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EQUIPPING PARENTS OF EAST MARYVILLE BAPTIST
CHURCH IN MARYVILLE, TENNESSEE,
TO DISCIPLE THEIR CHILDREN

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EQUIPPING PARENTS OF EAST MARYVILLE BAPTIST
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PREFACE

I am indebted to numerous people for their influence in my life and specifically in creating this work. First and foremost, I could not achieve this, or any other, work without the grace of God poured out on my life. I am forever grateful for the steadfast love of Jesus Christ.

I would like to thank my wife, Bethany, for her support and encouragement throughout this endeavor. I am at my best with you and words can never fully communicate how much you mean in my life. Proverbs exclaims that an excellent wife is “more precious than jewels” (31:10), and I see that more each day as you are truly precious to me. I dedicate this project to you as my companion in life and to our children. Kaydin, Chloe, and Isaac are a constant source of joy in my life and blessing to our family. It is one of the greatest privileges in my life to be called your daddy. To the rest of our family, including my parents and in-laws, I truly appreciate your care and support over the years.

I am also thankful to Southern Seminary for their training in both my Master of Divinity and doctoral programs. I have been greatly influenced by some faculty who are no longer at the seminary, including Dr. Russell Moore, and others who are, such as Dr. David Prince. These people have been instrumental in my training and development even though they were not directly involved in this particular work. Dr. Richard Ross at SWBTS has also served as a great inspiration and ministry encouragement. I would also like to personally thank seminar leaders and SBTTS professors, Dr. Timothy Paul Jones, Dr. Jeremy Pierre, Dr. Michael Wilder, and Dr. Shane Parker. I especially want to acknowledge the instruction and mentoring from my supervisor, Dr. John David Trentham.

Finally, I am thankful to East Maryville Baptist for their support in my doctoral program and to my expert panel for giving their time to review portions of this

project. I have been blessed to serve in the local church and pray that this work will equip God's people for greater faithfulness in family discipleship. May the bride of Christ continue to grow more beautiful by God's grace as we await our final redemption.

Jason Salyer

Maryville, Tennessee

December 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This project took place in an effort to equip parents to become primary disciple makers of their children. The Bible gives a clear mandate to parents to raise their children to know and follow Jesus Christ. Four key scripture passages will be considered for their teaching concerning family discipleship. Similarly, a survey of historical, societal, and practical considerations affirms the importance of parental leadership in the Christian formation of the next generation. A ministry project that utilized preaching and teaching to equip parents was designed and carried out to enable families to make disciples in their own homes. The scope of this project sought to apply the mandate of parent led family discipleship more faithfully to the local church setting at East Maryville Baptist.

Context

East Maryville Baptist Church (EMBC) is known as a church for the whole family. The congregation of EMBC is planted in the city of Maryville, a rural region that is included in the Knoxville Metropolitan area and rests in the Great Smoky Mountains. The church recently celebrated its 100-year anniversary, marking its place among some of the longest running churches in the region. The church's roots reach back to its beginning as a Mission Sunday School in 1900. A gathering of ten charter members began meeting in the original church building in July of 1917. The church continued in growth until it moved to a new building in May of 1953. From that time, the congregation of EMBC grew into the hundreds and the adult Sunday school ministry expanded with new education space.

The growth of EMBC continued in the early 1960s with a new sanctuary building near its current location along with several expansions ending in 1981. After moving to two morning worship services in 1992, the church began its most recent expansion and constructed the current sanctuary in 2001. The church has continued to grow significantly in the past decade with a most recent expansion taking place to include new student and children's ministry space in 2012. While EMBC has been a presence in the community for nearly 100 years, it has experienced steady growth especially in the last two decades. The current membership lists 1,500 members, although the church averages approximately 600 participants in its morning Sunday school hour and roughly 800 in morning worship. The church has continued in steady growth with a strong emphasis on missions locally and internationally. The pastoral staff positions have seen long tenures, with the two previous pastors serving for over twenty years each. The staff of EMBC also saw expansion with associate pastors hired to serve in areas of education, worship, youth, children, and administration over the last thirty years.

The church's vision statement reads, "We exist to connect people to Jesus and each other," and the promotional statement is "A church for the whole family." The ministry of EMBC to the whole family has seen shifts with changes in staff vision and building space. While EMBC has not faced any major divisions in its history, growth has come with its share of challenges. The sanctuary constructed in 2001 was across the parking lot from the previous sanctuary. The new meeting space did not include enough space for middle school, high school, or college students. While the adults and children met in the new space, the student and college ministry primarily functioned out of the former sanctuary and education space across the parking lot. The separation led to some challenges keeping the student ministry connected with the church, and parents became accustomed to dropping off their teenage children at a separate location. However, the congregation at EMBC continued to flourish and look for new ways to grow in evangelism

and discipleship. The church has taken strides to offer ministry programming for every age group and involve people of all ages in worshipping and serving.

Rationale

This project took place in a socially conservative community and a church that would affirm the role of family. However, an affirmation of the role of family has not prevented a breakdown in many family structures within the church. The pastoral staff faces challenges of failing marriages and family conflicts within the church on an ongoing basis. Due to challenges such as busyness and family turmoil, some parents have retreated from their calling to be spiritual leaders in the home. The consistent struggles of fathers and mothers have impacted their effectiveness to be a positive spiritual influence on their children. The church staff has noted that many families have been limited in their ability to serve due to issues they face within their own home. A deeper rootedness in the gospel is needed to not only handle the daily struggles of family life, but also frees families to be more effective in service to God's kingdom.

The church also has a noticeable lack of family discipleship, meaning that many parents are not intentionally engaged in passing their faith to the next generation. While some families engage their children spiritually, many families have abdicated their role as spiritual leaders in the home. Families frequently rely on the church's programs to fulfill the spiritual needs of their children. The lack of faith training in the home has been evident in the actions of parents and students who compartmentalize their faith. A casual and general observation of a number of students in the church indicated that they are not necessarily rejecting their parents' faith, but following a broken model and embrace a faith relegated to an allotted time each week. In recent years, I have met with parents to better determine the level of spiritual engagement happening in their homes. Conversations have revealed that many parents do not understand or embrace their role as spiritual leaders. Some parents recognize they have a critical role to play but have not

acted upon it. In addition, conversations with both parents and students would indicate that faith-based discussions are rarely occurring in the home.

The leadership of the church has a strong history of biblical preaching and teaching, but can still grow in efforts to communicate the need for biblical faithfulness in the home. The church has taken steps in recent years to provide encouragement and resources for parents. In the past three years, the student ministry has developed a parent resource page including a rites of passage experience for teenagers. The student ministry also offers monthly parent e-mails with further resources and encouragement. However, a wider emphasis was needed to help equip parents to take steps toward accepting their responsibility for Christian formation in the home. The current church staff realize that relative success in many programs may have led parents to view the church's programs and leadership in a similar role as a sports coach or musical teacher. In other words, the leadership may have unintentionally led parents to believe that the church can best engage and handle the spiritual or even behavioral aspects of their children and should therefore become the primary voice of spiritual encouragement in their child's life. Parents are given a scriptural mandate to raise their children intentionally and the church must speak to this critical area of family discipleship with words of challenge and encouragement. Therefore, this project carries significance in an effort to bring about greater biblical faithfulness in equipping parents to disciple their children.

This project was significant for a few reasons: the health and ministry of the church, the passing of faith to the next generation, and biblical faithfulness. The spiritual health of families has a profound impact on nearly every other ministry area in the church. Helping parents to connect better spiritually with their children will not only make disciples of the next generation, but will have a long-term impact for the kingdom of God. A solid strategy for family ministry in any church context must recognize that family ministry is not an end by itself. A biblically-grounded family ministry points people to making disciples of the next generation and spreading the gospel to the ends of

the earth (Deut 6:4-9; Matt 28:18-20). The use of sermons and small group teaching with parents was directed to bridge the gap of what many may believe versus what is practiced in the home. Equipping parents also means providing a framework to instruction in the church so that parents can engage their children on that same teaching when they gather in the home.

The project was also important for passing on the faith to the next generation. Gospel-centered homes will have marriages and parenting practices that face spiritual battles in the strength of the Lord and mobilize men and women to engage their calling to disciple their children. The impact of student ministry is limited in its scope and potential if it is not combined with faith training in the home. Even the most gospel-centered student ministry programs are limited by the amount of time they can teach Scripture and spiritually engage students. For even the most committed students, the amount of hours spent in the church will pale in comparison to the amount of hours spent in the home. The church must strategize to leverage the hours of influence in the home to turn the hearts of children toward Christ. This project is an important step to better engage parents and equip them to take the lead in the Christian formation of their children. The church must take steps to partner with parents so that the next generation will see and hear the gospel clearly.

The project was also critical to moving the church toward greater biblical faithfulness. The church is called to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:12). Obedience to this scriptural calling means EMBC must teach and train parents to be spiritual leaders in the home. A family equipping ministry model enables EMBC to come alongside parents and help them become the primary disciple makers in their homes.

The goal to equip parents to disciple their children is not a corrective measure without foundation. Faith training in the home is a biblical calling. Throughout Scripture, God commands those who are blessed with children to raise them with

intentionality. Deuteronomy 6 commands parents to teach their children to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (6:5).¹ Parents are to teach God’s truth through faith conversations and living examples so that their children may grow to also follow Christ. This project was accomplished to bring about greater biblical faithfulness in connecting the church and home. The lasting impression of this project also brought about a shift in ministry philosophy regarding family discipleship in both staff and parents.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents of East Maryville Baptist Church in Maryville, Tennessee, to disciple their children.

Goals

Four goals were used to determine the project direction and implementation process. East Maryville Baptist was assisted by specific measures taken to evaluate and direct ministry to families. The following goals were used to determine current practices and create a stronger family ministry at EMBC.

1. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship practices among families with teenagers who are members of East Maryville Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop and preach a four-week sermon series to raise awareness of parental responsibility and develop interest in the group study.
3. The third goal was to develop a four-week group study that would equip parents to disciple their children.
4. The fourth goal was to equip parents to disciple their children by teaching the study to a group of parents at East Maryville Baptist Church.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project included a pre-series survey, a post-

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

series survey, and an evaluation rubric.² This project had four goals. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship practices among families with teenagers who are members of East Maryville Baptist Church. Meeting this goal required surveying parents and students using paper and electronic surveys to determine the amount of prayer, Scripture study, and faith-based conversations happening in the home. This goal was measured by administering the Family Discipleship Practices Survey (FDPS) and Family Discipleship Child Survey (FDCS) to 20 member families who have at least one teenager residing in the home. The FDPS provided information regarding the current family discipleship practices in the home as communicated by parents while the FDCS gave understanding regarding the child's perception of family discipleship in the same homes. This goal was considered successfully met when 20 families completed the FDPS and FDCS and the inventory has been analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the current discipleship practices among EMBC families.

The second goal was to develop and preach a four-week sermon series on the role of parents and families in making disciples of their children. The sermons were shared on Sunday mornings during corporate worship gatherings. The goal of the sermons was to motivate parents to accept their biblical responsibility as primary disciple makers in the home as well as encourage them to join the parent study group. This goal was measured by a group of three pastors with a Masters of Divinity degree from a Southern Baptist Seminary, who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators meet or exceed the sufficiency level.³

²All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

³If after evaluation the results did not meet the 90 percent level, adaptations and corrections would have been made to hit this mark, if not exceed this standard.

The third goal was to develop a four-week group study that would equip parents to disciple their children. The resources selected and developed covered basic discipleship issues such as leading a family worship experience, creating ministry opportunities for the family, and developing a family plan for spiritual development. The number of family ministry resources has increased in recent years, providing opportunities for churches to better come alongside parents with tools to minister to their families. Due to the nature of family structure and busyness, it was critical for the resources used in family discipleship to be easily accessible and fit the needs of church families. This goal was measured by a panel of three family pastors with a Master of Divinity degree from a Southern Baptist seminary, who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, scope, and applicability of the resources. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meet or succeed the sufficient level.

The fourth goal was to equip parents through the teaching of the curriculum. Equipping included teaching curriculum developed for parents and families as well as providing resources and materials in a way that is easily accessible. This goal was measured by administering the post-study evaluation rubric that evaluated the parents' level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to disciple their children. This goal was considered successfully met when each student scored at the sufficient or above level on the evaluation rubric.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Child(ren). In this study, children referred to sons or daughters of parents who are EMBC members.

Faith talk. A faith talk is a “designated time, at least once per week, for the household to gather for prayer and to study a biblical truth together.”⁴ This time is to be led, or facilitated, by the parents of the home.

Family. In this study, *family* refers to an adult with one or more children in the home who attend EMBC. Adults include fathers, mothers, and grandparents.

Family-equipping ministry. Family-equipping ministry means “coordinating every aspect of your present ministry so that parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”⁵

Family discipleship. Family discipleship is “the process which takes place when parents guide their child(ren) through regular and intentional practices which focus on knowledge of Scripture, reverence for God, and obedience to Christ.”⁶

Primary disciple maker. To refer to a parent as the primary disciple maker means that parents are given “the primary responsibility for the spiritual formation of children does rest squarely in the hands of parents.”⁷

Complementarianism. Complementarianism is the view that God created man and woman in his own image, equal in value and personhood, yet distinct in their roles in the home and the church.⁸ This equality and distinctiveness are indicated in creation and

⁴Timothy P. Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 154.

⁵Ibid., 132.

⁶Wesley Ryan Steenburg, “Effective Practices for Training Parents in Family Discipleship: A Mixed Methods Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 8.

⁷Randy Stinson and Timothy P. Jones, eds., *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 15.

⁸John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 470.

redemption.⁹ God has called men to the distinct role of exercising spiritual leadership in the home.

The project had one limitation in that the training would be limited in effectiveness if parents did not attend all the sessions. To limit the problems this issue could cause, the material for the study was made available online for those who miss any weeks of the study. Parents were asked to make up any material in the study that was covered during their absence.

There were several delimitations placed on this project. The research was delimited to the specific timeframe of the project. Second, the duration of the project also serves as a delimitation. Third, the project was also delimited by the research and project implementation occurring only at EMBC. A fourth delimitation was that only parents with teenagers took the surveys. A final delimitation was that the surveys were given only to those in the parent group that also attended the sermon series. The rationale for this procedure was to better determine the effectiveness of both corporate preaching and parent trainings. A clearer understanding of the project's effectiveness came by receiving survey results from those who have attended or reviewed material for both the sermons and the study.

Conclusion

The church and the family are both institutions designed by God. Christians are called to make disciples and that calling must begin in the home. The parents at EMBC need to strive to effectively disciple their children in order to bring these two institutions together with a common strategy for making disciples. The church can better minister to families, parents can pass their faith to their children, and together the church and home can grow in biblical faithfulness.

⁹Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 16.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR PARENTS BECOMING THE PRIMARY DISCIPLE MAKERS OF THEIR CHILDREN

The purpose of every person, made in the image of God, is to know Jesus Christ and follow him with every aspect of their lives (John 17:3; Rom 8:29). Believers come to faith and experience growth through hearing the Word of God and obeying it as an expression of love for Christ (John 14:5; Rom 10:17). Thankfully, God has not left the means by which the next generation is to hear and follow his Word to chance or wonder. The four passages examined in this chapter clearly demonstrate God's design for parents and the process of effectively communicating biblical truth to their children. The first passage emphatically declares that parents are to teach their children to love the Lord and follow his commands (Deut 6:1-9). The second passage calls God's people to communicate the Lord's faithfulness to the next generation intentionally (Ps 78:1-8). The third passage speaks to the foundational design of marriage in the home as a witness to the covenantal love between Christ and the church (Eph 5:22-33). The fourth and final passage contains instruction to both parents and children on how they are to live out the gospel in their homes (Eph 6:1-4). Together, these four scriptures set forth God's design and expectation for parents to be primary disciple makers in the lives of their children.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

The book of Deuteronomy lays out God's expectations for his covenant people. Specifically, Deuteronomy 6:1-9 is a key passage demonstrating God's plan for parents to pass on faith to their children. In this passage, Moses speaks to those who had survived the journey in the wilderness and were ready to enter the Promised Land. In his message

to God's people, Moses lays out specific commands and expectations of what it means to be a people of faith who are walk in obedience to God, their deliverer. Daniel Block writes that the book of Deuteronomy "presents itself as a series of sermons that review events described in the narratives of earlier books and challenges the people to faithful living in the future."¹

While chapter 6 continues the trend of narrative combined with commands and covenantal reminders, the distinct emphasis contained in the Shema makes it a central passage in the book. Though given to the people corporately, the commands are also written to God's people at the individual level. Specifically, the singular use of "you" denotes personal responsibility to covenantal obedience.² In addition, the personal obligation to God's commands does not end with the individual but is to be passed on through each generation. The key issue addressed for God's people is their obedience to his commands in response to his deliverance and covenantal love shown to them. Moses clearly intends to tie together love for God with obedience to God for current and future generations. Gary Hall notes that for God's people, observing the law stands in direct relation to a love for their redeemer: "How does one live out whole hearted love for God? One loves God by not forgetting God (vv.10-15), not testing God (v.16-19) and by instructing their children (vv15-20)."³

The command to love God and obey his Word is of such central importance that the communication and implementation is given to parents to pass on to their children. As the primary influencers on the lives of their children, parents are called to teach and

¹Daniel Isaac Block, *Deuteronomy*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 25-26.

²Telford Work, *Deuteronomy*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 95.

³Gary Harlan Hall, *Deuteronomy*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000), 133.

model the truth of God’s Word and help their children develop a heart that loves God through active faith and obedience. A necessary element connecting love for God with faithful obedience is what Deuteronomy 6:2 references as “the fear of the Lord.” The fear of the Lord is a fear that results in obedience to God’s commands in both current and future generations.⁴ The word was given for God’s people to hear and obey so that they would have prolonged life, multiply greatly, and take possession of the land that flows with milk and honey. Thus, the blessings of God’s favor are shown in the Promised Land that his people were to enter together. Specifically, the phrase “milk and honey” in verse 3 highlights and magnifies the inherent richness of the Promised Land.⁵ The milk and honey are representative: “The one product of human labor, or agriculture, and the other the product of nature,” with both pointing to the fullness of blessing given by God.⁶

The Shema, as it is known, represents the central focus of instruction in the passage by drawing special attention to the nature of the words that follow. Jesus references the Shema in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matt 22:37-38; Mark 12:29-30; Luke 10:27). The Hebrew verb שמע denotes an imperative for the people to not only hear, but to act upon the commands that follow. Eugene Merrill notes that the nature of the Shema links hearing with obeying: “Shema ‘To hear,’ in Hebrew lexicography, is tantamount to ‘to obey,’ especially in covenant contexts such as this. That is, to hear God without putting into effect the command is not to hear him at all.”⁷ The call to hear is immediately followed by a pronouncement concerning the very nature of God. The declaration that

⁴V. H. Kooy, “The Fear and Love of God in Deuteronomy,” in *Grace Upon Grace*, ed. J. I. Cook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 106-16, quoted in Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 161.

⁵S. D. Waterhouse, “A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 1 (1963): 152-66, quoted in Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 161.

⁶Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 161.

⁷*Ibid.*, 162.

God is one most commonly expressed as “unique or solitary”⁸ or one in terms of “unity or wholeness.”⁹

The central teaching to “love the Lord your God” is crucial to the commands for family worship and training that follow (Deut 6:5). Concerning verse 5, McConville provides a helpful overview to the covenantal love between God and man:

Love of Yahweh as covenant loyalty is fleshed out in Deuteronomy in a specific way, namely as gratitude to him for his special love towards and deliverance of them. The gratitude is to be expressed in obedience to his commands, based in deep and wholehearted commitment.¹⁰

The devotion, loyalty, and commitment commanded in this passage are embraced and expressed in a devout love for God. The covenantal love given and received also expresses the oneness of God as the greatest priority in all of life. The great commandment here unites both the ultimate reality and greatness of God with the essential aspect of what binds a relationship: love. The command to love God is a response to both the person and action of God as creator and redeemer.

The command to love God in covenantal obedience leads to a process of how the relational truths would continue from one generation to the next. The primary responsibility of families hearing these words from Moses is a commitment to nurture a covenant loyalty in the lives of the coming generation. Considering the method by which the truths of God were to be communicated, Peter Craigie notes, “The people were to think on them and meditate about them, so that obedience would not be a matter of formal legalism but a response based upon understanding.”¹¹ In order for parents to transfer the

⁸ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 163.

⁹Eugene H. Merrill, “Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Implied in the Genesis Account?” in *The Genesis Debate*, ed. R. Youngblood (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 123-28.

¹⁰J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, vol. 5 (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 142.

¹¹Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 170.

truth of God as teachers, they must not only know the revealed truth of God, but communicate God's covenantal love that they have themselves experienced.

Moses includes that this ongoing teaching dynamic for families is to be consistent with their covenantal relationship with God in that it not only shapes behavior, but connects with the motivations of the heart. In verse 6, he follows that the commands he has given are to be on their hearts. Weinfeld asserts that in many cases "heart connotes mind," similar to this same reflection in the New Testament to love "with all your heart (*kardia*) and with all the mind or understanding (*dianoia*)."¹² The connection to heart and mind reiterates that parents are to communicate more than abstract truths with no regard of their own faith. Instead, the great truths of God are best communicated as an outpouring of personal faith in God's promises and in relational connection with sons and daughters. The transference of truth in this context must include both teaching in words and in personal example.

