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EQUIPPING PARENTS OF BETHEL BIBLE CHURCH, TYLER,
TEXAS, TO USE FAMILY MEALTIMES IN THE SPIRITUAL
FORMATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

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TEXAS, TO USE FAMILY MEALTIMES IN THE SPIRITUAL
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This project is dedicated to those whom God has called me to love and shepherd.

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PREFACE

Many people made the accomplishment of this project possible. First, my wife, Marla, made this a practical possibility for our family. She gave up, or at least delayed, her dreams of higher education so that I could pursue a D.Ed.Min. from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. She proofread numerous papers, journeyed right beside me as we crafted the “I Spy” family mealtime devotionals, and fulfilled both parental roles during my trips to Louisville. Marla is the perfect “helpmate” for me in more ways than I can number. God knew exactly the woman I needed to marry. I could not have completed this degree or project without her unwavering devotion and support.

Second, Bethel Bible Church made this endeavor financially possible. I had a tremendous desire to continue my education so that I could serve the Lord better in the ministry to which He graciously called me. When I surveyed my situation, I knew I was not financially capable of reaching this goal on my own. However, once I shared my desire and hopes of this education, Bethel Bible Church stood with me. I am forever grateful for the financial support that Bethel Bible Church has shown me. I only hope that I can serve Bethel Bible Church more faithfully because of this opportunity. I cannot imagine loving a church more than I do Bethel Bible Church.

Third, Ross Strader, Fritz Hager, Eric Barton, Todd Wright, Brent Kirkley, and Jeff Bice, the pastoral staff of Bethel Bible Church, gave me the confidence and encouragement needed accomplish such a task. These men have constantly encouraged me to persevere and finish this chapter of my life. I wish others could experience the support I have from this band of brothers. I consider it an honor to serve alongside these great men, and I pray that I can encourage them as they have me.

Fourth, the parents involved at Bethel Bible Church gave me a group to implement this project through. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for all the parents that took the surveys, attended the training meetings, and implemented the project. They were the hands and feet of this project. Without this involvement, this project would not have succeeded in achieving its goals.

Fifth, the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who taught and challenged me through the seminars. The education provided equipped me to be a more effective leader. I am thankful to the professors and administrative assistance that made this degree a possibility. Within this group I would like to extend a special thank to Dr. Danny Bowen. He has aided me in raising the bar for excellence within the church. Dr. Bowen was a constant encourager and modeled for me how to lead others well.

Last, God's grace is evident in the completion and effectiveness of this project. God reached down into my life when I wanted nothing to do with Him and He saved me from my sin and myself. God's grace made me a part of His chosen race, His royal priesthood, and a person for His own possession. My heartfelt desire is that this project and this degree will in some way proclaim the excellences of His glory.

Mark Kuykendall

Tyler, Texas

December 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents of Bethel Bible Church, Tyler, Texas, to use family mealtimes in the spiritual formation their children.

Goals

The first goal of this project was to evaluate the current family discipleship perceptions and practices of families from Bethel Bible Church, Tyler, Texas. This evaluation provided a picture of the discipleship practices in the homes represented at Bethel Bible Church (BBC). This goal was measured by administering the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey (FDPP)¹ to BBC families who have at least one child ages 6 to 12 residing in the home. This goal was considered successfully met when 40 BBC families complete the FDPP and the inventory had been analyzed providing a clearer picture of the current discipleship practices and perceptions among BBC families.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week mealtime curriculum that equipped parents to disciple their children. The curriculum will include materials and activities to promote family connectedness, spiritual conversations, and Scripture memorization. This goal was measured by the elders of BBC using an evaluation rubric to assess biblical accuracy, age appropriateness, teaching methodology, scope, and

¹Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 202-3.

applicability of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal of this project was to equip all participating parents to use the eight-week mealtime curriculum. This goal was measured by a pre and post-project survey, as well as semi-structured personal interviews for three parents whose test scores evidenced the greatest change. The pre and post-project surveys measured the parent's understanding, knowledge, and level of confidence in using the eight-week mealtime curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-project survey scores, and if the interviewees perceived the family mealtime curriculum had a positive effect.

Context of the Ministry Project

This ministry project took place in the context of Bethel Bible Church in Tyler, Texas. Three factors related to the ministry context at BBC are relevant to this project. First, BBC has a strong disposition for seeing parents active in the spiritual formation of their children. In August of 2011, BBC created a position to focus on assisting parents in the discipleship of their children. BBC allocated resources and personnel to the task of helping parents see the need for discipling their children as well as providing training and resources for the parents.

The family ministry plan began with several meetings and training sessions for parents, called Milestones. The Milestones included baby dedications, faith commitments, transition from elementary to middle school, transition from middle school to high school, and launching young adults. The main focus of these trainings were to assist parents in discovering God's plan for discipleship, and to provide resources and opportunities for parents to be active in the spiritual formation of their children.

Second, the majority of families in the congregation are in the phase of life that biblically requires them to exercise leadership in the spiritual formation of their children,

but they did not understand how to do so. Eighty-seven percent of BBC's congregation is married. Seventy-six percent are married with children; of these parents with children at home, 55 percent have children between the ages of 2 to 18. In other words, over 50 percent are in the heart of childrearing years.²

The inability to be active in the spiritual formation of their children is expressed in different ways. Many parents, often through new member interviews, express an interest in more church programs to train and lead their children. The wives of several families have expressed discouragement over their husband's lack of initiative in being active in the spiritual formation of their children. While most parents would recognize the biblical mandates from passages such as Deuteronomy 6, 11, and Psalm 78, they do not seem to comprehend what it looks like to actively lead their children.

Third, families express frustration in the discipleship of their children due to lack of time. Schedules are created because of work, school, and extra-curricular activities that give little, if any, uninterrupted time as a family. BBC is located in an area known as East Texas where parents and children are expected and pressured to be involved in multiple activities. However, an important aspect to family discipleship involves time, which leads to greater family connectedness. Because of overscheduling, families are less connected than ever before.

On several occasions, parents have led opportunities to disciple their children, but few have followed through. The greatest success was seen when BBC published a family advent series that took place on four Sunday evenings in December 2013. The largest hindrance to family discipleship seems to be for families to find the time to be consistent with the discipleship practices.

²These statistics were taken from BBC's membership database on March 27, 2014.

Rationale for the Project

The context indicates that Bethel Bible Church was ready for an intentional effort to train parents to use family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children. First, the congregation of BBC has been continually exposed to the truth of God's plan for household discipleship through sermons, Bible studies, and Milestone parent meetings (Deut 6:1-8; Ps 78). BBC has seen an increase in attendance at Milestone meetings where parents are challenged to step in as the primary disciplers of their children. BBC has also witnessed more parents asking for assistance and resources in teaching their children at home. Therefore, there was no need to convince the congregation on the need for this project. This congregation exhibited a desire to follow God's plan of parents raising their children to follow Christ. This project built on this foundation and trained parents to use family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children.

Second, because over 50 percent of the congregation was in the heart of childrearing years, this project provided training that immediately impacted most of the people in the church. When the relevance and ease of the project to moms, dads, aunts, uncles, and grandparents was realized, most people in the congregation benefitted in some way from this project.

Third, this project broke through the two major hindrances families have expressed to household discipleship. The top expressed hindrance is time. Many families have allowed their schedules to become overly crowded. However, eating is a basic necessity and sitting down to eat with family and friends is a natural daily occurrence (Deut 6:1-8; Matt 26:17-20; Luke 22:7-23). The second obstacle is a plan or knowing what to do. This project provided parents with the training and resources needed to have meaningful spiritual conversations with their children. The mealtime resources included placemats that guided the households through questions to promote family bonding, step-by-step instructions, and ways for families to practice what they were learning. This project not only provided the parents with user-friendly resources, but also provided the

opportunity for unrivaled family connectedness. As families gathered for a meal, parents and children were engaged in meaningful conversations that increased the connectedness of the family. This was a project that the congregation of BBC found immediately valuable and necessary, therefore, it was of utmost importance and urgency that this project was implemented.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Family mealtimes. Family mealtimes are moments when a family stops, sits down, and shares food. Family mealtimes can happen during breakfast, mid-day meals, evening meals, meals eaten on the run, or meals in a restaurant.³

Milestones. A milestone is “an event, preceded by a period of instruction from parents, which celebrates a spiritual development point in a child’s life.”⁴ Milestones are natural celebrations and normal growth points that a person experiences as they grow in Christ.⁵ Milestones at BBC consist of five natural celebrations: baby dedication, faith commitment, childhood to adolescence, manhood and womanhood, and high school graduation.

Spiritual conversations. Spiritual conversations are moments when parents strive to engage their children around God’s Word.⁶ Spiritual conversations involve formal and informal ways to teach children who God is and what He has done.

³Melodie M. Davis, *Whatever Happened to Dinner?* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2010), 19.

⁴J. Otis Ledbetter et al., *Spiritual Milestones: A Guide to Celebrating Your Children’s Spiritual Passages* (Clovis, NM: Heritage Builders, 2001), 10.

⁵Brian Haynes, *The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting* (Nashville: Randall, 2011), 60.

⁶Timothy Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway,

Spiritual formation of children. Spiritual formation is the process of leading children in the direction of trusting and following the example of Christ. Spiritual formation includes equipping children to have a “strong sense of identity that comes from knowing who made them, who they are, and how they fit into the larger drama of life.”⁷

This project had two limitations. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-project surveys was dependent upon the honesty of the respondents’ spiritual practices in leading their children. To avoid this limitation, the respondents were assured that their answers would not be viewed in a judgmental way and would not be shared with other families. Second, the effectiveness of the family mealtime curriculum were limited by the consistency of family mealtimes. To mitigate this limitation, participants were contacted each week by phone or email to encourage them to remain as consistent as possible with the family mealtime curriculum.

The first delimitation of the project was that it focused on parents of BBC that have at least one child ages 6 through 12 residing in their home. While other families were encouraged to participate in the eight-week family mealtime curriculum, only parents with at least one child ages 6 through 12 took part in the pre and post-project survey. The second delimitation of the project was that it addressed spiritual leadership in the home, but not in the church. Spiritual leadership in the home included leading the family to be active in church, but the equipping did not address the exercise of spiritual leadership in the life of the church itself. The third delimitation of the project was that it focused on family curriculum during family mealtimes. Although, it is true that families teach their children anytime and anywhere, this project focused on the time a family sits down to share a meal.

2012), 108.

⁷Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope, *It Starts at Home* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 68.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project included the Family Discipleship Practices and Perceptions Survey (FDPP), a pre-project survey, an evaluation rubric of the family mealtime curriculum, an identical post-project survey, and semi-structured interviews⁸ post-project.⁹ Three goals determined the effectiveness of the project. The first goal of this project was to assess the current family discipleship practices of BBC families who have at least one child ages 6 through 12 residing in the home.¹⁰ The assessment took place through an online version the FDPP survey, which was sent to all active families of BBC in good standing that have at least one child ages 6 through 12 residing in their home. Parents without an email took a paper version of the FDPP survey and the results were included. The survey assessed the dynamics of parents' disengagement from their children's spiritual development. This survey, once it was analyzed, provided a clearer picture of the current discipleship practices and perceptions among BBC families.

The second goal was the development of an eight-week mealtime curriculum that equipped parents to disciple their children. The curriculum consisted of five mealtime lessons for each of the eight weeks. The mealtime curriculum focused on a variety of activities such as questions to help the family connect, scripture memorization, and spiritual conversations. The elders of BBC used an evaluation rubric to assess biblical accuracy, age appropriateness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the

⁸A semi-structured interview is a process of asking pre-determined open-ended questions to explore themes or ideas.

⁹All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

¹⁰See appendix 1.

curriculum.¹¹ Once the feedback from the evaluations demonstrated a 90 percent sufficient or above level, the family mealtime curriculum was distributed to the families. The distribution of the family mealtime curriculum took place during a parent meeting where the parents took the pre-project survey.

The third goal of this project was to equip all participating parents to use the eight-week mealtime curriculum. Parents who have at least one-child ages 6 to 12 were invited to a parent equipping session. At the equipping session, a pre-project survey was distributed to the training parents.¹² Each participant identified himself or herself on the survey using a personal four-digit code of their choice. This pre-project survey assessed the parent's awareness, conviction, and confidence in discipling their children. The pre-project survey also assessed the parent's perspective on the level and depth of the connectedness of family members.

Once the pre-project survey was completed, parents were instructed on the proper use of the family mealtime curriculum. Curriculum, containing five lessons per week, was distributed to all parents. A sample lesson was used to teach and model how family mealtimes would be used in the spiritual formation of children. After the parent equipping session, families commenced with the family mealtime curriculum in their homes. Each week families were contacted by email or phone to answer questions, encourage their efforts, and provide accountability in using the family mealtime curriculum.

At the end of the eight-week period, the participating families took an identical post-project survey to assess the parent's awareness, conviction, and confidence in discipling their children. Each participant was asked to identify him or herself on the

¹¹See appendix 2.

¹²See appendix 3.

post-project survey using the same four-digit code they used on the pre-project survey. Like the pre-project survey, the post-project survey also assessed the parent's perspective on the level and depth of family connectedness.

A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine if there is a significant difference between the pre-project and post-project survey scores. A t-test for dependent samples "involves a comparison of the means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between the scores."¹³ In addition to the t-test for dependent samples, semi-structured personal interviews¹⁴ were conducted with three parents whose test scores evidence the greatest change. The third goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-project survey scores, and if the interviewees perceived the family mealtime curriculum had a positive effect.

¹³Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 191.

¹⁴See appendix 4.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR PARENTS USING FAMILY MEALTIMES IN THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

God created and established the home as the primary place of discipleship (Deut 6).¹ From the beginning, parents have been the most powerful influence in their children's lives. Modern parents, though, have outsourced the spiritual discipleship of their children to the church. This project assisted families in taking more ownership in the spiritual formation of their children by reestablishing the importance of consistent family mealtimes and devotionals.

Spiritual Formation of Children

Long before the church was established, God instituted the family structure. God created Adam and Eve for the purpose of being fruitful, multiplying, filling the earth, subduing the earth, and having dominion over birds and animals (Gen 1:28). Adam and Even were created to be the first parents in God's creation. Their command was to lead their children to know who God is and what he has done. Parents were to train their children in the path God intended (Prov 22:6). Concerning parents leading their children, Brian Haynes writes, "God is the architect of the brilliant plan to capture the hearts of the generations. From the very beginning, God designed the family as the vehicle to pass on a heritage of faith, a godly legacy to the next generation."² Training

¹All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

²Brian Haynes, *The Legacy Path* (Nashville: Randall, 2011), 4.

and leading one's children is to be done inside the confines of a marriage between a man and a woman.

Marriage is an illustration of Christ's relationship with His people.

Consequently, parents are God's gift to children to teach them how to live under loving authority. The love between a man and a woman, as husband and wife, is a child's first exposure to love and grace. It is within this relationship that parents must view their roles, not only as caregivers and providers, but shepherds of their child's heart and soul.³

God created the family to be the most powerful influence in the spiritual formation of children. Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope articulate the importance of parents using their influence to disciple their children:

As parents it is our job to give our children a framework for living, to equip them with a strong sense of identity that comes from knowing who made them, who they are, and how they fit into the larger drama of life. We must help them understand their story from the Author's perspective, to enjoy the wonder that comes from knowing that with God everything is sacred, so nothing is meaningless. Put simply, we want them to grow up with God.⁴

Parents accomplish this leading and training by loving God before their children. The problem is that "many parents simply do not know what it means to function as primary faith disciplers in their children's lives."⁵ Parents must first understand, from a biblical mindset, that God has created them to be the primary disciplers of their children.

Authentically following Christ, applying useful tools, and creating moments of family discipleship accomplish parent-to-child spiritual formation. Ed Moll and Tim Chester communicate the importance of parents living faithfully:

³Timothy Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 91.

⁴Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope, *It Starts at Home* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 68.

⁵Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 34.

We can't convert our children. Only the Spirit of God can open blind eyes to the truth about Jesus. But we (parents) can ensure our children realize what matters to us. Once we as parents realize that God has hand selected us to introduce our children to who his is and what he has done, we must strive to foster a relationship with our children that speak boldly of our commitment to following God and leading them. We can communicate, teach, and model a life lived for the glory of God.⁶

Jonathan Edwards succinctly states, "Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by His rules."⁷

Although God created the family to be the primary place of discipleship, he did not leave the family without help. Bruner and Stroope highlight this partnership between the church and home:

The home cannot be the church any more than the church can be the home. Christianity is a communal faith to be experienced through corporate worship, under pastoral leadership, and amid what many call 'doing life' with other believers. God never intended a family's faith to occur apart from local church engagement. But neither did he design the church to replace the home.⁸

The church is to come alongside families with support, encouragement, and resources as parents train their children to follow after Christ. Many pastors, church leaders, and authors recognized the importance of reestablishing the home as the primary place for discipleship. One of those voices, Mark Holmen, wrote, "The church's role is to be equippers of families. What we [churches] ought to do is train parents and send them back into their mission field—their homes—to grow Christians."⁹ Parents have a tremendous influence on the character of their children. A community of faith can and should support parents in the effort to raise their children to follow Christ. The church is to be a vital

⁶Ed Moll and Tim Chester, *Gospel-Centered Families* (Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2011), 20.

⁷Elizabeth Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon Union of Sarah and Jonathan Edwards* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 44-45.

⁸Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 33.

⁹Mark Holmen, *Faith Begins at Home* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 74.

support for parents in this life-long calling. Holmen explains accurately the idea of the church and home creating a partnership:

The critical factor is what takes place in the home. Parents have an overwhelming significant influence on who their children turn out to be. A community of faith can-and should-support parents in that effort, but the responsibility and opportunity to raise God-honoring children are given to the parents.¹⁰

For far too long, many churches have simply been providing entertainment for children and parents instead of offering training and resources that would actually assist parents in bringing Christ and Christ-like living back into their daily lives.¹¹ God created parents for His glory, which includes training children to love God and follow His commands, and this command is not accomplished by just taking children to church. Holmen continues these thoughts of a partnership between the home and church when he writes,

The role of the church isn't to make sure that, as you look down on this community, you can see the light shining bright from our facility. Rather, the role of the church is to make sure the light shines in each and every home, lighting the community for the world to see.¹²

Nevertheless, God's design was that parents would not have to fulfill this responsibility alone. The community of faith, the church, has a great opportunity for providing support, encouragement, and resources to aid families in the spiritual formation of their children.

Significantly, throughout Scripture there are instruction and models for parents discipling their children and leading them to love God and follow His commands.

Parents observe the unequivocal importance of training directly through everyday life and conversations from Deuteronomy 6:1-9:

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear

¹⁰Mark Holmen, *Church + Home* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 10.

