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TRAINING CHRISTIAN MEN TO LEAD THEIR FAMILY  
WHILE INCARCERATED AT THE HAMPTON COUNTY  
DETENTION CENTER IN VARNVILLE,  
SOUTH CAROLINA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

TRAINING CHRISTIAN MEN TO LEAD THEIR FAMILY  
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SOUTH CAROLINA

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I dedicate this ministry project to all the men in correctional facilities across this country who want to stop the cycle of fatherlessness in their families, communities, and cultures. I pray that God's Word impacts and empowers you.

Additionally, I dedicate this ministry project to any man who has a desire to be a godly leader of his family yet is not always able to be home because of deployment, business, or any other calling on his life.

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## PREFACE

My family deserves a lot of recognition for what this ministry project has become. I thank my wife, Sarah, for encouraging me to pursue my education further and engage in the process of this ministry project. I want to recognize my three youngest children, Dominick, Matthew, and Ronen, for inspiring me to choose this topic, since their biological father was incarcerated frequently. I want to thank my older children, Alena, Kieran, Hannah, and Chloe, who read, proofread, and offered different perspectives as I endeavored on this path.

I appreciate my chaplain colleagues in the Federal Bureau of Prisons and other Southern Baptist correctional chaplains. They helped me to see needs and opportunities in our unique ministry environment.

I am thankful to the many inmate participants who provided the data needed for this project. I am particularly grateful for the man I met early in my correctional ministry who said, “If I had known what you are teaching, I would not be here, serving a life sentence with my son.”

I am also grateful to the faculty and staff at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for allowing me to pursue this project. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Don Whitney, who could not answer the question that I am addressing when I asked it. I am hopeful that this material may be useful not only in the correctional environment but also in every situation where fathers are required to spend time away from their families.

Jeremy McIntyre

Varnville, South Carolina

January 2025

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

God’s plan for humanity has always included the formation of families. After creating man and woman in his image, God commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28).<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Bible, God has given directions for the leading and management of families. In his Word, God has also given examples, both good and bad of differing responses to those directions. The results of the breakdown of the family are evident in correctional institutions throughout our nation, including the Federal Bureau of Prisons, where I have served as a chaplain for more than eight years. The mass incarceration of descendants from a fatherless generation is a popular topic for both the news media and politicians. We see a multitude of men, many of them proclaiming to be Christian fathers, who know of no hope for their children. The cycle will continue until those fathers initiate God-directed, Holy Spirit-empowered, and Christ-honoring change in raising their families, even while they are incarcerated. As God uses these men to change their families, cultures can change, and the result could be a transformation of our nation.

#### **Context**

This ministry project took place in Varnville, South Carolina, in the context of the Hampton County Detention Center. The congregation at this prison consisted of men assigned to several different security levels who self-identify as Christian as well as any other inmates who voluntarily attended any classes or workshops offered by Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.

chaplains. The inmates were incarcerated as either pre-trial detention or as convicted felons. Most of them had less than one year left to serve, yet some are serving longer sentences. These inmates have the opportunity for occasional in-person visitation, and telephone calls, and letter writing. The size of the congregation ranges from twelve to fifty individuals on an average Sunday, but in addition to these participants, classes may also draw inmates who do not attend Sunday service.

The opportunity for communication with their children was not as robust as initially anticipated. Other prisons have much greater access to telephone and email than a county detention center. Communication and practice expectations needed to be lowered to match the inmate's ability and access to communicate with their child. The inmates were encouraged to do the best that they could under their unique circumstances. Father-child interactions were discussed whenever an inmate was able to access his child.

The members of this congregation have a wide range of socio-economic and educational levels. Anyone from anywhere can make decisions that result in their incarceration. Additionally, the inmates in a county detention center are usually closer to home than state or federal inmates. This relative proximity typically allows for more in-person influence through visitation by family members than higher-security inmates receive at other institutions. Within the Federal Bureau of Prisons, inmates at every level have a different opportunity for emails, phone calls, and regular visits. The County Detention Center does not have such a robust communication program. They have the opportunity for weekly visits, letter-writing, and an occasional phone call.

Many studies show that most inmates in prison grew up in homes without a father or other healthy male role model in the home. Additionally, many of the inmates also have children of their own who are growing up without their father's presence. The

danger to these families, and our society, is that the cycle of fatherlessness will continue.<sup>2</sup> These men, and the population that they represent, need to become the fathers God intended. They need to know what God says about being a father and how to carry that out. Even while in prison, they need to develop the necessary tools to begin to lead their children and family as God intended from prison, and they need to continue implementing those tools when they return home.

Chaplaincy is a blending of two primary functions. The first is to be a pastor to Christians who, for whatever reason, have entered the prison population. A part of the pastoral function is offering pastoral counsel over a variety of life circumstances. The second function is to ensure that all inmates have access to what is needed to exercise their First Amendment right to practice their faith. Chaplaincy fits within the reentry affairs structure, as it is seen as part of the program to ensure that inmates return to society in a better condition than when they entered incarceration. Faith-based programming offered by a chaplain supports both the institution's goals and is inherently productive in leading the congregational aspects of Christian life in prison.

The volunteer chaplain at Hampton County Detention Center stated that family ministry is an important topic and needs this kind of program. There is not a paid chaplain at this facility. Pastor Herbert Brown of Greater Faith International Ministries in Varnville, SC, serves as the chaplain on a voluntary basis. He offers a weekly service and Bible study and was instrumental in supporting this program.

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<sup>2</sup> A Department of Justice publication listed seven statistics showing the adverse outcomes of fatherlessness, one of which is that "seventy percent of youths in State institutions are from fatherless homes." Cicero Wilson, "Economic Shifts That Will Impact Crime Control and Community Revitalization," in *What Can the Federal Government Do to Decrease Crime and Revitalize Communities* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice and the Executive Office for Weed and Seed, 1998), 11, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/172210.pdf>.

## **Roadblocks to Success**

The men in this congregation and in other correctional settings have many roadblocks to their growth in biblical fatherhood. Separation from their families makes it difficult for them to influence the lives of their children. Many inmates grow up without a father they should emulate, and oftentimes they do not have the biblical literacy to look to Scripture for that model. Inmates must be motivated to work through these obstacles to become the fathers God is calling them to be.

Some inmates may not have the opportunity to engage with Scripture through available prison-chapel based programming due to discipline and security issues. Some men are incarcerated for only a few months at a prison camp, making it difficult for them to engage in useful programming. Others are serving multiple life sentences, and safety necessitates that they move them every few years. This latter group does not currently exist at Hampton County Detention Center. Still, my years of experience at a high-security institution will help ensure that the findings generated in this project will be useful across the prison system. Chaplains also move around periodically due to family reasons, a promotion, a desire for a change of pace, or reaching the mandatory retirement age. Thus, inmates cannot rely on the continuity of chapel programming but must participate whenever possible.

One apparent roadblock to inmate fathers' growth in biblical fatherhood is that these men are not home with their families. The time away varies according to the crime and circumstances. Some may spend a matter of months away before they return home, while others may never see freedom. Fathers in this latter circumstance will have great difficulty in influencing the lives of their children. Some may be able to talk on the phone for a limited amount of time every month, while others may be able to send an email. Every inmate may communicate through letter-writing if they can read and write, and the institution may provide postage for those who cannot otherwise afford it. Inmate fathers

must utilize whatever means of communication are available and relationships with trusted and godly men who are close to their children to build a relationship of influence.

As previously mentioned, many of these men grew up without a father to emulate in their lives. They never saw a man lead his family as God commanded. They do not observe in the media many examples of a father truly living out their call. Those who did have their fathers, or uncles, around during childhood often learned from them the lifestyle that eventually brought them to prison. For some, it seems that even from childhood, incarceration seemed almost an inevitability. One of the challenges of this project is to provide models of biblical fatherhood for these men.

Literacy, in general, is a difficulty for many of the men in the prison-camp congregation. Some of the men at Hampton County Detention Center failed within the traditional education system. Several reasons for difficulties in literacy exist in the correctional environment, such as undiagnosed dyslexia as well as other cognitive, behavioral, and psychological difficulties. Some traditional training methods may not be effective in this low-literacy environment. Any method of training must account for the problem in reading.

Biblical literacy is an explicit area where these men struggle. Although some inmates come from a strong Christian tradition, many come from a nominal church background and have never adopted the tenets of the Christian life for themselves. Others come to Christ in prison and need the mentoring of believers in order to grow in their faith. To become biblical fathers, inmates will need to know and understand what the Bible has to say about the subject.

Many inmates express a hopelessness based upon the belief that they saw no opportunity for their lives to turn out differently. From that perspective, their environment dictated their outcome. Even after being reminded that others from their home environment have made different choices, some inmates still believe they could not have done any differently. Because of their lives before incarceration, many inmates

pledged allegiances (often to gangs) that present a deterrent to positive change. For some, to resist the gang leadership and turn to Christ could result in a severe threat to their safety. Other inmates, especially gang members, may see chapel programming, or any other form of programming, as an opportunity to engage in their criminal enterprise. Their members may attend chapel programming, but not for the right reasons. Any project must overcome this hopelessness, sense of inevitability, or gang pressure to be successful in the prison environment.

An additional hinderance was the fact that the project was not performed at my ministry site. The interpretation of ethics regulations did not allow the project to proceed at the original context. It became vital to find a similar context to maintain the unique perspective brought to the discussion of biblical fatherhood. This change required finding a correctional facility that would allow the project to proceed and inmates that were previously unknown to me instead of utilizing men that were members of my own congregation with whom I already had relationships. As a result, relationships had to be built within the time period of the project, materials needed to be submitted and approved by the institution, and everything needed to be inspected before I brought a physical copy of anything into the facility. It also required forming a communication network with facility staff so that they could inform me of instances when it was not possible to meet due to other circumstances.

### **Strengths of This Congregation**

The primary strength of prison congregations is that they are comprised of men who are learning that they are experiencing the negative result of their previous life choices. This congregation was the same. In this context the inmates begin to see where they came from, what they did, and what the consequences of their actions are. These men understand the impact of growing up without a father in the home. For many, this



reality creates a desire to become the fathers their children need, with the result that they finally have the motivation to make the changes needed to become biblical fathers.

Another strength these fathers experience in prison is the abundance of time available to them. These men may choose how they will prioritize their time within the structure given. Like changing classes in school, inmates may only move from place to place at certain times. At least three different blocks of time are available daily for self-improvement. Additionally, inmates may review borrowed resources on their own between these times. In other words, inmates have the time to work on becoming biblical fathers.

Some of these men want their children to choose a different direction than they themselves did. The inmates already try to maintain their relationships through the means available to them. Some men come from cultures that, at least superficially, care about fatherhood and fathers' leading their family. Others come from a culture that prides itself on a man's having many children by many different women. For instance, early in my correctional chaplaincy ministry, I met a man who had twenty-eight children by nine different women. Older inmates often come from a culture that respected the church, respected authority, and had a more traditional understanding of family. Some inmates are much younger and are not able to give respect to anything because they do not respect themselves. Great diversity exists among the inmates that this project must direct into the path of biblical fatherhood.

### **Rationale**

According to a report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2002, 39.2 percent of inmates lived with their mother only.<sup>3</sup> Many inmates are in the position of being absent fathers who did not have a positive influence from their own father. An important part of

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<sup>3</sup> Doris J. James, "Profile of Jail Inmates, 2002," *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*, July 2004, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/pji02.pdf>.

the solution to breaking the cycle of fatherlessness is to equip these men to be godly fathers. This project helps the inmates at Hampton County Detention Center by changing the focus and direction of their lives as well as introducing them to the power of Christ so that they will be able to accomplish their new focus and direction. As these fathers engaged this project, this change will help future generations to avoid the traps and temptations of the past by pointing them to a different course. Everyone benefits when biblical fathers are in the home.

Since creation, it has been a man's calling to lead his family. Inmates do not relinquish their responsibility to lead their partners and children while they serve their sentences. Many challenges are involved in committing to a biblical view of fatherhood in this environment. Nevertheless, a need exists for these men to see the direction God has given to fathers and to find a way to accomplish that vision for fatherhood given their situation. Because they are not in the home daily, these inmates may not be able to follow the specific directions from Deuteronomy 11:19–21:

You shall teach [these words of mine] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

However, these men should still be able to follow the more general direction of Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go.” Inmates—and fathers who are required to spend time away from their family—need to be trained on how to engage in this God-given task while incarcerated.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to train, encourage, and develop fathers at Hampton County Detention Center in Varnville, South Carolina, to become godly

examples to and biblical shepherds of their children with a view toward ending the cycle of hopelessness, lawlessness, and failure in their families.

### **Goals**

To train, encourage, and develop fathers toward biblical fatherhood, it was necessary to accomplish four goals:

1. The first goal was to assess the practices of Bible reading and prayer among participants at the Hampton County Detention Center congregation.
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum for training men in biblical fatherhood that adapts current scholarship to the prison environment.
3. The third goal was to increase practices of fatherly engagement among class participants who completed the class.
4. The fourth goal was to articulate a guide for best practices of incarcerated fathers who desire to practice biblical fatherhood.

A specific methodology was designed and followed to acquire measurement data and thus accomplish these goals. That methodology is described in the next section.

### **Research Methodology**

Successful completion of this project required the achievement of four goals.<sup>4</sup> The first goal was to assess the practices of Bible reading and prayer among participants at the Hampton County Detention Center congregation.<sup>5</sup> This goal was measured by administering a initial-series survey to discover the level of participants' biblical understanding of fatherhood responsibilities (see appendix 1). This goal was articulated to be successfully met when twenty fathers completed the initial-series inventory and the

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<sup>4</sup> All of the research instruments used in this ministry project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in this project.

<sup>5</sup> Much of the original data was compromised by errors in implementation that will be explained in chapter 5.

data was analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the participants' current understanding concerning biblical fatherhood responsibilities.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum for training men in biblical fatherhood that adapts current scholarship to the prison environment. This goal was measured by an expert panel who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical content, methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum (see appendix 2).<sup>6</sup> The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded predetermined benchmarks.

The third goal was to equip fathers at Hampton County Detention Center to develop methods to lead their families in spiritual disciplines while incarcerated. This goal was measured by a comparison between the usable items on the initial and final tests. This goal would have been considered successfully met when 75 percent of the participants reported at least one positive interaction each week throughout the project. If weekly interactions were not possible, the inmate will be in compliance if he can demonstrate that he is doing everything that is available in his context.

The fourth goal was to articulate a guide for best practices of incarcerated fathers who desire to practice biblical fatherhood. The goal was measured by administering a initial- and final-series survey (see appendix 1) and a second final-series survey (see appendix 4) to determine if participants felt better equipped and which activities these fathers thought were effective. This goal was considered successfully met when compilation and analysis of the final-class surveys yielded a list of best practices.

### **Definition, Limitations, and Delimitations**

This ministry project used the following definition of a key term:

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<sup>6</sup> This panel consisted of two active or retired correctional chaplains.

*Chaplain.* The Bureau of Prisons defines a chaplain as one who administers, supervises, and performs work involved in a program of spiritual welfare and religious guidance for inmates in a correctional setting.<sup>7</sup> In common usage it may be either a full-time or part-time, paid or volunteer position.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, this project was limited to drawing from a potential participant pool of approximately one hundred inmates at Hampton County Detention Center. Second, because of the nature of correctional chaplaincy, not all of the participants shared the same Christian worldview from which this project was presented. To mitigate this limitation, I (the chaplain) stated my worldview at the beginning of the course, and the course proceeded from this stated Christian worldview. It was not necessary to discount the data from non-Christian participants.

One delimitation applied to this project. Only inmates identified as fathers to children still in the home were to be studied. This data was available to the detention center and they assisted by approving only fathers with children in the home for this course. It was important for the project that the participants share what they learned with their children as part of the course, but future iterations of this project may include those who plan to become fathers upon release from incarceration.

### **Conclusion**

This project sought to change the culture of fatherlessness among the families of prison inmates. It sought to be founded upon solid biblical doctrine, and it addressed a need found in many communities. As inmates learn to practice the spiritual disciplines found in Scripture and share them with their children, they will be better prepared to experience change by the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Before they leave prison,

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<sup>7</sup> Federal Bureau of Prisons, "Chaplain," accessed October 2, 2024, <https://www.bop.gov/jobs/positions/index.jsp?p=Chaplain>.

these men will also begin to lead their children in the worship of God and these disciplines. The ultimate goal of this project was to transform both the homes and the communities to which these believing fathers will return after incarceration.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF CHRISTIAN FATHERHOOD

The previous chapter discussed the need for a biblical fatherhood program at Hampton County Detention Center. As this project aims to help Christian fathers who are incarcerated at this facility to raise, train, guide, and discipline their children in accordance with Scripture, it is only fitting that this chapter turns to the Bible for guidance, focusing on five passages from the books of Deuteronomy, Psalms, Hebrews, and Ephesians. These passages illustrate how God has provided himself as an example of fatherhood, relayed the calling to pass on the knowledge of God to the next generation, and addressed the directive for men to disciple their children. These themes became a foundation for the project. After reading the passages and examining these themes during class, it will be important that the participants practice and obey the revelation contained therein within the constraints imposed upon them by incarceration.

The first passage explored is Deuteronomy 32:44–47, where Moses illustrates God’s example of fatherly care over Israel. Here, Scripture records the final period of Moses’s leadership of Israel and the preparation for Joshua to succeed him. He is reminding Israel that their success in their new life in the promised land is dependent on obedience. Fathers are specifically directed to “command their children to obey carefully” the law (Deut 32:46). Presumably, the success of any future generation will also be linked to obedience to God. This can be a problem for incarcerated fathers as they are not able to ensure the child obeys the commands as carefully as they could at home. The separation between parent and child may create an opportunity to practice obedience

to an unseen father. This context parallels obedience to an unseen Heavenly Father. Therefore, it is important that they continually send the message.

The next passage examined is Hebrews 12:4–11, where the author illustrates God’s fatherly attributes in the ways that he disciplines his children. It is incumbent upon believers, as the children in this scriptural example, to father their own children accordingly. This is a significant theme of this project. Inmates will learn to father from the Father. It may be difficult for a father to impose consequences or otherwise guide his child from prison. This does not relieve him of his responsibility.

The subsequent passage reviewed is Psalm 78, which reminds believers to pass their faith on to the next generation. This is a fundamental function of faithful fatherhood. This exhortation is important for fathers who are attempting to be obedient to the Spirit as they receive the inheritance that God has given them and then learn to pass it on to their children.

The final passages examined are Deuteronomy 6:1–9, in which God directs men to disciple their children, and Ephesians 6:1–4, in which Paul further describes the relationship between father’s training and instruction in the Lord and the child’s obedience and honor of his parents. Inmate fathers cannot meet the frequency of the Deuteronomy passage as they are not in the home to talk about God’s revelation at various times each day. In the same way it may be difficult for a child to directly honor his father while he is in prison. The opportunity for the child to obey may not present often. These instances should be maximized when they occur.

These five passages illustrate God’s direction for fathers concerning their children. Under ideal circumstances, a father should be doing all these things. These passages provide God’s guidance as well as the enduring example of our Heavenly Father. The constraints of incarceration require that fathers utilize the opportunities available to directly lead his children, enlist some trusted adults to substitute for him while he is gone, and entrust the local churches to assist him in his responsibility to



disciple his children. The need in the inmates' lives, in their families, and in the communities to which they will return is great. However, the hope provided by a life yielded to the example of God is greater.

### **Deut 32:44–47 and Heb 12:4–13: God Models Fatherly Care and Discipline for His Children**

#### **Deut 32:44–47: Context**

The first five books of the Bible are often referred to as the Pentateuch, the Law, or the Torah. According to tradition, Moses is the author. They contain the covenant with Abraham and include many of the promises that God made to the patriarchs. They look forward to a future fulfillment of these promises while relating God's direction for establishing the nation. J. G. McConville, Professor of Old Testament Theology in the University of Gloucestershire, notes that this dichotomy creates a tension between the "now" of present partial fulfillment and the "not yet" of future complete fulfillment.<sup>1</sup>

Tradition holds that Moses is the author of Deuteronomy, but some scholars, such as Peter Craigie, former professor at Carleton University, McMaster University, and University of Calgary, place it much later, as late as the seventh century BC.<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, Old Testament Scholar-in-Residence at Criswell College, counters that "pre-critical Jewish and Christian tradition nearly unanimously attributed Deuteronomy to Moses, at least in its basic substance."<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Tigay, Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages and Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, concludes that "Deuteronomy is the source of the idea that religious life should be based on a sacred

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon J. McConville, "Deuteronomy," in *The New Bible Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson and R. T. France (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 207, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 26. Here, Craigie argues that the structure, form, and the significance of that form as well as comparing that with other documents from the region as late as the seventh century BC.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1994), 17.

book, and hence the obligation of all Jews, not only an elite class, to learn the Torah and teach it to their children.”<sup>4</sup>

The passage under consideration (32:44–47) is found within the final section of Deuteronomy, which is referred to as “Moses’s Song.” It is preceded by Israel’s preparation for the future and followed by God’s final instructions to Moses, his farewell blessings, and his death. The song closes with an admonition for the children of Israel, beginning with verse 46.

### **Deut 32:44–47: Content**

Deuteronomy 32:44–47 forms an admonition that provides essential insight into how God directed the fathers of Israel to lead their children. Moses declares, “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess” (vv. 46–67). There are several essential concepts to examine within these two verses.

The first is, as Merrill states, “The seriousness of Israel’s obligation can be seen in the emphatic words of the charge in v. 46. ‘Take to heart’ (Heb. *šimû lēbabkem*) is a command of strongest force, one that leaves no room for equivocation.”<sup>5</sup> Moses intends for the people to perceive the directive as a call to make the words of God that Moses just spoke the foundation of their lives. These steps of obedience are intended to continue throughout the generations that follow. Israel is to pass these words on to their children so that they, too, may obey them, passing them on to subsequent generations. The fathers are the head of the family. They are given the greatest responsibility to ensure

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), xxviii.