The teaching of Moses, showing the people God's law, was to be passed on to children "not simply by enforcing them as a law code but by making them the fabric of life and conversation."¹³ The great truth of God's relationship with man, along with his commands and promises, must saturate every aspect of life for families. Specifically, in verse 7, the nature of communicating God's truth is illustrated through a series of settings to leave an impression. The command to impress demonstrates the ongoing nature of instruction in the home. The concept to impress "refers to the constant repetition for the benefit of the children."¹⁴ The idea implied within the language found in verse 7 is that a father "must impress the words of covenant faith into the thinking of his children by

¹²Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 338.

¹³McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

¹⁴Hall, *Deuteronomy*, 139.

inscribing them there with indelible sharpness and precision.¹⁵ Merrill explains the imagery as “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 stay.”¹⁶

The continuity of the message, demonstrated again in verse 7, relies on the use of conversations and teaching as parents go throughout every day life with their children. The contrasting aspects, both in places and postures, represent the holistic nature of the training that is to take place in the home. Whether it is in activity, such as walking, or inactivity, such as sitting, the central truth found in the Shema must be communicated to the next generation. Similarly, the aspect of time, found in scenarios of lying down at night and rising in the morning, communicate that the covenant Word of God is to be taught and repeated in the ears of children. In summary, Eugene Merrill rightly states that God’s covenant truth is so important that “it must be at the very center of all one’s labor and life.”¹⁷ The model for transferring God’s truth includes identifying those responsible for communicating it followed by a description about the manner by which they are to do it. Reflecting on this passage, Craigie asserts, “The signs described in vv.8-9 indicate that the individual (v. 8), his home, and his community (v. 9) were to be distinguished in their character by obedience to the commandments as a response of love for God.”¹⁸

The use of signs and symbols are introduced in verses 8 and 9. The detailed commands point to tangible means by which parents are to communicate key aspects of

¹⁵J. W. McKay, “Man’s Love for God in Deuteronomy and the Father/Teacher—Son/Pupil Relationship,” *Vetus Testamentum* 22, no. 4 (1972): 426-35.

¹⁶Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 171.

their faith to their children. The symbols of covenant community were to include symbols associated with the hands, forehead, doorframes, and gates. The purpose is that these symbols would be a sign that identified the bearer with a heritage of faith and preserved the distinctiveness of the community of God. In post-biblical Judaism, as well as present day, a miniature box known as prayers, or phylactery, containing scripture of the Torah, would be constructed and even worn by practicing Jews.¹⁹

The nature of the commands has led to some diversity in views regarding their exact intention and application. Some argue that the commands are figurative, meaning that the intention was to give priority to God's commands without literal obedience by physically placing them in the places described. The figurative interpretation is rooted in several arguments, most of which point to the context of the commands and the fact that modern Judaism wears these adornments only on special occasions.²⁰ Others contend for a figurative interpretation when comparing the commands to passages such as Proverbs 1:9.²¹ The metaphorical reading is propped up, in part, by observing such passages reflect Deuteronomy's "insistence on internalization of outward requirement."²² Other voices of biblical scholarship argue for a literal obedience to these verses in their original context. Some point out that verse 9 was not written as a proverb but in historical narrative and in terms of a command.²³ In addition, it is well accepted that early Judaism took the command literally, as seen in the discoveries of artifacts located around the Dead Sea.²⁴ While there may exist debate over the extent of literal or metaphorical interpretation of

¹⁹Lawrence H. Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1991), 244-45.

²⁰Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 168.

²¹Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 342.

²²McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

²³Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 342.

²⁴McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

this series of commands, it is clear that the text expects a clear agreement between inward motivations and outward activity.

The passage in Deuteronomy, as a whole, sets a standard of family engagement that prioritizes faith training and communicates, in both action and words, a committed relationship with God. A genuine love for God can and must be expressed in both the individual's heart intentions and ongoing lifestyle. Children have the best opportunity to see firsthand what loving obedience in a relationship with God looks like when they have parents that use every opportunity and means at their disposal to teach and demonstrate it. The charge given by Moses in Deuteronomy 6 seeks to set apart God's people in terms of their faith distinctiveness as well as their practices. The importance of their exalted view of God is communicated by their obedience to the Lord's commands and the commitment of parents to pass on God's truth to the next generation.

Psalm 78:1-8

Psalm 78 is a historically rich passage that charges parents to teach their children by recounting God's faithfulness in the midst of human failure. Asaph, the author of this particular Psalm, begins by calling his people to hear his teaching in the form of instructions that echo the Shema passage of Deuteronomy. The date of the Psalm is not essential to understand its purpose, as the intent is clearly stated in the opening verses. The psalm may have been read or recited in regular worship occasions and the speaker could be considered a prophet or Levitical priest.²⁵ Similar to the Shema, the call to hear also implies the need for the audience to understand and obey the teachings to follow. The introduction in verses 1 and 2 follows the style of the wisdom writings, with the Hebrew

²⁵John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 482.

word for parable also providing the title for the book of Proverbs.²⁶ The New Testament book of Matthew quotes verse 2 in describing the way in which the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, would teach God’s truth. Charles Spurgeon contends, “Whereas the first verse called for attention, the second justifies the demand by hinting that the outer sense conceals an inner and hidden meaning, which only the thoughtful will be able to perceive.”²⁷

In this psalm, Asaph contends that the spiritual condition of future generations depends on the ability of the current generation to clearly pass on the truths of God. The psalm recounts the blueprint of God’s design for the home with a plea for fathers to speak and model in their homes the overarching narrative of God’s redemption. A clear and essential component within each generation’s calling is their responsibility for the spiritual training of their children. The richness of historical narrative provides both a reminder and a warning for God’s people in their ongoing responsibility to future generations. As Spurgeon notes, “The mind of the poet-prophet was so full of ancient lore that he poured it forth in a copious stream of song, with spiritual truth capable of enriching those who could dive and bring them up.”²⁸

The psalmist seeks to emphasize the intergenerational continuity of the covenant that God has made with his people. This psalm implores fathers to transmit to their sons the gift of the law and the knowledge of the marvelous works of God and His people.²⁹ Verse 2 commands parents in Israel to instill “dark sayings of old,” which refer to the

²⁶Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150, Kidner Classic Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 311.

²⁷Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Classic Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1876), 433.

²⁸Charles H. Spurgeon, *Psalms, Crossway Classic Commentaries* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 2:328.

²⁹Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 565.

parabolic messages handed down from their previous generations.³⁰ Derek Kidner notes that the paired expressions of testimony and law in verse 5 emphasize “the certainty and the clarity of what God has delivered to us.”³¹ The entirety of the psalm demonstrates God’s glorious redemption in contrast with Israel’s history of disobedience. The psalm gives account of God’s faithfulness throughout a history where his chosen people stumble in disobedience. The children of Israel were to understand the goodness of God throughout their history while recognizing their own history of disobedience in order to avoid the sins of past generations.³² The teachings passed down were to include both the things that were heard and known, handed down from their fathers (Ps 78:3). The multigenerational consideration of instruction is vital to light the way long term for a people who would be set apart for God’s purposes. The calling placed on fathers in particular is demonstrated in the priorities of modeling faith and teaching truth to children so that they will remember God’s covenantal faithfulness and obey his Word.

The three key phrases found in verse 7 picture a threefold cord of faith as being personal trust, informed and humble thinking, and an obedient will.³³ Consequently, the remainder of the Psalm, verses 9 through 72, details aspects of Israel’s history as a warning of what happens when God’s people do not learn from their history and the message found in the psalm’s introductory verses. In preparation for the rest of the chapter, Asaph warns against forgetfulness. Craig Broyles highlights the danger of Israel’s forgetfulness

³⁰Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 295.

³¹Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 311.

³²Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word, 1991), 295.

³³Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 312.

when noting, “Memory is the critical factor, and it should result in the attitude of trust in God and in the behavior of keeping his commands.”³⁴ A failure to remember and learn from the past can have disastrous effects for God’s people. The psalm connects this warning with the declaration that “we will not hide them from their children,” effectively drawing attention to the spiritual condition of future generations.

The form of the Psalm lends itself to communicating through both historical narrative and poetic song. Goldingay observes, “Each of these narrative sections follows the same sequence, relating marvels of grace that God did, acts of rebellion and testing on Israel’s part, and a response of wrath and chastisement on God’s part.”³⁵ The recollection of historical narrative amongst God’s people gets to the deeper issue of the heart as reflected in the second half of verse 8, where the psalmist reveals the nature of their collective rebellion. The people did not have firm hearts that sought after and trusted God, but rather followed their own rebellious desires. The call to repentance, in the midst of remembrance, will also involve a redirecting of the heart toward God. The people are ultimately held responsible for what the psalm calls for as the firming of hearts and settling on God’s truth.³⁶

The parental responsibility of communicating God’s faithfulness involves connecting children to their common heritage of redemption. Considering the scope of the narrative reviewed in the psalm, Goldingay reflects that conveying this teaching was to be done “in such a way that it is not just known but also acknowledged.”³⁷ In other

³⁴Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1999), 322.

³⁵Goldingay, *Psalms*, 480.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 487.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 486.

words, the teaching of children in the larger narrative was to be deeply personal. The story of redemption provides more than a sequence of historical facts, but conveys a personal testimony of a life changing narrative. As Charles Spurgeon notes that “children should be taught cheerfully by word of mouth by their own mothers and fathers, as well as by the printed pages.”³⁸

The urgent petition of the passage is demonstrated in both the ongoing historical reflection and call to covenantal remembrance. Charles Briggs summarizes the role of remembrance so that the “story of the divine works of redemption and judgment may never be forgotten.”³⁹ In the introduction and then throughout the remainder of the Psalm, Asaph models the kind of teaching and instruction that he is calling others to follow by declaring the faithfulness of God to the people. Asaph lays out faithfulness over at least four generations. The transference of the message moves from children, to the next generation, the children yet unborn and, finally, their children. The intention is clear: the message is not to be lost with each coming generation, but proclaimed with the same clarity as the first generation that received the message. According to Goldingay, a key theme for the psalm is that of confidence.⁴⁰ The rise and fall of each generation, in many ways, falls on whether their confidence is placed in God or in themselves.

The transference of life shaping truth is meant to spark a greater confidence in God with each passing generation by learning from the shortcomings of their predecessors rather than repeating them. John Calvin proclaimed, “It is our bounden duty to use our endeavors that there may be a continual succession of persons to communicate instruction

³⁸Spurgeon, *Psalms*, 2:329.

³⁹Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 182.

⁴⁰Goldingay, *Psalms*, 487.

in divine truth.”⁴¹ According to Asaph, this duty falls first and primarily to fathers (Ps 78:5). Leupold summarizes,

The writer goes on to develop the practical purpose that he has in mind in treating the problems of history (vv. 3-8). He lays stress chiefly on the fact that the basic lessons involved are to be taught diligently to their children by the fathers lest the coming generations continue to make the same mistakes in a wearying and endless round.⁴²

Asaph continues in verse 7, instructing his readers that setting hope in God includes both remembering his works and keeping his commandments. In communicating the nature of God’s redemption, the Torah brings together the Word of God in both commandment and narrative. Marvin Tate notes,

Torah is a combination of story and commandments; the commandments are understood in the 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.⁴³

The goal for each generation, as reflected in this psalm, is to hear of an ongoing history of God’s redemption as children, before experiencing it in their own lives.

Ephesians 5:22-33

Ephesians 5:22-33 gives clear instruction for the home to be a representation of God’s glorious gospel through the reflection of Christ and the church in marriage. Husbands and wives are to model the relationship of Christ and the church in the home. While models for household structure are present in virtually every culture and setting, the Christian view presented in Ephesians is foundationally different. Whereas a Hellenistic model of the home had deeply political roots, the model and motivating force in Paul’s

⁴¹John Calvin, *Psalms 36-92, Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 231.

⁴²Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 564.

⁴³Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 289.

letter is Christ himself.⁴⁴ Though some have sought to connect a Christian household code with other cultural traditions, Andrew Lincoln asserts that while the contemporary Greco-Roman worldviews may have prompted Paul to address the issue in his letters, the Christian view is not directly dependent on any single model for its teachings.⁴⁵

Wives are commanded in verses 22-24 to submit to their own husbands as a reflection of their submission to Christ. While proponents of the feminist viewpoint will contend that the spirit of Ephesians 5:22-6:9 contradicts the preceding chapters, it is clear that the message in this passage is not about equality, but hierarchy.⁴⁶ The resistance that modern, especially Western, culture may have to the household model explained in Ephesians is not simply refuting a cultural premise, but is also rejecting a deeply theological pattern shown in Scripture. The hierarchical pattern of the household is not simply patriarchal in tone but is, at its root, creational.⁴⁷ The clear teaching of Scripture is that women are created equal to men as those who bear the image of God and are able to reflect his glory (Gen 1:27; Gal 3:28). The relational dynamics in the home are not based on a difference of value, but of roles. Andreas Kostenberger rightly observes, “The biblical model for marriage is that of loving complementarity, where the husband and the wife are partners who value and respect each other and where the husband’s loving leadership is met with the wife’s intelligent response.”⁴⁸ Complementarity, he explains,

⁴⁴Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: Apollos, 1999), 406.

⁴⁵Andrew T. Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 360.

⁴⁶Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 728.

⁴⁷O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 408.

⁴⁸Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 64.

“includes the notion of equal worth but differing roles for the sexes, and is an essential and foundational part of God’s design for marriage.”

Based on the context and specific terms used in this passage, it is clear that Paul means for each wife to submit to her own husband as opposed to men in general.⁴⁹ For example, the specific words Paul chooses here for wife and husband continue in the context of the household rather than switching to terms solely denoting female and male.⁵⁰ Hoehner stresses that the hierarchy structure is in direct relation to the church’s submission to Christ and this dynamic provides proper motivation for the submission of the wife to her husband.⁵¹ The nature of submission on behalf of the wife is not through compulsion or force. Similar to the church’s submission to Christ, which is free and willing, the wife’s submission should be voluntary.⁵² Kostenberger adds,

If Christ chooses to submit to God the Father while being equal in worth and personhood, there seems to be no good reason why God could not have designed the husband-and-wife relationship in such a way that the wife is called to submit to the man while likewise being equal in worth and personhood.⁵³

The relational design and creation imagery are further revealed in connection to the head and body metaphor used both in previous chapters in Ephesians, as well as in the book of Colossians. The head and body illustration indicates that the two metaphors are, in some ways, combined in their use.⁵⁴ A man and a woman come together in

⁴⁹Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, Monograph Series/Society for New Testament Studies 59 (reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57.

⁵⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God Part 2: The Election of God-The Command of God* (London: Bloomsbury, 1957), 610.

⁵¹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 736.

⁵²Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 372.

⁵³Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 64.

⁵⁴Gregory W. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33*, Biblical Interpretation Series 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 119-20.

marriage in a one flesh union (Mark 2:28; Gen 2:24). As husband and wife, they share in a new identity with one another so that what is true of one has become true of the other. The new relationship demonstrates the mystery Paul describes through both expressions of respect in willful submission and love in sacrificial headship. The mystery of God's redemptive plan in creation of male and female is revealed in the marriage union and its reflection of Christ and the church (Eph 5:32).

The husband bears a responsibility to model the sacrificial love of Christ for his wife and family. The headship of the husband is pictured in Ephesians 5:25-29 not in terms of a privilege to be flaunted but as a duty to be carried out. John Stott explains, "Although Paul grounds the fact of the husband's headship in creation, he defines it in relation to the headship of Christ the redeemer."⁵⁵ The function of headship, if modeled in the relationship of Christ to the church, is not a role of domination. O'Brien notes that nowhere in the list of instructions to husbands are they told to exercise their headship, but they are repeatedly told to love their wives.⁵⁶ The love a husband is to show for his wife is not to be self-seeking but sacrificial, by placing the needs of his wife before his own desires. Thus, the husband's actions and thoughts must always include his wife. The woman who becomes a wife is not merely an addition to the man's life, but has become in a very real sense a part of himself, sharing in a one flesh union. Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes, "You cannot detach yourself from your body, so you cannot detach yourself from your wife. She is a part of you, says, the Apostle, so remember that always."⁵⁷ Paul calls attention to the reality of a one flesh union in terms of caring and nurturing. Any hatred or animosity within the marriage union is nonsensical because the husband and wife are

⁵⁵John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1986), 225.

⁵⁶O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 419.

⁵⁷David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18 to 6:9* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 215.

one flesh and a husband who cares for his wife equates to one who cares for his own body or, as Paul relates, to Christ caring for his church (Eph 5:28-29). Considering verse 28, O'Brien notes that the model of Christ giving his life for his church "will have profound implications for the husband's behavior as the head of his wife."⁵⁸

Beginning in verse 26, the text also points to the husband's responsibility to care for the spiritual growth of his family. Christ sanctifies his bride, the church, presenting her in splendor, without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27). The beauty and purity in which the church is presented represent a moral purity found in holiness as a people who delight in their Lord.⁵⁹ The church is cleansed through the Word of the gospel by Jesus himself (John 15:3, 17:17). Lincoln notes that the text goes beyond the husband's immediate role to demonstrate how his actions are a shadow of the love of Christ.⁶⁰ Although the husband does not save or sanctify his wife, he does carry a responsibility for spiritual leadership in the home and must uphold the Word so that his household will serve the Lord.

A critical component of the one flesh union described in Ephesians 5:28-31 is that of a shared identity. In *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes the profound significance of a shared identity in marriage: "The moment a woman becomes the bride of a man she shares his privileges. Whatever they are, she becomes a partaker of them and sharer of them."⁶¹ The benefit of this one flesh union is more than social stability or financial security, for it points to a deeper truth and far greater reality. In marriage, what is true of one person becomes true of the other. Spouses share an identity in a common name and form a one flesh union that mirrors the relationship of

⁵⁸O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 414.

⁵⁹Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 377.

⁶⁰Ibid., 378.

⁶¹Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 201.

Christ and the church. Lloyd-Jones follows, “The Apostle is saying here that this is true of the church. What do we share? We share the Father’s love.”⁶² Similar to adoption, all believers need to have an identity shaped by their new standing in Christ and sharing in his name. This core doctrinal truth affirmed in this passage is so vital that Lloyd-Jones declares, “Am I not right when I say that the real tragedy today is the failure of the church to realize the truth about herself? All things are yours—everything! The cosmos is ours, in a sense, because we belong to Christ.”⁶³ Paul is demonstrating a mystery revealed in marriage that points to Christ and the church. As a result, the purpose of creation as male and female is realized as those made in God’s image for his glory. Believers are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17).

One of the primary functions of marriage is having and raising children. Therefore, in the book of Ephesians, it naturally follows that the instruction to husbands and wives is immediately followed by instruction to fathers and mothers. Parents carry a vital role in the family structure by raising children, but their functions as father and mother are preceded by their roles as husband and wife. Thus, the roles of husband and father, along with wife and mother, overlap in daily life so that the marriage modeled before children can not only shape their view of marriage, but also their understanding of the great truths of God. John Piper observes, “As husband and wife, they are a drama of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and the church.”⁶⁴

If a husband and wife seek to live out the beautiful narrative of Christ and the church in their homes, then it stands to reason that the audience that will have the closest and clearest view for such a display would be their own children. A child that grows up in a loving home that seeks to model the biblical roles of husband and wife, in addition to

⁶²Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 201.

⁶³Ibid., 203.

⁶⁴John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 144.

father and mother, will grow up with a better understanding of the gospel. Conversely, a child that grows up in a home where parents fail to reflect the mystery of Christ and the church may have a more difficult time developing a framework of understanding for certain aspects of the gospel message. In view of the covenantal aspects of both salvation and marriage, David Peterson affirms, “Christ died to devote the church to himself in an exclusive and permanent relationship analogous to marriage.”⁶⁵ Children who are raised in a culture where abuse, abandonment, and divorce are prevalent, will not only carry those wounds into their adult life, but perhaps most importantly, will lack a clear picture of the relationship between God and his people expressed in the Christ-and-church covenantal union.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Ephesians 6:1-4 speaks to a gospel-centered approach to family dynamics, specifically turning attention to the relationship between parents and their children. Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls this section a “further illustration of the great principle which the Apostle has laid down in the previous chapter, and which he works out in terms of varied human relationships.”⁶⁶ Indeed, the passage, in its immediate context found in the book of Ephesians, follows a series of key arguments concerning the salvation and union of believers with Christ and an explanation of ways in which this new life and identity are to be lived. The new life of the believer is to be distinct from the world and altogether different from the previous life once held before the redeeming work of Christ. As seen previously demonstrated in Paul’s words on marriage, the home is an essential part where this new reality of Christian truth is to be displayed in the life of the believer.

⁶⁵David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 1 (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 136.

⁶⁶Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 237.

While verse 4 speaks most directly to parents, the preceding verses lay out a godly expectation of relational dynamics within the home. The first verse opens with a command given to children to “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph 6:1). Paul asserts the reasons for children’s obedience, including its moral rightness, along with its connection with Mosaic Law and God’s redemptive plans. At some level, obedience to parents must be a social norm that brings about stability within any society.⁶⁷ However, the phrase “in the Lord” demonstrates that a child’s obedience is about more than maintaining social structures as it points to a child’s position under the authority of Christ in relationship to their parents. Children are to see parental authority in their life as a critical component of God’s design so that their obedience to their parents is, in turn, showing obedience and honor to the Lord himself. The phrase “in the Lord” in this sense could be understood similar to “as to Christ” as seen in 5:22 in regard to wives. Additionally, the affirmative action does not mean that only children with Christian parents are to obey them, but that they are to be obedient as unto the Lord.⁶⁸ William Kline notes that obedience in the Lord indicates that “Christian children must obey their parents in keeping with their commitment to Christ. In other words, children are expected to obey as the Lord would expect them to obey.”⁶⁹

It should be noted here that Paul gives the command for children to obey their parents using the backdrop of the Mosaic Law (Eph 6:2-3; Deut 5:16). Listing the fifth commandment of the Decalogue would have been not only familiar to many households listening to Paul’s letter, but children in the gathering would likely have this command

⁶⁷O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 442.