¹¹Tim Kimmel, *Connecting Church & Home* (Nashville: Randall, 2013), 47.

¹²Holmen, *Church + Home*, 53.

therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. “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.

Parents also witness the value of taking time to teach about God’s faithfulness in the past so that their children will know and never forget what Psalm 78:4-8 says:

We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

Family Mealtime

One effectual model for parents to use in discipling their children is to use the time a family gathers for meals. There is something powerful about a family sitting down together to share a meal. Research over the past twenty years shows the influence and positive effects of family meals. Timothy Witmer reports, “Harvard researchers looked at which activities most fostered healthy child development: play, story time, events family members and other factors. Family dinners won out.”¹³ Likewise, Miriam Weinstein reports, “Eating ordinary, average everyday supper with your family is strongly linked to lower incidence of bad outcomes such as teenage drug and alcohol use, and to good qualities like emotional stability.”¹⁴ Having dinner as a family is one of the easiest and most natural routines for creating opportunities for parental engagement and

¹³Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home*, 49.

¹⁴Miriam Weinstein, *The Surprising Power of Family Meals* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth, 2005), 2.

communication. Exodus 12:1-29 provides an example of using family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of children. In these verses, God instructs parents to teach their children about His deliverance through the illustration of the Passover meal. Even though Jesus did not have children, he used the Passover meal in the spiritual formation of his disciples (Matt 26:17-30).

God, in all his wisdom, created people with the need for food and nourishment thus providing families with an optimal opportunity to speak truth and life into their children. Families need regular contact with one another for the process of spiritual formation, and meal times are being neglected and forgotten. Miriam Weinstein states, “Combining our needs for food and for sociability on the same sort of regular, dependable schedule should be a no-brainer.”¹⁵ Giving up on family meals is nothing more than a family giving up on opportunities to connect and train. Focusing on the following exegesis will help parents understand their role as the primary disciplers of their children and the importance of using family mealtimes in the discipleship of their children.

Old Testament Family Discipleship

Family discipleship is seen throughout the pages of the Old Testament. God always had a plan for the family to be the primary place of discipleship. The Old Testament highlights the importance of families being active and intentional in the spiritual formation of their children. The following exegesis not only emphasizes the importance of parents’ discipling their children, but also the significance of parents using family mealtimes in the process.

Deuteronomy 6

Deuteronomy contains three great speeches and a collection of legal arrangements given by God to Moses at the end of his life and holds religious education,

¹⁵Weinstein, *The Surprising Power of Family Meals*, 49.

as its primary purpose. Christensen writes, “The focus of attention in this reading is on the very purpose of Deuteronomy as a pedagogical tool to instruct each generation on what it means to be a part of God’s chosen people.”¹⁶ This book contains instructions and serves as a model for how the Law should be taught to the younger generations. The main purpose of the book of Deuteronomy is to remind the Israelites of God’s faithfulness. Children were not expected to discover this on their own; they were to be taught this by the previous generations.¹⁷

Deuteronomy 6:1-8 gives clear evidence that parents are called upon to teach the laws and commandments to their children so that they may grow in their knowledge of the Lord. This passage substantiates the importance of parents being intentional with the spiritual formation of their children.

Deuteronomy 6:1-3 highlights the covenantal loyalty Israel was to have with the Lord. They were to “fear the Lord” (Deut 6:3), which is to love God and to serve him with all their heart. Weinfeld notes, “In Deuteronomy the term *love* has a special meaning of loyalty, as in the vassal loyalty oaths.”¹⁸ This fear was to pass from generation to generation, from father to son. Having understood the commandments themselves, parents were responsible to catechize their children. The responsibility of passing on the covenantal loyalty was accomplished by a constant awareness of the law.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 contains what is referred to as the fundamental truth of

¹⁶Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-21:9*, rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 137.

¹⁷Eugene Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 162.

¹⁸Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, The Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 338.

Israel's religion, the Shema.¹⁹ The Shema is a representation in sixteen words of Hebrew text on the essence of all God's person and purposes. These words would be known by every adult member of the community and were to be taught diligently to their children. The first section begins with the imperative "to hear" (Deut 6:3), which, according to the Hebrew lexicography, is equivalent of "to obey."²⁰ Weinfeld is helpful in his commentary on Deuteronomy when he states,

The imperative is followed by a declaration of faith (Deut 6:4-5), and continues with a didactic passage to educate the children through a monotheistic creed (Deut 6:7) and concludes with the demand to memorize the words of YHWH by phylacteries and door inscriptions (Deut 6:8-9).²¹

The adult community members were to listen to the voice of the Lord, through Moses, and obey the commandments laid out in the Shema. The imperative was to love the Lord their God with all their heart, their soul, and their might (Deut 6:5). Eugene Merrill, in his commentary on Deuteronomy, explains this commandment:

In covenant terms, then, love is not so much emotive or sensual in its connotation (though it is not excluded in those respects), but it is of the nature of obligation, of legal demand. Thus because of who and what he is in regard to his people who he elected and redeemed, the Lord rightly demands of them unqualified obedience. This was to be passed down from generation to generation because it is a covenant between God and His people not just a generation.²²

Merrill correctly highlights that the importance of the covenantal relationship was intended to reach beyond the immediate generation. These promises and provisions were not only for that generation, but also for the generations that would come. Deuteronomy 6:1-8 stresses the weightiness of fathers and mothers educating their sons and daughters of the importance of hearing and obeying the commandments of their Lord.

¹⁹Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-21:9*, 142.

²⁰Ibid., 162.

²¹Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 328.

²²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 164.

Once the importance of passing on the knowledge of their loving God has been established the author moves to the practical way of instilling this obedience. The laws were not only an expression of reverence for God, but also a means of teaching reverence.²³

Fathers and mothers were to first believe and obey the commands of the Lord and then teach them “diligently to their children” (Deut 6:7). Another way of communicating this is to say parents are to “impress them on their children” (Deut 6:7). Holmen notes, “The word impress in the original Hebrew literally means to establish, fix, or permanently brand like when a farmer brands his cattle. The brand is there to stay.”²⁴ Impressing was accomplished by talking about commandments when they sit, when they walk, when they lie down, and when they rise (Deut 6:8). Sitting and lying down encompass inactivity, while walking and rising include activity. Together these phrases show that the teaching of children would involve all aspects of life. Israel’s duty to love God was inseparable from their daily lives. Not only was the teaching to encompass every aspect of a family’s life, in effect the faith seen in their parents was to be authentic. Parents must first have these commands on their hearts before they ever try to pass them down to their children. Peter Craigie, in his commentary on Deuteronomy, states, “The commandments were to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to the end of the day. In summary, the commandments were to permeate every sphere of the life of a man.”²⁵ Deuteronomy 6:1-8 provides some of the clearest evidence for parents to teach their children about who God is, what he has

²³Jeffrey Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 75.

²⁴Mark Holmen, *Impress Faith on Your Kids* (Nashville: Randall, 2011), 54.

²⁵Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 170.

done, and how they can relate to him. Although Deuteronomy 6:1-8 does not directly mention family mealtimes, the verses do address that parents should take advantage of the normal activities of family life, such as sitting at home, walking along the road, and lying down and getting up.

Psalm 78

Psalm 78 continues the belief of passing on the marvelous works of God from one generation to another. In Psalm 78, Asaph is calling the people to hear God's instruction (v. 1) concerning the Lord's works, power, and wonders (v. 4) that he would make known to his generation.²⁶ These had been handed down from earlier generations as God commanded so that following generations would trust and obey the Lord and not stumble into unbelief and rebellion.

Psalm 78 opens with establishing the urgency of the audience to pay attention to the teachings. In his commentary, Marvin Tate notes, "Israel has been able to know Yahweh in two ways. First is through God's words, the covenantal law and the second is through divine actions, the exodus."²⁷ Knowledge of God's words and deeds were not to be hidden from the younger generations. The verb hidden or concealed (*nechached*, v. 4) shows that "these things should be published from age to age without interruption; so that being transmitted from father to child in each family, they might reach even the last family man."²⁸ The older generation is exhorted to instill in the younger the significance of God's faithfulness from the stories of their ancestors. However, the passing of these stories from parents to their children was not only for knowledge sake. John Goldingay is correct when

²⁶Allen Ross, *Psalms*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 850.

²⁷Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 288.

²⁸Ross, *Psalms*, 230.

he states, “It is designed not merely to record the past but to change people for the future.”²⁹ If the younger generation is not led to understand God’s mighty deeds and faithfulness they will be in danger of rebellion and disbelief. When parents are intentional about passing on the truth of who God is and what he has done, it not only affects their children but their unborn grandchildren (v. 6). Timothy Paul Jones writes in his book, “Children are far more than a gift for this life. They are bearers of the gospel to the generations yet unborn.”³⁰ This intentional family discipleship has the end goal of the next generation continuing to be faithful to the Lord in obedience to His commandments. Goldingay helps anchor this point:

Verses 6-7 are more likely three bicola than the two tricola implied by MT. Verse 6a-b continues to restate the point about that process involving three generations (past, present, and future), but then vv. 6c-7a goes beyond that to the fourth generation. Yhwh set up and put (*qum* hiphil, *sim*) declaration/teaching; it will be the coming generation’s task to respond by rising up (*qum* qal) and putting (*sim*) their confidence in the right place.³¹

A didactic psalm, Psalms 78 draws upon lessons from the past and stresses the importance of parents handing down the history of God’s dealings with his people with the desired outcome of producing future faithfulness.³² In conclusion, it is important to note to whom this command is given. The passing down of knowledge and faithful obedience is given to the children by their parents. Psalm 78 reminds that parents have the greatest privilege of teaching their children to know God and His Word. In this Psalm, Asaph does not lay this responsibility at the feet of the Levites or priests, but upon the fathers.³³ Psalms 78

²⁹John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 479.

³⁰Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 102.

³¹Goldingay, *Psalms*, 486.

³²Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 239.

³³Jason Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 36.

provides clear support for parents to not remain silent but rather be intentional about teaching their children the Lord's deeds and Word.

Exodus 12

Exodus 12 continues to support the thesis of family discipleship showing that Scripture instructs parents to teach their children about God's deliverance through the illustration of the Passover Meal. Exodus 12 records the details Israel was to go through in preparing for the annual Passover Meal. The Passover Meal was observed in remembrance of God's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The final plague that God brought to the Pharaoh and his land was that the angel of death would take the life of the first-born son of any home that did not have blood over the doorpost. The Passover Meal was not only a remembrance of God's deliverance but was to be used annually to teach the younger generation. The celebration of Passover was centered in the homes. On the tenth day of the month each Israelite family was to select a goat or lamb and prepare the meat along with bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and wine. Each element of the meal brought meaning and remembrance. What is now established are the parallels between the use of the Passover and the instructions known as the Shema in Deuteronomy 6. Victor Hamilton states, "This catechistic passage highlights the God-given, educative ministry of parents to offspring. The education of children by telling them the history of their ancestors who were freed from oppression is something unique to the Israelite nation."³⁴ Beginning with the preparation of the food all the way to the conclusion of the meal, opportunities were available to educate, disciple, and connect with their children.

During the selection and preparation of the lamb or goats, the blood would be spread over the doorpost of their home. Its blood became a mark of protection. John

³⁴Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 189.

Hannah states, “The sprinkled blood of the Israelites’ homes provided protection from death when God destroyed the Egyptian firstborn. From the verb, pass over (*pasha*) comes the noun that designates the feast, the Passover (*pesah*).”³⁵ The sacrificial animal became a gift of gratitude along with a catalyst of family communion as they would gather as a family unit and retell the story of God’s protection on the night before they left Egypt. Bitter herbs were also prepared with the sacrifice to recall the suffering they endured while in Egypt as a result of the past rebellion toward God. Unleavened bread cakes were baked to memorialize the haste for which the Israelites fled from Egypt. All of the preparation and elements were to be used by families for teaching the younger generations. Victor Hamilton summarizes,

In Exodus 12:1-20 the Lord, beginning with v. 4, uses “eat” thirteen times, and five more times in the additional Passover instructions in vv. 43-49. What to eat? When to select the animal that is to be eaten? When to prepare it for eating? What to do with the leftovers you cannot eat? With whom to eat it? At what speed to eat it, slowly or quickly? What side dishes come with the entrée? What to wear when you eat it?³⁶

Every aspect of the Passover meal was used to teach children about who God was and what he has done.

The Passover was first observed during the last night Israel would spend in Egypt under the rule of Pharaoh. God then led the people from bondage back to the Promised Land he had prepared for them. Exodus 12:25-27 (ESV) reads, “And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover.’” Parents were to have an answer for why they observed this meal each and every year. The questions and answers around the Passover meal created opportunities for discipleship. The remarkable realization from this

³⁵John D. Hannah, *Exodus*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 128.

³⁶Hamilton, *Exodus*, 180.

Passover ritual is that there is no association of priests with a rite of type later strictly limited to them. R. Alan Cole writes, “Therefore, it is clear that this festival arose before the establishment of ‘professional’ priesthood in Israel. The head of the home, father and mother, were to act as priest of their own homes.”³⁷ In agreement, Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony state, “In connection with Exodus 12:25-27, it was always God’s plan that the family home would be the greenhouse for the growth of faith for motion.”³⁸ Even dating back to the original group that was brought out of Egypt, parents were to use this annual festival for the discipleship and teaching of their children. The Passover reiterates the essential family nature of discipleship. For God’s people, the Passover meal, family meals, and dinners should be used to teach children about the story of God’s salvation. Ed Moll explains, “When Moses gave instructions on how to keep the Passover, it was so that parents could explain God’s rescue to their children.”³⁹ The Passover Meal functioned as a meal of remembrance, but it was also an important time for families to spend together. As in Exodus 12, family mealtimes provide natural interactions for parents to teach their children about God’s mighty deeds.⁴⁰

New Testament Family Discipleship

God designed parents to be the primary disciplers of their children.⁴¹ From the

³⁷R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 (London: Inter-Varsity, 1973), 113.

³⁸Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 209.

³⁹Moll and Chester, *Gospel-Centered Families*, 64.

⁴⁰Exod 12 is not a paradigm or template for families to follow in using mealtimes in the discipleship of their children. Exod 12 is a record of a special meal called the Passover that was directed to a specific group of people, Israel. However, the Passover was a meal that was used to teach the younger generation about God’s faithfulness.

⁴¹William P. Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 179.

Old Testament it is clear that parents are to intentionally engage in the spiritual formation of their children, and family meals provide a natural opportunity for families to connect. The use of the family meal in the discipleship of children is also seen in the New Testament.

Matthew 26

In this text, Jesus uses the Passover meal in the spiritual formation of His disciples. Even though Jesus did not have children He used many opportunities to teach and lead His followers. The evening before Judas betrayed Jesus, he and his disciples were eating the Passover meal, and Jesus took this opportunity to teach the disciples some valuable lessons. Jesus used the Passover meal, most often observed by families, to guide his disciples' spiritual knowledge of who he was and what he was going to do. As a result, he initiated Holy Communion.

Toward the end of the meal, Jesus took some bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. He then spoke the words that began the service known as Holy Communion: "Take, eat; this is my body" (v. 26). Jesus then took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to his followers saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (vv. 27-28). Jesus began in the context of a meal, not as a separate piece of religious ceremony.⁴² Jesus used the elements of the Passover meal to increase the disciples' knowledge of his mission. Jesus took the opportunity of a meal to communicate truths about himself and God's plan of redemption. Today, family mealtimes provide opportunities for parents to connect with their children and teach them the truths of Christ. R. T. France describes how the Passover meal provides a means for education:

⁴²Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 658.

The traditional Passover ritual included an explanation of the meaning of the unleavened bread and herbs (*m. Pesah* 10:3-5), and Jesus takes that opportunity to introduce a new level of symbolism. The Passover bread did not directly symbolize the killing of the lamb, but when Jesus identifies it as his body the symbolism of death is clearly intended, and the shedding of blood in v. 28 will confirm this.⁴³

Jesus used the Passover meal, which connected Israel's redemption from Egypt with Jesus' redemptive death, to those who shared his table.⁴⁴

Jesus understood the sacrificial death he was about to undergo and he took the opportunity during this meal to communicate with those closest to him. During the Passover meal, children would ask the meaning of all these symbols and the head of the home would take the opportunity to explain them. Mark Strauss provides the historical context when he writes,

Toward midafternoon on Thursday, 14 Nisan, the lambs (one per "household"—a convenient group of perhaps ten or twelve people) would be brought to the temple court, where the priests sacrificed them. The priests took the blood and passed it in basins along a line until it was passed out at the foot of the altar. They also burned the lambs' fat on the altar of burnt offerings. The singing of the *Hallel* (Pss 113-18) accompanied these steps. After sunset, the "household" would gather in a home to eat the Passover meal, which by this time would have been roasted with bitter herbs. The head of the household began the meal with thanksgiving for that feast day (the Passover *qiddus*) and for the wine, praying over the first of four cups. A preliminary course of greens and bitter herbs was, apparently followed by the Passover *Haggadah*—in which a boy would ask the meaning of all this and the head of the household would explain the symbols in terms of the exodus.⁴⁵

In Matthew 26, Jesus is serving as the head of the household while Peter confesses that he will not be the one to fulfill Jesus' prophecy of people denying him. Matthew 26 links several elements. First, Jesus links the past salvation of Israel from Egypt with the present salvation that will come to all those who trust in the sacrificial death of Jesus. Second, Jesus links the Passover supper and the communion service. On the night Jesus was

⁴³R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 992.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Mark Strauss, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 597.

betrayed he became the author and creator of the Lord's Supper. He used the family Passover meal to teach of His coming sacrifice. Jesus links the past deliverance to the future salvation. Today family discipleship is also linked to family mealtimes. Weinstein conveys this link when she writes, "Supper works to consolidate group identity, shepherding a family through time. That is why they call it communion because it's everyone eating together. As a Christian, it acts in the same way as supper."⁴⁶

We read about an example of communion in Matthew 26 where Jesus uses the power of sitting down and sharing a meal to communicate vital truths to his disciples. In Scripture, meals are seen as a tremendous opportunity for teaching and discipling.