<sup>5</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 382.

this transfer to their progeny occurs. In *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, the late Gleason L. Archer Jr., formerly Professor Emeritus of Old Testament and Semantics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, lists “remember and not forget” as a characteristic admonition emphasized throughout the book.<sup>6</sup>

Professors Andreas J. Köstenberger, Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and David W. Jones, Professor of Christian Ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, point out that “it appears that just as fathers had a defined role in pronouncing blessings and curses upon their children.”<sup>7</sup> God did the same at this point, just before Moses transferred leadership to Joshua to conquer the promised land. This paradigm sets an example for how fathers are to lead their children. A healthy fear of consequences enables children to understand the need to obey.

Verse 46 also reminds Israel that the word they are to obey contains a warning. Throughout this song, Moses illustrates the father-child relationship that God has with his people. Moses declares that when Israel strays and acts corruptly, “they are not [God’s] children” (v. 5). In leaving the commands of God, they stepped outside the blessing dedicated to the children of God. Several verses display God’s care and his provision for his children.

Verse 47 adds the “why” to the directive. Obedience is a prerequisite for success in the conquest of the land. Israel can expect to reap according to how closely they follow the directions God gave them. It would be foolish to assume that the Creator would not know or understand the optimal use of what he created. Therefore, following

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<sup>6</sup> Archer L. Gleason Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 2001), 273.

<sup>7</sup> Köstenberger and Jones offer a list drawn primarily from the Torah of a father’s responsibilities toward his sons, including naming, consecrating, circumcising, delighting in and having compassion, nurturing, instructing, discipling, and arranging for their marriage. It also lists managing the household and not leading his sons into his sin. There are also responsibilities toward daughters listed immediately following. Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 95–96.

God's instructions and passing them on to progeny is the most reasonable method for Israel to thrive and secure success in the promised land.

### **Deut 32:44–47: Conclusion**

Many incarcerated men did not have the opportunity to be influenced by a godly father. This creates a culture where boys have no example of what a godly man is. Left to themselves, the media, and other broken families, children grow up accepting broken as normal, comfortable, even ideal. Young fathers learn from the only parents they know, their mothers. This has a crippling effect on a father's understanding of who he is and what he is to do. When biblical fatherhood is absent, the result is what Orthodox Arch-Priest Fr. Weldon Hardenbrook, author of *Missing from Action: Vanishing Manhood in America*, and a chapter in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* describes as "flight from the feminizing forces of a matriarchal culture [pursuing] the only option he sees available to masculinity . . . creating an American male who is confused about his identity and under a great deal of psychological stress, and who ends up lashing out in frustration."<sup>8</sup> This can be a common path without the guidance of a godly father leading toward the power generated by a criminal enterprise. Moses's instructions in this passage provide a first line of defense against this as God recalls what he has done for Israel and then calls fathers to help their children remember what God has done.

Merrill contends that "conservative Old Testament scholars typically hold that Deuteronomy is the 'book of the law' discovered during the seventh-century (BC) reign of King Josiah."<sup>9</sup> The result was that there was a turn back to God by a king who led to a temporary change in the nation's path. This repentance illustrates the power that the

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<sup>8</sup> Weldon Hardenbrook, "Where's Dad: A Call for Fathers with the Spirit of Elijah," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 388.

<sup>9</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 24.

Word of God must command attention to itself and turn the hearts of its hearers. This passage from Deuteronomy functions to call out and guide fathers to lead their families according to the example given by God.

### **Heb 12:4–13: Context**

Because the letter to the Hebrews is unsigned, there is disagreement as to which canonical grouping it should belong. Some scholars include it with the General Epistles. Others believe that the author is the apostle Paul and group it with his other letters. Still others believe that the letter is written by some other author and thus in a group of its own. The letter's authorship, however, is not as important as the broad applications that its readers can understand and apply.

There is a wide range during which this book could have been written. Thomas D. Lea and David Allan Black state that “any date between A.D. 60 and 95 is possible. Most of the evidence, however, points to a time of writing prior to A.D. 70.”<sup>10</sup> This timeframe does not leave much room for a discussion concerning the specific circumstances addressed in the letter, but it does allow for a general application and understanding of the letter. Reformer John Calvin sees it as unique among the texts of Scripture:

There is, indeed, no book in the Holy Scriptures [other than Hebrews] which speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, so highly exalts the virtue and dignity of that only true sacrifice which he offered by his death, so abundantly treats of the use of ceremonies as well as of their abrogation, and, in a word, so fully explains that Christ is the end of the Law.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, Lea and Black see Hebrews as a “book [that] is written for Jewish Christians who are being urged to continue their profession.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas D. Lea and David Allan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 501.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), xxvi.

<sup>12</sup> Lea and Black, *The New Testament*, 499.

Gareth Lee Cockerill, formerly the Academic Dean and Professor of Biblical Interpretation and Theology at Wesley Biblical Seminary, bolsters the superlative description of this letter:

Hebrews has a message for the people of God who live in a world that refuses to acknowledge God: God has spoken . . . Through this word in the Son, God invites his people into his presence. He also provides for the cleansing from the sin of unfaithfulness and for the renewal of the heart in obedience that are necessary for entrance . . . They are to persevere in this life of faith despite the opposition of the world through the resources that are theirs in Christ until final entrance at Christ's return.<sup>13</sup>

The passage to be examined (12:4–11) comes from a section of Hebrews that Lea and Black refer to as “the Superiority of Christ’s Power (Hebrews 10:19–13:25).”<sup>14</sup> The primary metaphor of Hebrews 12 is a competitive race. This idea looks back to those mentioned in the previous chapter who have run the race successfully, naming them a “cloud of witnesses” (12:1). The author then encourages readers to run the race.

Within this section of the letter, various aspects of a race are described, including the race itself as well as the training and challenges involved. It is within the training section that the father-son relationship is presented. Several verses in 12:4–11 directly describe God as the example for the training and disciplining of children. Christian fathers need to study and understand the practical principles found within this passage of Scripture in order to effectively “train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov 22:6).

### **Heb 12:4–13: Content**

After a brief call to endurance at the beginning of Hebrews 12, the author points to the suffering of Christ to encourage the believers: “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or

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<sup>13</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 77.

<sup>14</sup> Lea and Black, *The New Testament*, 505.

fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?” (vv. 3–5). Calvin contends that

this one thought alone ought to be sufficient to conquer all temptations, that is, when we know that we are companions or associates of the Son of God, and that he, who was so far above us, willingly came down to our condition, in order that he might animate us by his own example; yea, it is thus that we gather courage, which would otherwise melt away, and turn as it were into despair.<sup>15</sup>

How much were the believers addressed by the author of Hebrews suffering? How long had they endured? How does that compare with what Christ endured in order to accomplish his mission?

The first few verses of Hebrews 12 also address believers’ experiences. Some may have been playing at the fight against sin. The author is clear that he intends more than that. Cockerill contends that “this verse not only reflects the athletic endeavor, but would also allude to imagery of the Maccabean martyrs.”<sup>16</sup> The encouragement is that we can resist sin to a much greater extent than we are currently experiencing. Calvin argues that, “the persecutions which we endure for the Gospel’s sake, are on another account useful to us, even because they are remedies to destroy sin; for in this way God keeps under the yoke of his discipline, lest our flesh should become wanton.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, according to Ben Witherington III, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary, it must be remembered that in this case, the opponent is sin and the struggle is the same one “in which all [of God’s children] have participated, [and] the outcome is not repentance, but a larger capacity for endurance, like athletic training.”<sup>18</sup> Many times the Father disciplines not only to eliminate sin, though that is also desirable.

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, 313.

<sup>16</sup> Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 278.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, 314.

<sup>18</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 330.

It is to help the son grow stronger through the struggle to prepare him for the struggles to come.

The reason the author of Hebrews gives for enduring the suffering is the position of sonship given to believers by Christ. As such, Ben Witherington III and Laura Ice, MA in Biblical Studies from Asbury Theological Seminary, see in these verses a “brief discourse on the father-son relationship between God and believers.”<sup>19</sup> The author quotes from two Old Testament books (Job 5:17; Prov 3:11–12) and is surprised that the Hebrews have forgotten this obvious parallel.<sup>20</sup>

Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Professor of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Thomas R. Schreiner writes on this point, “The readers are to endure discipline as those loved by God. Discipline, in fact, demonstrates that the readers are truly sons.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus endured the cross and triumphed over sin. Jesus faced temptation and did not sin. Cockerill writes, “Our suffering should reflect the suffering of the Son.”<sup>22</sup> Since Christ suffered, the believer should not be surprised at suffering. It is encouraging to know that in times of difficulty, Jesus is the role model for how godly men are to suffer.

Believers are to pay attention to the work that God is doing in their lives. The author of Hebrews quotes Proverbs 3:11–12: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb 12:5b–6). Cockerill contends, “‘My son’ makes the proverb, and its reference here in Hebrews, addressed to every

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<sup>19</sup> Ben Witherington III and Laura Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son and Spirit in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 52.

<sup>20</sup> Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 278.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 382.

<sup>22</sup> Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 277.



person [whom] God accepts.”<sup>23</sup> Discipline is how God leads believers, yet his discipline is infinitely better than that of an earthly father. The verse says that godly discipline is an act of love. On this subject, Calvin echoes King Solomon writing much of Proverbs to “my son”: “If the scourges of God testify his love towards us, it is a shame that they should be regarded with dislike or hatred. For they who bear not to be chastised by God for their own salvation, yea, who reject a proof of his paternal kindness, must be extremely ungrateful.”<sup>24</sup> Christians can understand the love of God by understanding the care with which the Heavenly Father disciplines them.

Discipline is how fathers guide and shape their children. From the same root is found the word disciple. It reaches beyond a simple cognitive exercise of learning to a life in pursuit of a goal. It takes discipline to become a champion athlete, world-class musician, or any other endeavor. It also takes discipline to follow God’s plan; first the Law and then in Christ.

The original readers of this letter may have understood a sense of corporal punishment in the usage of the term. And this makes some sense; as Witherington recognizes that “suffering is a form of discipline from God himself . . . [T]he function is corrective, not punitive.”<sup>25</sup> They would have known Proverbs 13:24 that says, “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” This loving discipline is how a loving God treats his sons, and it is a model that Christian fathers should emulate. It provides a disincentive for following the wrong path and an incentive for choosing what is right.

Godly fathers need to prepare their children for life ahead. There are at least two reasons for fathers’ providing godly discipline to their children. First, according to

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<sup>23</sup> Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 279.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, 316.

<sup>25</sup> Witherington, *Hebrews, James and Jude*, 330.

Cockerill, “The heavenly Father’s discipline hardens them in obedience, thus confirming them in holy living.”<sup>26</sup> Through discipline, godly fathers intend to guide their children to conform to the family’s values. This kind of discipline teaches children to hear and follow their father’s voice. A second purpose of fatherly discipline is to prepare children for further growth and training. Witherington suggests that “the outcome of discipline is not repentance but rather a larger capacity for endurance.”<sup>27</sup> Readers should be familiar with these truths. Cockerill argues that “it is of the very essence of sonship to be disciplined by a father.”<sup>28</sup> Children’s legitimacy is often brought into question if they go without discipline from their father. God has set the example in how he treats his children, and fathers should endeavor to care for their children accordingly. No matter how difficult this life is, fatherly discipline is worth it in light of the life to come. In Calvin’s words, “God’s chastisements are appointed to subdue and mortify our flesh, so that we may be renewed for a celestial life.”<sup>29</sup>

The passage closes with a call to continue the race: “Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed” (Heb 12:12–13). These verses are a call to stay focused when things are difficult—to “persevere in order to reach the goal in the eternal life of the heavenly city.”<sup>30</sup> Fathers will get tired, but the reward is worth it. Calvin also warns fathers to stay focused when he says, “Those who keep not a straight course, but gradually though carelessly turn here and there, become eventually wholly alienated from God.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 281.

<sup>27</sup> Witherington, *Hebrews, James and Jude*, 330.

<sup>28</sup> Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 280.

<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, 319.

<sup>30</sup> Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 272.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, 323.

## **Heb 12:4–13: Conclusion**

In the discussion of discipline, several important ideas are essential to becoming a godly father. God disciplines his sons because he loves them; fathers need to learn from this example. Such discipline is intended to help children grow and to help them conform to the family's values. Godly fathers discipline for the life ahead—a life in which there will be a battle against sin and a prize to be gained. There is much resting upon the discipline that fathers give to their children. God intends that men will become the kind of fathers that train their children as he does.

## **Ps 78:1–8: God Calls Fathers to Pass His Teachings on to the Next Generation**

### **Ps 78:1–8: Context**

The poetry found in Scripture can communicate in ways that prose and prophesy sometimes cannot. Sometimes it is because the poetic quality allows for the truths revealed through the words written and recited to attach more firmly to the understanding and worldview of its readers or hearers. Patrick Bourckel, Director of Worship and Administration at St. Luke's Anglican Church in Los Angeles, relates that “when we sing, we place the content deep into our souls and psyches, beneath the level of active recall and into our long-term memory storage.”<sup>32</sup> This function of singing places the poetic words of God in a place where the Holy Spirit helps the believer to recall them at opportune moments throughout life.

The book of Psalms is in the poetry section of the Bible. The Psalter, as it is sometimes called, contains the words that describe almost every emotion that people experience. Within Psalms, David is the most prolific—but not the only—writer. A few of the psalms represent the only work recorded by the author or one of just a few. In addition to these, Asaph and the sons of Korah wrote several. Others are anonymous.

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<sup>32</sup> Patrick Bourckel, “Singing the Psalms, Part I: Why Sing Psalms,” Seedbed, February 17, 2016, <https://www.seedbed.com/singing-psalms-part-1-sing-psalms>.

Psalm 78 is identified as a Maskil. Archer says this means “a didactic poem or contemplative poem, may mean ‘give attention to, consider, ponder, or give insight to, teach someone.’”<sup>33</sup> As such, the author intends for the readers, hearers, and singers of this psalm to listen in order to learn something. The first verse makes this intention unmistakable.

Asaph, credited with writing these verses, is the author of twelve psalms, including Psalm 50 and Psalms 73–83. According to Archer, these psalms are part of a collection that may have been officially “published during the reign of King Josiah or Hezekiah, during their reform and revival movements.”<sup>34</sup> It makes sense that leaders would be writing songs to help the people turn back to the path that God had directed them to follow.

Fr. Konrad Schaefer, Professor of Scripture at the Pontifical University in Mexico City, sees Psalm 77 and 78 as a matching pair. “Psalm 77 can be seen as an introduction to this ‘epic’ psalm, expanding the brief history and reviewing God’s favor and the people’s chronic failure.”<sup>35</sup> Through this history, the people would be reminded of God’s faithfulness and warned of their tendency to go astray. Psalm 78 was written to remind Israel of God’s faithfulness to them and encourage their faithfulness to follow him. Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University in British Columbia, Canada, Craig C. Broyles claims that “the psalm’s solution to the dilemma for ‘the next generation’ lies in retelling this story, so they, unlike their forefathers, would not forget but know, put their trust in God and keep his commands. A living memory of God and his acts is the crucial factor.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 498.

<sup>34</sup> Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 494.

<sup>35</sup> Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Books, 2001), 190.

<sup>36</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, Understanding the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 65.

Michael and Michell Anthony from Familymin Academy point out that “the Psalmists of Israel called fathers to train their children in the stories and statues of Israel’s God (Ps 44 and 78:1–8).”<sup>37</sup> Fathers must obey this command. If the parents do not pass the knowledge of God on to their children, then how will such knowledge continue? Fortunately, God provided an outline for accomplishing this: “In Ps 78:2–7 we find a blueprint of God’s grand method for faith replication throughout all generations. He chose to use the family as the primary place to nurture faith.”<sup>38</sup> Within the family, headship belongs to the father. This is reinforced in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3.

### **Ps 78:1–8: Content**

Psalm 78 begins with a call to attention: “Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!” (v. 1). Asaph is the author, and he is calling the people to listen to the words that follow. Augustine of Hippo maintains a different understanding of this verse: “Whom may we supposed to be here speaking, but God? For it was Himself that gave a law to His people.”<sup>39</sup> In either case, the people are to pay attention.

Verse 2 summarizes the content of the rest of the psalm: “I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.” According to biblical commentator Marvin Tate, formerly Senior Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “The knowledge to be conveyed is ancient, ‘riddles’ handed down from previous generations that apparently must be understood if

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 157.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony and Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 183.

<sup>39</sup> Augustine of Hippo, “Exposition on Psalm 78,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, Series 1, vol. 8, *St. Augustine: Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Christian Literature, 1888), §2 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 8:366), Logos Bible Software.

Israel is to continue as the people of God.”<sup>40</sup> Asaph intends to pass down to the hearers of this Psalm the rich heritage belonging to the people of God. The concern is that when God’s people lose their history, they tend to fall away from him.

Thankfully, God has provided a plan. Verse 3 reports that the people have heard and known the things passed down from their fathers. The writer changes from singular to plural, emphasizing his connection to his hearers. John Goldingay, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament in the School of Theology of Fuller Theological Seminary, contends that the hearers will one day “become the teacher ‘taking a place in a chain.’”<sup>41</sup> In the family, a father bears the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the transfer of information takes place with his children. According to Tremper Longman III, Distinguished Scholar of Biblical Studies at Westmont College, “The ultimate object of his instruction is the next generation, again like Proverbs in which a father teaches his son.”<sup>42</sup> If a father is not actively teaching his children the knowledge, commands, and ways of God, or ensuring someone else stands in his place then his children are left to find their way alone.

Asaph illustrates that the transmission of biblical teaching is part of a solution to the problem: “We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done” (v. 4). Köstenberger and Jones deduce that this verse “underscores the importance of teaching one’s children about God.”<sup>43</sup> One place to begin the conversation about God is with the name of God. The late Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, formerly Professor for Old

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<sup>40</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 288.

<sup>41</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 2, *Psalms 42–89*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Ada, IL: Baker Academic, 2006), 485.

<sup>42</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 380.

<sup>43</sup> Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 102.

Testament at the University of Bonn, and Erich Zenger, Professor of Old Testament Studies at the University of Munster/Westfalen, point out that in this particular place the author chooses to use “YHWH, God’s proper name in the text.”<sup>44</sup> In doing so, Asaph chooses to avoid any confusion about who is the subject of this psalm.

To this firm foundation, Asaph adds God’s deeds, might, and wonders. Goldingay states, “Israel knew that wisdom more often lies in what has been passed down through the generations than in the latest theory or research finding, which will soon be outdated.”<sup>45</sup> These subjects and Israel’s failures are the main topics of the remainder of the psalm. The psalmist reminds Israel of all that God had done by recounting God’s deeds, might, and wonders; how faithful he had been; and how merciful in taking them back every time they failed. Fathers must pass on knowledge to their children, but they would also do well to parent in a way that reflects the character of God.

The historical narrative begins in verse 5 and carries through the rest of the psalm. Verse 5 reads, “He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children.” Hossfeld and Zenger suggest that “the history of Israel begins with the institution of the law.”<sup>46</sup> At the issuance of the law, there is a reminder of the command that fathers ought to teach these things to their children. Goldingay observes that “the present generation has a responsibility to pass these lessons on to the next generation.”<sup>47</sup> One primary role of fathers is to pass the knowledge of God on to their children.

Asaph then gives the reasons this is important: “That the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children” (v. 6). If

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<sup>44</sup> Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms*, vol. 2, *A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 294.

<sup>45</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 485.

<sup>46</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 51–100*, 295.

<sup>47</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 514.

fathers do not pass the knowledge of God on to their children, such knowledge transmission is broken. It has been said that the church is only one generation away from extinction. According to Ruth Gledhill, former religion affairs correspondent for the British daily newspaper *The Times*, this saying has been attributed to Lord Carey as the Archbishop of Canterbury around 1991–2002.<sup>48</sup> David Kalamen, Founding Pastor of Kelowna Christian Center in British Columbia credits the saying to Steve Rabey in talking about the twenty-first-century church.<sup>49</sup> While this statement parallels a quote from Ronald Reagan in 1967 concerning freedom, Henry Morris IV of the Institute for Creation Research holds that it is no less true of the Christian faith.<sup>50</sup> If the faith is not passed down, how will future generations receive it? Indeed, Christ can—and will—build his church (Matt 16:18), but the divine instructions revealed in this psalm are for fathers to be among God’s chosen instruments of accomplishing the task.

The future generations must possess knowledge of God “so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments” (v. 7). When fathers pass the knowledge of God on to the next generation, there is hope; a hope centered in God is founded upon his works and results in a life lived according to his instructions. If the people of God want to continue as such, then this perpetual handoff must take place. The results of dropping the baton are far too easy to see.

Verse 8 transitions from the plan of God to the result of not following that plan: “And that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.” Israel

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<sup>48</sup> Ruth Gledhill, “Church Is One Generation from Extinction, Warns Ex Archbishop,” *The Times*, last modified November 19, 2013, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/church-is-one-generation-from-extinction-warns-ex-archbishop-3kcbccvj3jf>.

<sup>49</sup> Dave Kalamen, “One Generation Away from Extinction,” DAVE Talks, last modified October 2, 2018, <https://davetalk.ca/2018/10/02/one-generation-away-from-extinction/>.

<sup>50</sup> Henry M. Morris IV, “One Generation Away,” Institute for Creation Research, last modified August 31, 2020, <https://www.icr.org/article/one-generation-away>.



can look at their history and see where the baton was dropped. This warning is directed to fathers specifically in their role as fathers. God's people eventually faced difficulty due to the failure of the fathers to receive, practice, and pass on the knowledge of God. The remainder of the psalm reiterates the unfaithfulness of God's people and contrasts it with his faithfulness toward them.

Fathers are the weak link in this psalm; however, by following the plan and passing the faith down to the next generation, fathers also become the solution. Köstenberger and Jones state, "From generation to generation, God's ways and will are to be passed on for children to learn from the sins of their fathers and for God to be known as mighty and glorious."<sup>51</sup> As these children become fathers, they undertake the role of continuing the chain. When a father fails, the chain is broken, the image of God is tarnished, and the child must learn the things of God from another source.

