayer possible? Yes and no. It is, of course, impossible to carry on a running dialogue while we are working or at other times, but the prayer called for here is not so much the articulation of words as the *posture of the heart*.”<sup>48</sup> He closes, “Continual prayer is God’s will for every Christian, no exceptions. . . . We are to have a perpetual inner dialogue with God. We must always be looking up, even when driving to work or mowing the lawn.”<sup>49</sup> Certainly a man must develop a “posture” of prayer, whereby he is ready to pray often and in any situation. For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus, his family should observe such a posture of prayer in his life.

**Personal prayer.** Although Scripture instructs the believer to pray without ceasing, a dedicated daily time of personal prayer was also modeled by Jesus and others in the Bible. This personal time of prayer is what Calhoun calls “fixed-hour” prayers.<sup>50</sup> Fixed-hour prayers are simply times set aside for prayer, potentially along with personal Bible reading and meditation. Jesus modeled such dedicated prayer times as he sought to be alone to pray (Mark 1:35; Matt 14:23). Peter and John modeled fixed-hour prayer time as they went to the temple at a designated time of prayer (Acts 3:1). Peter climbs upon a roof alone to spend time in prayer (Acts 10:9).

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(Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>48</sup>Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 97.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>50</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 223.

Such times of prayer could be early in the morning (Ps 5:3), at night (Lam 2:19), or any time of the day, as the Psalmist declared, “Seven times a day I praise you” (Ps 119:164). For a man to lead his wife and children to treasure Jesus, personal prayer must be a priority, and a man must discipline himself to set aside time for such an important task.

**Praying for his family.** Part of a man’s responsibility is to pray specifically for his family. R. Kent Hughes discusses how a man is to pray for his wife:

On the evening Christ gave Himself up for us, John 17 tells us, He prayed in succession for Himself, for His twelve disciples, and for all of us who would later believe. When He finished praying for His future bride, He went to the cross. Then came His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His enthronement at the right hand of the Father, where He constantly makes intercession for us. Thus we understand that giving ourselves for our brides involves prayerful intercession. Men, do you pray for your wives with something more than, “Bless good old Margaret in all she does?” If not, you are sinning against her and against God. Most Christian men who claim to love their wives never offer more than a perfunctory nod to their wives’ needs before God. Men, you ought to have a list of her needs, spoken and unspoken, which you passionately hold up to God out of love for her. Praying is the marital work of a Christian husband.<sup>51</sup>

Any husband and father must recognize first of all that the spiritual life of his wife and children is ultimately a work of God (Phil 1:6). In understanding this truth, a man must then discipline himself to make prayer for himself and his family a priority and reality. After pointing out the inordinate amount of time the apostle Paul prayed for other people rather than praying for himself, D. A. Carson elaborates,

If we follow Paul’s example, then, we will never overlook the monumental importance of praying for others. Prayer will never descend to the level where it is nothing more than a retreat house in which we find strength for ourselves, whether through the celebration of praise or through a mystic communion with God or through the relief or casting our cares upon the Almighty. Prayer may embrace all of these elements, and more; but if we learn to pray with Paul, we will learn to pray for others. We will see it is part of our job to approach God with thanksgiving for others and with intercession for others. In short, our praying will be shaped by our profound desire to seek what is best for the people of God.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 36.

<sup>52</sup>D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 74-75.

Jesus never allowed the church to decide what was best for herself. He understood what was best according to the Father's plan, and then worked and prayed to lead his bride towards God's goal. When a man begins to see more clearly God's desire for the nurture and growth of the family's faith, he will commit to pray for his family. In addition, when a man prays for his family, he begins to understand God's direction for the family. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun explains,

As we keep company with Jesus through intercession, we begin to see the world and the people in it from his perspective and heart. Increasingly we long for the same things he longs for. The Holy Spirit guides our intercessions so they sound more and more like Jesus' own intercessions for this world. "Your kingdom come, your will be done."<sup>53</sup>

A man must make praying for his family a priority in order to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ.

**Fasting and prayer for the family.** For most believers, the practice of fasting is much neglected. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun describes fasting as "the self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer. Bringing attachments and cravings to the surface opens a place for prayer. This physical awareness of emptiness is the reminder to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy."<sup>54</sup>

Fasting is seen in the Old Testament in the lives of Moses (Exod 34:28), Daniel (Dan 9:3), Esther (Esth 4:6), Ezra (Ezra 8:23), and Nehemiah (Neh 1:4). In each example, there was a specific reason for the fast. At times, God commanded his people to fast before him (Joel 2:12). In the New Testament, Jesus also fasted (Matt 4:2), and he taught about fasting and expected his followers to fast as well (Matt 6:16-18).

Although fasting may not be a common occurrence in a man's life, nevertheless there are times or seasons in the life of a man where fasting is necessary.

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<sup>53</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 232.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 219.

Donald Whitney explains that fasting is to be done for a specific spiritual purpose:

Although the physical discomfort is unpleasant—perhaps even painful—it is important to feel some degree of hunger during your fast. Your hunger helps you, serving as a continual reminder of your spiritual purpose. For instance, if your purpose is to pray for your spouse, then every time your stomach growls or your head aches, your hunger reminds you that you’re fasting, which in turn reminds you that you’re fasting for the purpose of praying for your spouse—and then you pray. So throughout your fast, every time you feel hunger—whether you are working, driving, talking to someone, sitting at the computer, walking, or whatever—you are reminded of your purpose, in this case to pray for your spouse. As a result you will be prompted by your hunger to pray for your spouse far more often than you would have otherwise, which is exactly what you wanted to do.<sup>55</sup>

Any man seeking to lead his family to treasure Jesus will experience trials and hardships. Fasting is an excellent way to focus extra time and attention on praying for one’s family and praying through the difficult seasons.

## **Worship**

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun rightly points out that “all disciplines lead to worship.”<sup>56</sup> Although many individuals tend to view worship as a song to sing or even as a service to attend at a church, worship is certainly much more. Worship incorporates all areas of life, as the Apostle Paul urged the believers in Rome “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Theologian David Peterson defines the worship of God as “an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible.”<sup>57</sup> Richard Foster offers a simpler explanation: “Worship is the human response to the divine initiative.”<sup>58</sup> It is worth noting that worship is always preceded by God’s initiative in drawing men to Himself by His grace.

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<sup>55</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 200.

<sup>56</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 24.

<sup>57</sup>David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 20.

<sup>58</sup>Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 158.

Kent Hughes articulates the problem for many today, “The unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today’s Christendom is that worship is primarily for *us*—to meet our needs.”<sup>59</sup> He continues,

It is important that we understand, in distinction to the popular view that worship is for us, that worship begins not with man as its focus, but God. Worship must be orchestrated and conducted with the vision before us of an august, awesome, holy, transcendent God who is to be pleased and, above all, glorified by our worship. Everything in our corporate worship should flow from this understanding.<sup>60</sup>

Donald Whitney says it best, “The more we focus on God, the more we understand and appreciate His infinite worth. As we understand and appreciate this, we can’t help but respond to Him.” Whitney explains that if a man could see God at this very moment as He is, that man would have no other option but to respond in worship. Because God cannot be visibly seen by man now, God has revealed Himself generally through creation (Rom 1:20). God has also revealed Himself specifically through His Word (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:20-21), and through Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14; Heb 1:1-2).<sup>61</sup> Whitney writes, “We should seek God by means of Christ as revealed in the Bible. As we do so and the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our understanding, we see God revealed in Scripture and respond with worship.”<sup>62</sup> He then elaborates, “That’s why all worship of God—public, family, and private worship—should be based upon and include much of the Bible. The Bible reveals God to us so that we may focus on Him and to the extent we focus on Him we will worship Him.”<sup>63</sup>

Worship is also connected to man’s desires. Calhoun writes, “Worship happens whenever we intentionally cherish God and value him above all else in life.

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<sup>59</sup>Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 110.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 104.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 105.

Worship reveals what is important to us.”<sup>64</sup> For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus, he must include worship in the spiritual practices of his life—in public, private, and family contexts—allowing his family to see that he genuinely values and cherishes Jesus.

**Public worship.** On two occasions in the Old Testament, as God instructed parents to delight in His Word and to pass down a vibrant faith to their children, the Lord explained that the children would question, “What does this mean?” (Exod 13:14; Deut 6:20). God knew that as the children observed their parents delighting in and celebrating God and His Word, a healthy hunger for a deeper understanding of God would arise.

Unfortunately, on any given Sunday today, countless men appear seemingly unengaged in the Sunday worship service, arms crossed, rarely even making the effort to mouth the words of the songs. Most likely, a glance towards their children will reveal a myriad of imitators. For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, his family must observe in him the glad, public worship of the Savior. Patrick Kavanaugh declares, “We cannot expect our children to worship God consistently if we are not worshipping God consistently.”<sup>65</sup> One of the greatest influences a man can have in the life of his family is to demonstrate unashamed passion for the Lord through participation in the worship service at the local church. In order to encourage his family to actively engage in corporate worship, a man must model public worship with full participation.

**Private worship.** Donald Whitney offers a series of profound questions concerning the nature of personal worship:

How can we worship God publicly once each week when we do not care to worship Him privately throughout the week? Can we expect the flames of our worship of God to burn brightly in public on the Lord’s Day when they barely flicker for Him in secret on other days? Could it be that our corporate worship experience often

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<sup>64</sup>Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 44.

<sup>65</sup>Patrick Kavanaugh, *Raising Children to Adore God: Instilling a Lifelong Passion for Worship* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2003), 32.

dissatisfies us because we do not pursue satisfying worship in private?

Whitney's questions are valid. If a man is to worship rightly in public, he must learn to worship rightly in private.

Patrick Kavanaugh wisely points to the consequences of a failure to pursue private worship:

So, if true worship is an inward experience that can take place anywhere, you may ask, what is the problem? Just this. Most teaching about worship rightly divides the topic into two parts, corporate worship and individual worship. Both are found in Scripture and both are strongly encouraged. Yet today there is so much emphasis on corporate worship that many believers never consider worshipping God privately. In other words, they spend a half hour or so each week in corporate worship and trust that they are meeting God's call. They are actually limiting themselves to worshipping only when they have a church, congregation and musicians available to help them!

It is because of this practice, perhaps more than any other reason, that so many sincere Christian parents have such a difficult time teaching their children to adore God.

Think about it. If our children hear us talk about our wonderful, magnificent God but note that we worship Him only once a week, even the youngest children figure out that our actions belie our words. They conclude: "Why should I bother worshipping this God so much, when my parents seldom do so?" Whether we know it or not, we have just created a huge obstacle in the spiritual training of those in our care.<sup>66</sup>

Kavanaugh rightly points out a significant problem. If his simple definition of worship as the "individual adoration of God" is true, then, essentially personal worship is little more than a man simply delighting in Christ throughout the day.<sup>67</sup> Such joy in the Lord is what a family needs to observe in a husband and father. Private worship is vital in the life of any man who wishes to lead his family deeper in the faith.

### **Why the Disciplines?**

Patrick Morley explains that "disciplines demonstrate to God how serious we are about following Him, and they also help us see how serious we are as well."<sup>68</sup> To

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<sup>66</sup>Kavanaugh, *Raising Children to Adore God*, 20-21.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>68</sup>Morley, *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*, 16.

which should be added that a man's spiritual disciplines also help his family see how serious he himself is about treasuring Jesus. Studies have shown that "youth who have a parent with a higher level of private religious practice (especially a parent who makes children the focus of her prayers) may follow the religious example of their parent."<sup>69</sup> As Kendra Creasy Dean explains, "Awakening faith does not depend upon how hard we press young people to love God, but on how much we show them that we do."<sup>70</sup> If a man desires to lead his family to treasure Jesus, he must first himself treasure Jesus through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

### **A Home Saturated with God's Word**

Time in God's Word has already been introduced as part of the personal practices a man must incorporate into his life in order to lead his family to treasure Jesus. Because of the central role that Scripture plays in the spiritual formation of individuals, a man must seek to saturate not only his own private life, but also his entire home with God's Word. Scripture is a sufficient tool for guiding the family in all areas of life. The apostle Paul declared, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Scripture also clearly instructs parents to raise their children steeped in God's Word (Deut 6:1-9; Ps 78:1-8; Eph 6:4). Consider God's commands to his people in Deuteronomy 6:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9)

In this passage, God has directed his people to teach His Word to their children.

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<sup>69</sup>Lisa D. Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64.

<sup>70</sup>Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, 120.

The teaching, however, is not merely a formal time of instruction, but rather is to encompass all aspects of life. Whether formal or informal, day or night, or at home or away, God's Word is to have a constant presence in the family life. If a man is to lead his family to treasure Jesus, systematically exposing his family to and grounding his family in God's Word is essential.

### **Formal teaching**

God's command to his people concerning the need for parents to pass on their faith to their children is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 6:7:

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut 6:7 ESV)

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut 6:7 NIV)

Although the NIV translation uses the word "impress" regarding God's command for parents and the ESV uses the phrase "teach them diligently," Peter Gentry suggests that "repeat" is the better word translated from the Hebrew.<sup>71</sup> The duty of parents is indeed to teach God's Word, and according to Gentry, "Teaching involves constant repetition."<sup>72</sup> He concludes, therefore, that formal training is most likely in mind here. As Kendra Dean explains, "Exposing adolescents to faith ... is no substitute for teaching it to them."<sup>73</sup> Two viable means of formal faith formation in the home include the use of catechism and family faith talks.

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<sup>71</sup>Peter Gentry, "Equipping the Generations: Raising Children the Christian Way," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 2, no. 2 (2012): 9-10, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.sbts.edu/family/blog/raising-children-the-christian-way/>.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>73</sup>Dean, *Almost Christian*, 16.

**Catechism.** A catechism is merely “a summary of Christian doctrine put in the form of questions and answers.”<sup>74</sup> J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett add, “It is the intentional passing on of the Faith, not merely for cognitive apprehension, but for the holistic transformation of individual believers and for the maturing of those believers together as the body of Christ.”<sup>75</sup> For Packer and Parrett, catechism is both a very biblical practice, and a proven effective means of passing on the faith.<sup>76</sup> However, lest one begin to think that catechism is merely about memorizing information, Kendra Dean points out the heart behind the practice:

Catechesis sets out to evoke trust in a person, and specifically the person of Jesus Christ, more than to inculcate religious ideas. For this reason, it submits the whole learner—not just the intellect or the emotions—to divine transformation so we will “know by heart” the ways of Christ and, empowered by the Spirit, participate in the work of God.<sup>77</sup>

The general idea of catechesis is explained by Peter Schemm:

Practicing the art of catechesis is not complicated. It is as simple as selecting a question for the week and enfolding that question into our lives at various times—at church, in the truck, at bedtime, during a backyard conversation, or at the workbench in the garage. Once the routine is established, the weekly question flows naturally in and out of conversations with one another. Over time the warehouse of biblical and theological teaching gets stocked. Even at a modest forty or so weeks per year—allowing for other seasonal commitments and unexpected life events—this is one of the most effective means I know of to be “trained in the words of the faith” (1 Tim. 4.6).<sup>78</sup>

Catechisms are many and varied. Some focus on Scripture and theological truths. Others are framed around historical creeds, or distinctive denominational beliefs. Resources for catechism are available for the man who chooses to lead his family through

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<sup>74</sup>Peter R. Schemm, Jr., “Habits of a Gospel-Centered Household,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 185.

<sup>75</sup>J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 42.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>77</sup>Dean, *Almost Christian*, 115.

<sup>78</sup>Schemm, “Habits of a Gospel-Centered Household,” 186.

such a faith-forming activity. Any man who feels devoid of the knowledge necessary to teach his children Scripture will find the use of a catechism a valuable tool for the whole family. As Voddie Baucham points out, “The benefits catechism provides are needed by a spiritually immature father as well as by his children.”<sup>79</sup>

J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett call attention to the problem that arises when parents fail to nurture children in God’s Word through catechism:

Because of our failure to obey the biblical mandates about raising children of the covenant within the Faith, we wind up having to do far too much remedial work among adults. By the time they reach adulthood, many of our members have already been so thoroughly catechized in unbiblical thinking and values that our efforts to catechize them in the Faith of the Gospel become truly a steep uphill climb through very difficult terrain.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, the problem is not merely the lack of catechism in the faith, but the competing “counter-catechisms of the surrounding culture” that work against the very tenets of Christian faith.<sup>81</sup>

The counter-catechisms of our surrounding culture offer contrasting instructions regarding nearly every point of biblical catechesis. We would speak the Truth but our hearers have been schooled in numerous false-isms of the age. We witness to the Life that comes from a living relationship with the living God; our hearers have long been trained in the worship of assorted idols within the culture. We point toward and strive to lead in the Way; the culture has catechized our congregants toward a very different way—toward perverse practices and habits that are plainly not-the-way. We tell God’s redemptive Story; the culture propagates countless other narratives. We proclaim the Gospel, but pseudo-gospels have been trying to lead us astray for many years.<sup>82</sup>

Because of the vast influence of the culture, Packer and Parrett rightly point out, “The wise Christian catechist must discern the competing catechisms at work in controlling the heads, hearts, and hands of our congregants.”<sup>83</sup> At the family level, it is

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<sup>79</sup>Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 63.

<sup>80</sup>Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 200.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 162-63.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 163.

the father and husband's task to ground his family through repeated exposure to God's Word, not only for the purpose of shaping his family's faith, but to protect his family from evil influences. A man must rightly determine what Scriptures and doctrines are essential, and lead his family to understand and apply them.

**Family faith talk.** Less formal than Catechism, yet still formal in the sense of having an established time and agenda, is the family faith talk, or family devotional. Brian Haynes defines the faith talk as "a time set aside each week for families to gather around the Bible, its application to life, and the worship of Jesus."<sup>84</sup> Although the busyness of family life will work against an established family faith talk, Haynes suggests that a man must show leadership by "protecting time for the family to talk about the Word and learn to live God's way."<sup>85</sup> The faith talk is a planned conversation that men must prepare for regularly in order to lead their families to treasure Jesus Christ.

There are plenty of resources to help men lead a family faith talk, such as various family devotion books or even a catechism. Essentially, a Family Faith Talk should incorporate three things: Bible, prayer, and song.<sup>86</sup> The simplest course of action for a man is to read systematically through Scripture together with his family, and lead a family discussion on the passage covered that day followed by family prayer and a song of praise. For Brian Haynes, the family faith talk is a weekly occurrence, with less formal daily talks geared more for the individual members of his family.<sup>87</sup> A man must determine based on his family schedule how often the family faith talk should occur,

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<sup>84</sup>Brian Haynes, *The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 2011), 45-46.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>86</sup>Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 79.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 49.

whether daily, weekly, or several times a week. Nevertheless, the importance of such a time for the family to gather around God’s word together is vital. Haynes elaborates,

If we are to raise a generation of kids who become adults madly in love with Christ we will have to worship the King in our living rooms. Our homes have been devoid of the worship of Christ in recent years leading our children to one practical conclusion: Christ is King at church but not at home.”<sup>88</sup>

For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, he must lead his family to gather around Christ’s Word in the home regularly.

### **Informal teaching**

Not only does God instruct parents towards structured, formal training in the faith, but parents are also commanded to teach children as they “walk along the way” (Deut 6:7). Informal teaching, explains Brian Haynes, occurs “as you travel through life together.”<sup>89</sup> He writes,

Along the way, whether you are driving, flying, or walking, you will encounter countless opportunities to demonstrate Christian faith and to speak biblical truth into your child’s life. It is a matter of learning how to capture “God moments.” A God moment is just that: a moment ordained by God designed for parents to speak truth to their children in the midst of normal life situations. These moments are not manufactured but instead captured as they emerge for the purpose of leading our children spiritually.<sup>90</sup>

Such opportunities may present themselves in positive, celebratory moments, such as pointing to God’s goodness during a spectacular sunset and explaining how “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). Informal teaching opportunities may also arise at inconvenient times, as when a child requires discipline at a time that interferes with one’s busy schedule. A father must recognize that in such a moment his schedule has been, in the words of Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, “providentially hindered” by God in order to teach his children.<sup>91</sup> These

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<sup>88</sup>Haynes, *The Legacy Path*, 46.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>91</sup>Martha Peace and Stuart W. Scott, *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family*

everyday moments are prime opportunities for faith formation in the family. Tedd Tripp illuminates:

Honest, thorough, truly biblical communication is expensive. Insightful and penetrating conversations take time. Children require both time and flexibility. Children do not pour their hearts out or open themselves up on a demand schedule. A wise parent talks when the kids are in the mood. Every so often they will ask a question, make a comment, reveal some little aspect of their heart. In those times, when their conscience is stirred, you need to talk. This may require dropping everything else to seize a critical moment.<sup>92</sup>

Of course, a man shouldn't simply wait until the open door to speak God's Word into the family life. His life and relationships should be saturated with God's words regardless of whether or not it was solicited. "The most profound teaching your child receives is the everyday talk from your mouth," declares John Younts.<sup>93</sup> He continues, "Your everyday talk reveals where your treasure is and, therefore, where you heart is. Does love for God dominate your thoughts and your everyday talk?"<sup>94</sup>

The man seeking to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ must ensure that his home is saturated with God's Word, with repeated occasions of formal instruction along with Scripture-saturated "everyday talk" throughout the various rhythms of family life.

### **A Gospel-Centered Home**

Greg Gilbert keenly observes that there are two different, yet equally biblical ways to answer the question, "What is the gospel?"<sup>95</sup> One answer seeks to define the gospel in terms of the message a person must believe to be saved. By this route, many people understand the gospel in terms of propositional truths about God's holiness,

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(Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2010), 57.

<sup>92</sup>Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2005), 90.

<sup>93</sup>John A. Younts, *Everyday Talk: Talking Freely and Naturally About God with Your Children* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004), 95.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Greg Gilbert, "Addendum: What Is the Gospel," in *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology* by Mark Dever et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 121-23.

Man's sinfulness, Jesus Christ's substitutionary atonement, and man's required response of faith. These propositions must be understood and believed in order to be saved. These scriptural truths also call for a specific response of faith in Jesus alone, which is why believers are to preach them to the unsaved.

The second way the gospel can be defined is in terms of the whole good news of Christianity. This definition of gospel encompasses the big picture of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation as the good news of God's work to redeem all creation, and especially humanity, in Christ. For this chapter, the gospel will be understood as the whole good news of Christianity, because God's Word to humanity is indeed more than just a set of propositional truths to believe. God has given his Word in the context of an overarching, good news story highlighting God's glory and grace. Naturally, the propositional truths that make up the first definition of gospel are included within the broader definition of the second. For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, he must make his home gospel-centered, framing family life in terms of the whole good news of Christianity.

In the words of Carl F. H. Henry, "The gospel is NEWS—big news, good news, true news."<sup>96</sup> Such good news is worth telling, and worth telling right. Henry elaborates,

History's most unusual and momentous news continues to be the message that the holy God provides sinful man a way of escape from the damning consequences of sin, and proffers him a new kind of life fit for both time and eternity. This ongoing global news is more important than the Allies' rollback of Hitler and the Nazis, or modern technology's putting a man on the moon, or scientific research's latest medical breakthrough. The gospel's offer of spiritual rescue and renewal that leads to life in Christ's image and an eternal destiny in God's holy presence is earth's best news. It is astonishingly true news; it may even strike some men as "too good to be true." Small wonder that Jesus' own disciples at first thought it beyond belief. Luke tells us that when the crucified Jesus showed himself alive, some of the eleven disciples were "still unconvinced, still wondering for it seemed too good to be true" (Luke 24:41 NEB). Never has this good news been so misconstrued as in our own

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<sup>96</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations*, vol. 1 of *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 28.

time, while all the while it alone holds out more hope and promise than any other message.<sup>97</sup>

Ultimately, the gospel, as God’s grand story, is the “primary meaning-making narrative” that should shape the family.<sup>98</sup> In God’s gospel story, God is the main actor—working specifically through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:3-4). Ever since Adam’s first sin in Genesis 3, however, this world has been “permeated by a very different story.”<sup>99</sup> Michele Anthony writes,

Sometimes I am tempted to believe that *I* am the main character, that the story is really about me—because after all, I am in every scene. But that’s a lie. It’s a lie that our children are told on every TV channel, in every advertisement, and in every song. Sometimes it’s blatant and sometimes sublime, but nonetheless they are being made to believe that the greatest story ever told is happening in their obscure little world.<sup>100</sup>

A gospel-centered home directs the family to a purpose and mission in life flowing contrary to the culture’s pseudo-gospel stories. God’s gospel story flows directly from his heart to see the nations revel in his own glory. However, the story must be told well. As Kendra Dean points out, when the gospel story remains untold, or inadequately taught, young people look for meaning elsewhere. She writes,

Youth are unlikely to take hold of a “god” who is too limp to take hold of them. Perhaps young people lack robust Christian identities because churches offer such a stripped-down version of Christianity that it no longer poses a viable alternative to imposter spiritualities like Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. If teenagers lack an articulate faith, maybe it is because the faith we show them is too spineless to merit much in the way of conversation. Maybe teenagers’ inability to talk about religion is not because the church inspires a faith too deep for words, but because the God-story that we tell is too vapid to merit more than a superficial vocabulary.<sup>101</sup>

It is vital for families to “know the whole story of God, meet God in the story,

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<sup>97</sup>Henry, *God Who Speaks and Shows*, 28.

<sup>98</sup>Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 84.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>100</sup>Michele Anthony, *Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today’s Families* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 45.

<sup>101</sup>Dean, *Almost Christian*, 36.

and make God's story their story."<sup>102</sup> In order to make his home gospel-centered, a man must be able to explain clearly the gospel story, repeat the gospel story, and constantly seek to apply the gospel within the home.

### **The Gospel Story**

Voddie Baucham's explanation of the gospel story offers a clear hero with a heroic feat and a gracious invitation for humanity to find their small place in God's grand story. He declares the gospel to be "the glorious, Christ-centered, cross-centered, grace-centered news of what God has done in Jesus Christ (the last Adam) to redeem man from the fall of his federal head (the first Adam) and to give man an eschatological hope that all things will eventually be redeemed in Christ." This definition offers an excellent starting point for understanding the gospel.

**Christ-centered.** While Scripture saturation in the home is important, to immerse the family in the Scriptures apart from the context of the gospel story can lead to legalism, leaving individual striving to be the hero of their own story of seeking to conquer the law through self-effort. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson declare in no uncertain terms: "Everything that isn't gospel is law." They write,

Every way we try to make our kids good that isn't rooted in the good news of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ is damnable, crushing, despair-breeding, Pharisee-producing law. We won't get the results we want from the law. We'll get either shallow self-righteousness or blazing rebellion or both (frequently from the same kid on the same day!). We'll get moralistic kids who are cold and hypocritical and who look down on others (and could easily become Mormons), or you'll get teens who are rebellious and self-indulgent and who can't wait to get out of the house. We have to remember that in the life of our unregenerate children, the law is given for one reason only: to crush their self-confidence and drive them to Christ.<sup>103</sup>

Fitzpatrick and Thompson are certainly echoing the Apostle Paul's words

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<sup>102</sup>Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 83.

<sup>103</sup>Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson, *Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 36.

declaring that the law is a tutor pointing directly to Christ (Gal 3:24). It is important to realize that humanity's unworthiness leaves everyone in need of a Savior. Only Jesus is worthy to be the hero in God's gospel story (Heb 3:1-6). Whenever a man ceases to point his family to Christ, he is left placing the harsh burden of the law upon his home, and subtly establishes a lie declaring that through self-effort anyone can become the hero of the story.

**Cross-centered.** Sin is an ugly offense against a holy God. Yet today's culture hardly blinks at sin. D. A. Carson observes, "The hardest truth to get across to this generation is what the Bible says about sin."<sup>104</sup> Carson continues,

In the Bible the most fundamental category of all to which the biblical writers resort in order to portray the nature of the problem is our offensiveness before God. It follows that what is needed first and foremost for us to be saved—for this situation to change—is to provide a means by which we may be reconciled to this God.<sup>105</sup>

In order to grasp the importance of the cross in the gospel story, one must comprehend God's response to sin. Leon Morris explains,

If God really made the universe a moral universe in which punishment follows sin, then He cannot be exempted from responsibility when it does so. We may choose to call the result the outworking of the wrath of God as the scriptural writers do, or we may prefer some other way of putting it, but the important thing is that we do not overlook the fact. Scripture is insistent that God reacts in the strongest possible way to men's sin.<sup>106</sup>

God's strongest reaction to sin is to condemn sinners to death and hell—something all mankind deserves (Rom 3:23). Yet in an equally strong response to sin, God chose to place his full wrath upon Jesus as he suffered on the cross in the place of sinners. The blood of Jesus shed at the cross satisfied God's wrath against man's sin (Rom 5:9). At the cross all guilt is absolved (Col 2:14). Through the cross, peace with

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<sup>104</sup>D. A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 41.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>106</sup>Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 224.

