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EQUIPPING PARENTS AT CROSSROADS COMMUNITY
CHAPEL IN WINFIELD, WEST VIRGINIA,
TO TEACH GOD'S REDEMPTIVE STORY
THROUGH FAMILY DEVOTIONS

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EQUIPPING PARENTS AT CROSSROADS COMMUNITY
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PREFACE

I am grateful for the Spirit's continued passion in my life for discipling families after nearly eighteen years in youth ministry. For most of that time, my main focus has been on investing in the teenagers through the use of programs and mentorships. While this is an important aspect of youth ministry, I realize that I have neglected the necessary task of equipping parents to disciple their own children. This project is a culmination of my thoughts, prayers, questions, and shift to a family-equipping youth ministry model as I have transitioned into a lead pastoral role.

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of those who have walked with me throughout this process. It has been a blessing to serve in three local churches that have allowed me the opportunity to flesh out my passion for youth and family ministry. The First Baptist Church of Nitro, West Virginia, offered much grace and patience as I began this journey of discipling teenagers. New Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia, allowed me to expand my role in ministry to include families and other pastoral responsibilities. Special thanks goes to Crossroads Community Chapel in Winfield, West Virginia, for their faith in calling me as lead pastor and for their support and participation in this project.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for stretching me academically and nurturing me spiritually. Three faculty members in particular have demonstrated the image of Christ

these past six years. Dr. Troy Temple and Dr. Michael Wilder cared for me and my family during a very tragic time in the midst of this project. Their love and presence will continue to be remembered and shared with my family. Dr. Shane Parker encouraged me to finish strong and offered much needed direction. I am grateful that he took on the role of my supervisor during the last few months of the project. Both he and Dr. Joseph Harrod provided critical insight for sharpening the focus of this research. I would also like to thank the panel of experts who completed the rubric to review the devotion series: Dr. Terry J. Betts, Dr. Russell T. Fuller, Dr. Troy Temple, and Dr. Steve Willis.

I am especially grateful for my beautiful wife, Stephanie, who graciously sacrificed for my continued education and pushed me to complete this project. She has selflessly managed our household and cared for our children while I spent hours and days away reading and writing. Her steadfast love, support, grace, and patience continue to be an inspiration to me. We are blessed with three incredible children: Adalyn, Bryson, and Rylee. I thank the Lord for the honor of being called their dad, and my hope is that I will continue to live out the principles of family discipleship that I have learned throughout my studies. To God alone be the glory!

Bryan M. Cantrell

Winfield, West Virginia

December 2017

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents at Crossroads Community Chapel in Winfield, West Virginia to teach God’s redemptive story through family devotions using the Minor Prophets.

Goals

The first goal for this project was to evaluate the perceptions and practices of parents at Crossroads Community Chapel in the area of family discipleship. This goal was measured by the use of a pre-project survey¹ given to parents in order to evaluate their understanding and practice of family discipleship prior to their participation in this project.

The second goal of this project was to teach the biblical framework for family discipleship and to equip the parents to lead family devotions. Through a preaching series and teaching seminar, parents studied key passages of Scripture that spoke of the discipleship development of children. This provided parents with a biblical foundation of how children should experience God’s Word with the hope that the parents would demonstrate an improvement in their perceptions and practices of family discipleship as a

¹See Appendix 1.

result of the project. A post-project survey measuring their perceptions and practices was administered to the parents at the conclusion of the project. A comparison of the post-project survey results with the pre-project survey results yielded an evaluation of this goal. This goal was considered successful if a t-test for dependent samples displayed a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-project surveys.

The third goal of this project was to develop a weekly devotional series for the parents to lead with their children. The devotional series provided parents with a theologically sound and practical resource for family discipleship. The twelve-week devotional series focused on the twelve books of the Minor Prophets with the intention of teaching God's redemptive story through Scripture. The goal was considered met if the participating families completed all twelve of the devotions. After the project was completed, a rubric² was created and passed out to a panel of experts to assess the quality of the devotions, and a questionnaire³ pertaining to the effectiveness of the devotions was administered to the parents in a focus group format.

Ministry Context

Winfield, West Virginia

Crossroads Community Chapel is located in Winfield, West Virginia. Winfield is the county seat of Putnam County and sits along the Kanawha River. According to the 2010 census, Winfield has a population of 2,301 within city limits. Winfield is a part of the Huntington-Ashland West Virginia-Kentucky-Ohio Metropolitan Statistical Area,

²See Appendix 4.

³See Appendix 5.

which has a population of approximately 363,000.⁴ The town is also located on the boundary of the Charleston Metropolitan Statistical Area, which has a population of approximately 265,000. Putnam County has been one of the few areas of steady population growth in West Virginia due to its location between the two large metropolitan areas along Interstate 64. Winfield is also beside an unincorporated area that is divided into the two districts of Teays Valley and Scott Depot. This area has a population of 13,175. The Scott Depot area is a part of the Winfield school district. The whole region is often referred to as Teays Valley because of the remains of the pre-glacial Teays River.

The area serves as a bedroom community for both white-collar and blue-collar working families. Job opportunities are available in the medical field due to six hospitals located within thirty miles. The steady growth of the area provides opportunities for contractors and retail industry workers. The largest influence on the growth and affluence of the area is the Toyota Manufacturing Plant in the county. The plant was opened in 1996 and employs over 1,600 people in the area. In 2016, Toyota announced plans for an additional investment of over \$400 million in the plant. Toyota is vital to the economic growth of the area, but also invests in the community. The company has provided funds for new school buildings and facilities, donated vehicles, purchased emergency services equipment and ambulances, and partnered with educational programs in the county.

The population is fairly spread out with the largest age segment in the 25-44 range. This group makes up approximately 29 percent of the population. In fact, 65 percent of the area is under the age of 44 with another 25 percent in the 45-64 range. The

⁴All city and county statistics are taken from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/54/5439460.html>, accessed November 9, 2016.

median income for a household in the city is \$53,053, and the median income for a family is \$62,711. This is significantly higher than the state average. About 6.5 percent of families and 8.1 percent of the population live below the poverty line. The unemployment percentage is significantly below the state average. The ethnic makeup of the city is 96 percent white, 1 percent black, and other races constitute the remaining 3 percent. The Winfield school district consistently ranks as one of the highest districts in West Virginia in the areas of education, athletics, and extra-curricular activities. Parental involvement and support are very high in these areas. There are a number of specialized athletic training facilities in the area where children and teenagers invest time and resources to advance in their specified sport. Activities for children, especially sports, are highly valued and emphasized.

Crossroads Community Chapel

Crossroads Community Chapel is affiliated with the Teays Valley Baptist Association, the West Virginia Baptist Convention, and the American Baptist Churches USA. The church began in January of 2000 as an outreach ministry. Crossroads developed a mission statement as a way to promote the uniqueness of the church. This statement reads: “Crossroads Community Chapel is the church that doesn’t care! We don’t care about your past, how much money you make, or what kind of clothes you wear. We care about your relationship with Jesus Christ.” The church was one of the first non-traditional churches planted in the Teays Valley area. The congregation first met in the local YMCA and now gathers at Winfield High School. The relationship with the school began in 2006 and there exists a strong partnership with each other. The founding pastor resigned in 2014, and I was hired as the new lead pastor in the summer of 2015.

This is my first lead pastor position after serving in youth and family ministries over seventeen years in other churches.

In 2011, the church hired a part-time youth minister. The role of the youth minister is to grow disciples through the youth ministry of the church. At the present time, the church is searching for a part-time worship minister. Crossroads reaches out to the surrounding community with a strong missional emphasis. Funds that would be used to maintain a building are instead distributed as a blessing to the community. The church has purchased 100 chairs and an electronic sign for the high school. Throughout the year the church provides monetary funding for scholarships, trips, and leadership camps for students attending the high school. The church also provides backpacks, meals, and educational supplies to high school students as needs arise. Crossroads has a partnership with the juvenile court system in Putnam County by providing free weekly meals to teenagers in drug court. Approximately 20 teenagers and adults participate in a mission trip annually to a rural community in West Virginia. The church hosts two large community outreach events each year. The Summer Impact Festival is held in August as a gift to families in the community. The free event includes food, health screenings, haircuts, backpacks, school supplies, community demonstrations, inflatables, and a movie. Approximately 1,000 people attend the festival each year. In December, the church hosts a Christmas dinner for the community at the high school. The dinner includes free food, gifts, and a concert.

Crossroads Community Chapel is a multi-generational congregation with 38 as the average age for members. The congregation currently averages approximately 85 for Sunday morning worship. The church seeks to reach all generations in worship, and

employs a musically blended modern style using the gifts of the congregation and worship ministers. The lack of a church building has required a different mindset and structure in order to function. Volunteers faithfully arrive early every Sunday morning to set up the audio/video system, set out chairs, and prepare the welcome and hospitality area. There is a healthy attitude of expectancy throughout the church as God continues to bless the congregation with conversion growth and new families. People are seeking to grow spiritually through fellowship groups, solid teaching, and small group study times.

The people of Crossroads possess a strong bond of connection with each other as a result of experiencing God's vision for the church. However, members exhibit a casual attitude about church participation and involvement. Some have expressed concern that the purpose statement "We are the church that doesn't care" has in fact attracted people who "don't care" about commitment, accountability, or growth. A recent shift away from this purpose statement has begun to communicate what is involved with church commitment.

The lack of a facility creates the challenge of providing a safe and clean space for children's ministries. Families are hesitant to commit to the church due to the nomadic existence and the lack of a permanent sense of security. The majority of families began attending the church as young married couples so the children that are present were "birthed" into the church fellowship. Very few new families with young children have joined the church. The membership number has remained steady even though a large number of original families and members have left.

The church as a whole is very supportive of children's and youth ministries. Many members volunteer time to serve as teachers and youth leaders. Crossroads invests

a lot of time, energy, and resources into these ministries. The student ministry meets on Sunday evenings and in Wednesday evening small groups. Teenagers are incorporated into the corporate worship gathering by participating in the worship band, set-up and tear-down for the service, and assisting the children's ministry. The children have a age-specific teaching time in a classroom during the sermon every week. They are present during the singing, fellowship, and sharing of prayers and testimonies. The children also have a teaching time on Sunday evenings. Crossroads Community Chapel partners with two other area churches for a week-long Vacation Bible School program in the summer.

The people view the church as a family that takes care of families. Many members cite the church ministries as primary influencers of their faith. As a result, some families have adopted a passive approach to discipling their children. The emphasis is more on encouraging the children and teenagers to attend and participate in activities than family discipleship. In the past year, the lead pastor has placed a greater emphasis on resourcing the youth and children ministries to better equip families to disciple their children.

Rationale

The study of Scripture provides a solid foundation of how youth should be taught God's Word. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and Ephesians 6:4 clearly place the responsibility of the spiritual formation of youth on the family. The home is where the young person should first be presented with the teachings of Christ and provided the opportunity to respond to the gospel. Spiritual formation and discipleship should begin in the home. Formation should not stop there, however, as evidenced Titus 2:2-8. Further discipleship occurs in the context of a trusted community of faith by teachers and adults

who are sincere, genuine, and able to teach. One challenge youth and children ministries face is to partner with parents in spiritual formation without taking the place of parents as the primary spiritual leaders of their children.

The responsibility for the spiritual formation and discipleship of children is an issue in the modern church. In many cases, families are asking the church to raise and disciple their children. The role of the family is to be the primary context of discipleship for a child, and the role of the church is to equip that discipleship process in the family. These two institutions partner together to model multi-generational faithfulness. The church partners to equip and resource the parents while encouraging the family to be that primary faith caregiver, and parents partner with the church by not putting pressure on the church to disciple their children. However, a quick survey of churches in America reveals that there is a large amount of confusion over this responsibility. In fact, research shows that the majority of Christian parents are not actively engaged at all in the discipleship of their children.⁵

At Crossroads Community Chapel, there is a concern that parents do not recognize, understand, or embrace their role as the primary disciplers of their children. This responsibility is understood to fall under the purpose of the youth ministry of the church and the children's ministry leaders. Therefore, training and equipping from the church is needed to help parents commit to greater intentionality in the spiritual formation of their children. A major component of this equipping process was the creation of a weekly devotional series for parents to use at home with their children. This

⁵Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 25.

devotion was a biblically and theologically sound resource that will help children learn the scope of God's redemptive plan throughout Scripture. As families begin to make the commitment to invest in the discipleship process, it will strengthen the Crossroads Community Chapel community. Parents will not only be discipling their children, but equipping their child to be able to teach their own future children about the Gospel. This results in multi-generational discipleship and faithfulness in the church for years to come.

Definitions and Limitations

Definitions

Discipleship. By definition, a disciple is a follower, one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another. Discipleship is learning from and following a teacher.⁶ A Christian disciple is a person who accepts and assists in the spreading of the good news of Jesus Christ. Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in Jesus Christ and are equipped by the Holy Spirit to overcome the pressures and trials of this present life and become more and more like Christ. This process requires believers to examine their thoughts, words, and actions through a biblical lens.

Family. The term "family" can carry many different meanings. There is much diversity in defining a family in modern culture. A family can be identified as a household with cohabiting adults with no children or a household with children but only one adult. Extended family households containing two or more generations that one nuclear family have diminished, but have traditionally been defined as a family unit.⁷

⁶Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Making and Being Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 24.

⁷Carle C. Zimmerman, *Family and Civilization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1947), 42.

From a sociological and historical viewpoint, families have been defined differently according to function, purpose, and origin.⁸ For the purpose of this project, “family” referred to parents/legal guardians and children under the age of eighteen living in the same household.

Family devotion. This phrase refers to an intentional time in a household where the family worships together. God deserves to be worshipped by families in the home. Elements of a family devotional time include reading the Bible, praying together, and singing songs of praise to the Lord.⁹ For the purpose of this project, this was the designated time for the family to read selected passages from Scripture together and discuss the application.

Redemptive story. This project created a devotional series from the Minor Prophets with the intention of teaching this overarching redemptive history so parents will see Christ in all the Bible, teach Christ from the Bible, and love Christ through the whole Bible.¹⁰ Scripture contains events, institutions, and people that are a part of the historical stream by which God redeems His people through Jesus Christ. Even though the Bible is a library of 66 books written by different authors, it contains the single metanarrative of the revelation of Jesus in both its unity and diversity.¹¹ The

⁸David Popenoe, *Families without Fathers: Fathers, Marriage, and Children in American Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 2.

⁹Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2016), 47.

¹⁰Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 153.

¹¹Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 202.

metanarrative contains four movements throughout the redemptive story identified as creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

Limitations

The long-term effects of this project were difficult to determine and are beyond the scope of this project. Parents received training that equipped them to disciple their children. In addition to the training, the parents used a theologically sound devotional resource. While the training provided the foundation for future application, the resource was limited to only 13 weeks. Parents recognized the need to locate additional resources to use beyond the 13 weeks to continue their weekly devotions.

The devotional series focused on the books of the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament. While one of the stated goals was to provide a theologically sound resource with the intention of teaching God's redemptive story through the Bible, this devotional series only covered a small portion of that story. Further devotional resources will need to be developed and/or located to present the entire redemptive history.

The training and devotional series was created exclusively to parents with children in the home at Crossroads Community Chapel. The application of this project, however, can be used in any church setting as a viable resource to equip parents of children and teenagers.

Research Methodology

A pre-project survey was used to evaluate the present family discipleship practice of parents at Crossroads Community Chapel. The survey was based on the "Family Perceptions and Practices" survey developed by Timothy Paul Jones in his book

Family Ministry Field Guide.¹² Leading up to the beginning of the project, I preached a six-week sermon series on multi-generational faithfulness. This series focused on selected passages from Scripture that teach the parental role in family discipleship. At the beginning of the project, a parent seminar was held for the purpose of training parents how to lead a family devotion. Parents were given a family devotional series to begin on week two of the project.

The twelve-week devotional series focused on the Minor Prophets with the intention of teaching God's redemptive story through Scripture. This series provided one devotion per week and was divided into six sections: Be Together, Hear Together, Learn Together, Talk Together, Pray Together, and Serve Together. These sections guided families through a time of fellowship, experiential learning, Bible study, discussion, prayer, and an application activity that is missional in focus. At the conclusion of the project, a rubric was created to determine the accessibility, accuracy, and quality of the devotions. This panel was comprised of two Old Testament professors, a professor in the field of Family Ministry, and an expert in the field of Youth Ministry. A focus group also met after the conclusion of the project to participate in an open discussion guided by a questionnaire.

A twelve-week sermon series on the Minor Prophets was preached each Sunday morning that coincided with that particular devotion for the week. At the end of the designated twelve weeks, the church held a celebration program for the parents. This program included an open time of discussion to provide parents the opportunity to share their questions, experiences, struggles, successes, critiques, and ideas from their family

¹²Jones, *Field Guide*, 201.

devotion time. At the meeting, parents were given the “Family Perceptions and Practices” survey a second time. These surveys helped evaluate their perceptions, thoughts, and opinions on the devotional series. The surveys were reviewed over the course of the following week.

The results from the post-project survey were analyzed and compared with the results from the pre-project survey to determine if the project was effective in improving the perceptions and practices of family discipleship in the home. The “Family Perceptions and Practices” survey was scored by numerically weighing the answers from 1 to 6, with 6 the best possible answer value and 1 the worst possible answer value. Once the survey was completed, the total score was assessed, with ninety-six being the optimal total score. The survey was divided into two sections, “Family Perceptions” and “Family Practices,” which each had the optimal score of forty-eight. The pre- and post-tests of participating parents were matched enabling the results to be tabulated for a t-test for dependent samples. Standard statistical computations were used to confirm whether or not the change was significant. This goal was considered successfully met if a t-test for dependent samples displayed a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-tests. This research instrument was performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

The family is the oldest institution known to humanity. It is co-existent with the human race, and was created before government, school, and even the church. Genesis 1 teaches that God instituted the family as the means by which his people would fill the earth. However, this institution of the family was created for much more than just procreation. God's purpose in creating humanity and instituting the family is to fill the earth with people who know Him, love Him, worship Him, and bear His image.

The Bible has much to say about family, parenting, and educating children. Family discipleship involves teaching children theology. They need to know who God is and what He has done. Sound theology includes children understanding who they are and how they should respond to the gospel. This moves beyond just an intellectual assent of biblical truths in the mind to life transformation.

Scripture places the primary responsibility of the spiritual formation of children on the family. The emphasis on family discipleship is predominantly found in the books of the law, wisdom literature, and the epistles. An exposition of key passages in Scripture will provide a biblical foundation of parental responsibility in discipleship. The church has a responsibility to both remind parents of their duty and to equip parents to

accomplish the task. This chapter will provide a scriptural foundation for reminding parents of their responsibility to disciple their children.

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Deuteronomy contains a record of oral speeches given by Moses to the people of Israel as they were stationed on the borders of the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is an anonymous composition because the author of the book does not identify himself. Before the rise of the source critical method, both Jewish and Christian scholars assumed Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy.¹ Although some methods and positions deserve careful consideration, there is sufficient biblical evidence for Mosaic authorship. The book opens with the statement “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness” (1:1). This attributes the following passage and, by implication, the entire book to Moses.² Other Old Testament books refer to Moses as the author as well (Josh 1:7, 2 Kgs 14:6, Neh 8:1). The New Testament also refers to the laws that Moses commanded Israel to obey (Matt 8:4, Mark 1:44, Luke 5:14, John 8:5, Acts 6:14) and to the book of Moses (Mark 12:26).

The book reviews the teachings and events of God’s deliverance as recounted in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Moses functions as the authorized spokesman for God and delivers these words according to the commands of God (1:4). By giving these instructions to Israel prior to them entering the promised land, Moses was exhorting the people to remember God’s commands and hold fast to them.

¹Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 2.

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), .

Obedience to God's commands would place the Israelites in the best possible position to know God and enjoy the benefits and blessings of covenant with Him. These blessings would pass on through the generations as their children and their children's children would remain obedient to God's words. Nothing was more important to the future of God's people than the communication of the commandments.

The first four chapters of Deuteronomy record key events from Israel's journey from Mt. Sinai to the plains of Moab. The Decalogue is recounted in chapter 5 and reviews events described in the earlier books of the *Torah*. The remaining chapters of Deuteronomy serve as a discourse on the implications of the statutes and ordinances for life in the land that Israel is about to inhabit.³ Life in the promised land will be different than it is in the wilderness; there will be new challenges and temptations. Moses will not lead the people into Canaan, so he stresses the importance of God's instructions. He emphasizes that obedience to these commands is not only necessary but also beneficial for the blessing of future generations. The focus on instructing future generations demonstrates that Deuteronomy is a pedagogical tool to help each generation understand what it means to be a part of God's chosen people.⁴

Deuteronomy chapter 6 is an admonition to love and fear God by keeping the commandments and passing them on to future generations. Central to this passage in Deuteronomy 6 is what Jewish tradition refers to as the *Shema*. This teaching has been called the "fundamental truth of Israel's religion" and the "fundamental duty founded

³Block, *The Gospel According to Moses*, 10.

⁴Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-21:9*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6A (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 137.

upon it.”⁵ This chapter is structured in a way that guides the reader to hear, learn, fear, obey, and live. Verses 1-3 speak of hearing and learning God’s commands. Verses 4-9 emphasize teaching the commands to children. Verses 10-15 warn the people not to forget God once they enter the land. Verses 16-19 again remind the people to keep God’s commands. Verses 20-26 re-emphasize the importance of teaching children to remember. This pattern demonstrates the importance of teaching children so future generations will remember God’s faithfulness and live in obedience to the covenant.

Verse 4 begins with Moses proclaiming to the nation of Israel that the Lord is one. Their God was the only one true God and there was no other God. He is unique. He alone is to be the exclusive object of worship, love, and honor. Craigie explains,

As one God (or the “Unique”), when he spoke there was no other to revoke that promise; when he warned, there was no other to provide refuge from that warning. He was not merely first among the gods, as Baal in the Canaanite pantheon, Amon-Re in Egypt, or Marduk in Babylon; he was the one and only God who imposed on Israel the charge to love.⁶

The God of Israel has no rival and his people are not to live as though he does. This further clarifies the commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me,” and “You shall not make for yourself a carved image...for I the Lord your God am a jealous God” (Deut 5:7-9). This God entered into an intimate and covenantal relationship with His people Israel. He is the only one for them and they are the people on whom He has set His love. Therefore He is to be the only object of their undivided loyalty and wholehearted devotion. The fundamental truth of the *Shema* is that God is one, and the

⁵Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 168.

⁶Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 169.

fundamental duty is Israel's response of love.⁷ This was an essential truth for the Israelites to understand as they lived in a polytheistic world.⁸

Verse 5 explains what exclusive allegiance to God involves. Obedience to God is to be a response based upon the understanding of His love. Peter Craigie says, "By reflecting on the commandments they were reflecting on God's words, and by understanding the path of life set down by the commandments they would at the same time be discovering the way in which God's love for them was given expression."⁹ Living in obedience to the commandments is seen as a response to the love of God who called Israel to be His own.

Moses encourages the Israelites to love "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." This love of God encompasses their whole being. A study of Hebrew anthropology indicates that the heart is "the seat of the intellect, equivalent to the mind."¹⁰ It functions metaphorically as the inner being of a person and involves the emotions and will.¹¹ The soul represented a readiness to sacrifice life for God and carried with it the idea of full devotion.¹² Might is symbolic of the physical being. The implication of one's might involves ability, power, strength, and means.¹³ Using one's might exhausted all physical resources. This holistic love finds its expression in joyfully

⁷Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 168.

⁸Block, *The Gospel According to Moses*, 237.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 164.

¹¹Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 183.

¹²Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 339.

¹³Ibid.

obeying the words and commands of God. The love of God and love of His commandments impact His people individually, within the community, and within the family. Those who live in light of these realities will have transformed lives and invest themselves in passing on those life changing beliefs to future generations.

Deuteronomy 6 is concerned with the individual's obedience to God, but it is also concerned with families. God is calling His people individually to first seek to worship Him and keep His commands. Parents need to love God supremely. A parent cannot pass down and give to their child what they do not possess. Individual parents are to keep His words on their heart, think on them, meditate on them, and reflect on them. He then calls individuals to pass on these words from generation to generation so that His people may continue to know Him. The next few verses reference teaching children as a response to personal obedience.

The phrase "teach them diligently" in verse 7 carries the strong idea of an assertive, repetitive, and intentional teaching process in the family context. Moses chose the Hebrew term *shanan*. This word means to "sharpen, to pierce through, or to give a sharp edge; to hone."¹⁴ Eugene Merrill explains this concept,

The covenant recipient must impress the words of covenant faith into the thinking of his children by inscribing them there with indelible sharpness and precision. The image is that of the engraver of a monument who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches a text into the face of a solid slab of granite. The sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done the message is there to say.¹⁵

¹⁴John Currid, *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy*, Evangelical Press Study Commentary (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 165.

¹⁵Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

This passage teaches two fundamental principles in family discipleship. First, discipleship is an impressionable, holistic process that involves the head, heart, and hands. Parents are to teach their children to know God's words, believe God's words, and obey God's words. Second, every moment of the day is a chance to speak, teach, and demonstrate the love and character of God to children. There needs to be deliberate teaching and intentional instruction as God's truth is the topic of conversation from morning to evening. The family is to be preoccupied with the words of God and faithful transmission to children. "When you sit down" and "when you walk" suggests teaching both during times of restful inactivity as well as busyness. Both encompass all of human effort. "When you lie down" and "when you rise" speak of the totality of time. Covenantal transmission is so important that it must be at the center of all of one's labor and life.¹⁶ God's design for the family is to make God's word a part of everything they do. Everything is to involve the word of God, and His word should be read, spoken, meditated on, and memorized as it is applied to every aspect of one's life.

The body is also marked by these words and commandments as they are placed on the hand and on the forehead. This command may be interpreted metaphorically as a constant awareness of the message, although several factors speak for a literal application.¹⁷ Verse 9 calls for an actual, physical writing of the commandments. If that is the literal case, then the commandments could be tied to the body like an amulet and should be with the person in all places at all times.¹⁸ The high priests wore a medallion

¹⁶Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

¹⁷Block, *Deuteronomy*, 185.