When a father succeeds, the opposite is true. The chain continues, God's image is preserved, and his child knows the necessary things of God to do well in this life. Tate reminds us that it is, "only by understanding the old traditions can the present generation avoid repeating the sins of the previous one."<sup>52</sup> When fathers transmit these traditions to their children, and the lessons are learned from them, the next generation is prepared to avoid the sins of the past and march on to a better future.

### **Ps 78:1–8: Conclusion**

Psalm 78 declares its importance from the beginning, calling all hearers, readers, and singers to pay attention. The matter is of utmost importance. It is an attempt to turn around a nation that has been far from God. It can be read now as a call to return

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<sup>51</sup> Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 102.

<sup>52</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 289.

to the faith as well. God’s plan is a call for fathers to faithfully follow and then pass the knowledge of God that they received on to the next generation.

### **Deut 6:1–9 and Eph 6:1–4: God Directs Fathers to Disciple Their Children**

This section presents two related passages. The first is a foundational teaching for Jewish fathers to pass on to their children. In Deuteronomy 6:1–9, Moses presents both the command and the instruction to pass it on to succeeding generations. There are also directions on how to accomplish it. The second passage also contains directives and considerations for fathers as they disciple, or train in godliness, their children. As this teaching is present in both the Torah and Paul’s letters, it appears that God intended to provide a methodology for the transmission of his revealed words to succeeding generations.

#### **Deut 6:1–9: Context**

As the context of Deuteronomy has already been discussed in an earlier section, it will not be repeated here.

#### **Deut 6:1–9: Content**

In this passage, Moses informs the Israelites of the commandment that is the foundation of all of the other commandments, statutes, and rules. The command is this: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:4–5). These verses also serve as an example of the process God is prescribing for the nation.

The first verse shows several steps for passing on the required knowledge of God. Moses states, “The Lord your God commanded [him] to teach to [them].” In his commentary on Deuteronomy, Merrill suggests that even in this first verse, there is the idea that “covenant leadership must presuppose and be accompanied by covenant transmission, hence the need for a full and final statement of covenant require prior to

Moses' death and Joshua's succession."<sup>53</sup> This pattern is the foundation upon which the history of Israel will be based. Generations will succeed by receiving the Word of God from a father and then passing it on to a son.

The second verse adds the term "your son's son." There is to be a continuation of this passing of knowledge. The verse contains a purpose statement indicating (1) that God's children should fear him, (2) instruction to accomplish this purpose by obedience, and (2) a promise of long life. Tigay suggests that this has two purposes: fearing God and obedience.<sup>54</sup> The difference in words does not equate to a difference in application. The people of God are to fear God and obey him.

The promise continues into the third verse. God says that in addition to a "long life," obedience will yield a good outcome. He also promises to multiply the families "in a land flowing with milk and honey." God is describing the kind of life that he wants to give to his children. It is a picture of prosperity, care, and provision. The magnitude of this promise would be dependent on Israel's ability to follow and obey.

Because the understanding between God and his people is so important, he gives them what has come to be known as the *Shema*. Merrill claims Moses intended that "the message is made indelible by constant repetition."<sup>55</sup> This understanding is the beginning of education as a child of God. Therefore, every adult member of the community knows it. Merrill also points out the *Shema*, "is the expression of the essence of all of God's person and purposes in sixteen words of Hebrew text."<sup>56</sup>

Anthony and Anthony assert that "it would be ideal if Christian fathers made it a point on a daily basis to recite [the *Shema*] with their children to deeply ingrain the

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<sup>53</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 20.

<sup>54</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 75.

<sup>55</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

<sup>56</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 140.

most foundational teachings in their children.”<sup>57</sup> In the prison context a father can only accomplish this as much as the circumstance allows. An incarcerated father should take advantage of every opportunity to pass this message on to his children.

These words communicate the monotheistic nature of God. Tigay refers to Zechariah 14:9: “‘The Lord will be king over all the earth; on that day the Lord shall be one and His name one.’ Meaning that for all humanity, יהוה and His name will stand alone, unrivaled; as Zechariah says earlier, ‘I will erase the very names of the idols from the land; they shall not be uttered anymore.’”<sup>58</sup> Merrill illustrates this truth as leading to a requirement for believers: “All three citations of the Shema agree in demanding that one love God with all his being if he is to claim to be obedient to the first and great commandment.”<sup>59</sup>

The response is love toward God. This love is to be all-encompassing, involving heart, soul, and strength. Tigay relates, “Love of God in Deuteronomy is not only an emotional attachment to Him, but something that expresses itself in action.”<sup>60</sup> That action is obedience to the words God has given. Merrill quotes Assyriologist and Jesuit Priest W. L. Moran in contending that “[in this passage] in language appropriate to covenant, that obedience is construed as love; that, to obey is to love God with every aspect and element of one’s being.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Anthony and Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 83. The authors also state, “Everyone cites Deuteronomy 6:4–9 as the single most important text related to parenting.” This may be due to the fact that Jesus also recites this Scripture when asked what was the most important commandment (Matt 22:37).

<sup>58</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 76.

<sup>59</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 141.

<sup>60</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (January 1963): 82, quoted in Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 139.

As they lead their families, Moses instructs fathers how to ensure this happens in the life of their children. Primarily, according to McConville, “the words of God are to be ever before his people (6–9), part of the routines of life, and of every normal human activity. This is not a religion for the Sabbath (or Sundays) only. God has something to say about every aspect of life and every decision that human beings can make.”<sup>62</sup> The following verse commands fathers to pass the words of God on to their children, throughout the day, in all kinds of different situations. Tigay insists that this is essential to the aim of Deuteronomy—that men would “study the Torah and teach it to [their] children.”<sup>63</sup>

Anthony and Anthony suggest that verse 7 “records Moses’ belief in the centrality of this educational role when he instructed parents not only to obey the laws God gave him but also to impress them upon their children.”<sup>64</sup> It is important to note that this is not a prescription for formalized teaching but a way of instilling a worldview in daily life. The full intent is that these conversations are to take place everywhere. Merrill states, “The pairing of these sets of contrasting places and postures forms a double merism (using opposing terms to express an all encompassing concept.) . . . So important is covenant truth that it must be at the very center of all one’s labor and life.”<sup>65</sup>

The instruction to fathers is not finished. There are yet more reminders to be woven into the practice of daily life. In verse 8, it is understood that “copies [of God’s commandments] must also be worn on the body.”<sup>66</sup> In the following verse, fathers are also directed to create physical reminders throughout the living environment. “This

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<sup>62</sup> J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2002), 207.

<sup>63</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 78.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony and Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

<sup>66</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 78.

ensures constant public exposure for God’s teachings because the city gate was the center of public activity.”<sup>67</sup> Fathers are to ensure that every aspect of life becomes an opportunity to tell their children about God. Even what is worn and the doorposts of the home were to give testimony. As Merrill states, “In this manner the person and his entire family and community become identified as the people of the Lord.”<sup>68</sup>

It is difficult for an incarcerated father to wield this kind of influence over his children. He must partner with people on the outside to ensure that the biblical message is transmitted as much as possible by others whenever he does not have the opportunity to engage personally. One could hope the inmate’s wife, or the child’s mother could be the primary person to substitute in this endeavor. In many cases it is more likely that trusted family members and close friends will also be needed as a voice for the father in the life of the child.

Specifically, a father could begin every visit, email, phone call, and letter by reminding his child of what is most important. This may help the father begin to relate thoughts and experiences that he wanted to share with his child from a biblical perspective. He could also request that the son begin his correspondence in the same way.

### **Deut 6:1–9: Conclusion**

God was very specific in his instructions to Israel. He reminded them of the commandments. He gave them a promise concerning the Promised Land. He asserted in the Shema that their love and obedience of him were to be first in their minds. Lastly, they were to pass them on for generations. Then God gave them specific directives to ensure this happened. The passing on of these things may seem difficult to an incarcerated father, but he should do the best he can in the circumstance.

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<sup>67</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 79.

<sup>68</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 143.

### **Eph 6:1–4: Context**

The letter to the Ephesians is one of the apostle Paul’s letters to the early church. Most of Paul’s letters were written to address specific issues that the church was encountering. The passage is part of a more extensive section (5:29–6:9) that may be referred to as “instructions for Christian households.” The late Thomas D. Lea, former dean at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s school of theology, describes this section of Paul’s letter thus:

Paul taught that this new life revolutionizes the Christian home (5:22–6:9). Husbands and wives were to practice mutual submission to each other. Paul appealed to husbands to love their wives sacrificially (5:25–32). Children were to obey their parents, and parents were to provide consistent discipline and instruction for the children (6:1–4). Christian servants were to obey their owners from the heart, and the owners were to treat their slaves with the confidence that the Lord would reward their mercy and compassion (6:5–9).<sup>69</sup>

This ideal was a significant departure from the model known to both Jewish and Greek societies. In many cases, the inferior person was promoted in value and position, while the superior was demoted. In his *Ephesians* commentary, Peter S. Williamson, Associate Professor of Sacred Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, contends that this is due to Paul’s new teaching: “Paul introduces the entire section with the exhortation, ‘be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ’ (5:21), a teaching that radically alter the manner in which authority is to be exercised.”<sup>70</sup> It is clear that in this part of Ephesians, Paul prescribes the distinguishing marks of the Christian family.

It is interesting to note that Paul immediately turns to spiritual warfare after the passages concerning the family code. Perhaps he does this because household relationships are common targets that the enemy would attack to break down the order

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<sup>69</sup> Lea and Black, *The New Testament*, 441.

<sup>70</sup> Peter S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 283.

that God had instituted. Unfortunately, there is plenty of evidence in the world today to support this supposition.

### **Eph 6:1–4: Content**

While the specific recipients of this letter are not known, it is safe to assume that it would be read in a gathering of the faithful. Frank Thielman, New Testament professor at Beeson Divinity School, assumes that “both groups are gathered together within a house with other believers for worship, listening to his letter as it is read aloud.”<sup>71</sup> The text of this passage clearly articulates that both fathers and their children had a part to play in forming a faithful Christian household. Williamson argues that

parents’ greatest responsibility is to form their children as disciples of Jesus. “Training,” *paideia*, refers to the whole process of education and formation in life, including “discipline,” the word used here by most English translations. “Instruction,” however, refers more to admonition or correction. Here Paul is saying that parents are responsible to correct and discipline their children, a consistent theme of the wisdom literature.<sup>72</sup>

Though children are subject to their father, Paul takes the time to address children directly, ensuring that they understood their part in the process.

The role the father plays is primary in the education of his children. Williamson relates that “fathers, according to Roman law, had virtually absolute power over their children and very few obligations. But ‘in the Lord’ both parents and children have responsibilities.”<sup>73</sup> In parallel fashion, Andrew T. Lincoln, Emeritus Professor of New Testament at the University of Gloucestershire relays that, “within Judaism the emphasis was heavily on the religious upbringing of children, and this was seen as

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<sup>71</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 395.

<sup>72</sup> Williamson, *Ephesians*, 288.

<sup>73</sup> Williamson, *Ephesians*, 287.



ultimately the responsibility of the father.”<sup>74</sup> Both cultures understood the importance of the father.

Paul begins this short passage by addressing the children that would hear the letter read. It would have been enough to require the younger believers to obey their parents, but Paul expands on that topic. First, this is to be done “in the Lord.” Williamson suggests that this phrase refers to a condition in which “obedience to parents is a responsibility that children fulfill as an expression of their relationship with Jesus.”<sup>75</sup> This condition was to be understood regardless of the culture involved. Thielman quotes Peter Balla, Professor and head of Department of New Testament Studies at the Faculty of Theology, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, as he relates that “in the Greco-Roman world, the duties of children toward their parents included love, honor, providing for them in old age, burying them, and venerating them after death.”<sup>76</sup> All these activities were part of *pietas*, the virtue that lay, according to Richard Saller, Professor of European Studies at Stanford University, “at the core of the Romans’ ideal of family relations.”<sup>77</sup>

“Hellenistic Jewish literature takes a similar approach,” says Thielman. “Children were expected not only to provide for their elderly parents and see to their burial, but also to honor them next only to God, speak respectfully to them, and provide for them in old age . . . [O]bedience to parents was a critical element in fulfilling one’s

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<sup>74</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 400.

<sup>75</sup> Williamson, *Ephesians*, 285.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 66, quoted in Thielman, *Ephesians*, 396.

<sup>77</sup> Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105, quoted in Thielman, *Ephesians*, 396.

duty toward them.”<sup>78</sup> Obedience was not commanded by older and stronger individuals but was part of the plan for discipling children.

The final clause in this Ephesians 6:1 reveals a motive for this obedience. Thielman sees it as the last of “three motivations: in the Lord, because it is right, and the Law commands it.”<sup>79</sup> It is essential that every believer, regardless of age, should be trained to do the right thing before God simply because it is the right thing.

Ephesians 6:2 reflects the teaching in Deuteronomy 5:16. Thielman declares that Paul believes children should obey their parents because the Decalogue mandates it.<sup>80</sup> There is no introduction of the wording; Thielman writes, “Paul simply states the commandment, probably a sign that he thinks it is well known to his readers and that it is self-evidently authoritative.”<sup>81</sup>

The command to honor is added to the obedience called for in verse 1. This directive is foundational in the training of children. Harold Hoehner, former Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, contends that “a child’s honor and obedience to the parents is the first important step in learning to honor and obey God.”<sup>82</sup> These concepts are to be taught while children are young, but the responsibility does not diminish as they mature. Williamson relates that “experience confirms that obeying parents and respectfully caring for them in their old age contributes to the well-being of families and even to the health and longevity of individuals.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 396.

<sup>79</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 397.

<sup>80</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 397.

<sup>81</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 398.

<sup>82</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 789.

<sup>83</sup> Williamson, *Ephesians*, 285–86.

Verse 2 ends by reminding those who knew the Decalogue that there is a promise involved. Paul restates this in Ephesians 6:3 as “live long in the land.” According to Thielman, “Paul explains the importance of the command from the promise that is attached to it and thus from the blessing that comes to children who obey it.”<sup>84</sup> God had initially given those words to Moses, but thousands of years later, their truth was just as pertinent as it was in the desert.

Incarcerated fathers have a difficult task in following Paul’s instructions in this passage. Since fathers are responsible for the discipleship of their children, further instruction is given. This responsibility is not abdicated while incarcerated. It is incumbent upon the father to leverage every appropriate relationship to meet this requirement during their absence. The instructions here may help the father choose what kind of man he should partner with for the biblical training and admonition of his children. Williamson relays that “some fathers may have been tempted to exercise authority over their children in a manner that was inconsiderate, disrespectful, or self-serving. Or perhaps Paul aims to restrain the tendency of some fathers to place excessive demands on their children out of a desire to help them achieve.”<sup>85</sup> Thielman adds that “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. Something similar to this last concern is Paul’s focus when he says that children should be reared in the *παίδεια* and *νουθεσία* of the Lord.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, both cultures had positive and negative aspects of child-rearing.

Paul tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger. The late F. F. Bruce, former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of

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<sup>84</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 398.

<sup>85</sup> Williamson, *Ephesians*, 287–88.

<sup>86</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401.

Manchester in England, compares this statement to Colossians 3:21, where he interprets Paul as saying that “fathers are urged not to assert their authority over children in a manner more calculated to provoke resentment than ready obedience.”<sup>87</sup> Every parent has at times likely placed unreasonable expectations on their child. Many parents may punish beyond what was necessary. When engaging in discipline, fathers must exercise their authority with restraint and for their children’s good. The warning in this verse is that unreasonable parental demands and severe punishment will create a wave of smoldering anger within children.<sup>88</sup>

Paul includes not only the negative aspect but the positive aspect as well. After saying, “do not,” he shows fathers a different perspective. The directive is for fathers to “bring [their children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg, field linguists and teachers of graduate linguistics working in southeast Asia, assert, “The present active imperative *εκτρέφετε* appears only here and in Eph 5:29 where it is better translated as provides. It means, “(1) of the body nourish, feed (figuratively in EP 5:29); (2) of children rear, bring up, educate (EP 6:4).”<sup>89</sup> In the chapter 5 reference, the word is used to describe the way that a person may take care of his own body. Fathers are to have an intimate level of care in the discipling of their children.

With respect to the notion that care is to be exercised in the “training and instruction of the Lord,” Bruce notes that this is the only time Paul uses the word “training” outside of 2 Timothy 3:16.<sup>90</sup> What is the aim of this training? Why is important

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<sup>87</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 178.

<sup>88</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401.

<sup>89</sup> Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids 2000), 141, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>90</sup> Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 178.

enough to include in this letter? Thielman asserts that this training is not without purpose: “Paideia had a broad range of meanings, from physical and mental training in the values of a particular culture to disciplinary punishment. In early Christian literature, even when the element of disciplinary punishment in paideia is emphasized, the educational value of the punishment, and so its inherently merciful quality, is also important.”<sup>91</sup> Instruction is different from training. Thielman contends that “it is likely that *νουθεσια* has an admonitory, but not a punitive, nuance.”<sup>92</sup> The idea is that instruction should guide rather than punish.

Köstenberger and Jones hold that “rather than functioning as a despot or dictator, in healthy households the father and husband usually inspired the trust and security of its members. Hence, it was not primarily the power and privileges associated with the father’s position but rather the responsibilities associated with his headship that were emphasized.”<sup>93</sup> The manner in which fathers lead their children matters. He should be trusted by his children and provide security for them. There are many aspects to consider in attempting to conform to this biblical model. Research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School Gerald L. Bray quotes Reformer John Calvin as follows:

Parents are told not to irritate their children with undue harshness. . . . Kind and liberal treatment keeps children loyal to their parents and makes them all the readier to obey. A hard and unkind severity makes them obstinate and destroys their sense of filial duty. At the same time, Paul insists on discipline, because he does not want children to be spoiled by doting parents. Their kindness must be measured so as to keep them disciplined according to God’s command. Children need to be constantly warned and coerced, since otherwise they will run riot.<sup>94</sup>

It should be noted that even the best of fathers will have children that rebel from time to time. Köstenberger and Jones address this issue well when they write,

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<sup>91</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 402.

<sup>92</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 402.

<sup>93</sup> Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 95.

<sup>94</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 395.

“Parents ought not to be surprised or shocked when their children disobey. Of course children will disobey—they are sinners! Parents rather should be expecting their children to sin, even after they have come to faith in Christ. Such an expectation is realistic and enables the parent to deal with each infraction calmly and deliberately, administering discipline with fairness, justice, and consistency.”<sup>95</sup>

In the real world, children will sometimes fail. They will make the wrong choices. This is not the end of discipleship. The path to maturity often goes through these difficult places. A wise father will provide guidance and protection to his children as they learn to navigate the world with a biblical perspective. It is best if he isn't surprised by the event and if he has a plan to guide his child forward.

### **Eph 6:1–4: Conclusion**

Fathers have a mandate to raise their children in the lord. Likewise, children have a mandate to obey and honor their parents. It is difficult to keep that relationship in the proper perspective, and each side will fail at times. At those times it becomes important for a father to continue to disciple his children. This is better done in person but is entirely possible through the different communication systems that incarcerated fathers have at their disposal and bringing the father's godly relationships to bear upon his children.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrated biblical teaching concerning fatherhood. In the pages of both the Old and New Testaments God demonstrates what the discipline and care of a father should look like. He also calls fathers to pass on His teaching to the next generation. Lastly, he directs fathers to disciple their children. Not all of these ideals can be completely met by an incarcerated father. Still, the directive is there and Christian

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<sup>95</sup> Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 125.

fathers in prison must utilize whatever communication, relationships, and organizations are available to engage the God-given task faithfully.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL  
ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

**Introduction**

Incarcerated Christian fathers must recognize the truth of their circumstances. There is something inherently awry in the life of someone who finds himself in prison. Many hardships come from that circumstance for both them and their loved ones. It is likely that the spiritual leadership of the children before the father's incarceration was lacking. The first theme that the father must learn and reinforce is that he can redeem the time, as stated in Ephesians 5:15. Regardless of what came before, the time of incarceration can be the crossroads in the father's story and his family.

Most fathers in prison already live in a financially stressful situation.<sup>1</sup> When fathers are in prison, their children must overcome that financial hardship within their family, the trauma they experience from the situation, and the stigma it may cause within the family and the community. This chapter will endeavor to show that incarcerated Christian fathers can redeem their time by engrossing themselves in the practice of spiritual disciplines, engaging with biblical fatherhood training, employing proven and successful parenting practices, and exerting the influence they still have with their children.

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<sup>1</sup> Lory notes, "Inmates are first and foremost poor people, Consider the social profile of the clientele of the nations jails: fewer than half of inmates held a full-time job at the time of their arraignment and two-thirds issue from households with annual income amounting to less than half of the so-called poverty line." 60.



## **Incarcerated Christian Fathers Can Redeem the Time by Engrossing Themselves in the Spiritual Disciplines**

The life of a dedicated disciple of Jesus does not usually land an individual in prison. The legal system usually cannot put a person in jail for living a godly life.<sup>2</sup> Most fathers who enter the legal system are likely unfamiliar with or do not practice the basic spiritual disciplines. The first thing a follower of Christ must do to redeem his time in prison is to make these disciplines a foundation for his new life in prison and beyond.

This foundation is important for several reasons beyond the improvement of the incarcerated. God calls a father to lead his family to understand and worship God. A father also reflects God's character to his children. Their view of God may be initially skewed by what they understand of their father. Fathers have a great responsibility to paint an accurate picture of God in how they lead their children. Moore observes, "what you see is a little picture of God the Father in the father who is laboring to feed his children."<sup>3</sup> This responsibility is important and is an additional impetus for turning to the spiritual disciplines.

### **Fathers and Spiritual Leadership**

Many assert that the father is to be the head of the home and is responsible for the spiritual upbringing of his children. Often, the father's relationship with God, or lack thereof, inhibits him from reflecting God's character to his children and inhibits his spiritual leadership of the family. The family needs him to be the man God created him to be. H. B. Grobler, a professor at multiple universities in South Africa, asserts that "without his relationship with God, the father is unable to assimilate his own identity. This situation leads to an unbalance (disequilibrium) within himself and his relationship

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<sup>2</sup> The first two clauses of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

<sup>3</sup> Russell D. Moore, "4 Priorities for Every Gospel-Centered Parent," Southern Equip, July 10, 2014, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/as-for-me-and-my-house-taking-gospel-parenting-seriously/>.

with his son, which can lead to unreasonable expectations and friction within the father/son relationship.”<sup>4</sup> The father cannot give the child what he does not have. However, the family situation does not have to stay this way. With the father's leadership, the son (or the daughter) can both find their identity in Christ.