God is offered (Col 1:20). The cross is indeed wonderful. In God’s story, only Christ could bear the cross on behalf of sinners (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24). The cross is good news. Teaching the depth and significance of the cross in the home is foundational to keeping the home gospel-centered.

**Grace-centered.** Grace, according to Wayne Grudem, is God’s “unmerited favor.”<sup>107</sup> William Farley argues, however, that such a definition is incomplete. He explains that grace should be more specifically defined as God’s “reward, or favor, given to those who *deserve judgment*.”<sup>108</sup> One theologian observes, “Since man is fallen and cursed, any favor shown by God to him is surprising.”<sup>109</sup> Grace leaves no room for self-effort before God (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 11:6). Only because of God’s grace—through Christ and his cross—can a believer approach God (Heb 4:6).

Grace also points the believer to more than undeserved blessings from God. Second Corinthians 8:9 declares, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Grace reminds believers of the cost God was willing to pay. A gospel-centered home will never lose sight of the fact that the goodness God bestows upon his people is completely undeserved, unmerited, and is not cheap. Such grace offers both motivation and power for God’s people to live Christ-honoring lives (2 Cor 12:9; 2 Tim 2:1; Titus 2:11-12).

Only because of God’s Christ-centered, cross-centered and grace-centered gospel was the Apostle Peter able to remind persecuted believers scattered abroad,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of

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<sup>107</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 729.

<sup>108</sup>William P. Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 89.

<sup>109</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R 2002), 425.

darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

In the home, great emphasis must be placed on clearly proclaiming God's story of good news leading to new life. Along with consistently presenting God's story, a man must lead his family towards the only appropriate response—faith in Jesus Christ and repentance.

### **The Gospel Repeated**

If the gospel story is to sink deep into the heart of the family, a man must intentionally ensure that the truths of the gospel are regularly repeated and rehearsed in the home. C. J. Mahaney explains,

Reminding ourselves of the gospel is the most important daily habit we can establish. If the gospel is the most vital news in the world, and if salvation by grace is the defining truth of our existence, we should create ways to immerse ourselves in these truths every day. No days off.<sup>110</sup>

Mahaney then offers five actions any believer can do to keep focused on the gospel, each of which can easily be modified by a man to utilize in the home in order to keep the gospel central.<sup>111</sup> The first activity is to memorize the gospel. The significance of Scripture memory has already been addressed above; however, to memorize the gospel is to memorize specific passages that explain gospel truths, such as Isaiah 53:3-6; Romans 3:23-26; Romans 5:6-11; Romans 8:32-39; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; and Galatians 2:21. Each passage speaks of God's work of salvation through Christ and the cross. To memorize such Scriptures in the home will help the family keep the gospel in mind.

A second helpful practice is to pray the gospel. Mahaney offers this explanation for how to pray the gospel:

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<sup>110</sup>C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2002), 54.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 56-69.

To pray the gospel, simply begin by thanking God for the blessing of eternal life, purchased through the death of His Son. Acknowledge that Christ's work on the cross is what makes your very prayer possible.

Thank Him that, because Jesus bore God's wrath for sin, you will never be separated from God's love. Thank Him that, because of the cross, you are reconciled to God and have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell in you, lead you, guide you, and empower you to resist sin and serve God. Then ask God to bless you graciously with all that you need to obey and glorify Him.<sup>112</sup>

When a man prays such gospel centered prayers in his home, it allows the family to hear gospel truths repeated and reinforced.

A third beneficial practice to help reiterate the gospel is to sing the gospel. There are plenty of appropriate songs available, ranging from children's songs to worship anthems sung at church. The gospel is found in many old hymns such as *The Old Rugged Cross*, or in contemporary works such as *In Christ Alone*, by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend. The key is to ensure that the songs are centered on the cross. Such songs would be an excellent choice to incorporate during a family faith talk.

Fourthly, meditating on one's own testimony regarding how God has changed his life is useful for pointing others to the gospel. Rather than trying to forget the past, Mahaney suggests that believers think about how God graciously saved and cleansed them from sin. One must allow his past to point to the cross. Although a man may choose to use wise discretion regarding subject matter, his family needs to hear him articulate how God has saved him and changed his life.

Mahaney's final recommendation is to study the gospel. He declares, "Never be content with your current grasp of the gospel. The gospel is life-permeating, world-altering, universe-changing truth. It has more facets than any diamond. Its depths man will never exhaust."<sup>113</sup> In order to deepen one's understanding of the gospel, Mahaney suggests spending time in explicitly gospel-saturated books of the Bible such as Galatians or Romans, or by reading books that illuminate the cross such as *The Cross of Christ* by

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<sup>112</sup>Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, 61-62.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 67.

John Stott. If a man desires to lead his home to be gospel-centered, repetition of the gospel story through these various means is imperative.

### **The Gospel Applied**

Repetition of the gospel story must be accompanied by application of the gospel truths. Certainly a primary application of the gospel is to recognize God's goodness, man's sinfulness, and Christ's sacrifice, and to respond with appropriate repentance by turning away from sin and self-idolatry, and by turning towards Jesus with saving faith. However, the gospel is more than a one-time decision. The gospel is meant to be applied to the daily decisions of life, because God intends for the lives of His people to be shaped by the gospel story.<sup>114</sup> To apply the gospel means to "approach every decision with the one good story, the gospel story, in mind."<sup>115</sup> One excellent way of applying the gospel is through asking gospel-oriented questions when faced with various choices in the life of the family. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson offer a helpful list of questions for use in the family decision making process:<sup>116</sup>

What does the gospel teach me about this choice?

Where do I see the great king in this situation?

What does the activity of the beloved Son teach me about this?

Is this a trick of the wicked Imposter?

What am I believing when I forbid or allow this?

Is my allowance of this choice a function of love for God or love for the world, or is it something else entirely?

Am I remembering the Great Commandment to love my neighbor and seeking to fulfill the Great Commission to share the gospel with him as part of a relationship?

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<sup>114</sup>Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 83.

<sup>115</sup>Fitzpatrick and Thompson, *Give Them Grace*, 113.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 113-14.

Am I building a fortress of piety in an effort to keep the bad out and the good in?  
Or am I naively inviting the wicked Imposter into my family?

These questions provide excellent criteria by which a man can seek to keep his home gospel-centered. With some decisions, allowing the family to wrestle together with the answers to some of these questions may be an effective means of training the family to apply the gospel to daily life.

Another means of gospel application comes through the process of discipline and restoration in the home. William Farley encourages parents to “make each discipline event an occasion to teach, re-explain, and reinforce the gospel.”<sup>117</sup> To incorporate the gospel in the discipline time involves explaining the consequences of the sin before God along with the wrath and punishment that are deserved, followed by the good news of God’s love as demonstrated through Jesus as a substitute on the cross. It should be carefully explained that only through faith in Jesus alone does God forgive, accept, and clothe the believer in Christ’s righteousness.<sup>118</sup>

John Younts offers one example of gospel-centered discipline:

When your children complain that they can’t do what God wants, you will seize the opportunity to respond with the powerful gospel of grace. This is your opportunity to say, “Sweetheart, I know that you can’t obey by yourself. This is why Jesus died. He did what you cannot do. Now He can help you to trust Him. Let’s ask Jesus to forgive you and help you love Him by the power of His gospel.”<sup>119</sup>

It has been observed that “adults and children alike use stories to help them make sense of their lives.”<sup>120</sup> If this declaration is true, then in making his home gospel-centered, a man helps his family to know and embrace God’s story as the metanarrative that brings meaning to everything else.

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<sup>117</sup>Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 166.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>119</sup>Younts, *Everyday Talk*, 27.

<sup>120</sup>Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 82.

## **An Intentional Spiritual Growth Plan for the Family**

Striving to pursue spiritual disciplines in his own life, seeking to saturate his family time with God's Word, and ensuring that the home is gospel-centered are all excellent practices for a man to incorporate into the family life. To lead one's family to treasure Jesus effectively, though, requires an intentional plan for leading the family in these arenas.

This final section addresses some necessary ingredients for implementing a Family Spiritual Growth Plan. A Family Spiritual Growth Plan is a written plan of action outlining the intentional practices that a father will explicitly utilize in order to nurture the faith of his family as a whole, and each member individually. The plan will include a primary set of faith-forming activities along with additional supporting activities that reinforce the basic practices.<sup>121</sup> In order to develop such a plan, a man must have a vision for the spiritual direction of his family, a man must know where the members of his family are in their spiritual lives, and finally, a man must develop a written, intentional plan of action with specific goals and appropriate steps to lead his family towards the destination of treasuring Jesus Christ.

### **A Clear Vision for the Family**

Just as Christ clearly knew the destination towards which he was leading his bride (Eph 5:25-27), so must a man know the destination to which he is leading his family. Far too many families struggle through life in survival mode, giving little thought to what kind of spiritual legacy will follow. For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus, he must cast a long-term vision for his family, and establish a family mission statement to help guide the direction of family life.

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<sup>121</sup>John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner, eds., *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children: Helping Your Child Develop Personal Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2000), 37.

**A long-term vision.** John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner assert, “Spiritual training is not an add-on; it forms the core of your children’s being and life.” A simple study of Ephesians 5:25-27 demonstrates how spiritual nurture is also at the heart of a husband’s relationship with his wife. While spiritual formation of one’s wife and children is a principal duty of every man, the spiritual formation of the family will never be a quick fix activity or short term agenda. Rather, as Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope explain, “Spiritual formation at home is a little-by-little, long term process rather than a one-time event.”<sup>122</sup> In the words of Tedd Tripp, “You must be a person of long-term vision. You must see your children’s need for shepherding, not simply in terms of the here and now, but in terms of long-range vision.”<sup>123</sup>

A man must realize that the way he leads his family today “will directly influence a multigenerational cycle of family traits, beliefs, and actions—for good or bad.”<sup>124</sup> This principle is biblical, as God declared, “I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exod 20:5-6).

Because there are long term consequences for how a man leads his family, a man must have a long term vision for leaving a spiritual legacy. Every spiritual investment in the life of his wife and children potentially impacts generations for years to come. This means that every spiritual conversation or family faith talk that seems inconsequential at the time truly matters both in the moment and in the long run. A man must grasp the importance of being faithful in the small areas of life, including the way he leads his family towards vibrant faith in Jesus (Luke 16:10). Such a vision of a long-

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<sup>122</sup>Kurt Bruner, and Steve Stroope, *It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide for Nurturing Lifelong Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 32.

<sup>123</sup>Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 190.

<sup>124</sup>Bruner, and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 75.

term spiritual legacy offers motivation for leading the family well.

**A family mission statement.** Having a long-term vision for leaving a vibrant spiritual legacy is vital. However, in order to keep the family focused on the long-term spiritual goal, some simple guardrails are necessary. A family mission statement can be of great help in keeping the family on track spiritually.

Because Jesus' mission was for God's glory, Michael Wilder suggests that "any Christian family's mission statement could begin with 'Our family exists to glorify God by.'"<sup>125</sup> He offers the following helpful advice on developing a family mission statement.<sup>126</sup> First, the family must discuss values, determining what is most important to each family member. Second, the family must evaluate their values in view of Scripture. They must determine what values are in line with Scripture, and what values need to be changed or discarded. The values that align with Scripture constitute the family's core values. Third, family members draft the family mission statement together. The statement should be shaped by the family's core values and by Scripture. Wilder instructs, "If you have children, discuss the statement with them; clarify your family's expectations based on this scripturally shaped statement. How your family will engage in outreach and evangelism should be essential to this statement."<sup>127</sup> Fourth, there must be a family commitment to the mission statement. Each family member should strive to memorize the statement. Finally, the family must establish a plan to implement the mission statement in specific ways in the life of the family. Wilder concludes,

Few Christians are clear about their personal place in God's plan; even fewer families can clearly articulate how they plan to proclaim God's glory to the ends of the earth. Family mission statements can provide direction in decision making and

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<sup>125</sup>Michael Wilder, "Building and Equipping Missional Families," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 248.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 248-49.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid, 249.

stir a mission and passion for the expansion of God's kingdom.<sup>128</sup>

Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope discuss how one important role of parents is to define what is "normal" for the spiritual life and expectations of the family.<sup>129</sup> Many men seeking to be the spiritual leader in their homes will have to *redefine* what is normal for his family in terms of their spiritual life and direction. In developing and implementing a family mission statement, a man is essentially declaring a new paradigm from which the family does life together.

### **A Current Assessment**

Not only must a man know where the family is heading spiritually, and have a mission statement to guide the way, but a man must also know where his family stands spiritually in order to know how best to lead them to mature in their faith. As a man begins to lead his family spiritually, he will find himself in major competition from all sides. The pace of family life may interfere with spiritual formation. The culture points to the pleasures of the broad road rather than the narrow (Matt 7:13-14). Each family member is wired differently, with various interests and passions. Each child in the family will be in various, constantly changing ages and stages, so that the way each family member learns and responds will be different. Even the spiritual heritage of the family members will affect the family dynamic for good or ill.<sup>130</sup> In order to lead the family to treasure Jesus, a man must intentionally invest in the family relationships, while observing and evaluating the spiritual condition of each family member.

**Spiritual formation in a relational context.** Faith formation does not occur in a vacuum. A man cannot impose faith in the life of a spouse or child apart from the

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<sup>128</sup>Wilder, "Building and Equipping Missional Families," 249.

<sup>129</sup>Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts At Home*, 101.

<sup>130</sup>John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner, eds., *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children: Helping Your Child Develop o Personal Faith*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2000), 67-71.

relational context. Timothy Witmer describes marriage as “the most important relationship you have in this world.”<sup>131</sup> His rationale comes from Genesis 2:24, where God says a man is to leave his parents and cling to his wife. The apostle Paul uses God’s declaration of marriage in Genesis 2:24 to explain how marriage is a model relationship demonstrating the way God relates to man through Jesus (Eph 5:31-33).

Marriage is clearly a picture of the gospel, yet marriage is also very practical. The relationship that Jesus modeled with his bride, the church, was one of humble service and loving commitment to her. For a man to lead his wife spiritually, he must also invest in the marriage relationship, showing the same humble service and loving commitment to his wife. Apart from lovingly investing in the marriage relationship, his attempts to lead his wife spiritually will amount to little more than a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1).

Likewise, for a man to be the spiritual leader of his children he must also invest in his relationship with them. It is easy for a man, tired from a busy schedule and long hours at work, to be physically present with his children and yet to be emotionally detached. Timothy Witmer suggests, “Time with children must be seen as time *invested*, not merely time *spent*.”<sup>132</sup> A man must discipline himself to engage with his family rather than just being physically present. This investment involves participating with the kids as they enjoy their play and activities, and even means investing in one-on-one time with each of the children. When the relationship is a priority, a man will find that his spiritual leadership is more fruitful in the children’s lives.<sup>133</sup> Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope explain, “In the context of healthy relationships, children tend to embrace the beliefs and values of their parents.”<sup>134</sup> Tedd Tripp concurs: “The most powerful way to

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<sup>131</sup>Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope, *It Starts At Home*, 23.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>133</sup>Trent, Osborne, and Bruner, *Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, 28.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

keep your children from being attracted by the offers of camaraderie from the wicked is to make home an attractive place to be.”<sup>135</sup> He adds, “Young people generally do not run from places where they are loved and know unconditional acceptance. They do not run away from homes where there are solid relationships. They do not run from homes in which the family is planning activities and doing exciting things.”<sup>136</sup>

Stuart Scott and Martha Peace offer a healthy perspective with this sobering declaration: “Only two things on earth last for eternity: one’s soul and the Word of God.”<sup>137</sup> Similarly, William Farley writes, “Christian parenting is the process of preparing our children for the day of judgment.”<sup>138</sup> Christian men must be determined to invest in the souls of their wives and children. Moreover, the spiritual investment must be one of the greatest passions in life rather than viewed as an inconvenient imposition upon a self-absorbed life. Because eternity is at stake, relationships matter. Men would do well to reprioritize their schedules to meet the relational need of the family in order to foster an environment for prime spiritual growth. While more could be addressed concerning the nature of a man’s relationship with his wife and family, much of it falls outside the scope of this project. Nevertheless, it will serve a man well to recognize that much of his success as spiritual leader to his family will depend on his investment into the relationships he has with each family member.

**Knowing the spiritual condition of family members.** Not only must men invest in the relationships in the home, but in doing so the spiritual condition of each family member must be carefully observed. In the words of Timothy Witmer, “The

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<sup>135</sup>Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 194.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Scott and Peace, *The Faithful Parent*, 15.

<sup>138</sup>Farley, *Gospel Powered Parenting*, 51.

shepherd knows his family.”<sup>139</sup> For a man to serve his family as the spiritual leader, in addition to knowing the temperaments, passions and preferences of his family members, he must also know where each member stands regarding his or her faith in Christ and level of spiritual maturity.

Obviously, a man should know whether his wife and children have professed saving faith in Jesus, and publically proclaimed their faith through baptism. However, William Farley advises, “Parents should never presume that their children understand the gospel.”<sup>140</sup> Farley goes so far as to declare that an assumption of children’s spiritual birth could potentially be the greatest mistake a parent makes.<sup>141</sup> Following a family member’s proclamation of faith in Jesus, a man must observe the new believer, looking for increasing signs of spiritual life. At times it may prove difficult for a man to discern spiritual fruit in the life of a spouse or child. A helpful suggestion from Stuart Scott and Martha Peace is for a man to observe the “habitual day-in and day-out lifestyle” of the family members.<sup>142</sup> Determine if the long-term lifestyle shows evidence of genuine faith in Jesus. Such evidence is what Susan Hunt describes as “signs of regeneration such as a love for God, desire to hear His Word, a loving and obedient attitude, a love for others, and growth in holiness.”<sup>143</sup>

Brian Croft offers some key evidence that may be observed in the life of a believing child, including a growing affection and need for Jesus and the gospel, a heightened understanding of the truths of Scripture, increased kindness and selflessness toward siblings, greater awareness of and distaste for sin, and a noticeable desire to obey

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<sup>139</sup>Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 17.

<sup>140</sup>Farley, *Gospel Powered Parenting*, 184.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>142</sup>Scott and Peace, *The Faithful Parent*, 27.

<sup>143</sup>Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant: Leaving a legacy of Faith for the Next Generation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 102.

parents.<sup>144</sup> For older children or one's spouse, some key traits of a genuine follower of Jesus may include: surrender to a gospel-centered life; hunger to know God; embracing a Christian community; a missional lifestyle; the desire to worship God; and personal involvement in multiplying disciples.<sup>145</sup> A man must consistently lead towards and pray for these characteristics in the members of his family.

Tedd Tripp explains that when behavior or attitudes that do not honor Christ are observed, the issue is not merely the behavior itself, but rather what is going on in the heart.<sup>146</sup> At this point a man must determine how best to address the heart issues. Constant, prayerful observation of the spiritual condition of one's family will help a man know how to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ.

### **A Plan for the Journey**

Although many men have a plan for putting their children through college, a plan for career advancement, or even a plan for retirement, far too many fail to plan for the nurture of their families. Tedd Tripp writes,

It is instructive to ask parents what concrete training objectives they have for their children. Most parents cannot quickly generate a list of the strengths and weaknesses of their children. Nor can they articulate what they are doing to strengthen their child's weak areas or to encourage his strengths. Many moms and dads have not sat down and discussed their short-term and long-term goals for their children. They have not developed strategies for parenting. They do not know what God says about children and his requirements for them. Little thought has been given to methods and approaches that would focus correction upon attitudes of heart rather than merely on behavior.

Interestingly, the majority of books surveyed for this chapter pertaining to faith formation in the home provided persuasive arguments demonstrating the need for parents to offer spiritual guidance to their children, yet very few offered a practical, step-by-step

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<sup>144</sup>Brian Croft, "Is Your Child a Christian?," The Gospel-Coalition Blog, entry posted July 24, 2013, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/is-your-child-a-christian/>.

<sup>145</sup>Allen Jackson, *Disciple: The Ordinary Person's Guide to Discipling Teenagers* (Birmingham, AL: Youthministry360, 2015), 87-88.

<sup>146</sup>Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 4-5.

plan to help parents fulfill their biblical mandate of leading the family to spiritual maturity. Each of these works points to Deuteronomy 6 and acknowledges that God intends for parents to train their children spiritually through both formal and informal means in the context of daily life, yet very little emphasis was given to establishing specific spiritual goals for the family along with developing the appropriate steps to lead the family in that direction.

For instance, Voddie Baucham emphasizes the more formal aspects of faith training in his work *Family Shepherds*. He stresses the need for catechism and family worship in the home, yet after offering a few examples of catechism and suggesting that family worship involves simply a Scripture reading, a prayer, and a song, he closes with this advice: “Just do it! This is important stuff.”<sup>147</sup> If faith formation is indeed important, it seems that a detailed, step-by-step process to develop a plan of action would be beneficial’ especially considering that many men may never have had a parent intentionally invest in their own spiritual growth.

Another example of such neglect to offer a specific plan is Mark Holmen’s *Impress Faith on Your Kids*. He declares that parents need a specific plan, then goes on to explain how to develop a mission statement.<sup>148</sup> He writes, “In many ways, your family mission statement is your family’s building plan.”<sup>149</sup> Holmen identifies the mission statement with an action plan, leaving the reader with very little specific help. After instructing parents to identify one or two areas of the mission statement in which the family could improve, and to determine what will be done once a week, once a month, and once a year to improve, he closes by declaring, “So there you have it! Now you have a customized plan that you are moving toward as a [Deuteronomy 6] family.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup>Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 80.

<sup>148</sup>Mark Holmen, *Impress Faith on Your Kids* (Nashville: Randall House, 2011), 22-26.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

In *Spiritual Parenting*, Michelle Anthony asks the question, “What is my end goal in raising each of the children God has entrusted to me, and then how will I parent them with that end in mind?”<sup>151</sup> The only plan, however, that she offers is how to create “environments” within the home that may likely facilitate God’s work in the lives of children.<sup>152</sup>

Some works offered help to a parent in a specific area of parenting. For instance, *Teach Them Diligently* by Lou Priolo instructs parents in the appropriate use of Scriptures in the process of raising children. This instruction is very important, but it leaves a parent still searching for a big-picture plan to lead the family. *Gospel-Powered Parenting* by William Farley, and *Give Them Grace* by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson, both focus on the gospel and its multifaceted applications within family life. Certainly incorporating grace into the life of the family is important, yet no specific help for developing a plan to lead the family towards spiritual maturity is included.

*Raising Children to Adore God*, by Patrick Kavanagh does at least offer parents a guide for doing family faith talks together, with helpful pointers guiding the use of Scripture, how to pray as a family, and how to do songs together. His work is helpful for the specific area of family faith talks, but fails to offer a big picture plan or steps of action towards a family spiritual growth plan.

One excellent work by Bryan Haynes does offer an excellent long-term plan for the spiritual growth of children centered around seven specific milestones experienced in the lives of all children and adolescents.<sup>153</sup> His plan is one that many parents will find both useful and exciting. While the author does offer a helpful section on leading a family faith talk, the milestone ministry plan emphasizes spiritual “core

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<sup>151</sup>Michelle Anthony, *Spiritual Parenting*, 25.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>153</sup>Haynes, *The Legacy Path*, 59-60.

competencies” for each child during specific life stages rather than providing a guide to the daily, regular faith-forming practices most men would find helpful in their homes.<sup>154</sup>

*Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, by Tedd Tripp, *Teaching Kids about God*, by John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner, and *The Faithful Parent*, by Stuart Scott and Martha Peace, all offer comprehensive advice pertaining to what children need at each life stage and how parents can age-appropriately address spiritual issues with each child. However, while those works offer helpful direction for parents regarding what their children can and should know and how they learn best at their stage of life, the authors fail to help the parent develop steps to take in order to lead the children towards each level of spiritual maturity, nor do these authors walk a parent through the process of developing a specific, written plan for the spiritual growth of the family based on the material covered in the books. A man may find it helpful to know what his children should know at their specific age, but he may still be left wondering how to achieve that goal.

*The Shepherd Leader*, by Timothy Witmer, encourages a man to lead both his wife and his children. He gives solid scriptural references for both tasks, yet admits that what he offers are “foundational functions” of a shepherd leader rather than a practical plan of action for the spiritual leadership of the family.<sup>155</sup>

Many books offer help for parents regarding the spiritual growth of their families, yet most do not offer specific steps instructing a man how to develop a comprehensive plan to lead his family towards spiritual maturity. If a man could read the entire body of works referenced in this chapter he would gain a broad understanding of spiritual parenting, and may feel adequately prepared to lead his family. Few men, however, will ever make the investment to read so many pages. Perhaps the lack of step-

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<sup>154</sup>Haynes, *The Legacy Path*, 61-62.

<sup>155</sup>Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home*, 13.

by-step instruction in these books demonstrates the need for more works specifically offering help in establishing a family growth plan, especially considering that many parents today have likely never had anyone train them spiritually.

One exception is worth noting. In *A Parent's Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, the authors do provide step-by-step guidance to help parents in developing a Family Spiritual Growth Plan. The plan gives a man direction in leading both his children and his spouse. The authors offer seven steps towards designing a custom spiritual growth plan for the family.<sup>156</sup> The first step involves assembling all the pertinent information regarding the personality traits and struggles of each family member, the pace at which the family lives, the family interests, and even the spiritual heritage of the family.

The second step involves establishing a time for nurturing the faith of the family together as a whole based on the information collected in step one. The family spiritual growth plan includes a basic plan along with a support plan. The basic plan walks through options of church attendance, family devotions, bedtime routine, mealtime routines, drive time opportunities, and family nights. The idea is for parents to select a few of these moments—the times most suited to the schedule and needs of the family—upon which to capitalize rather than trying to cram all of them with spiritual purpose. Wisely, the authors explain, “Most families will do far more by doing less.”<sup>157</sup> The support plan includes guidance for parents during fun time, special holidays and celebrations, and teachable moments.

The third step is to put together individual growth plans for each family member. Each individual plan is shaped by the age and stage of the individual, with his or her interests, personality and needs in mind as well. Parents will establish what

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<sup>156</sup>Trent, Osborne, Bruner, *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, 253-267.

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, 232.

church-related activities in which the children will participate, as well as determine the bedtime routines for younger children, quiet times of personal Bible reading for older children, and Bible studies for teens that will be guided by the parents. In this step, the father will also complete a spiritual growth plan for himself, because “meeting your own spiritual needs is part of your responsibility in training your children.”<sup>158</sup> In addition, the authors wisely suggest,

If yours is a two-parent family, set up your own and your spouse’s plan together so you can give each other support and encouragement in sticking with your plans. Discussing your individual plans with each other may also give you both an opportunity to get a deeper insight into each other’s spiritual and personal needs.<sup>159</sup>

The fourth step in developing a family spiritual growth plan is to have a family meeting. Here the details of the plan along with its importance are discussed. If the family members are old enough, gathering feedback from them may be appropriate. However, it is important that each family member agrees to the expectations. It is also suggested that each member sign a family commitment card, followed by some kind of family celebration as a memory marker.

The fifth step is to finalize the family plan and individual plans after making any adjustments following the family meeting. The activities and times agreed on and the commitment cards may be posted in a prominent place in the home, such as on the refrigerator, for all to see.

The sixth step is to decide on specific action steps that correspond to the activities in the family and individual plans. By action steps, the authors really mean “tools” for use with each activity selected. For example, the father will choose a book of the Bible to read, or a faith-based movie to watch and discuss during family night.

The final step in developing the plan is to celebrate the successes after a

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<sup>158</sup>Trent, Osborne, Bruner, *Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, 258.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

designated time period of three, six, or twelve months. These designated times also provide opportunity to evaluate and adjust as necessary.

Interestingly, one of the authors of the *Parents' Guide* coauthored another book entitled, *It Starts at Home*. In this work, he guides parents to implement a much simpler plan. He instructs, "With each child's specific developmental stage in mind, indicate at least one activity per month you can use to create impression point opportunities during the coming 120 days. . . . Be sure to carve out a day and time on your calendar or PDA for each idea."

Although it may seem like a time consuming task to prepare an intentional plan to nurture the faith of a family, with only twenty minutes a week spent on spiritual formation with a child beginning at age four, by his fifteenth birthday, he will have received over one-hundred-ninety hours of biblical training.<sup>160</sup> The investment is certainly worth the cost.

Despite the lack of parenting literature specifically focused on instructing husbands and fathers how to develop a plan for the spiritual growth of their families, God's call for men to serve as the spiritual leaders within their homes still stands. In order to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, a man must have a clear plan.

