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EQUIPPING PARENTS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
JACKSON, TENNESSEE TO PROCLAIM THE
GOSPEL TO THEIR CHILDREN

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EQUIPPING PARENTS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
JACKSON, TENNESSEE TO PROCLAIM THE
GOSPEL TO THEIR CHILDREN

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To Lauren,

“So we’ll both be more like Jesus in the end;”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

And to

Jordyn, Cole, and Rowan,

I long for the day when you respond to the gospel.

May I be faithful in proclaiming it to you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	ix
PREFACE	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	1
Goals	1
Ministry Context	2
Rationale	5
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	6
Research Methodology	7
2. AN EXEGESIS OF EPHESIANS 5:21-6:4	9
Ephesians 5:21	11
On “Submitting to One Another”	11
On “Out of Reverence for Christ”	13
Ephesians 5:22-24	15
On “As to the Lord”	15
On The Submission of Wives and the Submission of the Church	16

Chapter	Page
On “κεφαλή”	18
Ephesians 5:25-30	19
On “ἀγαπάτε”	19
On Christ’s Love for the Church and the Husband’s Love for the Wife	20
On “ἐκτρέφει”	23
Ephesians 5:31-33	24
On “μυστήριον”	26
Ephesians 6:1-4	30
On Ephesians 6:4	32
Conclusion	34
 3. AN EXAMINATION OF RELEVANT SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE	 37
Fatherhood in Social-Scientific Perspective	38
Father Involvement and Child Development	40
Father-Infant Attachments	41
Father-Child Relationships	41
Nonresident Father Influences	43
Faith, Father Involvement, and Child Development	44
Generative Spirituality, Generative Fathering	46
The Effects of the Father-Mother Relationship on Child Development	50

Chapter	Page
Fathering Vulnerability Hypothesis	52
Paternal Mental Health Hypothesis	54
Differential Reactivity Hypothesis	55
The Effects of the Father-Mother Relationship on Child Spiritual Development	57
Effects of Parental Discord on Preadolescent Religiousness	59
Quality of Parental Relationships for Families with Preadolescents	61
A Postulation and Conclusion	64
4. DETAILS OF THE PROJECT	66
Training Seminar	66
Weeks 1 and 2	67
Week 3 (Session 1)	68
Week 4 (Session 2)	69
Week 5 (Session 3)	70
Week 6 (Session 4)	71
Week 7 (Session 5)	72
Week 8 (Session 6)	73
Devotional Guide	73
Week 9 (Devotional Guide Week 1)	75

Chapter	Page
Week 10 (Devotional Guide Week 2)	75
Week 11 (Devotional Guide Week 3)	76
Week 12 (Devotional Guide Week 4)	77
Week 13 (Devotional Guide Week 5)	78
Week 14 (Devotional Guide Week 6)	78
Week 15 (Devotional Guide Week 7)	79
Week 16 (Devotional Guide Week 8)	80
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	82
Evaluation of the Purpose	82
Evaluation of Goals	83
Project Strengths	87
Project Weaknesses	89
Suggested Improvements	91
Theological Reflections	92
Personal Reflections	94
Conclusion	95
 Appendix	
1. PRE- AND POST-SEMINAR QUESTIONNAIRE	96
2. SEMINAR SURVEY	100
3. DEVOTIONAL GUIDE SURVEY	102
4. TRAINING SEMINAR OUTLINE	104

Appendix	Page
5. DEVOTIONAL GUIDE	106
BIBLIOGRAPHY	189

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. T-TEST RESULTS	84
2. PRE- AND POST-QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS	85

PREFACE

I could not have completed this work apart from the help and support of many others. Dr. Michael Wilder's encouragement to persevere through each step of the project was an inspiration from the beginning. Likewise, Dr. Timothy Paul Jones inspired, challenged, and helped me to think critically throughout the project.

I am grateful to my father-in-law, Dr. Roger S. Oldham, for allowing me to collaborate with him in completing the devotional guide resource and for agreeing to allow it to be used in the project. He also provided much encouragement and help along the way.

Many others also provided me with support and offered prayers on my behalf as I completed this task. Among these are my parents, in-laws, and other family members and friends. I am especially indebted to my church family, First Baptist Church, Jackson, Tennessee. All of these have, in different ways, helped to carry the burden of the project with me. It would not have been possible to complete this work without them.

The gratefulness I wish to express to my wife, Lauren, for her encouragement and support during these years goes beyond words. Through her steadfast, sacrificial love, she has motivated and cheered me on every step of the way. This accomplishment is hers as much as it is mine. My love, fondness, and appreciation for her continues to grow daily.

And finally, while it was I who planned to complete this project, it was the LORD who established my steps through its completion. May I ever continue to stand in awe of His grace and mercy, which He demonstrated to me through Jesus Christ in salvation, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit who empowers me to serve Him. To Him alone be all glory, honor, and praise.

Aaron P. Kennedy

Jackson, Tennessee

December 2015

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a strategy to equip parents at First Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee to proclaim the gospel to their children.

Goals

The purpose of this project was fulfilled by attaining three goals. The first goal was to determine the knowledge level and confidence level of parents in proclaiming the gospel to their children. This was measured by a pre- and post-seminar questionnaire for parents. The questionnaire was given before and after a seminar that is described in the second goal of this project. An increase in knowledge and confidence was expected from the pre-questionnaire to the post-questionnaire.

The second goal was to equip parents to proclaim the gospel to their children. This was done through an eight-week seminar (two weeks of preparing and six weeks of meeting times) in which parents were instructed in ways to proclaim the gospel of Christ to their children. This goal was measured by a survey, apart from the pre- and post-seminar questionnaire, upon the conclusion of the seminar.

The third goal of this project was to collaborate with others to develop a resource for parents to use in proclaiming the gospel to their children. This resource was in the form of an eight-week devotional guide and was designed to help parents answer

questions pertaining to their child's readiness to respond to Christ. The guide was completed by parents together with their children upon the conclusion of the previously described seminar. The target group was children ages 7-11. This goal was also measured by a survey upon the completion of the resource. Bi-weekly contacts were made, and accountability for the participating families was offered throughout the duration of the resource's use.

Ministry Context

The general context of this ministry project is Jackson, TN, a city of 65,000 people in the otherwise-mostly rural region of West Tennessee.¹ The more specific context is a church that has been in existence for more than 175 years. First Baptist Church in Jackson, TN was organized in January of 1837. She has lived through the Civil War; her members have gathered in different buildings; and she has been led by nearly 40 different senior pastors. Through all of the peaks and valleys of her rich history, God has been faithful. Because Union University is located in Jackson, there are many members of the church who are also affiliated with this well-known Southern Baptist University.

The most specific context of this ministry project is the preschool and children's ministry of the church. In recent years the church has experienced an increase in attendance and membership of young families. As a result, the attendance numbers in the preschool and children's ministry have climbed to account for nearly a quarter of the

¹United States Census Bureau, accessed August 13, 2012, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47/4737640.html>.

400 average weekly Sunday morning attendance. Realizing a ministry need, the church chose to create a staff position for a minister to children and families. Previously this position was led by a children's director.

The Minister to Children and Families position was created primarily because the church realized that if the children were going to be truly ministered to, parents must be trained, equipped, and encouraged as the primary disciple-makers in the home. It is the purpose of the minister to children and families to lead families to realize and fulfill their responsibility to connect the church and home, and to lead the church in partnering with families in contributing to the spiritual formation of their children. Historically this has not been done in a clear and direct way at First Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee.

As has already been mentioned, the size of the preschool and children's ministry in the church is substantial compared to the overall size of the church. Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings are the weekly opportunities for the church to minister to children and their families. In addition to these opportunities there are special children and family events throughout the year.

On Sunday mornings there is a corporate worship service followed by a small group Bible study called, Life Groups. During the worship service there is nursery care provided for bed babies through three-year olds, and a children's worship service offered for four and five-year old children. All other children are encouraged to participate in the corporate worship service with their families. The Life Groups for the preschool and children are age-segregated. The average preschool and children attendance on Sunday mornings is around eighty.

On Sunday evenings, preschoolers and children have the opportunity to

participate in children's choirs. These choirs are for three-year old children through fifth grade children. The choirs rehearse throughout the semester and assist in leading worship at the end of each semester. Also on Sunday evenings, discipleship classes are held for youth and adults to attend. The average preschool and children attendance on Sunday evenings is around twenty-five.

On Wednesday evenings throughout the school year preschoolers and children participate in AWANA at the church. This program is made available for two-year old children through fifth grade children. The children memorize Scripture for awards and prizes, learn about missions, and play games. The average preschool and children attendance for the AWANA program is around sixty.

Other major preschool and children events throughout the year include a Trunk-or-Treat, an Easter egg hunt, VBS, and a summer camp for 3rd-5th graders. Also, in the past the church has held various father-son/mother-daughter events for families. All of these ministry events and weekly opportunities are good ways of ministering to the children of the church; however, prior to the implementation of this project, there was no clear and direct training, equipping, and encouraging of parents as primary disciple-makers currently being done through the ministry in conjunction with these. With the exception of the older children being in the corporate worship service on Sunday mornings and family-friendly events during the year, parents have little, if any, support in instructing faith outside of church activities.

Steps are being taken to address this, but what does this ministry context mean for the purposes of this project? It indicates that parents are not being trained, equipped, and encouraged to connect church and home. It means parents are not being equipped at

First Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee in a clear and direct way to proclaim the gospel to their children. Therefore, when a child begins to ask questions related to the gospel, parents are typically timid and uncertain about how to answer them and how to direct the child. Often parents will seek out the “expert,” who is the pastor, to talk with the child in order to determine his or her readiness to respond to the gospel, and to “take over” the conversation. Even if the child makes a profession of faith in Christ, parents are frequently unsure of how to explain baptism and how to continue the discipleship process. This issue leads to the rationale for this study.

Rationale

The *majority* of parents understand they are primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of their children. The *minority* of parents are doing something about it.² Therefore a true and urgent need exists for parents to engage in the discipleship of their children. Discipleship begins with evangelism, the proclamation of the gospel. If parents are equipped to proclaim the gospel of Christ to their children, then a great foundation for family discipleship is in place.

Sadly, many parents in the church today do not know how to share the gospel with their children clearly and confidently. Instead they lean heavily on the pastor, children’s pastor, youth pastor, etc. to determine the readiness of their child to respond to the gospel. This paradigm is not what God intended. According to Scripture, it is God’s design and command for parents to pass on their faith to the next generation. This cannot be done apart from the gospel. Clearly parents must be equipped to proclaim the gospel

²Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 99.

to their children, because it is first and foremost the responsibility of the parents, not the church.

One reason so many parents lack knowledge and confidence in this area is that the church has failed to fulfill her responsibility to train parents for the task. The desired benefit of this project will be to equip parents of First Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee, through training and the provision of a devotional resource, to proclaim the gospel to their children, thus establishing a solid foundation for family discipleship.

Because of the recent creation and filling of the new position of Minister to Children and Families, the timing for this project is ideal. Not only will the project help parents to better fulfill their responsibility as primary disciple-makers in the home, it will help both the church and parents to better understand the shift towards a more family discipleship-focused children's ministry.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Children. The term "children" is a broad term. It can refer to sons, daughters, and/or descendants of any age. For the purposes of this project, a child is a son or daughter from conception to the fifth grade. While parents of adolescent children may benefit from some aspects of this project, the term used throughout this project refers to the aforementioned age range.

Gospel Proclamation. Whenever gospel proclamation is discussed throughout this project it refers to the teaching of the core truths of the gospel both in a general, day-to-day sense, as well as in a specific manner through gospel conversations.

Devotional guide. A devotional guide was developed through the collaboration with others and was provided to parents to help them answer questions

pertaining to their children's readiness to respond to Christ. The devotional guide follows the fictional stories of two children as they are made aware of their need for Christ, respond to Him, and begin to grow in their relationship with Him. There are questions and an activity at the end of each story to reinforce the intended lesson for that day. The devotional guide includes five stories per week for eight weeks.

Because the readiness for a child to respond to Christ cannot be controlled, the full extent of the effectiveness of this project may not be determined in the sixteen weeks planned for its completion. Therefore, the limitations of this project were its duration and the possibility a parent did not have the opportunity to see the fruit of their gospel proclamation to their child during its duration. Furthermore, it was difficult to accurately measure the effectiveness of the seminar and of the devotional guide based upon the limitation of duration. A delimitation of this project was that the target group was parents of children from conception through fifth grade.

Research Methodology

A pre-project questionnaire was used to determine the knowledge level and confidence level of parents in proclaiming the gospel to their children. The pre-project questionnaire was completed by the parents who participated in the parent training class during the first session of the class. This was done to first demonstrate the need for the class, then the class was provided.

The training class was eight weeks in duration (two weeks in preparing and six weeks of meeting times). Upon the conclusion of each week's session parents gathered in small groups to answer questions related to that week's topic. The answers were recorded to measure the level of understanding of the parents. At the conclusion of the

seminar a post-questionnaire was used to measure the knowledge level and confidence level of parents in proclaiming the gospel to their children. Also, a separate survey was completed by the participants to measure the perceived effectiveness of the seminar.

Finally, the devotional guide was made available following the seminar for parents of the target group to work through with their children. Participating parents completed a survey upon the completion of this resource to measure its effectiveness. Also, bi-weekly contacts and accountability for the participating families were offered throughout the duration of the resource's use.

The pre- and post-project questionnaire consisted of written responses and responses based on a Likert-type scale. Each participant's pre- and post-questionnaire was matched using a t-test for dependent samples in order to determine the statistical change.

CHAPTER 2

AN EXEGESIS OF EPHESIANS 5:21-6:4

God has charged parents with the task of proclaiming the gospel to their children because they are the best qualified by His design. It is with their parents whom children most often sit in the house, walk by the way, and spend the evenings and mornings (Deut 6:7). Parents are with their children the most regularly, they know their children the most intimately, and are, therefore, best able to communicate to them God's story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. No one else possesses the natural bond with children like the one that God has established through the parent-child relationship.

It is important for parents to realize that the bond of the parent-child relationship works both ways. In the same way that parents know and observe their children better and clearer than anyone else, children also observe and learn from their parents in ways that are unique to anyone else. Children are constantly learning from their parents, even in regard to the gospel.

In Ephesians 5, the marriage relationship is described as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:21-33). Immediately following this explanation, parents, especially fathers, are instructed in the sixth chapter not to provoke their children to anger, but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). The thesis of this chapter is that a primary way fathers nurture their children

in the discipline and instruction of the Lord is by loving their wives as Christ loves the church; thus parents proclaim the gospel to their children through the marriage relationship.

It is crucial for parents to understand how the marriage relationship influences the Christian formation of their children. William Farley explains this influence by writing, “God wants your child to watch your marriage and think, ‘I want a marriage like that, and I want the God that produced it.’ Or, ‘When I think of the beauty of the gospel, I think of my parents’ marriage.’”¹ Similarly, John Piper writes, “[God’s] design is that children grow up watching Christ love the church and watching the church delight in following Christ. His design is the beauty and strength and wisdom of this covenant relationship be absorbed by the children from the time they are born.”² While it is God’s design for both parents to proclaim the gospel in this way, it is the father who is ultimately responsible.

When a father nourishes and cherishes his wife just as Christ does the church, he is also nourishing his children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, thus proclaiming the gospel to them through the marriage relationship. When a father abdicates his responsibility to love his wife as Christ loves the church, he fails to depict the gospel accurately to his children, thus discouraging them and provoking them to anger. In order to defend this thesis, a deep exegesis of Ephesians 5:21-6:4 will be provided in this chapter.

¹William Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 111.

²John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 144.

Ephesians 5:21

Much has been written about Ephesians 5:21 and its relation to the verses preceding and following it. It has been called a transitional verse, a bridge verse, a hinge verse, etc. While scholars are in general agreement about the significance of this verse to its context, there is disagreement about its meaning, particularly as to how it relates to the remainder of the passage that is being discussed in this chapter.

In its original text the verse reads: ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ, which translates, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”³ The first phrase of this verse is a participial phrase that follows four other participles within the preceding verses which are dependent upon the imperative ‘be filled’ (v. 18). These participles describe actions that should result from being filled with the Spirit. Furthermore as Peter O’Brien writes, “At the same time, v. 21 introduces a new topic of ‘submission’, which is then developed throughout the household table (5:22-6:9), particularly in 5:22-33, which presents the longest statement in the New Testament on the relationship between husbands and wives.”⁴ It is this topic of submission that is at the center of the debate surrounding this verse.

On “Submitting to One Another”

The infinitive form of the participle at the beginning of this phrase is ὑποτάσσω. It literally means “to arrange under”, and when it is used in the New

³Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

⁴Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 399.

Testament it carries a meaning of being subject or submissive to authority.⁵ It is followed here by the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλοις, “one another.” The interpretation of this phrase, which seemingly calls for reciprocal submission to authority, has led to dispute among commentators and scholars. Some scholars such as Witherington believe “this verse calls for mutual submission of all Christians to each other.”⁶ Other scholars such as O’Brien believe the correct interpretation of this phrase is that there is to be “submission to those who are in authority over them.”⁷ The remainder of the passage is affected depending on the interpretation.

Those who argue for the mutual submission interpretation believe the remainder of the passage relates to 5:21 through a coexistence of mutual submission within hierarchal roles of the household.⁸ Furthermore, they propose Paul uses the middle voice of the verb “to signify a voluntary submission or subordination, and this means to act in a loving, considerate, self-giving way towards one another” similar to elsewhere in Ephesians (4:2, 3, 25, 32) and in the New Testament (cf. Phil 2:3).⁹ In other words, within the marriage relationship and other household relationships, “there is a sense in which everyone is involved in serving others.”¹⁰

⁵O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 399.

⁶Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 316.

⁷O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 404.

⁸Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 366. Also Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 373; Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon*, 318.

⁹O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 400.

¹⁰Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 373.

Those who argue for the interpretation of submission to those in authoritative positions, lean heavily upon the semantic range of ὑποτάσσω. According to O'Brien,

In its other New Testament instances the semantic range of our verb does not include acting in a thoughtful or considerate way, or showing mutual courtesy, deference or respect. The term, then, should not be assigned to a meaning that is outside its semantic range, especially when its usual meaning makes good sense in the context. We are not suggesting that acting in a loving, considerate, self-giving way is absent from the household table; only that words other than 'submit, be subordinate or submission' are used to describe this loving service (cf. vv. 25, 28, 29).¹¹

Additionally, O'Brien goes on to point out that the pronoun "one another" is not always fully reciprocal (Rev 6:4, Gal 6:2, 1 Cor 11:33), and that the observed flow of Paul's argument supports the interpretation that "the apostle is not speaking of *mutual* submission in the sense of reciprocal subordination, but submission to those who are in authority over them."¹² Therefore, this is the more accurate interpretation of this phrase.

On "Out of Reverence for Christ"

This second phrase of verse 21 demonstrates what should be the proper motivation for submitting to one another. The word from which "reverence" is translated is φόβω. It possesses "a wide spectrum of meaning ranging from absolute terror to respect. It is the context that determines the meaning."¹³

Some scholars such as Barth and Lincoln believe the proper translation should be "fear," but not necessarily in a manner of fright or terror. According to Lincoln, "This is an attitude that looks to Christ in awe at his overwhelming love and at his power and

¹¹O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 402.

¹²Ibid., 404.

¹³Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 718.

that also lives in the light of his sovereign claim and righteous judgment.”¹⁴ Likewise, Hoehner writes, “Since the word is used in the context of Christ’s love that is so amply demonstrated in this letter, it is best to view it as a reverential fear or reverential respect.”¹⁵

Perhaps the best commentary on this phrase, especially as it pertains to the thesis of this chapter, is provided by Sampley. He writes, “In both 2 Cor 7 and Eph 5:21ff. the point of φόβος refers primarily to an initiative taken by God (2 Cor. 7:1) or by Christ (Eph. 5:21-33). It is because of previous action in both cases, that the . . . Ephesians find themselves called upon for . . . a response in view of what has been done for them.”¹⁶ In other words, Christ’s actions shown to them are to be mirrored and reflected to others.

Therefore, to conclude this section, Ephesians 5:21 is not calling for followers of Christ to mutually submit to one another, rather to be submissive in ordered relationships out of a reverential fear for Christ. Or, for the purposes of this chapter, God intends for believers to voluntarily and willfully submit to those whom He has placed in authoritative positions over them. And they are to do this through a worshipful response to Christ, for His glory. This has tremendous implications for the husband-wife and parent-child relationships as they relate to the proclamation of the gospel. These implications will be demonstrated and expounded upon throughout the remainder of the chapter.

¹⁴Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 367.

¹⁵Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 719.

¹⁶J. Paul Sampley, *‘And the Two Shall Become One Flesh’: A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33* (1971; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 121.

Ephesians 5:22-24

Wives are addressed first in the husband-wife relationship in verse 22 by being commanded to submit to their own husbands, as to the Lord. Most scholars agree that the verb of this verse is missing in the original text, but according to Hoehner, “It is included in the majority of manuscripts from the earliest times If the original text omitted the verb, one can easily see why the scribes would have inserted it for the sake of clarity.”¹⁷ The verb at hand is the verb discussed from the previous verse, ὑποτάσσω, “with the imperative being understood instead of the participle.”¹⁸ As O’Brien writes, “At the heart of this submission is the notion of ‘order.’ God has established certain leadership and authority roles within the family, and submission is a humble recognition of that divine ordering. The apostle is not urging every woman to submit to every man, but wives to submit to their husbands.”¹⁹ Also here, as in the previous verse, Paul gives what is to be the motivation for this submission.

On “As to the Lord”

Commentators are in general agreement that the adverbial phrase, “as to the Lord,” of verse 22 carries a bit of uncertainty as to its meaning. Thielman suggests two possible interpretations: (1) Wives are to submit to their husbands as if their husbands were Christ; or (2) When wives submit to their husbands, they are submitting to Christ because they are doing what Christ wants them to do.²⁰

¹⁷Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 730.

¹⁸O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 411.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Thielman, *Ephesians*, 376.

According to Hoehner, the interpretation that wives are to submit to their husbands as their “masters” or as if they were Christ is unsustainable for several reasons. Perhaps the most significant of these reasons is that in the other two instances of this adverbial phrase (Eph 6:7 and Col 3:23), it refers to Christ and not to humans, and so “it is reasonable to think in the present text it also refers to Christ and to husbands.”²¹ Similarly, Lincoln writes, “As the next verse will explain, what is involved here is that in voluntarily subordinating herself to her husband the wife is to see this as done in subordination to the Lord.”²² Therefore, as Hoehner once again concludes, “As the wife submits to the husband she also submits to Christ.”²³ This is the beginning of Christ-church/husband-wife analogy that Paul uses throughout the remainder of the chapter.

On the Submission of Wives and the Submission of the Church

In verse 24 as in verse 22, wives are commanded to submit to their husbands, but here in verse 24 there are two phrases added: “as the church submits to Christ” and “in everything.” In order to better understand the role of the wife in proclaiming the gospel through the marriage relationship, the meaning of these two phrases should be further examined.

First, if a wife is to submit to her husband as the church submits to Christ, how, then, does the church submit to Christ? Lincoln provides a thorough response to

²¹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 736.

²²Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 368.

²³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 737.

this question when he writes that one can simply look to this letter to the Ephesians for the answer:

The church receives God's gift of Christ as head over all on its behalf (1:22). In the building imagery of 2:20, 21 the Church looks to Christ as the crowning stone of its structure and the one who holds it all together . . . It grows toward its head and receives from him all that is necessary for such growth (4:15, 16), including teaching about him (4:20, 21). The Church imitates Christ's love (5:2) and tries to learn what is pleasing to him (5:10) and to understand his will (5:17) . . . The Church's subordination, then, means looking to its head for his beneficial rule, living by his norms, experiencing his presence and love, receiving from him gifts that will enable growth to maturity, and responding to him in gratitude and awe. It is such attitudes that the wife is being encouraged to develop in relation to her husband.²⁴

In regard to the second phrase, "in everything," its meaning is not as clearly defined. "The phrase *ἐν παντί*, particularly in a text as effusive in its language as Ephesians, is not intended to be taken woodenly to mean 'in everything no matter how harmful, silly, or sinful.'"²⁵ As Foulkes writes, "Subject to her husband *in all things* does not mean . . . that she is in the hands of one who has authority to command what he pleases. She is to be submissive to one whose duty to her is expressed in nothing short of the highest demand of self-giving love."²⁶

If, therefore, wives bear the responsibility of responding to their husbands as the church responds to Christ, husbands bear the even greater responsibility of representing Christ in the relationship. In verse 23 the husband is charged with being the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body. There has been debate over

²⁴Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 372.

²⁵Thielman, *Ephesians*, 380.

²⁶Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 157.

this verse as well as to its exact meaning. It, too, has great implications for how a husband proclaims the gospel through the marriage relationship.

On “κεφαλή”

First, as Stott notes, and as has already been alluded to, the presence of this term does not establish a stereotype of masculine behavior.²⁷ Likewise, Chapell writes, “First, headship does not merely mean ‘source’ as some modern-day exegetes have claimed because they dislike the second-class status they feel is necessarily implied by the traditional rendering of *kephale*.”²⁸ Some claim this word used here “means ‘origin’ or ‘life source’ without the meaning of authority. They believe the husband is the source of the wife in the sense of life-giving love, service, and help to the wife.”²⁹

In order to acquire this term’s proper meaning, “it is very important to understand the meaning of the headship of Christ in relationship to the church.”³⁰ In both Ephesians 1:22 and 4:15 the term ‘head’ when used in reference to Christ conveys a position of authority, supremacy, and leadership over the church. Therefore, as O’Brien concludes, “Here the headship of the husband, in the light of the usage at 1:22, the general context of the authority structure of the Greco-Roman household, and the submission of the wife to her husband within marriage in verses 22-24, refers to his

²⁷John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 225.

²⁸Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 274.

²⁹Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women, Equal Yet Different: A Brief Study on the Biblical Passages on Gender* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1999), 56.

³⁰Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 739.

having authority over his wife, thus he is her leader or ruler.”³¹ At the same time, “the headship of the husband does not connote any sense of qualitative superiority to the wife. . . . In God’s administration the role of the husband’s headship is positional power. His headship and the wife’s submission are for the sake of harmony.”³²

It is through this harmony of the husband’s headship and the wife’s submission that the picture of the Christ-church relationship is so beautifully illustrated. Also in this harmony, it is the husband who is responsible for carrying the melody, and in the remainder of this passage he is instructed how he is to do so.

Ephesians 5:25-30

The husband’s role in the marriage relationship has been made clear. God has placed him in a position of prominence, authority, and leadership over his wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. In verses 25-30, husbands are charged with how their headship should be exercised. If wives are to submit in everything to their husbands, this is how husbands should lead their wives. The Apostle Paul, says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (v. 25).

On “ἀγαπᾶτε”

The infinitive form of the verb used in verses 25, 28, and 33 is ἀγαπάω, “to love.” As Hoehner describes, “It refers to love irrespective of merit, even to the undeserving The present imperative reinforces the idea that a husband’s love for his wife is to be an ongoing process. Thus in this context husbands are to love their wives

³¹O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 414.

³²Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 740.

even when they may seem undeserving and unloving, in other words, unconditionally.”³³

It is “love that is totally unselfish, that seeks not its own satisfaction, nor even affection answering affection, but that strives for the highest good of the one loved. This love has as its standard and model the love of Christ for His Church.”³⁴

O’Brien writes that the love of Christ for the church is embodied in the latter phrase of verse 25, “and gave himself up for her”:

Again the verb ‘gave over’, together with the reflexive pronoun ‘himself’, stresses the fact that Christ took the initiative in handing himself over to death (5:1, 2). He went to the cross as the willing victim, and this action on behalf of his people was the supreme demonstration of his love for them.

If they heed this apostolic injunction, husbands will not behave in an overbearing manner. All areas of married life will be characterized by this self-giving love and forgiveness.³⁵

This is a powerful picture that the husband is responsible for living out, and it is not without purpose as Christ’s love for the church was not without goal or purpose as is demonstrated in verses 26-27.

On Christ’s Love for the Church and the Husband’s Love for the Wife

As Hoehner writes, “Paul presents the purpose or goal of Christ’s love for the church by the three *ἵνα* clauses: that he might sanctify her (v. 26); that he might present to himself a glorious church (v. 27a); and that she might be holy and without blame

³³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 747.

³⁴Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul*, 157.

³⁵O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 419-20.

(v.27b).”³⁶ According to O’Brien, there are two elements to the first phrase: “a separation from all that is unclean and evil, and a consecration to God and his will.”³⁷

According to verse 26, Christ gave himself up for the church “that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” This is yet another phrase in this passage that has proved to be controversial. Many scholars and commentators believe this phrase refers to baptism. This view is not supported in the present context, nor anywhere else in the New Testament. “It is probably best to see it as a metaphorical expression of redemption with the imagery of the bridal bath practiced in the first century . . . as a picturesque way of expressing the cleansing effected by Christ’s death.”³⁸

In regard to the phrase, “with the word,” O’Brien writes that it “is closely linked by most commentators to the immediately preceding expression, ‘the washing of water’, and understood as accompanying the baptism A better interpretation is to join the phrase . . . with the ‘cleansing’, and to understand it as signifying ‘through the word of the gospel.’”³⁹ Therefore, “the reason that Christ gave himself for the church (redemption) was in order that he might sanctify her because he has cleansed her with the washing of the water, speaking metaphorically of his sacrificial death and this is in connection with the proclaimed word of Christ’s death.”⁴⁰

³⁶Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 750.

³⁷O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 421.

³⁸Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 754.

³⁹O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 423.

⁴⁰Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 757.

Regarding the final two ἵνα phrases of Christ presenting the church to himself in splendor . . . that she might be holy and without blemish, it seems likely Paul is referring to the parousia.⁴¹ O'Brien gives four reasons for taking this line, the most convincing being: "The verb to 'present' appears in Pauline contexts where it can only refer to the final day (2 Cor. 4:14; cf. Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 8:8). This is particularly the case when the verb is used, as in Colossians 1:22, 28, where the same ('holy', 'blameless') . . . focus on the occasion of the great assize."⁴²

Some commentators such as Thielman believe verses 26-27 are the result of a digression by Paul from the analogy between the love of husbands for their wives and the love of Christ for the church, and that these verses only refer to the relationship between Christ and the church.⁴³ Other scholars such as Hoehner and O'Brien offer different perspectives. For example, Hoehner writes, "The purpose of Christ's love for the church was for her ultimate good, which should be the goal of a husband's love."⁴⁴ O'Brien offers a similar viewpoint, writing, "In the light of Christ's complete giving of himself to make the church holy and cleanse her, husbands should be utterly committed to the total well-being, especially the spiritual welfare, of their wives."⁴⁵ The stance that Hoehner and O'Brien assume on this particular section of the passage seems to be the most plausible, and the one most in agreement with the context as a whole.