¹⁸Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 341.

(Ex 28:36-39) and there is extrabiblical evidence for ornaments worn on the forehead and for the practice of wearing phylacteries in the late Second Temple Period.¹⁹

Moses goes on to order that the commandments should be worn not just on the physical body as well as the home and village. In this way, the person and entire family would become identified as the people of the Lord.²⁰ Bock explains,

In so doing Israelites will remind themselves that their primary allegiance is to Yahweh whenever they leave from or return to their homes, and that love for Yahweh must govern all activities inside and outside the house. Furthermore, it will declare to guests and all who pass by that in this household Yahweh is not only the unseen guest but also the supreme head. The inscription on the gates extends this commitment to the entire community, reminding citizens and visitors alike of Yahweh's rule over the town and the nation as a whole.²¹

Hands and head are actions and attitudes. Doorframes and gates are the entrances to the home and city. Both of these spaces represent the two primary points of access into a family's life. Whether taken literally or metaphorically, the markings and signs described indicate that all parts of the Israelite life were distinguished by obedience to the commandments as a response of love for God.²²

The contents in the first nine verses of this chapter are designed to keep the words and commandments of God central in the experience of each individual member of the covenant community. Moses thus shifts his focus of instruction to a warning for the people to heed. The temptation to forget God's commands and faithfulness will be present as the Israelites take possession of the promised land.

¹⁹Bock, *Deuteronomy*, 185.

²⁰Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 168.

²¹Bock, *Deuteronomy*, 186.

²²Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 171.

Verses 10-19 teach how crucial the transmission of the covenant promises are for the people of Israel. Those who have witnessed God's faithful deliverance need to be continually reminded of those events. Over time it is possible that such events would lose their meaning or sense of purpose. Merrill notes, "No other people had been called to such a significant mission, one that enveloped within it the very salvation of humankind. Israel must therefore recall its history and pass along its facts and values to generations yet to come."²³ The chapter then returns again to an emphasis on generational transmission in verses 20-25.

The nature of the question from son to father implies a good family relationship built on trust and an adherence to earlier commands to diligently teach. This is a question from a child who is growing to maturity in the faith community. It is hinted in the text that the child already has been instructed to obey, but wants further understanding on the meaning and significance of the commandments that have shaped the life of the parent and family. Moses commands the parent to be ready to give an answer that explains the redemptive history of God. The brief history is given in outline form, beginning with the experience of God's deliverance in the Exodus. The themes that arise from this teaching include God's judgment, God's purposes, God's gift of the promised land, God's giving of the law and commandments, and God revealing Himself by both action and word. The result for the people is righteousness described as a personal relationship with God that would be seen in the lives of His people. The answer

²³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 174.

to the question focuses on the response of obedience to God and the fruit of that response in daily life.²⁴

The book of Deuteronomy was the primary curriculum for the ongoing program of religious education for Israel.²⁵ In this chapter, God places the responsibility first and foremost at the feet of the parents in the family. Parents are to teach the words of God to their children. Families are to make the grace and deliverance of God known throughout all aspects of life. God's covenant is to be visible everywhere in the home. God intended that Israel would be a nation of people that loved the Lord their God with their whole being and who willingly and faithfully lived by God's commands. The younger generations carried the hope for the covenant faith community. The teaching and traditions passed on by the family would guarantee the future of the covenant. The continuity of faith in a religious community depends on the observance of that faith within the context of individual families. If parents fail to live out that faith and pass it on responsibly to their children, the very existence of that faith community is in danger.²⁶

Psalm 78:1-8

An exposition of Psalm 78 will provide a biblical understanding that parents are to pass on their faith to future generations. This Psalm portrays in poetic fashion the importance of fathers applying what they have learned from their own fathers, and passing that wisdom onto their own children. The passage demonstrates the responsibility parents have of proclaiming the greatness of God to their children.

²⁴Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 175.

²⁵Christiansen, *Deuteronomy 1-21:9*, 143.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 151.

Psalm 78 was written to teach the faithfulness of God in the course of redemptive history. It is a long psalm that contains seventy-two verses recalling the history of Israel's disobedience and God's repeated mercy from the time of the Exodus. The reader is given a historical perspective on how God has displayed His faithfulness as His people have walked in rebellious ways. This Psalm was composed by an author named as Asaph. Asaph was a poet and prophesied under the direction of King David (1 Chr 25:2). He was one of David's three chief musicians, and was one of the Levites who helped lead the music before the ark in Jerusalem. Asaph wrote a number of Psalms including Psalms 50 and 73-83, but in this particular psalm he calls for God's people to teach the wonders of God to each successive generation so that they would put their faith in God. Each generation's faithfulness with this task is critical, so that successive generations would not forget the works of God. The first eight verses reveal this purpose and call the reader to listen to the teachings of the psalm.

Asaph begins the psalm as a prophet by demanding a hearing from the people. He wants the people to not just hear the words but to be obedient to his teaching. The word translated "teaching" is the Hebrew word *torah*. This was the word for their law, but also referred to any authoritative instruction.²⁷ He records the history of Israel by using a "parable" or "proverb" that gives spiritual meaning and instruction within the story. Asaph's goal is to show Israel's history from God's perspective.²⁸ The "dark things" Asaph refers to are the riddles and stories of God's interaction with the previous

²⁷Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 281.

²⁸Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 405.

generations. The reader is reminded of the accounts of the past that have been heard and known. The sayings “from of old” carry forth an application that is timeless. These stories have been passed down by the father and told repeatedly so as to bring to remembrance the history of God’s faithfulness. The audience is called to read and ponder the stories to determine their meaning so that each generation may draw understanding from the past.²⁹ The sayings applied to past generations as well as indicating both the present and future need for application.

Aspah reveals the content of the teaching that each generation is to remember and tell to the next generation. This threefold phrase includes recounting the glorious deeds of the Lord, his strength and power, and the wonders that he has accomplished to deliver his people. These teachings must not be hidden from children, and the mere mention of this reminder demonstrates that the temptation to forget God and his saving power is prevalent in each generation. Fathers need to share with their children the wonderful things God has done. Children should be told about the mighty deeds recorded in the Scriptures and be encouraged to respond with faithful obedience.

This Psalm teaches that not only should the works of God be shared, but also the words of God’s testimony. God has revealed himself to Israel through his law and his divine actions that preceded it.³⁰ Both are necessary for living in relationship with him. God established a “testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel.” This testimony encompasses all of God’s revealed words, including his laws, commandments, warnings,

²⁹Longman, *Psalms*, 405.

³⁰Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1990), 288.

and promises. Each generation must remember the ways of God in relation to Israel as an integral part of legal and covenantal instruction.³¹ Marvin Tate notes, “The commandments and practices need the tradition of God’s active love to give them life and to set them in context. Torah is a combination of story and commandments; the commandments are understood in context of the story and the story is incomplete without the commandments. Only by understanding the old traditions can the present generation avoid repeating the sins of the previous ones.”³² The teachings require a long-term vision of multi-generational faithfulness. Fathers are to be aware of the consequence of hiding these teachings from their own children as it affects generations yet to come.

Along with the exhortation to teach to future generations, Asaph reveals three results of faithful teaching in verses 7 and 8. First, children will set their hope in God. Second, they will remember God’s commandments. Third, they will keep his commands. The coming generation will be obedient. A living memory of God and his actions will lead to application.³³ They will not be like their forefathers who demonstrated a selective memory of God’s commands.

The remainder of the psalm recounts the history of Israel from its time of slavery in Egypt to the reign of David. It is a history steeped in rebellion that is not to be repeated. Asaph specifically mentions two generations of forefathers who stubbornly rebelled against God. One was the generation that perished in the wilderness. They forgot the wonderful works of God. Asaph recounts in verses 40-43, “How often they rebelled

³¹Longman, *Psalms*, 405.

³²Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 289.

³³Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 319.

against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe, when he performed his signs in Egypt and his marvels in the fields of Zoan.” The other generation settled in the promised land following the death of Joshua. This generation, though faithful in serving the Lord, failed to teach the next generation. The book of Judges says, “And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.” (Judg 2:10) A whole generation grew up who did not know of the works and word of God because the previous generation failed to teach. The result was multiple generations of people who responded to God’s faithfulness by being stubborn and rebellious. They did not remember God’s deeds. They did not believe or set their hope in him. They did not keep his covenant and so continued to sin and test him. They were not loyal or faithful. Asaph goes on to say that in response God became angry and gave them over to be destroyed. The judgment God had previously reserved for Egypt now turned on Israel.³⁴ The psalm serves as a warning to both present and future generations to not be like their forefathers.

The teaching of Psalm 78 is a reminder that God has established his testimony in Jacob. He has established his law in Israel. It is now each generation’s responsibility to make sure the next generation is told so that they would know God, put their hope in him, and learn how to walk in faithful obedience. Each generation must hear the story of salvation and be taught to choose to trust God. As a teaching tool for multi-generational faithfulness, Asaph tells of the great miracles of God. He reminds the listener of the grace

³⁴Broyles, *Psalms*, 320.

that is evident through all the judgments as God guides, redeems, and shepherds his people.³⁵ It is this teaching that each generation must pass on to future generations so that each subsequent generation might know of the faithfulness of God.

Ephesians 6:1-4

An exposition of this passage will provide a biblical mandate that parents, notably fathers, are to disciple their children. Fathers are commanded in this passage to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. These verses serve as a guideline for fathers to follow so as to not discourage the child from the faith by inappropriate attitudes and actions in teaching. This highlights the responsibility a father has in spiritual formation and mandates the intentionality of that responsibility.

In the letter to the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul is teaching how believers are to walk in a manner worthy of their new identity in Jesus Christ. God is concerned with what happens in all spheres of one's life. In chapter five Paul exhorts the church to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (5:21). This phrase serves as an introduction to the directions given in the remainder of chapter five and the first verses of chapter 6. Paul turns attention specifically to the household unit and the rules of conduct expected by each member of the family. He first explains what submission to Christ and one another looks like in marriage, and continues to teach the rules of conduct as they apply to children and parents. As in the previous section on the marriage relationship, there is the emphasis that the actions of a believer are both grounded in and directed toward the Lord.³⁶

³⁵Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 281.

Paul previously addressed wives as the subordinate group first, and so he again follows a similar pattern. Paul envisioned an audience of children gathered together in the churches in Ephesus where the letter would be read. He appeals first to the children to obey their parents. There is the assumption that the children are old enough to be believers and understand instructions on Christian living, but still young enough to be under the care and authority of their parents' household.³⁷ A child's act of submission in the household relationship is carried out by obeying the parents. The phrase "in the Lord" modifies the verb "obey." Christian children are to obey their parents in keeping with their commitment to Christ.³⁸ This is the first but not the only motivation given for obedience. Obedient behavior is generally accepted to be the morally right thing to do, and this exhortation is supported by the fifth commandment of the Decalogue.³⁹ The prominent position in the Decalogue of this command shows that true obedience is a reflection of one's relationship with God.⁴⁰ In the Old Testament, honoring one's parents meant obeying them, while to dishonor them was disobedience. According to this command, both parents are to be honored.

Paul includes that this commandment is the first in the law that has a promise attached to it. The first promise given to a commandment in the Decalogue comes from

³⁶Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 277.

³⁷William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 147.

³⁸Klein, *Ephesians*, 147.

³⁹Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1990), 406.

⁴⁰Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 439.

the second commandment that prohibits idolatry (Exod 20:6). Therefore Paul must mean this is the first promise with respect to children.⁴¹ This promise speaks of prosperity and longevity for those who honor their parents, and originally applied to life in the land of Canaan. Paul understands this promise to be a proverbial expression that generalizes the most likely outcome for families who are obedient to this command and honor God in this way.⁴² He believes that a Christian community in which parents are honored by their children will experience well-being and good health within both the household and the church body.

In verse 4, the latter group within the family household is now addressed. Just as Christian children carry the responsibility to honor and obey, there is an expectation placed upon the parents, specifically the father of the family. Fathers are enjoined to raise up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. The change from “parents” to “fathers” is significant. Whereas obedience is required toward both parents, it is the father’s responsibility to discipline and disciple their children.⁴³ This highlights the biblical headship of the husband found in Scripture (Eph 5:22-23). Even though the primary responsibility rests upon the father, the mother is to share in that responsibility to nurture the children and serve as a godly example for them. In Proverbs 1:8 children are exhorted not only to listen to the instruction of their father, but also not to forsake the law of their mother. As she carries out her God-given role as presented earlier in Ephesians, she becomes a model of submission for her children.

⁴¹Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, 277.

⁴²Klein, *Ephesians*, 147.

⁴³O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 445.

Paul reminds the father that his responsibility is not so much linked with authority as the patriarch of the household but with his identity in Christ.⁴⁴ This is great insight into the parenting responsibility of spiritual formation. Fathers are not to hold authoritarian rule over their children, even as the children are obedient in honoring their parents. A father is to conduct himself toward those under his authority with restraint and for their good as an expression of his relationship with the Lord. This responsibility is expressed in both a positive and negative sense. Negatively, fathers are not to provoke their sons or daughters to anger. This is the type of anger that leads to bitterness and resentment over time. Paul gives a similar instruction to fathers in Colossians when he says “do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (Col 3:21). Peter O’Brien notes,

In the earlier paraenesis the apostle had expressed his concern about anger among God’s people, urging his readers to deal with it promptly. If anger is prolonged, Satan can use it for his own ends, exploiting the strains that develop within the Christian community. Now specifically within the family, fathers are urged to avoid those attitudes, words, and actions which would provoke their children to anger. Effectively, the apostle is ruling out excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child’s needs and sensibilities. Behind this curbing of a father’s authority is the clear recognition that children, while they are expected to obey their parents in the Lord, are persons in their own right who are not to be manipulated, exploited, or crushed.⁴⁵

In the ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures the father was an extraordinarily powerful figure within the household who carried far-reaching legal authority over his

⁴⁴Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 407.

⁴⁵O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 446.

children.⁴⁶ Paul is enjoining Christian fathers not to abuse that authority, but instead to nurture their children in a way that shows love, concern, provision, and instruction. Paul moves from the negative admonition of the father's responsibility to the positive exhortation to "bring up" his children. This verb has the meaning "to nourish." It was often used to refer to bodily nourishment and care, but can also apply to holistic care of the entire person.⁴⁷ This nurture is given through the "discipline" (*paideia*) and instruction (*nouthesia*) of the Lord. Instead of unreasonable parental conduct, the discipline would involve following Christ's example and putting into practice his teachings. The children would be more eager to learn if the parents themselves show the way by their obedience and faithfulness.

The term παιδεία (*paideia*) carries the idea of both physical and mental training as well as disciplinary punishment.⁴⁸ The educational value of this discipline was an important and essential component in shaping the behavior of a child. The concept involved providing guidance, limits, structure, and punishment for disobedience. God employs the use of discipline in the process of producing spiritual growth and maturity in his children (Heb 12:5) and is an indication and testimony of his love (Heb 12:6).

Discipline must be accompanied by instruction. The term νουθεσία (*nouthesia*) often referred to wise counsel, guidance, or warning.⁴⁹ It involved setting

⁴⁶Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 401.

⁴⁷Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, 278.

⁴⁸F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 398.

⁴⁹Thielman, *Ephesians*, 402.

one's thinking straight. For the Christian household, this discipline and instruction would involve teaching about the person of Jesus, following his example, and putting into practice his precepts.⁵⁰ It is the parent's task to mold not only the child's behavior according to what is acceptable and productive but also the child's understanding, attitudes, and knowledge of God according to God's Word. The Christian father is to be a gentle and patient teacher whose instruction focused on the lordship of Jesus Christ. The ultimate concern for the father is not just that his children will be obedient to his authority, but that through this training and instruction the children will come to know and obey the Lord.

The apostle Paul wrote this passage to the church in Ephesus to show the believers that the household relationship between parent and child provides another opportunity to live out the commands of God. The home provides an outlet for the family to express the mutual honor, respect, and loving admonition that is at the heart of the message of Jesus. God cares about how children treat their parents. Children serve Christ when they obey their parents and honor them. Conversely, God cares about how parents raise their children. Parents serve Christ when they nourish their children's growth in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Summary of Biblical Texts

This chapter has provided an exposition of three biblical texts that serve as a theological foundation for family discipleship. Deuteronomy 6:1-25 teaches that parents are primarily responsible to teach God's words and commands to their children. This teaching occurs in all areas and aspects of family life. Parents teach their children how to

⁵⁰Bruce, *Epistles*, 398.

love God by loving God in front of them. Parents intentionally impress the truth of God on their children. In Psalm 78, the importance of multi-generational faithfulness is emphasized for the continuation of the covenant community. Each generation is responsible to teach their children so that they might know God, put their hope in him, and walk in obedience to his commands. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes to the church in Ephesus concerning Christian submission in the household. Ephesians 6:1-4 teaches that fathers are to disciple their children, and do so in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. These three passages from the Old and New Testaments exhort parents to be the primary disciplers of their children. The Bible consistently instructs parents to train their own children in the ways of God.

God's Redemptive Story

In light of the passages from Scripture that command parents to disciple their children, a well-developed biblical worldview should frame how the Bible is taught and communicated. Scripture is the sole authority to teach because it is the very revelation of God Himself. Reading the Bible enables the reader to know God more fully and to know how to respond to Him in love and obedience.

Discipleship invites young people into God's redemptive story and prepares them to receive the Holy Spirit who calls them, shapes them, and enlists them in God's plan to change the world.⁵¹ Growing in understanding of the grand story of redemption is crucial for teaching and spiritual formation. Families and churches must develop a vision of Christian discipleship to children and adolescents in order to pass on the gospel story

⁵¹Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

from generation to generation. According to Matthew 28:19-20, disciples are to create disciples, baptize them into faith and knowledge of the Trinity, and teach them to be obedient. Christian formation is therefore the intentional process of developing disciples who are actively and continually growing to maturity in Christ. This maturity involves possessing a profound and personal sense of God's love, forgiveness, and confidence in Christ to bring about his good purposes for them in the story.

Children and adolescents need to know the whole story of God, meet God in the story, and make God's story their story. The formative power of Scripture is released when both adults and children discover that the biblical story is a compelling unity that is ongoing, dependable, and that each individual has a place within.⁵² It is vitally important to teach that the whole Bible tells the story of God's redemption from beginning to end. Each section of Scripture plays a part in the divine metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Systematic planned teaching should focus on the content of God's story, whether the hearer is church-ed or unchurch-ed.⁵³ Healthy discipleship will use different styles of teaching so that different learning styles, age-appropriateness, and cognitive understanding can be accommodated.

Teaching God's redemptive story through Scripture is a foundational beginning to Christian formation and continues its application of the understanding of kingdom living here on earth. For example, the Minor Prophets demonstrate humanity's struggle to atone for sin, and tell pieces of the great redemptive story into which God

⁵²Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 83.

⁵³Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 148.

graciously invites everyone. Within that story for a believer, there should be a concern for loving others, growing up into salvation, working out one's salvation with fear and trembling, and a concern for social justice and acts of mercy.⁵⁴ Much of discipleship focuses on living life as a faithful disciple while anticipating the revelation of the fullness of the kingdom of God. Formation involves disciplines, practices, and traditions that leads children and adolescents toward loving obedience rather than dutiful obligation.

The whole Bible shows a movement through human history with four main parts. At creation, the world and all that is in it was made for humanity to joyfully live in the presence of God. However, a conflict develops as a result of Adam and Eve's choice to reject God's rule over them. As representatives of humanity, sin entered the world. Through their attitudes and actions all of humanity is in enmity with God, and this rebellion leads to both a physical and spiritual death. In the person of Jesus Christ, God entered the world to renew and restore His people. The redemptive metanarrative of the Bible climaxes with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The story consummates as God promised to renew the whole world. The restoration of all things will occur when Jesus Christ returns to judge sin and evil, and ushers in righteousness and peace. These four elements constitute the basic components of the metanarrative plot. Therefore the process of Christian discipleship in children begins with careful, intentional instruction of God's redemptive story of salvation in Scripture. This teaching, along with the relational mentoring and care given by their parents, leads them toward spiritual growth in Christ.

⁵⁴Gary Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 104.

The Minor Prophets

The purpose of the sermon and devotion series is to give parents a sound resource that highlights the metanarrative themes of fall, redemption, and consummation found in the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets consist of twelve books: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. They were written by twelve authors, whose names are used as the titles of each book. In the Hebrew Bible, these twelve books are included in the “Latter Prophets” to differentiate them from the “Former Prophets.” This classification simply indicates the order of placement in the Hebrew Bible. In English translations of the Bible, the books are referred to as “Minor Prophets” because of their size in relation to the larger books of the prophets in the Old Testament. Charles Feinberg provides a succinct and insightful description of the contexts and messages of the Minor Prophets,

The human authors lived, labored, and wrote from the ninth to the fifth century BC. Their messages, which are of major significance, contain the dominant themes of the prophetic Scriptures concerning the Messiah, Israel, the nations, and the earthly Kingdom of the Lord. Their times belong in the era of the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian period, and the post-captivity centuries.⁵⁵

The teachings and prophecies of the twelve prophets are predominantly centered around four points in history. First, they preach within the immediate historical context of their own times and culture. Second, they warn of the threatening captivities to come as a result of Israel’s disobedience. Third, they speak of the restoration of Israel as promised by God after exile. Fourth, they prophesy the coming of the Messiah and the reign of the Messiah as king. Irving Jensen provides a lucid summary of the topics in the Minor Prophets. He writes,

⁵⁵Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 9.

Many chapters deal with sin, warning, and judgment, but they do so because that is the very setting of God's good news of redemption. There is a positive, bright evangel in every book of the "The Twelve:" the irrepressible love of God to sinful men; the perseverance and pursuits of His grace; His mercies that follow the exiled and the outcast; His truth that goes forth richly upon the heathen; the hope of the Saviour of mankind; the outpouring of the Spirit; counsels of patience; impulses of tenderness and of healing.⁵⁶

The Minor Prophets identify the specific ways in which Israel has broken the covenant. These include social injustice and oppression, insincere worship of God, mixing pagan religions with the true faith revealed by God, and the worship of false gods and idols. The prophets also pronounce the judgment of God on this unfaithfulness to the covenant. Sometimes the judgment is predicted in specific terms and other times it is more general or universal. Judgment is coming. The Minor Prophets then speak a message of comfort to the faithful. God will yet save them completely, finally, and gloriously.⁵⁷

The twelve prophets individually move through judgment to salvation. Each minor prophet focuses on sin, judgment, and restoration in their own specific way within their own specific historical context. However, this movement in the redemptive story can be seen as the prophets are viewed as a singular unit. James Hamilton notes,

Broadly speaking, in Hosea through Micah the covenant sin of Israel is denounced. Then the coming punishment, judgment, is declared in Nahum through Zephaniah. And through judgment salvation comes as the restoration to the land and the glorious future for which Israel still longs come into view in Haggai through Malachi.⁵⁸

The Minor Prophets present a message full of hope. God's promise has not been overturned or withdrawn. A new day is coming. A new creation will dawn. A new

⁵⁶Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 396.

⁵⁷Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 189.

⁵⁸James M. Hamilton, Jr, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 183.

covenant will be established, whereby Yahweh writes his law on the hearts of his people. The prophets make it clear that these blessings are not only for Israel. Gentiles too will be made members of the new covenant and beneficiaries of the blessings.⁵⁹ All nations will behold the consummation brought forth by the victorious King.

Hosea

Hosea revealed very little about his background, though this book offers a detailed glimpse into his life and family. The prophet's name means "salvation," which is likely a reference to Hosea's position in Israel as a voice of hope to those who would repent and turn to God because of his message. God commands Hosea to marry Gomer, a bride described as "a wife of whoredom" (1:2) and a woman who bore Hosea three children (1:4,6,9). God used the names of these children, along with his wife's unfaithfulness, to send specific messages to the people of Israel.

Structured around five cycles of judgment and restoration, the book of Hosea makes clear its repetitious theme: though God will bring judgment on sin, He will always bring His people back to Himself. God's love for Israel, a nation of people more interested in themselves than in God's direction for their lives, shines through clearly against the darkness of their idolatry and injustice (14:4). Throughout the book, Hosea pictured the people turning away from the Lord and turning toward other gods (4:1–3; 8:5–6). This propensity for idolatry meant that the Israelites lived as if they were not God's people. And though God told them as much through the birth of Hosea's third child, *Lo-ammi*, He also reminded them that He would ultimately restore their

⁵⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 426-27.

relationship with Him, using the intimate and personal language of “sons” to describe His wayward people (1:9–10; 11:1).⁶⁰

More than any other prophet, Hosea linked his message closely with his personal life. By marrying a woman he knew would eventually betray his trust and by giving his children names that sent messages of judgment on Israel, Hosea’s prophetic word flowed out of the life of his family. The cycle of repentance, redemption, and restoration is evident in Hosea’s prophecy and in his marriage.

The key to understanding the book of Hosea is the analogy between Hosea’s experience with his wife Gomer and the children, and God’s experience with Israel.⁶¹ Israel’s relationship with God is viewed as a marriage, and that marriage is broken because of sin. Therefore the fundamental sin of God’s people is the sin of spiritual adultery.⁶² Sin is betraying a faithful husband in exchange for other lovers who will only destroy. This portrays sin in a personal sense as every sin committed is an expression of commitment to another apart from God. From God’s perspective, being Israel’s husband is the equivalent of being married to a prostitute. The Lord demonstrates the ultimate act of redemption and restoration when He tells Hosea to go and buy his own wife (3:1-2). He is purchasing the bride who is already his wife. This is the picture of Christ within the redemptive story.⁶³

⁶⁰Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr. and Gary E. Yates, *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 68.

⁶¹Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 60.

⁶²James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 1, Hosea-Jonah (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 21.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 14.