One of the reasons why fathers may not pick up the mantle of spiritual leadership in the family is that they may feel inadequate to engage in this responsibility. American society rewards the successful, and many dread failure and the shame that goes with it, so they do not try new things. Nevertheless, Rob Rienow of Visionary Family Ministries and Andrew Hedges, professor of church history, note that "many parents are beginning to see their responsibility as the primary spiritual guides of their children, but they're hesitant to begin."<sup>5</sup> They sense that the trajectory needs to change, but they need to know where to start and be encouraged to engage in the process.

Any small start can have long-lasting and profound effects. For example, Pamela Ovwigho and Arnold Cole, from the Center for Bible Engagement, find that “Bible engagement can play [a role] in children’s development and in preparing them to face the temptations and challenges they encounter in the world.”<sup>6</sup> The inmate must be practicing Bible engagement before he can lead his child in it. The result may be that knowledge and adherence to Scripture are improved, but that is just the beginning. New strength drawn from God’s Word can enable a child from a family of addiction, abuse, or abandonment to forge a new direction for subsequent generations to the glory of God. These children can face a world that continually tells them, “You can’t,” by responding,

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<sup>4</sup> H. B. Grobler, “The Role of God in the Father/Son Relationship during Identity Formation—A Gestalt Theoretical Perspective,” *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 75, no. 2 (2010): 399.

<sup>5</sup> Rob Rienow and Andrew Hedges, “JDFM Forum: Inspiring Parents to Disciple Their Families,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2012): 73.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Caudill Ovwigho and Arnold Cole, “Spiritual Engagement, Communication with God, and Moral Behavior among Children,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 15, no. 2 (May 2010): 112.

“But God can.” The wisdom offered by God meets the turbulent times as well as the trials and temptations of the teenage years.

For this to happen, fathers must endeavor to do whatever it takes to ensure that they provide a godly model for their children. Along with Bible engagement, fathers must commit to sacrifice for their children. Schemm does not overstate the point when he states, “I am suggesting that fathers actively engage in the strict denial of their desires and tendencies to form the Christian home.”<sup>7</sup> Only then will they be able to pass on that heritage of biblical fatherhood to the next generation. This change of perspective is a challenge for engaging incarcerated fathers and the church. Once fathers put their families first, they can become the biblical fathers God intended.

### **Fathers Reflect God’s Character**

A child’s circumstances and development tend to improve when the father reflects God’s character. God chose fathers to reflect his character. In Scripture, God identifies himself as Father, and Christ refers to him that way. Therefore, one of the primary purposes of a father in this life is to reflect God’s character and relationship with man. Peter R. Schemm, former Associate Professor of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and former editor of the *Journal for Biblical manhood and Womanhood*, proclaims, “It should be the lifelong pursuit of all earthly fathers to imitate God the Father.”<sup>8</sup>

As such, God reveals himself in creation through man, created in his image. He shows his provision by placing a drive deep within a man to provide for those whom God has entrusted to him. A man also displays God’s willingness to sacrifice for those he loves. According to J. Ryan Davidson, pastor, professor, and counselor, “The formation

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<sup>7</sup> Schemm, “Equipping the Next Generation,” 63.

<sup>8</sup> Peter R. Schemm Jr., “Equipping the Next Generation: The Ascetic Character of Fatherhood,” *Journal of Family Ministry* 1, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2011): 65.

of human beings in the image of God, including both relationality and the human constitution, must be seen as a primary influence on all human behavior."<sup>9</sup> Man's fulfillment comes when he is living a life that reflects God.

Having a father who reflects God's fatherly character improves a child's circumstances and development. Children can grow, question, learn, and stretch in this environment. They are safe to try because they trust the father. The alternative is equally clear, as Mark T. Hancock of Trail Life USA (a national Christian leadership program for young men) observes: "Boys are starved of moral direction and ignored in terms of academic struggles. They have no platform for their own defense because they've already been judged deficient."<sup>10</sup> This description does not only apply to boys. Children who develop under a system that does not provide the safety of a godly father will not be encouraged to risk, stretch, and grow. It takes the influence of a godly man to establish a family's sense of safety. When that happens, both sons and daughters of the following generations benefit.

### **Fathers and Church**

Children are much more likely to want to attend church when their fathers go to church with them. For those that are incarcerated, providing this for their children is not possible in a traditional sense. A father will have to be creative in relaying the importance of church attendance to his children. Many churches have men's ministry or fatherhood training. Church is a good place for men who need a role model to find one. The chapel in the prison can be a substitute in the case of the incarcerated. Unfortunately, most men do not make this a priority. Patrick Morley, widely regarded as a leading authority on men's issues, quotes a recent study that "the male population in America

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<sup>9</sup> J. Ryan Davidson, "Secure Attachment? A Biblical and Theological Analysis," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2012): 45.

<sup>10</sup> Mark T. Hancock, *Let Boys Be Boys: 3 Winning Strategies for Leaders of Boys* (n.p.: Trail Life USA, 2019), 1.

exceeds over 98,000,000 and only 35,000,000 men know Christ. Of these 35,000,000 men, only 8,000,000 are involved in some form of discipleship."<sup>11</sup> Only one out of every twelve American men is being discipled. This passes to the children. Robbie Low, the editor of *New Directions*, observes that “dad’s absence [from church] indicates that going to church is not a ‘grown-up’ activity.”<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately, the converse is also true. The father’s positive effect on a family is undeniable. God has not relieved fathers of responsibility for their children. On the contrary, engaging with the church and encouraging his wayward children will have positive outcomes. Even if the father comes to faith in prison or rededicates his life to more closely follow God, there should be a corresponding effect within the family. It may develop more slowly, especially where trust is difficult, but the father must lead the way for his children.

He cannot wait until he returns home. The father must engage in whatever opportunities are available in his circumstance. Many institutions offer parenting and personal development classes. Prisons that have a chaplain may offer biblical parenting courses, regular discipleship, Bible study, prayer meetings, and other events that churches supply. Additionally, by grouping like-minded people, there is an opportunity to create peer groups for growth and encouragement. These opportunities help him to engage the process of spiritual growth. They also, when he communicates about them to his children, help his children to see that he values church and Bible study attendance and expects it of them as well.

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick Morley, David Delk, and Brett Clemmer, *No Man Left Behind: How to Build and Sustain a Thriving, Disciple-Making Ministry for Every Man in Your Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 27.

<sup>12</sup> Robbie Low, “The Truth about Men & Church,” *Touchstone*, June 2003, <https://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-024-v>.

## Personal Spiritual Disciplines

To become good at anything, it must be learned, practiced, trained, and exercised. The same is true of our spiritual lives. This is why the Apostle Paul uses physical training for a metaphor for training in the spiritual life in verses such as 1 Timothy 4:8 and 2 Timothy 4:7. The author of Hebrews also writes in chapter 12 verse 1 about this subject. A Christian father can practice many personal spiritual disciplines while incarcerated. The following list illustrates how several disciplines interact with some correctional institutions' policy and practice.<sup>13</sup> The practice of these personal disciplines will help the incarcerated father to be transformed in his knowledge and understanding of God and godliness. This first list illustrates how a father in prison may be able to engage in many of the same personal spiritual disciplines as anyone else is able to. A later list will illustrate how these disciplines become interpersonal spiritual disciplines when the father teaches or leads his children in these disciplines, passing them on to the next generation.

### *Bible Intake*

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. In each of those examples Jesus uses Scripture to counter the temptation. Since this is the example of the same Jesus that we want to become more like, it follows that the knowledge of Scripture, and therefore the intake of it, is of primary importance. The personal discipline of Bible intake entails the various methodologies available to engage the content of the Bible in a way that transforms the individual to become more like Jesus. This discipline can include Scripture reading, study, meditation on, and memorization to name a few. Inmates, in most circumstances, will have access to

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<sup>13</sup> The following list of spiritual disciplines comes directly from *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney. These disciplines appear also in most of the other lists consulted. Some of the terminology and definitions that helped frame this section are from Dr. Whitney. Some disciplines may also have unique applications within the correctional environment and potential hurdles to overcome.

a Bible. Many organizations donate Bibles to prisons. Institutions with a chaplaincy program will make Bibles available. Jails that allow for the purchase of books will allow a Bible through that program. When a Bible is available it is possible for a father who wants to be a godly man to read, study, memorize, and meditate on any time and anywhere he can access that Bible.

### *Prayer*

Prayer is a personal discipline that anyone can practice in any circumstance. There are many different approaches to prayer, but the important thing is that prayer is practiced to become more like Jesus. The prayer may be long or short, focused or broad, scripted or extemporaneous. Scripture can be prayed or used as a prompt for prayer. It may be difficult at times to find regular time for extended and focused prayer, the relative safety of an inmate's jail cell is usually sufficient to allow for it. Additionally, chapel rooms may be available for prayer. Depending on an institution's specific details, there may be some limitations on gathering for group prayer.

Prayer is a discipline that can never be taken away from an inmate. They can pray silently anywhere and at any time. This is important because prayer is the inmate's connection with the Father in the midst of every difficult situation that exists, both in and out of prison. The author of Hebrews quotes Deuteronomy 31:6 reminding readers of the promise that God "will never leave nor forsake you." (Heb 13:5) In the Deuteronomy passage it was directed toward Joshua before his military campaign against those living in the land they were about to inhabit. In Hebrews the same phrase is used in reference to contentment. In either case, the promise of God's presence alleviates some of the fear the hearer may be facing.

### *Worship*

Upon hearing the term worship, many people will understand it to be the church service or the musical part of that service. These kinds of worship opportunities

are usually available at most long-term correctional facilities. Chaplains may provide worship services, or volunteers may offer their time. Sometimes, a group will be allowed to gather for worship without either of these but with guidance and oversight from prison officials. Both the book of Acts and the Epistles demonstrate that worship is something that can be done within the confines of a jail cell, sometimes ending in a miraculous event. Other times it concluded with an opportunity to witness to those who have observed the faithful worship of believers.

The personal discipline of worship can happen at large gatherings, or in the quiet of a jail cell. They may involve music, responsive reading, and many other common elements of a church service. It may be as simple as Dr. Whitney describes as, “read, pray, sing.”<sup>14</sup> Worship may also involve anything done to the glory of God. The Apostle Paul writes, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor 10:31) This verse is a reminder to inmates that every aspect of their lives is to be lived in worship.

### *Evangelism*

The personal spiritual discipline of evangelism is sharing one’s faith with others to become more like Jesus. Evangelism can be an interesting topic in prison. There are many situations where the practice of evangelism would be discouraged. This limitation is especially true when some faith groups have been guilty of recruiting under the guise of evangelism. These groups would then encourage participation as they act out together or radicalize the inmate for future terrorist activity. While protected as a First Amendment activity, prison staff will closely scrutinize the practice. As a believer, one should, “always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” (1 Pet 3:15)

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<sup>14</sup> Whitney, Donald S. *Family Worship*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 33.



If a man is going to practice evangelism in prison, he must be intentional to utilize natural opportunities to share his own story, how Christ has made a difference in his life. This conversation is more likely to happen in the housing unit, on the recreation yard, or in the food service facility than in the chapel. This is not unlike how evangelism happens outside of the fence. One important difference would be that there are no door to door or street corner evangelistic campaigns. These could potentially cause an unsafe situation to develop in the prison environment. There are no rules against sharing of a personal testimony in a thoughtful and polite manner with a willing audience or individual.

### *Serving*

Serving can be seen as being hospitable to others, doing things for them, or providing what is needed to become more like Jesus. There are opportunities for service within a prison. For example, prisoners can participate in the worship service by reading Scripture, using a musical gift, setting up or storing chairs, and other activities. Serving is important because it combats the consumer mindset within the congregation.

Jesus provided an example of servant leadership throughout the Gospels. Often time his service to a person was an entry into a deeper conversation about spiritual things. When a man serves, he demonstrates that he values the person who he is serving. He meets another person's need. In prison this can be as simple as letting a new person borrow toiletry items until they are able to get their own. An inmate may serve another by helping a new person to acclimate to the prison environment, its rules, schedules, and policies. They may find a multitude of ways to serve each other based on the specific facility in which they find themselves.

There are other opportunities to serve within the prison environment. Most inmates will have a job, and their service benefits the entire group. Frequently, an inmate may receive bad news from home or be going through a difficult time. An inmate may be

an encouraging friend or a sounding board for the one that is struggling or celebrate with one who receives good news. All of this is in addition to various ways that an inmate may serve in the context of a worship service.

### *Stewardship*

Stewardship can be defined as properly caring for and utilizing the resources and gifts that God has entrusted to the believer to become more like Jesus. Stewardship must be approached differently than it is in the church outside the walls. As a government function, the prison cannot accept tithes and offerings from the inmates. For those with financial resources to share, there is a way to send money to organizations outside the prison, such as a home church. The church in Philippi was commended for sending an offering to assist with Paul's ministry.

An inmate can practice stewardship in several ways. One resource available is time. The inmates can offer time to one another for help in any area of prison life. Often this could be assistance with studying for the GED test, or any other academic goal. Sometimes an inmate can utilize his specific skills and gifts to assist someone who does not have that skill set, such as making up his bunk or assisting with translation when necessary. An inmate may also allow someone to borrow his MP3 player or tablet for a time. If an inmate is serious about practicing stewardship, there are opportunities.

### *Fasting*

The discipline of fasting is the intentional abstaining from food to become more like Jesus. A believer may observe this personal spiritual discipline simply by not eating. According to Thomas A Tarrants Vice President for Ministry & Director Washington Area Fellows Program of the C.S. Lewis Institute, fasting is important if a believer desires "a deeper, more intimate and fruitful relationship with God, or if [he

needs] His help in a time of real need.”<sup>15</sup> There are many circumstances in Scripture when a fast is proclaimed or performed. Esther proclaimed a fast when seeking deliverance before she went to the king without being requested (Esth 4:15–17), and Jesus fasted in the wilderness while he was facing temptation (Mat 4:1–11). In these and other circumstances fasting either assisted in the completion of a spiritual task or emboldened someone to act in faith.

There are some considerations for a believer in prison who desires to practice fasting. It is wise for the inmate to notify authorities that he will be conducting a religious fast. The institution is responsible for the inmate's well-being and take an interest when someone has not eaten for some time. If it is to be an extended fast, this notification is necessary to not be confused with someone on a hunger strike. It may also be advisable to let some people know so that they will have an answer if they are asked by authorities.

### *Silence*

Silence is the discipline of being quiet before the Lord to become more like Jesus. The practice of silence puts the believer in a better condition for hearing from God. During the life of Elijah God communicated to him in a “still, small voice.” Jesus often withdrew from the people and his disciples to find silence. These examples illustrate the importance of finding a way to practice silence to experience the blessing of alone time with God.

In prison there are very few opportunities for a person to find quiet. The best opportunities may happen while everyone is asleep or on the recreation yard walking track. Late at night movement may be restricted, and the inmate will have to find silence in their bunk. During the day he may find ways to spend a few minutes alone, even if it is in the bathroom. Many of these men have relayed that the only way to find quiet is to put

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas A. Tarrants. “The Place of Fasting in the Christian Life.” *Knowing & Doing*, (Summer 2018): 1.

in earbuds with nothing playing. Others understand that is a signal that he does not want to be disturbed.<sup>16</sup>

An added way to practice silence is to learn to hold his tongue when he would normally argue or lash out verbally. Proverbs tells us that “even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent” (Pro 17:28). Many times, inmates do not understand why specific rules are in place, or why they are not the exception to them. When corrected by staff the instinct is to argue. Often this becomes heated and sometimes violent. Prison is an environment where staff cannot allow an inmate to escalate to where he puts himself and others in danger. To hold his tongue would not only appear wise, but it would be the wisest option available at that time. The grievance can be addressed later.

Proverbs also provides another reason for a man to hold his tongue. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly” (Proverbs 15:1–2). A man in custody is wise to respond gently and diffuse a volatile situation rather than add to it. His gentle words display his wisdom in the middle of a difficult circumstance. Men who have been in prison for a long time understand this dynamic. They know that arguing will not help the situation, but a calm discussion later may benefit all involved.

### *Solitude*

Solitude is the discipline of being away from everyone else for the purpose of becoming more like Jesus. Jesus went alone into the wilderness to face temptation. After a long day of ministry, Matthew tells us that “he went up on a mountain by himself to pray” (Matt 14:23). Much like being alone with a loved one, there is great benefit from time spent alone with Jesus. During this time an inmate can communicate his love and

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<sup>16</sup> This information was gleaned by the author during his nine years of prison chaplaincy. It has been true at the highest and the lowest security levels.

devotion as well as his needs and desires. Additionally, solitude provides an opportunity to receive guidance, encouragement, and correction from God through Scripture. There is also an ability to truly focus on him and his word that cannot be found among the crowd.

Prison has some unique distractions, and solitude can help an inmate distance himself from those distractions. This discipline is very closely linked with silence. Sometimes the only way to have one is to also engage the other. Solitude can allow silence, and silence can simulate solitude. Both require intentionality on the part of the inmate. The prison environment does not allow for much solitude. Those with a Chaplain may request to spend time in the Chapel area to find the necessary solitude to be alone with God. Others may find time alone in their cells, a quiet corner of the housing unit, or some other place that institution staff designates. Different areas on the recreation yard may suffice. A man will have to be creative to practice solitude in prison.

### *Journaling*

Journaling is the practice of writing down Scripture, insights, prayers, and questions to become more like Jesus. It provides a record of a person's spiritual journey and can be an encouragement to the believer. This discipline also helps to order the believer's thoughts. The practice of writing is a well-known memory tool. There are many ways to keep a journal. It can be a daily record of a man's journey in spiritual growth. It can be a place to keep prayer requests. The journal may be used to record significant events in the life of the believer. It can become a record that will help generations understand who the author is and how they got to be that way.

Journaling can also have negative consequences in prison. Anything written down can and will be used against the inmate by staff or other residents. There are no secrets in a correctional institution. If an incarcerated man is careful about the information he writes down, keeping it strictly about his spiritual journey, he should be able to negotiate keeping some form of a journal in the prison environment.

## *Learning*

The personal spiritual discipline of learning is engaging in book studies and theological studies to become more like Jesus. The obvious reason for this discipline is to know and understand our God better. It is important to know and understand what we believe and why we believe it. Additionally, the process of learning causes the learner to engage with God's word more. It is through learning that application is revealed as the author suggests what a particular verse or passage may mean for the current time.

It is never the wrong time to engage in spiritual learning. Adults in custody usually access learning materials through programs offered by chaplains and volunteers. Where this is unavailable or lacking, theology books can be obtained either in a library for inmates or by ordering them through the mail. There will be a limit to how many books an inmate is allowed to keep. Learning is an intentional act of engaging with study helps in order to understand the Bible, and our God, more.

### **Incarcerated Christian Fathers Can Redeem the Time by Engaging with Biblical Fatherhood Training**

God assigned a vital role to fathers. Children begin to learn about God's character through their fathers. Fathers also fill the role of spiritual leader to their offspring. Most people would assert that a child's psychological well-being is affected by the interactions with their father (or lack of). Ultimately, the faith activity of fathers is an influential factor in the faithfulness of their children.

When a father is not in the home, the family experiences a significant loss. God designed a father's spiritual leadership to create an environment that gives his children a sense of protection and safety to grow. When a man commits to biblical fatherhood, he not only brings blessing to his family but reaps the benefit of living out God's purpose for him. Unfortunately, the culture around incarceration is severely lacking in fathers who commit to taking up this role. For those who follow God's directions for fathers, many resources are available to help fathers grow into the role.

There are also resources that can help fatherless families find a way to accomplish this responsibility.

The importance of the father's role is not only a Christian perspective. Psychologists and educators within the prison system also know this to be true. As such, a curriculum designed to help a father step into his role with his children should emphasize the importance of a father's identity and role according to Christ. In a review of one fatherhood curriculum, Fazel Freeks, professor of practical theology at North West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, comments, "It was striking to note that Scripture readings about fatherhood and the role of the father-figure became the order of the day."<sup>17</sup> Many Christian men have not seen an example of this in their upbringing. When family time in the Bible is not valued, it will likely be valued even less in subsequent generations. An epidemic of biblical illiteracy leads to many of society's problems today.

### **Example Programs**

Many Christian parenting programs come from two specific principles. John Bartkowski and Christopher Ellison, professors of sociology at the University of Texas at San Antonio, have found "two core theological tenets that legitimate these distinctive conservative Protestant parenting orientations: (1) the doctrine of biblical literalism, . . . and (2) the belief that human nature . . . is inherently sinful, and therefore ultimately subject to divine judgment."<sup>18</sup> Bartkowski and Ellison recognize the need to acknowledge

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<sup>17</sup> Fazel E. Freeks, "Amelioration of Family Dynamics with the Focus on Fatherhood and the Role and Influence of the Father-Figure through the LIFEPLAN ® Intervention Programme1: A Rural Impact Assessment," *Journal for Christian Scholarship* 56, nos. 1–2 (2020): 132.

<sup>18</sup> John P. Bartkowski and Christopher G. Ellison, "Divergent Models of Childrearing in Popular Manuals: Conservative Protestants vs. the Mainstream Experts," *Sociology of Religion* 56, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 31.

the sinfulness of even the smallest human beings. They see the Bible accurately describing God's plan to deal with that sin and learn to respect proper authorities.

Conversely, most psychology-based programs begin with the assumption that man is ultimately good. When parents meet their children's needs, they will develop appropriately into functioning adults. Bartkowski and Ellison observe that "mainstream specialists focus on meeting the psychosocial needs of the child, while conservative Protestant family experts focus on the child's spiritual needs."<sup>19</sup> The two are opposed. One begins with an assumption of man's goodness, and the other assumes man's sinfulness. This contrast creates two different paradigms. The following programs may balance the two, but something else is needed.

