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EQUIPPING PARENTS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
IN SODDY DAISY, TENNESSEE, FOR
FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

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**EQUIPPING PARENTS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
IN SODDY DAISY, TENNESSEE, FOR
FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP**

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I dedicate this project to my amazing wife, Mary Elizabeth, who has encouraged me since the day we met. There is no one I would rather walk with daily than her. Thank you for your grace and beauty.

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PREFACE

This project was completed with so many people cheering me on. I am forever grateful for the love, support, and encouragement of so many. First, I am thankful for my Heavenly Father for providing every step of the way. Psalm 119:105 states, “Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path (CSB).” This project has helped me understand that more and more.

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Third, my parents, Gregory and Debra have been in my corner cheering me on for years now, and I am so thankful for the blessing God has given me through them. They dedicated time and energy to help me understand the things of God as a child, and this work is in part because of their efforts all those years ago.

Fourth, I am thankful that I can stand on the shoulders of faithful believers who have gone before me, both academically and professionally. Through the faculty and staff at SBTS God has blessed me in an incredible way to understand why a project like this matters. Because of the churches I have served in the past, God gave me a burden to help parents train their children to know and follow the Lord. My current church, FBC Soddy Daisy, has been such a blessing, as they have supported me in so many ways throughout this process. I cannot say thank you enough to all who have helped me in this whole process.

I could not have gotten very far in this project without the leadership of my

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Thank you to my editor, Michelle Tipton. Your knowledge and help were a huge stress relief.

Finally, God has blessed me with two incredible sons and a beautiful daughter. I am so thankful I get to be their father. Hudson, Asher, and Amelia, there has not been a time in the research, the writing, or the editing when I did not think how this impacts you. I pray that I can help you see the glories of the gospel in these pages so that you can help your future children do the same. My prayer is that this project would encourage, educate, and equip parents to faithfully lead their families in family devotions and discipleship. In doing so, may God be glorified.

Brandon Johns

Soddy Daisy, Tennessee

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Children are a blessing from the Lord. Scripture highlights this in Psalm 127:3 when it states, “Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, offspring, a reward.”¹ Parents must take heritage seriously. Parents are tasked with the responsibility of leaving a godly heritage with their children, and hopefully their children’s children. The greatest blessing a Christian parent can experience is their children following in the ways of the Lord. That blessing is cultivated through family discipleship.

Christian parents must understand the great role they play in guiding their children to know the Lord. The responsibility lies with parents to help their children know and apply biblical values. However, many children receive most of their biblical literacy from the church and not their parents. Parents are not fighting for the spiritual life of their children. According to a study from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Timothy Paul Jones, less than 50 percent of families surveyed in 2008 had regular times set aside for family devotion and discipleship time.² Parents may feel unqualified and unprepared to lead their children in this manner. For this reason, this project sought to develop a curriculum to equip the parents of children at First Baptist Church of Soddy Daisy, Tennessee, to lead their children in family discipleship better.

Context

This ministry project has taken place at First Baptist Church (FBCSD) of

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

² Data taken from the Family Life Family Needs Survey results chart from Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide, How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 28, Kindle.

Soddy Daisy, Tennessee. This church, located just north of Chattanooga, has been in existence since the late 1800s and has undergone many changes, including changes in name, location, pastoral leadership, and ministry methods over the years. Through those changes, FBCSD has continually shown a deep love for the families who are members of the church, as well as those who live within its community.

The church has many strengths that lay a solid foundation for reaching and discipling families together. First, FBCSD provides fun family outreach events for the community at least four times per year. These ministries are geared to reach families with children. Through these opportunities, God has guided new families to FBCSD. The church has seen more young families join and engage in church life in the past few years than in the previous decade. New families have brought excitement to the church that is felt throughout all age groups.

Second, FBCSD has opportunities for families to serve together in ministry and missions. Families serve together in two community caring ministries. The food bank at FBCSD serves people from all around the Soddy Daisy community. Each week, families can serve together by distributing grocery boxes and praying with the recipients. Student ministry families serve together quarterly by preparing and handing out meals to those who live in the communities nearest the church campus.

Third, a major strength at FBCSD is the children's ministry. A non-paid staff member and volunteers lead the children's ministry. Those volunteers have accepted their roles and flourished in making the children's ministry area excel. There is excitement in the children and their families each week, as the church continues to see new families coming into the membership via the children's ministry. Several of the new families did not come from a church background, and FBCSD has baptized the parents of these new families. The church has seen new life come to parents through the ministry to children. This is a contributing reason that the church has baptized more people in the past two years than it did in the previous seven years combined. The children's ministry was once

a struggling area of the church but now is thriving.

There have been new families who have moved into the church with children in both the student ministry and the children's ministry. With the growth, however, competing ideas over the purposes of the ministry caused frustration. The first challenge at FBCSD involved the current expectations of the parents. Some parents wanted a deeper engagement with the Scriptures out of their children's experiences in these ministries, but others were simply happy that their children were in attendance. The church has done an excellent job at providing avenues for attendance but little in the way of deeper biblical discovery.

Second, the parents were not afforded the chance to grow in their God-given leadership roles as the chief spiritual influencers of their children. There was no plan in place to provide adequate resources and encouragement for parents to assist them in leading their families spiritually. There has been no training, formally or informally, for parents on how to lead family devotionals or family worship nights. Not providing these types of resources and plans ultimately hindered the whole church. When parents are serious about their roles as the chief spiritual influencers in their children's lives and are actively pursuing that leadership in their homes, the faith of the parents may well grow. As parents strive to lead their families and households well, their spiritual depth should increase. As spiritual maturity grows among parents, the church is strengthened.

To exacerbate this, there was not a plan for parents to accept the role of chief spiritual influencer in their children's lives. Parents were not leading their families in spiritual discipleship not because they did not want to do so, but because they did not feel confident in their ability. Some of them voiced a desire to have a reproducible plan to conduct family devotions and worship. If FBCSD is going to be serious about equipping all members to live under the obedience and guidance of the Holy Spirit, then helping parents to lead their families spiritually outside the walls of the church must become a priority.

Rationale

This ministry project aimed to help equip parents to lead family discipleship times in their homes with their children. Equipping parents to have family devotions in their homes is highly important to both the individual families and FBCSD. There are two theological reasons as well as two practical reasons for equipping parents for family discipleship.

The first theological reason for equipping parents is that parents have a biblical responsibility to be the chief spiritual influencers in the home. A parent must lead his or her children in spiritual matters, and regular times of family devotions are key to achieving this goal. God has ordained and commanded family-led discipleship in the Old Testament when he commanded his people to take his words and “repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut 6:6–7). Family discipleship is also commanded in the New Testament when fathers are instructed to “bring them [children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). For far too long families have neglected this command. As Jones says, “The overwhelming majority of Christian parents are not actively engaged in any sort of battle for their children’s souls. When it comes to the process of discipling their progeny, most Christian parents . . . have abandoned the field.”³ However, as pastor Jay Strother states, “The home has the greatest impact on young lives; with few exceptions, if we fail to impact the home, we will never make a lasting impact on students.”⁴ Scripture is clear that the family is the best avenue for passing down spiritual matters to children. When family discipleship is overlooked or ignored, it can create nominal Christianity and contribute to the decline of the church.

³ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guild*, 28.

⁴ Jay Strother, “Family Equipping Ministry: Church and Home as Co-Champions,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*, 2nd ed., ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), 94.

Parents need to understand the biblical command to teach their children, take it seriously, and feel equipped and confident to do so.

A second theological reason for equipping families is so that children who are led by their parents in discipleship learn by example how to understand and apply the Scriptures themselves. Family discipleship leads to true disciple-making. Children will see their parents' love for God and grasp the need to follow their parents' example. Parents who take the time to have family devotions and truly disciple their children will be teaching Scripture and how and why it matters to them personally. Nothing is more important than imparting a legacy of biblical faithfulness to one's children, and family devotions are a key part of reaching this incredible goal. As pastor Voddie Baucham says, "There are many worthwhile pursuits in this world, but few of them rise to the level of training our children to follow the Lord and keep his commands."⁵

The first practical reason for this project's importance is that parents should be the chief spiritual influence in their children's lives because they have so much more time available with their children than does the church. The average person under eighteen at FBCSD is under the teaching of the church for less than three hours per week, and that is only if they are there every time programming is available (e.g., Sunday morning small groups, worship service/kids worship, and midweek activities). Parents have far more time with their children. Parents need encouragement and tools to make the most of that time and guide their children toward godliness. The church does not have the time capacity with children and students to give them all the spiritual direction they need to stand against the schemes of the devil. When churches make decided changes to help parents disciple their own children, positive results occur.⁶ Parents do have the time, and

⁵ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 29.

⁶ According to Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel's examples in *Passing on the Faith*, several churches have experienced positive church-wide results by equipping parents for ministry. Merton

when they understand and accept their role and responsibility in this area, they will make family discipleship a priority.

A second practical rationale for this project is that it allows FBCSD to develop leaders as we train parents to lead their families well. As FBCSD is in somewhat of a revitalization process, leadership is essential to the growth of the church. If FBCSD wants to truly fulfill the vision of being a neighborhood church for the nations (the church's vision statement), then it must equip all members to live lives worthy of the gospel. Preparing and helping parents have family devotions for discipleship will help the families of the church grow in godliness. When families are growing in godliness outside the church, it can make their church experience more meaningful as well. Families will become more mature in their faith and will be more apt to assist in leading ministries inside the church as well as taking more ministry to the surrounding neighborhoods. The pastoral leadership of FBCSD wants to see more ministry happen during the week outside the walls of the church, and stronger, more faithful Christ-followers can help accomplish that.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents of children and teenagers at First Baptist Church, Soddy Daisy, Tennessee, to lead family discipleship times in their homes.

Goals

To equip parents of FBCSD to lead family discipleship in their homes, three goals were achieved.

P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel, *Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* (Winona, MN: Christian Brothers, 2000), 25-27.

1. The first goal was to assess the current family discipleship beliefs and practices among the families of FBCSD.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip, train, and prepare parents of FBCSD.
3. The final goal was to equip parents of FBCSD with the created curriculum to implement family discipleship in their homes.

Also included with these goals is a specific research methodology that measured the success and effectiveness of each of these goals. The following section details this research methodology.

Research Methodology

Three goals determined the success of this project. The first goal was to assess the current family discipleship beliefs and practices among the families of FBCSD. This goal was measured by administering the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey (FDPPS)⁷ to a minimum of ten families with children and/or adolescents in their homes (see appendix 1). This goal was measured as successful when at least ten families completed the FDPPS and returned the survey. The responses were recorded to evaluate the current discipleship practices of the families involved.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip, train, and prepare the parents of FBCSD. This curriculum included eight sessions that guided parents through models of family discipleship, through different ways to instruct children in biblical principles and character development and gave parents a model to begin family discipleship with their children. This curriculum was evaluated by an expert panel consisting of local area pastors, student ministers, children's ministers, and youth ministry organizational leaders (see appendix 2). This panel used a rubric to evaluate scriptural accuracy, methods, scope, and practicality. This goal was considered successful when 90 percent of the evaluation criterion was met or exceeded by the expert panel.

⁷ This survey is taken from Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 201.

The final goal was to equip parents of FBCSD with the created curriculum to implement family discipleship in their homes. This goal was measured by administering both pre- and post-surveys to the participants that evaluated the families' practice of family discipleship. This goal was considered successful when a t-test for the surveys demonstrated a positive difference in the pre- and post-surveys.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Family discipleship. Family discipleship refers to times of Bible study and prayer that are led by parents. Timothy Paul Jones refers to them as “faith talks” and defines them as a “designated time, at least once per week, for the household to gather for prayer and to study a biblical truth together. This household gathering may include not only parents and children but also other individuals who have been invited to share this time with the family.”⁸ Family discipleship is intentional and balances doctrinal instruction and practical application.

Chief spiritual influencer. The chief spiritual influencer is a person who has the most impact on another person spiritually. According to this project, the chief spiritual influencers in the lives of children are their parents. Through the various ministries of the church, many individuals can have an impact on children. The parents hold the main responsibility to teach godly perspectives to their children. God's plan from Deuteronomy 6 shows that the primary mode of discipleship must come from the home.

The first limitation was the honesty of the participants in both the pre- and post-surveys. Parents may not have wanted to be as honest as possible when evaluating their family discipleship practices for fear of embarrassment. This limitation was addressed by administering the surveys anonymously.

⁸ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 154.

The second limitation was the new and different times that the curriculum was taught. Many of the parents of school-aged children at FBCSD currently serve on Sunday mornings. Some parents are Sunday School teachers, and some serve on the worship or technical teams. To have the greatest impact possible, the teaching times happened at a time that was not currently used for teaching. This happened on a Sunday evening when nothing else happened on the campus. This limitation was addressed by better promoting the times available.

The third limitation was the time span of the curriculum. Although eight weeks was not a large time commitment, it was more than was previously offered at FBCSD. Not only did parents have to come at a different time than normal, but they also had to commit to eight weeks of meetings. This limitation was addressed by promotion and conducting the sessions during a time of the calendar year that was less busy for parents. Parents also had a chance to get a handout summary of the previous week's material if they had to miss.

One delimitation applied to this project. Only parents of children from birth to 18 years old at FBCSD were included in the project. This kept the results of the pre- and post-surveys consistent with the target demographic. This delimitation also helped solidify the results to the faith family of FBCSD alone.

Conclusion

Parents have a high calling to disciple their children. The purpose, goals, and research methodology of this project are all directed toward helping equip parents to achieve this high calling. This project seeks to provide the equipping parents can use to make the most of their family discipleship times. The next generation matters, and by equipping parents with this specific purpose, this project can invest in the next generation. Chapter 2 will focus on the scriptural mandate for parents to be the chief spiritual influencer of their children, as well as set an example of what to teach them.

Chapter 3 will focus on the practical issues of parent-led, church-supported family discipleship.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
PARENTS AS CHIEF SPIRITUAL
INFLUENCERS OF THEIR
CHILDREN

God wants to see all his children grow in their relationship with him. God has given his church a plan for this goal to be accomplished. That plan is for parents to disciple their children and bring them up in the ways of the Lord. While the local church is charged to assist parents along this path, it is not supposed to supplant parents as the chief spiritual influencers of their children. Parents must learn tools they may need for the venture, for it is ultimately up to them to carry out this task. God provides a framework for parents to disciple their children and gives them models for it. This chapter offers an overview of passages in both the Old and New Testaments that command parents to be the chief spiritual influencers of their children. A careful exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4–9 provides the Old Testament foundation for parental spiritual guidance. Proverbs 4:20–27 gives an example of a father guiding his son in the ways of the Lord. An exegesis of Ephesians 6:1–4 provides a New Testament directive for parents as the chief spiritual influencers of their children in the context of the New Covenant church. One should begin with the text that suggests the basis for family discipleship.

The Foundational Model: Deuteronomy 6:4–9

The basis for parents to be the chief spiritual influencer is found early in the Bible. The *Shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4–9, provides the foundational model that shapes parents as they seek to lead their children through family devotions. Moses makes it clear that faith in God should be the supreme guide in one’s life, and parents should pass that faith along to their children:

Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.

In these six verses, parents can understand the necessity of maintaining their own spiritual health and providing ways to influence their children in the ways of the Lord. Moses points out the importance of this passage to every Israelite and how it should not only be lived out but passed down to future generations.

The Importance of the Shema

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 highlights a key to understanding the greatness of God.¹ In this passage, one may find a guiding principle to life—that Yahweh God is the one true God. The key to principled living and replicating faith among those within one’s family is demonstrated within this text. Professor Duane Christensen suggests, “The content of this book was the primary curriculum in an ongoing program of religious education in ancient Israel.”² According to 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God.” The Shema is divinely inspired, useful, and valuable in training others to live obedient lives to God.

It is important to note that Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is a passage of Scripture that values both knowledge of God and devotion to God. Old Testament scholar Christopher J. H. Wright states, “The ‘Shema’ (Deut 6:4–5) is both an affirmation about God and a call for commitment to God.”³ These two premises work together. Proclamation comes from devotion. Christensen states, “The focus of attention in this reading is on the very

¹ For more details concerning how the Shema relates to the greatness of God, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 138.

² Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary 6A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 143.

³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary, Old Testament Series 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 95.

purpose of Deuteronomy as a pedagogical tool to instruct each generation on what it means to be part of God's chosen people."⁴ One must uphold that the God of the Scriptures is the only God and be ready to communicate this knowledge and devotion to the next generation.

Faith must be passed along in this manner. Christensen asserts, "Nothing is more important to the future of God's people than the communication of 'these words.'"⁵ However, when the younger generations hear the Shema, much more than instruction is given. As Old Testament professor and scholar Eugene Merrill states, "It is the expression of the essence of all of God's person and purposes in sixteen words of Hebrew text."⁶ In this passage, one may see the holiness of God and how this knowledge can positively affect all of life. Wright mentions, "Israel was a people summoned by God to hear God's Word. They were not merely spectators at a divine show, but the recipients of divine revelation in words. They were to hear the truth and respond to it."⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4–9 issues a call to knowledge that demands action.

Listen, Israel, to the One God

From the first word in this passage, God calls Israel to listen. Listening involves the intake of words and the processing of ideas. The idea to be processed is the singularity and prominence of God. Hearers would come to know this statement well. Christenson reports, "The familiar phrase 'Hear O Israel' . . . are the most familiar words of the entire Bible to the observant Jew, since they are repeated daily."⁸ This practice is not just auditory, but contemplative. Bible scholar Peter Craigie states, "The people were

⁴ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 137.

⁵ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

⁶ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 138.

⁷ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 95.

⁸ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 137.

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.”⁹ Hearing in this manner changes a person.

The God that called out the nation of Israel from the Egyptian captivity now calls them to understand exactly who he is. He is the one and only God. Christensen affirms, “The words of the Shema in Deut. 6:4 bear witness to the experience of the living presence of God in history who created Israel as a people.”¹⁰ He is the only one worthy of following. His oneness highlights his authority in their lives as their Creator and sustainer.

However, the first verse of the Shema may be translated in a few ways. German theologian Gerhard von Rad argues, “It might be translated ‘Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone!’ But it might also be translated ‘Yahweh, our God, is one Yahweh.’”¹¹ Von Rad goes further and explains, “In the first case the passage is a confession set in opposition to the temptations of the Canaanite cult of Baal; in the other case it is a confession of the oneness of Yahweh in the face of multiplicity of divergent traditions and sanctuaries of Yahweh. Both interpretations can claim support in Deuteronomy.”¹² While both ways of translation demonstrate different aspects of God, both are nuanced similarly. A careful translation and study of Deuteronomy 6:4 will show the importance of the uniqueness and the unity of God.

God as the single Creator of the Jewish people leads to another highlight of Deuteronomy 6:4, when Moses states that “the Lord is One.” Christensen points out,

⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 93.

¹⁰ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 143.

¹¹ Gerhard Von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 63.

¹² Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 63.

“The doctrine of monotheism is implicit in this brief creedal statement.”¹³ English theologian John Rogerson said concerning God’s oneness, “It most likely refers to Yahweh’s uniqueness.”¹⁴ Craigie declares, “As one God, (or the ‘Unique’), when he spoke there was no other to contradict; when he promised, there was no other to revoke that promise.”¹⁵ The uniqueness of God shows that there is no other God like him. God is alone in his power, his character, and his authority.

Other cultures may believe in a plethora of divine beings, but the God of the Israelites (the God of the Bible) is one, even though he exists in three persons. The revelation of the triune God was not fully made known to the Old Testament believers, but that does not negate the validity of the Godhead’s existence. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all unified in essence. Merrill says that this passage works “to provide an unmistakable basis for monotheistic faith. The Lord is indeed a unity, but beyond that, He is the only God.”¹⁶ There is no other God but him. This demonstrates God’s single-minded purpose among his people. Wright points out, “The oneness of Yahweh implies a unity of will and purpose. Yahweh is not inwardly divided.”¹⁷ Wright states, “Yahweh was to be met with a response involving the wholeness of the human person.”¹⁸ The one God demands the total devotion of his people.

The Whole Person

The chosen nation of Israel, the people of God, are instructed to love God with an all-encompassing devotion. Merrill states, “Israel must love God with all its essence

¹³ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 143.

¹⁴ John W. Rogerson, *Deuteronomy*, Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 28, eBook.

¹⁵ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 93.

¹⁶ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 139.

¹⁷ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 96.

¹⁸ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 98.

and expression.”¹⁹ The God of both unity and uniqueness demands total love from his people. His love for them has been known from the time of the exodus; now it is time for the Jewish nation to demonstrate their love for him in totality. Craigie submits, “The commandments, which provided the framework within which the Israelites could express their love of God, were to be upon your heart—that is, 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.”²⁰ The children of God here showed their love for him by following his commands. Obedience demonstrates love. The Israelites’ love for God was to be fixated upon their hearts and would filter down to the rest of their lives.