Joel

The prophet Joel identifies himself as the son of Pethuel. He preached to the people of Judah, and expressed a great deal of interest in Jerusalem. The book focuses its prophetic judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah with frequent references to Zion and temple worship. Joel made several comments on the priests and the temple, indicating a familiarity with the center of worship in Judah (1:13-14; 2:14,17).

Within the metanarrative of the redemptive story found in Scripture, Joel is the first book to develop the idea of the “day of the Lord.”⁶⁴ This book gives striking and specific details about this day, including darkness, armies that conquer like consuming fire, and the moon turning to blood.⁶⁵ This time of ultimate judgment makes clear the seriousness of God’s holiness and judgment on sin. This day of the Lord is not a reference to a single day, but to a period of judgment that involves the judgment of God’s people, the judgment of foreign nations, and the purification and restoration of God’s people through intense suffering. Joel spoke of the coming day of the Lord as an ultimately redemptive event (2:1-11, 3:1-16).

The book of Joel highlights the sovereign character of God who rules the universe in every way, and who is strong enough to save His people in Joel’s day and in the future.⁶⁶ The prophet uses the occurrence of a locust plague to deliver God’s message of judgment and the hope of repentance and restoration. Instead of focusing on the devastation caused by the plague and the devastation facing his nation, Joel began his

⁶⁴Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 130.

⁶⁵Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Minor Prophets: Texts and Sermon Suggestions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 29.

⁶⁶Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 125.

prophecy by focusing on the spiritual condition of the people. The spiritual lessons of the current generation are meant for their children and grandchildren as much as they are meant for the immediate audience. The locusts are a mere warning of the horde of Babylonians that would one day overwhelm the nation and enslave it. God's purpose in sending judgment is for his people to repent and turn back to Him with their whole hearts.⁶⁷ If God's people would repent and turn back to Him, He promised to pour out His Spirit on them. God does not leave His people in judgment. The point is to bring people to repentance and restoration.

Amos

The prophet Amos lived among a group of shepherds in Tekoa, a small town approximately ten miles south of Jerusalem. Amos made clear in his writings that he did not come from a family of prophets, nor did he even consider himself one. Rather, he was “a dresser of sycamore figs” as well as a herdsman (7:14-15). His connection to the vocational life of the people made its way into the center of his prophecies, as he showed a heart for the oppressed.⁶⁸ Though he came from the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos delivered his prophecy against the northern kingdom of Israel and the surrounding nations, leading to some resistance from the prideful Israelites (7:12).

Through the use of five visions, the message of Amos was directed against the privileged people of Israel.⁶⁹ These people showed no love for their neighbor, took advantage of others, and only looked out for their own concerns. They were selling off

⁶⁷Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 108.

⁶⁸Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 37.

⁶⁹Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 144.

needy people for goods, taking advantage of the helpless, oppressing the poor, and using women immorally. Their own economic success had led the people to lose the concept of caring for one another. In this book, God holds His people accountable for their injustice and mistreatment of others. Their lifestyle served as evidence that Israel had forgotten their God.

Because Amos was a foreigner from the south, the people of Israel ignored his message of judgment.⁷⁰ Rather than seeking out opportunities to do justice, they embraced their arrogance, idolatry, self-righteousness, and materialism. Amos communicated God's utter disdain for the hypocritical lives of His people (5:21-24). His prophecy concludes with only a brief glimpse of redemption and restoration, and even that is directed to Judah, rather than the northern kingdom of Israel (9:11-15).⁷¹

Obadiah

Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament. His message is one of judgment on the nation of Edom, Judah's neighbor to the southeast.⁷² Edom had been found guilty of pride before the Lord (1:3). When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, Edom prevented the fleeing Judeans from escaping to their lands. They had thought themselves greater than they actually were, and used their prideful position to mock, steal from, and even harm God's chosen people.⁷³ But the "Lord God," a name Obadiah used to stress God's sovereign power over the nations, will not stand by and let His people

⁷⁰Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 168.

⁷¹Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 144.

⁷²Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 50.

⁷³Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 236.

suffer forever (1:1). Through Obadiah, God reminded Edom of their poor treatment of His people (1:12–14) and promised redemption, not to the Edomites but to the people of Judah (1:17–18).

Obadiah's name means "servant of Yahweh."⁷⁴ As a servant of Yahweh, Obadiah placed himself in a position of humility before the holiness of the Lord and embraced his lowly place before God. Pride puts people in opposition to God, whereas humility leads to repentance. Obadiah offers a reminder to God's people to place themselves under God's authority, to subject their appetites to His purposes, and to find their hope in being His people when the restoration of all things is fulfilled.⁷⁵

Jonah

The book of Jonah does not explicitly name the prophet as the author of the book, but describes the account of Jonah. He is identified as the son of Amittai and was from the northern kingdom of Israel.⁷⁶ However, rather than direct Jonah to prophesy to his own people, God commissioned him to the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh. Jonah is unwilling to journey to Nineveh at first. He instead goes the opposite direction to the farthest westward point of Tarshish.⁷⁷ Through the use of a storm and a giant fish, God eventually turned Jonah in the right direction, and the prophet obediently prophesied to the people of Nineveh.

⁷⁴Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 150.

⁷⁵Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 258.

⁷⁶Ibid., 161.

⁷⁷Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 169.

The story of Jonah reveals God's heart of love and forgiveness. It also reveals humanity's heart of rebellion personified in Jonah's attitude and actions. Jonah flees from God Himself, not just from what God told him to do.⁷⁸ While Jonah did eventually proclaim God's message, he was not happy about the outcome (4:1). Another key theme in Jonah is that sin deserves judgment, but repentance leads to freedom and restoration. God is compassionate and desires all to repent and turn to Him.

Jonah was one of only four prophets that Jesus mentioned by name during His earthly ministry. In fact, Jesus actually identified Himself with the prophet's three-day encounter in the belly of the fish, noting it as a foreshadowing of His own death (Matt 12:40). Jesus would spend three days in the heart of the earth before His resurrection. The book of Jonah stands as an important link in the metanarrative of redemption as it gives a glimpse of Christ's death and resurrection hundreds of years before it occurred.

Micah

The prophet Micah identified himself by his hometown, called Moresheth, which sat near the border of Philistia and Judah. His message shows a strong concern for the lame, the outcasts, the afflicted, and the lowly and less fortunate of society (4:6). Therefore, Micah directed much of his prophecy toward the powerful leaders of Samaria and Jerusalem. The leaders took bribes, the rich cheated the poor, and the priests did not teach God's laws from Scripture. Micah also predicted the fall of Israel to the Assyrian Empire. His name can be translated as the question, "Who is like God?"⁷⁹ The book ends with that same type of question: "Who is a God like You?" God sends Micah to bring a

⁷⁸Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 58.

⁷⁹Peter C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 5.

lawsuit against His people for not living up to the standards He has set for them.

Much of Micah's book revolves around the prediction of judgment on Israel and Judah and the restoration of God's people in the coming kingdom. In the final sequence of a courtroom scene of Micah's prophecy, judgment and restoration inspire fear and hope, where God's people stand trial before their Creator for turning away from Him and from others (6:1–7:20). In this sequence, God reminds the people of His good works on their behalf, and how He cared for them while they cared only for themselves. But rather than leave God's people with the fear and sting of judgment, the book of Micah concludes with the prophet's call on the Lord as his only source of salvation and mercy (7:7), pointing the people toward an everlasting hope in their everlasting God. God required righteousness from His people, but they turned away from Him and faced slavery.⁸⁰ Micah gives the people a message of hope. A leader was coming to free God's people, and this leader would be both Shepherd and King.

The book of Micah provides one of the most significant prophecies of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, pointing some seven hundred years before Christ to His birthplace of Bethlehem and to His eternal nature (5:2). Surrounding Micah's prophecy of Jesus's birth is one of the most lucid pictures of the world's future under the reign of the Prince of Peace (5:5). This future kingdom will be characterized by the presence of many nations living with one another in peace and security and coming to Jerusalem to worship the reigning King (4:2).

⁸⁰Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 203.

Nahum

The prophet Nahum's name means "consolation," though his message carries little of it.⁸¹ He brought a message of judgment against Nineveh. God's willingness to send Nahum into a hopeless situation displays His unrelenting love and grace to offer comfort to those who would repent. Nahum's singular focus on the impending judgment of Nineveh offers a continuation of the story that began in Jonah. Sometime around 760 BC, God sent Jonah to Nineveh to preach repentance and hope to the Assyrian people. At that time the nation turned from their evil ways. However, one hundred years later, during the time of Nahum, the Assyrians had returned to their sinful ways. They had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and were lording their power over Judah in the south (2 Kngs 17: 1-6; 18:13-19:37). Jonah had failed to realize what Nahum reminded the people of Judah. God's justice is always right and always sure. Though He may choose to grant mercy for a time, that good gift will not compromise His ultimate sense of justice for all.⁸²

While the book as a whole clearly shows God's concern over sin, His willingness to punish those guilty of wickedness, and His power to carry out His desire for judgment, it also contains a message of hope. The people of Judah would have immediately taken hope in the idea that Nineveh, their primary oppressor for generations, would soon come under judgment from God.⁸³ Also, a small but faithful remnant in an

⁸¹Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 59.

⁸²Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 213.

⁸³Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 386.

increasingly idolatrous Judah would have been comforted by declarations of God's slowness to anger (1:3), His goodness and strength (1:7), and His restorative power (2:2).

Habakkuk

Little is known about Habakkuk beyond the two mentions of his name in this book of prophecy. Both times, he identified himself as "Habakkuk the prophet," a term that indicates he was a professional prophet. He also could have been a priest involved with the worship of God at the temple because he states, "To the choirmaster on stringed instruments" (3:19). He spoke often of the imminent Babylonian invasion, an event that occurred on a smaller scale before the total destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.⁸⁴ His prophecy is directed to a world that, through the eyes of God's people, must have seemed on the edge of disaster. The people were wondering if God really was sovereign in the midst of the invading army. Habakkuk's prayer of faith for the remainder of God's people in the face of such destruction stands as a witness of trust in God's sovereignty and control.

Habakkuk provides an extended dialogue between himself and God.⁸⁵ The prophet initiated this conversation based on his distress about God's perceived inaction in the world. He wanted to see God do something more, particularly in the area of justice for evildoers. The book of Habakkuk pictures a frustrated prophet who channeled his frustration into prayers and eventually praise to God.

The book of Habakkuk offers a picture of a prideful people being humbled, while the righteous live by faith in God (2:4). Even though God may seem silent and

⁸⁴Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 87.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 88.

uninvolved in the world, He always has a plan to deal with evil and always works out justice in the end. The example of the prophet Habakkuk encourages the people of God to wait on the Lord, expecting that He will indeed work out all things for good and bring about His promised restoration.⁸⁶

Zephaniah

The author introduces himself as “Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah” (1:1). Among the prophets, this is a unique introduction with a genealogy tracing back to his great-great grandfather, Hezekiah. Zephaniah the prophet wanted to highlight his royal lineage as a descendant of one of Judah’s good kings.⁸⁷ The reference to “this place” (1:4), indicates that he prophesied in Jerusalem, while his many references to temple worship display a strong familiarity with Israel’s religious culture.⁸⁸ All these factors portray Zephaniah as a man who was at the center of Judah’s political and religious world.

This book mentions the day of the Lord more than any other book in the Old Testament. It refers to both Judah’s fall to Babylon and to the eventual judgment and restoration of all humanity in the future. Zephaniah saw in the day of the Lord the destruction of his country, his neighbors, and eventually the whole earth (2;10). Zephaniah wrote that the day of the Lord was near (1:14), that it would be a time of wrath (1:15), that it would come as judgment on sin (1:17), and that ultimately it would result in the blessing of God’s presence among His people (3:17).

⁸⁶Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 236.

⁸⁷Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 106.

⁸⁸John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise, *Minor Prophets II*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 97.

Zephaniah follows a pattern of judgment on all people for their sin followed by the restoration of God's chosen people. Zephaniah's primary target for God's message of judgment was Judah, who had fallen into grievous sin by worshipping other gods, turning away from the Lord, and not seeking His presence (1:5-6). Zephaniah's prophecy shouted out for godliness and purity. The people of Judah had long since turned their backs on God, not only in their personal lives but also in their worship. This reflected the depth of their sin and the deep need for God's people to repent on their path to redemption and restoration. The message of Zephaniah declares that there is judgment for those who will not turn to God, but there is still hope for those who seek Him. Zephaniah closes his prophecy with an encouragement for the remnant as they wait for the consummation of God's kingdom.⁸⁹ In those closing verses, emphasis is placed upon God's ability. God promises to do all that needs to be done for His people's restoration.

Haggai

The prophet Haggai recorded four messages to the Jewish people after their return from exile in Babylon. His prophecy came at a time when the people of Judah were extremely vulnerable. They had been humbled by their exile to Babylon, hopeful in their return to the Promised Land, and then so discouraged by opposition in their rebuilding of the temple that they quit their efforts.⁹⁰ Haggai had an important message for the Jews who had recently returned from exile. They had forgotten their God, choosing instead to focus on their own interests, so it was time for them to consider their

⁸⁹Boice, *The Minor Prophets* 459

⁹⁰Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 134.

ways⁹¹ (1:5-7). Nothing was more important for the Jews than to show that the Lord was at the center of their thoughts and actions, so Haggai directed them to finish rebuilding God's temple. Haggai blamed their lack of food, clothing, and shelter on their failure to rebuild the temple.

Unlike most of the other prophets, Haggai dated his prophecies down to the day. He gave four separate messages that encouraged the people to finish building the temple and to have hope in God for the promise of future blessings. His message to rebuild the temple was passionate, simple, and straightforward (1:8). No one could mistake whether or not the people listened, because the results would be evident for the people to see. Through the physical act of rebuilding the temple, the people began to indicate a shift in their spiritual lives from devotion to self toward devotion to God.

Haggai encouraged the people with the hope of future glory in the temple and a victory to come over the enemies of God's people (2:7-9, 21-22). According to Haggai's message, if the people would place God at the center of their lives, they would realize the future blessings that God had in store for His people as His presence will dwell with them.⁹²

Zechariah

The prophet Zechariah was a priest and a member of a priestly family who returned from exile in Babylon. Because of his family lineage, Zechariah was a priest in addition to a prophet. Therefore, he would have had an intimate familiarity with the

⁹¹Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 468.

⁹²Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 267.

worship practices of the Jews, even if he had never served in a completed temple.⁹³ He delivered messages from the Lord to the Jewish remnant recently returned from Babylon. While Haggai's overall message had more of a cautionary tone to warn the people of their sin, Zechariah emphasized a tone of encouragement to the struggling Israelites trying to rebuild their temple.⁹⁴ Zechariah provided specific prophecy about their immediate and distant future. Their nation would still be judged for sin (5:1–11), but they would also be cleansed and restored (3:1–10), and God would rebuild His people (1:7–17). Zechariah concluded his book by looking into the distant future, first at the rejection of the Messiah by Israel (9:1–11:17), and then at His eventual reign when Israel will finally be delivered (12:1–14:21).

His name means, “God remembers.” His book speaks with the hope that God would remember His promises to His people, even after all the time they spent outside the land.⁹⁵ The prophet used a simple structure of eight visions, (1:1-6:15), four messages (7:1–8:23), and two oracles (9:1–14:21) to anticipate the completion of the temple and the future reign of the Messiah from Jerusalem.

The book of Zechariah contains the clearest and largest number of messianic prophecies among the Minor Prophets. Zechariah pictures Christ in both His first coming (9:9) and His second coming (9:10–10:12). The Messiah will come, according to Zechariah, as Savior, Judge, and ultimately as the righteous King ruling His people from Jerusalem (14:8–9).

⁹³Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 270.

⁹⁴Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 486.

⁹⁵Goldingay and Scalise, *Minor Prophets*, 280.

Malachi

The book of Malachi is the final book in the Old Testament. The prophet's name means "messenger," which points to Malachi's role as a prophet of the Lord delivering God's message to the people.⁹⁶ He delivered his message of judgment to a Judean audience familiar with worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem (2:11). Though the temple had been rebuilt, the fervor of those early returning Israelites gave way to an apathy for the things of God. This led to rampant corruption among the priesthood and a spiritual lethargy among the people. The people of Judah had turned away from the true worship of the Lord, leaving themselves under judgment and in need of salvation.

Malachi came along at a time when the people were struggling to believe that God loved them (1:2). The people focused on their unfortunate circumstances and refused to account for their own sinful deeds.⁹⁷ So God pointed the finger back at them, and through Malachi, God told the people where they had fallen short of their covenant with Him. If they hoped to see changes, they needed to take responsibility for their own actions and serve God faithfully

Throughout Israel's history, the nation failed and God called His people back to Himself. Each time, Israel would fail again, prompting the cycle to begin again. God's final word of the Old Testament concerns judgment for sin and testifies to the inability of His people to love Him without the help of His intervention and love.⁹⁸ Malachi's call

⁹⁶Goldingay and Scalise, *Minor Prophets*, 320.

⁹⁷Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 127.

⁹⁸Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 320.

prompts God's people to live faithfully before and offers hope that God is not yet through with extending mercy to His people.

Summary of the Minor Prophets

The prophets provide an insight into Israel's history, helping the reader to understand the metanarrative on a more intimate level. Most of the prophets are preexilic, warning Israel and Judah about the consequences of disobedience. A few of the prophets are exilic or postexilic, reflecting the people's condition after returning to the land. All focus on judgment and salvation, and teach with powerful imagery that God reigns over all things for his glory both in judging and saving his people.

CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

Family discipleship was a key emphasis for believers following the first century. Elders, pastors, and church leaders throughout the history of the church reminded families of their responsibility to disciple their children. Secular scholars in the social sciences also recognize the importance of the family and the impact parents have on their children. This chapter will provide a historical and sociological foundation for family discipleship. the prevalence of family discipleship throughout the history of the church.

History of Family Discipleship in the Church

Christian history shows the high value believers have consistently placed on formal family worship. Throughout the centuries the church and church leaders have preached and taught the important doctrines from Scripture that parents are the ones who are primarily responsible to disciple their children. This section presents a brief survey of the history of family discipleship and the family worship practices of key church leaders from the early church period to the present day

Family Discipleship in the Early Church

The emphasis on family discipleship was the teaching and practice of the early church. These early Christians believed that the worship of God began in the home. It was seen as a biblically legitimate practice and duty to institute and administer worship to the family. The different family households represented the church community as there were no church buildings or places for the believers to meet. The home was a place of worship and spiritual education.¹ Christian leaders gave general exhortations about the importance of teaching the faith to future generations. These exhortations were addressed primarily to parents, but also included the broader church community's involvement in children's discipleship.²

According to Book II, Section II of the Apostolic Constitution, if a person desired to be a bishop in a church he had to demonstrate that he was intentionally and actively leading and educating his children piously in bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.³ This echoed the instructions from Scripture regarding qualifications for elders in the church (1 Tim 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). Instructing children was a nonnegotiable responsibility for parents and especially for those in church leadership.

Teaching children the commands of God in the home is mentioned in many early extra-canonical Christian writings. Clement was the leading pastor of Rome near

¹Rob Rienow, *Visionary Parenting* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2009), 97.

²Robert L. Plummer, "Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord: Family Discipleship among the First Christians," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 58.

³Otto Krabbe, *The Work Claiming to Be the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Including the Canons: Whiston's Version*, ed. Irah Chase, trans. William Whiston (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1848), 13.

the end of the first century. In 1 Clement 21, as part of his message on Christians living a life that is pleasing to Christ, he exhorts believers to teach their children. Clement says, “Let our children receive the instruction that is in Christ: let them learn how strong humility is before God, what pure love is able to accomplish before God, how the fear of him is good and great and saves all those who live in it in holiness with a pure mind.”⁴

Other apostolic fathers make similar injunctions regarding the teaching of children. Polycarp of Smyrna, in a letter to Christians in Philippi in the second century, exhorted husbands to instruct their wives “to teach their children with instruction that leads to the fear of God.”⁵ The responsibility of the family rested on the leadership of the husband to ensure that discipleship and training was occurring in the household, even though the wife was the one specifically instructed to teach the children. Writings in the first and second century include the same commands to parents.⁶

Church leaders continued to teach the importance of family discipleship into the late second and third centuries. The earliest Christian communities acknowledged this powerful influence and mandate from Scripture. Churches stressed the importance of Bible reading outside of public worship. Men, women, and children were exhorted to read the Bible daily.⁷ Church leaders directed that children in Christian homes should be

⁴Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 53.

⁵*Ibid.*, 137.

⁶Bryan Nelson with Timothy Paul Jones, “Introduction: The Problem with Family Ministry,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 16.

⁷Adolf von Harnack, *New Testament Studies V: Bible Reading in the Early Church*, trans. John Richard Wilkinson, Crown Theological Library (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 84.

introduced to the Bible from the very earliest age as a part of their regular education.⁸ Children heard the Scriptures read to them daily and they committed the passages to memory. The chief aim of education and training was that a child should be taught to understand the Bible. This emphasis on biblical education in the home continued through the fifth century. Chrysostom contended with firm conviction that if he was able to establish regular Scripture readings in the family and among individuals it would lay a solid foundation for a mature Christian life.⁹

As church history moved into the medieval period, Christians inherited a church united by creeds, a stable biblical canon, and a well-developed philosophical tradition. During this period, often referred to as the Dark and Middle ages, literacy declined. Not only were parents illiterate, but the production of books, especially Bibles, became expensive.¹⁰ Families had little to no access to the Scriptures which made it difficult for people to read the Bible for themselves in their homes. This discouraged parental responsibility and training of children in the home, and the regular practice of family worship discontinued. C. Michael Wren, Jr. notes, “With the dawning of imperial favor in the fourth century AD and the crumbling of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the primary locus of Christian practice drifted from homes to dedicated

⁸Harnack, *New Testament Studies*, 122.

⁹Ibid., 117.

¹⁰ C. Michael Wren, Jr., “Among Your Company at Home: Family Discipleship in Late Ancient and Medieval Churches,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 112.

institutional structures.”¹¹ This period of history lasted from the fall of the Roman Empire until the Protestant Reformation.

Family Discipleship and the Protestant Reformation

The invention of the printing press in 1440 led to a triumph of literacy and the availability of the Bible. Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible into German in 1534 provided a translation of the Bible that could be read by everyone.¹² As biblical literacy improved, the notion of family discipleship was revived with the mass production of the Bible into common languages. The Reformation era, with its emphasis on Scripture and doctrine, resulted in an increased value on marriage and family, and the home was again viewed as an arena where important spiritual work was accomplished. Parents were to serve as priests to their children nourishing them in the faith as well as providing for their physical needs.¹³ Along with the availability of the Bible, the Reformation period produced catechisms for families to use in the home for the spiritual instruction of their children.

Martin Luther believed that the parent should be the apostle, bishop, and priest to his children.¹⁴ He developed a robust vision for Christian training in the household,

¹¹Wren, *Among Your Company at Home*, 101.

¹²Michael Reeves, *Theologians You Should Know: An Introduction: From the Apostolic Fathers to the 21st Century* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 156.

¹³Gene Edward Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 19.

¹⁴Michelle DeRusha, *Katharina and Martin Luther: The Radical Marriage of a Runaway Nun and a Renegade Monk* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 234.

calling parents to disciple their children.¹⁵ As a part of his assertion of the priesthood of all believers, he taught that the home must be the initial staging ground for the advancement of the gospel. It was the parents' duty, as priests of the home, to present the gospel to their children.¹⁶ Luther highlighted this concept in one of his sermons from Genesis,

Abraham had in his tent a house of God and a church, just as today any godly and pious head of a household instructs his children and domestics in godliness. Therefore such a house is actually a school and church, and the head of the household is a bishop and priest in his house... Yet we, too, shall properly call our houses and churches tents when someone has a church in his home and in it instructs his children and domestics in godliness and virtue.¹⁷

Luther himself recognized the importance of his personal responsibility as a father. Through his marriage to his wife, Katharina, he radically changed the way the church viewed marriage and family.¹⁸ He believed that parenting and raising a family was a holy vocation and a divine calling. His *Small Catechism*, which was published in 1529 and is still used in Lutheran youth education and confirmation classes today, was compiled as a result of the religious instruction he led in his own home. Every morning he would pray with his children, and before each meal they would read a few verses aloud from the Bible. Teaching his children to commit prayers, hymns, and psalms to memory was

¹⁵C. Jeffrey Robinson, Sr., "The Home is an Earthly Kingdom: Family Discipleship among Reformers and Puritans," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 115.

¹⁶Robinson, *The Home is an Earthly Kingdom*, 116.

¹⁷Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 384.

¹⁸Robinson, *The Home is an Earthly Kingdom*, 116.

important to Luther because he believed repetition of prayers and Scripture strengthened one's faith.¹⁹

Family Discipleship in the England and America

As the exploration and colonization of the west progressed, so too did the teachings of family discipleship in the church. The Puritans in England and America cultivated this vision of consistent family worship and discipleship. Each household was to be a household of faith. Puritans understood Scripture to teach a divinely ordained order of responsibility within the household that acknowledged the father as the one primarily responsible for the training of children.²⁰ Fathers were expected to lead their families in prayer twice a day and study the Scriptures on the Lord's Day.²¹ Pastor Richard Baxter devoted a major portion of his writings on the duties of fathers in family worship. He would frequently visit each family in the community to hold parents accountable for the regular practice of the discipleship of their children.²²

Jonathan Edwards, a prominent theologian and evangelist during this time, frequently taught on the biblical doctrines of family life. Edwards understood the importance of multi-generational faithfulness and the impact it has on the advancement of the church. He preached that the family was "a little church and commonwealth by itself," and "the head of the family has more advantage in his little community to promote

¹⁹DeRusha, *Katharina and Martin Luther*, 233.

²⁰J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 271.

²¹Robinson, *The Home is an Earthly Kingdom*, 121.

