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EQUIPPING PARENTS AT NORTHEAST PARK BAPTIST  
CHURCH IN EVANSVILLE, INDIANA, FOR FAMILY  
DISCIPLESHIP

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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  
Steven Michael Taylor  
December 2018

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING PARENTS AT NORTHEAST PARK BAPTIST  
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Steven Michael Taylor

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Timothy Paul Jones (Faculty Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Shane W. Parker

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To my wife, Kathy, who has been my best friend through all of life's adventures for thirty amazing years. May we continue to raise our daughters to know the Lord, to know His commands, and love Him all the days of their lives.

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## PREFACE

My journey into family discipleship started long before I even knew there was something called family discipleship. It began with my father and mother, Bruce and Sharon Taylor, who not only took me to church whenever the doors were open but talked about the Scriptures around the house as if they were normal topics of conversation. I still go to them with spiritual questions.

The faculty of Southern Seminary first shaped my ministry during studies toward my Master of Divinity degree. Most of those professors have since left the seminary but I am especially grateful for Dr. Robert Stein, who taught me “meaning belongs to the author,” and Dr. Daniel Block, who increased my love for the Old Testament.

Southern Seminary has now blessed me a second time. My gratitude extends to Dr. John David Trentham, Dr. Stuart Scott, and Dr. Shane W. Parker. However, words cannot possibly express my gratitude to Dr. Timothy Paul Jones. Thank you for not only being my instructor and my doctoral supervisor, but for giving me guidance in this project. Plus, you are correct; the greatest Christmas movie of all time is *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Apart from my faith in Christ, I thank God for Kathy Taylor more than anyone else. She convinces me I am capable of doing far more than I ever believed possible. She runs the race with excellence, and I am blessed to have her by my side. Thank you for raising two beautiful young ladies by my side.

Steve Taylor

Evansville, Indiana

December 2018

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Parents are charged by Scripture to teach their children who God is and what God has done. This command was given specifically to both Israel in the Old Testament and to all Christian parents in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> While this command is directed primarily to parents, many children are being taught more about God by the church than by their own parents who have handed this job off to paid professionals. When looking at the current state of biblical literacy and comprehension of the children and youth that regularly attend Northeast Park Baptist Church, it becomes clear that one to four programs a week at church are not successfully accomplishing the task of fully discipling children. Parents need to be equipped by the church to fulfill the commands of God and disciple their children.

#### **Context**

This ministry project was performed with families of Northeast Park Baptist Church (NEPBC) in Evansville, Indiana. Four realities at NEPBC were relevant to this project. First, there were no family discipleship programs offered by the church. The discipleship strategy at the church consisted of an age-segregated Sunday school hour, corporate worship, and age-segregated Wednesday evening Bible studies. Yet, none of these activities coordinated with one another in effort to ensure the full counsel of Scripture was taught. These discipleship times separated families and had no emphasis on either bringing the family together or equipping parents to teach their children. Students

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<sup>1</sup>This command to Israel is seen in Deut 6:7 and the command to all believing fathers is given by Paul in Eph 6:4.

were learning different lessons than their parents, met in different parts of the facilities, and had no structured plan to ensure major teachings of the Bible were being covered. NEPBC had grown into Stuart Cummins-Bond's "one-eared Mickey Mouse."<sup>2</sup> The "one-eared Mickey Mouse" effect is seen when the youth ministry of the church acts as a separate ministry group that is only loosely attached to the rest of the church body. While both the adult members of NEPBC and the youth were both considered a part of the same organization, the activities, goals, and functions of the two groups were separated. Separate activities were planned for the youth whenever the adults planned something so "there would be something for the kids."

The second reality stemmed from circumstances that occurred twelve years ago. Trouble arose between the congregation and the senior pastor. The pastor was dismissed. The youth pastor left and took a job at another local church. Many families followed him while other families left to find different congregations, and a once thriving youth ministry was left with less than a handful of young people. Currently, there is a newly growing core group of youth attending weekly activities. New families have come into the church with younger children. The church now has regular influence into the lives of thirty children aged four through seventeen. These thirty children represent almost one-third of the regular attendance of NEPBC.<sup>3</sup> Some of these students have parents that are unbelievers or are recent converts. These parents never experienced a model of home discipleship. Some are very new believers and are still learning the biblical stories and reported feeling incapable of explaining a biblical passage to their children.

Third, busyness has overwhelmed many parents at NEPBC. It can be an

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<sup>2</sup>Stuart Cummings-Bond, "The One-Eared Mickey Mouse," *YouthWorker Journal* (Fall 1989), 76.

<sup>3</sup>This figure comes from a comparison of the youth who come to Sunday school and/or Wednesday evening Bible Studies to the number of attenders in the Sunday morning worship service.

ongoing challenge to fit in a regular program of family worship between soccer practice, music lessons, extra-curricular activities, birthday parties, community gatherings and more. NEPBC does not face this challenge alone. *Family Ministry Field Guide* reports from the FamilyLife study that over half of parents surveyed reported never or rarely engaging in any type of family devotional time.<sup>4</sup> These findings were from surveying church attending families. Coordinating the busy schedules of parents and children becomes overwhelming. In a survey done by the Gheens Center for Christian Family Ministry, two-thirds of parents disclosed family devotions were not a priority in their day-to-day schedules.<sup>5</sup> Timothy Paul Jones writes, “Parents perceive accomplishments in sports and schooling as their children’s pathway to present popularity and future financial success. As a result, athletics and academics define parents’ designs for their children’s lives.”<sup>6</sup> In a 2009 Lifeway Research survey, the top parenting goals for children were to give them good values and to raise them to be “happy adults”; only 9 percent mentioned being “godly” or “having faith in God.”<sup>7</sup> When developing faith in God is not a top priority, family discipleship will not be a top priority.

Fourth, NEPBC does not employ a professional youth or family minister and has no current plans to do so in the near future. The church budget simply does not provide resources for hiring someone to this area of ministry. Ministry is not only for professionals. Parents must be fully equipped to disciple their own children. Even if a minister were soon to be hired, the charge would still fall upon the parents to disciple their children. Some parents believe churches are responsible for teaching religion and

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<sup>4</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 27.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>7</sup>Mark Kelly, “Lifeway Research Looks at Role of Faith in Parenting,” March 24, 2009, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-looks-at-role-of-faith-in-parenting>.

schools are responsible for teaching secular education. These parents can come to see their role in discipleship as transporting their children to facilities so paid professionals can do their jobs. Parents, not paid professionals, are charged by God to bring up their children in the knowledge and fear of the Lord (Ps 78:1-8, Deut 6:6-9). The church should be involved in the discipleship of the next generation, but it must guide parents to see their own home as a critical area of their ministry.

### **Rationale**

Equipping parents to be the primary disciplers of their children is needed at NEPBC first and foremost because it is a biblical concept. The Scriptures teach parental responsibility in the raising of children to know the mighty works of God. If there were no other reason to have implemented this project than that it brought NEPBC into biblical compliance, that reason alone would have been sufficient. This project was not done to attempt to retain children in the church after graduation. This project was not done to take part of the burden of discipling children off the church. It was done because NEPBC was not equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry. It was failing to equip parents to disciple their own children. The church was viewed as the disciple-making hub for children more than the home. Some parents at NEPBC acknowledged their responsibility to disciple their children with their mouths, but they also stated they were not even consistently praying with their children at home.

Equipping parents to be the primary disciplers of their children also addressed challenges NEPBC faces. It addressed the issue of biblical illiteracy seen in NEPBC students. When one talked with students and asked basic biblical questions, it was not uncommon to get blank stares and confused answers. Children could be enabled to grow more quickly in their understanding of foundational biblical truths if they were being taught these truths by their parents on a regular basis. Martin Luther believed youth ministry began at home and wrote, "If ever the church is to flourish again, one must begin

by instructing the young.”<sup>8</sup> When parents take the lead in discipling their children, the church begins to reinforce what is taught at home and a firm foundation is developed for children to face the future armed with the words of God.

Parents who do not understand their role as the primary disciplers of their children will not seek to make time in their busy schedules to fulfill that role. This misunderstanding of their role leads parents to have no hesitation filling up their children’s time with all sort of activities. Parents will persist in having calendars hostile to disciple-making their children until they are taught and believe the critical call on their lives to make the necessary time. The amount of time that a child spends at church is miniscule compared to the amount of time the parents have access to them. Opportunities to disciple a child are wasted when parents do not intentionally seek to take them.

Many of the volunteers at NEPBC are the parents of children. While some have grown up as believers, some volunteers are new Christians. This project was run in part to help ensure parental volunteers have a firm grasp on the major storyline of Scripture. The foundational truths Scripture guides parents to teach in the home are the same truths that must be taught in Sunday school classrooms. While this project did not benefit every teacher at NEPBC directly because not every teacher was a parent of a current student, pieces of the training offered to parents could easily be offered to every teacher. Some parts of the training would be more applicable to non-parental teachers than others, but foundational biblical doctrine is something every teacher in the church must be able to comprehend and teach.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip parents ages thirty to forty-five at

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<sup>8</sup>Martin Luther, preface to *The Small Catechism* (1529), trans. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, quoted in Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111.

Northeast Park Baptist Church in Evansville, Indiana, for family discipleship.

### **Goals**

Four goals were established for this ministry project. These goals reflected a step-by-step process necessary to reach the desired result of equipping parents to be able to disciple their children.

1. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship perceptions and practices of parents of students at Northeast Park Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that would equip parents to disciple their children more effectively.
3. The third goal was to equip parents at Northeast Park Baptist Church with the developed curriculum to engage in family discipleship.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a discipleship plan for intentional, ongoing family training.

The instruments used and the benchmarks for success are outlined in the following sections. Documentation of all materials used in the process is provided and evaluated for consideration not only of success but for future usefulness in the ongoing ministry to the parents of NEPBC.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology of the project included a pre-course survey, a post-course survey, and two evaluation rubrics.<sup>9</sup> The level of effectiveness of the project was determined by the success or failure of its four goals. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship perceptions and practices of parents at NEPBC. This goal was measured by administering a Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey

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<sup>9</sup>All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

(FDPPS) to parents before the course began.<sup>10</sup> This survey included questions concerning the parents' understanding of their role in their children's discipleship and their current family discipleship practices. The benchmark for success of this goal required a minimum of ten surveys returned and recorded.

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum to equip parents to more effectively disciple their children. The curriculum covered the biblical metanarrative including creation, fall, Israel, redemption, the church, and consummation. It also covered family discipleship practices such as parental responsibility, methods in leading a family worship experience, and an emphasis in a growing love for God as the motivation for continued obedience. This goal was measured by three ordained men to NEPBC, two staff members of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, and two local church pastors.<sup>11</sup> This expert panel utilized a rubric to measure biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of curriculum.<sup>12</sup> The benchmark for this goal to be considered successfully met was when each criterion had six of the seven reviewers agree the evaluation criterion met or exceeded sufficient level or higher. If an evaluation criterion had resulted in two or more reviewers marking it below sufficient level, then the curriculum would have been revised based on recommendations until it reached or exceeded the necessary score.<sup>13</sup>

The third goal was to equip parents at NEPBC with the developed curriculum

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<sup>10</sup>See appendix 2. This survey is taken from Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 216-17. Used by permission of the author.

<sup>11</sup>Ordained men who were also parents of students at NEPBC were excluded from the panel. Studying the curriculum before the course could skew the results.

<sup>12</sup>See appendix 1.

<sup>13</sup>Setting the goal at 100 percent agreement among reviewers would have led to a higher possibility of making a Type II error and rejecting an effective curriculum. Setting the goal too low (two people disagreeing would equal only 71 percent agreement) would increase the chance of a Type I error and believing the curriculum was effective when it was not. Protecting against one error increases the chance of making the other error. Arthur Aron, Elliot J. Coups, and Elaine N. Aron, *Statistics for Psychology*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 180.



to engage in family discipleship. The developed curriculum was utilized to teach parents over a six-week period during the normal Sunday school hour. Following the completion of the course, parents were invited to join two family-style meals that were served at the church. Each family was granted private use of a Sunday school classroom. These dinners were offered to give parents a dedicated time to practice sharing a biblical story with their children following a meal. The biblical passage was taught to the parents during the morning Sunday school hour. The spiritual leader of the home was encouraged to close the family meal by teaching the biblical passage to the family. The goal was measured by administering the FDPPS a second time to measure changes in family discipleship perception and practices. This goal was considered successful if the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-survey scores.

The fourth goal was to develop a discipleship plan for intentional ongoing family training. This plan outlines ways parents will be taught at NEPBC with an emphasis on sharing each lesson with their children and gives a weekly, monthly, and yearly plan to continue equipping parents for family discipleship. This goal was measured by the active deacons of NEPBC who utilized a rubric to evaluate the plan.<sup>14</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when each rubric met or exceeded sufficiency level. If the criteria fell below this level, then the strategic plan would be revised based on recommendations from the deacons until it reached or exceeded the necessary score.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project:

*Family discipleship.* Timothy Paul Jones defines discipleship as “a personal and intentional process in which one or more Christians guide unbelievers or less-mature

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<sup>14</sup>See appendix 3.

believers to embrace and apply the gospel in every part of their lives.”<sup>15</sup> In a family, the “one or more Christians” would be the parent(s). Considering this idea, family discipleship is the personal and intentional process used by parents to guide their children to embrace and apply the gospel in every part of their lives. For the purpose of this project, families with no school-aged children will not be considered.

*Curriculum.* Curriculum is defined as “a desired goal or set of values, which can be activated through a development process culminating in experiences for students.”<sup>16</sup>

Certain limitations affected this project. The first limitation was the honesty of the respondents to the FDPPS. Parents may not want to admit they have limited family discipleship practices. This limitation was addressed by making the surveys anonymous and only identified by a personal identification number chosen by each participant. The names of the participants are not shared in the study.

Another limitation of the study occurred due to the lack of attendance for each session. Some parents missed lessons. This limitation was addressed in three ways. First, the sessions were scheduled during a time most parents already regularly attended. Second, it was addressed by personally giving copies of the missed lessons to each participant and asking them to read through the material. It was also addressed by getting other members of the church to cover church responsibilities of the parents during the six-week course.

A delimitation of this project was to work with a group of parents aged thirty to forty-five. Using parents in this age range helped give a consistency to the sample group by drawing from people of the same generation. This delimitation helped to

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<sup>15</sup>Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 17.

<sup>16</sup>Jon Wiles and Joseph Bondi, *Curriculum Development: A Guide to Practice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 1998), 12.

remove a variance in results due to drastic generational differences. Other delimitations of the project involved the decision to only work with parents who currently had students that regularly attended NEPBC, and the eight-week time period needed for the six-week curriculum and the two weeks of dinners.

### **Conclusion**

God has called parents to disciple their children. He has called the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry leading to maturity (Eph 4:12). This project was an attempt to equip parents at NEPBC to carry out God's command to all parents. In chapter 2, the biblical mandate to make the mighty works of God known to the next generation will be examined.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CALL OF GOD TO RELAY HIS MIGHTY WORKS TO THE NEXT GENERATION

God intends the story of the mighty works he has done throughout history to be taught from one generation to the next. Fathers are charged with the responsibility of instructing their children to know these mighty works and all that God has commanded. The father's congregational leaders, other members of his congregation, and his wife are to come alongside him to enable him to effectively fulfill this God given role. An exegesis of the first eight verses of Psalm 78 reveals the use of corporate worship to instruct fathers and encourage their faithfulness at home for the benefit of future generations. The consequence of failure is a rebellious generation who forgets the Lord.

#### **Context of the Psalm**

A passage must always be kept in its proper context. Knowing who wrote a psalm may help to properly understand the psalm itself. The date of the psalm helps to place it within the history of Israel and explain why some events may not be included. For example, knowing that a psalm was written during the time of David would explain why it does not mention the exile. The authorship, dating, and genre of Psalm 78 will be examined for the purpose of better understanding its meaning.

#### **A Psalm of Asaph**

Psalm 78 is listed as a psalm of Asaph. An examination of the historical Asaph reveals a man who not only led worship in such a way as to teach God's commands to the nation of Israel but was also showed himself to be faithful. Asaph was the chief Levite in charge of the ministers appointed by David to serve before the ark of the covenant (1 Chr

16:4-7). When the ark was brought into Jerusalem, David tasked a group of Levites with invoking the Lord, giving him thanks, and leading his praise. These ministers served through music, including the use of the harp, lyre, cymbals, and trumpets. Their continued connection between serving in the sanctuary and the ministry of music is seen throughout the Chronicles.

Besides being the chief Levite over these musical ministers, Asaph is also referred to as “a seer” (2 Chr 29:30). His role as a prophet is not explored in Scripture beyond the psalms bearing his name. It will be seen in this psalm, however, that Asaph employs the prophetic voice using phrases commonly used by the prophets such as “my people” and “my teaching.” The exhortations Asaph delivers to his audience are more than mere suggestions for a better life. His words command devoted and loving obedience to a powerful God.

After Hezekiah became king, he cleansed the temple from Ahaz’s idolatry and restored right worship in the temple. He commanded the songs written by David and Asaph to be used in worship. Considering this historical incident, it comes as no surprise to see that just as there are psalms attributed to David in the canon, there is also a collection of psalms attributed to Asaph. Some scholars may challenge whether all the psalms that bear Asaph’s name were penned by the historical Asaph appointed by David to lead worship. This challenge should be answered as fully as is currently possible, so the richness of the author’s faithfulness can make his words more fully appreciated.

Liberal scholars such as C. H. Toy question whether Asaph was an actual historical person. If he had lived, they doubt him as the actual composer of the psalms attributed to him.<sup>1</sup> Doubt about Asaph’s historicity is unwarranted and to be rejected outright if one holds to the inerrancy of Scripture. To deny Asaph lived is to deny

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<sup>1</sup>Crawford Howell Toy, “On the Asaph-Psalms,” *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* (June 1886): 73.

multiple biblical accounts. Asaph is presented in a genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6:39. Braun lists nine different purposes for genealogies including its attempt to “demonstrate the legitimacy of an individual in his office or provide an individual of rank with connections to a worthy family or individual of the past.”<sup>2</sup> Asaph is being presented in this genealogy as one of the leaders of music in the house of the Lord. The genealogy connects Asaph to Levi. The historical reality of both Levi and Asaph are being declared through the use of this genealogy. Even Iain W. Provan, who accepts the possibility that Old Testament historical accounts might include fictive qualities, argues that references to Israel’s past must be regarded seriously.<sup>3</sup> One cannot faithfully separate the historical claims of the Scripture from the historical events and people upon which those events are based.

The purpose and message of Psalm 78 remain the same regardless of the actual author.<sup>4</sup> The psalm is divinely inspired and is not dependent on Asaph’s credentials. God could have used anyone to pen this psalm, but a richness is lost if one denies the authorship by the historical Asaph. The Old Testament speaks not only of the service of Asaph but also of the faithful service of his sons.<sup>5</sup> Asaph’s sons continued to serve the Lord faithfully and was seen serving at the return of Israel from exile. Understanding the psalm’s connection to Asaph and his sons’ later service in the temple leads to an appreciation of the psalm’s message. If Asaph did indeed pen Psalm 78, and the arguments are convincing that he did, then the faithful psalmist who prophetically charged the people of Israel to teach the mighty deeds of God to their children, faithfully

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<sup>2</sup>Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1986), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 6-10.

<sup>4</sup>Some scholars argue the possibility the psalms attributed to “Asaph” refer not to the man himself but to Asaph’s family. Still other scholars believe it may refer to a guild of singers or poets in a school of priests that took up the name “Asaph.” Today’s reader cannot know with complete certainty whether Psalm 78 was written by the historical man Asaph, by one of his descendants, or by a member of a guild of singers named after Asaph. It is the author’s belief that Asaph is the author of the psalm.