⁴¹O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 424.

⁴²Ibid., 425.

⁴³Thielman, *Ephesians*, 382.

⁴⁴Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 762.

⁴⁵O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 423.

On “ἐκτρέφει”

In verses 28-30 this picture of the Christ-church relationship, which is represented in the husband-wife relationship, is brought even more into focus as Paul again encourages husbands to love their wives. In leading up to the climax of this analogy (vv. 31-33), Paul uses phrases such as “husbands should love their wives as their own bodies” (v. 28) and “no one has ever hated his own flesh” (v. 29) to further describe how husbands are to love their wives. It is one verb, ἐκτρέφει translated “nourishes”, used here in verse 29 that demands further examination in support of the thesis of this chapter.

Paul’s use of this term is in contrast to his assertion that no one has ever hated his own flesh (v. 29a). Instead, Paul says, people (here husbands in particular) love their own bodies (v. 28) and nourish (also cherish) their own flesh (v. 29b). The infinitive form of the word for nourish is ἐκτρέφω, which means “‘to bring up from childhood, rear up.’ Interestingly, in the NT, it is used only here and Ephesians 6:4. In 6:4 it refers to fathers who rear their children. Similarly, here it has the same connotation, that of a parent who nurtures a child.”⁴⁶ This connection to Eph 6:4 will be expounded upon in the last section of this chapter, but it is significant here because Paul is reinforcing his point that he who loves his wife loves himself (v. 28b), and that a husband is to nourish his wife as he does his own flesh, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body (v. 30). Clearly, the context of Ephesians 5 points to the equivalency of

⁴⁶Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 767.

‘flesh’ and ‘body’. Therefore, “husband and wife, are regarded as one person, a single entity.”⁴⁷

Therefore, as Bruce concludes, “since husband and wife are ‘one flesh’ or one body, to love one’s wife is not merely a matter of loving someone else *as* oneself; it is in effect loving oneself.”⁴⁸ O’Brien echoes this conclusion: “The idea of husbands loving their wives as their own bodies reflects the model of Christ, whose love for the church can be seen as love for his own body (cf. vv. 23, 30) Let each husband, then, follow Christ’s example and be wholehearted in loving and tenderly caring for his wife.”⁴⁹ As Christ nourishes and cares for his own body, the church, the husband is to nourish and care for his wife, to whom his flesh is joined. This glorious truth and its implications for the proclamation of the gospel will be elaborated on in the following section.

Ephesians 5:31-33

In verse 31 Paul reveals that “the text that has provided the substructure of his thought throughout, namely Genesis 2:24.”⁵⁰ This all-important Old Testament text comes after the description of how God made woman from a rib taken from the side of man to be his companion, and it says: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Foulkes calls “this statement from the creation story the most profound and fundamental statement in the

⁴⁷O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 427.

⁴⁸F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 391.

⁴⁹O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 427-28.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 429.

whole of Scripture concerning God’s plan for marriage.”⁵¹ Why does Paul insert this verse here?

First, the quotation appears without an introductory formula as Paul does elsewhere to indicate that a citation from an Old Testament passage is forthcoming. However, scholars generally agree this format is not altogether strange because there are other instances even within Ephesians where Paul does not use an introductory formula for an Old Testament quotation. As O’Brien clarifies, “The absence of an introductory formula is that the opening words, *for this reason* [or *therefore*], dovetail neatly and logically into Paul’s argument.”⁵² In all likelihood the “therefore” of verse 31 is referring to its immediate antecedent of verse 30, “because we are members of his body.”⁵³

So, “as Paul has argued that husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies just as Christ loves the church because we are members of his body, he concludes by quoting Gen 2:24 to demonstrate that in marriage man and woman are one flesh.”⁵⁴ Again, as Bruce has concludes, “The body language of Ephesians makes it natural for the union both of husband and wife and of Christ and the church to be equally expressed in terms of ‘one body.’”⁵⁵

In reference to this “body language,” Paul says in verse 32, “This mystery (μυστήριον) is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” This statement has caused much debate in scholarship as to the meaning of the mystery to

⁵¹Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul*, 161.

⁵²O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 429.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 772.

⁵⁵Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians*, 393.

which Paul is referring. O'Brien calls this a "notorious crux," and rightly states that there are "several distinct though related questions that must be addressed before we can understand its meaning."⁵⁶ This crux, though notorious, is significant because of how the biblical view of marriage is affected.

On "μυστήριον"

The term μυστήριον is used many times in the New Testament, noticeably in Paul's writings, including several times in Ephesians other than 5:32 (1:9, 3:3, 4, 9, 6:19). Exegetes generally agree that it refers to "something which is hidden in God and which humans could not unravel by their own ingenuity or study but is revealed by God for all believers to understand."⁵⁷ So what specifically is "this mystery" referring to here in 5:32? There are three main views according to scholars: (1) the husband-wife relationship explained in Genesis 2:24; (2) the union of Christ and the church; and (3) the Christ-church relationship as a typology for the husband-wife relationship. These views will be briefly described below.

"The view that μυστήριον refers to the marriage relationship is often taken by Roman Catholic theologians, who view the term within the framework of their 'sacramental' ecclesiology."⁵⁸ The Latin Vulgate translates μυστήριον as "sacramentum," and according to Catholic dogma, the institution of marriage conveys grace. To hold this view is to interpret verses 22-30 as being about the human marriage

⁵⁶O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 430.

⁵⁷Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 775.

⁵⁸Andreas Kostenberger, "The Mystery of Christ and the Church: Head and Body, 'One Flesh,'" *Trinity Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 86.

relationship only. As O'Brien writes in reference to this view, "The relationship between Christ and the church is incidental to this thrust, and any parallels between husbands and wives are merely illustrative."⁵⁹

According to the view that the "mystery" is referring to the union of Christ and his church, "There is a shift in emphasis (esp. in vv. 28-32) within the structure of 5:22-33 to the church as the body of Christ . . . and Paul's assertion at the end of v. 32, 'and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church,' comes by way of contrast and indicates that he is no longer dealing with the physical union of husband and wife but is making clear that the mystery is the union of Christ and the church."⁶⁰

The view, according to O'Brien purports that "this mystery" refers to the Christ-church relationship as a typology of marriage suggests that "theologically, Paul's argument does not move from human marriage to Christ and his church; rather, Christ and the church in a loving relationship is the paradigm for the Christian husband and wife."⁶¹ As Foulkes writes, "The husband's position as head, and his duty of sacrificial love and devoted care for his wife are but pictures, imperfect, but the best that this life can offer, of Christ as Head, and of His love, self-sacrifice and concern for His Church."⁶² Likewise, Knight concludes, "Paul saw that *when God designed the original marriage He already had Christ and the church in mind*. This is one of God's great

⁵⁹O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 430.

⁶⁰Ibid., 431.

⁶¹Ibid., 433.

⁶²Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul*, 162.

purposes in marriage: to picture the relationship between Christ and His redeemed people forever!”⁶³

In defense of the thesis of this chapter the last approach described is the most accurate interpretation of “this mystery.” This approach “does not treat the Christ-church relationship as incidental to the household discourse (as does view [1]). It also avoids the pitfall of understanding the whole passage in terms of the Christ-church relationship so that human marriage functions as a secondary theme (cf. interpretation [2]).”⁶⁴

In verse 33 Paul offers “a concluding statement in which the admonitions both to the wives and to the husbands are recapitulated.”⁶⁵ The verse says, “Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” Paul begins the statement with the introductory adverb, *πλὴν*. As Lincoln writes, “This term can be adversative (‘but,’ ‘however’) or, as here, be used to round off a discussion and accentuate its main point (‘now,’ ‘in any case’). In this way, the writer reminds his readers that the exalted depiction of marriage in the light of the relationship of Christ and the Church is meant to serve the purpose of practical exhortation.”⁶⁶

Here husbands and wives are addressed in the singular form. “No husband is exempt from giving himself to his wife in loving service so that she might become what God intends for her . . . and each wife is individually responsible to heed the apostle’s

⁶³George W. Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church: Ephesians 5:21-33 and Colossians 3:18-19,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 176.

⁶⁴O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 434.

⁶⁵Sampley, ‘*And the Two*,’ 106.

⁶⁶Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 384.

exhortation to ‘fear’ her husband.”⁶⁷ Despite modern thinking, “The fear described here is one of terror and not to respect, but not of fear of wrath or punishment.”⁶⁸ Rather, as in 5:21 when believers are commanded to submit to one another out of fear for Christ, it connotes a sense of awe. Here the wife is to be in awe of the position God has given her husband as head. Again Lincoln rightly concludes, “The summarizing exhortations in verse 33 indicate the high status this writer [Paul] accords to marriage. Through the love, on the one hand, and the fear, on the other, which marriage involves, husband and wife are to mirror the great mystery itself, the union between Christ and his Church.”⁶⁹

Thus far it has been established that all relationships are not created equal. God has designed certain relationships to be ordered or authoritative (v.21a). Within these relationships believers are to submit out of a worshipful response to Christ (v. 21b). Therefore their purpose is not to exalt power, authority, or submission, but rather to exalt Christ.

The husband-wife marriage relationship, more than any other divinely ordered relationship, is one such relationship. This relationship has been designed to picture the relationship of Christ and the church (vv. 22-33). Just as believers have become members of the body of Christ with Him as their head (vv. 23, 30), husband and wife are united as one flesh as a proclamation of the Christ-church relationship – the gospel (vv. 22-33). Furthermore, it is the husband who is charged with following the example of Christ in loving and caring for his wife, even spiritually. These truths have tremendous

⁶⁷O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 436.

⁶⁸Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 784.

⁶⁹Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 385.

implications for the husband and wife who are also father and mother, as will be seen in Ephesians 6:1-4.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Here Paul addresses the children of the household. He commands them to obey their parents in the Lord, for this is right (v. 1). He makes reference to the fifth of the Ten Commandments (honor your father and mother), noting it is the first commandment with a promise (vv. 2-3). Finally, he ends with a stern admonition to fathers: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (v. 4). This section will focus on verse 4, but first verses 1-3 will be briefly examined as they relate to 5:21-33 and 6:4.

Although the Greek word for children (τέκνα) used in verse 1 can refer to adult sons and daughters, “here the text has in view children who are in the process of learning and growing up (cf. v. 4). Presumably they were old enough to understand their relationship to their Lord and the commitments that followed from it.”⁷⁰ They are commanded to obey both parents, although, as O’Brien notes, “the corresponding exhortation in verse 4 is addressed to fathers only, and this is further example of submission within divinely ordered relationships.”⁷¹ Furthermore, “the obedience of Christian children to their parents is all of a piece with their submission to Christ: the additional motivating phrase, ‘in the Lord,’ is virtually synonymous with ‘as to the Lord’

⁷⁰O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 441.

⁷¹Ibid.

or ‘as to Christ’ (cf. 5:22; 6:5) and indicates that their obedience is part of their Christian discipleship.”⁷²

In verses 2-3, Paul uses the fifth commandment of the Decalogue to support his command for children to obey their parents. As Stott writes, “Since this is the fifth of the Ten Commandments and appears at first sight to concern our duty to our neighbor, many Christians have divided the Decalogue into two uneven halves But the Jews regularly taught that each of the law’s two tablets contains five commandments.”⁷³

Viewing the fifth commandment apart from our duty to our neighbor is significant because it

brings the honoring of our parents into our duty to God. And this is surely right. For at least during our childhood they represent God to us and mediate to us both his authority and his love. We are to ‘honor’ them, that is, acknowledge their God-given authority, and so give them not only our obedience, but our love and respect as well. It is because parental authority is divinely delegated authority that respectful obedience to parents was invested with such great importance in the life of God’s covenant people.⁷⁴

Therefore, the parent-child relationship is a divinely ordered relationship just as is the husband-wife marriage relationship. Children are to obey or to submit to their parents whom God has placed in an authoritative position over them. Their obedience should arise out of a godly *fear* of Christ (5:21).⁷⁵ Clearly there is a connection here to 5:21-33. Paul’s address to children and fathers is a continuation of the previous passage. This understanding is helpful in determining the purpose of the divinely ordered parent-

⁷²O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 441.

⁷³Stott, *Message of Ephesians*, 239.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 443.

child relationship. If the husband-wife relationship is to mirror the Christ-church relationship, what are the effects of this in the parent-child relationship? The answer can be found in 6:4.

On Ephesians 6:4

Ephesians 6:4 states, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Hoehner writes of Paul’s address to fathers as an address to the ones who have authority over the children: “Within the structure of the hierarchal family, Paul makes it very clear that the father must take responsibility for raising his children.”⁷⁶

Just as the husband is given the position of head of the wife (5:23), the position expands to the entire family when a husband becomes a father. As Hoehner writes, “In Hellenistic Judaism, parents were considered as superior, similar to seniors, rulers, benefactors, and masters, while children occupied a lower position that is, juniors, subjects, receivers of benefits, and slaves. Hence, parents [fathers] were to children as God is to the world.”⁷⁷ Perhaps this is why verse 4 begins with a warning to fathers not to provoke their children to anger.

Scholars and commentators are not entirely certain what is meant by Paul’s admonition at the beginning of this verse. Some claim that Paul is connecting an earlier passage in the letter (4:26-27), and he intends for fathers “to avoid those attitudes, words, and actions which would provoke their children to anger.”⁷⁸ However, according to the

⁷⁶Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 794.

⁷⁷Ibid., 795.

⁷⁸O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 446.

thesis of this chapter, a father provokes his children to anger when he abdicates his responsibility to love his wife as Christ loves the church, thereby failing to portray an accurate picture of God's love to the child.

While the noun form of the verb for anger is used in 4:26, the verb form actually occurs only here in 6:4 and in Romans 10:19. Chapell provides interesting insight with his explanation of this Greek verb for "provoke" or "exasperate": "The Septuagint usage of 'exasperate' (with which Paul would be familiar) does not refer simply to frustration, anger, or anxiety. The term was usually reserved to describe God's own just anger over Israel's idolatry. Thus, the King James Version translates this instruction of Paul as 'provoke not your children to wrath.'⁷⁹ Chapell concludes, "The exasperation described here refers to a righteous resentment of actions or attitudes inconsistent with one's faith commitments. An exasperated child is one who has a right to be provoked because of the incongruities between a parent's stated beliefs and that parent's actual behaviors."⁸⁰

In other words, a child is provoked to anger when the father fails to act towards the child in ways in which he should, in ways that seem inconsistent or hypocritical. In the context of Ephesians 5:21-6:4, this occurs when the father fails to live out his divinely appointed authoritative position as head of his wife and family. Paul then follows the negative warning with a positive exhortation by revealing how a father is to avoid being inconsistent or hypocritical to his children or how he is to live out his divinely appointed

⁷⁹Chapell, *Ephesians*, 317.

⁸⁰Ibid., 318.

authoritative position as head of his wife and family. Paul writes, “But bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

The verb Paul uses for “bring them up” here in 6:4 is the same word he uses in 5:29 in reference to how husbands should love their wives as themselves, just as Christ does the church. The term is ἐκτρέφει. Again, these are the only two instances of this verb being used in the New Testament. The connection between 5:29 and 6:4 should not be overlooked. Paul is saying there is a relation between how a father loves his wife as himself and how he loves his children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

The terms for discipline (παιδεία) and instruction (νουθεσία) “are more or less identical in meaning and thus seem to be redundant.”⁸¹ Here, the reference is in all likelihood to training in general, while encompassing discipline for wrongdoing as well.”⁸² In regard to the final phrase, “of the Lord,” O’Brien writes,

The phrase could be understood as a subjective genitive, indicating that behind those who teach and discipline their children stands the Lord himself. Ultimately, the concern of parents is not simply that their sons and daughters will be obedient to their authority, but that through this godly training and admonition their children will come to know and obey the Lord himself.⁸³

Conclusion

To summarize this section and, thus, this entire chapter, husbands are divinely appointed as leaders of their wives, and they are commanded to love and care for them as they do themselves, just as Christ does the church (5:23, 25-33), and through doing so the

⁸¹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 798.

⁸²Andreas J. Kostenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 108.

⁸³O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 446.

Christ-church relationship is reflected in the husband-wife relationship (5:30-32). It is a proclamation of God's great, unconditional love for his people – the gospel.

For the husband who is also a father, his position does not change, and he is given more responsibility (6:4). He is to exalt and honor Christ in the parent-child relationship through loving and caring for his wife so that his children might come to know the Lord (5:23, 6:4). In other words, children learn of the love of Christ for them as their father loves their mother as Christ loves the church. They see the gospel through the marriage relationship. When a father fails to fulfill his responsibility to his wife, he fails to fulfill his responsibility to his children, and his children are exasperated, provoked to anger, and discouraged from believing (6:4; Col 3:3).

God designed the marriage relationship to be a picture of His faithful, unconditional love for His people. God designed the parent-child relationship to be a natural avenue through which this picture could be clearly seen and understood by the children. All of this is for the glory of God through the proclamation of the gospel, that the gospel could be spread from generation to generation, and to the ends of the earth. As Stott appropriately concludes, “The overarching theme of *Ephesians* is that through Christ's reconciling work there is now one multinational, multicultural family of God. So human fathers are to care for their families as God the Father cares for his.”⁸⁴

The connection, as demonstrated in this chapter, between the husband/father's nurturance of his wife as Christ loves the church, and the nurturance of his children in the wisdom and instruction of the Lord was further examined from a theoretical/sociological

⁸⁴Stott, *Message of Ephesians*, 245.

perspective in the following chapter, and was further emphasized throughout the implementation of this project.

The project was implemented through a seminar and through the provision of a devotional resource. During the seminar, substantial time was given to emphasizing the conclusion of this chapter, and to teaching about the significance of the marriage relationship, moreover to the husband's/father's role, in proclaiming the gospel to children. It is crucial for husbands/fathers to be informed of their role in God's design for marriage and parenting, and to be instructed on how that role is to be fulfilled. Consideration was made for families where the husband-wife relationship and/or the father-child relationship is absent. For these families exhortation was given for father-like figures to be sought out within the church for the sake of the child.

The conclusion of this chapter was also emphasized through the use of the devotional guide. The devotional guide was designed for children and parents to help answer questions pertaining to the child's readiness to respond to Christ. Fathers and mothers were instructed to work through the devotional guide together with their child, engaging with him or her throughout.

CHAPTER 3

AN EXAMINATION OF RELEVANT SOCIAL- SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

In the previous chapter it was affirmed that God has designed the husband-wife/father-child relationship in such a way that as a father nourishes and cherishes his wife as Christ does the church, he also nourishes his children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, thus proclaiming the gospel to them through the marriage relationship. Therefore, when a father abdicates his responsibility to love his wife as Christ loves the church, he fails to depict the gospel accurately to his children, thus discouraging their faith in God and provoking them to anger and bitterness. This chapter will seek to further examine this thesis from a social-scientific perspective.

The answers to these questions will be sought in this chapter from the survey and examination of social-scientific research from two perspectives as they relate to child development in general and to child spiritual development specifically: father involvement and the effects of the father-mother relationship. The end of the chapter will include a postulation that a father, through his relationship with his wife, does have an impact on how his children perceive God and His love for them. To begin, it will be helpful to obtain an understanding of the social-scientific perspective on the role of the father over time.

Fatherhood in Social-Scientific Perspective

Many historians in the scientific field believe and accept that the social roles of fathers were first considered by social scientists in the early twentieth century.¹ The well-known psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud characterized fathers by classic, masculine qualities such as masculinity, dominance, assertiveness, etc., and thus, much study was done to determine the correlation of the son's personality to these characteristics of the father.²

Following World War II the social-scientific perspective on fatherhood was impacted in significant ways by literature focusing on maternal deprivation and father absence. According to psychologist Michael Lamb, "The results of many studies and the contents of many commentaries suggested that children, especially boys, were irrevocably harmed when they grew up in families without fathers, either because their fathers had been killed or were deployed away from home for long stretches of time (e.g., Sears, 1951)."³ Much of this literature was later criticized for methodological inadequacies and fallacies; however this criticism "did not noticeably diminish the impact of the work itself."⁴ Once again, according to Lamb, "The maternal deprivation literature directly shaped the emergent attachment theory, which led to a single-minded focus on mothers, and seriously undervalued the potential for others (including fathers)."⁵ The

¹Michael E. Lamb, "The History of Research on Father Involvement," *Marriage & Family Review* 2, nos. 2-3 (2000): 28.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 29.

⁵Ibid.

role of the father was restricted to be viewed and measured quantitatively based on time spent with children, rather than measuring the qualitative elements as it was earlier in the century.

The decade of the 1970s marked the most recent shift in the perception of fatherhood in social-scientific research. Feminist and scholarly critiques of masculinity and femininity resulted in the emergence of “a concern with the ‘new nurturant father,’ who played an active role in his children’s lives.”⁶ Lamb describes this current perspective on fathering in this way:

Researchers, theorists, and practitioners no longer cling to the simplistic belief that fathers ideally fill a unidimensional and universal role in their families and in their children’s eyes. Instead, they recognize that fathers play a number of significant roles – companions, care providers, spouses, protectors, models, moral guides, teachers, and breadwinners – whose relative importance varies across historical epochs and subcultural groups. Only by considering fathers’ performance of these various roles, and by taking into account their relative importance in the socioecological contexts concerned, can fathers’ impact on child development be evaluated.⁷

Therefore, social-scientific research continues and will continue to evaluate fatherhood. As one expert in the field writes, “There is now – and there always will be – a continuing need for new ways to conceptualize and to measure the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of the ‘new’ father as new fathers respond to newly changing social expectations and social conditions.”⁸ And so while the approaches and methods of social scientists in measuring father influences have evolved over the past century, one

⁶Michael E. Lamb, “How *Do* Fathers Influence Children’s Development? Let Me Count the Ways,” in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 5th ed, ed. Michael E. Lamb (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 3.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Gordon E. Finley and Seth J. Schwartz, “The Father Involvement and Nurturing Fathering Scales: Retrospective Measures for Adolescent and Adult Children,” *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 64, no. 1 (2004): 144.

assumption and one conclusion has remained the same from the beginning: fathers influence the lives of their children. What follows is an examination of what social-scientific research has revealed as to *how* fathers influence the lives of their children.

Father Involvement and Child Development

The majority of social scientists accept that father involvement has an all-encompassing effect on child development. Research has revealed that when fathers are involved in the parenting of their children, the children exhibit “better mental health as adults; higher levels of cognitive and social competence; increased social responsibility, capacity for empathy, self-control, self-esteem, social maturity, and life skills; more positive child-father and adolescent-father relationships; fewer school adjustment difficulties, better academic progress and enhanced occupational achievement in adulthood.”⁹

Furthermore, recently “research on paternal influences has also moved beyond correlational studies and studies of ‘absence’/divorce or enhanced involvement to explore the pathways through which fathers ultimately affect their children.”¹⁰ Lamb concludes that fathers affect their children directly (through their behavior and attitudes) and indirectly (through their effects on other people and social circumstances that bear on children’s development).¹¹ The direct effects are believed to begin with the development of the father-child relationship while the child is in early infancy.

⁹Katherine R. Wilson and Margott R. Prior, “Father Involvement and Child Well-Being,” *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 47, no. 7 (2011): 405.

¹⁰Lamb, “How Do Fathers Influence Children’s Development?,” 8.

¹¹Ibid.

Father-Infant Attachments

According to Lamb and Lewis, “The establishment of attachment relationships between children and parents constitutes one of the most important aspects of human social and emotional development, and Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory has guided most development on this topic in the last four decades.”¹² Beginning in the 1970s attachment relationships were measured by separation protests as demonstrated by the infants. Although slightly controversial, this research did lead to evidence that children do form attachments to fathers in early infancy.

Later the focus of the research shifted beyond the attachment itself to the quality of the attachment. Again, according to Lamb and Lewis, this research found that, among other things, “Father-infant attachments are more likely to be insecure when fathers report high levels of stress, as attachment theory would predict, and longitudinal studies also reveal some important continuity (for both mother-infant attachments and father-infant attachments).”¹³ One can conclude, then, that father-infant attachments are important, and that “the extent of involvement in early care may have long-term effects on the family.”¹⁴

Father-Child Relationships

The research completed on the influences of fathers on children during childhood is considerably less than the amount of studies regarding the effects of father

¹²Michael E. Lamb and Charlie Lewis, “The Development and Significance of Father-Child Relationships in Two-Parent Families,” in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 5th ed, ed. Michael E. Lamb (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 98.

¹³Ibid., 102.

¹⁴Ibid., 101.

involvement during infancy. However, the data that does exist is convincing that father involvement during childhood is extremely influential. For example, “fathers may play a special role as intermediaries between the family and the outside world, and that there are continuing links between paternal styles and the child’s educational performance.”¹⁵

Lamb and Lewis assert that “across the preschool years, at least, fathers who are supportive in their interactions appear to help children do better on language and cognitive measures (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). Additionally for school-age children, it appears that men have a particular influence on their children’s prosocial development (Rah and Parke, 2008).”¹⁶

In the year 2000 a study was published by a group who examined the role of father involvement in the social-emotional development of children. They found that “fathers who are highly involved may be more likely to notice subtle behavior problems that affect their children, and that high father involvement may increase children’s feelings of paternal acceptance, a factor which plays a role in the development of self-concept and esteem.”¹⁷

All of these findings are further validated by a systemic review of twenty-four longitudinal studies involving 22,300 children. This review reported that “twenty-one of twenty-two studies revealed positive and only one negative effects of paternal involvement on children’s development (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg,

¹⁵Lamb and Lewis, “The Development and Significance of Father-Child Relationships,” 122.

¹⁶Ibid., 123.

¹⁷Rex E. Culp et al., “Relationships among Paternal Involvement and Young Children’s Perceived Self-Competence and Behavioral Problems,” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 36.

2008).”¹⁸ The authors of the aforementioned study also “concluded that lack of paternal involvement was related to both the frequency of behavioral problems in boys and the level of psychological problems in girls once they mature. Involvement was also associated with enhanced cognitive development.”¹⁹

Nonresident Father Influences

Nonresident fathers now more than ever have an influential role in society. As Amato and Dorius write, “Due to the rise in family disruption (marriages as well as cohabiting unions with children) during the past half-century, more children are living apart from their biological fathers than any time in American history.”²⁰ While most of the research done thus far regarding the influence of nonresident fathers has dealt mainly with frequency of contact, “most scholars recognize that the quality of the father-child relationship is more important for children than the quantity of time spent together.”²¹ Consider Amato and Dorius’s discussion of the data regarding the quality of nonresident father involvement,

At one extreme, if nonresident fathers are abusive toward their children, or if fathers have strong antisocial personality traits, then frequent contact is not in the children’s best interest (Blazei, Iacono, & McGue, 2008). More commonly, nonresidential fathers engage in “recreational parenting,” as reflected in activities such as going to restaurants, movies, or sporting events. Although these types of activities are not harmful to children, it is doubtful whether they contribute a great deal to children’s development.²²

¹⁸Lamb and Lewis, “The Development and Significance of Father-Child Relationships,” 124.

¹⁹Ibid., 125.

²⁰Paul R. Amato and Cassandra Dorius, “Fathers, Children, and Divorce,” in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 5th ed, ed. Michael E. Lamb (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 186.

²¹Ibid., 189.

²²Ibid.

A study published in 2011 sheds a little more light onto the linkages of child behavior and the involvement of nonresident dads. This study found that when nonresident fathers were involved in their children's lives, the children's behavior improved, and that "nonresident fathers have a salient role in family processes that help children construct their behavior."²³ So, while the frequency of contact with children by nonresident dads may be less significant than the quality of contact, the contact nonetheless is important to child development.

In discussing the results of a meta-analysis study (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999), Amato and Dorius conclude that "positive forms of father involvement are more important than the simple frequency of contact in understanding children's adjustment and development."²⁴ However, again this does not diminish the significance of the contact itself. To summarize, "Although frequent contact with nonresident fathers may not be appropriate for all children, increasing the level of father contact and improving the quality of father-child relationships would benefit many children as well as fathers."²⁵

Faith, Father Involvement, and Child Development

In a study published in 2001 Marks and Dollahite "found that religion may promote greater commitment to children and greater father involvement; religion may

²³David Mullins, "Linkages between Children's Behavior and Nonresident Father Involvement: A Comparison of African American, Anglo, and Latino Families," *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 1 (2011): 18.

²⁴Amato and Dorius, "Fathers, Children, and Divorce," 190.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 192.

strengthen marriage, which, in turn, may promote father involvement.”²⁶ Also, “for many fathers, religious faith plays a role in their construction of the father role and fosters their involvement (King, 2003; Latshaw, 1998).”²⁷ Other recent studies show that fathers who are religiously affiliated are more engaged with their children, are warmer towards their children, and communicate more with their children.²⁸

Perhaps the landmark study done thus far in regard to fathering, faith, and spirituality is another Dollahite study published in 2003. In this study he evaluated the personal experiences of thirty-five Latter-day Saint fathers of children with special needs to find how their religious beliefs and practices have influenced the meaning of those experiences.²⁹ He concludes that

the nature of the data reported did not allow for the determination of a causal relationship between different types of beliefs, desires, commitments, and actions in the lives of these fathers. However . . . their religion provided a powerful and unique worldview and framework of fathering that inspired and guided their actual beliefs and behaviors as fathers. Specifically, their *belief in a divine plan* . . . created a sense of meaning despite disability. The father’s belief . . . created an *expectation of an eternal relationship* with that child And this . . . inspired . . . a *commitment to a sacred responsibility* . . . for their child with special needs.³⁰

An important implication of this study was the possibility that “religion is a transcendent influence in the lives of its adherents as opposed to merely another form of

²⁶Chris J. Boyatzis, David C. Dollahite, and Loren D. Marks, “The Family as a Context for Religious and Spiritual Development in Children and Youth,” in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Eugene C. Roehlkepartain et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 302.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹David C. Dollahite, “Fathering for Eternity: Generative Spirituality in Latter-Day Saints Fathers of Children with Special Needs,” *Review of Religious Research* 44, no. 3 (2003): 237.