²²Richard Baxter, *The Godly Home*, ed. Randall J. Pederson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 119.

religion than ministers have in the congregation.”²³ Edwards also practiced at home what he preached. He devoted himself and his family to the discipline of worship in the home, diligently reading Scripture with his eleven children each day. Edwards was an early riser, and one of the first duties of the day was to lead his family in worship. Samuel Hopkins, a student staying with Edwards and his family, once described this early morning routine,

He used himself to rise by four or between four and five in the morning . . . he was wont to have his family up in season in the morning; after which, before the family entered on the business of the day, he attended family prayers, when a chapter in the Bible was read, commonly by candle-light in the winter, upon which he asked his children questions according to their age and capacity.²⁴

Edwards also set aside time on Saturday evening for family worship in order to prepare his family for worship on Sunday. Singing psalms, Scripture readings, prayers, and age-appropriate questions were all components of family worship practiced in the Edwards’ household.²⁵ In 1751, Jonathan Edwards was fired from his pastorate position. The situations that led to his dismissal stemmed from many factors, including his emphasis on the practice of communion and church discipline. In his farewell sermon, he took the opportunity to highlight the importance of family discipleship in the midst of controversy within his church,

We have had great disputes [about] how the church ought to be regulated; and indeed the subject of these disputes was of great importance; but the due regulation of your families is of no less, and, in some respects, of much greater importance. every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order

²³Jonathan Edwards, “Living to Christ,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 10, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 577.

²⁴Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), 182.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 186.

are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual. If these are duly maintained, all the means of grace will be likely to prosper and be successful.²⁶

The local church provided the lens through which Edwards viewed the functions of the family. He proclaimed that what the family should be doing in the home should mirror the tasks and purposes for which God had assigned the church. The household represented the “outworking of the life of the local congregation.”²⁷

Another proponent and practitioner of family worship was Matthew Henry. Henry is most known for his commentary on the Bible, but he also preached about the importance of family discipleship in the home. He taught that there was a deep connection between the impact of Christians on the world and the family. Henry exhorted that every house should be a little church.²⁸ His point was not that the home should replace the church, but that the home should become a blessing for both the local church and the community at large. He preached that healthy families are vital to God’s plan to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.²⁹ In 1704 he delivered his sermon entitled “Sermon Concerning Family Religion.” He preached,

The pious and zealous endeavors of ministers for the reformation of manners, and the suppression of vice and profaneness, are the joy and encouragement of all good people in the land, and a happy indication, that God hath yet mercy in store for us. Now I know not anything that will contribute more to the furtherance of this good work than the bringing of family religion into practice and reputation. Here the

²⁶Jonathan Edwards, “A Farewell Sermon,” delivered July 1, 1750, accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/farewell.htm>.

²⁷Robinson, *The Home is an Earthly Kingdom*, 126.

²⁸Rienow, *Visionary Parenting*, 100.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 100.

reformation must begin. Other methods may check the disease we complain of, but this, if it might universally obtain, would cure it.³⁰

Family Discipleship and the Industrial Revolution

Another massive cultural shift began to occur in the late 1800s with the Industrial Revolution. Life in the United States moved from an agricultural society to an industrial society. Fathers no longer worked near the home, but moved away from the family to work in factories.³¹ As a result, children were no longer being apprenticed by the fathers into the family business or family farm. Mass production meant that families were separated from each other for the majority of the day.³² Public schools were formed to educate children. Women also began to work outside the home. All of these factors resulted in a steep decline of family discipleship in the home.³³

Charles Spurgeon was an influential preacher in London during the mid to late nineteenth century as the Industrial Revolution began. He wrote about the pressing issue of the decline of family worship in his article, “The Kind of Revival We Need.” He wrote,

We deeply want a revival of family religion. The Christian family was the bulwark of godliness in the days of the Puritans, but in these evil times hundreds of families of so-called Christians have no family worship, no restraint upon growing sons, and no wholesome instruction or discipline. How can we hope to see the Kingdom of our Lord advance when his own disciples do not teach his gospel to their own children? Oh, Christian men and women, be thorough in what you do and know and

³⁰Matthew Henry, *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry—Treatises, Sermons, and Tracts* (Edinburgh: Fullarton, 1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1:248-67.

³¹Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 94.

³²Mark Senter III, *When God Shows Up* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 78.

³³*Ibid.*

teach! Let your families be trained in the fear of God and be yourselves ‘holiness unto the Lord’; so shall you stand like a rock amid the surging waves of error and ungodliness which rage around us.³⁴

Spurgeon recognized the danger of neglecting family discipleship. His article was a needed exhortation to the home and the church. He also was devoted to family worship in his own life. Spurgeon communicated the importance of family worship by establishing it as a regular practice in his home. He faithfully led his own family in worship every evening. A guest in his home described the practice,

At six o’clock all the household gathered in the study for worship. Usually Mr. Spurgeon would himself lead the devotions. The portion read was invariably accompanied with exposition. How amazingly helpful those homely and gracious comments were. Then, how full of tender pleading, of serene confidence in God, of world-embracing sympathy were his prayers! With what gracious familiarity he could talk with his Divine Master! Yet what reverence ever marked his address to his Lord. His public 77 prayers were an inspiration and a benediction, but his prayers with the family were to me more wonderful still.³⁵

In the midst of a hectic and busy schedule of writing and preaching, Spurgeon made it a priority to lead his family in prayer, Bible reading, and devotions. It was an expression of his joy as a believer to disciple his children. He lived in such a way to show his belief that the home is where God invites people to begin a life of faith.

Family Discipleship in the Twentieth Century

The Industrial Revolution continued to have a profound negative impact on family discipleship as the church moved into the twentieth century. The emphasis on age-segregation and the institution of the public school system challenged the home, and the

³⁴Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Kind of Revival We Need,” accessed January 18, 2017, <http://www.spurgeon.org/revival.php>.

³⁵William Williams, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Personal Reminiscences* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895), 36.

church responded by introducing age-specific missions and ministries. Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, pastors held youth meetings in their churches throughout the week.³⁶ Later in the eighteenth century in England, Robert Raikes saw a need for impoverished children to learn to read and write. Using the Bible as the textbook, Raikes opened the first school on a Sunday. This was the only day of the week that the boys and girls were not working alongside their parents in the factories. Raikes set out to prevent these children in the slums from falling in to a life of crime. The Sunday school sought holistic teaching and was not confined to one socio-economic class.

The idea of age-based ministry to older children was established in the nineteenth century. The term *youth* was used to describe anyone who was beyond childhood and had reached puberty, but could not yet support a family on their own.³⁷ This adolescent life stage was further defined by the government through sets of legislative acts. These acts dealt with child labor laws, mandatory school attendance, and the establishment of a juvenile court system.³⁸ All of these factors, including the effects of the industrial revolution, contributed to adolescents becoming a concern for both pastors and parents alike. Young men left their homes in search of jobs, and many were left to fend for themselves in strange new towns. The temptations of the city provided ample opportunities for young men to stray from their Christian faith. George Williams saw this need and responded. In 1841 he founded the Young Men's Christian Association

³⁶Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 37.

³⁷Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 103.

³⁸C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951), 4.

in London, England. The YMCA would soon find its way to North American cities.³⁹

Again, holistic ministry was an emphasis as physical, emotional, and spiritual needs were being met.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century Francis Clark, influenced by a youth society model created by Theodore Cuyler's church in Brooklyn, started the Society for Christian Endeavor using the ideas and methods from the YMCA and from the young men's temperance movements.⁴⁰ Cuyler's goal was to evangelize and disciple young men and women in his church.⁴¹ It was led mostly by youth as they shared stories of their faith at each weekly meeting. Youth were also given leadership responsibilities in the forms of committees. The structure of Christian Endeavor was highly accountable as youth were required to sign a commitment to be involved in the ministry.⁴² The Society for Christian Endeavor and the society models that evolved were effective in the spiritual formation of young people. Adolescents stayed actively involved in the church, experienced nurture in their Christian faith, and allowed experiences of God's presence to be an active part of their lives both publicly and privately.⁴³

The society structure thrived into the twentieth century but began to limp along after the world wars, roaring twenties, and Great Depression. A new movement of youth ministry dawned with the use of radio and rallies through parachurch organizations like

³⁹Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A.*, 4.

⁴⁰Theodore Ledyard Cuyler, *Recollections of a Long Life* (New York: The American Tract Society, 1902), 39.

⁴¹Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 82.

⁴²F. O. Erb, *The Development of the Young People's Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1915), 115.

⁴³Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 145.

the Miracle Book Club, Young Life, and Youth for Christ. The Miracle Book Club used homes in neighborhoods for meeting times. Adults led the meetings as teenagers were expected to show up and bring their friends with them. Youth for Christ relied on rallies, bible quizzes, and strong communicators. Young Life revolutionized the camping ministry as they bused teenagers away each summer for an immersive experience. All three of these parachurch ministries sought to reach the local high schools by entering into the world where teenagers lived, thus bypassing the home. Much of the methods of modern youth ministry can be traced back to this era.

The parachurch ministries recognized the need for cross-cultural discipleship. This missional approach of studying teenage culture and entering into their world is vital to evangelizing unchurched youth. The gospel did not change and salvation was still offered, but the methods were adjusted to speak the language of youth.⁴⁴ This missional emphasis did come at a cost, however. Youth ministry continued to move farther away from the larger body of Christ found in a multi-generational community. Parachurch ministries lose much of the contact with the family in their ministry settings. These ministries are designed to be temporary peer groupings for a short amount of time. Therefore there was little to no connection with the parents or exit strategies on transitioning youth into adulthood and into the life of the church.

Within the church, the focus on youth ministry was fellowship. Children were viewed as an important part of the church, but fellowships were more of a ministry to young people than a ministry with them.⁴⁵ Originally intended to coordinate parents,

⁴⁴Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 276.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 206.

pastors, teachers, and other adults, the fellowship eventually became focused on a Sunday evening activity with an adult adviser to supervise and help plan events.⁴⁶ While fellowship is important, this model became dysfunctional very quickly. It functioned as a holding pen for children and adolescents to group together until they were old enough and mature enough to enter into adult church life. Fellowships like this gave young men and women the opportunity to meet each other in a natural way and join in a common goal.⁴⁷ However very little emphasis was placed on missions, evangelism, and discipleship. The church did a poor job of partnering in spiritual formation and equipping parents during this period.

In the late 1960's, publishing companies like Group and Youth Specialties brought resources to the front doors and finger tips of churches. National conventions and social networking opportunities opened the door for youth leaders to congregate together and share ideas. It was at this time when churches began to see an advantage in hiring pastors who were specifically trained to minister and reach children and teenagers. The rise of the youth pastor profession had started with Young Life and Youth for Christ, but was firmly established during this period.

Much can be commended about the rise of age-specific ministries. These visionaries who started Sunday schools, class meetings, societies, rallies, and ministries all saw a need and responded. Each wave of ministry sought to bring young people together for unified fellowship, discipleship, worship, and evangelism. However, the

⁴⁶Sara Little, "Youth Ministry: Historical Reflections Near the End of the Twentieth Century," 1997, [www.ptsem.edu/ym/research/lectures/downloads/1997/1997%20 Little %Youth %20Ministry.pdf](http://www.ptsem.edu/ym/research/lectures/downloads/1997/1997%20Little%20Youth%20Ministry.pdf), 21-22.

⁴⁷Erb, *The Development of the Young People's Movement*, 17.

absence of the family in these youth ministry movements is evident. As adolescence grew into an accepted and identified life stage, it seemed as though parents backed off of their responsibility of spiritual influence. None of the ministry movements emphasized a partnership with and/or equipping parents to be the primary disciplers in the lives of their children. This lack has led to the disconnected relationship of parents and age specific ministries of churches in the present day. These ministries should function within the greater mission of the church and partner with parents in reinforcing the spiritual formation that Scripture teaches should occur in the home. Robert Plummer notes, “As parents live genuine lives of repentance and faith together in community with other believers, their faith will both be ‘caught by’ and ‘taught to’ each generation. Parents must embrace their roles not only as providers and disciplinarians but also as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”⁴⁸ The Bible and church history remind believers in the present age to rediscover family discipleship. John Westerhoff affirms, “No matter where you look in our Judeo-Christian heritage it is the parents who have the prime responsibility to bring up their children in the faith.”⁴⁹

Sociological View of the Importance of Parents

The family unit has continued to change and evolve as influenced by the surrounding culture.⁵⁰ With most families becoming two income households, children involved in extra-curricular activities, and keeping up with household maintenance, little

⁴⁸Plummer, *Bring Them Up*, 59.

⁴⁹John Westerhoff, *Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1980), 7.

⁵⁰Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 211.

and time and effort is devoted to spiritual formation. This can be attributed to weariness, stress, misplaced priorities, or simply laziness.⁵¹ The Bible, while being the authoritative word for the believer, is not the only source that recognizes the importance of parents in the development of a child. Research in the social sciences overwhelmingly shows that when a child is raised in a stable home environment by parents who love, nurture, and teach the child the basics of life, that child grows up to become a mature adult who can then form his or her own family and repeat the process. This is a sociological view of multi-generational faithfulness as parents pass on their values to their children. This section will examine the role of parents from the social sciences, and explore the affects of spiritual development in the life of children.

Child Development from the Social Sciences

Harvard University sociologist Carl Zimmerman studied the rise and fall of every major world empire in history. In his book *Family and Civilization* he scrutinized what happened to the family unit in each of these empires. He concluded that families go through three stages, the last occurring just before each major empire collapsed. He listed these characteristics from the final phase: marriage lost its sacredness, alternative forms of marriage were advocated, feminist movements flourished, parenting became more difficult, adultery was celebrated, sexual perversions abounded especially incest and homosexuality.⁵² From this list of characteristics it can be deduced that the breakdown of the family affects the development of morals and values of children.

⁵¹H. F. Cope, *Religious Education in the Family* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1915), 14.

The deterioration of stable marriages and families has been a principal generator of moral decline. This is because children learn moral values mainly from their parents and grandparents. They rely on their parents as role models. A child's moral development is stunted when parents are absent, emotionally distant, preoccupied, unstable, or immoral. Everything known about human behavior suggests that the family is the institution in which most children learn about character and morality.⁵³ Schools, churches, and government are all helpful agents in the process of character development, but they have much less influence on their own.⁵⁴ If morality and character are not taught in the home, other institutions cannot be relied upon to undo the damage. This is why the family is society's most fundamental institution.⁵⁵

The effects of the industrial revolution and the advent of the modern nuclear family where husband and wife are distanced from other relatives has impacted parenting and childhood. Children and teenagers were regarded as different from adults, and childhood became a time of play, diminished work responsibilities, and formal learning in the school system. Industries developed that marketed directly to children and a realm of childhood commercialization formed. But while life is far more secure economically and medically for most children than any time in history, parenting methods have grown increasingly more passive. Media, advertising, the entertainment industry, and the

⁵²Carle C. Zimmerman, *Family and Civilization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1947), 260.

⁵³David Popenoe, "We Are What We See: The Family Conditions for Modeling Values for Children," accessed February 9, 2017, <http://parenthood.library.wisc.edu/Popenoe/Popenoe-Modeling.html>.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵David Popenoe, *Families without Fathers: Fathers, Marriage, and Children in American Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 77.

sexually-saturated popular culture no longer provides a protected period for childhood. Children are influenced by adult culture at an early age. Communities have become less safe and more anonymous, and families feel more isolated than ever before.

Sociologists generally sense that parents have been failing at modeling moral values for their children.⁵⁶ The amount of time that parents spend raising their children has diminished because of absent fathers and mothers in the workplace. Without a consistent presence, morals cannot be modeled. Popenoe states, “Prosocial behavior and moral values must be purposely taught, modeled, and reinforced by parents and other caregivers. A good example must be continually set. Indeed, strongly attached children will follow the example of parents’ behavior even when it is bad.” Parents are the key value developers for their children. They will have a positive or a negative impact on their child’s growth, but either way they will have the biggest impact.⁵⁷ Parents must be physically, emotionally, intellectually, and morally present and engaged with their children.

The family unit is also where a child learns respect for authority and a sense of obligation to comply with social rules and laws. Social psychologist William Damon says, “The child’s respect for this authority is the single most important moral legacy that comes out of the child’s relationship with the parent.”⁵⁸ Character traits based on respect for authority such as honesty, obedience, and responsibility are first learned in the home. If these traits are learned well, they are transferred beyond the family to society as a

⁵⁶Popenoe, *Families without Fathers*, 59.

⁵⁷Popenoe, “We Are What We See.”

⁵⁸William Damon, *The Moral Child: Nurturing Children's Natural Moral Growth* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 52.

whole. This includes respect for the authority of God and the responsibility to be obedient to his commands.

As a child grows into adolescence, parents begin to feel that their authority is not as influential as it once was. Many parents operate under the belief that their older children do not listen to or value what they say. The influence of peers, the media, and relationships outside the family unit are powerful forces in the life of a teenager. These common misconceptions, paired with the uncomfortable nature of topics may lead parents to avoid important and necessary teaching moments altogether. But parents carry a lot more influence than they realize. Their children are still looking to them as a guide and model for relationships and emotional development.

Current secular research shows that parents not only have a voice in their child's development, but still carry the most influential voice. An extensive study of 272,400 teenagers conducted by *USA Today Weekend Magazine* found that 70 percent of teens identified their parents as the most important influence in their lives. Twenty-one percent said that about their peers and only eight percent named the media.⁵⁹ In a national survey, 1,129 middle school student were asked what the greatest influence in their life was, and parents topped the list.⁶⁰ MTV and the Associated Press released a study on influence of parents. Spending time with family was the top answer to the open-ended question of "what makes you happy?" Parents are seen as an overwhelmingly positive

⁵⁹Wayne Rice and David Veerman, *Understanding Your Teenager* (Lakeside, CA: Understanding Your Teenager Books, 1999), 118.

⁶⁰Steve Wright with Chris Graves, *ApParent Privilege* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest Ministries, 2010), 19. Wright and Graves quote statistics taken from Southern Baptist Convention survey, www.sbcstudents.com/annualsurvey/2007ParentYouthRelationships.pdf.

influence in the lives of most young people.⁶¹ Secular researchers Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger note, “All of the different approaches to studying parental influences in the religious socialization process converge on a single conclusion: Parents play an extremely important role in the developing religious attitudes and practices of their offspring. In fact, few researchers would quarrel with the conclusion that parents are the most important influence in this regard.”⁶² Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel’s research led them to say, “We conclude our research by reiterating that the family is the most powerful institution in promoting faith in youth. The family atmosphere allows children to enter into a love relationship with God. We say this out of a conviction that congregations have erred in allowing the focus of faith development to shift from the home to the congregation or parish.”⁶³ This secular research points to the importance of parents, and contradicts the cultural misconceptions that friends and other sources are the primary influencers for teenagers.

Christian research also has consistently pointed to the primary influence of parents. Based on the National Study of Youth and Religion, Kenda Creasy Dean writes, “Research is nearly unanimous on this point: parents matter most in shaping the religious

⁶¹Wright and Graves, *ApParent Privilege*, 19. The statistics quoted by Wright and Graves are from “MTV and the Associated Press Release Landmark Study of Young People and Happiness” accessed at www.mtv.com/thinkmtv/research/.

⁶²Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, *Amazing Conversions* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), 226.

⁶³Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel, *Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2000), 304.

lives of their children.”⁶⁴ Based on the same National Study of Youth and Religion research, Christian Smith and Melinda Denton note,

Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parental misperceptions, we believe that the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. Grandparents and other relatives, mentors and youth workers can be very influential as well, but normally parents are the most important informing their children’s religious and spiritual lives. . . . The best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents look like.⁶⁵

Research shows the powerful influence parents have over the holistic development of their children. This influence is important as parents recognize their responsibility to disciple their children spiritually. They are to provide a spiritually rich environment to intentionally cultivate an awareness of God.

Spiritual Development of Children

The factors that influence spiritual development are complex. Biological maturation, emotional and cognitive development, social experience, cultural traditions, and religious influences all come together to enact change and movement through faith development. Faith gives coherence and direction to a child’s life, links them in shared community with others, connects a their values to a larger frame of reference, and enables them to answer life’s tough questions about purpose and existence. For the Christian, spiritual development is rooted in saving faith found in Jesus Christ. Not everyone has

⁶⁴Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 112.

⁶⁵Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 261.

the same path through spiritual development, but this research shows that there are common themes found in faith journeys in the areas of cognition and moral development.

The spiritual world created for children to inhabit enables them to think spiritually. Religious stories, language, and prayer sets the stage for the cultivation of spiritual awareness. In a rich spiritual environment children become aware of and open to God.⁶⁶ Children are inherently social from conception and are gifted with capacities for communicating and responding to parents, adults, and siblings. Parents are extremely significant in the earliest months and years of a child's life. Cognitive, moral, and spiritual development in a child is a profoundly interactive matter. A parent's responses and initiatives that are enriched with language, stories, and love are of immeasurable importance in the development of selfhood and faith.⁶⁷ Children first hear the name of God or Jesus on the lips of parents, other adults, and other children. The name may be spoken in the flow of conversation, in prayer, or in song. When God's name is spoken frequently and naturally, children assume the reality of God.⁶⁸ Parents plant the seeds of love as they speak the name of God and tell Bible stories with genuine love, gratitude, and wonder. A child's representation of God employs the child's experiences with the parents or their surrogates. The child constructs a representation of God that has some of the characteristics of the parental figure or figures.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 44.

⁶⁷James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdom Press, 1996), 50.

⁶⁸Stonehouse, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 44.

⁶⁹Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 50.

Parents have the responsibility of making available to children the important pieces needed for the formation of their picture of God. As life is shared in the home, adults intentionally and unintentionally provide bits of insight about God.⁷⁰ The first and most important thing for a young child to learn is that God loves him or her unconditionally. Young children are in the process of learning what is right and wrong and have a limited understanding of why something is right or wrong. Catherine Stonehouse states,

If early in life children discover that God loves them, then when they understand right and wrong and become aware that they have sinned, they have a loving God to go to for forgiveness. If before they know the love of God, however, we introduce God as the judge who condemns certain behaviors, children often fear God, wanting to hide their sins from such a God. God is love, and desires that every child experience and know that love.⁷¹

Children use images and words they hear from parents, Sunday school teachers, and pastors as well as ideas from movies, songs, and Scripture in forming their view of God, Jesus, and salvation. A caring, nurturing, church family is an essential supplement for children's spiritual development. Children lack deep connectedness to other people and to moral and spiritual meaning. Forming such connections requires intergenerational communities that embrace children and live out their faith and values together.⁷²

As children mature they begin to move away from a concrete view of God. They acknowledge that God is not just the greatest of all human creatures, but a supernatural Creator beyond their comprehension.⁷³ Their experiences of God have been

⁷⁰Stonehouse, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 38.

⁷¹Ibid., 36.

⁷²Ibid., 21.

⁷³Ibid., 28.

the primary path to their spiritual development to adolescence. As children enter and live through the teenage years, their pathway becomes more reflective as they wrestle with doubts and fears. Adolescents begin searching for meaning and purpose, and begin to reflect on what it looks like to take personal responsibility for one's own faith and life.

Parents continue to play a vital role in the spiritual development of adolescents. Even as the teenager feels an increased urgency to be their own person, the need for parents as a source of security is not erased. Teenagers conform to the religious beliefs and practices of their parents to a very high degree. Parents produce in their children what they are religiously.⁷⁴

Along with parents, peer relationships are critical components in the maturation of faith in teenagers. The spiritual needs of a high school student in relationship to peers, being accepted and valued, having a safe social haven, and hearing messages of affirmation, are very real.⁷⁵ Faith takes root in the rich relational soil of families, congregations, and mentor relationships where young people can see what faithful lives look like, and encounter people who love them and inviting them into a larger story of divine care and hope.⁷⁶

As demonstrated through research on the influence of parents over the spiritual development of their children, a proper understanding of faith is primarily learned in the home. How a parent lives their life, how they love and discipline their children, the

⁷⁴Dean, *Almost Christian*, 18.

⁷⁵Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 193.

⁷⁶Dean, *Almost Christian*, 11.

stories they tell, the comments they make, and the lessons they teach are all essential for children to use as they actively construct their understanding of God's ways.

Current Practices of Family Discipleship

Studies from both church sources and secular studies illustrate the importance of family in shaping a young person's life. This growth includes a child's physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological, and social development. With the prevalence of age-segregated education and ministries, parents often forget that the family is just as important in the area of spiritual and faith development. Some parents are aware of their role, but do not know how to go about discipling their children or lack the confidence to do so. A brief look at the past century demonstrates that the church needs to help parents take the responsibility of training their children in righteousness seriously. According to the Family Needs Survey conducted by FamilyLife in 2007, more than half of the parents interviewed reported that their family never or rarely engaged in any sort of family devotional time.⁷⁷ The survey also reported that approximately forty percent of parents never, rarely, or only occasionally discussed spiritual matters with their children.⁷⁸ Other research that reinforced the findings from FamilyLife led Timothy Paul Jones to conclude, "From the perspective of one out of every five parents, church activities seemed to have been the family's sole intentional experiences of Christian formation."⁷⁹

⁷⁷Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 27.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., 29.

The majority of Christian parents understand the importance of raising their children to know God, but they are not concerned enough to take any additional steps beyond attending church programs.⁸⁰ Parents have become comfortable with the church planning their children's faith development. When a church, whether intentionally or unintentionally, assumes the parent's responsibility in the area of spiritual development, it fosters an unhealthy dependence upon the church to relieve the family of its God-given responsibility to disciple their children.⁸¹ Many families do not feel that they have permission or the knowledge to choose what is best for their children in the area of discipleship. They feel that the church can do a more effective job. The belief is that trained professionals can run a better program and have studied the relevant needs of their children. Parents should look to the church for guidance and support, but not pass on their responsibility to spiritually train their children.

Many parents accept the responsibility for their child's spiritual development, but largely ignore what the Bible says about raising children.⁸² Scripture records God's purposes for the family. Christian parents believe that God has called them to be their child's primary teacher, but statistics consistently show that they are failing to consistently act upon that belief.⁸³ In most households, any intentional practice of

⁸⁰The Barna Group, "Americans Not Concerned about Their Spiritual Condition," accessed on December 18, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/98-americans-not-concerned-about-their-spiritualcondition>.