## Conclusion

After analyzing the data from numerous interviews with emerging adults ages 18 to 23, Christian Smith et al. observe,

Perhaps we should put the matter even more strongly. Perhaps it is not too stark to say that we as a society are *failing* our youth in crucial ways. If our analysis . . . is correct, then it may not be too strong to suggest that we are failing to equip teenagers and emerging adults with the basic tools for good moral reasoning. We are failing to teach them how to deal constructively with moral, cultural, and ideological differences. We are failing to teach them to think about what is good for people and in life. We are failing to equip our youth with the ideas, tools, and practices to know how to negotiate their romantic and sexual lives in healthy,

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<sup>160</sup>Trent, Osborne, and Bruner, *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, 38.

nondestructive ways that prepare them to achieve the happy, functional marriages and families that most of them say they want in future years. We are failing to teach our youth about life purposes and goals that matter more than the accumulation of material possessions and material comfort and security. We are failing to challenge the too-common need to be intoxicated, the apparent inability to live a good, fun life without being under the influence of alcohol or drugs. And we are failing to teach our youth the importance of civic engagement and political participation, how to be active citizens of their communities and nations, how to think about and live for the common good. On all of these matters, if our analysis is correct, the adult world is simply abdicating its responsibilities.

Moreover, if our analysis is correct, we in the older adult world are failing youth and emerging adults in these crucial ways *because our own adult world is itself also failing* in those same ways.<sup>161</sup>

If Christian Smith’s observation is correct, then the ultimate need is for Christian men—husbands and fathers—to stop failing their wives and children, and to lead them to treasure Jesus Christ. He must do so first by example, through treasuring Jesus in everyday spiritual practices of Bible intake, prayer and worship. A man must then lead his family to treasure Jesus by saturating his family life and home in Scripture, all of which testifies about Jesus (John 5:39; Luke 24:27). Additionally, a man must make his home gospel-centered, by which the family knows its place in God’s greater story and lives with the purpose of sharing God’s gospel story with the world. Finally, a man must develop an intentional plan for the spiritual growth of his family.

The apostle Paul’s exhortation to the men of Corinth is fitting for all husbands and fathers striving to lead their families today: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13).

### **How This Chapter Shapes the Project**

The project includes a five-session equipping series that will train fathers at First Baptist Church to be the primary disciple makers of their families. The first session of the project will be directed at helping men understand how God has called and equipped them to lead their families, and the session will be shaped largely by the biblical

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<sup>161</sup>Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 237-38.

and theological foundations addressed in Chapter Two of this project.

This chapter argued that in order to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ a man must first treasure Jesus through his own personal practices, make his home Scripture-saturated, make his home gospel-centered, and develop a specific family spiritual growth plan. The final four equipping sessions of the project are aimed at helping men to disciple their families, and each of the sessions will be shaped by one of the four primary sections of this chapter.

The second equipping session of the project is geared towards a man's personal spiritual practices, with specific emphasis on Bible intake, prayer, and worship. The session will seek to help men establish godly habits of devotion in their own lives, enabling them to model such practices for their families.

The third teaching session will focus on how to saturate the home in Scripture. The session will address various methods of using Scripture in formal settings, such as through the use of a catechism or family faith talks, as well as how to apply Scripture informally in the daily routine of family life.

The fourth teaching session will focus on how to center the home on the gospel. The emphasis will be on how to tell God's big story of redemption, how to repeat the story with the family, and how to understand and explain life in terms of the gospel story.

Finally, the last teaching session of the project will specifically walk the participants through a process of developing a family spiritual growth plan. Emphasis will be on establishing spiritual goals for the family unit as well as individual members, and developing actions steps leading towards those goals. An interview with the men will be conducted four weeks later to determine how many men are still following their plan, along with what aspect of each plan has succeeded or failed.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

This project consisted of three phases: a preparatory phase, an equipping phase, and a follow-up phase. The initial preparatory phase included an initial assessment of the spiritual leadership in the homes of young adults at First Baptist Church. Following the assessment, the development and approval of five sessions of curriculum and homework were completed. Finally, the first phase ended as participants were recruited for the five week series.

The second phase of the project was to implement the approved five-week equipping course for fathers. At the end of each session, the participants were given homework for the week to help apply in the home what was discussed in the lesson. Additionally, during the first session of the series each participant was given a pre-test, which was then collected and held until the end of the project for comparison with the post-test to determine the effectiveness of the series.

The final phase of the project was a four week period of follow-up. During each week of this phase the participants were contacted via email with encouragement to continue faith-nurturing practices in the home and to offer various tools designed to help men lead their families well. At the end of the follow-up phase the men were invited to gather together to take a post-test for comparison with the pre-test to determine what impact the series had in the lives of the participants regarding the practices and attitudes towards spiritual leadership in the home. During the final meeting, a semi-structured interview was also conducted with the group that was present, to illuminate the significance of the series in the homes of the participants. The post-series survey and the interview questions were e-mailed to all participants absent from the final meeting in

order to gather the necessary data. The final task of the project was to gather and evaluate the data.

### **Phase 1: Six Weeks of Preparation**

The first phase was a six-week preparation period that included a survey of fathers and teenage children designed to yield a clear picture of faith-at-home practices and attitudes in the homes of young adults at First Baptist Church, Sherwood, Arkansas. Following the first week assessment, the next five weeks were devoted to curriculum and homework development and approval. Also during this first phase the fathers with children 18 years of age and younger living in the home were recruited to participate in the five-week series designed to encourage and increase faith-nurturing practices at home.

#### **Initial Survey**

The project began with a survey of matched fathers and children in order to gain a clear picture of the faith-nurturing practices currently occurring in the home. The survey was scheduled to be given during the Sunday school hour on January 10, 2016. Men who were members of one of the church's three young adult Sunday school classes and who also had children in the youth Sunday school department of the church were eligible to take the survey. I visited each of the Sunday school classes one week prior to the survey in order to recruit men—along with one of their youth—to take the survey the following week. The survey for the men was the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey, which came directly from the book *The Family Ministry Field Guide*, by Timothy Paul Jones.<sup>1</sup>

The survey for the youth was a selection of six questions from the fathers' survey, modified to reflect the students' perception of the issues.<sup>2</sup> The six questions of

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<sup>1</sup>See appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup>See appendix 2.

the student survey asked youth to identify the frequency of prayer by a parent in the home, the occurrence of regular family Bible reading, the regularity of spiritual discussions, how often the family eats meals together, the presence of family faith talks, and the extent to which any parent has been observed engaging in personal evangelism. The idea behind conducting the student survey was to determine what, if any, difference was evident between the fathers' perceptions of the spiritual leadership in the home and the students' perceptions of spiritual leadership in the home. The surveys were completely anonymous. Each corresponding father survey and youth survey, however, had a matching six-digit numerical code pre-printed to demonstrate any major discrepancies between what the father says is happening and what the child says is happening at home.

Only matched pairs of father and youth were able to take the survey on the designated Sunday. If an eligible father showed up for church, but his youth child was absent, the father was not given the survey. On the day of the survey, tables and chairs were set up in the youth room to allow space for the participants. The young adult classrooms are all adjacent to the youth room, so the men and students were directed to the youth room as they arrived in the building. Because the arrival times to church are always inconsistent among this demographic, each father and child pair was given their respective surveys immediately upon arrival along with instructions and permission forms, and allowed to complete the survey at their own pace. The surveys were then collected in a large manila envelope and each participant was allowed to continue on to their own Sunday school class.

The following week the scores were tallied and analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the perceptions regarding spiritual leadership in the home along with the extent of actual faith-nurturing activities in practice. In total, 19 matched father and youth pairs completed the survey out of a possible 36 qualified pairs in the church at that time. With a little more than half of that particular demographic completing the survey, I felt I indeed had a very clear picture of the faith-at-home beliefs and practices of the young

families active at First Baptist. The data from the survey helped shape the curriculum for the training series as it demonstrated both a willingness of fathers to lead, but also offered some reasons for neglect of leadership, with busyness being a major factor.

### **Curriculum and Homework Development**

The next five weeks were devoted to development and approval of the five-week curriculum along with the corresponding homework for each lesson.

**Week 2.** The first session, developed during week two, emphasized the nature of God's design for men as spiritual leaders in the home.<sup>3</sup> The material was based primarily on Chapter 2 of this project with the basic outline of the session following the outline of Ephesians 4:21-6:4. The four main points of the session were as follows:

1. A man is the spiritual leader of his wife (Eph 5:21-24).
2. A man sacrifices for the spiritual benefit of his wife (Eph 5:25-27).
3. A man nurtures the faith of his wife (Eph 5:28-32).
4. A man nurtures the faith of his children (Eph 6:1-4).

The lesson opened with a video illustration from the movie *The Incredibles*, depicting a family in disarray, lacking leadership from the father in the home. The video was intended to spark a discussion regarding the state of the family in most homes and the need for clear leadership by the husbands and fathers. The curriculum was completed and submitted to the expert panel via email for evaluation according to the appropriate rubric.<sup>4</sup> The expert panel consisted of the senior pastor, the education/administration pastor, and the children's pastor at FBC. The teaching manuscript was approved by the expert panel with all evaluation indicators scored at the sufficient or above levels, although some minor edits were made according to the comments from the expert panel.

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<sup>3</sup>See appendix 7.

<sup>4</sup>See appendix 3 for the Curriculum Evaluation Rubric and appendix 4 for the Homework Evaluation Rubric.

The homework assignment for session 1 was also completed, offering each participant activities that reinforce the main idea of session one such as praying with his wife or leading a family faith talk in the home.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the session 1 homework was submitted via email to the expert panel for review and all evaluation indicators were scored at the sufficient or above levels.

**Week 3.** During week 3, session 2 of the teaching series was written.<sup>6</sup> The main idea of this series was that in order to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, a man must himself first treasure Jesus Christ through regular, personal faith-nurturing practices commonly referred to as spiritual disciplines. The material for this session was based primarily on a section from chapter 3 of this project. The session defined spiritual disciplines, and then offered instruction specifically regarding Bible intake, prayer, and worship. Obviously other spiritual disciplines could easily have been included in this session, especially those of service and personal evangelism. Because time was limited, however, these three disciplines were the sole focus. The session opened with a video illustration of an artist making a picture of his dad by simply tapping his ink pen millions of times onto the canvass.<sup>7</sup> The dots were arranged and weighted in such a way as to create a portrait of the artist's father. The drawing was called "Hero." The point was made that each dot produced by the artist helped shape the picture of the father; likewise each man's life is shaped by many "dots." Those dots come from the many varied life experiences, both good and bad. The lesson then emphasized the three primary spiritual "dots" that must shape each man's life: Bible reading, prayer, and worship, with examples, instruction, and encouragement for each discipline.

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<sup>5</sup>See appendix 9.

<sup>6</sup>See appendix 10.

<sup>7</sup>See <https://vimeo.com/33091687>.

The session was submitted to the expert panel via email for evaluation. During this week one member of the expert panel failed to submit evaluations for this session and all the following sessions. At this point the Family Ministry team leader at the Arkansas Baptist State Convention was invited to serve as a member of the expert panel along with the two remaining members. Upon agreement, the sessions were emailed to him for review.

The second session homework was also completed.<sup>8</sup> The homework offered suggestions as to how each man can begin to incorporate the spiritual disciplines into his personal life during the week. Both the teaching material and the homework were evaluated by the expert panel and returned. All evaluation indicators were scored at the sufficient or above levels, with two exceptions: one question on the curriculum rubric and one question on the homework rubric. Both questions pertained to how well the material supported the immediate and long-term goals for First Baptist Church. Because the Arkansas Baptist State Convention member of the expert panel was not on staff with FBC, he noted on the evaluation form how he was unaware of any immediate or long-term goals of FBC and therefore scored the rubric below the sufficient level. An easy remedy for the issue should have been to submit to the reviewer a copy of the immediate and long-term goals for the church, but the church, unfortunately, has no officially stated goals at this time. Because his rationale for scoring those two indicators so negatively was simply due to lack of knowledge of the goals of FBC, I chose to overlook those particular below sufficient scores and proceed with the process of curriculum development. A few edits were otherwise made according to suggestions from the expert panel.

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<sup>8</sup>See appendix 9.

**Week 4.** During week 4, the third teaching session was developed along with its corresponding homework.<sup>9</sup> This session focused on saturating the home in God’s Word, and was based on a major section from Chapter 3 of this project. The central idea of this lesson was that in order to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, a man must expose his family to and ground his family in God’s Word. The session emphasized the need to saturate one’s home with Scripture both through formal means and informal means. The formal means of Bible instruction at home that were highlighted in this session include catechism and family faith talks. Examples of each method were provided. The corresponding homework was also developed, offering various options for a man to bring Scripture into the life of the family throughout the week.

The lesson and homework were submitted to the expert panel via email. The non-staff expert again scored two indicator markers pertaining to goals of FBC as less than satisfactory. Because of his rationale those marks were dismissed, as with the previous lesson evaluation. Another member of the expert panel—the senior pastor at FBC—scored several indicator marks at below sufficient. Regarding the lesson, he questioned whether the material in the session was biblically based and whether the session supports the immediate and long-term goals for FBC. His rationale for the low scores in those areas was due specifically for the use of the word *catechism*. He explained that he is not a fan of the terminology and suggested that the material could be taught without “introducing a word with baggage.” A low mark was scored for one marker on the homework evaluation for the same reason. After meeting with him in person to discuss his scores, I intentionally chose to keep the terminology of catechism in the lessons specifically because the practice of biblical catechesis was a major emphasis in the lesson. Additionally, a significant reason for the use of a catechism in the home

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<sup>9</sup>See appendix 13 for the Session 3 Lesson Transcript and appendix 15 for the Session 3 Homework.

came from J. I. Packer’s warning that Christians are being thoroughly catechized by the world.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore vital for a man to catechize his family with God’s Word both proactively and in response to the contrasting worldviews pervasive in contemporary culture. Finally, some minor edits were made to the lesson and homework according to the comments from the expert panel.

**Week 5.** During week 5 the fourth session was developed along with the corresponding homework.<sup>11</sup> This session focused on making the home Gospel-centered and was based on a section of chapter 3 of this project. This lesson defined the gospel in terms of God’s grand narrative of redemption with emphasis on how men can allow their family life to be shaped by God’s story. The first point of the lesson was to tell a better story—one that is Christ-centered, cross-centered, and grace-centered. The second point of this lesson—to repeat the better story—offered various methods of repeating and reinforcing the gospel truths in the life of the family. The final point of the lesson was to apply the better story by asking gospel oriented questions in the daily decisions of life and to allow discipline of the children to be shaped by the gospel. Homework was developed to correspond with the lesson, allowing various opportunities for the men to tell the gospel story, repeat it, and apply it throughout the week.

The lesson and homework were submitted to the expert pane via email. One member of the expert panel—the Arkansas Baptist State Convention staff member—failed to return the evaluation for the lesson and homework for this session and the following session due to time constraints, thereby reducing the expert panel down to two members. All evaluator indicator marks were scored at the sufficient or above level by

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<sup>10</sup>J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 200.

<sup>11</sup>See appendix 16 for the Session 4 Lesson Transcript and appendix 18 for the Session 4 Homework.

the remaining panel members. A few minor edits were made according to some suggestions of the panel.

**Week 6.** During week 6 the session 5 lesson and homework were both developed.<sup>12</sup> This session guided each man to develop an intentional plan for nurturing the faith of his family. The main points of the session included developing a clear vision for the family, assessing the current spiritual condition of the family members, and developing a written spiritual growth plan for the family. The session was based on a major portion of chapter 3 of this project. The homework for this session provided the men step-by-step guidance towards developing a family mission statement and a written spiritual growth plan during the week.

The lesson and homework were submitted to the expert panel via email and returned with all evaluator indicator marks scored at the sufficient or above level. Some minor edits were made according to the suggestions of the panel.

**Recruitment.** During weeks 4 through 6, advertisement and recruitment for the course were directed towards the eligible men in the church. Two weeks prior to the start of the equipping course, I visited each of the three young adult Sunday school classes at First Baptist Church in order to explain the details of the project and invite the men to participate in the series. An advertisement was also placed in the weekly church bulletin which was handed out on Sunday mornings before worship, and the pastor promoted the course during the announcements in the Sunday morning worship services. Additionally, an invitation letter was mailed to each of the qualified men with details of the course and how they could register to participate.<sup>13</sup> Each eligible father casually encountered in the halls of the church received a personal, verbal invitation as well.

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<sup>12</sup>See appendix 19 for the Session 5 Lesson Transcript and appendix 21 for the Session 5 Homework.

<sup>13</sup>See appendix 22.

To register for the course, the men were asked to simply inform me of their intent to participate via email, text, or phone call. Five men signed up for the course prior to the first session, and one additional man indicated he might be able to participate as well, depending on his busy schedule.

### **Phase 2: Five Weeks of Training**

The second phase of the project consisted of teaching through each of the five sessions over the course of five weeks. Each session was taught on a Sunday evening in the conference room at First Baptist Church, and each session lasted only one hour to coincide with the Sunday evening church service. At the end of each session, every man was given homework for the week that corresponded to the week's lesson.

**Week 7.** During week 7, the first session was taught at FBC. In anticipation of the first session, fifteen copies of the pre-test were prepared. Additionally, a box of ink pens and fifteen three-ring notebooks were purchased. A copy of the first session worksheet containing a fill-in-the-blank outline of the lesson and space for taking notes was developed inserted inside each notebook.<sup>14</sup> Homework for the week was also printed and inserted in the notebook, and the notebooks with ink pens were arranged on the tables prior to the participants' arrival. The introduction video was set up and ready to go along with a PowerPoint presentation.

Six men were potentially expected for the course, but twelve showed up. One additional father who registered for the course was unable to make the first session due to a child's baseball event. Arrangements were made for him to take the pre-test on the following Sunday during Sunday school hour and he was emailed a copy of the session one transcript and homework to read and follow.

At the start of the first session, the participants were given a pre-test to reveal

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<sup>14</sup>See appendix 8.

current practices and attitudes regarding spiritual leadership in the home.<sup>15</sup> Each man was asked to provide a six-digit number on the top of the pre-test. The participants would later be asked to use the same identification number on the post-test. Upon completion, the surveys were collected and stored in a folder in the church office, and the first lesson began.

Of the twelve men who attended the first session, one of the men was ineligible according to the delimitations of the project. He was not officially a member of one of the young adult classes of the church, nor was he a parent. He had showed up with a friend who thought he could benefit from the class since he was about to marry a woman who had a child of her own. The man was invited to stay and participate, but his pre-test scores were discarded. He did not show up to any following sessions.

At the end of the session the homework was explained, a list of cell phone and emails was collected, and the men were dismissed.

**Week 8.** During the eighth week, the second session was taught. A few days prior to the session, the men were emailed and texted with a reminder of the upcoming session. A fill-in-the-blank handout was developed prior to the session.<sup>16</sup> The student handout and homework were printed and set on the tables before the participants arrived. The introductory video was set up along with the PowerPoint presentation. Prior to this session, a few men gave notice of their absence due to a baseball conflict, and one participant simply forgot to show up. Arrangements were made to email the men the lesson transcript to read through along with the corresponding homework to complete. At the end of the session the homework was explained and the men were dismissed.

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<sup>15</sup>See appendix 5.

<sup>16</sup>See appendix 11.

**Week 9.** During the ninth week, the third equipping session was conducted. A few days before to the session, the men were emailed and texted with a reminder of the upcoming session and the corresponding fill-in-the-blank handout was created.<sup>17</sup> The handout and homework were printed prior to the session and set out on the tables before the participants arrived, and the PowerPoint presentation was set up. As in previous session, three men gave notice of absence due to baseball conflicts or to family trips and one man was absent without prior notification. Arrangements were made to email the men the lesson transcript to read through along with the corresponding homework to complete.

**Week 10.** During the tenth week, the fourth session was taught. A few days ahead of the session, the men were emailed and texted with a reminder of the upcoming session and the student handout was created.<sup>18</sup> The PowerPoint presentation was set up, and the fill-in-the-blank worksheet and homework were printed prior to the session and set out on the tables before the participants arrived. The weather on this particular Sunday was dreadful, with numerous thunderstorm and tornado warnings across the state. Several men indicated their intent to stay home due to the treacherous weather. In anticipation of so many participants absent, a video recorder was hastily set up in the room in order to record the session. Five men showed up, and the session was taught and recorded. The video was edited the following morning and uploaded to a Dropbox account. The link to view the video was then emailed to the participants along with the homework.

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<sup>17</sup>See appendix 14.

<sup>18</sup>See appendix 17.

**Week 11.** The fifth session was taught during week eleven. The corresponding student handout was created before the session.<sup>19</sup> Participation was again disappointing for this final session with only seven men present, due to baseball, family outings, and a few unexplained absences. Nevertheless, the session was taught and the transcript and homework were emailed to the men who were absent. A video recording for this session was attempted, but the battery of the camera failed around the midpoint of the session. At the conclusion of the session, the homework was explained and the men were dismissed.

### **Phase 3: Four Weeks of Follow-Up**

The final four weeks were intended to allow time for the men to develop and implement their intentional family spiritual growth plan.

**Weeks 12 through 14.** Once a week, during weeks 12 through 14, each man was emailed a note of encouragement along with a list of helpful resources, including useful apps, resourceful websites, and encouraging articles.

**Week 15.** During week 15 the men were invited to gather for one final follow-up meeting that involved a post-test and group interview.<sup>20</sup> Only four men attended the final meeting. The post-test was given to the participants in attendance and collected. The post-test was also developed into an online survey at SurveyMonkey.com, and the online link was emailed to allow the other participants to complete the post-test. Each participant was asked to use the same six-digit identifying number that he used on the pre-test.

The questions from the final survey were asked of the men attending the

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<sup>19</sup>See appendix 20.

<sup>20</sup>See appendix 5 for the Post-Series Survey and appendix 6 for the Post-Series Interview Questions.

follow-up session. The same interview questions were also developed into a separate SurveyMonkey.com survey and emailed to the participants for completion in order to offer course feedback and to inform as to what, if any, new faith-nurturing practices in the home were still in practice one month following the final session.

Once completed and collected, the data from the pre- and post-test was entered into a spreadsheet used to evaluate statistical growth using the *t*-test for dependent samples. The data from the interview questions was also gathered, offering a better picture of how the course influenced the participants in terms of spiritual leadership at home.

Overall, nine of the participants completed both the pre-test and post-test, and only five of the participants completed the final interview questions.

### **Conclusion**

The project was designed to meet a need in the lives of fathers at First Baptist Church. The initial survey to reveal the current state of spiritual leadership in the homes of young families at First Baptist Church showed that men were willing to lead spiritually in the home, yet the data demonstrated that the men also allowed busyness of extracurricular activities drive the family life. This dichotomy certainly proved itself true throughout the equipping series as men signed up to participate, but had to miss various sessions due to baseball, family trips, and other activities. The men were asked to commit to the course from the beginning, but such commitment was not honored by a significant number of participants. Whether the project actually met a true need at First Baptist Church is questionable. The final statistics of the project yielded some positive results along with some disheartening data, all of which will be examined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The implementation of the project was at once enjoyable and stressful, as I was challenged personally and professionally. The project was also personally rewarding and helpful within the life of my ministry at First Baptist Church despite some disappointments throughout the process.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The stated purpose of the project was to equip fathers at First Baptist Church to understand and embrace their God-ordained role as the primary disciple makers of their families. Based on the data of the pre-test and post-test scores, the project did indeed fulfill the purpose of equipping men to understand their role as the primary disciple makers of their families as the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores.

Table 1. t-Test: Paired two sample for means

	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	83.2222	99.4444
Variance	92.6944	109.778
Observations	9	9
Pearson Correlation	0.54289	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	8	
t Stat	-5.048	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0005	
t Critical one-tail	1.85955	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00099	
t Critical two-tail	2.306	

Conversely, the project failed to help men embrace their specific role as the primary disciple makers of their families considering that none of the participants demonstrated the final development and implementation of a written, intentional spiritual growth plan for their families as was assigned in the last session of the teaching series. Because of this inadequacy the project did not completely meet the overall stated purpose.

Table 2. Number of participants completing each stage of the faith-at-home course.

Number of participants who completed initial survey	12
Number of participants who completed final survey	9
Number of Participants who completed final interview	5
Number of participants who developed a specific, intentional plan for the spiritual growth of their families at the completion of the project	0

To assess the project as an absolute failure, nonetheless, is unfair. Notably, a mere increase in knowledge alone was not the desired end. Rather, evidence of men putting such knowledge into an action plan was the ultimate purpose. Illustratively, Paul’s prayer for the Colossian church was that they would be “filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9). Paul did not have a simple increase in knowledge as the desired outcome for the Colossian Christians, but explained that the purpose of the increased knowledge was “to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work” (Col 1:10). The absence of written family spiritual growth plans at the conclusion of the equipping series does indicate a failure of action to some degree, yet it is worth noting that several of the

pre-test and post-test scores do indeed indicate a positive change in action.<sup>1</sup> Four questions in particular demonstrate significant increase in active spiritual leadership in the homes of the participants.

Interestingly, the two survey questions with the largest overall numerical increases from the combined scores of the participants reflect an increase of the men’s spiritual leadership in the lives of their wives in particular. This came as a surprise to me as several men expressed great unease in this area. The survey questions receiving the third and fourth largest numerical increases from pre-test to post-test scores both involve a father’s leadership over his children. Although the men failed to complete a written plan of action for the spiritual leadership of their families by the conclusion of this project, the survey questions showing four highest increases overall are worth celebrating.

Table 3. Survey questions with the seven highest overall numerical increases from pre-test to post-test.

Survey question	Numeric growth
I regularly encourage my wife to read her own Bible, and share insights with me from what she read	14
I pray FOR the spiritual growth of my wife	12
I pray FOR the spiritual growth of my children	10
I regularly encourage my children to read their own Bible	10
I read Scripture out loud with my children	9
I help my children memorize Bible verses	9
I try to use my children's Bible curriculum from church to initiate faith conversations at home	9

<sup>1</sup>See table A1 in appendix 23 for the complete list of questions with overall numerical increases.

## **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

The first goal of this project was to assess the current family discipleship practices taking place in the homes of the families of First Baptist Church with children 18 years old and younger living in the home. Matched pairs of fathers and children were recruited to take a survey questioning the frequency of family prayer times, Scripture application in the home, and intentional faith discussions between fathers and children. A survey was developed for fathers who are members of one of the three young adult Sunday school classes at First Baptist Church, and a corresponding survey was developed for students who were between the ages of 12 and 18 whose parents were members of one of the young adult Sunday school classes at FBC.<sup>2</sup> The survey of the fathers and children occurred during the Sunday school hour at church on a designated Sunday. The aim was to have 15 matched pairs of fathers and children complete the survey. On the morning of the survey, 19 matched father and youth pairs completed the questionnaire. The goal was clearly met and was also beneficial to my church beyond the scope of this project, as it provides church leadership with a concrete glimpse into the actual discipleship perceptions and practices occurring in the homes of young families within the church. Such information could only be speculated prior to the completion of this survey.

Although the project was focused on fathers, the parallel student survey added a unique dimension to the project. The aim of having the students take a parallel survey was to provide a layer of accountability in case the fathers overestimated the frequency of any spiritual practices occurring in the home. Should the men esteem their own leadership too highly then it would be revealed in the data from the student survey.

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix 24, table A2 for the complete results of the adult survey and appendix 25, table A3 for the results of the student survey.

Table 4. Fathers' perspectives of frequency of selected faith-at-home practices

Matching survey questions for fathers	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
Other than at mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children?	28	33	11	6	11	11
How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and others similar media turned off?	17	6	22	33	11	11
How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?	11	17	28	17	6	22
How many times in the past MONTH have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?	17	11	17	44	0	11
How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?	39	11	22	11	0	17
How many times in the past year have I intentionally participated with one of more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?	28	22	28	11	0	11

Note: Answers are in percentages

I was actually expecting the student data to demonstrate a much lower frequency of spiritual practices happening in the homes than indicated by the men's survey. To my surprise, the opposite was true. In general, the students seem to perceive a slightly higher frequency of spiritual practices in the home than did the fathers. Then again, the students also generally recorded a higher percentage of the "never" response than did the fathers. Perhaps where the men tried to keep their answers in the safe middle range of scores, the students were uninhibited in marking the extremes. One possible explanation for the students marking a higher frequency of faith-nurturing practices in the

home could be that the fathers only responded in regards to their own involvement and the students responded according to what they observe their fathers *and mothers* do. Whatever the rationale, the student survey offers a unique perspective at least worth considering.

Table 5. Student perceptions of frequency of specific faith-at-home practices

Matching survey questions for students	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
Other than at mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK has one of your parents prayed aloud with you?	33	17	11	11	11	17
How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and others similar media turned off?	0	11	22	17	17	33
How many times in the past MONTH has one of your parents read or discussed the Bible with you?	17	6	22	44	0	11
How many times in the past MONTH has one of your parents discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with you while engaging in day-to-day activities?	22	11	11	22	11	22
How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has one of your parents led any family devotional or worship time in your home?	50	11	22	0	11	6
How many times in the past YEAR have you observed one of your parents, while in your presence, witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?	22	17	28	17	0	17

Note: Answers are in percentages

The second goal of this project was to develop a five-week training series that equipped men to be the primary disciple-maker in their homes. This goal was measured

by an expert panel consisting of three FBC staff members, using a rubric evaluating how well the material corresponds to the primary biblical passage of Ephesians 5:21-6:4, provided practical help for men in the home, and met the needs of the church as determined by the staff.<sup>3</sup> The success of this goal was based upon receiving a sufficient or above score for 95 percent of the evaluation indicators on the evaluation rubrics for each session. All but one, session 3, met the stated goal.