⁶⁸Ibid., 441.

⁶⁹William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman, David E. Garland, and Todd D. Still (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 156.

committed to memory.⁷⁰ Here one not only sees how Paul interprets and applies certain aspects of the law, but how he connects it to the larger picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The commands of the Mosaic Law are not only reaffirmed through Paul's writing, but are further explained in context of their relationship to Christ and life in the gospel.⁷¹ The connection to Old Testament law further demonstrates God's design for parents to be spiritual leaders in their homes showing their children how to know and follow God's Word. The role of parents, as those who train their children in the home, is an outworking of those who live according to the Spirit and walk "not as unwise but as wise" (Eph 5:15).

Paul speaks directly to the temperament and conduct of parents in verse 4, instructing fathers not to provoke their children to anger. While the term "fathers" could be considered to encompass both fathers and mothers, it could be that the emphasis here highlights the father's responsibility for teaching children God's truth. Richard Mellick affirms this notion: "Paul used the term fathers in addressing the parents. The term may easily encompass both father and mother, as it does here, but it also served to remind them that the fathers bore a primary responsibility for the children in the home."⁷² The relationship between parents and their children is an essential conduit through which God's truth is to be communicated. Therefore, issues that detract from the relationships will, in turn, alter the ability of parents to effectively train up their children in the way of the Lord. Specifically, fathers must consider how their own actions and words can shape the hearts and lives of their children either positively or negatively. Clinton Arnold comments, "This passage effectively rules out reactionary flare-ups, overly harsh words,

⁷⁰William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 259.

⁷¹O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 443.

⁷²Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 315.

insults, sarcasm, nagging, demeaning comments, inappropriate teasing, unreasonable demands and anything else that can be perceived as provocative.”⁷³

The matter of maintaining a level of fairness and sensitivity in the home serves as a further reminder for parents to see the image of God in their children. Stott argues that the command here serves as a clear reminder 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.”⁷⁴ Because the child has a picture of the fatherhood of God represented in the home, the interactions between parents and children can serve to help or hurt their understanding of God’s nature and actions. Considering this aspect of children’s hearts, Thielman notes, “Paul urges fathers not to abuse their authority by treating their children in harsh, unfair ways that create resentment and bitterness.”⁷⁵ A wise father seeks to form a loving environment in the home that allows for communication of the gospel to happen clearly and consistently. Children are to obey the rules of the household in the context of a relationship with their parents. In this manner, the example of parents can be a powerful illustration of the truths they teach their children and prepare a child’s heart to trust the gospel and follow Jesus Christ.

The words “discipline” and “instruction” in verse 4 are similar in nature and closely related in function. The term “discipline” can be translated as “training” and may more strongly emphasize the external activity of education. Similarly, the term “instruction” can be understood in terms of correction or admonition and focus more on the internal, or verbal, correction that takes place between parent and child.⁷⁶ Together,

⁷³Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 418.

⁷⁴Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 246.

⁷⁵Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 401.

⁷⁶Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 767.

the message to parents is that they bear a responsibility, both internally and externally, to shape the hearts and lives of their children according to the Word of God. The terms carry meaning not just for positive reinforcement but admonition in the form of correction when the child strays in their attitude or behavior.⁷⁷ The use of the phrase “of the Lord” in verse 4, similar to the statement “in the Lord” in verse 1, carries great significance.

O’Brien asserts, “The phrase could be understood as a subjective genitive, indicating that behind those who teach and discipline their children stands the Lord himself.”⁷⁸

The phrase “in the Lord” also serves as a constant reminder that the aim of Christian parenting supersedes that of the prevalent culture, both then and now. If Christian fathers are to direct their children in the Lord, then they are to consistently teach and live out the Scripture in their homes, while showing love and gentleness along with firmness and dedication. Ultimately, the concern of parents is not simply that their sons and daughters will be obedient to their authority, or successful in a worldly sense. Instead, parents must patiently commit to the godly training and instruction they pray will lead to children knowing and obeying the Lord himself.⁷⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has considered primary texts demonstrating God’s will for parents and children. God has set forth a glorious design and purposeful plan to show his glory. God’s blueprint is for parents to play an integral role in his majestic narrative of redemption through proclamation of God’s faithfulness to each generation. Christian parents are called to model and communicate the gospel to their children through their actions and words.

⁷⁷Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 407.

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

⁷⁹Ibid.

The overarching teaching of parents being the primary disciple makers for their children spans both the Old and New Testaments. In Deuteronomy 6:1-9, parents are shown to be the primary spiritual influence in the lives of their children and are instructed to carry out both formal and informal teaching as they go throughout daily life. Psalm 78:1-8 warns against the dangers of repeating the sins of previous generations while providing a historical backdrop of God's faithfulness. Asaph calls each generation to take up their responsibility to pass on the great truths of God's redemption to the coming generations. In the New Testament book of Ephesians, Paul first instructs men and women as husbands and wives before guiding their roles as fathers and mothers. In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul reveals the bigger picture of marriage by declaring the profound mystery of Christ and the church. The design for marriage, as God intends it, is to reflect the gospel both inwardly between spouses and outwardly to others, including children. In Ephesians 6:1-4, Paul gives further direction for the home in calling for the obedience of children and faithful training and instruction from parents.

The spiritual formation of children is of such importance that Scripture neither advocates nor permits parents to outsource their training to others. While the church has a vital role in reaching the next generation and equipping them with the gospel, it must not supplant the God-given responsibility that has been placed in the hands of fathers and mothers. Parents are given stewardship, for a season, of those made in God's image and for his glory. Parents fulfill their scriptural calling by leading their children to love God and obey his commands.

CHAPTER 3
SOCIOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND PRACTICAL
SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AS PRIMARY
DISCIPLERS OF THEIR CHILDREN

This chapter examines the sociological, historical, and practical support for parents serving as the primary disciple makers in their homes. In chapter 2, key biblical texts were examined to discover the calling of God upon parents as those given spiritual leadership in the home. Family discipleship can be understood as parents raising children to love and follow Jesus Christ, receive and apply the gospel, and walk in faithfulness throughout their lives. In this chapter, the ongoing effects of society and history are examined to consider how churches have arrived to their current state of family discipleship. In addition, societal and historical factors lead in to a consideration of practical aspects of how the church equips parents and invests in families. Both general influences and specific challenges to family discipleship are investigated to provide a clearer picture of the necessary steps for the church to take moving forward.

Sociological Support

Societal Influence on the Family

Sociological research shows the importance of equipping parents to be the primary disciple makers in their homes. Casual observation suggests that many parents in churches today raise their children in a way that seems acceptable to their peers. The values and expectations of the surrounding culture may be expressed both explicitly or perceived implicitly. Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof note that parents often experience what they refer to as “Stock Family Syndrome,” where parents compare themselves to a

false ideal of other families who, in their own perception, have it all together.¹ The church is not exempt from this sociological perception, but rather can be a breeding ground for such views because of the value placed on moral standards and having children who behave according to those standards. Often, when parents compare to a false standard, they tend to minimize the dysfunctional aspects found in other family structures while maximizing their own. False perceptions such as these only serve to further convince many parents that they are not capable, due to their own struggles and lack of ability, to affect the faith formation of their children. However, other social factors also strongly influence parental involvement in their child's spiritual development.

Parents who live in a community are impacted by the culture around them in more ways than they may realize or even admit. Sociologist Ann Swidler coined the term “cultural toolkit” to describe the symbols, stories, rituals, and relationships that encompass one's worldview.² Tim Clydesdale writes, “Like a computer operating system, culture gets installed with certain ‘default’ settings that, unless overridden, determine how humans view their world and structure their everyday behavior.”³ These cultural defaults cause parents to feel pressure to lead their families according to what is socially normative rather than to a biblical standard. Kenda Creasy Dean notes, “Helpful or harmful, our first impulse is to reach for the cultural tools—the language, stories, relationships,

¹Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connect Your Family to a Wider Community* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 38.

²Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51 (April 1986): 273.

³Tim Clydesdale, “Abandoned, Pursued, or Safely Stowed?” *Social Science Research Council*, February 6, 2007, accessed November 5, 2016 <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Clydesdale.pdf>.

practices, and worldviews— that we see people ‘like us’ using to navigate the world.”⁴ The resulting values instilled in the child will often, in turn, impact their own parenting goals and motivations. George Barna observes, “When it comes to raising our children, Americans have created a matrix of measurements based upon what our society defines to be significant.”⁵ Parents must consider how these cultural norms, as well as their own personal perceptions, continuously shape the way they raise their children.

Not only does the larger culture impact parenting, but a parent’s upbringing can strongly influence the priorities of their home. Another default for many parents stems from their own childhood experiences. These experiences can be seen both positively and negatively as they create both helpful and harmful cycles from one generation to another. The faith and value systems that parents pass down to their children create a sense of identity and direction that continue in influence for future generations. Both secular and Christian authors have noted that parental influences in a child’s life will mark out aspects of their self-identity and further influence their future parenting of the next generation. In *Parenting from the Inside Out*, Daniel Siegel explains, “In the absence of reflection, history often repeats itself, and parents are vulnerable to passing on to their children unhealthy patterns from the past.”⁶ Paul David Tripp goes further by contending that parents can form their identity from their past or their future rather than in Christ, naming identity replacement as a real struggle when it comes to parenting: “What this means for a parent is that if you are not getting your identity from

⁴Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 48.

⁵George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting: What the Research Shows Really Works* (Carol Stream, IL: Barna Books, 2007), 5.

⁶Daniel J. Siegel and Mary Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive* (New York: J. P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2003), 5.

God and the work of his Son, you will probably try to get it from your children.”⁷ In order for parents to properly train their children, they must come to terms with their own identity struggles and trust the gospel of Jesus Christ for their identity rather than societal or familial affirmation.

Church Influence on the Family

The church need not shy away from societal influence on the lives of teenagers, but can leverage the influence of community to guide faith formation in the next generation. Dean notes,

Before mature faith can emerge, young people must learn what the cultural tools available in their faith communities mean, how to employ them, and why they are significant for “people like us.” And that requires the people nearest to teenagers—parents, youth leaders, pastors, congregations, interested adults—to use these cultural tools as well.⁸

While a number of factors lead to a faith development that endures in adolescents, Kara Powell and Chap Clark assert that the larger faith community in the local church plays a key role: “More than any single program or event, adults making the effort to get to know the kids was far more likely to make the kids feel like a significant part of their church.”⁹ A rich web of relationships experienced through intergenerational ministry can help every age group benefit from their unique experiences while embracing a common identity as followers of Christ.

The separation that occurs through church programming can, to some extent, work against the necessity of intergenerational interaction. Age appropriate programming is important, but must be met with intentional opportunities for adolescents to develop

⁷Paul David Tripp, *Parenting: The 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 77.

⁸Dean, *Almost Christian*, 50.

⁹Kara Eckmann Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 99.

relationships with significant adults in the congregation. Powell and Clark add, “Sticky social webs don’t just happen by accident. As with most aspects of parenting, we have to be intentional. We must devote significant time and energy to surrounding our children with intergenerational relationships.”¹⁰ When the next generation matters to the larger faith community they will be given opportunities to serve and engage in ministry. In *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, the adoptive ministry approach to youth in the church is explained in terms of helping students identify their rightful place in the church body. Mark Cannister urges churches to delegate organizational responsibilities to a leader, but to always see the collective church responsibility to youth in the congregation: “Once a church has established a deep commitment to community, the responsibility of the entire community, the whole pastoral staff, and all parents of teenagers. This is not an endeavor that can be executed by the youth minister alone.”¹¹

Although the church can influence a number of vital components in family life, its ministry to marriages has the potential to carry the greatest impact on the lives of young people. The impact of having one or both parents in the home drastically influences many functioning factors for children. Research has shown that when compared with families with two biological parents, students who lived with neither biological parent scored lower with regard to academic performance, educational aspiration, sense of self-determination, and self-esteem, and they exhibited more behavioral problems.¹² While ministries to those without parents, as well as single-parent homes, are vital, God’s design for the permanence of marriage is clearly seen in its effects on the development of children.

¹⁰Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 102.

¹¹Mark Cannister, “Thinking Ecclesialogically: Teenagers Becoming Part of the Church.” In *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*, ed. Chap Clark. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 139.

¹²Youngmin Sun, “The Well-Being of Adolescents in Households with No Biological Parents,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65, no. 4 (November 2003): 894-909.

In *Why They Stay*, Steve Parr’s research reveals that a young adult whose parents are divorced is more likely to stray from the church. Those whose parents divorced while they were in high school or later were twice as likely to do so as those who faced divorce prior to age eleven.¹³ Parr writes, “Adolescents are already vulnerable as they are framing their worldview, testing boundaries, wrestling with questions, and going through a physical hormonal storm. When divorce is added to that equation the results can be spiritually devastating.”¹⁴ Thankfully, involvement in a local church positively influences the health of marriages. Among misinformed opinions regarding the state of marriage of those in the church is the idea that the divorce rate is roughly the same inside and outside the church; however, recent research has shown otherwise. Shaunti Feldhahn reports, “The rate of divorce in the church is 25 to 50 percent lower than among those who don’t attend worship services, and those who prioritize their faith and pray together are more connected to their families.”¹⁵ Perhaps the greatest thing a parent can do to influence the spiritual imagination of their children, as well as prepare them for future family life, is to love their own spouse well. It will strengthen the gospel witness for children and help them thrive in a safe and loving environment for discipleship if the church deeply invests in marriages.

Adult Influences on the Christian Formation of Adolescents

The maturation process for children, both physically and spiritually, does not occur in an instant, but rather is experienced in a long process. Similarly, parental

¹³Steve R. Parr and Tom Crites, *Why They Stay: Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Investments That Keep Children and Teens Connected to the Church for a Lifetime* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow, 2015), 80.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁵Shaunti Feldhahn, *The Good News about Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2014), 86.

discipleship efforts can and should continue in the adolescent stage. The development of even basic emotional and social skills can be influenced by the intentional engagement of mature adults or the lack thereof. Richard Ross notes that “people 18-25 do not see themselves as adults, and they know they are not prepared for adult roles. Spiritually, socially, and emotionally, they are underdeveloped. Even regions of their brains are underdeveloped.”¹⁶ The disengagement from adults can often stagnate spiritual and emotional growth causing an extended adolescent culture and can be observed in the lives of those hanging on to the lack of responsibility found in adolescence. Indeed, most young Americans shun the title of “adult” until they reach their late twenties or early thirties.¹⁷

A heightened sense of connection with peer groups and surrounding society does not preclude the need for ongoing engagement from parents in the lives of their children. The adolescent years naturally lead to additional voices influencing in thought and decision making processes. Walt Mueller asserts, “Adolescence is a time when teenagers begin to disengage from the family while building extensive and meaningful relationships with their peers. This shift in social orientation from parents to peers is normal.”¹⁸ However, the rising influence of peer groups and heightened sense of individualism does not negate the powerful ongoing influence of parents in the lives of teenagers, especially in matters of faith. Healthy relationships between parents and teenagers are possible, while still giving room for sons and daughters to grow into independent adults.

¹⁶Richard Ross, *Accelerate: Parenting Teenagers toward Adulthood, How Not to Find Your 25-Year-Old Still Living in Your Basement* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2013), 6.

¹⁷Dean, *Almost Christian*, 9.

¹⁸Walt Mueller, *The Space Between: A Parent’s Guide to Teenage Development* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 2009), 48.

Christian parents need not assume teenage rebellion as an end to their ongoing influence in the lives of their children. Social perceptions have led to a mistaken view of parental influence during a critical time in their child's development. Most Americans have bought into the idea that they do not carry an influencing voice in their teenagers' lives so they take their cue and bow out in many areas in a tragic self-fulfilling prophecy.¹⁹ Christian Smith observes, "Oddly, this withdrawal of parental influence on adolescents seems most especially evident when it comes to religious commitments and practices."²⁰ While remaining engaged in areas of academics or athletics, parents continue to disengage in the area most vital to a teen's development. Although academic or athletic achievement carries some meaning, it does not settle the foundation of worldview, truth, and personal identity that faith can form in adolescence. Smith adds,

In the name of individual autonomy—informed here by a cultural myth that is socially erroneous—the usually most crucial players in teenagers' lives disengage from them precisely when they most need conversation partners to help sort through these weighty matters.²¹

The spiritual landscape of American churches presents numerous sociological factors that have influenced the nature of faith development in American youth.

Sociologists observe American Christians as

restless people who come to church for the same reasons people once went to diners: for someone to serve us who knows our name, for a filling stew that reminds us of home and makes us feel loved, even while it does a number on our spiritual cholesterol.²²

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton headed an extensive research project looking into the spiritual lives of American teenagers. The results of their surveys

¹⁹Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 283.

²⁰Ibid., 284.

²¹Ibid.

²²Dean, *Almost Christian*, 8.

revealed a belief system they termed Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), which held to the following common beliefs: (1) A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. (2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. (3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. (5) Good people go to heaven when they die.²³

While some may assume that the shift toward MTD is something unique to emerging adults in local congregations, research gathered in the collective works of *Soul Searching* and *Souls in Transition* convince us otherwise. Smith and Denton note, "Our religiously conventional adolescents seem to be merely absorbing and reflecting religiously what the adult world is routinely modeling for and inculcating in its youth."²⁴ Going further, Smith and Denton note the parasitic nature of this new faith system: "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is, in the context of teenagers' congregations and denominations, actively displacing the substantive traditional faiths of conservative, black, and mainline Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism in the United States."²⁵ Finally, Smith and Denton assess and summarize their extensive research by concluding that the new version of faith in MTD may be the "new mainstream American religious faith" that, over time, has been "converting believers in the old faiths to its alternative religious vision of divinely underwritten personal happiness and interpersonal niceness."²⁶

²³Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162.

²⁴Ibid., 166.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 171.

The shift in religious beliefs among teenagers and their parents reveals more than a watered-down version of Christianity, to a different form of belief altogether. Dean concedes, “Perhaps most young people practice Moralistic Therapeutic Deism not because they reject Christianity, but because this is the only ‘Christianity’ they know.”²⁷ The challenges that come about by engaging teenagers entrenched in MTD extend into every area of evangelism and discipleship. Churches will have to intentionally communicate the gospel to each generation while equipping one generation to hand down truth to another. Mack Stiles contends, “The gospel is accepted. The gospel is assumed. The gospel is confused. The gospel is lost.”²⁸

The church must not only teach the gospel with clarity, but engage the belief systems of parents along with their children. Because the false views of MTD did not originate with teenagers, but rather was passed down to them, the church must reverse the cycle by raising up families who relationally hand down a worldview deeply rooted in Scripture. The end result of faithful parental engagement would begin to create new defaults for children who reach adulthood themselves. Families are always passing on faith and values of some kind or other, because families are the context in which children develop and form their values and worldviews. Roland Martinson explains, “Families of origin are intergenerational systems that create an ethos (way of life) as well a mythos (a life perspective).”²⁹ Children who are blessed to be trained in their homes will have a gospel well that runs deep and can be drawn from their whole lives through.

²⁷Dean, *Almost Christian*, 12.

²⁸J. Mack Stiles, *Marks of the Messenger: Knowing, Living, and Speaking the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 40.

²⁹Roland D. Martinson, “The Role of Family in the Faith and Value Formation of Children,” *Word & World* 17, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 397.

Historical Support

Historical evidence demonstrates that parents are to be the primary disciple makers of their children. The influence of history upon faith formation in the church and the home must be investigated in order to learn how they have led churches to their current ministry contexts. While many may assume that current practices in churches and in families are representative of the way it has always been, a closer look at several key movements throughout history reveal significant shifts that provide a more complete perspective on approaches to evangelizing and discipling the next generation. Don Whitney proclaims, “The lives of our Christian heroes testify that God deserves to be worshipped daily in our homes by our families.”³⁰

Early Church Fathers

As noted in the previous chapter, parents are given a primary role as spiritual leaders in their homes according to the authority of Scripture. The early church was instructed in like manner with instruction for parents to provide discipleship in the home. Clement wrote The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians in the name of the Church of Rome to the church at Corinth. This letter was highly valued by the early church and guided the duty of fathers in the household stating,

Ye enjoined young men to be of a sober and serious mind; ye instructed your wives to do all things with a blameless, becoming, and pure conscience, loving their husbands as in duty bound; and ye taught them that, living in the rule of obedience, they should manage their household affairs becomingly, and be in every respect marked by discretion.³¹

In the Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians, Ignatius of Antioch exhorted fathers to teach their children the Holy Scripture so that they may not indulge in idleness.

³⁰Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 28.

³¹Clement, “The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 5.

He recognized, “A righteous father educates his children.”³² Similarly, second-century theologian Tertullian described the nature of family worship as flowing from Christian marriage: “They pray together, they worship together, they fast together; instructing one another, encouraging one another, strengthening one another.”³³

The Protestant Reformation brought about a renewed emphasis of individual responsibility to know and live out the scriptures. A significant effort was given during this time to raise up parents who invested in the faith formation of their children.

