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EQUIPPING PARENTS OF OAK HILL BAPTIST CHURCH IN
SOMERSET, KENTUCKY, TO DISCIPLE THEIR CHILDREN

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

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

by
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May 2020

APPROVAL SHEET

EQUIPPING PARENTS OF OAK HILL BAPTIST CHURCH IN
SOMERSET, KENTUCKY, TO DISCIPLE THEIR CHILDREN

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To the greatest joys of my life: my wife, Kelli, and our children,
Owen, Henry, Elliott, and Graham.

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PREFACE

While my name is listed on the cover page of this project, in no way was this project a solo effort. This project bears the prints of not only me, but of the countless people the Lord has graciously placed around me. This is my meager attempt to give credit where it is due.

To my parents, thank you for bringing us up “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Ultimately, you are the foundational influence for this project. Your encouragement and support, both then and now, are evidence of God’s grace in my life.

To both the staff and congregation of OHBC, thank you for the grace and patience you have extended to me. There is no doubt that you have ministered to and encouraged me far more than I have you over the course of our time together. It is a joy to serve alongside you each week.

To my friend and mentor, Todd Meadows, I both blame you and thank you for my foray into both family ministry and doctoral studies. Our conversations over coffee each week have been transformative for my life and ministry—you have counseled and encouraged me in ways that I will forever be grateful for.

To my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Timothy Paul Jones, Dr. Kevin Jones, and the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, thank you for your influence not only on this project, but also on my life as a husband, father, and pastor. I consider it a great gift to have sat under your teaching and instruction—I am better equipped for both life and ministry because of it.

To our children, Owen, Henry, Elliott, and Graham, in many ways you are the driving force behind this project. Of all the opportunities that the Lord has graciously

afforded me in this life, being your daddy is the most precious to me. Every day I feel the good and necessary weight of teaching you “the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done” (Ps 78:4). My continual prayer is that, through my imperfect efforts, you would grow to love and worship our perfect Savior.

To my wife, Kelli, there are no words sufficient enough to express my gratitude for you. “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov 18:22). In you, I have no grounds to ever question God’s favor and grace in my life. You have been my constant encourager, biggest supporter, and very best friend. You have worked hard and sacrificed much in walking alongside me through the highs and lows of life and ministry. I love you—with everything, through anything.

Finally, all glory and praise be to God through Christ, in whom “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us” (Eph 1:7-8). As I reflect on his abundant goodness in my life, I agree with the psalmist: “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places” (Ps 16:6).

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Somerset, Kentucky

May 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest responsibilities of the people of God is to raise the next generation “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). This responsibility is explicitly stated in Scripture (Ps 78:1-8), and a failure to fulfill this expectation is met with devastating consequences and judgment (Judg 2:10-15). The weight of this responsibility is placed primarily on parents, and especially on fathers (Deut 6:4-9; Eph 6:4). While parents are ordained by God to be the primary disciple-makers of their children, they ought not go at this task alone. Whereas parents are to train their children, the church functions to train and equip parents for the task of ministering to their children (Eph 4:11-16). In light of this, the student ministry of Oak Hill Baptist Church in Somerset, Kentucky, seeks to equip parents to be active in the discipleship process of their children.

Context

Founded in 1895, Oak Hill Baptist Church (OHBC) has been a fixture in Somerset, Kentucky, for over one hundred years. Over the years OHBC has grown from 28 charter members to an average weekend worship service attendance exceeding 700 people.

Much of the growth OHBC has experienced, particularly in recent years, has been most realized in the children and student ministries. OHBC offers multiple age-segmented programs for children and students on a weekly basis: children’s ministry (preschool through fifth grade), middle school ministry (sixth grade through eighth grade), and high school ministry (ninth grade through twelfth grade). Children’s ministry

attendees have their own age-appropriate Sunday morning (Sunday school and worship) and midweek gatherings, while middle and high school students have their own respective Sunday school and midweek groups but join the adult congregation for Sunday morning worship. On a typical Sunday, children and youth (preschool through twelfth grade) account for nearly 25 percent of the weekend worship attendance. Moreover, an average midweek gathering will see approximately 300 children and youth in attendance.

Recent growth in the children and student ministries forced pastoral and diaconal leadership of OHBC to take steps to address the concerns and issues that accompany ministry growth. This led to the construction of a state-of-the-art children and youth facility as well as extensive renovations to the existing facilities to accommodate these growing ministries.

Despite the numerical growth and the recent additions and renovations of facilities, there are still areas of concern that must be addressed. The most obvious of these concerns is the spiritual growth of children and students. While the ministries of OHBC labor to disciple the children and students entrusted to their care, the reality is that 2-3 hours of programming each week is an insufficient amount of time to effectively disciple children and students. Pastoral staff and leadership have expressed a desire to more intentionally partner with parents in order to promote the spiritual growth of the children and students of OHBC.

Additionally, the pastoral staff and leadership of OHBC have expressed concern about the role of parents as it pertains to the discipleship of children and students. Parents are raising their children in an increasingly segmented culture. Parents drop their children off at school for academic instruction, at sports practice for athletic instruction, at instrument lessons for musical instruction, etc. In light of this, the leadership of OHBC is concerned that parents may be inclined to see the children and student ministries of OHBC as places to drop off their children to receive spiritual instruction rather than stepping into their God-ordained role as the primary disciple-

makers of their children.

Rationale

Given the context and challenges mentioned above, there are multiple reasons why OHBC must equip parents to be active in the discipleship process of their children. The primary reason OHBC must equip parents is because parents are explicitly commanded to be the primary disciple-makers of their children. In both the Old and New Testaments, it is clear that God has ordained parents, especially fathers, to be the primary spiritual influences in the lives of their children (Deut 6:4-9; Eph 6:4). By equipping parents to be active in the discipleship process of their children, OHBC is encouraging parents to fulfill their God-given responsibility. Ultimately, parents will be held accountable for their influence on the spiritual development of their children.

Furthermore, OHBC must equip parents in order to promote the spiritual growth of the next generation. Scripture is clear that the people of God must be intentional in telling “the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord” (Ps 78:1-8). Failure to raise the next generation in the knowledge of the Lord is to live in disobedience to God. In Scripture, disobedience in this area has proven to result in devastation and judgment (Judg 2:10-15).

Finally, OHBC must equip parents because research confirms that parents are the primary influences in the spiritual lives of their children. According to Kenda Creasy Dean, “Parents matter most when it comes to the religious formation of their children. While grandparents, other relatives, mentors and youth ministers are also influential, parents are by far the most important predictors of teenagers’ religious lives.”¹ Although parents are most influential in the spiritual development of their children, research indicates they are ill-equipped and unprepared for the task. According to Barna Research

¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

Group, parents have “no plan for the spiritual development of their children . . . do not consider it a priority, have no training in how to nurture a child’s faith, have no related standards or goals they are seeking to satisfy, and experience no accountability for their efforts.”²

In response to this, the student ministry of OHBC must equip parents to be active in the discipleship process of their children—failure to do so is to ignore the God-ordained and most transformative influence in a child’s spiritual life.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to transition the student ministry of Oak Hill Baptist Church in Somerset, Kentucky, to a family-equipping model by equipping parents to disciple their children.

Goals

This project was deemed successful upon the completion of the following three goals:

1. The first goal was to assess the current family discipleship perceptions and practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC student ministry.
2. The second goal of this project was to develop a ministry resource to increase parents’ awareness of their unique role in the discipleship process of their children.
3. The third goal was to improve family discipleship practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC student ministry.

Appropriate research methodology was used to determine when these goals had been successfully met. This methodology is discussed in the following section.

Research Methodology

Three goals determined the successful completion of this project. The first

² “Parents Accept Responsibility for Their Child’s Spiritual Development But Struggle with Effectiveness,” The Barna Group, May 6, 2003, <https://www.barna.com/research/parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness/>.

goal was to assess the current family discipleship perceptions and practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC student ministry. This goal was measured by administering a pre-ministry resource implementation survey.³ This goal was considered successfully met when the survey had been completed and data had been analyzed to yield a clearer picture of the current family discipleship perceptions and practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC student ministry.

The second goal of this project was to develop a ministry resource to increase parents' awareness of their unique role in the discipleship process of their children.⁴ This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the proposed resource for raising parents' awareness of their role in the discipleship process of their children and equipping them for that task.⁵ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to improve family discipleship practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC student ministry. This goal was measured by administering a post-ministry resource implementation survey to measure family discipleship perceptions and practices.⁶ This goal was considered successfully met when the post-ministry resource survey revealed a measurable increase in parents' engagement in the discipleship processes of their children.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

³ See appendix 1. 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.

⁴ See appendix 5.

⁵ See appendix 4.

⁶ See appendix 1.

Family-equipping ministry. Family-equipping ministry is a model of ministry in which every aspect of a ministry is coordinated “so that parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”⁷ Rather than adding family-friendly programs (family-based ministry) or removing all forms of generational segmentation (family-integrated ministry), family-equipping ministry “[reorients] activities that are already happening so that parents are equipped to become primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”⁸

Discipleship. Jones offers the following thorough definition of discipleship:

A personal and intentional process in which one or more Christians guide unbelievers or less-mature believers to embrace and apply the gospel in every part of their lives. Discipleship is a process that includes personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ, as he has been revealed in Scripture. Discipleship involves developing perspectives and practices that reflect the mind of Christ. The gospel . . . is the center point of discipleship; conformity to Jesus Christ is the goal of discipleship.⁹

There was one limitation applied to this project. The accuracy of the pre- and post-ministry resource implementation surveys was dependent upon the ability of the individuals completing the surveys to provide honest responses to the questions and prompts presented in the surveys. In an attempt to mitigate this limitation, individuals completing the pre- and post-ministry resource implementation surveys were promised that their surveys would remain nameless.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, in order to effectively develop, implement, and evaluate the ministry resource, the first delimitation placed on the project was to limit the scope to the middle school division of the OHBC student ministry.

⁷ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 132. For additional reading on family-equipping ministry, see Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones, eds., *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), and Timothy Paul Jones, ed., *Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views* (Nashville: B&H, 2009).

⁸ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 132.

⁹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 17.

The second delimitation placed on the project was that the implementation portion of the project was confined to a timeframe of 10 weeks. This provided adequate time to implement the ministry resource as well as conduct the pre- and post-ministry resource implementation surveys. This timeframe was intentionally limited to increase parents' commitment and involvement throughout the duration of the project. While the long-term goal is to transition to a family-equipping ministry model, it must be noted that this transition is a lengthy process. According to Jones, changing the culture of a ministry to make parental discipleship the norm rather than the exception is a process that can take years.¹⁰

Conclusion

The people of God must be intentional in making disciples of the next generation and the primary context for this intergenerational disciple-making to occur is the family. While parents are to bear the weight of responsibility for making disciples of their children, they are not alone in this task. God calls the church to equip parents to make disciples of their children. In light of this, the student ministry of OHBC must equip parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children. The following chapter provides a biblical foundation for partnering with parents in this process.

¹⁰ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 116.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Scripture clearly presents parents as the primary disciple-makers of their children. God's explicit command for parents to diligently teach God's law to their children is found as early as the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 6:4-9). The theme of parents being the primary spiritual influence in the lives of their children continues throughout the Old Testament. In Psalm 78, parents, particularly fathers, are commanded to teach their children God's law so that "they should set their hope in God and forget not the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Ps 78:7). The responsibility of parents to teach and instruct their children is likewise implied in the frequent reminders in Proverbs for a son to "hear . . . [his] father's instruction, and forsake not [his] mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8). Furthermore, the role of parents as the primary disciple-makers of their children does not change with the formation of the church in the New Testament. Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus, keeps in line with the Old Testament teaching on the role of parents as he commands fathers to raise their children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4).