Table 6. Percent of rubric evaluation indicators scored at sufficient or above for each lesson.

Session 1	96.8
Session 2	95.8
Session 3	87.5
Session 4	100
Session 5	100

There were two reasons the third session failed to meet the goal. The first reason was that one member of the expert panel was unaware of any stated immediate and long-term goals for First Baptist Church. Because of his unfamiliarity with the goals of the church he chose to score the particular questions as “requires attention.” Such a score alone would not have dropped the overall score below the passing mark. The senior pastor, however, also scored two other criteria with “requires attention,” questioning whether the material in the session is clearly biblically based and questioning if the session truly supports the immediate and long-term goals for First Baptist Church. Such scores left the particular session with 87.5 percent of evaluation indicators at the sufficient or above levels. Evaluating the biblical basis of the session, the pastor

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<sup>3</sup>See appendix 3.

commented, “Not a fan of the terminology of catechism. Could have taught the doctrines without introducing a word with baggage.” Likewise, commenting on whether the session supports the immediate and long-term goals for First Baptist Church, he wrote, “Would not use terminology of catechism going forward.”

One option to bring the scores into compliance with the goal would have been to edit the material in such a way as to remove the word “catechism” from the material. It was suggested that perhaps I could use the concept of catechism, but simply call it “questions and answers.” Ultimately I chose to use the material as originally written, despite not receiving the sufficient score, primarily because I felt very strongly that the practice of catechism was a major point in the session. This difference of opinion highlighted the differences in theology and in ministry philosophy between me and the senior pastor. The remainder of the lessons met the target goal.

The third goal of this project was to develop five weeks of faith-at-home activities corresponding to the five-week equipping series for fathers to utilize within the context of their own homes each week. An expert panel—consisting of three FBC staff members—measured this goal using a rubric that evaluated how well the homework tool correlated with the five-week training series, ease of use, and how well it provided practical help for fathers to spiritually lead their families.<sup>4</sup> The measure of success for this goal was to receive 95 percent of the evaluation indicators scored at the sufficient or above levels by the expert panel.

As in the case of the session 3 lessons, the session 3 homework scored at 91.6 percent, just below the mark for meeting the goal. One member of the panel gave a low score because he was unaware of the goals of the church, and the other low score came from the senior pastor due to the use of the word *catechism*. Choosing to keep the original wording, I proceeded with the material as written with the goal unmet.

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<sup>4</sup>See appendix 4.

Table 7. Percent of rubric evaluation indicators scored at sufficient or above for each session's homework.

Session 1	96.8
Session 2	95.8
Session 3	91.6
Session 4	100
Session 5	100

The fourth goal of this project was to recruit ten fathers who were members of FBC and who had children eighteen years old or under still living in the home to participate in the course. Recruitment was conducted through mail, church bulletin, from the pulpit, and through personal invitations. The goal was met as twelve eligible men were signed up at the start of the first session. If participation in the course is defined as completing the course, however, then the goal was not met. Looking back, I should have clearly defined the extent of participation expected. Although twelve men started, only nine men completed the post-series survey. Even fewer men—five—completed the final interviews conducted either during the last session or through the available online final interview.

The fifth goal of this project was to equip fathers in knowledge and in practice to be the primary disciple makers in their families. During the five-week training series, each father was taught to understand his God-ordained role as disciple-maker, encouraged to establish personal God-honoring habits, and begin conducting family-faith practices in the home. Ultimately, each man was encouraged to develop a long-term family spiritual growth plan to implement with his own family. This goal was measured through the use of a pre-test survey along with a post-test survey, and an interview four weeks following the completion of the teaching series. The teaching of doctrine to the participants indeed made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of

their doctrinal knowledge ( $t_{(9)} = 5.048, p < .0009$ ).<sup>5</sup> For the goal to be fully met, however, the follow-up interview had to reveal that 60 percent of the men demonstrated the continued execution of their family faith plan four weeks following the completion of the series. This was clearly not met as virtually all of the men failed even to provide an intentional plan for the spiritual growth of the family.<sup>6</sup> As stated above, there was some positive increase worth celebrating. The lack of participation in the final survey and interview in particular was nevertheless disappointing.

### **Strengths of the Project**

A particular strength of the project was that it clearly demonstrated a true need in the church, albeit slightly different than anticipated. The project was based on the premise that there was a legitimate need at First Baptist Church for equipping men to lead their families. This need was shown to be true as twelve men meeting the criteria signed up for the class. All of the participants, however, were fathers of teenagers. There were no fathers of young children. It was particularly evident that parents of teens were looking for help in raising their children. Notably, virtually all of the participants were not Sunday night church attenders, but showed up on Sunday nights for this specific study, which also demonstrated that these men indeed wanted help as fathers and husbands. While the project failed to meet its stated purpose considering that none of the men completed a written family spiritual growth plan, most participants found some benefit and encouragement through their participation in the sessions as revealed either through the increase between the pre-test and post-test scores or through comments made during the classroom sessions or in the final interview.

An additional strength of the project was that it afforded me the opportunity to

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<sup>5</sup>See table 1 for t-test details.

<sup>6</sup>See appendix 25 for the final interview responses.

reinforce relationships I had with some parents, and even to establish relationships with a few parents of youth that I was merely acquainted with prior to the project. Relationship building with parents of youth always aids my ministry within the church in general. At the time of this writing, I am scheduled to meet for family counselling with one of the participants of the study with whom I had no prior relationship.

A final strength of the project worth noting was that I personally gained a better understanding of the needs of the men regarding their families and youth as they opened up during some discussion times in the five sessions. I regularly speak truth into the lives of their teenage children and have invested significant time with many of the youth, but these discussion times with the fathers helped me gain a clearer perspective of the lives of the students in my youth group. Most notably, I was able to see how some of the fathers struggle to lead in homes where I assumed the presence of strong spiritual leadership.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Several weaknesses became evident as the project progressed. One clear weakness in the project was a failure to implement any form of accountability regarding the completion of homework. At the end of each session, every participant was given homework for the week to put into action the material learned. At the start of the next meeting we would discuss the homework assigned the previous week. Most men, however, elected to remain quiet, suggesting a failure to implement the homework throughout the week. Some men simply described the homework as being “hard,” with no other comments, leaving one to assume the homework was not completed. It became evident that while most men were willing to attend the sessions, many did not desire to put much effort into the homework, which was a major element in the series.

Another weakness was the anonymity of the participants regarding the pre-test and post-test data, and the final interviews that were conducted online. I had no way of

knowing which of the men were actually making the effort to apply the material and which were choosing not to participate other than through mere attendance. In all likelihood, the fact that there was no accountability regarding the homework allowed some men to continue attending without any fear of being outed. I would have liked to know which men were showing the greatest amount of growth in knowledge and in practice. While all of the pre-test and post-test scores demonstrated a positive statistical increase, some of the individuals showed a much more significant increase than others. The anonymity of the surveys prevented me from identifying which men showed the most growth. Some men did approach me with comments and discussion regarding the material, and some did comment on various aspects of the homework, revealing to me their level of participation. I even asked the wife of one participant what her husband has done different at home. She could not identify one thing. Overall, the anonymity of the surveys prevented me from knowing the level of participation and potential impact in the family lives of many of the men.

A third weakness of the project was that it was too broad in scope, hindering the potential impact in the personal and family lives of the participants. The topics addressed in each of the five sessions were all appropriate, including leading one's wife, personal spiritual disciplines, using Scripture in the home, rehearsing and applying the Gospel in the home, drafting a family mission statement, and developing a written family spiritual growth plan. I feel, however, that the participants were asked to do too much in too short a timeframe. I am confident that I would have seen greater impact had only one topic been selected and taught in depth over the course of several weeks rather than try to address every topic in the same amount of time.

A final weakness of the project was the fact that the members of the expert panel were not really experts in the field of family ministry. Some helpful suggestions were offered and some minor grammatical errors were caught, but few of the comments pertained specifically to leading men to lead their families better. Instead, many of the

comments addressed differences in philosophy of ministry or theological convictions rather than helpful suggestions on how to better equip men to lead their families. In this regard I feel that their evaluations of the teaching material and the homework plans were not as helpful as I would have preferred. In hindsight, it would have been more beneficial to assemble an expert panel comprised of men completely outside the church who could freely offer criticism and suggestions without compromising the working relationship within the church. Utilizing staff members from my own church as the expert panel led to some unfortunate and unnecessary minor friction between me and some staff members. One exception on this expert panel was the family ministry expert from the Arkansas Baptist State Convention who was a late addition to the panel. He offered some beneficial critique with an outsider perspective, but his participation as part of the expert panel was limited to the first three sessions only.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

If the opportunity to teach this material were presented, one significant change I would make would be to involve the wives in some capacity. One of the problems that became evident early on in the project was the fact that many of the men struggled more with leading their wives than with leading their children. From the start there was clear trepidation regarding the need for men to act as the spiritual head over their wives. For some men the simple idea of praying alone with their wives appeared to be nearly impossible. During the recruitment phase of the project, the equipping sessions were promoted as pertaining primarily to fathers leading their children, but the very first session clearly emphasized the call to lead one's wife. Some men may have been caught off guard in that session and never fully recovered.

During the final evaluation meeting, several of the men indicated that a parallel track for wives would have been beneficial. This would allow the pastor or facilitator to broach the subject of male spiritual leadership in the home prior to the men coming home

to implement the homework, thus making their task at home much easier. If afforded the opportunity to repeat the equipping series with men, I would find a way to include wives in the process, whether through a parallel track or perhaps even customizing some of the sessions to allow couples to participate together. Also, that two of the greatest overall numerical increases between pre-test and post-test scores involved questions pertaining to the men praying for their wives and encouraging their wives from scripture demonstrates how the men were willing to lead in this regard when prompted with some applicable encouragement and instruction.

Another change I would make is to narrow the focus of the study. I stated above that one weakness of the project was the broad nature of the material. There are two ways in which I would narrow the focus of the study. First, as I wrote and developed the material, I was constantly writing with my own family in mind, consisting of three young children. I had some difficulty connecting with an audience comprised of fathers of teenagers, rather than parents of young children. The material therefore needs to be specifically geared either towards fathering teens or towards fathering young children.

A second way I would narrow the focus of the study would be to concentrate exclusively on equipping men to develop a written, intentional spiritual growth plan for the family. Rather than making the growth plan the emphasis of the final session alone, I would take several weeks and lead men through a process of developing a specific plan for their families. The idea of a father having a specific plan for the spiritual growth of his family is profoundly neglected in churches and there seems to be a dearth of books and resources in the field of family ministry aimed specifically at equipping men for this vital action. Plenty of resources instruct men on conducting family worship, using Scriptures to teach and instruct children, and how to shepherd a family in general, but very few resources lead a man to develop an intentional, strategic plan for the spiritual formation of his family. In hindsight, focusing specifically on leading men to develop a simple, written family spiritual growth plan over the course of several weeks would have

been a better project to complete.

Another change I would make is to instill some form of accountability with the homework. If the focus were to be narrowed exclusively to developing a family growth plan, perhaps some of the work could be done in class each week, thus allowing the men to evaluate and challenge one another's ideas. Such accountability in class may lead to more execution at home.

A final change I would make is to include more personal examples. This idea was also a suggestion from one of the participants. Realizing that I don't have teenage children, and therefore my personal examples are not relevant to the needs of the participants, I would find outside testimony from men who have had success leading their families through the teenage years. The participants wanted to see how some of the faith-at-home principles worked in real life in their specific contexts.

### **Theological Reflections**

Thinking theologically about this project, one significant thing I learned about the church is that ministry to families—to men in particular—is not a priority, at least as far as my church is concerned. There is a Men's Ministry within the church but the emphasis is primarily on fellowship with some thoughts on Christian living thrown in. The idea of men actually leading in their own homes is ideal, but seldom mentioned in the church and certainly not an expectation. Instead, what often matters most are the "purposes" of the church: evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, worship, and prayer. As long as the church is programming for each of these tasks and individuals are participating we are supposedly doing our job well. The litmus test for a man's spiritual life falls more along the lines of encouraging him to have a "quiet time" rather than imploring him to intentionally lead his family as Christ leads his church. There is a great unintentional disconnect here between church and home. Yet passages such as Ephesians 5:21-6:4 offer more than mere suggestions for men. Through this project I have observed

greater compartmentalization between faith at church and faith at home than I realized prior to spending time with the men during the project.

Another theological insight I gained throughout the process of this project concerns the nature of male headship in the home. More specifically, I have realized through the study of Ephesians 5:21-6:4 that spiritual leadership in the home involves much more than attempting to get my family to memorize a verse or read the Bible and pray together. Spiritual leadership encompasses the daily laying down of one's life for his bride and children in order to set them up to thrive in relationship with the Lord. I have come to understand that when I am unwilling to lay down my life for the spiritual and physical welfare of my family, I am not merely being selfish, I am being anti-Christ. Such a description seems brutal, but I now realize that the sacrificial nature of spiritual leadership cannot be overstated. While the church constantly promotes the propositional truth of Christ crucified, buried, and raised to life again, the proclamation of the glory of Christ displayed through the sacrificial, Christ-like leadership of men at home is sorely neglected. This has been a trying season in the life of my family for many reasons, and several times I have even found myself saying, "I can't do this anymore," regarding some sacrifices I've had to make. Each time that thought has come to mind, the powerful truth of how I am called to lay down my life for my family as Christ laid down his life—even unto death—has eclipsed the selfish attitude in my own heart.

One final theological insight worth considering is the need for clarity in the church regarding theological words and ideas. Two specific instances during this project showed how a misunderstanding of a theological concept or a contrary assumption of the meaning of a word can cause problems. First, because several of the participants assumed that spiritual leadership in the home simply meant nurturing the faith of children, many were surprised to learn that spiritual leadership in the marriage is a vital component of being the primary spiritual leader in the home. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote more concerning the spiritual leadership of a man with his wife

than he wrote of the spiritual nurture and care of one's children, yet many of the men still assumed prior to the course that spiritual leadership at home is focused solely on children. Clarity, even in advertising for the class, could have helped prevent some of the surprise experienced by a few participants. The other incident during this project where a theological idea caused concern involved the use of the word "catechism." The history of the word and its connection with Catholicism caused alarm with the senior pastor. Additionally, one participant who happened to have a catholic background indicated that he was surprised to hear the word used in a Baptist church, but after a demonstration of how the practice could be used in the home he quickly acknowledged the potential benefits of catechism in the home. As pastors and leaders it is vital we are mindful to ensure clarity regarding the theological words and ideas that we use.

### **Personal Reflections**

On a personal level I struggled with two very real tensions throughout this project. The first tension I experienced was ironic considering the nature of this project. In attempting to create a project that equipped men to become better and more intentional leaders in their homes, I found myself many times neglecting my own family for the sake of research, reading, and writing. Numerous times the sense of inadequacy as a family leader and the weight of self-condemnation made my heart heavy for spending time writing while abandoning my wife to singlehandedly lead our three young children through the tedious bedtime routine. It was difficult for me to expound on Ephesians 4 and 5 while often failing to meet the standard of Christ-like leadership in the home as described by the Apostle Paul. The project was personally beneficial to be sure, yet not without much personal conviction regarding spiritual leadership within my own home.

The second tension with which I wrestled came as I attempted to implement in my own home certain spiritually nurturing practices. I found a real tension between the ease that seemed to be presented in the literature concerning the implementation of

spiritual leadership practices in the home against the difficulty of attempting to establish actual faith-nurturing practices at home in the midst of the rough and tumble of real life. What I thought should be simple to apply in my own home was often crushed by the brutal family schedule, personal attitudes, pace of life, and unexpected conflicts. I realized that apart from having a strong determination to persevere, the best of intentions regarding spiritual leadership at home will quickly become nonexistent. As a young teenager I observed this tension at home sometime during my junior high school years when my father was convinced that he should lead family devotions at home. After several grim attempts to lead family devotions all ended with disciplinary action towards at least one of the children, he ceased trying to lead family devotions. I remember those family devotion attempts more for their failure than anything else. I admit that the countless hours I spent for this project reading literature and studying Scriptures concerning spiritual leadership at home helped me develop a determination to persevere. I wish, though, that I had emphasized this concept more to the participants in my project.

I also personally realized the need to offer myself grace in the area of spiritual leadership at home. During the latter portion of this project I found out firsthand how difficult it is to be the spiritual leader of the family during the tumultuous seasons of life. Notably, this season has been an extremely difficult one for my family. One month prior to the implementation of the project, my father-in-law and mother-in-law were each diagnosed with cancer within five days of one another. My mother-in-law's cancer was especially urgent and she underwent surgery almost immediately, followed by five months of chemotherapy and then thirty days of radiation. On top of the diagnosis, my in-laws were in the midst of a purchasing a new home and moving. My wife virtually packed and moved her parents' home and belongings singlehandedly, and spent significant time away caring for her mother throughout her treatments, at times leaving me to care for our children alone. In the very season I was trying to equip men for spiritual leadership in the home, I often found my own spiritual leadership with my

family strained. I realized how easy it is for the Pharisee in me to elevate certain faith nurturing practices at home to the level of burdensome, binding laws. I needed to preach grace to myself often. Puffed up with pride, I often wanted to be the exemplary spiritual leader at home in the eyes of the men in my project, which was a burden I could not carry. Grace is a lifesaver.

In Ecclesiastes 3, the author describes the reality of radically different seasons of life. Because of my family circumstances during the implementation of this project, I came to experience firsthand how various seasons of life indeed affect spiritual leadership in the home. More specifically, I realized how even an excellent plan for the spiritual leadership in my own home must be adapted, changed, or postponed at times as the circumstances of life dictate.

With my own family, we were rarely able to all gather together for our family devotional time. We had been previously trying to work through Marty Machowski's family devotional *Long Story Short*, which includes five days of devotions each week. For the sake of simplicity I dropped the family devotional book for the season and began sharing foundational Scripture verses each morning from the Desiring God Fighter Verses app on my phone during the best available time with my kids, which was typically during breakfast or during the morning commute to school. Because of how this difficult season of life affected the way I lead my own family and related to my wife, I realize how I need to be more perceptive of the difficult seasons of life in which the people I lead and disciple find themselves, and intentionally show them empathy and encouragement. To expect men to instill a system of faith-nurturing practices within their homes without ever adapting to the various seasons of life and marriage is tantamount to placing a pharisaical burden on the shoulders of the men who need grace much more than law.

Through the implementation phase of this project in particular, I also realized the need for transparency in my own leadership. Spiritual leadership at home proved to be a sensitive topic in some of the participants' homes. I came to understand my natural

resistance to transparency was nothing more than pride, and I feel that often the men participating in the project were more encouraged by my failures rather than my few successes.

### **Key Takeaways**

There were several key takeaways from this project that are worth noting, each of which helps shape my ministry moving ahead.

#### **Adolescent Children Show a Positive View of Parental Spiritual Leadership**

First of all, it is worth noting that parents are not failing their children, at least in the eyes of many of the students who completed the initial student survey at the start of this project. The survey questioned men regarding the frequency of various faith-nurturing practices in the home. Many of the same questions were also given to an adolescent child of those men. I had expected the results to show that the children generally held a more negative view regarding the spiritual practices occurring in the home. To be sure, the overall responses from the students tended to be more extreme. When the dads generally indicated very low occurrences of a practice, the students more often recorded the practice as non-existent. On the other hand, students generally indicated a greater frequency of spiritual practices occurring in the home. The student portion of the survey in this project provided some positive encouragement for parents who are at least trying to practice faith-nurturing activities in the home by showing that students indeed notice the spiritual leadership in the home and perhaps give the parents more credit than they deserve.

When partnering with parents in student ministry there is often a tendency to highlight the negative aspect of students leaving the faith or to focus on the detrimental effects of parental neglect when it comes to the spiritual formation of children. When encouraging parents to be the spiritual leader in the lives of their children, rather than

leading the discussion with negative statistics perhaps it would be beneficial to lead with this positive news that students take note of a parent's attempts at spiritual leadership in the home. Parents are more likely to pursue spiritual leadership at home when they know that what they are doing actually makes a difference in the lives of their children.

### **Men Struggle to Lead Their Wives**

A second key takeaway is that men struggle specifically to be the spiritual leader in their marriages. This struggle was expressed at various times during the project. There were several comments offered during the classroom sessions regarding the difficulty of some of the homework particularly associated with pursuing a time of prayer with wives each week. Numerous comments were also made during the final interviews suggesting that including the wives in the course would have been beneficial to the men.<sup>7</sup>

Statistically, the two pre-test and post-test scores showing the greatest overall increases in faith-nurturing activities in the home both involved the men's leadership of his wife, including encouraging one's wife to spend time in God's Word and praying specifically for the spiritual growth of one's wife. Perhaps the increase in these two practices demonstrates that although the struggle is real, there generally remains a willingness by the men to pursue leadership in the marriage when provided encouragement and instruction. In light of how the participants demonstrated difficulty in leading their wives during this project, church leaders need to stop assuming that spiritual leadership is routinely happening in the marriages of men in the church. Pastors would be wise to find a way to constantly and intentionally offer men clarity, instruction, and encouragement in how to be the spiritual leader within the marriage relationship.

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<sup>7</sup>See appendix 26 for the final interview responses.

## **Men Need Instruction that is Both Simple and Fundamental**

Several factors during the project indicated that when it comes to instilling actual faith-nurturing practices in the home, men need practices that are both simple and fundamental. First, it was noted how the difficult seasons of life did indeed impact my own family routine during the implementation of this project. It would be foolish for me to assume that difficult family circumstances were unique to me and my family during this timeframe. In all likelihood, many of the participants were experiencing the pressures of various seasons of family life and marriage. Second, the busyness of many of the men, particularly with athletics, contributed to a lack of participation with and completion of homework that was, at times, demanding. Additionally, that men seemed to have difficulty with the homework perhaps suggests that I may have overestimated the ability of some of the men to put into practice faith-nurturing activities that are characteristic of mature Christians, including reading the Bible regularly on their own and applying the Bible in the life of their family.

It is also notable that as the participants were all in their mid-thirties to mid-fifties, each one brought 30 to 50 years of life habits to the table, including their spiritual practices. The majority of the men had never had solid spiritual leadership in the home modeled for them. They were simply living life in a manner consistent with what they have always known. Change is always difficult, especially when it comes to personal matters of faith and family routines. Complicating the frustrations that come with various seasons of life, the busyness of the family, and the lifelong neglect of spiritual habits is the fact that men also struggled specifically in leading their wives.

In light of the complexity that stems from the combination of various seasons of life, busy schedules, a lack of healthy spiritual habits, and struggles with leading their wives—all of which were revealed throughout this project—it is clear that the men need to be equipped to lead their families with faith-nurturing practices that are both simple and fundamental.

## **A Real Sense of Regret**

A final significant takeaway from the project was that when confronted with the issue of spiritual leadership in the home, many men felt a sense of regret in their perceived failures in this arena. This became particularly evident through classroom conversation as the course progressed and through responses during the final interview. The majority of the participants were fathers of older teenagers. Many expressed during the class sessions how they wished they had been equipped to be the spiritual leaders over their families when they were newly married or at the start of parenthood. It was frustrating at times to observe a lack of participation of some men because they felt it was too late to make much difference in their family lives because their children were almost out of high school. During the final interview, a few men suggested that the course should be offered to young couples at the start of parenthood. Notably, all eligible men in the church, including many fathers of young children, were indeed invited to participate.

Despite the regrets expressed by the fathers of older adolescents, the fact that there were no young fathers from the church participating in the course indicates that spiritual leadership in the home may not be a priority in the minds of the young parents in the church. At the front end of fatherhood, there appears to be little awareness of the need to pursue spiritual leadership with the family, but on the other end of fatherhood, as the children began to leave home, the fathers showed significant regret in their lack of spiritual leadership. This observation suggests that church leaders must do a better job of equipping men to lead in their families early in the marriage and at the start of parenthood.

## **Next Steps**

After weighing the results of the project and considering the key takeaways mentioned above, an ideal next step would be to establish a plan to invest specifically in the young parents in the church, especially in light of the regrets expressed by many of

the participants in this project as they looked back on their parenting journeys with their older children. This particular young adult demographic, however, does not fall under my responsibility at church. I can offer suggestions and share data from my project with our senior pastor and children's and preschool minister, but that is the extent of my direct influence. It is nevertheless important for me to consider what I can do right now in my current context in light of the completion of this project. In considering next steps, I chose to think simple and sustainable. Another classroom setting is not the best next step. With these thoughts in mind I plan to select a few men with whom to begin a discipling relationship focused on simple personal godly habits, a simple family devotion routine, and a vision to equip other men in the near future.

### **Establish Godly Relationships**

The first step is to recruit a select group of three to five men, primarily from the pool of participants from the project, to meet regularly over the course of a year. I personally need to develop deeper godly relationships with some men in the church, and these men need godly relationships as well. Meeting with the participants during the project was enjoyable for me, and I observed a camaraderie among them that is rarely fostered in this church. I am hopeful that meeting regularly for prayer and encouragement will kindle a sense of community and accountability as the men pray together for the church, their children, their families, and their marriages.

### **Simple Personal Habits**

With the select group of fathers the next step is to pursue godliness together. In addition to prayer, I will have a plan to systematically read through specific scriptures along with a plan for scripture memorization. In our "mobile" culture, I have found the Desiring God's Fighter Verses app for smartphones to be an excellent tool both for personal use and for use with my family. I will provide app store gift cards to enable the men to purchase the app for their own phones. The weekly Bible verse schedule on the

Fighter Verse app will give us an organized system for weekly Scripture discussions and Scripture memory.

### **Simple Family Habits**

Finally, with this group of men we will encourage one another to better lead in the home through the specific practice of family devotions. At the conclusion of the project, the participants were given several resources to help equip them to be the spiritual leader in their homes. Among the gifts were two recently published books on family worship: *A Neglected Grace* by Jason Helopoulos and *Family Worship* by Donald Whitney. Both books are in agreement regarding the core elements of family worship, namely scripture reading, prayer, and a song. Although my family is quite musical and is happy at times to sing a song together, some families are less inclined towards singing together. I am content to see any family gather regularly around Scripture and prayer alone. It is to this end that we will encourage one another. For the sake of simplicity, the Fighter Verse app will also serve as a tool to use for family devotions. Not only does it offer five years' worth of weekly memory verses, but the app also contains a set of foundation verses for children. Each foundation verse also includes a visual picture to aid in memorization, so even families with smaller children will find the app a helpful tool for use in the context of a family devotion.

### **Release the Men to Do Ministry**

Investing in a small group of fathers over the course of a year will provide adequate time for men to establish solid and simple godly habits in their personal life and with their families. However, the goal for the men is ultimately much more than developing consistent godly habits in their personal lives and family routines. Ideally, throughout the time together I will cast a vision for men to begin to invest in other fathers in the church.

The final action step, therefore, is to release the men to do ministry. After

investing in the lives of the men for a year, each of these men may be paired with another father, perhaps the father of a new incoming middle school student. The idea is to release the men to minister to the young fathers by befriending them, praying for them in person, and encouraging them on a weekly basis towards more effective spiritual leadership in the home. By releasing the men to do ministry in this manner, more men will be sharing in the ministry within the church and making disciples of other men.

### **Conclusion**

Of the men who signed up to participate, their general level of interest at the start seemed to predict how they would finish. There were a few men who were apathetic from the start. One man joined the course at the urging of his wife. His desire to participate was clearly trivial. I observed little change if any in their lives from the start of the series to the end. The busy fathers simply became busier by adding the class to their schedules, and eventually they quit participating. The men who showed up eager and willing to improve their leadership at home demonstrated growth. With some of these men new ministry relationships were developed. The men that I knew to already have strong leadership in their homes simply became stronger leaders. They were often the only ones commenting on the previous session's homework during class discussion each week.

Ultimately, at the end of this project I had hoped to see men put into practice a written plan for the spiritual growth of their families. It was disappointing to realize that at the conclusion of the project none of the participants had a plan. Despite this frustration, the project still had some significant positive outcomes in the lives of many of the participants, and has yielded much fruit in my own life. At the end of the project now, I am certainly a better husband and father, having been challenged and encouraged in both my ministry at home and ministry at church. Additionally, I am eager to implement in my current ministry context the next steps articulated above.

God has given a clarion call for men to lead, and such leadership at times is a great burden. Nevertheless the words of Paul to the church at Philippi are helpful: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). It is no great stretch to modify Paul’s words to say, “He who began a good work in your family will be faithful to complete it.” Such is a wonderful promise to claim.

## APPENDIX 1

### INITIAL FAITH-AT-HOME SURVEY OF ADULTS

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of the participant regarding faith-nurturing in the home. This research is being conducted by Toby Havens for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.* By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

#### **Note:**

For the purposes of this survey, “church leader” include pastors, elders, ministers, deacons, teachers, or small group leaders.