Conclusion

God clearly communicated through the scriptures that parents have the primary responsibility for discipling their children. Parents must understand and then intentionally lead their children to know of God and His wondrous deeds. Parents do not have the power to control the salvation of their children, but parents can faithfully model and teach a life devoted to Christ. Old Testament examples, such as Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78, and Exodus 12, prove the powerful influence and responsibility parents have in spiritually leading their children. Deuteronomy 6 shows that parents are to lead their children through their normal and every day activities. Parents must authentically follow Christ in front of their children. Psalm 78 highlights the importance of older generations to make sure younger generations do not neglect the teachings of God. Exodus 12 gives powerful and practical ways in leading children through the use of the Passover meal. The Passover meal was observed every year and children were reminded of God's faithfulness and salvation. Matthew 26 records Jesus transforming the Passover meal for his disciples while retaining the teaching element of the meal. From both the Old and New Testaments,

⁴⁶Weinstein, *The Surprising Power*, 155.

it is clear that parents hold the primary place as disciplers of their children, and this spiritual formation is naturally suited to mealtimes.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND PRACTICAL
ISSUES FOR PARENTS USING FAMILY MEALTIMES
IN THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION
OF THEIR CHILDREN

Where does discipleship begin? Chapter 2 demonstrated that God created and established the home as the primary place of discipleship. Throughout the Bible God encourages, commands, and equips parents to teach their children about who He is and what He has done (Deut 6:1-8; Ps 78:1-7). Parents are faced with many challenges in discipling their children. When it comes to the spiritual formation of their children, many parents do not understand God's design. Parents often default to the church for the biblical training of their children. Once parents begin to embrace God's design for them to be the primary disciplers of their children, there are further challenges. Spiritual formation of children requires parents to follow Christ before they can begin properly leading their children. Parents who follow Christ with all their heart, soul, and might are then equipped to lead in the spiritual formation of their children.

After parents recognize God's design and pursue the things of Christ personally, they will face many practical hurdles. However, God has provided help for parents. God created a natural way for parents to actively engage in the discipleship of their children. He has given parents family mealtimes (Exod 12:1-12; Matt 26:26-28). This chapter addresses the issues of God's design for household discipleship and family worship, obstacles that hinder parents in discipling their children, and how family mealtimes provide parents with an optimal time for pursuing the spiritual formation of their children.

God's Design for Household Discipleship and Family Worship

Parents unquestionably hold the greatest amount of influence over their children. Children are products of the environments they grow up in. This influence was designed by God to be used by parents in the spiritual formation of their children. As previously shown from Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78, the home is to be the primary place children learn of who God is and what He has done. However, evidence and experience prove that many homes are not actively discipling their children. Timothy Paul Jones recognizes this when he writes, "Many parents simply don't know what it means to function as primary faith trainers in their children's lives."¹

Decline of Household Discipleship

There are perhaps many contributing factors to the decline of household discipleship. One contributing factor as to why parents do not function this way is because many parents were not disciplined themselves. Many parents have turned over the responsibility of discipling their children to churches or para-church organizations. Mark Holmen notes, "Many parents today would rather pass instilling their children's faith on to the professionals at church instead of tackling this responsibility themselves. Because they often didn't experience what it was like to have Christ at the center of their home."² What is being seen in homes is the breakdown of generational discipleship. It only takes one generation to not follow God's commands of generational discipleship to affect many others. If the cycle is not broken, soon there will be a generation that does not know and follow God. Parents must realize God's design for them to be primary faith trainers of their children. The importance of this generational discipleship cannot be emphasized enough. William Farley highlights the importance of discipleship: "Failure to feed our

¹Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 34.

²Mark Holmen, *Church + Home* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 43.

children the Bread of Life has catastrophic, eternal consequences.” Failure to give children spiritual nourishment creates children who do not know the importance of prayer, confession, and dependence on God. Failure to spiritually feed children can lead to a lack of understanding of who God is, which can result in an agnostic lifestyle that ends in spiritual death.³

Another contributing factor to the breakdown of parents leading in the spiritual formation of their children is a lack of reality. Parents and children face many challenges, whether it is through academics, sports, or extracurricular activities. What often gets pushed to the side is the actual need for spiritual training and nourishment. When asked about the greatest need for their children, most parents would respond with self-esteem, better grades, or accelerating in sports. A major challenge for parents is to realize that the problem is the very sinful nature of their children. In *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, William Farley writes, “Most parents do not share the conviction that their children have a sin nature, and this breakdown is responsible for many parenting failures.”⁴

Parents can become distracted from what their child’s greatest need is and focus little, if any, time leading their children spiritually. In *Church + Home*, Mark Holmen reports statistics from the Search Institute, which conducted a nationwide survey of over 11,000 participants from 561 congregations across six different denominations. The results showed that only 12 percent of youth have a regular conversation with their mother and only 5 percent of youth have a regular conversation with their father regarding faith and/or life issues. Only 9 percent of youth have experienced regular reading of the Bible and

³William P. Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 176.

⁴*Ibid.*, 151.

devotions in the home.⁵ If parents would begin to recognize that their children are sinners, and in need of salvation, they would begin taking all necessary actions to help their children. The solution to their child's future is faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone and God has designed the home to be the predominant place that this happens.

If changes are not made within the homes, there will soon be an entire generation of biblically-illiterate adults who do not follow God. In July 2006, the Barna Group conducted a survey of 608 children between the ages of 8 and 12 across the nation. The findings revealed that not even half of young people believe that their religious faith is very important in their lives. The results showed that only 2 out of every 10 adolescents strongly disagree with the statement that people cannot know for sure what will happen to them after they die. The group reported that the majority of them live for things other than loving God with all their hearts, minds, strength, and souls, and only 58 percent believe that God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, Creator of the universe who still rules His creation. The evangelicals' hope rests in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but of the group surveyed, only one-third contend that Jesus Christ returned to physical life after His crucifixion and death on the cross.⁶ The problem is a lack of spiritual formation happening in homes. Parents must understand that their job is to teach their children about God, and to assist them in connecting with God's grace.

Parents are to prepare their children, not just for this earthly life, but for eternity as well.⁷ Obviously a shift needs to occur in homes for the spiritual health of children and the generations to follow, and the solution is not outsourcing to churches and para-

⁵Holmen, *Church + Home*, 27.

⁶George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting* (Wheaton IL: Barna /Tyndale, 2007), 8-9.

⁷J. Otis Ledbetter et al., *Spiritual Milestones: A Guide to Celebrating Your Children's Spiritual Passages* (Clovis, NM: Heritage Builders, 2001), 11.

church organizations. One major building block that parents need to recapture is the practice of family worship.

Family Worship

Family worship is a time where families gather to study God's Word, pray, and sing. Family worship will take on a different style depending on each individual family. No matter what form or style the family worship has, they all share in the same goal: parents lead their children to follow after God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Family discipleship happens through faithfully teaching God's Word, giving God praise through songs, communicating with God in prayer, and parents modeling a lifestyle of devotion to God.

The Bible expresses three forms of worship for individuals and families. The first form of worship is secret or private worship. Individuals are commanded to communicate and worship God privately in their own rooms as well as in their minds. The second form of worship is corporate. Individuals and families are not to neglect meeting together with other saints for the purposes of worshiping God and building one another up in the faith. The third form of worship is family worship. Most evangelicals are aware and familiar with the importance of private and corporate worship but few have even heard of family worship.⁸ Family worship is not intended to replace the first two types of worship, but parents are to strive to engage their family regularly in the Word of God.⁹ In chapter 2, family worship was described in Deuteronomy 6 and Exodus 12. Families were to gather together to give God praise and discover more about who He was and what He had done. Family worship, although intimidating at first, provides enormous blessings to

⁸Jason Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 26.

⁹Timothy Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 108.

parents as well as their children. Jason Helopoulos states the concept well: “Family worship can be one of the most beneficial and satisfying aspects of you and your family’s life in Christ. How good it is to lead your family before God and reencounter each day His abundant grace.”¹⁰ It is important for families to acknowledge what family worship is and is not.

Family worship is not a replacement for corporate or private worship. Families are to meet regularly with other believers as the bride of Christ. The home is not to replace the church just as the church is not meant to replace the home. The two should work in harmony with each other. Family worship would not be a burdensome duty. When parents are following Christ, family worship will be an outflow of their joy found in Him. Family worship is not the worship of family. The tendency could be for parents to begin placing their faith in their family worship but family worship is not a guarantee that children will turn out exactly as planned. Family worship is also not just an activity or even a game night. Families need to also engage in these types of activities but those activities do not go far enough.¹¹ Family worship consists of times that families gather together while the parents, and even older siblings, train and teach the younger ones what a life of Christ looks like. When families begin regularly meeting together for the purpose of family worship many benefits will be experienced.

Family worship promotes family unity and spiritual health. In *A Neglected Grace*, Helopoulos highlights several effects family worship will have on a home: (1) centers the home on Christ, (2) encourages children in the things of Christ, (3) builds Christian character, (4) increases peace at home, (5) holds the family together, (6) provides

¹⁰Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 76.

¹¹Ibid., 76-78.

a common knowledge and language, (7) trains children for corporate and private worship, (8) reinforces spiritual headship, and (9) provides systematic discipleship.¹²

Each family has its own identity. A family's identity is created through what the family members value and invest in. Some families are known for their love of baseball, board games, or movies. A family that faithfully participates in family worship will have a home centered on Christ. Families that read the Bible, pray, and sing together will begin to have its actions, thoughts, and words shaped by these daily events. Farley writes, "Parents who joyfully pursue God are contagious."¹³ Children will internalize the passions of their parents and pursue what they pursue. Family worship allows parents to be intentional about communicating and creating a family centered on the gospel.

Families that consistently hold family worship times encourage their children in the things of Christ. A parent's goal in raising their children is not to raise moral or competent people but children that grow up to be true worshippers of God. In *Spiritual Milestones*, Jim Weidman and Janet Weidmann write,

We must be able to point positively to our relationship with God as a pattern for our kids to emulate. The quiet testimony of a parent who loves God will accomplish more good in a child's relationship with Christ than taking them to a thousand Sunday school classes.¹⁴

Family worship times allow parents optimal opportunities to lead their children in the things of Christ. Christian parents' goal is to prepare their children for eternity. Family worship times create opportunities for parents to direct their children to seek Christ daily.

Family worship times urge Christian character. Family worship times serve as a daily reminder to see oneself in relation to Christ inside and outside the home. A child

¹²Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 41-49.

¹³Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 106.

¹⁴Ledbetter, *Spiritual Milestones*, 225.

has an upfront seat to their parent's lives. Children witness their parents at their worst and best. A parent's lack of Christian character is more evident at home and allows parents the opportunity to model confession and teach their child about their need for Christ. In *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, Farley explains,

Our children see the very sins to which we are blind. They have a front row seat to them. Pride makes it possible for us to tell our children one thing even while we unknowingly do another. The result is hypocrisy and hypocrisy hardens children's hearts to the message we want them to hear.¹⁵

Family worship creates moments for families to face these hypocritical moments and model grace and forgiveness. It is important for parents to remember if they could be perfect their children would not need a savior. Family worship times can urge Christian character that is modeled before them.

Family worship times promote peace and unity at home. Every home struggles at times with unity and peace. The reason for the break in harmony is that every home has sinners under the same roof. Jim and Janet Weidmann write, "The place for kids to learn about intimacy with God is in the nurture of a home that naturally speaks of Him. It's a home with an atmosphere that has fallen in love with God and encourages interaction with and about him."¹⁶ Family worship times provide opportunities for every member to be before God in confession, repentance, and receive God's grace and comforts.

Families will also experience bonding through family worship moments. A level of intimacy is reached when people open God's Word, pray together, offer forgiveness, and acknowledge sins. When family members are actively and consistently in these types of settings there is a greater opportunity for them to create a unique bond. Family members will begin to experience a trust and unity that binds them together.

¹⁵Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 115.

¹⁶Ledbetter, *Spiritual Milestones*, 226.

Family worship provides an avenue for parents and children to have a common knowledge. Most families attend churches where Bible studies and lessons do not connect the adults and children. Family worship gives families the opportunity to discuss and learn together.

Family worship can assist in equipping children for corporate and private worship. Children learn in a variety of ways. Some are auditory learners while others may thrive best with hands on learning. Each church has a level of expectation for corporate worship. When children are gathered in their living room or around their dinner table they have a greater opportunity to learn how to be good listeners. Family worship creates optimal teachable moments for parents in preparing their children for corporate worship. Family worship also provides a training ground for private worship. Private worship can consist of personal prayer, individual Bible reading, journaling, etc. Family worship times can incorporate these types of private worship that can lead a child into what constitutes a healthy private worship life.

Family worship reinforces spiritual headship. God has created the husband or father to be the head of the family as Christ is the head of the Church. Family worship paints a picture of biblical leadership for children. When children witness their father calling the family together, or selecting individuals to read scripture or pray, they are experiencing leadership that matters. Children need to see their father leading in spiritual matters more often, and family worship provides these opportunities. Fathers have a profound influence on whether or not their children will embrace a biblical worldview. A father's spiritual example is the primary tool that shapes his children's desire to embrace his religion. In *Gospel-Powered Parenting* William Farley reports,

When both father and mother attended church regularly, 33 percent of their children ended up as regular church goers. But when the father was nonpracticing, and the mother a regular church attender, only 2 percent of their children became regular worshippers. If the father was a regular church attender, but the mother an irregular or nonpracticing church attender, extraordinarily, the percent-age of children who became adult church attenders went up from 33 percent to 38 percent (with the

irregular mother) and 44 percent (with the nonpracticing mother. It was as if loyalty to the father's commitment grew in proportion to Mom's laxity, indifference, or hostility to her husband's religion.¹⁷

The influence of a mother on her children is a powerful force, but too often fathers delegate the spiritual formation to the mothers. Family worship creates an environment where the parents can be seen working together and experience spiritual headship by the father as well.

Homes in churches today could use more male leadership in the home. Mothers are often the ones that have a desire for their children to be led spiritual and men need to rise to the challenge. Family worship can provide a platform for fathers to exercise spiritual leadership in the home.

Lastly, family worship provides systematic discipleship. There are a variety of resources for families to use in family worship and this project provides one.¹⁸ Families cannot thrive by eating one large meal once a week. Families need daily nourishment. Family worship creates an ongoing systematic way for parents to spiritually feed their children.

The home is the most powerful influence in the world and within churches. The home is where the church lives every single day. Homes and churches will become healthier when parents own the spiritual formation of their children and participate in dependable family worship times. Helopolous gives an inspirational challenge when he writes, "Let us be parents who love our Lord well by loving our families well. And let us love our families well by caring for their souls. And let us care for their souls by leading our families in worship."¹⁹ Household discipleship is a calling God has placed on every parent. Far too few parents recognize and step into this vital opportunity. God has

¹⁷Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 129-30.

¹⁸See appendix 5.

¹⁹Helopolous, *A Neglected Grace*, 40.

chosen parents to lead their children to know who God is and what He has done and this will not fully happen with families simply taking their children to church. Parents must begin actively leading their families through times of worship together. However, family worship is not an easy undertaking. Family worship is foreign to many households and the next section outlines many of the obstacles that stand in the way.

Obstacles to Household Discipleship and Family Worship

Whether parents realize it or not, God has selected them to lead their children in following Christ. Even parents with the greatest intentions of leading their child will face a plethora of obstacles. The last things Satan wants to see happen is for families to be centered on the gospel, grounded in their faith, and living lives full of grace. This section brings to light several obstacles families face in reference to household discipleship and family worship.

Obstacle: Opportunities for Outsourcing

The first obstacle many families face in the area of household discipleship is too many opportunities for outsourcing. Many families have relinquished this responsibility to the professionals in the church and para-church organizations. Parents have been taking a backseat when it comes to the spiritual development of their children. This area of outsourcing has become almost like a virus for many families. Parents are either too busy or lack the skills they feel are necessary, therefore, parents look to outsourcing for almost every activity.²⁰ Children are sent to baseball, football, basketball, cheerleading, reading, mathematics, music, and voice camps. If these outsourcing venues

²⁰Jen Doll, "American Parents Are Now Outsourcing Basic Parenting Skills," *The Wire*, December 27, 2012, assessed July 19, 2016, <http://www.thewire.com/entertainment/2012/12/american-parents-are-now-outsourcing-basic-parenting-skills/60357/>.

do not accomplish what the parents hope they turn to individual lessons such as with tennis, golf, cooking, and even lessons on how to behave in social settings. When outsourcing becomes the norm it is no wonder parents have fallen into the trap of outsourcing the spiritual development of their children as well. Parents are not the only ones to blame because the church has acted as if leaving the spiritual development of children belongs to the church.

Too many churches, whether intentional or unintentional, have taken the discipleship of children away from the parents. Churches offer discipleship classes, children's churches, summer camps, Bible memorization competitions, vacation Bible schools, and retreats, not realizing the effects this would have on household discipleship. Search Institute conducted a nationwide survey of more than 11,000 participants from 561 congregations across 6 different denominations. The results showed that only 12 percent of teenagers have a regular dialog with their mother on faith issues and only 5 percent with their father. Of the teenagers that regularly attended church with their families, fewer than 10 percent read the Bible together, pray together or participate in an act of service as a family unit.²¹ The church often hires professionals, even seminary trained leaders, to build these types of programs that inadvertently draw discipleship away from the home. It has become easier for parents to drop their children off to be taught and trained rather than taking that responsibility themselves. The good news is there has been an awakening to this movement and many churches are looking for ways to partner with families in the discipleship of their children.

The first major obstacle of household discipleship involves a change in philosophy. The philosophy of outsourcing that encompasses many aspects of family life must be reversed in the area of spiritual formation of children. The effects of outsourcing

²¹Mark Holmen, *Faith Begins at Home* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 72-73.

cannot be reversed overnight, but there is hope when churches and families recognize the need for a partnership that equips, supports, and encourages families to be the primary disciplers of their children. As the obstacle of outsourcing began to rise, parents began experiencing a lack of competence or ability.

Obstacle: Lack of Competency

As parents began to give up the discipleship responsibility through outsourcing, they soon developed a lack of competency in their abilities to teach their children. God has gifted parents with everything they need to disciple their children. Parents have been resourced with the Word of God, the people of God, and the Spirit of God. As with any talent or gift, if not used one can begin to lose their competency in the ability. Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony write, “Many parents agree that the spiritual mantle has been given to them by God; however, they often do not feel prepared or equipped to pass on their faith to their children”²² Parents feel this way because they are not developing themselves to be the primary disciplers. Parents need to recapture the biblical mandate to disciple their children and then begin to develop the tools necessary for discipleship. This obstacle is a big mountain to climb but it is not impossible. When parents outsource the discipleship of the children they lose their own competency in the resources God has given them because of their lack of use. The two obstacles then lead to a lack of confidence.

Obstacle: Lack of Confidence

The third obstacle that parents must overcome in the discipleship of their children is a lack of confidence. When parents outsource household discipleship and have a lapse in competency they will lose confidence. Parents can lose confidence in themselves, God, and the power of the gospel. Everyone leans on someone or something.

²²Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 185.