³⁰Ibid., 249.

psychological and social influence.”³¹ Social scientists most often explain away religious influences in fathering/parenting to social and psychological factors. Dollahite proposes that “scholars of religion need to find ways to determine empirically how religious beliefs, practices, and communities add explanatory power *beyond* demonstrated beliefs of psychological coherence (that may arise from religious belief), social support (that may arise from religious community), and structure (that may arise from religious practice).”³² One such way may be through something called generative spirituality or generative fathering.

Generative Spirituality, Generative Fathering

Generative spirituality refers to conceptual and empirical work which connects Erik Erikson’s idea of generativity (caring for the next generation), with spirituality.³³ Researchers of generativity describe it as “a transcendent connection with the next generation that flows from and encourages convictions of abiding care for that generation.”³⁴ According to Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Marks, “A spiritual approach to generativity emphasizes the benefits (blessings) of faith to adults and children and to relationships (marital, horizontal, intergenerational).”³⁵

Thus, generative fathering “suggests that responsible fathering involves working to meet the needs of children by being responsive to their needs and to one’s

³¹Dollahite, “Fathering for Eternity,” 249.

³²Ibid.

³³Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Marks, “The Family as a Context,” 304.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 305.

moral and spiritual values and beliefs.”³⁶ It is “developmental in nature and encourages relational, moral, and spiritual growth over the life span.”³⁷ In the 2003 Dollahite study of the Latter-day Saints fathers of children with special needs, the conclusion was made that “the generative spirituality framework emphasizes a moral and spiritual commitment to be continually present in the life of one’s child. A faith that inspires such commitment generates many lasting benefits both for the child and for the father.”³⁸

This research related to generative spirituality and generative fathering is significant, perhaps even groundbreaking in social science, for two main reasons. First, it verifies that spirituality impacts parenting. Children can benefit from the faith of the father (Dollahite, 2003), which goes beyond any social or psychological factors. Secondly, it reveals to an extent that father involvement can indeed impact the development of children, especially if the father is himself spiritual.

As this type of research goes forward, Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Marks suggest helpful questions that would even further aid in demonstrating the connections of father involvement and the spiritual development of children. These questions include the following: “(a) What are your deepest and strongest spiritual beliefs that pertain to helping your children and youth grow spiritually? (b) In what ways do these beliefs influence your relations with your children? (c) When your child faces challenging circumstances, are there ways you try to help your child develop spiritual resources to

³⁶Dollahite, “Fathering for Eternity,” 240.

³⁷Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Marks, “The Family as a Context,” 305.

³⁸Dollahite, “Fathering for Eternity,” 247.

address the situation?”³⁹ Andrew Parker, a PhD graduate from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has already completed research on questions similar to these listed above.

Parker’s research focused on the correlation of father involvement on the spiritual development of adolescents. For the purposes of his study he defined an adolescent as being between the ages of 12-25. Four research questions guided his study. Two of these are helpful here: “(1) What is the relationship, if any, between the spiritual development of adolescents and perceived father involvement? (2) What is the relationship, if any, between the spiritual development of adolescents and desired father involvement?”⁴⁰ Parker surveyed 400 adolescents and placed them in three categories: early adolescence (ages 12-14); middle adolescence (ages 15-18); and late adolescence (ages 19-25).

In regard to the first question, Parker found that “research findings demonstrated that there was a significant correlation between spiritual development of adolescents and perceived father involvement (Spearman's $\rho = .159$, $p < .001$). As participants scored their fathers higher in involvement their spiritual development scores were higher The data shows that when teens perceive their fathers as being involved in their lives, spiritual development is positively impacted.”⁴¹

Similar positive findings were demonstrated regarding the second question. A

³⁹Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Marks, “The Family as a Context,” 305.

⁴⁰Andrew Clyde Parker, “An Analysis of the Relationship between Adolescent Spiritual Development and Father Involvement” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 113.

⁴¹Ibid., 116.

significant correlation exists between the desire of adolescents for their fathers to be involved in their lives and their own spiritual development (Spearman's $\rho = .188$, $p < .0001$). As Parker concludes, “Though modern culture makes it difficult for fathers to spend all their time with their children, it should be noted that adolescents expressed a desire for more father involvement. The positive indication is that adolescents want their father’s attention, love, and meaningful involvement.”⁴² If these are the results for adolescents, it is very likely the findings would be similar, if not stronger, for younger children.

Regarding each of these two research questions, age was inversely related to perceived father involvement: “The highest mean FIS score was from the younger adolescent category ($m = 80.64$) while the lowest score was found in the older adolescent category ($m = 72.95$). There was a robust correlation between father nurturance and father involvement (Pearson's $r = .865$, $p < .0001$). Understandably, if a young man perceives his father as being highly nurturing, that same young man would perceive his father as being highly involved in his life.”⁴³

In conclusion of this section, data exists which demonstrates the positive impact of a father’s faith on the development of children, but the data is far less substantial than that which demonstrates the correlation of father involvement to child development in general. However, the research work referenced in this section does indeed point to positive results for the development of children when fathering and faith are combined.

⁴²Parker, “An Analysis of the Relationships,” 119.

⁴³Ibid., 116.

What about the effects of the father's relationship with the mother on the child's growth and development? It has been asserted at the beginning of this chapter that according to Ephesians 5:21-6:4, father involvement through the relationship with the mother affects the spiritual development of children and their perception of God's love for them. Is there evidence of this from social science research? The following section will examine the relevant social-scientific literature.

The Effects of the Father-Mother Relationship on Child Development

Fathers affect their children directly (through their behavior and attitudes) and indirectly (through their relationships with other people). The direct effects were examined in the previous section. The following section will examine the indirect effects through focusing on the marital relationship.

According to Lamb and Lewis, "The quality of marital relationships appears to be a key marker of the way that parents interact with their children from an early age."⁴⁴

Consider the findings from the following studies:

Infants characterized by negative emotionality early in the first year tended to become more positive when they had active, sensitive mothers in good spousal relationships, whereas some infants became more negative when their fathers were dissatisfied with their marriages, insensitive, and uninvolved in their children's lives (Belsky, Fish, & Isabella, 1991). In the year after the birth of the first child, Grych and Clark (1999) reported that marital quality predicted the amount of appropriate stimulation that fathers gave their 4- and 12-month-olds, while Lundry (2002) reported that marital dissatisfaction adversely affected paternal synchrony and thus the security of infant-father attachment.⁴⁵

Therefore, as Lamb and Lewis rightly conclude, "Harmony between the parents seems to

⁴⁴Lamb and Lewis, "The Development and Significance," 106.

⁴⁵Ibid.

be a key predictor of father-child relationships.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, in an article published in 1989 describing a study done by Cox et al., “It was concluded that even when differences in individual psychological adjustment are taken into account, mothers are warmer and more sensitive with their infants and fathers hold more positive attitudes toward their infants and their roles as parents when they are in close/confiding marriages.”⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, similar results have been found in similar studies, even in different countries and cultures.⁴⁸ An additional note of interest here is that father-child relationships seem to be more affected by the marital relationships than the mother-child relationships.

Cox et al. report in the aforementioned study that “with regard to fathers, several researchers have suggested that the impact of marriage on parenting may be greater for fathers than for mothers.”⁴⁹ According to Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson, “Fathers appear to withdraw from their child when they are not getting along with the mother As Frustenberg and Cherlin (1991) have asserted, for many men, marriage and parenthood are a ‘package deal.’”⁵⁰ Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson also conclude that “for most American heterosexual fathers, the family environment most supportive of fathering is a caring, committed and collaborative marriage. This kind of marriage means that the father lives with his children and has a good partnership with their mother.”⁵¹

⁴⁶Lamb and Lewis, “The Development and Significance,” 106.

⁴⁷Martha J. Cox et al., “Marriage, Adult Adjustment, and Early Parenting,” *Child Development* 60, no. 5 (1989): 1015.

⁴⁸Lamb and Lewis, “The Development and Significance,” 107.

⁴⁹Cox et al., “Marriage, Adult Adjustment, and Early Parenting,” 1021.

⁵⁰William J. Doherty, Edward F. Kouneski, and Martha F. Erickson, “Responsible Fathering: An Overview and Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60, no. 2 (1998): 286.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

Clearly the social-scientific evidence supporting the impact of the interparental relationship on child development is present and substantial. The goal of research now is to demonstrate “the complexities of how, why, and under what circumstances the interparental relationship affects multiple domains of child development.”⁵² Cummings, Merrilees, and George assert there are multiple pathways worthy of consideration through which the father-mother relationship affects parenting.⁵³ In their article, Goeke-Morey and Cummings focus on three of these: Fathering and father-child relationships, children’s exposure to fathers’ marital discord, and fathers’ psychological functioning.⁵⁴ Each of these pathways is driven by its own hypothesis, and will be further described throughout the remainder of this section.

Fathering Vulnerability Hypothesis

The Fathering Vulnerability Hypothesis is associated with the first pathway that seeks to “describe the effects of marital conflict on fathering in relation to mothering (Cummings et al., 2004).”⁵⁵ The hypothesis essentially states that “fathering and father-child relationships are more vulnerable to negative effects of marital discord than mothering and mother-child relationships, with differentially more negative implications

⁵²E. Mark Cummings, Christine E. Merrilees, and Melissa Ward George, “Fathers, Marriages, and Families: Revisiting and Updating the Framework for Fathering in Family Context,” in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 5th ed, edited by Michael E. Lamb (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 154.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁴Marcie C. Goeke-Morey and E. Mark Cummings, “Impact of Father Involvement: A Closer Look at Indirect Effects Models Involving Marriage and Child Adjustment,” *Applied Development Science* 11, no. 4 (2007): 222.

⁵⁵Cummings, Merrilees, and George, “Fathers, Marriages, and Families,” 157.

for children's adjustment."⁵⁶

Those who have advanced this hypothesis speculated broadly about as to why a child's relationship with his or her father might be more negatively affected by negative marital relations of the parents. This speculation includes gender role theory and male coping responses. Many sociologists believe that "social withdrawal may be an effort to alleviate the emotional distress men are feeling, and thus may occur in response to stress in the marital relationship, which may contribute to withdrawing from other contexts in the family, such as parenting or parent-child relationships (Calzada, Eyberg, Rich, & Querido, 2004)."⁵⁷ Regardless of the reasoning, evidence in support of this hypothesis is long-running:

Based on studies from the 1980s and early 1990s, Cummings and O'Reilly (1997) concluded that differences between mother-child and father-child relationships increased as marital quality declined . . . Corio and Emery (1998) concluded that when there were significant differences, greater effects were found for fathering than mothering . . . Owen and Cox (1997) reported negative effects of marital conflict on attachments to both mothers and fathers but more pervasive negative effects of marital conflict on father-child attachments than on mother-child attachments.⁵⁸

In a similar manner, Goeke-Morey and Cummings conclude their analysis by stating, "Fathers' emotional unavailability was a more consistent predictor of child adjustment problems (i.e., internalizing and externalizing problems and decreased scholastic adjustment) than was mothers' emotional unavailability."⁵⁹

⁵⁶Goeke-Morey and Cummings, "Impact of Father Involvement," 222.

⁵⁷Cummings, Merrilees, and George, "Fathers, Marriages, and Families," 158.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Goeke-Morey and Cummings, "Impact of Father Involvement," 222.

Paternal Mental Health Hypothesis

The Paternal Mental Health Hypothesis is associated with the pathway of fathers' psychological functioning. Goeke-Morey and Cummings write, "This hypothesis asserts that, like mothers, fathers' psychological functioning is related to marital conflict, and important for accounting for child outcomes."⁶⁰ A strong version of this hypothesis is that, "Fathers' mental health in the marital context has implications for child development that are even more pronounced than mothers' mental health in terms of the relations associated with the marital context."⁶¹

Evidence in support of this thesis has been found through research on such mental health issues as paternal dysphoria, paternal depression, and even paternal problem drinking. In 2003 "evidence was found that differences in marital conflict associated with parental dysphoria lead to differential outcomes in the 8-16-year-old children of these couples (Du Rocher Schudlich and Cummings)."⁶² Furthermore, speculation in this study indicates that "although either parent's depressive symptoms are problematic for children, fathers' appearance of vulnerability and fragility may pose an even greater threat to children's sense of emotional security about marital relations and therefore children's own adjustment, as it contradicts the expectation of fathers as strong and vulnerable."⁶³

In regard to paternal problem drinking, "a recent longitudinal study (Keller,

⁶⁰Goeke-Morey and Cummings, "Impact of Father Involvement," 223.

⁶¹Cummings, Merrilees, and George, "Fathers, Marriages, and Families," 162.

⁶²Goeke-Morey and Cummings, "Impact of Father Involvement," 224.

⁶³Ibid.

Cummings, Davies, & Mitchell, 2006) found that fathers', but not mothers', problem drinking contributed to increased marital conflict, which in turn negatively impacted parenting and consequently children's adjustment."⁶⁴ According to Cummings, Merrilees, and George, "The findings from the parental drinking literature further support a strong version of the parental mental health hypothesis."⁶⁵

Differential Reactivity Hypothesis

The pathway of the Differential Reactivity Hypothesis is associated with children's exposure to marital discord. The hypothesis states that "children are more reactive and distressed by fathers' than mothers' expressions of discord during marital conflict. That is, children were assumed to have more negative reactions to the same conflict expressions by fathers than by mothers."⁶⁶ In keeping with Cummings, Merrilees, and George, "The differential reactivity hypothesis is most closely tied to the children's reactions to parents' marital conflict behaviors rather than parents' reactions to these behaviors. Children's cognitive understanding of conflict has important implications for the impact of marital conflict behaviors on children's differential reactions to conflict."⁶⁷

Evidence for this hypothesis exists in that

across studies, mothers' and fathers' anger, sadness, and fear in the context of marital conflict elicit emotional insecurity in children. However, it appears that children may be particularly sensitive to mothers' fear and sadness, and fathers' fear and anger. Physically threatening and hostile behaviors seem to be more distressing

⁶⁴Goeke-Morey and Cummings, "Impact of Father Involvement," 224.

⁶⁵Cummings, Merrilees, and George, "Fathers, Marriages, and Families," 165.

⁶⁶Goeke-Morey and Cummings, "Impact of Father Involvement," 223.

⁶⁷Cummings, Merrilees, and George, "Fathers, Marriages, and Families," 167.

for children when enacted by fathers than mothers Along the same lines, of the conflict behaviors used by fathers, in the study, the one that elicited the most insecurity for children was physical aggression toward the mother.”⁶⁸

So while it appears that children are most affected by fathers’ attitudes, actions, and behaviors in a negative way during marital discord, Goeke-Morey and Cummings made an interesting observation when fathers addressed mothers constructively during conflict. They report that “when it comes to constructive conflict tactics during marital discord (i.e., problem-solving, support, and affection), children were more reactive to fathers’ behaviors, but in a positive rather than a negative way.”⁶⁹

Therefore, this section demonstrates that child development is indeed affected by the father-mother marital relationship. The evidence is clear and substantial that not only do parents impact their children’s growth and development through how they relate to one another, but also that the father’s influence is greater than the mother’s. In other words, even from social-scientific, non-religious research there is confirmation that the father/husband nourishes his children through how he nourishes his wife.

Secondly, this section also shows that when a father withdraws from his wife, he is likely to withdrawal from his children as well. Also, when a father exhibits mental health issues in the midst of marital conflict, a children’s sense of emotional security is weakened. Furthermore, when a husband/father is hostile verbally and/or physically to his wife, his children are greatly distressed and most often react in negative ways. Conversely, when fathers work through marital conflict in positive and loving ways towards their wives, the impact on the children is also positive.

⁶⁸Goeke-Morey and Cummings, “Impact of Father Involvement,” 223.

⁶⁹Ibid.

If, then, the marital relationship of fathers and mothers is so influential on child development in general, and fathers impact their children in such significant ways through their interaction their wives, should not it be the same regarding spiritual development? Does a father influence his child's spiritual formation through the treatment of his wife? If so, can the impact be measured and evaluated sociologically? The following section will seek to discover the answers.

The Effects of the Father-Mother Relationship on Child Spiritual Development

Historically spiritual development has garnered very little attention in the realm of social science. In July 2002, two broad social-scientific databases were searched by a group of social scientists who were seeking “to determine the extent to which religion and spirituality were being addressed in published studies between 1990 and July 2002. In addition, a more refined search of six premier journals on child and adolescent development was conducted.”⁷⁰ The results of this search revealed “less than one percent of the articles addressed issues of spirituality or spiritual development among children and adolescents.”⁷¹ Perhaps even more surprising, “only one in five articles on spiritual development specifically addressed children or adolescents. It is noteworthy, too, that no articles on spiritual development appeared in the six leading journals across these 12 years.”⁷²

⁷⁰Peter L. Benson, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, and Stacey P. Rude, “Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence: Toward a Field of Inquiry,” *Applied Development Science* 7, no. 3 (2003): 206.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., 207.

Many reasons exist for this lack of thoughtfulness of social scientists towards spiritual development of children. These include “a lack of religious belief among academicians and scientists; the absence of training in and exposure to the area among psychologists, and the fact that the area is ‘politically sensitive and philosophically different.’”⁷³ Perhaps the main reason is that “because of its multidimensionality, spirituality does not fit neatly inside any particular domain of social science.”⁷⁴

So what does this lack of research mean for the examination of the father-mother relationship on child spiritual development? It means that data is extremely limited in demonstrating spiritually what has been made so clear from a plethora of data socially; that is, parental relations are crucial for child development. If, as was demonstrated in the previous section of this chapter, father and mothers do influence child development in how they relate to one another in general, then it does seem logical that there would also be at least some impact on the children spiritually.

The famous developmental psychologist Jean Piaget has been quoted as saying, “the child spontaneously attributes to his parents the perfections and abilities which he will later transfer to God if his religious education gives him the possibility.”⁷⁵ Whether or not Piaget was right in his observation is more than likely too difficult to prove. However, according to a recent report to the Nation from the Commission on Children at Risk, “Regarding monotheistic religion, ample research now suggests that

⁷³Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude, “Spiritual Development in Childhood,” 207.

⁷⁴Ibid., 208.

⁷⁵Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 354, quoted in Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003), 27.

children’s conceptions of God – who God is and how God acts – initially stem partly from the child’s actual day-to-day experiences with parents, and partly from the child’s magnified, idealized conceptions of who the parents are.”⁷⁶ The Commission concludes that primary nurturing relationships do influence early spiritual development:

The first tendency, attributing to God traits that come from experiences with parents, is an example of what might be called the *spiritualization of attachment*. The latter tendency, attributing to God those larger-than-life traits that the child had first attributed to one or both of the parents, is an example of the drive to idealize.

Children often associate both maternal and paternal qualities with God, and their early positive or negative experiences with their parents can predispose or hinder their development of religious faith later in life.⁷⁷

Therefore, there does seem to be some support from social-scientific literature that fathers and mothers do impact the spiritual development of their children, at least individually. What about together? The remainder of this section will evaluate two sociological studies on the effects of the father-mother relationship on the religiousness of children/adolescents. The first study measured parental religiousness and degree of discord in predicting the religiousness of youth. The second study examined associations between three dimensions of family religious involvement and the quality of relationships between teens’ mothers and fathers.

Effects of Parental Discord on Preadolescent Religiousness

The expectation from the first study was that there would be “significant interaction between parental religiosity and discord in predicting the religiousness of

⁷⁶Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003), 28.

⁷⁷Ibid.

youths.”⁷⁸ The study also purports that boys should be more directly affected by parental fighting than girls; however the concern here is for the overall effects on the religiousness of the children. The data from this study was collected by questionnaire in 1975 from 2,774 fourth through eighth graders residing in southern Minnesota.⁷⁹

The findings of this study revealed that “youths who perceive their parents as high in religiosity and as often or sometimes arguing or fighting score *lower* in religiosity than youths who perceive their parents as high in religiosity and never arguing or fighting. This is evidence in favor of the argument that religion could be endangered in the context of parental discord for youths who perceived their parents as low in religiosity.”⁸⁰ Based on these findings, the more religious parents claim to be, the greater potential for influence on the religiousness of their children. In other words, children of highly religious parents are aware of the claims and beliefs of their fathers and mothers, and are swayed either positively or negatively in regard to the same beliefs based on how they observe their parents living out their faith.

The study also measured interaction between grade level and parental discord in predicting religiosity of youth. According to the findings, “A comparison across grade levels indicates considerable decline among youths who perceive their parents as often or sometimes arguing or fighting, moderate decline among youths identifying their parents as not often arguing or fighting, and no decline among youths who say their parents never

⁷⁸Hart M. Nelsen, “Gender Differences in the Effects of Parental Discord on Preadolescent Religiousness,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 4 (1981): 353.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 354.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 356.

argue or fight.”⁸¹

In his discussion of this study, Nelsen writes, “Comparing the frequencies for the perception of parents as low, moderate, or high in religiousness, by grade level and controlling on parental discord gives partial gammas of - .290 for females and - .071 for males These differences suggest different processes leading to the apostasy of male and female adolescents.”⁸² Through all of these findings Nelsen concludes, “Parental dissension belies the religiosity which the parents wittingly or unwittingly attempt to transmit.”⁸³

Quality of Parental Relationships for Families with Early Adolescents

The goal of the second aforementioned study was to “examine associations between three dimensions of family religious involvement (the number of days per week the family does something religious, parental worship service attendance and parental prayer) and the quality of the relationship between teens’ mothers and fathers.”⁸⁴ The instrumentation of this research was the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997) (NLSY97). “A total of 8,984 respondents participated in the survey. Ninety-two percent of eligible respondents were interviewed. Additionally, 7,942 parents or parent figures completed a separate survey, one parent per youth respondent.”⁸⁵ The findings of this

⁸¹Nelsen, “Gender Differences in the Effects of Parental Discord,” 357.

⁸²Ibid., 358.

⁸³Ibid., 359.

⁸⁴Christian Smith and Phillip Kim, “Family Religious Involvement and the Quality of Parental Relationships for Families with Early Adolescents,” *A Research Report of the National Study of Youth and Religion*, no. 5 (2003): 5.

⁸⁵Ibid., 7.

report reveal that “early adolescents living in religiously involved families in the United States are more likely to report stronger, more positive relationships between their parents than do adolescents in families that are not religiously active.”⁸⁶

In order to determine the quality of the father-mother relationships, 12 variables were examined (6 each, 3 positive and 3 negative, for the father and the mother). These variables were father encourages mother, father expresses love to mother, father compromises with mother, father blames mother, father insults mother, father screams at mother and vice versa for the mother in relationship to the father. Again, according to the report, “All twelve of the family relationship variables examined were significantly related to some dimension of family religious involvement.”⁸⁷ In each of the variables, statistical significance was measured at the $p < .05$ level comparing religious variables to the designated nonreligious and low-religious comparison variables.

Of particular interest in regard to this report are the overall percentages of the parental quality relationship variables in comparison to the number of days per week the family does something religious. For the youth who reported their family does something religious five to seven days a week, the “always” and the “never” responses for the positive and negative variables of the parent relationship were significantly greater than those youth who reported their family does something religious zero days per week. In other words, the more religious the family, the greater the likelihood that the child possesses a favorable perception of the father-mother relationship.

The report notes, it is “difficult to determine precisely the causal effects of

⁸⁶Smith and Kim, “Family Religious Involvement,” 5.

⁸⁷Ibid.

religion. It might be that religion itself causally influences stronger parental relationships. It might also be that parents who are already committed to high-quality relationships choose to become more religiously involved as one strategy to pursue them. It might be that when parental relationships deteriorate, families reduce religious practices.”⁸⁸ Regardless, a strong association does appear to exist between a child’s perception of his or her father-mother relationship and the level of religiousness of the family.

Finally, it is important to add that in 2007 a study was published that both validates the claims made in this section, and also challenges them to some degree. The study “explored the implications of parental divorce for the religious involvement of offspring.”⁸⁹ One of the hypotheses of the study was, “Young adult offspring of divorce will attend religious services less often, pray less often, and feel less closeness to God, on average, than young adults whose parents did not divorce.”⁹⁰ This hypothesis supports the data examined thus far in this section which points to a correlation between parental relationships and religiousness of the offspring.

The results of the study reveal that based upon the representative sample of 1,506 young adults (751 from divorced families and 755 from intact families), “The offspring of divorce report significantly lower levels of adult religious attendance than their counterparts of intact families ($p < .001$) . . .”⁹¹ However, the researchers also report

⁸⁸Smith and Kim, “Family Religious Involvement,” 7.

⁸⁹Jiexia Elisa Zhai et al., “Parental Divorce and Religious Involvement among Young Adults,” *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2007): 125.

⁹⁰Ibid., 129.

⁹¹Ibid., 135.

that “there is no evidence that parental divorce depresses non-organizational religious involvement (e.g., prayer life) or subjective religiousness (e.g., feelings of closeness to God) in adulthood.”⁹² While this finding does seem to challenge the claims made in this section regarding the overall effect of parental discord on the religiousness of children, Zhai et al. did conclude that, “Divorced fathers are much less engaged in religious socialization of their offspring than fathers in intact families. Although mothers are also less proactive in religious training, it is the distinctive role of fathers that appears to account for the gap in self-reported attendance among young adults.”⁹³ Therefore, while parental discord might not affect all aspects of religiousness for their offspring, evidence from this study once again supports the claim that parental relationships do influence offspring religiousness.

A Postulate and Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to evaluate, from a social-scientific perspective, the thesis that a father nourishes his children in the Lord through his love for his wife. While such a thesis cannot be proven from social-scientific literature, social-scientific literature does reveal insightful data akin to such a thesis.

First, father involvement is crucial for child development. Substantial research and accumulated data reveal that the role of the father is crucial to every aspect of a child’s development. Even when the father does not live in the same residence as the child, he can still have a tremendous impact through simply staying involved in the

⁹²Zhai et al., “Parental Divorce and Religious Involvement,” 139.

⁹³Ibid.

child's life. Therefore, there is something powerful about the potential influence a father can have on the life of his child.

Secondly, this chapter demonstrates that the faith of a father can enhance fathering in positive ways. Religion has been shown to be a transcendent influence in the lives of fathers, and children and fathers both have exhibited long-term positive benefits through generative spirituality/generative fathering. Therefore, a father's faith can have profound effects on how he fathers his child and even on the child himself.

Next, relevant social-scientific literature proves that the father also influences child development indirectly through his relations with his wife. Substantial evidence exists that a child's development is greatly affected positively (when the marital relationship of father and mother is positive) and negatively (when marital discord is present). Furthermore, fathers have greater influence in this regard than mothers. Therefore, social-scientific research suggests that how fathers treat their wives does influence their children.

Lastly, an attempt was made to examine the specific impact of the father-mother relationship on the *spiritual* development of the child. While research in this area has been far-less widespread, it does indicate that the religiousness of the father and mother and the quality of their marital relationship do have bearing on whether or not their children embrace their form of religiousness, and the extent to which they embrace it. Therefore, religiousness and marital relationships do play an important role in the transmittance of the parents' religiousness to their children. Social-scientific research does indeed suggest that it is possible that the father's love and nourishment of his wife might impact their child's perceptions of their parents' religion, beliefs, and practices.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

The implementation of the project consisted of two parts: the training seminar and the devotional guide. This chapter will provide a detailed explanation of each of the two parts through week-by-week descriptions of the project's implementation.

Training Seminar

The purpose of the training seminar was to equip parents to proclaim the gospel to their children. It was eight weeks in duration (two weeks of preparation and six weeks of teaching). Participants were not enlisted because the seminar was held during the normal meeting time for Life Groups. Pre- and post-seminar questionnaires were completed by seminar participants before the first session and after the final session of the seminar in order to measure the knowledge level and the confidence level of the participants in proclaiming the gospel to their children (see appendix 1). Two weeks of preparation were included in the implementation of the project in order to study and better prepare myself to teach parents the components of the gospel, how the gospel relates to children, and how parents can communicate the truths of the gospel to their children.

The majority of the parents in the target group attend one of two Life Groups (small-group Bible study classes) at First Baptist Church, Jackson, Tennessee. Therefore,

for the purposes of the Training Seminar the two classes combined, and the seminar was held on Sunday mornings for six consecutive weeks.

Weeks 1 and 2

Weeks 1 and 2 were used to prepare for the teaching of the seminar.

Preparation was done primarily by reading books related to the gospel and children. The books that were used were *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert; *Teach Them Diligently: How to Use the Scriptures in Child Training* by Lou Priolo; *Gospel-Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting* by William Farley; *The Faith of a Child: A Step-by-Step Guide to Salvation for your Child* by Art Murphy; *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel* by Sally Michael, Jill Nelson, and Bud Burk; and *Leading Your Child to Christ: Biblical Direction for Sharing the Gospel* by Marty Machowski. A pamphlet entitled *Forbid Them Not: Rethinking the Baptism and Church Membership of Children and Young People* by Ted Christman was used as well. Each of these works was helpful in preparing to teach the seminar.

In *What is the Gospel?* Greg Gilbert provides a clear and concise explanation of the gospel. This clarity of content was useful in communicating to the seminar participants that there must be a firm and crisp understanding of the gospel if it is to be properly proclaimed to their children. *Teach Them Diligently* and *Gospel-Powered Parenting* were beneficial in helping to communicate to parents their role in proclaiming the gospel to their children.

The Faith of a Child, *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel*, and *Leading Your Child to Christ* were all valuable resources for preparing for the sessions of the seminar that dealt with understanding how children think, how to prepare children for the

gospel, and then how to share the gospel with children.

Forbid Them Not was extremely advantageous in preparing for the session of the seminar about discerning a child's readiness to respond to the gospel and baptism. This session was one of the more difficult ones to teach, and I would strongly recommend this resource to be used in preparation.

Week 3 (Session 1)

This week was spent making final preparations for Session 1 of the Training Seminar, which included writing a manuscript, creating a handout for notes, and forming discussion questions for participants to answer in small groups following the session. Session 1 was held at the conclusion of Week 3.

At the beginning of Session 1 the pre-seminar questionnaires were distributed, completed, and returned. The title of the seminar was "Equipped to Proclaim," and the title of Session 1 was "Equipped to Understand (Part 1)." The content of Session 1 and Session 2 centered on the premise that before one can properly teach, one must properly understand both what is being taught and who is receiving the teaching. In the context of the Training Seminar, this meant that in order for parents to proclaim the gospel to their children, they must have a proper understanding of the gospel and their role in proclaiming the gospel to their children, and how the understanding of their children develops.