While Scripture is consistent and clear in calling parents to disciple their children, Scripture also implies that parents are not to go at this task alone. Just as God has called parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children, he has likewise called the church to be the primary equipper of parents as they walk in obedience to God's command to disciple their children. This chapter will examine Ephesians 4:11-16 as it relates to the role of the church to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph 4:12), particularly the role of the church to equip parents for their primary ministry of discipling their children.

Introduction and Background

Ephesians is a theologically robust, yet intensely practical letter addressed to the church in Ephesus and surrounding communities in Asia Minor.¹ It is widely accepted that the letter was written by the apostle Paul, though Pauline authorship of the letter to the Ephesians has been debated.² Nevertheless, sufficient evidence exists to attribute authorship of the letter to Paul. The apostle's own words suggest that he is writing the letter while imprisoned (Eph 3:1, 13; 4:1; 6:20). Thielman insists that the letter was written toward the end of Paul's lengthy imprisonment in Rome in AD 62.³ Assuming Pauline authorship of the letter, the letter to the Ephesians is written to a group of people that the author knew well and had a deep affection for, as evidenced by his emotional departure from Ephesus in Acts 20:17-38.

While it is likely that Paul would have written the letter with specific faces in mind given his extended stay with the people of Ephesus (Acts 19:10; 20:31), it has also been noted that the letter to the Ephesians has much broader and universal application than to the Ephesian church.⁴ Commenting on the popularity of the letter, Andrew Lincoln writes that Ephesians "easily transcends its original setting" and has "broad and universal appeal."⁵ This is significant in that many of the practical admonishments and commands in Ephesians would be applicable to believers across a variety of backgrounds and contexts, including modern day readers of the letter.

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 79, 97.

² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), lx-lxxiii.

³ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 17-19.

⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 112.

⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxxi.

Purpose

As several commentators have noted, the lack of specificity in Paul's exhortations have led to a variety of conclusions regarding the purpose of the letter to the Ephesians.⁶ A survey of the debate over the purpose of the letter is beyond the scope of this project—however, there is at least one theme that most commentators agree is at least present, if not central to the letter: unity.⁷ Thielman proposes that the letter serves as “a response to a certain weariness in the readers' commitment to the gospel,” further suggesting that the discouragement the readers were experiencing “led to disunity and moral compromise with the surround culture.”⁸

There are multiple suggestions for the cause of apparent disunity addressed in the letter. Lincoln insists that Paul's death was likely the cause for disunity; the absence of Paul's “defining presence” may have caused disruption and disunity to grow in the wake of his death.⁹ Thielman agrees that Paul's absence was likely a cause for disunity, yet he maintains that it is not necessary to date the letter after Paul's death for this scenario to be plausible—Paul's lengthy imprisonment provided ample time for disunity to grow as a result of his absence.¹⁰

Another source of disunity was the relationship between the Gentile and Jewish communities. Paul's early ministry in Ephesus was directed toward the Jewish community (Acts 18:19-20; 19:8-9), yet most of the Christians were Gentiles by the time Paul concluded his ministry in Ephesus. Commenting on the growing disunity between the Gentile and Jewish communities, Thielman writes, “By the time Paul wrote Ephesians, it may well have been necessary to remind believers in the city, by now an

⁶ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 19; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 98-102.

⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 102.

⁸ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 20.

⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxxv; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 24.

¹⁰ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 25-28.

almost entirely Gentile group, of the value of its Jewish heritage . . . and of the necessity of unity with the few Jewish Christians who still identified themselves as Jews.”¹¹

Finally, details surrounding the recipients of the letter also provide insight as to why Paul felt it necessary to address disunity. The church in Ephesus was not necessarily one large church, but many smaller house churches located throughout Ephesus and Asia Minor.¹² As Thielman rightly observes, a variety of household churches “would naturally foster diversity as households differed from one another in belief, practice, social standing, and loyalties.”¹³ Paul—knowing that diversity would be the natural result of these house churches—stresses that the individual members of the body must strive for unity in order for the church to “fulfill the grand calling of spiritual and cultural transformation that he has set forth in the opening chapters.”¹⁴

Of particular interest to the scope of this project is unity and disunity as it relates to the household. Most obvious is Paul’s exhortation for submission and selflessness that promotes unity within marriage (Eph 5:22-33), but MacDonald presses this further, insisting that the unity within marriage “is rooted in notions of familial harmony that encompass[es] children.”¹⁵ Therefore, MacDonald continues, “Ephesians promulgates a vision of the unified family that serves as the perfect representation of the setting for bringing up children in the instruction and discipline of the Lord.”¹⁶

In light of MacDonald’s comments and, more importantly, Paul’s inclusion of the family structure in his letter to the Ephesians, it is necessary to briefly consider how

¹¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 26.

¹² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 79; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 27.

¹³ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 27.

¹⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 182.

¹⁵ Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 105.

¹⁶ MacDonald, *The Power of Children*, 107.

unity (or disunity) within the church manifests itself in the parent-child relationship. According to Paul, children are to obey and honor their parents while parents, specifically fathers, are to raise their children in the knowledge of the Lord (Eph 6:1-4). As both parties fulfill their God-ordained roles and responsibilities, there is unity within the family as both parents and children walk together in harmonious obedience to God.¹⁷ By extension, particularly in the house church model present in Ephesus, unity in the family would serve to promote unity in the church. Conversely, when one or both parties fails to walk in obedience to Paul's commands, the result is disunity in both the family and the church.

Structure

The letter to the Ephesians can be divided into two major sections. In chapters 1 through 3, Paul “[shares] his grand vision of the divine power available to the church for spiritual and cultural transformation”¹⁸ by expounding on theological themes, such as election (1:4-6), salvation (2:1-10), and union with Christ (2:11-22). The themes included in the first three chapters are offered as “a celebration of God’s accomplishment in Christ of his eternal purpose.”¹⁹ Bruce’s use of “celebration” is accurate, as Paul frequently erupts in praise and thanksgiving as he expounds on the aforementioned theological themes.

Chapters 4 through 6 make up the second major section of the letter to the Ephesians. In these final three chapters, Paul provides general counsel on a wide variety of practical issues such as Christian unity (4:1-6), the function of the church (4:7-16),

¹⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 785. Hoehner uses the phrase “harmony between children and parents.” His use of “harmony,” particularly in the musical sense where harmony is understood as unique notes played together simultaneously to form a single chord, is consistent with the theme of Ephesians, particularly the theme of “unity through diversity” found in chap. 4.

¹⁸ Chapell, *Ephesians*, 182.

¹⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 241.

conduct and speech evident of sanctification (4:17-32), sexual conduct (5:1-14), instructions for husbands and wives (5:22-33), instructions for parents and children (6:1-4), and spiritual warfare (6:10-20). The last three chapters of Ephesians are not a break from the first three chapters; these practical exhortations are to be understood as “the logical outcome of the truth revealed in the first three chapters.”²⁰ Lincoln offers the following helpful summary of the structure of the letter to the Ephesians:

The first part [chapters one through three] reinforces [the recipients’] sense of Christian identity, the privileges and status they enjoy as believers who are part of the Church. The second part [chapters four through six] appeals to them to demonstrate that identity as they live in the Church and in the world.²¹

Of particular interest in this project is the fourth chapter of Ephesians, which marks the transition between the two major sections of the letter mentioned above. Chapell marks the significance of this transition by indicating that chapters 4 through 6 serve to describe how the church is to function in order to properly fulfill its mission.²² It is at this point in the letter where the central theme of unity becomes clear. Verses 1-16 make up one large passage on unity in the body, yet the passage can be further divided into subsections, each with a particular focus. In verses 1-6, Paul stresses the importance of maintaining unity in the body (4:3). According to Paul, this unity will be achieved only as individuals walk in humility, gentleness, and patience, “bearing with one another in love” (4:2). Paul concludes this subsection by reminding the Ephesians that their striving for unity is based on the reality that they have been called to “one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism [and] one God and Father of all” (4:4-6).

While the overall theme of the passage is unity, the second subsection (4:7-10) introduces the “motif of diversity.”²³ According to Paul, this diversity is no accident—in

18. ²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976),

²¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxv.

²² Chapell, *Ephesians*, 182.

²³ Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand

fact, it is a gift of grace (4:7) and, as elaborated on in verses 11-16, diversity is God's good design for achieving unity in the church. Referencing Psalm 68, Paul writes that it is the risen and ascended Christ who has bestowed different gifts upon individuals (4:8-10) "for the purpose of enriching the whole."²⁴ The final subsection of the passage (4:11-16) describes how God intends for these different gifts and the subsequent diversity within the body to promote unity. It is this final subsection that this project will explore in greater detail.

Ephesians 4:11-16

Beginning in verse 11, Paul begins to list the specific gifts that Christ has given to his church. Elsewhere in the New Testament gifts refer to "diverse ministries allocated by the Spirit"²⁵—however, here in Ephesians 4 the gifts given by Christ to his church refer to gifted people.²⁶ It is important to note that there has been some debate over the nature of the gifts listed in verse 11. Some hold the position that the gifts listed refer to offices or positions within the church.²⁷ Conversely, others hold that the gifts listed refer to individuals that have been gifted by the Spirit to accomplish particular activities, but that Paul is not referring to offices.²⁸ Holding the latter position, Thielman insists, "the most plausible understanding of the text places the emphasis less on positions

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 286. O'Brien has acknowledged his "clear-cut, but unintentional, plagiarism" in this commentary ("Eerdmans Statement on Three New Testament Commentaries," Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., August 15, 2016, <https://www.eerdmans.com/Pages/Item/59043/Commentary-Statement.aspx>).

²⁴ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 286.

²⁵ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 297.

²⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 541; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 249.

²⁷ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 301. O'Brien suggests that it is appropriate to refer to the ministers listed in 4:11 as officers. Furthermore, O'Brien proposes that suggesting the list refers to functions rather than offices is "to introduce a false antithesis." Lincoln suggests that neither functions nor offices are listed exactly, but he does provide general points to suggest that it may be appropriate to refer to those listed as offices (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 252).

²⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 539–40, 551.

[or offices] that certain people hold in the church and more on the activities that Christ has equipped certain people to perform.”²⁹ The gifts listed are best understood as “gifted individuals who are foundational” but not necessarily officers of the church.³⁰ As further exegesis will reveal, this interpretation is most consistent with the thrust of the passage as a whole.

The first of the gifted persons given by Christ to his church are the apostles (ἀποστόλους). Of the gifts listed, apostles are always given priority in order due to their proximity to the historical Jesus.³¹ The primary role of an apostle was to proclaim the gospel message and establish churches in areas where the gospel had not yet been declared.³²

The second of the gifted persons listed by Paul are the prophets (προφήτας). Given the context, the prophets listed here refer not to Old Testament prophets but to individuals living in Paul’s own day³³ who were given “the gift of prophecy for the purposes of edification, comfort, encouragement . . . and further, to understand and communicate the mysteries and revelation of God to the church.”³⁴

Third on the list of gifted persons are evangelists (εὐαγγελιστάς). The term appears only twice in the New Testament, making it difficult to conclude its precise meaning. To provide clarity, Thielman traces the use of two similar terms, εὐαγγέλιον (“good news”) and εὐαγγελίζω (“bring good news”), to conclude that evangelists are those called and equipped by God to spread the good news of the gospel message by

²⁹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 273.

³⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551.

³¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 273.

³² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 542.

³³ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 274.

³⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 542.

traveling from place to place,³⁵ though O’Brien suggests that the term does not necessitate an itinerant ministry.³⁶ Due to the similarities between their functions, apostles and evangelists have been closely linked, especially in the post-apostolic period when evangelists continue much of the activities and work undertaken by the apostles.³⁷ However, while their functions may be similar, evangelists would not be equal in authority to apostles due to “their lack of direct connection to the historical Jesus.”³⁸

The fourth and fifth gifts given by Christ to his church are the shepherds (ποιμένας, also referred to as pastors) and teachers (διδασκάλους). Given the context, shepherds or pastors refer to those that care for their flock just as a shepherd cares for his sheep.³⁹ Pastoral duties include “ministering to troubled saints, exhorting and comforting all believers, and administering the activities in the local assembly.”⁴⁰ The second of these terms, teachers, refers to those equipped by Christ for “instruction in doctrine and its application to daily life.”⁴¹ It is important to note that these gifts are grouped together by the grammatical structure of the verse; up to this point, each of the gifts listed has been separated by τοὺς δέ (“and some to be”)—however, pastors and teachers are introduced together with a single τοὺς δέ and linked with καί (τοὺς δέ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, “and some to be pastors and teachers”).⁴² The language employed has led to uncertainty as to whether pastors and teachers should be understood as two distinct gifted persons or

³⁵ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 274.

³⁶ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 299.

³⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 299; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 347.

³⁸ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 275.

³⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250–51; O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 299–300.

⁴⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544.

⁴¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 545.

⁴² Thielman, *Ephesians*, 275.

as one person that exhibits both gifts.⁴³ Despite differing views, most commentators agree on the overlapping functions of pastors and teachers—all pastors must necessarily be teachers (because teaching is an integral part of pastoral ministry), but not all teachers are pastors.⁴⁴

After listing the gifts in verse 11 Paul moves on to reveal the purpose for which Christ has given these gifts to the church in verse 12. Proper interpretation of this verse requires making sense of the three prepositional phrases Paul uses to describe the purpose of the gifts: πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων (“for the preparation of the saints”); εἰς ἔργον διακονίας (“for the work of the ministry”); εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“for the building up of the body of Christ”).⁴⁵

The debate surrounding these prepositions is centered on whether edifying the body is a task completed by the individuals listed in verse 11 or is a task completed by the body as a whole. Given the context of the passage, particularly Paul’s insistence in verses 7 and 16 that the gifts were given to “each one” and “the whole body” respectively,⁴⁶ the edifying of the body is a task undertaken by the whole body, not solely by the individuals listed in verse 11.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Hoehner suggests that charging only the gifted persons listed in verse 11 with the task of edifying the body creates a division between clergy and laity that is ultimately inconsistent with the scope of the passage as a

⁴³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 543; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 275. Both Hoehner and Thielman conclude that there is insufficient evidence to consider shepherds (pastors) and teachers as a single group. Conversely, commentators such as F. F. Bruce conclude that the two terms should be united “to denote one order of ministry” (Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 348).

⁴⁴ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 300; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544–45; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 275; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 348.

⁴⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 547.

⁴⁶ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 301–3; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 277–80.

⁴⁷ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 301–3. Thielman (*Ephesians*, 277–80) and Hoehner (*Ephesians*, 547–49) agree with O’Brien that it is the role of all believers to do the work of ministry, although it must be noted that this view is contested (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 253–55).

whole, which is focused on unity within the body.⁴⁸ O’Brien offers the following helpful summary: “It is better . . . to regard those enumerated in v. 11 as helping and directing other members of the church so that all may carry out their several ministries for the good of the whole.”⁴⁹ In light of this, *καταρτισμός* is better understood as “equipping” the saints for a particular purpose rather than “completing” or “perfecting” the saints.⁵⁰ The particular purpose for which the saints are equipped for is rooted in *διακονίας*—acts of service or ministry toward others.⁵¹

Finally, the ultimate goal for which the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers equip the saints to minister to one another is the building up of the body of Christ. Through the progression of verse 11, it is clear to see that both the ministers listed in verse 11 and the saints mentioned here in verse 12 work together to accomplish this goal.⁵² Christ bestowed “foundational gifts” upon the church (those listed in verse 11) in order to equip and prepare each member of the body for their respective ministries and service. As each member fulfills his or her respective ministry, the entire body of Christ is strengthened.⁵³ O’Brien succinctly connects the three prepositional phrases of verse 11, stating, “What has been done *for* the saints, by the apostles, prophets, and others preparing them, and *by* the saints through the exercise of their gifts in Christian service, is

⁴⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 547–48.

⁴⁹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 303.

⁵⁰ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 279; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 303; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 549–50. The noun *καταρτισμός* appears only once in the New Testament, whereas the cognate verb (*καταρτίζειν*) appears often and may refer to “repairing,” “equipping,” “preparing,” or “completing.” While Thielman, O’Brien, and Hoehner all agree that *καταρτισμός* is best understood as “equipping,” Lincoln contests that *καταρτισμός* should be understood as “completing.” Therefore, Lincoln maintains that it is the ministers Christ has given in v. 11 that are to bring believers “to a state of completion” (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 254).

⁵¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 550–51. The term *διακονίας* is closely related to *διακονία*, which conveys the idea of service, particularly the service of the Lord. Therefore, in this context the term is best understood as “serving the Lord by ministering to one another.”

⁵² Thielman, *Ephesians*, 280.

⁵³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551.

for *building* the body of Christ.”⁵⁴

At this point the connection between Paul’s exhortations to the Ephesians and contemporary family ministry is established. The gifted leaders listed in verse 11 contribute by “exercis[ing] their ministries in such a way as to help other members of the church exercise their respective ministries.”⁵⁵ Paul writes that Christ gave gifted individuals to the church for the purpose of “equipping the saints for the work of ministry” (4:12). One of the most important works of ministry that saints are to fulfill is to “tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord” (Ps 78:4)—this is, in fact, a primary “work of ministry” for parents, particularly fathers (Deut 6:4-9; Eph 6:4).⁵⁶ Therefore, if parents are to fulfill their “work of ministry” of discipling and shepherding their children, it is the role of the church to equip them for that task. Timothy Brown writes,

A parent’s ministry in the home is as clear in the Scriptures as the role of elders, deacons or any other ministry in the body of Christ. Parents should be equipped for their significant, biblically-commanded work of ministry—to raise their children to love and obey God through the discipline and instruction of the Lord.⁵⁷

W. Ryan Steenburg and Timothy Paul Jones further clarify that “the church should not try to do the work *of* parents or *for* parents; instead, every effort of the church should be to *equip* parents for this momentous task.”⁵⁸ In the contemporary church, this is especially true of pastors—their pastoral responsibility to shepherd the flock includes acknowledging, equipping, and holding parents accountable as the primary disciple-

⁵⁴ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 304.

⁵⁵ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 345–46.

⁵⁶ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 155.

⁵⁷ Timothy Andrew Brown, “Equipping Parents to Disciple Their Children Using Faith Milestones at Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Brighton, Michigan” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 38.

⁵⁸ W. Ryan Steenburg and Timothy Paul Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 159.

makers in their children’s lives.⁵⁹ Commenting on contemporary youth ministry, Wayne Rice even suggests that equipping parents should be the *primary* role of the youth pastor.⁶⁰ Furthermore, part of the pastor’s responsibility in shepherding the flock is to serve as an example (1 Pet 5:3) by fulfilling his role as the primary disciple-maker of his own children. The pastor’s family is his first ministry—failure to shepherd his household is to disqualify himself from church leadership (1 Tim 3:4-5).⁶¹

Similarly, teachers also serve a role in equipping parents to disciple their children. In addition to instructing the body in matters of doctrine, teachers instruct the body in matters of practical Christian living.⁶² Few aspects of Christian living are more practical than “bring[ing children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Incorporating the gifts listed in verse 11 within the context of the family, Chris Shirley goes so far as to say that parents have been assigned “the roles of evangelist and pastor/teacher in the home, so as to lead their children to Christ and equip them to serve the Lord.”⁶³ In the end, whether the gifted leaders be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers, Jones offers a succinct connection between the gifted individuals listed in verse 11 and their role in family ministry: “The role of God-called leaders in the church is to encourage, acknowledge, and equip fellow members of the church to serve as ministers and missionaries first within their own households.”⁶⁴ The biblical mandate is clear: the church is called to equip parents for their God-ordained role as the primary

⁵⁹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 132.

⁶⁰ Wayne Rice, *Reinventing Youth Ministry (Again): From Bells and Whistles to Flesh and Blood* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 124–25.

⁶¹ David Prince, “The Pastor’s Home as Paradigm for the Church’s Family Ministry,” in Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 173; Brian Haynes, “The Pastor’s Leadership and Example,” in *Family Ministry and the Church: A Leader’s Guide for Ministry Through Families*, ed. Chris Shirley (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 2018), 111.

⁶² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 251.

⁶³ Shirley, *Family Ministry and the Church*, 48.

⁶⁴ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 178.

disciple-makers of their children.

Moving forward in the passage at hand, the ultimate goal of “building up the body of Christ” is found in verse 13: “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and to the knowledge of the son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” As several commentators note, the use of the word “attain” in verse 13 is consistent with the “already, not yet” tension found elsewhere in Paul’s writing.⁶⁵ The recipients are declared already united by the work of Christ (2:11-22), yet unity will not be completely realized until the coming of Christ—therefore, Paul urges his readers to not only “maintain” unity (4:3) but to continue “building up the body of Christ” until unity is attained.

Again, Paul uses three prepositional phrases to communicate his point—however, whereas the prepositional phrases in verse 12 build on each other, the three phrases in verse 13 “view the same result from different angles.”⁶⁶ The first of these phrases, “to the unity of the faith and to the knowledge of the son of God,” contains both intellectual and experiential components. The “unity of the faith” refers to the body of Christ affirming a particular set of doctrines,⁶⁷ while the “knowledge of the Son of God” refers to “personal, experiential knowledge of God’s Son.”⁶⁸ Thielman combines the intellectual and experiential elements of the first clause when he writes, “Paul describes the goal of ‘the building up of the body of Christ’ as the unity of all its parts in a common

⁶⁵ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 306; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 255–56.

⁶⁶ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281. The three prepositional phrases of v. 13 are also referred to as “three aspects of one goal” (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551) and “a threefold description of the goal of the Church’s existence” (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 255).

⁶⁷ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281. O’Brien agrees that, given “syntactical connection between faith and knowledge,” the “unity of faith” in v. 13 refers to “objective content rather than the reader’s believing” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 306).

⁶⁸ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281. Thielman proposes that, given the use of ἐπίγνωσις (knowledge) elsewhere in the letter, it likely refers to “personal, experiential knowledge of God’s Son.” See also Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 350. At this point O’Brien disagrees, suggesting that the “knowledge” of v. 13 refers to what can be objectively known of the Son of God (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 306).

set of doctrines and in a common experience of knowing the Christ on whom those doctrines are focused.”⁶⁹

The second phrase, “to mature manhood,” is more easily interpreted in light of verse 14. ἄνδρα τέλειον (“mature man”) offers a distinct contrast from the “children” referenced in verse 14 that are “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”⁷⁰ Therefore, the mature man of verse 13 refers not to a perfect or complete man,⁷¹ but one who is considered fully grown or stable.⁷² While the language employed by Paul is suggestive of individual maturity, the reference here is not to any individual believer but to the body of Christ as a whole.⁷³

The final prepositional phrase of verse 13, “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” again promotes the concept of maturity among the body of Christ. According to O’Brien, the goal of mature manhood referenced in the previous clause is “defined by the fulness [sic] of Christ.”⁷⁴ Likewise, Lincoln connects the second and third clauses of verse 13 by indicating that both describe the church in its “completed state.”⁷⁵ Bruce also agrees in the connection of the second and third phrases and offers the following clarifying comment on the “fullness of Christ” as the goal of spiritual maturity of the body of Christ: “The glorified Christ provides the standard at which his

⁶⁹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281.