Anthony Guerra writes,

Protestants effected more immediately the spiritualization of the household. Believing that the family was the training ground for successful participation in all other social organizations, including the church and the state, Protestants promoted a new focus on the family. Prayers and Bible readings became part of the daily routine of the family.³⁴

The Reformers consistently taught that the parents had a God-given responsibility to lead in the Christian formation of their children. Luther emphasized parental participation in the education of their children and specifically urged fathers to provide religious instruction in their homes at least once a week.³⁵ Parents were to prepare themselves to serve as those who could provide consistent instruction to their children.

Similar to Luther, John Calvin emphasized the father’s responsibility to provide religious education in their homes, urging that both children and servants participate in

³²Ignatius, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians: Shorter and Longer Versions,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 81.

³³Tertullian, “Ad uxorem (To my wife),” *The Tertullian Project*, accessed October 24, 2016, http://www.tertullian.org/works/ad_uxorem.htm.

³⁴Anthony J. Guerra, *Family Matters: The Role of Christianity in the Formation of the Western Family* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2002), 66-67.

³⁵Martin Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962), 353.

catechism.³⁶ Indeed, many of Calvin's writings gave consistent reminders to the role of parents in the home. For example, one Old Testament commentary instructed parents that "constant conversation should be held . . . with their children, in order that fathers should diligently attend and apply themselves to the duty of instruction."³⁷ Calvin held that the younger generation needed instruction from their elders and that older saints in the church bore responsibility to the youth in their congregations. Elders were to act kindly to those younger around them as they sought to provide needed wisdom and guidance.³⁸ In addition, Calvin believed society, as a whole, had responsibility "to provide the right conditions for raising children to be godly."³⁹ The lasting effects of the Reformation are clearly seen in Protestant churches, but the direction provided for households would hold significance for many years to come.

The Puritans

The Puritans took up many of the goals of the Reformers, seeking to know and follow Scripture in the context of their daily lives. The renewed emphasis on faith formation in the home expanded significantly as several took up the banner of family discipleship in developing catechisms and ongoing instructions for the home. The goal for many Puritans, and those influenced by them, was for faith to impact all of life, not just moments set aside for instruction of children. Noted seventeenth-century Puritan

³⁶Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 124-31.

³⁷John Calvin, *Harmony of the Law*, pt. 2, *Calvin's Bible Commentaries* (London: Forgotten 2007), 367.

³⁸Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 28.

³⁹Barbara Pitkin, "The Heritage of the Lord': Children in the Theology of John Calvin," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge, Religion, Marriage, and Family Series (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001).

preacher Thomas Watson taught that Christian parents should “endeavor that their children may be more God’s children than theirs; they will ‘travail in birth until Christ be formed in them.’”⁴⁰

The consistent example provided by parental engagement is essential to helping children grow into spiritually mature Christians. Richard Baxter asserts,

Let your own example teach your children that holiness, and heavenliness, and blamelessness of tongue and life, which you desire them to learn and practice. The example of parents is most powerful with children, both for good and for evil. If they see you live in the fear of God, it will do much to persuade them that it is the most necessary and excellent course of life, and that they must do so too.⁴¹

Parental example can reinforce or undermine biblical teaching heard in the church or the home. Ministers, such as Baxter, recognized the power of parental influence and sought to leverage it in Christian discipleship.

Another minister, Cotton Mather, provided both political influence and religious instruction for many in the Puritan movement. Mather strongly believed and taught that parents were to provide ongoing spiritual training for their children at every opportunity. In Mather’s view, while parents were to teach their children many things, the most urgent and eternal investment came through faith formation in spiritual instruction:

The knowledge of other things, though it be never so desirable an accomplishment for them, our children may arrive to eternal happiness without it. . . . But the knowledge of the godly doctrine in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ is of a million times more necessary for them.⁴²

⁴⁰Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes: An Exposition of Matthew 5:1-10* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2014), 235.

⁴¹Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: An Essay on His Genius, Works, and Times* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 453.

⁴²Paula S. Fass and Mary Ann Mason, eds., *Childhood in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 291.

Mather encouraged parents to not be satisfied solely with catechism answers, but to probe the heart by asking additional questions of their children. On this matter, Mather instructed,

Endeavor that your children may not only receive the Catechism into their understandings, but also have their affections and practices conformed to what they understand. . . . When we are catechizing our children, we are delivering unto them a form of doctrine; and we should contrive all the charms (incentives) imaginable, that their hearts and lives may be molded into that form.⁴³

Mather's teaching, among others in the Puritan era, was that faith training was no less important than basic physical provision in the home of the believer. The family was to be a household of faith that partnered with local churches to provide biblical instruction and discipleship to the next generation. It should also be noted that worship was most often intergenerational in the local church and parents were encouraged to teach and question their children concerning what they learned in the sermons and teachings of the church.⁴⁴ Children were integrated into the life of the congregation through their parents, and had the opportunity to see their parents engage in worship and Scripture study. However, the priority of generations gathered together for worship did not preclude Mather's recollection of young people who gathered together on Sunday evening and, as he recalled, "prayed, sang a psalm, taking our turns in such devotions."⁴⁵ Both parental example and peer interaction made up important components of faith development in children and young adults.

⁴³Edmund Sears Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion & Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1994), 99-100.

⁴⁴Ibid., 102.

⁴⁵Frederick DeLand Leete, *Christian Brotherhoods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2009), 209.

Modern Influences

Throughout the following centuries, new models were utilized by the church, but much of the emphasis remained for parents to lead their homes spiritually. For example, even though nineteenth-century pastor Samuel W. Dike founded the Home Department to equip parents to teach biblical truth in their homes, the foundation of “the faith training of children occurred both in classes at church and in the daily contexts of their households.”⁴⁶ However, the nature of parental involvement began to change again significantly by the middle of the nineteenth century as an effect of the Industrial Revolution. Children’s and youth ministry became organized groups within the church and separated from the main corporate gathering. This change was in part an effect of the campaign for equal education through public schools. As a result, Christian parents have gradually become dependent on specialists for children’s religious education, resulting in many Christian parents disengaging from their children’s spiritual development.

A series of cultural shifts and reactions from the church have in many ways influenced youth ministry over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The economic influences of the Great Depression followed by World War II created a change in adolescent structure and expectation. Adolescence in America developed into a wider transition period between childhood and adulthood. In *Huck’s Raft*, Steven Mintz details the cultural climate: “Middle-class parents responded to the war’s traumas through an intensified commitment to a protected, prolonged childhood. Parents who had been rushed to adulthood sought to provide their offspring with a sheltered childhood.”⁴⁷ In the period of the late 1940s through 1950s, the country saw a rise in secondary education in

⁴⁶Bryan Nelson and Timothy Paul Jones, preface to *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy P. Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 19.

⁴⁷Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 132.

light of a renewed economy. The economic recovery coupled with shifting mindsets of parenting led to vastly different expectations on youth than in previous generations. Rather than bearing responsibility to contribute to family labor, many families began to enable the following generation with disposable income and free time.⁴⁸ In turn, the rise of the American teenager became a strong economic and social influence. Patricia Hersch notes that the following decades through the close of the century further widened the generational gap as parents further disengaged from their children in favor of pursuits in financial success and personal hobbies of leisure. Hersch laments, “A clear picture of adolescents, of even our own children eludes us, not necessarily because they are rebelling, or avoiding or evading us. It is because we aren’t there. Not just parents, but any adults. American society has left its children behind.”⁴⁹

The sweeping changes that the twentieth century brought to the surrounding culture also had significant influence on the church. In *Trained in the Fear of God*, Steenburg and Jones note,

From the young people’s societies of the nineteenth century until the Young Life organization began hiring youth ministers in the mid-twentieth century, youth ministry had been a volunteer endeavor. In the 1950s and 1960s, youth ministry shifted to a paid profession, solidifying the youth group’s segmentation from the rest of the congregation.⁵⁰

Reflecting on the relationship between church and parachurch ministries, youth ministry pioneer Jim Burns adds, “We who did youth ministry took the Youth for Christ and Young Life models and brought them into the church.”⁵¹

⁴⁸Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 14.

⁴⁹Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 32.

⁵⁰W. Ryan Steenburg and Timothy Paul Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation: Family Discipleship in Modern and Postmodern Contexts,” in *Trained in the Fear of God*, 153.

⁵¹Jim Burns, quoted in Wendy Murray Zorba, “Class of ‘00,” *Christianity*

The segmentation of youth from the congregation further added to the mindset that the Christian formation of youth and adolescents was primarily the job of trained ministers in the church rather than parents. Wayne Rice, another long time youth ministry veteran, interjects,

But what we have today is not really a youth ministry problem. It's a church problem. Truth is—it has always been a church problem. When the baby boomer generation forced the church to take young people seriously, it did so by hiring youth workers to warehouse them and keep them busy with fun and games and other programs especially for teenagers. Now several generations later we are seeing the result of all that.⁵²

The struggle to reach and retain youth within the church continues to be swayed by affluence and parents who have not been equipped to spiritually guide their children. Concerns over biblical literacy and teenagers leaving the church have further added to questions surrounding the progression and purpose of youth ministry in the local church. Opportunities provided for teenagers have also added new challenges to the discipleship process. Mark Senter notes,

The “youth problem” extended beyond youth ceasing to attend church. Economic prosperity made alternative forms of activities far more appealing to youth than church services, which appealed primarily to the cognitive powers of listeners. Not only was the church losing her youth; they had begun to “worship” elsewhere.⁵³

The response of the church has largely been to increase efforts in specialization, segmentation, and training of those who engage youth culture. However, at a time when youth ministry specialization, training, conferences, and events are at an all-time high, the problems surrounding youth discipleship remain prevalent. Some ministries attempt discipleship apart from adult involvement from parents and others in

Today, February 3, 1997, 21. See also Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother, *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*, ed. Timothy P. Jones (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 34.

⁵²Wayne Rice, *Reinventing Youth Ministry (Again): From Bells and Whistles to Flesh and Blood* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 144.

⁵³Mark Senter, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, Youth, Family, and Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 155.

the church. Other church and parachurch ministries have simply tried to attract large numbers of teenagers to establish their validity, keeping them distracted moving from one calendar event to another. In *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, Mark Yaconelli reflects on the development of what he calls ministries of distraction: “Like parents who pop in a video to entertain kids when relatives arrive, the idea is to keep the kids from running out, to keep them in the general vicinity of the church, to keep them happy until they are mature enough to join the congregation.”⁵⁴ The problematic nature of the issues encountered in the development of modern youth ministry have underscored the need to learn from historical and cultural trends and to return to biblical and theological fidelity. Stinson and Jones indicate the absence or lack of parental engagement in the children’s discipleship of this model:

In less than two centuries, the segmented-programmatic paradigm became, at least in people’s perceptions, “traditional.” It would be a flagrant overgeneralization to blame parental abdication on segmented church programming. At the same time, the growth of professional, age-focused ministers may have made it easier for parents to perceive that the training of their children in the fear of God must be someone else’s responsibility.⁵⁵

The historical shifts of recent centuries, especially the most recent, have shaped the structure of current ministry to generations in the local church. The resulting siloed approach to ministry in the church has manufactured programming that is contextualized to the culture of each generation, but often neglects the necessary interdependence needed amongst generations within the body of Christ. The rise of professionalization within youth ministry over the last century could further separate children from their parents and take over the role given to fathers and mothers, or it can be leveraged to equip parents to spiritually lead their homes in a way consistent with the mission of the church.

⁵⁴Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 44-45. See also Timothy Paul Jones, “Historical Contexts for Family Ministry,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 34.

⁵⁵Nelson and Jones, preface to *Trained in the Fear of God*, 20.

Practical Support

Practical research models show the importance of equipping parents to disciple their children. Parental influence throughout childhood and into adulthood is instrumental for the physical, social, and spiritual development of the next generation. Parenting is biblically grounded, historically demonstrated, and socially essential. Practically speaking, the role of parents is that of a necessary conduit through which hearts and minds are formed. George Barna notes that adults who are more likely to be successful in parenting view their role as a parent as more meaningful than their careers.⁵⁶ The foundational priorities of parents will be reflected in the schedules, actions, and conversations taking place in the home. For many homes, the lack of spiritual depth in children can be traced to a lack of intentionality from fathers and mothers who have prioritized other areas over Christian formation. Barna's research further indicates that many parents do not feel capable of providing ongoing spiritual guidance for their children because they are deficient in those same areas of spiritual maturity. The Barna Research Group suggests, "When it comes to raising children to be spiritually mature, the old adage, 'you can't give what you don't have,' is pertinent for millions of families."⁵⁷ A church that desires to minister to the next generation will invest in the daily life practices of the family.

Parental Time Investment

The practical outworking of equipping families beyond the walls of the church also means multiplying the amount of influence the church can provide by recognizing the amount of time parents have with their children. A church with extensive programming options for students still only influences a few hours a week. However, parents carry

⁵⁶Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, 24.

⁵⁷Barna Research Group, "Parents Accept Responsibility for Their Child's Spiritual Development But Struggle with Effectiveness," *Research Releases in Family & Kids*, May 6, 2003, accessed October 22, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness/>.

influence over a far greater span of time in the lives of their children. The opportunity for daily influence in the home can both affirm the limited teaching that is received in church gatherings and provide visual examples of lessons that children have yet to be taught by any adult. Wayne Rice reminds, “The spiritual formation of children wasn’t reserved for the Sabbath day or for special times of corporate worship in the temple or synagogue; it was to take place in the daily routines of life and home.”⁵⁸ A church that leverages the time and influence that parents carry will invest in the next generation in vastly more significant ways.

In order to maximize their ministry in the home, the church must help parents utilize time with their children with intention. Parents can use every day moments as they go throughout their days driving down the road, helping with homework, watching a movie, or putting their children to bed to have planned on spontaneous moments that serve to reinforce biblical truth in the heart of their children. Ann Fishel, professor at Harvard Medical School, declares, “Studies link regular family dinners with lowering a host of high risk teenage behaviors parents fear: smoking, binge drinking, marijuana use, violence, school problems, eating disorders, and sexual activity.”⁵⁹ Families that prioritize family gatherings and mealtimes most likely give importance to other healthy family activities that positively influence children. Sharing meals as a family has the opportunity to provide spiritual as well as physical nourishment as long as they plan for both purposes. In *Practical Family Ministry*, Matthew Thompson suggests, “There has to be intentionality behind the family meal. In a culture in which precious little of the family is held sacred, a family meal is one simple but profound means of protecting,

⁵⁸Rice, *Reinventing Youth Ministry (Again)*, 167.

⁵⁹Anne K. Fishel, *Home for Dinner: Mixing Food, Fun, and Conversation for a Happier Family and Healthier Kids* (New York: American Management Association, 2015), 17.

equipping, and ministering to your family.”⁶⁰ Families can set goals to use quality and quantity of time together to provide meaningful interaction between parents and children.

Church programming can do good for the spiritual development of children and adolescents while they attend church programming, but unintentionally harm their development outside the church building by taking the primary setting for spiritual training from the home. Strategic church programming would carefully consider how each ministry’s strategy either enhances or undermines the role of parents.

Parent-Child Relationship

Parents carry a naturally existing relationship with their children weaved together by the design of God. While relationships with adult leaders in the church can be meaningful, they are not a replacement for the relationship between parent and child that God himself has instituted. Timothy Paul Jones notes, “When a task is mostly about skills, it’s typically a good idea to call in a trained expert. In other areas of life, skills and training may be helpful, but the personal relationship matters more than the professional skills.”⁶¹ Because the unique nature of a parent-child relationship allows for deeper heart connections, the truths of the gospel can be communicated more deeply in action and word than in any other relationship over the course of the child’s life. Children that grow in an environment they feel is safe and receive unconditional love will be more likely to maintain strong heart connections with their parents. Research continues to indicate that family stability is inherently linked to positive outcomes for children and a regression in negative behavior in children.⁶² While healthy family relationships are truly important

⁶⁰Matthew Scott Thompson, “Family Meals, A Place of Spiritual Nourishment,” in *Practical Family Ministry: A Collection of Ideas for Your Church*, ed. Timothy P. Jones and John David Trentham (Nashville: Randall House, 2015), 50.

⁶¹Timothy P. Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 81.

⁶²Shannon E. Cavanagh and Aletha C. Huston, “Family Instability and

for emotional health and stability, parents have a far greater responsibility when it comes to their child's soul.

While the home carries the potential for ongoing influence, studies suggest that many homes do not take advantage of this opportunity, with most doing little to nothing to lead their homes spiritually.⁶³ Parents face a type of cognitive dissonance with the majority knowing they have a key role but many doing little to nothing to disciple their children. Research has shown that the majority of parents neglect their responsibility because they feel they lack the training and time to disciple their children.⁶⁴ In addition, misguided priorities may lead parents to forfeit spiritual leadership responsibilities in favor of other pursuits. Rival pursuits could include anything placed in higher priority than worship and discipleship in the home. Particularly prevalent in many homes in American culture are rival pursuits of economic prosperity, athletics, hobbies, and leisure activities. Additionally, parents may wrongly assume that their parental responsibilities are limited to the healthy physical development of their children. Although physical protection and provision are essential responsibilities, the parent effort to guide Christian formation is equally critical. Henry Cope laments,

The depersonalized home is the modern menace. We have come to think that provided you throw furniture and food together in proper proportions you can produce a capable life. So we depend on the home as a piece of machinery to do its work automatically, forgetting that the working activity is not the home but the family, not the furniture but people.⁶⁵

Many parents want to provide a perceived quality of life that is better than they experienced as children. However, the value of the family structure carries with it a meaning and

Children's Early Problem Behavior," *Social Forces* 85, no. 1 (2006): 551-81.

⁶³Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 99.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁵Henry Frederick Cope, *Religious Education in the Family* (Middletown, DE: Hard Press, 2006), 203.

function that far outweighs temporal care of providing food and clothing. The family is a conduit for spiritual formation that lasts for eternity. Because parents carry such a natural and ongoing influence in the life of their children, the nature of the relationship itself will effect the parent's ability to shape the heart of the child.

When parents develop close relationships with their children established upon trust, it will help their children to have a trusting relationship with Jesus Christ. Joyce Munroe rightly states, "Trust and love in the family are the cornerstone of spiritual nurture."⁶⁶ The nature of the relationships between parents and children can positively or negatively impact a child's view of God. David Miller observes, "Children who do not experience the love, acceptance, and discipline of proper parenting easily fail to realize and believe in God's love and acceptance, and thus reject restraints on behavior imposed by God and society."⁶⁷ Conversely, when children receive a godly image about God from the character of their parents, they will be in a better position to understand and embrace the Christian faith. Martinson writes, "It will only be possible for a child to grasp the meaning of 'Jesus loves you' and 'God forgives you' where love and forgiveness are part of daily life."⁶⁸

Children are meant to have a reflection of God's mystery in their presence everyday through their parent's marriage. Michael Wilder contends,

The family is a God-ordained launching pad for gospel ministry. The primary human relationship, second only to our relationship with God, is the covenantal union of a husband and wife. God gave Eve to Adam. In this act of grace, God

⁶⁶Joyce Huth Munro, "The Family: Cradle of Spiritual Development," *Review & Expositor* 75, no. 1 (1978): 45-55.

⁶⁷David R. Miller, "A Child's First God: Spiritual Development in Young Children," *The Fundamentalist Journal* 4, no. 2 (1985): 18.

⁶⁸Martinson, "The Role of Family," 396-404.

revealed his covenant-keeping character and created an analogy of his relationship with his people.⁶⁹

John Piper states, “The highest meaning and the most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenant relationship of Christ and his church on display. That is why marriage exists.”⁷⁰ The practical working of family life in the routines of daily life provides the opportunity to consistently represent the grace and truths of God before children.

However, in order for this priority to be a reality in any home, parents must maintain an intentional focus on the bigger picture and God’s plan for the family. Jones notes,

When the whole story of God frames every part of a family’s existence, parents don’t just see their children as sons and daughters. They also see their children as potential or actual brothers and sisters in Christ. When parents see their children not only as their children but also as their brothers and sisters, it changes everything.⁷¹

Models of Family Ministry

The practice of family ministry in the church has involved or excluded the role of parents to varying degrees. To understand the role of the church in relationship to the home, ministry leaders need to gain a better understanding of the broad range of ministry models regarding church and family ministry. In *Trained in the Fear of God*, Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones join a collaboration of authors to offer theological, historical, and practical insight into family ministry, including an overview of family ministry models. Each model containing a component of ministry to families has natural overlap in terms of programming and even philosophy. However, the models do provide their own set of unique attributes that would differentiate them from other approaches to

⁶⁹Michael S. Wilder, “Building and Equipping Missional Families,” in *Trained in the Fear of God*, 245.

⁷⁰John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 4.

⁷¹Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 71.

engaging the church and home. Both the commonalities and distinctiveness of each model help provide a better understanding of utilizing and evaluating a family ministry approach.

Segmented-programmatic model. The segmented-programmatic ministry model has been the dominant structure in most American churches for some time. Bryan Nelson and Timothy Paul Jones note, “In less than two centuries, the segmented-programmatic paradigm became, at least in people’s perceptions, traditional.”⁷² Elements of age segmentation can be helpful, particularly to allow for age specific instruction. However, when the segmented-programmatic model becomes the only structure for ministry within the church, parents may not see their role as the primary spiritual leaders in their homes. Similarly, the church may do well in providing biblical instruction to children and adolescents, but take a primary role in the Christian formation by ignoring the opportunity to invest in parents. Among the concerns of ignoring parents is that the church provides only a short-term ministry approach in its various age ministries, neglecting the lifelong relational connections within families that are natural conduits for evangelism and discipleship.