⁸¹Clint Archer, *The Home Team: God's Game Plan for the Family* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2014), 44.

⁸²The Barna Group, "Parents Describe How They Raise Their Children," accessed February 2, 2017, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/184-parents-describe-howthey-raise-their-children?q=parenting>.

⁸³Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 99.

discipleship is sporadic at best. One out of every five Christian parents admit to never engaging in practices of prayer, Bible reading, or worship in their households.⁸⁴ If parents acknowledge their role and responsibility, why do they fail to apply it? The modern family schedule is packed with education, extra-curricular activities, practices, and church functions. Parents may disengage simply because they do not have the time or energy to focus on discipleship. They may prioritize and place higher value on these activities over the faith development of their children. George Barna concludes,

Most churchgoing parents are neither spiritually mature nor spiritually inclined and, therefore, they do not have a sense of urgency or necessity about raising their kids to be spiritual champions. . . . But how do parents reconcile the apparent contradiction between saying that they have the primary responsibility for the spiritual development of their own children and their practice of dropping off the kids for others to provide virtually all of the spiritual instruction that their children receive? By believing that because they are responsible and yet personally incapable of meeting their children's spiritual needs, the best thing they can do is to seek the help of others who are more skilled in spiritual matters.⁸⁵

Research shows that another reason parents delegate their responsibility is that they struggle with effectiveness.⁸⁶ Parents delegate their responsibility because they did not experience family discipleship in their own childhood. Their parents never modeled it to them. They have no idea what it looks like to disciple their children. Training their children and leading them to faith in Christ is a frightening and foreign concept to the

⁸⁴Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 99.

⁸⁵George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 78–79.

⁸⁶The Barna Group. "Parents Accept Responsibility for Their Child's Spiritual Development But Struggle With Effectiveness," accessed February 2, 2017, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/120-parentsaccept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>.

average parent.⁸⁷ Teaching from the Bible can be intimidating for a parent who is unfamiliar with Scripture. That is why it is important for parents to have an actively growing faith of their own and a commitment to understand God's redemptive story revealed in all of the Bible. This is an area where the church can offer empowerment through solid teaching and encouragement. Voddie Baucham, Jr. writes:

So many parents think they don't have enough Bible knowledge to teach their children. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you can read, you can teach your children God's Word. All you have to do is stay a step ahead of them. Don't be afraid. God has given you everything you need to do this. You don't have to be a seminary-trained theologian to read the Bible and talk about what it means. Besides, God would not have given you the responsibility unless he knew you could handle it.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Equipping parents to disciple their children and train the next generation of believers is one of the greatest opportunities for ministry in the church today. George Barna concludes, "The only way in which the church will thrive in the future is if families lead the process of directing and furthering their own spiritual growth. Let me again emphasize this notion: the future of the church in America depends largely upon the spiritual commitment of families."⁸⁹ The family provides the most consistent and comprehensive context to teach children about faith.

Research shows that the church must come alongside the family and equip parents to make healthy choices for their child's faith development. This empowering

⁸⁷Brian Haynes, *Shift: What it Takes to Finally Reach Families Today* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2009), 36.

⁸⁸Voddie Baucham Jr, *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 93.

⁸⁹George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), 191.

includes teaching parents about their role, encouraging them to embrace their responsibility, training them to lead in the home, providing resources, and adjusting programs to support that role. The church and the home need each other. They both exist because God desires to use them to demonstrate his plan of redemption and restoration.⁹⁰ Together these two institutions have been created by God to tell his redemptive story to the generations.

⁹⁰Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connect Your Family to a Wider Community* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2015), 33.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

The equipping parents for family discipleship project at Crossroads Community Chapel was implemented over an eighteen-week period from February 5 through June 11, 2017. The implementation focused on the stated goals of the project. This chapter gives a detailed summary of each phase of the project. First, the preparation phase consisted of a six-week sermon series emphasizing multi-generational faithfulness from selected passages of Scripture. Second, a devotional series was developed focusing on the Minor Prophets from the Old Testament. Third, a survey measuring the present perceptions and practices of family discipleship was administered to parents at Crossroads Community Chapel. Fourth, a parent workshop was presented to help parents prepare to lead family devotions for twelve weeks. At this time parents were given the twelve devotions to do at home. Fifth, a twelve-week sermon series was preached on Sunday mornings from the Minor Prophets to coincide with the selected family devotion for each week. Sixth, a celebration seminar was held for the parents to evaluate and share their experiences with the devotional series. At this event, parents were given the post-project survey to evaluate their perceptions and practices. After the conclusion of the project, a rubric was created and administered to a panel of experts assessing the devotional series. In addition to the rubric, a focus group of parents met to evaluate the effectiveness of the devotional series.

Development of the Devotional Series

The Minor Prophets were chosen for the devotional series because it is a section of the Bible that is often overlooked, misunderstood, and under read in relation to the metanarrative of Scripture. The Bible stories connect to form one big story of God's redemptive plan. It is important that children recognize how these Bible stories are connected. Using selected passages from the Minor Prophets, the weekly devotions for this project were designed to help children understand the truths about God, humanity, sin, and redemption through Jesus Christ.¹

Devotion Structure

Considerable time was spent studying each of the prophets using various commentaries and resources. The text for each weekly devotion was chosen from a selection of Scripture from each book of the Minor Prophets in canonical order in the Old Testament. Therefore, at the end of the devotional series families will have worked their way through the Minor Prophets from Hosea through Malachi.

Each devotion was structured to facilitate learning and discussion with the intention of taking fifteen to twenty minutes to complete. Each devotion included 8 sections. The first section was called "Background." This gave the parents basic information about the book and the prophet. It usually included a brief history of the context, major themes included, and other information that might be helpful in teaching the text. The second section, "Major Promise," stated the main idea for the devotion in a simple phrase. This served to help the parents stay focused on the major promise for the

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 3.

passage. The “Bring It Up” section was the opening discussion starter. Children enjoy hearing stories about when their parents were young, so this section would involve the parent sharing a personal story or experience. The “Picture It” section was a segue from the discussion starter to the passage. It would bring up some of the themes and topics for the devotion, and was designed to be an experiential and personal activity for the children to do with their parents. It could involve the child sharing a story, drawing a picture, or a similar activity. This section was also divided into two parts for younger children and older children so families could adapt the activity to their home.

Following the activity families read the specific text for the devotion. In this “Read It” section, families were instructed to either read just the selected text or choose to read the entire book. It was noted that reading the passage aloud would be preferred as well as having the children read along with the parents. The “Talk About It” section included a few discussion questions to help apply the passage and keep conversation flowing. Most of the questions were designed for older children so parents were encouraged to adapt as necessary for younger children. The “Connect It” section served to connect the text from the minor prophets to God’s salvation story found in Jesus. The goal was to show families and children how these passages, written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, point to Jesus and God’s plan for redeeming his people. The final section was entitled “Pray About It.” This section gave a few ideas about what to pray for as a family based on the devotion. It also served as a guide to help close out the devotional time in prayer.

Project Implementation Phase

Three weeks prior to the implementation of the project, the promotional phase of the project began. The vision for family discipleship was shared during announcements and through the weekly church newsletter in the weeks preceding the project. A new Sunday morning sermon series focusing on family discipleship and multi-generational faithfulness was also announced. An informational letter was mailed, emailed, and posted to the church's website and social media sites inviting every family in the church with children living at home to attend the sermon series, the family devotion workshop, and participate in the devotional series.

Sermon Series on Multi-Generational Faithfulness

On Sunday March 5, 2017, the project began with the first sermon in the series. Psalm 78 was used as the selected text to teach about the faithfulness of God in the course of redemptive history and the importance of passing on the faith to successive generations. The focus dealt primarily with parents, but emphasis was placed on applying this passage to all stages of life in the church. Multi-generational faithfulness needed to be a new direction for Crossroads Community Chapel, and this first sermon served to cast that vision.

The second sermon in the series was preached from Deuteronomy 6:4-25. This sermon emphasized that Scripture places the primary responsibility of the spiritual formation of children on the family. The focus on instructing future generations demonstrates that Deuteronomy is a teaching tool to help each generation understand what it means to be a part of God's chosen people. The application of this sermon sought to show that the pattern for family discipleship happens when parents listen to God, love

God, live out his commands, lead their children to obey, and learn together about the faithfulness of God.

The third sermon in the series was preached from Ephesians 4:1-4. Parents were again encouraged to be the active initiators in the spiritual formation of their children. Godly discipline and instruction were key themes presented from the passage. This sermon gave special emphasis to the role of fathers as the spiritual leaders in the home.

Second Timothy 3:14-15 provided the text for the final sermon in the teaching series. Parents were challenged to formulate a biblical vision of parenting for their home that would provide a legacy of multi-generational faithfulness for their family. Godly parenting has a different motive and goal. Christian parents seek to model the gospel, value and protect the sanctity of marriage, view their children as blessings, and desire for Jesus to captivate their child's heart. This message presented practical steps for parents to begin discipling their children. Parents were encouraged to take the next step in the project by attending the family devotion workshop.

Family Devotion Workshop

To accommodate families with busy schedules, two separate workshop opportunities were presented. Each workshop presented the same teaching and materials, so parents only needed to attend one. The workshops were held on the Sunday evenings of March 26 and April 2 during the weekly adult Bible study time slot. This Bible study is usually attended predominantly by parents as it takes place during the children's and youth ministry activities. Out of a possible 19 families from the church, 8 families attended the workshop and agreed to participate in the devotional series. Of this 8, 5 were

couples and the other 3 were married mothers. The families who did attend were eager to learn more about discipling their children.

The workshop began by asking parents to share their own personal experiences with family devotions. This question sparked a discussion that revealed just how little of an emphasis family discipleship had been in their homes growing up and now with their own families. For most of the parents, the sermon series and the workshop was the first time they had heard from Scripture that God intended for them to be the primary disciplers of their children. All of the parents expressed the desire for resources and training to help them feel more competent and confident in fulfilling their God ordained role.

The workshop provided practical examples and ideas for the parents to use at home. Parents were encouraged to look for those moments throughout the course of the day where they can turn a child's attention or discussion toward God. Discussion questions and ideas were given to help spark spiritual conversations in the home and on the road. Parents were reminded to share their testimonies and stories of God's faithfulness in their own lives with their children. Ideas were shared about how the church can come alongside and help equip families to disciple their children. Families were then encouraged to designate a time each week to gather for prayer, worship, and a devotional time in Scripture as they began the devotional series.

The twelve-week devotional series from the Minor Prophets was then passed out in book form to each family. Parents were informed that the church would be studying the Minor Prophets along with them on Sunday mornings during a twelve-week sermon series. The sermon would focus on that particular book and introduce the theme

from the minor prophet that coincided with the devotional for the week. This would encourage families to attend the sermons together and provide further discussion information during the devotional time if needed.

To help the parents feel confident with the material, the first devotion was done together in the workshop with the instructor acting as the parent in the family. This helped to model what a family devotion time could look like in their home. The workshop concluded with each parent filling out the pre-project survey adapted from *Family Ministry Field Guide* by Timothy Paul Jones. This survey was used to measure their current practices and perceptions of discipleship.

Twelve Week Devotional Series

During the next twelve weeks of the project, the devotions were made available on the website and social media site if families or others from the church wanted to use a digital format of the devotion to accompany the sermon series.² Most of the participating families also attended the regular Sunday evening Bible study, so that provided a time to follow up with how the devotions were going in their homes. Parents were encouraged throughout the series to keep leading. The sermon series also provided a weekly challenge and reminder to apply at home what was learned from the pulpit.³

Celebration Meeting

On the Sunday evening of June 26, the participating parents were asked to attend a celebration that marked the end of the devotional series. Parents were given the

²See Appendix 6.

³See Appendix 7 for an outline of the sermons.

post-project survey adapted from *Family Ministry Field Guide* by Timothy Paul Jones. The comparative results would be used to measure the success and effectiveness of the devotional series and project instruction. The first section of the survey asked parents to measure their current perceptions of family discipleship, and the second section asked to measure their current practices of family discipleship in their home.

Post Project Phase

Of the original 13 parents comprising 8 families who began the project and filled out the pre-project survey, 9 parents representing 6 families were able to attend the post-project celebration and complete the post-project survey. One parent failed to fill out the second half of the survey. At the post-project celebration, families were asked to share their experiences and level of involvement in the devotional series. No family completed all 12 of the devotions in the series. One family completed 10. One family completed 8. Two families completed 5 of the devotions. The other 2 families did not do any of the devotions in the project. As stated in the goals, the pre-project survey and post-project survey responses were compared to better understand the effectiveness of the project. The first section of the survey asked parents to measure their current perceptions of family discipleship, and the second section measured their current practices of discipleship in the home. This section summarizes the responses from the surveys.⁴

Parental Perceptions

For the parental perceptions section, parents were asked to measure their current perceptions with 1 of 6 answers ranging from strongly agree, agree, somewhat

⁴See Appendix 2 for tables.

agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree. The first question asked if parents prioritized consistent family devotional or worship times in their schedule. In the pre-project survey, all 13 responded in one of the 3 disagree categories. Two strongly disagreed, 8 disagreed, and 3 somewhat disagreed. After the project, everyone again responded in one of the three disagree categories as no one strongly disagreed, 2 disagreed, and 7 somewhat disagreed.

The second statement gauged interest in family devotions, even if they believed to be too busy to do them. The pre-project survey responses covered the entire range of possible answers with the majority in somewhat agreement. The post-project survey showed similar results with the majority in the same category. There was a change, however, as no one responded in agreement whereas 4 respondents noted they agreed in the first survey. In the closing celebration, every parent present discussed the difficulty of being consistent with the devotions due to busy schedules. All believed it to be important but struggled due to family activities and work shifts.

The third statement asked parents if they believed that the church is where children ought to receive most of their biblical teaching. In the pre-project survey, 5 responded in somewhat agreement. That number dropped to 2 in the post-project survey. The rest of the results from both categories fell in the disagreement category.

In the next statement, parents were asked if they wish their children would ask a minister or other church leader instead of them when spontaneously asked a biblical or theological question from their child. The majority of parents in both surveys responded in the disagreement category. There does seem to be a shift though from the pre-project

survey to the post-project survey. Three parents responded in somewhat agreement before the project. No one responded in that category after the project.

In question 5, parents were asked to respond if they would be willing to do whatever it takes for their child to succeed in sports or other activities even if that meant being too busy to share a family meal together. The responses stayed the same for the most part in this statement with the vast majority responding in the disagreement spectrum. There was a slight shift from the pre-project survey however. Two families indicated that they agreed with the statement before the project. No one responded in the agreement spectrum post-project.

Question 6 asked if parents, particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with their children. In the pre-project survey all but one responded somewhere along the agreement spectrum, with 5 in strong agreement. After the project, all responded in the agreement spectrum with no responses in disagreement. However a slight shift occurred away from strong agreement as the majority answered in somewhat agreement. This slight shift is interesting when compared with the participation of fathers in the devotional series. Of the 8 families present for the workshop, 3 fathers were absent. It was exactly those three families that either did not complete any of the devotions in the series or did not participate in the post-project celebration. That variable highlights the leadership role of the father in the discipleship process.

Question 7 asks parents if they believe that church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling their children and teaching them to share the gospel with others. Ten out of 13 parents responded along the disagreement spectrum in the pre-

project survey. The subtle change occurred in the post-project survey as 2 people agreed before the project, and no one responded in that category post-project. There were still 3 parents who responded in the agreement spectrum. The idea that the church and church leaders are the ones who should be focusing on the spiritual care of children remained among those respondents.

The final question dealing with perceptions asked to see if parents believed their church has helped them develop a clear plan for their child's spiritual growth. In both the pre-project survey and post-project survey, 7 parents responded along the agreement spectrum with the majority in somewhat agreement. 6 parents somewhat disagreed in the pre-project survey, and that number dropped to 2 post-project. It is difficult to determine causation for this change because of the lower sample size for the post-survey. There was no other shift in numbers among the respondents.

Parental Practices

For the parental practices section, parents measured their current practices of discipleship with 1 of 6 numerical answers ranging from never to seven or more times. Parents were first asked how many times, apart from mealtimes, that they prayed out loud with their children. The pre-project survey results showed that over half of the parents never prayed with their children. Three prayed once and 3 prayed a couple times. In the post-project survey, the number decreased from 7 to 4 in the never category. Two parents responded that they prayed three or four times.

The second question asked how many times in the past week the family had eaten a meal together without external distractions. In the pre-project survey, the highest

number of 4 was in the never category. The other responses ranged from once to 5 or 6 times. In the post-project survey, the highest number was 4 for 3 or 4 times.

The third question asked how many times in the past month had the parent read or discussed the Bible with any of their children. The pre-project survey showed that 3 parents responded with never and one with once. The other answers were along the spectrum with 3 answering a couple times, 5 answering 3 or 4 times, and 1 answering 5 or 6 times. This category shows movement from the pre-project survey. In the post-project survey, four parents responded that they discussed the Bible 7 or more times. No one answered in the never or once category.

When asked in the next question how many times in the past month there occurred a discussion of biblical or spiritual matters with their children while engaging in day-to-day activities, the majority indicated 3 or 4 times before the project. One each responded with never, once, or a couple times. Post-project, those 3 categories were 0. Four parents indicated they discussed spiritual matters 7 or more times. This was an increase of 2 from the previous survey. At the closing celebration, parents did share that they were able to talk about the sermon and the devotions throughout the course of the week in normal conversation. This particular question supports their comments.

Parents were then asked how many times in the past two months had their family engaged in any devotional or worship time at home. Initially, 11 parents responded that they had never engaged in a family devotion prior to the project. One responded that it occurred once and another that it had occurred a couple times. The post-project survey showed a positive shift in this category. No one responded with never. The

rest of the responses were varied along the spectrum with 2 engaging once, 3 with a couple times, 2 with three or four times, and 1 with 5 or 6 times.

The next question asked parents how many times in the past two months they had talked with their spouse or a close friend about their child's spiritual development. Of the respondents in the pre-project survey, 7 indicated that they had never or only talked once in the past two months, and 4 others said that they had discussed it 7 or more times. In the post-project survey, the same number discussed it 7 or more times. No parent marked never or once on the survey. Two parents each responded with a couple times and 3 or 4 times.

When asked how many times in the past year they have intentionally participated with one or more of their children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church, 7 answered never and 4 answered once. One respondent answered 3 or 4 times and 1 answered 7 or more times. In the post-project survey, the answers were evenly spread throughout the spectrum. Those reporting "never" did drop from 7 to 2, and those reporting "once" dropped from 4 to 1. There was a slight increase in those answering a couple times and seven or more times.

The last question asked parents how many times in the past year a church leader contacted them to help them engage actively in their child's spiritual development. In the pre-project survey, 5 parents said that a church leader had never contacted them, 5 indicated that it had happened only once, and 3 mentioned it happened a couple times. In the post-project survey, only 2 said it happened once with 4 indicating it happened a couple times. Two others recorded that a church leader had made contact with them three or four times, while the biggest change noted is that no parent answered with never.

Additional Research Post-Implementation

As noted above, not one family completed all twelve of the devotions. Due to this lack of participation with the devotional series, two further research instruments were implemented at the conclusion of the project. First, a rubric was created for a panel of experts to review the quality of the devotions.⁵ Second, a focus group of parents was formed to fill out a questionnaire about the devotional series. These implementations helped to evaluate if the lack of participation was due to the inaccessibility of the devotional series.

The panel of experts concluded that the devotional material strongly met the criteria set forth in the rubric.⁶ All 4 strongly agreed that the devotions were designed with the philosophy that parents are the primary disciplers of their children, were biblically and theologically sound, connected the passages to the greater metanarrative, pointed to gospel, gave ideas for parents to use to engage in spiritual conversations with their children, and followed an organized and easy to follow teaching plan. One agreed and 3 strongly agreed that the devotions were user-friendly in that any parent could easily teach and that the devotions communicated the passage and theme clearly. Two agreed and 2 strongly agreed that the devotions were helpful in explaining key passages of Scripture, contained suggestions for applying biblical truths, and contained a variety of

⁵The panel was represented by Dr. Terry J. Betts, Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Russell T. Fuller, Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Troy Temple, Professor of Theology and Family Ministries at The Liberty University School of Divinity, and Dr. Steve Willis, Lead Pastor at First Baptist Church of Kenova, West Virginia. Dr. Willis has over 20 years of youth ministry experience in the local church.

⁶See Appendix 4.

age-appropriate teaching methods. Three agreed and 1 strongly agreed that the devotions provided sufficient biblical commentary and background information on the passages.

All the parents who participated were invited to a focus group discussion after the completion of the project. All 9 parents who attended the post-project celebration and completed the post-project survey participated in the focus group. The focus group was formatted to facilitate an open discussion about the devotion series. All of the parents offered feedback, and their responses were very similar to the discussions from the celebration. At the conclusion of the focus group, each participant filled out a questionnaire about the series. According to the responses, each devotion took anywhere from 10 to 45 minutes to complete. The parents who recorded the higher times were families that had older children. One of the strengths mentioned was that every child had a role in the devotion time. Some would read the Scripture passages, while others would read the questions or background information aloud. The benefits mentioned were quality time together, quiet time together, and the opportunity to discuss the sermons and apply what they heard.

The biggest factors that contributed to not finishing all twelve devotions were different work shifts, kid schedules, no free time, travel, sports, medical issues, procrastination, fatigue, consistency, and simply forgetting to do them. Most parents recorded that they were already fairly comfortable leading a devotion time, and that the experience really did not increase their level of comfort. However, some did report that having a usable resource was very helpful and increased their level of confidence in the material. All of the respondents noted that their children were very engaged during the devotional time, and that the format was easy to follow. The parents discussed how they

enjoyed learning more about the Minor Prophets, and many mentioned they had never personally read the books or even heard a sermon preached about any of the prophets. While all 9 mentioned that they were very thankful for the opportunity to lead a devotion at home with their children, only 2 said that they would like to make it a consistent practice in their home. The rest indicated that they were not likely to plan a consistent time of family worship, even though they recognize that it is important and healthy for their family.

Conclusion

The project was implemented over a period of eighteen weeks. The sermon series on the biblical mandate for parents to disciple their children was preached. A training seminar was held to help equip parents to lead devotions with their children in their own home. The pre- and post-project surveys were administered to evaluate the present perceptions and practices of family discipleship at Crossroads Community Chapel. Parents were provided with a devotional series from the Minor Prophets to lead with their children emphasizing God's redemptive story. Adjustments and additional research instruments were administered after the conclusion of the project to further evaluate the effectiveness of the devotional series. The complete analysis and evaluation of the project will be covered in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

The overall aim of this project was to help parents engage in spiritual conversations with their children. The church should partner with parents by helping them acknowledge their role as primary disciplers and equipping them to teach the truths of the gospel to their children. This chapter provides a detailed analysis and evaluation of the project at Crossroads Community Chapel. First, the project's purpose and goals will be evaluated using the criteria established from the beginning of the project. Second, the project's strengths and weaknesses will be analyzed with suggestions for improvement. Third, personal and theological reflections gleaned from the project will be presented.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents at Crossroads Community Chapel to teach God's redemptive story to their children through family devotions. The Minor Prophets were chosen to help parents see that all of Scripture points to God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. The need to help parents understand their role as the primary disciplers of their children was evident at Crossroads. The sermon series and workshop helped parents understand and acknowledge their responsibility, and the devotional series provided parents with a biblically sound resource they could use to teach God's redemptive story. As a result of this project the parents at Crossroads

Community Chapel were taught, encouraged, challenged, and given resources to faithfully disciple their children at home.

Evaluation of the Goals

Three goals were established to support the purpose of the project and to provide direction. Each goal builds off the other in sequential order to achieve the overall purpose of the project.

Goal 1

The first goal of the project was to evaluate the perceptions and practices of parents in the area of family discipleship. Research demonstrated that many parents were not actively acknowledging their role as the primary disciplers of their children. Through the use of observation and conversation, a primary concern at Crossroads Community Chapel was that many parents were not prioritizing the spiritual development of their children or recognizing the responsibility of discipleship in the family. To accomplish this goal, parents were asked to fill out the pre-project survey. The survey results presented a clearer understanding of the discipleship perceptions and practices of families in the church prior to their participation in the workshop and devotional series.

Goal 2

The second goal of this project was to teach the foundational framework for family discipleship and to equip the parents to lead family devotions at home. The biblical framework was taught through the Sunday morning sermon series on family discipleship and the parents were taught and modeled how to lead devotions at the parent seminar. The Sunday morning series lasted four weeks and focused on passages in

Scripture related to God's design for the family in multi-generational discipleship. Using key passages from Deuteronomy, Psalms, Ephesians, and 2 Timothy, parents were reminded of their role as the primary disciplers of their children. At the end of the series, parents were encouraged to attend the workshop on leading family devotions. The workshop provided an outlet for parents to share their personal experiences with family devotions, including their perceived fears, weaknesses, and failures. Creative ideas, examples, and tips for engaging in spiritual conversations were offered and shared among the participants. The workshop concluded with the challenge for parents to participate in the twelve week devotional series.

In order to provide a comparison to measure the success of this goal, a post-project survey was administered to the parents at the conclusion of the twelve week devotional series. Of the parents who participated in the workshop and filled out the pre-project survey, 9 of the 13 participants filled out the post-project survey. By pairing the results from both surveys from each participants who filled out both surveys, a *t*-test for dependent samples was conducted.¹ The null hypothesis states that there is no difference between the means of the pre-survey and post-survey scores. The hypothesis for this project states that there would be a difference in the scores, which rejects the null hypothesis. The *t*-test results confirm that there was a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of perceptions and practices of family discipleship for those parents who participated in the project ($t_{(50)}=4.0$, $p<0.00197$).

¹See Appendix 3 for *t*-test data.