Session 1 focused on helping the seminar participants understand the gospel according to God's Word. This was done by using Scripture to explain and expound upon the four core truths of the gospel: God, Man, Christ, Response. Following the session, discussion questions for review were distributed to participants. Due to a

shortage of time, I requested that the discussion questions be taken home and returned the following week.

Week 4 (Session 2)

The majority of this week was spent making final preparations for Session 2 of the Training Seminar, which included writing a manuscript, creating a handout for notes, and forming discussion questions for participants to answer in small groups following the session. Session 2 was held at the conclusion of Week 4.

The title of Session 2 was “Equipped to Understand (Part 2).” Prior to the teaching time, the discussion questions from the previous week were gathered. Session 2 began with a brief review of the content of Session 1. This was followed by an explanation of the role of parents in proclaiming the gospel to their children. Using primarily Scripture, *Teach Them Diligently*, and *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, I described the role of parents as “4 Pillars.” These pillars were principles for parents to grasp in understanding their role in proclaiming the gospel to their children: (1) The Word of God must first be on your heart and in your soul; (2) You shall teach them diligently to your children and talk of them; (3) Fathers are responsible for taking the lead; and (4) The church is your help, support, and encouragement.

Session 2 also included an explanation of the development of the understanding of children. Using *The Faith of a Child* and *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel*, I shared “4 Stages” through which children might develop: (1) The Discovering Stage; (2) The Discerning Stage; (3) The Deciding Stage; and (4) The Discipling Stage. Following the session, discussion questions for review were distributed to participants. Once again, due to a shortage of time, I requested that the discussion

questions be taken home and returned the following week.

Week 5 (Session 3)

As in Weeks 3 and 4, Week 5 was spent making final preparations for the Training Seminar. This included writing a manuscript, creating a handout for notes, and forming discussion questions for participants to answer in small groups following the session. Session 3 was held at the conclusion of Week 5.

The title of Session 3 was “Equipped to Prepare.” The goal of this session was to help parents understand how to prepare their children to receive the gospel. I wanted them to realize that although a child’s response to the gospel is ultimately a work of God (John 6:44), it does not mean that they cannot work in cooperation with God, and labor in such a way to be used by Him in proclaiming the gospel to their children (1 Cor 3:7).

Prior to the teaching time, the discussion questions from the previous week were gathered. Session 3 began with a brief review of the content of Session 2. To begin this session “The Parable of the Sower” was shared, and the importance of cultivating the soil of the hearts of children was discussed. Once again leaning upon *The Faith of a Child* and *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel*, I then shared “7 Ways to Prepare Children for the Gospel”: (1) Work to provide a gospel-centered home; (2) Work to establish authority; (3) Work to develop meaningful relationships; (4) Work to encourage godly role models and heroes; (5) Work to exhibit a positive attitude about life and God; (6) Work to maintain open communication; (7) Work to pray. Following the teaching time, discussion questions for review were distributed to participants. This week enough time was left for participants to gather in small groups for discussion, and the questions were returned upon leaving.

Week 6 (Session 4)

As in previous weeks, Week 6 was spent making final preparations for the upcoming session of the Training Seminar. Writing a manuscript, creating a handout for notes, and forming discussion questions for participants to answer in small groups following the session were all included in the preparation time. Session 4 was held at the conclusion of Week 6.

The title of Session 4 was “Equipped to Proclaim Indirectly.” Beginning with this session, the Training Seminar transitioned from theoretical and foundational to practical in terms of equipping parents to share the gospel with their children. I explained that what I meant by proclaiming the gospel indirectly was that parents proclaim the truths of the gospel to their children through how they relate and interact with one another in the marriage relationship. For this session I was able to use chapter 2 of this Project as a valuable aid and resource.

During the teaching time I shared first how God has created the marriage relationship to display the gospel, and that while both the wife and the husband have a role, it is the responsibility of the father to not exasperate his children to anger (Eph 6:4). I shared that a father is commanded to nourish his children as he is to nourish his wife (Eph 5:29; Eph 6:4). When the father fails to nourish his wife, he fails to properly proclaim the gospel through the marriage relationship thus failing to nourish his children, exasperating them. I then shared how parents can prioritize their marriage relationship by prioritizing their time together, by visibly showing affection through service and touch, and by expressing love verbally in front of children. Following the session, discussion questions for review were distributed to participants. Once again, due to a shortage of

time, I requested that the discussion questions be taken home and returned the following week.

Week 7 (Session 5)

The majority of this week was spent making final preparations for Session 5. This included writing a manuscript, creating a handout for notes, and forming discussion questions for participants to answer in small groups following the session. Session 5 was held at the conclusion of Week 7.

The title of Session 5 was “Equipped to Proclaim Directly.” The goal of this session was to equip parents to have a gospel conversation with their children. Prior to the teaching time, the discussion questions from the previous week were gathered. I began this session by reminding the parents that as they apply all that had been shared over the previous weeks of the seminar, it will more than likely have a cumulative effect on their children. In other words, as the gospel is being consistently discussed and displayed, it will eventually (Lord willing) lead to questions about responding to the gospel.

In order to help parents have gospel conversations with their children, I encouraged them to: (1) Be natural; (2) Ask questions; (3) Point to God’s Word; and (4) Explain the gospel. I reminded the parents that the same gospel that is meant to be shared with adults is the same one that is meant to be shared with children. I encouraged them to recall the content from Session 1 of the seminar, and to have a plan to use certain Scripture passages to go over with their child. I then shared they should remember to (5) Leave the decision up to the child; (6) Encourage the child; and (7) Pray with the child whether they are ready to respond or not, and to also pray for continued understanding.

Following the teaching time, discussion questions for review were distributed to participants. This week enough time was left for participants to gather in small groups for discussion, and the questions were returned upon leaving.

Week 8 (Session 6)

This week was spent making final preparations for Session 6, which included writing a manuscript, creating a handout for notes, and forming discussion questions for participants to answer in small groups following the session. Session 6 was held at the conclusion of Week 8.

The title of Session 6 was “Equipped to Proclaim and Discerning/Baptism.” During this session I sought to answer some common questions related to children and their readiness to respond to the gospel and to baptism. These questions were (1) Is my child old enough to become a Christian? (2) How do I know if my child truly understands the gospel? (3) How does my child become a Christian? (4) How do I know if my child is genuinely converted? (5) How long should we wait before making the profession public and baptism? (6) Should I be concerned if my child has yet to demonstrate interest in the gospel? Ted Christman’s pamphlet, *Forbid Them Not* was extremely useful in helping to provide answers to these questions. Following the teaching time, discussion questions for review were distributed. At the conclusion of this final session of the seminar, post-seminar questionnaires and seminar surveys (see appendix 2) were also distributed, completed and returned.

Devotional Guide

Roger S. Oldham is a long-time pastor and theologian. He served as pastor of

First Baptist Church in Martin, Tennessee for twenty-one years, and he has served since 2007 as a member of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention as Vice President for Convention Communications and Relations. Several years prior to leaving the pastorate he started working on a manual for families to use when children begin to inquire about being saved. In the introduction of the manual Oldham writes to parents, “This manual is a tool to help you guide your child to respond to Jesus Christ with an understanding heart and mind. Regardless where your child falls on the ‘readiness scale’ to receive Christ, this manual will provide a greater understanding of the fundamental concepts of spiritual new-birth.” I thought this devotional guide would be an excellent resource to provide for parents following the Training Seminar, and a great way to extend this Project. Oldham agreed to allow me to collaborate with him in completing the resource, and it was made available to parents to use as a follow up to the Training Seminar.

The manual is entitled *The Good News Family Devotional Guide: A Resource for Parents to Help Children Understand the Gospel* (see appendix 5). It was written to be used five days a week over the course of eight weeks. Each day follows the story of brother and sister, Joshua and Emily, as they are introduced to the truths of the gospel. Daily Bible lessons, Scripture readings, interactive games and puzzles, prayers, and questions also follow each day’s story. Because Oldham had already completed the story line, as well as the Bible lessons and Scripture readings, my role in the collaboration was to write the interactive puzzles and games, and also a few prayers and follow-up questions. The remainder of this chapter is a week-by-week description of the implementation of the second half of this project.

Week 9 (Devotional Guide Week 1)

The beginning of this week the Devotional Guides were distributed to the participating families, and they were encouraged to begin. I communicated to them that the target age range for the devotional guide was 7-11 years of age. I also briefly described to the parents the structure of each day's devotional, pointing out the five-day-a-week format. The families seemed excited about going through this resource with their children.

Week 1 of the Devotional Guide is entitled, "Good News: God Made Me Special." During this week children learn that God made them special (Ps 127:1-5), God made them for a purpose (Ps 139:13-17), God made them in His own image (Gen 1:26-31), God is Spirit (John 4:21-26), and God gave them a spirit (Rom 8:9-17). Also during this first week, children and parents are introduced to 9-year-old Joshua and his almost 11-year old sister, Emily. The two siblings begin a conversation with their parents one Sunday after church when Emily asks, "What did the preacher mean when he said our bodies are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'?" This question leads to other questions for the two children as they begin to learn the truths of the gospel. Each devotional closes with a prayer and an activity i.e., word find, crossword puzzle, word scramble, etc. that reinforces the lesson of the day.

Week 10 (Devotional Guide Week 2)

This week I contacted the participating families to encourage them as they continued to work through the Devotional Guide. One family responded by thanking me for providing the material, and commented how much they were enjoying using it.

The title of week 2 is "Good News: God Still Loves Us Even When We Do

Wrong Things.” In the story of Joshua and Emily this week, Emily disobeys her mother when she buys ice cream after being told she could not do so, and she buys the ice cream with money she steals from her father’s dresser. Throughout the week, the guilt and shame of Emily’s sin weigh heavily upon her until she finally confesses to her mother and father.

Through the Bible readings and Bible lessons this week the children learn about sin, and how although they might do right some of the time, no one does right all the time (Rom 3:10, 23). They learn about how sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, and about how they, too, felt guilty and ashamed of their disobedience (Gen 3:8-11). They also learn that spiritual death is the consequence of sin (Rom 5:12). Day 5 of this week emphasizes God’s promise of forgiveness of sin when it is confessed to Him (Ps 32:1-5). Admit, Believe, and Confess are shared and expounded as a simple way to remember God’s way of salvation, but it is the first step of admitting to God one is sinner that is the focus at this point. Again, each devotional closes with a prayer and an activity i.e., word find, crossword puzzle, word scramble, etc. that reinforces the lesson of the day.

Week 11 (Devotional Guide Week 3)

This week parents and children continued working through the Devotional Guide together. The title of week 3 is “Good News: God Sent Jesus to Forgive Me.” The story this week focuses on Joshua, and his discovery that God and Jesus are the same person. He also realizes the tremendous implications of this truth, namely the righteousness of Christ which qualifies Him to take away sin. The children are also introduced to the doctrine of the Trinity in easy-to-understand ways. Ultimately every

attempt to explain the concept of the Trinity falls short, yet it is important this is introduced in helping the children to understand the deity of Christ.

The Bible readings of this week include John 1:1-4, 14-18; 14:1-9, 1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 1:1-5, 13-21. Once again every day closes with a prayer and activity that reinforces the Bible readings and lessons. The story concludes this week with Joshua understanding that “since Jesus was God, that means Jesus was able not to sin. And, it means, He could take my sins away from me before I was even born. Now that’s *really* cool!”

Week 12 (Devotional Guide Week 4)

This week I contacted the participating families again to encourage them as they continued to work through the Devotional Guide. I reminded them the devotional guide was indeed only a guide, and encouraged them to have conversations with their children beyond the devotional times. At the same time I reminded them not to push or force their child’s understanding.

The title of week 4 is “Good News: Jesus Loves Me SO Much He Died and Rose for Me.” This week’s story focuses on Emily, and her discovery of Christ’s saving work on the Cross, and the meaning of His resurrection. The Bible readings and lessons focus on the following: Christ redeeming us and paying the ransom for our sin (Matt 27:45-51); Christ becoming sin for us (2 Cor 5:18-21); Jesus finishing the work of the Cross through His death on the Cross (John 19:30); and Christ’s victory over sin and death through His resurrection (Acts 2:22-36). As in the previous weeks, a prayer and activity accompanies each lesson throughout the week.

By the end of the story this week, Emily begins to understand that God put her

sins on Jesus so He could put Jesus' righteousness in her. It is clearly communicated this week that this is the only way anyone can become righteous enough or clean enough to go to heaven. Furthermore, Emily realizes that while "God offers her free salvation, it cost Jesus everything." Finally, she realizes that "the resurrection of Jesus puts the stamp of authenticity that Jesus really did die for us."

Week 13 (Devotional Guide Week 5)

This week parents and children continued working through the Devotional Guide together. The title of week 5 is "Good News: Jesus Wants Me to Understand His Love." The story of Joshua and Emily continues as their family travels to Grandma's house for a visit. During their visit, Grandma shares her salvation story which piques the interest of the two siblings, and their understanding of the gospel continues to grow.

Through the Bible readings and lessons this week children learn that God demonstrates His love for creation in many different ways, and for us that is providing forgiveness of our sins (Rom 5:6-8); that just as the Apostle Paul shared the gospel with others, so should we (Acts 26:19-20); God's offer of salvation is not based on our own merit, but based on His mercy and love (Eph 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7); and that the Holy Spirit is always working to convince us of our sin, Christ's righteousness, and God's judgment (John 16:8). Each devotional closes with a prayer and an activity, i.e., word find, crossword puzzle, word scramble, etc. that reinforces the lesson of the day.

Week 14 (Devotional Guide Week 6)

This week I once again followed up with the participating families thanking them for their willingness to use this resource. I communicated to them that I was

continuing to pray for them as they were having gospel conversations from the devotional guide with their children. Week 6 is entitled, “Good News: Jesus Will Come into My Heart Forever.” The story continues this week with Joshua and Emily at Grandma’s house. After hearing Grandma’s testimony the night before, Joshua and Emily awake the next morning and pray with their father to receive Christ. The two siblings express their understanding of the gospel, and their desire for Jesus to be their Savior. The story concludes this week with the family at church remembering and giving thanks for the day of their salvation.

The Bible readings this week include on 2 Corinthians 6:2, Romans 10:9-17, 1 John 5:11-13, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The Bible lessons focus on among other things: providing an example of a prayer parents can use to pray with their child to receive Christ, having assurance of salvation, and remembering and celebrating salvation through the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Once again, each lesson concludes with a prayer and an activity.

Week 15 (Devotional Guide Week 7)

This week parents and children continued working through the Devotional Guide together. The title of week 7 is “Good News: Jesus Wants Me to Show Others through Baptism that He Lives in My Heart and Is My Savior.” In this week’s story Joshua and Emily return home and have a conversation with their pastor about baptism. The children learn three important roles of baptism: (1) It shows what Jesus did *for* us; (2) It shows what Jesus did *in* us through bringing our dead spirits back to life at the point of salvation; and (3) It reminds us that Jesus will one day receive us into heaven. This week’s story concludes with Joshua and Emily making a public profession of faith and

being baptized a few weeks later.

The Bible readings for this week also focus on baptism and its purposes. They include Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 6:4-10, Ephesians 2:1-7, and Acts 2:41-47. The Bible lessons focus on baptism as well. For example, one defines and describes immersion, and another emphasizes the celebration of baptism.

Week 16 (Devotional Guide Week 8)

I began this final week of the implementation of this project by contacting the participating families one last time. Over the course of these weeks, I had learned that a couple of the families had fallen behind in working through the Devotional Guide, so I encouraged them to persevere. I also asked those families who were finishing up to let me know in order to give them a survey to evaluate the resource (see appendix 3).

The title of week 8 is “Good News: Jesus Wants to Make a Difference in My Life . . . Forever.” In this week’s story the children learn of Joshua’s struggle with sin even after he is saved, and what it means for their own lives and for everyone who is a follower of Jesus. Joshua becomes discouraged and short with his sister after things do not go his way at his baseball game. Through a conversation with his babysitter, Joshua learns that not only did Jesus die for all of sins *before* he was saved, but that He also died for sins he would commit *after* he was saved. He also learns that the Holy Spirit lives inside believers to reveal sin, and to help them grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

The Bible readings and Bible lessons for this week focus on Christian living. They include the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-25); putting others before self (Phil 2:1-16); confessing sin instead of blaming others (1 John 1:4-9); and growing to be more like Jesus (2 Pet 3:18). As with the previous weeks, a prayer and activity is also included in

each day's devotional.

The Devotional Guide ends with a postlude in which six steps are listed to help new believers to continue to grow in their faith. They are (1) Reading your Bible at a set time each day; (2) Practice daily prayer; (3) Attend church regularly; (4) Tell others about your faith in Jesus; (5) Use your gifts in God's work; and (6) Obey your parents. To complete the project implementation the parents of the participating families were given a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the Devotional Guide.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter will provide a thorough evaluation of the project. Was the purpose of the project appropriate and valid? Were the project goals achieved? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the project? How could the implementation of the project be improved upon in the future? These questions will be addressed throughout this chapter. Theological and personal reflections of the project will also be shared.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of the project was to develop a strategy to equip parents to proclaim the gospel to their children. As a pastor, my calling includes equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12). More specifically, as pastor to children and families, equipping, encouraging and training parents to fulfill their role as primary disciple-makers of their children is one of the ways I fulfill Ephesians 4:12. This most certainly includes equipping parents to proclaim the gospel to their children. It is with this understanding that I believe the purpose of the project was appropriate and valid. Through fulfilling the goals of the project, the purpose was fulfilled.

Furthermore, throughout the research, writing, and implementation of the project, the worth and potential impact of developing such a strategy for parents was

demonstrated time and again. These strengths of the project and of its purpose will be discussed more in depth later in this chapter.

It is important to note that the goals and means through which I sought to accomplish the project purpose were designed specifically for my particular ministry context. Depending on culture and setting, multiple ways exist for a purpose such as this one to be carried out within a church. The following section provides an evaluation of the goals created for First Baptist Church, Jackson, Tennessee.

Evaluation of Goals

The first goal of the project was to determine the knowledge level and confidence level of parents in proclaiming the gospel to their children. This was measured by a pre- and post-seminar questionnaire for parents (see appendix 1). An increase in knowledge and confidence was expected from the pre-questionnaire taken before the seminar to the post-questionnaire, which was completed at the conclusion of the six-week training seminar. The questionnaire featured short-answer questions as well as a 20-item survey with a 6-point Likert-type scale. Based on the responses to the short-answer questions and the data analysis of the *t*-Test for dependent samples that was used for the Likert-type scale survey, this goal was successfully met. The survey instruments did reveal an increase in knowledge and confidence of parents in proclaiming the gospel to their children ($t_{(24)} = 2.478, p < .021$).

One of the short-answer questions used in the pre- and post-questionnaire was, “Please describe your confidence level in proclaiming the gospel to your child/ren.” Seventeen out of twenty-five participants responded to this question using specific wording akin to increased confidence following the seminar. Eight participants

responded using similar wording to the response given on the pre-questionnaire. Zero participants responded in a way that would indicate a decrease in confidence following the seminar.

The Likert-type scale was composed of statements to determine knowledge levels and confidence levels before and after the seminar. It contained such statements as, “I am scared and nervous at the thought of verbally proclaiming the gospel to my child,” “I am excited and hopeful at the thought of verbally proclaiming the gospel to my child,” “I am prepared for any question my child might ask me related to salvation,” and “I am confident I know how to determine if my child’s repentance and faith are genuine.” Again, according to the *t*-Test, the training seminar made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of the participants’ knowledge and confidence in proclaiming the gospel to their children.

Table A1. *t*-Test: Paired two sample for means

<i>t</i>-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
Mean	80.64	83.2
Variance	36.49	47.83333333
Observations	25	25
Pearson Correlation	0.689949114	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	24	
t Stat	2.478399561	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.010310295	
t Critical one-tail	1.71088208	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.02062059	
t Critical two-tail	2.063898562	

Table A2. Pre- and post-questionnaire results

Participant	Pretest	Posttest
1	86	86
2	76	83
3	78	80
4	84	89
5	85	96
6	83	88
7	98	99
8	84	88
9	76	81
10	79	75
11	88	89
12	87	81
13	78	80
14	86	78
15	81	85
16	72	69
17	76	72
18	78	77
19	78	82
20	80	86
21	85	87
22	73	74
23	71	84
24	75	85
25	79	86

The second goal of the project was to equip parents to proclaim the gospel to their children. This was done through an eight-week seminar (two weeks of preparing and six weeks of meeting times) in which parents were instructed in ways to proclaim the gospel of Christ to their children. This goal was measured by a survey, apart from the post-seminar questionnaire, upon the conclusion of the seminar (see appendix 2). A 6-point Likert-type scale was used to measure the effectiveness of the seminar itself as a useful way to equip parents to proclaim the gospel to their children.

The survey contained ten statements including, “Overall this seminar was helpful in equipping me to proclaim the gospel to my child,” “After the seminar I feel more confident and knowledgeable to share the plan of salvation with my child,” and “Overall this seminar was not helpful in equipping me to proclaim the gospel to my child.” Twenty-three out of twenty-five participants indicated they agreed/strongly agreed that overall the seminar was helpful. Eighteen of twenty-five participants indicated they agreed/strongly agreed that they felt more confident and knowledgeable to share the plan of salvation with their child following the seminar. Seven of twenty-five participants indicated that they agreed somewhat that they felt more confident and knowledgeable. Only one participant indicated somewhat disagreement that overall the seminar was not helpful. The remaining participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed that overall the seminar was not helpful.

The third goal of the project was to collaborate with others to develop a resource for parents to use in proclaiming the gospel to their children. This resource was in the form of an eight-week devotional guide (see appendix 5). The guide was completed by parents together with their children (ages 7-11) upon the conclusion of the previously described seminar. This goal was also measured by a survey upon the completion of the resource (see appendix 3).

Three families were willing to commit to going through this resource with their children. The number of families participating in this portion of the project was substantially less than those who participated in the seminar.¹ Still, based on the results

¹This decrease was largely, but not entirely, due to the different target-age ranges of the seminar (birth-5th grade) and the devotional guide (2nd-5th grade).

of the surveys they completed, the devotional guide was indeed helpful to the participating families in proclaiming the gospel to their child. Once again a 6-point Likert-type scale was used to measure the devotional guide's effectiveness. All three families indicated that they either agreed somewhat, agreed, or strongly agreed that the resource was helpful to them in proclaiming the gospel to their child. In a like manner, all participating families agreed somewhat or strongly agreed that they would recommend the resource to other parents. Also, all participating families indicated that using the resource created further conversation with their child regarding the gospel.

Project Strengths

Although this was not a perfect project on any level, certain strengths which would be valuable to emphasize in future implementations of the project. First, the project focused on the gospel. Parents were taught that in order to proclaim the gospel properly to their children, they must first have a proper understanding of it themselves. Much time was spent teaching about the core truths of the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Then as parents were taught how to teach the gospel to their children, the gospel was repeated to them multiple times in multiple ways. Emphasis on the gospel continued with the devotional guide resource. Through its use parents were able to discuss the core truths of the gospel extensively with their children. Parents and children were not the center of the project, the heart of the project was the gospel.

A second strength of the project was its emphasis upon the father's role in proclaiming the gospel to children through the marriage relationship. Through a deep exegesis of Ephesians 5:21-6:4, chapter 2 expounded upon an interpretation of Ephesians 6:4 that perhaps has been previously overlooked. The Scriptures and the corresponding

commentaries and literature helped to support and confirm that God’s design is for children to see the beauty of the covenant relationship through the marriage relationship.² Furthermore, “an exasperated child is one who has a right to be provoked because of incongruities between a parent’s stated beliefs and that parent’s actual behaviors.”³

The support of social-scientific data examined in chapter 3 was also a strength of the project. It demonstrated the religious influences that a father has on his children including through the marriage relationship. In light of recent events in our nation regarding the attempt to redefine marriage, it is crucial that the biblical truth regarding the marriage relationship, the gospel, and children continue to be taught clearly and held up in our churches, as well as proclaimed to the world around us.

Yet another strength of the project was that parents were given an opportunity through the devotional guide resource to put into practice some of what was learned during the training seminar. While the readiness for a child to respond to Christ could not be controlled throughout the project’s duration, the devotional guide did allow parents to have gospel conversations with their child, which in turn helped to further measure the effectiveness of the project.

Finally, the results of the project should be considered as a positive overall. The project was semi-successful at the very least in equipping parents to proclaim the gospel to their children. Although the data indicates the project was a success, a significant drop off of participants did occur from the seminar to the devotional guide.

²John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 144.

³Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians, Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 318.

This decrease in devotional guide users cannot be overlooked. However in the same way, the fact that the goals and methods on the whole resulted in positive results is a strength that cannot be overlooked.

Project Weaknesses

Throughout the research and implementation process of the project, several weaknesses became evident. For example, although through the research of social-scientific data and literature it was determined that a father, and a father's marital relationship with a mother could potentially have influence on the religion of children, it is impossible to make such a conclusion with certainty. Therefore only a postulation could be made, and not a hard and fast verification of the theses of chapters 2 and 3.

One weakness in the implementation of the project was the time in which the training seminar was held. The seminar was held during a time-restricted Life Group hour on Sunday mornings. At First Baptist Church, Jackson, Tennessee, the Life Group hour follows the worship service. By the time everyone fellowships following the service and upon entering Life Groups, the allotted time is significantly shortened. This time crunch resulted in many of the sessions of the training seminar being rushed. The intent was for seminar participants to gather in small groups following each session to discuss what was learned each week, but this only happened in two out of the six sessions due to shortages of time.

Another reason why conducting the training seminar during the Life Group hour on Sunday mornings was a weakness of the project was that it did not allow parents to choose to participate in the seminar. While I was thankful to have a large percentage of parents to represent the target group (parents of children birth-5th grade) present for the

training seminar, I cannot say with confidence the same number would have chosen to participate had the seminar been held at a different time. This reason was evidenced by the attendance of some being more inconsistent than others over the course of the seminar, which very likely resulted in some of the responses to the post-seminar questionnaire being negatively skewed in comparison to those who were more invested in the seminar.

In addition to the meeting time of the training seminar being a weakness of the project, I believe the research instruments were also a weakness. While the Likert-type scales was very useful in helping to determine whether or not the training seminar and devotional guide made a difference, I feel as though I could have worded certain statements and questions better or more clearly. Furthermore, there was no place provided for participants to communicate why they chose a certain high number or low number on the Likert scale. This, too, would have been helpful in obtaining a more accurate measurement of the effectiveness of the project.

A third weakness of the project was difficulty in keeping parents accountable throughout the eight-week duration of the devotional guide. Even by contacting the participating families bi-weekly to encourage them and support them in their commitments to complete the devotional guide, some families still struggled to finish. Six families agreed to go through the devotional guide, yet only three families finished in the designated time.

Finally, the project's limitations were also weaknesses. The duration of sixteen weeks was insufficient time to obtain a true measurement of whether or not parents were truly equipped to proclaim the gospel to their children. Also, many of the

parents were not able to see the fruit of their gospel proclamation in the duration of the project.

Suggested Improvements

Several changes could improve the project's chances of being an effective means of equipping parents to proclaim the gospel to their children. One aspect that I would do differently would be to ensure an allotted time of 60-75 minutes for each session of the training seminar. I believe there should be 45-55 minutes planned for teaching and 15-20 minutes planned for small group discussion following the teaching. Providing an opportunity for seminar participants to discuss what is being learned in each session and throughout the seminar not only helps in the processing of the material being taught, but it also enhances confidence and knowledge of the parents. During this initial implementation I was attempting to complete teaching and provide time for small group discussion in 45-50 minutes total, and this proved to be an insufficient amount of time.

Another aspect of the project that I would do differently would be to conduct the training seminar at a time and place that would require participants to attend on a more voluntary basis. During this initial implementation the training seminar was held during the Life Group hour in the same meeting rooms as the Life Groups. This meeting time and meeting location resulted in two choices: participate in training seminar or not come to church at all. I would change this either by conducting the seminar at a different time and place altogether, or conducting it in a different place other than Life Group meeting rooms on a Sunday morning. Thus allowing people who did not wish to participate in the seminar the opportunity to still be able to attend small group Bible study as usual.

A third aspect of the project I would modify would be the research instruments. I would reword some of the questions and statements in order to obtain a more accurate measurement of parents' knowledge and confidence levels before and after the training seminar, as well as to get clear feedback regarding the devotional guide resource. I would also provide space within the Likert-type scale survey for parents to communicate why they chose certain numbers for certain statements, which would ensure participants understood the statements being used to measure the effectiveness of the project, and it would allow participants to provide clearer feedback.

Finally, I would attempt to provide better accountability and support for families going through the devotional guide resource. One way this could be done would be to provide a brief training on how to use the resource. Another way this could be done would be to make weekly contacts with the families instead of bi-weekly contacts. Also, scheduling a designated time approximately halfway through the eight-week devotional guide for the participating families to come together and share how using the resource is going, and to encourage one another to continue in completing the resource would be helpful.

Theological Reflections

Through the research and implementation of this project I have learned much about God, His church, and His Word as they relate to equipping parents to proclaim the gospel to their children. I have a much greater appreciation for Ephesians 5:21-6:4 as a result of the work of this project. Peter O'Brien's and Harold Hoehner's commentaries on Ephesians were most useful in helping me to think through the proper interpretations and applications of the passage for the purposes of the project. I am especially grateful

for O'Brien's handling of Ephesians 5:21 as it has great bearing on how the remaining verses of the passage are interpreted. His conclusion that "on grounds of semantics, syntax, and the flow of Paul's argument The apostle is not speaking of *mutual* submission . . . but submission to those who are in authority over them," affirmed my own thoughts as I worked through the passage.⁴

As I prepared for the training seminar several books helped to continue to form my thoughts and views on helping children to understand the gospel. I mentioned these writings in chapter 4, but three that really helped to shape and drive my teaching from a theological perspective were Art Murphy's *The Faith of a Child, Helping Children to Understand the Gospel* by Sally Michael, Jill Nelson, and Bud Burk, and the pamphlet by Ted Christman entitled, *Forbid Them Not*. Christman provides an excellent argument for why "Reformed Baptist churches ought to be baptizing and receiving into membership children and young people who give credible evidence of being truly saved."⁵

Regarding the church, through the project I was reminded of the church's responsibility to be intentional about equipping parents for the task at hand. The church cannot assume that parents are able to communicate the gospel to their children. The church cannot even assume that parents, nor any members, have a clear and biblical understanding of the gospel. In many ways this is a discipleship issue for churches. Parents themselves must first be discipled, immersed in God's Word, and growing in their faith before they can be disciple-makers of their children.