Family-based model. A family-based ministry model retains the age-segmented structures of ministry while including intergenerational activities and parental training.⁷³ In this model, the activities and ministry focus seek to empower parents within existing age-segmented structures. Congregations adopting this model may differ from one another, but all would seek to add programs and events that emphasize both parental responsibility and extended church family. Timothy Paul Jones explains the family-based ministry model with a helpful illustration. “One way to envision the family-based

⁷²Nelson and Jones, preface to *Trained in the Fear of God*, 20

⁷³Ibid., 25.

approach would be to think of a sunflower. Each petal remains separate, yet all the petals come together at the central disk.”⁷⁴ The model recognizes that churches need to do more for families and is adaptable in nearly every ministry context. However, in light of the current church and family culture, some ministry leaders question whether or not the model goes far enough to effectively accomplish its goals.⁷⁵ In addition, the responsibility for families will most often fall under the job of a youth or children’s pastor rather than a church-wide ministry strategy.

Family-integrated model. The family-integrated approach is noticeably unique in its structure and mindset as it represents a complete break from age-segmented structures. In a family-integrated church, all age specific ministries that would divide a family are effectively eliminated, leaving churches to do all ministries of worship, discipleship, and fellowship together at all times. While the extent of whole family activity may vary from church to church, the goal is to engage all generations in the family simultaneously. Youth and children’s ministries do not exist, at least not in a typical sense, within family-integrated churches. The inward focus does create ongoing problems with fulfilling the church’s calling for evangelism, as many youth do not have parents to reach and disciple them. The model is so far geared toward traditional and even healthy family structures that it loses its reach in homes where parents are physically or spiritually absent.⁷⁶ Going further, the discipleship structures may give parents the primary emphasis, but does so while overlooking the spiritual giftedness of the church gathered together as a family of faith.

⁷⁴Timothy Paul Jones, “Foundations for Family Ministry,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 43.

⁷⁵Jay Strother, “Possible Problems in the Family-Based Church,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 129.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 82.

Family-equipping model. A final model to consider brings together many of the best elements of previous models with a stronger comprehensive strategy for making disciples of the next generation by combining the influence of both church and home. A family-equipping model retains some age-organized ministry, but redirects the overall focus to involve parents in the discipleship process directly. Similarly, family-equipping involves providing intentional interaction between the generations. Children whose parents are not believers remain connected to spiritual guidance through relationships with mature believers within their congregation.

Timothy Paul Jones, who coined the term of “family-equipping” ministry, refers to effective family ministry as the “process of intentionally and persistently coordinating a ministry’s proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”⁷⁷ In this model, the congregation is driven to coordinate all ministries around a strategic emphasis that champions the role of both church and home. Jones illustrates the action of a family-equipping church as a river, with dual riverbanks representing the church and the home. The river represents the Christian formation of children and the critical role of church and home are demonstrated as “both banks are necessary for the river to flow forward with focus and power.”⁷⁸ Going further, Jones emphasizes that family-equipping ministry is not an end in of itself, but equipping households to fulfill God’s mission to the ends of the earth. Jones asserts, “Through family ministry, families become contexts where Christian community is consistently practiced with the goal of sharing the good news of God’s victory far beyond our families.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 33.

⁷⁸Nelson and Jones, preface to *Trained in the Fear of God*, 27.

⁷⁹Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 59.

Conclusion

Historical and sociological patterns, along with current observations, suggest existing structures in many churches do not support a biblical vision for parents, nor do they promote a sustainable ministry to the next generation. One specific survey of church parents with children under the age of 13 found that “eighty-one percent said no church leader had ever spoken to them about how they as parents could be involved in their children’s spiritual development.”⁸⁰ An intentional partnership between parents and the local church is necessary in order to make disciples of the next generation. Barna Research came to the conclusion that

ministries having the greatest success at seeing young people emerge into mature Christians, rather than contented churchgoers, are those that facilitate a parent-church partnership focused on instilling specific spiritual beliefs and practices in child’s life from a very early age.⁸¹

A family-equipping model includes the best elements of previous models while maintaining biblical faithfulness in its priorities for both the family and the community of faith. Churches must learn from historical, sociological, and practical research along with clear biblical directives in order to equip parents as spiritual leaders in their homes. In order to move beyond the flawed models promoted in recent decades, the church and home must come together around a common strategy that leverages the God given roles of both institutions to make disciples of the next generation.

⁸⁰Jones and Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry*, 71.

⁸¹Jay Strother, “Family-Equipping Ministry: Church and Home as Cochampions,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 143.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MINISTRY PROJECT

The process of implementation began after the primary research found in chapters 2 and 3 was complete. The project was conducted at East Maryville Baptist Church in Maryville, Tennessee, in the spring of 2017. This chapter describes the target group, survey, and week-by-week process for carrying out the project in the local church.

The Target Group

The target group in this project was designated parents of middle and high school students in grades 7 to 12 at EMBC. The congregation is diverse in age categories, allowing for high levels of participation from the initial four-week sermon series. According to attendance records, 48 parents participated in at least one week of the four-week study that followed. However, only 25 parents attended the sermon series and completed all four weeks of the group study. The scope of this project is an evaluation based on the 25 completed surveys.

Questionnaire

Research into family discipleship practices at the beginning and conclusion of the project were determined by administering the Family Discipleship Parent Survey (FDPS) to parents of teenagers.¹ The surveys were distributed to parents the Sunday before the four-week sermon series began. The FDPS employed questions from Timothy

¹See appendix 3 for the Family Discipleship Parent Survey (FDPS).

Paul Jones' *Family Ministry Field Guide*.² Parents utilized a four-digit code that was recorded on the FDPS to allow for matching and anonymity.

In addition to the FDPS, I developed the Family Discipleship Child Survey (FDCS)³ and distributed it to 50 teenagers in the student ministry. The FDCS was adapted from a portion of the FDPS and was utilized to provide insight to church staff and parents concerning the perception of family beliefs and practices from the vantage point of teenagers at EMBC. The additional insight gained from the FDCS helped to provide a more holistic overview of the level of family discipleship taking place in EMBC homes. The results of the FDCS were gathered and shared with parents in the church during the parent study group. Addressing common areas of concern in both the FDPS and FDCS allowed for better understanding of family discipleship perceptions and practices from both parents and their children.

The FDPS questions were divided into four parts to differentiate the type of questions for each section. The first section contained six questions. The first five utilized a “yes” or “no” response, and the sixth question had five different age ranges to choose from in the adjacent column. The intent of this section was to give insight concerning an individual’s Christian commitment. The FDPS participants were asked to share if they considered themselves a Christian, were baptized, and are members of EMBC. The opening portion of the FDPS also helped to confirm that the participants had children in the student ministry.

The second part of the FDPS consisted of ten questions that evaluated faith practices in the home. Several questions in this section focused on parental understanding of Christian formation in the hearts of their children. For example, parents were asked if they had a biblical understanding of how to raise their children and were aware of the

²Timothy P. Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 216-18.

³See appendix 4 for the Family Discipleship Child Survey (FDCS).

areas that their believing children struggle in sanctification. Similarly, other questions in this section measured how often parental beliefs translated into gospel-based conversations in the home and addressed their child's spiritual growth. I primarily used questions from this section of the FDPS to develop the questions on the FDCS. As previously noted, parental perception and practice concerning family discipleship can be better understood when compared to the perceptions of their children in the same areas. A six-point Likert scale was used to receive responses for each question in this portion of the FDPS.

The third part of the FDPS, questions 17 to 24, examined parental views of their own roles in family discipleship, especially in relation to the local church. Participants were asked concerning their views of where children should be receiving the majority of their Bible teaching and who should take the lead in the discipleship process. Additionally, the third portion of the FDPS gauged commitment to church attendance and participation compared to other activities such as sports. The information received from this section of questions provided further insight into how parental perceptions help guide family priorities. The distinct but overlapping roles of parents and the local church is best understood when the two are working in harmony. However, EMBC is similar to many local church contexts in that it faces significant challenges from the growing demands of sports and extracurricular activity schedules. The increasing commitment levels required to pursue academic or athletic excellence can influence some families to shift priorities in pursuit of school recognition or financial gain through scholarships. However, parents and their children have limited hours for their pursuits and will eventually be forced to choose how to prioritize their time. In order for the church and home to be partners in making disciples of the next generation, parents must recognize the importance of time invested in biblical teaching within both the church and home. Like the previous section, questions 17 to 24 utilized a six-point Likert scale.

The fourth and final portion of the survey included questions 25 to 32 and were included to measure the frequency of faith-based activities such as prayer, Scripture

reading, or evangelism. The questions in the final section sought to gauge how family time was being invested over a weekly or monthly basis. Parents were asked to estimate how often they engaged in activities such as family meals, faith discussions, or family devotions on a scale that ranged from “never” to “seven or more times.” The responses to these questions provided a more concrete look at family discipleship as it moved from perception to practices. While it is possible for a parent to state openly the importance of any number of pursuits, the more accurate read of family values is often reflected in the ongoing rhythms of activity within the home. The question regarding frequency of family meals is a helpful gauge to determine the pace of family activity and could detect where families are divided in their pursuits, robbing them of valuable time together.

Project Implementation Process

Preparation and Course Development: Week 1

During the opening week of the project, the staff met to discuss the scope and intention of each week in the process of equipping parents at EMBC. The staff included the senior pastor, associate pastor of administration and education, associate pastor of worship, associate pastor of students and families, children’s ministry director, and media and facilities director. Three members of the staff had former experience in ministry to students and families and all but one are currently raising children in their own home. The staff considered the goal of initiating or improving areas of family discipleship in the church and the student and children’s ministry leaders discussed how they have involved parents in the past.

The first two sermons of the Sunday morning preaching series were planned out this week. The first message came from Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-21 and was titled “As You Go.” The passage was preached with a specific emphasis on the roles of both the parent and the faith community in the discipleship of youth and children. Parents were given a specific challenge to initiate faith-based conversations each week and to look for

opportunities to respond to questions that their children have as they go through daily life in the home. The church also began what was known as a *Faith Talk* element in Sunday morning worship. The *Faith Talk* was a simple question drawn from the passage that parents could discuss with their family as they left the worship gathering.

The second message was based on Psalm 127 and titled “A Firm Foundation.” The message emphasized the biblical call to build family values and priorities on a biblical foundation. Children, who are portrayed as arrows in a quiver (Ps 127:4), were given to parents in order to be sent out on mission for God’s glory. The sermon called parents to consider their family priorities in light of their weekly routines and schedules. Parents were challenged to clearly communicate the purpose of their family by discussing shared priorities with their children. In addition, parents were encouraged to not merely communicate their priorities verbally, but demonstrate them in their actions.

Preparation and Course Development: Week 2

During week 2 of the project, the third sermon was constructed based on Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and was titled “The Gospel at Home.” The emphasis of this message was to help families understand how marriage and family reflect the gospel in daily life at home. Specifically, husbands and wives are to reflect the relationship of Christ and the church (Eph 5:22) and parents communicate the gospel in how they raise their children (Eph 6:4). During this week, the first two sermons were presented to the church’s pastors for approval. This group consisted of the senior pastor, an associate pastor, and a former senior pastor of EMBC who still attended the church. The sermons were evaluated using an evaluation rubric⁴ and discussed during church staff meetings.

⁴See appendix 1 for Evaluation Rubric.

**Preparation and Course
Development: Week 3**

During week 3 of the project, the fourth sermon was written and the third sermon was presented to the pastors for approval. The focus of the fourth message came from Psalm 78 and was titled “A Vision for Future Generations.” The message centered on a biblical vision for Christ-centered parenting and intergenerational community in the local church. Specifically, the message called Christian parents in the congregation to embrace a shift in priorities and practices in their homes. In addition, believers of all ages were challenged to “tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord” (Ps 78:4). On this week, the third sermon in the series was presented to the pastors for approval.

**Preparation and Course
Development: Week 4**

In week 4 of the project, the first two lessons of the parenting study were developed. The focus for these lessons was to take the biblical mandates from the morning sermons and walk through them in a historical, cultural, and practical context. The church staff recognized that many parents in the congregation did not understand how to carry out the role of primary spiritual influencer in the lives of their children. Similarly, the church’s leaders and teachers recognized they had never adequately communicated how historical and cultural influences may have affected the nature of homes today. The group study met on Sunday evenings after the morning sermon series and helped parents to have better understanding of how to raise their families biblically. The first lesson was titled “What Families Need,” and the focus was on parental priorities in culture compared to the scriptural calling God has placed on families. While the first lesson provided insight into cultural influences on the family, the second lesson, titled “Back to the Future,” communicated the historical influences on both church and family. Additionally, the fourth sermon was presented to the pastors for approval.

Preparation and Course Development: Week 5

In week 5 of the project, the third lesson was prepared. After the first two weeks' studies provided deeper insight into the historical and cultural influences on the church and home, the third lesson, titled "The Gospel at Home," sought to bring practical application of gospel truth into the daily routines of families at EMBC. The most accurate representation of character, including strengths and weaknesses, is expressed in daily life with one's families. For this reason, it is critical that parents and their children learn to express biblical commands in the home.

In addition, lessons 1 and 2 were presented to an expert panel for review. The expert panel consisted of three pastors who have had extensive experience working with middle and high school students, parents, and families. All members of the expert panel had previously earned a Master's Degree in Christian Education. Likewise, each member had shown interest or had experience in developing family ministry in the local church and had read multiple books on the subject of parental responsibility in the home. The first member of the expert panel served in a nearby local church as a family pastor and had oversight in ministry to both youth and children. In addition, he is married years and currently raising two elementary age daughters. The second member of the expert panel had served as a student and family pastor in local churches for over a decade. He also had experience in organizing student and family events for both his church and local Baptist association. He and his wife had been married for nine years and are raising two children in their home. The third member of the expert panel had served in church ministry roles to youth and children as well as a local Christian school. He currently serves as a local church senior pastor and desires to lead his church to equip parents and families. He and his wife had been married for over twenty years and have two children in the home as well as two grown children. I met with the group to review the material and discuss the teaching material along with communicating through e-mail over the remaining weeks of their involvement in the project.

**Preparation and Course
Development: Week 6**

In week 6, the fourth lesson was written and titled “Connecting Church and Home.” This group study helped parents know how they can partner with EMBC in an effort to disciple their children. Specific emphasis was given on how the church can resource and equip parents to lead their families in prayer and times of devotion. Parents also learned how they could engage in the ministry of the church as a family with opportunities in family missions. The church also began promotion of the Sunday morning sermon series through cards and announcements. Finally, the third lesson was presented to the expert panel for approval. The panel provided feedback that helped shape the discussion questions utilized in lesson 3 by rewording some statements to be more inclusive of single parents and children being raised by grandparents.

**Preparation and Course
Development: Week 7**

In week 7 of the project, the FDPS was given to parents and students in order to evaluate the current perceptions and practices regarding discipleship in the home. The FDPS was given to parents the week before the sermon series began to be preached on Sunday mornings with the intention to distribute another FDPS after the conclusion of the parent group study. Similarly, the FDCS was given to teenagers age 13 to 18 in order to provide further insight to the church leadership regarding the type and frequency of discipleship practices taking place in the home. Both the FDPS and FDCS used a Likert scale to gauge the extent of parental involvement in activities such as prayer, Scripture study, faith conversations, and service. The fourth lesson was also given to the expert panel for review. The panel provided helpful feedback regarding ways to encourage parents to continue in faith practices in the home through the final parent group study. The group also sharpened the final lesson by prompting a discussion of what was next for parents to look forward to in regard to church and family partnership.

Implementation: Week 8

Week 8 of the project was the beginning of the implementation period. I preached the first sermon, titled “As You Go,” on a Sunday morning for the entire congregation. Other elements, such as testimonies and videos, were included in the worship service to help the congregation consider parental responsibility for faith training in the home. The scripture utilized in the sermon (Deut 6:1-9, 20-21) set the tone for the entirety of the series with a plea for the sufficiency of Scripture in both the church and the home. Parents were encouraged to take moments throughout daily life to impress the truth of God’s Word on the hearts of their children. I included a challenge for parents to consider the power of symbols in their home through objects and milestone moments. The use of symbols, along with conversations taking place throughout each day, can continuously point children to the truth of the gospel. I experienced a significant amount of feedback from parents within the congregation after preaching the first sermon. A few parents were convicted by the clear calling God had for them and shared how they had missed so many opportunities to instill biblical truth in the hearts of their children. However, these same parents also expressed that they were encouraged and motivated by grace rather than guilt. In other words, they recognized that the Lord must first do a work in their life as parents, and then they must continually trust the Spirit’s work through them in the lives of their children.

Implementation: Week 9

In week 9, I preached the second sermon, titled “A Firm Foundation.” The instruction given in Psalm 127 clearly us that “unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Ps 127:1). I encouraged parents to consider that their actions in parenting could be driven more by the way they were themselves parented, or even by the surrounding culture, than by God’s Word. The mission calling of Psalm 127 was also a reminder to each parent that their children are not their own, but serve a unique purpose in God’s plan. Finally, parents were challenged to have a plan when it comes to the

direction and goals they set for their families. Parents can err in neglect by having a lack of boundaries on one end and err in being overly protective by creating a social bubble on the other. I took time to ask the congregation to consider how their family has fallen under spiritual attack in recent years and encouraged them to cling to God's Word as a strong foundation for their families.

During this week, the church staff met and briefly discussed the project and conversations taking place in the congregation regarding the emphasis on family discipleship. The staff gauged how parents had responded on the FDPS and how the church was responding to the sermons. After the second sermon, church pastors offered to meet and counsel with any parents or families who desired to make any changes in their family's direction. The most common and helpful response from parents during this week came from those who recognized that they were communicating unhealthy priorities in their homes.

Implementation: Week 10

In week 10, I preached the third sermon, titled "The Gospel at Home." The primary scripture for this sermon was found in Ephesians 5:22-6:4. The gospel provides eternal value to the believer, but must not be relegated to a subject matter discussed only when at corporate worship in the church. Husbands and wives are to reflect Christ and the church in daily life. Spouses live out the gospel in their homes not only in front of each other, but especially before their children. Marriage provides children an up close and personal glimpse of God's love and covenantal faithfulness. Additionally, Scripture gives instruction for children to honor their parents and for parents, and for fathers to bring their children up "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:1-4). The sermon drew application to how biblical commands to demonstrate patience, love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace are to be expressly lived out in the context of families and in the church body.

Parental response after the third sermon fluctuated between a variety of points covered in the passage. The most significant conversations came from parents who sought to have a healthier marriage that can provide a stable home environment for their children and help communicate the gospel to them. One woman confessed to putting the wants of her children above the needs of her husband. Another couple with young children desired to prioritize a healthy marriage by working on their communication with one another. In this particular case, the children were causing division between the parents, resulting in ongoing arguments over parenting styles. I met with the parents during the following week to discuss communication in their home and provided some material for further study.

Implementation: Week 11

In week 11, I preached the fourth and final Sunday morning sermon, titled “A Vision for Future Generations.” The sermon, based on Psalm 78:1-8, called for believers in the congregation to see their responsibility to future generations and pass on their faith to the youth and children of EMBC. The sermon also emphasized the centrality of God’s word as a standard of truth both in the church and in the home.

The feedback and conversation following the fourth and final message came primarily from church ministry leaders. The message demonstrated how the biblical role of families in the home was rooted in the larger family of faith in the local church. The challenge to EMBC was for adults from multiple generations to see their responsibility to future generations. A significant aspect of the sermon was a call for intergenerational unity through worship, service, and prayer. The follow-up to the sermon series included a plan to partner students with adult prayer partners across multiple generations in the coming months.

Following the final sermon preached in the Sunday morning worship gathering, I made final preparations for the parent group study that was set to begin the following Sunday evening. The church staff met to select a designated area for the group and briefly discussed the structure and format of the meetings. Because of a new Sunday night

schedule in the church, parents were able to gather for two hours in the evening for the study. However, the schedule allowed for two short breaks lasting fifteen minutes, meaning the time spent teaching and discussing the material covered roughly one and a half hours each week. During the breaks, EMBC provided drinks and snacks in a nearby foyer. This break time addition proved significant as many of the parents continued in conversation about the material during the break periods.

Implementation: Week 12

In week 12 of the project, I began teaching the parent group study on Sunday evenings. The attendance was better than the church staff expected with several grandparents and those who were newly married without children participating in the study. In all, the group consisted of 60 different participants of which 48 were parents, 8 were grandparents, and 4 were married without children. While I did not include those who were not currently parents in the FDPS, their presence and input were beneficial to the conversations that took place each week. The group began with scripture reading and prayer, followed by teaching the material, and concluded in discussion groups before a break or dismissal.

The opening study was titled “What Families Need,” and focused on the state of families at EMBC and in the surrounding community. I used personal examples to explain how culture has set up a false standard of parenting. All too often parents feel as though they must carry a certain perception from their peers in order to be considered good parents. The false expectations resting on many parents’ shoulders cause them to parent out of fear or in an attempt to be affirmed by others in public and on social media. However, if Christ is to be central in homes, then parents must accept a different standard by giving priority to teaching and training in the gospel every day. I also shared a warning concerning the risks of neglecting Christian formation in the home. The gospel must be intentionally taught in Christian homes or parents risk missing a fundamental aspect of their calling. Mack Stiles communicates this message concisely when stating,

“The gospel is accepted. The gospel is assumed. The gospel is lost.”⁵ Before dismissing, parents were asked to consider what obstacles stood in the place of having Christ keep first place in their homes.