<sup>5</sup>1 Chr 25:1-6; 2 Chr 20:14; 2 Chr 29; Ezra 3:10.

taught the mighty deeds of God to his own children. These words of instruction were not being written or sung by a man unwillingly to personally heed his own teaching. It was written by a faithful Levite who would enjoy the blessing of having multiple generations of his sons serving before the ark, in the first temple, and in the second temple. Asaph did not hide the mighty works of God from his children, and his children passed the stories down to their children who also set their hope in God.

Reading through the collection of psalms that bear the name of Asaph reveals an important theme prominent in Psalm 78. In examining the psalms grouped together from Psalm 73 to Psalm 83, nine of the psalms directly use God's previous mighty works as a basis for praise, instruction, or hope.<sup>6</sup> This theme is especially noteworthy when one considers 1 Chronicles 16, where David sings a song in the hearing of the people when the ark of the covenant is returned, recounting the mighty deeds of the Lord and telling the people to declare God's works. Following David's song, Asaph is left to minister before the ark every day. Recognizing this theme in the Asaph psalms heightens the theme's use and elevates the exhortation to fathers in Psalm 78.

### **The Timeless Nature of Psalm 78**

There is not a consensus as to the dating of the psalm. Commentators suggest dates ranging from the time of David in the tenth century through the postexilic period. Those attributing this psalm to the historical Asaph must give it an early dating. This early date would help explain why the events recounted in the psalm only go through the reign of David. If the psalm were written early in the reign of David, it would easily explain the psalms stopping with the faithfulness of David and ignoring his failures.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>One could argue that ten of the psalms reference the mighty works as a basis for praise, as Ps 79 does not do so explicitly but refers to "God of our salvation" and declares from generation to generation the people will "recount" God's praise. The outlier in the group seems to be Ps 82.

<sup>7</sup>Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand

However, focusing on the events used by the psalmist alone would not be a strong argument for an early date. Many historical events may have been omitted because they would not further the psalmist's arguments. Later historical details are also missing from the historical sections of the book of Hosea for the same reason.<sup>8</sup> Still, an early date seems to rightly explain historical accounts that are missing and honor the recognition of Asaph as the author.

Another argument against a later date is the absence of any mention of the exile. The occasion of the exile would perfectly fit the stated purpose of the psalm and emphasize the dangers of being a rebellious generation, yet it is missing from the psalm's historical review. Arguments from silence are admittedly weak. However, this argument combined with the attribution to Asaph and his connection with David make a strong argument for an early dating. Due to the stated purpose of the psalm, the dating is not critical to Asaph's objective. It is entirely possible that this psalm was used throughout Israel's history.<sup>9</sup> Speaking to the unknown date of this psalm, Ross writes, "Whatever the occasion for the psalm's composition, its message would have been relevant to the people of Israel of any time, especially the people of Judah who had been given the trust of the sanctuary."<sup>10</sup>

The very fact that the date is so hard to determine speaks to the universal nature of the psalm. The truth contained in the psalm is not a truth that is specific to only one generation. The lesson being taught by Asaph in Psalm 78 was just as important when he wrote it as it is important to the Christian reading it today. It would be a mistake

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Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 650.

<sup>8</sup>Martin J. Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82, no. 4 (December 1963): 385.

<sup>9</sup>Nancy Delaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 617.

<sup>10</sup>Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 650.



to believe the exhortations of Psalm 78 were for those under the Mosaic covenant and not for the modern believer. The apostle Paul clearly teaches the events discussed in this psalm are events that are useful in the instruction of Jew and Gentile alike in 1 Corinthians 10:1-6. This connection will be explored in detail later in this chapter.

### **A Mixture of Genres**

Just as scholars differ on the dating of the psalm, they also differ about how to classify the psalm. The major classifications of the psalm refer to it as either historical or didactic. Tate surveys commentators' classifications of Psalm 78 and finds,

Maillot and Lelièvre, Schmidt, and Sabuorin view it as at least partly a historical psalm with affinities to the wisdom genre because of its narrative nature and a stated purpose of educating the next generation. Dahood, Mowinckel, Briggs, Carroll, and Weiser are among those who consider the psalm to be didactic.<sup>11</sup>

The reality is this psalm is both. Asaph presents history but not with the intention of giving an initial presentation of the historical details to the congregation. The psalmist claims the audience has already been told the historical events recorded in the psalm by their fathers. The psalm is didactic in nature using the story of Israel's history as the vessel carrying the truth that needs to be taught and understood. It is only in uniting together the didactic and historical classifications that the reader begins to be able to rightly interpret this psalm.

A helpful way to understand the genre of this psalm would be to view its purpose as one would view the purpose of a catechism today. Catechism does not seek only to convey knowledge to children; it strives to help children memorize truths that will guide the child throughout his life in the proper way to live. The psalmist has the same objective. Greenstein argues the psalmist is not trying to simply recount history but to

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<sup>11</sup>Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 284.

bring about a remembrance that leads to change.<sup>12</sup> Asaph is drawing upon the fact the audience's fathers taught these mighty deeds of God to them, and he is building his argument upon those shared teachings. The psalm is not a question-and-answer catechism. Yet, like many Old Testament question-and-answer catechisms, it builds upon the themes that were vital for Israel's understanding of their relationship with the Lord.<sup>13</sup> Asaph opens the pages of history to demonstrate the critical importance of teaching the next generation to trust and obey the Lord. He exhorts them to teach their children in the same way they were taught the stories of their faith by their fathers.

The use of stories in instruction is an important tool commanded by God himself. God commanded fathers to use the stories of the exodus in the Passover celebration.<sup>14</sup> The telling of stories holds together traditions and values. McMillion states, "Stories bind a community together, they also shape and preserve what is important for a community to remember and to pass on to the next generation."<sup>15</sup> As catechism strives to ensure the next generation knows the truth of God's works, so Asaph strives to bring to memory that which his audience was taught when they were children. McMillion writes about Psalm 78:

Teaching is involved, but it is teaching in a specific and limited religious setting with a particular purpose in mind. A catechism intends to train initiates in the facts necessary for their growth and development in the faith, but also in how to understand those facts in the proper way. A catechism must present not only the facts, but also the meaning behind those facts. In the faith of Israel, those two elements were always closely bound together. One never gets "just the facts" without the meaning or the message those facts are meant to convey.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Edward L. Greenstein, "Mixing Memory and Design: Reading Psalm 78," *Prooftexts* 10, no. 2 (1990): 197.

<sup>13</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 83.

<sup>14</sup>Exod 12:26; 13:14.

<sup>15</sup>Phillip McMillion, "Psalm 78: Teaching the Next Generation," *Restoration Quarterly* 43 (2001): 219.

<sup>16</sup>McMillion, *Psalm 78*, 221.

The reader cannot separate the didactic intention of the psalmist from its historical context. If the audience of the psalm is unaware of the history, then the impact of the lesson is missed, and the truth is not learned. The stories of the faith must be shared if the faith itself is to be shared. The effectiveness of stories will be explored more in chapter 3.

The reader must not forget that even though Asaph offers a rebuke of a previous generation and is setting out to teach the audience, this composition is a psalm. Its purpose is not understood and experienced solely in the office of the scholar but in its presentation within public worship. The use of the first-person plural throughout the first eight verses calls the congregation together to make their commitment. It is a constant reminder to today's reader that the psalm finds its natural use when read or sung publicly. Asaph did not intend his words be read in isolated study but to be heard poetically and musically in the public worship of God. C. S. Lewis persuasively argues,

Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems, as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems if they are to be understood; no less than French must be read as French or English as English. Otherwise we shall miss what is in them and think we see what is not.<sup>17</sup>

Just as a technical manual is not written to be sung, a psalm is not written merely to be read in the mind. A psalm needs to be heard.

Today's reader must recognize the use of poetry as an attempt to do more than pass along information. If giving information was the only purpose of Psalm 78, then the use of poetry would be highly inefficient. Instead, the priest/prophet/poet attempts to guide the hearer to become a participant in the author's experience.<sup>18</sup> By setting this teaching as a psalm to be used in public worship, Asaph moves beyond a single father making a private commitment to teach his son. Each father is transformed into a public

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<sup>17</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 3.

<sup>18</sup>Daniel J. Estes, "Psalm 78:1-8 as a Musical Intertext of Torah and Wisdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173, no. 691 (July-September 2016): 307.

gathering for a joint commitment to obey the command of God as together they proclaim, “We will not hide them from their children.” Estes contends, “The inclusion of Psalm 78 in the Psalter implies that it was performed in the worship of Yahweh by the ancient Israelites. As part of the Christian scriptural canon, Psalm 78 continues to be part of the repertoire for the people of God today.”<sup>19</sup> Fathers today are not teaching their children in isolation. Faithful men are joining together with the faithful fathers of every generation to carry out the desire of God to make his mighty deeds known.

### **The Prophetic Voice**

Psalm 78 begins with a call for the audience to “give ear” to the teaching of the psalmist. Prophets employed this style of language. This call can be found in Deborah’s Song, Job, the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Joel.<sup>20</sup> Most notably, it is language employed in the Song of Moses spoken in the hearing of the people found in Deuteronomy 32. The Song of Moses is a song by the prophet Moses containing strong parallels to this psalm. Both recount the works of God to their audience with the intention of giving a spiritual lesson warning against not remembering God and the consequences associated with rebellion.

The call to “give ear” moves beyond simple listening to the voice of the prophet. It demands obedience to the lesson being taught. As a prophetic psalm, the singer of the psalm itself is to be in view. It is not a song sung by any individual for personal expression.<sup>21</sup> This fact is an even stronger argument for the prophet Asaph as the author. When Asaph employs the phrase “give ear,” he desires more than to be heard. He desires his words to be obeyed. The phrase “give ear” can clearly be seen to mean

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 311.

<sup>20</sup>The usage in Job is not by a prophet but by Elihu. While Elihu was no prophet, he was attempting to give wise counsel in the stead of God as a prophet would give.

<sup>21</sup>Buss, “Psalms of Asaph and Korah,” 391.

obedience in Nehemiah 9:30 where the people had been warned by the prophets, but they would not “give ear.” The result of disobedience was God’s handing them over to other nations. Asaph warns the psalm’s audience of the consequences if they would hear his words but did not “give ear” to his teaching.

Continuing to speak as a prophet, Asaph refers to his audience with the terms “my people” and refers to “my teaching.” Given that Israel is God’s chosen people and God’s laws are being taught it would be tempting to ascribe the psalm as the being spoken by the Lord, but this is unnecessary. It was not uncommon for the people of God to identify other Israelites as “my people.”<sup>22</sup> This intimate language draws the audience close to the prophet and his words.

Asaph also speaks with the language of the teacher. Teachers in the Scriptures often employed the phrase “my law” or “my teaching.” Some instances include not only Proverbs 3:1; 4:2; and 7:2 but can be extended to include Paul’s reference to “my gospel” in Romans 2:16; 16:25; and 2 Timothy 2:8.<sup>23</sup> The usage of this language by different speakers does not imply the message being proclaimed is a message of their own device and remove its divine origin. Referring to the message as “my teaching” means only that it is being taught by them. God uses human agents to proclaim divine truth. Asaph is teaching his audience. His audience is to go and teach their children. Their children would later refer to the teaching of their fathers. The truth is completely from God regardless the speaker.

Asaph declares his teaching will come in parables (*mashal*) and riddles, or dark sayings. The term *mashal* is used almost equally in wisdom texts and prophetic texts.<sup>24</sup> It

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<sup>22</sup>A few examples include Gen 49:29; Judg 12:2; Ruth 4:4; Esth 7:3-4.

<sup>23</sup>W. S. Plumer, *Psalms*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (1867; repr., Chelsea, MI: Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 746.

<sup>24</sup>Estes, “Psalm 78:1-8 as a Musical Intertext of Torah,” 301.

is a term used in multiple contexts. Kirkpatrick sees four ways *mashal* is used but prefers in this instance the usage of a teaching by comparison.<sup>25</sup> Robert Stein states the term *mashal* can refer to a proverb, satire or taunt, riddle, figurative saying, extended simile, story parable, example parable or an allegory.<sup>26</sup> Ross states “a parable is a teaching based on analogy.”<sup>27</sup> Sometimes the parable is a single expression, and other times the parable is a complete story. Stein emphasizes that even though a parable comes in many forms, basic to all those forms is a comparison between two things and should be interpreted by looking for a single common point of comparison.<sup>28</sup> It is dangerous to draw multiple conclusions from a single parable. The parable should never be pressed beyond the intention of the author of the parable. In this psalm, Asaph compares the forgetfulness of a generation and their stubborn rebellion against God. This comparison serves simultaneously as a warning and an encouragement to each father present.

The parallel in this psalm to *mashal* is *chidah* which the ESV translates “dark sayings.” In other places in the ESV, such as Proverbs 1:6, the same word is translated “riddles.” Riddles often reveal a type of paradox that exists within reality.<sup>29</sup> There is a great riddle presented in this psalm, though not explicitly stated. The great riddle is the continued rebellion of the people of Israel despite all the wonders of God they had witnessed. The answer to this riddle reveals the purpose of the psalm. The answer is the sad realization that while the congregation may know the stories from the past, they have not understood their implications. It is the job of the psalmist to explain the meaning of

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<sup>25</sup>A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 269.

<sup>26</sup>Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 137.

<sup>27</sup>Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 654.

<sup>28</sup>Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 140.

<sup>29</sup>Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 281.

the events in question as his congregation reexamines the teaching of their fathers. Perowne argues that the use *marshal* and *chidah* refers to the psalmist's objective of bringing from history truths that are veiled with a significance that is only available to those who would rightly hear or read those truths.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus employed this method of teaching to reveal the truth to some and hide the truth from others. Matthew's citation of Psalm 78:2 in reference to Jesus' teachings in Matthew 13:35 supports Perowne's argument. As God has revealed himself through the moments of history, his people must learn from the retelling of these events from generation to generation. The psalmist intends to teach a truth that can be known but is missed by those who have ears but do not hear. Fathers must hear and heed his teaching.

Shifting from the first-person singular to first-person plural, Asaph pronounces that the congregation will not hide the things taught to them by their fathers from their children. Why would any father attempt to hide a lesson from God? Why would the psalmist declare something so evident? He is not. Asaph announces his intention of declaring the truths that are supposed to be declared. Hiding the truth from someone does not only include active deception or intentionally withholding information. Hiding the truth also includes a passive neglect to teach what must be taught. Asaph's declaration assumes the idea that the one who does not teach the truths God has commanded him to teach is counted as one who would intentionally and actively hide something from his child. Neglecting to teach the works of God to the next generation has the same effect as actively hiding the truth from them. Plumer quotes "Scott": "It is awful to think how many parents, by their negligence and wickedness, become the murderers of the souls of their children."<sup>31</sup> Asaph is declaring that not only will he teach his audience, but his audience will join with him in obedience to God's command and teach their children.

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<sup>30</sup>J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (1878; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 59.

<sup>31</sup>W. S. Plumer, *Psalms*, 758.

Asaph reveals the source material from which he has drawn, and it is a shared past familiar to the audience. These events are not new ideas to either the psalmist or the audience. Asaph has developed his lesson based upon the teachings the hearers' fathers have already made known to them. Asaph's work is to build upon the foundation that has been laid by faithful fathers.

### **Centrality of fathers**

The question must be answered as to how Asaph uses the term "fathers." Is this a case where "fathers" refers to an historical generation or is the reference to familial fathers? Context will need to determine Asaph's meaning as both usages can be found in the Scriptures. The term "fathers" is used three times in the first eight verses of Psalm 78, and the term "children" (literally *sons*) is found four times. Looking at these terms in context reveals the referent of the term "fathers."

The first use of "fathers" is found in verse 3 about the things "our fathers told us." By itself, this reference could be referring to the generation as a whole, or to men who serve as the head of a household. Light begins to be shed on the fullness of its meaning when considered with the use of "children" in verse 4. The psalmist refuses to hide the glorious deeds of God from "*their* children." This language would be unnecessarily intimate if Asaph was only desiring to refer to the generation as a whole. Asaph links together three generations using the idea of definitive familial ties. He speaks not of the desire to teach his own children, though that is what he is doing, but passing on the teaching of his father to his father's grandchild. Even if the generation is being referenced as a unit, the psalmist refuses to sever the responsibility from individual fathers to teach their own specific children. Daniel Block demonstrates that multiple generations would live together under the authority of a single father serving as the head



of house.<sup>32</sup> This arrangement would mean that a father would likely teach his children under the watchful eye of his own father.

The second use of “fathers” occurs in verse 5 and further supports the concept of individual fathers being referenced. The psalmist refers to the Lord’s command for fathers to teach their children which is found throughout Deuteronomy. These instances contain not only the idea of teaching a single generation but the repetition of the command for the benefit of multiple generations being taught the mighty works of God. Each father is called upon to teach all their children what God has done.

The third use of “fathers” seems to expand upon how the term is used. In verse 8, the “fathers” are referred to as a stubborn and rebellious generation. This usage is not looking at each individual family unit but the collective group of fathers who together did not do what the Lord commanded. It is in this third usage that the full weight of what the psalmist is communicating should be understood. For a single father to fail to teach his children the ways of the Lord would be devastating for his children. For a collection of fathers to fail to teach their children the ways of the Lord would be devastating for a generation. The psalmist is crying out to fathers of an entire generation to individually teach their children for the benefit of the children, the entire generation, and for the benefit of generations to come.

It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of fathers in ancient Israel. While frequently glossed over by modern readers, genealogies run throughout the Old Testament, connecting person after person to his father. When speaking of death, the Scriptures stated a man was not merely buried but that he “slept with his fathers” (1 Kgs 2:10, 11:43, 14:31, 22:40). A woman left the house of her father when she married to be a part of the house and care of her new husband. Block convincingly argues that the society

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<sup>32</sup>Daniel I. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 38-39.

in Israel should be characterized by the term *patricentrism*.<sup>33</sup> Societal structures radiated out from the fathers. Fathers oversaw multi-generational houses, which together made clans, which together made tribes, which together made the nation of Israel.<sup>34</sup> When this structure is considered, there are great implications for the psalm being studied.

First, this structure of Israelite society demonstrates why it is impossible to consider Asaph's use of "fathers" as either an entire generation or simply individual fathers. Such a distinction might carry weight in the present Western society but would be a nonsensical separation in a *patricentric* society. A father's refusal to follow the command of Asaph would not only affect his own children but all who lived in his house. This would include multiple generations of children, their wives, and their servants. This neglect would have a large impact on multiple generations.

Second, this structure helps the reader to understand why the important task of teaching children is placed upon the father. If Block is correct, and he seems to be, then fathers should not be thought of as the head of a house simply as a ruler over the home but in relation to his responsibilities toward those under his care. The role of theological education of the child is central to a father's responsibilities to his family. Asaph calls for fathers to be faithful to the charge God has given them as the head of the household.

Finally, Asaph's command to fathers is not merely a duty to be done out of mindless obedience but from a love for God. Moses charged Israel to teach their children about God in Deuteronomy 6, but he did so only after commanding them to love God with all their heart, soul, and might. A desire to see coming generations be faithful to God is declared throughout Psalm 78:1-8. This declaration is not only for the benefit of the coming generation, but it is the outpouring of love that desires all people to show faithfulness to God. An obedience that springs from love is sweeter than obedience for

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<sup>33</sup>Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 41.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 35.

the sake of obedience.

Love for God is the primary motivation for teaching the next generation, but teaching the next generation was a responsibility that affected the lives of every Israelite. The ability of God's people to remain in the land was based on Israel's faithful observance of the covenant. In the Ten Commandments, the call to honor the father and mother was commanded with the blessing of living long in the land God was giving them. Moses, after teaching the people with what is referred to as the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, declared in verses 46 and 47, "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." Moses and Asaph words demonstrate that children must be taught the law of God for the well-being of all Israel.