### *Triple P*

Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) claims to be a parenting and family support system designed to help children realize their potential. The progression begins with a baby module designed to help parents prepare for and adjust to parenting a newborn or infant. While the company claims it is research-based, the veracity of that is questionable, beginning in the baby module. Lukka Popp, in his research at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, finds "no beneficial effects for parental outcomes"<sup>20</sup> of Triple P. Additionally, this program may be challenging to initiate due to the multiple courses and the implementation team model, which could be cost- and security-prohibitive in the prison environment.

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<sup>19</sup> Bartkowski and Ellison, "Divergent Models of Childrearing," 31.

<sup>20</sup> Lukka Popp, Sabrina Fuths, and Silvia Schneider, "The Relevance of Infant Outcome Measures: A Pilot-RCT Comparing Baby Triple P Positive Parenting Program with Care as Usual," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (October 2019), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02425/full>.



*POTTS (Parents of Teens and Tweens)*

The internet has invigorated the formation of many online support groups. Frontline Ministries offers POTTS. “POTTS stands for Parents of Teens and Tweens. This site is a place to connect with other parents and groups in working together, learning together, and sharing resources that will help us in the journey of growing up our children into mature Christian Adults.”<sup>21</sup> This program is a support group for parents learning to successfully parent their teens and tweens. A benefit of POTTS is that a father can join with like-minded perspectives for encouragement. Unfortunately, accomplishing this model may not be easy in a prison setting.

*Life Connections Program/Threshold*

One program designed explicitly for the prison setting is The Change Companies’ Life Connections Program (LCP). “LCP is an 18-month residential program aimed at strengthening participants’ understanding of what it means to live and work effectively in the community.”<sup>22</sup> Through faith-based and psychological paradigms and the benefit of living in a community geared toward the goal, LCP helps inmates restructure their priorities, relationships, and many other areas. In addition, LCP and its non-residential counterpart Threshold are “open to inmates across the agency seeking grounding in positive values and responsibility, regardless of religious affiliation.”<sup>23</sup> While not specifically parenting programs, both LCP and Threshold have the potential to benefit families.

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<sup>21</sup> POTTS, “What Is POTTS?,” accessed December 13, 2021, <https://pottsgroup.wordpress.com/what-is-potts/>.

<sup>22</sup> Reentry Services Division, “First Step Act: Approved Programs Guide,” U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, February 2021, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Reentry Services Division, “First Step Act,” 18.

### *National Parenting from Prison Program*

The Bureau of Prisons' primary program for parenting education is The National Parenting from Prison Program. This program is a two-phase model focusing on services for incarcerated parents. "Phase one, the National Parenting Program Workshop, is a dynamic, psychoeducational course focused on parenting basics. Phase two, National Parenting Specialty Programs, focuses on specific parenting needs such as parenting as an incarcerated mother, father, grandparent or parenting a child with a disability."<sup>24</sup> Since this program explicitly addresses parenting education, spiritual perspectives only arise if a participant initiates the conversation.

### *Franklin Covey's 7 Habits on the Inside*

Another program available to fathers who want to improve their parenting skills is 7 Habits on the Inside. Franklin Covey states that

this program addresses interpersonal skills impacting relationships. It emphasizes character, integrity, and trustworthiness. It helps individuals move from the dependent state to the independent state, where they accept responsibility for their thoughts and actions. The ultimate goal of the course is to improve relationships with family, work, and peers.<sup>25</sup>

This program will benefit fathers and their children as a relationship course. The seven habits are well known, and the program modifies the material to the prison environment. However, as with other courses, it lacks spiritual content.

### *LIFEPLAN*

One program that does have some Christian basis is LIFEPLAN. Freeks relays that "LIFEPLAN is specially designed to guide and assist families conducting training and equipping sessions about fatherhood and the role of the father who wants to be equipped and to become knowledgeable in terms of his role as a father and to be involved

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<sup>24</sup> Reentry Services Division, "First Step Act," 20.

<sup>25</sup> Reentry Services Division, "First Step Act," 36.

in the lives of his children.”<sup>26</sup> This program's foundation is in Bible readings about fatherhood and the father's role. LIFEPLAN encourages fathers to read and study these topics and explore and learn how they may incorporate them into their parenting.

### **Effects of Father’s Engagement in Parenting Intervention Programs**

It would be a waste of time to seek out these programs if they did not work. Fortunately, there is evidence that parenting education programs are effective. For example, Jessie J. Wong, instructor in the Department of Pediatrics at Stanford University, illustrated that “a majority of fathers are willing to engage if their participation is explicitly valued and encouraged.”<sup>27</sup> Some may see the willingness to engage as a success. As previously demonstrated, when the father engages the children’s conditions are better.

Many fathers want to improve their children's lives. However, they must address some roadblocks for this to be effective. Sometimes, as Wong et al. suggest, “economic stress [was] a significant barrier to father engagement in family interventions.”<sup>28</sup> Sometimes, the level of communication, compromise, and commitment between the mother and father works against the process. Fathers are more likely to abandon these parenting programs when there is constant bickering.

### **Incarcerated Christian Fathers Can Redeem the Time by Employing Proven and Successful Parenting Practices**

Many fathers in prison did not have a father in the home during their childhood. They may think they know what a godly Christian father might be like, but

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<sup>26</sup> Freeks, “Amelioration of Family Dynamics,” 118.

<sup>27</sup> Jessie J. Wong et al., “Father Enrollment and Participation in a Parenting Intervention: Personal and Contextual Predictors,” *Family Process* 52, no. 3 (2013): 452.

<sup>28</sup> Wong et al., “Father Enrollment and Participation,” 452.

they have never seen one in action. For these men, says Canfield, “there is a need for modeling, where men see examples of father closeness.”<sup>29</sup> This modeling is challenging to accomplish in the correctional setting. The inmates cannot learn this from each other, and the media representations of fatherhood are usually laughable caricatures at best. Therefore, select staff members and community volunteers must provide the frame of reference for any programming to strengthen families.

A group of fathers attempting to improve is a transformational learning environment. Because these men actively pursue the call to biblical fatherhood, they see a much better outcome and are willing to do what it takes to get there. The group environment is best when men can form and maintain trust with one another. Often, this is the most valuable part of the process. Herschel Swinger of Project Fatherhood at the Children’s Institute indicates that “fathers reported that the shared experience in listening to other men was most helpful, particularly when a failure or shortcoming was revealed.”<sup>30</sup> If fathers form that kind of group, then they will encourage each other to engage in the material and make changes more than a single father trying to do it alone.

### **Helpful Activities**

There are many things a father separated from his children can do to attempt to maintain a connection. The following section will illustrate a few of these ideas. This list is not exhaustive. An incarcerated father must use every appropriate resource within his reach to maintain the greatest influence possible.

Building a family legacy of biblical literacy can be simple but not necessarily easy. Like their children, fathers should begin with baby steps in prayer and Scripture intake and then share that with their children. Rienow and Hedges proclaim that “the few

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<sup>29</sup> Canfield, “The Modern Fatherhood Movement,” 29.

<sup>30</sup> Herschel Swinger, *Fatherhood: Insights and Perspectives* (Los Angeles: Children’s Institute, 2009), 38, quoted in Canfield, “The Modern Fatherhood Movement,” 29.

minutes of family prayer and Scripture are key.”<sup>31</sup> An incarcerated father can accomplish this prayer during a phone call, or an in-person visit. If fathers begin a simple pattern with their children, they can change the family legacy for generations.

### **Interpersonal Spiritual Disciplines**

These spiritual disciplines are similar to the previous list beginning on page 52. The application is adjusted from individual to group or interpersonal disciplines. Rather than the father practicing the disciplines, these are an opportunity for him to share these disciplines with his children. He can effectively lead and train his children while he is incarcerated.

#### *Bible Intake*

Reading the Bible is the single most important practice that a father can share or impart to his children. It is through Bible intake that children begin to know God for themselves. It is through Bible intake that they begin to understand what this life is all about. Children must see their father reading and studying the Bible to understand the importance of the practice.

Sharing Bible intake is more difficult for an incarcerated father to practice with his children, but there are many methods to accomplish this goal. A father could share a Bible reading plan with his children and then correspond with the children about what they are reading. This may require the assistance of an adult in the home, but it is important that the father engage in the Scripture with his children.

A father could ask his children to recite Bible verses in telephone calls or at in-person visitation. The father could choose the plan for the family, but again it would require an adult in the home to partner with the father in teaching his children to hide God’s word in the hearts of his children.

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<sup>31</sup> Rienow and Hedges, “JDFM Forum: Inspiring Parents,” 73.

It would be wise for a father to take advantage of every opportunity to read and study the Bible with their children. This could only happen at an in-person visit as time is limited on the telephone and video technology where available. Still, it is a good use of the father's available time to engage the Bible together.

It is also important that there are adults on the home front that will support the children in Bible intake. Paul recognizes the believers who had shared the faith with Timothy, his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:5). Though they did not have a believing father or grandfather, the women were able to pass it on. It would be much better to have a father, even one incarcerated, who takes his responsibility for the training and admonition of his children seriously.

### *Catechism*

Another method utilized throughout church history to train children is catechism. Children begin to see how the Bible can teach them about important topics by memorizing a question and its answer. Jeff Robinson, former senior editor at The Gospel Coalition, notes, "Luther and Calvin placed high priorities on catechizing both children and adults, and each wrote catechisms for that purpose."<sup>32</sup> Churches still practice catechism hundreds of years later because it works. Young children and the newly converted soak up this information like sponges.

Once memorized, those truths stay implanted. They will be available to believers well into adulthood. Therefore, the catechism firmly establishes the doctrines in the lives of the catechized. It becomes so ingrained that, at times, believers might make biblical decisions without understanding where the thought originated. When Christians commit more Scripture, doctrine, and praxis to memory, the Holy Spirit can retrieve

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<sup>32</sup> Jeff Robinson, "Teach Your Kids a Catechism. Here's Why," Southern Equip, May 8, 2020, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/teach-kids-catechism-heres/>.

biblical passages in believers' lives whenever needed. This foundation is essential when fathers and children experience teaching and events that challenge their faith.

This has some of the same opportunities and obstacles as Bible intake. The father can engage with the children through whatever technology is available, but he can also practice through the mail. He can ask the question, and the child can provide the answer back in a letter. As the child grows, he may add the scriptural reasoning for the answer or provide an opportunity to apply the knowledge.

### *Prayer*

The spiritual discipline of prayer can be practiced together in person, or at any distance. The father will be praying for his children, and he can encourage the children to pray for him. They can share prayer requests, answered prayers, and other enlightenment that is given to them during a time of prayer. It is important for the children to know that their father prays for them and they might even feel more connected to him in praying for him.

### *Family Worship*

Attending church together is a practice that is essential if a father is to pass on his faith to his children. Since this is not possible, the incarcerated father must pass on the importance of church attendance some other way. Many assert that "without dad in church, children get the message that church is unimportant." In order to communicate the importance he places on church attendance, he must relay this to his children. He can send the bulletin home, talk about the sermon, share the main points, and ask the same from his children. Even if the child is the one who is away, all is not lost. Sung Joon Jang relates,

Juvenile offenders who increasingly attended religious activities, perceived religion to be important and helpful in their lives, and experienced God's care and love and a close personal relationship with God were likely to increase their crime/marijuana use slowly if they were on the rise or decrease quickly, if declining, relative to those

who did not.<sup>33</sup>

Fathers passed their faith on to their children through worshipping together for centuries. When a father leads his family in regular Scripture study, prayer, and praise, it is more likely to lead to the children's adopting and maintaining that faith into adulthood.<sup>34</sup> Some of the heroes of church history, such as Charles Spurgeon, have held this priority closely. Donald Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality and the John H. Powell Professor of Pastoral Ministry at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, relays the fact that in Spurgeon's life, everyone knew that "despite the ceaseless, crushing demands on his schedule, at 6:00 each evening, setting aside a to-do list that few could match today, he gathered his wife, twin boys, and all others present in his home at the time for family worship."<sup>35</sup> While there is no expectation that many men will ever measure up to Spurgeon in this or any other area, this example illustrates that family worship must be a primary and critical practice within the family.

Family worship time does not have to be a difficult task for the new father or seasoned grandfather. John Divito, a pastoral intern at Cornerstone Fellowship Church in Newburgh, Indiana, suggests that "it can be as simple as gathering together to read Scripture and pray before bed."<sup>36</sup> Add a single worship chorus or well-known hymn, and children will experience a miniature church service led by their father daily in their homes.

There are many ways for a father to accomplish family worship, and he is encouraged to adjust it occasionally. Scripture can be read, studied, and memorized.

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<sup>33</sup> Sung Joon Jang, "Religiosity, Crime, and Drug Use among Juvenile Offenders: A Latent Growth Modeling Approach," *Journal of Quantifiable Criminology* 5, no. 1 (2019): 53.

<sup>34</sup> House, "Want your church to grow? Then bring in the men."

<sup>35</sup> Donald Whitney, "Why You're Not Too Busy to Lead Family Worship," *Southern Equip*, March 2, 2015, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/too-busy-to-lead-family-worship/>.

<sup>36</sup> John Divito, "What Elements Should Family Worship Include?," *Southern Equip*, February 14, 2017, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/elements-family-worship-include/>.



Prayer can be led by the father or participatory for everyone. Singing does not have to be good; much help is available to those with a simple internet connection. There is no need to be intimidated in any of these areas. The important thing is that fathers make it a priority and keep doing it.

This mode of discipleship is difficult for the incarcerated father. He is not with the family daily to engage with them in worship. He must use every opportunity available to share worship with his children. He may have the opportunity to share worship in some way during a family visit or during phone calls. Talking about worship communicates the priority and can be relayed by email or letter. The father must use what he has available for this practice.

### *Serving*

An incarcerated father who wants to lead his children must also be an example to them. He must find whatever ways are available to serve. Perhaps he can help set-up for service. Maybe he can sing or play an instrument. Maybe he is good at inviting people. He may even be comfortable praying in public or leading a Bible study. He should utilize whatever gifts God has given him.

Additionally, the father should encourage the same in his children. He can do this by asking them about what they are doing to help at church. He can give them assignments for accomplishing this discipline about which they will report back to him. He can encourage his children by telling them what he is doing to serve and demonstrating that it is a blessing both to others and to him. He may also need to recruit a trusted adult to step into the children's lives to help create and engage with opportunities for service.

### *Stewardship*

This discipline could be difficult to relay to the children of an incarcerated father. There is no way that he will be able to demonstrate the principles of financial

stewardship within the system of incarceration. There are methods for him to send out funds to charitable organizations, or even his home church, but the child will not see this happening. He can explain to his children how important it is to him to be able to do so, then that can communicate to a small degree. He can also ask the children about their practices in how they handle their stewardship responsibilities in financial as well as other areas of life such as stewardship of time, resources, and influence.

### *Silence and Solitude*

Many children will not understand the benefit of silence and solitude initially. Incarcerated fathers may have difficulty finding a place and time to practice it. Still, it is important to talk about the practice. Any time that a follower of Christ can find to be quiet and at peace before the Lord will benefit him greatly. It may be that the best time may be while lying in bed and everyone else is sleeping. An incarcerated father must share this information with his children and encourage them, as Jesus did, to go into their own prayer closet. (Matt 6:6)

### *Journaling*

Journaling has many known benefits and yet it is one of the least practiced disciplines. An incarcerated father might be hesitant to journal. There may be a fear of his journal being discovered and discussed by staff or by other inmates. There is no reasonable assumption of privacy in a prison. Everything can, and should, be subject to random search by prison staff. Most people, including those incarcerated, would like others to stay out of their private lives as much as possible.

While it could be an inconvenience or a nuisance for staff to find the journal, it could be dangerous for certain inmates. If someone decided to put things down in his journal, other inmates may interpret what is said as a breach of inmate etiquette that may come with consequences. This can happen whether that was intended or not.

The children would benefit if their father mailed home the journal and shared at that level of openness about the regular pursuit of God through every means available. It could be inspiring to the children, and even the adults he has left behind. It could illustrate what God is doing. This journal may become a family heirloom at some point, as a record of what God was able to do with this father at this time in history.

### *Learning*

There are several ways in which learning can be accomplished as an incarcerated father attempts to pass his faith down to his children. The first is for the father to be engaged with Christian learning himself. He could relay this by talking to his children about what he is learning in his personal and group Bible studies. He could also ask his children what they are learning at church, Sunday school, and other children's programming as well as in their own study of the Bible when appropriate. It could be helpful for a father and his children to correspond with each other about a class or study that they have chosen to work on at the same time. When a child is mature enough for this it might be the best solution to provide his children with his fatherly influence.

### **Routines and Rhythms**

Routines and rhythms are a powerful way to create time and expectation for spiritual education in the life of a family. There are many ways to accomplish this, even from a distance. As this project includes teaching and practicing spiritual disciplines, one option is for the father to share with his children how this benefits him. The father can share what God is teaching him from Scripture. He can accomplish this task via email, letter, telephone, or social media, depending on available resources. The father should use what he has. The vital part is integrating spiritual leadership with all other regular efforts to maintain the relationship, giving the task prominent time and maximum effort. Chris Shirley, Dean of the School of Educational Ministries at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, contends that even "the disciples' spiritual formation and

effectiveness would be contingent upon this sustaining relationship: one in which the disciple receives a constant flow of spiritual nourishment from the divine source."<sup>37</sup> Fathers must provide this leadership until the children are ready to feed themselves spiritually.

From a distance, fathers can still initiate changes in the family culture or support routines that need to be maintained. This process is simple but not necessarily easy. For example, a father can, as Greg Morse, Staff Writer for *Desiring God*, suggests, "guard family rhythms like eating dinner together and going to church together."<sup>38</sup> For the incarcerated father, these are not usually daily traditions but still can become expected routines. Letters can be mailed on a particular day of the week, resulting in receiving that letter on a regular schedule. When possible, the father can send emails or make phone calls at regular times to carve out those times and create anticipation on both sides. In-person visitation can begin and end with spiritual traditions such as prayer and the speaking of a blessing. These practices build relationships and provide a place for family conversation and spiritual leadership. Everyone knows there will be a time for worship and that there will be a time when their parents will hear them. Upon returning home, it will be easier to enter these traditions if Dad has already created the expectation. The family dinner table or some other time of day can also become where the family reads the father's correspondence and writes communication to him while eagerly awaiting his return.

Other standard practices help families to stay close. Some of these are as good from a distance as in person. Morse proposes that the father can lead the family in "developing a family creed to give direction to decisions . . . encourage 'the talents and

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<sup>37</sup> Chris Shirley, "Overcoming Digital Distance: The Challenge of Developing Relational Disciples in the Internet Age," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (2017): 377.

<sup>38</sup> Greg Morse, "A Place to Eat, Sleep and Watch: Emptiness in the Modern Household," *Desiring God*, July 12, 2021, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-place-to-eat-sleep-and-watch>.

passions in the home."<sup>39</sup> Assigning tasks to each child's strengths will help him or her feel wanted, needed, and successful. In addition, since everyone gets to participate in these activities, it can build closeness and give absent fathers a sense of being part of the family.

## **Resources**

It is essential to understand that the individual father or church must not enter this fight unarmed. Many organizations have stood the test of time. For example, Canfield lists "organizations which promoted responsible fatherhood from a Christian perspective. These groups and their leaders dominated the field and continue to do so today. They included such groups as Dad the Family Shepherd, Focus on the Family, Dads Only, The National Center for Fathering, Great Dads, and Promise Keepers."<sup>40</sup> Undoubtedly, there are more.

### **Incarcerated Christian Fathers Can Redeem the Time by Exerting the Influence They Still Wield with Their Children**

There are numerous ways that an incarcerated father can influence their child in a godly way. He will need help from others, especially when presence is essential. A multitude of people can provide this presence. The father needs to converse with everyone who can help his child in his absence.

### **The Non-Resident Father Can Maintain influence**

Many men have ventured to become successful non-resident fathers. This decision is honorable during a difficult time for the mother, father, and child. Whatever the reason, the child benefits from a father who wants to be in his or her life. William S.

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<sup>39</sup> Morse, "A Place to Eat, Sleep and Watch."

<sup>40</sup> Canfield, "The Modern Fatherhood Movement," 25.

Aquilino of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Human Ecology contends that "when noncustodial fathers invested in their relationships with their sons and daughters during childhood and adolescence, the investment paid off in a closer relationship with their biological offspring in early adulthood."<sup>41</sup> There are several obstacles to parenting from prison, leading to adverse outcomes.

One negative outcome of absenteeism is that children who never experience dad in the home are at a greater risk of being absentees themselves. Aquilino suggests that "the long-term relationship between noncustodial fathers and children appears to be at greater risk when the initial separation occurs in early childhood, leaving adult children with no memory of having lived with their father."<sup>42</sup> Children will have difficulty maintaining a relationship with a father they do not remember in the home. As a result, some may choose not to pursue their fathers. As children can make their own choices, not remembering time with their father influences their relationships with him. Incarcerated fathers must prioritize their relationships with their children by whatever means are available.

Another negative situation is when the non-resident father has an adversarial relationship with the child's mother. The child will likely only hear the mother's perspective and completely identify with her if the parents are at odds and the father is incarcerated. Another difficulty with clashing parents occurs during in-person visitation opportunities. In some cases, correctional workers have seen one parent use the child as a weapon to manipulate or harm the other. For example, the mom decides not to bring the child to a scheduled visit or uses the child's visitation as leverage to get something from the father. There are also situations where conditions for visitation exist that the father

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<sup>41</sup> William S. Aquilino, "The Noncustodial Father-Child Relationship from Adolescence into Young Adulthood," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68, no. 5 (November 2006): 942.

<sup>42</sup> Aquilino, "The Noncustodial Father-Child Relationship," 943.

cannot possibly meet. These may be the exception and not the rule, but they occur enough that they are well known. According to Larry D. Icard, Professor Emeritus at the Temple University College of Public Health, et al., there are many stories of a father preferring “to have a child placed in foster care [because it] seems to prompt a reorganization of [the] non-residential fathers’ relationships with their children. Fathers are no longer required to go through the mother to see their children.”<sup>43</sup> This outlook is bleak. Many people see foster care as the worst possible outcome, and nobody wants to see a child taken from the family. However, fathers may see their children more often with arranged foster care visits.