Verse 5 in the Shema begins with the direct command to “love the Lord your God” and then gives three main areas in which this love should initiate: “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut 6:5). This verse instructs the Israelites to love God with their total being. Rogerson and Dunn agree: “Taken together, this means a person’s total life, physical, mental, and spiritual.”²¹ Obedience is shown in total submission to his will.

Moses writes this verse as a guide for his people to love God completely and demonstrate that love with the entirety of their lives. Wright notes, “In verse 5, the affirmation about Yahweh is followed by the claim upon Israel’s total allegiance.”²² This total allegiance begins with the heart, which was thought of as the part of the body that gave the most direction. Wright points out, “The heart (*lebab*) in Hebrew was not as much the seat of emotions or feelings . . . as the seat of the intellect, will, and intention. You think in your heart, and your heart shapes your character, choices, and decisions.”²³

¹⁹ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 140.

²⁰ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 93.

²¹ Rogerson, *Deuteronomy*, 28.

²² Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 98.

²³ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 98–99.

The actions one takes initiate from the heart. What a person believes, thinks, and acts upon originates in the heart. Therefore, if one is to love the Lord with all his heart, all decisions he would make would promote a love for God which would also direct those decisions. As a person continues to do so, his choices will be directed by his love for God. His character is shaped by this love and directs his whole person. This is why Wright believes the heart “is also the center of the human being as a moral agent.”²⁴ A man’s character flows from his heart.

In verse 5, Moses gives the Israelites the directive to love God with all their soul. The soul describes all the workings of the inner man. Wright suggests, “Soul . . . most often is used to express the whole inner self, with all the emotions, desires, and personal characteristics that make each human being unique.”²⁵ The soul is the thrust of all that makes a person who he is and gives him the indistinguishable characteristics that sets him apart from other people. God’s creativity can be seen in everyone’s soul, and he is called to love God with all the God-given ways he is unique.

Finally, God’s people are called to love him with all their strength. Wright again adds that strength really points to a “total excess” sort of love.²⁶ Not only are the Israelites to love God with their hearts and souls, but to love him with an abundance from those two areas. Strength denotes the means of loving with all one’s heart and soul. It describes the forcefulness of love that one has for God. This type of love for Yahweh will always lead to action. Craigie states, “The all-encompassing love for God was to find its expression in a willing and joyful obedience of the commands of God; this theme is developed in the next four verses.”²⁷ This love is not just an emotion. It is an action that

²⁴ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 99.

²⁵ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 99.

²⁶ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 99.

²⁷ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 93.

carries forth to the next generation.

Discipleship in the Family

The directives from the first two verses of the Shema were intended to be taught and shared with others. It is the responsibility of the parents to pass along this devotion to the Lord to their children. Wright suggests, “Deuteronomy 6:6 is part of a strong stream of Old Testament teaching that calls for the internalizing of the law in the heart, i.e., at the center of a person’s mind, will, and character.”²⁸ The best way to internalize this idea for both parents and children was to make it the priority topic of conversation in their home. As Merrill declares, “An important demand of the covenant relationship was that it be perpetuated beyond the immediate generation of those with whom the Lord made it, for its promises and provisions were for generations yet unborn.”²⁹ God’s plan was for parents to pass those promises and provisions down to their children and for that cycle to continue throughout the family lineage.

This type of replication of love for the Lord can only happen with the intentionality of a strategy. Thankfully, verses 6–9 give parents direction towards God’s plan for family discipleship. It first involves repetition. God calls them to repeat it to their children. Merrill states, “In practical terms, this necessitated a regular routine of instruction. Fathers must educate son and son the grandson so that the fact and features of the covenant might never be forgotten.”³⁰ Parents cannot let this important task slip, they must continue in teaching it every day. Inconsistent repetition will lead to inconsistent obedience. Merrill affirms, “Moses says the way this message is made indelible is by constant repetition.”³¹ Parents must keep this instruction in front of themselves and in

²⁸ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 100.

²⁹ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 141–42.

³⁰ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

³¹ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

front of their children. Wright states, “The law of God was to be the topic of ordinary conversation in ordinary homes in ordinary life, from breakfast to bedtime.”³² Loving the Lord completely must dominate the household conversation.

Parents must move to an even deeper level of instruction of the Shema. It must be engrained in their children’s lives. It should be tied on their hands and symbols on their foreheads. The love children should have for God should flow outwardly from their thoughts and actions. The Shema should also be placed permanently in focal points of the families, on the doorposts of houses, and on city gates. Merrill describes, “The image is that of the engraver of a monument who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches a text into the face of a solid stone of granite. The sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done the message is there to stay.”³³ Families should set up markers to act as prompts for their children to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength. The visual representation here demonstrates the prominence of the Shema in Jewish families. Children should be reminded of this daily in what they hear, see, and do.

The same applies to families today. Parents should make efforts to help their children remember to love the Lord their God completely. The Holy Spirit works through the parent’s efforts and in the lives of the children to illuminate biblical truths and make this endeavor pleasing to God. Teaching the Shema to children is still a necessity today. Parents must also show their children how to apply their love for God across every circumstance they may face. This involves practicing biblical wisdom. The following section will show a biblical example of a father instructing his son to apply the Shema via wise living.

³² Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 100.

³³ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

A Biblical Example: Proverbs 4:20–27

The book of Proverbs is filled with fatherly directions for living. The beginning of the book contains the true source of wisdom, the fear of the Lord (Prov 1:7). One can find godly instructions for living for all people here: men, women, and children. Several times, however, fathers instruct their children in the ways of the Lord. This is most prominent in chapter 4, a chapter broken down into three sections of godly wisdom passed down from father to son. For the sake of this portion, the final section of those three will be explored. The wisdom of the father directs his son in all aspects of life, using language involving the physical body both literally and spiritually. Both mothers and fathers today must carry on this same instruction to their children.

A Father's Instructions Give Life

Parents are given the highest task of teaching their children the ways of the Lord. This process involves teaching the Scriptures to their children and helping them apply those teachings in everyday life. The book of Proverbs provides godly teachings of wisdom and the way one looks for it. Old Testament professor Daniel Estes states, “In practical terms, the search for wisdom involves careful observation of life through personal experience and through the experiences of others passed down through teachers.”³⁴ Proverbs is a book containing the experiences and direction of those from whom one can learn.

Proverbs should not only be learned but taught. These sayings provide a guide for parents to teach their children. In Proverbs 4, a parent is passing down godly wisdom through the instruction of guidance in the way one should live. Professor Sid Buzzell points out, “The book of Proverbs is useful for parents in instructing their sons and daughters.”³⁵ Parents can look to Proverbs to aid them in teaching their children and be

³⁴ Daniel J. Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1–9*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 31.

³⁵ Sid Buzzell, *Proverbs*, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Wisdom*, ed. John F Walvoord

confident that this will be applicable in all areas of life. Without this instruction, it may be difficult for children to rightly understand the way God has set up the world and their place in it. Estes verifies, “In order for learners to be able to make rational and wise decisions, they need an intellectual and moral framework for their choices.”³⁶ That framework is provided in the book of Proverbs and understood through this wisdom taught from parents. Once a child understands this structure, he may be equipped to live fruitfully in the world today. As Estes states, “The goal of the wise teacher is to guide the learner to live within Yahweh’s world.”³⁷ Parents carry a weighty responsibility to adequately prepare their children to live wisely as they apply biblical wisdom to every situation in life.

This inward change in children may not happen overnight. Parents must continue diligently to teach their children. As Buzzell proposes, “The teachings in this book guide its readers to lead wise, godly lives and how to avoid the pitfall of unwise, ungodly conduct.”³⁸ Actions are important in living a godly life; however, behavior modification is not the only intended purpose. Godly wisdom changes one’s ideals. The beliefs one carries are best shaped by the wisdom from the Scriptures, and parents have a responsibility to pass that along to their children as well. Old Testament professor Lindsey Wilson affirms, “These words are to shape you outwardly and inwardly: how you relate to the world and what you value in yourself.”³⁹ While it is important to remember that “nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom 7:18), one should value the work that God is doing within him. The flame of this work is kindled and

and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2018), 221.

³⁶ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 133.

³⁷ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 133.

³⁸ Buzzell, *Proverbs*, 220.

³⁹ Lindsay Wilson, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 94.

strengthened by the parental teaching of Scriptural truths. Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman III adds, “The father is not interested in just a superficial response from his son, some kind of behavior modification; he desires that his child be wise at his very core.”⁴⁰ Godly wisdom passed down from parents to their children can affect the child’s entire life, as the next section will highlight.

A Father’s Instruction for Life

The father in Proverbs 4 instructs his son to follow the path of the Lord with all he is. The father mentions parts of the body to illustrate the completeness of devotion his son should have toward God. Buzzell points out the Proverbs 4 father’s goal to provide “a wise, skillful approach to living, which begins with being properly related to the Lord.”⁴¹ This approach must be evident in all aspects of life. Proverbs 4 points that idea out as the writer mentions these different body parts. As professor of doctrinal theology Amy Plantinga Pauw indicates, “Proverbs advocates a passionate engagement of the whole person toward what pleases God and makes for human flourishing.”⁴² This type of flourishing only comes about when a person is living out the wisdom found in Proverbs.

The key edict of this passage is for children to pay attention to their father’s words. If a child does not pay attention, he will not know the ways of the Lord. To pay attention (*qasab*) is much more than hearing, but weighing what has been instructed and allowing it to guide one’s thoughts and actions. If one grasps this instruction, all his life will be fixed on godly living. As Estes describes, “The learner is challenged to align each area of his life, represented by the sensory organs, with what is right.”⁴³ The son cannot

⁴⁰ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 154.

⁴¹ Buzzell, *Proverbs*, 221.

⁴² Amy Plantinga Pauw, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 38.

⁴³ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 114.

do this if he fails to pay attention. This first command directs all the next; the son must pay attention.

In verse 22, the father describes his words as life. As he continues leading his child down this path of the Lord, the father will describe these sensory organs in ways that help his son live. When all these body parts are aligned with the father's direction, the child will walk worthy of the Scriptures. They will be life to him. In many cases, life may describe longevity; however, as Wilson expresses, "While wisdom sometimes speaks specifically of long life, the focus here is rather on the quality of life."⁴⁴ The son's life is made better by following the instruction of his father.

This idea instills weight on a parent. The task of instructing a child in the ways of the Lord is great and should be done with care and consideration. Fathers must keep the words of the Lord in their mouths if they are to teach them to their children. Both parents and children have responsibilities in this labor.

Children are given instructions on safely keeping the instructions of their father. They are called to "keep them within your heart" (Prov 4:21). As discussed previously, the heart in Hebrew (*leb*) is used differently than it is in English when used metaphorically. Professor Ernest Lucas adds, "In English, it is used of the centre of emotions, especially love. In Hebrew it is used of the inner person, especially the centre of thinking, willing, and feeling."⁴⁵ The heart is where decisions are made and life is given direction. One must focus on the heart. It is where the instructions should be kept and should be guarded diligently.

The heart is the source of life (Prov 4:23). It is where these instructions are kept and what governs people's thoughts and actions. Estes points out that the father,

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Proverbs*, 94.

⁴⁵ Ernest Lucas, *Proverbs*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 55.

“challenges the son to guard it carefully lest his whole life be ruined.”⁴⁶ It is imperative that all diligence be given to guard the heart. An unkept heart will lead to an unkept life. Estes also states, “The heart, representative of the character, inevitably affects the outcome of the total person.”⁴⁷ Without a guard, destruction will occur.

Guarding one’s heart should be one of the highest priorities he should have, for in it is stored the treasure of the father’s instructions. One must consider how to protect the heart. Old Testament theologian Bruce Waltke suggests, “Guarding the heart . . . must be reckoned as more important than anything else that one needs to restrain.”⁴⁸ This process both protects the heart from outside influences and from losing the instruction held within. One must give great devotion to this act. Waltke explains, “*MISMR* refers to a place under guard, a prison, or a standing guard. In that sense, it may mean either to keep a sharp lookout to keep someone or something in custody and so restrain it as a prison . . . or to protect it from an enemy without.”⁴⁹ This command dictates much more than a brief glance at the heart, but a dedicated process of protecting the heart. Estes verifies, “Control of this vital centre of personal experience comes by choice, not by chance, for the learner is exhorted, ‘guard your heart.’”⁵⁰ One must do all he can to verify the security of the instructions held in the heart. The wisdom from the father is both the guard for the heart and to be guarded there as well.

The instructions from the father should be valued above all else. What is stored in the heart is highly regarded, for values come forth from the heart. Guarding it against the evils of the world is paramount. If worldly desires get into the heart, the person will

⁴⁶ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 69.

⁴⁷ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 69.

⁴⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 188.

⁴⁹ Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 188.

⁵⁰ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 148.

pursue those desires. Waltke states, “[By] keeping the commands within the heart it remains guarded against evil intentions.”⁵¹ The values instilled by the father’s instruction should be kept pure and true to the Scriptures, and this can only happen if the heart is guarded. Parents have the responsibility to teach both the truths of Scriptures and the importance of the children valuing those teachings greatly.

When the heart is guarded, the whole body goes in the right direction. Nowhere is this demonstrated more than in one’s speech. Jesus said about the evil person in Luke 6:45, “for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.” Guarding your heart effectively leads to guarding what you say. Parents must teach their children that purity comes from within. Biblical scholar Michael V. Fox proposes, “The heart must be guarded more zealously than anything else—not to protect it, lest it utter inappropriate words.”⁵² Parents must also teach their children that what comes out of their mouths reveals what is on the inside as well.

The idea that the heart and the tongue are linked may be correct, but it does not mean that they are the same. The heart (*leb*) and the mouth (*pe*) are not the same. Fox may exercise liberty in saying that to guard your heart is “synonymous with [guarding] your mouth.”⁵³ As stated above, Jesus said the words a person says originates in the heart. He did not say they were the same thing. Fox later states it more accurately: “The heart works its power in tandem with the tongue. The heart is the source of life, and it sends up the thoughts the tongue utters.”⁵⁴ This statement helps link Proverbs 4 to the Shema. Parents need to teach children the words of the Lord so that they will be infused into their heart.

⁵¹ Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 188.

⁵² Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 18A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 185.

⁵³ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 185.

⁵⁴ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 186.

Finally, the writer of Proverbs 4 instructs his son to keep his eyes forward to keep his feet on the path. One's eyes direct his whole body. It is vitally important that parents teach their children to keep their eyes fixed on the path of righteousness offered through the Scriptures. Waltke affirms, "The eyes give undivided attention to the right path, and the foot must not deviate from it."⁵⁵ Straying from this path may lead to destruction. If a person wants to stay in the way of the righteous and avoid the pathway of sinners (Ps 1:3), he must keep his eyes on the teachings of his father.

Scriptures will guide a person to holiness. Waltke points out, "As long as people have their gaze fixed on heavenly truth, Satan has no advantage over them. Eve fell only after she looked at the forbidden fruit."⁵⁶ The only way one will avoid temptation and the sin that can follow is by keeping his eyes on the path and staying true to its course. Fox suggests, "Looking straight ahead is an external expression of unswerving directedness toward a goal. Temptation lies on both sides, and one must not ever glance at them."⁵⁷ The only way for one to keep his feet on the right path is to keep his eyes there first.

Biblical instruction from a parent is key. It is a child's best hope to keep a clean heart and follow biblical teachings. However, this idea is not just an Old Testament directive. Paul in the New Testament writes about the importance for parents to teach their children as well as the children's responsibilities.

Obedience to the Training: Ephesians 6:1–4

Jesus proclaimed the birth of a new covenant, one that is written with his blood. Hebrews 9:22 declares that "According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." This

⁵⁵ Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 189.

⁵⁶ Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 189.

⁵⁷ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 187.

covenant was put into effect at his resurrection. No longer are sacrifices of bulls, rams, and lambs needed; the sacrifice of the Lamb of God covers all sins. However, Jesus did not do away with Old Testament commandments; He fulfilled them (Matt 5:17). The parents' responsibility to disciple their children is not abolished by the new covenant; rather, it is strengthened. Family discipleship still stands as the main way for children to understand the ways of the Lord. Ephesians 6:1–4 gives the new covenant church further instructions concerning the practice of family discipleship.

A Command to Children

Ephesians 6 begins with a direct command to children. The command is rooted in the Decalogue commandment to honor your father and mother, but it carries a different nuance. New Testament professor Harold Hoehner describes this as a familial pattern that follows a “household code.”⁵⁸ That code prescribes parents to teach their children and children to obey.

Obedience is the key response of children in this text. James Montgomery Boice, a pastor and theologian, wrote, “Obedience is the fundamental relationship of children to parents.”⁵⁹ There are spiritual consequences to disobedience as well. If children do not obey, it breaks down the key elements that God commanded from Deuteronomy 5:16—the commandment to honor your father and mother.

Although this command applies to all people, the context should be given consideration. Hoehner states, “[Paul] makes a direct appeal to the children of the families of the Ephesian church.”⁶⁰ This directive is for children of Christian families. Hoehner again submits that because Paul used the Greek word *teknon*, he “had in mind

⁵⁸ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 784.

⁵⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 212.

⁶⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 786.

children old enough to understand and exercise their free will.”⁶¹ While Paul does not give a specific age, many children can understand and obey their parents beginning at a young age. The parents must be willing to teach them to obey. This applies in today’s context as well. Children today do well to obey the directions of their parents.

Obedience to parents should be continual and active. Hoehner declares, “The present imperative stressed that the obedience of children is an ongoing action.”⁶² This command extends to all children, older and younger. Hoehner also states, “The verb ‘to obey’ is active, demonstrating children’s responsibility as free moral agents to carry out this instruction before God.”⁶³ Children should strive to do all possible to always obey their parents; to do so demonstrates their obedience to the Lord.

Disobedient children bore a negative mark on a family. In modern terms, people may assume that disobedient children stem from lackluster parenting, even if that really is not the case. However, during the writing of the New Testament, Paul writes of an even bigger contextual issue that it provided. Children disobeying their parents connected them to the unbelieving Gentiles. Theologian and professor Abraham Kuruvilla declares, “Disobedience to parents was the mark of the depravity of the Gentiles (Rom 1:30) and a sign of the chaotic evil pervading the last days (2 Tim 3:2).”⁶⁴ New Testament scholar Frank Thielman adds, “The widespread neglect of this obvious principle of conduct was a sign of the moral chaos into which the world had degenerated in ‘the last days.’”⁶⁵ When children did not obey their parents, it demonstrated a lack of connection to the Lord’s people.

⁶¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 786.

⁶² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 786.

⁶³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 787.

⁶⁴ Abraham Kuruvilla, *Ephesians: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 187.

⁶⁵ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 397.

In addition to the ties to the people of God and new church, obedience to parents demonstrated the faith of the family. For believing children, their faith is expressed in obedience. Thielman indicates, “Because they have been incorporated into Christ by faith (1:13), they should obey their parents.”⁶⁶ The faith of the family, and particularly the children, should be the driving force behind all their actions. The first action they can take is to obey their parents. Obedience to parents is a mark of spiritual maturity. Kuruvilla affirms, “Obedience is part of spiritual formation and discipleship to God, a mark of a follower of Christ, and not simply a response to authority. And, not least, such submission to parents is integral to, and a sign of, being filled by the Spirit.”⁶⁷ Children who are growing in Christ will see obedience to parents as a natural outflow of their relationship with God.

Honor and Promise

Obedience is not a new command to children. It finds its roots in the Old Testament call to honor one’s father and mother. The word honor (*timao*) requires an estimation of value and internalization of parental leadership so that a child both understands and obeys. Values incorporate the hands and the heart. As children hear from their parents, they are to obey, and obedience leads to honor.

The relationship between obedience and honor is close. Hoehner states,

This commandment to honor one’s father and mother encompasses a variety of related commandments. Anyone who strikes or curses his or her father or mother shall be put to death (Exod 21:15, 17); anyone who dishonors his or her father or mother shall be cursed (Deut 27:16). Accordingly, it is commanded that ‘everyone shall revere/fear his mother and father (Lev 19:3). Hence, the OT writings maintain that to obey one’s parents is to honor him; conversely, to disobey them is to dishonor them.⁶⁸

Children who obey their parents honor them. Obedience is the outward action of an

⁶⁶ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 397.

⁶⁷ Kuruvilla, *Ephesians*, 188.

⁶⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 788.

inward decision of obedience.

Paul adds a reminder to the Ephesian church that obedience is tied to a promise in the Old Testament: “So that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land” (Eph 6:3). There are rewards for children who honor their father and mother. New Testament professor Lynn Cohick proposes, “God’s command for children to honor parents is sweetened with his promise to honor the obedient ones with long life.”⁶⁹ God seems to attach some sort of quality and quantity of life to obedience to parents. This may seem confusing to some, but a study of other Old Testament promises may bring clarity. Hoehner adds, “Perhaps the best clues in the Old Testament context are given for those children who dishonored their parents. It states that a son who persistently disobeys his parent is to be stoned (Deut 21:18–21) and a son or daughter who strikes or curses his or her father or mother is to be put to death (Ex 21:15, 17).”⁷⁰ There are negative promises toward disobedience and dishonor, which lead to a better understanding of the positive promises of honor.