Goal 3

The third goal of the project was to develop a devotional series for the parents to lead with their children each week over the course of twelve weeks. This series covered the Minor Prophets portion of the Bible. Parents were given a devotion to lead each week with their family that coincided with that Sunday's sermon message from the Minor Prophet. Each devotion was designed to guide families through key themes and major promises from that particular book. The format consisted of the historical and theological background to help parents feel competent and confident to lead the devotion. The devotional time would begin with a fun activity or story that would help lead into the passage and discussion time. Families were encouraged to read Scripture together and ask specific questions to aid in the discussion. An important point of emphasis in the conversation was helping families understand God's plan of redemption by connecting the passage to Jesus. Every devotion concluded with ideas for guided prayer together.

After the conclusion of the project, it was necessary to add the rubric conducted by a panel of experts to further measure the overall usefulness of the devotional series. The rubric helped to assess if the lack of participation in all twelve of the devotions by parents was due to the devotional material itself. This rubric provided a measureable standard that evaluated key elements of the devotional material. The panel concluded that the devotions strongly met the goal of using the Minor Prophets to teach God's redemptive story found in Scripture.

A focus group questionnaire was also implemented after the conclusion of the project to help discover the reasons why parents did not participate in all twelve devotions. Through the discussions and comments reported, it can be concluded that the

devotional series served as a solid and simple resource for the parents to use, and the parents took advantage of the opportunity to lead family devotions in their home.

However, other factors such as time, commitment, and consistency prevented this goal from being accomplished.

Evaluation of the Project

Strengths

Parents can find unlimite accessible resources related to parenting. Many offer conflicting opinions on what should be prioritized in raising children. Christian parents in the culture today have to filter through all of the voices telling them how to raise their children. A major strength of this project is that it led parents to explore their roles and responsibilities through a biblical worldview. Scripture informs parents to be the primary disciplers of their children. From beginning to end, this project used the Bible as the primary source for parenting and multi-generational discipleship. Parents were continually pointed to God's design for their family.

Another strength of this project was that the scope included parents with children of all ages. It was important for parents to understand that God's mandate for discipleship was not limited to just a specific age range in the family. Broadening the scope also encouraged more families to participate in the workshop and devotional series. This initially presented a challenge in preparing the family devotions due to the range of maturity levels and learning capabilities among children. An added benefit was that during the workshop parents were able to encourage each other from their own experiences with engaging their children in conversations based on the age and stage of childhood.

A third strength of the project was the availability of an applicable resource for parents to use. This provided the “how” to support the “why” of family discipleship. For those parents who acknowledged their role, many needed help on where to start in their home. The devotional series provided a resource they could begin using immediately for an extended period of time with the hope of establishing the discipline of a weekly family devotional time. A key component of this resource was making it available through a wide variety of formats. Parents were given hard copies of all twelve devotions in book form at the workshop. Each week those parents were also emailed the devotion and it was made available on the church website and social media pages in digital form. This weekly update also served as a reminder each week to participate in the devotional series.

A fourth strength was the Minor Prophet sermon series that coincided with the twelve weeks of the devotional series. This actually encouraged parents to attend Sunday morning more faithfully or listen to the audio of the sermon later in the week if they were unable to attend. Parents wanted to hear the message so they could be better prepared to lead the devotion that week. The series provided the opportunity for the parents to be taught from Scripture and then share what they personally learned with their children. Thoughts about the message began to occur more spontaneously in everyday conversations throughout the week.

Weaknesses

One weakness of the project was the small sample size of families. Out of 19 families invited to participate in the workshop and devotional series, only 8 families accepted the invitation. Of the 8, only 5 families participated in the closing celebration and filled out the post-project survey. This created a small sample size to study the

impact of the teaching and devotional series. Among those that did participate, all were traditional families with both parents married and living at home. However, three fathers did not attend the workshop. There were also no single parents, step-families, or divorced parents who participated in the project. Having a larger sample size and more familial diversity would have provided a more accurate picture of the church and of the surrounding community.

Another weakness is the limited time frame of the project. The scope only included a twelve-week devotional series to use. It is hard to study the overall effectiveness of the teaching in such a small amount of time. Furthermore, a larger time frame could open up the possibility of more family participation and help families continue to engage in discipleship as they maneuver through the busy seasons of the year with their children. Parents will need to be more proactive in seeking out additional devotional resources to use, and the church will need to be more proactive in helping provide resources for the aim of this project to continue beyond the time frame.

Suggested Adjustments

After evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the project, there are a few adjustments that might be of benefit. The first thing I would do differently is change the start time of the project. The family discipleship sermon series began on March 5, thus placing the ending celebration gathering of the project on June 26. It was difficult to schedule the closing due to summer schedules and family vacations. Only 5 of the 8 families were able to attend. The project might have had better participation if it began in January and ended before the summer.

Another adjustment I would make is personally inviting parents and families to participate. Every parent who regularly attended Crossroads Community Chapel received an email and a letter explaining the project and encouraging participation.

Announcements were made weeks prior and on social media sites. But with only 8 of a possible 19 families participating, it could have improved attendance if I personally called or spoke with parents before the project began. It would have provided an opportunity to share the goals of the project and cast the vision of why family discipleship is important. It would also have given parents the opportunity to ask questions or share their reservations about participating in the devotional series.

A third adjustment would involve accountability for the parents. At the workshop it would have been helpful to pair families together as accountability and prayer partners throughout the devotional series. This would have provided parents with an outlet to share their celebrations and struggles throughout the project. It would have been beneficial for me to contact parents at certain times throughout the series as well to offer encouragement and prayer.

A fourth adjustment would have to do with the timing of the pre-project survey. The survey was administered before the parent seminar, but after most of the parents had heard the six-week sermon series on family discipleship. It is possible that hearing the sermon series had already affected their current perceptions and practices, and therefore would lead to a smaller statistical change from the post-project survey. Since the majority of the parents in the seminar shared that they had never really recognized their role or experienced family discipleship in their own homes growing up, I

am curious to know what measurable affect just the sermon series had on their perceptions.

Theological Reflections

The primary sphere where evangelism and discipleship of children should occur is within the context of the family. Christian parents have been given the primary role, responsibility, and calling to teach their children God's redemptive story of salvation. The Bible teaches clearly that the institution of the family is the primary means used by God to pass the faith down through future generations.

Moses described the responsibility that parents have in passing on and applying God's words to the next generation. This responsibility involved the call to teach diligently and to train children throughout the course of every day life. Scripture describes an active environment of learning and questioning for the transmission of the gospel. Soon after the Israelites heard those words, there arose a generation that did not know God or remember his faithfulness. The rest of the Old Testament follows that pattern. One generation rebels against God, and another rises up to call the Israelites back to faithfulness. But a failure again occurs in passing on that faithfulness to the following generations, and so the cycle repeats. Thankfully through God's grace and provision his promises continue despite Israel's unfaithfulness. In Psalms and Proverbs, Scripture records reminders of teaching youth the gospel and passing it down through generations.

The New Testament still holds true to that emphasis but begins to expand on the responsibility of spiritual formation to younger generations. Discipleship continues to happen in the home, but also occurs within the context of what will become the greater family of God as the story of grace and redemption is fulfilled with the life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Paul's writings he specifically points out the home and family in the context of walking in love as imitators of God.

The commands are just as relevant today for parents to actively and intentionally place the Bible as the central voice and foundation of the home. Parents need to responsibly fulfill their calling as the primary disciplers of their family. This involves a commitment to teach clearly and intentionally the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Parents are to do this prayerfully and boldly with all humility as they see their children not just as their children, but as potential brothers and sisters in Christ.

Many Christian parents do take seriously the call to disciple their children, but in the reality of daily life find it next to impossible. With most families being two income households, children involved in extra-curricular activities, and keeping up with the home, little time and effort is devoted to spiritual formation. This can be attributed to weariness, stress, misplaced priorities, or simply laziness. Other parents may just not know how to go about discipling their children in day to day life.

The responsibility for the spiritual formation and discipleship of children is an issue in the modern church. In many cases, families are delegating the task of discipling their children to the church. This is not what the church is designed to do. The role of the family is to be the primary agent of discipleship for a child, and therefore the role of the church is to be the supporter of that discipleship process in the family. These two institutions partner together to model multi-generational faithfulness. The church partners to equip and resource the parents while encouraging the family to be that primary faith caregiver.

Personal Reflections

First and foremost, this project served as a challenging reminder to me to be more intentional in my own home. The readings and research for this project continually convicted me in the area of family discipleship. I always acknowledged my responsibility from the beginning to have a Christ-centered vision for my family. My goal is to make Christ's priorities our family's priority. Having that purpose and goal will continue to keep my family from heading in different directions with no real tangible purpose or faithful outcome.

While having that goal is an important foundation, I have learned through experience that the practice of family discipleship needs to be intentional, or else it will never be done with any sort of consistency. Life can be full of activity, busyness, and unforeseen circumstances on any given day. This project reminded me of the important truth that it is vital to adjust every day life to fulfill the purpose for family found in God's Word.

One major truth from this project that continually challenged me was my personal responsibility to my wife and children. I must love God with all my heart, soul, and might. All efforts of discipleship will flow outward from my inward commitment to Christ. While my own personal time with the Lord could always grow deeper, that area of impression upon my heart is easier to change. It is the joint impression upon the heart of my wife and I that has continually been a struggle for consistency. There are good seasons of faithfulness on my part in leading this and barren seasons. There just needs to be greater intentionality in this area as we prevent the hectic chores of every day life from pushing out our prayer time together.

I know what God requires of me as a husband and father. I am to love my wife as Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for her (Eph 5:25). I understand I am called to be the spiritual leader of my home, consistently providing a godly example for my family to follow. In my personal walk with the Lord and in my relationship with my wife and children, I am to model what it means to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). I am to model sacrificial love and put the needs of others first (Phil 2:3-4). I am to encourage them to develop spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible, study, and worship (Phil 3:17). I am to exemplify setting priorities and making decisions according to biblical principles by following that rule in my own life (Psalm 119:9). Just dwelling on these responsibilities makes me feel overwhelmed and inadequate.

Thankfully God graciously supplies all that we need in accomplishing what he desires of us!

Leading this project at Crossroads Community Chapel has brought both blessing and disappointment. It was a blessing to hear parents share their experiences of doing a devotion together, some for the first time as a family. As the lead pastor, I am grateful to be in a position to champion family discipleship from the pulpit. I hope to be faithful in following through with communicating this vision consistently and intentionally to the congregation. The most helpful feedback I received from families revolved around the family devotion corresponding with the weekly sermon. It provided parents and children the opportunity to discuss the message throughout the week. It encouraged parents to listen more intently and take more detailed notes so that they would be prepared for possible discussions with their children. This is a task that I desire to continue doing. It will require additional preparation and work for me, but what a labor

of love it will be to witness families engaged in worship together both on Sundays and throughout the week.

This project also brought disappointment and frustration. It was disheartening to have so few parents participate in the devotional series. The families who were already engaging in some form of discipleship at home were the ones most eager to learn more, while the ones who perhaps need this teaching the most were absent. My experience with years in youth and family ministry continues to show that many families in the church simply prioritize other activities for their children above spiritual development. The structures for family life in our culture pull families apart as opposed to bringing them together. School, sports, and extra activities result in little time for connecting together as a family. While teaching this series, I could see the tension families struggle with in regards to busy schedules. Yet many parents cheerfully sacrifice their child's spiritual development for the sake of athletic or academic success and popularity.

This tension was most evident throughout the sermon series on family discipleship and discussions that followed. There was a different response from each generation. Parents with grown children were often defensive with the idea of discipling their children. Some shared with me their guilt for not making it a priority. Others had developed the attitude that they did their job well, even though their grown children were not actively living for Christ as adults. The series forced these parents to look back and reflect on their parenting, and for many it brought conviction and defensiveness. For parents currently with teenagers, they were more responsive yet found it difficult to change the pattern that had been formed in their family over the years. These families were typically the busiest as well. Consistency will continue to be difficult unless a

change in that family culture takes place and other pursuits are placed behind the priority of family discipleship. The most receptive families were those with young children. In this season of life it is much easier to have a devotion before bedtime. Even though these families still had activity, they were able to keep a more consistent schedule because of the younger age of their children. I recognize that it is these families going forward that will set the precedent for Crossroads to equip and champion multi-generational faithfulness in the home.

Conclusion

The process of Christian formation in children begins with careful, intentional instruction of God's redemptive story of salvation in found in Scripture. This teaching, along with the relational mentoring and care given by parents, leads one toward spiritual growth in Christ. Discipleship begins in the home with the family, but the church community equips and helps the family apply kingdom living for the growing child. The hope is that the young person will seek spiritual growth both alone and with others, gain awareness of God's presence in their own life and in the world, act out of a commitment to faith in Jesus Christ through worship and ministry, make faith a way of life by integrating their beliefs into daily life, live lives of service and care to others, speak publicly about their faith in Jesus and God's participation in their life and the world, exercise moral responsibility by living a life of integrity, and understand their identity sealed in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

As Crossroads Community Chapel continues to build upon the biblical principles from this project, many parents will be introduced to the idea of family discipleship for the first time. My hope and prayer is that each parent will acknowledge

their role and be equipped by the church to fulfill their calling as the primary disciplers of their children. There are no perfect parents and no perfect families. God simply calls parents to be obedient and faithful. He freely gives much grace to accept that calling of transmitting the Gospel to children and leaving a legacy of multi-generational faithfulness.

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your current perceptions and practices of family discipleship. This research is being conducted by Bryan Michael Cantrell for the purpose of doctoral project research. In this research, you will indicate whether you agree or disagree and tell how often you participate in various activities regarding family discipleship. 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 completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

THE FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES SURVEY

This instrument is intended for parents with children 18 and younger living at home. For the purpose of this survey, “church leaders” include pastors, ministers, deacons, teachers, or small group leaders.¹

1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family’s schedule.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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¹Survey adapted from Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan House, 2011), 202-203. Used with permission.

4. When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

5. I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities – even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

6. Parents – and particularly fathers – have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipline my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child’s spiritual growth.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children?

Never Once A couple times Three or four times Five or six times Seven or more times

10. How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?

Never Once A couple times Three or four times Five or six times Seven or more times

11. How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?

Never Once A couple times Three or four times Five or six times Seven or more times

12. How many times in the past MONTH have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?

Never	Once	A couple times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
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13. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?

Never	Once	A couple times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
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14. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?

Never	Once	A couple times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
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15. How many times in the past YEAR have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?

Never	Once	A couple times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
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16. How many times in the past YEAR has any church leader made contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?

Never	Once	A couple times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
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APPENDIX 2

SURVEY RESULTS

These tables show the responses from the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey. This appendix shows the responses from each question.

Table A1. Question 1: I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	0	0
Somewhat Agree	0	0
Somewhat Disagree	3	7
Disagree	8	2
Strongly Disagree	2	0

Table A2. Question 2: I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Strongly Agree	1	0
Agree	3	0
Somewhat Agree	5	7
Somewhat Disagree	2	1
Disagree	2	1
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Table A3. Question 3: The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	0	0
Somewhat Agree	5	2
Somewhat Disagree	1	3
Disagree	6	4
Strongly Disagree	1	0

Table A4. Question 4: When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	1	1
Somewhat Agree	3	0
Somewhat Disagree	2	3
Disagree	4	2
Strongly Disagree	3	3

Table A5. Question 5: I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities – even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together.

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	0	0
Somewhat Agree	2	0
Somewhat Disagree	5	5
Disagree	5	3
Strongly Disagree	1	1

Table A6. Question 6: Parents – and particularly fathers – have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Strongly Agree	5	1
Agree	2	8
Somewhat Agree	5	0
Somewhat Disagree	1	0
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Table A7. Question 7: Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipline my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	2	0
Somewhat Agree	1	3
Somewhat Disagree	1	1
Disagree	6	3
Strongly Disagree	3	2

Table A8. Question 8: My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child’s spiritual growth.

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	1	2
Somewhat Agree	6	5
Somewhat Disagree	6	2
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Table A9. Question 9: Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children?

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Never	7	4
Once	3	0
A couple times	3	2
Three or four times	0	2
Five or six times	0	0
Seven or more times	0	0

Table A10. Question 10: How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Never	4	0
Once	2	0
A couple times	1	3
Three or four times	3	4
Five or six times	3	1
Seven or more times	0	0

Table A11. Question 11: How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Never	3	0
Once	1	0
A couple times	3	3
Three or four times	5	1
Five or six times	1	0
Seven or more times	0	4

Table A12. Question 12: How many times in the past MONTH have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Never	1	0
Once	1	0
A couple times	1	0
Three or four times	6	3
Five or six times	2	1
Seven or more times	2	4

Table A13. Question 13: How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Never	11	0
Once	1	2
A couple times	1	3
Three or four times	0	2
Five or six times	0	1
Seven or more times	0	0

Table A14. Question 14: How many times in the past TWO MONTHS have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Never	3	0
Once	4	0
A couple times	1	2
Three or four times	0	2
Five or six times	1	0
Seven or more times	4	4

Table A15. Question 15: How many times in the past YEAR have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Never	7	2
Once	4	1
A couple times	0	2
Three or four times	1	0
Five or six times	0	1
Seven or more times	1	2

Table A16. Question 16: How many times in the past YEAR has any church leader made contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?

	Pre-Project	Post-Project
Possible Responses	Respondents	Respondents
Never	5	0
Once	5	2
A couple times	3	4
Three or four times	0	2
Five or six times	0	0
Seven or more times	0	0

APPENDIX 3

TABLE OF SURVEY RESULTS

This table shows the pre-project and post-project results from the entire sample from the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey. The labels of the participants reflect the respondents who completed both surveys.

Table A1. Summary scores of the sample.

Participant	Pre-Project	Post-Project
001	57	66
002	67	76
003	38	50
004	58	67
005	52	61
006	54	54
007	33	33
008	57	60
009	54	57

Table A2. *t*-Test: paired two sample for means.

	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	52.22222222	58.22222222
Variance	109.4444444	148.4444444
Observations	9	9
Pearson Correlation	0.932199107	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	8	
t Stat	-4.0	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.001974886	
t Critical one-tail	1.859548038	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.003949773	
t Critical two-tail	2.306004135	

APPENDIX 4

PEER EVALUATION OF DEVOTION SERIES

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help equip parents to teach God's redemptive story through family devotions. This research is being conducted by Bryan Michael Cantrell for the purpose of doctoral project research. In this research, you will evaluate the devotional series from the Minor Prophets that was used by families participating in the project. 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 completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Please answer the following questions regarding the devotional series from the Minor Prophets.

1. The devotions are designed with the philosophy that parents are the primary disciplers of their children.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. The devotions are biblically and theologically sound.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. The devotions are helpful in explaining key Scripture passages to participants.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. The devotions provide biblical commentary and background information on the passages being discussed.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

5. The devotions connect the passages to the greater narrative of God's redemptive story.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

6. The devotions point the participants to the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

7. The devotions give ideas for parents to use to engage in spiritual conversations with their children.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

8. The devotions contain suggestions for helping learners apply biblical truths to their lives.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

9. The devotions contain a variety of age-appropriate teaching methods to engage learners in active study and discussion.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

10. The devotion follows an organized teaching plan that is easy to follow.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

11. The devotion is user-friendly in that any parent could easily teach the passage.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

12. The devotion communicates the passage and theme clearly.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

APPENDIX 5

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Did your family complete all the devotionals in the 12-week series? If not, how many did you complete?
2. If you did not complete the series, what factors contributed to not finishing the 12 weeks?
3. What would you say your level of comfort was in leading family devotions before the series?
4. What would you now say is your level of comfort in leading family devotions?
5. On average, how long did the devotion time take each week?
6. What would you say was most beneficial for your family in participating in the devotional series?
7. What would you say was most difficult about participating in a weekly devotional time with your family?

8. Which devotion sparked the most discussion in your family?

9. How engaged would you say your children were during the devotional time?

10. Is there anything that you would add or take away from the devotion structure?

11. How likely are you to continue doing a weekly devotion with your child/children?

12. Further comments, suggestions, and/or ideas?

APPENDIX 6

DEVOTION SERIES

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Hosea

Background

Hosea is called to be a prophet during a time when the original kingdom of Israel has split in two. The northern kingdom is known as Israel and the southern kingdom is known as Judah. So the book starts by letting us know the timeframe in which Hosea was a prophet. It mentions the kings who were on the throne during the time of his ministry. Hosea's career spanned four decades, from the prosperous years of Jeroboam to shortly before the fall of Samaria and the exile of Israel. During this time the dominant faith of Israel was no longer a reflection of obeying God's laws but rather a mixture of the worship of God with the local Baal religions. Israel was prosperous and complacent under the rule of Jeroboam 2, but after his death, and a succession of 6 kings who were all assassinated by their successors, life became increasingly insecure and the nation's resources weakened. Israel stubbornly sought help from other nations instead of from the Lord. Hosea spent all of his ministry prophesying in the northern kingdom of Israel.

God uses Hosea, his life, his marriage, and his family as a living object lesson between His relationship with Israel and even today with us in our new covenant relationship through Christ. There are two major themes in the book of Hosea - the seriousness of sin and the unrelenting faithful love of God.

If you have younger children, you might want to explain that Hosea was married to a woman who didn't love him back and kept running away. But he kept loving her and chasing after her. He even paid a price to get her back. That's what God's love is like.

Major Promise

God loves us even when we are unfaithful.

Bring It Up

Share your favorite love story. It could be a movie, a book, or how you met your spouse. If you have teens, you can ask them what their favorite love story is too, or what is the most ridiculous love story they have watched in a movie. For younger children, you can talk about their favorite Disney movie, or why they love their favorite toy or show. Then say: "Today we are going to read about a strange love story from the Bible."

Picture It

For Younger Children - Imagine you were given a brand new puppy. You take care of

your puppy. You feed him. You play with him. You give him a warm cozy bed. He is always there to jump on you when you get home from school. But one day while you are giving him a walk, he runs away. You call for him, but he doesn't come back home. Later on you find out that he has decided to live at your neighbor's house. Sometimes he comes back home to get food from you or a little attention, but ends up going back to the other house. How would this make you feel?

For Older Children - You can still use the puppy illustration, or you could talk about what it feels like when a best friend betrays them.

Read It

Hosea 1:2-11 and 2:14-23 and 3:1-5

Talk About It

- What do the names of Hosea's children reveal about God's message to His people?
- What happens at the end of chapter 1 with these names? How would this give the people hope?
- Hosea shows tender love to his wife. How does God show tender love to us when we stray from Him?

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

Hosea's relationship with Gomer reminds us of God's relationship with the people of Israel and with us. Even though God's people are unfaithful and love other things more than they love God, God still loves us. Just as Hosea had to purchase Gomer to bring her home, Jesus paid for our sin on the cross to bring us back into relationship with God.

Pray About It

Ask God to forgive you for your unfaithfulness and thank Him for His love and forgiveness in your life through Jesus.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 106.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Joel

Background

Joel's name means "Yahweh is God." He is a prophet who calls the people of Judah and Jerusalem to lament and return to the Lord during a time of national disaster. The locust plague destroyed the vineyards and fields, and this hindered the ability of the people to present their offerings in the temple as acts of worship.

The day of the Lord dominates the Book of Joel. Every major event of Joel is treated as the day of the Lord. The locust plague that initiated the book is Yahweh's "army," whose coming signals dreadful destruction from the Almighty (1:6, 15). The army of 2:1- 11 comes against Jerusalem on the "day of the Lord," a "day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness" (2:1- 2). This army has all the trappings of an apocalyptic enemy. But the day of the Lord is also salvation for Israel. Remarkably, even the pouring out of the Spirit is accompanied by the dreadful signs of the day of the Lord (2:30- 31). The healing of the land after the locust plague also will come about because the Lord will do "great things" and "wonders" in Judah (2:21, 26). Finally, the destruction of the northern enemy and the judgment of all nations is, from beginning to end, the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord refers to a decisive action of Yahweh to bring his plans for Israel to completion. This action may be an act of punishment or of salvation for Israel, but in either case it carries forward the purposes of God. God's plans are moving forward!

Major Promise

When we turn to God, he will forgive us and save us.

Bring It Up

Share a humorous experience you have had with bugs. Which insect gives you the creeps the most?

Picture It

For Younger Children - Talk about a time when a little mistake you made caused something to break or get ruined. They may even have an example from something they have done. In the book of Joel, a bunch of bugs caused the land to be ruined.

For Older Children - Talk about a traumatic, world news event that you remember in your life time. It could be a natural disaster (flooding, earthquake, storm) or an events like a terrorist attack or school shooting. Share where you were, what emotions you felt, questions you had. Ask them if they remember any of those events and what they thought as well. In the book of Joel, a catastrophic locust plague swept through the area.

Read It

Joel Chapters 1-3

Talk About It

- How will the plague affect each of the people groups mentioned in chapter 2 - the

- drunkards, the priests, and the farmers?
- Joel compares the invasion to the “day of the Lord.” What can we learn about that “day” from these verses in Joel?
 - Joel calls the people to repent. How are they to demonstrate their repentance? When we repent, what promises does the Lord make? (2:18-27)
 - Joel describes the Lord as a lion, a thunderstorm, a refuge, and a stronghold (3:16). What do these images reveal about the God?

Connect It to God’s Salvation Story¹

Sin, like the locusts, causes great devastation. But even in our sin, God makes a promise to His people. If they would turn back to Him, He would protect them. He would drive away their enemies and bless His people. When that happened, God said, “You will know that I am Yahweh your God.” Like Joel, Jesus calls sinners to repent. Jesus died and was raised so that all people could experience repentance and forgiveness.

Pray About It

Pray that God will help us see how destructive sin is in our lives and in our world. Ask for forgiveness and the strength to turn away from sin and trust Jesus. Thank God for Jesus so we all can have forgiveness and new life.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013),

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Amos

Background

It is a time of economic prosperity and peace for both Israel and Judah. The economic boom brought about an increase in religious activities. Sadly, the period was characterized by moral and spiritual decline and by social upheaval. Israel's frequent attendance at the shrines to make sacrifices did not result in moral, spiritual, and social uprightness. The rich oppressed the poor, indulged in extravagant lifestyles, denied justice to the oppressed, and engaged in immorality. Israel's moral and spiritual decline, plus the social upheaval brought on by greed, contradicted their religious activities. Amos was a shepherd and provider of sheep who was called by God to prophesy.