⁷⁰ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 307

⁷¹ τέλειος (translated literally as “having reached its end”) is often used to convey perfection; however, the present context does not permit perfection as a suitable translation (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 554–55).

⁷² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 554–55; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 307.

⁷³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 555–56.

⁷⁴ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 307.

⁷⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256.

people are to aim.”⁷⁶

In verse 14, Paul contrasts the goal of spiritual maturity in verse 13 with the imminent dangers of spiritual immaturity. Paul again uses the illustration of human development to differentiate between spiritual maturity and immaturity—whereas the spiritually mature are referred to as a grown, mature man in verse 13, the spiritually immature are referred to as children. The children in verse 14 are marked not only by immaturity, but also by disunity (a direct result of spiritual immaturity): the plural “children” suggests individualism, while the mature man suggests oneness or “corporate unity.”⁷⁷ It is the immature children that are “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,” which commentators generally agree is a reference to false teaching in the form of religious philosophies that threatened to undermine or dilute the one true gospel.⁷⁸ Due to their lack of maturity and stability, the “children” of verse 14 are those easily confused and swayed by the influence of others, specifically the deceptive teachers mentioned by Paul.⁷⁹ This false teaching was being promoted not in ignorance, but rather “by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” The false teachers referred to by Paul are intentionally deceitful, signified by the use of *κωβεία* (“cunning”), which suggests a malicious intent to manipulate through trickery and deception.⁸⁰ Finally, implicit in verse 14 is a connection to the gifted persons listed in verse 11—the spiritually immature are susceptible to being led astray by false teaching. Therefore, Christ has given the gifted persons of verse 11, all of whom have some

⁷⁶ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 350.

⁷⁷ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 308. See also Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 561; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 257; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 283.

⁷⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 258; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 309.

⁷⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 560–61; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 257–58; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 283.

⁸⁰ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 309; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 258–59.

responsibility to teach,⁸¹ for the purpose of “building up the body of Christ” (v. 12) to “mature manhood” (v. 13) so that the body would not be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (v. 14).⁸²

There is again a connection between Paul’s exhortations and family ministry. As part of its responsibility to equip parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children, the church aids parents in the spiritual formation of their children by combatting false doctrine and deceptive philosophies (Eph 4:14). False teaching is no less prevalent today than it was at the time Paul wrote the letter to the church in Ephesus. Perhaps most pervasive in the lives of children and youth today is what Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton have labeled “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”⁸³ It is the role of the church to combat this and similar deceptive philosophies by reminding one another of the truth of the gospel “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). As the church equips parents to disciple their children, it must encourage parents in true doctrine and hold them accountable to teaching and living in accordance with sound doctrine so that their children would set their hope in the one true God (Ps 78:5-7).

In verse 15, Paul once again employs language that sharply opposes the preceding verse. Paul exhorts readers towards maturity and unity by “speaking the truth in love.” The contrast with verse 14 is twofold: first, the false teachers implied in verse 14 were presenting false doctrine, whereas in verse 15 Paul exhorts his audience to present truth; secondly, the false teachers in verse 14 presented their doctrine deceitfully,

⁸¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281.

⁸² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 259; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 284; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 560; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 308, 310.

⁸³ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162.

whereas in verse 15 Paul appeals to the recipients of his letter to present the “truth in love,” which necessitates the absence of cunning, craftiness, and deception.⁸⁴ It is by “speaking the truth in love,” that is, “by speaking gospel truth to others,”⁸⁵ that the body of Christ is to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” Paul once again returns to the analogy of human growth as an illustration of spiritual maturity. According to Paul, as the members of the body of Christ lovingly exhort one another in truth, the body as a whole grows from infancy (“children” in verse 14) toward maturity (“mature manhood” in verse 13). This growth is to happen “in every way,” which is to say that the body is to grow and mature in all areas of spiritual life.⁸⁶ Furthermore, as the body speaks the truth in love, thereby promoting growth in all areas of spiritual life, the body is to grow “into him who is the head, into Christ.” Progress and maturity towards Christ are the goal of the body—and, as verse 16 indicates, Christ is not only the goal of maturity but also the source of it.⁸⁷

In verse 16, Paul makes it clear that, as the head, it is Christ that supplies that which is necessary for the body to grow into him.⁸⁸ Keeping with the theme of “unity through diversity” of the passage, Paul concludes that Christ has supplied not only the gifted persons of verse 11, but has also carefully fit together every member,⁸⁹ each of

⁸⁴ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 310–11; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 285.

⁸⁵ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 285. There is some debate as to whether the ἀληθεύοντες refers to speaking the truth or to proving or being true. The former seems to be the most appropriate, especially considering the gifted persons of v. 11 who Christ gave to speak the truth in contrast to the false teaching of the day (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 310–11). Conversely, Hoehner maintains that ἀληθεύοντες refers to proving or being true rather than speaking truth (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 564–65).

⁸⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 566–67. Hoehner offers the following analogy: “As it is preferable for a child to develop in all areas of life rather than just in one or two areas, so is the child of God to develop in all areas of spiritual life.”

⁸⁷ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 312–13; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 567–68.

⁸⁸ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 313; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 286.

⁸⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 569.

which is gifted for the purpose of the growth of the body as a whole.⁹⁰ While Paul alludes to the importance of each member of the body making his or her respective contributions and using their gifts to the appropriate measure (“when each part is working properly”),⁹¹ the emphasis of this final verse remains on the corporate growth of the body as it has throughout the entirety of the passage.⁹² Nevertheless, each respective member of Christ’s body has a role to play in the corporate growth of the body. As the individual members are “joined and held together,” it is the consistent contact between members that contributes to the growth of the body as a whole.⁹³ Finally, Paul concludes that as each member of the body exercises their respective gifts appropriately the body as a whole “builds itself up in love.” If the church is to reach “mature manhood” (Eph 4:13), it must do so by pursuing unity (Eph 4:3) that is rooted in genuine love (Eph 4:2, 15).⁹⁴

Up to this point the connection between Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and contemporary family ministry has relied heavily on the individuals listed in verse 11. However, at this point it is necessary to point out the importance of the body as a whole as it relates to family ministry. Implicit in Paul’s instruction in Ephesians 4:11-16 is the responsibility of parents to rely on the body of Christ to assist them in the discipleship of their children. While each individual must fulfill their respective ministries, no individual is called or equipped to do *all* the work of ministry.⁹⁵ Parents are undoubtedly called to disciple their children, yet they are equally part of a larger body that must work together

⁹⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 571; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 268.

⁹¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 576.

⁹² O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 313.

⁹³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 571–74. Hoehner maintains that ἀφῆς is most appropriately understood as “contact.” O’Brien, however, interprets ἀφῆς to mean “ligament” and further suggests that these ligaments refer to the list of gifted persons in v. 11. Therefore, in O’Brien’s view it is the gifted persons of v. 11 that connect the members of the body, all of whom have a role to play in the growth of the body (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 315).

⁹⁴ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 353.

⁹⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 576.

in order for the body to grow (Eph 4:15). For example, Robert Plummer suggests that, in addition to instruction from their parents, children benefit from the instruction of other members of the body that are gifted to teach.⁹⁶ Rice again provides pointed instruction: “The spiritual formation of children and youth is the responsibility of . . . the entire congregation.”⁹⁷ A well-known proverb states, “It takes a village to raise a child”—similarly, it takes “the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly” (Eph 4:16) to disciple a child.

Furthermore, it must not be overlooked that children are a part of the body. Jones affirms this, stating, “Our children are far more than our children; they are also potential or actual brothers and sisters in Christ.”⁹⁸ The fact that Paul addresses children directly in the letter (Eph 6:1-3) suggests not only that they were present, but that he views children as a part of the body worthy of receiving admonition and instruction.⁹⁹ Therefore, both the admonitions and benefits of Ephesians 4:11-16 apply to believing children. Children are called to be both active participants and recipients of the ministry of the body so that the body “grow[s] up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15).

In summary, it is through the diversity of Christ’s gifts that the church will grow in unity and maturity. Christ has given gifted individuals to the church (Eph 4:11) for the purpose of preparing and equipping the members of the body to fulfill their respective ministries (Eph 4:12). As the members of the body fulfill their ministries to one another, the church grows in unity and maturity (Eph 4:13). As the body matures, it is less susceptible to fall victim to the false teaching of the day (Eph 4:14) and, as the

⁹⁶ Robert L. Plummer, “Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord: Family Discipleship Among the First Christians,” in Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 54–55.

⁹⁷ Rice, *Reinventing Youth Ministry (Again)*, 149.

⁹⁸ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 75.

⁹⁹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 396; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 786.

members of the body lovingly exhort one another with the truth of the gospel (Eph 4:15) and appropriately exercise their respective gifts, the corporate body grows toward the ultimate goal of conformity to Christ (Eph 4:16).

Ephesians 4:11-16 and Family Ministry

While the contemporary implications of this passage are innumerable, at least one way in which the church must consider these implications is in how it ministers to families. The church is called to equip parents for their primary ministry of making disciples of their children. Listed below are four ways in which the church, as described in Ephesians 4:11-16, equips families. Each of these four areas will be elaborated on in the following chapter.

Gifted Members and Family Ministry

According to Paul, Christ has given gifted individuals to the church (Eph 4:11), and these individuals, particularly shepherds and teachers, bear responsibility to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). For parents, the “work of ministry” they are to be equipped for includes functioning as the primary disciple-makers of their children. Therefore, one of the most important tasks for gifted leaders within the church is to acknowledge and equip parents as the primary disciple-makers of their children and hold them accountable to this God-ordained responsibility.

The Pastor and Family Ministry

Paul’s list of gifted individuals includes “shepherds” or pastors (Eph 4:11) that, by the very nature of their role, bear the responsibility to serve as “examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:3). Therefore, when it comes to leading the parents and families that God has entrusted to their care and oversight, pastors bear the responsibility to model practically to their flock what it looks like to function as the primary disciple-makers of their children. This responsibility is so significant that elsewhere Paul includes faithful

spiritual leadership of one's own family as a prerequisite to pastoral ministry (1 Tim 3:4-5; Titus 1:6).

False Teaching and Family Ministry

As evidenced by Paul's comments, the environment surrounding the Ephesian church was fraught with improper doctrine, false teaching, and deceptive philosophies (Eph 4:14). While the context of the contemporary church differs from the context to which Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesian church, equally dangerous doctrine, teaching, and philosophies are just as prevalent today. As the church and its gifted individuals equip parents to disciple their children, they must be mindful to help parents confront the false teaching and deceptive philosophies that are so pervasive in the contemporary culture with the truth of the gospel.

The Body of Christ and Family Ministry

Earlier in his letter, Paul refers to the members of the church of Ephesus as "members of the household of God . . . in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" in whom they are "being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph 2:19-22). In the passage considered in this chapter, Paul similarly remarks that the Ephesians are "to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Eph 4:16). Given the repetition of Paul's exhortation for the body to build itself up, it is clear that spiritual growth and maturity of the members of the body is the responsibility of the whole body, not just a few select individuals. Therefore, concerning family ministry, while parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual growth of their children, they are not solely responsible. All members of the body are encouraged to use their gifts to contribute to the equipping of parents for discipleship as well as the spiritual growth of the children God has entrusted

to the church body.

As the church equips parents and they respond by functioning as the primary disciple-makers of their children, parents and children alike are fulfilling their role in the overall growth of the body. Chuck Colson offers the following appropriate summary:

“The church must also equip its members to build strong marriages and families . . .