I shared some FDCS results with the parents to let them know what their children perceived to be the priorities communicated in their homes. I briefly shared the entirety of the FDCS before focusing on three key responses for discussion.⁶ The three areas I chose to focus on were relevant to the teaching that week and, perhaps even more importantly, demonstrated a potential difference in perception between teenagers and their parents. The first discussion point I shared centered around the FDCS responses to church attendance. Teenagers at EMBC were asked to gauge how important corporate worship attendance was for their family. The question and student responses were presented to the parents in figure 1.

The analysis was significant because it varied from parent responses on the FDPS. Parents were more inclined to believe they were making Sunday worship gatherings a high priority in their responses, with only one out of the twenty-five responses on the FDPS disagreeing. While many of the teenagers affirmed the parental priority of Sunday worship gatherings, their perception did not communicate it as strongly as the parents. The first point led to a discussion of how parents can say that church worship gatherings are a high priority for their families, but if they miss frequently because of sports or other activities, their actions communicate a different message. Parents acknowledged this struggle and discussed the danger of overly busy schedules.

⁵J. Mack Stiles, *Marks of the Messenger: Knowing, Living, and Speaking the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 40.

⁶See appendix 7 for FDCS Results.

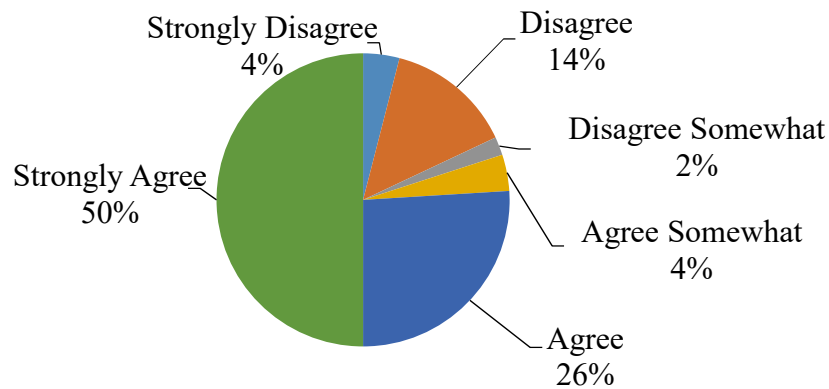


Figure 1. Response to: My parents make attendance of Sunday worship gatherings a high priority for our entire family over other events and activities

The second discussion point I shared centered on parental knowledge of what areas their child may struggle in their Christian growth. Parents and their children in the youth ministry answered a question involving awareness of personal struggles on a Likert scale. I shared the students’ responses, as indicated in figure 2, with parents in the group.

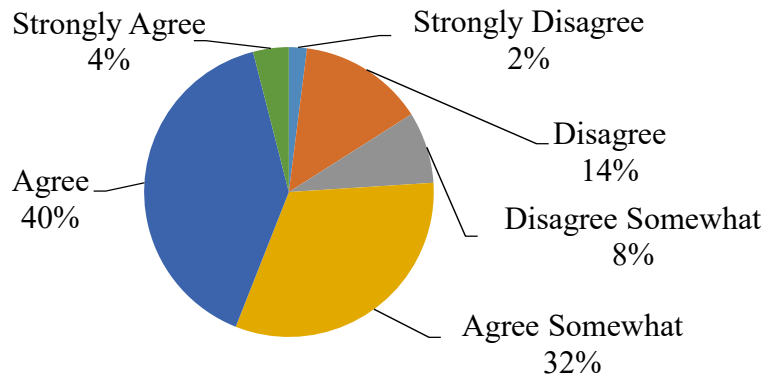


Figure 2. Response to: My parents know the areas in which I struggle in my Christian growth

The second discussion point led to a productive discussion in the parent group. Similar to the first point, the FDPS revealed that more parents felt as though they knew their child’s spiritual struggles. The difference in perception could be influenced by a variety of factors, but the variance led to a healthy discussion on openness and vulnerability

in the home. I shared the importance of heart connections between parents and their children along with ideas on how to build or repair their relationship with their child.

The third discussion point I shared with the parent group concerned the nature of faith-based conversations in the home. Specifically, parents and students were asked to respond to a question about parental initiative to discuss what God is teaching them from Scripture. A Likert scale was used to gauge responses and I shared the following statement and figure 3 from the FDCS with the parent group.

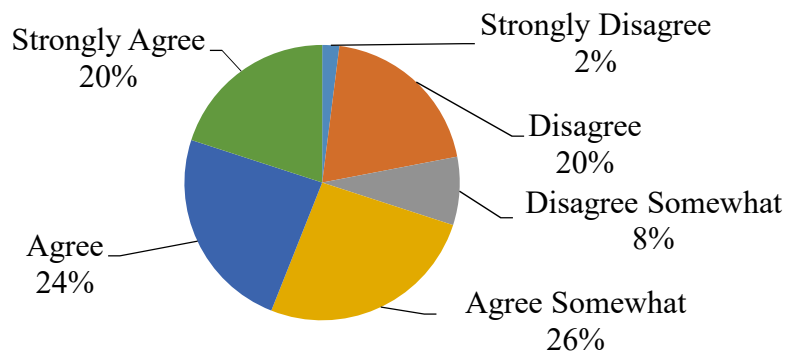


Figure 3. Response to: My parents talk frequently about what God is teaching them from the Bible

The statement and responses varied somewhat from the parent FDPS, but the benefit in this discussion point rested in the conversation that followed. I shared specific ways that parents could initiate or respond to opportunities to share what God has been teaching them from Scripture. Many parents admitted that they had not consistently initiated these conversations with their children. However, the parents in the group recognized that they must first commit to growing in their own Christian walk and then take advantage of opportunities to share God’s truth with their children.

Overall, the feedback from the teaching sessions was much less formal in conversational tone compared to the sermon series, but just as meaningful. Parents felt as though they could speak casually about the material rather than coming in response to a specific point of conviction as they did more frequently with the sermon series. Many

parents spoke about the FDCS responses and felt they helped show what areas needed to be addressed in the church and home. Several parents expressed a sense of thankfulness and relief in the discussion that acknowledged the false expectations parents face each day. It was clear that many fathers, and especially mothers, had become overly self-critical because of the false expectations setup by social media. A few mothers in the group gave specific examples of feeling inadequate when viewing the activities and achievements shared by others on social media platforms. The common temptation the parents experienced came from comparing their daily life against the highlights of their peers. The false expectations of parenting along with the temptation of comparison led some parents to reconsider their personal social media interaction in order to set a healthier example for their children.

The conversations from both the sermon series and parent study group helped guide subsequent lessons. For example, I was aware of specific needs in the room based on conversations following the sermon series. Additionally, the ongoing feedback from both church staff and parents helped guide the presentation of the material by providing voluntary testimonies and personal examples from members of EMBC to illustrate specific points of application. For example, two families who began doing family devotions following the sermon series shared their experiences and struggles. In turn, I was able to utilize their testimony as an example and a source of encouragement to others as part of the parent group study.

Implementation: Week 13

In week 13 of the project, I taught lesson 2 of the parent group study. The second study was titled “Back to the Future,” and focused on historical influences on the church and home as well as how parents can reclaim biblical training in their families. The historical background of this lesson considered the practices of the early church in family discipleship, the significance of historical events such as the Industrial Revolution and World War II, and the development of youth ministry in recent decades. The brief

overview of the historical shifts utilized Timothy Paul Jones' book, *Family Ministry Field Guide*.⁷ The study also revisited Psalm 78 from the morning sermon series in order to lead into discussion on how parents can faithfully communicate the gospel over multiple generations.

Also included in this lesson was a discussion on discipleship, with a specific emphasis on transitioning children to adulthood. The historical information regarding the development of the modern teenager transitioned to a biblical discussion on developing maturity and responsibility in the lives of teenagers at EMBC. Many parents in the discussion time lamented their observation that many young men and women in their early to mid-twenties appeared no closer to adulthood than in their teenage years. This section of teaching also utilized information and concepts from *Accelerate* by Richard Ross.⁸ Parents discussed ways they can invest in building responsibility in their teenagers and help them become mature followers of Christ. A key component in the interaction this week came from the fact that many parents shared a common struggle in the area of helping their children move toward adulthood. Parents realized they were not alone in their struggle and were able to pray empathetically with one another.

The material from the first week of the parent groups study was made available temporarily online. The following weeks was also placed on a temporary website page in order to allow accessibility to the material for those who could not attend a particular week of the study. The sermon series was also available for temporary audio download or in DVD format, by request.

⁷Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*.

⁸Richard Ross, *Accelerate: Parenting Teenagers toward Adulthood: How Not to Find Your 25-Year-Old Still Living in Your Basement* (Bloomington, IN: Crossbooks, 2013).

Implementation: Week 14

In week 14, I taught the third lesson, titled “The Gospel at Home,” to the parent group study. In this lesson, parents were taught specific ways they could incorporate biblical teaching in the routines of daily life. Specifically, parents discussed the following seven factors of Christian formation in children:

1. Faith Talks
2. Faith Walks
3. Faith Processes
4. Parental Guidance at Home
5. Parental Engagement in the Church
6. Larger Family of Faith
7. Family Worship

The first three factors are what Timothy Paul Jones refers to as faith talks, faith walks, and faith processes.⁹ These three factors help provide ongoing faith formation in the home through intentional conversations and family activity. The fourth factor of parental guidance in the home reminds parents they must set boundaries and build trust in the home through healthy heart connections with their children. The fifth factor of parental engagement encourages parents to be closely involved in the life and ministry of the local church. Research has shown that children who have parents directly involved in ministry opportunities in their local church, rather than merely attending occasional worship services, were more likely to remain involved in the church during adulthood.¹⁰ The sixth factor, the larger family of faith, referred parents to opportunities to involve others in the discipleship of their children. Additional adult influences may include Christian grandparents within the family along with other committed adult followers of Christ within the local church. These adults and senior adults can have a significant impact on the faith formation of adolescents through their example, wisdom, and mentoring.

⁹Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 151-67.

¹⁰Steve R. Parr and Tom Crites, *Why They Stay: Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Investments That Keep Children and Teens Connected to the Church for a Lifetime* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow, 2015), 114.

The seventh factor of family worship refers to the need for parents to have some level of family worship and devotion time that allows for direct teaching and discussion of God's truth. The use of family worship can take different forms, but most times includes some combination of scripture reading, prayer, sharing, or even singing. Family worship may look significantly different for each family depending on the ages of their children, but parents must utilize it as an intentional and ongoing factor in the Christian formation of children and teenagers.

The other portion of the study focused on the heart of the parent and the child. Parents were first encouraged to be aware of the sin struggles in their own heart and how those areas can impact the way they engage their children. Similarly, parents were challenged to consider the condition of their child's heart and not settle for mere outward conformity. Parents who invest in keeping strong heart connections with their children will have a direct path to communicate biblical truth. Jesus Christ transforms the heart of both the parent and the child when they believe the gospel and begin the process of living out their new identities faithfully in the home.

Finally, it is important to note that this week carried the greatest amount of parent feedback from the entire parent group study. I continued in personal conversations with parents and watched them interact with one another for almost another hour after the group dismissed. I believe this came from a combination of the material and discussion in the study and the number of weeks that parents had to engage and build relationships with one another to this point. I later learned that some parents engaged one another outside of the study because of their time building a relationship in the same discussion group. The interpersonal relationships that began around the material will be one of the longest lasting impacts of the study.

Implementation: Week 15

During week 15 of the project, I taught the fourth and final lesson of the parent group study. This study was called "Connecting Church and Home," and focused on how

EMBC can partner with parents to help them disciple their children. In this session, I expressed the need for both parents and the local church to use the same playbook, meaning both of these God-ordained institutions share the same strategy to make disciples of the next generation.

The final teaching session was significant because it gave further opportunity to share resources and ideas with parents. Parents learned about ongoing opportunities at the church where they could serve in ministry alongside their children. In order to help parents who may feel ill equipped to lead their families spiritually, parents learned of the development of a resource library section at EMBC that would be available beginning that night. The resource library was setup to help provide ongoing tools to parents to help them guide their families. I also shared the student ministry core values, which were developed to communicate the ministry's priorities.

In addition to the items in the resource library, I also placed a number of resources on the church website to make them more accessible for parents on the go. Some of the website resources included a family devotional, dinner table discussions, and a rites of passage experience for parents to walk through with their children around each birthday celebration. Finally, we began a bimonthly parent e-mail that included helpful church information along with a devotion designed to equip them in some area of parenting.

I distributed and collected the FDPS at the conclusion of the final week of the parent group study. In addition, I distributed and collected the parent study survey.¹¹ This survey was optional for parents to take after the final parent group study dismissed and generated only a handful of responses. The goal of the parent study survey was to provide some immediate insight to the church pastors and student ministry leadership regarding parental feedback regarding the study group. The participant feedback in the parent study survey affirmed that many parents recognized the need for the study and

¹¹See appendix 5 for the Parent Study Survey.

sought to apply aspects of the material in their own home. I shared highlights of the parent study survey with the staff the following week. A father of two teenage children used the space in the comments and below the survey to write his appreciation, citing specific ways he would apply the teaching in the coming weeks. A single mother had taken a devotional Bible from the resource display and shared how she planned to begin utilizing it the following week now that she felt more confident to disciple their own children. She also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to build relationships with other mothers during the group discussion.

Follow-Up: Week 16

During week 16, I distributed and collected the FDPS post test and compared pre- and post-survey results. The pre- and post-surveys scores of the FDPS were compared using a t-test for dependent samples. I expressed my thanks to the parents of EMBC who attended, especially those who came to all four sermons and parent group studies in addition to completing the FDPS.

Conclusion

The project implementation went smoothly overall, with the exception of the challenges noted in the implementation period. As stated in chapter 1, a key limitation would be that the effectiveness of the study would be limited to parents who did not attend all four sermons or all four sessions of the parent group study. In order to overcome this limitation, the material was made accessible for the duration of the study online or, in the case of the sermon series, in DVD format by request. I corresponded with three different parents online through e-mails regarding the material they missed from one or more weeks of the study. Beyond that, not many parents accessed the material through the website or DVD. Once the implementation period concluded and the FDPS responses were collected, the parent group study material was removed from the website, but the DVDs were still made available upon request.

The delimitations considered in the first chapter involved the short time frame of the study and the scope of the study being limited to EMBC. The FDPS was only distributed to parents who participated in the four sermons and four sessions of the parent group study. While the narrow focus of the FDPS was necessary in order to determine the effectiveness of the material, the parents who attended other sessions still benefited from the study. Several parents requested the material to be presented again so they could continue through any missed sessions as well as have the opportunity to invite parents from neighboring churches to attend. The church staff discussed this possibility along with the option of doing a local associational church event and consolidating much of the parent group study material into a one day conference.

The preaching of the sermon series to the entire church body and the teaching of the parent group studies, while covering the same subject matter, utilized differing settings to accomplish the project's goal. Both settings dealt at some level with the cognitive, affective, and volitional aspects of responding to God's Word. The distinctive appeal to thoughts, feelings, and actions undoubtedly overlapped on a number of levels, but each carried some areas of distinction. The preaching series sought to exegete key passages of Scripture in an effort to appeal to the heart and imagination of parents and families. While the sermons included specific points of application, they did not do so with as much specificity as the parent group study material. Conversely, the parent group study did not seek to convince parents of their spiritual role as much as the sermons, but was instead directed at equipping parents with the wisdom and practical examples needed to spiritually lead their homes. As a result, the sermon series and parent group study were designed to work together to equip parents at EMBC to disciple their children.

The insight gathered from the target group in the questionnaire helped to guide the teaching of the curriculum. The FDPS and FDCS revealed some specific areas to discuss regarding family practices. In addition, the sermon evaluation rubric, and the parent study curriculum evaluation rubric helped guide any final changes to the material

used in the sermon series and parent group study. For example, the sermon evaluation rubric included a suggestion for some further examples to be used based on the church context at EMBC. I incorporated this recommendation by giving examples of challenges common to parents in the Maryville community regarding athletics and academics. Similarly, the parent group study curriculum evaluation included suggestions for specific points of application in the context of EMBC. I responded to these suggestions by including parent testimonies to supplement the material. I also targeted specific resources to provide parents assistance based on the needs raised from reviewing the FDPS.

I have shared the details of the project in order to provide insight into the process for planning and implementation. The sixteen weeks were designed and carried out in order to equip the parents of EMBC to disciple their children. In chapter 5, I move to an evaluation of the project.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

A sufficient evaluation of the ministry project is necessary to determine its overall effectiveness. The evaluation tools detailed in chapter 1 were used to measure the stated goals in relation to their outcomes. In short, the project met the stated goals and purpose as the following sections demonstrate. In addition to evaluating the goals, the strengths and weaknesses of the project must be considered along with further reflection on the project's overall ministry implications.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of this project was to equip the parents of East Maryville Baptist Church to disciple their children. The process for meeting the goal was pursued through an intentional sixteen-week process of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The effectiveness of the project is demonstrated through the evaluation of the four stated goals. The purpose of equipping parents to disciple their children was measured by comparing results on the Family Discipleship Practices Survey (FDPS). A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the scores on the FDPS before and after the sermon series and parent group study. The result revealed that the mean score of the FDPS after the four Sunday sermons and four parent group study sessions ($m = 106.2$), is greater than the mean score before ($m = 97.8$). Overall, the sermon series and parent group study at EMBC made a statistically significant difference in parental understanding and practices ($t_{(23)}=3.32, p<.003$). The statistical difference is further demonstrated in the paired-samples t-test.¹

¹See appendix 6.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Goal 1: Assessment of Current Practices

The first goal was to assess the current discipleship practices among families with teenagers who are members of EMBC. This goal was accomplished by utilizing the FDPS. In addition, the FDCS was given to fifty teenage students who were active at EMBC. The survey results from the FDCS were shared with the parents and other church members attending the parent group study. In some cases, this comparison was beneficial and shed light on parent versus teen perceptions. For example, when asked about making attendance of Sunday worship gatherings a high priority over other events and activities, all of the FDPS participants answered between “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree.” When given the same question to the sample of fifty teenagers, at least one in five of them disagreed. The FDCS was given out to all the teenagers of the FDPS participants, not only to those who attended all four sermons and four parent group studies. Although this difference does not guarantee that the teenagers taking the FDCS were in the same household as the parents taking the FDPS, the variance in some questions did provide additional insight into general parent attitudes and actions. As previously noted, the FDPS suggested that EMBC parents were better motivated and equipped to make disciples of their children following the sermon series and parent group study.

Goal 2: Develop and Preach Sermon Series

The second goal was to develop and preach a four-week sermon series to raise awareness of parental responsibility and develop interest in the group study. This goal was accomplished through a great amount of prayer and diligent study of Scripture. A sermon evaluation rubric was given to three pastors to give feedback on the four sermons.² The evaluation rubric yielded favorable results as all the pastors scored the sermons above the 90 percent required level. All the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the

²See appendix 1 for the sermon evaluation rubric.

sufficiency level. In addition to the evaluation rubric, the pastors attended the preaching of the four sermons and provided helpful feedback each week.

Collectively, the pastors gave very positive feedback of the sermon series and were encouraged to see a strong response during public invitations inviting families to respond by seeking prayer or counsel. The pastors also provided some helpful recommendations to sharpen the sermon series. For example, the senior pastor of EMBC recommended that the sermons begin or end with a brief overview to allow the congregation to understand the scope of the entire series. The overview helped make the series more cohesive and built anticipation for the next scripture and message. The pastor over educational ministries at EMBC made a helpful suggestion to make sure the sermon series continuously referred to the parent group study that would begin on Sunday evenings. The effort to connect the sermon series with the parent group study made the congregation aware of an immediate opportunity to be further equipped in the area of family discipleship. The worship pastor was able to add elements in the worship service during the sermon series that included intergenerational singing and utilized a parent leading worship alongside their child. The added worship elements helped to illustrate the message of the sermon series throughout the morning worship gatherings.

Goal 3: Develop Curriculum

The third goal was to develop a four-week group study to equip parents to disciple their children. This goal was measured by an expert panel of three students and family ministry pastors, who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, scope, and applicability of the teaching material and resources.³ This goal was successfully met as the response on the evaluation rubric exceeded the sufficient level. Considering the responses of the expert panel along with the interaction from the studies themselves, I believe the parent group study was effective in motivating and equipping parents to be

³See appendix 2 for the parent study evaluation rubric.

the primary disciple makers of their children. The studies helped provide a framework and practical ideas for parent-led discipleship in the home as well as church-driven equipping of families at EMBC.

Goal 4: Equip Parents

The fourth goal was to equip parents to disciple their children by teaching the study to a group of parents at EMBC. As noted, the FDPS demonstrated that the teaching material succeeded in equipping parents to more effectively serve as disciple makers in their own homes. The material was helpful to participants on a number of levels, including the teaching and discussion that took place in the group study as well as take-home elements for parents to incorporate into their family routines. The study also provided an opening to engage multiple parents and adult church leaders as part of a larger strategy for family discipleship at EMBC.