As stated previously, parents began leaning more and more on the professionals of the church and para-church organizations. Partially because parents are absent during moments that the power of the gospel is seen in the lives of their children. Anthony and Anthony recognize this when they say,

If parents believe that the Holy Spirit is God's chosen teacher in children's heart and that He is the one who causes spiritual growth when and as He chooses, then they must be willing to cultivate environments in their home that will allow their children not only to hear God's words but also have the opportunity to put them into practice.²³

Parents may not have all the professional training they feel they need but they can be immensely effective in discipling their children when they have a greater confidence in the power of God than themselves. God calls parents to be faithful in leading their children and to leave the results up to Him. This obstacle is real in many homes because parents lack confidence in the power of the gospel. The more confidence parents have in the power of the gospel, the more persistently they will lead and teach their children.²⁴ However, if parents can be equipped and trained to disciple their children, they can experience success in the discipleship of their children they will see an increase in their confidence in the power of God to change hearts.

Obstacle: Time

The last obstacle that families face in the spiritual formation of their children is time. Families experience overcrowded schedules which leave little, if any, time for family discipleship moments. Parents balance the demands of work and the education of their children, as well as extracurricular activities. For parents to actively disciple their children they must spend time together. Discipleship moments can occur either by being intentional and planned out or spontaneous. To overcome this obstacle, parents need to be

²³Anthony and Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministry*, 189.

²⁴Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 181.

sensitive to God’s leading through planned moments of training and moments that happen unexpectedly. Farley highlights this need when he states, “You can’t teach God’s word to your family unless you meet together consistently.”²⁵ For parents to be effective as disciplers of their children they must create the time needed. When families look over the calendars for the week few will see the time needed. Once the alarm clock rings it is a mad dash to get everyone out the door, and when the final school bell rings children are raced around town to all their extracurricular activities. The schedule of many families leaves minimal time for family worship. If parents desire to institute moments of family worship, the obstacle of time must be dealt with.

Several obstacles can hinder household discipleship, but it is well worth the fight to create and maintain these moments. Brunner and Stroope define the worth: “Satan hates that God became flesh. He also hates healthy families because they serve as flesh and blood icons of unity and love.”²⁶ Families have obstacles they must face and there is a great solution to all of these obstacles. The next section highlights a method for overcoming the above obstacles. The method gives parents an opportunity to disciple their children and increase competency and confidence as disciplers. This method also takes into consideration the obstacle of family time.

Using Family Mealtimes for Household Discipleship

The most influential activity for homes is the family meal. Family meals provide opportunities for family members to share experiences, communicate desires, and bond through beliefs. The family meal is perhaps one of the oldest rituals known to man. It is through family meals that families bond together and create their household

²⁵Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 189.

²⁶Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope, *It Starts at Home* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 21.

identity. However, one of the greatest dangers society faces is the erosion of this vital ritual known as family mealtime. When families neglect family mealtimes it affects a child physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. When families recapture the importance of consistently sharing meals together, the impact will be realized for generations to come.

Erosion of Family Meals

The loss of the family mealtime is one of the most unfortunate losses of this age. The reasons range from longer working hours, overscheduled kids, and media distractions.²⁷ According to a recent survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, the top two reasons for infrequent meals are too busy/different activities, and long work hours.²⁸ As children get older, the meals become less frequent. In 2012, 53.8 percent of 6 to 11 year olds ate meals with their families at least 6 days a week, 45.8 percent of children 12 to 14 years old, and 35.3 percent of teenagers age 15 to 17.²⁹

Family mealtimes allow families to connect before the day begins or to reconvene at the close of the day. The importance of recapturing these moments cannot be overstated. Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott state, “Nightly supper is like a liturgy, acting on you in this unconscious way, to remind you that the family is important. It’s a deeply held belief, whether you’re conscious of it or not.”³⁰ When families neglect these

²⁷Melodie M. Davis, *Whatever Happened to Dinner?* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2010), 20-21.

²⁸Jeffrey B. Lane, “The Importance of Family Dinners VIII” (CASAColumbia White Paper, presented September 2012), 2.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 5.

³⁰Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *The Hour that Matters Most: The Surprising Power of the Family Meal* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2011), 148.

opportunities the children suffer. A disheartening factor is that 60 percent of teens that have less than five family dinners per week would like to have dinner with their parents more often.³¹ Children, whether they can voice it or not, have a desire to connect with their families over meals.

Family mealtimes are slowly being eroded through crowded schedules, long work hours, and media distractions. In reality, parents and children long for family mealtimes. According to a similar Columbia survey, “Two-thirds of teens (64 percent) and three-quarters of parents (75 percent) say they would be willing to give up a weeknight activity if it meant they could have dinner with their family.”³² Parents and children are busy and easily distracted, and family mealtimes are often neglected. Long work hours, overcrowded schedules, and media distractions have slowly eroded family mealtimes; however, if more families would realize the effects of family mealtimes, sacrifices would be made to recapture them.

Benefits of Family Mealtimes

Having breakfast or dinner as a family is one of the easiest ways to create routine opportunities for parents to engage and communicate with their children. Melodies Davis writes, “Eating food together is a bonding experience that can ease tension, make conversations happen, and make strangers less self-conscious.”³³ Families that consistently share meals together have a greater level of connectedness. A powerful force occurs at family mealtimes when food is being eaten and conversations are being shared. According to the 2012 Columbia survey, teens who have frequent family meals

³¹Lane, “The Importance of Family Dinners VIII,” 2.

³²Joseph A. Califano, Jr., “The Importance of Family Dinners VI” (CASAColumbia White Paper, presented 2010), 2.

³³Davis, *Whatever Happened to Dinner?*, 35.

are one and half times more likely to say their parents know a great deal or a fair amount about what is really going on in their lives (92 percent vs. 60 percent); and 5 times less likely to say their parents know very little or nothing at all about what is really going on in their lives (8 percent vs. 40 percent).³⁴ Family mealtimes are an ideal setting and opportunity to strengthen the quality of the family relationships. Davis continues, “Sharing food, passing it around, waiting on each other, talking about what happened at school and work helps to raise the families connectedness.”³⁵ Not only do families that share meals together have a greater level of connectedness, consistent family mealtimes are proven to promote healthier behaviors. The following information is reported by the Child Trends Databank:

Like other forms of parental involvement, frequent family meals are associated positive behavioral outcomes for teens and children. Teens who regularly have meals with their families are less likely to get into fights, think about suicide, smoke, drink, and use drugs; and are more likely to have later initiation of sexual activity, and better academic performance, than teens who do not. Even after controlling for other forms of family connectedness, frequent family meals are associated with less substance use, fewer depressive symptoms, fewer suicidal ideations, and better grades. Children under 13 have fewer problem behaviors overall, as well as fewer externalizing (“acting out”) problems when they have more frequent family meals.³⁶

Families who eat together five or more times a week have kids who are significantly less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana, have higher grade point averages, less depressive symptoms, and have fewer suicide attempts, than families who eat together two or fewer times a week.³⁷ Not only do families experience a greater level of connectedness through family meals, children and teenagers have healthier minds, actions, and lives. In

³⁴Lane, “The Importance of Family Dinners VIII,” 1.

³⁵Davis, *Whatever Happened to Dinner?*, 19.

³⁶Child Trends Data Bank, “Family Meals: Indicators on Children and Youth,” accessed January 22, 2015, <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=family-meals>.

³⁷Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 190.

addition, family mealtimes provide optimal opportunities for promoting the spiritual health of their children.

Family mealtimes are moments where children hear stories about their ancestors and learn about their family values. It is during these shared moments over food that children begin to discover what separates their families from others. The beliefs parents' hold are passed down through conversations and stories. Along with learning what a family values, the children begin to understand the family's expectations.

During family meals parents have the opportunity to calmly discuss beliefs and expectations revolving around how to behave in different situations, grades, manners, etc. Family mealtimes create excellent opportunities for parents to pass down their beliefs and values. All reports show that teens and children having frequent family meals have high quality relationships with their parents and these moments increase a parent's influence in their child's spiritual formation. During these moments of sharing a meal, parents can engage their children in spiritual conversations. It is during the family meals that parents can establish a regular practice of daily connection, prayer, Bible study, scripture reading, scripture memorization, and worship. When the influences of family connectedness and meals are combined, the effects will be long lasting. Farley is correct when he states, "The best time and place to gather the family for instruction is a family meal. The meal and the teaching should be habitual. The teaching does not need to be long but the family meal is a consistent time when the family is together."³⁸

The goal of this project was to increase the frequency of family meals that promote a greater level of connectedness which produces overall healthier children—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Also, during these meals parents had opportunities to lead their children and teenagers into a greater understanding and love for who God is

³⁸Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 189.

and what He has done. Families not only shared physical food together, but also spiritual food. Through the use of family meals parents once again took ownership and control of the spiritual formation of their children. When families give up their family mealtimes for work, extracurricular activities, and media, they are squandering an obvious opportunity to connect their families and experience discipleship. The hope was that this project reestablished parents as the primary disciplers of their children.

Conclusion

Every time families gather for a meal there is an opportunity for discipleship. The meal could be first thing in the morning or at the close of the day. An unrivaled power surrounds the family mealtime. Miriam Weinstein states, “So every time we have supper—regular, profane, everyday supper—it contains echoes of all the suppers we have had. As well, we sense the echoes of suppers through all the centuries of our faith group.”³⁹ Families are a collection of God’s stories. Each family is unique and created by God as places of nurture, love, and discipleship. Hearing family tales, sharing experiences, and enjoying each other creates anchors that remind parents and children of who they are and who God is. These family mealtimes, when used for moments of discipleship, give children an identity, a sense of belonging, and hope.

³⁹Miriam Weinstein, *The Surprising Power of Family Meals* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth, 2005), 147.

CHAPTER 4

THE METHODOLOGY USED TO COMPLETE THIS PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to equip parents of Bethel Bible Church, Tyler, Texas, to use family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children. In order to achieve this objective an eight-week family mealtime curriculum was developed and parents were trained on how to implement the curriculum into their family mealtimes. The project began on August 15, 2015, and continued for fifteen weeks. The project occurred in four phases. In phase 1 of initial preparation(weeks 1-2), the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey (FDPP) was administered to parents with at least one child ages 6 to 12 living at home. The information from the survey was assessed to inform the development of the curriculum and training. In phase 2 (weeks 3-6) the eight-week family mealtime curriculum was developed to coincide with the fall preaching series. During phase 3 (weeks 7-14) the project was implemented beginning with a parent-training meeting where the pre-project survey was administered. In phase 4 (week 15), the post-project survey was administered and a *t*-test was performed to determine the project's effectiveness. Once the results were analyzed, semi-structured interviews were conducted on three parents whose tests scores evidenced the greatest change.

The Target Group

After the Ethics Committee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary approved the proposed research instrument, the project launched. The target group in this project was parents with at least one child between the ages of 6-12. The Family

Mealtime curriculum was made available to anyone attending BBC, including singles, couples without children, and empty nesters. Anyone interested was encouraged to participate in the curriculum; however, only parents with children ages 6-12 were asked to complete the pre-project survey.

Phase 1: Initial Preparation

Preliminary Preparations

The first phase of the project occurred over a two-week period in which the FDPP was administered and its results were analyzed to help determine the content of the eight-week family mealtime curriculum. The results were also used in preparing for the parent-training meeting. The administration of the survey required a period of preliminary preparation. Approximately two weeks prior to the project's start date an online survey was created and parents with at least one child ages 6-12 living at home were identified.

The Pre-Course Survey

On the first day of the project, the FDPP was administered to all families across all three BBC campuses through an online tool called Survey Monkey. Families with at least one child ages 6-12 living at home were identified at all three campuses. The survey was beneficial in gaining an understanding of the in-home discipleship practices of families at BBC. Sixty parents completed the survey within the first three days. The survey was limited to parents who have at least one child ages 6-12 living at home, but was open to members and non-members of BBC. Once the goal of 40 individuals was met the data was collected and analyzed.

As noted in chapter 1, the surveys were used to inform the content and format of the family mealtime curriculum. The first week was used to collect the data from the survey and the entire second week was used to examine the data. The surveys were

examined for noticeable trends. The first and most obvious pattern was a collective agreement concerning the lack of church leaders making contact with parents to help engage with them in their child's spiritual formation. The determination was made to use this understanding to personally invite parents to the training meeting through phone calls and face-to-face conversations. Most parents expressed an understanding that the home is the primary place for the discipleship of their children, but they also desired to be personally supported and connected with church leadership.

Another noticeable pattern was most families average 3 to 5 family mealtimes each week, which was an encouraging pattern. This information was used to encourage parents during the parent training to continue the healthy pattern of family mealtimes.

A third noticeable pattern was that most families pray and even have spiritual conversations with their children several times a week; however, around 40 percent have never or only once in the past month engaged their family in any family devotional or worship times. This information showed a desire of parents to disciple their children, but on the other hand they lacked the tools or model for how to formally lead their children in the study of God's Word or authentic worship. This information revealed a need to develop a user-friendly tool for families to lead their child in family devotionals.

The last noticeable trend was that three-fourths of the participants said they had witnessed with their child to a non-Christian less than two times in the past year. This trend highlighted the need for teaching and inspiring parents to engage in evangelism with non-Christians. If children experience the joy of sharing the gospel with others at an early age they will continue as they get older. This information was used to create questions and activities for families during the family mealtime devotionals that address this trend. No other noticeable trends were revealed through the surveys. Each survey revealed areas of understanding and misunderstanding depending on the respondent,

therefore, the determination was made to give as thorough an overview in as many areas of family discipleship as time allowed.

Phase 2: Course Development

Phase 2 occurred during weeks 3-6 of the project. Each week of this phase was spent developing eight weeks of family mealtime devotionals for families of BBC.

Course Material Development

The family mealtime curriculum provided information to assist parents in using family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children. The intent of the curriculum was to provide forty family mealtime devotionals over an eight-week period that included five nights per week.

A meeting was conducted with the BBC's teaching team to determine the fall preaching series. The teaching team consists of five pastors that are most often called upon to preach. It was decided that the fall sermon series would be seeing Christ in the Old Testament, often called types. A type is a person, event, or thing that was used by God to foreshadow Christ.¹ The series was established to cover a period of eleven weeks, including an introductory sermon and ten types of Christ in the Old Testament. The ten types were identified as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Joseph, Moses, Jonah, Boaz, David, and Hosea. From the ten types of Christ, eight were selected for the family mealtime curriculum and a theme and format were created. To have enough time to offer the parent training meetings, the decision was made to begin with Noah and conclude with David, which left out Adam and Hosea from the Family Mealtime devotionals.

¹David Noel Freeman, *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1341.

The family mealtime curriculum was created with a theme called “I Spy,”² where families would venture together to spy Jesus in the Old Testament. Each week focused on a different Old Testament person from the previous Sunday sermon and families were led to see Jesus through them.

The family mealtime curriculum called “I Spy” was written to give families a consistent and familiar format. Each mealtime lesson was created with four sections based on three main goals founded in this project: (1) encourage creative ways for families to connect, (2) provide curriculum that would develop more biblical knowledge, and (3) promote confidence in parents as they led family devotionals.

In the first section on connectedness, questions and activities were used to increase the level of connectedness with family members. From the connection questions families would either read an Old Testament passage from the Bible, Jesus Storybook Bible, or listen to the passage in the YouVersion app for Kids. Once a family read or listened to the passage, family members answered a series of questions. The hope of this section was to raise the level of biblical knowledge among families. After the Old Testament focus, the families turn to the “I Spy” section. During this section families read a New Testament passage to connect Jesus to the Old Testament person. To conclude the mealtime lesson, families were instructed with a wrap up activity. The wrap up activity consisted of family prayer and memory verse work. For the course of eight weeks a memory verse was given for families to learn together. The pre-project surveys proved that most parents are not regularly engaging with their children in scripture memory. Depending on the ages of the children, they could choose one of three lengths. The first and longest was Colossians 1:15-20. The second option was Colossians 1:15-16. The third and shortest version was Colossians 1:17. Families were encouraged to

²See appendix 6.

write the verse on note cards or on a poster board that could be seen during family mealtimes.

The first week focused on Noah. Day 1 was an introduction to the “I Spy” concept and the memory verse that families would be memorizing together. Day 2-5 looked at Noah as the preacher of righteousness, the blameless one, restorer of humanity, and a night of prayer as Noah built an alter and praised God.

The second week looked at Abraham. Abraham was seen as the one God made a covenant with, the interceder for Israel, promised father of Isaac, and the one willing to sacrifice his son.

The third week highlighted Melchizedek as the high priest, the giver of the tithe and blessing followed by a night of prayer and scripture memory.

The fourth week emphasized Joseph as the beloved son, rejected brother, forgiving prince, and the one whose brothers bowed down. This week concluded with a prayer of blessing as seen in Genesis 48.

The fifth week focused on the murder plot of Moses, the birth of him as a prince, the commissioning of Moses, the rejection of Moses despite the miracles, and Moses as God’s deliverer.

The sixth week looked at Jonah bringing the message of repentance, spending three days in the fish, and sacrificing his life. The week concluded with a night of prayer from Jonah 2 and a night of memory verse attention.

The seventh week highlighted Boaz as he provided for the daily needs of Ruth and Naomi, showed kindness to the women, and became Ruth’s redeemer. This week also concluded with a night of prayer around the Lord’s Prayer and memory verse work.

The final week looked at David as the shepherd, the victor, the king, and merciful one. The final night was night of prayer around Psalm 145.

After the family connection activity, each lesson focused on an Old Testament person listed. After the Old Testament focus the family was led to discover or spy Jesus through them. Jesus was seen as the better Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Joseph, Moses, Jonah, Boaz and David.

Once all eight weeks of family mealtime lessons were crafted, an evaluation form was created. Packets that included an instructional letter, a copy of the “I Spy” curriculum,³ and an evaluation form were distributed to the pastors and elders of BBC. The leaders were instructed to read through the curriculum, use the evaluation rubric, and return them within the next two weeks. The evaluation rubric focused on nine questions:

1. Is the lesson clearly relevant to the issue of spiritual formation in the home?
2. Is the material biblically accurate?
3. Is the material theologically consistent?
4. Is the thesis of each lesson clearly stated?
5. Do the points in the lesson clearly support the thesis?
6. Do the lessons contain points of application?
7. Do the lessons seem age appropriate for children ages 6-12?
8. Are the lessons user-friendly enough to all parents to lead family mealtime lessons?
9. Overall, are the lessons clear?

Additional sheets were provided that listed each week’s lessons for evaluators to give specific feedback on each lesson.

Elders were asked to return the evaluation form in the provided envelope by dropping it off with the church secretary or using the smartphone app called genius scan. The elders that received an evaluation form were contacted twice over the next two weeks via email to encourage their participation in reading and evaluating the Family Mealtime devotionals. Eight evaluations were received.

³See appendix 6.