Due to the theological construction of the Bible (God authored the Scriptures by the prompting of the Holy Spirit in the lives of faithful followers), one can see the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The promises God makes in the Old Testament are carried out in the New Testament. For Paul to bring this idea of blessing from honoring one’s parents is worthy of note. As Hoehner suggests, “The same general Old Testament principle can be applied to the New Testament, namely, that obeying and honoring father and mother will bring well-being and long life on earth. Again, there will be exceptions to the rule, but the general principle holds.”⁷¹ Children who honor their parents will have long lives, but what exactly does that mean?

⁶⁹ Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series 10 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 144.

⁷⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 792.

⁷¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 793.

Long life seems to mean to have many days on the earth. Conversely, it means that one will not have an untimely death. While this is not a guarantee, this promise holds true generally, specifically in the context in which it was written. Many children, some would say nearly half, would die before reaching teenage years.⁷² However, children who honored their parents could avoid an early death—not from sickness and disease but from other hardships and tragedies. As Thielman states, “Children who took to heart the wisdom of those who cared for them had a better chance of doing well and living long than those who despised their parent’s instruction.”⁷³ In a day and time when children did not have a high probability of seeing adulthood, obeying their parents could help further that cause. Kuruvilla indicates, “I would much rather affirm, all other causes and conditions being the same, obeying one’s parents will increase one’s lifespan.”⁷⁴ Honoring and obeying parents has both moral and practical implications.

Parental Role

Up to this point, children have been the focal point of Paul’s instruction, but beginning in verse 4, the attention is shifted toward parents and their responsibilities. Both parents and children have a role to play in this relationship; neither is excluded from carrying out obedience to the Lord’s direction. Kuruvilla submits, “That Ephesians 6:4 beings with ‘and’ (*kai*) emphasizes the mutuality of the relationship and focuses on the respective responsibilities of the parties involved: children obey their parents and parents (fathers) foster their children.”⁷⁵ Paul makes a shift into directing the parents who hold the responsibility of guiding their children.

Parents are accountable for their children. This imperative is extended to every

⁷² Thielman, *Ephesians*, 399.

⁷³ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 400.

⁷⁴ Kuruvilla, *Ephesians*, 189.

⁷⁵ Kuruvilla, *Ephesians*, 190.

member of the family for fathers. Hoehner points out, “The father is responsible for the whole family.”⁷⁶ This includes every area of growth for the family, but particularly regarding the ways of the Lord. A Christian parent must teach his children about Jesus. Hoehner again indicates, “The father was also responsible for the education of his children (more particularly his sons) concerning the Lord and his wonderful dealings with the nation of Israel.”⁷⁷ There was no reliance on a religious structure as the main spiritual influencer of a child. God expected parents to have the lead role in their children’s lives.

Paul’s instruction to parents is mainly directed at fathers; however, this does not exclude mothers from the task. Anglican theologian John Stott mentions, “Fathers are to care for their families as God the Father cares for his. And incidentally mothers are surely included too.”⁷⁸ This parental responsibility is given to both parents. Just as the admonition to train children was for both parents in Proverbs, it links both parents here in Ephesians. Fathers, in mimicking the Heavenly Father, are to be the source of guidance for their families. Mothers play an important part in this process as well. Cohick confirms, “Paul is not implying that mothers should not teach their children, rather that fathers should be actively involved.”⁷⁹ Neither parent should completely delegate this important activity to the other; both should be involved. However, fathers must lead in this undertaking.

Fathers are instructed against invoking anger in their children. They have the role of helping foster a love and devotion to the Lord. Fathers who do so in a demeaning manner may produce the opposite. Severe leadership from parents may discourage children from following the Lord. Thielman adds, “Here Paul reigns in his power, urging

⁷⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 794.

⁷⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 794.

⁷⁸ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 245.

⁷⁹ Cohick, *Ephesians*, 145.

fathers not to abuse their authority by treating their children in harsh, unfair ways that create resentment and bitterness.”⁸⁰ While fathers should teach their children the ways of the Lord, they should not discourage them by the way they teach. Children will carry a disconnect with the love of God if it is not taught lovingly. This does not mean that parents should avoid discipline. God does not avoid it, and neither should parents. One must keep in mind the tone and lifestyle of the parent should imitate the Scriptures. Any type of abuse—physical, verbal, and even spiritual—should be avoided at all costs when teaching children God’s ways. Thielman states, “Here in Eph 6:4, where Paul both circumscribes the power of the father of the household reminds him of his responsibilities, it is likely that *nouthesia* has an admonitory, but not punitive nuance.”⁸¹ God’s Word should lead children to love, not anger, and parents must guide them toward that end.

God uses parents in the lives of their children. He wants parents to bring them up according to his Word. The Greek word *ektrepheo* is used for “bring up,” but carries the connotation of a nurturing relationship. Parents do not act merely as guides, but as comforting, cultivating, and sustaining agents for the Lord to their children. Hoehner mentions, “The fathers are the Lord’s agents and, therefore, raise their children according to His mandates. Such training and admonishment would be sensitive to the children’s responses and needs.”⁸² This training includes a caring aspect that benefits the child. Thielman agrees, “The rearing of children in the Jewish tradition included not only providing for their physical needs, but also showing them affection . . . and especially teaching them the law of God.”⁸³ Without a nurturing care for children, the instructions of

⁸⁰ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401.

⁸¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 402.

⁸² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 799.

⁸³ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401.

the law of the Lord will not take root in their hearts. As parents disciple their children, it must come from a place of love, not of anger or duty.

As parents nurture their children under the instruction of the Lord, they call them to obey. Obedience to God does not come naturally to people. Although we are made in his image, the stain of sin has marked us as separate from him (Eph 2:12), strangers (Eph 2:19), and dead in our transgressions (Eph 2:1). Parents who seek to disciple their children must exercise discipline (*paideia*). The term *paideia*, from where the word training comes, has to do with discipline, education, and instruction together. Parents must teach all sides of God's Word to their children.

This responsibility (to teach, to guard, not to exasperate) falls first and foremost on the parents. Parents cannot believe that bringing their children to church will sufficiently provide all these avenues. Church is a foundational aspect of the Christian's life, but it cannot replace the home as the primary place of instruction for children. Stott confirms, "Christian parents should jealously guard their responsibility, delegating of it indeed to both the church and school, but never surrendering it."⁸⁴ This may even change the way parents view the options for education for their homes. Some homeschool families do so for the sake of knowledge and discipleship. Parents must guard their responsibility with all diligence and make sure they are instructing the things of God to their children. British theologian Andrew Lincoln expresses, "Ephesians . . . calls on fathers to bring up their children in a distinctly Christian way."⁸⁵ That way must be firmly rooted in the Scriptures and instructed in a caring, loving, yet unwavering manner.

Conclusion

God's plan was always for parents to be the chief spiritual influencers of their

⁸⁴ Stott, *God's New Society*, 248.

⁸⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 407.

children. From the Shema in Deuteronomy, God told parents to keep the instruction of his ways near their children through teaching and visual representation. He also gave examples of how to teach one's children through the rest of the Old Testament and particularly in Proverbs. Fathers are given the reins in Ephesians to lead their children toward maturity in Christ. Churches cannot assume this role. Churches can, however, help invest in those who might need more encouragement, such as single parents, to help give them as much support in this venture as possible. Churches can enlist adults to provide spiritual guidance for children and teenagers who come to church without their parents. Churches also must highlight the power and role of the Holy Spirit, who guides this process and creates the change within the children. Parents should find encouragement, guidance, and coaching within the church to carry out this responsibility well. The church should be the main supporter of parents as they lead their children toward godliness, but the parents hold the highest responsibility in this endeavor.

CHAPTER 3

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE AND PRACTICE OF FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

Scripture has given parents the responsibility of spiritually training their children. The biblical foundations of this role have been laid out in the previous chapter. Throughout history, many Christians dedicated their efforts to not only training their children in the ways of the Lord but also helping other parents do the same. Pastors have communicated through both sermons and writings the importance of training children to follow the Lord. However, this practice has not always been the case. Along the way, some churches have assumed the role of chief spiritual influencer in the lives of children and youth. Additionally, some parents have abdicated this role to the church. The church should engage in assisting parents to disciple their children, not the other way around.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the need for the renewal of an emphasis of family discipleship in local churches. This goal will be accomplished first by identifying the historical practice of family discipleship by focusing on a sampling of key figures from the church's history. Second, a description will be given of when the discipleship of youth and children primarily shifted from families to the church. Finally, a proposal for recovery and retrieval from the voices of the past will be expressed for parents to reclaim the role of chief spiritual influencers in their children's lives via family discipleship.

Historical Practice of Family Discipleship

Throughout the life of the church, some theologians and pastors considered helping parents lead their families well a noble task. From the early church fathers, through the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and even into the modern age, there are, at

minimum, traces of theologians and pastors who wanted to see parents fulfill their duties as the chief spiritual influencers of their families.¹ This section will highlight the church's impact on family discipleship, particularly focusing on a selection of pastors and theologians throughout history who were dedicated to preparing parents for this task.

In the Patristic era, the church sought to equip parents to lead their children. New Testament professor Robert Plummer argues for the continuation of the New Testament practices of family discipleship into the early church era. Plummer expresses, "In the Christian writings that followed the New Testament era, the instructions for parents are like the ones found in the New Testament. Early Christian leaders reminded husbands and wives of their obligations to love one another, to live in orderly households, and to love their children."² Church fathers like John Chrysostom utilized homilies to urge parents to teach their children to know and follow the Lord. Chrysostom proposes, "Let everything take second place to the care of our children, our bringing them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord."³ Chrysostom also encourages his people to focus on the actions of their children as they teach them. He states, "A pattern of life is what is needed, not empty speeches; character, not cleverness; deeds, not words."⁴ Chrysostom employed his homilies to illustrate how important it was for parents to teach their children the things of God.

The Middle Ages saw minimal efforts to equip parents for family discipleship,

¹ Donald Whitney provides a clear description of pastors and theologians who advocated for parent discipleship in chapter 2 of his book *Family Worship*. Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 28–43.

² Robert L. Plummer, "Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 55.

³ John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, Popular Patristics 7, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 68.

⁴ Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, 69.

as the church (and clergy) grew in importance.⁵ However, this did not mean that the equipping of parents for family discipleship was totally neglected during this time. Even though advocates of family discipleship were few, pastor C. Michael Wren Jr. points out a few clergymen who did. Two of those who did were John Bromyard and Thomas Aquinas. Wren highlights, “John Bromyard, a fourteenth century Dominican friar in Hereford . . . called upon parents to disciple their children appropriately, to teach them God’s commandments, and to teach them to restrain their tongues.”⁶ Fewer catechisms existed during this timeframe, but there are some to be found. Scarcity does not imply absence. Wren again states, “Thomas [Aquinas] produced a manual of instruction, *The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*.”⁷ One can find proponents of family discipleship in the Middle Ages, but he will have to look carefully to do so. An elevation of the office of clergy and a downplaying of those outside of the clergy caused this shift to occur.⁸ Even during the Medieval Period, when family discipleship was not typically given a high priority, there remained key voices who encouraged parents to help their children grow in the faith.

A shift occurred during the Reformation. Faithful followers of Christ during this time saw the value, clarity, and usefulness of the Scriptures. This high regard for the Scriptures, coupled with the priesthood of believers, brought the practice of family discipleship to a more prominent level. Men like John Calvin and Martin Luther made tremendous impacts on the spiritual lives of families during this time. Author C. Jeffery

⁵ C. Michael Wren Jr. comments on the role the priests played, stating they “were not involved in the spiritual development of families and produced very little aid to those who were.” C. Michael Wren Jr., “Among Your Company at Home,” in Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 112.

⁶ Wren, “Among Your Company at Home,” 111.

⁷ Wren, “Among Your Company at Home,” 106.

⁸ Coley and Robinson write, “By the fourth century, the church grew more and more into a top-down form of leadership and structure, with the emphasis more on the clergy and less on the saints and the households.” Ken Coley and Blair Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship* (Nashville: Randall House, 2021), 21.

Robinson Jr. stated that both these men “developed a robust vision for Christian training in the household and called parents to disciple their children.”⁹ Both Luther and Calvin advocated for catechisms to be utilized in the homes. Each of these men wrote catechisms to guide parents as they trained their children.¹⁰ Luther understood the importance of family discipleship so much that he referred to it not just as a responsibility, but a calling from God that must be fulfilled. Pastor Terry Johnson, who has written several books on family worship, states that for the Reformers, “The greatest service one could perform for humanity was to rear godly children.”¹¹ The skew away from parents being the chief spiritual influencers of their children was halted and a reversal back to the importance of the household was put into place during the Reformation that continued forward.

As ministers rekindled the desire to see family discipleship flourish within their churches, many delivered sermons on the topic. The late seventeenth-century presbyterian pastor Matthew Henry was no exception. Henry connected the strength of a church with the strength of family discipleship.¹² In his sermon, “A Church in the House,” Henry makes the importance of family discipleship clearly known as he declares, “I know not anything that will contribute more to the furtherance of this good work than the bringing of family-religion more into practice and reputation.”¹³ Throughout this

⁹ C. Jeffrey Robinson Sr., “The Home is an Earthly Kingdom,” in Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 115.

¹⁰ Coley and Robinson share, “Luther wrote his *Small Catechisms* in 1529 and included an appendix on ‘Household Duties’ that was meant to help heads of households to lead their family in Scripture and doctrine study,” and, “Calvin condensed the principles of his opus, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, into a catechism for fathers to train their children.” Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 22.

¹¹ Terry L. Johnson, *Understanding Family Worship: Its History, Theology and Practice* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2022), 13.

¹² Donald Whitney writes of Henry’s stance on this topic further by stating, “The reformation we long for and pray for in our churches also involves the home. Since the church is comprised of family units—from singles to large families and everything in between—if the homes are changed through family worship, the church will be changed.” Whitney, *Family Worship*, 35.

¹³ Matthew Henry, *Select Sermons of the Late Reverend Mr. Matthew Henry* (London: Samuel Palmer and J. Buckland, 1782), 2.

sermon, Henry brought to light the importance of family worship as well as the means for carrying it out. He emphasized the importance of Bible reading and of prayer in the times of family worship.

The goal of Bible reading in family worship was not passing on information, but comprehension that led to internalization. Henry states, “You must read scriptures to your families, in a solemn manner, requiring their attendance on your reading, and their attention to it; and enquiring sometimes whether they understand what you read.”¹⁴ Parents must read the Bible with their families clearly, and families must obey what the Bible states. From Henry’s sermon, this is the foundational work of family discipleship.

Henry also encouraged prayer and singing during times of family devotion. Prayer should be offered for confession, thanksgiving, temporal needs, temptations, and intercession for others.¹⁵ Henry asserts, “In a word, let us go by this rule in our family devotions; whatever is a matter of our care, let it be the matter of our prayer.”¹⁶ He also instructed families to sing during their times of devotions, particularly using Psalms.¹⁷ A family who put this into practice daily would benefit greatly. Henry describes it as “a good legacy, nay, it will be a good inheritance.”¹⁸ Family discipleship has a lasting impact on future generations.

Arguably no other pastor or theologian has given as much detailed attention to the topic of family discipleship than did Richard Baxter. A Puritan minister, Baxter not only taught on the subject from his pulpit, but also visited church members’ houses to help them succeed in family worship.²³ Baxter may have had an advantage over many

¹⁴ Henry, *Select Sermons*, 8.

¹⁵ Henry, *Select Sermons*, 14–19.

¹⁶ Henry, *Select Sermons*, 20.

¹⁷ Henry, *Select Sermons*, 20.

¹⁸ Henry, *Select Sermons*, 29.

²³ Robinson notes that “Baxter visited regularly the homes of his entire congregants to make

pastors today in visiting all his people due to their location (most of his congregation lived close enough for a walking visit), but his dedication to producing families who held the training of children in high regard is something many would do well to continue today.

In Baxter's opus, *A Christian Directory*, he writes about the necessity and importance of family devotions. In the second section of this monograph, Baxter states his thesis for his argument: "If families are societies of God's institution, furnished with special advantages and opportunities for God's solemn worship, having not probation so to use them; then the solemn worship of God in and by families as such, is of divine appointment."²⁴ Baxter saw the need for a partnership between the church and families and believed parents must be equipped to lead their families well as a way to strengthen both the household and the church. He would even go on to say that the lack of family discipleship would do just as much harm to the children as ordered family worship would do good.²⁵ The eternal value parents had in their children's lives cannot be overstated, and Baxter makes sure his readers understand such.

Not only did Baxter give parents the reasons why they should lead family discipleship times, but he also gave them a plan to help them accomplish the task. He encouraged parents to teach their children, beginning with the Bible. Baxter states, "Begin with that which is easiest and most grateful to them as the history of the Scriptures, and the lives of the martyrs and other good men, and some short, familiar lessons."²⁶ In other words, Scripture should receive primary importance as parents disciple their children, and then they can help their children understand some of the

certain that they were learning the catechism." Robinson, "The Home is an Earthly Kingdom," 122.

²⁴ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (London: Robert White, 1673), 495.

²⁵ Baxter states, "The ungoverned, ungodly family is a powerful means to the damnation of all the members of it . . . but a well-governed family is an excellent help to the saving of all souls who are in it." Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 512.

²⁶ Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 544–45.

people throughout history who have exemplified Christianity.

Brevity was key for Baxter as well. He highlighted that shorter lessons may be preferable and most helpful teaching a child. He saw a primary way of doing this by catechisms.²⁷ Baxter again says, “Let the manner of your teaching them be very often interlocutory or by the way of questions.”²⁸ Short, thoughtful questions help children process the information in a way that allows for them to recall during their lives. Truly few have had the impact on his church, as well as the future generations through his writings, as did Richard Baxter. Pastors seeking to help their church today in family discipleship would do well to hold his writings in high regard.

Anglican evangelist George Whitefield agreed with others that family worship was essential to the spiritual vitality of a family and the local church. In his sermon, “The Great Duty of Family Religion,” Whitefield declared, “For every house is as it were a little parish, every governor (as was before observed) a priest, every family a flock.”²⁹ This was a common theme for several of the post-Reformation theologians. They saw the value in parents instilling godly values through family discipleship and taught this importance to their church.

Whitefield saw this as an ongoing necessity for parents. The goal of raising children to know and fear the Lord should not be accomplished solely in a church setting. Whitefield states, “Who more proper to instruct them . . . than parents and masters, who (as hath been more than once observed) are as much concerned to feed them with spiritual as with bodily bread, day by day.”³⁰ He believed this must be an ongoing function of parenting consisting of devotion and planning.

²⁷ Baxter wrote *The Catechizing of Families* as a reference guide for parents and leaders of households to accomplish this.

²⁸ Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 583.

²⁹ George Whitefield, *Fifteen Sermons Preached on Various Important Subjects* (Glasgow, Scotland: Paisley, 1794), 248.

³⁰ Whitefield, *Fifteen Sermons*, 251.

Whitefield also saw the aid of catechisms as a useful way to go about training children. As children learn through the question-and-answer format of catechisms, the repetition of such answers solidifies the biblical truths that parent discipleship aims to reinforce. Whitefield affirms, “Indeed scarce any think is more frequently pressed upon us in Holy Writ, than this duty of catechizing.”³¹ In fact, Whitefield saw catechisms as vastly important to the spiritual direction of a family and a holy action parents need to take for the sake of their children. He states, “Would then the present generation have their posterity be true lovers and honourers of God; masters and parents must take Solomon’s good advice and train up and catechize their respective households in the way wherein they should go.”³² Parents today would do well to see the same value in catechisms and utilize them in their training of their children.

The American theologian Jonathan Edwards not only taught the importance of family discipleship but modeled it as well. Robinson notes, “Jonathan Edwards diligently read Scripture with his eleven children each day and taught them the catechisms.”³³ Johnson even affirms that Edwards held this as so important that he made sure to include instructions for family worship in his last sermon to a church that had dismissed him as their pastor.³⁴ Edwards gave both instruction and examples of family discipleship.

In the nineteenth century, presbyterian pastor James W. Alexander devoted his writing to the advancement of family discipleship. Authors Ken Coley and Blair Robinson acknowledge, “Alexander wanted to fortify families with God’s Word as the

³¹ Whitefield, *Fifteen Sermons*, 253.

³² Whitefield, *Fifteen Sermons*, 254.

³³ Robinson, “The Home is an Earthly Kingdom,” 126.

³⁴ Edwards wrote, “Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated on Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual. If these are maintained all the means of grace will be likely to prosper and be successful.” Found in Johnson, *Understanding Family Worship*, 19.

world continued to gain ground in the church.”³⁵ Alexander saw the best way to solidify the Christian beliefs of all family members as happening through family worship. He states, “Family worship has a direct and manifest tendency to make religion a matter of every-day interest.”³⁶ Here, Alexander states his goal is to help every member of a family live out their faith daily.