The weight of the command to instruct children has been placed upon the shoulders of fathers. Asaph reiterates this truth in verses 3 and 5. Mothers, however, are also to be involved in this instruction. Wisdom literature is filled with exhortations to sons to listen to the teachings of their parents. Proverbs repeats this charge in 1:8; 4:1-3; 6:20; 13:1; and 15:5. Fathers are typically the parent emphasized, but the mother's instruction is placed in parallel in 1:8 and in 6:20 demonstrating that fathers alone should not be viewed as the teacher of the child.

This joint effort in teaching children finds its roots in creation. After God created man, he created woman to be a helper for him. Köstenberger states about the creation of woman that the role of helper "sums up her very reason for existence in relation to the man."<sup>35</sup> She is to assist him in carrying out the duties and functions given

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<sup>35</sup>Andreas Kostenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 26.

to him by God. This role would naturally include the teaching of God's commands to the next generation. Asaph singles out the fathers as responsible, but this proclamation in the psalm does not negate the commands given to all Israel found in other parts of the Old Testament such as Deuteronomy.

All of Israel is called to teach their children in Deuteronomy 4-6. Deuteronomy 4:9 states all the things the people of Israel have seen with their eyes should be taught to their children and grandchildren. There is no designation that only men should speak of these things to their children. The expectation is for all Israel to relay the works of God to the next generation. In Deuteronomy 6, all Israel was charged to diligently teach their children. This instruction happened both in and out of the home and was a regular topic of conversation. It is inconceivable to imagine mothers not being involved in supporting her husband by teaching such important truths to their children.

The New Testament continues to demonstrate the role of mothers in teaching things of the faith to their children. Not much is known about Timothy's family, but what is revealed highlights the role of his maternal family. Timothy's father was a Greek who had not circumcised his son. The faith of Timothy's grandmother and mother are mentioned as certain fact by Paul in 2 Timothy. The home where Timothy was raised could not have been a typical pious Jewish home, for Timothy's mother had married a Greek and did not have her son circumcised.<sup>36</sup> Despite the lack of these Jewish distinctives, Timothy had grown up knowing the Scriptures. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:14-15, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Paul emphasizes to Timothy the reality of being brought up with

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<sup>36</sup>William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 471.

knowledge of the Scriptures, and the profit that comes from this knowledge. Timothy was trained by his grandmother and mother and is now to pass on this knowledge to other men who can teach other men. The recital of the mighty works of God was to continue.

### **The Mighty Deeds of God**

Now that the character and nature of the author has been explored, the genre examined, and the intended audience evaluated, the purpose of the psalm must be made clear. This endeavor is not difficult as Asaph explicitly explains the purpose of his teaching. He declares the purpose of the psalm in verses 4 through 8. Asaph implores his audience to make known “the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done” to the coming generation. Not only must they declare deeds of God, but they must teach their children the laws of God. He then shares the positive outcome of such instruction and the negative consequences of neglecting this command.

When reading the history presented by Asaph, the reader must be constrained by Asaph’s stated purpose of the recounting God’s deeds. Asaph wants each generation to teach the following generation the lessons from Israel’s past so that each future generation will place their confidence in God, remember the works of God, and obediently keep the law of God. This teaching will also guide the following generations away from being a stubborn and rebellious generation who are not loyal to God and are unfaithful to him as previous generations had been. To read other purposes into the psalm would run the risk of eisegesis.

The mighty acts of God demonstrate his faithfulness, steadfast love, grace, and mercy.<sup>37</sup> The psalmist is teaching the congregation that God is worthy for Israel to put their hope in him because even when Israel rebelled, God continued to bless them. He remained faithful to the covenant promises that he made to Abraham, Moses, and David.

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<sup>37</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 515.

When today's parents teach their children about the actions of God, they need to add God's faithfulness to bring about the new covenant in the person of Jesus Christ. The work of Christ is the greatest revelation of God's mighty deeds.

Understanding who God is requires that one think about what God has done. God reveals himself through Scripture, through his Son, and through his works in his creation. If a father wants to teach his child about the nature of God, he would do well to start with the works of God in nature. The exodus event gives ample opportunity to see how the Lord is over all creation in the plagues, the journey out of Egypt, and the wilderness miracles of God's provision. Psalm 77, the preceding psalm of Asaph, demonstrates how knowing the mighty deeds of God guides him to understand the nature of God when he is troubled in the night. He declares, "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds" (Ps 77:11-12). Then he looks to crossing of the Red Sea in the exodus to strengthen his confidence in God. Just as God's deeds in history cause Asaph to put his hope in God, those same deeds can guide the next generation to do the same thing.

Verse 5 shows a transition from teaching the things God has done to teaching the laws God has given. Both divine action and divine law are necessary to have a right understanding of God and living a life that is pleasing to him.<sup>38</sup> It is noteworthy that Asaph mentions the mighty deeds of God before mentioning the commandments throughout this psalm. His actions and his commandments are seen together in verses 4 and 5 and again in verse 7. This order reflects the order that God himself follows in the book of Exodus. It is not until he has demonstrated mighty deeds against Egypt and brings the people out of slavery with a strong hand that he gives them the Mosaic covenant and its laws. It is his mighty deeds of salvation that are the basis for the people

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<sup>38</sup>Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 288-89.

of Israel entering the covenant (Exod 20:2). Asaph proclaims the mighty deeds of God throughout this psalm stating that knowing what God has done will serve as the basis for the next generation not only hoping in God but also following his command.

A full examination of every verse of Psalm 78 is not in the purview of this chapter, but a simple reading of the text of the psalm demonstrates that most of its verses speak of the exodus and wilderness experience. The exodus event serves as a major tool to allow the people of God to understand his actions. Patterson and Travers trace the exodus motif through the Old and New Testaments and demonstrate how biblical authors use the exodus as a basis for much of Israel's religious life.<sup>39</sup> They state, "The exodus event is one of the archetypal narratives of the Bible for it informs the beginning, middle, and end of the biblical account of redemptive history."<sup>40</sup> Asaph uses the event that served as the basis for the Mosaic covenant as the backbone of his argument. Those who do not know history are truly doomed to repeat it.

The apostle Paul uses the wilderness wanderings in the same manner as Asaph. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul speaks of the drawing water from the rock and draws a spiritual connection to Jesus Christ. Then in verse 6 he wrote, "Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did." Thiselton argues the function of biblical texts is that of "spiritual and ethical formation" which may lead to or require "transformation."<sup>41</sup> Paul does not see the events in the wilderness only as a story to be learned and passed down to future generations of Israelites for the sake of head knowledge. He saw them as relevant to his day and necessary for his audience. The early Israelites lived through the wilderness events, but the meanings of the events should be

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<sup>39</sup>R. D. Patterson and M. Travers, "Contours of the Exodus Motif in Jesus' Earthly Ministry," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 66 no. 1 (2004): 25-47.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>41</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 731.

taught to each and generation.<sup>42</sup> Paul connected the lessons that should be drawn from history to a congregation containing Gentile believers. The messages and warnings contained in Israel's history are significant for the Gentile believers in Paul's day and in the current day as well. Paul uses the knowledge of God's mighty acts of redemption in the exodus and the subsequent rebellion and judgment "as a prism through which the Corinthians are to understand their own situation."<sup>43</sup> According to both Paul and Asaph, learning from history affects the desires of today. If one does not learn how God acted in the past, he will not have the heart that God desires for today. The individual who has not learned from the past will be guided by his naturally sinful heart and continue in wickedness and rebellion.

The events of the exodus are not the only mighty deeds to which Asaph makes his appeal. He also speaks of God's rejection of Ephraim and selection of the tribe of Judah and David as the faithful shepherd of Israel. David would care for God's people just as he had cared for sheep and nursing ewes. God brought this blessing to Israel despite Israel's recurring rebellion and disobedience. Asaph effectively used multiple moments from history to show Israel the reason every generation should place their hope in God.

Singling out these particular events does not preclude the use of other biblical events. Biblical authors did not include every detail of every story. They chose the necessary information to bring out the lesson currently being taught. Asaph does not teach his audience to only speak of the exodus and the choosing of David with their children. In another psalm of Asaph, he declares, "But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of *all your works*" (Ps 73:28,

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<sup>42</sup> F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (1953; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 223.

<sup>43</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 443-44.



emphasis added). Fathers are to make known all God has done and all God has commanded to their children. Omissions may have great consequences.

Asaph states negative consequences of fathers failing to teach their children the things of God. If the rising generation should “forget” God’s works they will become like the previous stubborn and rebellious generation and be unfaithful to God. They are to look to the past, not only for encouragement, but to learn what not to do.<sup>44</sup> Evidence from the history of Israel demonstrates how quickly the Israelites turn against God to follow the fears and passions of their hearts. God miraculously provided for one need in the wilderness only to have his people grumble about something else. Though they saw his mighty deeds, they would quickly forget them when faced with a new challenge. Lest they forget, and so that the next generation would know, Moses charged Israel to make talking about God’s deeds a daily occurrence.<sup>45</sup> They were to have objects around them every day to remember what God had done and commanded. It was to be the regular topic of conversation with one another, including the children. It is too easy to forget what God had done if his deeds are not rehearsed on regular occasions.

Psalm 78 reminds the audience of the consequences of being a stubborn and rebellious generation. The Lord filled with wrath against Israel (v. 21), he killed the strongest and laid low the young men (v. 31), he killed them (v. 34), rejected Israel (v. 59), forsook Shiloh (v. 60), and gave them over to captivity (v. 61). These are the consequences Asaph wants to spare coming generations. Even though God continued to bless Israel despite their rebellions, the wrath of God is vented at those whose hearts do not remain steadfast.

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<sup>44</sup>Declaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 622.

<sup>45</sup>Deut 4:9-14; 6:6-9, 20-25; 11:18-21.

### **The Impact of Psalm 78:1-8 on this Project**

Psalm 78 gives an impressive model for the church and families partnering together in the instruction of the next generation. It teaches (1) the importance of modeling what one proclaims, (2) teaching every generation the mighty works of God, (3) the freedom to use different styles, methods, and techniques to convey the message, (4) the benefit of teaching the next generation and the cost of failing to do so, (5) the responsibility that is upon the father, the mother, and the church, and (6) the importance of knowing the whole story.

The instruction of the next generation includes fathers and church leaders not only speaking of God but modeling this behavior in their lives. Asaph publicly proclaimed the works of God and exhorted the congregation to do the same. This public proclamation and challenge was made by one who himself faithfully instructed his children in the fear and knowledge of God. Today's leaders and fathers are called to do the same. Church leaders must not only teach their congregations to instruct the next generation; they must practice this behavior themselves in their own homes.

Every generation needs to learn the mighty works of God. The events will not, however, be limited to the couple of events used by Asaph. Asaph could only speak through the time of David, but today's leaders must include the mighty deeds of God through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. Asaph spoke with the language of the first exodus, displaying the rebellions of God's people without smoothing over their sin. Today's believer must show how that rebellion still existed in the time of Jesus, and it still happens today. The exodus wanderings and selection of David are major biblical themes included in the project's curriculum, but the discussion of all God has done would be incomplete for today's audience without a focus on God's faithfulness on display in the cross of Christ and the continuing work of the church.

Psalm 78 is a mixture of genres. It is a parable, based on history, told as a story, contained in a song. The plethora of genres contained in one psalm is a good

reminder that different genres convey truth in ways easier for different people to understand. Some learn best from reading reference manuals while others learn better through art. Presenting the teaching through multiple genres and encouraging parents to do the same for their children was an important part of the project.

The project presented not only the benefits of faithfully teaching the next generation but also the costs of failure. The individual nature of the present society tends to make families believe that the decisions made by the family only truly affect their own family. Psalm 78 teaches when fathers fail, the impact reaches an entire generation. Warning parents of the disastrous effects of failing to teach their children was critical piece of this project. Apart from knowing what God has done, a child is incapable of setting his hope in him. Children who never learn of God's mighty acts will continue to live in their rebellion against their Creator.

Psalm 78 still cries out to fathers to teach their children. This psalm served as a guide for this project in demonstrating the emphasis on the father's role in family discipleship. While this exegesis noted that mothers are not excluded from the command to teach the next generation, special emphasis is placed upon the father's responsibility to carry out God's command. Today's father is quick to see his responsibility as providing resources for the home by going out into the workplace to bring home a paycheck and the primary role of raising the children as the responsibility of the wife. However, as Psalm 78 and passages from Deuteronomy demonstrate, this main responsibility is given to fathers.

The understanding of the mother as dually responsible is very important in the Northeast Park context. Not every family unit in the church is made up of a father, mother, and child combination. In cases where the father of the child is gone (through divorce, abandonment, or through death), the mother takes on the full parental responsibility to train the child. This was the case in some families involved in the project. This reality was acknowledged in the project.

## **Conclusion**

Asaph has called all believers not only to consider the mighty works of God but to pass on the knowledge of God's mighty deeds throughout history. The works of God are not to be taught with an end goal of a simple acknowledgement of history. These acts are to be warnings for all against disobedience and a guide to the wise to set their hope in the Lord. Parents are called to take the lead in instructing their children, and the congregation and its leaders must not neglect public exhortation. Fathers are primarily responsible for the spiritual upbringing of their children, ensuring they will not forget the mighty works of God and are fully aware of his laws and commands. Failure to instill this knowledge into the next generation will have eternally negative consequences. If fathers do not pass on the mighty works of God to their children, the beliefs of the next generation will bear no resemblance to the faith of the Bible.

CHAPTER 3  
THE USE OF STORYTELLING TO DISCIPLE  
CHILDREN IN THE HOME

“You like history?” This was the question posed to me by a Kurdish man in his shop after I mentioned my job involved being familiar with ancient history. The gentlemen turned and grabbed an item from a shelf located behind his cash register. Very carefully he opened a crumpled napkin to reveal an item he had found while planting tomatoes in his backyard. The item was a small metal object which he handed to me and asked, “Do you know what this is?” Inspecting the object, I saw on one side the figure of a man with a halo holding a cross. The words, “IHSUS, XRISTUS, BASILEU, BASILE” were emblazoned on the other side. I responded, “I do not know exactly *what* this object is, but I do know *who* this is on the coin.” His eyes widened, and he eagerly asked, “Who?” I replied, “This is an image of Jesus.” With great excitement he blurted out, “I have read about him in the Incil! I have noticed that in the Koran we have saying after saying. The Incil has stories. Please tell me the meaning of one story. The Incil says Jesus had to die. Why did Jesus have to die?”<sup>1</sup>

This encounter on a mission trip to Turkey is a demonstration of the power of the biblical narrative. Unlike the sacred writings of other religions, such as Islam’s Koran which is comprised mostly of collected sayings and teachings, the Bible is a single story comprised of many individual stories. The gospel at its very core is a story. It is the story that begins at creation, walks through the garden to witness the fall of man into sin, through the history of man’s continued failure, finds its hero crucified on a cross, and

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<sup>1</sup>The Incil is the Turkish New Testament. This conversation is one that occurred between the author and a Kurdish man on October 20, 2011 through a translator.

raised from the dead to walk out of a tomb, sees the hero ascend into the heavens, details the work of his followers, and finds its ultimate conclusion in the future return of that hero to earth. It would be impossible to share the gospel message with anyone without telling a story, or more accurately stated, telling *the* story. Both the church and parents must harness the power of storytelling in family discipleship. It is not only a biblical mandate to use stories in the instruction of children, but it is also a prudent practice supported with scientific research in multiple fields.

### **A Storytelling Creature**

The sharing of stories is at the very heart of what it means to be human. Everywhere man turns he runs into stories. They are told through books, conversations, fairy tales, movies, music, television and more. Professor of English Jonathan Gottschall writes, “We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.”<sup>2</sup> Social media continues to develop new forms of stories as can be seen in the now closed Vine application which challenged individuals to make six second stories. Facebook is littered with memes attempting to use one image and a sentence or two to tell a complete story. A fast-rising feature in social media is Instagram Stories, which allows users to create miniature stories using a variety of different media formats and methods. Stories “go viral” today with the aid of the internet and television and shape the way people think all around the world.

These stories help define not only the individual, but also culture. When a person experiences a story that affects them either positively or negatively, they share that story. People strive to understand what is going on around them to such a degree that they are able to relate the information to others. German ethnologist Kurt Ranke coined the phrase *homo narrans* to capture this idea. Explaining what Ranke meant, his student said,

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<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), xiv.

“It is a basic human need. . .to perceive the world in the fullness of its contents and functional dimensions in order to be able to tell about it. Every narrative research has to start from this universal human precondition.”<sup>3</sup> Mankind needs to understand its environment and context for the purpose of being able to pass that context on to someone or something else. Exciting events of the day are simply “too good not to share.” Dramatic events of the day need to be shared with others as a type of therapy. Psychologists sit and speak with people, not always giving advice, but sometimes simply listening to individuals share their stories.

William A. Stahl and Lisa L. Stenmark write, “Without stories, all action and experience would disappear into oblivion and human beings would have no connection to previous action and experience, not our own, and certainly not those of others.”<sup>4</sup> Events that never get passed along in stories quickly become forgotten and lost to history. The apostle John tells his readers that there are many other things Jesus did in his life, but there simply was not room enough to tell all the stories. The stories that are present in the Scriptures are told for a significant benefit to the receiver of the story. These stories are not given merely for entertainment. They are given because the stories will lead readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing they will have life (John 20:30-31).

This connection between events and the telling of the events in stories helps the storyteller and listener to process the meaning of the event. The people present at the crucifixion of Jesus would not have fully understood the meaning of the event by simply observing the event taking place. It would not be until they later understood the

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<sup>3</sup>Albrecht Lehmann, “Cultural Anthropology and Narratology,” in *Anthropological Perspectives: Tools for the Analysis of European Societies*, ed. Klaus Schiewer and Salvador Cayuela Sánchez (Münster: Waxmann, 2014), 76.

<sup>4</sup>William A. Stahl and Lisa L. Stenmark. “Stories That Matter: A Narrative Approach to Implicit Religion” *Implicit Religion* 7, no. 3 (2004): 257.

Scriptures and remembered the things that Jesus had told them that the remembrance of the event and the meaning of the event would come together such that it could be related to others and change the lives of the disciples. As science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin would write, “Even if we are present at some historic event, do we comprehend it—can we even remember it—until we can tell it as story?”<sup>5</sup> Tom Sjöblom of the University of Helsinki summarizes scientific findings by saying that humans possess a narrative drive which brings a coherence to the memories we hold.<sup>6</sup> Stories are far more than means of entertainment, they help us to make sense of the world.

### **The Call of Scripture**

The Scriptures instruct parents to use stories to instruct their children. This command is found explicitly in the Old Testament and implicitly demonstrated in the New Testament. Not all storytelling is equal. Stories can be told in different manners and to different ends than the original authors intended. Parents need to be careful to use these stories properly and match each individual story with proper didactic teaching while placing each one into the larger metanarrative of Scripture. The consequence of failing to use each story correctly could lead children to emulate biblical characters who, while used by God for his purposes, acted in a sinful way.

### **Old Testament Charges**

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 has stood as a foundational bedrock for the field of family ministry. Its clear call to fathers to teach their children rings out in book after book and article after article. Deuteronomy 6:7 instructs fathers to teach Gods commands to their children and to speak of them throughout the day in every given setting. There can be no

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<sup>5</sup>Ursula Le Guin, *Tales from Earthsea* (London: Orion, 2001), xii.

<sup>6</sup>Tom Sjöbolm, “Wordpower: Narratives, Tradition and Religion,” *Temenos* 39/40 (2003): 191.



mistaking that fathers are commanded to teach their children. It is also clear from the verses that follow that stories are to be used as a tool to accomplish this task.

Deuteronomy 6:20 informs fathers of a moment that will occur during the instruction of their children when sons will ask the meaning of the testimonies and statutes. The fathers are given the response they are to give. The response is a story.