⁴Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 404.

⁵Ted Christman, *Forbid Them Not: Rethinking the Baptism and Church Membership of Children and Young People*, accessed March 23, 2012, http://www.hbcowensboro.org/mediafiles/uploaded/f/Oe1609819_forbid-them-not-pdf.

Lastly, through the project I was reminded that God does not need us to do His work of drawing children to Himself, yet in His goodness and grace He chooses to use us. Ultimately salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a child just as it is in the life of anyone else. While parents may not be able to proclaim the gospel in the most winsome and most articulate of ways, God's Word is alive and He will draw children to Himself in spite of us. This does not diminish the responsibility and urgency of parents and the church to work together in proclaiming the gospel to the coming generations, but it should humble, comfort, and encourage us nonetheless.

Personal Reflections

As I reflect on the project from a personal perspective, and on what I learned about myself as a minister, two main lessons stand out from the rest. First, my calling to minister to families and children was affirmed. Although completing the research, writing, and implementation of the project was challenging and trying at times, I also found it to be captivating and enjoyable. I enjoyed learning more about how parents proclaim the gospel to their children, and teaching parents from God's Word all that I had learned. It was enjoyable helping to develop a resource for parents to use as they proclaim the gospel to their children. Through the project I was reminded of my passion to equip parents to disciple their children, and my desire to lead the church to walk alongside them as they do so. I am grateful and humbled that God has called me to serve Him in this way.

Second, through the project I obtained a greater understanding of the need for perseverance in life and ministry. Completing the project was a long and arduous task. I was aware of this would be the case from the beginning, and I felt as though I had a good

plan for completing the work. I soon learned that no matter how detailed the plan, interruptions of life and ministry would happen.

There were times when it seemed as though the work of the project would never be complete. I had to learn to persevere in completing the work in the midst of everything else occurring in life and ministry. The difficulties taught me much about my personality and much about my sin that I would not have been made so keenly aware of otherwise.

Conclusion

The purpose of the project must go beyond the project itself. In other words, equipping parents to proclaim the gospel to their children is more than just a one-time training seminar with a devotional guide. It is an aspect of children and family ministry that needs to be returned to return to again and again. As I have already stated, this is a matter of discipleship.

Therefore, much of ministry to children and families should be the intentional discipleship of husbands/fathers to be the spiritual leaders to their wives and children. This also means that I myself must continue to learn and grow as a follower of Christ, husband, father, and pastor. May God grant the grace and wisdom for this to come about, and may it always and only be for the furtherance of His kingdom and for the fame of His name.

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-SEMINAR QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge level and your confidence level in proclaiming the gospel to your child, and in determining his or her readiness to respond to Christ. This research is being conducted by Aaron Kennedy for purposes of project research. In this research you will answer the following questions the first week and the last week of this seminar. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Please provide the following demographic information:

1. Please provide the last four digits of your Social Security Number to be used throughout the project: _____

2. Are you a member of First Baptist Church, Jackson, TN? Y or N

3. Please circle the range of years you have been a Christian:

Not a Christian 1-5 6-10 11-15 15-20 20+

4. What is your marital status? (Please circle one below)

Married Separated Divorced Single

5. If you are married and your spouse is attending this seminar with you, please indicate this by circling who is attending with you:

Husband Wife

6. If you are married and your spouse is not attending this seminar with you, please indicate this by circling who is absent:

Husband Wife

7. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? _____

8. How many children do you have, and what are their ages?

9. At the conclusion of this seminar would you be interested in completing an eight-week devotional guide with your child to help determine his/her readiness to respond to Christ? Y or N

10. If you answered yes to the previous question, please provide your name and phone number:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Please answer the following questions related to proclaiming the gospel to your child/ren:

1. Please describe your interpretation of the phrase, "proclaiming the gospel to your child/ren":

2. Please describe your confidence level in proclaiming the gospel to your child/ren?

3. Please describe how your confidence, or lack thereof, is related to your knowledge of *how to* proclaim the gospel to your child/ren:

4. Please explain why many parents may not be confident in proclaiming the gospel to their children:

Please answer the following questions according to the rating scale below by writing the number that best corresponds to your feelings:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. Children should be a certain age before they become a Christian. _____
2. It is my primary responsibility as a parent to proclaim the gospel to my child. _____
3. It is the primary responsibility of the pastor or children's pastor to proclaim the gospel to my child. _____
4. I am confident that I myself understand the gospel. _____
5. I am confident I know how to determine when my child is ready to respond to Christ. _____
6. I am scared and nervous at the thought of verbally proclaiming the gospel to my child. _____
7. I am fearful I will be a hindrance or a stumbling block to my child responding to Christ. _____

8. I am excited and hopeful at the thought of verbally proclaiming the gospel to my child. _____
9. I believe my relationship with my spouse has bearing on my child's understanding of the gospel. _____
10. I am prepared for any question my child might ask me related to salvation. _____
11. It is important for my child to hear me pray aloud for the salvation of lost friends/family members. _____
12. It is important for my child to hear me pray out loud for his/her own salvation. _____
13. There should be a period of time between a child's profession of faith and his/her baptism to ensure the decision was genuine. _____
14. I am prepared for any question my child might ask related to baptism. _____
15. It is important to initiate conversations with my child related to salvation. _____
16. I should begin to pray for my child's salvation when he/she begins to ask questions related to salvation. _____
17. If my child begins to ask questions related to salvation and/or baptism, it is a sign he or she may be ready to come to faith in Christ. _____
18. The children's pastor and/or the pastor should have the final say regarding my child's readiness to become a Christian. _____
19. I am confident I know how to determine if my child's repentance and faith are genuine. _____
20. I do not know *how* to pray for my child's salvation. _____

APPENDIX 2

SEMINAR SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure the effectiveness of the seminar in which you have participated over the last eight weeks. This research is being conducted by Aaron Kennedy for purposes of project research. In this research, you will provide feedback regarding the effectiveness of the seminar. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Please provide the last four digits of your Social Security Number: _____

Please answer the following questions according to the rating scale below by writing the number that best corresponds to your feelings:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. Overall this seminar was helpful in equipping me to proclaim the gospel to my child.

2. Some of the material covered in the seminar was confusing in how it related to proclaiming the gospel to my child. _____

3. After completing the seminar I feel more confident and knowledgeable to share the plan of salvation with my child. _____

4. I would recommend this seminar to other parents. _____

5. I understand how all of the material taught in the seminar relates to how to proclaim the gospel to my child. _____
6. Prior to participating in this seminar I had never thought about how to proclaim the gospel to my child. _____
7. I have unanswered questions related to proclaiming the gospel to my child after the seminar. _____
8. Prior to participating in this seminar I often thought about how to proclaim the gospel to my child. _____
9. After participating in the seminar I feel able to determine the readiness of my child to respond to Christ. _____
10. Overall this seminar was not helpful in equipping me to proclaim the gospel to my child. _____

APPENDIX 3

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure the effectiveness of the devotional guide resource, which you have used over the last eight weeks with your child/ren. This research is being conducted by Aaron Kennedy for purposes of project research. In this research, you will provide feedback regarding the effectiveness of the devotional guide resource. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Please provide the last four digits of your Social Security Number: _____

Please answer the following questions according to the rating scale below by writing the number that best corresponds to your feelings:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. Overall this resource was helpful in equipping me to proclaim the gospel to my child.

2. The content and flow of the resource were confusing in helping me to explain the plan of salvation to my child. _____

3. After completing the resource I feel more confident and knowledgeable to share the plan of salvation with other children, or other lost friends/family members. _____

4. I would recommend this resource to other parents. _____

5. The resource was easy to use. _____
6. My child enjoyed the story and games of each devotion. _____
7. Using this resource created further conversation with my child regarding the gospel.

8. Prior to completing this resource I often spoke about things related to the gospel with my child. _____
9. After completing this resource I feel able to determine the readiness of my child to respond to Christ. _____
10. Overall this seminar was not helpful in equipping me to proclaim the gospel to my child. _____

APPENDIX 4

TRAINING SEMINAR OUTLINE

- I. Session 1 – Equipped to Understand (Part 1)
 - A. God
 - B. Man
 - C. Christ
 - D. Response

- II. Session 2 – Equipped to Understand (Part 2)
 - A. Understanding the role of parents
 - B. Understanding the development of the child

- III. Session 3 – Equipped to Prepare
 - A. Work to provide a gospel-centered home
 - B. Work to establish authority
 - C. Work to develop meaningful relationships
 - D. Work to encourage godly role models
 - E. Work to exhibit a positive attitude about life and God
 - F. Work to maintain open communication
 - G. Work to pray

- IV. Session 4 – Equipped to Proclaim Indirectly
 - A. Parents proclaim the gospel to their children through the marriage relationship. (Ephesians 5:21-6:4)

- V. Session 5 – Equipped to Proclaim Directly
 - A. How to have a gospel conversation with your child

- VI. Session 6 – Equipped to Proclaim and Discerning/Baptism
 - A. Is my child old enough to become a Christian?
 - B. How do I know if my child truly understands the gospel?
 - C. How does my child become a Christian?
 - D. How do I know if my child is genuinely converted?
 - E. How long should we wait before making the profession public/baptism?
 - F. Should I be concerned if my child has yet to express interest in the gospel?

***Suggested Resources:**

-*What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert

-*Teach Them Diligently: How to Use Scriptures in Child Training* by Lou Priolo

-*Gospel-Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting* by William Farley

-*The Faith of a Child: A Step-by-Step Guide to Salvation for your Child* by Art Murphy

-*Helping Children to Understand the Gospel* by Sally Michael, Jill Nelson, and Bud Burk

-*Leading Your Child to Christ: Biblical Direction for Sharing the Gospel* by Marty Machowski

-*Forbid Them Not: Rethinking the Baptism and Church Membership of Children and Young People* by Ted Christman

APPENDIX 5

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

The Good News Family Devotional Guide: A Resource for Parents to Help Children Understand the Gospel


Roger S. Oldham and Aaron P. Kennedy

January 2015

When children begin to inquire about being saved, they express their interest at different stages of understanding, development, and spiritual preparation. Some are ready to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord after a single conversation. Others are like fruit hanging heavy on a tree. Though they may appear ready on the outside, they are not yet fully ripe for the harvest. This manual is a tool to help you guide your child to respond to Jesus Christ with an understanding heart and mind. Regardless of where your child falls on the “readiness scale” to receive Christ, this manual will provide a greater understanding of the fundamental concepts of spiritual new-birth.

If your child is fully prepared to pray to receive Christ, of course, I would encourage you to pray with your child at any time as you study through this manual. Don't wait until the end. Joshua and Emily's stories are not your child's story. Their questions, however, are some of your child's questions. The Bible lessons, Scripture readings, interactive puzzles and games, prayers, and questions will help your child have a better understanding of what it means to trust in Jesus Christ.

It is our hope and prayer that you will have the blessed privilege of witnessing your child's confession of faith in Jesus Christ. Many fathers and all birth mothers have the privilege of being in the delivery room when their child is born physically. There can be no greater parental joy than to be present at the time of your child's spiritual birth.



Week One: *Good News: God Made Me Special*

Week One, Day One—God Made Me Special

STORY

Joshua laid his head over on his mother’s lap. Sometimes he got so sleepy during church. This Mother’s Day service was no different. At his age of 9, he would never admit it to anyone, but he still liked it when his mom stroked his hair and patted his head when he dozed off in her lap. It made him feel very special. In fact, he dimly heard Pastor James saying “Yes, your child is a special gift from God” as he drifted off into sleep. It made him smile and feel very special indeed.

BIBLE READING

Psalm 127:1-5

Key verse: Psalm 127:3, “**Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD.**”

BIBLE LESSON

God made everyone who has ever been born. Each one is special—special to God, special to her or his parents, special to others. Can you think of some people to whom you are special? Write their names below.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

God made you exactly like you are. He made *you* special. God loves you. He loves you very much. He wants you to know Him and love Him forever. To help you love Him more, God put you in a special family. He knows who your parents are. He gave you the parents you need to help you see how much you need God. Some parents, like Joshua’s mom, already love God and know Him. Other parents do not know God yet. You are a heritage from the Lord to your parents. If your parents already know Jesus Christ, you should be thankful. If your parents do not know Jesus Christ, perhaps God’s plan for your life is to point your parents to God.

PRAYER

“Thank you, dear God, for giving me life. Thank you for making me special. Thank you for giving me my parents. Help me to love them more each day. Help me to love you with all my heart. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Find these key words from today's lesson:

M	V	P	G	H	Q	S	D	X	I	GOD
J	U	E	P	S	T	D	D	I	S	MADE
Q	E	U	L	N	R	U	A	H	R	ME
M	O	W	E	J	J	B	M	E	N	SPECIAL
X	H	R	W	T	Q	D	U	R	Z	CHILDREN
D	A	X	Q	I	T	Q	R	I	Y	HERITAGE
P	S	P	E	C	I	A	L	T	C	PARENTS
P	V	N	M	A	D	E	I	A	I	
C	H	I	L	D	R	E	N	G	C	
Z	G	O	D	U	M	I	L	E	H	

Week One, Day Two, God Made Me for a Purpose

STORY

After church that day, Joshua's older sister Emily, who was almost 11, asked her dad, "What did the preacher mean when he said our bodies are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'?" Her dad paused a moment before replying.

"Well, Em," he said, "I guess it means that God made us just right to be able to do all the things we do. Suppose your head was on top of your hand and your eye was at the end of your arm." Emily and Joshua both laughed as they finished their lunch. Dad continued, "Not only would we look pretty scary, but we would have a hard time picking things up. Besides, having an eye at the end of our arm would make us 'look' pretty funny, too!" They all laughed together.

BIBLE READING

Psalm 139:13-17

Key verse: Psalm 139:14, **"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."**

BIBLE LESSON

God knows how many hairs are on your head. He knows how tall you are now and how tall you will be when you grow up. He knows what kind of foods you like and why. He knows what kinds of things you enjoy doing for fun.

How many hairs do you think you have on your head? _____

How tall do you want to be when you grow up? _____

Why do you want to be this tall? _____

Before we were even born, God had already designed what we would be like and look like. Some people do not like how they look. Sometimes we forget that God makes no mistakes!

God has made you very special so that you can love Him and enjoy Him forever. Whether your hair is straight or curly is important to God and to you. But God is more interested in whether your attitude is pleasant. Whether you have blue eyes or brown eyes is important to God and to you. But God is more interested in whether you treat other people with kindness and courtesy. You are "fearfully and wonderfully made" for a special purpose. God wants to enter into your life so you can be a blessing to many others.

PRAYER

“Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for making me who I am. Give me the strength and desire to care about the inside as much as I care about the outside. Please let others see your love in me. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Use this code to find the missing letters:

R= □ A= ◇ E= △ O= ⊕ U= ☾

“I will P _____ I S _____ Y _____, for I am
 □ ◇ △ ⊕ ☾

F _____ F _____ LLY and
 △ ◇ □ ☾

W _____ ND _____ F _____ LLY M _____ D _____.”
 ⊕ △ □ ☾ ◇ △

-Psalm 139:14

Week One, Day Three, Made in God's Own Image

STORY

Mom chimed in as dad began to clear the dishes from the table. Dad often helped around the house, but this was Mother's Day! "You know, we have a pretty amazing body. But, what makes us extra special to God is that He made us in His image." Joshua wasn't sure he understood. "You mean God looks like us?" he asked with a funny look on his face. "No, silly," Emily said. To her mom she said, "We just studied this in Sunday school." Turning to Joshua, she explained, "In His image means that we can think and feel and choose——just like God. None of the animals can do this, so we are very special to God."

BIBLE READING

Genesis 1:26-31

Key verse: Genesis 1:27, "**So God created man in His own image.**"

BIBLE LESSON

When God made us in our image, He made us in such a way that we could know Him. He created us to be able to think deep thoughts. He fashioned us to have strong emotional feelings like love and trust. He made us so we can make decisions that change the way we act and the way we live. The person we are now and who we will be is made up of three very important qualities. These are:

Mind	Intellect	what we think about
Emotions	Feelings	what we feel on the inside
Will	Choices	how we decide to act

God is like that. He makes choices. He chose to create the world. He chose to put you in your family. He chose to give you life.

God has strong feelings. He loves everyone He has made. He is pleased that His creation is so beautiful. He feels grief when people do not obey Him.

God is able to think deep thoughts. He thinks about you every day. He thinks about the wonderful plans He has made for your life. He thinks about the day you will trust Him as your Lord and Savior. He thinks about you.

To be made in His image means that we have these abilities——to think, to feel, and to choose. Do you think about God? Do you love Him?

PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you for thinking about me every day. Thank you for loving me. As I think about You, help me to understand how I can know You. I want to know You well enough to love You with all my heart. Lead me to know and understand Your love for me. In Jesus’ Name, *Amen.*”

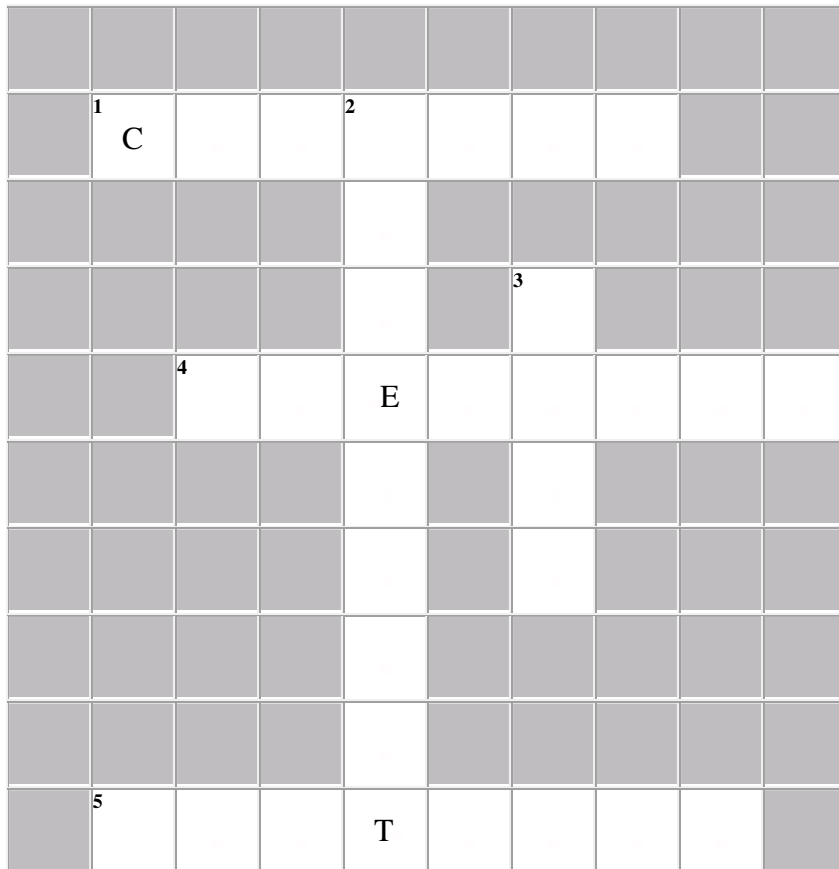
ACTIVITY

Use the clues to complete the crossword puzzle:

ACROSS

DOWN:

1. How we use our will
2. What we think about
4. Another word for emotions
3. How we decide to act
5. What we feel on the inside



Week One, Day Four

STORY

When the dishes were finished, dad returned to the table. “That’s right, Emily, but there’s more. The Bible teaches us that God is a Spirit. When God made us in His image, he created an inside part of us that no one can see, except God Himself. The Bible calls this our ‘spirit.’ Sometimes it is called our ‘soul,’ or our ‘mind’, or our ‘heart.’ When the Bible uses these words, it is pointing to that inside part of us that no one can see except God himself.”

Seeing that Joshua and Emily looked a little bit puzzled, mom added, “Just like your thoughts are real—your thoughts *are* real, aren’t they?” Both children nodded. She continued, “Well, no one can see your thoughts, but they are very real to you. In the same way, no one can see your spirit—that inside part of you that God created in His image—but it is very real to Him.”

BIBLE READING

John 4:21-26; Mark 12:28-34

Key verse: John 4:24, “**God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**”

BIBLE LESSON

The word “heart” has two meanings. It describes the muscle inside our chest that pumps our blood. It is the source of our physical life. Without our heart to pump our blood, oxygen cannot get to our brain. We would die. The Bible never uses the word “heart” this way. Rather, the Bible uses the word “heart” to describe that inside part of us where we think, feel, and choose. When we say, “I love you with all my heart,” we mean, “I love you so much that I would feel pain and sadness if something happened to you.” God loves us this much.

How is the word heart used in the sentences below?

Place a P beside sentences that describe a physical heart.

Place an S beside sentences that describe a spiritual heart.

- _____ Joe’s mother had heart surgery.
- _____ Ashley loved her mother with all her heart.
- _____ Matthew got hit in the chest with a baseball and bruised his heart.
- _____ The aorta is a large valve that supplies blood to the heart.
- _____ The way we think in our heart is the way we really are.
- _____ Emily did not have the heart to tell her mom that she had disobeyed.

One day, Jesus saw a crowd of people. He was so sad when He saw that they had no one to guide them, He was moved with compassion. This means that His heart was touched with sadness.

On another day, Jesus felt great joy when He saw His disciples believe in His teachings. He was so glad when He knew that some had trusted in Him. God made us to feel the same kind of sadness when we see sad things. He made us to feel that kind of gladness when we experience His love. Can you think of some glad things you have experienced? Can you think of some good choices you have made? Can you think of someone you love with all your heart?

PRAYER

“Dear Lord, thank you for loving me with all your heart. Thank you for making me in such a way that I can feel your love. I want to love you with all my heart. Jesus died on the Cross for my sins so that I could be forgiven. When I trust in Jesus, I am able to love you with all my heart. Please help me understand more each day about how Jesus paid for my sins. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Unscramble the words that describe how the Bible uses the word “heart.”

The _____ part of _____ where we _____, _____,
(sdisnei) (su) (khtin) (elfe)
and _____.
(oscoehc)

Week One, Day Five

STORY

This conversation had gotten a lot deeper than anyone had planned. But, while they were on the subject, dad added, “The neatest thing about this, Joshua, is this: God *is* a Spirit; we *have* a spirit. God made us this way because His greatest joy is when we ask Him to live in us to be our God. It may not make a lot of sense right now, but God made us in His image because He loves us and wants to live in us forever.” As Joshua left the table for his room that afternoon, he was unusually quiet as he thought, “Hmmm, God *is* a Spirit; I *have* a spirit; He wants to live in me. Now that’s a cool thought.”

BIBLE READING

Romans 8:9-17

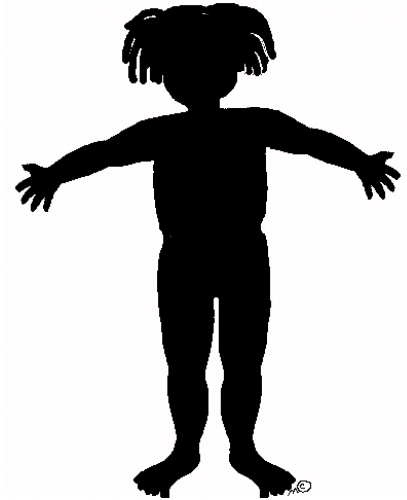
Key verse: Romans 8:9, “**Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.**”

BIBLE LESSON

Some other words that describe our *inside heart* are the words *mind* and *spirit*. A doctor can look at a human heart when she performs surgery. But no human being can see the spiritual *heart*. A doctor can take a picture of the human brain with a special kind of x-ray. But no human can take a picture of the spiritual *mind*. But, God can see our heart. He can read our mind. He knows everything about us. Since God is a Spirit, He can live inside of us. When God lives inside of us, we cannot see Him. But, we can know Him. We can know how much He loves us. We can feel His presence. Since we are made in the image of God, His Holy Spirit can give new life to our human spirits.

Blaise Pascal, a famous man who lived almost 400 years ago, said that there is a “God-shaped” place inside each of us, waiting to be filled by God alone.

No one knows where this spiritual heart is located in the human body. No one knows what the spiritual heart even looks like. But, most people know there is an inner part of us where God wants to live.



In the human figure to the right, draw an arrow to where you think the spiritual heart should be. Then draw what you think the spiritual heart may look like in the space below.

Why did you put it there? Why did you draw it the shape you drew it?

PRAYER

“Dear God, thank you for making me in such a way that I can know you in my heart. I ask your Holy Spirit to fill me with your wisdom. May I understand in my mind and heart how much you love me. I ask you to show me how to be your child forever. I pray in Jesus’ Name. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Write the letter missing from each word based on alphabetical order.

“God _____ a Spirit; I _____ a Spirit;
(HJK) (QRT) (GIJ) (ZBC) (UWX) (DFG)

He _____ to
(UVX) (YZB) (LMO) (SUV) (RTU)

_____ in me.”
(JKM) (GHJ) (TUW) (CDF)

Week Two: **Good News:** God Still Loves Us Even When We Do
Wrong Things

Week Two, Day One

STORY

Emily heard the ice cream truck bell. She so wanted some ice cream, but her mom had said, "Not today. Supper's almost ready." As she walked through her mom's and dad's room, she saw some change from her daddy's pocket on the dresser. She picked up just the right amount and ran down the street. She was just in time to catch the ice-cream truck. She bought her ice cream. Scared to go home, she sat behind the tree in her neighbor's yard and ate the ice cream as quickly as she could. It was very good, but somehow she didn't enjoy it as much as usual.

BIBLE READING

Ephesians 6:1-2; Romans 3:10-23; 2 Timothy 3:1-5

Key verse: Romans 3:10, "**As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one.'**"

BIBLE LESSON

Sin means that we do wrong things. When a child disobeys a parent, this is wrong. No child does wrong all the time. Neither does any child do right all the time. In Romans 3:10, the Bible says "there is none righteous." The word **righteous** has what five-letter word in it? ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

In this verse, the word righteous means "to do right **all** the time."

Circle the phrase that best describes you.

I do right things . . .

Some of the time Much of the time Most of the time All of the time

When we take the time to think about how we behave at home and school, we may recall times we disobey mom and dad, we get angry at our friend, or we got in a fight with a sister or brother. Can you write down some things you can recall when you did not do right?

When we do not do right, the Bible calls that sin. The Bible tells us that we have **all** sinned; there is **no one** who does right all the time. How would you describe the word sin?

One way of describing sin is this: “doing something that God calls wrong.” Since none of us *does right all the time*, then **we all do wrong sometimes**. So, when the Bible says “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23), we know that this is true. My own experience confirms the teaching of the Bible—I have sinned; I have done wrong things; I do not do right all the time.

PRAYER

“Dear Heavenly Father, Sometime I find myself disobeying those I love the most. Sometimes I disobey you. When I do, help me to remember that you want me to grow in obedience. Please let me honor my father and mother. Please let me honor you. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

How many do right all the time?

To find the answer, circle the extra letters in the words from Romans 3:23 and write them in order in the blanks below:

“FOR ALL HAVE SINNNED AND FALL SHOORT
OF THEN GLOREY OF GOD.”

Week Two, Day Two

STORY

When Emily came in the back door a few minutes later, she heard her dad saying to her mother, “I thought I left more change here. I must have miscounted.” She eased into her room. She was afraid he might ask her if she knew what had happened to his money. She fiddled with some of her things, but nothing seemed interesting. She felt a little ashamed, a little scared, and a little dirty. She didn’t know why she disobeyed her mom and stole from her dad. It seemed like a fun thing to do at the time, but now she wasn’t so sure.

BIBLE READING

Genesis 3:8-11; Romans 5:12

Key verse: Romans 5:12, **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”**

BIBLE LESSON

The biblical story of Adam and Eve explains how sin came into the world. Before Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the world was a perfect and wonderful place to live. No one did wrong things. Even the animals got along together—lions and lambs; dogs and cats; cats and mice; deer and coyotes. Can you name some other animals that do not get along now, but did in the Garden of Eden?

Then one day Adam and Eve listened to the voice of a serpent. This was really the devil disguised as a snake. He told Eve and Adam to doubt God and to disobey God. And they did! When they ate the fruit from a special tree—the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—their lives suddenly changed! They felt guilty and ashamed. They had never felt this way before. When we disobey God, we too are guilty of sin and we feel shame.

God had told Adam that if he and Eve disobeyed Him by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die in the very day they ate. I remember wondering when I first heard this story, “Why didn’t Adam and Eve drop over dead? How could they live for 900 more years! WHY? HOW?” Because God was not talking about their **bodies** dying. He was talking about their **spirits** dying. The spirit is on the inside, where God wants to live. If we could have seen their spirit before

they disobeyed God, it would look beautiful and alive. If we could see it just moments later, it would be a dried, shriveled, wrinkled, dark mess.

In the space below, draw a dried-out, shriveled raisin. This is what our spirits look like in God's eyes.

Adam and Eve died in their spirits, that inside part where God wants to dwell. That's why they felt ashamed and guilty. That's why they were afraid and hid from God. Ever since then, every person who is born is born with a spirit that is already dead. It needs a special touch from God to make it alive!

PRAYER

"Dear Heavenly Father, when I feel that you are far away, help me remember that you did not move away from me. When we are separated, it is because I made wrong choices. Help me to live in such a way that I feel your closeness, always and in all ways. *Amen.*"

ACTIVITY

Correctly complete the following statements from today's lesson by writing the opposite of the word in parentheses:

1.) The devil, disguised as a snake, told Adam and Eve to _____ God.
(obey)

2.) When Adam and Eve sinned their spirits _____ on the _____.
(bloomed)
(outside)

3.) Everyone born since Adam has been born with a spirit that is _____.
(alive)

4.) When we _____ God, we are _____ of sin and we feel _____.
(obey) (innocent)
(proud)

Week Two, Day Three

STORY

Joshua was full of excitement over his day at school. At supper, he told a story about his reading class. Joshua struggled a little with understanding the things he had to read for school, but that day, he had answered a question that no one else knew. He was really excited. Emily only half-way listened. She stirred her fork around in her food, but didn't have much of an appetite. That ice-cream had seemed like the thing she wanted, but now she wasn't hungry at all. When dinner was over, she went back to her room. She didn't want to hang out in the den with mom and dad. She was afraid dad might say something else about the missing change. After a while, mom came to her room and sat on the bed. "What's wrong, Emily?" Emily said, "Nothing." But mom gave her that look and said, "Now Emily, that's not the whole truth, is it?" Emily laid her head over in mom's lap and began to cry.