There are other ways that family discipleship benefits the whole family. Alexander points out, “The daily assembling of a household, at regular periods, for a religious purpose, directly tends to promote good habits.”³⁷ When families are engaged in regular discipleship opportunities, their lives are stronger together. The unique bond that comes from these times helps grow the family emotionally. Family discipleship builds a togetherness that encourages the well-being of all individuals involved. Alexander declares, “Family peace is a blessing which cannot be overstated; and I desire to show that it is directly promoted by family worship.”³⁸ Family discipleship fosters peace in life and in the family.

Family discipleship can help guard against sin and ungodliness. If exercising this practice acts as a protection against such things, the lack of family discipleship raises the possibility of falling into the snares of sin. Alexander submits, “Where the Scriptures are fully and statedly read in a household day by day, there is the greatest possible safeguard against error.”³⁹ When that protection is lowered and family worship is not practiced, it not only provides more room for sin to enter, but also makes it more difficult to begin practicing family worship again. Alexander once again points out, “Laying aside

³⁵ Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 33.

³⁶ James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family-Worship* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847), 22.

³⁷ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family-Worship*, 38–39.

³⁸ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family-Worship*, 48.

³⁹ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family-Worship*, 79.

all flattering words, I may say plainly that I regard the neglect of family worship as spring from lukewarmness and worldliness in religion.”⁴⁰ When a family stops family discipleship efforts, it becomes much harder to break from the lack of practice and begin again. Family worship begets family worship.

Very few theologians from the nineteenth century wrote as practically as did J. C. Ryle. Ryle, an Anglican bishop, spent most of his writing blending theology and practice. He wanted to see Christians equipped to live in a way that demonstrated holiness continually. Ryle argues, “The man who has nothing more than a kind of Sunday religion—whose Christianity is like his Sunday clothes, put on once a week then laid aside—such a man cannot, of course, be expected to care about ‘growth in grace.’”⁴¹ Family discipleship lays the groundwork for this to be solidified in a person’s life. Ryle also states, “Seek the Lord early, and so you will be spared many a bitter tear.”⁴² Parents give their children a good start if they practice family discipleship early.

Ryle desired for parents to care about the eternal aspects of their children’s lives. He aimed to help parents think and act considering their children’s souls. Ryle states, “In every step you take about them, in every plan, and scheme, and arrangement, that concerns them, do not leave out that mighty question, ‘How will this affect their souls?’”⁴³ When a parent begins to ask these questions and work to maintain their children’s souls, they will not approach this task haphazardly. Ryle suggests that parents place time and effort into these family devotions so that their children will know and understand the Lord and not depart from him as they grow. Ryle encouraged parents to

⁴⁰ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family-Worship*, 145.

⁴¹ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 85.

⁴² J. C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men: From Many Points of View* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 16.

⁴³ J. C. Ryle, *How Should a Child Be Trained* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1919), 17.

“[show] them how to begin. Tell them what to say. Encourage them to persevere.”⁴⁴

Parents must accept this responsibility. Ryle states this duty falls clearly on the leadership of the parents. Ryle mentions, “You may send your children to the best of schools, and give them Bibles and prayer books, and fill them with head knowledge, but if all this time there is no regular training at home, I tell you plainly, I fear it will go hard in the end with your children’s souls.”⁴⁵ Training at home is more important than all else.

Throughout the ages, God has used men to lead his people to understand the importance of family devotions. Children who grow up in households where family devotions occur frequently tend to grow up with a fear and reverence for the things of God. Without this training from parents, children can embrace their faith, but it is less likely than when a parent puts effort into family devotions. God’s plan for the Christian life was for parents to be the chief spiritual influencers of their children.

The importance of family discipleship may have waned in the Middle Ages but was rekindled in the Reformation and continued for several centuries. However, during the following age of specialization and industry, an emphasis on family discipleship was skewed by programming through the church and parachurch ministries for the discipleship of its young members. The church would take the place of home as the primary discipleship making efforts toward children and teenagers.

A Shift from Family Discipleship

A shift from family discipleship to a more concerted effort made by other agencies began in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although this practice was not abandoned during these times, as noted by men like Ryle and Alexander, it became more advantageous for working families to allow the church and parachurch ministries to lead the discipleship of their children. As occupations became more specialized in the

⁴⁴ Ryle, *How Should a Child Be Trained*, 23.

⁴⁵ Ryle, *How Should a Child Be Trained*, 59.

workplace, so did the discipleship of the young. Authors W. Ryan Steenburg and Timothy Paul Jones write, “From generation to generation, the concern has been the same: children need Christian training, parents should be the primary providers of that training, but practices of family discipleship have been difficult to maintain.”⁴⁶ This practice became more difficult during this time frame. The purpose of this section is not to belittle the church or these other agencies for assuming the role that is designed for parents. Rather, the goal is to describe what happened so that parents can reclaim their role as chief spiritual influencer.

When parents began to work outside the home (and consequently with both parents working a higher likelihood as well), it became harder for them to prioritize the discipleship of their children. Additionally, children began to work outside the home during the Industrial Revolution, and family discipleship became harder to achieve. Steenburg and Jones point out that during the Industrial Revolution, “Families increasingly deferred the education and discipleship of their children to programs and institutions outside the household.”⁴⁷ To keep up with the changing times, parents viewed these institutions as necessary for the spiritual health of their families. With less time to devote to the discipleship of their children, parents saw the importance of these programs in edifying the spirituality of their children.

The concerted effort to institutionalize the discipleship of children and youth picked up steam in the nineteenth century. Steenburg and Jones again mention, “Throughout the nineteenth century, Sunday schools and youth societies were—with the best of intentions and, in many cases, because of perceived necessity—providing religious education that had once occurred in the household.”⁴⁸ Well-meaning Christians saw a

⁴⁶ W. Ryan Steenburg and Timothy Paul Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” in Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 145.

⁴⁷ Steenburg and Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” 146.

⁴⁸ Steenburg and Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” 149.

need that existed and sought to fill it with their own brand of student discipleship. These societies offered the opportunities of spiritual teachings that many young people did not get. Professor Mark H. Senter III reveals, “Sunday school was seen by Christian lay leaders as the hope for evangelizing the children of poor immigrants who had freshly arrived from Europe.”⁴⁹ Sunday schools were started in hopes of reaching youth with the gospel.

Sunday schools were not a discipleship arm of the church, as many consider them to be today. They began outside the church as parachurch organizations. Senter remarks about Sunday schools, “The Sunday school . . . was a vital part of the first cycle of youth ministry in the United States.”⁵⁰ The Sunday school movement birthed a whole plethora of organizations and unions with the intent of helping disciple children and youth.⁵¹ This movement was not intended to replace parents, although there is little in any of these agencies that lent itself to equipping parents in teaching their own children. These agencies would end up not only bridging a gap, but assuming the role of chief spiritual influencer in the lives of youth.

During the twentieth century, churches saw the lack of influence they had in the realm of youth discipleship. Churches began to focus their attention on the youth among their congregation and sought out opportunities to minister to them more directly. With the age of specialization in the marketplace came similar attitudes in the church.

⁴⁹ Mark H. Senter III, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 104.

⁵⁰ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 100.

⁵¹ Senter indicates, “The cycle received its initial boost in 1824 when the American Sunday School Union was formed in Philadelphia and became the first national parachurch agency dedicated to establishing Sunday schools throughout the West . . . the following decade, the juvenile temperance movement, a second movement from the British Isles, gave Christian adults another means of shaping the lives of young people. Though focused on abstinence from alcoholic beverages, the movement provided a means of preserving youth for a life of Christian living. Both movements were stimulated during the middle of the century by the introduction of the Young Men’s Christian Association and Young Women’s Christian Association, two parachurch agencies that, like Sunday school and juvenile temperance movements, had their roots in England.” Found in Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 100–101.

Steenburg and Jones note of the workplace culture, “Great emphasis was placed on specialization, professionalism, and standardization.”⁵² Many of the church members worked in a way that specialized in a trade or a task and allowed their churches to do the same. With the rise of the parachurch agency in reaching young people, churches also began to look for ways to accomplish this task. They did so by creating youth fellowships and equipping a leader with whom the youth could identify.

The gathering place of children throughout the United States became the schools in the twentieth century. This is particularly true for older youth. Public schools became the place for learning, socialization, and formation. Senter remarks, “It appeared as if the era of Christian youth ministry had come to an end. Now it was time for the public education system to assume the responsibility for building the character of the nation’s youth.”⁵³ More children were attending public school, and the youth societies and Sunday schools in place became more obsolete.

While the educational side of youth societies and Sunday schools had been replaced, a gap remained in the spiritual side. Churches started seeing this void as well and created youth fellowships to meet that need. These youth fellowships arose so that youth could have biblical training under the auspices of the church. Senter states,

Youth fellowships differed from youth societies in two very significant ways. First, they were under the complete control of the local church. Usually this meant being accountable to the church committee or commission on religious education. The second difference from youth societies had to do with the ages of the members. . . . Youth fellowships were open to every person in the church between the ages of twelve and twenty-four. . . . Youth fellowships were further divided into intermediates (twelve to fourteen), seniors (fifteen to seventeen), and older youth (eighteen to twenty-four). The primary focus, however, was on the high school age group.⁵⁴

Through these youth fellowships, churches believed they developed a way to teach the

⁵² Steenburg and Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” 153.

⁵³ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 174.

⁵⁴ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 183.

youth in their congregation and reach those outside with no church to call home. Sunday schools were reformatted to follow this model as well.

Denominations assisted churches in creating youth fellowships. Southern Baptists were a leading denomination in helping churches accomplish this goal of reaching youth.⁵⁵ Southern Baptists used their already existing means of publishing to help create materials for their fellowship, the Baptist Young People's Union. Senter declares, "More than in any of the sister denominations, programming materials for Southern Baptist churches were assigned to the Sunday school board with its enormous publishing capacity. Responsibility for the Baptist Young People's Union, however, remained at the local church level."⁵⁶ This effort on behalf of the SBC Sunday School Board to prepare churches to minister to the young in their congregations was a well-meaning endeavor; however, its effectiveness varied from church to church.

The efforts of SBC churches emphasized a form of academic teaching over spiritual leadership and development. Senter points out, "Southern Baptist youth ministers were for the most part trained as Christian educators tied to church educational structures far more than they were as evangelists or spiritual directors."⁵⁷ More was done for informational instruction than spiritual formation. These adults may have been able to teach but did little to guide youth in holy living, at least not in the way a parent can do. While youth fellowships were a benefit to churches, they helped to create the illusion that the parental responsibility of discipleship had been passed on to the churches, which was not the case.

Youth fellowships set the standard of youth and children discipleship in the twentieth century. Churches began to place more emphasis on the people leading these

⁵⁵ For a more detailed account of the Methodist and Presbyterian denominations' youth fellowships, see Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 184–91.

⁵⁶ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 189.

⁵⁷ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 190.

groups and how well they were doing in that capacity. The rise of parachurch ministries also began during this time to meet the needs of the young. This had a direct effect on local churches. Steenberg and Jones note, “By the mid-twentieth century, local churches were imitating parachurch ministries such as Young Life and Youth for Christ by hiring professional ministers whose primary purpose was to engage adolescents.”⁵⁸ The age of fellowships waned with the age of hiring professional youth and children’s workers in churches and the growing popularity of parachurch organizations.

Age-segregated ministries are important to the life of the church. However, during this time, an overemphasis was placed on such ministries to the neglect of family discipleship. Children and youth looked to their church workers as their chief spiritual influencer rather than their parents. Pastor Voddie Baucham states,

As a result of this growing professionalism, there’s a general idea that anything that needs to be done for the advancement of the mission of the church has to be done by a paid specialist. The consequences of this attitude are myriad. And there’s perhaps no area of Christian life that has been affected more negatively than the ministry of the home.⁵⁹

The professionalism of youth and children’s ministries is not the single cause of the downfall of family discipleship. It is not the sole solution either. They should be viewed as assisting parents in their roles, not taking the lead in the discipleship process.

Over the past two hundred years, churches have worked hard to minister to children and youth. Pastor Jay Strother points out, “Despite all the investments and supposed advances in age-organized ministries over the past thirty years, churched children and youth are growing up less likely than ever before to have a biblical perspective on life.”⁶⁰ There is a better way. Churches must assume the roles of equipper

⁵⁸ Steenburg and Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” 156-57.

⁵⁹ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 68.

⁶⁰ Jay Strother, “Family Equipping Ministry: Church and Home as Co-Champions,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*, 2nd ed., ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), 93-94.

and encourager to the parents as they train their children. Children’s ministries and youth ministries can help with content development, but they must be secondary to the leadership of the parents as the chief spiritual influencers in the lives of children and youth.

A Recovery and Retrieval of Family Discipleship

Scripture points out that parents have the role of chief spiritual influencer in their children’s lives. Theologians throughout history have done the same. The church should aim to assist parents in reclaiming that role. Children’s ministries and youth ministries can come alongside parents and partner with them to provide avenues for parents to assume this responsibility effectively. Parents should not do this alone. The church can help prepare and equip them. This section seeks to highlight the development of family discipleship by emphasizing the importance of the role of the church, Bible intake, prayer, singing, and modeling.

The Role of the Church

It is within the context of the family that God wants to form children’s identities. Here children become rooted in the gospel. Professor Johannes Reimer states, “It is the family that teaches us how to live our lives and how to discern good from evil, right from wrong.”⁶¹ Reimer goes on further to declare, “It is the family that lays the foundations for the basic form of our beliefs.”⁶² Parents have a highly important responsibility that should not be taken lightly.

The fact that parents are the chief spiritual influencers of their children does not negate any responsibility of the local church in this manner. The church must help equip parents to fulfill this role. Family discipleship is not intended to isolate families

⁶¹ Johannes Reimer, *Family in Mission: Theology and Praxis* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2020), 35, Kindle.

⁶² Reimer, *Family in Mission*, 44.

from the church but to strengthen their spiritual formation so that they may be more engaged with the local church.

Considering all this information, churches should assist parents in creating a plan for teaching their children. Strother calls out churches to “partner with parents to develop a comprehensive vision for their children’s spiritual formation.”⁶³ There is little value in carelessly approaching this subject. The theologians noted above did not see this as two separate emphases. Parents must lead family devotions, but the church must equip and support parents as they do so. In his study on the Puritans, professor Leland Ryken points out, “Puritans had such a high view of the institution of the home to worship the Lord because they equated the home with the church.”⁶⁴ Churches may not only provide materials for parents to utilize in family discipleship times but also provide training for parents to help overcome any obstacles they may face in beginning and conducting these valuable efforts.

Richard Baxter championed the value of family Scripture readings. Baxter spent a great deal of time with his congregants teaching them how to lead family discipleship times. However, he did not detach families from the church in this effort. Family discipleship is a far cry from separation from the church. Baxter believed that a strong family discipleship practice would benefit the entire church body. He proposes, “The life of Religion, and the welfare and glory of Church and State, dependeth much on family Government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we undo all.”⁶⁵ Baxter believed dedication to family discipleship times would only strengthen the church.

As theologians and pastors from history and today explain, there are three main

⁶³ Strother, “Family Equipping Ministry,” 148.

⁶⁴ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1986), 75.

⁶⁵ Richard Baxter, *Gildas Salvianus: The Reformed Pastor* (London: Robert White, 1656), 83.

parts to family worship: Bible intake, prayer, and singing.⁶⁶ Parents would do well to include the same three elements in their family worship gatherings now, too. A retrieval from the historic theological leaders from above can prove helpful for parents as they carry out discipleship practices with their children.

Bible Intake

The primary way parents can begin the discipleship process is with the Bible. Baxter instructs families in three areas: “Teach the letter of the Scriptures by reading it, teaching others to read it, and causing them to learn it by memory.”⁶⁷ Parents should open the Word of God, read it with their children, and help their children understand how to obey the directions from it. Reading is where family discipleship begins. Parents cannot afford to read the Scriptures in a boring fashion. As Whitney points out, Scriptures should be read “enthusiastically and interpretively.”⁶⁸ Parents must come to God’s Word with an expectation to hear something from God. Dry and tired readings of the Bible lack the emphasis that is needed for a child’s engagement. Parents must be passionate about the Scriptures themselves. When a parent is devoted to God’s Word, reading with emphasis is easier.

A casual reading of God’s Word does not suffice in the efforts to spiritually influence a child. A parent must strive not only to read the Word of God but also to help his children understand, internalize, and apply it. Parents gain direction from Ryle’s

⁶⁶ The voices from history discussed in the first section of this chapter declared these three aspects highly important. These three areas of family worship have continued today. Whitney states, “Basically there are three elements to family worship: read the Bible, pray, and sing.” Whitney, *Family Worship*, 44. Joel Beeke also points out, “According to Scripture, God should be served in special acts of worship in families today in the following three ways: (1) Daily Instruction in the Word of God . . . (2) Daily prayer to the throne of God . . . and (3) Daily singing the praise of God.” Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009), 10–12.

⁶⁷ Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 498.

⁶⁸ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 45.

statement, “Train him in the way that is scriptural and right.”⁶⁹ A beneficial way of accomplishing this goal may occur by using catechisms.

Catechisms are useful because they allow for in-depth memorization and internalization of the biblical truths. They also provide a parent with an accessible plan for study. Theologian Gregg Allison defines a catechism as “a teaching tool that is used for the process of instructing Christians in the faith and its practice.”⁷⁰ Catechisms typically contain a series of truths in question-and-answer format. Children memorize the answers as they grow to understand these biblical themes. Many of the voices from the past noted above wrote and utilized catechisms in their own homes, as well as provided them for their congregations.⁷¹ Catechisms have been tested through time and have been found effective.

A major case for catechisms’ effectiveness lies in the approach. Historian Tom Nettles describes catechisms as being able to “both inform the mind and arrest the heart.”⁷² Parents must not only teach their children the answers to the questions in a catechism but also explain why they need them in their everyday lives. Memorizing these answers can assist a child in his devotion to God and his Word.

Parents should not simply teach the Bible to their children without a purpose. Having a time of family discipleship is not the end goal. A main goal of family discipleship is to lay the foundations of faith and encourage conformity to Christ. Parents can guide their children through these times in the Scriptures to both know and follow Christ. The Holy Spirit can use these times of discipleship to transform children. Again,

⁶⁹ Ryle, *How Should a Child Be Trained*, 9.

⁷⁰ Gregg Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 36.

⁷¹ Many of the theologians listed in the first section including Luther, Henry, Calvin, Baxter, and Calvin, as well as other notable theologians, have written catechisms to train others in the faith.

⁷² Tom J. Nettles, *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts: The Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1998), 15.

catechisms become helpful tools in children grasping these foundations of the faith.

In addition to spiritual formation, parents must see this as an opportunity to help instill a biblical worldview in their children that affects every aspect of life. The Scriptures help all believers find hope in the world today. Parents have a responsibility in helping to shape this worldview for their children regardless of their children's age. Baucham exclaims, "If giving our children a biblical worldview is the why of family driven faith, giving them biblical instruction is the what."⁷³ Parents need to begin family discipleship in the Word of God.

Prayer

Prayer is the second key part of family devotions. Prayer does not only conclude family worship (being included at the end to signify the time has finished), but it should also precede it. Professor Joel Beeke states, "Even before family worship begins, we should privately pray for God's blessing upon that worship."⁷⁴ Parents need to pray prior to beginning these times. It is paramount that parents talk to God about their children before they talk to their children about God. Prayer must happen before family discipleship.

Prayer should accompany biblical devotions. Concerning prayer, Ryle indicates, "Prayer is the mightiest engine God has placed in our hands. It is the best weapon to use in everyday difficulty, and the surest remedy in every trouble."⁷⁵ Family discipleship times must demonstrate effective prayer. Christians can be bold in prayer. There is power in prayer. Henry argues, "Praying families are kept from more mischiefs

⁷³ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 96.

⁷⁴ Joel Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009), 17.

⁷⁵ Ryle, *How Should a Child Be Trained*, 22.

than they themselves are aware of.”⁷⁶ Parents must teach the value prayer has in everyday life and the magnitude of its effectiveness in communicating with God.

Prayer is not necessarily an extension of the teaching portion of family discipleship. However, prayer can be a way of applying the family discipleship’s biblical readings. Prayer is not extra teaching time. Beeke again highlights, “Teach with your eyes open, pray with your eyes shut.”⁷⁷ Parents must remember that prayer is the main way we communicate with God. Times of prayer within family discipleship should be leading children in how to pray, it is not a bonus time to deliver one more piece of advice. When parents are leading prayers during this portion of family worship, they should pray. No other motive is necessary but to pray to God.

A helpful way to pray during family devotions is by praying through the Scriptures discussed.⁷⁸ Allow God’s Word to direct and guide the family’s prayers. Prayer reinforces that which families read. Ryle suggests, “If you are to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil . . . you must pray; it is in vain to look for strength in the hour of trial, if it has not been sought for.”⁷⁹ While prayer is not a teaching time, the teaching time can infuse power in prayers.

Another key element to praying during the family discipleship times involves bringing variation in prayers. Not all the prayers a family prays should be the same. Johnson notes that prayers should be “brief and varied.”⁸⁰ Scripture provides examples of prayer, and Jesus gives us a model for prayer. Parents should follow them to not only pray with their children during family discipleship times but to teach their children to

⁷⁶ Henry, *Select Sermons*, 26.