"Then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.'" (Deut 6:21-25)

The meaning of the testimonies and statutes that God gave to the Israelite people cannot be understood apart from the story in which they were given. If the children of Israel were going to find the motivation for doing what God intended for them to do, they would first be required to know the story of what God had done for them.

Knowing the story of what God had done for Israel is the very heart of the law. God led Israel by his mighty hand to the wilderness of Sinai when he brought them out of slavery in Egypt. God spoke to Moses and gave to him the Ten Commandments while Israel was encamped at the foot of the mountain witnessing thunders and lightnings, a thick cloud, and a very loud trumpet blast (Exod 19:16). Before granting Moses the tablets of stone, God identified himself with the historical event of the exodus that had just occurred. As a preamble to the Ten Commandments, God spoke, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). It is noteworthy that the ten commandments are repeated and confirmed in Deuteronomy 5:1-21 to the following generation. Yet, Moses spoke as if the congregation in front of him in Deuteronomy had been present at the first presentation of the law recorded in Exodus. In reality, it was their parents that had been present. Moses spoke to them as if they already knew everything that occurred. Moses' sermon supposed that their

fathers had shared with them the story of all God had done, and they would need to know the story to properly live out the commandments. They were then charged to pass down to their children what God had done and what he had commanded (Deut 6:6-7).

The telling and re-telling of stories holds together the traditions and values of a culture. In his book, *Homo Narrans*, humanities professor John D. Niles argues that oral storytelling builds and develops a culture. He states, “Storytelling is an ability that defines the human species as such, at least as far as our knowledge of human experience extends into the historical past and into the sometimes startling realms that ethnography has brought to light.”<sup>7</sup> As seen in Psalm 78, Asaph unites multiple generations in the passing on of the stories of the mighty deeds of God. As Asaph opens his mouth to join with the congregation to utter the things their fathers told them, he is doing so to shape the mindset and behaviors of the next generation and forming the values of the people.

### **New Testament Examples**

The use of stories as an expected teaching tool is not limited to the Old Testament. When Jesus spoke to the people, he often spoke in parables. It must be noted that his purpose in doing so was not for the full instruction and understanding of all his listeners but to obscure the meaning from an unbelieving generation (Matt 13:10-17). Jesus’ use of parables would bring about understanding in his disciples as it would simultaneously keep hidden the teaching from those in rebellion.

Paul used the stories of his travels and co-workers to further the understanding of his readers. He would tell of his trials and tribulations, as well as the sickness of his co-workers such as Epaphroditus (Phil 2:27). He recounted his personal conversion story multiple times, told of his rebuke of Peter, spoke of the kindness of the Philippian church, and many other stories. Paul used these stories not only to inform but to develop personal

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<sup>7</sup>John D. Niles, *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999), 4.

bonds and disciplines between members of the church. Yet, they accomplish more than bringing people together. They also point those who hear his stories to Christ. Fuller New Testament professor Hwang Jin Ki examined Paul's use of stories in the letter to the Philippians. He notes, "It is now clear that Christ's story functions as an overarching story or what we may call one big story or metanarrative. Each of the other stories in the letter points either forward or backward to it and has a meaning in light of it."<sup>8</sup> The stories are Paul's tools for discipleship.

In Luke's account of the ascension of Christ, Jesus tells his apostles, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). At the heart of being a witness is recounting the story of what one has seen, heard, or experienced. The apostles were called to share the stories of Jesus with the world. As John says in his first letter,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-4)

The telling of the apostles' stories was intended to develop fellowship with the listeners. When parents tell the stories of the Old and New Testaments to their children, they obey the commands of Christ and continue the practice of the apostles.

### **Science and the Practice of Discipleship Through Story**

Following the commands of God is reason enough for parents to share the biblical story with their children. Parents can be further encouraged in how to honor this command when by understanding the techniques and best practices demonstrated by

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<sup>8</sup>Hwang Jin Ki, "Storytelling and Spiritual Formation According to the Apostle Paul." *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 9, no. 1 (2016): 43.

science. When looking at the biology of the brain God constructed, parents can find assistance in becoming the storytellers God intends.

Effectively using stories with children begins with a consistent, distraction-free engagement. Scientists discovered when using MRI technology with four-year-old children that mental engagement was greatly aided when caregivers or parents read to them more often and focused on interaction and story content.<sup>9</sup> It seems as children become more accustomed to spending time together with their parents reading and telling stories, the more the child enjoys the time and benefits from that time together. This discovery highlights God's command in Deuteronomy telling fathers to speak of his commands when they rise, when they sit, when they walk, and when they lie down. Applying these findings to family discipleship, parents can learn that the more consistently and frequently they share God's commands with their children in an engaging way, the more the child will benefit.

Why consistency makes story-time more pleasurable in children might be explained by Jonah Lehrer in his book *How We Decide*. Lehrer reveals that we determine what is pleasurable or disagreeable, and even what is right and wrong, by a release of dopamine in the brain. When an activity is repeated regularly with positive consequences, the brain fires dopamine and pleasure is experienced. The brain becomes trained to expect and enjoy these regular patterns. If they do not continue, the brain attempts to learn the new pattern.<sup>10</sup> When story-time is regular between parent and child, the child begins to anticipate the time together, and grows more and more excited for that time. When this anticipation and excitement occurs, the benefits of the stories are magnified.

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<sup>9</sup>John S. Hutton et al., "Story Time Turbocharger? Child Engagement During Shared Reading and Cerebellar Activation and Connectivity in Preschool-age Children Listening to Stories," *Plos ONE* 12, no. 5 (2017): 12-13.

<sup>10</sup>Jonah Lehrer, *How We Decide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 28-56.

Consistent repetition also has additional benefits for children. When people become familiar with a story, they give that information more credence. Neurologist Richard Restak argues that even if information is false, when it is repeated enough times, people will come to believe the information to be true. He writes, “Familiarity is the key concept: the more something is repeated, the more familiar it becomes. If we hear something often enough, it becomes familiar to us, and we’re more likely to believe that there must be something to it.”<sup>11</sup> If repetition of a falsehood can make the statement become more valuable to a child, then it follows that the repetition of the truth to their children must become a priority in the lives of parents. Again, God’s commands of daily repetition of his commandments is highlighted. As Psalm 78 proclaims, the telling of the stories to the next generation is absolutely benefits that generation.

The time of interaction between parent and child does not have to be free from technology. While there are many who rightfully cry out against the level of involvement children exhibit with technology, sometimes the use of technology and digital storytelling benefits the child. Kocaman-Karoglu conducted a study comparing traditional storytelling with digital storytelling. The results of the study confirmed other studies that the use of digital technology aids in children understanding concepts being taught.<sup>12</sup> The implication of this finding demonstrates that while parent-child interactions should be consistent, they are not required to technology-free. As Deuteronomy 6 emphasizes, the telling of the stories of God should exist within the context of daily life. Today’s life uses technology, and parents are encouraged to use digital means as one method of sharing the truth with their children.

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<sup>11</sup>Richard Restak, *The Naked Brain: How the Emerging Neurosociety is Changing How We Live, Work, and Love* (New York: Harmony Books, 2006), 79.

<sup>12</sup>Ashhan Kocaman-Karoglu, “Telling Stories Digitally: An Experiment with Preschool Children,” *Educational Media International* 52, no. 4 (2015): 348.

## Narrative Therapy

The benefits of story go far beyond regular chemical releases of dopamine in the brain which increase with familiarity. The power of story is being explored in the social sciences as well. It is seen most clearly in the emerging field of narrative therapy. There is not a universally agreed upon definition of narrative therapy, but many studies are being done to help define the range of what should be considered under the term. Psychologists are using a narrative metaphor to help people see their lives as a story that can be grouped in different ways to achieve different results.<sup>13</sup> Quoting from Dulwich Centre Publications, Wallis, Burns, and Cadevila write:

The word ‘narrative’ refers to the emphasis that is placed upon the stories of people’s lives and the differences that can be made through particular tellings and retellings of these stories. Narrative approaches involve ways of understanding the stories of people’s lives, and ways of re-authoring these stories in collaboration between the therapist/community worker and the people’s whose lives are being discussed. It is a way of working that is interested in history, the broader context that is affecting people’s lives and the ethics or politics of this work.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, narrative therapy emphasizes the connection between the story of the individual to the larger story of history. The narrative approach to therapy seeks to help people by viewing their lives as a part of a larger narrative in the same way preachers attempt to help people view their lives as part of a “grand story and, in the process, understand how their life story was shaped in the past and how they can be re-shaped in the future.”<sup>15</sup>

Studying foundational premises of narrative therapy can serve as an elucidating endeavor. Narrative therapy believes that people give meaning to their lives

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<sup>13</sup>Jennifer Wallis, Jan Burns, and Rose Capdevila, “What Is Narrative Therapy and What Is It Not? The Usefulness of Q Methodology to Explore Accounts of White and Epston’s (1990) Approach to Narrative Therapy,” *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy* 18, no. 6 (2011): 487.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 487-88.

<sup>15</sup>Kent J. Edwards, “Stories Are for Adults: Equipping Preachers to Communicate Biblical Narratives to Adult Audiences,” *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, 15, no. 2 (2015): 51.

based on the events of their lives within a cultural context.<sup>16</sup> This point helps the Christian understand the weight of passages like Psalm 78 to an even greater extent. Asaph encourages the congregation to pass on the stories of previous generations for the benefit of the coming generations. When examined through the lens of narrative therapy, this exhortation becomes quite reasonable.<sup>17</sup> How will the coming generation understand the meaning of their obedience if they do not appreciate the trials and tribulations of their fathers? The consequences suffered by their fathers gives a motivation for the obedience to the law of the Lord.

This application is still appropriate today. While it is true that the fathers of modern believers did not wander through the wilderness, children are often encouraged toward behaviors by focusing on the larger history of their family. Children are encouraged to study hard in school because their grandfather gave up everything to bring them to America to give them an opportunity. Today's church is exhorted to hold the Scriptures as sacred because faithful men in the Reformation gave up their lives to put the Bible into the language of common man. Telling the story of the history of salvation from start to finish is a valuable piece of the discipleship process.

The mind utilizes story to help develop the way the child understands the world.<sup>18</sup> Stories give the child the ability to walk in someone else's shoes and learn from experiences without needing to make the mistakes others made. They guide children to

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<sup>16</sup>Jennifer A. Gilling, "What Can Narrative Therapy Bring to Our Understanding and Practice around Mental Health and Behavior? Constructing Preferred Stories in the Classroom," *Educational & Child Psychology* 33, no. 4 (2016): 82.

<sup>17</sup>Not all foundational premises of narrative therapy should be accepted by believers. Narrative therapy focuses on the idea that problems exist outside of the individual and that individuals are experts in their own lives and can bring about change through skills and redefining their thought pattern. This approach is a very individual focused approach which denies the tenet of Christianity that the problem is within the individual and can only be solved by an outside agent, namely the person of Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup>Jeffrey E. Feinberg, "Making Stories Come Alive," in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 147.

see the rewards of living godly lives and the heartaches that come from other people's disobedience. This development can be aided by the interaction between the child and the storyteller. According to Ford and Wong,

To communicate the Christian story effectively and meaningfully to children, parents need to view the Christian story not as merely a set of facts to be transmitted, but schema-setting accounts that can be discussed thoughtfully and explored for personal applications. Children need to see the biblical narrative within an all-encompassing view of reality, to encourage discovery of the ways they too can participate in God's redemptive mission for the world.<sup>19</sup>

Children can learn from the stories of the Bible that God punishes those who disobey him, just as they can learn the danger of lying about trouble from a story of a little boy "crying wolf."

Children need the biblical stories in their lives to help them make sense of the world where they live. They need to learn from the examples of the people of history to see how the good news of God's redemption of man should be lived out practically in day-to-day life. God intended all his children to hear those stories, because as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did" (1 Cor 10:6). God wants his followers to learn from the saints and sinners included in the biblical narrative, that they might not be stubborn and rebellious, but might set their hope in God and keep his commandments.

Parents need to be informed how to correctly tell the biblical stories to their children. There is a danger in misusing biblical stories by using the wrong hermeneutical approach. Too many readings of Scripture have been followed by the well-intentioned, but very wrong, question, "So what did that story mean to you?" Robert Stein clearly reminds readers, "Meaning belongs to the author."<sup>20</sup> Parents cannot let children run with

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<sup>19</sup>Victoria M. Ford and Esther Wong, "Narrative and the Moral Education of the Christian Child" in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 319.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 20-22.



their imagination to determine what they believe the story means. Children must be taught that the Scriptures convey a specific meaning that is not subjective from one individual to the next.

There is also a danger in making every story an object lesson. While the biblical stories can serve as positive examples for believers to follow, they also use sinful people to highlight God's gracious nature. Hebrews 11 highlights the faith of key historical figures with the goal of exhorting the reader to live a life of faith. The biblical story can be passed on to the next generation with the qualified admonition to "be like David." David was faithful. At the same time, David did not always live a life worthy of mimicry. When teaching about the exodus, parents should be reminded by 1 Corinthians 10:5 that God was not pleased with most of Israelites even as he gave them water to drink in the wilderness. The presence of God's provision does not always equal God's approval. Therefore, parents must be careful in teaching their children to "be like" anyone other than Jesus.

To rightly understand the major storyline of Scripture, children also must not be taught to read themselves into the story. Just because David slayed Goliath, the child does not need to slay his giants. Moses' raising of his hands before the Red Sea does not mean that Christians should raise their hands to the Lord to overcome every obstacle. Teaching in this manner is counter-productive from seeing the Scripture as one main story of salvation for mankind. The stories found in Scripture do not point to little Johnny or little Jane, but to the person and work of Christ. Jesus himself made this clear on the road to Emmaus when "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

### **Using the True Story to Disciple Children**

It would be tempting to assume it has always been accepted to tell the stories of God's mighty acts to the next generation, but the reality is there have been some

people who have argued that parents and teachers should not tell the biblical stories to their children. Ronald Goldman argued in 1964 that many biblical stories should be avoided in the education of children. Goldman's work and thoughts are influenced by the theories of Jean Piaget leading him to believe that children simply do not have the ability and language to process the meaning of many passages. He quotes Ainsworth in saying, "In the light of Piaget's work, the young child's understanding of the parables is questionable. Since the significance of the parables is abstract rather than concrete, is it possible that the child will understand this before he has reached the formal stage in his development?"<sup>21</sup>

Goldman's concerns reach beyond the parables. He was also concerned about many of the foundational concepts of Christianity including concepts of the Bible, the nature of the divine, the holiness of God, and the church. Goldman's argument rests on the idea that teaching should be focused on the intellectual level, asking the learner to not merely emotionally learn something, but to be able to give an intellectual answer to questions about the given subject.<sup>22</sup> He argues, "If 13 to 14 is the mental age at which this level in religious thinking is generally achieved, a great deal of time and effort may be wasted by the instruction in ideas which are beyond the comprehension of the child."<sup>23</sup>

If only this thinking were left behind in the sixties. Unfortunately, its effects have continued to echo into the present day. In 2004, Howard Worsley wrote that the effects of Goldman's theories were still influencing the syllabuses of institutions in England.<sup>24</sup> Goldman misses an important aspect of storytelling. A story is not told with

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<sup>21</sup>D. Ainsworth, "A Study of Some Aspects of the Growth of Religious Understanding of Children Aged Between 5 and 11 Years" (dip. ed. diss., University of Manchester, 1961), quoted in Ronald Goldman, *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (New York: Seabury Press, 1968), 6.

<sup>22</sup>Ronald Goldman, *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (New York: Seabury Press, 1968), 2.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>24</sup>Howard Worsley, "How Children Aged 9-10 Understand Bible Stories: A Study of Children

the expectation that every detail and lesson of a story will be grasped and immediately processed for intellectual discussion. Stories take root in the mind and influence the overall thinking of the individual. Even if one is not able to clearly recite every implication of a story and pass a religious test as Goldman gave to children, the story begins its work in the life of the child. Sometimes children grasp implications of stories faster than adults. This point is seen the hyena story.<sup>25</sup>

The hyena story was told by Jack Priestley to two culturally diverse groups. The story was of a hungry and greedy hyena that could smell food in two different directions. He kept changing directions until he split in half. When questioned about the story, Western-society test takers declared the story was untrue. Tribal people were offended at the declaration and stated the story was indeed true. The difference in answers sprouted from the understanding of what was meant by the story being “true.” The Western-society audience meant the story did not literally happen. The tribal audience was arguing the truth of the point, “greed kills.”<sup>26</sup> Testing children for spiritual comprehension may be asking whether they grasp the concrete details of the story or not, which they often get wrong. However, children may well be internalizing the truths about God the story is attempting to convey.

The question is not whether a parent should tell their children biblical stories, for Scripture commands that they should, but what stories the parent should teach. Discernment will need to be used by parents at what their children can understand and handle. Parents may choose to wait to tell their children particular stories such as Judah and Tamar, Jephthah, or David and Bathsheba. It is not as much that these stories should

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at a Church-aided and a State Primary School in the Midlands,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 9, no 2 (August 2004): 203-4.

<sup>25</sup>Jack G. Priestley, “Concepts with Blurred Edges: Story and the Religious Imagination,” *Religious Education* 78, no. 3 (1983): 377.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 378.

never be told to children but rather that parents must consider carefully what subject matters the child can process. So how does a parent make sure that the child gets the full storyline of Scripture while admittedly leaving out individual stories until the child is older?

Parents can accomplish this task by having a focus on the metanarrative of Scripture. A father can choose stories that highlight each major unit of the biblical metanarrative and teach the overarching story to his children when he clearly understands the grand story of Scripture. There are different ways of presenting this metanarrative that have emerged. One of the most well-known and often used summary of the divisions of the biblical story breaks into four categories: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation.

The concepts of these four categories are found as far back as the teachings of Augustine of Hippo and his four states of man.<sup>27</sup> Augustine's theology on the freedom of the will can be summarized by (1) man's ability to sin and man's ability to not sin (as seen in original creation), (2) man's inability to not sin (as seen in the fall), (3) man's ability to not sin (as sin in the redemption), and (4) man's inability to sin (as seen in the consummation). This four-part narrative is an effective tool in understanding the main point of the biblical metanarrative. The four-category structure is employed by the Lifeway curriculum *The Gospel Project* which is currently used by Northeast Park Baptist Church.<sup>28</sup>

The question becomes whether using only four categories is the most effective method in understanding and teaching biblical stories to disciple children. These four categories do effectively highlight God's work in salvation, but many stories in Scripture

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<sup>27</sup>Augustine, *The Enchiridion* trans. J. F. Shaw ed. Paul A. Böer, Sr. (n.p.: Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012) 118.

<sup>28</sup>Ed Stetzer and Trevin Wax, "Letter from the Editors," accessed October 21, 2017, [http://www.gospelproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TheGospelProjectAdults\\_PreviewGuide.pdf](http://www.gospelproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TheGospelProjectAdults_PreviewGuide.pdf).

would need an extra classification in a couple of other major headings. For example, where would the story of Sampson fall in the major timeline. One could say that he is an example of the fall, but one could also say the same of Ananias and Sapphira. The difference is that one story is pre-redemption, and one story is post-redemption. Parents using the Scriptural storyline to teach their children will need to be able to show children where in the overall story each individual story falls.

Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen have found an effective way of separating the metanarrative of Scripture into six categories. They keep the four categories mentioned above and add in two other categories. The headings could now read: Creation, Fall, Israel, Redemption, Church, and Consummation.<sup>29</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen use these six ideas (without necessarily using these words) and develop a compelling storyline of a King who establishes his kingdom (creation), yet the people of the kingdom rebel (fall). The King then chooses one group of rebels from all the people (Israel) to use to redeem the rebels. The King send his Son who comes and brings salvation (redemption). The message of what the Son accomplished is charged to those who experienced redemption (church). Mankind is awaiting the final act when the King's Son returns, and the act of redemption is brought to its ultimate conclusion (consummation).