Finally, the father’s family is essential to his success as a father, whether in the home or as a non-resident father. A family that values employment will push him to get a job and pay his bills. This influence positively affects the children because the father is encouraged to provide for his children. The father’s family may positively influence his parenting. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests that “a patriarchal structure holds men accountable for the care, protection, discipline, and nurture of children. In such a society, irresponsibility in the tasks of parenthood is seen as a fundamental threat to civilization itself.”<sup>44</sup> In short, the father’s family structure and culture can push him to become a better father than he would have been otherwise.

### **The Non-Resident Father Can Care at a Distance**

Being away from loved ones is one of the main difficulties that incarcerated fathers encounter. Many of the New Testament letters are, among other things, examples

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<sup>43</sup> Larry D. Icard et al., “Father’s Involvement in the Lives of Children in Foster Care,” *Child and Family Social Work* 22, no. 1 (February 2017): 63.

<sup>44</sup> Albert Mohler, “Fatherhood and the Future of Civilization,” June 13, 2008, <https://albertmohler.com/2008/06/13/fatherhood-and-the-future-of-civilization>.

of the letter's author trying to care for people he loves from a distance. The apostle Paul wrote much of the New Testament to communicate his care for the many churches he was connected to, helping them deal with their difficulties. Obviously, the analogy breaks down at many points, but the letters provide an encouraging example. An incarcerated father does well to leverage every opportunity to take responsibility for the spiritual development of his children. These efforts will be well worth the father's maintaining and growing the relationship with his children. However, there will be other enduring results beyond this. Release Day is the day that every incarcerated father looks forward to, the day he goes home to his children. Inmates who understand what they lost will anticipate the day they get that relationship back. So, it is good to prepare for this day in advance.

In addition to the practices of prioritizing and communicating, fathers have the best and most powerful resource available: prayer. Incarcerated fathers should never cease praying for their children and for their opportunity to lead their children biblically.

### **The Non-Resident Father Can Disciple His Children**

God requires fathers to disciple their children so that they transmit their faith to subsequent generations. As Russell D. Moore, Editor-in-Chief of *Christianity Today*, says, some fundamental illustrations show that “human fathering points and shows something of what it means to know God and who God is.”<sup>45</sup> If a child is to trust God, then he must first trust his father. Likewise, if a child is to love God, she must first love her father. Understanding that this comes from positive and negative reinforcement is essential. God treats man the same way.

Children will feel more accepted as part of the family if the father trains them in the family's culture. Moore is correct when he states, “Children are designed for the Hebrews 12 pattern, to see and understand that ‘if I am not disciplined, then I am not

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<sup>45</sup> Moore, “4 Priorities for Every Gospel-Centered Parent.”



really yours.”<sup>46</sup> The father must not only pass down the family's standards but also show their purpose. Some of these standards will be apparent applications from Scripture, but some will also be life lessons and experiences handed down to the children. Both convey a sense of belonging as children begin to understand what it means to be a part of the family.

A father also provides a sense of protection. Moore suggests that children learn more of “an accurate picture of God with the protection and the security that comes from an earthly father who will not put you in danger when you are in need of deliverance.”<sup>47</sup> Our Heavenly Father is much the same. How Jesus treated those in need during his earthly ministry illustrates this truth. Even though he often corrected people, he met them at their felt point of need. Then, after tenderly attending to that need, Jesus addressed their actual spiritual need.

Children also learn about belonging and inheritance from their fathers. A father tells a child what it means to be a family member. He consistently rehearses the family's expectations and characteristics. Even in the later years of life and death, the father still illustrates that there is more to expect as a family member. Moore recalls, "Scripture says that in our homes we are to learn and see what it means to receive an inheritance."<sup>48</sup> This teaching is education about and preparation for the final revelation of the Heavenly Father, and it helps us understand our relationship to him as adopted into the family of God.

Timothy Paul Jones, Vice President for Doctoral Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says, “Parents must aim at becoming active partners in

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<sup>46</sup> Moore, “4 Priorities for Every Gospel-Centered Parent.”

<sup>47</sup> Moore, “4 Priorities for Every Gospel-Centered Parent.”

<sup>48</sup> Moore, “4 Priorities for Every Gospel-Centered Parent.”

every aspect of their children’s spiritual development.”<sup>49</sup> A child’s spiritual development impacts every area of life. Therefore, fathers must lead their families as Scripture directs, encourages, and commands. With the father’s leadership, it becomes easier for the child to understand the truths concerning the Heavenly Father. It may seem intimidating. However, this education can be a manageable assignment. Jones suggests that the training of parents could happen “typically before or during an event for their children—to apply at home the spiritual truths that their children are learning through the event.”<sup>50</sup> The training would prepare the father for the material his child is learning. This training model would be a great example of the church and the family working together for the child's soul. There are many ways to accomplish this task. For example, a father can find out what his child is learning and study it himself, or he can read a book on a spiritual topic and discuss it with his child through whatever means are available, leading to a spiritually significant conversation.

### **The Non-Resident Father Can Pray for His Children**

Prayer is the most straightforward way a father can influence the lives of his children. It is available anytime and anywhere. He can pray for anything concerning his children; sometimes, he can also pray with them or even teach them how to pray.

Praying for his child should be the most apparent task associated with fatherhood, whether he parents from afar or within the home. An article by Family Life discusses various character traits a father can pray for concerning his children's development. These are "praying for your child's faith, wisdom, integrity, identity,

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<sup>49</sup> Timothy Paul Jones, “How to Train Parents to Disciple Their Kids,” Southern Equip, November 5, 2014, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/family-ministry-do-parents-take-over-where-you-left-off/>.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, “How to Train Parents to Disciple Their Kids.”

relationships, ability to forgive, and contentment."<sup>51</sup> Praying for these traits covers much ground, but a father should also pray for the child's future spouse, future family, health, and the usual things that a father would pray for concerning his children. A father's being specific and communicating what he prays about to his children is essential.

As a father prays for his child, he will learn what it is to come before our heavenly father. He will learn the love of a father, the provision of a father, and the joy that our father has in his children. He will understand that his children look to him for theirs just as he turns to the father for his needs. He will know that his children are supposed to be learning what a father is by watching him. Being incarcerated does not lend itself to fatherhood, but even those in the darkest places can still pray.

One of the best ways for a father to know how to pray for his children is to consult Scripture. There are several passages that may work as prayer prompts. One such example is Galatians 5:22-23. Scripture says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." These would be great things for a father to pray for in his children. The verse may also prompt prayer for other kinds of characteristics as well. These include the character of honesty, integrity, justice, wisdom, understanding, graciousness, compassion, teachability, encouragement, uprightness, blamelessness, discernment, courage, a good work ethic, leadership, and humility. Any father should want to spend time praying for these things.

Psalm 119:26 says, "O give me life according to your word. O teach me your statutes and so shall I meditate on your wondrous works. be gracious to me through your law." This verse can remind a father to pray for his children's understanding of Scripture. From Scripture, he can also pray that his child will have guidance and that the Lord will

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<sup>51</sup> Family Life, "Praying for Your Child's Character," 2018, pp. 2–8, [https://www.familylife.com/content\\_offer/praying-for-your-childs-character/](https://www.familylife.com/content_offer/praying-for-your-childs-character/).

illuminate the path before them and help them to follow it. He can also pray that God's word will reveal a vision and purpose for his children's lives.

The Psalm can also remind a father to pray that his children find their foundation in Scripture, from a prepared heart and salvation to their spiritual walk, spiritual armor guiding their heart, mind, and strength. Ultimately, he can pray that his child will be a powerful witness through his faith and hope.

Isaiah 33:2 says, "LORD, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress." Meditating on this verse, a father might pray concerning his child's physical, mental, and spiritual strength and resilience. He can pray that strength will enable his child to resist temptation, live with a right spirit, and trust in God's power.

Moses writes in Numbers 6:24–26, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." In blessing, a father may be thankful for the many blessings God has given, such as love, family, children, discipline, and favor. He may pray that God keeps his children safe from evil attacks against his child's mind, eyes, and ears, as well as physical and spiritual attacks. He can pray for the safety found in God's protection.

In Ephesians 1:15–23 Paul writes, 'I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.' This verse might remind a father how important friends will be to his children. He can pray that those friends will be healthy, loving, supportive, and encouraging godly influences and mentors.

It would be appropriate for a father to pray for the other people in their children's lives. This prayer could begin with the family of the child who provides for them daily. He could also expand that to include extended family who help out on a regular basis. He can pray for teachers, coaches, and other caregivers who impact their children's lives. Anyone who has influence over his children would be an appropriate subject for prayer.

It is important for a father to pray for his children's future. He can pray about the children's future careers, finances, faith decisions, and the like. He can also pray about the most important relationships his child will have. The child's marriage should be a regular topic of prayer, seeking that whoever that spouse will be will have God's hand upon her. He can pray that his spouse will be pure, godly, and noble. He can pray that they will have good communication skills, establish trust, and be loyal to one another. He can pray that they treat each other with compassion, tenderness, and encouragement.

Most importantly, a father should pray that his child seeks God daily, that he would hunger and thirst for God's presence in their lives, and that they would want to live a life of trust, obedience, and dependence upon him. If a father prayed these things for his child, he would do well.

### **The Non-Resident Father Can Teach His Children to Pray (and Other Spiritual Disciplines)**

The father is not finished when he prays for his children. He must also lead his children in prayer. This kind of leadership can be challenging to accomplish in prison. This is why it is important that any communication between father and child is seasoned with spiritual direction. There are ways to accomplish this feat.

In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. Fathers can effectively relay this information to their children, and incarcerated fathers can communicate and reinforce this lesson. It appears that Jesus's methodology worked because mentions of

prayer after this seem to assume that believers know how. Success would be one way to fulfill the requirements from Deuteronomy 6 concerning the *Shema*. In addition to prayer, there are many other spiritual disciplines that a father can teach his child.

Several authors have written on the topic of spiritual disciplines. While not all of them may be developmentally appropriate for children to practice, the father must let his children know what he is doing and why since they do not have the opportunity to see it in person. Both fathers and children may freely practice other disciplines. Engaging in meaningful conversation about the disciplines and what each is learning through it is critical in these cases.

Fathers have not always needed specific resources to show them how to engage with their children on spiritual issues. In most cases, whatever a father is studying and learning can be related to the children based on their level of understanding. Spiritual leadership can be as simple as conversing about a Bible passage or verse. On the other hand, it can be as complex as fathers choose to make it. However, many resources are available to help fathers learn to engage their children on spiritual topics.

If a father wants to teach his child to pray, Jesus has already given an example. The Lord's Prayer is a good starting point, but it may not be clear to a child how to apply it to his life and circumstances. The father can explain the Scripture passage in a way that is easier for his child to understand and put into practice at an in-person visit, over the phone, by email, or in a letter. The father will also want to enlist help from people he trusts to reinforce this teaching in person when he cannot be there. He may want to consult some spiritual mentors or studies on the subject and offer approaches that are appropriate for the child's developmental level.

For example, there are several different ways to approach teaching prayer. The father could try to explain to his child how to pray the Bible, as Dr. Whitney and others

suggest.<sup>52</sup> He could also simplify the Lord's prayer for his child. He could describe prayer as simply talking to God. He might attempt to use a mnemonic such as CHAT (confession, honor, ask, thank) or use body parts to remind the child to pray for connected subjects such as tummy—thank God for all he provides, including our food. There are many prayer helps for those fathers who want to find them.

Other spiritual disciplines can also be addressed with a little creativity. Bible intake could involve a father and child working from the same Bible reading plan and corresponding with each other about it. It could also involve them working on the same memory verse each week. He will want someone else to help the child, but the father must participate to whatever extent is possible.

Some disciplines do not work as easily. It would be very difficult for father and child to practice stewardship together. The resources that each is stewarding are different, with different opportunities and applications. At the same time, it could be a topic of conversation from time to time and reinforced by those on the outside helping to raise the child. It takes a team.

### **Conclusion**

For incarcerated men who want to become biblical fathers, there is hope. Where there is a will, there is a way. Since God calls fathers to lead their families biblically, doing so must be possible regardless of the circumstances. This knowledge does not promise that it will be easy or that the process will catalyze immediate results. God's presence is all the promise that is needed.

Fathers everywhere can engage in training and discipleship that produces results. Many programs are available to men who want to grow as fathers. The greatest resource is the Bible itself. As a father engages in study, Scripture can transform his life.

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<sup>52</sup> Whitney, *Praying the Bible*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL 2015. This reference refers to the text in its entirety as a complete method of prayer.

There are helpful passages that are directly related to parenting and fatherhood. However, getting to know the Heavenly Father better in the fullness of his revelation cannot help but have enduring effects.

Technology helps absent fathers continue leading and building closeness with their children. Letter writing is always available to fathers who have no other means. Getting help writing those letters is possible if needed for fathers who are in prison. In addition, telephone and email are privileges granted to inmates in the Bureau of Prisons. Some prisons and jails have video-calling capabilities available. Visitation, when it is possible, is the best way for a father to connect with his children. But sometimes, these means are not possible or are cost-prohibitive. Whatever means are available, fathers must leverage them to the maximum extent to retain as much biblical authority and leadership as possible in their situation.

When men seek to become biblical fathers, there is hope for a change in the next generation. A father, empowered by God, can change the shape of a family tree forever. A father can stand in the gap and declare, “This criminal life pattern ends with me.” Fathers faithful to the task will see the fruit of their labor in time. When fathers band together, they support each other and can be a transformational force in their neighborhood. Then, the hope for the future will be realized in a new outlook and in new opportunities for future generations.



## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to train, encourage, and develop fathers at Hampton County Detention Center in Varnville, South Carolina, to become godly examples and biblical shepherds of their children to end the cycle of hopelessness, lawlessness, and failure in their families.

This project was, in some ways, like many church-based biblical fatherhood projects that have preceded it. The rationale and the training materials were very similar. The unique contribution of this project was the study of familiar biblical fatherhood training ideas as applied to inmates in a prison setting. There were unanticipated additional steps and delays in the approval process of the various institutions contacted, resulting in an elongated schedule.

The project entailed four phases. The first phase was the curriculum development process. The second phase, prior to implementation, encompassed the required approval process from the Professional Doctoral Studies department and the correctional institution. There was some overlap between these two stages, such as developing the curriculum while awaiting approval for the project. The third phase was the implementation of the project. The final phase was post implementation. This phase consisted of collecting the data, evaluating the data, and drawing conclusions.

#### **The Curriculum Development Process**

The curriculum development process required identifying what the material must teach and how this information could be transferred home from father to child. A simple flow for each chapter helps the father to learn the content and directs them to

share it with their children and report back. There are five steps: teaching fathers what the Bible says, training fathers as the Scripture shows, fathers talking with children about what they are learning, taking the lead, guiding their children in these practices, and transforming their families. As competence with the material and confidence in sharing it increase, fathers should feel more equipped to lead their families and be encouraged to do so.

Several survey instruments were reviewed for potential inclusion in this project. Ultimately, two surveys were chosen. First, the Survey of Biblical Understanding of Fatherhood, adapted from James Benjamin Bowden's Doctor of Ministry project (see appendix 1),<sup>1</sup> was chosen to measure participants' improvement in understanding and applying biblical principles. Second, a final-series survey, adapted from Toby Michael Havens's Doctor of Ministry project,<sup>2</sup> was selected to measure the level of confidence the fathers have in leading their children spiritually (see appendix 4). Expert panelists used a rubric to evaluate the curriculum (see appendix 2), adapted from Bowden's. Lastly, a Weekly Methods and Observations Homework page was developed to collect data to help gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum, document the participants' efforts, and gather participants' feedback (see appendix 3).

### **Prior to Implementation**

The initial phases of this project's implementation began on August 7, 2023, with the submission of the forms required for approval to use human subjects. At that time, it was already questionable whether the ministry site would be appropriate for the project. The Federal Bureau of Prisons has its own approval process, which I initiated

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<sup>1</sup> James Benjamin Bowden, "Equipping the Men of First Baptist Church of Enterprise, Alabama to Be Gospel-Centered Leaders in Their Homes" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Toby Michael Havens, "Equipping Fathers at First Baptist Church, Sherwood, Arkansas to Be the Primary Disciple Makers in Their Families" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016).

then. Concurrently, I pursued other options concerning the implementation of the project should the approval not be granted. To that end, I developed a PowerPoint presentation and a single-page summary of the project's who, what, when, where, why, and how to help communicate the scope and intent of the project to the institutions. I contacted following institutions: Hampton County SC Detention Center, Allendale SC Correctional Institution, Effingham County GA Prison, Georgia Department of Corrections, Bulloch County GA Correctional Institution, and Screven County GA Correctional Institution. On September 27, 2023, at a meeting with Director Smith at Hampton County (SC) Detention Center, we made a tentative plan to begin the implementation at that facility in January of 2024. Initially, the implementation would include two cohorts, a lower and higher security level.

On November 22, 2023, the initial lesson plans were forwarded for review to John Johnson, a retired Supervisory Chaplain with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and to Richard Kowalczyk, an Associate Warden who previously served as a Supervisory Chaplain. On November 27, the remaining lesson plans were forwarded for review.

On December 4, 2023, the faculty supervisor and the Professional Doctoral Studies Department authorized the project's implementation. I communicated this approval to the institution on December 13. Later that week, I received the curriculum evaluations and incorporated the feedback offered.

### **Implementation**

The project's initial planned start date was February 7, 2024. This date had to change due to scheduled institution annual training requirements during this time and an attempt to find a way to complete this project on shift. The original time was to be Thursdays at 2 p.m.

Due to holiday schedules and family emergencies, the next scheduled start date was February 26, 2024. Again, this date did not work out due to the extended nature of

the family emergencies. By this point, some original participants had transitioned out of the institution. After some discussion and planning, the institution allowed the project to continue with a class of mixed security levels, provided specific security protocols were followed. This solution is not common in the correctional environment. Additionally, several inmates could not continue to participate for various reasons during the early weeks of the class. This prompted the beginning of a second cohort with the hope of increasing the validity of the data received.

### **The First Cohort**

On April 15, 2024, the project began with a meeting of participants at Hampton County SC Detention Center. Seven inmates from the higher and lower security dorms were in attendance. The institution's Captain and a Supervisory Corrections Officer attended a meeting that began with the participants in handcuffs. This precaution was due to the potential for physical and security issues when mixing the dorms of different security levels. They also received course materials and followed along with the program. The officer removed the handcuffs as the meeting progressed, and the room's mood relaxed. The inmates completed the initial interviews, and I collected them. Each participant chose their own number to encode their responses to ensure anonymity while allowing comparison between initial- and final-surveys. After an introduction, I began chapter 1 of the curriculum. This session reviewed Scripture passages concerning the importance of fathers disciplining their children. The standard weekly outline was introduced. This was: Teach what the Scripture says, Train as the Scripture shows, Talk with your children about what you are learning, Take the lead in training your children what you are learning, and Transform your family. This last section asks what changes have been observed in the past week and what is hoped for the upcoming week.

The first week of Bible Intake training was also a part of this session. This lesson was focused on establishing a pattern of Bible intake. The inmates read main

Scripture, Deuteronomy 11:19–21, and then explored the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of the instruction found there. At the session’s conclusion, I directed inmates to review chapter 1, fill in their answers using their Bibles, and complete the Weekly Methods and Observations Homework. I also told them to prepare for the second session by answering the questions in chapter 2 so that it would be easier to discuss them when the class meets.

On April 22, the class gained one inmate unavailable from the previous week due to disciplinary issues. To ensure the common experience of the participants, there were no more additions after this week. A different Supervisory Corrections Officer attended the meeting this week. Eight inmates and the Sgt for this second week discussed Bible Intake. About half of the inmates had completed the Weekly Methods and Observations Homework. After collecting that, the second lesson began. This is the second week of Bible Intake training. They read and discussed passages from several sections of the Old and New Testament. This lesson also focused on the importance of hearing the word and Scripture memorization. They followed on by discussing the rest of the standard weekly outline to encourage them to take the teaching, apply it to themselves, and then teach it to their children. After the second lesson, I reminded the inmates to read ahead for next week’s third lesson and complete the Weekly Methods and Observations Homework for this week’s lesson.

On April 29, over half of the first cohort participants produced the Weekly Methods and Observations Homework. Some asked how they were to complete the homework if they did not have regular contact with their children. Other inmates suggested methods of communication such as letter writing, phone calls, email, and visitation. I reminded the participants that the goal was to do their best with what they had. Part of the process was to determine what methods of communication work best for different circumstances. Each correctional institution has different strengths and weaknesses in this area. The third week’s topic was prayer. This topic referred to both the

teaching of Jesus and of Paul concerning the topic. During this lesson the participants identified several areas of the workbook that needed to be modified as the answers to the questions were left in from the production of the Leader Guide. A Supervisory Corrections Officer attended this lesson to supervise the inmates. Participants may not have felt free to talk with a staff member in attendance. Another suggestion to improve the workbook was to include a page with Psalm 23 printed on it to use as practice for praying the Bible. The class then proceeded to the application of this knowledge through the standard weekly outline.

On May 6, the first cohort was short by a few this week. One inmate completed his term in custody, and two were not feeling well. The topic of the week was worship. A Correctional Officer supervised the group this week. An additional benefit may have been that both the staff and the inmates receive the material. The staff's exposure to the material may have enabled them to remind the residents what they learned and utilize the knowledge in their own families.

When collecting the Weekly Methods and Observations Homework, a frank discussion occurred. Many participants expressed frustration with the inability to keep up with the homework due to the conditions of their confinement. Consistent communication with their children was the main difficulty. This institution does not provide daily access to email or telephone. Some of the inmates do not receive visits. Under ideal circumstances, it would not be realistic to expect that they could write a letter, send it, and receive a letter back from their children within a week. The children's ability and motivation to write back were also significant communication difficulties. The class reviewed the communication options discussed the previous week and added that the possibility of video visits could benefit this process.