Unless we [equip members to build strong marriages and families] the church cannot say it is making disciples and fulfilling the Great Commission.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Charles Colson and Ellen Vaughn, *Being the Body: A New Case for the Church to be Light in the Darkness* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 319.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The previous chapter addressed the biblical and theological foundations of the role of the church in equipping parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children. Chapter three will focus on the practical considerations of parents being the primary disciple-makers of their children as well as the implications for parents abdicating their spiritual responsibilities. Additionally, this chapter will practically consider the role of the church as it pertains to encouraging and equipping parents to engage in the discipleship processes of their children.

Gifted Members and Family Ministry

God has specially gifted individuals in his church to equip the members of his church for their own respective works of ministry (Eph 4:11-12). While the implications of this are numerous, at least one way in which this is to be carried out in the church is for pastors, teachers, and other gifted leaders to train parents to teach and disciple their children.¹ Research affirms the desperate need for church leaders to equip parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children. According to the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey conducted by Jones, while the overwhelming majority of parents affirm their responsibility as the primary disciple-makers of their children, over 50 percent of parents surveyed acknowledged they had read or discussed the Bible together with their children twice or less in the last month. Furthermore, over one third of parents surveyed admitted they had not engaged in any form of family worship or family

¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 155.

devotional time in the last two months.² Barna research sheds light on the same problem: while 85 percent of parents acknowledge their responsibility in the spiritual development of their child, the overwhelming majority reported that, aside from regularly taking their children to church, they “were not personally engaged in *any* activities that might guide their children to spiritual maturity.”³ According to several studies, the problem of parental disengagement concerning spiritual matters is not a new one. Strommen and Hardel follow the trend through several studies dating back to 1980; according to their summary of the research, no more than 10 percent of families from Protestant congregations engaged in spiritual conversations on any regular basis.⁴ Even as parents admit their responsibility to function as primary faith trainers in their children’s lives, most are doing little, if anything, to fulfill this role. For most parents, intentional processes of spiritual formation with their children range from sporadic to nonexistent.⁵ Given the findings of such research, if there were ever an area where the body needs to be more intentionally equipped for the work of ministry, it is equipping parents to be actively engaged in the discipleship processes of their children.

Furthermore, the gifted leaders in the church are tasked not only with equipping parents to disciple their children, but also with discipling children themselves. Delicately balancing the roles of the family and the church in the discipleship of children, Köstenberger comments, “it is the role of *the church* to disciple the nations . . . Believing parents have an important role to play, but this does not alter the fact that it is the *church*

² Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 217.

³ “Parents Accept Responsibility for Their Child’s Spiritual Development But Struggle with Effectiveness,” The Barna Group, May 6, 2003, <https://www.barna.com/research/parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness/>.

⁴ Merton P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel, *Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press/Christian Brothers Publications, 2000). Unlike Jones and Barna, Strommen and Hardel conclude that the research points to the fact that parents simply do not recognize their role in the spiritual development of their children.

⁵ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 99.

that was given the charge to disciple individuals.”⁶ This emphasis on the church and discipleship necessarily includes those listed in Ephesians 4:11, meaning that they are responsible not only for equipping parents, but also for teaching and discipling children. Multiple times in his letters, Paul refers to the church as the “household of God” (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15). According to Köstenberger, Paul’s use of the word “household” is not a reference to the church as a “family of families,” but rather, “the family of God where the older, more mature believers train up and nurture the younger ones.”⁷ The older, more mature believers charged to train younger believers may include parents, as they are certainly closest in proximity to their children,⁸ but this charge is not limited to parents. Scripture clearly affirms that parents are primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children, yet God has gifted other members of the body to come alongside parents to both complement and supplement their discipleship efforts.⁹ One of the ways the church accomplishes this is through the implementation of an intentional strategy of family ministry, several of which will be briefly discussed below.

The Pastor and Family Ministry

As part of their duty to “shepherd the flock of God that is among [them],” pastors are explicitly called to lead by example (1 Pet 5:2-3)—in a very real way, pastors are commanded to “practice what they preach.” This is certainly true in reference to matters of character and moral integrity (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9), but it is equally true in practical matters of the faith, such as the spiritual leadership of one’s family. Jones makes an interesting point regarding Paul’s list of qualifications for pastoral ministry

⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 255.

⁷ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 253.

⁸ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 79.

⁹ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 258.

found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Paul only briefly mentions administrative and teaching skills, yet he devotes two whole verses in this short passage to the issue of the pastor's home.¹⁰ The reason for Paul's emphasis on the pastor's role in the spiritual leadership of his own home is made clear: "For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" (1 Tim 3:5). Any pastor found to be failing in the shepherding of his own home is a pastor whose "influence is muted" and whose model of ministry "is one of tragic hypocrisy."¹¹

The importance of the pastor leading by example is not only a matter of theological significance, but also a matter of practical significance. David Prince comments on the essential role of the pastor in relation to family ministry when he writes, "The most fundamental way that a pastor can lead his church toward family-equipping ministry is to ensure that his family is a model of what he—and more importantly of what God—desires in the families of the church."¹² Similarly, in his practical guide to equipping parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children, Jones points out that family-ministry begins not with changes in the church staff or ministry curriculum, but rather in the lives and homes of pastors and other ministry leaders: "family ministry must flow from who the leaders and volunteers are with their families . . . As this identity takes root in their homes, they become better able to guide their ministries in the direction of equipping families."¹³ Simply put, equipping families begins with pastors and ministry leaders being the primary disciple-makers in their own homes before doing any family-equipping activities in their respective ministries.

¹⁰ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 139.

¹¹ David Prince, "The Pastor's Home as Paradigm for the Church's Family Ministry," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 168.

¹² Prince, "The Pastor's Home," 176.

¹³ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 137–40.

Richard Ross offers corroborating support for the importance of pastors and ministry leaders modeling faithful spiritual leadership in their own homes, insisting that “the spiritual life of church families usually will not rise above the spiritual life of the pastor.”¹⁴ Jones makes a similar claim to hold pastors and ministry leaders accountable for the spiritual leadership of their own families: “What you accomplish for God beyond your home will typically never be greater than what you practice with God within your home.”¹⁵

The link between the pastor’s home and parental engagement in the discipleship processes of their children is unavoidable. For pastors, a large part of their responsibility to equip parents for their primary work of ministry (Eph 4:11-12) consists of modeling faithful spiritual leadership in their own families. Prince offers a succinct summary of the importance of the pastor acting as the primary disciple-maker in his own family: “The shepherd who delights in weekly standing before the congregation of Christ’s sheep . . . is to be the same shepherd who possesses the same delight before his little flock at home in family worship.”¹⁶

False Teaching and Family Ministry

According to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, growing in unity and spiritual maturity requires the body to confront and reject deceptive teaching and philosophies that result in false doctrine (Eph 4:14). The same is true in the contemporary church; pastors and other ministry leaders charged with teaching must equip the body to confront equally dangerous false teaching and deceptive philosophies that threaten the church. Applied specifically to the context of family ministry, the church must equip parents to identify

¹⁴ Richard Ross, *The Senior Pastor and the Reformation of Youth Ministry* (Nashville: CrossBooks, 2015), 49.

¹⁵ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 139.

¹⁶ Prince, “The Pastor’s Home,” 173.

and refute errant teaching as they disciple their children. A survey of false teaching and doctrines that parents and children may be susceptible to is far beyond the scope of this project. However, there is one dangerous philosophy deserving of attention as it relates to family discipleship in the contemporary American church: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

In their summary of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), researchers Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton condensed their observations about the spiritual lives of American adolescents into the “religion” which they labeled as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. They propose the following creed for Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.¹⁷

Commenting on the dangers of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Ross points out that the focus of this deceptive philosophy is primarily oneself rather than God. The result is a large percentage of “believing” adolescents that “know Jesus primarily as a friend who brings them good things.” Consequently, the adherents of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (though they likely would not distinguish themselves as such) are “focused on the benefits of religion but are not desperately in love with Jesus.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162–163.

¹⁸ Ross, *The Senior Pastor and the Reformation of Youth Ministry*, 15–16.

If the prevalence of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism wasn't worrisome enough, consider this additional observation from the NSYR: "Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents."¹⁹ Commenting on the same NSYR study, Kenda Dean states, "Parents matter most when it comes to the religious formation of their children. While grandparents, other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers are also influential, parents are by far the most important predictors of teenagers' religious lives."²⁰ Herein lies the problem: if the deceptive philosophy known as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is rampant among adolescents in the contemporary American church, and if parents are the primary influences in the religious lives of their children, then "lackadaisical faith is not young people's issue, but [parents']."²¹

Given the problem at hand, it becomes clear that one essential way that the church must equip parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children is by instructing them in sound doctrine and charging and equipping them, particularly fathers, to do the same in their own homes. Whether it be through teaching parents a high view of Christology, training parents to model mature and passionate faith, or equipping parents to teach their children the overarching narrative of God's redemptive plan in the gospel, the church must be intentional to equip parents to confront false teaching and deceptive philosophies (such as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism) prevalent in modern culture.²²

¹⁹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56.

²⁰ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

²¹ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4.

²² Each of these is a proposed response to the problem of Moral Therapeutic Deism. Ross insists that "the antidote to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is a biblical understanding of the second member of the Trinity" (Ross, *The Senior Pastor and the Reformation of Youth Ministry*, 18-21). Dean proposes that "the solution [to lackadaisical faith] lies . . . in modeling the kind of mature, passionate faith we say we want young people to have" (Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4). Finally, Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang insist that if, in raising children in the faith, parents offer a list of dos and don'ts rather than teaching them the "mighty deeds of the Lord on our behalf," the result could contribute to problems such as Moralistic

The Body of Christ and Family Ministry

While parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual growth of their children, they are not solely responsible. God has placed parents and children alike within the body of Christ, in which members are encouraged to use their gifts to contribute to both the equipping of parents as well as the discipleship of children.

Parents Are Primary

Biblically and theologically, parents are called to be the primary disciple-makers in the lives of their children (see Deut 6:4-9; Ps 78:1-8; Eph 6:4). Practically, parents are positioned to influence their children's spiritual lives in ways that no other individual or organization can. Most obvious is the fact that parents typically have more access to their children than any other individual or organization. According to one author, the average church has approximately 40 hours each year to invest in children, whereas parents have approximately three thousand hours each year with their children.²³ While this statistic fluctuates due to both family situations and the difference in programming offered across a variety of ministry contexts, the message is obvious: at no point will the church as an organization ever have a comparable amount of access to children and adolescents.

Furthermore, parents are better relationally positioned to influence the spiritual lives of their children. Relationships are often the context for which the gospel is communicated and believed. As Chap Bettis points out, “[Disciples] are crafted with individual attention. What better discipleship unit than the family? What better model, teacher, and shepherd over a little one than a parent?”²⁴ Research supports Bettis's

Therapeutic Deism. Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 316–17.

²³ Chap Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent: A Comprehensive Guidebook for Raising Your Children to Love and Follow Jesus Christ* (n.p.: Diamond Hill Publishing, 2016), 137–38.

²⁴ Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 6.

assertion—according to the NSYR study, the quality of relationship that a parent has with their teenage child has a significant effect on the religious and spiritual life of that child.²⁵ Additionally, of the four levels of influence proposed by Strommen and Hardel, the influence that comes from familial relationships is most powerful: “The evidence is overwhelming that the probabilities of seeing committed youth are greatest when families are bonded to one another in a close relationship.”²⁶

However, at this point it must be noted that the church also serves an important role in the spiritual development of children. Just as parents are uniquely positioned to be the primary disciple-makers of their children, the church is uniquely positioned to support parents’ efforts to disciple their children. Barna, commenting on how churches might effectively help parents, insists that when it comes to investing in the faith of a child, “the role of the church is to equip and reinforce [parents]” rather than assume the lead.²⁷ As Prince helpfully notes, “The church serves a supplementary role, reinforcing the biblical nurture that is occurring in the home.”²⁸ Thankfully, many churches acknowledge their supplemental role and have responded to the problem of parental disengagement by instituting various forms of family ministry.