The six-category metanarrative is compelling for several reasons. First, it naturally demonstrates where in the metanarrative each story falls. Some would argue that the natural division of the Old and New Testament would resolve this problem, but that is ineffectively simplistic. The gospels contain stories of events that occurred naturally in the category of Israel before the moment of redemption. The precipitating event of the redemption story is begun with the birth of Christ, but the true moment of

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<sup>29</sup>Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

redemption story takes place on the cross. Jesus makes many comments to individuals that are best understood when realizing Jesus is not speaking to all people of all time, but specifically to Israelites who are under Israelite law.

Including Israel as a major division of the metanarrative will help the reader understand a variety of different passages. For example, when the reader understands the law was given to the nation of Israel, and not to every nation on earth, it becomes easier to handle the passages dealing with obscure laws. In the same way a United State citizen does not have to abide by British law while living in Texas, the Christian today is not bound by 4,000-year-old Israelite laws. This understanding is critical to answering the questions, “Why do we wear clothing of multiple materials?” and “Why can we plant different crops in the same field?” when Leviticus 19:19 forbids both practices. Taking time as a father to tell the story of Israel to his children and showing how it fits into God’s big story makes the entire story clearer.

Second, the six-category division helps children, and adults, see how salvation continued to expand throughout the Scriptures, and continues to expand today. By first focusing on Israel, the scope of salvation is seen to expand as the nation of Israel itself grew. That which began as a promise to Adam and Eve, made in response to their disobedience in the garden, would find its fulfillment come from one nation. There was one promised Seed that would crush the head of the serpent, and that one person would come from the descendants of Abraham.

Not understanding the specific period of Israel in the story of salvation makes some of Jesus’ comments seem unnaturally harsh. In Matthew 15 Jesus spoke to the Canaanite woman telling her originally that it was not time to help her. When the reader does not understand the movement of salvation began with Israel first, this lack of assistance seems quite uncharacteristic for the Savior of the world. By teaching the concept of Israel as a major division of the salvation story metanarrative, passages that single Israel out over the surrounding people begin to make sense.

This salvation story does not stay confined to Israel. God in his great mercy would include the Gentiles. The Gentiles would find themselves in the *ecclesia*, the church. They would continue the story of salvation after the ascension of Jesus. No longer would the message be looking forward to the coming messiah who would be born and would save the world from sin. Instead, the story is now told primarily in the past tense. The one messiah came. He lived. He died. He rose again. It really happened and so now we have hope because of an actual historical event. The church is told how to live in light of that development in the story, and it is different from how Israel was told to live.

Third, it highlights the important idea that each person reading Scripture is a part of the large story of God's salvation. Seeing how Israel was supposed to function as the keepers of the promise will help fathers point to the fact that today the members of the church are the keepers of the promise. God did not use a people at one point in history to carry the message of salvation and then abandoned the strategy. Instead, God has included people of every nation tribe and tongue in his promise of salvation (Rom 11:11-24). This inclusion of Israel and the church as major headings in the biblical narrative reminds children that their lives are a part of a much larger story. This point is the convergence of the commands of Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78 to teach the mighty works of God, the premise of narrative therapy anchoring people's lives to a larger story, and each person's natural predisposition toward story. The child is living and active in God's big story. Each child has an important part to play in God's plan and should strive to think and live in a manner that reflects this great truth.

### **Application**

This project attempted to communicate these truths to parents. First, it strove to ensure that parents understand the role God has called given them to tell the biblical stories to their children to guide them in the truth. It is not enough to read the biblical stories and walk away. While the Scriptures can lead a person to the knowledge of God

that is required, parents are called to have regular conversations about the truths of God with their children (Deut 6:4-9). The church is called to actively engage children with the truths of God, but the overall responsibility falls on the parents themselves.

Second, parents need to understand the power of story in the lives of people. This point is important because it is easy for parents to believe that rote memorization is often the best method of discipling children. Memorization is important and should not be abandoned but ignoring the scientific benefits of story would be a critical mistake. God commands his stories to be told. He created us to be beings who love to hear stories. Parents must understand the benefits of telling stories.

Third, parents must become effective storytellers to become effective discipling-makers. While all parents do not need to become Garrison Keillor, telling a boring story can cause children to lose interest. Learning some simple techniques to keep a child's interest was an important part of the project.

Fourth, teaching the parents the metanarrative of Scripture was imperative. If the parents are going to tell their children the stories of Scripture, they need to be able to know how each story fits into the big story of God. The more each parent understands the big story, the easier it is to teach the small stories. The importance of each story is revealed as it becomes clearer how the story points either forward or backwards to the moment of redemption.

Finally, this project gave practical advice on how to build family "story time" into its day-to-day practice. Different practical ideas will be shared, and time for parents to share their personal success and failure stories with one another will be included. The Scriptures teach that the stories are to be told but do not mandate the methods that must be employed. Parents were allowed time to share with one another their successes and failures. Hearing one another share what they have tried helped them to learn from each other by hearing one another's stories. This process reinforced the power of learning from stories.



Following the teaching of the six-week curriculum, one method of building “story time” into the family routine was reinforced: dinnertime. Gregory K. Fritz, M.D., editor of *Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter* states that family meal times are opportunities for parents to instill their values into their children.<sup>30</sup> This statement could be challenged based on its editorial nature. Many claims about the importance of family mealtimes are based upon more beliefs than actual evidence. Larson, Branscomb, and Wiley did a multi-discipline study to help separate the common folklore of mealtimes from its actual benefits.<sup>31</sup> They found that while not all family dinner practices are equal in quality, there does seem to be a benefit in socialization and cultural transmission that occurs when families eat together.

Throughout the Scriptures, the prominence of eating together is seen. In his book, *A Meal with Jesus*, Tim Chester points out how it was at numerous meals in Jesus’ ministry where he taught important truths such as humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Chester shows from Luke 7 how at a dinner party, thrown by a Pharisee, readers learn that Jesus welcomed sinners and sinners welcomed Jesus.<sup>32</sup> Jesus came together with the people around him to enjoy meals together. Chester argues that people can remain distant at bible studies but come together at the table.<sup>33</sup> As families fight to find time for the things that are the most important, it helps to find time to sit at the table and learn the truths of Scripture together. Group participants were invited to have family dinners at the church. The parents learned the bible lesson from the Gospel Project

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<sup>30</sup>Gregory K. Fritz, “The Importance of the Family Dinner,” *Brown University Child & Adolescent Behavior Letter*, February (2006), 8.

<sup>31</sup>Larson W. Reed, Kathryn R. Branscomb, and Angela R. Wiley, “Forms and Functions of Family Mealtimes: Multidisciplinary Perspectives,” *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development* no. 111 (2006): 1-2.

<sup>32</sup>Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 41, Kindle.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

curriculum in the morning. In the evening, they were provided a private room for their family and dinner. Following the meal, while still around the table, the leader of the family taught the lesson to his or her children. Following two weeks of this training, they were encouraged to continue the practice on their own inside their own homes.

### **Conclusion**

Parents must become storytellers if they desire to properly disciple their children. The Scriptures teach parents that they must tell the story of God's mighty deeds to the next generation. The gospel itself is a story that within itself has the power to save that must be told and re-told. Science has shown the power of story on the mind, behaviors, and thoughts of children and adults alike. By breaking the biblical story into six major components, children and adults alike can develop a framework that will be a lifetime guide of discipleship and biblical learning as they live in the story of God's saving grace.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

Parents are charged by God to tell the story of God to their children. It is more important than having “well-rounded” children who become honored in sports, find a high-paying job, and are seen by the world to be a huge success. One day every man, woman, boy, and girl will stand before the Creator of the universe and give an account of his or her life. Those who are found in the righteousness of Christ will be rewarded with eternal life. Those who did not trust in Christ during their life in this world will be separated from God for all eternity.

The purpose of this project was to teach this truth to parents and equip them to effectively and intentionally disciple their children. This purpose was set to faithfully follow the command of Scripture upon the church to equip the saints for the purpose of ministry and make disciples of all nations.

#### **Stages of the Project**

The project can be viewed through three stages. The first stage involved the writing of the curriculum. The second stage of the project involved the teaching of the curriculum. The final stage of the project involved writing a discipleship plan for ongoing family ministry.

#### **Stage 1**

The first stage of the project involved developing a six-week curriculum that would equip parents to more effectively disciple their children. The curriculum was based upon the exegesis of Psalm 78 and the research presented in chapter 3 emphasizing the benefits of using story in family discipleship.

Some themes were addressed nearly every week. There were aspects that were reinforced regularly throughout the course based on the knowledge shown in chapter 3 that repetition and consistency build credence in the mind of the listener. One repeated theme was the importance of having a love for God to be the parents' foundation for family discipleship. This theme was stated in week one and reinforced weekly in the closing action steps. The weekly action steps were goals parents set for themselves each week to practice aspects of what was learned during the class. The first action step for each week dealt either explicitly or implicitly with growing their love for God and its impact on family discipleship.

Another regular recurring theme dealt with the six-point metanarrative of Scripture. Parents were challenged to memorize these six categories in the main biblical story for use as a guide in helping them teach the individual biblical stories to their children. They were questioned to give a story from each part of the metanarrative and where each metanarrative was found throughout the Bible. The final lesson focused exclusively on this metanarrative. This focus at the end was done to help parents realize the fullness of the mighty works of God. Parents were encouraged to choose stories from each part of the metanarrative to teach their children throughout each year. Ultimately, parents will want to teach all that God has done, but parents need to focus systematically through the main storyline of Scripture regularly in family discipleship.

The curriculum did not only utilize the presentation of lectures to relay the content of Scripture but also used the class time to give opportunities and guidance in practicing what Scripture commanded. Every week offered times for interaction, discussion, and questions. Most weeks offered times for each participant to get involved with practice leading someone through Scriptures. Parents were asked to examine selected Scriptures with another classmate and ask one another three questions provided to everyone that can be asked of all passages of Scripture. The three questions were taken

from an interview with Justin Taylor recorded on the Gospel Coalition website.<sup>1</sup> One participant would read the Scripture and ask the questions to the other participant who would answer them. Then the two would switch roles with the one who was first answering questions becoming the leader. This section of the curriculum was done to provide a safe environment where parents who had never led someone through any Bible study could grow more comfortable.

The first question taught to each participant was, “What does this passage teach us about God?” This question was used as a reminder that Scripture is about God. The question, “What does this passage mean to you?” is a question that opens the door to a subjective view of Scripture that can easily lead to viewing Scripture in self-serving ways. The student of Scripture is served well by first viewing each passage of Scripture as a revelation of the Creator.

The second question taught was, “What does this passage teach us about ourselves?” While Scripture is ultimately a revelation of God and his work of redemption, the Scriptures constantly remind the reader of mankind’s need for salvation. Story after story point to the necessity of redemption and the blessings of faithfully trusting God.

The third question, which is two parts, was “What has God done about this, and what does he expect of us in light of what he has done?” These two questions flow together because they both show a response; God responding to man’s sin and man responding to God’s display of love and justice. God’s actions are always based in his character, and we are called to act in light of his action and our current condition. Many other questions could be asked of any given passage, but these questions were chosen for their focus on God and the ease for parents and children to remember them.

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<sup>1</sup>Justin Taylor, “Gerald Bray: On Three Questions to Ask of Biblical Texts,” The Gospel Coalition, November 18, 2009, accessed December 8, 2017, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-interview-with-gerald-bray-what-questions-should-we-ask-of-a-biblical-text/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-interview-with-gerald-bray-what-questions-should-we-ask-of-a-biblical-text/).

Before the curriculum was implemented, it was evaluated by an expert panel of seven men. Each man was chosen for their experience and wisdom. Those men were Steve McNeil, John Horn, Dale Maddux, Jeremiah Kinney, Brandon Lindsey, Steve Whicker, and J D Strouth.

Steve McNeil currently serves as the Executive Director for the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana. He has a D.Min. in Church Leadership and previously served as the Team Leader for Church and Leader Development. He has experience in evaluating curriculum and material used for discipleship.

John Horn currently serves as the Team Leader for Church Planting for the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana. Previously he has served as the Director of Missions for the Southwestern Indiana Southern Baptist Association. In the role of Director of Missions, he became familiar with NEPBC, its history, and present situation.

Dale Maddux was appointed to the Home Mission Board in 1962 and has been serving churches ever since. He has filled local church, associational, and regional roles. He currently is a member of NEPBC, and his experience and wisdom have provided great benefit.

Jeremiah Kinney has a Master of Divinity from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He planted a church in Muncie, Indiana. Five years ago, Kinney pastored a church in Evansville and then attended NEPBC giving him some insight to the church and an objective point of view as an informed outsider.

Brandon Lindsey is a church planter of a church in Evansville, Indiana. His church follows a family ministry model giving him some experience in equipping parents to be intentional disciple-makers of their children.

Steve Whicker is a lay member of NEPBC who has served as Music Minister in multiple congregations. His current role as a Sunday school teacher at NEPBC gives him insight into the appropriate use of curriculum for the congregation.

J D Strouth currently serves as the Sunday school director and Chairman of

deacons for NEPBC. He holds a Master of Arts in Christian Education from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He provided a trained eye to help determine the appropriate depth of the curriculum.

The curriculum was evaluated by the panel and passed all evaluation measures.<sup>2</sup> Several panelists gave valuable feedback and suggestions about the curriculum. The curriculum was altered to fix grammatical issues noted by the panelists.

## **Stage 2**

Stage 2 implemented the curriculum to equip parents at Northeast Park Baptist Church to engage in family discipleship. The curriculum was taught on six consecutive Sunday mornings during the Sunday school hour followed by two Sunday evenings during the hour before the evening worship time began. The pre-survey was administered and received before the first class began.

**Week 1.** Before the class began, each participant filled out the FDPPS and returned it privately to a folder. Each participant decided upon a four-digit number for identification of their survey. To ensure they would be able to remember their number, they also wrote a word next to the four-digit number. The word and number were recorded on a page that was shown to participants as they filled out the post-survey at the end of the course. After participants returned their surveys, they received the first week's curriculum, entitled "A Family Foundation." The lesson focused on a love for God being the primary motivation for teaching their children about God. Deuteronomy 6 displays this motivation as seen in the presentation of the Shema and the call to love God with all the heart, soul, and might preceding the command to teach children (Deut 6:4-7). Jesus spoke of the connection between loving God and keeping his commandments in John

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix 1.

14:15. Time was taken for all parents to pray that God would grow the love in their hearts and that love to manifest in urgency to disciple their children.

The next section of the curriculum introduced the six stages of the metanarrative. This was a brief introduction followed by a discussion about techniques parents had employed to disciple their children in the past. Parents shared what had worked well for them and what had not worked well. Discussion then centered on ways each participant could grow in both knowledge of the Scriptures and love for God.

The lesson concluded with setting goals for the coming week. Each parent was asked to set four action steps for themselves for the week. The first goal was to choose an aspect of God and meditate on it for growing genuine love for him. The second goal was to learn something about one category of the biblical metanarrative. The third goal was to have a biblical conversation with their child during the week. The fourth goal encouraged parents to do something that would show their love for God in such a way that their children would be able to witness the activity.

**Week 2.** The second week began by going over the previous week's successes and failures concerning personal goals. Some participants had accomplished some of their goals, and others were completely honest in saying they had not even tried. The group discussed the challenges of attempting to begin something new at home. The class was encouraged not to let the previous week's failures discourage them and not to get too comfortable with their success. Any given week will have its own challenges.

The second week's title was "Different Generations, Same Message." This lesson focused on how every generation is charged to pass on the same stories of Scripture. Children of today have different cultural realities they need to navigate, but the biblical message and the stories that carry it remain the same from generation to generation.



Participants were encouraged to consider whether their own parents or grandparents taught them the Scriptures. Psalm 78 demonstrates the intergenerational nature of passing on the Scriptures. Teaching the next generation is one way that parents who are believers can honor their own parents. Time was taken during class to allow participants to pray that God would help them honor their parents through their obedience in discipling their parent's grandchildren.

The remainder of the lesson focused on using the six-stage breakdown of the main biblical story to help parents select biblical stories to teach their children. As a group, the class thought of stories that fell within the boundaries of each of the six headings of the metanarrative. Then the three questions were introduced to the parents that were outlined earlier in this chapter. The class, as a whole, practiced using these three questions to examine Exodus 17:1-7.

The class was challenged to make three personal goals for the week. The first goal involved finding a way to deepen their love for God in the coming week. The second goal was to become more familiar with some biblical stories of their own choosing. The third goal was to go through a biblical story with their children at some point during the week.

**Week 3.** This week began by reviewing the previous week's goals. One participant who had declared he had not even tried to accomplish his goals from week 1 announced he had read the Bible with his children for the first time ever. After the class celebrated this event, it moved on to the week's lesson.

The lesson for week 3 was entitled, "Different Methods, Same Message." This week was focused on the idea of using different techniques to help children better grasp the message of the Scriptures. The first technique was the method practiced as an entire class in week 2. This time, however, each participant was paired up with one other classmate. Each person took a turn "being the parent" and reading the Scripture and

asking their partner the three questions learned in week 2. This exercise was to get them used to reading a passage of Scripture out loud and guiding a discussion over the passage.

The next exercise of the day stretched their comfort zones by having the class “act out” the Scriptures. The story of the prodigal son was given to the class, and they dramatically read it together with different people playing the different characters from the passage. This exercise helped them understand that some of their kids respond better when they can be actively involved with the story. The class was challenged to ensure that when trying this technique at home this exercise did not become an opportunity for their children to allow silliness to distract from the story. The same three questions were asked about the passage after being read dramatically that were asked of the previous passage that had been normally read out loud.

The final exercise dealt with singing songs together. The class was taught that many hymns can be used to help children understand the truths of Scripture. The class talked about the verses of “Amazing Grace” and then sang them together. No music was used to accompany the singing. It was done exactly as the parents could do with their children at home. The class was warned that hymns are not the same as Scripture and not all hymns are equal in their value or truthfulness. If the parents had difficulty finding hymns to use, they were encouraged to use the songs that were included in the previous week’s Sunday morning gathering.

To conclude the week, participants were challenged to make three goals for the coming week. The first goal was to do something for someone as an act of love toward God. The second goal was to pick one passage of Scripture to read dramatically with their children. The third goal was to pick one song that was used in that morning’s worship service and discuss the lyrics with their children and even to sing it together after they discussed its meaning.

**Week 4.** This week began celebrating the accomplishments of the previous week's goals. The class was split on how many families sang together during the week, but many parents reported a dramatic reading of different Bible stories. As was expected, some children enjoyed the experience, and some did not.

The title of the lesson for week 4 was "Whose Job Is It?" The focus of the lesson was to guide parents to understand that the primary responsibility of discipling their children falls on their shoulders and not the church. To accomplish this objective, five different passages (Deut 6:4-9; Deut 32:45-47; Ps 78:2-7; Deut 11:18-21; Eph 6:4) were printed out and read verbally in class. The question, "Who is called to teach children in this passage?" was asked. The answer to each question was that it is the parents' job to disciple their children. Time was taken in class to pray that God would help each parent in the task of discipling his or her children.

The role of the church in discipleship was then examined. Participants discussed who had been involved in their own personal discipleship. Each person in the class was encouraged to be actively involved in the discipleship of the children in the church. God's gift to each parent includes the members of the church who work together to help teach one another to love God and keep his commandments.

The class was challenged to make three goals for the week. The first goal was to find a way to share their personal love for God with their children. The second goal was to pick something specific to do with their children to actively disciple them. The final goal was to either ask someone to help them in the discipleship of their children, or to offer their assistance to someone else in the church to help them in the discipleship process.

**Week 5.** Week 5 began with a review of the previous week's goals. Many parents admitted that these goals were harder than previous weeks. The discussion began by noting how difficult it can be to ask someone else for help. A single mother in the

class admitted in the group she would love to have help but did not know whom or how to ask for help. A couple women in the class agreed to come alongside her to do whatever they could to help.