#### Part 1: Parental Perceptions

Circle the appropriate answer to each question according to the following scale:

SD=strongly disagree, D=disagree, DS=disagree somewhat, AS=agree somewhat, A=agree, SA=strongly agree.

1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family’s schedule.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

4. When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

5. I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

6. Parents—and particularly fathers—have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

## Part 2: Parental Practices

Circle the appropriate answer to each question:

9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children?

- a. Never
- b. Once
- c. A couple of times
- d. Three or four times
- e. Five or six times
- f. Seven or more times

10. How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?
- Never
  - Once
  - A couple of times
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Seven or more times
11. How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?
- Never
  - Once
  - A couple of times
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Seven or more times
12. How many times in the past MONTH have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?
- Never
  - Once
  - A couple of times
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Seven or more times
13. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?
- Never
  - Once
  - A couple of times
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Seven or more times
14. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?
- Never
  - Once
  - A couple of times
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Seven or more times

15. How many times in the past YEAR have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?
- a. Never
  - b. Once
  - c. A couple of times
  - d. Three or four times
  - e. Five or six times
  - f. Seven or more times
16. How many times in the past YEAR has any church leader made contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?
- a. Never
  - b. Once
  - c. A couple of times
  - d. Three or four times
  - e. Five or six times
  - f. Seven or more times

APPENDIX 2

INITIAL FAITH-AT-HOME SURVEY OF YOUTH

**Informed Consent**

You are being requested to give permission to a minor or a member of a vulnerable population under your legal supervision to participate in a study designed to identify the current understanding and practices of the participant regarding faith-nurturing in the home. This research is being conducted by Toby Havens for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, the participant will identify the frequency in which specific faith practices occur in the home. Any information provided will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will a person's name be reported or a person's name identified with his or her responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary and the person you are giving approval to participate in this study is free to withdraw at any time.*

By signing your name below, you are giving informed consent for the designated minor or member of a vulnerable population to participate in the research if he or she desires.

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Identification Number \_\_\_\_\_

### **Student Survey**

This Survey is designed for students at FBC who are between the ages twelve and eighteen, and whose parents are active members of the Adult 4 and Adult 5 Sunday school classes.

### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of the participant regarding faith-nurturing in the home. This research is being conducted by Toby Havens for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.* By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Circle the appropriate answer to each question:

1. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK has one of your parents prayed aloud with you?
  - a. Never
  - b. Once
  - c. A couple of times
  - d. Three or four times
  - e. Five or six times
  - f. Seven or more times
  
2. How many times in the past WEEK has your family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?
  - a. Never
  - b. Once
  - c. A couple of times
  - d. Three or four times
  - e. Five or six times
  - f. Seven or more times
  
3. How many times in the past MONTH has one of your parents read or discussed the Bible with you?
  - a. Never
  - b. Once
  - c. A couple of times
  - d. Three or four times
  - e. Five or six times
  - f. Seven or more times

4. How many times in the past MONTH has one of your parents discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with you while engaging in day-to-day activities?
  - a. Never
  - b. Once
  - c. A couple of times
  - d. Three or four times
  - e. Five or six times
  - f. Seven or more times
  
5. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has one of your parents led any family devotional or worship time in your home?
  - a. Never
  - b. Once
  - c. A couple of times
  - d. Three or four times
  - e. Five or six times
  - f. Seven or more times
  
6. How many times in the past YEAR have you observed one of your parents, while in your presence, witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?
  - a. Never
  - b. Once
  - c. A couple of times
  - d. Three or four times
  - e. Five or six times
  - f. Seven or more times

APPENDIX 3  
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

<b>Nurturing Faith at Home Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Session 1 Evaluation</b>					
<b>1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The session is relevant to the issue of fathers nurturing the faith of their families at home.					
The learning objectives for this session are clear.					
The points of this session clearly support the learning objectives.					
The material in this session is clearly biblically based.					
The session is Christ-centered, with emphasis on the role and application of the Gospel in the life of the family.					
The session offers achievable points of practical application.					
The instruction is simple and clear.					
The session supports the immediate and long-term goals for First Baptist Church.					

APPENDIX 4

HOMEWORK EVALUATION RUBRIC

Faith Nurturing Homework Evaluation Tool					
Session 1 Evaluation					
<b>1=insufficient ( completely fails to meet criteria)</b> <b>2=requires attention (some changes are necessary before proceeding)</b> <b>3=sufficient (meets criteria, but could use some minor editing)</b> <b>4=exemplary (no changes are necessary)</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The homework clearly corresponds with the parent session.					
The homework offers flexibility and options for families with varied schedules.					
The instruction clearly states the objective for each faith-nurturing activity.					
The homework is clearly biblically-based.					
The homework is Christ-centered, with emphasis on the role and application of the Gospel in the life of the family.					
The homework offers achievable points of practical application.					
The instructions are simple and clear enough for any father to understand, regardless of his level of Bible knowledge.					
The homework supports the immediate and long-term goals for First Baptist Church.					

## APPENDIX 5

### PRE- AND POST-SERIES SURVEY

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of the participant regarding faith-nurturing in the home. This research is being conducted by Toby Havens for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

#### Part 1: Personal Faith

Instructions: Circle the appropriate answer to each question.

1. I have a plan for my own personal spiritual growth.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Somewhat Disagree
  - d. Somewhat Agree
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
  
2. I personally read my Bible.
  - a. Never
  - b. Only on Sundays during church
  - c. Once or twice a week
  - d. Three or four times a week
  - e. Five or six times a week
  - f. Every day
  
3. Other than before meals, I personally take time to pray.
  - a. Never
  - b. Only on Sundays during church
  - c. Once or twice a week
  - d. Three or four times a week
  - e. Five or six times a week
  - f. Every day

4. I most recently memorized a verse from the Bible.
  - a. In the past week
  - b. In the past month
  - c. In the past year
  - d. Years ago
  - e. I have never memorized a Bible verse.
  
5. I read books, listen to messages, or attend classes on how I can better lead my family spiritually.
  - a. Never-This is my first time
  - b. Once a year
  - c. Once a month
  - d. Weekly
  - e. Every day
  
6. I understand what the Bible teaches regarding how I am to lead my children as a father.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Somewhat Disagree
  - d. Somewhat Agree
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
  
7. I can name specific Scripture(s) from the Bible regarding fatherhood by which my parenting principles are shaped.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Somewhat Disagree
  - d. Somewhat Agree
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree

## Part 2: Family Faith

Instructions: Circle the appropriate answer to each question.

8. Other than at meals, I pray out loud with my children.
  - a. Never
  - b. Only on Sundays during church
  - c. Once or twice a week
  - d. Three or four times a week
  - e. Five or six times a week
  - f. Every day

9. I pray FOR the spiritual growth of my children.
- Never
  - Only on Sundays during church
  - Once or twice a week
  - Three or four times a week
  - Five or six times a week
  - Every day
10. I read Scripture out loud with my children.
- Never
  - Only on Sundays during church
  - Once or twice a week
  - Three or four times a week
  - Five or six times a week
  - Every day
11. I help my children memorize Bible verses.
- Never
  - Only on Sundays during church
  - Once or twice a week
  - Three or four times a week
  - Five or six times a week
  - Every day
12. I regularly encourage my children to read their own Bible, and I monitor their progress.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat Disagree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
13. I know what my children are studying in their Bible studies at church.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat Disagree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree

14. I try to use my children's Bible curriculum from church to initiate faith conversations at home.
- Never
  - Once a year
  - Once a month
  - Once a week
  - Every single time my child comes home from church
15. I know the spiritual condition of my children.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat Disagree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
16. I have a plan for the spiritual growth of my children.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat Disagree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
17. I expect the youth or children's pastor to make sure that my children come to faith in Christ and are baptized.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat Disagree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
18. Other than at meals, I pray out loud with my wife.
- Never
  - Only on Sundays during church
  - Once or twice a week
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Every day

19. I read Scripture out loud with my wife.
- Never
  - Only on Sundays during church
  - Once or twice a week
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Every day
20. I encourage my wife to memorize Bible verses.
- Never
  - Only on Sundays during church
  - Once or twice a week
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Every day
21. I regularly encourage my wife to read her own Bible, and share insights with me from what she read.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat Disagree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
22. I know the spiritual condition of my wife.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat Disagree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
23. I pray FOR the spiritual growth of my wife.
- Never
  - Only on Sundays during church
  - Once or twice a week
  - Three or four times
  - Five or six times
  - Every day

24. I have a plan for the spiritual growth of my wife.

- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Somewhat Disagree
- d. Somewhat Agree
- e. Agree
- f. Strongly Agree

25. It is my responsibility to ensure the spiritual growth of my family.

- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Somewhat Disagree
- d. Somewhat Agree
- e. Agree
- f. Strongly Agree

## APPENDIX 6

### POST-SERIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the overall benefit you have gained as a result of completing the equipping series for fathers and implementing your Family Spiritual Growth Plan with your families at home. This research is being conducted by Toby Havens for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

#### Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

Question 1: Describe your own spiritual life before completing this series, and describe how you personally have changed because of this series.

Question 2: Describe the emphasis you placed on nurturing the faith of your children before completing this series, and describe what has changed in the way you seek to nurture the faith of your family because of this series.

Question 3: Describe what faith–nurturing practices are continuing in your home since completing the equipping series, and what faith-nurturing practices were begun, but failed to continue. Explain why you think the practices ceased.

Question 4: Describe what has been the most significant positive change in the life of your family since you began to implement a Family Spiritual Growth Plan with your family.

Question 5: Describe what has been the most difficult adjustment in your family life since implementing your Family Spiritual Growth Plan at home.

Question 6: What do you think will be the main obstacles that will potentially hinder the continuation of your Family Spiritual Growth Plan, and what will be the key to the continuation of your plan?

Question 7: What can we do to improve the equipping series? What do you wish we had addressed in the curriculum? What in the curriculum did you feel was irrelevant?

## APPENDIX 7

### SESSION 1 LESSON TRANSCRIPT

#### Session 1: Theological Foundations

**Main Idea:** God has both called and equipped men to lead their families to treasure Jesus Christ.

**Goal:** The student will understand God's call for men to be the spiritual leaders at home as outlined in Ephesians 5:21-6:4.

#### **Introduction**

**Intro Video:** The Incredibles Dinner Scene:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvElQvrx7ns>

#### **Discuss:**

- What is your initial reaction to the family in this video?
- More specifically, how would you describe the father in how he relates to his family?
- The reality is that too many fathers are not engaged with their families, especially when it comes to matters of faith. Just as the mother was desperate for her husband to engage with the family, many wives and children are desperate for husbands and dads to be engaged in the life of the family, especially in the spiritual life of the family. God has called men as husbands and fathers to engage in the faith of their families, and be the spiritual leader within the home.
- Why do you think spiritual leadership in the home is so neglected by men? Why do we struggle to demonstrate spiritual leadership?

#### **Bible**

**Explain:** Throughout Scripture we find God instructing parents—especially men—to raise children to adore God (Deut 6:4ff.; Ps 78:4). We also find specific instruction for husbands to be the spiritual head of their household, which includes

leading not only their children, but also being the spiritual leader over their wives. With this in mind we are going to take a look at what is often referred to as the Household Codes in Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (Eph 5:22-6:4). (Provide Overall Context for the Epistle)

**Read:**

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

**Discuss:**

- What immediately comes to mind when you read that the husband is head of the wife, and that the wife is to submit to her husband?
- What do you think has shaped most men's understanding of leadership, headship, or "manliness"? (Most men are likely influenced by the culture's view of masculinity as seen in Hollywood, etc.)
- The husband/wife relationship is compared to the relationship that Jesus Christ has with his church. In what ways does Jesus act as head of the church? (As Savior, Jesus used his authority and power for the benefit of the church).
- How does Jesus' example of headship shape the way husbands are to lead their wives? (Obviously, a husband is not the Savior of his wife, but like Jesus, a husband's headship is to be used for the benefit of his family. When a wife knows her husband has her best in mind, she will likely be much more willing to demonstrate submission)
- Based on what we've just discussed, in your own words how would you define headship according to Jesus? (Record your answer on your worksheet)

**Read:**

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

**Discuss:**

- Interestingly, after pointing out a man's authority over his wife, Paul does not instruct men to exercise their authority over their wives, but rather to love their wives. How would you define love?

- What would you say is God’s definition of love? Does your definition match God’s?
- God’s definition of love includes both a choice and an action. He chooses to love an unworthy people (grace!) and he proves his love by allowing Jesus to die on our behalf (demonstration!). But what is most noteworthy in these verses is the purpose for which Jesus sacrificed himself. It gets a bit complicated, but there are three “so that” clauses which all seem to build upon one another. These three clauses are important because they show us that we are not merely called to sacrifice for our wives in a general manner, but God calls men to sacrifice specifically for the “spiritual beautification” of their wives and family. Let’s take a look at the three “so that” clauses.

**Read verse 26:** “So that he might sanctify her” (via cleansing with the word)

**Discuss:**

- What does sanctify mean? (to set apart as holy, set apart for God’s purpose).
- What do you think is the “word” in this verse, and what is its role? (The word is the gospel message. ELABORATE HERE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GOSPEL REPETITION AND APPLICATION).
- What might this look like at home?

**Read verse 27a:** So that he might present her to himself in splendor, without

spot

**Discuss:**

- What is Jesus’ goal for the church? (Spiritual maturity/Christian formation/growth in Christlikeness)
- How does this purpose shape a husband’s leadership?

**Read verse 27b:** So that she might be holy and without blemish (ethical,

moral lifestyle)

**Discuss:**

- This final clause seems a bit redundant, because it looks very similar to the previous clause. However, this clause points to the ethical, practical realm. Because of the inward spiritual change that Jesus brings, the outward actions are likewise changed.
- The bottom line of this entire passage is that Christ sacrificed himself for the spiritual beautification of his bride, the church. Based on what we’ve just discussed, in your own words, how does this truth shape the way you are called to lead your wife and family?

- In light of this truth, what should be the goal of your spiritual leadership in your own home? (Record your answer on your worksheet )
- In your own home, what are some hindrances to pursuing this goal?
- What are some sacrifices a man may have to make in order to pursue this goal for his family?

**Explain: We are going to take the rest of the passage together, and while it seems like two unrelated sections, we'll discover a vital connection shortly.**

**Read:**

<sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

**6** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup> “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), <sup>3</sup> “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” <sup>4</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

**Discuss:**

- In the first part of this passage the author, Paul, changes the metaphor from marriage to the body. Specifically, husbands and wives are one flesh. What is the significance of this image? (Your own body is important, so you take care of it. Because you and your wife are one flesh, you care for her as you would care for yourself.)
- What are some ways a man takes care of his own physical body? (Make a list together).
- In verse 29, what two words does Paul use to describe the care a man has for his own body? How specifically does a man nourish his body? How specifically does a man cherish his body?
- How does this picture of care for the body translate into the spiritual realm?
- Shifting gears slightly, look at 6:4 where Paul is instructing fathers on how to lead their children. Describe Paul’s instructions for fathers. What do you think he means? Describe the meaning of the phrase, “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”
- On your worksheet or in your bible, circle the word “nourish” in 5:29, and circle the phrase “bring them up” in 6:4. Interestingly, the words you just circled in the

original Greek text are actually the same word. There is much more going on in this passage, but for the sake of simplicity, I want us to see how Paul is using the same word—which includes the idea of raising one up from childhood into maturity—for how a man leads both his wife (5:29) and his children (6:4). There is certainly a physical aspect here, but more importantly there is a spiritual significance. Your leadership in the home is meant to lead your family to mature in their faith. Yes, we do seek this goal through the church, but you are also called to seek this goal in the life of your wife and children.

- Can you describe the spiritual growth in your wife and in your children over the past year? Over the past five years? What role have you played in the process?
- How have you encouraged spiritual growth in your family? In what ways have you neglected spiritual growth in your family?
- Based on what we've just discussed, what do you think is God's goal for you regarding the spiritual life of your family?

### **Closing**

- Review
  - Ephesians 5:22-24: A husband is the spiritual leader of his wife (and children!)
  - Ephesians 5:23-27: A husband sacrifices for the spiritual benefit of his wife (and children!)
  - Ephesians 5:28-32: A husband nurtures the faith of his wife
  - Ephesians 6:1-4: A father nurtures the faith of his children
- Think back to the family in the video we saw at the beginning of the session. In the midst of the chaos of family life the man was distracted and unengaged in the life of the family when he was most needed. Now think about your own family. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=low, 10=high), how engaged have you been in the spiritual life of your family?
- Based on this Passage we've studied, what is God calling you to do with your family? (Record on your worksheet)
- What changes need to happen? What successes can be celebrated?
- Assign homework, close in prayer.

APPENDIX 8

SESSION 1 STUDENT HANDOUT

**Session 1: A Man's Call to Lead His Family to Treasure Jesus Christ**

**Ephesians 5:22-24: A husband is the \_\_\_\_\_ of his wife (and children!)**

*<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

- Based on what we've just discussed, in your own words how would you define headship according to Jesus?

**Ephesians 5:23-27: A husband \_\_\_\_\_ for the spiritual benefit of his wife (and children!)**

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

*So that he might \_\_\_\_\_ (verse 26)*

- What does sanctify mean?
- What might this look like at home?

*So that he might \_\_\_\_\_ (Verse 27a)*

- What is Jesus' goal for the church?
- How does this purpose shape a husband's leadership?

*So that she might be \_\_\_\_\_ (Verse 27b)*

- In light of this truth, what should be the goal of your spiritual leadership in your own home?

**Ephesians 5:28-6:4: A husband/Father \_\_\_\_\_ the faith of his**

*<sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

*6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup> “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), <sup>3</sup> “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” <sup>4</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

- How have you encouraged spiritual growth in your family? In what ways have you neglected spiritual growth in your family?
- Based on what we’ve just discussed, what do you think is God’s goal for you regarding the spiritual life of your family?

**Based on this Passage we’ve studied, what is God calling you to do with your family?**

## APPENDIX 9

### SESSION 1 HOMEWORK

Goal: The learner will reinforce his understanding of God's call for men to be the spiritual leaders at home as outlined in Ephesians 5:21-6:4, and will take simple steps towards being the spiritual leader in his own home with his wife and children.

#### **COMPLETE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES DURING THE WEEK**

- Read Ephesians 5:21-6:4 once daily for 7 days, meditating on the nature of spiritual leadership. Be sure to focus more on what God is calling you to do than what God is calling the rest of the family to do. Pray for courage to become the spiritual leader of your family. Pray for each family member specifically.
- Evaluate the status of your spiritual leadership in your own home. Identify three things that hinder your own spiritual leadership. Consider what sacrifices may be called for in order to effectively lead your family as God has called you to do.

#### **IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE ASSIGNMENTS, SELECT AT LEAST THREE ACTIVITIES TO COMPLETE FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST:**

- Pray out loud with your wife at some point during the week other than at mealtime.
- Pray out loud with each of your children at some point during the week other than at mealtime.
- Gather your entire family together for prayer at some point during the week other than at mealtime. Lead the prayer out loud.
- Share your testimony with your wife, children or entire family of how you came to saving faith in Jesus. Ask to hear theirs.
- Share your favorite Bible verse with your wife, and explain what impact/influence it has had in your life. Ask her to share her favorite Scripture with you and to explain why she favors it.
- Share your favorite Bible verse with a child, and explain what impact/influence it has had in your life. Ask him/her to share a favorite Scripture with you and to explain why it is favored.
- Read a passage from the Bible such as Psalm 1:1-6 together with the whole family at some point during the week (perhaps before a meal or at bedtime?). Lead a brief discussion of the passage and close in prayer, asking God to bless your family and to help you delight in His word and follow His ways.

## APPENDIX 10

### SESSION 2 LESSON TRANSCRIPT

Session 2: You First, Dad.

**Main Idea:** In order lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ a man must himself treasure Christ through personal spiritual disciplines.

**Goal:** The student will be equipped in knowledge and practice to incorporate the spiritual disciplines of Bible intake, prayer, and worship into his personal life.

#### **Introduction**

Intro Video: The Making of Hero. (<https://vimeo.com/33091687>)

**Discuss:** What stands out to you as you watch this video? Did you catch how many ink dabs it took to create the picture of this guy's dad? (3.2 million!) How time consuming do you this process took? Do you think you would have the patience to do this type of art?

**Explain:** I love that the artist was completing a picture of his father. I love that he called the artwork "hero." But there is also a good lesson here for us in real life as fathers and husbands. Just as every single dot contributed to shaping, defining, and clarifying the picture of the father, in a similar manner every single action or activity we do in life—no matter how small—is involved in shaping us, defining us, and clarifying us. Think about all the stories you tell over and over of things you've done or things that have happened to you. Each moment has helped shape your life. Think of the victories. Think of the defeats. Think of the sins. Think of the brokenness. Think of the healing.

Think of the friends. Think of the hobbies. Think of the trials. Everything shapes you to one degree or another.

**Discuss:**

- What would you say are some of the most common “dots” that shape a man’s life?
- Perhaps the most important question to ask is this: Of all the “dots” that shape and define your own life, how many of them could be considered spiritual (i.e., having to do with the bible, prayer, or worship)? How many of those are intentional? How regularly do you seek to add spiritual “dots” to your life? On your worksheet, take a minute to make a list of the spiritual “dots” in your life.

**Explain:** In this session we are going to address THREE spiritual dots that are vital for a man to incorporate into his life in order to effectively be the spiritual leader within his home. These actions are both personal and intentional. The big idea is this: in order to lead your family to treasure Jesus, you have to treasure Jesus yourselves. *I’m not saying we don’t necessarily treasure Jesus when we don’t read our bible, but a lifetime of neglect towards God’s Word speaks volumes to our families...(Just Sayin’).*

**What are Spiritual Disciplines?**

**Discuss:** The activities we are talking about today are often called spiritual disciplines. What comes to mind when you think of *discipline* or *disciplines*?

**Read:** 1 Timothy 4:7 says, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness.”

**Explain:** the verb train yourself comes from the Greek word γυμνάζω . It was commonly found in literature referring to “gymnastic exercises in the nude: ‘exercise naked, train’; but also fig. of mental and spiritual powers: *to train, undergo discipline*”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “γυμνάζω.”

(No, I'm not advocating reading the bible naked at home!) (Elaborate...). Let's begin by defining what we mean when we use the term "spiritual disciplines." Here's a great definition: "those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times."<sup>2</sup>

Another definition:

"Spiritual Disciplines are activities, not attitudes. Disciplines are practices, not character qualities, graces, or "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). Disciplines are things you do—such as read, meditate, pray, fast, worship, serve, learn, and so on. The goal of practicing a given Discipline, of course, is not about doing as much as it is about being, that is, being like Jesus. But the biblical way to grow in being more like Jesus is through the rightly motivated doing of the biblical Spiritual Disciplines."<sup>3</sup>

Finally, here's a much simpler definition: those activities that allow us to "keep company" with Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

**Explain:** Although there are numerous activities we can do that help us to grow in our faith and "keep company" with Jesus, the three basic actions, or "dots" that we are going to examine this session include Bible intake, prayer, and worship. We will examine what it looks like for us to personally "exercise" our "train" ourselves for the purpose of godliness through these specific means. Before we address the WHAT and HOW, we need to understand WHY.

### **Why are the Disciplines Important?**

First, growth in our faith is expected. Consider these verses from Scripture:

- *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ....*(2 Pet 3:18)

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<sup>2</sup>Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 4.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 6.

<sup>4</sup>Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 15.

- ...make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge (2 Pet 1:15)
- ...we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Eph 4:15)
- ...long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation ( 1 Pet 2:2)
- Paul prays for the Colossian church that they may increase in the knowledge of God (Col 1:10)

Second, research shows that Parents have more influence in the spiritual lives of their children than any other factor. “Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents.”<sup>5</sup> Studies have shown that “youth who have a parent with a higher level of private religious practice (especially a parent who makes children the focus of her prayers) may follow the religious example of their parent.”<sup>6</sup> As Kendra Creasy Dean explains, “Awakening faith does not depend upon how hard we press young people to love God, but on how much we show them that we do.”<sup>7</sup> Dads, you model faith for your family. If you want your children to grow in their faith, you must seek to grow in yours.

### **The First “Dot”: Bible Intake**

**Discuss:** Why do we sometimes have such a “hard time” listening? What are some of the things that distract us or keep us from hearing those important requests from our wives (or even our bosses at work!)?

**Explain:** Let’s move this hearing problem into the spiritual realm. One writer points out, “God is a speaking God—and a speaking God calls for a listening people.”<sup>8</sup> What are some reasons why men often neglect or fail to listen to God, especially in terms

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<sup>5</sup>Christian Smith, with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>6</sup>Lisa D. Pearce, and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America’s Adolescents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64.

<sup>7</sup>Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Lewis, *The Message of the Living God: His Glory, His People, His World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 25.

of spending time in God’s Word? Take a minute on your worksheet to list the two or three greatest hindrances in your life to spending personal time in God’s Word.

**Read:** Psalm 1 together. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).

**Discuss:** How does this psalm describe the man who is blessed by God?

**Explain:** In this Psalm, the law of the Lord stands in direct contrast to other influences in the life of a man. Commenting on this passage, Derek Kidner points out that “whatever really shapes a man’s thinking shapes his life.”<sup>9</sup> We fill our minds with so much stuff (entertainment, sports, work, etc.). All this stuff shapes our lives (remember the dots/picture illustration!). This Psalm points out the necessity of allowing Scripture to shape our lives. God blesses the man who spends personal time with Him regularly.

**Discuss:** Clearly, time in God’s Word is vital. Let’s make a list of all the ways we can spend time in God’s Word.... (After some discussion, offer the following 5 excellent means, with explanation and practical examples)

1. Hear (typically in church...)
2. Read (a regular reading plan...)
3. Study (notebook, pen, resources...)
4. Meditate (think deeply upon...“letting the Bible brew in your brain”)
5. Memorize (Hide in your heart...)(When did you last memorize a Bible verse?)

**Explain:** It has been said that Bible intake is the most important of all the Spiritual disciplines. How would you describe your Bible intake? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is low, 10 is high) how would you rate your diet (Record on your worksheet)? Are

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<sup>9</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 48.

you satisfied with your score? Does your score demonstrate to your family that you treasure Jesus? Identify TWO of the Bible intake methods that you can easily incorporate this week into your personal life. Write them down, and describe how and when you will do them. What might have to be sacrificed? What in your schedule might have to be changed?

### **The Second “Dot”: Prayer**

**READ:** “*Pray without ceasing.*” (1 Thess 5:15)

**EXPLAIN:** EM Bounds writes, “When faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live.”<sup>10</sup> How many men claim to follow Jesus, yet show no spiritual heartbeat due to a lack of prayer? Let’s look at three aspects of prayer: Continual prayer, personal prayer, and praying specifically for your family.

#### **Continual Prayer**

**Explain:** The command to “pray without ceasing” may be confusing to some. R. Kent Hughes explains, “Is continual prayer possible? Yes and no. It is, of course, impossible to carry on a running dialogue while we are working or at other times, but the prayer called for here is not so much the articulation of words as the *posture of the heart.*”<sup>11</sup>

It means to continually respond to the various moments, events, and interactions in the day with prayer. When you observe a beautiful sunset, you pray a prayer of praise to God. When you observe suffering, you voice a prayer of concern to God. When you have hardship, you pray over your troubles (with thanks!) to God.

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<sup>10</sup>E. M. Bounds, “The Necessity of Prayer,” in *The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds on Prayer* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>11</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 97.

When you are promoted, you celebrate with a prayer of thanks, etc. This is what a posture of prayer looks like in the life of a believer.

**Discuss:** As husbands and fathers, what are some real examples of how we might bring such a posture of prayer into our homes?

## 1. PERSONAL PRAYER

**Explain:** Although Scripture instructs the believer to pray without ceasing, a dedicated daily time of personal prayer was also modeled by Jesus and others in the Bible. This personal time of prayer is what one author calls “fixed-hour” prayers.<sup>12</sup> Fixed-hour prayers are simply times set aside specifically for prayer, potentially along with personal Bible reading and meditation. Jesus modeled such dedicated prayer times as he sought to be alone to pray (Mark 1:35; Matt 14:23). Peter and John modeled fixed-hour prayer time as they went to the temple at a designated time of prayer (Acts 3:1). Peter climbs upon a roof alone to spend time in prayer (Acts 10:9).

Such times of prayer could be early in the morning (Ps 5:3), at night (Lam 2:19), or any time of the day, as the Psalmist declared, “Seven times a day I praise you” (Ps 119:164). For a man to lead his wife and children to treasure Jesus, personal prayer must be a priority; hence a man must discipline himself to set aside time for such an important task.

**Discuss:** Most of our prayers are offered before meals or on the fly, or when we are in a pickle. Why do you think it is difficult for us to set apart time specifically for prayer? What are some practical steps we can take to develop a dedicated prayer time? What are some ideal times for you to set aside specifically for prayer? What are some ways we can include our children and wives in a specific prayer time as well?