⁷⁷ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 28.

⁷⁸ Donald Whitney’s work on this subject is very helpful. For more information regarding how to pray through Scripture, see Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

⁷⁹ Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men*, 68.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Understanding Family Worship*, 51.

pray on their own as well. Family devotions present great avenues to allow children to pray out loud. Parents should encourage such.

Singing

The third part of family discipleship times is singing. Singing in family worship can be an overlooked element. Many parents will forgo singing the songs of faith with their children to emphasize Bible lessons and prayer. However, singing is an important part of the discipleship process. Christianity is a faith that places importance on the collective power of a song. Families do well to involve singing in their times of family worship. Families that sing worship songs together remember the lessons more clearly. Children who sing with their parents during times of family discipleship see the importance of song and are more encouraged to sing during church-wide worship services.

Singing is not a new aspect of family discipleship. Matthew Henry encouraged his families to sing during their family discipleship times. Henry suggests, “I must not omit to recommend to you the singing of psalms in your families, as part of your daily worship.”⁸¹ Families can glean much from the retrieval of the practices of the past in their family discipleship today, particularly in singing.

Some parents will offer the lack of musical ability or talent as a reason to leave singing out of family discipleship. This is not an adequate reason to omit singing from family devotions. Parents may discuss with music ministers and worship leaders how they can engage children in the act of singing. Resources exist for churches to help equip parents to sing during their devotional times.⁸² Parents do not have to do this alone, but they should help their children see the importance of singing in their family devotional

⁸¹ Henry, *Select Sermons*, 20.

⁸² Two resources have been found helpful in this endeavor: Seeds Family Worship (www.seedsfamilyworship.com) and Doorpost Songs (www.doorpostsongs.com).

times.

Modeling

The final piece to family discipleship that needs to be included is modeling the faith for a child to follow. This part can be more informal. Parents informally practice family discipleship while they are living their lives. Parents who live out their faith within the context of a local church teach their children the importance of serving, giving, and abiding within that church. Pastors Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin describe this as modeling in their pivotal book, *Family Discipleship*. They submit, “Modeling requires a close, loving relationship with those you hope to lead and influence. . . . Live with your kids purposely nearby. Quality proximity is paramount to your effectiveness as a discipling parent.”⁸³ Family discipleship occurs in the living room as well as the backyard and the local church. Parents would do well to remember this.

Parents continually impact their children, both formally and informally. A true disciple not only acquires knowledge from a mentor but learns through modeling the behaviors of the mentor as well. This is one reason parents can have a great impact on the spiritual livelihood of a child. Author Cameron Lee suggests, “Parenthood, like discipleship, is a teaching relationship, but the teaching is more than cognitive. Children orient their lives according to deep personal relationship with their parents.”⁸⁴ Pastor Justin Earley adds to this idea by asserting, “Households are not simply products of what we teach and say. They are much more products of what we practice and do.”⁸⁵ Parents must keep this in mind as they seek to teach and model the gospel at home with their

⁸³ Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home Through Time, Moments, and Milestones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 69.

⁸⁴ Cameron Lee, “Parenting as Discipleship: A Contextual Motif for Christian Parent Education,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 270.

⁸⁵ Justin Whimel Earley, *Habits of the Household: Practicing the Story of God in Everyday Family Rhythms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 11.

children. Christian parents' primary role in life is to pass down the faith to their children.

Parents who desire for their children to follow Christ will take family discipleship seriously. Family discipleship takes stronger roots as parents dedicate themselves to engagement within the church as well as the daily practices of Bible intake, prayer, singing, and modeling an active faith. Faith in Christ becomes a family heritage when families engage in this activity continually.

Conclusion

Parents have an incredible responsibility to make disciples among their children. The goal for parents in this endeavor is not to have more well-rounded children, but to produce mature Christ followers who will, in turn, do the same with their children. Family discipleship is a legacy-building endeavor. Professor Timothy Paul Jones makes this clear: "Our purpose should be to leverage children's lives to advance God's Kingdom so every tribe, every nation, and every people-group gains the opportunity to respond in faith to the rightful King of kings."⁸⁶ Parents must see their role as making disciples of their children who make more disciples.

The church should recall the lessons from the past to emphasize family discipleship. Many voices throughout history have not only shown the importance of this endeavor but also given guideposts for accomplishing family discipleship today. Very little is more significant for parents than this task. Baucham declares, "If I teach my son to keep his eye on the ball but fail to teach him to keep his eyes on Christ, I have failed as a father."⁸⁷ May parents build on the foundations of church history and strive to train their children to love God through reading his Word, praying his Word, and singing his Word.

⁸⁶ Timothy Paul Jones, "Developing a D6 Vision for Our Families: Parenting from the Perspective of a Story That's Bigger Than Me," in *Practical Family Ministry: A Collection of Ideas for Your Church*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones and John David Trentham (Nashville: Randall House, 2015), 124.

⁸⁷ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 22.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Scripture lays out the role parents play in the spiritual lives of their children. Parents are to be the chief spiritual influencers of their children. They should have their children involved in a local church but should not rely on the church to be the main spiritual influence in their children's lives. The previous chapters lay out the biblical and historical foundations for family discipleship. Parents must grasp this mandate from the Lord and take the initiative to disciple their children.

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents of children and teenagers at First Baptist Church, Soddy Daisy, Tennessee, to lead family discipleship times in their homes. Three stages led to accomplishing this purpose. The first stage was to assess the family discipleship beliefs and practices among the families of FBCSD by administering the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey by Timothy Paul Jones.¹ The second stage was to develop a curriculum to equip, train, and prepare parents of FBCSD for family discipleship. Before teaching the class, an expert panel evaluated this curriculum for clarity, biblical validity, and overall effectiveness. Finally, the third stage of this project was to equip parents of FBCSD with the created curriculum to implement family discipleship in their homes. After this stage, the same survey was re-administered to evaluate the effectiveness of the class among the parents.

¹ The Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey (FDPPS) survey is copied from Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan 2011), 202, Kindle. Used by permission.

Stage 1

The first stage assessed the family discipleship beliefs and practices among the families of FBCSD. The tool utilized to accomplish this goal was the FDPPS. This survey evaluated both the parents' understanding of family discipleship as well as the application of it in their homes. Three weeks before the class began, I emailed surveys to all parents of children under the age of eighteen at FBCSD along with an invitation to the class that included a brief description of the material. Parents were encouraged to fill out the questionnaire and return it at the beginning of the class.

On the first night of the class, additional surveys were available for anyone who did not return their survey and for participants who did not receive the email. Before the beginning of the lesson, surveys were collected. A total of eighteen surveys were collected at this time. Three more were collected by the second week of class from participants who could not attend the first meeting for a total of twenty-one surveys collected. I added all data to a spreadsheet for future evaluation and analysis of the responses compared to the repeated survey after the class concluded.

The results from the initial survey confirmed the need for the study. Many of the families noted that although they knew and understood the importance of family discipleship, they did not make it a priority in their weekly schedules. Many who did make time to practice family discipleship times indicated they wanted the church to help them improve in this area. These results pointed to this class being a benefit to those who engaged in the weekly material.

Stage 2

The second stage was to develop a curriculum to equip, train, and prepare parents of FBCSD for family discipleship. I wrote an eight-week class curriculum to outline the basis behind family discipleship times as well as a guide for parents to conduct family discipleship times on their own. These lessons were founded mostly on the research completed in chapters 2 and 3. Each week's classes would involve lectures,

class discussions, and small group discussions based on a portion of God's Word. I also included action steps in the lessons for the parents to practice at home between each meeting.

Upon completing the material development, I gave the curriculum to a panel of five experts for evaluation. The participants of the panel came from a wide range of expertise: a sixteen-year youth ministry veteran and current director of a national youth leader resource and networking organization; a local church student minister; a local church pastor; a national publishing house curriculum writer; and an AWANA missionary, podcaster, and author of family discipleship resources. Each expert received a digital copy of the lessons and the rubric for evaluation.² The panel returned their rubrics to me within a week. The compiled score among all evaluations was 3.875 out of 4, which met the threshold for utilizing the material without significant edits. I implemented a few minor changes recommended by the expert panel for the sake of clarity and format.

Stage 3

I taught the curriculum in a Sunday evening class for eight consecutive weeks. I emailed pre-surveys to the participants beforehand who were asked to bring them back the first night, as well as made more copies available for anyone who needed a replacement or did not receive a survey. Each class consisted of lectures and group discussions. Table questions were key components of each lesson as well. Participants were seated at round tables for discussion, and each lesson was equipped with three to five table questions to help deepen the interaction and the understanding of each topic. Below is a detailed look at each of the sessions.

² See appendix 2.

Week 1: Why Am I the Chief Spiritual Influencer?

Parents were to return their surveys on the initial night of the class. Many of the parents returned them, but some forgot and filled out another survey before class began. Each participant decided on a four-digit code to help distinguish the results of both pre-surveys and post-surveys. Once the surveys were collected in a secure folder, the discussion sheet handout for the night's lesson was distributed. The main point for the first week's lesson was, "God has called parents to be the chief spiritual influencers of their children." We examined Deuteronomy 6:4–9 during class time, giving careful consideration to extending this directive from Israelite families to families in today's context. We discussed a definition of "chief spiritual influencer", taking guidance from the passage in Deuteronomy on the ways parents should influence their children.

The table questions this week helped participants introduce themselves as well as gain a greater understanding of the topic. The parents discussed what their parents taught them to do, what were some things that were "worshipped in our city that was not godly worship," and what were some creative ways to keep the things of God in front of their children. After each table question discussion time, participants were allowed to share their answers with the entire group.

The lesson concluded with some action steps for the participants to work on during the week. I explained that the action steps would increase in complexity and number each week. In the first week, I charged the participants with praying for their children three times and instructed those in the class who were married to pray together for their children. The class concluded with prayer.

Week 2: God's New Covenant for Family Discipleship

The second week began with a discussion of the action steps from the previous week. I asked the class if they spent time praying for their children the previous week. Many signified they had. Several said they did not. I encouraged the parents to make

every effort to participate weekly in the action steps.

The class began with the main point, “Scripture gives us the why and how of family discipleship.” The class discussed the New Testament reasoning behind family discipleship found in Ephesians 6:1–4. Parental discipleship is a form of training in obedience. Parents must live in obedience to God if they want to train their children well. Discussion focused on the reasons for children to obey and the directive for parents to implement family worship.

Table questions were utilized to help with better engagement with the topic. The questions centered around topics regarding children following the parents’ leadership. The goal of the table questions was to help parents understand their role in modeling their spiritual lives to their children. It is not enough to teach facts about Scripture to their children. Parents must model what God is teaching them to their children. They must be disciples first before they can make disciples of their children.

I challenged the class with three action steps this week. I encouraged parents to continue to pray for their children daily and to do so with their spouses. I directed parents to make efforts to spend time in the Scriptures and in prayer personally each day this week. Finally, I tasked parents with sharing their favorite Bible verse with their children and explaining to them why it was their favorite. The lesson was closed with prayer.

Week 3: An Old Testament Example of Family Discipleship

The third week began with table discussions regarding the action points assigned from the previous week. The participants around each table were to share their time in prayer for their children, their personal time in the Scriptures, and the experience of sharing their favorite verse with their children. Several parents shared that it was somewhat awkward to share their favorite verse with their children, but one mentioned it sparked further conversations about God’s Word.

The main point for this week was, “Scripture gives us examples of parents

practicing family discipleship.” The group studied Proverbs 4:20. The writer of this proverb diligently led his son to guard his heart first so that he would not go down a path away from the Lord. Careful consideration was given to the way of guarding one’s heart by hiding God’s Word in their innermost being. Parental discipleship creates ways for parents to equip their children to guard their hearts with the Word of God.

Table questions were again used to help solidify this principle and prepare the participants to put this lesson to use. The questions centered on the way the participants learned from their parents as well as a discussion on helping their children guard their hearts with Scripture. Before concluding the class, I again gave parents three action steps to practice this week. I instructed them to continue praying with their spouse every day for their children, to exercise their own spiritual health through daily devotional times, and to spend at least one time this week reading Scriptures with their children. I encouraged them to look for times they were naturally together with their children and incorporate God’s Word into those times. The lesson was closed by praying for each of their families.

Week 4: Learning from History

The fourth week began with a welcome and discussion time among the group regarding last week’s action points. Several parents mentioned how uncomfortable but encouraged they were to begin reading the Bible with their children. A few parents shared their plans to continue this application this week.

The main point for this week’s lesson was, “We can learn a lot about family discipleship as we look at the historical theology of the church.” Most of the material this week was found throughout voices from church history; however, my goal was to continue to remind the class of 2 Timothy 2:2 and how faith passed down is the key component of discipleship in general. The class discussed several men from different ages in church history and how their work impacted the cause of family discipleship. I

also introduced the usefulness of catechisms throughout history. I distributed a resource page to parents so they could begin looking into materials for their family discipleship times.

Table discussions this week centered not only on discussing the impact of the historical figures discussed in the lecture portion but also on those who had personally impacted the participants' lives. The goal was to help the participants see the impact they can have on their children and future generations of their families by putting family discipleship into practice. Action steps this week included having at least two times of family discipleship with their children and working on a plan to continue this practice after the class concludes. The lesson was closed in prayer in groups.

Week 5: Bible Intake and Prayer

The fifth week began with a discussion of the previous week's action steps. The conversation centered on encouragement for the families to engage with the material and put what they have learned into practice. They discussed their fears and reservations as well. Most families had not practiced the action steps due to fear and lack of time. Before any teaching began, we discussed how to make time for these family devotions.

I provided a clear expectation of the lesson at the beginning of the teaching time. This lesson was the first of the two most applicable lessons in the teaching series. I led parents through Deuteronomy 6:20–25 and taught that the father addressed in this passage demonstrates how to teach his son the things commanded in the earlier part of Deuteronomy 6. The class worked through this text and saw the importance of teaching their children the things of God.

The class considered the first two main portions of family discipleship times—Bible study and prayer. I encouraged parents to read the Bible with their children, read it enthusiastically, and read it with application in mind. I provided parents with ways of helping their children apply the Bible in their everyday lives by asking S.P.A.C.E.

questions.³ I also encouraged them to make consistency a key component to their family discipleship.

Next, we discussed prayer. I taught parents that prayer needed to be vital to their family discipleship times, not just a time that marked the conclusion. I encouraged them to use the A.C.T.S. method of prayer as a guide with their children. I challenged them to pick one theme from the A.C.T.S. method and devote prayer each night to that area with their children.⁴

Table questions were used once more but with a different purpose. This week, rather than being about the process of family discipleship, the questions centered more on the participants' personal spiritual lives. I aimed to help them in their own times of Bible reading and prayer, not just help them lead their children. If they are spiritually healthy, they can lead their children much more effectively.

The class ended with a challenge to practice family discipleship three times this week. I also encouraged the parents to journal how they believed their devotions went and any questions they had for the next week. The class concluded with prayer.

Week 6: Singing and Catechisms

The lesson began by reviewing the previous week's challenges. Many of the families discussed their trials of family discipleship. They talked through the awkwardness of each encounter but also remarked that with each week, the discipleship times became less awkward. I was pleased to see several more families were engaged in family discipleship than were last week.

This lesson focused on two less-emphasized portions of family discipleship

³ S.P.A.C.E. is an acronym I have used for years with my congregation. When reading a passage of Scripture, you look for points of application by asking yourself the following questions: Is there a sin to confess, a promise to claim, an attitude to change, a command to obey, and an example to follow?

⁴ The A.C.T.S. prayer method involves praying with adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

times: singing and catechisms. We read several Scriptures (Ps 68:4; Col 3:16; and Jas 5:13) to discuss the importance of singing. I encouraged parents to listen to songs of the faith, particularly songs connected to Scripture and provided several resources to aid parents in singing. We discussed the obstacles to singing and ways to overcome such barriers.

I also encouraged the parents to utilize catechisms to help instill biblical values in their children. Time was given to explain the creative way memorization can benefit students as they age. I discussed several catechism options with the participants but placed particular emphasis on the New City Catechism as a good first resource.⁵ Table discussions focused on the use of memorization and songs in learning.

I concluded the class by challenging the parents to include Bible intake, prayer, singing, and catechism use in their family discipleship times this week. I encouraged them to have five lessons with their children throughout the week. Finally, I charged the parents with creating a thirty-day plan for family discipleship. The class ended in prayer around the tables for each family.

Week 7: Families and Churches

The class began with a discussion of the homework. One family shared their transition into using catechisms and divulged that it benefited them and their children. Several families shared how singing was not commonplace in their family, but they attempted to do so in the car.

This session centered on the relationship between the church and families. The goal of this night was to help parents see that family discipleship is not counter to the local church but rather requires a mutual relationship between the church and families. The church needs strong families, and strong families make up strong churches. I gave

⁵ For more information on the New City Catechism, visit www.newcitycatechism.com.

attention to 1 Corinthians 12 and to the part children can play in the local body. Children should not be looked over as they seek to use their spiritual gifts. As parents help develop those gifts through family discipleship times, children can work out the gifts in the context of a local church. The local church is the best place to practice what is learned at home.

Small group table discussions were used to help parents understand the role of the church in their families. While the church is not supposed to overtake the role of parents, it should supplement and support family discipleship. Churches will grow when families are strengthened.

I encouraged parents to continue in their family discipleship times. The goal for each family was to have five discipleship times this week, utilizing all the processes discussed in the previous weeks. I told parents to bring in their family's thirty-day plan for discipleship with their children. The class concluded with prayer.

Week 8: Modeling Discipleship

The final session began with a group discussion of each family's discipleship times. Several parents shared success stories with the group. Multiple families talked about how encouraging the singing portion of discipleship went over the past week.

The last lesson was the shortest teaching lesson, although the time of the session remained consistent. More discussion around the group and the table occurred when going over each family's thirty-day plan.

This lesson focused on the non-formal way of discipleship. We discussed modeling Christlikeness with children. This was the main point of the lesson. The group looked closely at Joshua 24:14–15. Just as Joshua determined to have his family worship the Lord in all they did, I encouraged the participants to do the same and to live out their

faith with their children “in close proximity.”⁶ We discussed several examples of ways parents can serve alongside their children. Time was given for table discussions concerning different avenues of modeling.

The session closed with discussions of each family’s thirty-day plan for discipleship. Several families had prepared notes on their plan and dedicated their families to walking through this process for the next thirty days. After the session, I distributed the post-surveys for all families to fill out and return to me by March 31. The session was closed in prayer.

Gathering Post-Data

Upon completion of the course, I gave families the same survey as the pre-survey to serve as the post-survey. There were seventeen surveys returned by the due date of March 31, 2024, and then I analyzed the data. Although not all who participated in the pre-survey completed the post-survey, the goal of ten families completing both was reached. The goal was met when a t-test for samples showed a positive difference between pre- and post-survey results. Among all the participants who completed the pre- and post-surveys, a positive response was shown, indicating each participant grew in their knowledge and practice of family discipleship.

Conclusion

This project was written to prepare the parents at FBCSD to become the chief spiritual influencers of their children. The main way this can be accomplished is through parents leading family discipleship times with their children. The goal of this project was successfully met by the implementation of three stages. Parents were evaluated on their

⁶ For a more detailed look at this topic, parents were encouraged to review two resources: Matt Chandler and Adam Giffin, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home Through Time, Moments, and Milestones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); and Justin W. Earley, *Habits of the Household: Practicing the Story of God in Everyday Family Rhythms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

beliefs and practices of family discipleship. A curriculum was created to equip, train, and prepare parents of FBCSD for family discipleship. Finally, this curriculum was taught to the parents of FBCSD to help them implement family discipleship in their homes. May God use this class for his glory to raise up disciples within the homes of FBCSD who will make more disciples in the years to come.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter evaluates the project to equip parents of children and teenagers of FBCSD to lead family discipleship times in their homes. It will evaluate the project's purpose, goals, and effectiveness. A portion of this chapter will consider both its strengths and weaknesses and outline any parts I would do differently. Finally, theological and personal reflections on the project will be presented.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents of children and teenagers at First Baptist Church, Soddy Daisy, Tennessee, to lead family discipleship times in their homes. If parents are to be the chief spiritual influencers of their families, they must lead their children well. The training benefited parents by enabling them to actively participate in the spiritual development of their children. Parents need to be equipped to lead these discipleship times.

During this project, parents were instructed to acknowledge this responsibility belongs primarily to them. Parents were encouraged to strengthen the church by creating stronger families through family discipleship and not allowing the church to become the only place of spiritual nourishment for their children. Parents were presented with instructions from the Old Testament and the New Testament concerning the importance of family discipleship. They were also offered the tools from Scripture to lead their children confidently and effectively in their homes. The purpose of equipping parents to lead family discipleship times in their homes was accomplished.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Three goals were proposed to guide the project to completion. These goals provided a focal point to maintain consistency and direction for all the sections of the project. The goals were threefold: (1) To assess the current family discipleship beliefs and practices among the families at FBCSD, (2) to develop an eight-week curriculum to equip, train, and prepare the parents of FBCSD to hold family discipleship times in their homes, and (3) to equip FBCSD's parents with the curriculum to implement family discipleship in their homes.