I reminded the participants that I was not grading them and that their best efforts would be enough. It may be wise to consider this obstacle and its adaptations in future program iterations. This week's lesson on worship was intended to broaden the

participants' perspective on the subject beyond the music at the beginning of the service. The class discussed worship from nine passages several different areas of the Bible. Then the standard weekly outline took them through to application in their lives and the lives of their children.

The first cohort could not meet on May 13 due to institutional issues. They discussed the fifth lesson next week. The institution was not forthcoming concerning what those issues might have been, but this is something that happens from time to time in the correctional setting.

On May 20, the first cohort discussed serving. One of the men spoke of a time when he had felt prompted to help mow an elderly neighbor's lawn but asked for money. The neighbor died soon after, and he has held onto this memory as an encouragement to do good when he has the opportunity. This lesson draws from the Gospels, Acts, and epistles for a New Testament perspective on the definition and importance of serving.

Classes did not meet on May 27 due to the Memorial Day holiday.<sup>3</sup>

On June 3, the first cohort reviewed lesson 6 on stewardship. It is a difficult topic in the prison environment. Many inmates have their funds frozen or confiscated. Others do not have much. In both cases, it is challenging to conceptualize financial stewardship. The discussion utilized teaching from both Jesus and Paul concerning the topic. In this environment it was important to focus on other resources, such as time and talent, that one can still steward in a way that glorifies the Father regardless of the individual's financial status. The participants were able to identify areas where this was possible, but many needed help to apply a more abstract concept than the concrete financial understanding.

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<sup>3</sup> Ensuring enough staff is available to respond to emergencies when conducting a class is vital. On federal holidays, the institution operates on a minimal staff schedule. Therefore, a program like this is generally not accommodated on these days.

On June 10, the first cohort discussed fasting, silence, and solitude. These disciplines do not require as much explanation and are easy to combine. In the discussion concerning fasting, teaching came from the Old Testament and from Jesus. The silence and solitude part of the lesson drew from the Old Testament and from observing Jesus in the Gospels. The participants completed this week with a discussion concerning practical application and implementation. After the session, a few minutes were spent planning the end-of-course celebration.

On June 17, both cohorts completed the course by covering the lessons on Journaling and Learning. The lesson on journaling stressed the importance of the practice as seen in the Psalms. Learning was taught from five different passages from Deuteronomy to 1 Timothy. These lessons also proceeded through the standard weekly outline to encourage application and implementation. The inmates also completed the final-course survey.

There was a celebration, and I distributed blank certificates to the inmates for the purpose of a small ceremony. The detention center provided pizza and soda. As the participants' personal information was unknown, certificates were produced and sent to the detention center to distribute.

### **The Second Cohort<sup>4</sup>**

On April 29, a second cohort began. This group contained four inmates of the same low-security level. As in the first cohort, they also received books and followed along with the program. The initial interviews were completed and collected. Chapter 1 of the curriculum, Introduction and Bible Intake, began. I directed inmates to review chapter 1, fill in their answers using their Bibles, and complete the Weekly Methods and

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<sup>4</sup> The descriptions in this section are abbreviated as the information has already been reported concerning the first cohort. A second cohort was a desirable option for increasing the sample size of the study.



Observations Homework. I also told them to prepare for the second session by answering the questions in chapter 2 so that it would be easier to discuss them when the class meets.

On May 6, the second cohort discussed Bible Intake. As in the first cohort, some participants must still complete the written homework or come to class having answered the questions. I reminded them of these expectations. This group was much more prepared to engage the material verbally than the first cohort. The group discussed the second lesson concerning Bible Intake. At the end of the lesson, I reminded the participants of the Weekly Methods and Observations Homework and the expectation to be better prepared for the next session.

On May 13, the second cohort explored the third lesson on prayer. Those in attendance were unfamiliar with any of what Donald Whitney calls “praying the Bible.”<sup>5</sup> This was a primary topic of discussion for this lesson. The inmates were initially uncomfortable with the idea, but after demonstration and practice, they admitted that there was a place for practice. They committed to implement some of the prayer practices discussed during this session and share them with their children.

On May 20, the second cohort did not meet. I did not follow the procedures to ensure their presence would be accommodated. Therefore, the participants were not able to attend. Failure to communicate the scheduling of a program and identifying the participants each time is a problem in the prison environment, as accountability for the location of every person is a fundamental function of the institution.

Classes did not meet on May 27 due to the Memorial Day holiday.

On June 3, the second cohort discussed the spiritual discipline of worship. This topic usually requires redefining the term for the purpose of discussion. It is common for

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<sup>5</sup> See Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015). In this book, Whitney introduces a method of prayer that keys off the reading and understanding of a Scripture passage. As the practitioner works through the passage, he is encouraged to pray about whatever the words of Scripture bring to mind.

people to understand worship in terms of the music within a church service rather than as a way of life that reaches every area. Some had difficulty with the idea but eventually came to a working understanding that they could share with their children.

On June 6, the second cohort discussed the chapter on Serving. This session on a different day helped to catch up to the first cohort. This group had a robust participant-led discussion of various serving experiences both inside prison and at home. They were encouraged to incorporate serving as part of their lifestyle.

On June 10, the second cohort discussed section 6, Stewardship. The discussion proceeded much like it had for the first cohort.

On June 13, the second cohort discussed Fasting, and Silence and Solitude. This session caught the second cohort up to the first. Discussion on both disciplines and their applications ensued. Both cohorts will finish with the next session.

On June 17, both cohorts completed the course by covering the lessons on Journaling and Learning. They also completed the final-course survey.

There was a celebration, and I distributed certificates without names for the purpose of the brief completion ceremony. The detention center provided pizza and soda. As the participant's personal information was unknown, certificates were produced and the file was sent to the detention center to distribute certificates that contained the inmates' names.

### **Post Implementation**

On June 19, I compiled and reviewed the collected data. I recorded the initial answers on one chart and plotted the final ones on a second. Individual answers that changed were colored green and red to represent answers whose scores increased or decreased respectively. As some items were asked in the positive and others in the negative, it became necessary to evaluate each item to determine the desired direction of change. I restructured the scoring to reflect the data more consistently, with high numbers

being more desirable than low numbers. I then analyzed it to determine the outcome of the project.

### **Guidance for Incarcerated Fathers Desiring to Implement Biblical Fatherhood**

This project leads fathers in pursuing their spiritual growth so they will become better at discipling their children. The curriculum in this project was intended to help incarcerated fathers think through the implementation of Biblical Fatherhood considering the limitations imposed by their unique context. The county detention center was the location for the project, but the intent is that this kind of study can work in any correctional environment. Several important practices emerged during the conduct of the project. It is likely this list would grow with a larger population to test. These recommendations are listed below.

The first recommendation is to ensure the inmate is operating from a solid biblical foundation. The father should be a committed Christian who is still able to have influence in his family. Additionally, as illustrated in the curriculum, the spiritual disciplines must be learned, practiced and adopted by the father. This should produce fruit in his life and his family should recognize a change in him. A father who is being transformed by God can be used to transform his family.

An incarcerated father who makes the most of his time by prioritizing the practice of Bible study and prayer will usually observe that God honors his efforts. They may learn to pray for their children, and even with them. They will utilize the means available to them for communicating the importance of these things to their children. For some that will be in-person visitation, phone calls, or emails. Others will be more restricted and resort to letter-writing.

The second recommendation is that an incarcerated father should find a way to share spiritual experiences with his children in some way. The child will respond to the things that are important to the father. If he is rarely talking of spiritual things, the child

has no way to observe the importance they hold in his life. This is not intended to stem from over-spiritualization. Rather, the experiences shared should come from a recognition of God's work in his life. Progressing through the curriculum may trigger some of these events as the father interacts with God.

Another recommendation is that the father should ensure a quality support network around his children. He can encourage the person caring for the children to take them to church. He must let the church members meet the spiritual needs that are lacking during his absence. He should engage other godly influences to spend time with his child. If other opportunities present that will help, encourage his child's participation. The incarcerated father should continue to exercise the influence and opportunities available to him.

The most important advice is to keep trying. The father should utilize whatever resources his situation provides. If he can't do in-person visits, perhaps there are virtual visits. If there are not regular phone calls, perhaps there is an email system. In every case a father can write to his children unless there is a restraining order in place. If that is the case, he should engage God in his own transformation in such a way that the order can be removed and contact renewed. There is always something. He still has a responsibility. God will provide a way. He needs to be looking for it.

### **Conclusion**

There were many unexpected obstacles to overcome in the correctional field. The first and most significant obstacle was gaining permission to operate in the prison. The second obstacle was acquiring appropriate participants. Another difficulty was conducting the project while adequately protecting the participants' identity. Getting materials into the institution may be difficult in some places. It can be done. It would be easier to have a larger sample in a larger prison population where my relationship with the inmates already exists.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

It is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of this project and its ability to fulfill its purposes. The project's specific purpose consists of four distinct goals. Each goal had a measurement and a threshold to achieve to measure success. The first two goals concern the logistics of starting the study. These were mixed results. The other two goals were met in that improvement in both measures was evident. Without a significant longitudinal study it is difficult to ascertain whether the project will result in change in the culture around incarceration.

Though the measurements stated in the goals did not always meet the criteria established, there is still evidence that the project was successful. In every case where the original measure did not show success, there is another measure that may indicate that the project may be helpful toward meeting the stated goals. The lessons learned throughout the course of this project provided many opportunities for the author to expand his knowledge and capacity to conduct future projects.

#### **Evaluation of the Purpose**

This project aims to train, encourage, and develop fathers at Hampton County Detention Center in Varnville, South Carolina, to become godly examples and biblical shepherds of their children to end the cycle of hopelessness, lawlessness, and failure in their families. The project consisted of the construction of an eight-session course to that end. The general premise was to teach or refresh the practice of spiritual disciplines in the lives of the men and then challenge them to share what they have learned with their children by whatever means available. This chapter evaluates the effectiveness of the

project and shares lessons during the preparation of the curriculum and the project site, presentation, and post-project periods. The chapter will also include theological and personal reflections.

## **Evaluation of the Goals**

### **Goal 1**

The first goal was to assess the practices of Bible reading and prayer among participants at the Hampton County Detention Center congregation. This goal was measured by administering an initial survey to discover the level of participants' biblical understanding of fatherhood responsibilities (see appendix 1). The articulated goal was to have twenty participants complete the initial-series survey. The goal was not met as only thirteen participants completed the initial survey. That number was accomplished by starting a second cohort after the first had begun. Initially, there were ten participants. Several of these did not want to continue the course. Others got into disciplinary trouble and could not complete it. Lastly, others left the institution and were unable to complete it. Of the ten inmate surveys originally completed, only four inmates finished the program. The second cohort added three back to the number. The total number of participants that began the course was thirteen, and the number that completed the course was seven. Every inmate's initial appendix 1<sup>1</sup> survey was completed, charted, and analyzed.

Of the thirteen initial surveys, it seems that most of the participants pray at least once per day. Additionally, the group read the Bible and meditated on Scripture once per week on average. The scores drop when the fatherhood responsibility to lead their children are added. They pray with their child once per month. They read Scripture and other Christian books and lead their children in worship less than several times per

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<sup>1</sup> It was later observed that an incorrect version of the initial survey invalidated much of the data. The uncorrected survey is included as Appendix 6. The corrected survey is Appendix 1. The items that contained a Likert scale were supposed to be 6 points as in Appendix 1. Appendix 6 shows 8 points where the second set of 4 are a repeat of the first 4. Thus, data could not be accurately compared.

year. The most room for growth is on these fatherhood responsibilities. This one of the purposes of this project.

## **Goal 2**

The second goal was to develop a curriculum utilizing current scholarship adapted to the prison environment. An expert panel measured this goal using a rubric to evaluate the curriculum's biblical content, methodology, scope, and applicability (see appendix 2). The goal was met when 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded predetermined benchmarks.

This goal was met as the curriculum for an eight-session class, *Training Men to Become Godly Fathers*. The reviewers for the curriculum both have extensive experience as Chaplains in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The first reviewer was a retired Bureau of Prisons Supervisory Chaplain. He is an Elder in the Church of the Nazarene and a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary. His experience spans twenty-six years and six different correctional institutions. The second reviewer was an Associate Warden and a prior Supervisory Chaplain in the Bureau of Prisons. He holds a Doctor of Ministry in Cross-Cultural Sensitivities and Comparative Religions from Liberty University. In his career, he served seven correctional institutions. They offered helpful insight and had little negative to say about the initial curriculum offered. Each chapter was scored individually by both reviewers using appendix 2. The total of the responses that the reviewers graded sufficient or exemplary were 124 of 128 across the eight chapters. This 97 percent exceeds the 90 percent requirement. Several helpful suggestions became part of the curriculum.

## **Goal 3**

The third goal was to improve practices of fatherly engagement among class participants who completed the class. This goal would have been successfully met when 75 percent of the participants reported at least one positive interaction each week

throughout the project. This became a problem as the inmates did not have the anticipated regular access to communicate with their children. Some did not have access to regular telephone calls or email. Visitation was a rare opportunity. One cycle of sending a letter and receiving a response would take longer than a week. A decision was made to encourage the class that, if weekly interactions were not possible, the inmate would be growing in this measure if he can demonstrate that he is doing everything that is available in his context.

This goal was supposed to be measured by a weekly survey listing participants' attempts to lead their children in the lesson of the week and the participants' observations of the results (see appendix 3). This goal was not met by this measure. In the county detention center environment, the inmates did not have the anticipated level of regular access to communicate with their children. For example, one inmate did not have contact with his child throughout the project. The difficulty could also be partly attributed to the ones with custody of the children during incarceration, keeping the child from communicating, or the child choosing not to. This communication issue illustrates a difference between my ministry site and where the project was finally authorized. A lesson gained is to ask about these resources earlier in the process. Still, any contact in which a father imparts spiritual wisdom to his child is a gain.

The results for item numbers 23-26 show an increase in the inmate reports of their interaction with their children. Table 2 shows an increase of 3 or greater in all four item numbers with item number 23 being greater than 3.5 increase. This is an increase of between "not at all" and "several times" per month for item numbers 24–26. The increase in item number 23 indicated that the frequency of inmate fathers praying with their children moved from "not at all" up to an average of "once per week." While this result is not gleaned from the measure originally indicated, this result may show an improvement in fatherly engagement in spiritual leadership.



#### **Goal 4**

The fourth goal was to articulate a guide for best practices of incarcerated fathers who desire to practice biblical fatherhood. The goal was measured by administering a initial- and final-series survey (see appendix 1)<sup>2</sup> and a final-series interview (see appendix 4) to determine if participants felt better equipped and which activities these fathers thought were effective. This goal was considered successfully met when analysis of the final-class surveys yielded a list of best practices.

The items in appendix 4 were not properly designed to elicit responses that produced a list of best practices. There is a section describing best practices found on page 97. These suggestions are based on the experience of the author and not on the responses to survey items. They include information gleaned in years of communicating with fathers who are incarcerated.

The results of appendix I indicated that participants felt better equipped to lead their families. This can be drawn from the evidence of the increase in the practice of prayer, Bible reading, other Christian reading, and family worship with their children. It should follow that those who have increased in these practices will become more comfortable with it.

#### **Test Methodology**

Due to the small sample size a simple comparison of before and after responses is possible. As already stated, only thirteen men began the project and seven men completed both the initial and final surveys. This is less than the desired number of responses for a reliable source of data. Even in prison, the inmates had a choice to participate or not. Much like in the church, not everyone who attends service will attend a study. However, the data collected should still demonstrate the project's success. The initial and final surveys were intended to compare many things, but an error in using one

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<sup>2</sup> See the note for goal 1 concerning the use of an incorrect survey instrument.

scale on the initial survey and a different scale on the final survey invalidated data from items 4–10 and 17–22.

Items 11 through 13 employed an eight-point scale<sup>3</sup> to observe the inmate’s practice of the spiritual disciplines. Items 23 through 26 explore the inmate’s perception of his ability to lead his children in practicing the spiritual disciplines using the same eight-point scale. Items 14 through 16 compare preferences within spiritual disciplines and were irrelevant to this project.

### Test Comparison

The valid data remaining from the initial and final surveys allows for comparison in a few different ways. First, an inmates score on the initial survey can be directly compared to his score on the final survey. This shows growth for that inmate. Second, a item’s average score on the initial test can be compared with the score on the final test. This should illustrate growth on a given concept that was tested. Third, the average of the scores on the initial survey can be compared with the average of the scores on the final survey. This should demonstrate a general trend of the class.

Table 1. The results of individual participants

Participant	Initial Survey	Final Survey
A	25	56
B	31	53
C	21	51
D	20	19
E	18	30
F	15	16
G	22	41
Average Total Score	21.71	38

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<sup>3</sup> The scores within these items were rated as follows: 1-not at all, 2-several times per year, 3-once per month, 4-several times per month, 5-once per week, 6-several times per week, 7-once per day, 8-several times per day.

Table 1 shows the average total inmate score from the initial survey results was 21.71. The average of the final survey results compares favorably at 38.00. This illustrates an increase of 16.2857 or 75 percent. Though this trend is from a small sample, it may yet signify success.

This average was computed by assigning a score of 1-8 to the answers of items 11-12 and 23-26 and adding them together for each participant. A score of 1=not at all, 2=several times per year, 3=once per month, 4=several times per month, 5=once per week, 6=several times per week, 7=once per day, and 8=several times per day. The average total score was the sum of the seven participant's cumulative scores divided by the number of participants. This was conducted in both the initial survey and the final survey.

It is interesting to note that participant B answered items 11,12, and 13 on the initial survey with "more than once per day." This illustrates that this participant cannot improve on those scores. Additionally, four participants answered item 13 with "daily." This leaves room only for minimal improvement on that item.

The participants scored themselves very low on items 23-26 during the initial survey. Most answers were "not at all" and indicated the greatest opportunity for growth. The final survey showed growth in these areas. This may indicate that the participants felt more equipped and more comfortable to engage with their children concerning spiritual disciplines (Goal 4).

Growth was also measured in items 11-13, but it was not to the same degree. On the initial survey some of the applicants were already praying and reading their Bible regularly, but others were not. On the final survey those with the room to grow improved. As already mentioned, there were some that little or no room to grow on these measures. That the average of the scores increased indicates that the participants as a whole did improve on their practice of Bible reading and prayer (Goal 1). This was not attained by uniform growth, but by those with little to no practice beginning to do so.

It is also possible that the scores are somewhat inflated. Three participants scored themselves as seven or eight across the items tested. This could be due to the participants wanting to appear as if they had mastered the material or somehow improved the most among the group. It could be that they knew they were participating in this study and wanted the report to look good.

The four that answered in a less elevated manner illustrated two that reported growth and two that showed little deviation from the original score. These last two may illustrate that not everyone engages with the material at the same level. It may also show that these two were not as committed to the process. The other two, while not demonstrating the same level of growth as the top three, illustrated growth throughout the project.

Table 2. The average of results for individual items

Item	Initial Survey	Final Survey	Difference
11 I read my Bible.	4.2858	6.0000	1.7142
12 I meditate on Scripture.	4.8571	5.4286	0.5715
13 I pray.	7.1429	7.5714	0.4285
23 I find ways to pray with my children.	1.4286	5.1429	3.7143
24 I find ways to read the Bible with my children.	1.4286	4.5714	3.1428
25 I find ways to read Christian books to/with my children.	1.4286	4.4286	3.0000
26 I find ways to lead my child in family worship.	1.4286	4.8571	3.4285

Table 2 illustrates change in the responses to individual items by comparing the average of the score from the initial and final survey. The third item on personal prayer showed marked improvement. The next two items focused on meditation on Scripture and prayer showed minimal improvement after the course. This is likely because prayer was already being practiced among the participants. The remaining items focused on practices involving their children showed an increase. These items were at or above a 3-point difference on an 8-point scale. It appears that the project has impacted the awareness and practices of these fathers and their responsibility to be the spiritual leader of their children for the better.

Appendix 4 is the subjective interview asking the participants to describe various aspects of how the project's implementation affected them and their relationship with their children. The results in appendix 5 are word-for-word responses from the inmates at the end of the course. In some cases, it appears that they may not have understood the item. At other times, such as when one inmate told me, "I've always been a believer but now this series helped me see a lot of things I couldn't see before, like for example, the impact of my father growing up without his father had on me" it was evident that the curriculum produced a change in thinking. Another inmate said, "I barely touched the subject in the past. This class helped me see how important it is to teach" demonstrating a move from being ignorant of his responsibility to acknowledging his biblical role in the life of his child. These kinds of testimonies further illuminate the data collected.

### **Strengths of the Project**

This project had several strengths. First, it can work in the prison environment. As such, it can fulfill its role to reshape the inmate's perception of the role of a biblical

father, which is directly related to the project's primary purpose. The participants have the time to do what is required for the course. Those that choose to participate in the program are more likely to engage with its content. Every inmate has a way to communicate with loved ones, one of the primary tasks of the program. Participants realize that they need to do better in many areas of their life, including their own spiritual development and becoming the spiritual leader of their families.

The project also showed that the curriculum is flexible enough to adapt to different correctional environments. Emergencies happen, and sometimes it is not possible to program. The project easily adapted to these interruptions. Additionally, the curriculum was written with one context in mind and the project was executed in a different location. There were some adjustments to expectations in the new context, but the curriculum was still able to do its work.

A strength of the curriculum is the weekly practice and feedback homework. In the test environment, communication with loved ones was slow and inconsistent. This was a major difference between the planned context and the actual location of the project. Instead of regular access to phone calls and email, the detention center offered infrequent phone calls and encouraged letter writing. This slowed down the communication timeline, but it was an easy adaptation to make. None of these difficulties prevented participants from doing the best they could to engage in whatever mode of communication was available. The weekly homework is an important part of this project, and it was easily adapted to the resources available at the detention center.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

This project produced several lessons. The greatest of these is to obtain written permission well in advance from the appropriate authorities before beginning the project. When working with a government agency, many levels of approval must be acquired before testing can commence. This process can take months and still conclude with a

“no” answer. It is good to pursue multiple sites concurrently, hoping that some will grant permission to perform the project.