After the evaluation rubrics were returned, all suggestions were considered and the appropriate corrections were made. The most helpful suggestion was to provide a one or two sentence lesson aim for each lesson. This was valuable feedback and a lesson aim was added to each lesson. Another helpful suggestion was to clarify that there was only one memory verse passage for the entire eight weeks of lessons. This suggestion was noted and was highlighted in the parent training sessions. Once the “I Spy” curriculum⁴ met the appropriate guidelines with a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meeting or exceeding the sufficient level, the copies were made and bound for the families attending the parent training and implementing the family mealtime curriculum. For cost effectiveness, the curriculum was printed in house and bound with plastic combs. The curriculum included a cover page, introduction, and forty mealtime devotionals or five per week for eight weeks.

Phase 3: Equipping Parents

The third phase occurred during weeks 7-14 of the project. The first week of this phase focused on training the parents with at least one child between the ages of 6-12 in using the mealtime devotionals. The following weeks were used to follow up and encourage the parents in implementing the project.

Parent Training Meeting

Parents with at least one child ages 6-12 were identified as the target group for the family mealtime devotional project. A communication plan was created that involved postcards, emails, e-newsletters, a video, and pulpit announcements. First, the parents received two postcards introducing them to the parent training meetings. The postcards advertised three meetings, one at each of the three BBC campuses, and their attendance was encouraged at one of them. After the initial postcards, the parents received weekly

⁴See appendix 6.

emails providing further details about the three parent training meetings offered at each of the three campuses. The parent meetings were also listed in the weekly campus e-newsletters announcing the importance of families using family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children. The last piece of communication was a video so that all campuses could hear directly from me about the significance of this project. After the video each campus pastor encouraged parents to attend one of the meetings at their respective campuses. Since BBC has three locations, a parent meeting was provided on all three campuses two weeks before the implementation of the project. Parents were encouraged to attend only one of the meetings.

At the three meetings, parents were educated on the biblical example of household discipleship and family meals, informed of the research behind the effectiveness of family mealtimes, and trained in the use of the family mealtime devotionals.⁵

First, the meetings began with the biblical mandate and effective of household discipleship. A brief history was shared that informed the parents of BBC's change and dedication to a family-based model of discipleship. Two points were used during this section: (1) BBC believes that God has designed the home to be the primary place for the discipleship of children to take place, and (2) BBC believes the church is to partner with the home in the spiritual formation of children.

Second, Deuteronomy 6 and Psalms 78 were used to educate parents on the biblical example of parents discipling their children. Deuteronomy 6:4 begins with a declaration of truth and is followed in Deuteronomy 6:5-6 with a command to the parents. This command is that parents are to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and might. These verses prove that the spiritual formation of children begins with the faith and life of their parents. Deuteronomy 6:7-9 gives details to the previous command for

⁵See appendix 7.

parents to teach their faith in every aspect of their daily lives. Psalm 78:4 was used to show that it is the responsibility of the parents as well as older generations within the church to teach the children. The command from Psalm 78 is that the older generations are to teach the younger generation the glorious deeds of the Lord.

Third, Exodus 12 and Matthew 26 illustrated the importance of using meals in the spiritual formation of children. In Exodus 12:26-27, parents were to use the Passover meal to teach of God's deliverance of Israel through the Passover lamb. In Matthew 26, Jesus continued this example by using the Passover meal to teach his disciples of His coming sacrifice.

Fourth, once the groundwork for household discipleship and family meals times were presented from the scriptures, extra support was shared about the power of families sharing consistent meals together. During this section, parents were asked to share any questions or obstacles they face in making time for family mealtimes. Most families shared that the largest obstacle to consistent family mealtimes was extra-curricular activities.

Fifth, copies of the "I SPY"⁶ family mealtime devotionals were distributed. Parents were guided through the curriculum's structure and purposes. Attention was given to three main goals of the curriculum including increasing family connectedness, biblical knowledge, and the confidence of parents in leading family worship times. To aid in these goals, the lessons followed a structure that began with a family connection activity, followed by Scripture reading, family discussion questions, Scripture memory, and prayer. Parents were made aware of two additional helpful resources that the family

⁶See appendix 6.

mealtime curriculum included the *Jesus Storybook Bible*⁷ and the YouVersion App for Kids. The *Jesus Storybook Bible* had chapters that corresponded to

Week 1, Day 4, Noah— Restorer of Humanity

Week 2, Day 1, Abraham—The Promise and Call

Week 2, Day 5, Abraham—Sacrifice of Isaac

Week 4, Day 4, Joseph—The Forgiving Prince

Week 5, Day 4, Moses—Rejected even with miracles

Week 5, Day 5, Moses—The Deliverer

Week 6, Day 1, Jonah—Message of Repentance

Week 8, Day 2, David—The Big Victory

Week 8, Day 3, David—King

The YouVersion App for kids provides Bible lessons with digital storytelling and interactive graphics. The YouVersion provided lessons that corresponded with

Week 1, Day 4, Noah—Restorer of Humanity

Week 2, Day 1, Abraham—The Promise and Call

Week 2, Day 5, Abraham—Sacrifice of Isaac

Week 4, Day 3, Joseph—Rejected

Week 4, Day 4, Joseph—The Forgiving Prince

Week 5, Day 5, Moses—The Deliverer

Week 7, Day 3, Boaz—Kinsmen Redeemer

Week 8, Day 2, David—The Big Victory

The meeting concluded with parents completing the pre-project survey. The pre-project surveys were collected and saved for the use in evaluating the effectiveness of the project.

⁷Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

Phase 4: Follow-Up and Results

Parent Follow-Up and Encouragement

During the next eight weeks, emails, text, and phone calls were used to encourage parents in the use of the family mealtime curriculum. Parents were given the opportunity to ask questions and accountability was provided to the parents who participated in the project. Many parents initially reported that the lessons had an appropriate length of time to complete and that they were becoming more confident in leading family devotionals. Many expressed positive experiences with the family connecting questions and activities.

Results

At the conclusion of the eight weeks of family mealtime devotionals, parents who filled out a pre-project survey and had at least one child ages 6-12 years were administered the post-project survey. Thirty-two post-project surveys were collected and matched with their pre-project answers for analysis. The first four questions focused on the parent's spiritual status as Christian or non-Christian, marital status as married or unmarried, ages of children at home, and the age of the parents. Questions 5 through 20 of the pre and post-survey gave the following results:

Question 5, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 4.98, p < .0001$). This demonstrates that there was an overall increase in the parents' perceptions of their effectiveness as the spiritual leaders of their children.

Question 6, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 6.11, p < .0001$). Therefore, there project showed an overall increase in the confidence of parents in leading their families in the study of God's Word.

Question 7, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 2.48, p < .0092$). This improvement displays that parents began using their children's sin more often to instruct them with the gospel.

Question 8, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 2.46, p < .0098$). This demonstrates that through this project parents were more likely to encourage their children to spend time reading the Bible and praying.

Question 9, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 3.0, p < .0003$). This change shows that parents improved in using everyday situations as opportunities to instruct their children with biblical principles.

Question 10, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 7.36, p < .0001$). This supports the belief that through this project parents would prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in their family's schedule.

Question 12, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 2.62, p < .0067$). This improvement shows that there was an increase in the level of connectedness that parents believe they have with their children.

Question 13, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 4.42, p < .0001$). This demonstrates that through the project parents experienced and increased in the belief that they are supplied with significant resources for leading their family in spiritual conversations.

Question 14, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 6, p < .0001$). This question shows that children increased their request to read God's Word together or to do family devotionals.

Question 15, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 3.3, p < .0012$). This supports the belief that through the use of this project parents would increase the number of spiritual conversations they have with their children throughout the week.

Question 16, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 2.43, p < .0103$). This question displays that families increased the number of family meals they have together each week without television, music, and other similar media.

Question 17, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 3.34, p < .0011$). This shows that through this project parents increased the number of times each month that they read and discuss the Bible with their children.

Question 18, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 3.63, p < .0005$). This question demonstrates that over the past month spouses increased the number of conversation they had about the spiritual development of their children.

Question 19, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 6.19, p < .0001$). This displays that parents increased the number of times they engaged their family in memorizing Scripture.

Question 20, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 7.06, p < .0001$). This supports the belief that through the two months of this project parents increased the frequency of engaging their family in family devotional or worship times in their home.

The table is a summary of the t and p values that resulted from the pre and post-project surveys. t is simply the ratio of the mean of the differences divided by the standard error of the differences. p is the probability that the two groups differ due to chance rather than a systematic difference between the groups, e.g., from a treatment between the measurements.

Table. Pre and post-project survey results

Questions	t value	p value
I am an effective spiritual leader for my children.	4.98	0.0000
I am confident about leading my family in the study of God's Word.	6.11	0.0000
I use occasions of my children's sin to instruct them with the gospel.	2.48	0.0092
I encourage my children to spend time reading the Bible and praying.	2.46	0.0098
I use everyday situations as opportunities to instruct my children with Biblical principles.	3.8	0.0003
I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule.	7.36	0.0000

Table continued

The level of connectedness I have with my family is healthy.	2.62	0.0067
I have significant resources for leading my family in spiritual conversations.	4.42	0.0001
Our children ask to read God’s Word together or do family devotionals.	6	0.0000
How many times in the past week have I had a spiritual conversation with my children?	3.3	0.0012
How many times in the past week has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?	2.43	0.0103
How many times in the past month have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?	3.34	0.0011
How many times in the past month have I talked with my spouse about the spiritual development of our children?	3.63	0.0005
How many times in the past month have I engaged my family in scripture memorization?	6.19	0.0000
How many times in the past two months has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?	7.06	0.0000

Once the results of the *t*-test were conducted, three parents were engaged in a semi-structured interview⁸ to gain a greater insight. Three questions were asked: (1) during the parent training meetings what was something that caused you to want to participate in the family mealtime devotionals, (2) what if anything did you find helpful about the family mealtime devotionals, and (3) do you see your family continuing to have family worship times or devotionals.

Participant 1 responded,

[1] I was moved to act when I heard about the impact of families sitting down and sharing consistent family meals. [2] Having everything together is what helped the most. It was simple to follow and easy to discuss with the girls. Also, staying with the same bible story for a week. That way I wasn't trying to teach or go over a new concept each night. [3] Yes, we will continue with have family mealtime devotionals

⁸See appendix 4.

Participant 2 responded,

[1] I was excited to hear that the family mealtime devotionals were not creating a separate time for family worship. We consistently have family meals and it was shown to be a natural place to engage my family in spiritual conversations. [2] I found that it was extremely helpful that the devotionals went along with Sunday's sermon. I was able to engage my children in something we had heard together. [3] Absolutely, I want to continue having family mealtime devotionals.

Participant 2 responded,

[1] I was encouraged to participate when I saw so many other families wanting to begin having consistent family mealtime devotionals. [2] Our family really enjoyed the connecting activities. Our children loved the "Would you rather?" questions. They were always excited about what I would ask. It was very helpful to have all the resources I need to lead on one page such as scriptures listed and questions to ask. [3] Yes, I have thought about starting the devotional over, and when I find the right person that will benefit as we have, pass it along to them.

Conclusion

The first goal of this project was to evaluate the current family discipleship perceptions and practices of families from BBC. This evaluation provided a picture of the discipleship practices in the homes represented at in the church. This goal was measured by administering the FDPP⁹ to families who have at least one child ages 6 to 12 residing in the home. This goal was considered successfully met when 40 BBC families complete the FDPP and the inventory was analyzed providing a clearer picture of the current discipleship practices and perceptions among BBC families.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week mealtime curriculum that equipped parents to disciple their children. The curriculum included materials and activities to promote family connectedness, spiritual conversations, and Scripture memorization. This goal was measured by the elders of BBC using an evaluation rubric to assess biblical accuracy, age appropriateness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met

⁹Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 202-3.

when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level.

The third goal of this project was to equip all participating parents to use the eight-week mealtime curriculum. This goal was measured by a pre and post-project survey, as well as semi-structured personal interviews for three parents whose test scores evidenced the greatest change. The pre and post-project surveys measured the parents' understanding, knowledge, and level of confidence in using the eight-week mealtime curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-project survey scores, and if the interviewees perceived the family mealtime curriculum had a positive effect.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

At Bethel Bible Church, Tyler, Texas, parents believe that they are to be the primary disciplers of their children but often lack the skills, materials, and confidence needed. For several years they have been educated on the premises of the home being the central place of discipleship for children. Parents have heard sermons, been led through several milestone training sessions and activities, and have received family advent devotionals and video messages prompting the idea of parents leading their children spiritually. This project set out to equip parents of Bethel Bible Church to use family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children.

Positive outcomes to this project are highlighted in this chapter. Difficulties and flaws are also communicated, as well as what could be done differently to improve the overall effectiveness of this project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose and Goals

The project was intended to equip parents of Bethel Bible Church, Tyler, Texas, to use family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children. Parents needed several things before beginning this project. Most parents are eager to lead their children spiritually but lack the modeling, resources, and skills. Bethel Bible Church strives to create a partnership between the church and home so that parents can be effective disciplers of their children. To begin, parents needed to hear the benefits and effects of families sitting down and having consistent family mealtimes as well as the importance of parents leading their children in family devotionals and worship times. This project combined those two ideas and provided the training and resources needed for parents to

lead their children through family devotions during their family mealtimes. The project was biblically sound, practically developed, and spiritually necessary. This purpose was accomplished by meeting three goals.

Goal 1

The first goal was to evaluate the current family discipleship perceptions and practices of families from Bethel Bible Church, Tyler, Texas. This evaluation provided a picture of the discipleship practices in the homes represented at BBC. This goal was measured by administering the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey (FDPP) to BBC families who have at least one child ages 6 to 12 years residing in the home. This goal was considered successfully met when 40 BBC families completed the FDPP and the inventory had been analyzed providing a clearer picture of the current discipleship practices and perceptions among BBC families.

The FDPP was administered to families through the free survey website Survey Monkey. Sixty individuals responded within the first three days of the survey. Once the surveys were completed, the data was analyzed. Many insights were gained from survey.

Goal 2

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week mealtime curriculum that equipped parents to disciple their children during family mealtimes. The curriculum included materials and activities to promote family connectedness, spiritual conversations, and Scripture memorization. This goal was measured by the elders of BBC using an evaluation rubric to assess biblical accuracy, age appropriateness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The curriculum was developed over several weeks with the fall sermon series as the basis. The sermon series was titled “Christ in the Old Testament.” The purpose and goal of the sermon series was to help people see that the Bible is really one overarching story of God’s redemptive plan that finds its fulfillment in Jesus. The hope was that people would begin to see Christ through familiar Old Testament persons such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Boaz, etc. From this idea, the eight-week family mealtime devotionals, called “I Spy,” were created. Families led their children through family devotionals that would help them spy Jesus in the Old Testament.

Copies of the curriculum were delivered to elders, which included a cover letter explaining the expectations and an evaluation rubric for grading the curriculum. Nine evaluation rubrics were received. Each evaluation consisted of nine questions that requested a response of insufficient, requires attention, sufficient, and exemplary. There was also room for additional comments. There were no insufficient responses, three requires attention (3.7 percent), 29 sufficient (35.8 percent), and 49 exemplary (60.5 percent). The most helpful suggestion was to provide a one or two sentence lesson aim for each lesson. This was valuable feedback and a lesson aim was added. Another helpful suggestion was to clarify that there was only one memory verse passage for the entire eight weeks of lessons. This suggestion was noted and highlighted in the parent training sessions. The “I Spy” curriculum met the appropriate guidelines with a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria meeting or exceeding the sufficient level. Copies were printed and bound for all the families attending the parent training and implementing the family mealtime curriculum. For cost effectiveness, the curriculum was printed in house and bound with plastic combs. The curriculum included a cover page, introduction, and 40 mealtime devotionals, 5 per week for 8 weeks.

Goal 3

The third goal of this project was to equip all participating parents to use the eight-week mealtime curriculum. This goal was measured by a pre- and post-project survey, as well as semi-structured personal interviews for three parents whose test scores evidenced the greatest change. The pre- and post-project surveys measured the parents' understanding, knowledge, and level of confidence in using the eight-week mealtime curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-project survey scores.

Parents with at least one-child ages 6 to 12 years old were identified as the target group for the family mealtime devotional project. A communication plan was created that involved postcards, emails, e-newsletters, a video, and pulpit announcements. First, the parents received two postcards introducing them to the parent training meetings. The postcards advertised three meetings, one at each of the three BBC campuses, and their attendance was encouraged at one of them. After the initial postcards, the parents received weekly emails providing further details about the three training meetings offered at each of the three campuses. The parent meetings were also listed in the weekly campus e-newsletters announcing the importance of families using family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children. The last piece of communication was a video that all campuses could hear directly from me about the significance of this project. After the video, each campus pastor encouraged parents to attend one of the meetings at their respective campuses. Since BBC has three locations, a parent meeting was provided on all three campuses two weeks before the implementation of the project. Parents were encouraged to attend only one of the meetings.

At the three meetings, parents were educated on the biblical example of household discipleship and family meals, informed of the research behind the effectiveness of family mealtimes, and trained in the use of the family mealtime

devotionals. During the three initial meetings copies of the pre- and post-surveys were distributed. Parents were asked to provide their name, email address, and phone number for communication and post-survey matching purposes. Fifty-two individuals who have at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12 years living at home completed the pre-project survey.

Once the mealtime devotionals were completed, parents received an email with a link to the web survey. Parents were asked to click on the link to complete the survey. Thirty-two individuals who have at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12 years living at home completed the post-project survey. These surveys were compared and a *t*-test was calculated on each question. There was a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-project survey scores on questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. Only question 11 which asked, “I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together” showed no significant change. Once the pre and post-project surveys were analyzed, semi-formal interviews were conducted with 3 individuals.

There were three goals for the family mealtime devotional curriculum. The first goal was to encourage creative ways for families to connect. The second goal was to provide curriculum that would develop more biblical knowledge. The third goal was to promote confidence in parents as they led family devotionals.

Questions 12 and 16 directly relate to the issue of family connectedness. For question 12, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 2.62, p < .0067$). This shows there was an increase in the level of connectedness that parents believe they have with their children. For question 16, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 2.43, p < .0103$). Question 16 displays that families increased the number of family meals they have together each week without television, music, and other similar media. It

was encouraging to see that over the eight-week period parents perceived a greater level of connectedness with their family. There is a great possibility that well connected families will be more likely to have deeper spiritual conversations that will lead to parents effectively disciplining their children.