The title of the fifth week was “Benefits and Consequences.” The lesson began with a review of the fact that a love for God makes following the command to disciple our children possible. Class time was spent focusing on Ephesians 1:16-21 with the emphasis on God enlightening the eyes of believer’s hearts to know the hope to which he has called them. Time was taken to allow participants to pray that God would daily enlighten the eyes of their hearts.

Following the time of prayer, Psalm 78 was examined to see the benefits of teaching the next generation and the consequences of failure. Time was taken to pray for each child represented in the class. The prayer was asking God that he would both enable them to hear the teaching of their parents and know what God has done for them.

Discussion followed about whether participants were prioritizing family discipleship. The class discussed which was personally more motivating to them: the benefits of success or the cost of failure. Participants were asked to share what they might be willing to change in their schedules to make discipleship more of a priority. Some parents did share specific measures, but most did not.

The class was challenged to set three goals this week. The first goal was to do something during the week to guide their children to put their hope in God. The second goal was to share a story from their life with their child that demonstrated how they or a family member had benefited from putting their hope in God. The final challenge was to ensure that all in the class had put their hope in God. Each participant in the class has made a confession of belief prior to taking the class, but each person should do self-examination to see if he or she is in the faith (2 Cor 13:5).

**Week 6.** The final week of the lessons began as the others focusing on a review of success and failures in meeting personal goals. Some participants shared ways they had altered their week's schedule to include time together with their children looking at some biblical stories. Without being directly challenged to do so, no family had spent time singing with their family or using a hymn from the previous Sunday's morning worship. This lack of initiative to continue a previous week's goal led to discussion about the ongoing nature of discipleship and how it needs to continue even if there is not a weekly challenge to do so.

The title of the lesson for week 6 was "Know the Whole Story." Its focus was once again the six-stage breakdown of the Bible. Each section was broken down and examined in more detail and allowed question and answer time for each section. The main location of each part of the story was given to help parents understand basic boundaries for each stage of the story.

Following the teaching on the biblical metanarrative, some practical tips were given to each participant on how to keep going after the class was over. Two primary suggestions were given. The first suggestion would be fully aided by the church. Parents were encouraged to use their weekly Sunday school lesson with their children at home. Talking through a story that they had recently been taught would help prevent them from feeling as if they did not know the story well enough to teach it to their children. Parents were encouraged to ask questions in Sunday school to help them feel confident enough to teach each lesson to their child.

The second suggestion involved using the family mealtime with their children. As seen in chapter 3, studies suggest that eating a meal together is beneficial for passing on beliefs even if the exact reason why this is true is unknown. Some families admitted that eating together was a difficult proposition because their schedules were so busy, and often they were not together for meals. The discussion encouraged those families to attempt to set one meal aside a week to come together, but parents should not neglect to

use other times together. For example, families could use the time in a car ride to ball practice to read the Bible together. As time expired, there was a time of prayer that the lessons learned over the course would make an eternal impact on the lives of their children, grandchildren, and beyond.

At the end of the class, all families were given the FDPPS and asked to fill them out and return them. All participants filled them out, and their scores were recorded.

**Week 7.** All the participants of the class returned to a regular Sunday school class that was teaching from the Gospel Project curriculum. The format of the class was the standard format used at NEPBC including a brief time at the beginning to discuss how each person's week had been and taking any prayer requests. A handout was given to everyone in the class containing the three questions taught during the project. Class members were encouraged to take notes on the handout that would aid them in teaching that lesson to their children.

The evening of week 7, each participant in the class was invited to come to church an hour before the evening service with their entire family. Each family was given a classroom that had been set up as a family dinner table. A meal was provided for each family. Following the meal, the spiritual leader of the house was encouraged to take his family through the process of reading the passage they had learned during the Sunday school hour, asking the questions learned in the curriculum, and leading a family worship time. Four of the seven families represented in the project participated in the provided experience.

**Week 8.** The final week of the project once again had the parents involved in a Sunday school class teaching the Gospel Project curriculum. The handout containing the three questions was once again provided and parents were encouraged to take notes and ask questions that would help them disciple their children.

The evening of week 8 was exactly like week 7. The same four families

participated again. The three families that could not come to church at that hour stated they would lead the lesson at home with their children.

### **Stage 3**

Stage 3 focused on the fourth goal of the project: writing a plan for ongoing family training. The plan first needed to grow out of the study of Psalm 78. The psalm clearly instructs members of the congregation to teach their children the mighty works of God. It also includes a multi-generational mindset. These commands had to be demonstrated in the plan. The plan also needed to be personalized by addressing the results of the FDPPS. Parents at NEPBC need continued encouragement, resources, and an intentional plan.

The discipleship plan for ongoing family training was put together considering weekly, monthly, and yearly aspects of the church's involvement in helping parents to better disciple their children. It involves multiple members of the congregation being involved in the life of the child, while still putting the emphasis of disciple-making at the feet of the parents. The plan has the church striving to equip the parents for family discipleship. This plan was reviewed by the active deacons of the church.

The weekly aspect is in two parts. The first part is through the Sunday school. The Sunday school is one of the major strengths of NEPBC. Parents will be taught the lesson in the curriculum one week before the child. This extra week gives parents the opportunity to use what they learn in Sunday school as a tool to disciple their children. The church will then reinforce that lesson the following week by teaching the same passage of Scripture to the children.

The second piece of the weekly training involves a multi-generational gathering on Wednesday nights during the school year. In this gathering, the whole church will be together. Families will sing, learn, play, and pray together. Adult members and young children will learn the same lesson, at the same time, in the same place.

Games, music, food, and projects will be done side-by-side.

The monthly aspect of the training will be providing parents with the resources to know what events will happen in Sunday morning worship services for the following month. It will give hymns, songs, Scriptures, and special events so that parents can discuss these events with their children. When other special events arise within the church, they can be discussed in the parents' guide as well.

The yearly focus will include meetings with every parent to develop a spiritual discipleship plan for each child that attends NEPBC. These meetings will include the parent(s), Sunday School teachers, Children's Director or Youth Leader, and the pastor. The purpose of these meetings is to help all parents to have a specific plan for discipling each individual child and helping the church to know what tools and resources need to be made available.

### **Conclusion**

This project set out to determine the current family discipleship practices of parents at NEPBC and equip them to effectively disciple their children. It strove to appeal to them not with the words of man but from the Scriptures. Different techniques were offered as the Scriptures do not give a one-size fits all approach to discipleship. One thing that is commanded is that parents would make known God's mighty works to the next generation. For his glory alone, this project aimed to help them obey that command.



## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

This chapter evaluates the project run at Northeast Park Baptist Church in Evansville, Indiana. It focuses on the purpose of the project, an examination of the results of each goal attempted, a listing of strengths and weaknesses of the project, discussion on what I would have done differently due to hindsight, theological reflections raised by the project, and personal reflections. It is my prayer that the insights gained from the research and the instruction given to parents at NEPBC will forever be used to the glory of God and serve to benefit coming generations to assist them in putting their hope in God.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The project set out to equip parents at NEPBC to disciple their own children. It sought not only to have parents understand this aspect of their role in raising their children but to regularly fulfill this mission. Many parents showed early enthusiasm in project long before it began. Many hallway conversations centered around the idea of family discipleship long before week one ever arrived. Parents seemed to understand they had a responsibility in teaching the Bible to their children even as they would state they did not know where to begin. More than one parent stated they did not think they could teach their children about the Bible because they themselves did not know enough about it. There is now an excitement in some of these parents as they have said they feel much more comfortable speaking about the Bible with their children and exploring it together with them.

Throughout the project, there was a continual reminder of the biblical metanarrative. Just as the Marvel Cinematic Universe is currently using multiple movies

to tell stories that all fit together to tell one larger story, the Bible uses multiple individual stories to tell the primary story of God’s redeeming love displayed on the cross of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Individual biblical stories can each be examined to see how it reflects the nature of God, the nature of man, and the actions of both.

Telling parents that they are required to disciple their children without also helping them to understand the reason why is like instructing people to set a New Year’s resolution. It may be effective for a short period of time, but daily schedules quickly return to the regular routine. The purpose of this project was not to bring about a temporary change to obtain a statistical result for a project. It sought to bring about changes that would affect generations. Parents were reminded weekly that disciplining their children should be a natural outflow of their love for God. These reminders were used to bring forth an ongoing desire for family discipleship.

This project flowed from a pastoral heart that desired to see the best for the parents and children of NEPBC. It strove to set high expectations that could be reached through realistic and attainable steps on the parents’ part. This purpose was accomplished by the completion of its four goals.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

Unfortunately, you cannot simply tell the parents to disciple their children and watch them all start perfectly to do it. Strategic planning and great effort is often required. Four goals were set in this project to bring about the desired result. The evaluation of those goals follows.

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, “The Marvel Cinematic Universe and the Metanarrative of God,” Timothy Paul Jones, July 19, 2016, accessed July 13, 2017, <http://www.timothypauljones.com/culture-the-marvel-cinematic-universe-and-humanitys-hunger-for-a-metanarrative/>.

## **Goal 1**

The first goal of the project was to assess the current discipleship perceptions and practices of parents at Northeast Park Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering the FDPPS to parents before the course began. The goal would be considered successful if ten surveys were collected before the beginning of the course. Although there was a desire for more participants, the needed ten surveys were collected before the course began. This goal is considered successful.

## **Goal 2**

The second goal of the project was to develop a six-session curriculum to equip parents to more effectively disciple their children. The decision to use a six-session curriculum was born out of two realities. First, I deemed six sessions would sufficiently give parents the foundation needed to disciple their children. Second, a six-week curriculum taught during the Sunday school hour would get the highest participation without greatly disrupting many other parts of the Sunday school program. Many of the parents of NEPBC volunteer in multiple pieces of the Sunday morning programs. Additional volunteers had to be recruited for the entire length of the curriculum to enable these parents to participate.

Goal 2 was considered successful if an expert panel judged each piece of the curriculum sufficient or higher. Members of the expert panel were given a copy of the curriculum and a rubric to evaluate each session. They examined six categories:

1. The session is clear and easy to understand.
2. The information is logically arranged.
3. The graphics are helpful.
4. The information is appropriate for the target group.
5. The information is biblically accurate.
6. The material sufficiently covers the specific topic.

The panel reviewers had four scores they could give each category: 1 = insufficient, 2 =

requires attention, 3 = sufficient, 4 = exemplary. An area of the curriculum would have been deemed insufficient if it would have been rated below sufficient by two panel members. No area of the curriculum received two below sufficient marks.<sup>2</sup>

Even though no area required attention and the goal was considered successful, many of the panelists added comments about various aspects of the curriculum. Grammatical and formatting changes were made to the curriculum based on their suggestions. Other comments that were suggested did not change the curriculum material directly but did influence discussion times during the course as there was great wisdom to be found in panelists' advice.

### **Goal 3**

The third goal was to equip parents at Northeast Park Baptist Church with the developed curriculum to engage in family discipleship. This goal was addressed by implementing the designed curriculum and to host two family meals in weeks seven and eight.<sup>3</sup> The goal was measured by administering the FDPPS a second time to measure changes in family discipleship perception and practices. This goal was considered successful if the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-curriculum survey scores. Questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 were reverse scored for the perceptions portion of the survey. The results of the post-curriculum survey demonstrated teaching the curriculum made a significant difference from the pre-curriculum scores ( $t(9)=2.919, p=.017$ ).

Breaking the survey into two sections helps to reveal where the change occurred. The first eight questions of the survey addressed the perceptions of the participants. Examining these questions as a group demonstrated there was not a

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix 4.

<sup>3</sup>See appendix 7.

significant change from the pre- and post-curriculum scores ( $t(9)=2.217$ ,  $p=.053$ ). The last eight questions in the FDPPS addressed the practices of the participants. Examining these questions as a group demonstrated a significant change in pre- and post-curriculum scores ( $t(9)=2.295$ ,  $p=.047$ ).

These results might be explained by the fact that I have been teaching these parents over the last two years. On more than one occasion, I have taught parental responsibility in the discipleship of children in Sunday school and from the pulpit. I did not wait to share information I was learning through my studies at Southern Seminary with the congregation even though I knew it might have an impact on the scores of the project. In Sunday School, whenever discussion of the mission of making disciples would arise, I would speak about parents living in their mission field. Five months before the course began, I preached a two-week sermon series based on Deuteronomy 6:4-11 and Psalm 78:1-8 focusing on discipling our children out of a love for God and out of our love for them. Though these may have affected the scores of the project, parental influence over their children was too critical an issue to wait for the project's implementation.

A ceiling effect may appear in the results. A ceiling effect occurs when scores migrate to the high end of the measurement instrument because there is no higher score available to the one being tested.<sup>4</sup> When examining the results of the perceptions portion of the first survey, nineteen of the possible eighty responses gave a score of 6 for 20 percent of the responses at a maximum score. Some people do not like giving the highest score available.<sup>5</sup> When the number of 5s and 6s scored in the first survey are added together, they comprise 43 of the possible 80 scores in the first survey for a total of 54

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<sup>4</sup>Arthur Aron, Elliot J. Coups, and Elaine N. Aron, *Statistics for Psychology*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 708.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 18.

percent of the responses. Before the curriculum was taught, more than half the answers trended on the highest portion of the scale. There may have been a change in perceptions that the survey was unable to detect. Yet, while the perceptions of the parents did not show a significant change, the survey did demonstrate parents began putting into practice the things they were learning.

The behavior change was not seen in any one particular area. When a statistical analysis of each of the 16 questions is run individually, not one question demonstrates a significant change among the participants. When grouped as a whole, however, there was a significant positive change in the practices of the parents who went through the curriculum. It is a great encouragement to see parents become more active in the discipleship of their children.

#### **Goal 4**

The fourth goal was to develop a discipleship plan for ongoing family training. This goal would be considered successful if each rubric meets or exceeds the sufficiency level as judged by the active deacons of NEPBC. Each deacon was given a copy of the plan to evaluate and score individually.<sup>6</sup> At a regular deacons' meeting, the plan was discussed, and questions were answered. The deacons expressed excitement over the Wednesday evening meetings while also admitting concern over a large change. Changes are not easy, but the deacons that admitted concern also agreed the change was needed. The goal is considered successful and the plan was adopted by the deacons.

#### **Strengths of the Project**

The primary strength in this project resided in moving beyond lecturing information to parents. The strength of the project was found in giving guided opportunities for practice. It is easy to forget that curriculum is more than learning words

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<sup>6</sup>Results of the rubric can be seen in appendix 5.

on a page but moves into application. The definition of curriculum used for this project was seen in chapter 1, “a desired goal or set of values, which can be activated through a development process culminating in experiences for students.”<sup>7</sup> This definition requires more than a series of lectures on biblical passages. This project moved each parent to have multiple times in the class hour to teach Scripture to someone, and actively engage in discipleship practices. Parents can no longer say that they cannot guide their children in the Scriptures because they have publicly demonstrated their ability. These opportunities were seen in the six-week curriculum itself and in the two dinner experiences.

A second strength of the project was the six-stage metanarrative structure. Multiple parents met with me to share how encouraging it was for them to understand the notion of the church of today still being involved in God’s story. The idea of a closed canon is often repeated at NEPBC. Members are taught to be wary of new “words from the Lord” and are taught to continually test all claims against the biblical texts. This emphasis may have caused many members to lose sight of the truth that while the canon is closed, God’s mighty works and his story continue today. The idea of our lives being a genuine part of God’s continued story of redemption and the responsibility of the church to continue to carry this message impacted multiple parents. They reported a genuine desire to pass this concept on to their children.

A third strength came from the plan for ongoing family training. The plan put together and approved by the deacons brought genuine excitement that equipping parents was moving from a “happy accident” to an “intentional mission” of the church. The concept of intentional planning is being extended into every area of the church. Activities are no longer being put on the calendar simply to repeat the activities of the previous

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<sup>7</sup>Jon Wiles and Joseph Bondi, *Curriculum Development: A Guide to Practice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 1998), 12.

year. Each activity is being considered as to how it will make disciples and promote family unity. Picnics that were previously going to be “youth picnics” have suddenly become “family picnics.” The understanding is growing within the church that events that separate the family should only happen if there is a major benefit in using separation. It was not a stated purpose of the project to begin transitioning to a family-equipping model of church, but it is a welcomed by-product of the project.

The final strength of the project is the ownership of the curriculum itself. NEPBC now owns curriculum that can be used as new parents are brought into the membership of the church. The pastor or other teacher in the church can meet with new families in the church to help people understand their roles as parents in the discipleship of their children. The church currently has a membership class that all new members are required to attend to be members of the church. Pieces of the curriculum can be included for new members who are parents. This inclusion in the membership class will help to demonstrate the church’s belief that parents are to take the lead in their children’s discipleship and give information about tools the church will provide to help.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The project brought about positive results, but it was not perfect. A major weakness stemmed from participant absences. Everyone who participated in the project was present week 1. Subsequent weeks, however, saw various people absent. No individual missed more than two classes, but only four members of the course were present for all six sessions. Reasons for absences included sickness, vacation, helping in other areas of the church, and oversleeping. Attendance was emphasized at the beginning of the project, but there was simply no way to compel people to be present every week. To help negate this weakness, copies of the curriculum were given to every participant who missed a session.

Another weakness involved the time allotment for each session. The Sunday



school time limited each session to only one hour. The curriculum called for discussion and practice which caused the end of several lessons being rushed. Adequate time was not available to have people think through their personal goals before leaving, which led to some participants not writing down or finalizing their goals. Sometimes the goals parents made were never truly thought through and were practically impossible for them to complete.

A third weakness of the project came from relying on people's memory to fill out their survey. Many participants reported guessing when filling out the FDPPS on how many spiritual interactions they had with their children over the specified time periods. It is possible to talk about the Scriptures naturally in a conversation without registering in the mind that discipleship has taken place. Using a Likert-type scale can also mask some increases. For example, if a parent began reading the Bible with their children four times a month from three times, the Likert-type scale would show no change. This is a small change, but all improvement should be celebrated. The Likert-type scale also could mask a radical change in behavior. If someone read the Bible with their child seven times the previous month, and suddenly began reading the Bible with their child every morning and every night before bed, the scale would show no change.

### **Suggested Changes**

Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the project, given the opportunity to start over, there are things I would have done differently. The first change would be the time allotted for each session. An extra thirty minutes would have granted the opportunity to extend the discussion and focus more on the goals for the coming week. I would have asked people to share their personal goals before the session closed and had a time of prayer for parents regarding the completion of their goals. If the goals were written down and turned in to me, I could have prayed specifically for each goal through the week and

sent a specific note of encouragement to each participant. Positive reinforcement helps in the retention of behavior.

The next thing I would have done differently would have been to not wait until the six-week course was over to give parents the opportunity to use a family meal to teach their children. If I were to run the program again, I would have five dinners that run from week 2 until week 6. More practice for parents is better for the family. These extra meals may have given the families that did not participate in the additional two weeks the chance to be included in this aspect of the project.

Another area for improvement in the project comes from the evaluation committee that examined the curriculum. There was a diversity in types of jobs and experiences these men brought to the evaluation, but there was no diversity in ethnicity. The evaluation committee accurately represented the parents that would go through the course material but having insights from men of different ethnic positions would enriched the evaluation.

The final change I would make is to include a session teaching parents how to use popular stories, books, movies, and television shows in the discipleship of their children. Mankind is addicted to stories, and many stories can be used to help open the child's eyes to the truths of Scripture. Jon Bloom, co-founder of Desiring God, wrote when reflecting on the work of J.R.R. Tolkien,

No faërie story or myth or man-made religion in all of recorded history compares with the Great Story of Christianity. But we need all the help we can get to turn our eyes away from our confined corner of reality and see the Story with fresh eyes. For many, looking through the faërie lenses of Middle-earth has helped them see again the real Epic we each are a small part of. They have been helped to see the gleam of the true evangelium and press on in the journeys to which they have been appointed with renewed hope and courage, knowing that at the end of the Road is Home.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Jon Bloom, "Did Tolkien Waste His Life?" Desiring God, December 19, 2014, accessed June 6, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/did-tolkien-waste-his-life>.