The first goal was to assess the current family discipleship beliefs and practices among the families of FBCSD.¹ A parent assessment tool, the FDPPS, was administered to twenty-one families. The results of this survey helped assess the current practices of families at church. The goal was measured as successful when at least ten families completed the FDPPS. This goal was successfully reached.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip, train, and prepare the parents of FBCSD to hold family discipleship times in their homes. The curriculum included eight sessions that guided parents through models of family discipleship. Each lesson was grounded in scriptural basis and discussion. The curriculum offered different ways to instruct children on biblical principles and having it reviewed by an expert panel. The expert panel used the curriculum evaluation tool to evaluate each lesson.² This goal was considered successful when 90 percent of the evaluation criterion was met or exceeded by the expert panel. The panel results were scored above the 90 percent threshold; therefore, the second goal was successfully met.

The final goal was to equip FBCSD's parents with the curriculum to implement family discipleship in their homes. This goal was measured by giving the FDPPS to the families after the eight-week course. To be successfully met, ten families

¹ See appendix 1.

² See appendix 2.

who took the initial survey and attended our course needed to complete the FDPPS, and the t-test for the surveys demonstrated a positive difference in the pre- and post-surveys. Seventeen of the families who originally filled out the pre-surveys returned the post-surveys. Since this number is above the ten families needed in the initial FDPPS, there were enough surveys to validate the results.

The pre- and post-surveys were analyzed to determine if the teaching made a difference in the parents' attitudes and applications of family discipleship. The goal was met when the t-test of dependent samples demonstrated a statistically positive change from the pre- and post-survey scores: ($t_{(16)} = -7.893, p < .001$). Consequently, parents showed a positive change in both understanding and application, with greater growth demonstrated in the application. One can conclude that while those who participated in this project grew in knowledge ($t_{(16)} = -5.034, p < .001$), the practical aspect of family discipleship ($t_{(16)} = -6.732, p < .001$) is where more progress occurred. This project successfully fulfilled the third goal.³

Strengths of the Project

The project's greatest strength was that parents internalized their role as the chief spiritual influencers of their children. Many parents already knew this fact, but they were not putting it into practice. There were not any parents in this class who would have denied their spiritual responsibility toward their children. Still, many spoke of the renewed vigor they had toward ensuring their children understood biblical principles and applying them daily after the project. As Scriptures from Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Joshua, and Ephesians were explored intensively, parents saw the beauty in leading their children to the Lord. This idea of parental discipleship moved from an abstract concept to a practical application throughout this project.

³ See table 1.

Table 1. Paired response survey scores

Respondent	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
1969	56	69
0678	55	74
2894	72	86
7373	64	82
3416	68	88
1227	53	71
0918	74	85
3991	42	54
0813	70	74
1974	47	58
1216	69	80
0509	85	93
0916	64	94
9055	81	85
2012	48	68
0721	65	67
8012	72	90

A second strength of the project came from the fact that parents no longer felt alone on this subject of parental discipleship. A community formed within our church to encourage and hold one another accountable for family discipleship. Parents also saw that this idea was not something new, but it had existed since the creation of the church. As we encountered voices from historical theology, parents were encouraged and instructed to continue to pass down the faith that was passed down to them. Parental discipleship

has existed for a long time, and now our parents at FBCSD feel included in that endeavor. Whether it is from a group of peers in a room together or the voices of church leaders throughout the centuries, family discipleship is something around which we can unite.

A third strength of the project lies in the two lessons of the curriculum that describe the aspects of family discipleship. Through biblical training, discussion, and practice, parents are equipped to implement Bible reading, prayer, singing, and catechisms in their family discipleship times. These two lessons generated the most discussion from our parents and received the most positive feedback from all the sessions. The practical nature of these two lessons added a great deal to the overall effectiveness of the project. They were not only practical but accessible. Parents understood how to put the lessons into practice and realized how possible it is to find ways to fit family discipleship into their everyday lives.

A fourth strength of the project comes from the practical application of the thirty-day plan each family created. All the families who participated in the project class put together a thirty-day discipleship plan for their families. Several families have already mentioned the usefulness of this plan to me. Their plan has allowed families to prioritize family discipleship times over and above all the other things that bombard their calendars. Parents also see that they do not have to complicate this process. A theological degree is not required to lead children down the pathways of the Lord. Parents' own spiritual lives were enriched through the process of investing in their children. Family discipleship times will occur when we prioritize and plan for them.

Weaknesses of the Project

While many portions of this project were helpful, there were also a few weaknesses included in this project. The first weakness was found in the number of participants each week. Attendance was high in the first few weeks and in the last week of the project, but attendance dwindled toward the middle weeks with several families

missing. Many families had a valid reason for missing, but they missed, nonetheless. The eight-week commitment seemed quite large to some parents, especially since nothing else was planned for any other age groups during this timeframe. Many who could not attend in person watched the lessons in a closed group on the internet, but that did not help with the group learning aspect of the table discussions. I believe several sessions could have been combined to shorten the time needed for participation.

A second weakness lies in one area overlooked in the planning portion; little attention was given to single or divorced parents. While these lessons were not written for a family with both mother and father, there was a bias toward those families. Several single parents attended the class. Some parents who are married but are the sole spiritual presence in the household also attended. Many of the homework exercises included tasks for both parents. More consideration for single or divorced parents should have been included to help guide them to lead family discipleship times while not necessarily having unity with the other parent.

The final weakness of the project was the lack of specific inclusion of grandparents who act in a parental role in the lives of their grandchildren. Several grandparents at FBCSD have accepted the role of caretaker for their grandchildren. Because of the delimitation of this project, grandparents were not included. However, this could have benefited several grandparent-led families in our church.

What I Would Do Differently

The first thing I would do differently is craft one session to bring children in for a parent and child family discipleship night. A session could contain a family-style meal and include a time given for parents to put into practice a portion of family discipleship around the table. This practicum could help parents fine-tune their family discipleship practices. I also believe this would have been encouraging to students and children to witness not only their family participating in discipleship time, but their

friends' families as well.

Additionally, I would invite any grandparent who has a hand in raising their children to attend the class. Some grandparents have assumed the role of the chief spiritual influencer in their grandchildren's lives. I believe they would have found this class both encouraging and insightful. Even if the grandparents are not acting as parents, some may have enjoyed the class and gained ideas to pass along to their children. Effectively, they would be training their children to do family discipleship.

Another thing I would have done differently is give parents more instruction in their weekly homework. Once the time had come for parents to begin family discipleship times as their homework, I would have liked to give them a worksheet to work through so that they could make notes for the classroom discussion. Although homework was discussed each week at the beginning of the session, there needed to be some parameters on how to discuss it each week. Each discussion time trended toward emotions of family discipleship and less toward practical application. Providing more guidance in the homework would allow the discussion to be more helpful for all families involved.

The final change I would make with this curriculum is writing a session based on how family discipleship times help create a biblical worldview. While this was mentioned within a few of the sessions, I believe more emphasis should have been given to helping our children see the world through a biblical lens. As parents lead their children through family discipleship times, they can highlight current events and instruct their children on how to evaluate them based on God's Word. Helping children create a biblical worldview is one of the most important things parents can do. I will place more emphasis on that the next time I teach this class.

Theological Reflections

The Great Commission is not relegated to pastors but to all of Christ's followers. Pastors have the unique privilege of training and equipping all church

members to engage in the work of the Great Commission. There is no greater place to begin this work than in the confines of the Christian home. Parents should look first in the bedrooms of their houses to find whom to mentor. God gave parents the high calling to help their children become disciples. Every Christian should be in a disciple-making relationship, but the primary way a parent can help develop disciples is to look to their children. Parents who help their children spiritually mature are answering the call of the Great Commission. This is a great legacy to leave their children and, hopefully, the future generations of their families.

Second, family discipleship is a joy, not a burden. May believers never look at God's calling to lead their children in family discipleship as another task on their lengthy to-do list. Teaching one's children to know and follow the Lord should fill parents with great joy. Parents' love for God should motivate them to share that love with their children. As such, parents must view this task as a privilege. Many biblical proverbs are written from the standpoint of a parent sharing godly wisdom with their children. If we follow the example of the proverb author, we will carry this task joyfully. This opportunity is not one to be taken lightly, but it is also not one to elicit drudgery. Parents must let the joy of the Lord flow through them as they lead their children in family discipleship efforts.

Family discipleship is a work. God places a high value on it; therefore, parents must take this task seriously. Parents must be dedicated to the Word of God to take this work seriously. Scripture is our guide for applying family discipleship as well as the curriculum we teach in family discipleship. Family discipleship must be centered on the Word of God in all aspects. The motivation behind family discipleship encompasses the joy of the Lord in parents manifested through a desire to know and teach the Scriptures to their children. This work of knowing and teaching the Word to children is essential.

Family discipleship is vital not only for families but also for the local church. No dichotomy of families and church removes the need each has for the other. Families

that partake of family discipleship time strengthen the local church in which they are members. Churches that invest time and energy into equipping families for discipleship strengthen the families. These work together. Parents who are partaking in family discipleship should never separate themselves from the local church or negate the necessity of the local church for their families. There is still a call for families to join the local church. Churches should not program in such a way that replaces the need for family worship. Both churches and families work together to demonstrate the gospel in the world today.

Personal Reflections

This project drove me to look at certain passages of Scripture from a different viewpoint. Studying the common themes of family discipleship in passages from both the Old Testament and New Testament was a strong reminder of Scripture's overarching storyline. This observation was not only bearing witness to family discipleship but also to Scripture's connectivity. Since beginning this project, I have developed a greater love for biblical theology and its place in the local church. This may not have been the main objective, but it was a pleasant response to the research.

My family has been an integral part of this project. My father passed away during the research phase of chapter 2. During the writing of the final chapters, my family was matched with our adoptive daughter. I have reflected on my father's godly legacy and look forward to the legacy I can leave to all my children. This project has motivated me to prioritize family discipleship in a fresh way with my current children and plan for the child who will soon be in my house. My goal as a dad is to be the first person my children go to for spiritual matters.

Finally, this project has increased my love for the members of my church. I want to help the parents at my church understand their role in their children's lives. This project has become a path to greater discipleship efforts than we had before its beginning.

I have a deep devotion to the parents in my church and the entire church. Additionally, FBCSD started small discipleship groups for adults because of this project. A new chapter of discipleship is beginning at FBCSD, and this project was a catalyst for it.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents of children and teenagers at First Baptist Church, Soddy Daisy, Tennessee, to lead family discipleship times in their homes. All three goals given at the beginning of this project were successfully met. After exploring several biblical texts concerning the role of parents in the discipleship of children and researching the historical precedence set for this issue, I created a curriculum to equip parents to take on this responsibility. The overwhelmingly positive response from the participants was encouraging and hopeful. Parents continue to speak with me about their ongoing discipleship efforts with their children.

This class was highly beneficial, but it cannot stand alone. The church must not stop training and encouraging parents to practice family discipleship. While this project was a good starting place for family discipleship at FBCSD, it cannot be the only family discipleship event that occurs. Follow-up and encouragement for parents must continually be given. The church must continue to promote family discipleship as a core way of training children in the way of the Lord. I pray that a cycle of discipleship has begun that will continue for generations.

APPENDIX 1

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS AND
PRACTICES SURVEY

The following instrument gathered accurate information and assessed the family discipleship practices of the families at FBCSD. A general survey, written by Timothy Paul Jones, was given.¹ The survey remained anonymous, so no identifying information was revealed.

¹ FDPPS survey copied from Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 202, Kindle. Used by permission.

Table A1. Family discipleship perceptions and practices survey

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
01. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule.						
02. 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.						
03. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.						
04. When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.						
05. I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together.						

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
06. Parents—and particularly fathers — have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.						
07. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.						
08. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth.						
09. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children?						
10. How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?						
11. How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?						

	Never	Once	A couple times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
12. How many times in the past MONTH have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?						
13. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?						
14. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?						
15. How many times in the past YEAR have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?						

APPENDIX 2
PARENT EQUIPPING CURRICULUM
EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of local church pastors, one youth minister, one children's minister, and one youth ministry organizational leader. This panel evaluated the course material to ensure it is biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

Curriculum Evaluation Tool

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop a lesson to teach the Bible.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better teach their children the Bible.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

PARENT DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

The following is the eight-week curriculum taught at First Baptist Church,
Soddy Daisy, Tennessee.

Session 1: Why am I the chief spiritual influencer?

Hello everyone. I am so thrilled that you have joined our group. For the next few weeks, we are going to do a deep dive into Scripture to talk about potentially the most important thing Jesus commanded of us – discipleship. But we are going to be very intentional with our time to discuss why this matters, not in general but specifically for our children. So to begin, we want to start off by discussing some things. You are seated at round tables for discussion amongst each other. I want this to be more of a time of growing together, not just me lecturing the whole time. Let's begin with a story...

Tell story of my time as a 6th grader – parents teaching me about God's plan for relationships

- *Awkward, but necessary*

Tell story of Dad praying over family during time our sanctuary burned down.

Table Question: Who has influenced your spiritual life? In what way?

We will be looking intently at how God's plan for spiritual growth in a child's life will involve his or her parents. That's our main point for this session:

- **God has called parents to be the chief spiritual influencers of their children.**

We will look at this idea of a “chief spiritual influencer” and how parents can assume that role. But before we dive into it, I need your help. You received a questionnaire as you came in today. I would like you to take a few minutes at the end of our time today and complete this questionnaire. Don't worry, you do not have to sign it. I will not know who is filling out what, but I do need these. As this is not just a class, but working to help complete my Doctoral work in Seminary. I will take this data and use it to gauge growth in this area in your lives at the end of the study (yes, that means there will be the same thing at the end).

But also, as you fill out the questionnaire, I want you to be mindful of where you would like to be 8 weeks from now when we finish. How important is being the chief spiritual influencer in your child's life? As we will see, this is God's plan, and as Christians, we believe God's plan is best. So please make every effort to be a part of every session. If you can't be at every session, they will be recorded and you will be able to review prior to the next session.

As the chief spiritual influencer of your child, you have a responsibility to teach them the ways of the Lord. As parents, you should have the most significant spiritual impact on your kids. That goes for what is done at home and church. Parents need to help them engage in their spiritual lives and the church. This is far too important to leave unchecked in your lives.

How do we do this? How can we take this responsibility seriously and seek the opportunity to influence our kids spiritually? I think the best way to do so is by practicing

family discipleship times regularly. Family Discipleship times are a key way your family, particularly your kids, can grow spiritually. But how do we do this Family discipleship thing? I'm glad you asked....

Scripture teaches us a good deal about family discipleship. One of the first ways we see this idea brought about is from Moses's writing in Deuteronomy. If we look at Deuteronomy 6:4–9, we see this idea given to the Jewish nation.

“Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates. Deuteronomy 6:4–9

This passage, known as the Shema, is a directive given to Jewish families first and foremost. It's something that was meant to pass along the Torah from generation to generation. As New Testament believers, we should not be quick to discount the application for us. We are still commanded to always teach our children the things of the Lord in all possible ways. It starts with us as parents.

Table Question: What is something you can specifically say your parents taught you to do?

The Shema still has value for us today. One commentator writes a great deal about this passage being key to understanding the greatness of God.² In the very beginning, we see the first aspect of God we should help our children understand. That **God is ONE**.

What does it mean that God is One? This demonstrates that God is the only God, the only one worthy of our worship, or dedication, our dependency. This was written when polytheism (many gods) ran rampant. Many people worshipped many different gods for many different reasons. This passage helped the Jewish people understand there was only one God.

Polytheism may not be prevalent in our context, but we do allow other activities and things to become our gods. We hate to admit it, but there are things (grades, sports, etc.) that we allow to sit in the position of God's honor. We must remember, **God is God alone**. There is no other equal.

Table Question: While polytheism may not be widespread in Soddy Daisy, what are some things we can place on equal value with God?

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 138.

We are also called to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. God is telling us to love him with every part of our being; all we are. He warrants and demands total love from all his people. We should love him with all our lives. How is this best achieved? Through being obedient to Him and His word.

Table Question: How do you think your obedience shows your love for God? How does this equate for your children?

- When our children obey, there is a respect and love that is demonstrated. More on that next week!

The last portion of our time together today, we are going to focus in on the final section of the Shema – verses 6–9.

These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. ⁷ Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. ⁹ Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.

God gave the Israelites an intentional strategy for passing down this directive to their children. Look back at these words God gave them:

- **Repeat them** – do not make Bible readings and teachings a sporadic (or singular) opportunity.
- **Talk about them when you lie down and when you get up** – think how important your morning and evening times are with your children. We will talk about the importance of meal times soon.
- **Bind them on your hands** – They should become part of you and your children. These times should be ingrained in your family routines.
- **Write them on doorposts of house and city gates** – make focal points of where you go/what you do; your children need visible reminders.

Table Question: How do we keep the things of God in front of our children? What are some things we can do this week to encourage spiritual conversations?

As you may have figured out, teaching your children the things of the Lord does not start with your kids – it begins with you. It should flow out of your relationship with the Father. Your own life must be vibrant. You must first walk with the Lord.

Share the GOSPEL Journey – give a chance to respond.

Each week, as we conclude, we will take some time to go over some personal thoughtful questions for you to ponder through the week as well as some actionable items to do during the week. This week, your thoughtful question is:

How can I work on my relationship with God first this week?

We will finish with some actions steps each week as well. Here is some points of homework, if you will, for this next week.

Action:

- Fill out the Questionnaire and drop in box before you leave.
- Pray with your spouse for the spiritual vitality of your kids. Aim to do this 3 times this week.

Thanks and we will see each other next Sunday.

Session 2: God's New Covenant for Family Discipleship

Welcome back to session 2 of our study. I want to start off this session by asking you how your homework went. Did you pray together? Prayer is key to making this work, so let me encourage you to keep on going!

Today I want to look a little more deeply at what God's Word says about Family Discipleship and I want to do that in the context of the New Testament. But before we get too far into our time together, I would like to ask you a question. Have any of you put together any furniture from IKEA? Honestly, their directions are usually pretty good unless you are like me and like words AND pictures. There's always the picture of that little guy with a big nose putting together the furniture. It always works, but there's always a time when I'm curious if I'm doing it correctly. Words would be a big help to me.

God gave us instructions for how to do all of life. His Scriptures are the plan he has given to make our lives work. He tells us in Jeremiah 29:11 that in His Word we find hope and a future. So if we want to practice family discipleship well, we must stick close to God's Word.

The main point for this session is that **Scripture gives us the why and how of family discipleship**. If we want to understand why we should have family discipleship times and how to do it, we should look first to God's Word.

Table Question: What are some of your favorite ways to learn new things? Online videos? Books?

We all go to some resource to help us learn new things. I want to provide you with the tools from God's Word to learn how to promote family discipleship in your homes and families.

Start with a little refresher from last week. Last week we were looked at Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the Shema, to see the biblical basis for family discipleship rooted in the Old Testament. We saw this passage instructing Israel to remember there is One God, YAHWEH, and they should love him with their entire being. Furthermore, they were to teach them to their children and make it the quintessential part of their lives. We also discussed that, because this was in the Word of God and all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16), it is still relevant to us today.

But what about findings directly in the New Testament? Does the NT carry over from the OT the idea of family discipleship? I believe the answer can be found in the Paul's letter to the Ephesian Church. Let's read Ephesians 6:1-4.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. ² **Honor your father and mother**, which is the first commandment with a promise, ³ **so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land.** ⁴ Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The NT shows us that parental discipleship is a form of training for obedience. As you see here, the initial command is to the children, not the parents, and is for them to obey their parents. Obedience is a key response for children as they grow and mature. This should always be age appropriate, but it should happen regardless of the age. James Montgomery Boice states, "Obedience is the fundamental relationship of children to parents"³

As parents, if we want our children to obey, we must set the standard of obedience. We should first and foremost be obedient to the Lord. If we are not following the Lord, it is difficult to ask our children to do so.

Table Question: Where is one area in your life where you see your children acting like you? Maybe it's a characteristic or attitude.

In my life – Hudson: Love for Music; Asher: Love for Sports

- *Asher getting irritated and yelling, when I got on to him, his response: "I'm YOUR son!"*
 - o *Made us laugh and me feel terrible.*

The key in all this – if we are going to ask our children to obey us, we must set the standard. We must give them something to obey. And they we must do it consistently and effectively. Our lives should reflect God's values if we want their lives to reflect God's values.

Their obedience must be continual and active. This direction is given to children. While we as parents must give them something to follow, their role is obedience always. As a matter of fact, it's the way we understand one of the 10 Commandments. In Exodus 20:12, God tells the Israelites to "Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you." Children honor their parents by obeying.