A critical factor to understand in the FDPS results is the fact that the church has been experiencing a movement toward family equipping ministry for the past few years. I contend that the results of the FDPS would have shown a far greater statistical significance if not for the fact that I have been engaging in a family equipping ministry model at EMBC for a few years prior to the sermons and parent group study. Based on conversations with parents at EMBC, the sermons and study made the most significant difference for parents new to the church. Parents who have been members of EMBC during the recent shifts toward a family equipping ministry model were given new ideas and resources, but were not hearing of the need for family discipleship for the first time. Conversely, the FDPS results were helped by the fact that many of the parents who participated in the entirety of the project, including the four sermons and four parent group studies, represented newer families to the ministry. The parent group study averaged 48 participants each week, but only 25 of the parents attended all the sessions. In reviewing the FDPS results of parents with teenage children who did not attend all the sermons and study group sessions, I found that many responded that they were already leading their

homes in a biblical manner. Observation suggests that parents who have attended EMBC regularly for a few years have benefited from previous efforts in the area of equipping families. I heard from many of these parents at the conclusion of the study that they enjoyed what they had heard, even though some portions served primarily as a helpful reminder for what they have already been taught in recent years through the student ministry. Still, the studies provided tools for parents in their discipleship process along with serving as a watershed moment of sorts for several parents who had become largely disengaged from the process of Christian formation in their children.

Strengths of the Project

The project demonstrated several strengths that have enhanced a family equipping ministry model within EMBC. First, the material was biblically sound and well received by the participants. While the teaching sessions began by considering and acknowledging the cultural and historical influences upon the family and the church, the last two sessions focused exclusively on how the gospel impacts daily life in the home. In addition, the sessions increasingly shared how the church can partner with families to make disciples of the next generation. The preaching of the sermons and teaching of the parent group lessons also coincided well. The Sunday morning sermons communicated biblical truth while addressing home life at the level of understanding and motivation, while the four parent group study sessions also engaged the intellect, but moved into a deeper level of practical application. Furthermore, the material made a statistically significant difference in family practices.

Second, the project provided helpful opportunities, not only for biblical training in family discipleship, but also for parents to have meaningful interaction with one another. Parents are so often in need of a community that can provide wisdom and encouragement, especially in the many difficult moments that come with parenting. The format of the parent study group allowed for intentional interaction between parents each week in the small group format. The discussion parents experienced in the small group time carried

over into conversations before and after the session and even during breaks. Casual observation would suggest that new friendships were formed between some parents and others deepened in fellowship. Perhaps the most significant aspect of parental interactions was that this fellowship deepened not only around the common challenges and experiences of parenting, but also around a stronger understanding of the gospel in daily life. In other words, parents were brought together around the person of Christ, rather than connecting only over common interests.

Third, the project paired the biblical role of parents with the equipping role of the church. It is possible to err in one of two extremes in church and family ministry. On the one hand, parents can drop off their children at their local church with full expectation that the church will provide everything that is needed spiritually to help their children grow. On the other hand, churches can rightfully convey to parents that they are to be primary disciple makers in their homes, but fail to offer any support or guidance in the process. A unified strategy that utilizes the influence of both the church and home is necessary in making disciples of youth and children. The project's sermons and lessons provided a biblical framework for fathers and mothers to understand their calling while also urging the church to serve as an extended family of faith that trains and equips parents. The study, along with subsequent church ministry programs, paired both the biblical role of parents with the equipping function of the church.

Finally, the project included a sermon series and parent group study that sought to not only provide instruction and motivation, but practical tools to achieve the goals set forth. For example, rather than merely telling parents to disciple their children because the Bible says to do so, the implementation of family equipping ministry meant finding practical ways to assist parents in spiritually leading their homes. A display table of resources was featured to align with the topics being covered in the parent group study. In addition, the church website underwent a series of updates to provide resource help for parents seeking to lead in family devotions. Many more parents were motivated to

explore and utilize the resources provided because of the content of the sermons series and parent group study.

Weaknesses of the Project

While the project carried several strengths, it was not without its share of weaknesses. Upon further reflection, I have determined three key weaknesses to the project as a whole. First, I would identify the meeting area as a detriment to the parent group study, especially in the first couple of sessions. The staff decided, because of the meeting time and room availability, to keep the parent group study in the sanctuary. During the sermon series, the church sanctuary provided a wonderful space for worship and the proclamation of God's Word through the preaching of the four sermons. However, the same setup caused many to feel like they could not interact as freely during the early portions of the parent group study. The pews kept everyone from facing each other during the discussion time and the familiarity of the setting caused several to say they were more inclined to sit in quiet reflection rather than open interaction and discussion. I addressed this, in part, after the first session by adding folding chairs that could be turned to face the front row of the pews and have small groups face one another during the group discussion time. However, holding the parent group study in a different location would have allowed for a stronger level of interaction amongst participants.

A second weakness for the project appeared in the promotion aspect of the parent group study. While the student ministry leadership gave effort to communicate the importance of the study to parents, the scope of the promotion would have benefited from a better promotional strategy in the weeks leading up to the study. Some parents communicated that they were not aware of the details of the parent group study and others did not return for a week due to other obligations within the church at the same time of the parent group meeting. A more strategic promotion before the entire church would have helped any confusion in communication and likely boosted participation. Similarly, the parent group study was promoted briefly in the final two weeks of the morning sermon

series, but if it were promoted before and during the entirety of the sermon series, more members would have been aware of it.

A third weakness came from inconsistent attendance in the parent group studies. Because the sermon series was preached to the entire congregation on Sunday mornings, there was no real concern of not reaching enough of the parents during that time. However, the parent group study met on Sunday evenings in a new two-hour format. The 25 FDPS responses used from those who attended all four weeks of the parent group study represented roughly half of the 48 parents participating in the class. While other studies and activities took place at EMBC, they did not seem to have any significant impact on the group as they appealed largely to other age groups. Setup for another ministry event took place the same night as one of the parent group studies and the staff did not anticipate how heavily this would affect attendance. In turn, a drop in attendance on this particular night because of the scheduling conflict varied the number of FDPS responses received by participants who attended all of the parent group study sessions.

What I Would Do Differently

There are a few areas I would handle differently to some degree if beginning the project again at EMBC. First, when engaging the outworking of the gospel in the home, I would have left more time for parents themselves to share practical examples of how they apply the lessons from the study in the home. In some cases, such as leading family devotions, a visual demonstration would have been helpful for parents to experience. While I took time each meeting to give personal examples of the successes and failures of leading a family devotion, I believe now that this did not go far enough. Parents may have benefited even more if the meeting space included a mock living room setup to provide an example of a family worship experience. The setting would then be more conducive to a public demonstration of family devotion time. This visual example would have helped parents who still felt unsure about what to do when away from the church building. The need for more demonstration is further proved by how many of the

parents did not have a proper example of what it means to lead in Scripture study and prayer in the home. Perhaps a visual demonstration would help alleviate many of the fears and misconceptions that parents held concerning how they should lead in family worship in their own homes.

Second, I would recruit additional people to invest in the process of the project beforehand. I would find additional voices to participate in the planning and follow up process in order to enhance the long-term effectiveness of the project. Specifically, I would target meetings with other staff individually to help communicate the importance of our ministry mindset shift and how the project could serve as a catalyst for parents and families in the church. In addition, I would target specific parents who are already engaging in some level of family discipleship and mobilize them to assist in providing promotion, resources, and testimonies. Not only could these individuals have helped leading in to the project, but they would have served as additional voices to champion a family equipping ministry model to the church. While I was not a lone voice speaking to the importance of the project, I do realize that a few more intentional conversations leading up to the project could have paid significant dividends in the end results.

A third area I would handle differently concerns the long-term shifts in developing a healthy family equipping ministry. I would have set up a team of parents and student ministry volunteers to engage in new areas for equipping families along with providing assistance in facing challenges. For the duration of this project, the primary mode of promotion and follow up came through the student ministry of EMBC. However, in order to build sustainable change over a longer period, a more holistic church wide campaign will be necessary. An emphasis on a particular area of need, such as family ministry, is important and useful; however, if an ongoing structure is not put in place for continued development of a family equipping model, then the church will simply move on to the next emphasis with lingering effects of the project remaining. The church will need multiple people working together to ensure a healthy ministry model is in place

moving forward. The move toward an effective family equipping model will mean an ongoing effort to influence the mindset of EMBC as a whole, not just those most closely involved in the student ministry. While there could have been more steps planned for follow up before the project, a more thorough process has been established since its conclusion. In fact, some of the ideas for resources and ideas we began developing after the project stemmed from needs that we were made aware of throughout the project itself. While the focus of the project was to equip parents at EMBC to disciple their children, the church has continued to develop additional elements of intergenerational fellowship through worship, prayer, and service. The project strongly enhanced ongoing ministry to equip parents and there will need to be more follow up for ongoing investment in role of the church. The intergenerational discipleship is in keeping with the heart of the family equipping ministry as it connects believers within the larger family of faith. If beginning again, I would add more elements that spoke to the nature of the church as a family, understanding this is especially important for teenagers at EMBC who have unbelieving parents.

Theological Reflections

This project prompted several key areas for theological reflection. The first is that the supremacy of Jesus and the beauty of the gospel is not just truth to be taught, but brings about a new way of life in each believer. The life-changing message of the gospel speaks not only to what we know but to what we love. Scripture repeatedly calls believers to embrace a glorious view of Jesus, find union with him, then live out the new identity in Christ in daily life. Letters such as Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews communicate these truths as a sort of continuous flow, meaning that believers must first seek to know and love Jesus before they can effectively follow his calling in their lives. Perhaps the most realistic representation of a person's character and passions can be seen in who they are at home. It is the disconnect so often found between church and home that has led many ministry leaders to frustration or despair. Additionally, researchers have

come forth with warnings that many in churches hold to destructive views, such as moral therapeutic deism.⁴ Parents carry the strongest weight of influence in the lives of their children; however, the question remains as to what kind of influence the parent will be. Parents communicate what they believe not only in what they teach, but in how they prioritize their family activities and pursuits. The church has an incredible opportunity to bring about lasting change in the lives of future generations by investing in parents to serve as primary disciple makers in their homes. Children can grow to know and follow Christ as those who have heard God's glorious truth audibly spoken and visibly witnessed in both the church and home. Churches must recognize that many parents see their own shortcomings in family discipleship and should seek to motivate them by grace rather than from guilt. A sense of guilt will likely only lead to temporary changes that can easily be abandoned, but parents who daily depend on God's grace can pursue their calling with the assurance that Christ is sufficient to complete his good work in and through them.

Second, I am fully convinced of the sufficiency of God's Word for the development of student and children's ministry in the church as well as the discipleship of the next generation in the home. The assertion of Scripture's sufficiency in ministry does not negate the usefulness of a multitude of available resources for churches today. Rather, churches can make use of numerous resources and strategies, but must recognize the authority of Scripture in all that it speaks to, including the plan to disciple future generations. The scope of the project only served to demonstrate through historical and sociological investigation, along with research and practice, that Scripture is the clear and direct revelation of God's design for both the family and the church. An effort to develop a healthy model of partnership between believing parents and the local church is an

⁴Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162.

endeavor toward biblical fidelity. The command to make disciples is a high calling and Christ's followers must seek to be obedient to both the command and the means given in Scripture to fulfill it. Christian parents have been given a specific role in God's sovereign plan. Scripture is not silent on the matter of passing God's truth to the next generation. Christians must continue to contend for and pass on the faith once delivered unto the saints (Jude 1:3). The preservation of biblical truth in an ever-changing society will only grow more critical in the face of growing persecution. Churches must resist caving to both outward pressures of secularism and inner temptations toward pragmatism.

Third, the intergenerational nature of the church is a critical component of God's good design. The church is portrayed in Scripture as a body made up of diversity brought into unity and conformity (1 Cor 12:27). The body is first and foremost dependent on Christ who is the head. Furthermore, the body is to function in harmony with one another (Eph 4:16). The perception of believing youth and children in the church is critical to its overall health. Older generations can see young believers solely in terms of future potential, but that potential will likely never be reached if they are not integrated into the current ministry of the church.

Rising generations need godly and grace-filled examples of lifetime faithfulness to Christ. In a time when church attendance is fluctuating in many congregations, parents must intentionally invest in meaningful relationships with other adults for each member of their family. Parents need the community of support and wisdom that comes from engaging with others in the church body. While teaching and worship are to be done in the home, it is not to be a replacement for what uniquely takes place when God's people gather as the body of Christ. Scripture gives clear direction that older men and women are to train and encourage younger men and women in the church (Titus 2:3-8). In this respect, members of the church are to be examples to one another of what it means to live out the gospel throughout different stages and situations of life. Indispensable Titus 2 types of mentoring relationships will not come naturally when individuals are constantly

isolated into age and interest groups, but they can flourish through intergenerational relationships within the body. A church family, much like a nuclear family, is made up of spiritually diverse believers from different age groups and thrives through healthy dependence on God and each other.

Fourth, the proclamation and teaching of biblical truth in the church and the home must target the heart. The gospel moves beyond outward conformity to societal expectation into a transformed life through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ezekiel proclaimed the new heart and new spirit that God would give to his people (Ezek 36:26-27). Today, believers receive the Holy Spirit in salvation and spend a lifetime growing into their new identities in Christ. The nature of this project has prompted reflection on how it is that people truly change. There is a very real danger in Christian homes to have the gospel in the background of family experience, but largely ignore it in the process of daily change.

Parents can lead their homes in a way that seems most acceptable to their peers while being unaware of the struggles in their own hearts. A father or mother that does not intentionally invest in their own Christian growth will have little lasting substance to share with their children. Parents may even assume that their status of being a “church going” family means that they are socially conservative people who happen to agree with the moral stances of the local congregation. Such a mindset will be satisfied with behavior modification that keeps in line with family values, but does not “count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:8). However, a family that embraces the lordship of Jesus Christ will seek to address the heart of parents and children alike by applying scriptural truth in ways that guide each member to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matt 22:37-39). The weekly worship gatherings of the local church body must coincide with parents that are developing gospel rhythms of grace, faith, and repentance in their daily home lives.

Finally, the nature and process of completing this project effectively

demonstrates what Scripture has been telling God’s people for generations—the church and the home must be intimately joined together in their obedience of the command to make disciples of future generations. The process of discipleship, then, means embracing the gospel in every part of life, including roles and responsibilities within the home. Concerning children, the church carries a calling to equip parents to fulfill their role, but also has a specific calling to minister to the orphan (Jas 1:27). Due to broken homes and damaged family dynamics, spiritually orphaned children need special spiritual guidance and instruction from those within the body of Christ. The church can support the spiritual nurture of children through age appropriate instruction in supportive settings balanced with time spent relationally engaged with other age groups in the congregation. Those in the church are to engage one another as a family of faith. For example, Paul writes to Timothy with a commendation of the faith he received from his mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice, but in the same letter refers to Timothy as his beloved child (2 Tim 1:2,5). Jesus spoke of his mother and brothers as those who did the will of God (Luke 8:21). Children and teenagers who profess Christ can flourish in the family of faith, that is the church, with the reassurance that the family of God will never fade, but will last throughout eternity.

Personal Reflections

The process of planning, implementing, and evaluating this project has led to a few key areas of personal reflection. First, I have seen afresh my own need to lead my home spiritually, as a husband and a father. I have been given a wonderful spouse that is supportive as a wife and nurturing as a mother. Currently, I have the responsibility to care for and guide three elementary age children. In all these things, I know that I am simply not sufficient. God’s grace must be demonstrated in my weakness and I must die daily to self in order to lead my family to the throne of Christ my king. Many aspects of the reading and research required for this project have deeply convicted me as a parent.

Like so many others, I function in a multitude of roles in life including husband, father, and pastor. Most areas of life do not stay in neat compartments, but instead overlap with one another. This continuously overlapping dynamic seems especially true in regard to life in pastoral ministry. I have had numerous moments throughout the process of doing research and writing this project where I had to stop what I was doing and engage my children with what I have learned. The inclination to serve my own family well is critical in order to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only (Jas 1:22). While I want to act to the best of my ability in every area of life, the primary life roles I dare not fail in is as a husband and father. I want to make my life count for God's glory and I understand even more clearly now that the journey to do so begins at home.

Second, and similar to the first, I have given much thought and reflection to the unique dynamic of pastoral ministry and parenting. I have become increasingly aware of the type of environment that I set forth in my own home. The nature of both home life and vocational church ministry are so intricately tied together that many have a hard time finding balance. The priorities my wife and I set in our home are going to be reflected through countless rhythms of grace-drenched moments when we rise in the morning, go throughout the day, and lay down at night. I maintain that a person, even a minister of the gospel, can have Christian art hanging on the walls of their home, Christian literature on the bookshelves, and church event shirts filling their closet, but still miss the point of what the family is about. The work of the church can be so demanding at times that it places stress and added pressure on families, especially to the spouses and children of pastoral staff. However, I have determined that I will continue to seek ways to bring my family along for the journey of serving in the local church. In doing so, I hope to create a love for God and his people in the hearts of my children.

Third, although I have served in local church ministry for seventeen years at this point in my ministry, I have been reminded through this project, from Scripture, and through personal experience, to keep growing in my love for the church. Many aspects

of this project were difficult to accomplish in the very local church setting it was meant to serve. It seemed that many aspects of the project were hindered where others did not see the need to accomplish the same goals and others agreed but did not feel a sense of urgency to do so. Through the process, I seek to remind myself consistently that the church, like myself, is still a work in progress concerning faithful obedience to God's commands. I am also continuously learning that having the body of Christ always agree with you is not a prerequisite to serving it faithfully. I reflect on years of ministry in one location and see now where small amounts of incremental change over longer periods can still produce great change. I pray that this project is just another step of many that the Lord continues to use to make his bride beautiful.

Finally, I have deepened in my own personal commitment to not only understand and obey Scripture, but to rely on it through every aspect of life. I know that I am a finite and fallible creature who will stumble in obedience often, but I understand that my ability to make a difference in my family or in my home church does not come from my own wisdom. As mentioned, the sufficiency of Scripture was crucial in terms of theological reflection for this project; however, conviction must not only be theological, but also deeply personal. Parenting is a difficult task and is becoming increasingly complicated in today's culture. Some challenges that parents and families are facing now would hardly be conceivable even a decade ago, much less generations ago. Parents and families are looking for answers in the midst of uncertainty and the church must cling to the revelation of God in Scripture for guidance and hope. In whatever ways culture may shift in the coming years, one thing is certain—the Word of God will remain. If I, or any other church leader, will be of any encouragement or council, it will be because of the timeless truth of Scripture that can even speak to those uncertain challenges yet to come.

Conclusion

Jesus commanded his followers to go make disciples (Matt 28:19-20). I have given effort in these chapters to lay out a biblical case for parents serving as primary

disciple makers in the lives of their children. In recounting historical, sociological, and cultural influences on the church and the home, I sought to demonstrate how current methods and mindsets have been impacted by these areas. The church and the home are significant in God's design as both institutions play a significant role in Christian formation for future generations. The family is a critical component of God's creation and the conduit through which children have opportunity to hear and see the gospel displayed in front of them. The church is the bride of Christ and an eternal family for all who trust in Jesus. The church and the home must join together with a common strategy to accomplish what neither institution was meant to do entirely on its own.

The overall purpose of this project was to equip parents at EMBC to disciple their children. The research shows that the goal was met through the preaching of a four-week sermon series and teaching a four-week parent group study. However, the aim of the project is to achieve more than a temporary change of attitudes and behaviors amongst parents and families at EMBC. For this reason, it is important to note that the project also brought about a shift in trajectory that indicates the potential for long-term change.

In light of the project, EMBC has already undertaken three meaningful shifts in ministry to parents and families. The first is the launching of an intergenerational prayer campaign where adults from multiple generations volunteer to pray for a specific teenager in the student ministry at EMBC. The prayer campaign was an important next step not only because teenage students need intentional prayer, but because they also need invested relationships from other adults in the local church body. The second shift that came about as a result of the project concerns the student ministry parent team. While the team existed before the project, the purpose of the team shifted to a more productive role of engaging and evaluating a family equipping ministry model at EMBC. The third shift is the continued development of a family resource library. This project demonstrated helped to motivate and equip parents to spiritually lead their homes, but parents will need gospel-centered resources in order to face the ongoing challenges that families encounter. As the

resource center develops in the church building, the website is also receiving several upgrades to better equip parents. One significant resource comes in the form of a rites of passage experience for parents to walk through with their children each year. In the coming years, EMBC will need to be sensitive to new needs and challenges taking place in homes throughout Maryville and meet those needs with biblically sound resources that communicate the gospel and point families to Christ.

Overall, the most meaningful impact of the project will no doubt come in the mindset shift that has continued to take place in the church regarding the role of parents and families. The church must continue to train, equip, and encourage parents to live out the gospel in the context of their own homes and daily lives. The goal of an effective family equipping ministry is not simply to have healthier and happier families, but to make disciples of the next generation that bring glory to God. The church engages in the discipleship process of students most effectively when it partners with parents and equips them to be primary disciple makers in their home. Parents can best serve as spiritual leaders when they lead their homes in the larger context of the church body as God's people partner together to make disciples of people of all ages. This biblical partnership means that both the church and the home should be elevated in their importance of speaking truth into the lives of children and building relationships across generations. By connecting the influence of church and home, Christians can more effectively communicate the gospel to the next generation with the goal of producing devoted followers of Christ to the glory of God. In the end, the church will remain as a forever family to one another and a bride given unto Christ who is head of all, both in the church and in the home. Even so, come Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20).

APPENDIX 1
SERMON EVALUATION

The following evaluation was given to an expert panel of three local church pastors. This panel evaluated the sermons to ensure it is biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

SERMON EVALUATION

Sermon Evaluation Tool					
Sermons 1-3					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon is clearly relevant to the issue of spiritual leadership in the home.					
The content is biblically sound.					
The content is theologically consistent.					
The thesis of the sermon is clearly stated.					
The points of the sermon clearly support the thesis.					
The sermon contains points of practical application.					
The sermon gives consideration to our church context.					
Overall, the sermon is exegetically sound and beneficial.					