BIBLE READING

Matthew 26:69-75

Key verse: Matthew 26:75, "**And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.'** So he went out and wept bitterly."

BIBLE LESSON

Peter was one of Jesus' very best friends. He was a disciple, or a follower, of Jesus. For three years, he and Jesus had traveled together, eaten together, and spent many days and nights talking with each other. One day, shortly before Jesus was crucified, Jesus told Peter and his other disciples that he would soon be killed in the city of Jerusalem. Peter rebuked Jesus. He said, "This shall not happen to You!" A few weeks later, Jesus and his disciples ate a final meal together. Jesus again told them he was about to be killed. Peter rebuked Jesus again and said, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!" That very night, Peter did deny that he knew Jesus. When he saw that Jesus was about to be condemned to die, He was afraid. He denied Jesus not once, not twice, but three times. When Peter realized what he had done, he went out to be alone and cried. He was so sorry and ashamed.

When we disobey our parents, we don't want to look at their eyes. We are afraid they will ask us about our disobedience. When we disobey God, we don't want to think about Him. We are ashamed of our sin. Can you think of some times when you disobeyed your parents? Can you remember some times when you wanted to

be alone? Can you remember any times that you felt really bad because of your sin? The Bible teaches that all those who love God and believe in Jesus will feel sad when they sin.

PRAYER

“Dear God, thank you for being a God of comfort when I have messed up. You come to me in the middle of my sadness and give me new hope. You hear me when I cry out to you and bring me peace. May I always feel the pain of sadness when I have sinned against you. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

“Emotions Scramble”

Unscramble the words that describe how we feel when we sin/disobey:

fadria—_____

yrosr—_____

smdahea—_____

asd—_____

rsacde—_____

dab—_____

want to be aonel—_____

want to ihed—_____

Word Bank

Bad
Sorry
Afraid
Hide
Scared
Sad
Alone
Ashamed

Week Two, Day Four

STORY

Emily didn't know why she disobeyed mom. She didn't really want to; but at the same time, she *did* want to. It was all so confusing. It seemed that whenever she hit her brother or yelled at her best friend at school, part of her wanted to do the right thing, but another part of her wanted her own way. She just couldn't understand why she did some of the things she did sometimes. Emily's mom let her lay there a few minutes, then asked again, "What's wrong, Emily?" This time, Emily told her the truth. She couldn't look at her mom, so she just laid there and slowly told the story of her disobedience and theft. Mom listened patiently, but Emily knew her eyes looked at her with sadness.

BIBLE READING

Romans 7:15-25

Key verse: Romans 7:19, "**For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.**"

BIBLE LESSON

When God had the Apostle Paul write the book of Romans in the New Testament, he prompted Paul to tell the story of his own struggles with sin. Paul put it this way: "Sometimes I do what I don't really want to do. Sometimes I don't do what I know I should do." When he asked himself why he acted this way, he admitted that his root problem was sin. Sin is a word that is used in the Bible many times (more than 1,000 times!). Other words are used which mean something similar. Words like evil, unrighteousness, iniquity, lawlessness, disobedience. Each of these words points out something about each one of us: there is something in our hearts that causes us to do wrong things! Even though we must choose to sin, sometimes it just seems like we have no choice. We just do things, and wonder why later.

PRAYER

"Dear God, this week, I have been reminded that I have done wrong things. Thank you for loving me even when I have sinned. I don't understand how you can be so forgiving, but I am glad you are. Thank you for being such a great and awesome God. In Jesus' Name, *Amen.*"

ACTIVITY

Find some words that refer to sin. Underline the words in the list that are everyday things we do that are wrong. Circle the words in the list that sound like words the Bible uses to describe sin.

I	J	D	I	S	O	B	E	Y	W	ARGUE	LIE
R	N	S	T	E	A	L	T	I	H	BITE	POUT
O	S	I	N	I	P	T	C	Q	I	CHEAT	SIN
O	F	Z	Q	L	B	K	H	E	N	CURSE	SLAMDOOR
D	A	R	G	U	E	B	E	S	E	DISOBEY	STEAL
M	F	X	O	D	I	V	A	R	P	DOUBT	TALKBACK
A	U	D	N	T	I	T	T	U	O	EVIL	TRANSGRESS
L	S	E	E	L	L	E	Y	C	U	FUSS	WHINE
S	S	E	R	G	S	N	A	R	T	HIT	WICKEDNESS
S	N	T	A	L	K	B	A	C	K	INIQUITY	YELL

Can you think of some times when you did something that you wished you had not done? Can you remember how it made you feel?

Week Two, Day Five

STORY

When Emily paused from telling her mom her story, Mom said, “Well, honey, I think you need to tell this to dad, too.” Emily dreaded this so much. She wished she hadn’t disobeyed. She wished she hadn’t taken her dad’s money. But, she went to the living room with her mom. As she told her dad what had happened, he listened patiently. When she finished, he said, “Emily, I’m glad you told me. I already knew you had eaten the ice cream. I saw you hiding behind the tree when I took the trash out. Your mom told me she had told you not to get any ice cream today. I will need to punish you for your behavior. But, because you told me on our own, I’ll not be as hard on you.” Dad gave her a few extra chores to make up for the money she had stolen and did not let her go to her friend’s house that evening to work on their homework together. Though it hurt to have to stay at home, Emily was glad she could enjoy doing her homework in the den with her family that evening without feeling guilty.

BIBLE READING

Psalm 32:1-5

Key verse: Psalm 32:5b, “**I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.**”

BIBLE LESSON

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they wanted to hide from Him. When Peter denied Jesus, he ran to a lonely place. When we sin, we feel sad. But, God does not want us to stay separated from Him. He wants us to admit to Him that we have sinned. A simple way many people remember God’s way of salvation is A, B, C.

Admit	to God you are a sinner.
Believe	that Jesus is God’s One and Only Son.
Confess	your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

The first step in these ABCs is the A—— **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. The Bible tells many stories of men and women who admitted they were sinners. Jesus told the story of two men who admitted they were sinners. One was in a story called the parable of the Prodigal Son. Another was a story of a tax collector who stood in the Temple and told God he was a sinner. Our scripture reading for today is a story of King David in the Old Testament. David was a very important man. He was a king. He thought he could sin without anyone knowing about it. But, *God* knew David had sinned. After David sinned, he did not want to admit it. Soon, he began

to feel like an old man in his heart—weak, sad, alone. One day, he made a decision in his heart. He said, “I will confess my transgressions* to the Lord.” When he made this decision, God forgave him of his sins.

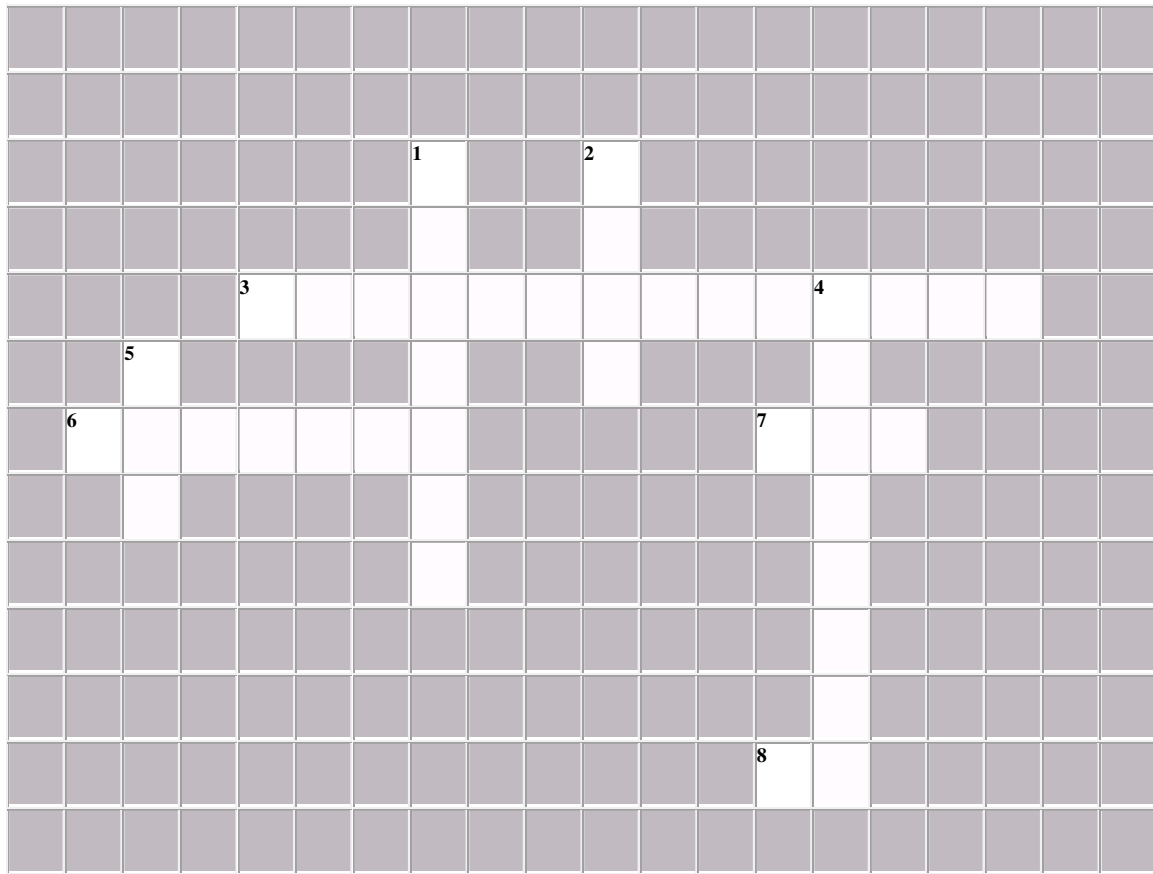
Look at the words list from yesterday’s puzzle. Is there something on that list you have done? Can you think of a time you admitted something you had done wrong? Did you ask your teacher to forgive you? Your friend? Your brother or sister? Your mom or dad? Isn’t it special when we make things right with others by admitting when we are wrong?

PRAYER

“Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of forgiveness. Sometimes it is hard to admit when I do wrong things, but I have seen how much happier I am when I confess my sins. Help me to be so open to your Spirit that I always respond to your gentle tugging in my heart. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Complete the crossword puzzle using the underlined words from Psalm 32:5b:
 “I said: ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.”



Week Three: *Good News: God Sent Jesus to Forgive Me*

Week Three, Day One

STORY

Joshua knew that God lives in heaven. He also knew that Jesus lived on earth. What he couldn't figure out was how God and Jesus could be the same person. He had heard his preacher say it, his parents say it, and his Sunday school teacher say it. But, he still couldn't understand it. So, the next Sunday when church was over, he went to the preacher and said, "Pastor James, how can God and Jesus be the same person?" Pastor James paused a moment, and then said, "That's a really good question, Joshua. That's a question that has been hard for some of the world's smartest thinkers to answer. It sounds to me like you have a pretty sharp mind." Joshua nodded his agreement, although he wasn't sure if he qualified as one of the world's smartest thinkers!

BIBLE READING

John 1:1-4, 14-18; 10:27-30; 14:1-9

Key verse: John 14:9, "**He who has seen Me has seen the Father.**"

BIBLE LESSON

Imagine that you were God and you wanted to talk with human beings. Since God can do anything, how would you introduce yourself to them? If you spoke from above, your voice might be so strong it would sound like thunder. If you picked them up and lifted them to heaven, you might scare them very much. On occasion, God did both. But, when God really wanted to get people's attention, He decided to do something very wonderful. God became a human being. He came to earth in a human body. By being a real human person, he was able to relate to people in such a way that they were not afraid of Him. He was able to attend wedding ceremonies and funerals, letting people know how much he cared about them. He was able to go to church on the Lord's Day. He was able to sit down at meal times and talk with people, developing a real friendship with them.

Since God is able to do anything, he decided to come to earth as the person of Jesus Christ. But since God is so large and great, He was still able to stay in heaven even while He was on the earth. Jesus tried to get people to understand this when he said some startling things. On one occasion, He said, "I and the Father are one." On another, he said to his good friend Thomas, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. So, when John introduced Jesus in his Gospel, he

said it this way: “No one has seen God at any time; the one and only Son (Jesus), He has revealed God to us.”

Would God be God if we could figure Him out? Would God be greater than the smartest woman if she could figure Him out? Would God be greater than the strongest man if the strongest man could do everything God can do? No! God is more—more than we can understand. If He were not *more*, he wouldn't really be God, would He? But, He is more, and He has revealed Himself to us through Jesus.

PRAYER

“Dear God, You are awesome and holy. Thank you for being so wise that even the smartest people in the world seem ignorant next to you. I like having a God who is bigger than I am. It is good to know that you're wise enough and powerful enough to fulfill all your promises. Teach me to trust in you, through Jesus Christ, your Son. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

From today's Bible reading, what did Jesus say when Philip asked to see God? To find out use the code to fill in the blanks:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

— — — — —
 18 13 25 18 19 18 15 2 2 13 13 9 21 13 18 15 2

— — — — — — —
 2 13 13 9 14 18 13 10 15 14 18 13 5

Jesus was saying He and God were one; He was God in the form of a human being.

Week Three, Day Two

STORY

Pastor James continued, “God is so big that we cannot understand how great he really is. He is only One God, but we see Him in different ways. Take your dad, for example. To you, he is your dad. But, to your mom, he is not her dad at all—he is her husband.” Joshua nodded in agreement, not knowing where Pastor James was going with all of this. Pastor James continued, “When your dad goes to work, he is not your dad’s boss’s dad is he?” Joshua shook his head no, understanding the question, but not really sure what the question meant. Encouraged, Pastor James went on, “So you see, your dad is only one person, but to you and Emily, he is your dad. To your mother, he is a husband. To me, he is a great friend. Your dad has many identities, but he is still only one person.” Again, Joshua nodded. “Ummm, thanks, Pastor James,” he said as he ran off to catch up with a couple of his friends in the parking lot.

BIBLE READING

1 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 1:3-14

Key verse: 1 Timothy 3:16,

**“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.”**

BIBLE LESSON

How many ways do people know you? Circle some of the things people might know you as:

Piano player ball player swimmer son daughter sister brother

nephew/niece student friend ballerina gymnast cousin

Write down some other identities people might know about you (examples might be artist, violinist), _____

Though you are known in different ways by different people, are you still only one person? Or are you *many* people? Most of us would think we are only one person.

In a similar way, God has revealed Himself in three ways, but he is still only one God. So, when you pray to Jesus, you are really praying to God. When you pray to God, you are also praying to Jesus. When you love God, you also love Jesus.

Jesus was God, “manifested (shown or revealed) in the flesh.” Perhaps the greatest mystery of all time is how God did this—but He is God. God can do anything He chooses to do. When we look at Jesus, we see God. When we pray to God, we pray to Jesus. From heaven’s viewpoint, God is Creator and Lord of all. From earth’s viewpoint, God is Savior and Lord of my life.

PRAYER

“Dear God, I don’t fully understand why you had to become a human being to save me from my sins, but, I am glad you did. Since you are God, you are able to do what seems to be impossible to others. Thank you for being my great God. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Complete these important statements from today’s lesson by using the clues to fill in the missing words:

- 1.) God is so (a) _____ that we cannot understand how
(b) _____ He really is.

Clue (a): rhymes with jig

Clue (b): rhymes with wait

- 2.) God has revealed Himself in (a) _____
ways, but He is still only (b) _____ God.

Clue (a): 10-7= ?

Clue (b): 101-100= ?

- 3.) When we (a) _____ at Jesus, we (b) _____
_____ God.

Clue (a): longer than a glimpse, but shorter than a stare

Clue (b): a word that sounds like the letter C

Week Three, Day Three

STORY

Joshua puzzled over what Pastor James had said. It didn't make a whole lot of sense to him. That week at school, his teacher had the class do an experiment. She took of pitcher of water and had each student pour some water into a container to freeze. The next day, the water had turned to ice. That day, Joshua's teacher had each student hold the container of ice over a small burner with a steady flame, what she called a Bunsen burner. They watched as the ice melted and turned back into water. After all the ice was gone, the water began to boil. Some vapor began to rise. The teacher held a small glass beaker upside down over the vapor. When the vapor hit the beaker, it turned back into small beads of water. Then the teacher said something that really got Joshua to thinking.

BIBLE READING

Job 38:1-23

Key verse: Job 38:22, **“Have you entered the treasury of snow?”**

BIBLE LESSON

Nature has many things that are three-in-one. In his science class, Joshua discovered ice, water, and steam. Fire has light, heat, and flame. In the space below, draw a circle. Do you see that it has an inside, an outside, and a continuous line? Then draw a triangle. Do you see that it has three sides (called “faces”), but is only one shape? Many Bible scholars have used a triangle with three equal sides to describe the nature of God—one God with three faces.

One day, a man named Job (pronounced Jōb) was asking God to explain who God is. God did not answer Job directly. Instead, God asked Job a whole lot of questions. One of the questions he asked Job reminds us of Joshua's experiment. God said, “Have you entered the treasures of the snow?” A snowflake is a very delicate form of frozen water.

All of God's creation is good. Tree leaves show His creativity. How many different kinds of tree leaves are in your yard or in your neighborhood?

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

PRAYER

“Dear God, You have created an awesome world. I admire the beauty of a sunset, the song of a bird, and the shade of a tree. You have made this world to bless me. You have also made the world to witness of your love and power. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Read these interesting facts about snowflakes as reminders of today’s lesson and of God’s awesomeness and creativity:

- Snowflakes form when tiny water droplets in the atmosphere freeze into ice crystals.
- All snowflakes have six sides.
- Billions of snowflakes fall in every snowstorm.
- It is believed that no two snowflakes are exactly alike—though there is no scientific reason that prevents it.
- Snowflakes are not white. They are actually clear and colorless. They only appear white from light reflecting off the ice crystals.
- The world's largest snowflake was reported to be 15 inches across and 8 inches thick. The Guinness Book of World Records states that this giant snowflake was found at Fort Keogh, Montana, on January 28, 1887.

Week Three, Day Four

STORY

What the teacher said sounded a lot like what Pastor James had said on Sunday. She said, “A single molecule of water is made of three atoms—two hydrogen and one oxygen. Depending on the temperature, we see it in different ways. When the water is real cold, it appears as ice. When it is room temperature, it appears as water. When it gets boiling hot, it turns into steam. Though it looks different to us, it never changes its form as a molecule of water.” Joshua started thinking, “Maybe that is what God has done. When he lives in heaven, we call Him God. When he walked on earth, we call Him Jesus. And, when he comes to live inside us, we call Him Holy Spirit.” He knew he didn’t fully understand everything there is about God, but suddenly he understood a little bit more than he had.

BIBLE READING

1 Peter 1:1-5

Key verse: 1 Peter 1:2, “**who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.**”

BIBLE LESSON

The word “triune” means “three are one.” There are many verses in the Bible that teach us the “triune” nature of God. List the names for God in the following verses. Notice, that, though the order may change, the names are all the same.

Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

1 Peter 1:2, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

2 Corinthians 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen.”

Matthew 28:19

1 Peter 1:2

2 Corinthians 13:14

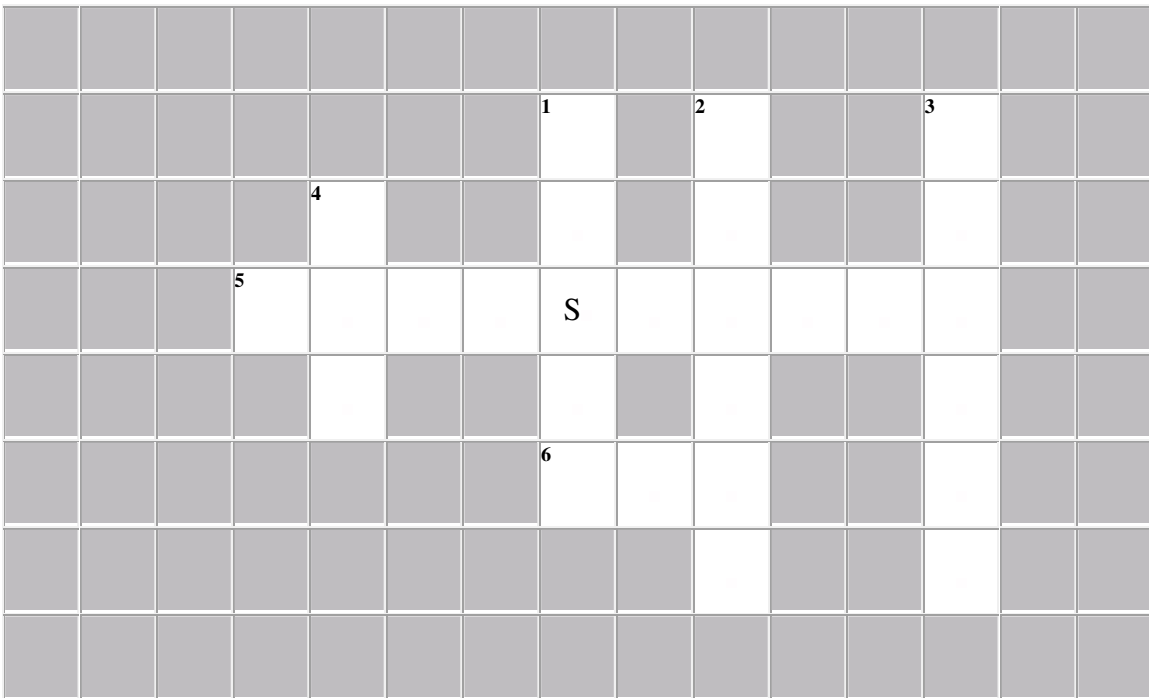
PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you for revealing yourself to me. As a loving, heavenly Father, you know everything about me—good and bad—and yet choose to love me anyway. As a precious Savior, you died on the cross to save me from my sins. As the Holy Spirit, you live in me to make me a new person. Thank you for loving me so much. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Complete the crossword puzzle with key words from today’s lesson:

- Triune
- God
- Father
- Son
- Jesus
- Holy Spirit



Week Three, Day Five

STORY

The next Sunday, Joshua ran over to Pastor James before church started and told him about his experiment—and his discovery. Pastor James said, “That’s good, Joshua. That’s a real good start. Of course, God is much bigger than a molecule of water. He is always God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. But, I like the way you are thinking. Maybe we can talk about this some more.” Joshua walked away pleased. That night after Joshua was in bed, he thought about the week. It suddenly dawned on him—everything God could do, Jesus could do. And everything Jesus was, God was. Even though Jesus was born, since He was God, He had always lived. That was awesome. As he continued to think, he suddenly realized something so wonderful he said it out loud in his dark room. “Since Jesus was God, that means Jesus was able not to sin. And, it means, He could take my sins away from me before I was even born. Now that’s *really* cool!”

BIBLE READING

1 Peter 1:13-21

Key verse: 1 Peter 1:20-21, “**He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.**”

BIBLE LESSON

Jesus was both God ... and man. As God, He was perfect and powerful. As man, he could feel the same things we feel. Using the letters G and M, identify each of the following Bible teachings about Jesus.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus never sinned | <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus calmed the storm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus was hungry | <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus walked on water | <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus grew in stature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus bled | <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus obeyed his parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus was thirsty | <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus healed the sick |

PRAYER

“Dear Jesus, Thank you for being God in human form. Thank you for being sinless. Thank you for being God so that You were big enough to carry the weight of my sins. Thank you for loving me enough to come to this world. Thank you for dying for me. I love you. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Find the words that describe Jesus as both God and man:

B E R T Y B M R R F K T	PERFECT
D E D R R H Q J R U Y S	HUNGRY
T J H U N G R Y N J X S	SLEEPY
D P W T D Z T L D C P N	PURE
I L E F T S L E E P Y E	RIGHTEOUS
U O I W R J F C P U R E	THIRSTY
H Y I I Y V J D O N J Z	HEALER
E D H L P E R F E C T Y	SNEEZY
A T A L W Q H A B Z I X	
L X R I G H T E O U S Z	
E G Z M R O O D Q G A B	
R O M J B X E D V P Z X	

Week Four: ***Good News: Jesus Loves Me SO Much He Died and Rose for Me***

Week Four, Day One

STORY

Emily's Sunday school teacher had asked the girls in her class to read their Bible every day. She had given them some suggested Bible readings from the first four books of the New Testament, called the Gospels. Emily had been reading in Matthew and had read some pretty interesting things. As she finished reading Matthew this day, several thoughts kept rolling over in her mind:

"Gave his life a ransom for many . . ." (*Matthew 20*);

"Have faith and do not doubt . . ." (*Matthew 21*);

"The righteous shall go into everlasting life . . ." (*Matthew 25*);

"This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins . . ." (*Matthew 26*);

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me . . ." (*Matthew 27*);

"He is not here; for He is risen . . ." (*Matthew 28*);

"Make disciples of all the nations . . ." (*Matthew 28*);

"Baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (*Matthew 28*).

That night, she thought over these verses, wondering what they all meant.

BIBLE READING

Matthew 20:25-28

Key verse: Matthew 20:28, "**the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

BIBLE LESSON

Jesus went about doing good and teaching. The first four books of the New Testament tell many stories about Jesus. They are called, "Gospels." The word Gospel means, "Good News." They tell the Good News about God's love for us. They describe how Jesus loved people by serving them, by meeting their many needs. Some of the ways Jesus served people include:

- Healing a blind man
- Washing the feet of the disciples
- Feeding 5,000 people when they were hungry

The most important way He served was by dying on the cross for our sins—giving His life to pay for our sins.

List 3 ways you have served someone. List the person (or group of people) and what you did to make their lives easier.

PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you for giving us the Bible. It is God’s Holy Word. It tells me about Jesus. It teaches me your ways. Let me learn to cherish it all the days of my life. In Jesus Name, *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Complete today’s key verse by matching the right letter with the right number:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
		1					19												10	11					3

T H _ _ _ _ _ T

10 19 23 9 18 6 18 26 4 20 6 17 16 17 6 18 10

C _ _ _ _ T _ _ _ _ _ U T T _

1 18 4 23 10 18 21 23 9 23 7 25 23 17 21 11 10 10 18

_ _ _ _ _ T _ _ _ _ _ H _ _ _ _ _

9 23 7 25 23 20 6 17 10 18 12 16 25 23 19 16 9 14 16 26 23

_ _ _ _ _ Y .

20 9 20 7 20 6 9 18 4 26 18 7 4 20 6 3

Week Four, Day Two

STORY

Over breakfast the next morning, Emily asked her mother to explain the verses she had been thinking about. Mom took a break from preparing breakfast to explain. “You see, Emily, since Jesus was God’s Son, He was able to take the sins of the whole world—those people who had already lived when Jesus was on earth and those who would be born after Jesus went back into heaven. We were held captive by sin. Jesus set us free by being a ransom for us.”

“What is a ransom?” Mom tried to explain. “Well,” she started, “Suppose someone kidnapped me from work one day. Suppose he called you and said he would not release me unless you and dad brought him some money. Would you be willing to get some money to get me back?” Emily laughed, “Well...I’d think about it.” Mom smiled, “We hope that doesn’t ever happen. But, sin has kidnapped all of us. Jesus paid the ransom for us.”

Emily seemed satisfied for a minute. Needing to catch her ride for school, Emily and mom had no more time to talk that morning.

BIBLE READING

Matthew 27:45-51

Key verse: Matthew 27: “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”

BIBLE LESSON

The Bible uses a number of “R” words to describe what Jesus did for us. These words, which include ransom, redeem, and redemption, are similar in meaning. They mean that a price has been paid to rescue us from captivity. In our spirit—the inside part of us that only God can see—we have been held captive by our sins. Jesus died to ransom us, or redeem us, from our sins. Read the following verses and write the correct “R” word beside each.

Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Galatians 3:13, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).”

Titus 2:13-14, "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

1 Timothy 2:5-6, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

1 Peter 1:18, "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ . . ."

Mark 10:45 _____
Galatians 3:13 _____
Titus 2:13-14 _____
1 Timothy 2:5-6 _____
1 Peter 1:18 _____

When Jesus died on the Cross as our ransom, the weight of our sins made Him feel as if God the Father had forsaken Him. It was as if God turned His back on Jesus. Can you imagine how you would feel if all of your friends at school turned their backs to you because of something you did to hurt their feelings? That is what our sins made Jesus feel like.

PRAYER

"Dear God, Thank you for loving me enough to rescue me from sin. Sin is so awful it keeps me away from you. Sin makes me feel guilty when I think about how good You are. Thank you that Jesus carried my sins for me when He died on the cross. Thank you that He died for me so that I can live forever in Him. In Jesus' Name, *Amen.*"

ACTIVITY

From what did Jesus ransom/redeem/rescue us? To get the answer complete the "R" word from today's Bible lesson and write each letter in parentheses in the blanks below:

___ A ___ (___) ___ M

___ E ___ ___ M ___ T (___) ___ (___)

___ ___ D ___ ___ M

___ ___ (___) C ___ E

Our _____

Week Four, Day Three

STORY

During the school day, Emily was unusually quiet. Her friends asked her if anything was wrong, but she just shook her head and smiled. “No, I’m okay.” But, inwardly, in her heart, she couldn’t get away from the sadness she felt over her sins.

When she got home from school, she got her Bible out and read the final few chapters of Matthew again. As she read, she was praying, “Dear God, help me to understand how you could love me so much that you turned your back on Jesus.”

Later that night, Emily talked with her mom again. “But why did God forsake Jesus on the Cross?” Mom explained, “Since God is holy, He cannot and will not live where sin is. When Jesus became sin for us, God had to turn away from His own Son.”

When Emily heard this, her heart grew heavy with sadness. She thought to herself, “How awful—God turned His back on His own Son because of me and my sins.”

Mom said, “Emily, I can’t really explain it; I just know what God said. There is a verse that says, ‘God made Him to be sin for us so we can be the righteousness of God through Christ Jesus.’ This means that God put our sins on Jesus so He could put Jesus’ righteousness in us. This is the only way we can become righteous enough or clean enough to go to heaven.”