Problematic, however, is the fact that many churches have usurped parents’ responsibilities to be the primary disciple-makers of children. Barna makes the following statement, an indictment of both parents and churches:

Parents across the nation admit that one of the greatest benefits they receive from attending a church is having that community of faith assume responsibility for the spiritual development of their children. Knowing that there are trained professionals and other willing individuals who will provide spiritual guidance to their children is

²⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 116.

²⁶ Strommen and Hardel, *Passing on the Faith*, 18.

²⁷ George Barna, *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church’s #1 Priority* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 98.

²⁸ Prince, “The Pastor’s Home,” 173.

a source of security and comfort for most churchgoing adults.²⁹

The Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey revealed that three out of every four parents feel, at least to some degree, that their church has failed to help them develop a plan for the spiritual growth of their child. Additionally, over two thirds of parents surveyed acknowledged that at no point in the last year had a church leader contacted them to help them engage actively in their child’s spiritual development.³⁰ If the research is any indicator, churches are neglecting parents if not bypassing them altogether when it comes to the spiritual development of children. Coupled by the fact that parents are increasingly willing and comfortable with outsourcing the spiritual growth of their children to the church, a vicious cycle ensues—churches willingly assume the responsibilities of the parents and, in turn, the parents increasingly relinquish their responsibilities to the church. As the cycle continues, the end result is that “churches are neither expecting nor equipping parents to disciple their children.”³¹

This, of course, is problematic given parents’ responsibility to be actively engaged in the spiritual development of their children. The church certainly plays a hands-on role in the spiritual growth of children and adolescents; children’s workers and youth leaders are vitally important—but they are not the most important. In response, churches must return to intentionally engaging parents as the primary disciple-makers of their children. Steenburg and Jones offer the following summary: “The church should not try to do the work *of* the parents or *for* the parents; instead, every effort of the church should be to *equip* the parents for this momentous task.”³²

²⁹ Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, 77.

³⁰ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 216–18.

³¹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 108.

³² Steenburg and Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” in Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 159.

Children are the Body of Christ

It has been said that “children are the church of tomorrow.” This, however, is only a half-truth—children certainly are the church of tomorrow, but they are also the church of today. An often-overlooked reality is that the believing child is just as much a member of the body of Christ as the eldest saint. Along these lines, Marcia J. Bunge points out that the church has largely failed to consider how children function as active members of the church body, insisting that insignificant attention has been given to issues that include “the role of children in religious communities . . . [and] the role of children in the faith maturation of adults.”³³

Biblically speaking, parents relate to their believing children not primarily as sons and daughters, but as brothers and sisters in Christ. Parrett and Kang point out that “our children may be *our* children, according to the flesh, for a brief season in this temporal life. But in the Spirit, and for all eternity, they are our brothers and sisters.”³⁴ Jones similarly points out this important consideration, noting that unity within a Christian community is rooted in something much deeper than “physical kinship,” namely, “the bond of the Spirit.”³⁵

The reality of children as members of the body has significant methodological implications for the church. This does not necessitate the removal of all age-segmented ministries or that every service or gathering of the church must be comprised of members from all generations,³⁶ yet pastors and other ministry leaders ought to consider the presence of children of various ages when planning services or gatherings in which

³³ Marcia J. Bunge, “The Dignity and Complexity of Children: Constructing Christian Theologies of Childhood,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen Marie Yust et al. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 53–55.

³⁴ Parrett and Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful*, 313.

³⁵ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 78.

³⁶ The removal of all age-segmented ministries and programs is a distinguishing factor of family-integrated ministries, which will be elaborated on below.

children might be present.³⁷ Congregational rituals, such as liturgies, songs, personal testimonies, baptisms, and the Lord’s Supper, can all be implemented in such a way that children are invited to participate and helped to understand the significance of such rituals. Additionally, churches may consider implementing various rites of passage to mark and celebrate spiritual milestones in the lives of children.³⁸

The church must understand that children are not just the church of tomorrow; they are vital members of the church today, and their presence should be acknowledged, celebrated, and welcomed. It is only when children and youth are included into the “full life of the body” that the body of Christ is “moving closer to God’s heart.”³⁹

The Body of Christ and Family Ministry: Models of Family Ministry

One of the primary ways for the body of Christ to equip parents as the primary disciple-makers of their children as well as promote the spiritual growth of children as members of the body is through instituting an intentional method of family ministry. Family ministry is more thoroughly defined as “the process of intentionally and persistently realigning a congregation’s proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as the persons primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children.”⁴⁰ In this section, three primary models of family ministry will be surveyed: the family-integrated model, the family-based model, and the family-equipping model, with special emphasis given to the family-equipping model as it is closely related to the ultimate goal of this project.

³⁷ Parrett and Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful*, 312.

³⁸ Jones refers to these rites of passage or spiritual milestones as “faith processes.” Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 163–67.

³⁹ Parrett and Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful*, 313.

⁴⁰ Timothy Paul Jones, ed., *Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 40.

Family-Integrated Model

The family-integrated model (commonly referred to as the family-driven or family discipleship model) is by far the most radical of the three models to be surveyed—so much so that family-integrated ministry has been referred to not merely as another program, but as a “paradigm shift” and “a complete overhaul of the philosophy that is accepted in our churches, colleges, seminaries, and homes.”⁴¹ The defining mark of the family-integrated model is that age-integration is “an ecclesiological principle.”⁴² In other words, age-segregated ministries are eliminated entirely—there is no children’s ministry, no youth group, no age or grade-segmented Sunday school classes, etc. This stance is explicitly confirmed by the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches:

*We affirm that there is a clear and consistent biblical pattern of worship and discipleship for the people of God that is age-integrated; and we believe that this pattern should be embraced and practiced We deny/reject that there is any clear, positive, and scriptural pattern or positive institution for creating distinct, age-segregated cultures in the church through age-segregated worship and systematic and comprehensive age-segregated discipleship.*⁴³

Therefore, family-integrated churches consist of multi-generational gatherings in which parents, children, and even grandparents worship together in a single setting.⁴⁴ By default, the family, particularly parents, is held responsible for the evangelism and discipleship of children.⁴⁵

Voddie Baucham, Jr., a proponent of the family-integrated approach to family ministry, notes the problem of parents abdicating their spiritual responsibilities to their children. He points out that the current trend is for parents to “hire out” when it comes to

⁴¹ Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 204.

⁴² Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 196.

⁴³ “A Declaration of the Complementary Roles of Church and Family,” National Center for Family Integrated Churches, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://ncfic.org/about/276>.

⁴⁴ Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 42.

⁴⁵ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 197.

academics, sports, etc. This is even true of spiritual matters, as Baucham elaborates, “We want our children to be upstanding citizens and Christians, so we hire a children’s pastor or youth minister.” The problem with this, in his view, is that “contrary to popular belief, the home, not the church, has been entrusted with the primary responsibility of teaching children the Bible.”⁴⁶ Baucham suggests that the age-segregated church environments of the last thirty years are the primary culprit when it comes to present-day parents that are ill-equipped if not entirely inept when it comes to evangelizing and discipling their children. His answer to the problem lies in the family-integrated approach to family ministry: the removal of age-segmented ministries means that parents can no longer outsource their spiritual responsibilities to children’s workers, youth leaders, etc.—parents are forced into their God-ordained role of being the primary disciple-makers of their children.⁴⁷

Family-Based Model

The second model of family ministry is the family-based model. According to Brandon Shields, family-based ministry is more of a ministry philosophy than a fixed ministry model in that it recognizes vast differences between church cultures and contexts. Family-based ministries recognize the importance of encouraging discipleship practices in Christian families, while also recognizing that many children in children and youth ministries do not come from intact Christian homes. Therefore, family-based ministries encourage and support Christian families while also engaging non-Christian families.⁴⁸

In his book *Family Based Youth Ministry*, DeVries, one of the pioneers of the

⁴⁶ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 95.

⁴⁷ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 198.

⁴⁸ Brandon Shields, “Family-Based Ministry: Separated Contexts, Shared Focus” in Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 98.

family-based approach, shares the two priorities of the family-based model: empowering parents and equipping the extended family of the church. To further elaborate, family-based ministries regard parents as the “primary nurturers” of their children’s faith and seek to encourage and equip them as such. Additionally, family-based churches also seek to connect children to the extended family of the church community, which is particularly helpful for children and youth that come from homes where parents are apathetic to the Christian faith.⁴⁹

Unlike the family-integrated model, age-segmented ministries are not eliminated. Whereas family-integrated churches explicitly reject age-segregated ministries, at least one proponent of family-based ministry contends that age-segregated ministries are a necessary response to address Western “cultural ills.”⁵⁰ Therefore, rather than eliminating age-segregated programming, each ministry is enhanced by the addition of activities and events that promote opportunities for intergenerational engagement.⁵¹ Family-based ministry is not primarily concerned with what programming looks like as much as what the programming is used for, and family-based ministries typically program in such a way that children and adults are encouraged to interact together.⁵²

Family-Equipping Model

The final model of family ministry to be surveyed is the family-equipping model. If family-integrated ministry falls on one end of the family-ministry spectrum with family-based ministry at the opposite end, family-equipping ministry falls somewhere in the middle as it contains elements found in each of the other two models.

⁴⁹ Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 103–6.

⁵⁰ Shields, “Family-Based Youth Ministry,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 113–14.

⁵¹ Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 43.

⁵² Shields, “Family-Based Youth Ministry,” Shields notes comments from Mark DeVries about the programming of family-based youth ministries.

For example, age-segmented ministries may very well remain intact as is the case in family-based ministries; yet parents are also championed as the primary disciple-makers in the lives of their children as is the case in family-integrated ministries.⁵³ Jones offers the following definition of family-equipping ministry:

Family-equipping ministry simply means coordinating every aspect of your present ministry so that parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children's lives. Family-equipping ministry is all about reorienting activities that are already happening so that parents are equipped to become primary disciple-makers in their children's lives.⁵⁴

One of the strengths of the family-equipping model lies in the fact that, for churches considering how they might better partner with parents, the transition to family-equipping ministry begins with one's present ministry in mind. Family-equipping ministry is not necessarily a radical paradigm shift that results in the elimination of all age-segregated gatherings (family-integrated ministry), nor is it the addition of activities and events to already busy calendars (family-based ministry). Rather, family-equipping ministry is focused on reorganizing activities and events that are already happening for the purpose of encouraging and equipping parents. While any transition in ministry philosophy requires attention, effort, and energy, the transition to a family-equipping ministry is an efficient use of those three valuable resources.

Ultimately, the greatest strength of the family-equipping ministry is the very specific and practical goals of the model: to acknowledge, equip, and hold parents accountable as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

Acknowledging parents. Parents, like all of humanity, are “prone to forget the implications of what God has done for us and in us.”⁵⁵ Therefore, parents need to be

⁵³ Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 43–44.

⁵⁴ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 132.