Question 8, 9, 10, 14, 17, 19, and 20 relate directly or indirectly to developing more biblical knowledge. For question 8, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 2.46, p < .0098$), which demonstrates that through this project parents were more likely to encourage their children to spend time reading the Bible and praying. For question 9, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 3.0, p < .0003$), which shows that parents improved in using everyday situations as opportunities to instruct their children with biblical principles. For question 10, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 7.36, p < .0001$), which supports the belief that through this project parents prioritized consistent family devotional or worship times in their family's schedule. For question 14, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 6, p < .0001$), which shows that children increased their request to read God's Word together or to do family devotionals. For question 17, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 3.34, p < .0011$), which shows that through this project parents increased the number of times each month that they read and discuss the Bible with their children. For question 19, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 6.19, p < .0001$), which displays that parents increased the number of times they engaged their family in memorizing scripture. For question 20, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 7.06, p < .0001$), which supports the belief that through the two months of this project parents increased the frequency of engaging their family in family devotional or worship times in their home. Through this project, families were more likely to engage in activities that could potentially increase their biblical knowledge.

Questions 5, 6, 7, 13, 15, and 18 relate directly or indirectly to promoting confidence in parents as they led family devotionals. For question 5, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 4.98, p < .0001$), which demonstrates an overall increase in the parents' perceptions of their effectiveness as the spiritual leaders of their children. For question 6, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 6.11, p < .0001$). Therefore, the project shows an overall increase in the confidence of parents in leading their families in the study of God's Word. For question 7, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 2.48, p < .0092$), which displays that parents began using their children's sin more often to instruct them with the gospel. For question 13, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 4.42, p < .0001$), which demonstrates that through the project parents experienced an increase in the belief that they are supplied with significant resources for leading their family in spiritual conversations. For question 15, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 3.3, p < .0012$), which supports the belief that through the use of this project parents increased the number of spiritual conversations they have with their children throughout the week. For question 18, there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(32)} = 3.63, p < .0005$). This question demonstrates that over the past month spouses increased the number of conversations they had about the spiritual development of their children. Through this project, parents discovered a greater confidence in leading family devotionals and worship times.

The three goals set for this project were successfully met. Next, it is helpful to address the strengths and weaknesses of this project.

Strengths of the Project

This project demonstrated many strengths. One of the strengths was having a foundation of household discipleship to build upon. For several years BBC have been stressing the importance of parents being the primary disciplers of their children. Over

my eight years at Bethel, I have had the honor of building many quality relationships with parents. At the three training meetings, parents with young children, parents with teenagers, and even grandparents were interested in learning about how to lead their children and grandchildren spiritually. The parent training meetings were a great encouragement. It is evident that parents and grandparents are eager to disciple their children and grandchildren. Because of the foundation and relationships with parents, many parents and grandparents were eager to participate in this project.

Another strength of this project was writing curriculum that coincided with the Sunday morning sermons. Many conversations were had over the benefits of being able to sit down and discuss a topic that the family had already been introduced to the preceding Sunday morning. I was fortunate to have the support of the other teaching pastors. This process allowed us to write sermons with the family in mind so that there was great continuity between the sermons and family mealtime devotionals. Toward the end of the project many parents asked us to continue publishing family devotionals around the sermons.

Another strength of this project was the simplicity of the curriculum. Each lesson followed the identical format and was written to be completed in about 20 minutes. From weekly conversations and the post-survey interviews I learned that parents appreciated that everything they needed for the devotional was included on one page and was simple to lead. This curriculum gave parents the confidence that they could lead a family devotional

Weaknesses of the Project

No project is perfect, including this one. As encouraging and beneficial as this project was, several weaknesses arose. One weakness of this project was the evaluation rubrics. It was evident that several evaluation participants read each lesson and gave detailed criticism and feedback. However, it was also evident that others gave glowing

remarks, perhaps because they were too busy to give the lessons the time they needed, or they were simply wanting to support the project and afraid to give honest feedback.

Another weakness is with the results of the pre- and post-project surveys. Parents were told at the initial meeting that they would be given a pre-project survey and a post-project survey at the conclusion. They were asked to be honest on both surveys. However, there is no control over the honesty of the answers. Parents could have been afraid to be honest on their answers, or they could have potentially answered low on the pre survey and higher on the post survey because they wanted to support me and this project.

A third weakness of this project is the actual pre- and post-surveys. More questions were needed that directly assessed family connectedness and biblical knowledge. The survey was a previously written tool that did not have enough questions to accurately assess the level of a family's connectedness. Although the survey had several questions that could relate directly or indirectly to biblical knowledge, questions written specifically about the biblical material of the family mealtime devotionals would have been helpful.

One last weakness was in maintaining excitement and involvement over the eight weeks. During the eight weeks I sent emails to encourage the parents; however, this method lacked a personal touch. With BBC now existing in three locations, I was unable to personally interact with parents at the other two campuses. I believe some parents lost interest and did not continue with the project, which was evident in that 20 individuals did not complete the post-project survey.

Theological Reflections

Everything Christians and followers of Christ do is a theological activity. Everything believers and parents do as has eternal implications.

The most notable theological observation from this project is the importance of parents leading their children spiritually. The *Shema*, found in Deuteronomy 6, shows that parents are to lead their children to know who God is and what He has done. This process of discipleship is to take place in planned as well as spontaneous moments. This process is to be a part of every day a family shares together. Parents have the greatest amount of influence and opportunity for instructing children to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength. Parents will spend more time and have more intimate conversations with children than any other adult, which supports the idea that God has designed the home to be the primary place of discipleship. According to Psalm 78, knowledge of God's words and deeds were not to be hidden from the younger generations. The older generation is exhorted to instill in the younger the significance of God's faithfulness from the stories of their ancestors. However, the passing of these stories from parents to their children was not only for knowledge sake. Parents are to teach the truth of God's Word and then rely on the Holy Spirit to plant the truths deep within them that begin to grow and never leave them. If the younger generation is not led to understand God's mighty deeds and faithfulness, they will be in danger of rebellion and disbelief. When parents are intentional about passing on the truth of who God is and what he has done, it not only affects their children but their unborn grandchildren.

A second theological reflection is the power of meals. Scripture shows the power of people, especially families, sharing meals. It was through the Passover Meal that parents were to teach their child about God's deliverance and faithfulness. Each element of the meal brought meaning and remembrance. Beginning with the preparation of the food all the way to the conclusion of the meal, opportunities were available to educate, disciple, and connect with their children.

It is not only through the Passover Meal that one sees the power of meals. Many people's lives were forever changed over a meal with Jesus. Zacchaeus was a

despised chief tax collector that sat down and shared a meal with Jesus. Zacchaeus went into his home the smallest man in Jericho and left one of the largest because of his new found relationship with Christ. Matthew, another tax collect, meets Jesus at the tax booth on the outside of town. Jesus tells Matthew to follow Him and Matthew stands up and leaves a profession and financial security that he will never be able to return. It was later that inside his home Jesus is invited to eat and the room is full of other tax collectors and sinners. The evening meal was the center of family life. It was at the end of the day and the largest meal. A family would cook, recline, eat, drink, and talk until it was time to go to bed. When a guest engaged in a meal with others he was telling everyone that he was uniting with them. It was in the home of Matthew that Jesus united Himself to Matthew and his fellow tax collectors and sinners. Jesus sat down to eat with them so that he could infect them with His mercy and grace. Matthew was forever changed by their life changing meal.

Another example of the power of meals is between Jesus and Peter. Peter was the disciple that was usually first to act. He was the first to jump out of the boat and try walking to Jesus, he was the first to defend Jesus in the garden by cutting off the guard's ear, and he was first to jump out of the boat a second time and swim to shore to see Jesus after his crucifixion and resurrection. Peter had previously denied Jesus three times in front of a fire and he was questioned by a young girl. It was on the shore in Galilee that Peter sits down in front of another fire. Jesus serves Peter a breakfast of fish and bread, and it was during this meal that Jesus ask Peter three times if he loves Him. It was over this meal that the denying apostle is fully restored to be a shepherd, pastor, and leader. Meals are a powerful force in one's theological journey. Children become like the people they eat with the most.

Personal Reflections

This project has been very encouraging. Several years ago I was asked to take some time and pray about what my role could be at BBC. I began praying and God led me to the idea of leading BBC to be a church committed to family discipleship. From that time, I began reading as many books, attending conferences, and frequenting websites that were dedicated to equipping the home to be the primary place of discipleship. During this time, BBC made many philosophical and practical changes. BBC ended providing a children's worship hour and encouraged families to worship together. BBC began implementing a Milestone Ministry that intentionally created a partnership between the home and church to assist parents in leading their children to follow Christ. This project was another step in leading BBC in that direction. I was overwhelmed with the response and encouragement to continue providing resources for families to lead their children.

I also want to be the type of leader that leads by example. Our family experienced a greater connectedness, biblical knowledge, and confidence in leading family devotionals. Some weeks were more consistent than others. But the hope and prayer is that the children of BBC will grow up, have families of their own, and continue fighting for the time to have consistent family meals and family devotionals. The families' participation can potentially impact generations that will follow.

Conclusion

As a pastor and father I am aware of the need for parents to actively lead family devotions that aid in the spiritual formation of their children. I previously led the church in different forms of family discipleship that revolved around the Milestone Ministry. In the fall of 2013, BBC published a four-week family advent curriculum, which was received with great excitement and many families asked what they could do to continue family devotionals. At that point I began the project proposal stage of the D.Ed.Min. degree. As I began looking into the area of family devotions, I read a few

books on the effectiveness of family meals. From this point the project began to take place. My goal was to write a family devotional curriculum that could be used around families sharing meals together.

Through this process that involved administering the FDPP, writing eight weeks of family devotionals, and leading three parent training meetings I have learned that parents are eager to disciple their children when resources, assistance, and encouragement are provided. My desire was that this project would enable parents to be active in the spiritual formation of their children and increase the connectedness of their family, raise everyone's biblical knowledge of Christ, and give parents a greater confidence in leading family devotionals and worship times.

At the completion of this project, many families asked if BBC could continue to provide family mealtime devotionals around the sermons. BBC now has a desire and vision to provide family mealtime devotionals that will assist families in the spiritual formation of their children.

Hopefully this project will be a catalyst as parents were encouraged and equipped to lead family mealtime devotionals. The biblical principles learned throughout this project and the community of parents who participated have the potential to give hope and change the current trend of parenting the next generation at BBC.

APPENDIX 1
FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS
AND PRACTICES

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate the current family discipleship perceptions and practices of families. This research that Mark Kuykendall is conducting will provide a picture of the discipleship practices in the homes represented at Bethel Bible Church (BBC). 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. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following multiple questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

10. Are you a Christian?

- A. Yes
 B. No

11. Are you married?

- A. Yes
 B. No

12. Do you have at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12 living with you?

- A. Yes
 B. No

13. What is your age in years?

- A. 18-24
 B. 25-34
 C. 35-44
 D. 45-54
 E. 55-64
 F. 65 and over

Continue on the next page

Part 2

This survey was copied from Family Ministry Field Guide.¹

Directions: Answer the questions based on the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please place a check mark in the appropriate box. For the purposes of this survey, “church leaders” includes pastors, elders, ministers, deacons, teachers, or small group leaders.

Parental Perceptions

Question 1	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family’s schedule.						
Question 2	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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 would probably be that way for quite a while.						
Question 3	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.						
Question 4	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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.						
Question 5	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if it means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together.						
Question 6	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Parents, and particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.						
Question 7	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.						
Question 8	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child’s spiritual growth.						

Continue to the next page

¹Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 202-3.

Parental Practices

Directions: Answer the following questions using the following scale never, once, a couple of times, three or four times, five or six times, and seven or more times; please place a check mark in the appropriate box. For the purposes of this survey, “church leaders” includes pastors, elders, ministers, deacons, teachers, or small group leaders.

Question 9	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past week have I prayed aloud with any of my children?						
Question 10	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past week has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?						
Question 11	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past month have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?						
Question 12	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
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?						
Question 13	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past two months has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?						

Continue to the next page

Directions: Answer the following questions: using the following scale never, once, a couple of times, three or four times, five or six times, and seven or more times; please place a check mark in the appropriate box. For the purposes of this survey, “church leaders” includes pastors, elders, ministers, deacons, teachers, or small group leaders.

Question 14	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past two months have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my child’s spiritual development?						
Question 15	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
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 friend to church?						
Question 16	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How often in the past year has any church leader made any contact with me to help me engage in my child’s spiritual development?						

This concludes the survey. Thank you!

APPENDIX 2

FAMILY MEALTIME CURRICULUM
EVALUATION RUBRIC

This rubric will be used for all 8 weeks of lessons.

Directions: Read each lesson and answer the following questions using the following scale: 1=insufficient, 2=requires attention, 3=sufficient, and 4=exemplary. Write down any comments under the comments column.

1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of spiritual formation in the home.					
The material is biblically accurate.					
The material is theologically consistent.					
The thesis of each lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of application.					
The lesson seems age appropriate for children ages 6-12.					
The lessons are user-friendly and will allow the parents to lead family mealtime lessons.					
Overall, the lesson is clear.					

APPENDIX 3

PRE AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure the parent's understanding, knowledge, and level of confidence in disciplining their children. The goal is that the family mealtime curriculum will produce a positive increase in parent's understanding, knowledge, and level of confidence in disciplining their children as well as increase family connectedness. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Answer the following multiple questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

1. Are you a Christian?
 A. Yes
 B. No
2. Are you married?
 A. Yes
 B. No
3. Do you have at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12 living with you?
 A. Yes
 B. No
4. What is your age in years?
 A. 18-24
 B. 25-34
 C. 35-44
 D. 45-54
 E. 55-64
 F. 65 and over

Continue to the next page

Directions: Answer the following questions using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please place a check mark in the appropriate box.

Question 5	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I am an effective spiritual leader for my children.						
Question 6	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I am confident about leading my family in the study of God's Word.						
Question 7	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I use occasions of my children's sin to instruct them with the gospel.						
Question 8	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I encourage my children to spend time reading the Bible and praying.						
Question 9	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I use everyday situations as opportunities to instruct my children with Biblical principles.						
Question 10	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule.						
Question 11	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together.						
Question 12	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
The level of connectedness I have with my family is healthy.						
Question 13	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
I have significant resources for leading my family in spiritual conversations.						
Question 14	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Our children ask to read God's Word together or do family devotionals.						

Continue to the next page

Directions: Answer the following questions: using the following scale never, once, a couple of times, three or four times, five or six times, and seven or more times; please place a check mark in the appropriate box.

Question 15	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past week have I had a spiritual conversation with my children?						
Question 16	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past week has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?						
Question 17	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past month have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?						
Question 18	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past month have I talked with my spouse about the spiritual development of our children?						
Question 19	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past month have I engaged my family in scripture memorization?						
Question 20	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How many times in the past two months has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?						

4 Digit Personal Identification Number _____

This concludes the survey, Thank You!

APPENDIX 4

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interviews were semi-structured focusing on three open-ended questions.

The questions were as followed:

1. During the parent training meetings what was something that caused you to want to participate in the family mealtime devotionals?
2. What if anything did you find helpful about the family mealtime devotionals?
3. Do you see your family continuing to have family worship times or devotionals?

APPENDIX 5

RESOURCES FOR FAMILY WORSHIP

There are numerous resources for families to use in their family worship times.

Below are a few examples:

Meade, Starr. *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000.

Thompson, Jessica, and Elyse M. Fitzpatrick. *Exploring Grace Together: 40 Devotionals for the Family*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.

Whitney, Donald S. *Family Worship*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

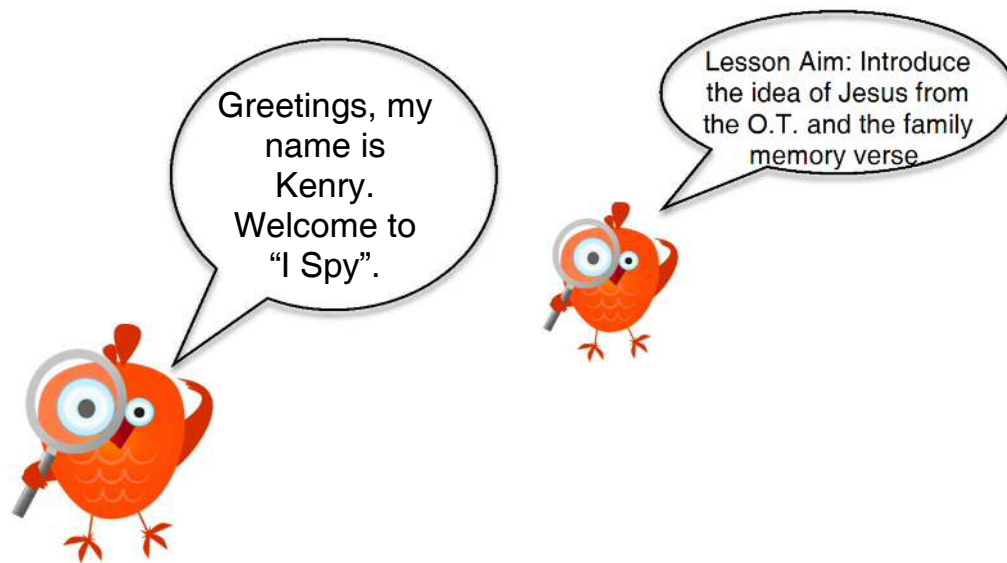
APPENDIX 6

“I SPY” FAMILY MEALTIME DEVOTIONALS



iSpy

.....
: Family Mealtime Devotionals :
.....



“I Spy” is a game every child has played to pass the time. But this is no ordinary game, in fact it is an adventure for families. For eight weeks, you are invited to gather your family around the dinner table to see who can be the first to “I Spy” someone special.

In the New Testament we read about a man that was unlike any other. This man walked on water, healed people that were sick, and even spoke to raging storms that obeyed Him. Yes, you know who I am talking about - Jesus. One of the things we know and believe about Jesus is that He is the Son of God who has always existed. So why do we only hear about Jesus in the New Testament, or do we? So over this 8-week adventure we want to see if you and your family can “I Spy” Jesus in the Old Testament.

“I Spy” will look back into the lives of eight people from the Old Testament. The hope is that as your family spends time around the table discussing these people there will be an explosion of biblical knowledge, an increase in family connectedness, and a greater confidence for parents in leading family devotionals.

Week 1 - Day 1: The Introduction

Family Connection

Play a round or two of the game “I Spy.”

- Someone starts by identifying an object in the room without telling anyone what it is. They then say, “I spy with my little eye something (name the color of the object). Other people then take turns guessing what the object is by the color.

Over the next eight weeks we will be playing a version of the game “I Spy.” We will be trying to spy Jesus not from the New Testament but from the Old Testament.

Questions

1. Where do we often read about Jesus? Old Testament or New Testament?

Read Colossians 1:15–20 (ESV) — **15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. **17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. **19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

2. What are some things we learn about Jesus from these verses?

Read Luke 24:24–27 (ESV) — **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” **25** And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” **27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

The Old Testament proclaims God’s mighty acts of redemption. These acts reach their climax in the New Testament when God sends His son. So we are going to see if you can spy Jesus from people we often hear about from the Old Testament.