The focus on the biblical metanarrative would have made a session focusing on using popular stories to benefit children who are drawn to these stories a natural fit.

### **Theological Reflections**

This project gave me an opportunity to study eight verses of Psalm 78 more deeply than I would have ever done on my own. There was a richness that was added by examining the life of the man Asaph. The Scriptures do not give many details about him, but the verses that are devoted to him demonstrate his faithful devotion to God and a continuing faithfulness in his offspring. Whether I am correct in assuming his authorship or not, I am encouraged to see how the man who gave his name to this psalm would see his sons follow in his footsteps serving God.

Psalm 78 shares the call of God instructing parents to pass on the stories of his mighty works to their children. They are not only to tell the stories but are to explain them and reveal their truths. These stories are guides to the next generation, showing them how to place their hope in the Creator of the universe and the holder of history. The consequences of failing to pass on God's story to the next generation will result in a stubborn generation that does not know God and continues in rebellion against him.

A love for children is not the first motivation for obedience. A love for God drives this storytelling process. As an examination of Deuteronomy 6 demonstrates, the people of God are to have a devotion toward the true living God with all their being. An outpouring of this love will result in conversations about God's commandments in daily life. God's mighty works will be talked about first thing in the morning, throughout the day, and when preparing for sleep. This all-consuming devotion to God empowers a discipleship that is not dependent upon the sheer willpower of the parent.

The power of story must not be neglected. The gospel itself is a story that must be shared for salvation. No human can be saved apart from knowing the story of Christ crucified for sins, buried, and risen from the dead (1 Cor 15:1-4). Today's believers can

know who God is and what he has done by reading his story starting in Genesis 1 and concluding in Revelation 22. Story after story contained in the pages of sacred Scripture reveal one ongoing theme: the king of kings loves a group of rebels so much he did all that was necessary to save them. Unworthy rebels are daily invited to become children of the king and receive all the benefits of sonship. This story is amazing, and it is true.

### **Personal Reflections**

Going back for a doctoral degree was never about the piece of paper at the end. The degree will not advance my career as I have even less desire to leave my church now than when this journey began. Should God choose to keep me at Northeast Park Baptist Church until my last day, I will be a fulfilled man. Returning to Southern Seminary was always about being more fully equipped to carry out God's command to equip the saints for the ministry (Eph 4:12). I did not know how to organize the church in such a way that families were not separated every week. I did not know how to teach parents how to teach their children. My strategy of telling them to "just do it" was not working.

Walking through the path Southern Seminary laid out for those who would study family ministry has not been easy. It has meant saying no to events I would have enjoyed attending and spending time away from my family which is never easy. Yet, looking back over the last three years of my life, I can see a spiritual growth within myself that would have never happened had I never submitted my application to Southern Seminary. Books that I would have never dreamed of reading now have permanent places on my bookshelf even if others will likely never be opened again. Honestly, even the difficult books have challenged me to broaden my scope of continued learning and never grow satisfied thinking I have learned enough.

I have been humbled to see the support NEPBC has given me over the last three years. They have been understanding of my times away to campus and have granted me the support necessary to make it through long nights reading book after book and

writing paper after paper. They have volunteered to temporarily take on new roles to enable others to attend the class I taught. They have even financially supported this endeavor. Maybe lots of pastors believe they serve the greatest congregation on earth; one of them must be right. I believe I may be that one.

Finally, I am reinvigorated for ministry through the things I have learned from assigned readings, the time invested in my life by godly men, the encouragement of fellow learners in my cohort, and the personal experience of writing and teaching a curriculum within my own congregation. I believe families have already been strengthened by the work done through my course of study and will continue to be enriched in the future through implementing the tools and knowledge I have gained. May it all be for the truth, for the church, for the world, and for the glory of God.

### **Conclusion**

This project has sought to equip the parents at NEPBC to disciple their children. The conclusion of the project is not the conclusion of the project. The lessons learned and the plans made must continue long past the time that anyone reads these words. The generation of parents not yet born must be taught the story of God. If God should grant continued tomorrows that far exceed the lifetime of every current member of NEPBC, the stories of the mighty works of God must still be told. It is the responsibility of this generation to teach the next generation that they in turn must teach the following generation. This process must continue. The story must be told.

APPENDIX 1  
 DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM EVALUATION  
 RUBRIC

<b>Curriculum Evaluation Tool</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>
The session is clear and easy to understand.					
The information is logically arranged.					
The graphics are helpful.					
The information is appropriate for the target group.					
The information is biblically accurate.					
The material sufficiently covers the specific topic.					

## APPENDIX 2

### FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES SURVEY

The following instrument is the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey. This survey, written by Timothy Paul Jones, was given before and after the curriculum.<sup>1</sup> It contains two parts. The first eight questions survey parental perceptions. The second eight questions survey parental practices.

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<sup>1</sup>The survey is copied from Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 215-18. Used by permission.





Directions: Please give your opinion on these statements 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.

- |   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for awhile.        | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. Parents, and particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Directions: Answer the following questions by circling the frequency in which you have done the specified event.

- |  |       |      |                   |           |           |                 |
|--|-------|------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| 9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the <i>past week</i> have I prayed aloud with any of my children?   | Never | Once | A couple of times | 3-4 times | 5-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 10. How many times in the <i>past week</i> has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?   | Never | Once | A couple of times | 3-4 times | 5-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 11. How many times in the <i>past month</i> have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?  | Never | Once | A couple of times | 3-4 times | 5-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 12. How many times in the <i>past month</i> have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?                      | Never | Once | A couple of times | 3-4 times | 5-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 13. How many times in the <i>past two months</i> has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?   | Never | Once | A couple of times | 3-4 times | 5-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 14. How many times in the <i>past two months</i> have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?                                      | Never | Once | A couple of times | 3-4 times | 5-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 15. How many times in the <i>past year</i> have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church? | Never | Once | A couple of times | 3-4 times | 5-6 times | 7 or more times |
| 16. How often in the <i>past year</i> has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?                              | Never | Once | A couple of times | 3-4 times | 5-6 times | 7 or more times |

APPENDIX 3

DISCIPLESHIP PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

Discipleship Plan Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The goals of the plan are clearly stated.					
The plan contains specific steps to achieve the goals.					
Where necessary, the plan outlines tools to be used.					
The plan is clear and easy to understand.					
The plan is appropriate for the ministry context.					
The plan is biblically faithful.					

APPENDIX 4

RESULTS FROM DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM  
EVALUATION RUBRIC

Table A1. Results from expert panel rubric evaluations

Session	Feedback Question	1's received	2's received	3's received	4's received	Average Score
1	1	0	0	2	5	3.71
	2	0	0	2	5	3.71
	3	0	0	4	3	3.43
	4	0	0	2	5	3.71
	5	0	0	1	6	3.88
	6	0	1	3	3	3.29
2	1	0	0	2	5	3.71
	2	0	0	1	6	3.88
	3	0	0	4	3	3.43
	4	0	0	1	6	3.88
	5	0	0	1	6	3.88
	6	0	0	2	5	3.71
3	1	0	0	2	5	3.71
	2	0	0	0	7	4.00
	3	0	0	4	3	3.43
	4	0	0	1	6	3.88
	5	0	0	1	6	3.88
	6	0	0	1	6	3.88

Table A1 continued

4	1	0	0	0	7	4.00
	2	0	0	0	7	4.00
	3	0	1	3	3	3.29
	4	0	0	1	6	3.88
	5	0	0	1	6	3.88
	6	0	0	3	4	3.57
5	1	0	0	2	5	3.71
	2	0	0	0	7	4.00
	3	0	0	4	3	3.43
	4	0	0	2	5	3.71
	5	0	0	1	6	3.88
	6	0	0	1	6	3.88
6	1	0	0	2	5	3.71
	2	0	0	2	5	3.71
	3	0	0	4	3	3.43
	4	0	0	0	7	4.00
	5	0	0	0	7	4.00
	6	0	0	0	7	4.00

APPENDIX 5

RESULTS FROM DISCIPLESHIP PLAN EVALUATION  
RUBRIC

Table A2. Results from discipleship plan evaluation rubric

Question	1's received	2's received	3's received	4's received	Average
1	0	0	3	4	3.57
2	0	0	2	5	3.71
3	0	0	5	2	3.29
4	0	0	6	1	3.14
5	0	0	5	2	3.29
6	0	0	2	5	3.71

## APPENDIX 6

### NORTHEAST PARK ONGOING DISCIPLESHIP PLAN FOR FAMILY TRAINING

The purpose of this plan is to ensure that Northeast Park Baptist Church invests time, energy, and other resources into the lives of parents to enable and encourage them for family ministry. The mission of the church is to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19-20). Therefore, it must equip believers to carry out the good works to which God has called them. Our goals for families are:

1. That each parent sets aside regular time with their children to talk about spiritual topics.
2. That each parent has resources available to them to guide them through the process of teaching the mighty works of God and his commands to their children.
3. That parental efforts for their children’s spiritual growth are known to the church so the church can assist parents in discipling their children.

#### **Weekly Training**

The Sunday school hour will be the first method of training parents to continue to disciple their children. Parents of students at Northeast Park Baptist Church will be placed in a Sunday school class that is using compatible curriculum to their children. This class will continue to be one-week ahead of their children’s class. This approach will give parents the opportunity to introduce their children to the biblical topics covered in Sunday school curriculum throughout the week. The child will have their parents’ teaching reinforced the following week in Sunday school. Sunday school teachers will be reminded by the Sunday school Director to encourage and support parents in teaching the material to their children.

During the school year, the Wednesday Evening activities will be changed to encourage intergenerational involvement. Wednesday evening will no longer separate everyone into different age groups. Families will stay together throughout the evening. An exception will be made for children too young to attend school. Separate activities and care will be provided for them.

After the Wednesday dinner, families will work together to clean up the facilities and move tables and chairs in the Fellowship Hall as needed. Evenings will begin with some music either led by a group of adults, a group of youth, a family, or a combination of ages. One lesson will be taught to everyone based on the Ninety-nine essential doctrines of the Gospel Project curriculum. Some Wednesday evenings will have a mission activity. Some evenings may include a game or a craft. Every evening will end with groups of families and individuals praying together. Each group will be given a list of church prayer needs and they will be encouraged to share their own requests. This prayer time is to feature people praying from every generation together. This intergenerational model will support the work of the family and strive to encourage similar activities within the home.

### **Monthly Training**

A monthly family guide will be produced that will include hymns and Scripture passages that will be used in the weekly Sunday morning gathering. This guide can be used by parents to talk with their children in advance about what will happen during worship, so each child can better understand the different components of the worship service. This guide will be included with the digital newsletter that gets sent to every member of the church.

### **Yearly Training**

A meeting will be held once a year that will focus on each student at NEPBC. The meeting will include the parents of the child, the Sunday school teacher, the



Children's Director or Youth Leader, and the Pastor. This meeting will discuss the observations each participant has concerning the spiritual life of the child. After sharing observations with the parents and hearing the parents' concerns, church leaders will assist the parent in making an individualized spiritual plan for the child. This plan will focus on ways the church can help better equip each parent to disciple their child and encourage the parent in finding regular methods of spiritual engagement. At the request of the parent, follow up meetings can be scheduled to help monitor and adjust parts of the plan as needed.

### **Evaluation**

This plan needs to be evaluated to see where adjustments need to be made and determine what is working and what can be improved or removed. A meeting with the pastor, the Chairman of deacons, the Sunday School Director, Children's Director, and Youth Leaders will be held in October for the purpose of review.

APPENDIX 7  
COURSE CURRICULUM

The following pages contain a text-only version of the six-week curriculum taught at NEPBC from April 8, 2018 through May 13, 2018.

## A FAMILY FOUNDATION

If I were to ask your child, “What does your mom/dad believe about Jesus?” how do you think your child would answer?

If I were to ask your child, “What is your mom’s/dad’s favorite book of the Bible?” how do you think your child would answer?

If I were to ask your child, “What is your mom’s/dad’s favorite thing to talk about?” how do you think they would answer?

If answering those questions was difficult for you, just know that you are not alone. But do not get comfortable with that thought! These questions are things your children should know about you!

How natural is it to have biblical discussions (about the Bible, not about church events) in your home? Why?

This course is going to attempt to guide you in becoming the primary people to disciple your children. While it will not answer every question you may have about the Bible, it will help you to understand the role God has given you as the father or mother of your child.

So how do you start? What do you teach your child first?

Well, it doesn’t begin with them. It begins with you.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the people of Israel are commanded to teach the laws of God to their children. However, before that commandment is offered, the people of Israel are told that they themselves must love the LORD with all their heart, soul, and might.

Why do you think Moses commanded the people of Israel to love God before he commanded them to teach their children?

What had God done for Israel that might cause them to love him?

What are the differences between heart, soul, and might in regards to loving God?

The walk should match the talk.

Loving God is shown in our obedience to his commands. No parent would accept a proclamation of love from a child who sings their praises in one moment but disobeys in the next moment. Keeping God’s commandments guards our love for him. God’s commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). They are designed to bring us joy as we live our lives the way God intended them to be lived. When we sin, we go against our original design, and even though it may bring momentary satisfaction, it eventually robs us of our love for God.

How would you evaluate your current love for God? Would you say the way you live reflects that love to your children?

If that answer is not what it needs to be, it will be difficult to guide your children to where they need to be.

*Let's take a minute and ask God to help us to love him in such a way that our children can see that love.*

You cannot love that which you do not know. A large focus of this course will involve getting to know God. We do that through meeting him in the Bible. We learn what he has done, and we learn more of his character. We learn of God's mighty acts.

There are many stories in the Bible. However, the Bible is one big story that reveals God's plan of salvation for his own creation. We will look at that story in more detail in a different session, but for now look God's story of redemption.

*Creation* – God created the earth and made everything good.

*Fall* – Mankind did not obey God and as a just punishment, God cursed everything.

*Israel* – God chose one nation to be the instrument he would use to carry out the eventual blessing of all the world.

*Redemption* – From Israel came one man (Jesus) who lived in perfect obedience to God, yet would die to bear the world's punishment.

*Church* – God chooses men and women of every nation to be the instruments He uses to carry the message of salvation to the all the world.

*Consummation* – In the end, God will purge his creation of its sin. Those who rejected redemption will continue in judgment. Those who are found in the Redeemer will enjoy God's blessing for all eternity.

Focusing on what God has done in each of these parts of the story helps us to love God more and more.

Which two of these parts of the story stand out the most to you? Why?

Which part of the six sections of the biblical story do you know the least about?

Can We Talk?

Discuss some struggles you have had in teaching your children about God. What has gone wrong? What has worked well for you?

Discuss some ways that you can grow in knowledge of the Scriptures for the benefit of your children.

Time for action

What is one thing you will meditate on to grow your love for God?

What is one thing you will do this week to learn something new about the section of Scripture where you feel the weakest?

What is one thing you will do this week to have a biblical conversation with your children?

What is one thing you can do to let your children catch a glimpse of your love for God?

## DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, SAME MESSAGE.

This generation must deal with issues previous generations never dreamed about. The internet has revolutionized how we gain information and what information is available to us. Our grandparents could not instantly discover what the weather was like 600 miles away, nor could they pull up directions to a new location and have those directions not only instantly given to them but have the directions change based on current traffic conditions.

What are some things our children learn how to do that you did not learn when you were a child?

What are some things our children need, that all children of all time have needed?

Because there are so many new things our children learn, there may be a temptation to believe our children NEED many new things than children of previous generations needed. While some needed skills may be new, there are some things children need because all humanity has the same greatest need.

Asaph called out to his congregation:

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!  
I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our fathers have told us.  
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. Psalm 78:1–4 (ESV)

Asaph makes a claim in this psalm that the people he is addressing know the stories of God's works because their "fathers" taught them those stories. Parents had been commanded to teach their children God's commands (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Did your father teach you biblical stories?

If your father did not teach you, you may be afraid you will not be able to adequately teach your children. But fear not!

What actions are you currently taking to better your knowledge of God's mighty acts?

Are you willing to do what it takes to know these stories well enough to teach them to your children? Privately answer that question now.

When we think of teaching our children, we only think of their benefit. But Asaph connected teaching your child to your parents! Notice how Asaph worded this psalm:

I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our fathers have told us.  
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.

Do you think about teaching your child as being a blessing to your parents? How might developing this attitude affect your motivation for diligently disciplining your child?

We are called to honor our parents no matter how difficult that may be for us. It is possible that your parents might not be believers. They might despise the gospel. Maybe your parents are no longer living or you have a strained relationship with them. You may not know your mother or father. In any of these situations, we obey the commandment to honor our fathers and mothers when we strive to ensure their grandchildren know the mighty acts of God.

After Asaph implored the congregation to tell their children of God's glorious deeds, he recounted some of those deeds to them.

What are some of the mighty deeds Asaph recounts to Israel in Psalm 78?

Why might Asaph have chosen these events? What is significant about them?

Asaph died before many biblical stories occurred. There are other stories that we could share with our children. Besides, "All of them," what are some biblical stories you believe you need to share with your children and why?

Eventually, you will want to have your child become familiar with all the Scriptures. But you have to start somewhere. When choosing stories to read through and discuss with your children, do not forget the six plot points of the biblical story: Creation, The Fall, Israel, Redemption, The Church, and Consummation. Draw stories and passages that will demonstrate each of these main plot points.

Name a story or passage that fits in each category.

Creation:

The Fall:

Israel:

Redemption:

The Church:

Consummation:

Take a moment to pray that God would help you honor your parents through your discipleship of their grandchildren.

Teaching your children about the Bible can be as basic as reading a biblical passage and then asking questions about that passage. Maybe reading the passage does not scare you but the talking about it does. Don't fear; you do not have to have every answer. Sometimes, someone may ask a question of the text that you do not know the answer. Make it a family challenge to find the answer.

There are always a number of questions that can be asked of any particular passage. Here are three questions that might help you on your way.

1. What does this passage teach us about God?
2. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
3. What has God done about this, and what does he expect of us in light of what he has done?<sup>1</sup>

The Bible is God's story. It speaks of him. Yet, it guides us to understand our problem and what God has done to fix our problem. It then calls us to a holy life. Teaching your children to think this way when they approach the Bible will help them not to read themselves into the text, but to search for Jesus and the gospel throughout the Scriptures.

#### Can We Talk?

Read Exodus 17:1-7. Ask the three questions of the passage, and together as a group discuss the answers.

#### Time for Action

How will you deepen your love for God this week?

What will you do this week to become more familiar with the biblical stories?

What will you do to go through a biblical story with your children this week?

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<sup>1</sup>Taylor, Justin. "Gerald Bray: On Three Questions to Ask of Biblical Texts." The Gospel Coalition, 18 Nov. 2009, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-interview-with-gerald-bray-what-questions-should-we-ask-of-a-biblical-text/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-interview-with-gerald-bray-what-questions-should-we-ask-of-a-biblical-text/). Accessed 12/8/2017.



## DIFFERENT METHODS, SAME MESSAGE.

The Bible is filled with different genres, yet it gives one consistent message. Asaph employs a blending of genres in teaching Israel to teach their children.

Psalm 78 is an historic psalm (it teaches what happened in history) as well as a didactic psalm (it teaches a truth that needs to be taught and understood).

Psalm 78 is a psalm (it was something that was sung) that declares the use of parable (a single story used to teach a main point).

To get the full weight of the poetic nature of Psalm 78, the audience needs to know the stories Asaph draws upon. So the modern reader may need to take time to read the narrative stories from the Scripture so they can come back and better sing the psalm!