⁵⁵ Jones, *Family-Ministry Field Guide*, 172.

frequently reminded of their God-ordained role as the primary disciple-makers of their children. Jones insists that parents need to be reminded of their role as the primary disciple-makers of their children “in the everyday life, work, and literature of the church.”⁵⁶ Rather than assuming parents are already aware of their role and responsibility to be the primary disciple-makers of their children, “family-equipping ministries intentionally over-communicate, taking every opportunity to acknowledge parents’ divinely designated role.”⁵⁷

Equipping parents. As the name suggests, equipping parents is foundational to the family-equipping model. Viewing the goals of the family-equipping model as a progression, equipping parents is the next step to acknowledging parents, although acknowledging and equipping parents must be a simultaneous endeavor for either to be effective. As Jones notes, acknowledging parents’ role in the discipleship of their children without equipping them to carry out the task only leads to feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Conversely, apart from constant acknowledgment of parents’ role, the church will likely only be further equipping parents that are already engaged as the primary disciple-makers of their children.⁵⁸ The two responsibilities of the church, to acknowledge and equip parents, must function in tandem.

The most significant way for churches to equip parents is to train them to be the primary teachers of the Scriptures to their children. This is consistent with Moses’s command for the Israelites to diligently teach God’s Law to their children (Deut 6:7). If parents are to fulfill their God-ordained role as the primary disciple-makers of their children, they must take on the role of Bible teacher in their homes.⁵⁹ In an apparent

⁵⁶ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 173.

⁵⁷ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 116.

⁵⁸ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 173.

⁵⁹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 155.

contradiction to the old adage that “more is caught than taught,” Dean insists that “exposing adolescents to faith, as it turns out, is no substitute for teaching them.”⁶⁰ The type of teaching that churches have the opportunity to equip parents for includes times of both formal (i.e., family worship, family devotions) and informal (i.e., conversations that spontaneously occur in everyday life) teaching.⁶¹

It must be noted, however, that one of the innumerable ramifications of living in a fallen world means ministering to fallen families. The tragic reality is that churches are filled each week with children and adolescents that come from homes where parents have little or no desire to engage in the discipleship processes of their children. That being said, the family-equipping church is no less called to minister to broken families than intact Christian families. In this case, being a family-equipping ministry means training “families in faith—mature believers who mentor spiritual orphans, who celebrate milestones with the children whose parents are not yet believers, and who seek opportunities to share the gospel with unbelieving parents.”⁶²

Holding parents accountable. Finally, as parents are acknowledged and equipped, they must continually be held accountable in their role as the primary disciple-makers of their children. The obvious reason that parents must be held accountable is that God has explicitly called them to function as the primary disciple-makers of their children. As has been discussed multiple times thus far, parental responsibility in the discipleship of their children is a constant theme in both the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, research confirms that parents matter most when it comes to the spiritual development of their children. No other individual or institution has the same powerful

⁶⁰ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 16.

⁶¹ Jones refers to formal and informal teaching opportunities respectively as “faith talks” and “faith walks.” See chaps. 12 and 13 of Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*.

⁶² Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 169.

influence in the life of a child that a parent does. Therefore, the church must hold parents accountable to their God-ordained role as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

It must not be overlooked, however, that the church must hold parents accountable in this task to promote their own spiritual maturity. One of the many problems of parents failing to engage in the discipleship processes of their children is that parenting is one of God's many means of sanctification. As Bettis points out,

Many parents are missing the Lord's agenda for their lives, because they have outsourced the spiritual discipleship of their children. Children are God's means to transform *us*. Their sin reveals our sin. Their questions reveal our ignorance. All of these are God's prompts for us to grow.⁶³

When churches fail to acknowledge, equip, and hold parents accountable for their spiritual responsibilities to their children, parents miss out on one of God's most powerful means of transformation.

Conclusion

In addition to the biblical and theological foundations presenting parents as the primary disciple-makers of their children, additional research indicates that parents are uniquely positioned as the primary influence in the spiritual lives of their children. While parents are primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children, they do not face the challenge alone. God in his great wisdom has provided parents and children alike with the body of Christ to not only encourage and equip parents, but also make disciples of the children that help make up the body. At least one way the church can accomplish this is by instituting a family-equipping ministry model, which intentionally acknowledges, equips, and holds parents accountable as the primary disciple-makers in the lives of their children.

⁶³ Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 15.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Focused preparation for project implementation began in the late spring and into the summer of 2019 and the project was implemented in the fall of 2019. Details about project preparation and implementation are included below.

Preparation

The following is an overview of preparation that led to the implementation of the ministry project. The preparation phase included planning, designing, and promoting the ministry project.

Planning Phase

Planning for project implementation began in late spring of 2019. Initially, a series of training classes was considered as the method for both assessing family discipleship perceptions and practices among parents and, ultimately, improving family discipleship practices. However, upon consulting the church's calendar during the desired implementation period, it was determined that conducting a series of weekly classes would be nearly impossible given multiple large events already scheduled during the time period allotted for project implementation. As a result, on July 18, 2019 the decision was made to create a ministry resource¹ to give to parents for the purpose of increasing their awareness of their role as well as equipping them with practical suggestions for engaging in family discipleship practices.

¹ See appendix 5.

Design Phase

Once the decision was made to move forward with a ministry resource, the next step was to design and prepare the resource for print. Over the course of the next several weeks, the content of ministry resource was researched, outlined, written, and revised. The ministry resource was intentionally designed to be accessible to families of various backgrounds (i.e., different levels of spiritual maturity) and structures (adopted, foster, single-parent, divorced, etc.) that were present in the ministry context.

The content of the resource was divided into three primary sections. The first section briefly addressed the role of family, particularly parents, in the spiritual development of children by reviewing Scripture's explicit commands for parents to act as the primary disciple-makers of their children. Building on the first section, the second section of the resource briefly explained the supplemental role of the church in the spiritual formation of children.

After the introductory sections on the roles of the family and the church, the third section of the ministry resource served as a six-week family devotional. The devotional section of the resource was based on a proper understanding of the gospel. This content was chosen to directly combat dangerous and deceptive false teaching and philosophies (i.e., moral therapeutic deism) as briefly discussed in chapter 3. Additionally, in an effort to align ministry efforts with family discipleship practices, students in the middle school ministry were simultaneously being taught an overview of the gospel during midweek programming. This alignment of the church and home was designed to help promote and facilitate discussions between parents and children about the gospel and its implications. Accompanying each week of devotional content were practical prompts to help parents engage their children in spiritual conversations and activities. These prompts were based on the rhythms and times for family discipleship found in Deuteronomy 6:7 (“when you sit in your house,” “when you walk by the way,” “when you lie down,” and “when you rise”).

Once the initial draft of the ministry project was complete, the resource along with an evaluation rubric was forwarded to an expert panel for review. The expert panel consisted of a combination of academic and professional reviewers: Dr. Melissa Tucker, Ed.D., Associate Professor of Education and Chair of the Department of Education at Boyce College; Todd Meadows, DMin., Pastor of Students and Families at Grace Baptist Church in Somerset, KY; Aaron Case, Lead Pastor of Eden Chapel in Seymour, TN. Originally, the expert panel included a fourth individual, however, unexpected medical issues prevented the fourth member from being able to review the ministry resource within the allotted time constraints. The reviews from the expert panel revealed that the ministry resource met or exceeded sufficient level in all criterion evaluated.² Minor revisions were suggested by the expert panel and, once those revisions were made, the resource was formatted and prepared for print. Originally, the ministry resource was to be professionally printed, however, unexpected delays resulted in the ministry resource being designed and printed in-house.

Promotion

Promotion for the luncheon began on August 13, 2019 in the form of an announcement in the monthly parent email for the OHBC middle school ministry. Over the course of the next month the luncheon was repeatedly announced, and invitations were sent in a variety of different forms. A digital invitation was created and sent out to all parents of middle school students with an email address on record. Additionally, the digital invitation was published to a private Facebook group dedicated to the parents of middle school students at OHBC. In both places, the invitation included an RSVP form for parents to complete in order aid in preparations for the luncheon and the distribution of the ministry resource. In addition to digital invitations, a physical invitation was also

² See appendix 4.

sent to the home of each middle school student that had an address on record. Less formally, as the event drew closer parents that had not yet signed up for the luncheon were extended an invitation through text messages and, in some cases, through in-person conversations.

Implementation

Following is a timeline of the implementation phase of the ministry project, including additional time for pre- and post-implementation surveys to be completed.

Week 1

The ministry resource was distributed at an annual middle school parent luncheon on Sunday, September 22, 2019. The luncheon was held immediately following morning worship services with approximately 30 individual parents in attendance. After food had been served, the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey³ was made available to all parents in attendance. Brief instructions were given to parents prior to beginning the survey, including an explanation of the voluntary nature of the survey as well as an explanation of the use of a 4-digit code in place of a name to protect the anonymity of the participant. Of the approximate 30 parents or guardians in attendance, 23 individuals completed the survey at the luncheon. Contact information was obtained for all parents that had completed the survey, including email and phone number for future communication purposes, but that information was obtained separate from the survey itself to ensure that an individual's contact information could not be linked with a specific completed survey or 4-digit code. The contact information would later be imported into a database for the purpose of ongoing communication with parents participating in the study.

Upon completion of the survey, the ministry resource was introduced to all

³ See appendix 1.

parents in attendance—even those that had elected not to participate in the survey. I provided a brief overview of the ministry resource along with instructions on how the resource was designed to be used. Additionally, parents were informed that there would be a follow-up survey for participants at the end of the time period allotted for completion of the ministry resource. There was very little discussion about the content contained in the ministry resource (the role of parents, the role of the church, or the family devotional content); these were intentionally not discussed so that any measurable increase in the parents' discipleship practices could be attributed to the resource itself rather than the presentation of the resource.

The week following the parent luncheon, efforts were made to provide the survey and ministry resource to parents that were not in attendance at the luncheon. An online version of the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices survey was created using Google Forms. Embedded in the online version of the survey was a video overview of the survey and directions for completing it as well as an explanation of the ministry resource and instructions on how the resource was designed to be used (the video overview was similar to the live presentation that occurred at the parent luncheon). Upon completion of the online survey, participants were provided a link where the ministry resource could be downloaded in PDF format and printed or saved to their device. The link to this online survey was delivered to parents across multiple communication channels. First, the link was published to the aforementioned middle school parent private Facebook group on Tuesday, September 24, 2019. One week later, a link to the survey was included in the October parent email that was sent out on Tuesday, October 1, 2019. Only three individuals completed the online version of the survey.

Week 2 Through Week 7

Over the course of next six to seven weeks, parents worked through the ministry resource at their own pace. For clarification, the resource included six weeks of

family devotional content, however, participants that completed the survey the week of the parent luncheon technically had an additional week to complete the study, whereas participants that completed the online version of the survey included in the parent email only had six weeks to complete the ministry resource.

During this time, parents were contacted at least twice in an effort to encourage them to continue in the study as well as answer any questions they had. First, a brief video was recorded to encourage parents to keep moving forward, even if they had fallen behind due to unforeseen circumstances. Additionally, the video served to remind parents that there would be a follow-up survey published at the completion of the time period allotted for the ministry resource study and parents were encouraged to look for that survey in the coming weeks. The video was published to the aforementioned middle school parent private Facebook group on Wednesday, October 16, 2019 and was subsequently sent via email on Monday, October 21, 2019 to all individual participants whose information was collected at the parent luncheon.

Similarly, a second video was created and published on Tuesday, November 5, 2019. The second video reminded parents that the time period allotted for the ministry resource study would soon be coming to an end and that there would be a follow-up survey published the following week. Participants were informed that the follow up survey would be conducted using an online survey and were informed when and where they could access the follow-up survey. Similar to the previous video, the second video was published to the middle school parent private Facebook group and was also sent via email to all individual participants whose information was collected at the parent luncheon.

In addition to these scheduled points of contact, I received several informal comments from parents throughout the implementation of the ministry resource regarding how they were using the resource and engaging (and even struggling to engage) in family discipleship practices. Finally, during this time the results of the pre-implementation

survey were organized and synthesized in preparation to be further analyzed in comparison with the forthcoming results of the post-implementation survey.