God's judgment came against Israel in the form of famine, drought, and plagues. But because the people failed to return to the Lord, Amos prophesied that all but a remnant would be destroyed. Still the Lord pleaded with them, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live!"

Major Promise

Seek the Lord and live.

Bring It Up

Share a story where you measured something incorrectly. It could be from a recipe, shopping for clothes, building something, etc. What was the result?

Picture It

For Younger Children - Play a version of the "quiet as a mouse" game where on the count of 3 everyone is quiet. See who can stay quiet the longest.

For Older Children - You can still play a version of the "mouse" game but try doing an important activity or putting something together without communicating with words. Talk about how difficult it was without words.

Read It

Amos Chapters 7-9

Talk About It

- What five visions does the Lord show Amos (7:1, 4, 7; 8:1-3 and 9:1-4)?
- Why do you think God relents with the first two visions?
- What would the world look like if there was a famine from hearing God? He doesn't speak. We have no Bible. He doesn't answer prayers.
- A plumb line is used to measure against a standard. Talk about how the Bible is our plumb line.

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

Amos predicted that because of their sin, Israel would experience a time when God would not speak to them. Israel would search for God, but they would not find Him. Their spiritual famine ended when God sent Jesus into the world as the Word became flesh. Jesus showed what God was like and brought about God's promise of restoration, plenty, and security through salvation in Him.

Pray About It

Thank God for giving us His Word - through the Bible and ultimately through Jesus.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013),

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets – Obadiah

Background

Obadiah is a short book of prophecy containing only one chapter. Unlike the other prophets, Obadiah's audience is not Israel or Judah. He is prophesying God's judgment on the nation of Edom. The Edomites were descendants of Esau. There were frequent border wars with Edom and Judah. When the Babylonian empire conquered Jerusalem in 587 B.C., Edom saw their opportunity. They joined forces with the Babylonians, prevented the fleeing Judeans from escaping to their lands, and grabbed and looted what they could from Judah.

For those sins Obadiah said Edom would be brought down by God. In this very short book, God brings up a lot of issues we all struggle with such as greed, pride, and injustice. If we are victims of those sins from others, we can take comfort that Obadiah ends his book with hope. God will bring about justice and restore what has been taken.

Major Promise

God will bring justice and restore His people.

Play It

Start off the devotion time with some wrestling. Play a version of "king of the hill" where everyone struggles to be the last one standing. Say, "Today we are going to talk about a group of people who thought they were on top of the mountain, but God was not happy with how they got there."

Bring It Up

For Younger and Older Children - Share a story of when you did something foolish and others laughed at you. Maybe you tripped, fell out of a chair, made a mistake in school, etc. Ask if they have ever laughed at someone who was in trouble. Or ignored someone who needed help? Stress the importance of having compassion for others when they fall.

Read It

Obadiah 1:1-21

Talk About It

- Edom had take advantage of the fall of Jerusalem and even helped destroy it. How did God respond to their actions?
- What was Edom's attitude toward the future?
- Why would Edom be destroyed?
- What warning do you see in Edom's example about how we should not respond to other
- people's misfortunes?
- When is it tempting to take joy in someone's downfall?
- How can we show compassion to others when they fall?

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

God is always in control. Even when Obadiah, and us, don't understand God's ways and why He allows bad things to happen, He is still in control. God promised to ultimately rescue His people from all their enemies. God showed His people that Jesus will set up His kingdom and make all things right.

Pray About It

Confess any spiritual pride or feelings of superiority over those who have fallen. Ask God to help you see others through His eyes of compassion. Thank Him that He sent Jesus makes all things right.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 148.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Jonah

Background

God called Jonah to preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which was the most powerful nation on earth. The more we know about Assyria, the more we understand why Jonah was reluctant to preach there. The Assyrians were a fierce, warring people who often treated their captives ruthlessly. Jonah had good reason to be afraid!

But fear was not the only thing that made Jonah reluctant. His attitude reflects the prejudice common in his day. The "chosen people" could not imagine that God could care about other nations—especially one as vile and idolatrous as Assyria. So the book of Jonah becomes a powerful illustration of the fact that God does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2Pe 3:9).

Major Promise

God's salvation is open to everyone who repents.

Bring It Up

Share a time from when you were growing up where your parents asked you to do something that you did not want to do and you ended up doing the opposite. Or maybe there was a time when as a young child you wanted to run away from home. How far did you get?

Picture It

For Younger and Older Children - The story of Jonah should be a familiar one because it is commonly taught in Sunday schools and children's programs. Ask your child what they remember about the story. Segue into the Bible by asking, "Do you think Jonah was a hero?"

Read It

Jonah 1-4

Talk About It

- Tarshish was in the exact opposite direction from Nineveh. Why do you think Jonah ran away from God?
- Why do you think God answered Jonah's prayer in Chapter 2?
- The people of Nineveh seem sincere in their repentance. How and why does the Lord respond to Nineveh in Chapter 3?
- Why was Jonah angry in Chapter 4?
- How does God use the vine to teach Jonah?

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

God showed His grace and mercy by forgiving the people of Nineveh when they turned

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 108.

from their ways and repented of their sin. God shows His love to the rest of the world by sending Jesus to die on the cross. This story shows that God's saving grace extends to everyone who repents and trusts in Jesus.

Pray About It

Thank God for sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Ask for help in turning away from our ways and in being obedient when He calls us to serve Him.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Micah

Background

Micah's name can be translated as the question "Who is like God?" This book ends with that same type of question: "Who is a God like you?" Micah was a prophet sent to the people of Judah. He lived during the reign of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. It was a period of great wealth and prosperity, but also of sin and corruption. The leaders took bribes, the rich cheated the poor, and the priests didn't God's true laws from Scripture. The people ignored God's commands and worshipped idols. So God sent Micah to bring a lawsuit against his people. God's people are in the dock, and God himself will bring about the judgment. Micah said to them: "Listen, all you peoples. Pay attention! The Lord has seen your sins. He is leaving His holy temple and coming down to trample the heights of the earth. The mountains melt beneath Him, and the valleys split apart. All this will happen because of your sins."

The book has a vital, much-needed message for today, and it applies to people in any age and of every generation. For God always requires justice, faithful covenant love, and humble obedience to him. The book ends with a question and response in 6:6-8: "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Major Promise

God is both the Judge who punishes sin and the Shepherd who faithfully forgives his people.

Bring It Up

Share your favorite Christmas memory or tradition as a family. Did you know that Jesus' birth was talked about hundreds of years before he was actually born? Micah even told the people what town Jesus was going to be born!

Picture It

For Younger Children - Draw a picture of God. What does he look like? Why did you draw him that way? Talk about the different parts of God's character - judge, shepherd, father, king, friend, etc.

For Older Children - Who is God? How do you picture God? Ask about specific characteristics and talk about why we view God the way we do. Do we tend to focus more on certain aspects of God's character? Micah explores the idea that God is both Judge and Shepherd.

Read It

Micah 1-7. *Because this book is longer, you might want to break up the reading throughout the week.*

Talk About It

- What sort of people is Micah preaching against (vv. 2:1-3, 8-9)?
- How does the punishment in verses 2:4-5 fit the crime of verses 1-3?

- In verses 2:6-7 Micah's audience is offended at his message since they consider themselves quite safe. How does Micah respond to their false confidence?
- Why does Micah characterize the "perfect prophet" as he does (v. 2:11)?
- What sort of promise does God make to Israel (vv. 4:11-13)?
- Contrast the present-day ruler (v. 1) with the ruler who is to come (vv. 2-5).
- How does the description of the future ruler give you comfort?
- In what ways can your family live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God this week?

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

Micah gave them the greatest hope of all – the hope of a Savior. Read 5:2-5. *“Now Bethlehem Ephratha, you are small among the clans of Judah. But One will come from you to be a ruler over Israel for Me. He will shepherd my people in the name of Yahweh. His greatness will extend to the ends of the earth. He will be their peace.”*

God required righteousness from His people, but they turned away from him and faced slavery. Micah gave the people a message of hope: a leader was coming who would free God's people. He would be a shepherd and a king. Micah was speaking about Jesus! Read 7:18-20.

Pray About It

Praise God that Jesus Christ is not only our Shepherd-King but also our substitute who sacrificed for us. Because of his death on the cross, God's wrath and judgment for our sins are placed on Christ.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 120.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Nahum

Background

Nahum's name means "consolation," though his message carries little of it. The book of Nahum is a tough little book to read. It is book of war poetry directed to the city of Nineveh destined for judgment and destruction. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire, and an enemy of God's people. Around 100 years before, Jonah had preached to Nineveh and they repented. The city was spared. Now Nahum sees that the city has fallen back into wickedness and prophesies that the Lord will use Babylon as his instrument of destruction.

What comfort can we gain from Nahum? The book displays the ultimate sovereignty of God. He will judge those who ignore His laws and hurt others. In a world that often seems to reward evil, Nahum stands as a reminder that God is good and a refuge in times of trouble.

Major Promise

God is good and a refuge in times of trouble.

Bring It Up

Share in an age-appropriate way a current world conflict that you have been following in the news. Ask your children how they think God feels about some of those issues?

Picture It

For Younger and Older Children - When you think about God, what words or pictures come to mind? This could be a good opportunity for younger children to draw God. It is interesting to see what attributes they highlight in their pictures! Chances are most will say - love, mercy, grace, holy, comfort, righteous. Talk about God being a just judge. We cannot have justice without judgment. Nahum reminds us that God is just, and that when we break His laws, we hurt ourselves and there are consequences.

Read It

Nahum 1 (You may read chapters 2 and 3 with older children)

Talk About It

- Which description of God in verses 1-6 is most striking to you? Why?
- How can you reconcile the statement in verse 7 with the rest of this chapter?
- What charges against Nineveh are found in verses 9-14?
- This book was written not directly to the Ninevites, but to Jewish readers. What might Nahum have intended the Jews to gain from hearing these words?

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

Nahum brought a message of comfort to God's people, reminding them that God loves

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 128.

them and will protect them from their enemies. Jesus also brought a message of comfort to his people. Jesus assured us of salvation and peace. All of the enemies of God and the enemies of God's children were defeated at the cross. In the end, all evil will finally be punished.

This is a great opportunity to share about Jesus. God says the same thing to us because of our sin - "I am against you." But the cross is our shelter, refuge, and stronghold. This is the good news that our feet are to bring!

Pray About It

Pray that God will give us His perspective of the world and of sin. Pray that we will be righteously angry at those things that anger Him. Ask Him to reassure you that He cares for those who trust in Him. Pray that we would be swift to bring the good news of Jesus to others.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Habakkuk

Background

Habakkuk was a prophet to Judah. But the book of Habakkuk reads a little differently than the other prophets. What is the difference in style? Formally, Habakkuk's book records a dialog with God and a concluding hymn. Instead of speaking to the people for God, Habakkuk spoke to God for the people. Habakkuk focused on the problem of injustice in God's world. He saw that evil never seemed to be punished and asked what God's response to such evil and suffering was going to be.

In his dialog with God, Habakkuk asked God directly how the wicked could go unpunished. How does God answer? He says: "You must wait to see the work I am about to do on the stage of world history." Next the prophet asked, "How could God use an evil instrument like Babylon to punish his own poor people, who were surely more righteous than Babylon?"

Habakkuk's message is set within a backdrop of real people facing real questions about real human suffering. The prophet's questions prompted God's revelation. The revelation reveals the words that have repeatedly transformed the world: the righteous shall live by their faithfulness to God.

Major Promise

We can trust God to take care of us in bad times.

Bring It Up

Share a story about a time when you questioned an authority figure - a teacher, coach, your parents, law enforcement, or a boss. How did it go?

Picture It

For Younger Children - How do you feel when your mom or dad gives you the answer "because I said so" to your questions? Do you think it's okay to argue with your parents or a teacher?

For Older Children - Have you ever argued with God? If so, how did it go? Do you think arguing with God is a good idea?

Read It

Habakkuk 1-3

Talk About It

- What causes us to question God's wisdom at times? In those moments of questioning, who are we trusting in?
- Do you ever wonder, stand amazed, and give God glory even when we don't understand what is happening around you?
- Do you trust God even when things don't look favorable? Why or why not?

- How can God let evil go unpunished?” This is only a slight variation from the possibly more popular, “Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people?”

Connect It to God’s Salvation Story¹

Habakkuk lived in a time when evil seemed to be everywhere. He had faith in God’s promise that God would deliver his people. In the midst of evil and injustice and pain, we too can live by faith and trust that Jesus will return to make all things right. We should have a longing for Jesus to come. One day we will see Jesus!

Pray About It

Thank God that he is bigger than all of our doubts and questions. He is a loving Father who wants us to come to him when we don’t understand things. Ask for courage and strength to walk through tough times, and praise Him for the promise of Jesus coming to make all things new.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 126.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Zephaniah

Background

Old Testament prophets majored on the themes of God's coming judgment and future blessing. They often blended the near future with events that were so far distant they have yet to happen. Zephaniah was one of those prophets.

Zephaniah prophesied during King Josiah's reign over the southern kingdom of Judah around 625-635 BC. In the 18th year of Josiah's reign, a copy of the book of the law was found in the temple that had been ignored and lost for decades. When the priest read it to the king, Josiah was broken. He humbled himself before the Lord and wept. Over the next 13 years Josiah led an amazing reformation in Judah based on the law of God. He renewed the covenant between God and his people. He took all of the idols out of the temple and burned them. He deposed the idolatrous priests. He broke down the houses of the cult prostitutes. And he reinstated the Passover that had been ignored since the days of the judges.

These are the events that are happening as Zephaniah comes on the scene. So a big part of his prophecy is the call for reformation that Josiah was pursuing. Much of the book of Zephaniah mirrors verses from Deuteronomy in the book of the law. No doubt the king and the prophet teamed up to try and draw the people back to God. His messages focused on God's judgments on Judah, fulfilled when Babylon conquered the nation and carried most of the people into exile. He also spoke about the coming day of the Lord, which is also a future time when God will judge the world and usher in His kingdom of peace and blessing.

Major Promise

God will rejoice over his people with gladness and quiet them with his love.

Bring It Up

Talk about choices. Ask if you could choose between chocolate or vanilla ice cream what would you choose? Ask a few more - pizza or chicken, football or baseball, dance or gymnastics, music or movies. We are going to talk about the most important choice we will ever make.

Picture It

For Younger Children and For Older Children - Think of a general rule in your house that you are expected to follow and obey. Is it hard to follow this rule? Why is it hard? What happens when you break the rule? God wants his people to follow his rules, and there are consequences when his people disobey.

Read It

Zephaniah 1-3

Talk About It

- What is pride? What does it look like in other people's lives? What about in ours?

- How does pride keep us from trusting in Jesus to save us from our sins?
- Close by reading Zephaniah 3:14-20. Discuss how God's judgment of the wicked contrasts with the eternal love, hope, and joy of God's people who have been saved from their sins. Encourage your family to meditate on Zeph. 3:17 before you close in prayer together.

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

Zephaniah talked a lot about the coming Day of the Lord, when God will judge the world for its sin and Jesus will return. He also described another day when Christ will restore all things to the way they are supposed to be. Everyone is faced with the same choice - to choose Jesus or not. We each have to make that choice to follow Jesus.

Pray About It

Thank God for choice. Praise God that he is a warrior who saves his people, that he rejoices over his people with gladness and delights in his people with songs and shouts of joy.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 124.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Haggai

Background

In 586 BC, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar defeated the southern kingdom of Judah and razed the city of Jerusalem, including the temple. They took many of the Jewish people captive as God's punishment for their sins, primarily idolatry. In 539 BC, Cyrus king of Persia conquered Babylon becoming the new ruler of the Jewish people. A year later, he issued a decree that allowed the exiles to return to their land.

The first group of exiles (about 50,000) returned in 536 BC under Zerubbabel's leadership to rebuild the temple. Apparently Haggai was part of this group. After laying the foundation, the exiles quit their work when their enemies threatened them and hired lawyers to frustrate their work. So the temple rebuilding stopped for 15 years. These events are recorded in the book of Ezra.

Then God sent the prophet Haggai to call his people back to this work. Rebuilding the temple was an important task for the Jewish people. The temple represented their relationship with God. It was the focal point of their worship and fellowship with God who called them to be his chosen people. But other things had gotten in the way of finishing this task, much like other things – even good things – get in the way of our doing God's will today.

Major Promise

We honor God by putting Him first in our lives.

Bring It Up

Share examples of how God has been gracious to your family this past year. How has God used your family to declare His glory to other families?

Picture It

For Younger Children - What is the most favorite part of your day? What is the most important thing you did today? Did you know that God wants to be the most important and the most favorite part of your day?

For Older Children - Make a list of all your activities scheduled this past week. This would include school, sports, hobbies, recreation, hanging out with friends, family time, meals, church, homework, etc. Do you ever feel like life is too busy? Do ever feel that your busyness distracts you from time with God? Haggai comes on the scene to talk to the people about their priorities.

Read It

Haggai 1-2

Talk About It

- In what kind of houses did the people live?
- What priority problems did the Jewish people have in Haggai's day?
- What did God have to say about dealing with inappropriate priorities?

- What were the results of their wrong priorities?
- How did the people respond to Haggai's message?

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

God gives Haggai three messages. He tells the people to be holy. He reminds them that He will be with them. And He gives them the promise of everlasting peace. God's people had been in a foreign land for a long time with no place to worship God. When they returned home, Haggai told them to put God first and to rebuild the temple, because the temple represented God's presence with them. When Jesus came to be with His people, God fulfilled his promise to be with us. We don't need a temple, a church, or a camp to worship God and be in his presence. If you are a believer in Christ the Holy Spirit dwells within you and your life is a holy temple. You are always in the presence of God. That's awesome news!

Pray About It

Ask for help in putting God first in our lives. Confess any sins of busyness or misplaced priorities that your family may have. Thank him for the promise of the Holy Spirit who comes to live in us when we believe in Jesus.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 152.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Zechariah

Background

The prophet Zechariah was a priest and a member of a priestly family who returned from exile in Babylon. His name means "God remembers." Zechariah takes place very soon after the book of Haggai. The people were already at work rebuilding the temple, but this obedience was not enough to meet their basic need - reconciliation with God. The people needed to humble themselves and repent of their sins. The people did repent, and after they repent God begins to speak to Zechariah in a series of visions that begin to explain some of the glorious plans of God.

Major Promise

God restores His people and makes them whole again.

Bring It Up

Share a time when you were in complete darkness - a cave, power goes out, in the middle of the woods, a dark room. How did light change your environment?

Picture It

For Younger Children - Why is being in the dark sometimes scary? What are some things that can help us see in the dark? (*This might be a fun devotion to do in a dark room with only a candle or a fire for light*)

For Older Children - Think of some activities that would be really hard or impossible to do in the dark. Be creative. Why would these be hard to do? How does light make it easier? In a vision God tells Zechariah about a lamp that brings light in a dark place.

Read It

Zechariah 1:1-6 and chapter 4. You may choose to reach the other chapters throughout the week.

Talk About It

- These people were faithfully rebuilding the temple under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel; yet, God calls them to repent and return to Him. Is it possible that any of us or all of us are trying to faithfully serve God and obey, but we have not repented of our sins and turned to God to worship Him alone and serve Him alone? Do we need to repent of any sins? Are we worshipping anything or anyone other than Christ?
- In chapter 4, God calls his people to be lights in the world. How can our family be a light to someone in need this week?

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

Zechariah sounds hope of restoration to God as he expresses the longing of the people of God for the glory of God. This book in the Old Testament leaves us longing for Christ. He alone is the true temple, where we encounter the glory of God. And He alone can reconcile and restore us to the presence of God. Zechariah looks forward to the victory that the Lord will bring, and indeed, Jesus alone will inaugurate that victory.

Pray About It

Thank God for His promise to restore His people and for forgiveness when we repent of our sins. Thank Him for Jesus being the light of the world, and pray that God will use your family to be lights in dark places.

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 154.

Major Promises from the Minor Prophets - Malachi

Background

The book of Malachi closes the Old Testament. After this, God would remain silent for 400 years while his people awaited deliverance. When we get to the end of the Old Testament, we find that this is a story without an ending. The entire book of Malachi is set up as a dispute between the Lord and the people of Israel. God brings a charge against the people, they seek to evade that charge, and God finally displays their guilt.

Malachi means “my messenger.” It was probably written in the late 5th century BC about 100 years after the exiles initially returned to the Promised Land. The revival under Ezra and Nehemiah was short-lived. The people had promised to obey the law of the Lord, just as they had done numerous times before. But the situation in Malachi is just as bad as it was before the exile.

Major Promise

God remembers those who fear and obey him.

Bring It Up

Share a story from when you were a child and did something wrong....and you tried to hide it or cover it up. Were you ever found out? Why did you try and hide it? Emphasize that nothing is ever hidden from God - He knows what we are thinking and everything that we do.

Picture It

For Younger Children - If you run around the parking lot, what could happen? If you play with fire what could happen? If you eat too much candy what could happen? Our bad actions lead to bad results. Who teaches us not to do these things - parents, teachers, adults in your life. They do this because they love you and want the best for you. This is what God is teaching us in Malachi.

For Older Children - Have you ever been in the process of doing something wrong, realized you deserved punishment and wondered what the punishment would be? Did it keep you from continuing with the action? Was the wrong choice worth the punishment you received?

Read It

Malachi 1-4

Talk About It

- How have you seen God use punishment to turn someone away from their sin?
- Who does the Lord call his “treasured possession”?
- What does it mean to fear the Lord? Re-read 3:16-4:3
- Is God’s love for His people contingent on their performance or on His unchanging character? (3:6)
- How should we respond to God’s love?

Connect It to God's Salvation Story¹

The prophet Malachi came with a message - he told God's people to turn away from the evil ways and repent. Malachi also told about another messenger God would send. This messenger, John the Baptist, would call people to repent and prepare them for a third messenger, Jesus Christ, who would bring good news of salvation.

Pray About It

Ask God to help us obey him and follow the Bible. Thank him for the promise of Jesus and remembering his children

¹*The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 166.

APPENDIX 7

MINOR PROPHET SERMON SERIES OUTLINES

HOSEA – “UNBROKEN LOVE FROM A BROKEN HEART”

INTRODUCTION

- We all love a good love story.
- Scripture reveals that God is love. God loves the world. God’s love transforms the world.
- Love of God goes after me until he gets me and tells me that the love of God makes a lover of one who knows nothing about what it means to love.
- Love story found in the book of Hosea

BACKGROUND OF HOSEA

- Historical
- Geographical
- Chronological
- Context

HOSEA 1:2-9 – THE COVENANT LOVE OF GOD

- Seriousness of Sin
- Affects of Sin
- Implications of Sin
 - Jezreel (2 Kings 9-10) “death and bloodshed”
 - Lo-Ruhamah “no compassion and no love”
 - Lo-Ammi “not my people”
- Hosea’s life was a living example of the seriousness of sin. His family is an analogy of how God deals with the sin of His people.

HOSEA 2:1-13 – THE TOUGH LOVE OF GOD

- The people go after other lovers because they believe that’s where life is found
- God – provided needs and is worth pursuing

HOSEA 2:14-15 – THE PURSUING LOVE OF GOD

- When all seems hopeless, a ray of light dawns in the “therefore”

- God says, “I’m not finished yet with my bride. Let me tell how I plan to bring her back.”
 - He owns everything and Lord over everything
 - God allures with words
 - Take away to a desolate place to listen

HOSEA 2:16-23; 3:1-5 – THE TENDER AND REDEEMING LOVE OF GOD

- God calls Hosea to go after Gomer and show love to her again
- “Love her as I love my people”
- God’s love is not quenched by failures, betrayals, faithlessness
- God’s love is an undeserved love
- Hosea pays the price to redeem Gomer

HOSEA 14:4-7 – THE RELENTLESS LOVE OF GOD

- When sin is seen at it’s worst, it cannot quench God’s desire to be compassionate to those who don’t deserve his love and grace.

CLOSING - HOSEA 6:1-3 – GOD’S LOVE...OUR RESPONSE

- Christ Connection - *Hosea’s relationship with Gomer reminds us of God’s relationship with the people of Israel and with us. Even though God’s people are unfaithful and love other things more than they love God, God still loves us. God sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sin and bring us back to Him. Despite all our spiritual adultery, we cannot exhaust the love of God and we deserve to be shown "No Mercy" and called "Not My People", but because Jesus was shown no mercy and was forsaken by the Father, we can rest secure in God's love for us. There is nothing in us that can evoke the love of God, and there is nothing in us that can exhaust the love of God.*

JOEL – “THE DAY OF THE LORD”

INTRODUCTION

- Bug invasion videos
- Stink bug invasions
- Recap series. In today’s passage we will look at how God uses the catastrophic event of a locust invasion to teach about the day of the Lord.

BACKGROUND OF JOEL

- Name means “Yahweh is God”
- Historical
- Geographical
- Chronological
- Context

DAY OF THE LORD THEME

- Every major event in Joel is treated as the Day of the Lord
 - Locust plague
 - Coming army
- Day of the Lord is also salvific
- Salvation for Israel
 - Pouring out of the Spirit
 - Healing of the land
- The “day” is both a one time event and many events
- The “day” is a decisive action of Yahweh to bring his plans to completion

JOEL 1:1-2:11 – THE DAY OF THE LORD BRINGS JUDGMENT

- "What you have seen in the locusts is the day of the Lord that you have often heard the prophets foretell. It has begun not with the Gentiles but with us, the chosen people. We must realize that we are not exempt from judgment, and we must repent."
- God’s Sovereignty
 - Did God send the locusts? Does God send disasters?
 - God’s judgment on sin is powerful

JOEL 2:12-17 – THE DAY OF THE LORD BRINGS REPENTANCE

- Joel calls the people to repent. How are they to demonstrate their repentance?
 - Rending their hearts and not their garments (not outward appearances)
 - Consecrate a fast
 - Call a solemn assembly
 - Gather the people for worship
- Sense of urgency

JOEL 2:18-32 – THE DAY OF THE LORD BRINGS RESTORATION

- When we repent, what promises does the Lord make?