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<sup>12</sup>Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 223.

## 2. PRAYER FOR YOUR FAMILY

**Explain:** Here's a final encouragement on prayer: men, pray for your families. From R. Kent Hughes,

“On the evening Christ gave Himself up for us, John 17 tells us, He prayed in succession for Himself, for His twelve disciples, and for all of us who would later believe. When He finished praying for His future bride, He went to the cross. Then came His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His enthronement at the right hand of the Father, where He constantly makes intercession for us. Thus we understand that giving ourselves for our brides involves prayerful intercession. Men, do you pray for your wives with something more than, “Bless good old Margaret in all she does?” If not, you are sinning against her and against God. Most Christian men who claim to love their wives never offer more than a perfunctory nod to their wives’ needs before God. Men, you ought to have a list of her needs, spoken and unspoken, which you passionately hold up to God out of love for her. Praying is the marital work of a Christian husband.<sup>13</sup>

**Discuss:** What are some specific things we should we be praying for our wives? For our children?

**Discuss:** Think about your prayer life. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is low), how would you rate your own prayer life? Write the answer down on your worksheet. Are you satisfied with your score? Does your score demonstrate that you are the spiritual leader in your home? List two specific steps you can take to increase your prayer life.

### The Third “Dot”: Worship

**Discuss:** the third “dot” is a bit more difficult to define, but let’s try together. How would you define worship? What are some real world examples of worship?

**Explain:** There are two things worth noting about worship: First, worship is not primarily about us, but is about God. Second, worship is connected to our desires. One author explains, “Worship happens whenever we intentionally cherish God and

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<sup>13</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 36.

value him above all else in life. Worship reveals what is important to us.”<sup>14</sup> For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus, he must include worship in the spiritual practices of his life—in public, private, and family contexts—allowing his family to see that he genuinely values and cherishes Jesus.

**Public Worship:** Your worship of God is meant to be seen. On two occasions in the Old Testament, as God instructed parents to delight in His Word and to pass down a vibrant faith to their children, the Lord explained that the children would question, “What does this mean?” (Exod 13:14; Deut 6:20). God knew that as the children observed their parents delighting in and celebrating God and His Word, a healthy hunger for a deeper understanding of God would arise. Question to consider: does your family see you delighting in God and in His Word at church (Do they see you delight and participate, or do they just see you there?). Do they observe you focusing on God in public? ““We cannot expect our children to worship God consistently if we are not worshipping God consistently.”<sup>15</sup> One of the greatest influences a man can have in the life of his family is to demonstrate unashamed passion for the Lord through participation in the worship service at the local church.

**Personal Worship:** Your worship of God is meant to be taken outside the walls of the church.

**Read Quote:**

“So, if true worship is an inward experience that can take place anywhere, you may ask, what is the problem? Just this. Most teaching about worship rightly divides the topic into two parts, corporate worship and individual worship. Both are found in Scripture and both are strongly encouraged. Yet today there is so much emphasis on corporate worship that many believers never consider worshipping God privately.

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<sup>14</sup>Adele Alhberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 44.

<sup>15</sup>Patrick Kavanaugh, *Raising Children to Adore God: Instilling a Lifelong Passion for Worship* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2003), 32.

In other words, they spend a half hour or so each week in corporate worship and trust that they are meeting God's call. They are actually limiting themselves to worshiping only when they have a church, congregation and musicians available to help them!

It is because of this practice, perhaps more than any other reason, that so many sincere Christian parents have such a difficult time teaching their children to adore God.

Think about it. If our children hear us talk about our wonderful, magnificent God but note that we worship Him only once a week, even the youngest children figure out that our actions belie our words. They conclude: "Why should I bother worshiping this God so much, when my parents seldom do so?" Whether we know it or not, we have just created a huge obstacle in the spiritual training of those in our care."<sup>16</sup>

**Explain:** Kavanaugh rightly points out a significant problem. If his simple definition of worship as the "individual adoration of God" is true, then personal worship is essentially little more than a man simply delighting in Christ throughout the day.<sup>17</sup> Such joy in the Lord is what a family needs to observe in a husband and father. Personal worship is vital in the life of any man who wishes to lead his family deeper in the faith. How would you rate your level of "individual adoration of God"? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is low), write your answer on your worksheet. Why is it often hard for men to show delight in God publically?

### Closing

#### Recap:

- Define Spiritual Disciplines and their importance
- First Dot: Bible Intake
- Second Dot: Prayer
- Third Dot: Worship

**Explain:** Think back to the video we saw at the beginning of the session. Just as each individual dot helped shape the picture, we explained that every event (DOT!) in your life shapes you. I loved how the artist was drawing a picture of his father, and he

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<sup>16</sup>Patrick Kavanaugh, *Raising Children to Adore God*, 20-21.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 21.

called the work “hero.” Here’s something worth thinking about: Not only does every dot in your life shape you, but every dot that you family observes shapes their perception of you. Do they observe spiritual dots in your life? What are you willing to do, to add, to quit, or to sacrifice in order to establish a routine of spiritual dots—spiritual disciplines—as part of your life? Do they look to you for spiritual leadership in your home?

**Discuss:**

- According to some authors, family worship includes three things: Bible reading, prayer, and worship. How feasible is it for you to set a time for your family to do all three together weekly? (Examples)
- Based on this session, what is God calling you to do in your personal life? (record on your worksheet)
- What changes need to happen? What successes can be celebrated?
- Assign homework, close in prayer.

APPENDIX 11

SESSION 2 STUDENT HANDOUT

**Session 2: You First, Dad**

**Intro Video: The Making of Hero**

- What stands out to you as you watch this video? What are some of the most common “dots” that shape a man’s life?
- Of all the “dots” that shape your life, how many of them could be considered spiritual?
- Why are spiritual disciplines so vital?
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_

**The First Dot:** \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup>Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; <sup>2</sup>but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. –Psalm 1:1-2

- How does this Psalm describe the man who is blessed by God?

Five ways to get into God’s Word:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low), how satisfied are you with your level of Bible intake? Why?
  - What two methods of Bible intake can you incorporate into your personal life this week? How will you do it?

**The Second Dot:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Pray without ceasing. -1 Thessalonians 5:15*

*“When faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live.” –E.M. Bounds*

Three Considerations:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

On the evening Christ gave Himself up for us, John 17 tells us, He prayed in succession for Himself, for His twelve disciples, and for all of us who would later believe. When He finished praying for His future bride, He went to the cross. Then came His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His enthronement at the right hand of the Father, where He constantly makes intercession for us. Thus we understand that giving ourselves for our brides involves prayerful intercession. Men, do you pray for your wives with something more than, “Bless good old Margaret in all she does?” If not, you are sinning against her and against God. Most Christian men who claim to love their wives never offer more than a perfunctory nod to their wives’ needs before God. Men, you ought to have a list of her needs, spoken and unspoken, which you passionately hold up to God out of love for her. Praying is the marital work of a Christian husband.

*~R. Kent Hughes,  
Disciplines of a Godly Man*

**The Third Dot:** \_\_\_\_\_

- How do you define worship?

So, if true worship is an inward experience that can take place anywhere, you may ask, what is the problem? Just this. Most teaching about worship rightly divides the topic into two parts, corporate worship and individual worship. Both are found in Scripture and both are strongly encouraged. Yet today there is so much emphasis on corporate worship that many believers never consider worshiping God privately. In other words, they spend a half hour or so each week in corporate worship and trust that they are meeting God’s call. They are actually limiting themselves to worshiping only when they have a church, congregation and musicians available to help them!

It is because of this practice, perhaps more than any other reason, that so many sincere Christian parents have such a difficult time teaching their children to adore God. Think about it. If our children hear us talk about our wonderful, magnificent God but note that we worship Him only once a week, even the youngest children figure out that our actions belie our words. They conclude: “Why should I bother worshiping this God so much, when my parents seldom do so?” Whether we know it or not, we have just created a huge obstacle in the spiritual training of those in our care.

*~Patrick Kavanaugh, Raising Children to  
Adore God*

Think about it:

- How have you encouraged spiritual growth in your own life? In what ways have you neglected spiritual growth in your life?
- Based on what we've just discussed, what do you think is God's goal for you regarding the nurture and growth of your own faith?
- **What is God calling you to do next?**

## APPENDIX 12

### SESSION 2 HOMEWORK

Goal: The learner will reinforce his understanding of God's call for men to pursue the Lord through the practice of personal spiritual disciplines by taking simple, practical steps towards developing a regular routine of personal disciplines

#### **COMPLETE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES DURING THE WEEK**

- **Get into God's Word.** Read Psalm 119 according to the following schedule: Monday=Psalm 119:1-24, Tue=Psalm 119:25-48, Wed= Psalm 119:49-72, Thurs=Psalm 119:73-96, Fri=Psalm 119:97-120, Sat=Psalm 119:121-144, Sun=Psalm 119:145-176. From the Psalm each day, meditate on the role of God's Word in the life of a believer. Make a list each day of how God's Word is described along with its benefits.
- **Personal Evaluation.** Evaluate the status of the personal spiritual disciplines in your life (Bible Intake, Prayer, and Worship). Identify three things that hinder your own spiritual growth. In light of these hindrances, develop a simple plan to incorporate all three disciplines into your personal life regularly.

#### **IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE, SELECT AT LEAST THREE ACTIVITIES TO COMPLETE FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST:**

- **Get into God's Word.** Choose a Bible reading plan to begin to work through over the next year.
- **Prayer.** Pray out loud with your wife at least twice during the week other than at mealtime. Make a list of specific requests for each of your children, and pray over them.
- **Prayer.** Identify three times this week that you can set aside 10 minutes specifically for prayer. If possible, make a list of things to pray for and pray for each request specifically.
- **Get into God's Word.** Memorize Psalm 119:9-11 OR Memorize The Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13) this week.
- **Get into God's Word.** Read a passage from the Bible such as Psalm 119:1-11 together with the whole family at some point during the week (perhaps before a meal)

or at bedtime). Lead a brief discussion of the passage and close in prayer, asking God to bless your family and to help you delight in His word and follow His ways.

- **Worship.** Be intentional about looking for moments to praise God during the week (such as praising God for an awesome sunset, or thanking God for a safe commute, or praising God for blessing you with your family). Praise God out loud for these things in the moment, and invite your family into the moment of praise with you. Set a goal to find ten moments during the week.

## APPENDIX 13

### SESSION 3 LESSON TRANSCRIPT

#### Session 3: A Home Saturated with God's Word

**Main Idea:** In order lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ a man must saturate his home with God's Word.

**Goal:** The student will understand the importance and practice of allowing God's Word to have a constant presence in the family life.

#### **Review**

**Explain:** We've learned about the meaning of marriage and how a man is called to be the spiritual leader of his family. We've also spent time understanding what it meant to order your personal spiritual life around some of the spiritual disciplines.

#### **Discuss:**

- From your homework during this past week, what practice have you found to be the most challenging and why?
- Considering the challenges just mentioned, what are some ways we can work to overcome these specific difficulties in pursuing spiritual disciplines?

#### **Introduction**

**Explain:** Time in God's Word has already been introduced as part of the personal practices a man must incorporate into his life in order to lead his family to treasure Jesus. Because of the central role that Scripture plays in the spiritual formation of individuals, a man must seek to saturate not only his own private life, but also his entire home with God's Word. Scripture is a sufficient tool for guiding the family in all

areas of life. The Apostle Paul declared, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Scripture also clearly instructs parents to raise their children steeped in God’s Word (Deut 6:1-9; Ps 78:1-8; Eph 6:4). Consider God’s commands to his people in Deuteronomy 6:

**Read:**

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9)

**Discuss:**

- In this passage, what has God directed his people to do?
- What is Israel’s responsibility towards their children?
- In what manner is the teaching of God’s Word to be employed?

**Explain:** Teaching God’s Word is to encompass all aspects of life. Whether formal or informal, day or night, or at home or away, God’s Word is to have a constant presence in the family life. If a man is to lead his family to treasure Jesus, systematically exposing his family to and grounding his family in God’s Word is essential. In this session we are going to address some ways you can saturate your home with God’s Word. There are basically TWO CATEGORIES: Formal teaching and informal teaching. We’re going to explain the nature of both categories and offer some ideas. In your homework you’ll seek to incorporate some of the ideas in your own home.

### **Formal Teaching**

**Discuss:** What is the all-time favorite movie in your home? How many times has the family gathered together to watch it again? What about the favorite show? How

regularly do you watch it? How many lines can you or your children quote from the show? What are your favorite quotes? Why are you able to quote it so much? (Answer: *Time and repetition!*)

**Explain:** God’s command to his people concerning the need for parents to pass on their faith to their children is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 6:7:

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut 6:7 ESV)

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut 6:7 NIV)

The NIV translation uses the word “impress” regarding God’s command for parents and the ESV uses the phrase “teach them diligently.” The Hebrew word used here is a bit difficult, but the best way to understand this idea of teaching diligently or impressing truth upon your children is the idea of repetition.<sup>1</sup> The duty of parents is indeed to teach God’s Word, and teaching involves constant repetition.<sup>2</sup> One of the best ways to repeat God’s Word in the home is through some type of formal training. As Kendra Dean explains, “Exposing adolescents to faith...is no substitute for teaching it to them.”<sup>3</sup>

**Discuss:** What are some ways we can formally train our children in God’s Word in our own homes?

**Explain:** One good method is through Catechism. (Hand out several examples: Northstar Catechism, Baptist Catechism, Shorter Westminster, etc) A

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Gentry, “Equipping the Generations: Raising Children the Christian Way,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 2, no. 2 (2012): 9-10, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.sbts.edu/family/blog/raising-children-the-christian-way/>.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>3</sup>Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford, 210), 16.

catechism is merely “a summary of Christian doctrine put in the form of questions and answers.”<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett add, “It is the intentional passing on of the Faith, not merely for cognitive apprehension, but for the holistic transformation of individual believers and for the maturing of those believers together as the body of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> That sounds complicated but it is a rather simple, biblical practice and a proven effective means of passing on the faith.<sup>6</sup>

The general idea of catechesis is explained by Peter Schemm:

Practicing the art of catechesis is not complicated. It is as simple as selecting a question for the week and enfolding that question into our lives at various times—at church, in the truck, at bedtime, during a backyard conversation, or at the workbench in the garage. Once the routine is established, the weekly question flows naturally in and out of conversations with one another. Over time the warehouse of biblical and theological teaching gets stocked. Even at a modest forty or so weeks per year—allowing for other seasonal commitments and unexpected life events—this is one of the most effective means I know of to be “trained in the words of the faith” (1 Tim. 4.6).<sup>7</sup>

Catechisms are many and varied. Some focus on Scripture and theological truths. Others are framed around historical creeds or distinctive denominational beliefs. Resources for catechism are available for the man who chooses to lead his family through such a faith-forming activity. Any man who feels devoid of the knowledge necessary to teach his children Scripture will find the use of a catechism a valuable tool for the whole family. As Voddie Baucham points out, “The benefits catechism provides are needed by a spiritually immature father as well as by his children.”<sup>8</sup> This is good news to all of us!!!

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<sup>4</sup>Peter R. Schemm, Jr., “Habits of a Gospel-Centered Household,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 185.

<sup>5</sup>J. I. Packer, and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 42.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>7</sup>Schemm, “Habits of a Gospel-Centered Household,” 186.

<sup>8</sup>Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 63.

**Discuss:** Let's be honest here. What are your initial thoughts when the idea of catechism is brought up?

**Discuss:** We may not like this idea of repeating questions and answers based around God's Word over and over in our homes, but let's step back for a minute and talk about this: what are the consequences for not repeating God's Word in our homes regularly?

**Explain:** J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett call attention to the problem that arises when parents fail to nurture children in God's Word through catechism:

Because of our failure to obey the biblical mandates about raising children of the covenant within the Faith, we wind up having to do far too much remedial work among adults. By the time they reach adulthood, many of our members have already been so thoroughly catechized in unbiblical thinking and values that our efforts to catechize them in the Faith of the Gospel become truly a steep uphill climb through very difficult terrain.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the problem is not merely the lack of catechism in the faith, but the competing "counter-catechisms of the surrounding culture" that work against the very tenets of Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> Think about those favorite movies or shows that your family watches repeatedly and can quote by memory. That may seem innocent enough, but what about all the other movies, songs, and talk that your children are exposed to daily that you have no idea about? In a very real way, your child is being catechized by the world around him.

Listen to the rest of this quote:

*The counter-catechisms of our surrounding culture offer contrasting instructions regarding nearly every point of biblical catechesis. We would speak the Truth but our hearers have been schooled in numerous false-isms of the age. We witness to the Life that comes from a living relationship with the living God; our hearers have long been trained in the worship of assorted idols within the culture. We point toward and strive to lead in the Way; the culture has catechized our congregants*

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<sup>9</sup>Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 200.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 162.

toward a very different way—toward perverse practices and habits that are plainly not-the-way. We tell God’s redemptive Story; the culture propagates countless other narratives. We proclaim the Gospel, but pseudo-gospels have been trying to lead us astray for many years.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the vast influence of the culture, Packer and Parrett rightly point out, “The wise Christian catechist must discern the competing catechisms at work in controlling the heads, hearts, and hands of our congregants.”<sup>12</sup> At the family level, it is the father and husband’s task to ground his family through repeated exposure to God’s Word, not only for the purpose of shaping his family’s faith, but also to protect his family from evil influences. A man must rightly determine what Scriptures and doctrines are essential and lead his family to understand and apply them.

**Explain:** A second good method of formal training in God’s Word is a Family Faith Talk/Family Devotional/Family Worship. Less formal than Catechism, yet still formal in the sense of having an established time and agenda, is the family faith talk or family devotional.

**Discuss:** What are your immediate thoughts when you hear the phrase “family worship time” or “family devotional”?

**Explain:** Family Faith Talk can be defined as “a time set aside each week for families to gather around the Bible, its application to life, and the worship of Jesus.”<sup>13</sup> Although the busyness of family life will work against an established family faith talk, we must show leadership by “protecting time for the family to talk about the Word and learn to live God’s way.”<sup>14</sup> A faith talk is a planned conversation that you prepare for regularly in order to lead your family to treasure Jesus Christ.

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<sup>11</sup>Packer, and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 162-63.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>13</sup>Brian Haynes, *The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 2011), 45-46.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

There are plenty of resources to help men lead a family faith talk, such as various family devotion books or even a catechism (HAND OUT SOME RESOURCES). Essentially, a Family Faith Talk should incorporate three things: Bible, prayer, and song.<sup>15</sup> The simplest course of action for a man is to read systematically through Scripture together with his family and lead a brief family discussion on the passage covered that day followed by family prayer and perhaps a song of praise. A man must determine based on his family schedule how often the family faith talk should occur, whether daily, weekly, or several times a week. Nevertheless, the importance of such a time for the family to gather around God's word together is vital. Think about this quote:

If we are to raise a generation of kids who become adults madly in love with Christ we will have to worship the King in our living rooms. Our homes have been devoid of the worship of Christ in recent years leading our children to one practical conclusion: Christ is King at church but not at home."<sup>16</sup>

For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, he must lead his family to gather around Christ's Word in the home regularly.

**Discuss:** If you had to choose either catechism or family faith talk to begin this week, which one would you go for? Why? Why not the other? What would be your greatest concerns with using each method?

### **Informal Teaching**

**Explain:** Not only does God instruct parents towards structured, formal training in the faith, but parents are also commanded to teach children as they "walk along the way" (Deut 6:7). Informal teaching, explains Brian Haynes, occurs "as you travel through life together."<sup>17</sup> He writes,

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<sup>15</sup>Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 79.

<sup>16</sup>Brian Haynes, *The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting* (Nashville: Randall House, 2011), 46.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

Along the way, whether you are driving, flying, or walking, you will encounter countless opportunities to demonstrate Christian faith and to speak biblical truth into your child's life. It is a matter of learning how to capture "God moments." A God moment is just that: a moment ordained by God designed for parents to speak truth to their children in the midst of normal life situations. These moments are not manufactured but instead captured as they emerge for the purpose of leading our children spiritually.<sup>18</sup>

Such opportunities may present themselves in positive, celebratory moments, such as pointing to God's goodness during a spectacular sunset and explaining how "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Ps 19:1).

Informal teaching opportunities may also arise at inconvenient times, as when a child requires discipline at a time that interferes with one's busy schedule. A father must recognize that in such a moment his schedule has been, in the words of Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, "providentially hindered" by God in order to teach his children.<sup>19</sup> These everyday moments are prime opportunities for faith formation in the family. Tedd Tripp illuminates:

Honest, thorough, truly biblical communication is expensive. Insightful and penetrating conversations take time. Children require both time and flexibility. Children do not pour their hearts out or open themselves up on a demand schedule. A wise parent talks when the kids are in the mood. Every so often they will ask a question, make a comment, reveal some little aspect of their heart. In those times, when their conscience is stirred, you need to talk. This may require dropping everything else to seize a critical moment.<sup>20</sup>

**Discuss:** What are some real examples of teaching our children God's Word "on the go"?

**Explain:** Of course, a man shouldn't simply wait until the open door to speak God's Word into the family life. His life and relationships should be saturated with God's words regardless of whether or not it was solicited. "The most profound teaching

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<sup>18</sup>Brian Haynes, *The Legacy Path*, 54.

<sup>19</sup>Martha Peace, and Stuart W. Scott, *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2010), 57.

<sup>20</sup>Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2005), 90.

your child receives is the everyday talk from your mouth,” declares John Younts. He continues, “Your everyday talk reveals where your treasure is and, therefore, where you heart is. Does love for God dominate your thoughts and your everyday talk?”<sup>21</sup>

The man seeking to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ must ensure that his home is saturated with God’s Word, with repeated occasions of formal instruction along with Scripture-saturated “everyday talk” throughout the various rhythms of family life.

### **Closing**

#### **Discuss:**

- Why train our children at home rather than just letting the church take care of it?
- Why do you think it is so difficult for men to bring up God’s Word regularly?
- One final thought: although we are commanded to diligently, repeatedly train our children in God’s Word.... There is no perfect parent except God himself. Think of all the grace he has offered us, and still does, even when we fail to teach His Word in our own homes. Despite our past neglect, he has called and equipped you in Christ for this task.

Let’s take a few minutes to look over the homework assignments, and then I want you to map out a plan before you go home to bring God’s Word into your home regularly (Suggest some ideas). (Close in prayer.)

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<sup>21</sup>Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 95.

## APPENDIX 14

### SESSION 3 STUDENT HANDOUT

#### Session 3: Word Up!

##### Review:

- From your homework this past week, what practices have you found to be the most challenging and why? The most fruitful?
- Considering the challenges just mentioned, what are some ways we can work to overcome these specific difficulties in pursuing spiritual disciplines?

##### The Bottom Line: \_\_\_\_\_

4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9)

- What has God directed his people to do?
- In what manner is the teaching of God’s Word to be employed?
- What are some ways we can repeat God’s Word in our homes?

#### Formal Training

##### Two Good Options

1. \_\_\_\_\_

Because of our failure to obey the biblical mandates about raising children of the covenant within the Faith, we wind up having to do far too much remedial work among adults. By the time they reach adulthood, many of our members have already been so thoroughly catechized in unbiblical thinking and values that our efforts to catechize them in the Faith of the Gospel become truly a steep uphill climb through very difficult terrain.

The counter-catechisms of our surrounding culture offer contrasting instructions regarding nearly every point of biblical catechesis. We would speak the Truth but our hearers have been schooled in numerous false-isms of the age. We witness to

the Life that comes from a living relationship with the living God; our hearers have long been trained in the worship of assorted idols within the culture. We point toward and strive to lead in the Way; the culture has catechized our congregants toward a very different way—toward perverse practices and habits that are plainly not-the-way. We tell God’s redemptive Story; the culture propagates countless other narratives. We proclaim the Gospel, but pseudo-gospels have been trying to lead us astray for many years.<sup>1</sup>

2. \_\_\_\_\_

- If you had to choose either method, which would you choose? Why? Why not the other option?

### **Informal Training:**

- Look at Deut 6:7. Where does the teaching occur?
- What are some real life examples of on-the-go teaching?

Along the way, whether you are driving, flying, or walking, you will encounter countless opportunities to demonstrate Christian faith and to speak biblical truth into your child’s life. It is a matter of learning how to capture “God moments.” A God moment is just that: a moment ordained by God designed for parents to speak truth to their children in the midst of normal life situations. These moments are not manufactured but instead captured as they emerge for the purpose of leading our children spiritually.<sup>2</sup>

Honest, thorough, truly biblical communication is expensive. Insightful and penetrating conversations take time. Children require both time and flexibility. Children do not pour their hearts out or open themselves up on a demand schedule. A wise parent talks when the kids are in the mood. Every so often they will ask a question, make a comment, reveal some little aspect of their heart. In those times, when their conscience is stirred, you need to talk. This may require dropping everything else to seize a critical moment.<sup>3</sup>

- To what degree have you fought to make God’s Word a priority in your home?
- Based on what we’ve just discussed, what do you think is God’s goal for you regarding the presence of God’s Word in the home?

What is God calling you to do next?

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<sup>1</sup>J.I. Packer, and Gary Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 162-163.

<sup>2</sup>Brian Haynes, *The Legacy Path*, 46.

<sup>3</sup>Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2005),

## APPENDIX 15

### SESSION 3 HOMEWORK

Goal: to reinforce your understanding of God's call for a man to saturate his home with God's Word by taking simple, practical steps towards exposing your own family to God's word this week.

#### **COMPLETE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES DURING THE WEEK**

- Identify three times this week that your family can set aside 10 minutes to read Scripture, pray, and offer praise to God. (suggested Bible passages: Psalm 150:1-6; Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 19:14; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 4:32)
- Pray out loud with you wife three times this week other than at meals. Pray for your family. Pray specifically for God's Word to flourish in your home. Pray that your children would delight in God's Word.

#### **IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE ASSIGNMENTS, SELECT TWO ACTIVITIES TO COMPLETE FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST:**

- Choose a weekly or daily Family Devotional resource to work through over the next year with your family.
- Select a children's storybook Bible to begin reading regularly to your younger children.
- Choose a "verse of the week" for the entire family to memorize. Be sure to review it with family at meals, during drive times, and other key times during the week. Consider rewarding the family for memorizing the verse. Think about visible ways to post the verse for the family to see regularly.
- Choose a simple catechism to begin quizzing with your children. Start with three questions. Make it fun.
- Be intentional to talk with your wife or children about a verse you recently read during your personal time with God that gave you direction or helped you grow in your faith.
- Ask your family about their most recent Sunday school lesson. Ask what they studied and what they learned. Tell them about what your class studied and what you learned.

- Discuss the Bible passage preached in the most recent worship service at church. Ask about the main points of the passage and how they can apply to the daily life of the family.

## APPENDIX 16

### SESSION 4 LESSON TRANSCRIPT

#### Session 4: A Gospel-Centered Home

**Main Idea:** In order lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ a man must center his home around the Gospel.

**Goal:** The student will understand what it means to align the family life within the framework of the Gospel.

#### **Introduction**

**Discuss:** It has been observed: “Adults and children alike use stories to help them make sense of their lives.”<sup>1</sup> What are the great stories in life that men, women, children, and families tend to embrace and try to find themselves in? (Examples: girls try to fit themselves into the Disney princess stories, boys try to fit themselves into a sports hero/war hero story, women try to fit themselves into a romance story, Men into a Mad Men story, etc.)

**Explain:** The truth is that we all love stories and we all try to fit our lives into a story. The world is constantly telling us what that great story of our live should be. God’s Word, however, tells a different great story. The question for us this: In which story is your family taking part? If an outsider were to observe your family, what great story would he observe? Take a minute to honestly think about it, and write it down on your student handout. Maybe there are several stories present in your family life? (Allow

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<sup>1</sup>Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 82.

a few minutes) In this session we are going to talk about making our home Gospel-centered. A home centered on the Gospel is a home that embraces God's story as the metanarrative that brings meaning to everything else.

**Discuss:** I've used the word "Gospel" several times now, but before we go any further we need to define it. How would you define the word "Gospel"?

**Explain:** Greg Gilbert keenly observes that there are two different, yet equally biblical ways to answer the question, "What is the gospel?"<sup>2</sup> One answer seeks to define the gospel in terms of the message a person must believe to be saved. By this route, many people understand the gospel in terms of propositional truths about God's holiness, Man's sinfulness, Jesus Christ's substitutionary atonement, and man's required response of faith. These propositions must be understood and believed in order to be saved. These scriptural truths also call for a specific response of faith in Jesus alone, which is why believers are to preach them to the unsaved.