3. If Jesus was before all things, created all things, and has always existed, where was Jesus during the time of the Old Testament?
4. What do you think is the purpose of the Old Testament or why do we have the Old Testament?

Family Wrap-up

Not only will we be trying to spy Jesus in the Old Testament we will also be spending time in prayer and also memorizing scripture. **Note: The memory verse will be the same for all 8-weeks of family mealtime devotions. Feel free to add as you wish.**

Youngest Kids

Colossians 1:17 (ESV) — **17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Older Kids

Colossians 1:15–16 (ESV) — **15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

Teenagers/Adults

Colossians 1:15–20 (ESV) — **15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. **17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. **19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Ideas

- Write verses on notecards or pasteboards
- Create hand motions
- Break the verse up into phrases



Week 1 - Day 2

NOAH - Preacher of Righteousness

Family Connection

Would you rather swim in a pool full of marshmallows or a pool full of M&M's?

Would you rather ride on the back of an elephant or a giraffe?

Would you rather have a summer job at a zoo or a giant aquarium?



Read

2 Peter 2:5

Questions

1. What does this verse tell us God did for Noah?
2. How is Noah described in this verse?
3. What do you think it means to be a preacher of righteousness

Righteousness means - that some person, action, or thing meets or fulfills the requirements of a given relationship.

Lesson Aim: Noah was told to tell the people to turn from their sins. Jesus proclaims the same message but also provides the solution to our sin problem.

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Read

Matthew 24:37–39 (NIV84) — **37** As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. **38** For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; **39** and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

John 11:25–26 (NIV84) — **25** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; **26** and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

How was Jesus a “Preacher of Righteousness”? Jesus show us and fulfills for us the requirements (perfect obedience) to have a relationship with God.

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 1 - Day 3

NOAH - Blameless One

Family Connection

Share a time someone said something really nice about you or gave you a compliment? Parents, go around and share something special about each of your children (character trait, act of kindness you saw, etc.)

Read

Genesis 6:5–10

Questions

1. When God looked at the people what did He see (vs. 5)?
2. What did their actions do to God's heart (vs. 6)?
3. What was different about Noah (vs. 8-9)?
4. What do you think it means that Noah was "blameless"? Do you think he was perfect and never sinned?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Matthew 3:16–17 (NIV84) — **16** As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. **17** And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Who else found favor with God?

Read

1 John 3:5 (NIV84) — **5** But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

Hebrews 4:15 (NIV84) — **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Who do we know was not only blameless but who never sinned?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.



Lesson Aim: God was sad when He saw how evil people were living. Noah did not follow their example and God smiled on him. However, Noah could not live his life without sinning, only Jesus could.

Week 1 - Day 4

NOAH - Restorer of Humanity

Family Connection

Share a High Point (something that made you smile or happy) and a Low Point (something that made you sad) of your day.

Read

Genesis 7:17-9:1

or

Jesus Storybook Bible, “A New Beginning”

or

Listen to “Two by Two” on the YouVersion App for Kids

Questions

1. How long did it rain on the earth?
2. What do you think it was like to spend that much time on the Ark? What do you think they did while they were on the Ark?
3. Who did God spare and save (Gen. 7:21-24)?
4. How did God use Noah to save and restore the world (Gen. 9:1)?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Read

Ephesians 1:10 (NIV84) — 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Hebrews 10:12 (NIV84) — 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

How did God, the Father, use Jesus to save and restore the world?

What did Jesus do to become our Savior?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.



Lesson Aim: Instead of punishing everyone God spared Noah and through Noah God restored the world (2nd chance). Jesus also came to be the restorer of the world by dying in the place of sinners

Week 1 - Day 5

Day of Prayer

Family Connection

Find something for your family to write down things they are thankful to God for. Examples: postcards, stones, around the edge of a dinner plate. You will write down some things at the conclusion of tonight's family mealtime devotional.

Read

Genesis 8:20–21

Question

What did Noah do as soon as he got off the Ark?

Read

2 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV84) — **14** But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

Write down as many things as you can think of that you would like to thank God for.

Family Wrap Up

Give thanks to God for all that He has done for us through Christ.



Lesson Aim: As soon as Noah got off the Ark he worshipped and praised God. We need to thank God for all the ways He has saved us.

Week 2 - Day 1

ABRAHAM - The Promise and Call

Family Connection

What is one of the biggest promises you have ever made or given? Did you or the person who made the promise follow through with the promise?

Read

Genesis 12:1–9

or

Jesus Story Book Bible, “Son of Laughter”

or

YouVersion app “God’s Amazing Promise”



Lesson Aim:

Through Abraham God created a unique group of people called the Israelites. They were to be a blessing to others. The biggest blessing was Jesus coming from the family tree of Abraham to save people.

Questions

1. Who was God talking to?
2. What did God tell him to do (vs. 1)?
3. What was the promise God made (vs. 2-3)?
4. How did Abraham respond? Would you have responded differently?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

John 6:38–40 (NIV84) — **38** For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. **40** For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

What is the promise made here by Jesus?

How is the promise to Abraham connected to the promise here?

What does it mean to have eternal life (continuation of time that has no end)?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse (the memory verse will be the same through out the 8-weeks of family mealtime devotionals).

Week 2 - Day 2

ABRAHAM - The Covenant

THIS IS THE MOST DIFFICULT LESSON TO UNDERSTAND. PLEASE DO NOT GET DISCOURAGED.

Family Connection

Take turns sharing with everyone something you are really concerned about today?

Read

Genesis 15:1–21

Questions



Lesson Aim: God not only made a promise with Abraham, God said he would endure the consequences if the promise was broken. We break God's promises by sinning and Jesus paid the consequences for us on the cross.

1. What was Abraham concerned about (vs. 2-3)?
2. What was God's response (vs. 4-6)?

Note: When a binding agreement was made between two people an animal would be sacrificed to bind the two people together. Half of the animal would be placed on the right and the other half on the left. The two people would walk between the two halves together as a sign that they would work to fulfill their part of the agreement.

3. Re-read Genesis 15:7. What passed through the two halves of the animal?
4. What does the flame symbolize?

Note: The flame, symbolizing God, passes between the pieces, symbolizing that God himself will bear the penalty if the promise is broken.

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Romans 4:25 (NIV84) — 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV84) — 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

How does Jesus fulfill the commandments of God's law for us (perfect obedience)?

How did Jesus bear the penalty for our disobedience towards God (pays our sin debt)?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family about the things everyone mentioned that they were concerned about and/or work on memory verse.

Week 2 - Day 3

ABRAHAM - Intercedes for Israel

Family Connection

Play a few rounds of the game “telephone.” Someone thinks of a phrase and whispers it to the next person only once. The second person then passes on the phrase they heard and so forth. When you are passing the message on, you are actually interceding for one person to the next. You are relaying the message.

Read

Genesis 18:20-33

Questions



Lesson Aim: Abraham pleaded with God not to destroy the people of S & G and God turned His punishment from them. Jesus turns God's punishment for our sins away from us.

1. What was God angry against (vs. 20)?
2. What did Abraham do (vs. 23-24)?
3. Why do you think Abraham pleaded or interceded to God for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah?
4. What was God's response?

Note: Abraham interceded for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah and God turned His wrath away from them.

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Hebrews 7:25 (NIV84) — **25** Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

How does Jesus intercede for us?

How was Jesus able to turn God's anger away from those who would believe and trust in Him?

Family Wrap Up

Read the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John 17 as your pray tonight.

or

Allow your children to hear you pray and intercede for them before God.

Week 2 - Day 4

ABRAHAM - Birth of Isaac

Family Connection

Get out some of your baby pictures and the baby pictures of your children. Parents, share the birth experience of your biological kids or the adoption story of your children given to you through adoption.

Read

Genesis 21:1-7



Questions

1. What was miraculous about the birth of their son?
2. What did they name the child?
3. How was Isaac a fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 12:1-9?

Lesson Aim: The birth of Abraham's son, Isaac, was a miracle because Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children. God sent Jesus whose birth was also a miracle.

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Luke 1:26–33 (NIV84) — **26** In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, **27** to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. **28** The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." **29** Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. **30** But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. **31** You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

God promised another boy would be born in a miraculous way. What was his name and why do you think he was born?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 2 - Day 5

ABRAHAM - Sacrifice of Isaac

Family Connection

Share one of the hardest things you have ever had to do? What was it that made it so difficult?

Parents, share a time with your children that you felt God was asking you or leading you to do something that was really difficult.

Read



Genesis 22:1-14

or

Jesus Storybook Bible, “The Present”

or

YouVersion app “The Big Test”

<p>Lesson Aim: God told Abraham to do something no parent would ever want to think of, sacrificing their child. Jesus’s life was given as a sacrifice for ours.</p>
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Questions

1. What did God tell Abraham to do (vs. 2)?
2. What are some of the emotions or feelings you think Abraham had because of God’s command?
3. Despite his feelings and emotions, how did Abraham show his faith in God (vs. 8-10)?
4. What did God provide to spare Abraham’s son?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Romans 3:25 (NIV84) — 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

Romans 8:32 (NIV84) — 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

“Many years later, another Son would climb another hill, he would trust his Father and do what his father asked. He wouldn’t struggle or run away.”¹

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

¹Sally Lloyd Jones, *Jesus Story Book Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007),

Week 3 - Day 1

Melchizedek - The Blessing

Family Connection

Share one of the best gifts you have ever received? What was it that made this gift so special?

Read

Genesis 14:18-20

Questions

1. After Abraham returns from battle what two kings come to meet him?
2. What was different about the second king? Hint: He was not only a king.
3. What does the King/High Priest Melchizedek do towards Abraham (vs. 19-20)?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Ephesians 1:3–5 (NIV84) — **3** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **4** For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

Melchizedek blessed Abraham, how has Jesus blessed us?

What blessings will we receive later through Jesus?



Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Lesson Aim: Melchizedek blessed Abraham by giving him gifts. Jesus has blessed us in many ways including eternal life.

Week 3 - Day 2

Melchizedek - High Priest

Family Connection

Think of one of the most important people in the world. What are some of the things you think they do because of their job?

Read

Hebrews 5:1-4



Lesson Aim: A High Priest would represent his people before God for his people. Jesus represents us by living a life of perfect obedience that we could never live.

Questions

1. What was the purpose or job of the high priest (vs. 1)?
2. Who appointed a person to be the high priest (vs. 4)?
3. What do you think it would have been like to be the high priest over a group of people?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Hebrews 4:14–16 (NIV84) — **14** Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. **16** Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

How is Jesus a high priest for us?

Hebrews 5:5–6 (NIV84) — **5** So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” **6** And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

How is Jesus an even better high priest than Melchizedek?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 3 - Day 3

Melchizedek - The Tithe

Family Connection

Would you rather keep an otter or octopus in your bathtub?
Would you rather be a deep sea diver or an astronaut?
Would you rather have hair that goes past your feet or be bald?

Read

Hebrews 7:1-10



Lesson Aim:
Abraham showed honor to Melchizedek by giving him the tithe. Jesus showed honor to us by making us sons and daughters of God.

Questions

1. Who did Abraham give his tithe to (vs. 2)? Note: A tithe was an amount of money, livestock, vegetables, or spice given to another person. Typically to support those who lead in worship of God.
2. Who were the Israelites supposed to give their tithes to (vs. 5)?
3. What is different about Abraham's tithe (vs. 6)?
4. What is Abraham saying about Melchizedek by giving him his tithe (vs. 7)?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Hebrews 7:20–25 (NIV84) — **20** And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, **21** but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" **22** Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. **23** Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; **24** but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. **25** Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

How is Jesus a better high priest toward us?

How can we show others that Jesus is our high priest?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 3 - Day 4

Night to Pray

Family Connection

Have everyone give an answer to the following three questions:

- What are you concerned about?
- What do you wish?
- What are you willing to do?

There are no wrong answers. Say something you are concerned about in the near future, something you wish was different or you could change, and something you are willing to commit to in the future.



Lesson Aim: Talking to God is a blessing to every family member and this practice will influence our children praying with their children.

Spend some time praying about what those around your table shared.

You could also all recite the Lord's prayer together.

Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen.

Week 3 - Day 5

Memory Verse Night

Family Connection



Lesson Aim: A family that hides God's word in their heart will be able to stand together.

Find a creative way to work on your memory verses.

Examples:

- Write all the lines on a separate piece of paper and shuffle them. Now take turns trying to put the words in order.
- Take turns with each person just saying one word of the verse and so forth.
- Write down the verses leaving out certain words and see if others can fill in the missing words.

Spend some time praying with your family or recite the Lord's prayer together.

1. Our Father, which art in heaven,
2. Hallowed be thy Name.
3. Thy Kingdom come.
4. Thy will be done in earth,
5. As it is in heaven.
6. Give us this day our daily bread.
7. And forgive us our trespasses,
8. As we forgive them that trespass against us.
9. And lead us not into temptation,
10. But deliver us from evil.
11. For thine is the kingdom,
12. The power, and the glory,
13. For ever and ever.Amen.

Week 4 - Day 1

Joseph - Beloved Son

Family Connection

Would you rather be only able to whisper or only able to shout?

Would you rather spend the night in an igloo or a teepee?

Would you rather give up your cell phone or your own room?

Lesson Aim: Joseph was a special son to Jacob. Jesus was God the Father's special and only son.

Read

Genesis 37:1-3

Questions

1. Name something you learn or observe about Joseph?
2. Why did Jacob love him more?
3. What did Joseph's father make for him?
4. Can you name a gift you received from someone that made you feel special? Have you ever made a special gift for someone?



NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Matthew 3:13–17 (NIV84) — **13** Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. **14** But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" **15** Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. **16** As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. **17** And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Matthew 17:1–8 (NIV84) — **1** After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **2** There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. **3** Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. **4** Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." **5** While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" **6** When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. **7** But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." **8** When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

How are Jesus and Joseph similar in these verses?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 4 - Day 2

Joseph - Brothers Bow Down

Family Connection

Why do you think we dream? Can you tell everyone about a dream you recently had that you can remember? Why do you think we can remember some dreams and not others?

Read

Genesis 37:5-11

Questions

1. What was Joseph's first dream?
2. What was Joseph's second dream?
3. How did his father and brothers respond to hearing about Joseph's dreams?



Lesson Aim:
Joseph told his brothers that one day they would bow down to him. We are told that one day everyone will bow their knee to Jesus.

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Romans 14:11 (NIV84) — **11** It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' "

Philippians 2:10-11 (NIV84) — **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What do these verses say that everyone will do toward Jesus one day?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 4 - Day 3

Joseph - Rejected

Family Connection

Share a time when you were left out or not included to go do something? How did that make you feel?

Parents, share a time when maybe you were rejected for a new job or something else and how that made you feel.

Read

Genesis 37:12-36

or

YouVersion app, “The Dreamer”



Lesson Aim:
Joseph was rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery. Jesus was rejected by many people who refused to believe he was God's son

Questions

1. Where did Joseph's father send him?
2. When his brothers saw him coming, what did they do?
3. What did the brothers decide to do with Joseph?
4. Was everyone in agreement on what to do with him? Why do you think there was a disagreement?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Matthew 21:42 (NIV84) — **42** Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

Luke 23:18–21 (NIV84) — **18** With one voice they cried out, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” **19** (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) **20** Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. **21** But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

What do these verses say about how people responded to Jesus?

Why do you think so many people today reject Jesus?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 4 - Day 4

Joseph - The Forgiving Prince

Family Connection

Share a time when someone did something very hurtful to you. Was it hard to forgive them? Why or why not?

Parents, this would be a great time to share how important forgiveness is in a marriage. Too many children hear and see their parents disagreeing but often do not see them reconcile. Note: We will never have to forgive someone more than Jesus has forgiven us.

Read

Genesis 45:1-8

or

Jesus Storybook Bible, “The Forgiving Prince”

or

YouVersion app, “Dreams Come True”



Lesson Aim:
Joseph forgave his brothers for what they did to him. Jesus forgave the people that were evil to him and forgives us for our sins too.

Questions

1. How did Joseph respond to seeing his brothers?
2. What do you think it was like for his brothers to see Joseph after what they had done?
3. Who does Joseph say was responsible for sending him away and why?
4. Do you think it was hard for Joseph to forgive his brothers? Why or why not?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

John 14:16 (NIV84) — **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—

1 John 1:9 (NIV84) — **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

What is the promise we have from Jesus and how is Jesus seen in the life of Joseph?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 4 - Day 5

Joseph - Prayer of Blessing

Family Connection

Why do we pray? How are the prayers of Christians (followers of Christ) different from the prayers of others?

Read

Genesis 48:15-16

A practice we find in the Old Testament people of God is to “bless their children.” Take some time and pray aloud a “blessing” over your child/children.

You can pray for their salvation, protection, and for your child/children to follow Jesus no matter the cost.



Lesson Aim:
Pray a blessing
over our children.

Week 5 - Day 1

Moses - The Murder Plot

Family Connection

Share a high and low moment of your day. Something that made you happy and something that made you sad.

Read

Exodus 1:8-22



Lesson Aim:

Pharaoh tried to have Moses killed because he was threatened by all the Jewish births. King Herod was threatened by the birth of Jesus and tried to have him killed also.

Questions

(Sensitive Material, please read ahead)

1. What was Pharaoh afraid of when he saw how the Israelites were increasing in number?
2. What did Pharaoh say to do when a baby boy was born?
3. How was God more powerful than Pharaoh?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Matthew 2:13–15 (NIV84) — **13** When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” **14** So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, **15** where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

What is similar between the births of Moses and Jesus?

What can we learn about faith in God from the births of Moses and Jesus?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 5 - Day 2

Moses - Birth of a Prince

Family Connection

Would you rather always take a cold shower or never get enough sleep?

Would you rather kiss a jellyfish or step on a crab?

Would you rather rake leaves or shovel snow?



Lesson Aim: God protected Moses and he was even raised in Pharaoh's home as a prince. Jesus was a baby born in a barn but His heavenly Father knew He was a prince.

Read

Exodus 2:1-10

Questions

1. What did Moses' mother do to hide him from Pharaoh?
2. Who did Miriam fear more, God or Pharaoh?
3. How did God provide protection for Moses?
4. What places of honor did Moses have by being raised by Pharaoh's daughter?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Isaiah 9:6 (NIV84) — **6** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Who do you think this verse is talking about?

What do you think it means that Jesus is our Prince of Peace (see 2 Cor. 5:18-19)?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 5 - Day 3

Moses - The Commission

Family Connection

What is one of the most important things you have ever been asked to do? Was it hard to fulfill the responsibility, why or why not? What was the outcome?

Parents, share a time when you felt God was telling you to do something?