- To have pity
- Send grain, wine, oil
- Satisfy
- Remove reproach
- Remove the enemy
- He will restore
- Never be put to shame
- Pour out His spirit
- Show wonders
- Salvation
- What is our response?
 - Fear not
 - Be glad
 - Rejoice
 - Praise
 - Know He is God

CLOSING

- Peter claims Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21 and 37-39). How then does Joel's promise of the Spirit and salvation apply to us?
- Paul references v32 in Romans – 10:8-13
- Repent and rend your hearts. Sin, like the locusts, causes great devastation. But even when...God is jealous for his people!
- Christ Connection - *God makes a promise to His people. If they would turn back to Him, He would protect them. He would drive away their enemies and bless His people. When that happened, God said, "You will know that I am Yahweh your God." Like Joel, Jesus calls sinners to repent. Jesus died and was raised so that all nations could experience repentance and forgiveness. He will restore!*

AMOS – “SEEK THE LORD AND LIVE”

INTRODUCTION

- Recap series
- Contrast today’s passage with the devastation background from Joel

BACKGROUND

- Name means “strength and brave”
- Mentions the “fire of God” more than any other prophet
- Historical
- Geographical
- Chronological
- Context – life is good, economy is good, peace and prosperity but great oppression on the poor

AMOS 1-2 – JUDGMENTS ON THE NATIONS

- For three transgressions and four – sin had reached the max God would not take any more.
 - Damascus/Syria – treating people like grain
 - Gaza/Philistines – exiling and slavery
 - Tyre – Lebanon/Phoenicians – breaking bonds of brotherhood
 - Edom – Esau/modern day Jordan – vengeance and unforgiveness
 - Ammonites – viciousness and murder
 - Moab – Saudi Arabia – being a bad neighbor
- Judgment on Judah (judged according to a higher standard – they rejected the law of the Lord and not kept his statutes)
- Judgment on Israel – up to this point Amos’ preaching was met with enthusiastic vigor – pagan nations coming up for judgment but also their rival Judah
- It is so easy to see the sin in others lives before we see it in our own
- That thing you’ve been doing – I’m not in it and I’ve never been in it.

AMOS 3-4 – ISRAEL DID NOT RETURN TO THE LORD

- Famine, drought, locusts, mildew, rot, disease, war

Why was God angry – slavery, bribery, dishonesty, murder of the innocents, misplaced worship, going through the motions, pleasing the flesh, sexual immorality, addicted and intoxicated to entertainment, bitterness, not taking care of one another, exploiting the poor and orphan and widow, idolatry

- *Because of this Israel, prepare to meet your God! 4:12*

AMOS 5-6 – THE DAY OF THE LORD BRINGS JUDGMENT

- “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”
V5:24

AMOS 7-9:4– FIVE VISIONS

- Locusts 7:1-3. Amos saw a swarm of locusts that ate all the plants of the land.
- Fire 7:4-6. Amos saw a judgement by fire. The fire destroyed the land.
- Plumb Line 7:7-9. The Lord said “I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel. I will judge them, and no longer spare them.”
- Fruit 8:1-3. Basket of summer fruit. Then God said I will no longer spare my people Israel. There will be a terrible earthquake and the sun will go down at noon.
 - 8:11-12 .There will be a famine, but not of bread or water, but of *hearing the words* of the Lord. People will search for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. You will not be able to see, understand, or hear even though the word is being spoken. You have hardened your heart against me, so if that’s what you want then that’s what you will get. (there will be a restlessness...they will wander...the only thing that brings peace is the word of God) Our hearts are restless until we find our place of rest in you – St. Augustine
- Altar 9:1-4. There is no escape. This should make you very uncomfortable.

AMOS 9:11-14 – CLOSING

- Closes with the Lord’s Promise of Restoration, Plenty, and Security – Good News!
- Where is our Christ connection? *Amos predicted that because of their sin, Israel would experience a time when God would not speak to them. Israel would search for God, but they would not find Him. Their spiritual famine ended when God sent Jesus into the world. Jesus showed what God was like and brought about God’s promise of restoration, plenty, and security through salvation in Him. John 1:1-14*

OBADIAH – “PRIDE AND PREJUDICE”

INTRODUCTION

- Recap Series
- What are some famous rivalries – two brothers lead to two nations that has devastating consequences for generations

BACKGROUND OF OBADIAH

- Name means “servant of Yahweh”
- Historical Background of Edom and Israel
 - Genesis 25:19-34
 - Genesis 27:41 – hate and kill Jacob
 - Genesis 28:8 – marries an Ishmaelite
 - What happens to Jacob
 - Genesis 33:1-4 – Esau and Jacob reconciliation
- Geographical – prophecies to Edom
- Chronological
- Context

OBADIAH 1-16 – JUDGMENT ON EDOM

- V1-2 – Why judgment?
- V3-9 – Pride of your heart has deceived you
 - Lofty dwelling
 - Trust in alliances
 - Arrogance
 - Delusive self confidence
 - Impervious to harm
- Violence done to their brother v10-14
 - Passive in helping (10-11)
 - Boasting over misfortune (12-13)
 - Looting and gathering the spoils (13)
 - Refused the fugitives help (14)
 - Captured survivors (14)
- Judgment – Day of the Lord is Near (15-16)
 - As you have done, it shall be done to you! You will reap what you have sown. Reverse golden rule.

OBADIAH 17-21 – RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

Edom is a representative nation on all ungodly nations that threaten the people of God

Judgment of Edom also signals the deliverance and rescue of Israel from its enemies.

None shall escape and there will be no survivor...Edom will be no more

Kingdom will be the Lord’s – God’s coming rule

- It will be holy
- Possess their own possessions
- Flame and fire
- Exiles returned

CLOSING

In this very short book, God brings up a lot of issues we all struggle with such as greed, pride, and injustice. If we are victims of those sins from others, we can take comfort that Obadiah ends his book with hope. God sees the human disaster. God will bring about justice and restore what has been taken. He will restore his people through Jesus Christ.

JONAH – “THE STUBBORN AND SAVING LOVE OF GOD”

INTRODUCTION

- Recap Series
- Jonah is a familiar story from childhood – what do you remember? What is the lesson you were taught?
- The stubborn and saving love of God has no limits and no boundaries

JONAH 1:1-17

- 1:1-2 – background of Jonah
 - Jonah means “dove” which is a symbol of peace to the Ninevites
 - His strict nationalism was boxing Jonah in...doves stay in one place
 - Jonah was a prophet (2 Kings 14:23-29) from Galilee during the reign of Jeroboam II around 760 BC
 - Promised the restoration of the borders and prosperity
 - National hero in Israel
 - Jonah witnessed firsthand the restorative compassion of God towards wayward people
- 1:2 – Call to Ninevah
 - Modern day Iraq
 - capital of the Assyrian Empire (large city – 3 days to walk through)
 - violent pagan people barbaric in nature
 - Israel’s enemies who would later rise in power and conquer the northern Kingdom
 - During this time weak – famine, civil war, conflicts, revolts, eclipse of the sun
 - Wicked group of people – modern day ISIS (i want them destroyed but should want them to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ!)
 - *What if God called you to witness to...*
- 1:3- Jonah flees from the presence of the Lord to Tarshish (Spain)
 - Why do you think Jonah fled?
 - God calls you to ISIS you say I’m going to Hawaii man!
 - It was the farthest place from west from Ninevah that one could go
 - *Have you ever fled from the presence of the Lord?*
- 1:4-16 – The whale of a tale
 - The pagan sailors worship God
- 1:17 – Jonah in the fish
 - The part that skeptics find unbelievable...If God created the heavens and the earth, how hard is it for him to command a fish to swallow a man
 - Psalm 139:7-12

JONAH 2:1-10

- Prayer of Jonah
- Lord spits him out

JONAH 3:1-10

- God calls a second time to Jonah
- Jonah goes and preaches
- Ninevah repents – God would later use them to punish Israel for disobedience
- God relents

JONAH 4:1-11

- Jonah is angry – we now know the real reason Jonah fled
 - Knew God would relent and be compassionate and merciful and abounding in steadfast love
 - Take my life – God is like “do you have any right to be angry?...I have shown you mercy...I have shown Israel mercy....why should I not show it to others?”
- The plant
 - more concerned about a plant that perished but showed no such concern for human souls
- 4:10-11 – the lesson
 - *We are left with the question – should God not show mercy to the wicked if they repent? How do we respond to God’s grace toward us? How do we respond to God’s grace toward others? Do we have a heart that loves like God has a heart that loves?*

CLOSING WITH CHRIST CONNECTION

Jonah is the object of God’s compassion. His compassion is boundless.

- Repent or be destroyed
- Cannot flee from his presence and you cannot outrun God
- Show compassion and mercy on others as God has shown compassion and mercy on you. Never write somebody off. Don’t box God in. God may be calling you “arise and go” arise and go and share with them my love.
- Following God is not always easy.

We don’t want difficulties or challenge and when God sovereignly brings that storm into our lives we find ourselves kicking against it instead of asking God how he can use it to bring glory to Him and demonstrate his love. Think of Jesus – if there’s anyway for this to pass then please take it from me – yet not my will but yours be done. God’s will may not always be easy...but it is always perfect. God’s plan for salvation is perfect. His stubborn love is perfect. He would do anything for love

MICAH – “MINOR PROPHET, MAJOR MESSAGE”

INTRODUCTION

Talk about jury duty and court room scenes

Recap series

God functions as both witness and judge against his people in Micah

BACKGROUND

- Name means “who is like God?”
- Historical
- Geographical
- Chronological
- Context

MICAH 1:1-5 – WHAT IS THE TRANSGRESSION

- God has had enough!
- Sin of idolatry

MICAH 2:1-11 – OPPRESSION

- Plan wickedness
- Devise evil
- Covet fields
- Seize fields
- Take away houses
- Opress others

MICAH 3:1-12 – RULERS AND PROPHETS DENOUNCED

Micah warned that a time would come when these leaders would cry out to God for help, but He would not listen because of their crimes.

- Hate good and love evil
- Devour people
- Lead the people astray
- Take bribes
- Teach for a price
- Preach safety

MICAH 4:1-7 – THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

- Highest of mountains
- People will flow to it out of a desire to be taught and walk in obedience
- God will teach
- Just judgments
- Peace
- No fear
- Everlasting
- Lame restored and healed
- Remnant returned

- Rescued and redeemed
- Lives devoted to the Lord

MICAH 5 – THE HOPE OF A SAVIOR

- Micah gives them the greatest hope of all – the hope of a Savior Jesus (v2-5)
- This ruler would be both Judge and Shepherd

MICAH 6:1-8 – INDICTMENT FROM THE LORD

- God calls creation as a witness. He interrogates his people and gives them a chance to respond. He recounts his past faithfulness. Provides the requirement for covenantal obedience.
- What it means for Israel to be in covenant is to live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

CLOSING

- God's Love and Compassion (7:18-20)
- This book ends with that same type of question that is a play on Micah's name – Who is a God like You???

HABAKKUK AND NAHUM – “WRESTLE, WATCH, WORSHIP”

INTRODUCTION

- Recap Series
- Watch Bruce Almighty clip as he struggles with God not answering his prayers

BACKGROUND OF HABAKKUK

- Prophesied in Judah about coming destruction from Babylon
- No time period but likely within a few years of the exile
- He was a levite priest/song leader
- Name means “embrace or cling” or “wrestle
- Reads differently than other prophets
 - Records a dialog with God and a concluding hymn
 - Instead of speaking to the people for God, Habakkuk spoke to God for the people
- *Habakkuk's message is set within a backdrop of real people facing real questions about real human suffering. The prophet's questions prompted God's revelation. The revelation reveals the words that have repeatedly transformed the world: the righteous shall live by their faithfulness to God. Habakkuk goes from wrestler to watcher to worshipper.*

HABAKKUK 1:2-4 – FIRST COMPLAINT (WRESTLER)

- he believes that God is letting sin go unpunished – how can he tolerate it
- this is not fair or not just
- the law “God’s word” has no power any more in the lives of the people and in the nation of Judah – it’s “paralyzed”
- world is full of wicked and it’s all gone to hell in a handbasket
- Do you ever feel that way today?
- Remember this is to God’s people

HABAKKUK 1:5-11 – THE LORD’S RESPONSE

- I already have a plan – the Chaldeans will be instruments of judgment upon Judah. God controls all nations and uses them for his own purposes
- Chaldeans – another name for Babylonians. Southern tribe that seized power from the Assyrians and defeated them in 605bc. Nebuchadnezzar led this victory and consolidated the Babylonian Empire where he became king.
- Verses describe their power and might and confidence
- “you wouldn’t believe it if I told you” – be careful what you ask for/when God answers us many times it just brings up more questions!

HABAKKUK 1:12-2:1 – THE SECOND COMPLAINT (WATCHER)

- wonders how God can use a wicked nation to punish a less wicked one
- description of Babylon
- how is that fair? How is that just? Where is justice?

- (2:1) he has spoken his peace and wrestled with God...now he will sit and watch waiting for a response

HABAKKUK 2:2-20 – THE LORD’S RESPONSE AND WOES

- Babylon plundered and spoiled
- Life will be brought down
- Knowledge of God’s glory will be on the earth/not violence
- Shame
- Trust in God not idols

NAHUM’S FLASHBACK OF GOD’S JUDGMENT ON NINEVEH

- Sometimes God’s answer seems slow, but we must be patient and wait for it
- **Christ Connection...**a puffed up person relies on self but the righteous rely on God. *The righteous know that it will take time to accomplish it and they will wait for God’s plans to unfold. This phrase is quoted numerous times in the new testament. This kind of faith is a continuing trust in God and clinging to his promises, even in the darkest days.*

HABAKKUK 3:1-19 – PRAYER OF WORSHIP (WORSHIPPER)

- Shigionoth perhaps refers to an instrument
- 3:2-15 – recounts God’s saving acts and faithfulness
- selah
- 3:16 – he knows its coming....difficult times...punishment...destruction
- 3:17-19 – Worship!!
 - Circumstances will not dictate my joy in the Lord...though all provisions fail
 - I will take joy in the God of what? My salvation! Why?
 - God, the Lord is my strength
 - He makes my feel like the deer – swift
 - Tread on the high places – goat
 - Sing it

CLOSING

- *Habakkuk lived in a time when evil seemed to be everywhere. By faith, he trusted God’s promise that God would deliver his people. In the midst of evil and injustice and pain, we too can live by faith and trust that Jesus will return to make all things right. We should have a longing for Jesus to come. One day we will see Jesus. When he appears in all his glory, two things are going to happen. His glory will be magnificently reflected in the mirror of our faith. He will be the trusted one and the hoped for one and the rejoiced in one. So his glory will shine in our faith and hope and joy. And the more pure and refined the gold of our faith, the more clearly his beauty and worth will be reflected. And secondly, we will finally see that the design of God in our distress has been the extraordinary joy of giving and sharing in the very glory and praise and honor of God himself.*

ZEPHANIAH – “FROM JUDGMENT TO JUBILEE”

INTRODUCTION

- Recap Series
- Halfway Herbert book by Francis Chan
- God takes us from judgment to jubilee

BACKGROUND

- Name means Yahweh has hidden/protected”
- Historical
- Geographical
- Chronological
- Context
- Theme – Day of the Lord
 - this coming day shows both judgment against those who sin against God and blessing for those who follow him. God will show himself just in both punishment and praise.

ZEPHANIAH 1:2-6 – COMING JUDGMENT ON JUDAH

- Why is God angry and against whom?
 - Those who bow down and swear to the Lord and Milcom (adulterers)
 - Those who do not seek the Lord or inquire of Him (idolaters)
 - Those who turned their back on following the Lord (apostates)

ZEPHANIAH 1:7-13 – COMING DAY BRINGS JUDGMENT

- all who put on foreign attire (Colossians 3:12-14)
- all who leap over the threshold
- all who fill their master’s house with violence and fraud
- all who are complacent and say... (“thickening on their dregs” is like undisturbed wine that collects useless sediment...they will not rouse themselves to save themselves...God hasn’t judged their sin yet so he probably won’t do it...but judgment can come at any day – the day of the Lord is near! Do you have a decision? Don’t put it off! The day of the Lord is near...)
- What does God do with complacency? Pours it out!...pour it out...pour us out not pour me)

ZEPHANIAH 1:14-18 – COMING DAY OF THE LORD

- “blind” and “dung”
- can’t buy our way out or bribe God
- something to look forward to?
- 2 Peter 3:11-12

ZEPHANIAH 2:1-3 – DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR

- Repent, seek, humble yourselves – do not put it off!

ZEPHANIAH 2:4-15 – COMING JUDGMENT ON SURROUNDING NATIONS

- Philistia (Palestine) 4-7
- Moab and Ammon (Jordan) 8-11
- Ethiopia and Cush (Egypt) 12
- Assyria (Iraq) 13-15

Human pride and power are useless in a time of God's judgment

ZEPHANIAH 3:1-8 – COMING JUDGMENT ON JERUSALEM

- did not obey authority
- did not accept correction
- did not trust God
- did not draw near to God
- Officials, priests, prophets
- Lord is righteous and shows forth his justice. He does not fail, he is faithful. But the unjust know no shame

ZEPHANIAH 3:9-13 – CONVERSION AND REMNANT RESTORED

- God the judge is also God the gracious. He intends and desires that all should turn to him. God is the one who acts to save and restore.
- Get a clue back in 1:7
- Eph 3:6 and Rev 5:9

ZEPHANIAH 3:14-20 – ISRAEL'S RESTORATION AND JUBILEE

Let yourself awaken to the wonder that the Lord, the King of kings, rejoices over you with gladness and exults over you with loud singing. What a promise! What a king! What a savior!

HAGGAI – “BUILD FIRST THINGS FIRST”

INTRODUCTION

- Recap Series
- What would someone observing you for a week think is your priority?

BACKGROUND

- Historical – post exilic
- Geographical
- Chronological
- Context
- Theme

HAGGAI 1:1-2

- The people are saying that it’s just not the right time to rebuild the house of the Lord – at first what caused them to stop? Enemies, obstacles, threats, lack of money. But once they stopped, it became a habit...and the habit grew into a lifestyle of neglecting the house of God.
- Do we ever say “it’s just not the right time yet?”
- Well what was the reason why the Israelites were saying it’s not time?....

HAGGAI 1:3-6

- God says oh it’s not time? Not enough time huh. Well you’ve had time to focus on your own comfortable dwellings while I remain homeless in your life.
- God evaporates their work and efforts...does not bring satisfaction because their priorities are out of whack

HAGGAI 1:7-11

- Consider your ways
- God’s goal is that he may be glorified
- Why does God’s house lie in ruins? Because you’ve busied yourself with your own house.
- Seek first his kingdom from Matthew 6:33
- Quote: “Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first and we lose *both* first and second things.

HAGGAI 1:12-15

- The people obey and fear
- God declares “I am with you” – God’s pep talk/halftime talk
- God stirred up the spirit and they got to work – a new vision and a new passion and a newfound energy

HAGGAI 2:1-3

- There was a remnant in their 70’s who saw Solomon’s temple...knew what they were building would not compare

- How often do we look to our past and become discouraged...or compare to others
- God wants to use YOU RIGHT NOW!

HAGGAI 2:4-9

- He answers “Be strong. Work. I am with you. Remember my promises. My spirit is in your midst – this is all you need! Fear not!”
- Shake the heavens – God will provide!
- The latter shall be greater than the former! Jesus promise!

CLOSING

- *Christ Connection- God’s people had been in a foreign land for a long time with no place to worship God. When they returned home, Haggai told them to put God first and to rebuild the temple, because the temple represented God’s presence with them. At the end of the book God promises that the signet ring of the Davidic kingdom will be restored forever. Jesus fulfills that promise!*

When Jesus came to be with His people, God fulfilled his promise to be with us. We don’t need a temple, a church, or a camp to worship God and be in his presence. If you are a believer in Christ the Holy Spirit dwells within you and your life is a holy temple. You are always in the presence of God. That’s awesome news!

ZECHARIAH – “THE LORD REMEMBERS”

INTRODUCTION

- Recap Series
- Memorial Day “ we remember”

BACKGROUND

- Historical – post exilic
- Geographical
- Chronological
- Context
- Theme - clearest insight/vision of the coming Jesus of all the minor prophets – 54 quotes 67 times in the NT. He was a man with a vision.

ZECHARIAH 1:1

- Iddo – In His Time
- Berechiah – The Lord Blesses
- Zechariah - The Lord Remembers

ZECHARIAH 1:2-6 – RETURN TO ME AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU

- God is always initiating and humanity is always responding
- God says I’ve laid the ground work...I’ve done it...it’s finished
- And now the invitation is given – return to me

ZECHARIAH 1:7-6:16 – VISIONS (WHAT ARE THESE MY LORD) (*summarize*)

- Horseman with three horses – patrol the earth and it remains at rest
 - 1:16-17
- Four horns and four craftsmen
- Man with a measuring line – Jerusalem will be without walls and God will be a fire around her and be her glory in the midst
 - 2:10
- Joshua the high priest – reinstating the priesthood and cleansing of sin
 - His role as high priest and the forgiveness of his sins is symbolized in the removal of his dirty garments and his being clothed in pure garments signify that Yahweh will raise up “my servant the branch”
 - 3:8-10
 - refers to Jesus’ work on the cross where sins were cleansed once for all through his sacrifice. Such forgiveness would lead to the coming of the kingdom and the fulfillment of all God’s promises
- Golden lampstand – the rebuilding of the temple is charged to Zerubbabel and Joshua and will occur by the power of the Lord
 - “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.” 4:6
 - role of the priest and king is accomplished in Jesus Christ and the temple he builds is not a literal one but is the new people of God the church

- Flying Scroll – curses and consequences come upon the covenant breakers
- Woman in a basket carried away by two women – wickedness will be removed
- Four chariots – God patrols the earth

ZECHARIAH 7:1-14

- Traditions get us in a rut
- As you do God’s work – make sure your heart is right (heart work leads to hand work)
- Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy, do not oppress

ZECHARIAH 8:1-23 – ALL NATIONS COME TO THE TEMPLE

- 8:1-8 – I will save
- 8:9-13 – Be Strong
- 8:14-17
- 8:18-23

ZECHARIAH 9-14 (summarize)

- Apocalyptic
- Visions of the Messiah
 - 9:9
 - 11:13
 - 12:10-14
 - 13:7

CLOSING

- Catch the vision of Jesus from Zechariah – The Lord remembers to redeem and restore.
- 2 Cor 4:16-18

MALACHI – “GOD’S BROKEN HEART”

INTRODUCTION

- Recap Series
- Issues in relationships that cause conflict
- Malachi lays out issues that cause conflict in our relationship with God

BACKGROUND

- name means “my messenger”
- Historical – post exilic
- Geographical
- Chronological
- Context
- Theme - Phrase Lord of Hosts appears more in this book than any other...why?
 - Temple is rebuilt...priesthood reinstated...but nation is small and powerless...no king...no army...how then do we live

I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, How have you loved us? A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of Hosts to you, O priests...

WHAT BREAKS GOD’S HEART

1. Who despise my name...How have we despised your name? (1:6)
 - By offering polluted food upon my altar
2. How have we polluted you? (1:7)
 - Offer stolen, blemished, blind, lame, or sick animals in sacrifice
 - What a weariness this is...snort at it (1:8-14)
3. You are faithless to the covenant and to one another (2:10-16)
 - Profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which he loves
 - By marrying the daughter of a foreign god (unequally yoked)
 - Being faithless to your wife (adultery/divorce)
 - Talk about the sacredness of the marriage covenant and how it is under attack...satan does not want to see godly offspring
 - Marriage – purpose? Glorify God and serve as a conduit of God’s love to spouse...it’s not about me or to make me happy...it’s to make me holy...want to learn how selfish you are then get married
4. You have wearied the Lord with your words...How have we wearied you? (2:17)
 - Whoever does evil is good in God’s sight and God delights in them. Or by asking “Where is the God of justice?”
 - Telling God that he is not fair or not just...that God you owe me
 - Messenger is coming to purify and bring justice (3:1-5)
5. Return to me, and I will return to you...How shall we return? (3:7)
 - The standards of God have changed with the times and the culture...they don’t apply to me

- Return in obedience and follow his statutes
- 6. Will man rob God..yet you are robbing me...How have we robbed you? (3:8-12)
 - In your tithes and contributions
 - God wants us to give cheerfully and abundantly...you cannot outgive God.
 - A tithe/tenth is a good place to *start*
- 7. Your words have been hard against me...How have we spoken against you? (3:13)
 - It is useless or vain to serve God. What does it profit? What's in it for me?
 - Chapter 4:1-6 – Day of the Lord and Jesus Coming

CLOSING

Christ Connection - Relationship with God that needs to be healed and mended...Jesus is the sun of righteousness rising with healing in his wings. Restores our relationship with the Father...response to God's love and healing - Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!"

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING PARENTS AT CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CHAPEL IN WINFIELD, WEST VIRGINIA, TO TEACH GOD'S REDEMPTIVE STORY THROUGH FAMILY DEVOTIONS

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The purpose of this project was to equip the parents at Crossroads Community Chapel in Winfield, West Virginia to teach God's redemptive story through family devotions using the Minor Prophets. Chapter 1 defines the ministry context of Crossroads Community Chapel and details specific characteristics of the project. Chapter 2 identifies the biblical and theological foundations for family discipleship. An emphasis is given to the theme of God's redemptive story through Scripture. Chapter 3 explores the historical and sociological foundations surrounding family discipleship and the role of parents. Chapter 4 details the development of the devotional series and the specific steps taken during the process of the project, including planning, implementation and gathering of results. Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the results of the project and personal reflection.

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