The second way the gospel can be defined is in terms of the whole good news of Christianity. This definition of gospel encompasses the big picture of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation as the good news of God's work to redeem all creation, and especially humanity, in Christ. For our sake today, the gospel will be understood as the whole good news of Christianity, because God's Word to humanity is indeed more than just a set of propositional truths to believe. God has given his Word in the context of an overarching, good news story from Genesis to Revelation that highlights God's glory and grace. Naturally, the propositional truths that make up the first definition of gospel are included within the broader definition of the second. For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ, he must make his home gospel-centered, framing family life in

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<sup>2</sup>Greg Gilbert, "Addendum: What is the Gospel," in *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology* by Mark Dever et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 121-123.

terms of the whole good news of Christianity.

Ultimately, the gospel, as God’s grand story, is the “primary meaning-making narrative” that should shape the family.<sup>3</sup> In God’s gospel story, God is the main actor—working specifically through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:3-4). Ever since Adam’s first sin in Genesis chapter three, however, this world has been “permeated by a very different story.”<sup>4</sup> Michele Anthony writes,

Sometimes I am tempted to believe that I am the main character, that the story is really about me—because after all, I am in every scene. But that’s a lie. It’s a lie that our children are told on every TV channel, in every advertisement, and in every song. Sometimes it’s blatant and sometimes sublime, but nonetheless they are being made to believe that the greatest story ever told is happening in their obscure little world.<sup>5</sup>

**Explain:** A gospel-centered home directs the family to a purpose and mission in life flowing contrary to the culture’s pseudo-gospel stories. God’s gospel story flows directly from his heart to see the nations revel in his own glory. However, the story must be told well. As Kendra Dean points out, when the gospel story remains untold, or inadequately taught, young people look for meaning elsewhere. She writes,

Youth are unlikely to take hold of a “god” who is too limp to take hold of them. Perhaps young people lack robust Christian identities because churches offer such a stripped-down version of Christianity that it no longer poses a viable alternative to imposter spiritualities like Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. If teenagers lack an articulate faith, maybe it is because the faith we show them is too spineless to merit much in the way of conversation. Maybe teenagers’ inability to talk about religion is not because the church inspires a faith too deep for words, but because the God-story that we tell is too vapid to merit more than a superficial vocabulary.<sup>6</sup>

**Explain:** It is vital for families to “know the whole story of God, meet God in the story, and make God’s story their story.”<sup>7</sup> In order to make his home gospel-centered,

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<sup>3</sup>Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 84.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>5</sup>Michele Anthony, *Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today’s Families* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 45.

<sup>6</sup>Kendra Dean, *Almost Christian*, 36.

<sup>7</sup>Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 83.

a man must be able to tell a better story than the world, find ways to repeat the great story, and show how the gospel story applies within the home. These are the three points for us today.

### **Tell a Better Story: The Gospel**

**Explain:** Voddie Baucham's declares the gospel to be "the glorious, Christ-centered, cross-centered, grace-centered news of what God has done in Jesus Christ (the last Adam) to redeem man from the fall of his federal head (the first Adam) and to give man an eschatological hope that all things will eventually be redeemed in Christ."

**Discuss:** By this definition, who is the main character? (Jesus!) Who is NOT the main character? (man!) **EXPLAIN:** This description of the gospel story offers a clear hero with a heroic feat and a gracious invitation for humanity to find their place in God's grand story. This definition also offers us an excellent starting point for understanding the gospel.

#### **Christ-Centered.**

**Discuss:** Why is it important for the story we tell to be Christ-centered?

**Explain:** While Scripture saturation in the home is important, to immerse the family in the Scriptures apart from the context of the gospel story can lead to legalism, leaving an individual striving to be the hero of his own story by seeking to conquer the law through self-effort. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson declare in no uncertain terms: "Everything that isn't gospel is law." They write,

Every way we try to make our kids good that isn't rooted in the good news of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ is damnable, crushing, despair-breeding, Pharisee-producing law. We won't get the results we want from the law. We'll get either shallow self-righteousness or blazing rebellion or both (frequently from the same kid on the same day!). We'll get moralistic kids who are cold and hypocritical and who look down on others (and could easily become

Mormons), or you'll get teens who are rebellious and self-indulgent and who can't wait to get out of the house. We have to remember that in the life of our unregenerate children, the law is given for one reason only: to crush their self-confidence and drive them to Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Fitzpatrick and Thompson are certainly echoing the Apostle Paul's words declaring that the law is a tutor pointing directly to Christ (Gal 3:24). It is important to realize that humanity's unworthiness leaves everyone in need of a Savior. Only Jesus is worthy to be the hero in God's gospel story (Heb 3:1-6). Whenever a man ceases to point his family to Christ, he is left placing the harsh burden of the law upon his home and subtly establishes a lie declaring that through self-effort, anyone can become the hero of the story.

### **Cross-Centered.**

**Discuss:** What are some reasons that it is important for our story to be Cross-centered?

**Explain:** Sin is an ugly offense against a holy God. Yet today's culture hardly blinks at sin. D. A. Carson observes, "The hardest truth to get across to this generation is what the Bible says about sin."<sup>9</sup> Carson continues,

In the Bible the most fundamental category of all to which the biblical writers resort in order to portray the nature of the problem is our offensiveness before God. It follows that what is needed first and foremost for us to be saved—for this situation to change—is to provide a means by which we may be reconciled to this God.<sup>10</sup>

In order to grasp the importance of the cross in the gospel story, one must comprehend God's response to sin. Leon Morris explains,

If God really made the universe a moral universe in which punishment follows sin,

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<sup>8</sup>Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, and Jessica Thompson, *Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids With the Love of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 36.

<sup>9</sup>D. A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 41.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

then He cannot be exempted from responsibility when it does so. We may choose to call the result the outworking of the wrath of God as the scriptural writers do, or we may prefer some other way of putting it, but the important thing is that we do not overlook the fact. Scripture is insistent that God reacts in the strongest possible way to men's sin.<sup>11</sup>

**Explain:** God's strongest reaction to sin is to condemn sinners to death and hell—something all mankind deserves (Rom 3:23). Yet in an equally strong response to sin, God chose to place his full wrath upon Jesus as he suffered on the cross in the place of sinners. The blood of Jesus shed at the cross satisfied God's wrath against man's sin (Rom 5:9). At the cross, all guilt is absolved (Col 2:14). Through the cross, peace with God is offered (Col 1:20). The cross is indeed wonderful. In God's story, only Christ could bear the cross on behalf of sinners (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24). The cross is good news. Teaching the depth and significance of the cross in the home is foundational to keeping the home gospel-centered.

### **Grace-Centered.**

**Discuss:** What is Grace? Why do you think it is important for the story we teach the family to be Grace-centered?

**Explain:** Grace, according to Wayne Grudem, is God's "unmerited favor."<sup>12</sup> William Farley argues, however, that such a definition is incomplete. He explains that grace should be more specifically defined as God's "reward, or favor, given to those who *deserve judgment*."<sup>13</sup> One theologian observes, "Since man is fallen and cursed, any favor shown by God to him is surprising."<sup>14</sup> Grace leaves no room for self-effort before

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<sup>11</sup>Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 224.

<sup>12</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 729.

<sup>13</sup>William P. Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2009), 89.

God (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 11:6). Only because of God’s grace—through Christ and his cross—can a believer approach God (Heb 4:6).

Grace also points the believer to more than undeserved blessings from God. Second Corinthians 8:9 declares, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Grace reminds believers of the cost God was willing to pay. A gospel-centered home will never lose sight of the fact that the goodness God bestows upon his people is completely undeserved, unmerited, and not cheap. Such grace offers both motivation and power for God’s people to live Christ-honoring lives (2 Cor 12:9; 2 Tim 2:1; Titus 2:11-12).

**Discuss:** The gospel story is Christ-centered, Cross-Centered, and Grace-centered. Which of these elements is the most difficult to bring up in the home? If you grew up in a Christian home, to what extent was your family life Christ-centered, cross-centered, or grace-centered?

### **Repeat the Better Story**

**Explain:** If the gospel story is to sink deep into the heart of the family, a man must intentionally ensure that the truths of the gospel are regularly repeated and rehearsed in the home. C. J. Mahaney explains,

Reminding ourselves of the gospel is the most important daily habit we can establish. If the gospel is the most vital news in the world, and if salvation by grace is the defining truth of our existence, we should create ways to immerse ourselves in these truths every day. No days off.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2002), 425.

<sup>15</sup>C.J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2002), 54.

**Discuss:** What are some ways we can repeat the Gospel story in our homes on a regular basis? Let's try to come up with 12.

**Explain:** From his book, *The Cross Centered Life*, Mahaney offers five actions any believer can do to keep focused on the gospel, each of which can easily be modified by a man to utilize in the home in order to keep the gospel central.<sup>16</sup>

A) **Memorize the gospel.** The significance of Scripture memory has already been addressed in the previous session; however, to memorize the gospel is to memorize specific passages that explain gospel truths, such as Isaiah 53:3-6; Romans 3:23-26; Romans 5:6-11; Romans 8:32-39; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; and Galatians 2:21. Each passage speaks of God's work of salvation through Christ and the cross. To memorize such Scriptures in the home will help the family keep the gospel in mind.

B) **Pray the gospel.** Mahaney offers this explanation for how to pray the gospel:

To pray the gospel, simply begin by thanking God for the blessing of eternal life, purchased through the death of His Son. Acknowledge that Christ's work on the cross is what makes your very prayer possible.

Thank Him that, because Jesus bore God's wrath for sin, you will never be separated from God's love. Thank Him that, because of the cross, you are reconciled to God and have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell in you, lead you, guide you, and empower you to resist sin and serve God. Then ask God to bless you graciously with all that you need to obey and glorify Him.<sup>17</sup>

**Explain:** When a man prays such gospel centered prayers in his home, it allows the family to hear the gospel truths repeated and reinforced.

C) **Sing the gospel.** (Seriously, no laughing here, gentlemen!) There are plenty of appropriate songs available, ranging from children's songs to worship anthems sung at church. The gospel is found in many old hymns such as *The Old Rugged Cross* or in contemporary works such as *In Christ Alone*, by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend. The key is to ensure that the songs are centered on the cross. Such songs would be an excellent choice to incorporate during a family faith talk.

D) **Meditating on one's own testimony** regarding how God has changed his life is useful for pointing others to the gospel. Rather than trying to forget the past,

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<sup>16</sup>Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, 56-69.

<sup>17</sup>Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, 61-62.

Mahaney suggests that believers think about how God graciously saved and cleansed them from sin. One must allow his past to point to the cross. Although a man may choose to use wise discretion regarding subject matter, his family needs to hear him articulate how God has saved him and changed his life.

- E) **Study the gospel.** Mahaney declares, “Never be content with your current grasp of the gospel. The gospel is life-permeating, world-altering, universe-changing truth. It has more facets than any diamond. Its depths man will never exhaust.”<sup>18</sup> In order to deepen one’s understanding of the gospel, Mahaney suggests spending time in explicitly gospel-saturated books of the Bible such as Galatians or Romans, or by reading books that illuminate the cross such as *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott.

**Discuss:** If a man desires to lead his home to be gospel-centered, repetition of the gospel story through various means is imperative. Which of these 5 methods would you say is a possible option in your home this week? Why? Which do you think would be the most difficult to do? Why?

### **Apply the Better Story**

**Explain:** Repetition of the gospel story must be accompanied by application of the gospel truths. Certainly a primary application of the gospel is for one to recognize God’s goodness, man’s sinfulness, and Christ’s sacrifice. One must also respond with appropriate repentance by turning away from sin and self-idolatry and by turning towards Jesus with saving faith. The gospel, however, is more than a one-time decision. The gospel is meant to be applied to the daily decisions of life, because God intends for the lives of His people to be shaped by the gospel story.<sup>19</sup> To apply the gospel means for one to “approach every decision with the one good story, the gospel story, in mind.”<sup>20</sup>

**Discuss:** What do you think it looks like for a person to approach every decision with the Gospel in mind?

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<sup>18</sup>C.J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, 67.

<sup>19</sup> Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 83.

<sup>20</sup>Fitzpatrick and Thompson, *Give Them Grace*, 113.

**Explain:** One excellent way of applying the gospel is through asking gospel-oriented questions when faced with various choices in the life of the family. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson offer a helpful list of questions for use in the family decision making process:<sup>21</sup>

1. What does the gospel teach me about this choice?
2. Where do I see the great king in this situation?
3. What does the activity of the beloved Son teach me about this?
4. Is this a trick of the wicked Imposter?
5. What am I believing when I forbid or allow this?
6. Is my allowance of this choice a function of love for God or love for the world, or is it something else entirely?
7. Am I remembering the Great Commandment to love my neighbor and seeking to fulfill the Great Commission to share the gospel with him as part of a relationship?
8. Am I building a fortress of piety in an effort to keep the bad out and the good in? Or am I naively inviting the wicked Imposter into my family?

**Explain:** These questions provide excellent criteria by which a man can seek to keep his home gospel-centered. With some decisions, even allowing the whole family to wrestle together with the answers to some of these questions may be an effective means of training the family to apply the gospel to daily life.

**Discuss:** Let's take a few real life issues and run them through the grid of these questions. (Examples: A specific current movie for the family to watch (Deadpool), A Job promotion that will require significant time investment, taking children to an abundance of extracurricular activities, etc.)

**Explain:** Another means of gospel application comes through the process of discipline and restoration in the home. William Farley encourages parents to “make each discipline event an occasion to teach, re-explain, and reinforce the gospel.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Fitzpatrick and Thompson, *Give Them Grace*, 113-4.

<sup>22</sup>William P. Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 166.

**Discuss:** For most of us, any time of giving discipline to a child is unpleasant. What is typically our main focus, or main objective when we are having to discipline our children? How can we approach discipline from a potentially better perspective, and use it as a teaching opportunity with the Gospel in mind?

**Discuss:** To incorporate the gospel in the discipline time involves explaining the consequences of the sin before God along with the wrath and punishment that are deserved, followed by the good news of God's love as demonstrated through Jesus as a substitute on the cross. It should be carefully explained that only through faith in Jesus alone does God forgive, accept, and clothe the believer in Christ's righteousness.<sup>23</sup>

John Younts offers one example of gospel-centered discipline:

When your children complain that they can't do what God wants, you will seize the opportunity to respond with the powerful gospel of grace. This is your opportunity to say, "Sweetheart, I know that you can't obey by yourself. This is why Jesus died. He did what you cannot do. Now He can help you to trust Him. Let's ask Jesus to forgive you and help you love Him by the power of His gospel."<sup>24</sup>

**Role Play:** Scenario 1: You find porn on your teenage son's phone. How can you allow the better story (Gospel!) to shape your response? How can you show the gospel in your discipline? Scenario 2: You're wife overspent from your checking account during a month when money is super tight. How can you allow the better story (Gospel!) to shape your response? Scenario 3: You've harshly (wrongly) dealt with your elementary daughter during a time of discipline. How can you allow the better story (Gospel!) to shape your response?

**Explain:** A third excellent means of telling a better story is to lead your family to serve the neighbors, serve in church, or serve on a mission trip together or

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<sup>23</sup>William P. Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 169.

<sup>24</sup>John A. Younts, *Everyday Talk*, 27.

individually. When we serve in Jesus name, we are reminded that we are not the hero of our story and that there is a greater story in which we are taking part.

**Discuss:** What are some ways you can lead your family to serve your neighbors? Serve in church? Serve on Mission Trips?

### **Closing**

**Discuss:** let's return to a question asked earlier, and to the answers you wrote on your student handout: In which story is your family taking part? If an outsider were to observe your family, what great story would he observe? Take a few minutes to think about your answer from earlier. After our discussion on telling a better story, would your answer change? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is low) how well have you been telling the greatest story with your family?

**Discuss:** We've mentioned three aspects of telling a better story: Know the better story (Christ-centered, cross-centered, grace-centered), Repeat the better story, and Apply the Better Story to life situations. Which is the most challenging to you, and why?

**Explain:** The good news is that the grace that is revealed in the big story is immediately applied to you right now. We've all failed at bringing the Gospel into our homes and making it a central focus of our families. God's grace offers us a new day tomorrow. And the next day. And again the next day. The homework will be a challenge, but over time it will be worth it. (Close in prayer.)

## APPENDIX 17

### SESSION 4 STUDENT HANDOUT

#### Session 4: Story Time!

##### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ **A BETTER STORY:**

Sometimes I am tempted to believe that I am the main character, that the story is really about me—because after all, I am in every scene. But that’s a lie. It’s a lie that our children are told on every TV channel, in every advertisement, and in every song. Sometimes it’s blatant and sometimes sublime, but nonetheless they are being made to believe that the greatest story ever told is happening in their obscure little world. (Michele Anthony, *Spiritual Parenting*)

Youth are unlikely to take hold of a “god” who is too limp to take hold of them. Perhaps young people lack robust Christian identities because churches offer such a stripped-down version of Christianity that it no longer poses a viable alternative to imposter spiritualities like Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. If teenagers lack an articulate faith, maybe it is because the faith we show them is too spineless to merit much in the way of conversation. Maybe teenagers’ inability to talk about religion is not because the church inspires a faith too deep for words, but because the God-story that we tell is too vapid to merit more than a superficial vocabulary. (Kendra Dean, *Almost Christian*)

#### **Three Keys:**

##### 1. \_\_\_\_\_-Centered

Every way we try to make our kids good that isn’t rooted in the good news of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ is damnable, crushing, despair-breeding, Pharisee-producing law. We won’t get the results we want from the law. We’ll get either shallow self-righteousness or blazing rebellion or both (frequently from the same kid on the same day!). We’ll get moralistic kids who are cold and hypocritical and who look down on others (and could easily become Mormons), or you’ll get teens who are rebellious and self-indulgent and who can’t wait to get out of the house. We have to remember that in the life of our unregenerate children, the law is given for one reason only: to crush their self-confidence and drive them to Christ. (Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, and Jessica Thompson, *Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids With the Love of Jesus*)

##### 2. \_\_\_\_\_-Centered

In the Bible the most fundamental category of all to which the biblical writers resort

in order to portray the nature of the problem is our offensiveness before God. It follows that what is needed first and foremost for us to be saved—for this situation to change—is to provide a means by which we may be reconciled to this God. (D. A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus*)

3. \_\_\_\_\_-Centered

Grace: reward, or favor, given to those who deserve judgment.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ **THE BETTER STORY:**

Reminding ourselves of the gospel is the most important daily habit we can establish. If the gospel is the most vital news in the world, and if salvation by grace is the defining truth of our existence, we should create ways to immerse ourselves in these truths every day. No days off. (C.J Mahaney, *The Cross-Centered Life*)

**Five Ways to Repeat the Story:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (Isaiah 53:3-6; Romans 3:23-26; Romans 5:6-11; Romans 8:32-39; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; and Galatians 2:21)

2. \_\_\_\_\_

To pray the gospel, simply begin by thanking God for the blessing of eternal life, purchased through the death of His Son. Acknowledge that Christ's work on the cross is what makes your very prayer possible... Thank Him that, because Jesus bore God's wrath for sin, you will never be separated from God's love. Thank Him that, because of the cross, you are reconciled to God and have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell in you, lead you, guide you, and empower you to resist sin and serve God. Then ask God to bless you graciously with all that you need to obey and glorify Him. (C.J. Mahaney, *The Cross-Centered Life*)

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ **THE BETTER STORY**

**Three Ways:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

- What does the gospel teach me about this choice?
- Where do I see the great king in this situation?
- What does the activity of the beloved Son teach me about this?
- Is this a trick of the wicked Imposter?
- What am I believing when I forbid or allow this?

- Is my allowance of this choice a function of love for God or love for the world, or is it something else entirely?
- Am I remembering the Great Commandment to love my neighbor and seeking to fulfill the Great Commission to share the gospel with him as part of a relationship?
- Am I building a fortress of piety in an effort to keep the bad out and the good in? Or am I naively inviting the wicked Imposter into my family?

2. \_\_\_\_\_

When your children complain that they can't do what God wants, you will seize the opportunity to respond with the powerful gospel of grace. This is your opportunity to say, "Sweetheart, I know that you can't obey by yourself. This is why Jesus died. He did what you cannot do. Now He can help you to trust Him. Let's ask Jesus to forgive you and help you love Him by the power of His gospel. (John Younts, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*)

3. \_\_\_\_\_

- To what degree is your home Gospel-Centered? What are the primary stories being told in your home? How are they Christ-centered, Cross-centered, or Grace-centered?

What is your next step?

## APPENDIX 18

### SESSION 4 HOMEWORK

Goal: to reinforce your understanding of God's call for you to center your home on the Gospel by taking simple, practical steps towards telling God's story at home, repeating the story, and applying the story.

#### **COMPLETE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES DURING THE WEEK**

- **Objective 1: Tell the Gospel Story:** Identify three times this week that your family can set aside 10 minutes to read a Gospel specific Scripture, pray, and offer praise to God. (Suggested Bible passages: 1 Corinthians 15:3–4; Romans 3:23–24; 1 Peter 2:22–25; Galatians 3:13–14; Ephesians 2:4–5; Philippians 2:6–8; Colossians 1:19–20; Colossians 2:13–14; Titus 3:4–7; Isaiah 53:4–6; Hebrews 2:14-17.)
- **Objective 2: Reinforce the Gospel in the lives of your family.** Pray out loud with you wife three times this week other than at meals. Pray for your family. Pray specifically for God's Story to be the passion in your home. Pray that your children would find their place in God's story and would delight in taking part in God's mission and purpose in the world.

#### **IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE ASSIGNMENTS, SELECT TWO OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES TO COMPLETE:**

- **Objective: Know & repeat the Gospel story.** Memorize a specific Gospel passage. Choose one: 1 Corinthians 15:3–4; Romans 3:23–24; 1 Peter 2:22–25; Galatians 3:13–14; Ephesians 2:4–5; Philippians 2:6–8; Colossians 1:19–20; Colossians 2:13–14; Titus 3:4–7; Isaiah 53:4–6; Hebrews 2:14-17. Make it a “verse of the week” for the entire family. Review it with family at meals, during drive times, and other key times during the week. Think about visible ways to post the verse for the family to see regularly.
- **Objective: Reinforce the Gospel in the lives of your children.** Pray the Gospel over your children at bedtime. Use the prayer from your class handout as a guide.
- **Objective: Tell the Gospel story.** Meditate on your own testimony of how God saved you through Jesus. Rehearse it. Tell it to your wife and family. Ask your wife to share her story with you and the children.

- **Objective: Study the Gospel.** Begin reading either *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* by John Piper (short read) or *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott (longer book).
- **Objective: Reinforce the Gospel story.** Following a favorite television show or movie, discuss with the family what big story was being told. Ask the family to identify how the show pointed to God's grander story. Are there any similarities? Ask the family to identify ways the show contradicted God's great story. You can use the 3D tool from Walt Mueller for help, which will be provided by Toby.
- **Objective: Apply the Gospel.** During a time of discipline with a child, calmly use the moment to point to the Gospel.
- **Objective: Apply the Gospel.** With your wife (and family if appropriate), use the Gospel oriented questions from your class handout to evaluate a decision that needs to be made this week.

## APPENDIX 17

### SESSION 5 LESSON TRANSCRIPT

#### Session 5: An Intentional Plan

**Main Idea:** In order lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ a man must have an intentional plan.

**Goal:** The student will understand what it means to have a vision for the family, evaluate each family member's spiritual condition, and draft a plan to lead the family towards a deeper faith in Jesus.

#### **Introduction**

**Discuss:** Up to this point we have covered some important issues such as the nature of male headship in the home, the importance of pursuing spiritual disciplines in your own life, the need to saturate your family time with God's Word, and seeking to make your home gospel-centered. These are all excellent practices for a man to incorporate into the family life. Let's be honest here. Which of these concepts is the most difficult in this stage of your life and family life to incorporate successfully?

**Explain:** While these practices are necessary, to effectively lead one's family to treasure Jesus also requires an intentional plan for leading the family in these arenas. This final section addresses some necessary ingredients for implementing a Family Spiritual Growth Plan. A Family Spiritual Growth Plan is a written plan of action outlining the intentional practices that a father will explicitly utilize in order to nurture the faith of his family as a whole and each member individually. The plan will include a primary set of faith-forming activities along with additional supporting activities that

reinforce the basic practices.<sup>1</sup> In order to develop such a plan, a man must have a vision for the spiritual direction of his family; he must know where the members of his family are in their spiritual lives; and finally, he must take time to develop a written, intentional plan of action with specific goals and appropriate steps to lead his family towards the destination of treasuring Jesus Christ.

### **1. A Clear Vision for the Family**

**Explain:** Just as Christ clearly knew the destination towards which he was leading his bride (Eph 5:25-27), so must a man know the destination to which he is leading his family.

**Discuss:** If you were put on the spot right now and had to give a clearly defined vision for where your family is heading, what would you say? Would you struggle to find words?

**Explain:** Far too many families struggle through life in survival mode, giving little thought to what kind of spiritual legacy will follow. For a man to lead his family to treasure Jesus, he must cast a long-term vision for his family and establish a family mission statement to help guide the direction of family life.

#### **A Long-Term Vision.**

**Explain:** John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner assert, “Spiritual training is not an add-on; it forms the core of your children’s being and life.” A simple study of Ephesians 5:25-27 (from session 1!) demonstrates how spiritual nurture is also at the heart of a husband’s relationship with his wife. While spiritual formation of one’s wife and children is a principal duty of every man, the spiritual formation of the family

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<sup>1</sup>John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner, eds., *Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children: Helping Your Child Develop Personal Faith*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2000), 37.

will never be a quick fix activity or short term agenda. Rather, as Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope explain, “Spiritual formation at home is a little-by-little, long term process rather than a one-time event.”<sup>2</sup> In the words of Tedd Tripp, “You must be a person of long-term vision. You must see your children’s need for shepherding, not simply in terms of the here and now, but in terms of long-range vision.”<sup>3</sup> Who do you want your children to be in five, ten, twenty, or fifty years from now? What kind of follower of Christ do you hope they become? What are you doing to foster and encourage that kind of faith in their lives?

A man must realize that the way he leads his family today “will directly influence a multigenerational cycle of family traits, beliefs, and actions—for good or bad.”<sup>4</sup> This principle is biblical, as God declared, “I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exod 20:5-6).

Because there are long term consequences for how a man leads his family, a man must have a long term vision for leaving a spiritual legacy. Every spiritual investment in the life of his wife and children potentially impacts generations for years to come. This means that every spiritual conversation or family faith talk that seems inconsequential at the time truly matters both in the moment and in the long run. A man must grasp the importance of being faithful in the small areas of life, including the way he leads his family towards vibrant faith in Jesus (Luke 16:10). Such a vision of a long-term spiritual legacy offers motivation for leading the family well.

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<sup>2</sup>Kurt Bruner, and Steve Stroope, *It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide for Nurturing Lifelong Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 32.

<sup>3</sup>Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995), 190.

<sup>4</sup>Bruner, and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 75.

## **A Family Mission Statement.**

**Explain:** Having a long-term vision for leaving a vibrant spiritual legacy is vital. However, in order to keep the family focused on the long-term spiritual goal, some simple guardrails are necessary. A family mission statement can be of great help in keeping the family on track spiritually.

**Discuss:** What do you think should be the core elements of a family mission statement?

**Explain:** Because Jesus' mission was for God's glory, Michael Wilder suggests that "any Christian family's mission statement could begin with 'Our family exists to glorify God by . . .'"<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Wilder offers the following helpful advice on developing a family mission statement.<sup>6</sup> Fill in the blanks on your worksheet as we work through these.

1. First, discuss your values. Determine what is most important to each family member.
2. Second, evaluate your family values in view of Scripture. Determine what values are in line with Scripture, and what values need to be changed or discarded. The values that align with Scripture constitute the family's core values.
3. Third, draft the family mission statement. Allow the statement to be shaped by the family's core values and by Scripture. Wilder instructs, "If you have children, discuss the statement with them; clarify your family's expectations based on this scripturally shaped statement. How your family will engage in outreach and evangelism should be essential to this statement."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Wilder, "Building and Equipping Missional Families," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. by Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2011), 248.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 248-249.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 249.

4. Fourth, make a family commitment. Each family member should strive to memorize the statement.
5. Finally, establish a plan to implement the mission statement in specific ways in the life of the family.

Dr. Wilder concludes,

Few Christians are clear about their personal place in God's plan; even fewer families can clearly articulate how they plan to proclaim God's glory to the ends of the earth. Family mission statements can provide direction in decision making and stir a mission and passion for the expansion of God's kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

**Explain:** Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope discuss how one important role of parents is to define what is “normal” for the spiritual life and expectations of the family<sup>9</sup>. Many men seeking to be the spiritual leader in their homes will have to *redefine* what is normal for his family in terms of their spiritual life and direction. In developing and implementing a family mission statement, a man is essentially declaring a new paradigm from which the family does life together.

**Discuss:** What are some potential changes that a family mission statement may lead a family to take?

### **A Current Assessment: What is the spiritual condition of your family right now?**

**Discuss:** As a parent, you evaluate your child regarding his grades, his athletic commitment, his music practice, and even his chores at home. When is the last time you assessed the spiritual condition of your children? Or your wife? Why do you think we

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<sup>8</sup>Michael Wilder, “Building and Equipping Missional Families,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, edited by Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 249.