Non-obeying children in the OT (and consequently the NT) were a greater challenge than they can be even today. This was not just a problem in the grocery store, it was equating

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 212.

the family with the unbelieving Gentiles. When God's people are linked to those who do not believe, it effects the ministry of the gospel. We are called to be different; to be salt and light in this world. If we live no differently than those who do not know Jesus, how can we win them to Christ? Children who obey can demonstrate the faith of a family.

I've already mentioned the 5th commandment, but I want see just how much obedience is tied to honor. Think about that, when you child honors you, are they being disobedient? Probably not. These 2 themes are tied for a reason.

This command has a promise, that it will go well with them and they will have a long life. While obedience does not guarantee they will live to 100, it does show that obedience and honor lead to a form of safety and security.

Table Question: Tell of a time when your child honored you? Was it through some form of obedience?

Is there ever a time honor can happen without obedience and vice versa?

While children have a role, Paul wraps up this section by talking mainly to us as parents. Parents we are accountable for our children. And specifically, fathers, we are called out here. I don't believe that we are alone in this, dads, but Paul directly calls out fathers.

John Stott tells us moms aren't off the hook. This passage is not just meant for dads, but both parents. Stott states, "Fathers are to care for their families as God the Father cares for his. And incidentally mothers are surely included too"⁴ Both moms and dads are responsible for training their children. We work together for this roll.

One of the keys Paul mentions is not invoking your child to anger. When it comes to family discipleship, sometimes you have to remember that less is okay. We never want to withhold family discipleship times from our children, but there may be areas where we have to stop and wait so as not to push our children to anger.

Our goal is to help our children grow up as fully functioning adults who love, serve, and honor the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength. If that is our aim, we should seek to help foster a loving obedience to the Word of God. Therefore, parents, we must be encouraging.

Table Question: Tell of a time you were most encouraging to your child. How can we encourage them in the Word of God?

When Paul writes of "Bringing up" your children, it carries much more weight than just teaching them what they should know. It has a connotation of nurture and care. If we are going to bring them up – we are going to lead them by what we say and what we do. It's not just words, it's actions. We must walk the talk if we want our children to do the same.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of the Ephesians* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Pres, 1979), 245.

There's a great difference in a flowing stream and a stagnant pool. Growing up in Guntersville, I was around water all my life. Every day I drove over it. I remember practicing baseball in a gym on rainy days. There was always standing water outside of the gym. The smell was atrocious! The stagnant pool was never something I would have ever thought of drinking from.

Remember, flowing water is always better than stagnant pools. The same goes for your family discipleship. Lead your families from a "flowing river" style relationship with God, not a stagnant pool!

The responsibility always falls to parents as the chief spiritual influencers. Next week, we will go to back to the OT to see a guide and example of this from the book of Proverbs.

As we close, here are 3 actionable items to apply this week.

Action:

- Pray with your spouse daily this week for the spiritual growth/vitality of your kids.
- Work on your own devotional time/walk with Lord.
- Share with your children your favorite bible verse and tell them why.

Session 3: An Old Testament Example of Family Discipleship

Good afternoon and welcome to the 3rd session of our study on family discipleship. I really want to convey my heartfelt thanks for being a part of this study. It's so important to me for several reasons. One, it's important because I get evaluated on it. That's why those surveys are so integral to the sessions. But that's not the most important reason. I actually have 3 "most important" reasons: Hudson, Asher, and our not yet adopted child.

Let's review some of our action points from last week. Around your table, discuss these points:

- 1. How has your time in the Word been?**
- 2. Have you prayed with your spouse this past week?**
- 3. What verse did you share with your kids?**

I take the course seriously because my kids' spiritual vitality depends on it. Your children's spiritual vitality does as well. For those who may think I'm being a little dramatic, here's my example.

Billy was a friend of mine and a pretty good kid when we were growing up. I spent the night at his house on several occasions, and I remember his dad sitting in the living room reading his bible while we were doing other things. We would play outside, play video games, and go fishing in the pond in front of his house. Billy would talk about his dad's devotion to church and to the Word, but Billy said it was always personal to his dad. He didn't pass that devotion and love down to his children.

Years later Billy walked away from the faith in which he grew up. He has told me it was never a topic of conversation in his house, even though his dad was devoted to the church. It was just something they did; it was not woven into the fabric of the family. Now, I'm not blaming Billy's father for his lack of faith, but it does beg the question "what if." What if the things of God were discussed more? What if there were strategic times which the family made efforts to understand the Bible together? Sadly, those questions will never get answered.

Maybe it's from a lack of knowledge of the importance of family discipleship. Maybe it's from a lack of understanding of how to do them. Whatever the case, we simply cannot drop the ball on this one, parents. In the same way we care for their physical and emotional needs, maybe care for our kids' spiritual needs as well.

The Bible not only tells us that we *should* have times of family discipleship, but it also gives us the means of *how* to do them. There are examples throughout the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament that can shape of our family discipleship times. I use the word "example" somewhat loosely, but it may act as a guide. That's really our main point for tonight....

Main Point: Scripture gives us examples of parents practicing family discipleship.

What I want to do tonight is dig into one passage in particular to see some examples we can follow from the OT, particularly the proverbs.

Table Question: What is one example your parents set for you that you still follow today?

- *I still like to bowl with my thumb out...*
- *Maybe other things are more important...*

What I want us to do is spend some time looking into a passage and seeing how a father directed a proverb to the instruction of his son. As you read the first part of Proverbs, you notice that they are mainly directed to “my son.” I want to focus on Proverb 4:20–27. As we look at this passage, I want to look at it through the lens of a father giving direction to his son.

We as parents have to teach what we learn about God through the Proverbs to our children. Professor Sid Buzzell tells us, “The book of Proverbs is useful for parents in instructing their sons and daughters.”⁵ What parents learn, they need to pass down. This is a key way godly wisdom is gained. Parents, we carry a weighty responsibility to adequately prepare our children to live wisely as they apply biblical wisdom to every situation of life.

*20 My son, pay attention to my words;
listen closely to my sayings.*

*21 Don't lose sight of them;
keep them within your heart.*

*22 For they are life to those who find them,
and health to one's whole body.*

*23 Guard your heart above all else,
for it is the source of life.*

*24 Don't let your mouth speak dishonestly,
and don't let your lips talk deviously.*

*25 Let your eyes look forward;
fix your gaze straight ahead.*

*26 Carefully consider the path for your feet,
and all your ways will be established.*

*27 Don't turn to the right or to the left;
keep your feet away from evil.*

What I want to do in our time together is see some of the things we can glean from this passage in our own family discipleship times.

⁵ Sid Buzzell, *Proverbs*, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Wisdom*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2018), 221.

One word of caution – do not make this about behavior modification. This is about way more than simply a change in actions. This is an internal change that shows up in external behaviors. The inward change must be the driving force behind external behaviors. You can't do it the other way around, external leads to internal. It must be in this order.

From the very beginning, the father is saying to his son “pay attention to my words.” As you read down the rest of the passage, you see how important the father/Proverb writer (who many believe to be Solomon) continues to talk about the importance of his words. If a child does not pay attention to his father's words (which come from God alone), it is easier for him or her to go down the wrong path.

The father's words are for every area of life. If the father is pointing his children to God and his ways, they will lead to life. What are some words that influence your interactions with your kids? Are your words encouraging? Uplifting? Pointing to God and his ways in all times? Parents' words matter. The father in verse 22 describes his words as life. Are you words giving life?

Table Question: How have you seen words tear down and words build up in your own lives?

We must teach the ways of the Lord. When I talk about words giving life, I don't necessarily mean just encouraging words, but God's Word. We must teach and share God's words with our kids. This is why it is extremely important to begin times of discipleship with times in God's Word, the Bible. Yes, in your homework you will be challenged to spend some time in God's Word with your children. It's the most beneficial thing you can do to disciple your children.

This passage also teaches us as parents to guard their hearts. What does guarding their heart look like? Guarding your child's heart isn't about protecting them from danger or harm. It's not insulating them from the world so that they do not see any harm from outside of Christian circles. A reminder from our first session – the heart is the center of life – where decisions are made. So helping them guard their hearts directs how they think, act, and live around all people.

What do we think of guarding/protecting? The word refers to a prison guard type of guarding. This is a very important task. It means keeping those in custody restrained and protecting them from those outside. It is protecting from both within and without. The best way to do this is to make sure they are getting a steady diet of God's Word.

Table Question: How can we protect and guard our children's hearts? Does it change the way we think about it to think of it as a prison guard?

Where do we go to help protect and guard their hearts? I'm glad you asked. We go to God's Word. Look at Psalm 119:11.

I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.

So let's put this together – we should teach our kids to guard their hearts. All of life springs up from their hearts. We do so by helping them treasure God's Word in their hearts, which keeps them from sin. So the very first thing we must do as parents when we want to begin family discipleship is to start with the Word of God.

Table Discussion: You were challenged to talk about your favorite verse with your children. What verse did you share? Did that spark any other conversations?

When we hide God's Word in our hearts, it's much more likely that our whole body goes in the direction of His leading. Scripture guides us toward holiness. One of our goals in family discipleship is to lead our families to love the Word of God more diligently than we did before. Each day we should be more dedicated to God's Word more and more. That begins with our dedication to the Lord (the parents set the tone).

This puts the responsibility on parents to be spiritually fit first. Our dedication to the Lord must be a priority before anything else and then we teach what we know/live to our kids. Parents who live their faith have more power when they teach the Scriptures to their children.

As we close, here are some action steps for you to take this week. Remember, we will discuss them next week, so don't skip this step!

Action:

- Pray with your spouse every day this week for the spiritual growth/vitality of your kids.
- Work on own devotional time/walk with Lord.
- Read a portion of the Bible with your child at least one time during the day
 - TIP: look for times you are naturally gathered together, i.e. meal times, before bed, etc.

Session 4: Learning from History

As a kid, I remember watching the old Davy Crockett shows. My grandparents taped them for me and I watched them at their house. I remember wearing a coon skin cap (still not sure of the reason people wore them) and running around in the woods. I liked the fact that he was a real person.

As I got older and into high school and college, I liked to read biographies. I still do. Biographies of men and women who were successful or had some form of high achievement were always high on my reading list. I remember doing a book report on a book about Franklin D. Roosevelt when I was in the sixth grade dressing up as him (in a wheelchair) to make my presentation (it was something we all had to do by the way).

In the past few years, I have really enjoyed reading the Bonhoeffer biography and the one called *Titan* about John D Rockefeller. I feel like as we read about the lives of people in history, we can learn a great deal about our lives today.

Table Question: Who is someone from history that has influenced you in one way or another?

Our main point for today is just that; **we can learn a lot about family discipleship as we look at a historical theology of the church.** For our time together, we are going to look at some of the important voices concerning family discipleship down throughout history. We won't cover every single person who has written about this topic, but we will look at some important ones and discover how they can help us today.

But first, I want to make sure we stick close to Scripture. Scripture teaches us about discipleship and history. The apostle Paul wrote about this subject in his second letter to his spiritual son, Timothy. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul wrote

What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

I want us to consider this passage and the progression of passing down spiritual information. Really it's more than just teaching, it's discipleship. Paul points to Timothy first and says what you have heard, highlighting the spiritual direction Timothy has. It matters to his life. But where did Timothy get it from? Paul is the one who taught him (and the many witness as well). Paul wasn't just focusing on one person, but it had impact to Timothy directly.

Next, Timothy was supposed to pass it down to others. Timothy's goal wasn't to soak up the information and get spiritually knowledgeable but to find other people to pass it along to. The goal was to keep the spiritual lineage of Paul moving. However, it doesn't stop with those Timothy teaches. He should look for faithful (reliable, trustworthy) men who can teach others. You see, the idea wasn't for one person to be impacted by the Word of God, but for many other generations to come as well.

I believe we can follow this same path in our own families. You aren't just practicing family discipleship for your kid's sake, but your grandkids'sake. It's a moving process.

Table Question: How does it feel to think that what you do today may impact the future generations of your family?

Again, this idea of family discipleship in the context of the church is not new. Dr. Donald Whitney provides a great overview of more pastors and theologians than I will in his great book, *Family Worship*. I encourage you all to get a copy.

From the early church fathers, the concept of family discipleship has been prevalent. John Chrysostom championed family discipleship in the early church. He used his sermons to encourage families to participate in these activities. He stated, "Let everything take second place to the care of our children, our bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."⁶ Chrysostom wasn't alone in promoting Family Discipleship in the early church. It came from many voices and theologians.

During the Middle Ages, there were minimum efforts in this practice, but that doesn't mean it was nonexistent. Thomas Aquinas not only promoted family discipleship but wrote a manual of aid to parents who wanted to pursue this high calling. His *Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas* led parents in a methodical way of teaching their children the ways of the Lord through memorizing answers to biblical questions.

Table Question: Do you think memorizing answers to biblical questions would be beneficial in your family discipleship times? Why or why not?

During the reformation, a shift in the importance of the sufficiency of Scripture occurred. This high regard for Scripture, along with the dedication to the priesthood of believers, brought the practice of family discipleship to a more prominent level than it had been previously. Martin Luther and John Calvin make tremendous impacts on the spiritual lives of families during this time. Author Terry Johnson states that for the Reformers, "The greatest service one could perform for humanity was to rear godly children."⁷ The skew of the church being the main place for discipleship was halted during this time and the reigns were given back to parents.

This idea grew more and more with the rise of the Puritans. With their basis in the Reformation, many of the Puritan pastors and theologians fine-tuned the idea of family discipleship. Rev. Matthew Henry had a sermon published on this very topic called "A Church in the House." Henry said when beginning family discipleship, you begin with the Scriptures. Henry is quoted as saying "You must read scriptures to your families, in a solemn manner, requiring their attendance on your reading, and their attention to it; and

⁶ John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, Popular Patristics 7, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimer's Seminary Press, 1986), 68.

⁷ Terry Johnson, *Understanding Family Worship: Its History, Theology, and Practice* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2022), 13.

enquiring sometimes whether they understand what you read.”⁸ Henry was devoted to his parishioners understanding God’s Word and having them teach their children effectively and understandably.

Another key for Rev. Henry was to have families pray and sing together. Families who read the Scriptures are led to pray the scriptures they read. The Bible guides their prayers. It also should encourage their singing together. I’m guessing the thought of singing together during this time is somewhat foreign to you all, but we will talk more about that in a few weeks.

The person who impacted me the most regarding this topic is Richard Baxter. Baxter was a puritan minister who took family discipleship extremely seriously. So seriously in fact, that he would visit the households of all his church members to help instruct them in this practice.

In his pivotal work, *A Christian Directory*, Baxter writes about the necessity of family devotions. Baxter saw the correlation between the church and the family, and that they should work together to make disciples well. Baxter writes, “If families are societies of God’s institution, furnished with special advantages and opportunities for God’s solemn worship, having not probation so to use them; then the solemn worship of God in and by families as such, is of divine appointment.”⁹ Baxter saw the need to help families make the most of every opportunity, and in doing so, assist the church in effective disciple-making.

Baxter encourages families to teach the word clearly and maintain brevity. Take heart folks, we don’t have to be long winded with regards to family discipleship. You can keep it short and to the point. It’s probably better than way for most of us anyway.

Still others made the most of family discipleship throughout history. Anglican evangelist George Whitefield encouraged every house to be a little parish and every parent a priest over the flock.

Jonathan Edwards, American theologian and pastor, not only taught the importance of family discipleship, but modeled it as well. He diligently read scripture to his 11 children every day. If he can do it with 11, surely, we can do it in our households! Edwards also utilized daily catechisms in teaching his children.

In the nineteenth century, presbyterian pastor James W. Alexander devoted his writing to the subject of family discipleship. Alexander wanted to fortify families with God’s Word as the world continued to gain ground in the church. His main weapon against the attack of the world was family discipleship. Alexander wanted every member of the family to

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Select Sermons of the Late Reverent Mr. Matthew Henry* (London: Samuel Palmer and J. Buckland, 1782) 2.

⁹ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (London: Robert White, 1673), 495.

live out their faith daily and the best way to prepare for this was to equip them through family discipleship.

Again, there were many more pastors who promoted family discipleship. The goal of this session was not to wow you by the achievements of dead pastors, but to encourage you by the fact that this is not a new idea. Family Discipleship is God's idea and has been practiced down through the centuries.

Table Question: What sticks out to you as interesting about all the historical church figures we have discussed today?

As always, here is your action plan for this week. There is one more handout for you today, it's a resource page with ideas to help you as you begin this idea of family discipleship. Next week, we are going to get really practical and look at the way we practice family discipleship at home. Don't miss out!

Plan:

- Pray with your spouse three times this week for the spiritual growth/vitality of your kids
- Read Scripture with your family at least 2 times this week.
- Talk over what your plan will be for your FD times
 - Look over resources to help with this (give resource page at this meeting)

Session 5: Bible Intake and Prayer

Welcome back. Thank you for coming to these sessions. They are extremely important to me. Today we get into the meat of the subject matter. We've already talked about this some, but today, I want you to walk away feeling confident in the fact that you can lead family discipleship times for certain.

We are going to jump right in and begin with a discussion of your homework from last week.

- I hope praying with your spouse is becoming 2nd nature. It should be that way for you.
 - o What are the challenges to praying with your spouse?
- Did you read Scripture with your family 2 times this week?
 - o What Scripture did you read? How did it go?
- What resources did you find helpful in your plan for family discipleship? Did you commit to any of them?

Table Question: How overwhelming did all that feel?

I'm sure it was awkward to some to sit down with your kids and have discussions on the Bible. It was for me when I began. I hope to help alleviate at least some of the barriers today as we discuss how to become better disciple-makers of our children. I believe many of these barriers can be removed with my big, overarching idea for the day: **You don't have to be a bible scholar to lead family devotions.**

You really don't. I want to give you my plan with my kids this year a little later on today and let you know I love how it's happening. It's more natural than anything I've done before. You don't have to use my method, but to do it correctly you have to use my source material, the Bible. Over the next 2 weeks we are going to focus on the three key elements of family worship: Bible reading, prayer, and singing. Today, we are going to talk specifically about Bible Intake and Prayer.

I want to go back to looking at Deuteronomy 6 today, although we are going to scroll down in the chapter to a conversation between parents and son, or at least a potential conversation. Let's read these verses together.

²⁰ "When your son asks you in the future, 'What is the meaning of the decrees, statutes, and ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?' ²¹ tell him, 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand. ²² Before our eyes the LORD inflicted great and devastating signs and wonders on Egypt, on Pharaoh, and on all his household, ²³ but he brought us from there in order to lead us in and give us the land that he swore to our ancestors. ²⁴ The LORD commanded us to follow all these statutes and to fear the LORD our God for our prosperity always and for our preservation, as it is today. ²⁵ Righteousness will be ours if we are careful to follow every one of these commands before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.' Deuteronomy 6:20–25

I want you to notice a few highlights from this passage. First, the son asks about the meanings of what God has commanded. The way we disciple our children must be in a conversational style. Lecturing alone is not the best way to communicate God's truths to your children. Parents, a key to this is for us to listen to what our kids are saying/asking. Sometimes we will have something prepared and a question from a child will veer us into another topic. As long as we go back to the Word, that's a good thing. We want them to ask questions. It means they are engaged in the process. Next week, we are going to talk about lot questions in the form of catechisms.

Notice what the parent does here – he goes right to the story of God and his care for the Israelites. The parent shared what he knows about God. That's precisely what we do too! What we know about God is through Scripture, so our family discipleship practices must be grounded in the Word.

Finally, we see the parent offers a point of application. He tells the child that God has commanded us to follow and points to the reward of following (righteousness). This is a good formula for a sermon too. We should always wrap up our time in God's Word with our children with something they can think, feel, or do concerning the passage. If there is no application, we are just reading to our kids. They need to see how the Scriptures can bring us more in line with the gospel.

So where do we begin? I think that's a good question. The plan our family has been using this year is the F260 NT reading plan our whole church has been using. As I am reading it daily for my personal devotion, I pick out a shorter section within the chapter to read with the boys. It not only helps us practice family discipleship, but it ingrains God's truth in me even more so. You definitely do not have to do this, but I believe it's a good place to start. Again, you can check out all the resources from last week too.

Table Question: What resource did you find that you were considering using?

Here are a few keys to make the most of your Bible reading time. First, read enthusiastically. Donald Whitney, who wrote the book *Family Worship*, says to read the Bible both “enthusiastically and interpretively.”¹⁰ That's why I like to use what I'm reading too, it makes it more impactful in my life and I teach it better. Dry and tired reading of the Bible lacks the emphasis that is needed for a child's engagement. So don't be boring!

Second, read the Scriptures with your child, don't just hand them a copy of God's Word and expect them to do it on their own. That doesn't mean that you have to read it verbally to them. You can engage them in the process and let them read it. However, reading God's Word together is a powerful part of family discipleship and should not be overlooked.

¹⁰ Donald Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 45.