APPENDIX 2

PARENT STUDY CURRICULUM EVALUATION

The following evaluation was given to an expert panel of three local church pastors. This panel evaluated the study material to ensure it is biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

PARENT STUDY CURRICULUM EVALUATION

Parent Study Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lessons 1-6					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of spiritual leadership in the home.					
The material is biblically sound.					
The material is theologically consistent.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is meaningful in our church context					
Overall, the lesson is scripturally sound and clear.					

APPENDIX 3

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PARENT SURVEY

The Family Discipleship Parent Survey (FDPS) survey was given to parents at East Maryville Baptist Church as a pre-test and a post-test before and after the sermons and parent study group.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PARENT SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of family discipleship in our church. This research is being conducted by Jason Salyer for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Please select a 4 digit code to help identify your pre and post survey responses while maintaining your anonymity. You should use a number that you will remember when you take the survey again. Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

4 Digit Code _____

Part 1¹

- | | | | |
|----|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Do you consider yourself a Christian? | Yes | No |
| 2. | Have you been baptized? | Yes | No |
| 3. | Are you currently a member of East Maryville Baptist Church? | Yes | No |
| 4. | Are you married? | Yes | No |
| 5. | Do you have any children age 18 or younger living in the home? | Yes | No |
| 6. | What is your age in years? | 18-24
35-44
55-64 | 25-34
45-54
65+ |

¹This survey is used by permission from Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 216-18.

Part 2

Directions: Circle your opinion to the statements using the following scale
SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,
AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 7. | I have a biblical understanding of what it means to disciple my children. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. | I make attendance of Sunday worship gatherings a high priority for our entire family over other events and activities. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. | I know the areas in which my believing children are struggling in their sanctification. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. | I use occasions of my children's sin to instruct them with the gospel. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. | I encourage my children to spend time reading the Bible and praying. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. | I have shared the story of my salvation experience (testimony) with my children. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. | I talk frequently about what God is teaching me from his Word with my children. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. | I use everyday situations as opportunities to instruct my children with biblical principles. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. | When I sin against my spouse, I express repentance and ask for forgiveness. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. | When I sin against my children, I express repentance and ask for forgiveness. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Part 3

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 17. | I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. | I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. | The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. | When my child spontaneously asks me a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 21. | I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 22. | Parents—and particularly fathers—have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 23. | Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 24. | My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 25. | Other than meal times, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 26. | How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 27. | How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 28. | How many times in the past two months has my family engaged in a family devotional or worship time in our home? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 29. | 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? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 30. | 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? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 31. | 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? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 32. | How many times in the past year has any church leader or another parent made contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 4

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP CHILD SURVEY

The following survey (FDCS) was given to students at East Maryville Baptist Church prior to the sermons and parent study.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP CHILD SURVEY

If you are between the ages of 13-18 and your parent(s) regularly attend EMBC, please answer the following survey questions.

Directions: Circle your opinion to the statements using the following scale
 SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,
 AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. My parents have a biblical understanding of what it means to help me follow Christ. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. My parents make attendance of Sunday worship gatherings a high priority for our entire family over other events and activities. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. My parents know the areas in which I struggle in my Christian growth. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. My parents use occasions when I sin to talk to me about the gospel. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. My parents encourage me to spend time reading the Bible and praying. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. My parents have shared the story of their salvation experience (testimony) with me. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. My parents talk frequently about what God is teaching them from the Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. My parents use everyday situations as opportunities to teach me biblical principles. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. When my parents sin against each other, I believe they will express repentance and ask for forgiveness of one another. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. When my parent sins against me, they express repentance and ask for forgiveness. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 5
PARENT STUDY SURVEY

The following survey was given to parents at the conclusion of the four-week parent study.

PARENT STUDY SURVEY

Parent Study Survey					
1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3= Agree 4=Strongly Agree					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The Parent study material was communicated clearly					
The Parent study motivated me to teach biblical truths in my home					
The Parent study motivated me to model biblical truth in my home					
The Parent study equipped me to teach biblical truth in my home					
The Parent study equipped me to model biblical truth in my home					
I feel more confident to parent biblically as a result of this study					
I have a better understanding of what the bible teaches me to do as a parent					
Overall, the study was affective in helping me to better honor Christ in my home					

APPENDIX 6
PRE- AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY
ANSWER STATISTICS

PRE- AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY ANSWER STATISTICS

Table A1. Paired samples t-test

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	97.83333333	106.2083333
Variance	117.1014493	111.3894928
Observations	25	25
Pearson Correlation	0.331896281	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	24	
t Stat	3.320475564	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00148978	
t Critical one-tail	1.713871517	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.002979561	
t Critical two-tail	2.068657599	

APPENDIX 7
FDCS RESULTS

The following figures detail responses to the FDCS by teenage students (grades 7-12) attending EMBC.

FDCS RESULTS

My parents have a biblical understanding of what it means to help me follow Christ.

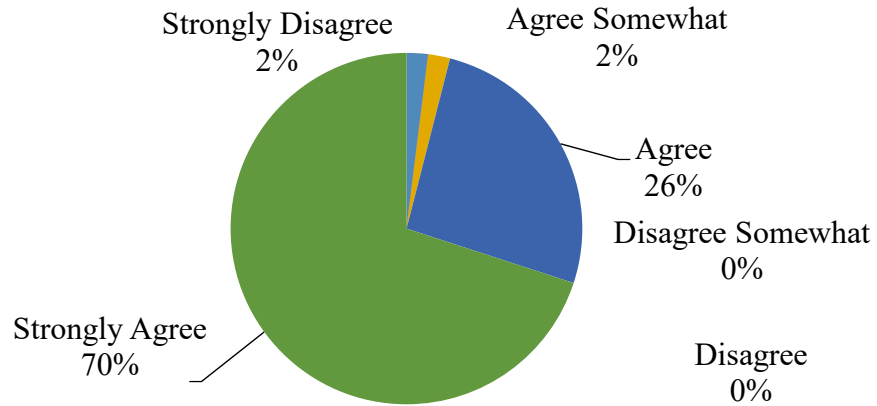


Figure A1. Responses to FDCS question 1

My parents make attendance of Sunday worship gatherings a high priority for our entire family over other events and activities

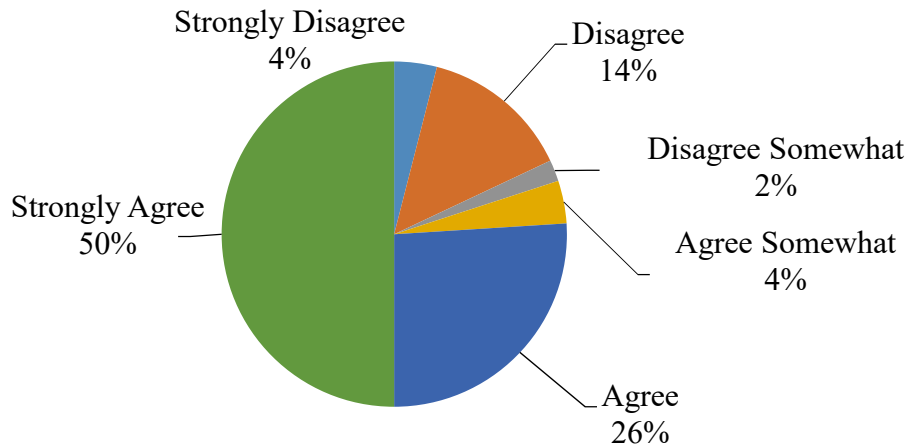


Figure A2. Responses to FDCS question 2

My parents know the areas in which I struggle in my Christian growth

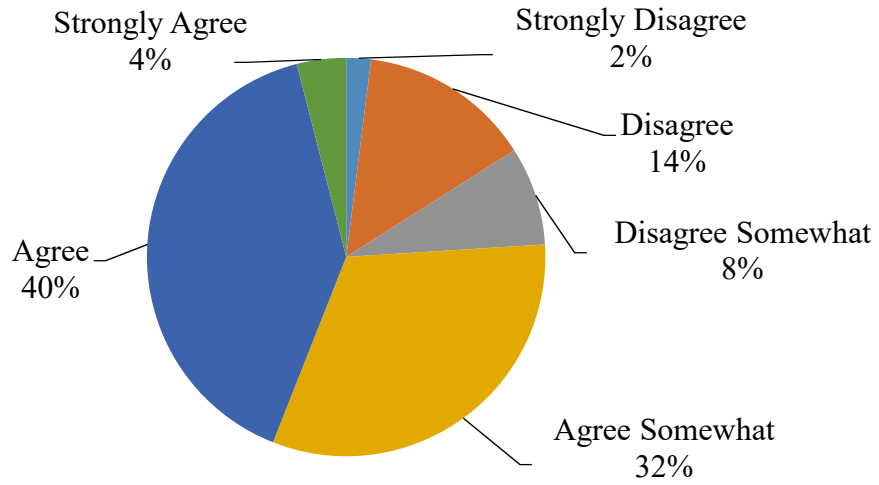


Figure A3. Responses to FDCS question 3

My parents use occasions when I sin to talk to me about the gospel

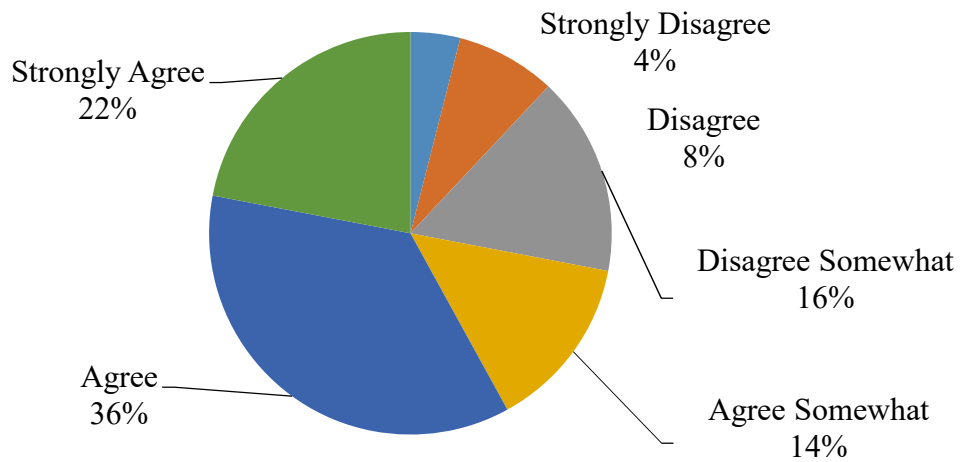


Figure A4. Responses to FDCS question 4

My parents encourage me to spend time reading the Bible and praying

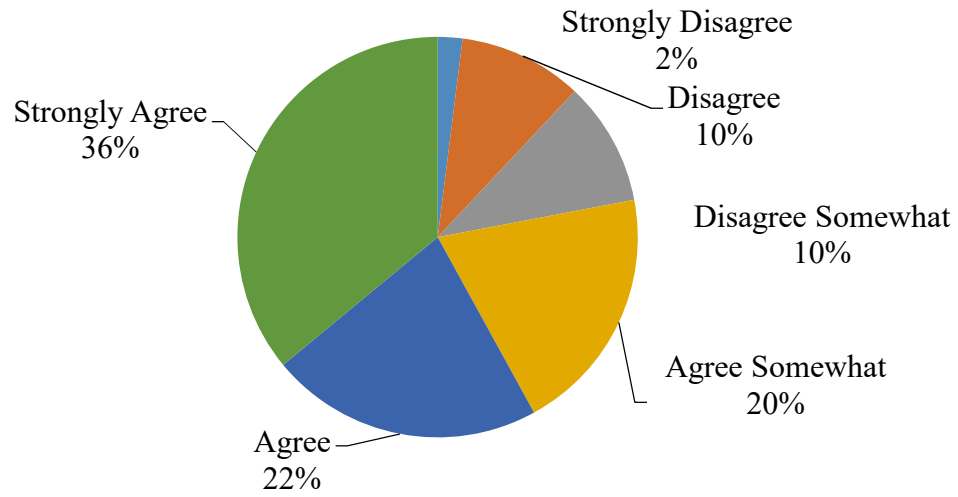


Figure A5. Responses to FDCS question 5

My parents have shared the story of their salvation experience (testimony) with me.

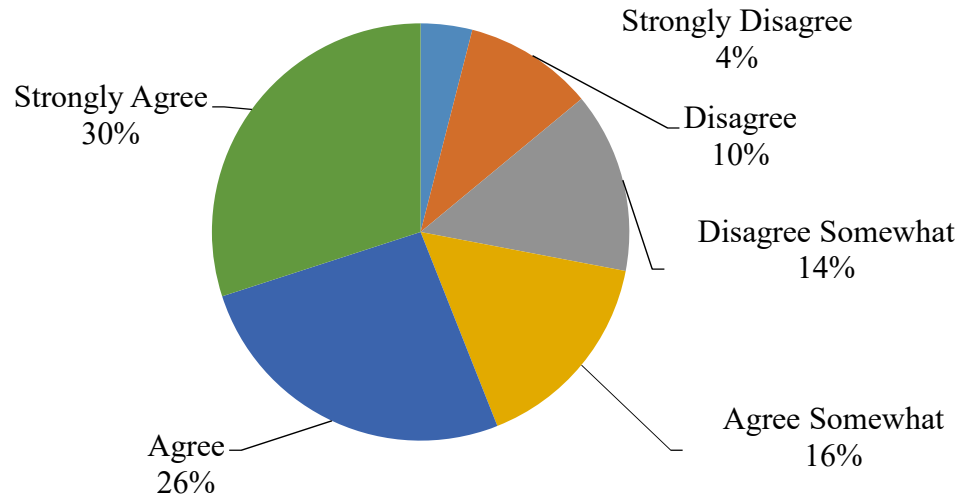


Figure A6. Responses to FDCS question 6

My parents talk frequently about what God is teaching them from the Bible

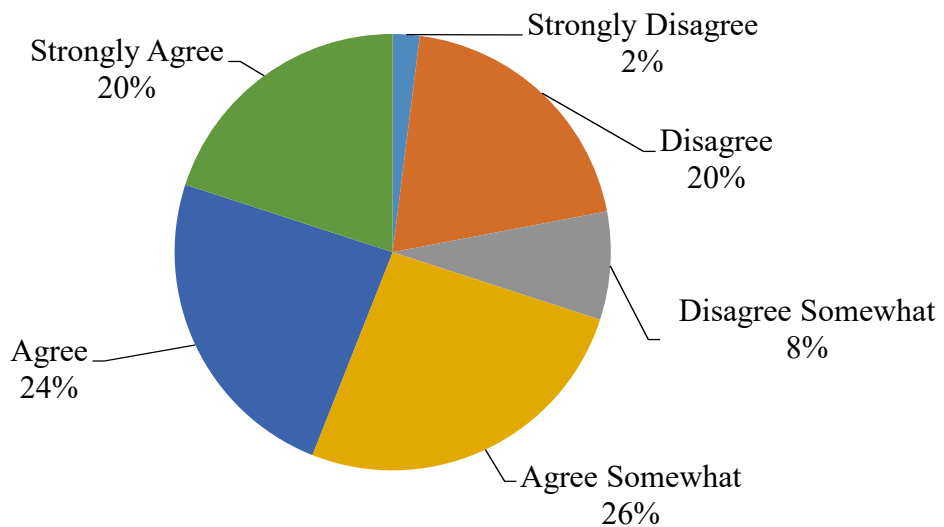


Figure A7. Responses to FDCS question 7

My parents use everyday situations as opportunities to teach me biblical principles

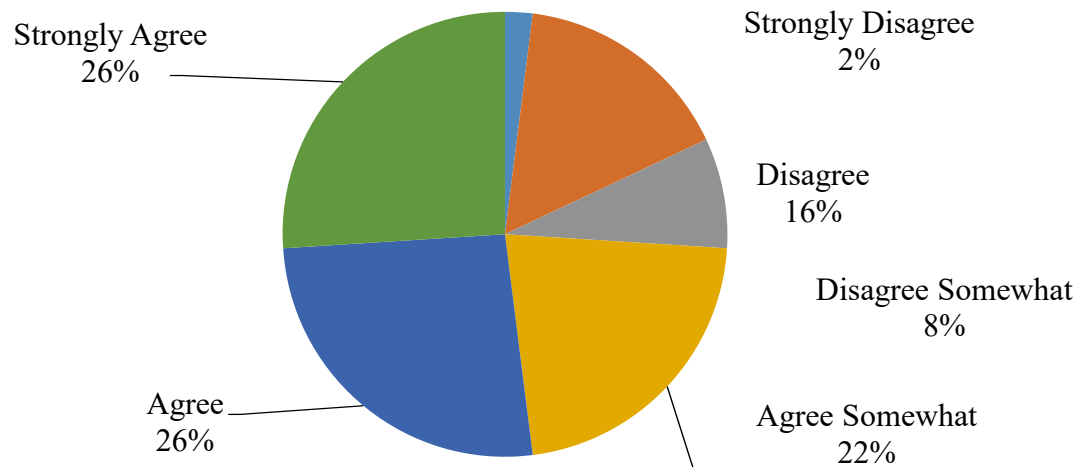


Figure A8. Responses to FDCS question 8

When my parents sin against each other, I believe they will express repentance and ask for forgiveness of one another.

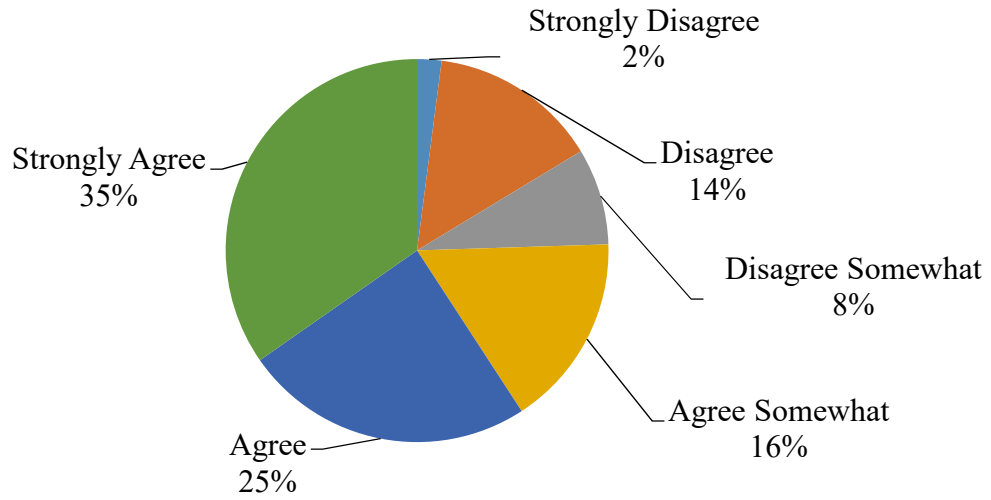


Figure A9. Responses to FDCS question 9

When my parent sins against me, they express repentance and ask for forgiveness

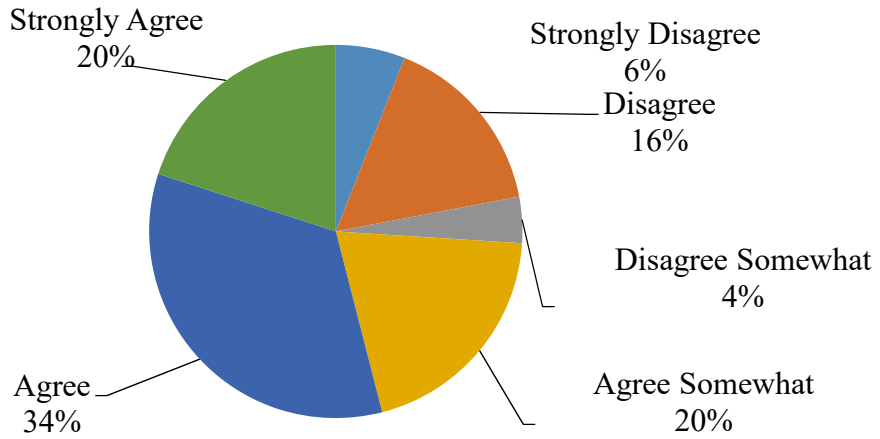


Figure A10. Responses to FDCS question 10

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING PARENTS OF EAST MARYVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH IN MARYVILLE, TENNESSEE, TO DISCIPLE THEIR CHILDREN

Jason Scott Salyer, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. John David Trentham

This project is designed to equip parents to disciple their children at East Maryville Baptist Church (EMBC). The project involves assessing current discipleship practices in the home and developing sermons and small group lessons to motivate and enable parents to be the primary disciple makers in their home. Models of student and family ministry will be explored and differentiated.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context of EMBC, along with the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodologies, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological basis for parents making disciples of their children. Foundational to the design of the training curriculum are four biblical passages: Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Psalm 78:1-8, Ephesians 5:22-33, and Ephesians 6:1-4. Together, these passages serve as the basis for parents making disciples of their children. Chapter 3 addresses sociological and practical influences on equipping parents. Chapter 4 details the sermon and curriculum plans. Chapter 5 concludes with an overall evaluation of the project and suggestions for improvement and further development.

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Associate Pastor to Students, Southwestern Baptist Church, 2001-2003

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