BIBLE READING

2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Philippians 3:8-11

Key verse: 2 Corinthians 5:21, “**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**”

BIBLE LESSON

The Bible teaches that our sins cost Jesus a lot. First Corinthians 6—bought with a price. First Peter 1—redeemed by the blood. When we trust in Jesus Christ, it may seem like an easy thing to accept God’s forgiveness—and it is. But, it is not a cheap thing. God sacrificed His Son so that we might be saved. We can never repay Him for His love and sacrifice. But, when we live for Him, it’s like throwing piles and piles of thank you notes on the door steps of heaven.

List 5 ways we can show God how thankful we are that Jesus paid for our sins.

PRAYER

“Lord, help me to understand what the phrase ‘bought with a price’ really means. Thank you for being willing to pay such a heavy debt for me and my sins. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Unscramble 2 Corinthians 5:21 by rewriting the underlined words in the correct order:

“We made sin who had no God to be us for Him, so that in God sin might become the righteousness of Him.”

“ _____ made _____ who had no _____ to be _____ for _____, so that in _____ _____ might become the righteousness of _____.”

Week Four, Day Four

STORY

Mom continued her conversation with Emily. “When Jesus died on the Cross, he gave a cry of victory just before He died.”

Startled, Emily exclaimed, “How could he give a cry of victory if he was dying for our sins?”

Mom smiled and explained, “In the most wonderful and terrible moment in history, Jesus paid the full penalty for our sins. Though He had suffered terribly, He knew in His heart that God was fully satisfied that the sins of the whole world had been fully paid for.”

Emily nodded her head. “I see,” she said. “God offers me a free salvation; but it cost Jesus everything.”

“Yes,” mom replied, “But Jesus willingly paid that high price, knowing that it would provide forgiveness of our sins—for your dad, for me, . . . and, for you. Would you like to accept God’s gift of salvation tonight?” Emily thought a moment and said, “Sort of, but I am not quite sure. Let me think about it awhile.”

BIBLE READING

Matthew 27:50; John 19:30

Key verse: John 19:30, “**So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.**”

BIBLE LESSON

“It is finished.” These are wonderful words. Think about some things that you have finished—a hard test, a race, a ball game, a trip. In the list below, circle things that you were glad when they were finished.

a long trip	another year at school	a summer vacation
a ball game	Christmas break	your birthday party
a race at school	being sick at home	an ice cream cone

The most important, “It is finished,” is Jesus’ cry from the Cross. Aren’t you glad Jesus did not decide not to pay the penalty for our sins?

PRAYER

“Dear Jesus, I rejoice with you that you completed God’s plan. It is a *horrible* thing that you had to die because of my sins. But, it is a *wonderful* thing that you were willing to do it for me. Thank you so much. I love you. Amen.

ACTIVITY

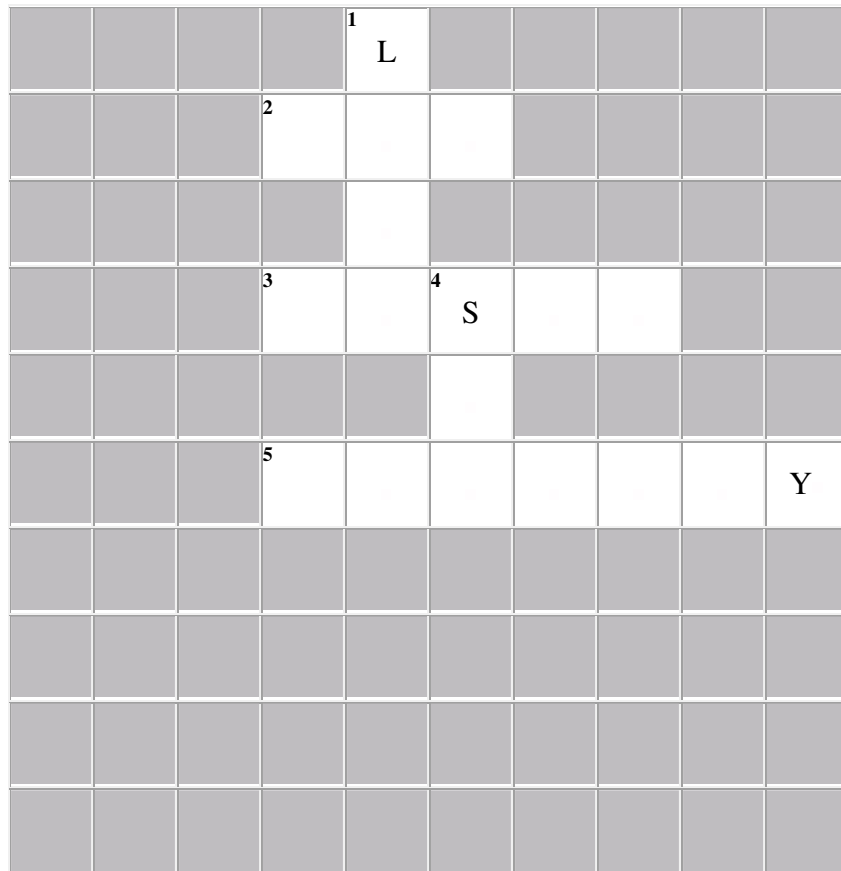
Complete the crossword puzzle by using the clues given:

Down

1. Jesus’ death can bring us this
4. Jesus became this for us

Across

2. Jesus chose to do this in our place
3. The One who said, “It is finished!”
5. Jesus chose to pay this for us



Week Four, Day Five

STORY

Later that night, Emily’s dad came to her room. “Mom told me what you have been talking about. Is there anything I can do to help?” Emily nodded. “Dad, I think I understand the part about Jesus paying for my sins. But I don’t understand about the resurrection. What does that mean?” “Well, Emily, I heard it this way one time. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would never really know if He did what He said He would do. Many people have died with great hopes. Since Jesus rose from the dead, He showed two things: (1) that He was God in the flesh and had power over death and sin; and (2) that when He let out His cry of victory, He really did pay the full penalty for our sins.” This made a lot of sense to Emily. When she went to bed that night, she felt a real sense of peace.

BIBLE READING

Acts 2:22-36

Key verse: Acts 2:24, **“But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”**

BIBLE LESSON

The empty tomb is God’s announcement that Jesus really did pay for our sins. It is like a signed receipt. If Jesus had not risen, His death would just look like thousands of other deaths. The Cross would be a sad story; but it would not stand out in any special way. But, the *resurrection* (meaning that Jesus was raised from the dead) of Jesus puts the stamp of authenticity that Jesus really *did* die for us.

The New Testament places special emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus. The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—each concludes the life of Jesus with the story of the resurrection. The sermons in the book of Acts and Paul’s teachings in the book of Romans also point to the resurrection as the greatest testimony of Jesus’ power to forgive sins. In Romans 10:9 the Bible says, “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

In your own words, what do you think Romans 10:9 means when it says, “and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead?”

Do you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead? ____ Yes ____ No

Why do you believe this?

PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you for the resurrection. Thank you that Jesus is still alive today. Since you are alive, it means you can come into my heart and make me new. I trust you and love you. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Reread today’s key verse, and then find these key words from it:

U I E V P A Z M R D P D	GOD
K M C W X F O R A Q C E	RAISED
E P W M Z U R E I A N A	DEAD
E O Q Y A W D E S Z E T	FREEING
P S O D G K F K E K V H	AGONY
A S M V O H O L D I V X	DEATH
O I A G N B T U O C N S	IMPOSSIBLE
H B B J Y N P J N O H G	KEEP
B L G O D U P Q U I V H	HOLD
K E I K U U I T D N C O	HIM
K Z N O W N I Y F S T M	
P F E S J I E G N U Q N	

Week Five: *Good News: Jesus Wants Me to Understand His Love*

Week Five, Day One

STORY

Joshua and Emily talked a lot. Like all brothers and sisters, they had their share of fusses, but they were only 18 months apart in age and were good friends.

On the way to Grandma's house that weekend for the Memorial Day holiday, Joshua started telling Emily about his experiment and his conversations with Pastor James. When he told her about his late-night thought—that Jesus could take his sins away before he was even born—Emily got very serious.

“Joshua,” she said, “my Sunday school teacher said almost the same thing last week. She said something like ‘While we were sinners, Christ died for us.’ Then yesterday, mom and dad helped me understand how Jesus’ death was just for me.”

They looked at each other and were quiet for a while. Mom and dad smiled as they listened to Joshua and Emily comparing their thoughts during the rest of the trip to Grandma's house.

BIBLE READING

Romans 5:6-8

Key verse: Romans 5:8, “**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**”

BIBLE LESSON

God demonstrates His love for His creation in many different ways. For the turtle, he provides a protective covering called a shell. For the horse he provides a tail to swat away the flies and speed to run from its enemies. For the moth, he provides the ability to change its color to match its surroundings. For us, he provides something far more important.

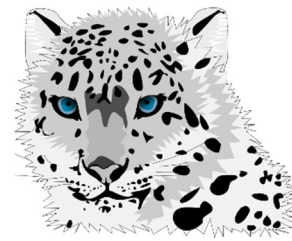
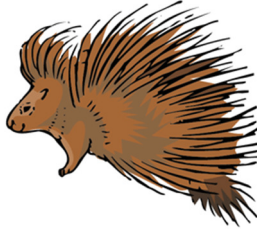
Our greatest need is forgiveness of our sins. The things we fear the most are sin, sorrow, sadness, and death. When Jesus died for us, He provided forgiveness of our sins. When He rose again, He conquered the power of sin, sadness, sorrow, and death. Even though our bodies may die one day, Jesus gives us assurance that our spirit, that inner part of us where Jesus lives, will live forever.

PRAYER

“Thank you, Lord, for loving me before I was ever born. Thank you for knowing my name before my parents even chose it for me. And, thank you for dying on the cross while I was still a sinner. Thank you for loving the unlovely. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Consider these animals God creates and loves. How has God provided for their protection?



1. FROG

2. PORCUPINE

3. DOLPHIN

4. SKUNK

5. SNOW LEOPARD

Week Five, Day Two

STORY

Everyone was excited when they got to Grandma's. She lived just far enough away that it was a special treat when they got to visit her home. She always had their favorite desserts fixed. Joshua liked her homemade apple pie. Emily really liked her strawberry delight. After dinner was finished and the dishes put away, Grandma pulled out some old pictures. Soon she was telling stories of her childhood. Emily and Joshua always liked this part of their visits to Grandma. On this night, she began to tell about her recent visit to the church where she had been baptized as a girl. She got a faraway look in her eyes for a moment as she said, "I'll never forget the day I asked Jesus to come into my heart to be my Savior." Emily and Joshua glanced at each other, wondering what else Grandma might say.

BIBLE READING

Acts 26:12-20

Key verse: Acts 26:19-20, **"So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God."**

BIBLE LESSON

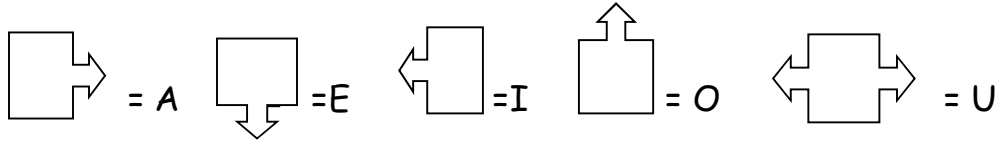
When the Apostle Paul was saved, it changed his life. From then on, he loved to tell other people about how he met Jesus. Paul's story of being saved is recorded in Acts 9. In Acts 22, he gave his testimony to a man named Festus. In Acts 26 he gave his testimony to a man named King Agrippa. Paul "testified" to many other people including a woman named Lydia, a teenager named Timothy, and the man who kept the prison in a city called Philippi. Acts 20:21 says that Paul even went from house to house and told people about Jesus. List some people *you* would want to tell about Jesus:

PRAYER

"Dear God, Help me to be bold enough to tell others about you. Help me to be sure enough that I know I have something to tell. Thank you for sending Jesus for me. Amen."

ACTIVITY

Reread Acts 20:21 and Acts 26:20. When Paul told others about Jesus what did he ask them to do? Match the vowel with its symbol:



R _____ P _____ NT

H _____ V _____ F _____ TH in J _____ S _____ S

T _____ RN to G _____ D

Week Five, Day Three

STORY

Grandma looked at Joshua. "I was just about your age," she said. "Maybe a little younger. Near the end of Sunday school class, our teacher told us the story about the Jesus dying on the Cross. I had heard it before, but never quite like I heard it that day. When I got home from church, I went outside to the tree house my dad had built me and just sat and thought."

"What made that day so special, Grandma?" Emily asked.

Grandma looked at her and said, "It was the first time I really understood what the Cross cost Jesus. Oh, I knew Jesus had died on the Cross for me; but that day, I realized how serious that was. Jesus became sin for me. My sins caused Him to die. God had to turn away from Jesus because of the darkness of my sins. It made me weep with sadness, and then with gladness. That afternoon, I told Jesus how sorry I was for my sins. I asked Him into my heart and trusted Him as my Lord and Savior."

BIBLE READING

Acts 2:37-41

Key verse: Acts 2:37, **"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart."**

BIBLE LESSON

Many people have favorite places they enjoy going to when they want to be quiet and think. Jacob was a man who lived long ago. We read his story in the Bible, in the book of Genesis. He had lied to his father and stolen from his brother. He was very sad and very afraid. He went to stay with his uncle for a while. On the way, he stopped at a campsite. During the night, he had a dream. He saw angels going up a ladder to heaven and coming down again. When he awoke, he knew God would never leave him. He named this campsite "Beth-el," which means "house of God." Many years later, he longed to go back to Beth-el to feel that special closeness to God again.

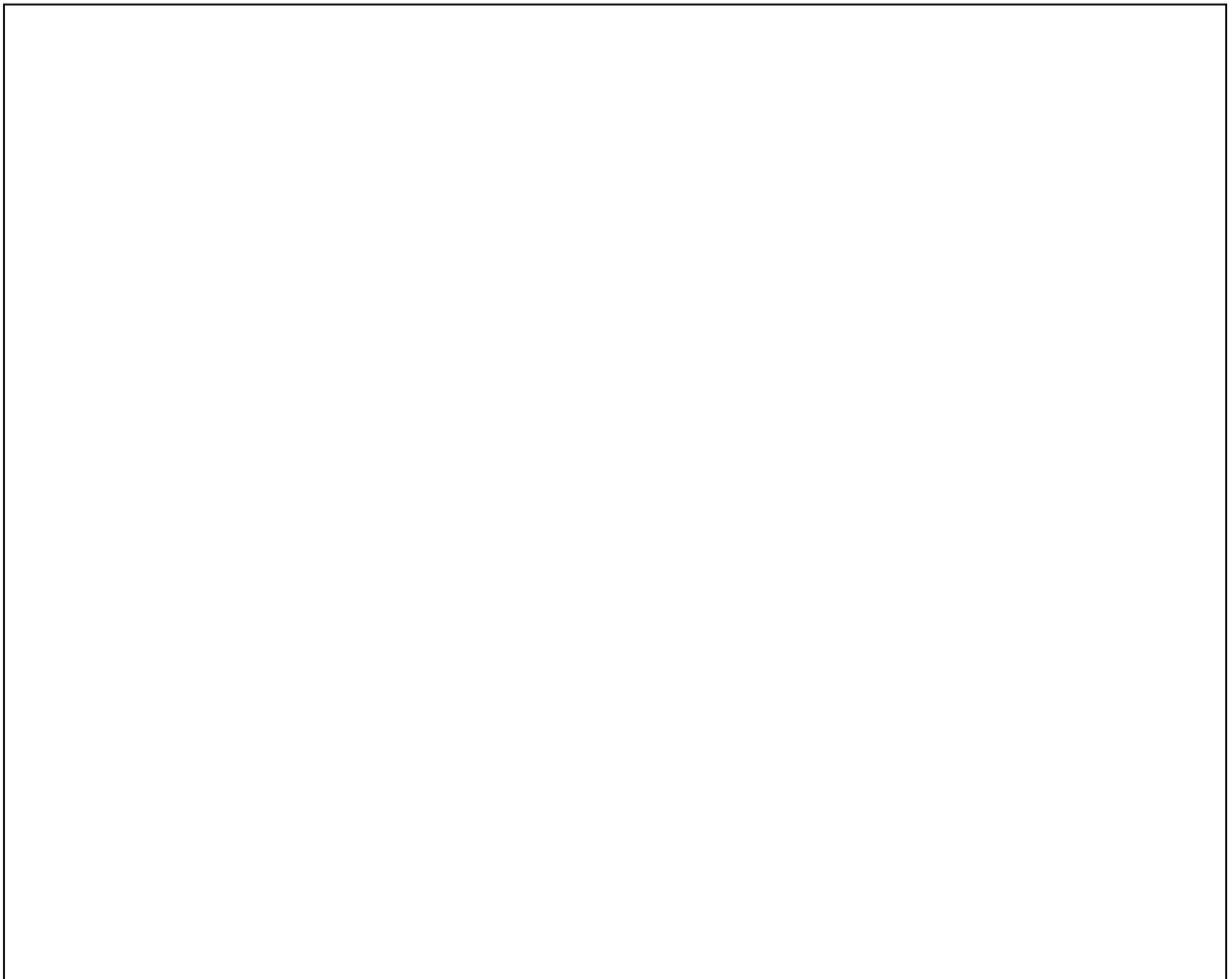
Is there a special place you like to go and sit when you want to be alone? Maybe a swing or a tree house? Maybe your room? Maybe a secret "fort" in your yard? Wherever it is, that is a good place to talk with God.

PRAYER

“O Lord, let me never take for granted how much you love me. Let me never make light of your sacrifice for me. Let me always remember the cost of your Cross. In Jesus Name, *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Draw a house and yard with some places you might go to be alone. Place an “X” in the places you would most likely go to be quiet and talk to God in prayer.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a drawing of a house and yard. The box is centered on the page and occupies a significant portion of the lower half of the page.

Week Five, Day Four

STORY

Everything was quiet for a moment. Then Joshua asked, “Grandma, how could Jesus take away your sins? You weren’t even born? Besides, you’re pretty good all by yourself!”

“Good question, Joshua,” Grandma answered. “Since Jesus is God, He can do things no one else can do. He knew that one day I would be born. He knew that He didn’t want me to be separated from Him. So, even before I was born, he reached out and took my sins from me and paid the penalty of death on the Cross. No man could do that; but Jesus did.”

“And, besides,” Grandma smiled, “I’m not good all by myself. I’ve been walking with Jesus for almost 60 years. He helps me each day to be more like Him.”

BIBLE READING

Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7

Key verse: Titus 3:5, “**He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.**”

BIBLE LESSON

Even though Joshua and Emily had talked about this on the way to Grandma’s, it was still hard for Joshua to understand. Grandma helped him review this wonderful truth.

In an earlier lesson, Romans 5:8 was the key Bible verse. It says that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This means that even before we were born, Jesus had already died for our sins. His offer of eternal life is not based on if we are good enough, for we will never be that good. He offers it because of His mercy for us.



through Jesus.

We stand at a fork in the road, with one road leading to God and the other leading away from God. When we depend on our own goodness, we choose to walk away from God’s mercy. This leads to separation from God and eventual destruction. When we trust in His mercy to save us from our sins, we choose to embrace Jesus as God’s way of salvation. This leads to fellowship with God and eternal life

PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you that you loved me before I was even born. I know you will always be there to watch over me, to guide me, to show me your ways. Teach me to trust in your mercy and grace. Thank you for working in me to save me from my sins and to make me a better person. In Jesus name, *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Why does God choose to save us? To find out draw lines to separate the words of Titus 3:5, and then rewrite it below:

HesavedusnotbecauseofrighteousthingswehaddonebutbecauseofHismercy

Week Five, Day Five

STORY

Dad cleared his throat. He said, “Well, Josh and Em, it’s about time for bed. We have a full day tomorrow.”

Grandma interrupted, “Wait, Son.” To Joshua and Emily she said, “Would you like to ask Jesus to come into your heart tonight?”

Before Joshua could say anything, Emily answered for them both. “Not tonight, Grandma. Let me think about it and maybe we can talk tomorrow.” Joshua wanted to talk more, but he nodded with Emily, and trotted off to bed.

But, that night, he lay awake a long time. Grandma had said the same thing he had already thought—even before we were born, Jesus died for us. Something inside him wanted to know Jesus personally. Finally he drifted off to sleep.

BIBLE READING

John 16:8-15

Key verse: John 16:8, “**When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.**”

BIBLE LESSON

The Holy Spirit never sleeps, even though we do. He is always quietly working in us to convince us of these important truths:

- (1) Sin—Read John 16:9. The worst sin of all is not lying or stealing or losing our temper. It is failing to believe in Jesus.
- (2) Righteousness—Read John 16:10. Only Jesus is good enough to walk straight into God’s home in heaven. No matter how good we try to be, we can never be good enough to walk right up to God in heaven. We need a Savior.
- (3) Judgment—Read John 16:11. Satan is “the prince of this world.” As the ultimate “sinner,” He has already been judged. He cannot ever go back to heaven. But, we can. When we trust in Jesus, our judgment is covered by the ransom Jesus paid for us on the Cross.

As we grow up, we get to sleep in many different places:

Parents' bed	Floor at friend's house	
Our own bed	Tent	
Car on a trip	Sleeping Bag	Couch

Where do you get the best rest? Where is your favorite place to sleep? Why?

Our best sleep comes when we know that we have a clear conscience in the eyes of God.

PRAYER

Dear God, Thank You that the Holy Spirit is always working. Help me as I continue to think and learn about sin, righteousness, and judgment. Amen.


ACTIVITY

Reread today's key verse—John 16:8. What does convict mean? Unscramble the definition to find out:

Convict—to feel **ULTGIY OBAUT MOSEHTIGN**.

Convict—to feel _____
_____.

Have you ever felt guilty about something you have done? This is God's way of using your conscience to draw you to Himself and His forgiveness.



Week Six: *Good News: Jesus Will Come Into My Heart Forever*

Week Six, Day One

STORY

Joshua was the first one awake the next morning—except for Grandma. She was bustling around in the kitchen, fixing breakfast for everyone.

Joshua watched her as she put some biscuits into the oven, then said, “Grandma, how did you know when you needed to ask Jesus into your heart?”

Grandma finished checking the settings on the oven, then sat down beside Joshua. “Well, Joshua,” she said, “The Bible says that the Holy Spirit convinces us that Jesus died for our sins. He also causes us to want Jesus more than anything else. When your heart is so full that you want to know God more than anything else in your life, then, that’s the right time to confess you are a sinner and ask Jesus to come into your heart and make you completely clean.”

BIBLE READING

2 Corinthians 6:2

Key verse: 2 Corinthians 6:2, “**I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.**”

BIBLE LESSON

You will remember that God gave each of us a *spiritual* heart. In our spiritual heart, we think, we feel, and we choose. The things we choose are controlled by the things we *want*. Sometimes, our wants are controlled by selfishness. More often, our wants are controlled by our needs.

In the following list, put the letter S beside a “selfish” want and the letter N beside a “need” want.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| _____ my friend’s toys | _____ sleep at night |
| _____ a bath when I am dirty | _____ breakfast before school |
| _____ the first piece of dessert | _____ the best grade on the test |
| _____ to know I am loved | _____ to be at peace with God |

PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you for causing me to want to know you. If you did not first seek me, I would not seek you on my own. But, you do love me, and you want me to want you. I want you and accept you as my Friend. In Jesus name, *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

The following are “need” wants. Draw a line from the statement in the left column to the best response in the right column.

I am hungry.

I am sleepy.

I am thirsty.

I am bored.

I am tired.

I am hot.

I am excited.

I am anxious to know God.

I want to cool off.

I want to go on a trip.

I want to play.

I want to drink.

I want to ask Jesus into my heart.

I want to rest.

I want to eat.

I want to go to bed.

Week Six, Day Two

STORY

Just then, Emily, followed by dad, then by mom, all came into the kitchen. Emily plopped down in a chair while dad and mom started getting the plates and silverware to set the table.

Not to be distracted, Joshua continued, “Grandma, how did you ask Jesus to come into your heart?”

She answered, “Joshua, we ask Jesus to come into our hearts through prayer.” Turning to Joshua’s dad, she said, “Paul, can you help Joshua know how to pray while I finish getting breakfast ready?”

Paul sat down with his son and daughter and said, “Joshua, when I was saved, I prayed a prayer like this: ‘Dear Jesus, I know that I have sinned and done wrong things in your sight. I am sorry for my sins. I also know that Jesus died on the Cross for my sins and rose again from the dead. I now ask you, dear Jesus, to come into my heart. I ask you to cleanse me from my sins. I believe in you as the Lord and Savior of my life. With all my heart, I trust you. Amen.’”

Paul asked his son, “Does this prayer say what your heart wants?” Nodding his head, Joshua said, “Yes sir. That’s what I really want.”

BIBLE READING

Romans 10:9-17

Key verse: Romans 10:9, “**If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**”

BIBLE LESSON

You may have already prayed a prayer like this. But, if this prayer reflects your true desire, why not ask your mom, dad, or your teacher or preacher to pray this prayer with you. Take their hand and pray the words of the prayer that Joshua’s father prayed:

“Dear Jesus, I know that I have sinned and done wrong things in your sight. I am sorry for my sins. I also know that Jesus died on the Cross for my sins and rose again from the dead. I now ask you, dear Jesus, to come into my heart. I ask you to cleanse me from my sins. I believe in you as the Lord and Savior of my life. With all my heart, I trust you. Amen.”

Did you really mean what you prayed? Do you believe God heard you? Did Jesus come live in your heart? If so, put your name and today's date on this line. Ask the person who prayed with you to sign as a witness of your prayer to God.

_____ Date _____
My name—"I prayed this prayer, asking Jesus to be my Savior."

Witnesses

PRAYER

"Dear God, Thank you for hearing my prayer. Thank you for coming into my heart to be my Savior. In Jesus name, *Amen*."

ACTIVITY

In order to find out what will happen when you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, fill in the phrases from Romans 10:9 and then fill in the letters in the blanks below:

"Confes() with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord.'"

1

Belie()e in your he()rt God rais()d Him from the ()ead.

3

2

4

5

You will be _____.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Week Six, Day Three

STORY

While Grandma and mom finished fixing breakfast, Joshua bowed his head at the table and prayed.

He said, "Dear God, I have sinned. It makes me feel so sad that Jesus had to die because of my sins. But, thank you that you did. I ask you to come into my heart and make me new. I trust you as my Lord forever. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

When he looked up, mom had tears in her eyes. Dad had the biggest smile. Grandma gave him the biggest hug ever. Inside, he felt a big sigh of relief. He was so excited.

After a moment, Emily joined in. "May I pray, too? I think I am ready to ask Jesus into my heart." Emily bowed her head and prayed her own prayer. When she finished, everyone's eyes were misty, especially Grandma's. She began to pray, "Dear God, thank you for making my family complete. Thank you that Emily and Joshua have been saved."

BIBLE READING

Acts 16:25-34

Key verse: Acts 16:31, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.**"

BIBLE LESSON

One of God's great joys is when everyone in your family has asked Jesus into his or her heart. When a man who kept the jail in an ancient city was saved, his whole family trusted Jesus, too. Do you know if your family members are Christians? Why don't you ask them? If they know the date, write it down. If not, maybe they remember how old they were or the time of the year it was.

PRAYER

"Dear God, Thank you for loving families. I love my family. They are very special to me. I pray for each one by name (mention each of your family members in prayer). Thank you for loving them and for loving me. *Amen.*"

ACTIVITY

Create your own special family testimony using this form.

Mom's Name _____ When, Where, & How Saved

Dad's Name _____

List other parents' names, the name of grandparents, the name of brothers or sisters, and the name of your best friends.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Week Six, Day Four

STORY

Breakfast that morning was a special meal. Mom and dad asked Joshua and Emily several questions, helping make sure that they had really trusted Christ.

Dad told them of his experience as a boy. “Grandma will remember this,” he said. “When I was about 7, I wanted God in my life. I walked forward at the end of a church service and talked with the pastor. He baptized me a few weeks later, but no one really explained to me why Jesus died or rose again. It was almost ten years later before I truly trusted Christ as my Savior.”

Joshua told his parents about his conversations with Pastor James and Emily, his experiment at school, and his talk with Grandma. When he finished, he told his dad, “Dad, I understand that Jesus died for me because I was a sinner. Before I was even born, he died for my sins. I want Him to be my Savior forever.”

Emily chimed in, telling about her conversations with mom and Joshua. She, too, expressed that she understood how much Jesus suffered for her and that she was giving her life to Him forever.

BIBLE READING

1 John 5:11-13

Key verse: 1 John 5:11-12, “**And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life.**”

BIBLE LESSON

There are many things in life we can be sure of. I am sure the sun will rise tomorrow. I am sure the birds will sing in the morning every spring day. I am sure the squirrels will jump and play in the park. I am sure grass will grow when it rains. Long ago, a blind lady named Fannie Crosby wrote a song about trusting Jesus. The title of the song goes like this: “Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine.”

When we are *sure* of something, we are *confident* it will happen, and this gives us *assurance* that we can count on it.

Can you say these words out loud?

“Jesus is my Lord, my Savior, and my Friend.”