Today may be very uncomfortable for some of you, and for some of you it may be the highlight of the course. Today, we are going to do more than just sit still and learn. Today, we are going to read, act, and sing!

To how many of you does this sound like a fun class?

To how many of you does this sound terrifying?

If you are terrified, relax; we will not force you to do anything you are not willing to do. But did you notice that some were excited and some were scared. The chances are, your children are the same way. Our children do not all enjoy the same things, and they do not all learn the same ways. To only use one method to try to teach them all might benefit some children but hinder other children.

So let's begin!

First, we are going to read out loud to each other. So let's pair up!

Directions: You will take turns reading the Scripture to your partner. Then you are going to ask the three questions we learned last week. Talk through the answers together, then switch readers.

Passage One: Deuteronomy 6:4–9

“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. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (ESV)

1. What does this passage teach us about God?
2. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
3. What has God done about this, and what does he expect of us in light of what he has done?

Passage Two: Psalm 127

Unless the LORD builds the house,  
those who build it labor in vain.  
Unless the LORD watches over the city,  
the watchman stays awake in vain.  
It is in vain that you rise up early  
and go late to rest,  
eating the bread of anxious toil;  
for he gives to his beloved sleep.  
Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,  
the fruit of the womb a reward.  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior  
are the children of one's youth.  
Blessed is the man  
who fills his quiver with them!  
He shall not be put to shame  
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. (ESV)

1. What does this passage teach us about God?
2. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
3. What has God done about this, and what does he expect of us in light of what he has done?

Congratulations! You can read a passage and talk about it! And you did that without any warning that you would be talking about the passage. Imagine what you might have been able to talk about if you had spent ten minutes beforehand to read it, pray about it, and think about how it might apply to your children!

You do not always have to be the reader! As your children learn to read, give them passages to read. Pass the responsibility of reading and asking the basic questions around the family so that everyone gets to “be the leader.”

What do you think is going to be the hardest part about spending time reading and talking about the Scriptures with your family?

What action steps do you need to take to overcome those challenges?

Are you willing to do it?

You do not have to simply read every passage of Scripture out loud. You may be able to act out the passage. Not every passage lends itself to this activity, but some might do so easily. You should think in advance whether there might be any issues acting out the passage before suggesting it.

There may be a danger in acting out Scripture. Children may get more into being overly dramatic than paying attention to the passage. Gently remind them the focus of the time together is to think about the passage and not to draw attention to themselves.

Volunteers needed: Reader, Father, Older Son, Younger Son, Servant

Luke 15:11–32

Reader: And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father,

Younger Son: ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’

Reader: And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said,

Younger Son: ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’

Reader: And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him,

Younger Son: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

Reader: But the father said to his servants,

Father: ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’

Reader: And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him,

Servant: ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’

Reader: But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father,

Older Son: ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’

Reader: And he said to him,

Father: ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’” (ESV)

1. What does this passage teach us about God?
2. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
3. What has God done about this, and what does he expect of us in light of what he has done?

You can act! You can also sing!

The Bible contains a songbook (Psalms). You can also use a hymnal! Great hymns and worship songs teach biblical truths, but not all modern songs are equal. Some hymns are really bad in their theology! Some worship songs are, too! You need to take the time to read through a song, and decide if it is appropriate to use with your children. If someone in your family can play an instrument, tell them in advance and then let them play for the family. Read through the words first and talk about them. Ask questions of the hymn, and think of Scriptures that say what the song is saying. Then, sing!

Let’s try one. Let’s talk about the hymn, then sing it:

Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now am found  
T’was blind but now I see

What is grace? What makes me a wretch?  
How was I lost? How do I now see?

Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

What dangers have I come through?

How has grace kept me safe?  
Where is my home to which grace will lead me?

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, who called me here below,  
Will be forever mine.

What is this verse talking about?

### Can We Talk?

How was today's experience for you? What was easiest? What was hardest?

How might you use these activities with your children?

Do you have experience using any of these methods with your children in the past? How did it go?

### Time for Action

What can you do for someone else this week as an act of love toward God?

Pick one passage to read dramatically with your children this week. Consider Genesis 18:1-15; Genesis 40; Matthew 17:1-13.

Pick one hymn to sing and talk about with your children this week. Consider using a hymn we use in today's corporate worship service.

## WHOSE JOB IS IT?

Name a time when you have sent your child to someone else to learn a specific skill or lesson.

We send our children to school where they are taught by professional teachers. We sign our children up for sports where they are taught by specialized coaches. We pay for lessons for our children to learn to play an instrument by accomplished musicians. We take our children to church where people who have studied the Scriptures teach them how to be Christians. We're done, right? Not so fast!

Deuteronomy 6:4–9

“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. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (ESV)

Who is called to teach children in this passage?

Deuteronomy 32:45–47

And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, “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.” (ESV)

Who is called to teach children in this passage?

I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our fathers have told us.

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.

He established a testimony in Jacob  
and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded our fathers  
to teach to their children,  
that the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and arise and tell them to their children,

so that they should set their hope in God  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments; (ESV)

Who is called to teach children in this passage?

Deuteronomy 11:18–21

“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them 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. (ESV)

Who is called to teach children in this passage?

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (ESV)

Who is called to teach children in this passage?

Based on all the passages you have read so far today, who would you say is responsible for teaching your children about God and His commands?

It becomes evident as you read the Scriptures, that fathers are called out to teach their children. Mothers are also assumed to be active in this job.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you say you rate on carrying out what God has charged you as a parent to do? \_\_\_\_\_

Take a moment and pray that God will help you in the task to discipling your children.

Group Discussion

Discuss as a group the things you have done in your own home to disciple your own children. Take notes of things other people say that sound intriguing to you. If you do not understand something, now is the time to ask. If you are uncomfortable asking publicly, write down who gave the idea, and follow up with them later.

If you are feeling overwhelmed at this responsibility, remember this one great truth: you are not alone!

The church plays an important role in the discipleship of your children.

God has provided the body of Christ individuals with certain spiritual gifts. Some of those people include shepherds (pastors) and teachers. They have a job: to equip you to do your job! Look back at some of the previous passages. Fathers and mothers are being charged to teach their children, but they are first being taught themselves! Moses was teaching the Israelites preparing to enter the Promised Land. Asaph was teaching the congregation the lessons learned in the wilderness. Paul was teaching Timothy, who was about to teach other faithful men.

Who, besides just your parents, had a hand in teaching you the things of God?

Remember, God gave you those individuals not just to make you smarter, but to equip you for the task he has now given you: to be able to teach your children.

You are the church. If you have the ability to teach others, it is vital that you do so. You may be the person God is going to use to help each parent at this church to be better equipped to teach their own child at home.

What are ways you can help teach the children that attend your church?

Equipping others goes beyond teaching a class. Sometimes it is coming alongside another parent to encourage them in teaching their children. Sharing your successes and your failures with one another can make the difference in their following the commands of Christ and them living in disobedience.

Hebrews 10:24–25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

How can you spur on each other to be active in discipling your children?

Whether the Lord comes back (the Day is drawing near) or our children move away from home, our time for raising children will eventually end.

How does that thought motivate you to draw together with other believers?

#### Time for Action

What is one way you can share your love of God with your children this week?

What is something you will do this week to disciple your children?

What do you need to ask of someone else to be an encouragement to you to continue teaching your child?



## BENEFITS AND CONSEQUENCES

After seeing that God has called parents to disciple their own children, you might believe that teaching your children should be done out of pure obedience. That way of thinking would turn what can be a most joyful act into a true drudgery. What is the motivation for teaching our children, and what are the benefits of success and the consequences of failure?

Have you ever known a person who was passionate about a particular topic? Have you seen someone who is overwhelmed with love about a specific thing? What characteristics about them let you know they love it?

Name a topic you enjoy talking about. What is it about that topic you like?

When it comes to a topic you love, do people have to order you to speak about it? Of course not! Some things consume our thoughts out of the sheer joy and delight we have in that area. God wants us to have that affection toward Him! God wants our delight to be in Him and what He has done. He wants it to overrun our speech so that when we are sitting around the house, we talk about Him. When we are out on walks, we talk about Him. When we lay down to sleep, He is the last thought we have. When we wake up, our minds go instantly to Him.

Fear may be gripping you right now. If you are like all other humans living today, you are not fully overwhelmed with love toward God. True, you may have your moments where you are overwhelmed by God's love for you and your love for Him, but then there are those mornings where you start out the day running behind and never seem to catch up. In those moments, God is not at the center of every thought. You may even wonder why God is not helping you catch a green light once in a while.

There is hope for us, not because we can fix ourselves, but because God wants us to love Him more. We need to ask Him to grow that love within us.

Ephesians 1:16–21

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 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they would come to know more of the goodness of God, and they would know more of the blessings of God in Christ Jesus. The more we see what God has done for us, the more we will find ourselves falling in love with Him.

Take a moment now to pray that God will enlighten the eyes of your heart, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.

As you grow in your love toward God, you will find it easier to make it a priority to disciple your children to know Him as you do.

### THE BENEFITS

What does your child receive when they are taught the deeds of God from you?  
Let's see what the Scripture says.

Psalm 78:6-7

that the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and arise and tell them to their children,  
so that they should set their hope in God  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments;

Notice the psalmist is not only interested in one generation. He is looking toward future generations that are not even born yet. Asaph is hoping to set up one generation after another knowing the glorious deeds of God because of your faithfulness.

What does Asaph want for future generations?

1. That those generations will place their \_\_\_\_\_ in God.
2. That those generations will not \_\_\_\_\_ the works of God.

### HOPE IN GOD

When recounting God's mighty acts, it is startling how often the Israelites rebel against him. Yet God does not destroy them in spite of all their rebellion. God spares them because he always keeps his promises and God had promised he was going to bring redemption through the Israelites. God always keeps his promises.

Read Genesis 12:1-3. How did God keep His promise to Abram? How does that encourage us today?

God has promised to save all who trust in his son, Jesus. Even though his children still sin, God will keep his promise to save them from the judgment their sin has earned. By teaching your children the biblical stories, you are guiding them to have hope in God. You may fail them; they may fail themselves, but through faith your children may develop a hope in God who never fails.

Take a moment now to pray that your children (and future generations) will have their hope, not in you or themselves, but in God alone.

Sadly, this is not guaranteed. Teaching your child about God will not guarantee their faith, and the faith of future generations. But it is that hope that drives us to do what God has called us to do. The results are in God's hands.

### THAT THEY NOT FORGET

Children have an amazing ability to forget things.

Name something your child has forgotten that you have told them more than once to do.

What do you do to help your child remember things?

Children have an amazing ability to forget the most common things. They can forget to brush their teeth even after being told to do it for 14 straight years. With this thought in mind, do you think hearing something in Sunday School one time will cause your child to remember it ten years from now? Unfortunately, probably not! They need to hear it again, and again, and again! Hear again Asaph's instruction:

so that they should set their hope in God  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments.

Asaph says we should teach our children in such a way that they will remember the works of God, and therefore live in obedience to what God has asked him to do. This will require going over the same stories again, and again, and again, and again....

Repetition of stories has a scientifically demonstrated benefit. Studies have shown that repetition of stories causes the listener to give more credence to the story. In other words, the more you repeat the story, the more your children are likely to believe the story to be important. If we want our children to "not forget" these stories and hold them to be true, we must dedicate ourselves to being regular storytellers!

Forgetting what God has done in the past can lead to disobedience today. Paul, referring to the biblical events of the wilderness, wrote:

## 1 Corinthians 10:6–11

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

The stories of the Bible are written for our instruction. If we do not remember the stories, we will likely live out the same types of sins for which they were punished. Which leads us to...

## CONSEQUENCES OF NOT DISCIPLINING OUR CHILDREN

### Psalm 78:8

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.

According to this Psalm, what are the consequences of not telling our children the stories of God? What would it practically look like?

We are likely to become stubborn and rebellious toward God when our hope is not in Him and we forget his glorious works. This does not necessarily mean that failing to disciple your children will cause them to be stubborn and rebellious toward you. Many children who never trusted in God were called “good kids.” Remember, the goal of disciplining your children is not positive behavior (that behavior is just a side-effect). The goal is spiritual faithfulness.

## Can We Talk?

Which is harder: teaching your children the Bible, teaching your children their school work, or teaching your children a skill or ability? Why?

To which of the above activities do you devote the most time? To which of the above activities do you talk about the most with your children?

Which is more motivating to you: the benefits of teaching God’s works or the consequences for not doing so? How does that one motivate you more?

Based on what you learned today, what things might need to be changed in your schedule?

#### TIME FOR ACTION

What is something you will do this week to help your children put their hope in God?

What story from your life can you share with your child that demonstrates how you or a close family member has benefited from putting their hope in God?

Have you put your hope in God? If you have not, what is stopping you. Don't let anything get in the way of trusting in God for your salvation. Talk to someone ASAP that will show you what it means to trust in God.

## KNOW THE WHOLE STORY

The Scriptures contain many stories, but it truly is one story. It is the story of the Creator God who makes a perfect creation which rebels against Him, and His work to save his creation until in the end it is completely redeemed. Since the Bible is one big story with many smaller stories, to disciple your children you must tell them stories.

Mankind is a storytelling creature. Think of all the different ways you absorb stories throughout your day. Commercials are often 30-second stories. The music you listen to tells a story. You talk about your weekend through telling stories. You pay money to a movie theater to watch a story. Television shows tell stories. We are so addicted to stories, our brain keeps telling us stories while we sleep!

When your children were younger, did you have story time with your children? If so, how did they respond?

Effectively using stories with children begins with a consistent, distraction-free engagement. Scientists using MRI technology actually discovered the more you tell your children stories, the more effective story-time becomes.

Remember: consistently telling the same story also grows the story's credibility in the mind of the listener. If you want your children to believe the story of the cross and give it importance, you need to tell them the story over and over.

So what is the big story? Where do we begin? Should we just read through the Bible starting with Genesis and ending with Revelation? You can, but you don't have to do it that way.

We can break the biblical story into six major categories that we saw in lesson one:

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Israel
4. Redemption
5. The Church
6. Consummation

Now let's break down each of these units and see how they build upon each other and how knowing them can help each individual story be more effective.

### THE CREATION

In the beginning...

It is important to show that everything we see when we look around was created by God. He is the Creator. He made everything good. In this original creation death was unknown. Sin was unknown. Things would not wear out and working the ground was not difficult.

While this is such a short part of the Scripture (it is covered in two chapters), it is the basis for showing why everything we see now needs redemption.

Where do we find this section? \_\_\_\_\_

## THE FALL

One chapter in the Bible helps us to understand every other chapter in the Bible. This moment of rebellion where mankind disobeyed God is the reason everything else is necessary. Mankind deserves to be destroyed because of our rebellion against God. God even warned man that the penalty of disobedience to his command was death. Every child is a descendent of Adam and Eve and bears the curse of their disobedience. We are born with a broken nature, not the way God originally created man. If we ever hope to dwell with God, we need the Creator to fix us. Even in the fall, God gives hope to the reader of the story that the Seed of the Woman will crush the head of the Serpent. The reader continues to ask, "Who is this one that will come?"

Where do we find this section? \_\_\_\_\_

## ISRAEL

By God's grace, He promises that He will redeem his creation. As the pages turn throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, we see God get more specific about the person He will send to earth to redeem everyone and everything. God chooses one nation from which his servant would come: Israel. As you view their disobedience, you must remember that God still has a plan to use them. As each new hero is talked about, you long for them not to disobey God so that they might be the one to redeem mankind. However, each one that rises up fails to do all that God commands. Even as God brings judgment upon Israel, He continually restores them, and the reader of the story keeps looking for the one God has promised.

Where do we find this section? \_\_\_\_\_

## REDEMPTION

As we get to the New Testament we are introduced to an unusual birth of a child. At his birth he meets every qualification for the one God has promised in the Old Testament. His name is Jesus. When he is tempted, he passes perfectly. When he is challenged by the religious people of the day, he remains faithful and continually points people to God while living out the law with his every thought, word, and deed. Yet, in jealousy and hatred, the Israelites, who should have been looking for this one man, order him put to death. In that glorious and tragic moment, God's plan of redemption is realized. The Seed of the woman defeats the Serpent, and bears the penalty of death for mankind's rebellion.

To show he truly was the one sent by God, God raises him from the dead defeating the power of death forever.

Where do we find this section? \_\_\_\_\_

## THE CHURCH

After Jesus' resurrection, he charges a group of men to go and be his witnesses throughout the world. Salvation was never meant only for the Israelites. It was meant for all mankind. Man is still born in sin but can be set free from its power through faith in Jesus. Forgiveness is available to all mankind. The church is called to take this message into the world. The plan of God to bring salvation to the world uses us in the church today. Your children are a part of God's eternal plan to see the world come to worship the Father through Jesus Christ. As you disciple your children, you are working God's plan of salvation for the world!

Where do we find this section? \_\_\_\_\_

## CONSUMMATION

Jesus is going to return to earth one day. All mankind will be judged. Those whose faith is in Jesus will be spared the wrath of God. Those who lived in rebellion against God and rejected Jesus will face the eternal and just wrath of God. God will redeem His creation from the curse and there will be no more sickness, tears, nor death. God will dwell with mankind and sin will be no more. This is the promise and hope of all who believe.

Where do we find this section? \_\_\_\_\_

## HOW TO USE STORIES WITH YOUR CHILDREN

There is not "one right way" of discipling your children. This being said, one way you can begin is by taking intentional time to tell them the stories of the Bible. A great way of doing this is to make time over dinner. Every week you are in Sunday School, you can use the lesson you learn in Sunday School to teach your child. After dinner, take a few minutes and read the story you were taught in Sunday School. Then, ask the questions you learned earlier:

1. What does this passage teach us about God?
2. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
3. What has God done about this, and what does he expect of us in light of what he has done?



### Can We Talk?

On average, how many nights a week do you eat together as a family?

Which of these nights would work best to have a time set aside to read the Bible together after the meal?

If you do not eat together now, when can you schedule time with your children to sit down with them over a meal or drink and read a Bible story together each week?

### Time for Action

Pick one time to dedicate to reading the Bible with each of your children (together or separate).

How will you plan to keep up your own personal growth in loving God now that this course is over?

Next week you will be taught from our regular Sunday School curriculum, but this class is not over. The curriculum that we use is the same curriculum your child uses, only we are one week ahead. We will provide you with dinner Sunday evening before church and a room for you to eat with your family. We ask that you would eat together as a family, then read the story we learned in the morning session. Ask your children the three basic questions and any other questions you may want to ask. Feel free to use acting, or music with them as well. The time is yours. If things come up, I will be around to answer questions following the evening service.

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING PARENTS AT NORTHEAST PARK BAPTIST CHURCH IN EVANSVILLE, INDIANA, FOR FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

Steven Michael Taylor, D.Min.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

The purpose of this project was to equip parents at Northeast Park Baptist Church in Evansville, Indiana, for family discipleship. It utilized a six-week curriculum followed by two church-provided family dinners to give parents an opportunity to put into practice the lessons they learned. Chapter 1 introduces the church context, rationale, purpose, and goals of the project. Chapter 2 focuses on Psalm 78:1-8 as a foundation for passing on the works of God to the next generation. Chapter 3 explores the role of storytelling in family discipleship. Chapter 4 gives the details and description of the implementation of the project. Chapter 5 evaluates the project and offers its strengths and weaknesses.

## VITA

Steven Michael Taylor

### EDUCATION

B.S., University of Evansville, 1997

M.Div., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Associate Minister of Worship, Park Place United Methodist Church,  
Jeffersonville, Indiana, 1999-2002

Pastor, New Friendship Baptist Church, Burgess, Virginia, 2002-2008

Pastor, Northeast Park Baptist Church, Evansville, Indiana, 2008-