<sup>9</sup>Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts At Home*, 101.

tend to neglect this aspect of our family members' lives? When evaluating the spiritual condition of our family, what do you think are some key things we are trying to observe?

### **Know the Spiritual Condition of Family Members.**

**Explain:** Not only must a man know where the family is heading spiritually (vision!) and have a mission statement to guide the way, but a man must also know where his family stands spiritually in order to know how best to lead them to mature in their faith. In the words of Timothy Witmer, “The shepherd knows his family.”<sup>10</sup> For a man to serve his family as the spiritual leader, in addition to knowing the temperaments, passions, and preferences of his family members, he must also know where each member stands regarding his or her faith in Christ and level of spiritual maturity.

Obviously, a man should know whether his wife and children have professed saving faith in Jesus and publically proclaimed their faith through baptism. However, William Farley advises, “Parents should never presume that their children understand the gospel.”<sup>11</sup> Farley goes so far as to declare that an assumption of children’s spiritual birth could potentially be the greatest mistake a parent makes.<sup>12</sup> Following a family member’s proclamation of faith in Jesus, a man must observe the new believer, looking for increasing signs of spiritual life. At times it may prove difficult for a man to discern spiritual fruit in the life of a spouse or child. A helpful suggestion from Stuart Scott and Martha Peace is for a man to observe the “habitual day-in and day-out lifestyle” of the family members.<sup>13</sup> Determine if the long-term lifestyle shows evidence of genuine faith in Jesus. Such evidence is what Susan Hunt describes as “signs of regeneration such as a

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<sup>10</sup>Bruner, and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 17.

<sup>11</sup>William P. Farley, *Gospel Powered Parenting*, 184.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>13</sup>Stuart Scott, and Martha Peace, *The Faithful Parent*, 27.

love for God, desire to hear His Word, a loving and obedient attitude, a love for others, and growth in holiness.”<sup>14</sup>

**Explain:** Brian Croft offers some key evidence that may be observed in the life of a believing child, including a growing affection and need for Jesus and the gospel, a heightened understanding of the truths of Scripture, increased kindness and selflessness toward siblings, greater awareness of and distaste for sin, and a noticeable desire to obey parents.<sup>15</sup> For older children or one’s spouse, some traits of a genuine follower of Jesus are key: surrender to a gospel-centered life; hunger to know God; embracing a Christian community; a missional lifestyle; the desire to worship God; and personal involvement in multiplying disciples.<sup>16</sup> A man must consistently lead towards and pray for these characteristics in the members of his family.

Tedd Tripp explains that when behavior or attitudes that do not honor Christ are observed, the issue is not merely the behavior itself, but rather what is going on in the heart.<sup>17</sup> At this point a man must determine how best to address the heart issues. Constant, prayerful observation of the spiritual condition of one’s family will help a man know how to lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ.

**DISCUSS:** What scares you the most about doing a spiritual assessment of your family as a whole and as individual members? Why?

### **Spiritual formation occurs best in the context of a relationship.**

**Explain:** Faith formation does not occur in a vacuum. A man cannot impose

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<sup>14</sup>Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant: Leaving a legacy of Faith for the Next Generation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 102.

<sup>15</sup>Brian Croft, “Is Your Child a Christian?,” The Gospel-Coalition Blog, entry posted July 24, 2013, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/is-your-child-a-christian/>.

<sup>16</sup>Allen Jackson, *Disciple: The Ordinary Person’s Guide to Discipling Teenagers* (Birmingham, AL: Youthministry360, 2015), 87-88.

<sup>17</sup>Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 4-5.

faith in the life of a spouse or child apart from the relational context. Timothy Witmer describes marriage as “the most important relationship you have in this world.”<sup>18</sup> Marriage is clearly a picture of the gospel, yet marriage is also very practical. The relationship that Jesus modeled with his bride, the church, was one of humble service and loving commitment to her. For a man to lead his wife spiritually, he must also invest in the marriage relationship, showing the same humble service and loving commitment to his wife. If he is not lovingly investing in the marriage relationship, his attempts to lead his wife spiritually will amount to little more than a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1).

Likewise, for a man to be the spiritual leader of his children, he must also invest in his relationship with them. It is easy for a man, tired from a busy schedule and long hours at work, to be physically present with his children and yet to be emotionally detached. Timothy Witmer suggests, “Time with children must be seen as time *invested*, not merely time *spent*.”<sup>19</sup> A man must discipline himself to engage with his family rather than just being physically present. This investment involves participating with the kids as they enjoy their play and activities, and even means investing in separate one-on-one time with each of the children. When the relationship is a priority, a man will find that his spiritual leadership is more fruitful in the children’s lives.<sup>20</sup>

Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope explain, “In the context of healthy relationships, children tend to embrace the beliefs and values of their parents.”<sup>21</sup> Tedd Tripp concurs: “The most powerful way to keep your children from being attracted by the

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<sup>18</sup>Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts At Home*, 23.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>20</sup>John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner, eds., *Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children: Helping Your Child Develop o Personal Faith*, 28.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

offers of camaraderie from the wicked is to make home an attractive place to be.”<sup>22</sup> He adds, “Young people generally do not run from places where they are loved and know unconditional acceptance. They do not run away from homes where there are solid relationships. They do not run from homes in which the family is planning activities and doing exciting things.”<sup>23</sup>

Stuart Scott and Martha Peace offer a healthy perspective with this sobering declaration: “Only two things on earth last for eternity: one’s soul and the Word of God.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, William Farley writes, “Christian parenting is the process of preparing our children for the day of judgment.”<sup>25</sup> Christian men must be determined to invest in the souls of their wives and children. Moreover, the spiritual investment must be one of the greatest passions in life rather than viewed as an inconvenient imposition upon a self-absorbed life. Because eternity is at stake, relationships matter. Men would do well to reprioritize their schedules to meet the relational need of the family in order to foster an environment for prime spiritual growth. While more could be addressed concerning the nature of a man’s relationship with his wife and family, much of it falls outside the scope of this project. Nevertheless, it will serve a man well to recognize that much of his success as spiritual leader to his family will depend on his investment into the relationships he has with each family member.

## 2. A Plan for the Journey

**Discuss:** what is your plan to put your children through college? What is your plan for your own career advancement? What is your plan for your retirement? ... What

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<sup>22</sup>Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 194.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>24</sup>Stuart Scott, and Martha Peace, *The Faithful Parent*, 15.

<sup>25</sup>William P. Farley, *Gospel Powered Parenting*, 51.

is your plan to nurture the faith of your family?

Tedd Tripp writes,

It is instructive to ask parents what concrete training objectives they have for their children. Most parents cannot quickly generate a list of the strengths and weaknesses of their children. Nor can they articulate what they are doing to strengthen their child's weak areas or to encourage his strengths. Many moms and dads have not sat down and discussed their short-term and long-term goals for their children. They have not developed strategies for parenting. They do not know what God says about children and his requirements for them. Little thought has been given to methods and approaches that would focus correction upon attitudes of heart rather than merely on behavior.

**Explain:** If faith formation is indeed important, it seems that a detailed, step-by-step process to develop a plan of action would be beneficial, especially considering that many men may never have had a parent intentionally invest in their own spiritual growth.

**Discuss:** What do you think should be included in a spiritual growth plan for a family?

**Explain:** In *A Parent's Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, the authors do provide step-by-step guidance to help parents in developing a Family Spiritual Growth Plan. The plan gives a man direction in leading both his children and his spouse. The authors offer seven steps towards designing a custom spiritual growth plan for the family.<sup>26</sup> Let's fill in the blanks on your handout as we work through these steps.

1. Assemble all the pertinent information regarding the personality traits and struggles of each family member, the pace at which the family lives, the family interests, and even the spiritual heritage of the family.
2. Establish primary designated times for nurturing the faith of the family as a whole based on the information collected in step one. Consider all options including church attendance, family devotions, bedtime routine, mealtime routines, drive time opportunities, and family nights. The idea is for parents to select a few of

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<sup>26</sup>Trent, Osborne, and Bruner, *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, 253-267.

- these moments—the times most suited to the schedule and needs of the family—upon which to capitalize regularly rather than trying to cram all of them with spiritual purpose. “Most families will do far more by doing less.”
3. Put together individual growth plans for each family member. Each individual plan is shaped by the age and stage of the individual, with his or her interests, personality, and needs in mind. Parents will establish what church-related activities in which the children will participate, as well as determine the bedtime routines for younger children, quiet times of personal Bible reading for older children, and Bible studies for teens that will be guided by the parents. Dads & Moms should also complete a spiritual growth plan for themselves, because “meeting your own spiritual needs is part of your responsibility in training your children.” If yours is a two-parent family, set up your own and your spouse’s plan together so you can give each other support and encouragement in sticking with your plans. Discussing your individual plans with each other may also give you both an opportunity to get a deeper insight into each other’s spiritual and personal needs.
  4. Have a family meeting. Here the details of the plan along with its importance are discussed. If the family members are old enough, gathering feedback from them may be appropriate. However, it is important that each family member agrees to the expectations. It is also suggested that each member sign a family commitment card, followed by some kind of family celebration as a memory marker.
  5. Finalize the family plan and individual plans after making any adjustments following the family meeting. The activities and times agreed on and the commitment cards may be posted in a prominent place in the home, such as on the refrigerator, for all to see.
  6. Decide on specific action steps that correspond to the activities in the family and individual plans. This essentially means to determine what “tools” to use with

- each activity selected. For example, the father will choose which book of the Bible to read or a faith-based movie to watch and discuss during family night.
7. Celebrate the successes after a designated time period of three, six, or twelve months. These designated times also provide opportunity to evaluate and adjust as necessary.

**Discuss:** How feasible does this process sound in your family context? What are some potential roadblocks that you foresee happening? How well do you think your family will be receptive to a spiritual growth plan? How can we work around these frustrations? Is it possible to develop a plan and work it without the children's knowledge? When might this be advantageous?

**Explain:** Preparing an intentional plan to nurture the faith of the family may seem like a time-consuming task; but with only twenty minutes a week spent on spiritual formation with a child from ages four through fifteenth, that child will have received over 190 hours of biblical training.<sup>27</sup> The investment is certainly worth the cost.

### **Closing**

**Discuss:** We've discussed having a vision for your family that includes a family mission statement. We've discussed the need to assess the spiritual condition of your family and to invest in the relationships in order to foster spiritual maturity. Finally, we've talked about developing a plan to nurture the faith of your family. What have you heard in this session about nurturing the family faith that excites you the most? What excites you the least? Why?

**Explain:** We've said it before, but it can't be said enough: The good news for us right now is that God's grace enables us to move forward despite what lies behind with our families. In moving forward, a wise man will consider where his family needs to be, where his family currently is, and plan steps to move the family in that direction.

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<sup>27</sup>Trent, Osborne, and Bruner, *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, 38.

Remember that no matter how we've failed in leading our families, God's grace offers us a new day tomorrow to love and lead our families. And the next day. And again the next day. The homework will be a challenge this week because you will be asked to develop a family mission statement and a family growth plan. It will be worth it. I would love for you to email me your plan so I can pray for you and offer encouragement. (Discuss homework and close in prayer.)

APPENDIX 20

SESSION 5 STUDENT HANDOUT

Session 5: A Family Spiritual Growth Plan

“I love it when a plan comes together.” -John “Hannibal” Smith

**A CLEAR \_\_\_\_\_ FOR THE FAMILY**

**1. A \_\_\_\_\_ vision for the family.**

“Spiritual formation at home is a little-by-little, long-term process rather than a one-time event.” (Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope, *It Starts at Home*)

You must be a person of long-term vision. You must see your children’s need for shepherding, not simply in terms of the here and now, but in terms of long-range vision.” (Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*)

I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exod 20:5-6)

- If you were put on the spot right now and asked to give a clearly defined vision for where your family is heading, what would you say? Would you struggle to find words?
- Every spiritual investment in the life of your wife and children potentially impacts generations for years to come. This means that every spiritual conversation or family faith talk that seems inconsequential at the time truly matters both in the moment and in the long run. Be faithful. Be intentional.

**2. A Family \_\_\_\_\_<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>These steps adapted from Michael Wilder, “Building and Equipping Missional Families” in *Trained in the Fear of God*.

- a. First, discuss your values. Determine what is most important to each family member.
- b. Second, evaluate your family values in view of Scripture. Determine what values are in line with Scripture, and what values need to be changed or discarded. The values that align with Scripture constitute the family's core values.
- c. Third, draft the family mission statement. Allow the statement to be shaped by the family's core values and by Scripture. Wilder instructs, "If you have children, discuss the statement with them; clarify your family's expectations based on this scripturally shaped statement. How your family will engage in outreach and evangelism should be essential to this statement."
- d. Fourth, make a family commitment. Each family member should strive to memorize the statement.
- e. Finally, establish a plan to implement the mission statement in specific ways in the life of the family.

"Few Christians are clear about their personal place in God's plan; even fewer families can clearly articulate how they plan to proclaim God's glory to the ends of the earth. Family mission statements can provide direction in decision making and stir a mission and passion for the expansion of God's kingdom." (Michael Wilder, "Building and Equipping Missional Families" in *Trained in the Fear of God*.)

## A CURRENT \_\_\_\_\_

### A. Know the \_\_\_\_\_ of your family members

**Some Signs of spiritual life:**

### B. Spiritual formation occurs best in the context of a \_\_\_\_\_

"In the context of healthy relationships, children tend to embrace the beliefs and values of their parents." (Trent, Osborne, & Bruner, *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*)

## A \_\_\_\_\_ FOR THE JOURNEY<sup>2</sup>

1. Assemble all the pertinent information regarding the personality traits and struggles of each family member, the pace at which the family lives, the family interests, and even the spiritual heritage of the family.
2. Establish primary designated times for nurturing the faith of the family as a whole based on the information collected in step one. Consider all options including church attendance, family devotions, bedtime routine, mealtime routines, drive time opportunities, and family nights. The idea is for parents to select a few of these moments—the times most suited to the schedule and needs of the family—upon which to capitalize regularly rather than trying to cram all of them with spiritual purpose. “Most families will do far more by doing less.”
3. Put together individual growth plans for each family member. Each individual plan is shaped by the age and stage of the individual, with his or her interests, personality, and needs in mind. Parents will establish what church-related activities in which the children will participate, as well as determine the bedtime routines for younger children, quiet times of personal Bible reading for older children, and Bible studies for teens that will be guided by the parents. Dads & Moms should also complete a spiritual growth plan for themselves, because “meeting your own spiritual needs is part of your responsibility in training your children.” If yours is a two-parent family, set up your own and your spouse’s plan together so you can give each other support and encouragement in sticking with your plans. Discussing your individual plans with each other may also give you both an opportunity to get a deeper insight into each other’s spiritual and personal needs.
4. Have a family meeting. Here the details of the plan along with its importance are discussed. If the family members are old enough, gathering feedback from them may be appropriate. However, it is important that each family member agrees to the expectations. It is also suggested that each member sign a family commitment card, followed by some kind of family celebration as a memory marker.
5. Finalize the family plan and individual plans after making any adjustments following the family meeting. The activities and times agreed on and the

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<sup>2</sup> These steps were adapted from Trent, Osborne, and Bruner, *Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*

commitment cards may be posted in a prominent place in the home, such as on the refrigerator, for all to see.

6. Decide on specific action steps that correspond to the activities in the family and individual plans. This essentially means to determine what “tools” to use with each activity selected. For example, the father will choose which book of the Bible to read or a faith-based movie to watch and discuss during family night.
7. Celebrate the successes. after a designated time period of three, six, or twelve months. These designated times also provide opportunity to evaluate and adjust as necessary.

## APPENDIX 21

### SESSION 5 HOMEWORK

Goal: This final homework session will guide you through the steps necessary for developing a family spiritual growth plan for both your family as a whole and for each individual member.

#### **COMPLETE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES DURING THE WEEK**

- **Objective 1: Partner with your wife.** Pray out loud with you wife three times this week other than at meals. Pray for your family. Pray specifically for wisdom and guidance in leading your family to treasure Jesus
- **Objective 2: Conduct a current assessment and cast a vision.** Take some time to think about your family. What is the current spiritual climate in your home? Do you see spiritual fruit in the lives of your children? Your wife? Yourself? Your family? Do you know when/if each of your family members has placed their faith in Jesus? What kind of follows of Jesus do you want your children and wife to be? What kind of spiritual legacy would you like to leave? Write down your vision for the family.
- **Objective 3: Determine your family's Mission Statement.** Spend some time drafting a family mission statement. Ask your wife to assist. If you children are older, consider involving them in the process. How does the family mission statement point to Jesus and his mission in the world? How can you make this statement visible on a regular basis? How can the family be reminded of the family purpose regularly? Use the steps discussed in the lesson to guide you through the process.
- **Objective 4: Spend several days working on a written plan to nurture the spiritual growth of your family.** When will your family gather together around God's word and for prayer? How often? What tools will you use? How can you encourage spiritual growth in each family member individually? What tools will you use? How often will you meet? How can you use upcoming holidays and birthdays as an opportunity to nurture faith in the family? Write down a specific family spiritual growth plan for the next 3 months, and some tentative ideas for the following 3 months. When will you implement the plan? Use the steps discussed in the lesson as a guide to help you through the process.

APPENDIX 22  
RECRUITMENT LETTER

February 7, 2016

Greetings, Dads!

It is a joy to partner with you in strengthening the faith of your children. For the past few years I've been working on a degree in Family Ministry from Southern Seminary which culminates in a final project. This project includes a Bible study for fathers to encourage and strengthen spiritual leadership in the home. This is where you come in. Dads, I need your help. I am recruiting a group of dads willing to participate in the five week Bible study along with a follow-up session one month later. To be clear, YES, I am asking for "guinea pigs." However, no matter what you already do in the home to nurture the faith of your family, this study will challenge and equip you to take steps towards greater spiritual leadership in the home.

The course is open to any father at FBC with a child 18 years old or younger. Each session is designed to give men a greater understanding of God's call to be the spiritual leaders at home with some practical guidance on specific faith-building practices for the home. The sessions will be interactive and discussion-based.

The group will meet in the Wade Sunday School classroom (Next to the Youth Room) on Sundays at 6pm on the following days:

February 21: Spiritual Leadership in the Home  
February 28: Treasuring Jesus Through Personal Practices  
March 6: Saturating Your Home With God's Word  
March 13: Centering Your Home Around the Gospel  
March 20: A Spiritual Growth Plan for the Family  
April 17: Follow Up & Evaluations

If you are interested in joining and willing to commit to these few weeks, please let me know so I can plan accordingly. You can register by calling, texting me, or sending me an email. Feel free to contact me with any questions. Thanks!

Toby Havens, Associate Pastor of Students and Missions

APPENDIX 23

SURVEY QUESTIONS ARRANGED BY INCREASE

Table A1. Survey questions arranged according to largest overall numerical increase from pre-test to post-test scores

Survey question	Numeric growth
I regularly encourage my wife to read her own Bible, and share insights with me from what she read	14
I pray FOR the spiritual growth of my wife	12
I pray FOR the spiritual growth of my children	10
I regularly encourage my children to read their own Bible	10
I read Scripture out loud with my children	9
I help my children memorize Bible verses	9
I try to use my children's Bible curriculum from church to initiate faith conversations at home	9
Other than at meals, I pray out loud with my children	8
I have a plan for the spiritual growth of my children	8
Other than at meals, I pray out loud with my wife	8
I encourage my wife to memorize Bible verses	8
I have a plan for the spiritual growth of my wife	7
I have a plan for my own personal spiritual growth.	6
Other than before meals, I personally take time to pray.	6
I know what my children are studying in their Bible studies at church	6

*Table A1 continued.* Survey questions arranged according to largest overall numerical increase from pre-test to post-test scores

I understand what the Bible teaches regarding how I am to lead my children as a father	5
I can name specific Scripture(s) from the Bible regarding fatherhood by which my parenting principles are shaped	5
I personally read my Bible.	3
I expect the youth or children's pastors to make sure that my children come to faith in Christ and are baptized	3
I read Scripture out loud with my wife	2
I know the spiritual condition of my wife	2
I read books, listen to messages, or attend classes on how I can better lead my family spiritually	1
It is my responsibility to ensure the spiritual growth of my family	1
I know the spiritual condition of my children	-2
I most recently memorized a verse from the Bible	-4

APPENDIX 24

DATA FROM THE INITIAL SURVEY OF FATHERS

Table A2. Initial survey of fathers at FBC Sherwood

Question For Fathers	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Agree Strongly
1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule	11	11	6	22	33	17
2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while	11	11	22	6	39	11
3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching	28	28	22	0	6	17
4. When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me	17	33	44	0	0	6
5. I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities--even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together	17	28	33	6	6	11
6. Parents--and particularly fathers--have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children	0	0	0	56	22	22
7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others	11	17	56	0	0	11
8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth	11	6	0	17	39	22

Note: Survey of eighteen fathers at FBC Sherwood. Answers are in percentages.

*Table A2 Data from the initial survey of fathers at FBC Sherwood continued*

Question For Fathers	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children?	28	33	11	6	11	11
10. How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?	17	6	22	33	11	11
11. How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?	11	17	28	17	6	22
12. How many times in the past MONTH have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?	17	11	17	44	0	11
13. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?	39	11	22	11	0	17
14. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?	17	6	39	17	6	17
15. How many times in the past year have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?	28	22	28	11	0	11
16. How many times in the past YEAR has any church leader made contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?	39	22	28	0	6	6

Note: Answers are in percentages

APPENDIX 25

DATA FROM THE INITIAL SURVEY OF YOUTH

Table A3. Data from the initial survey of youth at First Baptist Church

Question For Youth	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
1. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK has one of your parents prayed aloud with you?	33	17	11	11	11	17
2. How many times in the past WEEK has your family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?	0	11	22	17	17	33
3. How many times in the past MONTH has one of your parents read or discussed the Bible with you?	17	6	22	44	0	11
4. How many times in the past MONTH has one of your parents discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with you while engaging in day-to-day activities?	22	11	11	22	11	22
5. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has one of your parents led any family devotional or worship time in your home?	50	11	22	0	11	6
6. How many times in the past YEAR have you observed one of your parents, while in your presence, witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?	22	17	28	17	0	17

Note: Answers are in percentages

## APPENDIX 26

### FINAL INTERVIEW RESPONSES

QUESTION 1: Describe your own spiritual life before completing this series, and describe how you personally have changed because of this series.

#### RESPONSES

1. I attended church regularly and try to get involved with service to my church. I believe that after this series I have become more aware of the responsibility I have to lead my children in their spiritual growth.
2. I really did not pray with my family much. I am trying to at least for now do it twice a week.
3. I already had a good spiritual routine with my family for time to read and spend in God's word - I have however become more aware of being "intentional" in what I say or do.
4. Average...prayer, quiet time, study, prepare lessons. After this series I am even more aware of my responsibilities as a father and how much I come up short and need to rely on God even more!
5. am going to try to be more intentional

QUESTION 2: Describe the emphasis you placed on nurturing the faith of your children before completing this series, and describe what has changed in the way you seek to nurture the faith of your family because of this series.

#### RESPONSES

1. Before I would ask question about their Sunday school lessons in order to help them remember them. Now I am purposeful in my discussions with my kids. I make effort to lead the discussion.
2. Normal go to church and answer questions when asked. Now make a point to be more involved.
3. We were on a pretty good course - need to spend more 1 on 1 time with both kids and spouse to help keep us all accountable to one another.
4. Emphasized church, living out your faith, but little formal training at home. Now I am much more aware of the need to intentionally lead and talk about God in everyday things.

5. both are important but difficult to do

QUESTION 3: Describe what faith-nurturing practices are continuing in your home since completing the equipping series, and what faith-nurturing practices were begun, but failed to continue. Explain why you think the practices ceased.

#### RESPONSES

1. Teaching from a "grace" perspective. I was making effort to read a Bible verse once or twice each week. It has been hard to stay with it. Other activities have really reduced my private time with each child. It's easy to have a discussion, but more difficult to find time to get the Bible out.
2. Praying with family more. This is continuing.
3. Reading our bible every night before bed time - showing grace during times of punishment was stopped hard for me to stay committed to that...
4. Beginning to send out "text of the week" to the entire family (from the app that you suggested in the class)...hope to use this as a lead in to future Scripture memorization and discussion. The family meeting seemed like a big fail (and haven't done one since), however, in reality, it may have been the most positive thing we have done. See next question for more explanation.
5. Occasionally try to get family together to pray or read the Bible. Never can seem to keep them going. Too busy.

QUESTION 4: Describe what has been the most significant positive change in the life of your family since you began to implement a Family Spiritual Growth Plan with your family.

#### RESPONSES

1. Teach from the "Grace" perspective
2. More positive than negative in the home.
3. They know that we will spend time in prayer and in God's word every night before bed time.
4. I was able to use this class as a "reason to meet" (blame it on Toby!!!...just kidding). The "family meeting" helped lay a foundation. I am hoping that we can build on that foundation with more frequent and more open discussions centered around God's Word. We now have a family mission statement: "Making and growing lifelong followers of Jesus Christ". Now every decision or situation that comes up can be looked at through lens of our family mission statement.
5. do not have a spiritual growth plan for our family

QUESTION 5: Describe what has been the most difficult adjustment in your family life since implementing your Family Spiritual Growth Plan at home.

#### RESPONSES

1. Getting my wife involved.
2. Finding time to get everyone together.
3. Establishing a consistent time.
4. Overcoming established routines and habits (i.e. meal times with the TV on, electronic device or video game time, free time usage, etc). I wish that this course would have been offered when my kids were in preschool (or even before they were born)!
5. no spiritual growth plan

QUESTION 6: What do you think will be the main obstacles that will potentially hinder the continuation of your Family Spiritual Growth Plan, and what will be the key to the continuation of your plan?

#### RESPONSES

1. Getting my wife to get involved.
2. Time. Make a point to do it.
3. Vacations, after school late night activities will be and are barriers - will have to stick to "our guns" and do it no matter how tired we may be.
4. Already established habits/routines and the speed and busyness of life with older kids. The key to continuing will be the resolve to not give up on the small step...even when it doesn't seem like any progress is being made.
5. no spiritual growth plan

QUESTION 7: What can we do to improve the equipping series? What do you wish we had addressed in the curriculum? What in the curriculum did you feel was irrelevant?

#### RESPONSES

1. I think more time should be allotted to discussing the responsibilities of the husband to the wife and what the Bible says about that. This would help new marriages to build on a solid foundation for the spiritual growth of his wife and their new family.
2. Everything was great.
3. Maybe examples of what a good spiritual growth plan looks like and how some barriers with others were encountered and how they dealt with those barriers. Nothing irrelevant.

4. Offer it 15 years ago! Just kidding...overall outstanding course! All of the material was relevant and necessary. I do think that it is a good idea for a similar course for wives be developed so that both parents are given the same foundation to build from...and ideally catch young couples before or just after they have children. I only have one suggestion for the men's course: It would be great to hear from a couple of dads that are actually doing it the right way in their homes during part of a couple of the sessions (i.e. not every week, and not for the whole lesson time). I realize "doing it the right way" is a relative term...but I mean well-respected men who represent both the younger kids group and the older kids group (as determined by you, and later, who have been through the course). Men who can tell us about their struggles and victories so that we can see "real people" who are raising their families the way God wants them to. Again, Toby...this was an AWESOME course and so very needed today! I do believe that you have tapped into a need in the church (not just at FBC Sherwood). I would love to see you develop this into a course that could be offered to all churches...it has that potential! You rock and God reigns, what a combo! Thanks brother!
5. Maybe get wives involved. Begin a program like this when wives first get pregnant

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING FATHERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF SHERWOOD, ARKANSAS, TO BE THE PRIMARY DISCIPLE MAKERS IN THEIR FAMILIES

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

This project is designed to equip young men at First Baptist Church, Sherwood, Arkansas, to be the primary spiritual leaders in their homes. Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context, along with the purpose, goals, rationale, definitions, limitations, delimitations, and research methodologies of the project. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological basis for a man's spiritual leadership within the home. A thorough exegesis of Ephesians 4:19-6:4 demonstrates that God has both called and equipped men in their roles as husbands and fathers to lead their families to treasure Jesus Christ. Chapter 3 offers practical guidance for how a man can lead his family to treasure Jesus Christ. Particular emphasis is placed upon developing personal practices that honor Christ, establishing a home that is saturated with God's Word, ensuring the home is gospel-centered, and developing an intentional spiritual growth plan for the family. Chapter 4 provides the details of the three phases of project implementation, including an initial preparation phase, a teaching phase, and a follow-up phase. Chapter 5 offers an evaluation of the results of the project, theological and personal reflections, key takeaways, and next steps.

## VITA

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### EDUCATION

B.A., Indiana University, 2003

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### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Baptist Collegiate Evangelist, State Convention of Baptists in Indiana,  
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