Read

Exodus 3:1-12

Questions

1. How does the angel appear to Moses?
2. What do you think Moses wanted to do when he saw the burning bush and the angel spoke to him?
3. What did the Lord tell Moses to do?
4. Do you think Moses was excited about God's plan?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Matthew 26:36–39 (NIV84) — **36** Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." **37** He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. **38** Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." **39** Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

1 John 4:14 (NIV84) — **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

Jesus also received a plan from His Father. What was the plan?

Was Jesus willing to follow His Father's plan?

Do you think it was easy for Jesus to go through with His Father's plan? Why do you think He went through with the plan even though it can at a great cost to Jesus?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.



Lesson Aim:
Moses was given a special plan by God through a burning bush.
Jesus was given an even greater plan by God, the Father.
Jesus was sent to save the world from their sins.

Week 5 - Day 4

Moses - Rejected even with miracles

Family Connection

If you could have followed anyone around for a whole week from the Old Testament who would you pick and why?

If you could have followed any one around for a whole week from the New Testament (except Jesus) who would you pick and why?

Read

Exodus 5:1-2 and Review the 10 miracles in Exodus 7-11

or

Jesus Storybook Bible, “God to the Rescue”

Questions

1. Why do you think Pharaoh refused to let Israel go?
2. Of the first nine plagues, which one do you think would be the hardest to endure?
3. After which plague did Pharaoh finally agree to let Moses lead the people out of Egypt?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Name as many miracles as you can that Jesus performed.

John 6:66–67 (NIV84) — **66** From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. **67** “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

Was Jesus always accepted as God’s Son when He performed miracles?

Pharaoh rejected Moses as God’s messenger, in what ways do people reject Jesus today?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.



Lesson Aim: Pharaoh reject Moses as God’s messenger even when Moses performed miracles as proof. Many people rejected Jesus as God’s messenger even when He performed acts on God could do.

Week 5 - Day 5

Moses - The Deliverer

Family Connection

Share a moment in your life that you were saved from something bad happening or a time you helped someone avoid something bad.

Read

Exodus 14:31-15:18

or

Jesus Storybook Bible, “God Makes a Way”

or

YouVersion app, “Let My People Go”



Lesson Aim: God used Moses to deliver His people from slavery. God used Jesus to deliver us from the slavery of sin and death.

Questions

1. What was the song about that the Israelites sang?
2. What is a way “the Lord” is described to us (15:1-3)?
3. What did God do to deliver His people from slavery?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Colossians 1:13 (NIV84) — **13** For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

Galatians 1:4 (NIV84) — **4** who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

Hebrews 2:14–15 (NIV84) — **14** Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— **15** and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

God used Moses to deliverer or rescue the children of Israel from the slavery and bondage under Pharaoh. How is Jesus like Moses?

How is Jesus our deliverer or rescuer?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 6 - Day 1

Jonah - Message of Repentance

Family Connection

If you could live for one week as any character in a book or movie who would it be and why?

Read

Jonah 1:1-2; 3:4-5

or

Jesus Storybook Bible, “God’s Messenger”

Questions

1. What was God telling Jonah to do?
2. What do you think it was like to be a prophet?
3. Can you name any other prophets that God used to communicate to others?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Matthew 4:17 (NIV84) — **17** From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Mark 1:14–17 (NIV84) — **14** After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. **15** “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” **16** As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **17** “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

How was Jesus also God’s prophet?

What was the message Jesus was bringing to the world?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.



Lesson Aim: Jonah was told to tell the people of Nineveh to turn from their sins. Jesus calls people to do the same thing today and turn to God and way from sin

Week 6 - Day 2

Jonah - 3 Days

Family Connection

Would you rather wear a swimsuit in a snowstorm or wear a snowsuit on a 100 degree day?

Would you rather always stomp your feet when you walk or tiptoe?

If you could go anywhere for 3 days where would you go?

Read

Jonah 1:7



Questions

1. Where did Jonah spend 3 days and 3 nights?
2. What do you think that was like for Jonah? What do you think he did?

Lesson Aim: Jonah spent 3 days in the belly of a whale and was given new life. Jesus spent 3 days in the grave and was raised again to give us new life.

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Matthew 12:40 (NIV84) — 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

How can you see Jesus in the life and experience of Jonah?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 6 - Day 3

Jonah - Sacrificed Life

Family Connection

Can you name a time where someone gave up something for you or where you sacrificed for someone else? Why do you think they did that? Why did you choose to sacrifice something for someone else?

Read

Jonah 1:4-16

Questions

1. Why were all the sailors afraid?
2. How did the sailors find out who was the cause of the violent storm?
3. What remarkable thing does Jonah do to stop the storm and save the men?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

There was another man years later that gave or sacrificed or gave up his life to save others. In the Old Testament people gave up part of their harvest or the life of an animal to have their sins forgiven by God. This was to teach people how Jesus would one day be the ultimate sacrifice.

1 John 3:16 (NIV84) — 16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

How was Jesus' sacrifice even greater than Jonah's?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.



Lesson Aim: Jonah gave his life to save the other sailors. Jesus gave His life to save those who would turn to God.

Week 6 - Day 4

Night to Pray

Family Connection

Share a high and low moment of your week or day or use the three questions again: What are you concern about? What do you wish? What are you willing to do?

Read

Jonah 2

Questions



Lesson Aim:
Praying together
strengthens the
family.

1. How did God save Jonah?
2. In verse 7 Jonah says, “When his life was fainting away” what did he do?
3. How can we remember God and give thanks?

Family Wrap Up

Go around and share somethings you are thankful to God for. Make tonight a prayer of thanksgiving.

Week 6 - Day 5

Memory Verse Night

Family Connection



Lesson Aim:
Memorizing God's
word helps us
when we are in
need.

Find a creative way to work on your memory verses.

Examples:

- Write all the words on a separate piece of paper and shuffle them. Now take turns trying to put the words in order.
- Take turns with each person just saying one word of the verse and so forth.
- Write down the verses leaving out certain words and see if others can fill in the missing words.

Spend some time praying with your family or recite the Lord's prayer together.

Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen.

Week 7 - Day 1

Boaz - Provider of Daily Needs

Family Connection

Imagine you are on a deserted island as a family and each family member is only able to bring 3 items with them. What three items would you bring (ps. there is no cell phone coverage)?

Read

Ruth 2:1-17



Lesson Aim: Boaz provided for the daily needs of Ruth and Naomi. Jesus provides for our daily needs as well.

Questions

1. Who owns the field that Ruth gathers grain from to feed her and her mother-in-law?
2. What does Boaz do for Ruth (vs. 8-9)?
3. What instruction does Boaz give to the harvesters in regards to Ruth?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Philippians 4:19 (NIV84) — 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Boaz provided for Ruth's daily needs. How does Jesus provide for us as Boaz did for Ruth?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 7 - Day 2

Boaz - Showing Kindness

Family Connection

Brainstorm some ideas of how your family could show kindness to another family this week and set a time to do that?

Read

Ruth 2:19-20

Questions



Lesson Aim: Boaz showed great kindness to Ruth and Naomi. Jesus shows us even greater kindness.

1. What did Naomi ask Ruth?
2. What does gleaning mean?
3. What does Naomi say about the character of Boaz?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

Ephesians 2:7 (NIV84) — 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

How does Jesus show kindness and steadfast love toward us?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 7 - Day 3

Boaz - Kinsmen Redeemer

Family Connection

If you had \$100 what would you buy?
If you have \$1,000 what would you spend it on?
If you had \$10,000 what would you do with it?
If you had \$100,000 what would you spend it on?



Lesson Aim: Boaz purchased Ruth's freedom. Jesus purchases our freedom from sin and death.

Read

Ruth 4:1-10

or

YouVersion app "Wherever You Go"

Questions

1. What was a "Kinsmen Redeemer" (vs. 1-4)?
2. What was the tradition to show that a legal transaction was complete (vs. 7)?
3. What were the two things Boaz acquired or bought?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

1 Corinthians 6:20 (NIV84) — 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

A person would often sell land to purchase food to survive during a famine. A "kinsmen redeemer" is given the opportunity to redeem the field from Naomi. However, when he learns that Ruth will become his wife as part of the transaction, he changes his mind. Boaz then steps in to redeem the property and is willing to marry Ruth.

How did Jesus purchase us?

What does it mean to be redeemed by Christ?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 7 - Day 4

Night to Pray

Family Connection

Share a time when you have been scared? Share one of your greatest fears right now?

Read

Ruth 2:12
and
Psalm 36:5-10

Questions

Boaz prays that Ruth will be rewarded and protected by God.

Do you ever feel like you need protection from something or someone?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and ask God for the faith to trust in Him for protection.



Lesson Aim: Boaz prays that Ruth will be rewarded and protected by God for her courage. Pray for the protection of your family and for them to serve God with courage.

Week 7 - Day 5

Memory Verse Night

Family Connection



Find a creative way to work on your memory verses.

Lesson Aim: Continue to memorize the truth of God's Word which gives us life.

Examples:

- Write all the words on a separate piece of paper and shuffle them. Now take turns trying to put the words in order.
- Take turns with each person just saying one word of the verse and so forth.
- Write down the verses leaving out certain words and see if others can fill in the missing words.

Spend some time praying with your family or recite the Lord's prayer together.

Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen.

Week 8 - Day 1

David - Shepherd

Family Connection

Name a job that you think would be very difficult for someone living during David's time to understand.

Read

1 Samuel 17:34-36



Lesson Aim: David was a shepherd that carefully watched over his father's sheep. Jesus is a shepherd to us and carefully watches over and protects us.

Questions

1. What was David's job?
2. What were the responsibilities of a shepherd? What do you think a shepherd would do each day and night?
3. What does David save his father's sheep from?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Psalm 23:1-3 (NIV84) — **1** The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. **2** He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, **3** he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

John 10:11-18 (NIV84) — **11** "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. **13** The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. **17** The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

How is Jesus described in these verses?

How is Jesus our shepherd?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 8 - Day 2

David - The Big Victory

Family Connection

Would you rather eat a hamburger for breakfast or cereal for supper?

Would you rather live 100 years ago or 100 years in the future?

Would you rather have to cartwheel or walk on your hands to get places?

Read

1 Samuel 17:31-49

or

Jesus Storybook Bible, “The Young Hero and the Horrible Giant”

or

YouVersion app, “Stones, Slings, and Giant Things”

Questions

1. What was the difference in the weapons between David and the giant Philistine?
2. David seems very confident that he will win the fight against Goliath. Was he trusting in his own battle skills or something else (vs. 37)?
3. What did David use to defeat the giant?

NOW “I SPY” JESUS

1 Corinthians 15:55–57 (NIV84) — **55** “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” **56** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **57** But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

David defeated and conquered Goliath. What did Jesus defeat and conquer for us?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.



Lesson Aim: David stands in for all the Israel army and defeats the enemy. Jesus stands in for us and defeats Satan so that he no longer has control over us.

Week 8 - Day 3

David - King

Family Connection

If you could be the president of the United States for one day, what would you do?
If you could be the principal of your school for one day, what would you let everyone do?

Read

2 Samuel 5:1-4

or

Jesus Storybook Bible, "The Good Shepherd"



Lesson Aim:
David was a great king who led the people of Israel. Jesus is the King of kings who leads us to God.

Questions

1. Who came to David at Hebron?
2. Did the people give Saul or David credit for the victories?
3. What is David announced as in verse 3?
4. How long does David reign as king?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

Matthew 2:11 (NIV84) — 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Matthew 27:11 (NIV84) — 11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

John 18:36–37 (NIV84) — 36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." **37** "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

How is Jesus seen or described in these verses?

How is Jesus an even better King than David?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.

Week 8 - Day 4

David - Shows Mercy

Family Connection

Share a time when you deserved to be punished but you were given a second chance?

Read

1 Samuel 24:1-12

Questions

1. How many men did Saul take to go after David?
2. What does David do to Saul instead of killing him?
3. Why do you think David spared Saul's life and showed him mercy?
4. How would you define mercy?

NOW "I SPY" JESUS

1 Timothy 1:13–16 (NIV84) — **13** Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. **14** The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **15** Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. **16** But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

How does Jesus show us mercy?

Family Wrap Up

Pray as a family and/or work on memory verse.



Lesson Aim: David showed mercy to Saul even when Saul tried to kill him. Jesus shows mercy to anyone who will look to Him for salvation.

Week 8 - Day 5

Night to Pray

Family Connection

Discuss what it means to praise someone or something? Have you ever been praised for something? Share something you could praise God for today.

Read

Psalm 145



Lesson Aim: Prayer binds a family together and teaches children to rely on God.

Even though it feels good to hear someone say nice things about us, God alone is worthy of our praise.

See if you can spy all of the vocabulary words or phrases that David uses for “praising God.”

Read this Psalm out loud as you prayer tonight.

Family Wrap Up

Pray Psalm 145

Wrap Up

Congratulations for the last eight weeks you have been helping your family “Spy” Jesus all throughout the Old Testament. The Bible, both New and Old, are all about God’s redemptive plan for humanity and God’s redemptive plan finds it’s hero in Jesus. All throughout the Old Testament we read about men that foreshadowed God’s Son, Jesus. Thank you for leading your family to “I Spy” Jesus all throughout the Bible.

Noah - The Preacher of Righteousness and Restorer of Humanity

Abraham - Father of many nations that would bless the world

Melchizedek - Great High Priest

Joseph - The Provider and Forgiver

Moses - The Deliverer

Jonah - The Prophet

Boaz - The Kinsmen Redeemer

David - The Shepherd King

Jesus (Noah) is the ultimate preacher of righteousness and the one who can restore any sinner. We find all the blessings for this life and for eternity through Jesus (Abraham). Jesus is our great High Priest (Melchizedek). All blessings and forgiveness come from Christ (Joseph). Jesus (Moses) is the one that delivers us from sin and death. Jesus (Jonah) is the true prophet that said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus (Boaz) is the one that paid the price for our sins and reconciles us to God the Father. Jesus (David) tells us that He is our Shepherd and will not lose a single one of His sheep.

APPENDIX 7

FAMILY TRAINING OUTLINE

Family Discipleship Training Meeting Notes

Introduction

- God created the family to be the most powerful influence in the spiritual formation of children
- Brian Haynes, “God is the architect of the brilliant plan to capture the hearts of the generations. From the very beginning, God designed the family as the vehicle to pass on a heritage of faith, a godly legacy to the next generation.”
- Deut. 6 - IMPRESS. Mark Holman notes, “The word impress in the original Hebrew literally means to establish, fix, or permanently brand like when a farmer brands his cattle. The brand is there to stay.”
- Psalm 78 reminds us that as parents we have the greatest privilege of teaching our children to know God and His word
- Kurt Brunner and Steve Stroope, “As parents it is our job to give our children a framework for living, to equip them with a strong sense of identity that comes from knowing who made them, who they are, and how they fit into the larger drama of life. We must help them understand their story from the Author’s perspective, to enjoy the wonder that comes from knowing that with God everything is sacred, so nothing is meaningless. Put simply, we want them to grow up with God.

Although God created the family to be the primary place of discipleship, he did not leave the family without help.

- Brunner and Stroope highlight this partnership between the church and home when they say,
“The home cannot be the church any more than the church can be the home. Christianity is a communal faith to be experienced through corporate worship, under pastoral leadership, and amid what many call ‘doing life’ with other believers. God never intended a family’s faith to occur apart from local church engagement. But neither did he design the church to replace the home.”

The church is to come alongside families with support, encouragement, and resources as the parents train their children to follow after Christ.

Family Worship

Times for families to gather together to study God’s word, pray, sing, etc.

- Centers Home on Christ
- Encourages children in the things of Christ
- Encourages Christian character
- Encourages peace at home
- Binds the family together

- Provides common knowledge
- Equips children for corporate and private worship
- Reinforces spiritual headship
- Provides systematic discipleship

Family Meals

The most influential activity for homes is the family meal.

- In Exodus 12:1-29, God instructs parents to teach their children about His deliverance through the illustration of the Passover meal. Even though Jesus did not have children he used the Passover Matt. 26.
- Family meals provide opportunities for family members to share experiences, communicate desires, and bond through beliefs. The family meal is perhaps one of the oldest rituals known to man. It is through family meals that families bond together and create their household identity. However, one of the greatest dangers our society faces is the erosion of this vital ritual known as family mealtime. When families neglect family mealtimes it affects a child physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. When families recapture the importance of consistently sharing meals together the impact will be realized for generations to come.
- Timothy Witmer reports, “Harvard researchers looked at which activities most fostered healthy child development: play, story time, events family members and other factors. Family dinners won out.”
- Having dinner as a family is one of the easiest and most natural routines for creating opportunities for parental engagement and communication.
- There is a powerful force that happens at family mealtimes when food is being eaten and conversations are being shared. According to the 2012 Columbia survey, teens who have frequent family meals are one and half times more likely to say their parents know a great deal or a fair amount about what’s really going on in their lives (92 percent vs. 60 percent); and five times less likely to say their parents know very little or nothing at all about what’s really going on in their lives (8 percent vs. 40 percent)
- The family mealtimes are slowly being eroded through crowded schedules, long work hours, and media distractions. In reality, parents and children are longing for family mealtimes. According to a similar Columbia survey, “Two-thirds of teens (64 percent) and three-quarters of parents (75 percent) say they would be willing to give up a weeknight activity if it meant they could have dinner with their family.”
- Not only do families experience a greater level of connectedness through family meals, children and teenagers have healthier minds, actions, and lives. In addition, family mealtimes provide optimal opportunities for promoting the spiritual health of their children.

Family mealtimes are moments where children hear stories about their ancestors and learn what their family values. It is during these shared moments over food that children begin to discover what separates their families from others. The beliefs parents’ hold is passed down through conversations and stories.

Overview of “I Spy” Curriculum

Conclusion

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING PARENTS OF BETHEL BIBLE CHURCH, TYLER, TEXAS, TO USE FAMILY MEALTIMES IN THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

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The project seeks to equip parents of Bethel Bible Church to use family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children.

Chapter 1 gives the purpose, goals, establishes the context and rationale for equipping parents to use family meals to disciple their children.

Chapter 2 explores the biblical precedent for both parents being the primary disciplers of their children and the power of meals in the spiritual formation of people.

Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical, philosophical, and practical issues for parents in using family mealtimes in the spiritual formation of their children.

Chapter 4 explains the implementation of the project. The process began by assessing the current practices and perceptions of family discipleship. An eight-week family mealtime devotional curriculum, called "I Spy," was developed and evaluated. Three identical parent training sessions were conducted and the pre-project survey was collected. Upon conclusion of the eight weeks a post-survey was collected for analysis.

Chapter 5 offers an evaluation of the effectiveness, discusses strengths and weaknesses, and concludes with theological and personal reflections.

VITA

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