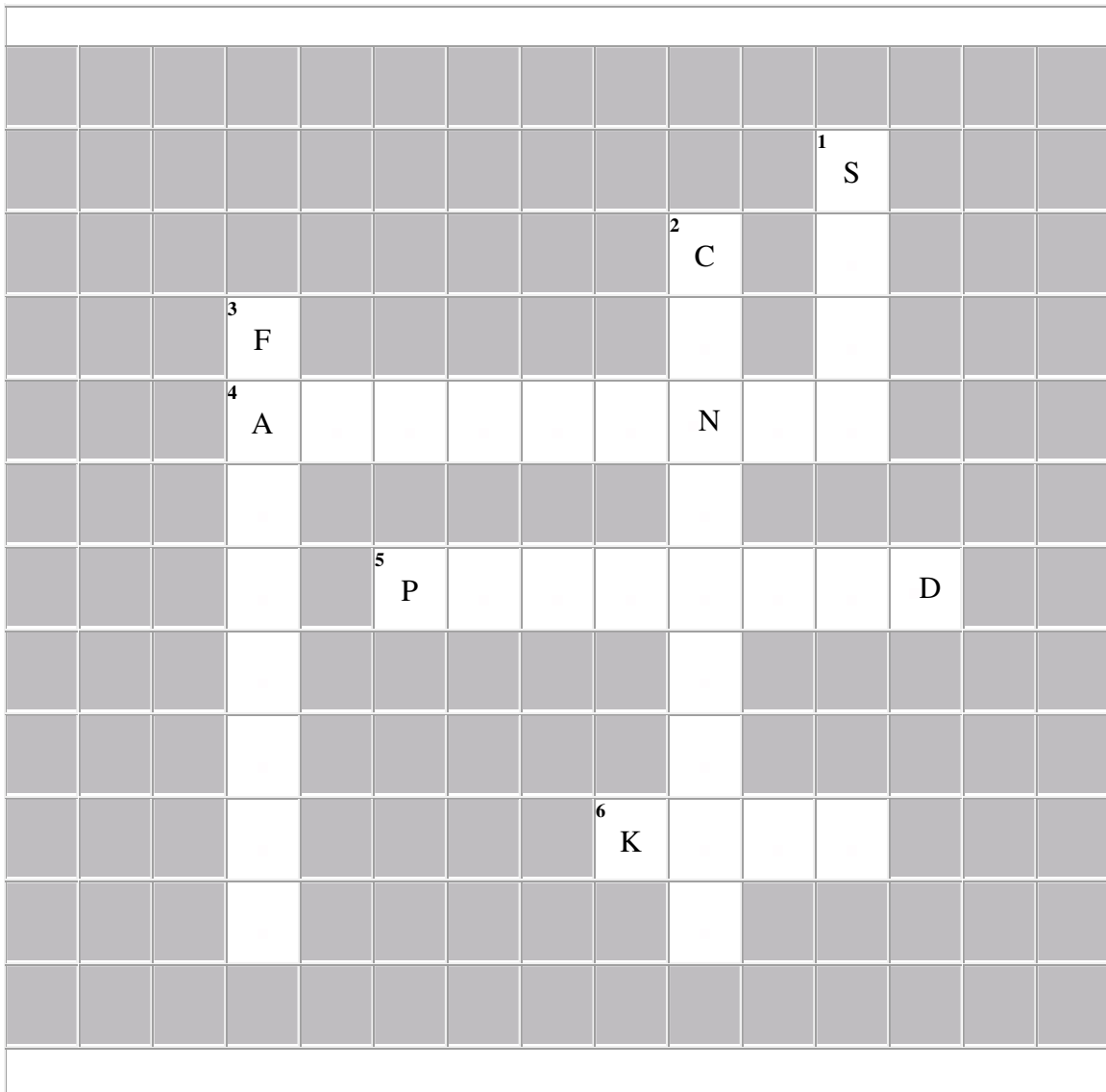
When you said these words, did your heart feel the assurance that He has saved you? I hope so.

PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you for being faithful. Everything you have promised is true. You promised you would hear me when I pray. I asked you to come into my heart. I know you heard me. I know you saved me. Thank you so much. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Complete the crossword puzzle with key words from today's lesson:



Week Six, Day Five

STORY

The visit to Grandma's house that weekend was one they would remember forever. When they went to her church the next morning, Joshua and Emily listened more intently than ever before.

Since it was Memorial Day weekend, the pastor spoke about remembering. He asked the congregation to remember their loved ones who had already died. Joshua and Emily thought about Granddad. They didn't remember a lot, but they remembered sitting in his lap in his recliner in the living room.

The pastor asked everyone to remember those who had died in wars so we could be free. Emily and Joshua didn't know anyone who had died in the wars, but thanked God for their willingness to die so we can live in a free nation.

The pastor asked everyone to remember the day of their salvation. At this, Emily and Joshua looked at each other and smiled.

Most importantly, the pastor said, we should remember Jesus and His sacrifice for us. Joshua leaned over against his mom's side and looked up at her. Dad took Emily's hand in his and gave it a gentle squeeze. It was a wonderful day of memory—a wonderful Memorial Day Sunday.

BIBLE READING

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Key verse: 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, **“When he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”**

BIBLE LESSON

Once a year, the citizens of the United States set aside a special day to remember the soldiers who fought for our nation's freedom. But, Christians celebrate another memorial day as well. Several times each year, most churches have a special service called, “The Lord's Supper” or “Communion.” In this service, the pastor will lead the church to eat a small piece of cracker and drink a small cup of juice. These are symbols that remind us of the body and blood of Jesus. His body was beaten

until it was bloody all over and then He was crucified on a cross. His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Only Christians can fully appreciate Jesus' sufferings. If you have trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior and been baptized as a follower of Jesus, ask your parents and your pastor when you can participate in the Lord's Supper.

PRAYER

O Lord, Thank You that when Christians participate in the Lord's Supper they remember Your love and sacrifice for us through Jesus' suffering and death. Help me to never take the Lord's Supper lightly, and help it to always be a time of thanksgiving and celebration. Thank you that Jesus is alive and is coming back one day soon. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

ACTIVITY

Reread today's key verse, and then find these key words:

L C O V E N A N T I G F
Y B E B T V J Q R B G W
X F S T W U K Z E F D Z
V J I E W G C G M A K H
J J F R Y L R P E O Y G
H X Q J X T U R M U Y N
N H L I R C B K B I W G
C Y D R A V J T R G O Q
K S S U P P E R A C F X
B L O O D B E G N E V G
O B O D Y T R H C N X G
O T Q T V P P C E B P M

BREAD
CUP
REMEMBRANCE
SUPPER
BODY
BLOOD
COVENANT

Week Seven: *Good News: Jesus Wants Me to Show Others through Baptism that He Lives in My Heart and Is My Savior*

Week Seven, Day One

STORY

Joshua and Emily could hardly wait for the next Sunday. Mom and dad spoke with Pastor James and told him that Joshua and Emily wanted to present themselves to the church for baptism and membership.

Pastor James came by their home on Tuesday evening to speak with them about what baptism meant. He began by reviewing with them what Jesus had done for them. Joshua and Emily both assured Pastor James that they had trusted Jesus as their Savior.

Pastor James then began to explain why baptism was so special and important. Emily said, "I remember reading that at the end of Matthew. Jesus told his disciples that they were supposed to make disciples and then baptize them."

Pastor James nodded his agreement. "That's right Emily. Our first and most important act of visible obedience when we have received Jesus is to be baptized as a believer in Him."

BIBLE READING

Matthew 28:19-20

Key verse: Matthew 28:19a, "**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**"

BIBLE LESSON

Jesus was baptized at the beginning of His ministry. When He came to see John the Baptist, Joshua knew that Jesus had no need to be baptized. Jesus was sinless. But Jesus told him, "No, I must do all things that fulfill God's righteous plan." Jesus became our example in baptism. He became our Savior through death. He is our Lord through the resurrection. Baptism became a sign of what He would do while He was on the earth: live, die, be buried, and rise again from the dead. As we go under the water, it is a symbol of being buried. When we come up out of the water, it is an image of being raised to new life in Christ.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, Thank You for becoming our Savior through death, Our Lord through Resurrection, and our Example through baptism. Please help me as I learn and think more about baptism. Amen.

ACTIVITY

As others received Jesus as their Lord, they, too, were baptized. Using the book of Acts in your Bible, match the person with the passage.

Acts 2:41	The Jailer (keeper of the prison) and his household
Acts 8:13	Lydia and her household
Acts 8:36-38	Those who gladly received his Word
Acts 9:17-18	Crispus and many Corinthians
Acts 10:30 and 48	Simon
Acts 16:14-15	Cornelius and his household
Acts 16:27 and 33	Saul, who later became Paul
Acts 18:8	A man (called a eunuch) from the country of Ethiopia

Week Seven, Day Two

STORY

Pastor James told Emily and Joshua that baptism served three important roles. First, he said, it shows what Jesus did *for* us long ago.

He explained, “Baptism is like a moving picture. When you stand in the water, it shows how Jesus was lifted up on the Cross. Then he died and was buried. Three days later . . .”

Joshua interrupted, “I know. He rose from the dead.”

Pastor James nodded his agreement. “That’s right Joshua, Jesus rose from the dead. When you come up out of the water, it is like a resurrection. It reminds us of Jesus and what He did for us.”

Emily joined in. “If Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would not know for sure that His death paid for our sins.”

“Right, Emily,” Pastor James added. “Your baptism will show that you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. When you are baptized, it shows your faith that Jesus died for you and rose again from the dead.”

Emily and Joshua both nodded their understanding.

BIBLE READING

Romans 6:4-10

Key verse: Romans 6:4, “**We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**”

BIBLE LESSON

Different churches sometimes baptize people in different ways. The Bible teaches that baptism is a dipping under water, often called *immersion*. To go under the water helps show the idea of a burial. This is a very important sign of our salvation. The old nature—the heart that did not have God in it—is buried away. When we lay back in the water and the water covers our face, it is sort of like being buried. We are under the water just like He was in the tomb.

When we come back up out of the water, it is like a resurrection. Just like Jesus was raised from the dead, we are raised up in a new kind of life.

We are baptized by immersion for two reasons. Jesus came up out of the water, so we want to follow His example by coming up out of the water. Jesus was buried and rose from the dead, so we want others to see that our old, dead heart has been buried and our new heart has been brought to life by faith in Jesus.

PRAYER

Dear God, Thank You for baptism and what it represents. Help me to one day follow Jesus' example of baptism and through it show others my new life in Him. Amen.

ACTIVITY

Complete the cryptogram:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
26				12				4						22						19					

__ E __ E __ E __ __ E __ E __ O __ E __ U __ I E __
 20 12 20 12 16 12 10 1 12 16 12 6 22 16 12 23 19 16 4 12 9

__ I __ __ __ I __ __ __ __ O U __ __ __ A __ __ I __ __
 20 4 10 1 1 4 17 10 1 16 22 19 14 1 23 26 18 10 4 5 17

I __ __ O __ E A __ __ I __ O __ __ E __ __ A __ ,
 4 2 10 22 9 12 26 10 1 4 2 22 16 9 12 16 10 1 26 10

__ U __ __ A __ __ __ I __ __ A __ A I __ E __
 7 19 5 10 26 5 8 1 16 4 5 10 20 26 5 16 26 4 5 12 9

__ __ O __ __ E __ E A __ __ __ O U __ __ __ E
 6 16 22 17 10 1 12 9 12 26 9 10 1 16 22 19 14 1 10 1 12

__ __ O __ __ O __ __ E __ A __ E __ , __ E
 14 11 22 16 13 22 6 10 1 12 6 26 10 1 12 16 20 12

__ O O __ A __ __ I __ E A __ E __ __ I __ E .
 10 22 22 17 26 13 11 4 15 12 26 2 12 20 11 4 6 12

Week Seven, Day Three

STORY

Pastor James went on.

“Second,” he said, “Baptism shows what Jesus did in your heart last week when you asked Him to be your Lord and Savior. Though your body was breathing, in your spirit, you were dead. Jesus took that dead spirit, buried it, and brought it back to life. Since He is a Spirit, he was able to come into your spirit and give it life. When He comes in your heart, He comes as the Holy Spirit.”

Joshua grinned and looked at dad. “Hey, dad, that’s what you said a few weeks ago. You’re pretty smart.”

Pastor James grinned at that. “Your dad *is* pretty smart, Joshua. When you asked Jesus to come into your heart, it is like he took the shriveled-up, dead spirit that was in you and brought it back to life. God’s Holy Spirit lives in you now—and will forever.”

Joshua and Emily both nodded their understanding and assured Pastor James of their trust in Jesus. They knew that *something* different was happening in their hearts.

BIBLE READING

Ephesians 2:1-7

Key verse: Ephesians 2:1, 4, 5a, “**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. . . . But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.**”

BIBLE LESSON

The word “Spirit” can sometimes mean “breath” or “air.” When we ask Jesus to come into our hearts, it is like God breathes new life into us. We are filled with His Spirit. Our life takes on a new shape as we begin to look like the way Jesus acted.

Put a check mark by those things that take a greater volume when filled with air.

Basketball

Bicycle Tire

Box

Football

Hot-air Balloon

House

Refrigerator

Soccer Ball

Water Float

Many other things take on a new shape when they are filled with air. Can you think of some?

When we were without Jesus, we were less than God intended for us to be. But, when Jesus lives in our hearts, we become so much more!

A glove is useless without any life in it. But, when we fill it with our hand, it does many good things for us. So, our heart is useless without any life in it. But, when Jesus fills our heart, we can do many good things for the Lord.

PRAYER

Father, Thank You that through Jesus' death and resurrection the Holy Spirit is able to give my spirit new life forever and ever. Amen.

ACTIVITY

Correctly complete today's key verse by filling in the opposite of each word in parentheses:

"As for you, you were _____ in your trespasses and sins . . . But
(alive)

because of His great _____ for us, God, who is _____
in _____, (hate) (poor)
(unkindness)

made us _____ with Christ."
(dead)

Week Seven, Day Four

STORY

The third thing Pastor James told them about baptism was that one day Jesus will come again to take all those who had trusted in Him to heaven. Until then, he said, many people will die.

He said it this way. "One day," he said, "our bodies will quit breathing. We will die and be buried. But Jesus gave us this promise. Everyone who dies who has trusted in Jesus will be raised again from the dead. They will live with God in heaven forever."

Emily asked, "Like Granddad?"

Her dad interrupted, "Yes, Emily. Your Granddad was a believer in Jesus Christ. When he was buried, we were comforted with God's promise that we will see Granddad again. This is one of the things that makes heaven so special. Not only will we see Jesus. We will see all our other loved ones like your Granddad."

Pastor James concluded, "You see, baptism is very special to God. It shows what Jesus did for us, what He does in us, and that He will one day receive us into heaven."

BIBLE READING

1 Corinthians 15:51-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Key verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:16b-17a, "**The dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.**"

BIBLE LESSON

Have you ever been to a cemetery? Many people are afraid of death. They remember the sorrow of separation when people we love die. But, for the Christian believer, death is the doorway that opens up to heaven. We must live here on earth for many years until God has prepared for us to come to heaven, too. But, we should not fear death. Perhaps you have a grandparent, or a parent, or a brother, or a sister, who has died. God has promised that you will see them again when we all get to heaven if Jesus was their Lord and Savior. Baptism is one way of showing that we believe that promise.

PRAYER

Dear God, Thank You that because of what Jesus has done for us we do not have to be afraid of death. Thank You that baptism reminds us of the promise that death is the doorway that opens up to heaven. Amen.

ACTIVITY

Why should we not fear death? Unscramble the answer below:

GOD SHA RMOPSIDE VEANEH ROF LAL HATT RSTUT NI JESUS.

GOD _____
_____ JESUS.

Week Seven, Day Five

STORY

The following Sunday, Emily and Joshua walked forward at the end of the sermon while the choir sang a song of commitment. They told Pastor James that they wanted to be baptized as believers in Jesus. One of the ladies in the church came to sit with them as they filled out a membership card. Then Pastor James introduced Emily and Joshua to the congregation.

He said, "Last weekend, Emily's and Joshua's parents had the privilege of leading their children to confess their faith in Jesus. Joshua and Emily have come this morning to share their confession of faith with you."

He asked Emily, then Joshua, if they had prayed personally to ask Jesus to come into their hearts. They both said yes. After church, many people came by and shook their hands. A few weeks later, when dad could go get Grandma for a weekend visit, Emily and Joshua were baptized.

BIBLE READING

Acts 2:41-47

Key verse: Acts 2:41a, "**Then those who gladly received his word were baptized.**"

BIBLE LESSON

Baptism is a wonderful time of celebration. People get excited when a new person is welcomed into the family, whether by birth, by adoption, or by marriage. In the same way, Christians get excited when a family member is baptized as a follower of Jesus.

PRAYER

"Dear God, thank you for the gift of family. Help me to love each member of my family and show them God's love by the way I treat them. *Amen*"

ACTIVITY

If you have not been baptized as a follower of Jesus, who are some people you would want to come to your baptism? Do some of them live far away? Why not ask your mom and dad to invite them to your baptism. Make a list below:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Week Eight: ***Good News: Jesus Wants to Make a Difference in My Life . . . Forever***

Week Eight, Day One

STORY

Joshua and Emily spent as much time outside as they could. Emily played summer league softball; Joshua played baseball. Emily was having a good season, starting at second base, and batting third. With her speed, she was leading the team in stolen bases.

On the other hand, Joshua was in a hitting slump. After starting for most of the season, he was put on the bench with three games to go before the tournament. He didn't like that at all!

When the coach posted the starting line-up, Joshua's name was missing. Joshua slung his glove against the dugout fence. He sat down with a scowl. Although his team won, Joshua was not happy.

When he got home, he snarled at his mom. Emily tried to cheer him up, but he only got madder. When he yelled at Emily to shut up, dad sent him to his room. After a few minutes, dad came down the hallway and tapped on his door.

BIBLE READING

Galatians 5:16-25

Key verse: Galatians 5:22-23a, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”**

BIBLE LESSON

A children's song has some silly lyrics. It says, “The fruit of the Spirit's not a coconut.” It ends by saying, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Can you count the words in the list? Can you repeat them until you know them in order? Can you say them real fast?

Here are some other fruits that are not a “fruit” of the Holy Spirit: strawberry, blueberry, mango. Can you name some other fruits?

When the Holy Spirit, who is Jesus living in us, is in control of our lives, we will be **kind** to others. We will be **patient** when things do not go our way. We will be able to have **self-control** over our temper. We will have **joy** in our hearts.

Based on Galatians 5:22-23, what five other qualities will we have—and how can we show these qualities to others?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

PRAYER

“Dear God, Sometimes I act in ways that hurt other people. In my heart I don’t want to; but sometimes I just do it anyway. Please teach me to practice self-control. Please let others see the fruits of the Spirit in my life. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Find the nine qualities of the Fruit of the Spirit:

Q F N B A P D J U Y F U T S E	LOVE
R W I E R F L O K I B E H B D	JOY
N F D K R L X Y P E A C E Q G	PEACE
Y A U Q T O C E B I J L K V J	PATIENCE
M I P H T H X K M E O Y D Q B	KINDNESS
H T P X P G F K F R H Q O F R	GOODNESS
Z H V S K A E J T L F M X E H	FAITHFULNESS
Z F D P O F T N B U O D V M B	GENTLENESS
K U O A Q Z O I T S S V J F O	SELFCONTROL
P L D S P C T U E L G U E V H	
D N Q O F Q Q Y O N E Y G L J	
P E I L Y U F F J M C N D D Y	
R S E S V H Y H T J D E E D Q	
F S J E O H K I N D N E S S F	
R G O O D N E S S O Y F S Z S	

Week Eight, Day Two

STORY

When dad came into the room, Joshua was lying across the bed with his head hanging over one side and his feet hanging over the other side.

“What’s up, son?” dad asked.

“It’s just not fair!” Joshua exploded. “I ought to be starting.”

Dad said, “Joshua, I think we have a bigger problem than whether or not you played tonight. You are a member of the team. Each member contributes in different ways and at different times. When you were hitting, someone else sat on the bench. Now someone else is hitting. When your team won, you should have been happy with them. Your problem is not that you did not start tonight. Your problem is pride and anger.”

Joshua didn’t say anything, but he knew his dad was right. He didn’t understand why he acted the way he did. A few weeks ago, when he had trusted Jesus as his Lord and Savior, he had felt clean and new. Now he felt dirty and ashamed.

BIBLE READING

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Key verse: 1 Corinthians 10:12, “**If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!**”

BIBLE LESSON

Before we were saved, we shared our heart with *self* and *Satan*, doing what we wanted to do or what Satan *tempted* us to do.. Even after we are saved, we sometimes let Satan control the way we think and act. The “I” in me—the desire to have my own way—began growing very strong from the day we were born and must constantly be given back to God in prayer and surrender.

When Jesus sits on the throne of our hearts, we show His love to others. We treat them the way that honors God. But, when I choose to put my own way back on the throne of my heart, it grieves the Holy Spirit in me, it makes me cross, and it hurts others around me. I become filled with pride and feel anger when things don’t go my way. Just like a bath washes the dirt off my body, God wants us to come to him each day and confess our sins to Him so he can cleanse our hearts. Only then will our joy in Jesus return.

PRAYER

“Dear God, Sometimes I don’t feel like praying. I know this feeling comes when I have disobeyed you. Please never let me get so hard-hearted in disobedience that I forget how much joy I have in being saved. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Put the letter “I” in the center of each of the following words. Do you see what they spell?

PR __ DE	BL __ ND
S __ N	DECE __ TFUL
AGA __ NST	GR __ EF
ANX __ OUS	GU __ LT
	L __ E

The Bible says this about our salvation: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Note these words, “It is no longer I.” Knowing that Jesus Christ in me makes me a new person, notice these words that have the new “I” in the center. Some of these words may not make sense right now, but perhaps your mom and dad can help explain them.

AB __ DE	FA __ TH
AL __ VE	JUST __ FIED
OBED __ ENCE	GLOR __ FIED
BEL __ EVE	REF __ NED
BU __ LD	RE __ GN
DEL __ VER	SACR __ FICE

Week Eight, Day Three

STORY

The next morning, when Joshua got up for breakfast, dad was already gone to work. Mom was getting ready to leave. Selena, a college student who kept Joshua and Emily in the summer, was just pulling in the driveway.

Joshua plopped down at the kitchen table. He was still in a bad mood. When mom asked what he wanted to eat, he mumbled, "It doesn't matter."

Selena walked in just in time to see his face and hear his voice. "What's up Joshua?" she asked cheerily. "Wake up on the wrong side of the bed?" She tousled his hair.

Joshua just looked at her. Then Selena startled him. "Joshua, how come you were so happy a few weeks ago when you told me you had gotten saved, but now you are so grumpy? What happened to your joy?"

Again, he just looked her. But he started doing some real thinking. What *had* happened to his joy?

BIBLE READING

Philippians 2:1-16

Key verse: 2:5, "**Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.**"

BIBLE LESSON

If the mind of Christ Jesus is in us, we will want to live in harmony with others. This is the only way we can fulfill and feel God's joy to the fullest. Philippians 2:2-4 says this:

"Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

Look for these words and ideas: like-minded; same love; one accord; one mind; lowliness of mind; esteem others; look out for the interests of others. Underline them in the verses above.

What do these words and phrases have in common? What do they teach us? These words teach us what it means to live with the mind of Christ.

PRAYER

“Dear God, let me treat others with kindness. Instead of being selfish about my own wishes, let me think about others’ needs and how I can help serve them the way Jesus served people when He was on earth. Please let me think with the mind of Christ in all things. *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

In today’s lesson we learned that when we think with the mind of Christ we focus on others before ourselves. And when put others before ourselves we have true joy and happiness. In other words, JOY can be spelled: **J**esus **O**thers **Y**ourself

To help you remember this important truth, learn and sing this song:

(To the tune of “Jingle Bells”)

J-O-Y, J-O-Y

That must surely mean

Jesus first, yourself last

And others in between

Week Eight, Day Four

STORY

Mom left while Joshua was finishing breakfast. He walked into the living room where Selena was straightening up. He liked Selena a lot. She went to his church. She always seemed so happy.

Sitting down, he asked, "How come you're always so happy. Don't you ever have a bad day?"

Dropping into a chair, Selena was thoughtful a moment. "Joshua," she said, "When I first got saved, I had a lot of trouble with my temper. I was moody all the time. When things didn't go my way, I got upset." She paused. "I knew that was not how God wanted me to live. So, I did two things that made a big difference."

Seeing that Joshua was really listening, Selena continued, "First, I told God that my anger is a sin." Selena made a face and said, "That didn't surprise God at all." Joshua laughed.

Selena grew more serious, "Joshua, when Jesus died for me, He died for *all* my sins. He died for sins I committed *before* I was saved. He also died for sins I would commit *after* I was saved. God did not make me a new person just so I would continue to live the same old way I was before I was saved. He saved me to set me *free* me from my sins."

Joshua asked, "How does He do that?"

Selena answered, "Each time I do something that is not like Christ, the Holy Spirit in me tugs at me heart. He reveals to me that my anger and selfishness are sin. I try to agree with Him right then, but sometimes I like to pout awhile first . . . sort of like you this morning!"

She laughed. Then she said, "Every time I confess my sins, he cleanses me all over again. It feels just like it did when I first got saved."

BIBLE READING

1 John 1:4-9

Key verse: 1 John 1:9a, "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins.**"

BIBLE LESSON

The word “confess” means to “agree with God.” It is often hard to agree that things God calls sin are, in fact, sin. The opposite of confession is blaming others. So, when I confess, I admit that I am responsible for the things I have done and must ask forgiveness from God and from others. When I blame someone else for my mistakes or my feelings of anger, I refuse to admit that my mistake or my anger is a sin that flows out of my own heart.

How often do we say things like, “She made me mad”; or “He treated me mean”; or “I don’t like her”; or “You’re not my boss!” When we feel anger or pride or when we take something away from others or hit them, we are not acting the way God’s Spirit wants us to act.

When we sin, we can either blame others or confess to God that we have had a sinful attitude or have committed a sinful action. When we blame someone else, we lose our joy. When we confess our sin, God restores our joy.

PRAYER

“Dear God, help me admit my sins to You. Even though I have trusted Jesus to save me, I still struggle with wrong attitudes and actions. Thank You that You continue to cleanse me and forgive me even when I act in ways that dishonor You. Teach me to confess quickly whenever I act selfishly. In Jesus’s Name, *Amen.*”

ACTIVITY

Correctly complete today’s key verse by inserting the following key words where they belong. Try at first to do it without looking back at the verse. When the verse is correct and complete, read it aloud saying the underlined key words louder than the others:

faithful confess forgive just He

“If we _____ our sins, _____ is _____ and _____
and will _____ us our sins.”

Week Eight, Day Five

STORY

Just then, Emily came into the room. “Hey, Em,” Selena said. “How are you?”

Emily glared at Joshua then said to Selena, “Fine, I guess.”

Sensing tension in the air, Selena continued. “The second thing I did, Josh, was this. I asked God to deliver me from the things that cause me to sin. First I asked Jesus to forgive me. Then I asked Jesus to deliver me.” She smiled at Joshua and Emily. “This doesn’t mean I am perfect. But, each day, I try to be a little more like Jesus. When I do, I experience His joy.”

She paused, then laughingly said, “And when I don’t, I act like you guys are acting this morning! None of us wants that do we?”

Joshua agreed with her. He turned to Emily and said, “I’m sorry for the way I talked to you last night.” He held out his fist. “Friends?” Emily dropped her fist onto his. “Friends,” she said.

Joshua went back to his room. A few minutes later when Selena went down the hallway, she heard Joshua praying, “And dear God, please help me not get angry when things don’t go my way. I want to be more like Jesus every day. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

BIBLE READING

2 Peter 3:18

Key verse: 2 Peter 3:18a, “**But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**”

BIBLE LESSON

Peter was one of Jesus’ closest friends and followers. Near the end of his life, he wrote two letters to believers in Jesus everywhere. His final words urge us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

This is our continuing goal—“Keep On Growing!” Keep on growing in grace (how we rely on God and act toward others). Keep on growing in knowledge (learning more and more about who Jesus was and is, *in* us and *for* us!). This is a way to experience His joy.

Though this manual is coming to an end, your new life with Jesus is just beginning. Becoming a Christian is like being born—it is just the start of the rest of your life. When we become a Christian, we do not become perfect. We will still struggle with sin. When we gain a victory over one sin, another one will suddenly appear when we least expect it. It may be a temptation of pride like anger or jealousy or greed. It may be a temptation of disobedience like shoplifting or sneaking out of your house without your parent’s knowledge. When we face the temptation of sins, God wants us to rise above them through obedience to His Word. He knows that sin always results in heartache and pain. He wants us to grow to be more like Jesus. As we do, we find more joy and greater peace.

Can you think of some things you wish you could have victory over? Maybe you talk back to our parents. Maybe you tell stories that aren’t true about friends at school. Maybe you talk ugly to your brother or sister. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you become more like Jesus in these areas.

PRAYER

“Dear God, I want to keep on growing to be more like Jesus. I know You died for me. I know You live in me. Now I want to live for You so that others can see Jesus through me.

ACTIVITY

Reread today’s key verse, and then find these key words:

J	X	O	S	Y	K	Y	T	F	I		GROW
R	G	N	C	U	N	R	W	W	D		GRACE
U	R	R	U	Y	O	E	V	E	K		KNOWLEDGE
P	Y	J	A	I	W	Y	Z	M	S		LORD
D	F	K	V	C	L	C	O	H	M		SAVIOR
R	M	A	W	M	E	Z	D	J	L		JESUS
T	S	G	V	I	D	O	H	E	O		
A	F	R	W	R	G	Y	P	S	R		
B	W	O	X	J	E	H	K	U	D		
J	L	W	O	K	V	M	A	S	B		

Postlude

Thank you for allowing Joshua and Emily to share their story with you. The book of your life is just beginning.

Our prayer for you is that you will stay close to God, grow more like Jesus, and show the fruits of the Spirit. There are six things you can do each day or each week that will help you become more like Jesus.

1. Reading your Bible at a set time each day. The Gospel of John is an excellent starting point—a chapter a day for three weeks.
2. Practicing daily prayer. Prayer is simply talking to God just like you talk to your best friend.
3. Attending Sunday school and church services regularly.
4. Telling your closest friends about your faith in Jesus.
5. Giving to God's work. Your gifts to God help you learn to trust Him and also show your thankfulness that He has saved you.
6. Obey your parents, in the Lord. This verse from Ephesians 6 teaches us that God has given your parents to you to help you learn and grow spiritually and physically.

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE PARENTS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, JACKSON, TENNESSE TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL TO THEIR CHILDREN

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015
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The purpose of this project was to develop a strategy to equip parents at First Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee, to proclaim the gospel to their children. Chapter 1 introduces the goals, ministry context, rationale, definitions and limitations/delimitations, and research methodology of the project.

Chapter 2 provides a thorough exegesis of Ephesians 5:21-6:4. Specifically, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the responsibility of fathers in bringing their children up in the instruction of the Lord through loving their wives as Christ loved the church.

Chapter 3 examines the relevant social-scientific literature to determine the effects of father involvement on child development and child spiritual development, as well as the effects of the father-mother relationship on child development and child spiritual development.

Chapter 4 describes the implementation of the project in detail. It provides a week-by-week explanation of the training seminar, and a thorough description of the devotional guide.

Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the project. The evaluation includes the strengths

and weaknesses of the project, suggested improvements, theological reflections, and personal reflections.

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