Another area for improvement in this project was the instability of prison life and scheduling the class sessions. On multiple occasions, my institution had operational commitments that prevented the course from beginning as scheduled. Once started, Hampton County Detention Center had two occasions where something at their institution precluded me from presenting the curriculum. Federal and state holidays also interfered with consistent scheduling.

A third difficulty in the project was unforeseen emergencies in my personal life. Too much time needed to be devoted to the emergency of the moment, which delayed implementation. Initially, the class was to begin in January and end in March. The conclusion was in June, adding three months to the timeline.

Another area for improvement was the amount of time requested to offer the course. The curriculum proceeded as an hour-long session each week. The inmate feedback indicated that the class time was too short to go deep. Often, I had to curtail an excellent discussion to complete the lesson within the timeframe. In different environments, different schedules will dictate the length of class periods. Some correctional institutions operate on a strict schedule, and programming must operate within that framework. Other institutions will support any requested timeframe if it does not interfere with mandatory events.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

Having learned the lessons from the first iteration of this project, the most important thing I would do differently is understand the approval process of the correctional institution and receive approval before getting to the project’s implementation phase. This error led to months of searching for a prison or detention center to allow me to run this project in their institution.

The second lesson also speeds up the process. I would not put off starting the project's implementation because of emergencies, leave, or holidays. This delay was supposed to provide some form of continuity, but prison ministry is unpredictable. It is better to get started and skip a week than to push off the beginning of the project. The availability of several participants was lost by the time the class finally began.

An important change that would have helped this project would be to ensure that the correct version of the initial and final surveys were used. Much of the data collected was not valid because of differences between the first survey and the final survey. The items that were different would have provided valuable support for the thesis, but the data was not useable.

I would not make corrections to the measurement instruments in the middle of the course. This led to invalid data and a lot of confusion among the class members. I would also spell out the survey choices rather than trust the participants would understand the abbreviations.

Another thing I would do differently is to request longer class sessions. Even the inmates noticed I tried to get too much information into an hour. My next iteration would be to try a 90-minute session. If an institution runs on an hourly schedule, then two hours would be better than trying to fit it into one. It would also leave time for more creative activities during the instruction period.

Last, I would extend the time from eight weeks to ten or even twelve weeks. The final two classes each included two spiritual disciplines. Those could be separated. Additionally, if an area seems important enough to spend more than one session working on, there should be flexibility to do that. It is sometimes more difficult for the inmates to commit to a longer course, but those who do tend to benefit more from it.



## **Theological Reflections**

The theological foundation of this project comes from five passages of Scripture. The first lesson concerned the duties of a parent according to Deuteronomy 6:1–9 and Ephesians 6:1–4. The third passage talked about how God leads fathers as they lead their children according to Deuteronomy 32:44–47. The fourth passage illustrated how to pass on our faith to our children to subsequent generations according to Psalm 78:1–8. The final passage demonstrated that God provides an example as he disciplines His children in Hebrews 12:4–13.

As taught in Deuteronomy, a father has a duty to disciple his children. God has not made this optional. Paul wrote the same to the Ephesians, expanding the description of the father-child relationship. Discipleship must be a discipline, but it should be easy for the child. Some dads expect more from their children than is appropriate for their developmental level. Fathers often abdicate this responsibility to the detriment of the child and society.

The second Deuteronomy passage illustrates God's example of fatherly care over his children, Israel. In chapter 32, Moses prepares the people to enter the promised land. He is also preparing them for a change in leadership to Joshua. At this time, God chooses to have Moses review what is most important for Israel's continued success and growth.

Psalm 78 recounts the history of Israel. The author presents great biblical stories that everyone would have known concerning God's leadership and provision and Israel's responses. In the first few verses, the psalmist reminds Israel that they must pass the knowledge on to future generations so that they can walk in the blessing of God. Fathers who are obedient to God receive the inheritance of the knowledge of God and pass it on to those who come after them, first within their own family and then in their community and elsewhere.

The final passage discusses discipline. Hebrews 12 illustrates how God disciplines his children as a perfect father. Christian fathers must do likewise. This project has been a beginning for some of the participants, but the ultimate goal in presenting the spiritual disciplines is that they will begin to learn to father from the Father on their own. This transformation is the kind of change this project hopes to catalyze.

### **Personal Reflections**

So many obstacles needed to be overcome for this project to succeed. There is a list of acknowledgments in the preface that only scratches the surface. I am grateful for Hampton County Detention Center's willingness to host this project. When the project encountered great difficulty, many suggested that I transition the project to the church environment. This project might benefit others in the correctional ministry environment. There may also be application of the curriculum for the military or any other situation that causes a father to spend time away from his children.

The entire process of this project has been enlightening. I am trying to become the parent about whom I am teaching. It is important to remember that there is always more to learn. Additionally, each child teaches me something different. I have had the opportunity to have devotional time with my adult children for their entire lives. Now, they each live for the Lord in their own unique ways. My younger children did not start life in my home. I see daily the importance of passing down the faith to our children, beginning at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project is to train, encourage, and develop fathers at Hampton County Detention Center in Varnville, South Carolina, to become godly examples to and biblical shepherds of their children with a view toward ending the cycle of hopelessness, lawlessness, and failure in their families. The participants reported that this project met its purpose. Not everything went smoothly. It was impossible to measure

some of the hopes contained in the purpose statement within this project's scope. This course is only the beginning, and now the ball has been handed off to the participants so they can hand it off to their children.

This project followed a proven process. It began with introductory material and the basic plan. Next, Scripture concerning biblical fatherhood was explored. After that, the historical and cultural issues relevant to the project followed. The curriculum was developed, the program was run, and the results were tabulated and analyzed. The statistics showed that this project could make a difference.

The promise of this project lies in the character of God. When a Christian father accepts his role in his child's life, he will likely pass his faith along. When a man shows children the way, they will follow. When Dad takes an interest in his children's spiritual well-being, they are more likely to thrive. If enough fathers would do this, the remainder of the purpose statement would be possible. They could see the end of the cycle of hopelessness, lawlessness, and failure in their families. The children would be free to become all that God had intended for their lives.

APPENDIX 1  
SURVEY OF BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF  
FATHERHOOD

The following survey was utilized to evaluate the participants' understanding concerning the biblical role of the father to accomplish the first goal of this project.<sup>1</sup> It was administered at the beginning and the end of the course to measure participants' improvement in understanding and in applying biblical principles.

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<sup>1</sup> This survey was adapted from James Benjamin Bowden, "Equipping the Men of First Baptist Church of Enterprise, Alabama to Be Gospel-Centered Leaders in Their Homes" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016). This is the revised survey and not the first one the participants filled out.

## INITIAL- AND FINAL-SERIES SURVEY

### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate will identify your current understanding and practices of spiritual leadership. Chaplain McIntyre is conducting this research to collect data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer items before the project, and you will answer the same items at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Personal Identification Number: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please put your Register Number)

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice items by placing a check mark next to the appropriate answer.

### **Part 1**

1. Do you consider yourself a Christian?

Yes  No

2. Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation?

Yes  No

3. What is your age in years? \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 2

Directions: Respond to the following items: (1) Place a check mark by the multiple-choice responses. (2) Some items ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree. Please circle the appropriate answer.

4. I am an effective spiritual leader of my home.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. I desire to lead my family well.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. I have a biblical vision for spiritually leading my wife/partner and children.

SD D DS AS A SA

7. I have a plan of action (steps I will take) for spiritually leading my wife/partner and children.

SD D DS AS A SA

8. My spiritual health directly impacts my ability to lead my family spiritually.

SD D DS AS A SA

9. If asked, I could communicate the gospel.

SD D DS AS A SA

10. I could instruct another man on how to be the spiritual leader of his home.

SD D DS AS A SA

11. I read my Bible (check only one)

A. more than once per day

B. once per day

C. several times per week

D. once per week

E. several times per month

F. once per month

G. several times per year

H. not at all

12. I meditate on Scripture (check only one)

A. more than once per day

B. once per day

C. several times per week

D. once per week

E. several times per month

F. once per month

G. several times per year

H. not at all

13. I pray (check only one)

A. more than once per day

B. once per day

C. several times per week

D. once per week

E. several times per month

F. once per month

G. several times per year

H. not at all

14. I have a specific time set aside for prayer.

A. Yes

B. No

15. I most often pray for (check only one)

A. myself

B. family

C. friends

D. other

16. I most often pray (check only one)

\_\_\_ A. at church

\_\_\_ D. at work

\_\_\_ B. at home

\_\_\_ E. other

\_\_\_ C. while traveling



**Part 3**

Directions: Respond to the following items: (1) Place a check mark by the multiple-choice responses. (2) Some items ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree. Please circle the appropriate answer.

17. I am an effective spiritual leader for my children.

SD D DS AS A SA

18. I know the areas in which I need to be praying for my children.

SD D DS AS A SA

19. I use occasions of my children's sin to instruct them with the gospel.

SD D DS AS A SA

20. I instill in my children the value of reading the Bible and praying.

SD D DS AS A SA

21. I use everyday situations as opportunities to instruct my children with biblical principles.

SD D DS AS A SA

22. When I sin against my children, I express repentance and ask for their forgiveness.

SD D DS AS A SA

23. I find ways to pray with my children (choose only one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. more than once per day | <input type="checkbox"/> E. several times per month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. once per day           | <input type="checkbox"/> F. once per month          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. several times per week | <input type="checkbox"/> G. several times per year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. once per week          | <input type="checkbox"/> H. not at all              |

24. I find ways to read the Bible with my children (choose only one)

- A. more than once per day
- B. once per day
- C. several times per week
- D. once per week
- E. several times per month
- F. once per month
- G. several times per year
- H. not at all

25. I find ways to read Christian books to/with my children (choose only one)

- A. more than once per day
- B. once per day
- C. several times per week
- D. once per week
- E. several times per month
- F. once per month
- G. several times per year
- H. not at all

26. I find ways to lead my child in family worship (a specific time of Bible-reading and prayer) (check only one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. more than once per day | <input type="checkbox"/> E. several times per month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. once per day           | <input type="checkbox"/> F. once per month          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. several times per week | <input type="checkbox"/> G. several times per year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. once per week          | <input type="checkbox"/> H. not at all              |

## APPENDIX 2

### RUBRIC FOR EVALUATING CURRICULUM

The following rubric was utilized for the evaluation of the curriculum developed in connection with the ministry project.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this evaluative tool was to demonstrate the accomplishment of the second goal of the project and to discover any areas where the curriculum does not meet the stated criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> This survey was adapted from James Benjamin Bowden, “Equipping the Men of First Baptist Church of Enterprise, Alabama to Be Gospel-Centered Leaders in Their Homes” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016).

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Becoming a Godly Father in Prison Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Lesson #</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Accuracy</b>					
This lesson interpreted Scripture accurately.					
This lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covered a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
<b>Pedagogy</b>					
Each lesson was clear and contained a big idea.					
Each lesson provided opportunities for participant interaction with and practice of the material.					
<b>Practicality</b>					
The curriculum clearly detailed how to develop spiritual disciplines.					
The curriculum clearly detailed how to pass on the practice of spiritual disciplines from father to child.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3  
WEEKLY METHODS AND OBSERVATIONS  
HOMEWORK

As part of this curriculum, participants relayed weekly observations via the following form. This form was used to collect data for the measurement of the third goal of the project. This form helped to gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum, document the participants' efforts, and gather participants' feedback.

## WEEKLY METHODS AND OBSERVATIONS HOMEWORK

This form will be used to gather information concerning how well the program is working. Please respond to the following prompts to the best of your ability.

Program Week #	
Topic of this week's lesson (participants will fill this section in before the end of class to remind them of the homework.)	
How I attempted to share this lesson with my child(ren)	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
I think this discussion with my child went well (0-5; 0 = not well at all, 5 = excellent)	0 1 2 3 4 5

Use the space below to share more about your practice of this subject with your child.

Please bring this form with you to class next week.

## APPENDIX 4

### FINAL-SERIES INTERVIEW ITEMS

These interview items were used to measure the fourth goal of this project.<sup>1</sup> The data collected illustrated the level of confidence participants have in their own spiritual life and the level of confidence they have in leading their children spiritually.

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<sup>1</sup> This survey was adapted from Toby Michael Havens, “Equipping Fathers at First Baptist Church, Sherwood, Arkansas to Be the Primary Disciple Makers in Their Families” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016).

## FINAL-SERIES INTERVIEW ITEMS

### **Agreement to Participate**

This form will identify the overall benefit you have gained as a result of completing the equipping series for leading your children. Chaplain McIntyre is conducting this research to collect data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. Your completion of this survey on the back of this page constitutes informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

**Item 1:** Describe your own spiritual life before you completed this series, and describe how you have changed because of this series.

**Item 2:** Describe the emphasis you placed on nurturing the faith of your children before you completed this series, and describe what has changed in the way you seek to nurture the faith of your family because of this series.

**Item 3:** Describe what faith-nurturing practices are continuing in your home since completing this series, and describe what faith-nurturing practices were initiated but have failed to continue. Explain why you think the practices ceased.

**Item 4:** Describe what has been the most significant positive change in the life of your family since you began to implement a Family Spiritual Growth Plan.

**Item 5:** Describe what has been the most challenging adjustment in your family life since you began to implement your Family Spiritual Growth Plan at home.

**Item 6:** What do you think will be the main obstacles that will potentially hinder the continuation of your Family Spiritual Growth Plan, and what will be the key to the continuation of your plan?

**Item 7:** What can we do to improve the program? What do you wish we had addressed in the curriculum? What did you feel was irrelevant in the curriculum?



## APPENDIX 5

### RESPONSES TO FINAL-SERIES INTERVIEW ITEMS

These responses to the Final-Series Interview Items are written exactly as they were submitted. There was no attempt made to correct the spelling or grammar.

### Responses to Final-Series Survey Items

Item	Responses
<p>Describe your own spiritual life before you completed this series and describe how you have changed because of this series.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have a better understanding of how to communicate.</li> <li>• It supported my faith in how a godly father should train his children in the Lord.</li> <li>• I've always been a believer but now this series helped me see a lot of things I couldn't see before, like for example the impact of my father growing up without his father had on me.</li> <li>• I have been having trouble building with my children, but through this course, I have been able to reach one at a time.</li> <li>• Because we thank God each and every day</li> <li>• To look at things differently</li> <li>• It was difficult. When I came here and took this class, it brought me closer to God himself and I felt like it shouldn't have to take for me to come to jail to do this.</li> </ul>
<p>Describe the emphasis you placed on nurturing the faith of your children before you completed this series and describe what has changed in the way you seek to nurture the faith of your family because of this series.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be more understanding and teach more</li> <li>• More Scriptures I have learned that will be helpful for training them</li> <li>• I barely touched the subject in the past. This class helped me see how important it is to teach.</li> <li>• Before my children was all over the place. Now they would sit down and listen.</li> <li>• Because we learn each &amp; every day to become better people</li> <li>• Can't really describe that right now</li> <li>• Well, I really didn't find out I had a child until I come here. It motivated me a lot.</li> </ul>

Item	Responses
<p>Describe what faith-nurturing practices are continuing in your home since completing this series and describe what faith-nurturing practices were initiated but have failed to continue. Explain why you think the practices ceased.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just practicing and learning more.</li> <li>• Continue Bible studies</li> <li>• We barely touched the subject in the past. This will change. I will prioritize prayer and praise as a family.</li> <li>• Teach them how God works on everyday problems.</li> <li>• Because we have let our families down by doing wrong</li> <li>• Discipline</li> </ul>
<p>Describe what has been the most significant positive change in the life of your family since you began to implement a Family Spiritual Growth Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They have become more trusting and willing to listen to me</li> <li>• Love</li> <li>• We will start from now on</li> <li>• My children wants to know more about how God working with me in my journey</li> <li>• That we all came together to help in our problems.</li> <li>• Going to see how it plays out when I get out</li> <li>• I intend to do better</li> </ul>
<p>Describe what has been the most challenging adjustment in your family life since you began to implement your Family Spiritual Growth Plan at home.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For me to listen to them and their needs</li> <li>• For them to receive and apply the Word of God</li> <li>• Looking forward to doing this</li> <li>• Talking to them about the Bible of the jail phone.</li> <li>• Everything came along &amp; help out to show that we can stick together</li> <li>• Going to see how it plays out when I get out</li> <li>• Understanding to see if I'm progressing and going to make a difference</li> </ul>
<p>What do you think will be the main obstacles that will potentially hinder the continuation of your Family Spiritual Growth Plan, and what will be the key to the continuation of your plan?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overlooking the process, keeping some type of record. Signs to remind us if we're slacking.</li> <li>• That we continuation to stick together through our lives.</li> <li>• To do better and to mean it</li> </ul>

Item	Responses
<p>What can we do to improve the program?            What do you wish we had addressed in the curriculum? What did you feel was irrelevant in the curriculum?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maybe a little more than an hour per session.</li> <li>• We all can come together and help each and every one</li> <li>• Nothing. I felt we did everything. I feel like I just need to do better.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 6

### SURVEY OF BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF FATHERHOOD- UNCORRECTED

The following survey will be utilized to evaluate the participants' understanding concerning the biblical role of the father to accomplish the first goal of this project.<sup>1</sup> It will be administered at the beginning and the end of the course to measure participants' improvement in understanding and in applying biblical principles.

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<sup>1</sup> This survey was adapted from James Benjamin Bowden, "Equipping the Men of First Baptist Church of Enterprise, Alabama to Be Gospel-Centered Leaders in Their Homes" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016). This was the uncorrected version the inmates encountered at the first session.

## PRE- AND POST-SERIES SURVEY

### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate will identify your current understanding and practices of spiritual leadership. Chaplain McIntyre is conducting this research to collect data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project, and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Personal Identification Number: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please put your Register Number)

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

### Part 1

4. Do you consider yourself a Christian?

Yes  No

5. Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation?

Yes  No

6. What is your age in years? \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 2

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a check mark by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree. Please circle the appropriate answer.

12. I am an effective spiritual leader of my home.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

13. I desire to lead my family well.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

14. I have a biblical vision for spiritually leading my wife/partner and children.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

15. I have a plan of action (steps I will take) for spiritually leading my wife/partner and children.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

16. My spiritual health directly impacts my ability to lead my family spiritually.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

17. If asked, I could communicate the gospel.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

18. I could instruct another man on how to be the spiritual leader of his home.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

19. I read my Bible (check only one)

\_\_\_ A. more than once per day

\_\_\_ C. several times per week

\_\_\_ B. once per day

\_\_\_ D. once per week

E. several times per month

G. several times per year

F. once per month

H. not at all

14. I meditate on Scripture (check only one)

A. more than once per day

E. several times per month

B. once per day

F. once per month

C. several times per week

G. several times per year

D. once per week

H. not at all

15. I pray (check only one)

A. more than once per day

E. several times per month

B. once per day

F. once per month

C. several times per week

G. several times per year

D. once per week

H. not at all

16. I have a specific time set aside for prayer.

A. Yes

B. No

17. I most often pray for (check only one)

A. myself

C. friends

B. family

D. other

18. I most often pray (check only one)

A. at church

D. at work

B. at home

E. other

C. while traveling



**Part 3**

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a check mark by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree. Please circle the appropriate answer.

20. I am an effective spiritual leader for my children.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

21. I know the areas in which I need to be praying for my children.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

22. I use occasions of my children's sin to instruct them with the gospel.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

24. I instill in my children the value of reading the Bible and praying.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

25. I use everyday situations as opportunities to instruct my children with biblical principles.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

26. When I sin against my children, I express repentance and ask for their forgiveness.

SD D DS AS SD D DS AS

27. I find ways to pray with my children (choose only one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. more than once per day | <input type="checkbox"/> E. several times per month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. once per day           | <input type="checkbox"/> F. once per month          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. several times per week | <input type="checkbox"/> G. several times per year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. once per week          | <input type="checkbox"/> H. not at all              |

41. I find ways to read the Bible with my children (choose only one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. more than once per day | <input type="checkbox"/> E. several times per month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. once per day           | <input type="checkbox"/> F. once per month          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. several times per week | <input type="checkbox"/> G. several times per year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. once per week          | <input type="checkbox"/> H. not at all              |

42. I find ways to read Christian books to/with my children (choose only one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. more than once per day | <input type="checkbox"/> E. several times per month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. once per day           | <input type="checkbox"/> F. once per month          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. several times per week | <input type="checkbox"/> G. several times per year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. once per week          | <input type="checkbox"/> H. not at all              |

43. I find ways to lead my child in family worship (a specific time of Bible-reading and prayer) (check only one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. more than once per day | <input type="checkbox"/> E. several times per month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. once per day           | <input type="checkbox"/> F. once per month          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. several times per week | <input type="checkbox"/> G. several times per year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. once per week          | <input type="checkbox"/> H. not at all              |

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## ABSTRACT

### TRAINING CHRISTIAN MEN TO LEAD THEIR FAMILY WHILE INCARCERATED AT HAMPTON COUNTY DETENTION CENTER IN VARNVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

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Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Matthew D. Haste

The purpose of this project is to train, encourage, and develop fathers at Hampton County Detention Center in Varnville, South Carolina, to become godly examples to and biblical shepherds of their children with a view toward ending the cycle of hopelessness, lawlessness, and failure in their families.

Chapter 1 provides the context for the project and outlines the goals, rationale, and methods undergirding the proposed training. Chapter 2 examines Bible passages men should consider as they think about spiritual leadership in the home and develops a biblical theology for how fathers might approach growing as spiritual leaders. This chapter impresses upon men, even those who are incarcerated, the importance of finding ways to lead their children. Chapter 3 surveys the writings of various thought leaders concerning the importance and impact of fathers on their children. Specifically, materials related to the father-child relationship in the context of separation are examined and compared. Chapter 4 offers a summary of the curriculum utilized for twelve weekly meetings of training, equipping, and practicing. Chapter 5 offers an overview of the project findings, an assessment of the results, and a reflection upon proposed changes in future iterations of the project.

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AS, University of Phoenix, 1998

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Chaplain, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, Camp Pendleton, California, 2010–2013

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