Third, make sure you give your children at least one point of application. I used the phrase, “something to think, feel, or do” earlier. The word of God is practical. It will lead us to think about God and others differently than we would on our own. It also changes how we feel about others. There are things to do in response to what we read. All three may not be in every passage, but at least one will. Make sure you highlight that area.

A good way to bring about that point of application is to ask the SPACE questions we have talked about previously. While you read the passage, ask your children is there a:

- Sin to confess
- Promise to claim
- Attitude to change
- Command to obey
- Example to follow

These questions help bring out application.

Table Question: Do you look for points of application yourself in your personal devotional times?

Lastly, be consistent. It will get difficult. Some nights, you run out of time. Find times that work best for your family and stick with it. Don’t give up. If it doesn’t look like mine, that’s ok. Keep going. Remember, your goal isn’t to have a time of reading, but of laying the biblical foundations of life in your kids. You are helping them create a Biblical worldview. So don’t give up.

The second portion I want to talk about today is prayer. We read Scripture first, and then we pray. Prayer is a key element of family discipleship because it allows us to talk with God and it shows our children how to do that as well.

Table Question: How can we value prayer in our families?

Prayer is a key part of family discipleship. It is more than an activity announcing the time of family discipleship is over. It is a time where we talk to God. Think about that statement. We, finite, created beings are actually talking with the Creator of the universe. It’s got to be important.

While yes, prayer does conclude our times in my house most days, but it also begins it. I don’t mean we pray as we start, but I pray in the morning that God would help me teach/lead my boys well through this passage. I go to the Lord for help in what I’m going to say to my boys that night. We have to make sure we are praying for our kids. That’s why I’ve had you praying together with your spouses since the 2nd meeting.

JC Ryle said, “Prayer is the mightiest engine God has placed in our hands. It is the best weapon in everyday difficulty and the surest remedy in any trouble.”¹¹ Let’s not treat it as

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *How Should a Child Be Trained*, (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House,

something tagged onto a devotion, but as a way to solidify the application points and ask the Creator of all things to help us live out the passage's direction.

Our prayers should bring variety. We don't have to pray the same words every time. Sometimes prayers will be long, sometimes they will be short. The key is to make sure to pray.

I find a method of praying helps me. I use the ACTS acronym to help. Many of you may know it, but if not, here it is:

- A – Adoration (begin with praise)
- C – Confession (confession of sins)
- T – Thanksgiving (tell God what I'm thankful for)
- S – Supplication (ask him for my needs/wants)

I would encourage you pick one of these areas and pray them with your kids as you begin your family discipleship times. You are teaching them to pray, not to follow an order. IF you are like me, however, you can wander in your prayers. This keeps me focused on the purpose – talking to God.

Lastly, I want you to remember to have everyone pray out loud at some point. I know some kids don't like this, but I think it's a good practice to begin. Encourage them that you are not grading them on their prayers, but that you want to help them. That may mean for little children, you are feeding them the words to say at some point. That works! Just pray together.

I know that's a lot of important information I've given you tonight. We could have gone in much deeper. But I want you to get started. Here are your action points for this week:

Plan:

- Have 3 nights of reading the Bible passage and family prayer together.
- Write down notes from your time to share with group.

Let's get started this week and dive in. I can't wait to hear your notes next week!

Session 6: Singing and Catechisms

Hello everyone. I hope your week was great. How was your time with your family? How were your discipleship efforts? I hope you made some notes because I want to begin our time today talking about them.

What did you find the easiest?

What did you find the most difficult part of the process?

What are some changes you want to make this upcoming week?

Remember, this is not about doing something during an 8-week class. This is so much more important than that. Several of you participated in our Both Hands project for our adoption. If you did, you may remember what the founder, JT Olson, said about adoption. If you didn't, this man said that we were "rescuing one from the grip of Hell." I thought that was a little overdramatic, but the point was made. I believe the same point applies here. How you continue discipling your children will matter in the long run. Don't let this stop now. Keep going. You can do it!

Last week we dove into the first two main priorities for your family discipleship times, Bible intake and prayer. Today, I want to focus on the last main part of family discipleship times, according to many of the voices we discussed several weeks ago, and then give you one other area to consider than may help you do in a different way that guides you all clearly. Today we will discuss the fact that **singing and catechisms are 2 important ways to help disciple your children.**

Ok, let's get this out of the way, I assume many of you don't sit down with your kids and sing. I doubt your idea of a fantastic Friday night is to have a family sing-along. But singing is an important part of worship, and really, isn't family discipleship a way to worship the Lord?

Look at what Scripture says about singing:

- Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.
- James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises.
- Psalm 68:4 Sing to God! Sing praises to his name. Exalt him who rides on the clouds—his name is the LORD—and celebrate before him.

And this is just the beginning of many verses that talk about singing and its importance in worship. If it is important in worship, it should be important in our family discipleship times.

I will agree with what many of you probably think now, it can be awkward. At least it can at first. Once you establish this as a routine, it becomes much easier. Christianity is a faith that places importance on the collective power of a song. We cannot overlook that in our family discipleship times.

Table Question: What are some songs you may have used with your kids to teach them something, i.e. a song teaching how to say the blessing or brush their teeth? Can you still sing it? (Bonus points around the table if you do!)

Singing is not new to our faith. If you look down through the halls of history, you can see our faith is a singing faith. Matthew Henry, Baxter, Alexander, and most of those we discussed included singing as a portion of their family discipleship times. Henry stated, “I must not omit to recommend to you the singing of Psalms in your families, as part of your daily worship.”¹² I want to talk about a few excuses to singing and then give you a resource.

Table Question: What are the common excuses you think would be used for the lack of singing in family discipleship times.

What are some of the excuses you came up with?

One excuse we use as to why we don’t sing in our Family Discipleship times is that it is just weird! It’s not something we are used to. Let me challenge you to think differently about singing. If we make it normal, it will be normal! It doesn’t have to be strange.

The biggest excuse – I can’t sing. There’s a 2 word solution to that – so what! The Bible doesn’t command only the ones with nice voices to sing. We are all commanded to sing praises to God (see verses above). Let’s make a joyful noise.

Finally, where do we start? You might be thinking, I can’t do this, I can’t play an instrument. Well, I’m glad you asked that question – let me introduce someone to you that you already know, Roy. He can point you in the direction of our songs at church so there’s continuity. But get online to see how to do this. YouTube has a plethora of worship songs with words scrolling across you can use. Seeds Family Worship and Doorpost Songs are 2 resources that are incredibly helpful because they are singing Scriptures. Don’t let your musical ability stop you from participating in singing the songs of faith with your children. Give your children the freedom to pick songs you sing too. That may help with them singing with you. Whatever you do, sing!

The last thing I want to talk about is the use of catechisms. These are fantastic ways to streamline your family discipleship times and help hide God’s truth in your children’s

¹² Henry, *Select Sermons*, 20.

hearts. Remember Psalm 119:11 says, “*I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.*” We need to hide God’s word in our hearts and teach our children to do the same. Catechisms help make that happen systematically.

Table Question: What’s something you memorized as a child you still remember?

Some of you may be thinking, “what is a catechism?” One of my professors, Gregg Allison, defined it as “a teaching tool that is used for the process of instructing Christians in the faith and it’s practice.”¹³ This is typically done through a series of questions and answers. The children will memorize the answer and, in doing so, grow to understand biblical themes.

For example, question 1 of the New City Catechism is “What is our only hope in life and death?” The answer is “That we are not our own but we belong to God.” That’s the children’s version. Tim Keller, who wrote this catechism, wrote an adult version too that says “That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.” I only know the kid’s version because that’s what I’ve used with my boys.

One of the things I like about catechisms so much is that they help me realize I am not alone in this. There have been families throughout all of history that have utilized catechisms to train their children in the ways of the Lord. Richard Baxter, John Calvin, Matthew Henry – all men we have talked about earlier – have written catechisms. Some have written multiple.

Catechisms are great tools because they speak to both heart and mind. Remember, we talked about last week leaving your children with something to think, feel, and/or do from your family discipleship times? These aid in this. As you go through the questions and

¹³ Gregg Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 36.

answers, remember it's not about just memorization. It's about life transformation, so talk through the questions with your children.

If you are looking for a catechism to use, I would suggest the New City Catechism. It's the one I mentioned earlier. It has just as much richness as all the ones passed down throughout history, with much more understandable language! John Piper also has a more Baptist-centered catechism on his website, www.desiringgod.org. You can access both of those for free on the internet. The NCC has a free app as well. So find a catechism and plug it into your family discipleship cycle. I think you will be happy you did!

I want to talk about action points. We have left every meeting with a few actions points, and I hope you are taking it seriously. This is where the rubber meets the road. Today, I have 2 big action points. One is for you to complete for this week, and the other is one I want you to begin, but is not something we will talk about until our final session. So here's your action plan for this week:

Action

- a. 5 nights of family worship (Bible Reading, Praying) this week.
 - a. Include 1 night of singing at minimum.
 - b. Include 1 night of utilizing a catechism.
- b. Begin working on a plan to bring the last night for the next 30 days of family discipleship
 - a. What format will you use? When will you do them?

Session 7: Families and Churches

Good afternoon. Thank you for changing the time for today's meeting. I am scheduled to be in a meeting for the next few days starting tomorrow. We are going to jump right in and begin with a discussion of your homework from last week.

- I hope praying with your family is becoming 2nd nature. It should be that way for you.
 - o What are the challenges to praying as a family?
 - o How many of you were able to do at least 3 discipleship times with your family this week? 4? 5?
- How was the catechism part? Did you get stuck anywhere along the way?
- How is your 30 day planning coming? Don't forget to utilize the resources I gave a few weeks ago.

Today, we are going to talk about something that I think could get overlooked if we are not careful when talking about family discipleship. If we go down the road too far, we can disconnect this practice from the church. While your family is the main group that this is for, there can still be a great impact for our local church. **Families and the Church can both benefit from family devotions.** I want to briefly look at what the Scripture says about the church and then see how family discipleship fits into the context of the church and how the church assists and promotes family discipleship.

Before we begin, we must describe the church. We have spent a great deal of time looking at what family discipleship is from a biblical perspective, but today I want to look at what a church is. I know we are all part of a local church, but what exactly is a church.

Table Question: How would you define a local church?

That's sort of a loaded question. Let me give you my definition:

The local church is a regenerated group of people who have been baptized into fellowship with one another. The church is led by the Trinitarian God and is governed by Scripture. It has appointed elders to guide the people in preaching, prayer, and ministry, The church also appoints deacons who serve the church. The church is responsible for administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, promoting unity among its members, and carrying out church discipline when the need arises. The church exists to make disciples of all nations.

Here's a couple of high points from that definition:

Regenerated group of people: The first part I want to highlight is that the church is a group of saved people. While a lost person can attend a church service, he can't be part of a local church in membership.

Been baptized into fellowship: Baptism is the symbol that God has saved us. It is how we make the call of God to salvation in our lives public. In our church, it is a mechanism by which one joins.

Led by Trinitarian God: The head of the church is God. God exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is the one who leads and guides the church.

Governed by Scripture: God has given us his word to direct us and guide us. Through His word we come to know God in a personal way.

Appointed Elders: Their role is to preach, pray, and conduct ministry. While not the main leader of the church, appointed elders (or pastors) act as an under-shepherd to lead the church along God's purposes.

Deacons to serve: The role of lead servants are the deacons of a church. In Acts 6, God called a group of men to serve the widows. Deacons today work in conjunction with the elders, not to overtake their role, but to serve.

Responsible for the Ordinances: The church carries out the Lord's Supper and Baptism.

Promoting Unity among members: The church should not cause division among itself. Churches should seek out unity in the people around the Scriptures.

Carry Out church discipline: When a member is not walking with the Lord and is unrepentant, the church should carry out the task of church discipline for the sake of restoration.

Make disciples of all nations: Churches should seek to make disciples of all people, always. Church should seek to start within its very walls and extend disciple-making efforts around her neighborhoods and the nations.

I want you to see the church as a help to you but not a replacement for you. While the church should make disciples, we must remember the church is a group of people, not an organization. The church is not your replacement. God will not allow us to slide on this task by saying, "Well, we took them to church."

Table Question: Why do families need strong churches?

- Go over answers

In addition, strong churches provide areas of growth and service. As you lead your child in family discipleship, the church should provide areas for them to work those things out. Your child grows at home and can put into practice what she is learning at church. She can serve the local body. The church provides areas of encouragement and spiritual formation from outside the family, but will never overtake the importance of the family in discipleship.

I once heard Dr. Richard Ross, leading youth ministry professor from SWBTS, state that for a student to grow in their faith, he or she needs a variety of connections. Parents are first, but they also need a connection with a youth worker/leader, a pastor, and a senior adult. He found that students who had these connections were less likely to drop out of church and abandon their faith after high school. Please notice the first one though, as I believe it is the most important connection. It's you. It's a parent. The church cannot and was never meant to replace you.

Just as families need strong churches, the church needs strong families. Parents who are serious about the call to disciple their children raise stronger families and, in turn, strengthen the church. If we take what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12 seriously, we must see our role as helping our children figure out what part of the body they are.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Indeed, the body is not one part but many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I’m not a hand, I don’t belong to the body,” it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I’m not an eye, I don’t belong to the body,” it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted. ¹⁹ And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 1 Corinthians 12;12–20

When parents help their children decipher what their gifts and talents are, they help them create ways of service in the church.

Table Question: How has God gifted you to serve in the church? Do you see any qualities in your kids today that might be ways for them to serve in the church?

What does this have to do with family discipleship? How do we connect these dots? The interlink between church and family must be considered, because as I have said before, stronger families create stronger churches. This is built upon the Puritan model we discussed last session. One professor added, “Puritans had such a high view of the institution of the home to worship the Lord because they equated the home with the church.”¹⁴ This is not a new idea. It has stood the test of time.

As you continue your disciple-making efforts with your children, keep in mind you are investing in our church as well. The stronger your family is, the better our church will be.

¹⁴ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1986), 75.

The church should not just receive from families, but should help prepare you to do this task as well. Just like the class, churches should work hard to help parents make disciples of their children. Churches should never rob you of your God-given duty with your children, but we better sure help you do it!

Our points of action are very similar to last week's action points. Let me encourage you, if you haven't chosen any resources, to dig in this week and find some resources. Next week, we will look at our 30 Day Plan and help each other. We will also have opportunities around the table to discuss how things went and share what you have learned in this class.

Action:

- 5 Family Discipleship times this week.
 - Bible Reading and Prayer
 - Singing at least 3 times
 - Using a catechism at least one time
- Continue working on your 30 day plan. Bring it completed (at least all you have) next week to the conclusion of our time.

Session 8: Modeling and Conclusion

Welcome to our final meeting and session. I hope this class has been beneficial to you. Tonight, we have a little teaching and then some time to brainstorm together (since this is the class that wraps everything up) better ways to carve out time for family discipleship.

I fully believe we do not find time for family discipleship, we make time. One of my goals for this class for you is that the level of importance you place on this subject has grown since we began. At the end of the night, I will hand out the same survey you filled out on the first night. It is how I will engage with the class and if it was beneficial to you all. It also will help determine how I go about tweaking the class to conduct again down the road.

So here's some questions for you today to get started and as a review:

- *How was your FD times this week? Anyone get 5 in?*
- *Did you sing? How was that? What resource did you use?*
 - o *My kids laughed at me when we started this btw*

As we conclude our class, I want to point out something that hasn't been discussed a ton during the past few weeks, but is extremely important and not to be overlooked. It's our main point for today. **Family Discipleship is more than just devotional times, it includes modeling Christ-likeness in all things.**

That may sound a little scary to us, but it shouldn't be. We model a lot of things for our children. They will remember the good and the bad. We know that from our own lives. I remember Saturdays with my dad when I was young; he was the volunteer director of the city's meals on wheels service. We went to those who needed it and we delivered food. My dad organized and equipped a team of other volunteers to help those in need. That's the kind of modeling I am talking about. It's one reason I chose this topic as my doctoral project – to make sure my dad's legacy lived on in my life and hopefully in the lives of others.

If we are going to model our relationship with our children, we must begin with what Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin discuss in their pivotal book, *Family Discipleship*. They submit, "Modeling requires a close, loving relationship with those you hope to lead and influence... Live with your kids purposely nearby. Quality proximity is paramount to your effectiveness as a discipling parent."¹⁵ I am so thankful for our student and children's ministries here, but we can't let them be our main arm for reaching and teaching our children. By God's design, it's up to us.

If we take a look at Joshua 24:14–15; we will see that modeling was key in the Old Testament. IN these Passages, Joshua states:

¹⁵ Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home Through Time, Moments and Milestones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 69.

Therefore, fear the LORD and worship him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt and worship the Lord. But if it doesn't please you to worship the LORD, choose for yourselves today: Which will your worship – the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord. Joshua 24:14–15

Joshua reminds the Israelites that the gods of their former captors, the gods of the people who previously owned the land, and all other gods are inferior to the one true God. He then asks them to choose – will they serve the gods who are not real gods at all, or will they serve the one true, living God. He then declares his mark – his family will serve the Lord.

That's what Joshua had done in his lifetime – serve the Lord. He led God's chosen people into the promised land. He saw God wipe out armies in unconventional ways. He walked with the Lord and led the people to do so. He declared it and then he did it! May our families be strengthened if we go about the same way.

Table Question: Discuss one time you followed up (or didn't) on a rule you set with your children? How did that go?

We can participate in all types of family discipleship times, but if our lives are not lining up with what we are teaching, we may have little impact. Or at least not the impact we want. That's why we started this whole series with talking about our personal spiritual lives. We must teach and lead from a flowing fountain, not a stagnate pool.

As we head toward the final stretch, I want to talk with you about some ways you can practice modeling. First let me recommend a resource – a book called *Habits of the Household* by Justin Earley. It has a breakdown of creating habits in your family that centers around key times and moments in your day – from waking to bed time. It's a fantastic book that I believe will serve you well.

Let's discuss some of these actions you can take at home and how to model.

What are some ways you can model your spiritual life at home?

Answers should include a variety of way, if not mentioned: make sure to highlight:

- Serving at church with your children
 - o We take great effort here at FBC to not be a place to just sit and soak, but to serve and send.
 - o When you are serving in a ministry or task here, bring your children along side you at the appropriate time
 - o *I love that some of our youth take up offering*
- Make the most of mealtime
 - o Don't rush, sit together and discuss day through biblical lens
- Movies

- Watch a movie together and then show them how what you watched either lines up with the Bible or it doesn't.
- Help your children see what the world is trying to sell them in media.
- Don't take for granted your influence over their pop culture!
- Discipline
 - When your children do something that requires discipline from you, make sure to explain discipline is a form of God's love for them
 - It is what keeps us in line with God's plan
- Dating/Relationships
 - Show them the importance of God's design for marriage and relationships
 - Date your spouse – show them how God set the institution of marriage as the first institution he blesses, and you are going to take that blessing seriously. It's important
- Work
 - Work is not a punishment for sin, but was designed by God
 - We should work hard so that they will follow, teach them God cares about our attitude when we work

A lot of this is non-formal, but it isn't non-important. You must make the most of your time. Your job as a parent is to constantly look for opportunities to model your relationship with Christ to them.

For single parent homes – this may be tough. Church needs to support single parent efforts to disciple their children in a major way. They have pressures of how to parent alone, how to cope with loss, how to manage finances, all the while knowing you must disciple your kids. It's tough.

So know the church stands with you. We as the church need to help our brothers and sisters in this way. That's why resources are so important – helps us live this out more. Parents in this situation need to also understand that it will impact how you disciple your children. But you can do it. Make sure your children first know you care and are always there for them. Then let them know you are going to point them toward the one who loves them the most – JC. It's not just about telling, it is showing as well.

Table Question: What's one way you will begin modeling your relationship with Christ to your children this week?

We have two more things to do before we close up. First, let's look at your 30 day plans. I would like for you to get them out and spend a few minutes discussing them around your table. Answer these questions:

- What resource are you going to use?*
- What are you most excited about?*
- What is intimidating?*
- Will you include some nonformal elements now?*

See what we can learn from each other...

(After a few minutes, lead group discussion about these)

Lastly, we are handing out the questionnaire. Please take it home and fill it out. Return to me by March 31.

Thank you for being a part of this process. I hope your family flourished through God's word!

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING PARENTS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN SODDY DAISY, TENNESSEE, FOR FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

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This project aims to equip parents to disciple their children. Chapter 1 presents the context, rationale, and methodology for the project. Chapter 2 shows the biblical basis for the project, exploring Deuteronomy 6:4–9, Proverbs 4:20–27, and Ephesians 6:1–4. Chapter 3 explores the practical foundations for parents to become the chief spiritual influencers of their children. This project provides training materials and strategies to allow the church to facilitate family discipleship. Chapter 4 explains the project, and the project is evaluated in chapter 5. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to train the parents of children and teenagers at First Baptist Church, Soddy Daisy, Tennessee to lead family discipleship times in their homes.

VITA

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EDUCATION

BSW, University of Alabama, 2003

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MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Student Minister, Creek Path Baptist Church, Guntersville, Alabama, 2003–2006.

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