Week 8 Through Week 10

The post-implementation survey was sent out to participants via email on Tuesday, November 12, 2019. Similar to the online version of the pre-implementation survey, the post-implementation survey was designed and administered using Google Forms. Accompanying the post-implementation survey was a video overview of the post-implementation survey. The video thanked all participants for their involvement in the ministry resource study and also instructed participants how to complete the post-implementation survey. The video specifically reminded participants to use the same 4-digit code on the post-implementation survey that they had used on the pre-implementation survey. In addition to the email sent directly to participants, a link to the post-implementation survey and overview video was also published to the middle school parent private Facebook group on the same date.

Due to slow responses to the initial follow-up survey, subsequent reminders about the post-implementation survey were sent to participants in the following weeks. A link to the survey and video was included in the monthly parent email on Friday, November 15, 2019. Additionally, the link to the survey and video was re-published to the middle school parent private Facebook group on Tuesday, November 19, 2019. On the same date, all participants whose contact information was collected at the parent luncheon were sent individual text messages asking them to complete the post-implementation survey if they had not already done so. The text messages also included a direct link to the post-implementation survey and overview video. A final link to the post-implementation survey and overview video was published to the middle school parent private Facebook group on Monday, November 25, 2019.

Conclusion

Upon completion of the implementation phase of the ministry project and accompanying surveys, data from both the pre- and post-implementation surveys was organized and analyzed to yield a clearer picture of family discipleship perceptions and practices and measure any changes that occurred during the implementation phase. The results of the research and subsequent analysis of the data are included in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

The purpose of this project was to transition the student ministry of Oak Hill Baptist Church in Somerset, Kentucky, to a family-equipping model by equipping parents to disciple their children. While a full transition to a family-equipping model happens gradually over the course of years,¹ positive steps were taken over the course of this project as parents were equipped to disciple their children. This chapter provides an in-depth look at how the purpose of this project was successfully achieved, including an assessment of the goals of the project, an overview of the strengths and weakness of the project, theological and personal reflections on the project, and comments on how the project will be leveraged moving forward.

Assessment of Goals

The first goal of this project was to assess the current family discipleship perceptions and practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC middle school ministry. To achieve this goal, participants completed the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey prior to implementation of the ministry resource.² Their responses to the pre-implementation survey were scored and organized to yield a clearer picture of current family discipleship perceptions and practices. These scores also provided a reference point for measuring the subsequent goals of the ministry project. Table 1 below provides an overview of the scores for all 26 participants in the pre-

¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 116.

² See appendix 1.

implementation survey.³

Table 1. Family discipleship perceptions and practices survey:
Pre-implementation scores

Participant Code	Family Disciple Perceptions (Pre-Implementation)	Family Discipleship Practices (Pre-Implementation)
0623	35	16
0706	29	23
0724	38	31
0810	32	33
0827	35	18
1104	32	19
1227	38	41
1266	43	31
1303	28	21
1981	36	33
2223	35	20
2233	37	31
2377	26	28
2391	39	33
2609	37	26
3945	33	12
4077	28	19
4347	38	31
4747	43	31
5228	39	36
5693	28	13
6288	40	27
7042	38	20
7629	33	24
7721	30	33
9487	37	18

The average score for the family discipleship perceptions section of the survey was 34.88, while the average score for the practices section was 26.08. The maximum possible score for both the perceptions and practices sections was 48. With the average perception score noticeably higher than the average practices score, at least one

³ There were two pre-implementation surveys that were improperly marked. Both surveys contained at least one survey question that was marked with two separate Likert scale responses. Rather than discarding the surveys altogether, the scores for the questions containing two separate Likert scale responses were calculated by taking the average of the two responses that were marked.

conclusion could be made in the pre-implementation phase of the project: proper understanding does not necessarily equate to proper practice. Similar to the findings presented in the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey conducted by Jones, preliminary research indicated that while parents acknowledged their responsibilities, their practical outworking of those responsibilities was lacking in comparison.⁴ While the data is cause for concern, it does provide an assessment of the current family discipleship perceptions and practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC middle school ministry; therefore, the first goal of the ministry project was successfully completed.

The second goal of the ministry project was to develop a ministry resource to increase parents' awareness of their unique role in the discipleship process of their children. As briefly described in the previous chapter, a ministry resource was created to both make parents aware of their spiritual responsibilities in the lives of their children as well as provide them with practical steps for fulfilling their spiritual responsibilities. Special emphasis was given to increasing parents' awareness of their unique role in the discipleship process of their children and equipping them to engage in spiritual conversations and activities with their children. The expert panel received a draft of the ministry project and, using the provided rubric, evaluated its usefulness in making parents aware of their God-ordained role as the primary disciple-makers of their children. The evaluations from the expert panel revealed that the ministry resource met or exceeded expectations in all areas of emphasis.⁵ Therefore, based on the feedback received from the expert panel selected to evaluate the ministry resource, the second goal of this project was also successfully completed.

The third goal of the ministry project was to improve family discipleship

⁴ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 155.

⁵ See appendix 4.

practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC student ministry. In order to assess the completion of this goal, participants that completed the pre-implementation survey were then provided with the ministry resource that was designed to increase parents' awareness and active engagement in the discipleship process of their children. The resource included an overview of the role of both parents and the church in the discipleship of children, as well as six weeks of family devotional content accompanied by practical prompts to help parents engage their children in spiritual conversations and activities.⁶ Upon completion of the ministry resource, participants were then asked to complete a follow-up (post-implementation) survey.⁷ Table 2 below provides an overview for all 10 participants in the post-implementation survey. Upon completion of the post-implementation surveys, scores from the pre-implementation surveys were compared to the scores from the post-implementation surveys to yield a clearer picture of how family discipleship perceptions and practices changed over the course of the study.

Table 2. Family discipleship perceptions and practices survey:
Post-implementation scores

Participant Code	Family Disciple Perceptions (Post-Implementation)	Family Discipleship Practices (Post-Implementation)
0617	39	20
0827	37	28
1011	33	28
1104	42	45
1209	38	41
5228	30	30
5255	36	33
6288	37	33
7629	34	35
7721	29	26

At this point, two significant issues must be noted. First, there was a drastic

⁶ See appendix 5.

⁷ See appendix 1.

decrease in the number of participants from the pre-implementation survey to the post-implementation survey. Whereas there were 26 participants in the pre-implementation survey, only 10 individuals completed the post-implementation survey. A possible explanation for this is that, while the pre-implementation surveys were completed primarily using printed survey handouts in a group setting, the post-implementation surveys were created online and delivered through email and other online communication platforms for participants to complete at their own convenience. The difference in form and environment may have directly resulted in fewer post-implementation surveys being completed. Although all participants provided their email addresses and/or phone numbers at the onset of the study, it is possible that some of the participants failed to receive emails and messages directing them to the post-implementation survey.

The second problem to note is that, of the 10 individuals who completed the post-implementation survey, only six of those participants used identification codes that were also used on the pre-implementation surveys. Each of the other four participants that completed post-implementation surveys used a new code that was not used in the completion of the initial pre-implementation survey. There are at least two explanations for this discrepancy: first, it is possible that four participants in the pre-implementation survey simply forgot their 4-digit identification code when it came to complete their post-implementation surveys. Second, seeing as how the ministry resource was made available to parents even if they chose not to participate in the study, it is also possible that these four new identification codes came from participants that did not complete a pre-implementation survey but still used the ministry resource and, upon completion of the resource, then also completed the post-implementation survey that was made available online.

Due to these discrepancies, I completed multiple statistical analyses to measure change in family discipleship perceptions and practices upon completion of the ministry resource. The first analysis performed was a paired *t*-test. This measurement includes

only those participants that can be identified as completing both the pre- and post-implementation surveys using the same identification code in each survey. The downside of this particular method of analysis was the extremely small sample size, making it difficult to determine if any statistically significant change occurred. Regarding family discipleship perceptions, there was no statistically significant difference ($t_{(5)} = 0.00, p = .5000$) in the change of family discipleship perceptions from the pre- to post-implementation surveys. Regarding family discipleship practices, there was also no statistically significant difference ($t_{(5)} = 1.33, p = .1202$) in the change of family discipleship practices from the pre- to post-implementation surveys.

The second analysis performed was an unpaired *t*-test. The advantage of the unpaired *t*-test is that it allowed all pre- and post-implementation scores to be used, accounting for the possible identification code errors mentioned above and thereby increasing the sample size used to measure the change from pre- to post-implementation. Regarding family discipleship perceptions, there was no statistically significant difference ($t_{(34)} = 0.37, p = .3584$) in the change of family discipleship perceptions from the pre- to post-implementation surveys. One possible explanation for the overall lack of improvement in family discipleship perceptions is that, as previously discussed in the assessment of the first goal, the pre-implementation survey results indicated that parents were relatively knowledgeable of their responsibility as the primary disciple-makers of their children. Due to their high pre-implementation family discipleship perceptions scores, it would have been difficult for a resource or any other variable to result in a significant increase in post-implementation scores.

However, the unpaired *t*-test did reveal a statistically significant difference ($t_{(34)} = 2.22, p = .0167$) in the change of family discipleship practices from the pre- to post-implementation surveys. The average pre-implementation family discipleship practices score was 25.69, whereas the average post-implementation family discipleship practices score was 31.9. Given that this increase from the pre- to post-implementation

surveys was determined to be statistically significant, the third goal of this project, to improve family discipleship practices among families with at least one child in the OHBC student ministry, was successfully completed.

Notable Discoveries

While the low participation rate in the post-implementation survey resulted in a sample size much smaller than desired, one advantage of the small sample size was the ability to compare pre- and post-implementation surveys in greater detail. In reviewing the pre- and post- surveys, some contradictions and discrepancies were discovered that are worthy of mention. First, for at least two participants who completed both the pre- and post- surveys, their post-implementation scores actually indicated a decrease in family discipleship perceptions. For one of these participants with a lower post-implementation score, a contradiction was found. In the pre-implementation survey, the participant indicated they “strongly agree[d]” that their church had helped them to develop a clear plan for their child’s spiritual growth. However, in the post-implementation survey, the participant marked “strongly disagree” to the same question. A possible explanation is user error—the participant may have simply marked the wrong response on the post-implementation survey. This seems the most logical possibility, as it would be a contradiction to indicate the church had helped develop a clear plan for their child’s spiritual growth prior to the ministry resource, but then failed to help parents develop a clear plan upon completion of the ministry resource.

Similarly, another participant indicated in their pre-implementation survey that they had been contacted six or more times in the previous year by a ministry leader seeking to help them engage in their child’s spiritual development; however, when asked the same question in their post-implementation survey, this same participant indicated that they had been contacted only once in the past year. Considering the implementation phase of this project lasted only a few weeks, this is a more blatant contradiction in

response between the pre- and post- surveys. Again, a possible explanation for the contradiction is user error. Another plausible explanation is that, during the pre-implementation survey, the participant was responding to the survey questions with general estimates—however, while completing the ministry resource, perhaps the participant began to think more deliberately about family discipleship perceptions and practices, resulting in more specific and critical responses in the post-implementation survey. In the end, while these findings and apparent contradictions certainly affected the statistical results, it is unlikely that different responses from these participants would have changed the results in any statistically significant way.

Additionally, there were significant contradictions discovered between perceptions and practices in the pre-implementation survey. In the parental perceptions section of the survey, 70 percent of parents agreed to some degree that they prioritized consistent family devotional or worship times.⁸ At first glance this was an encouraging statistic, considerably higher than the 46 percent of parents that responded similarly in the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey conducted by Jones.⁹ However, the parental practices section of the survey revealed a significant discrepancy—80 percent of parents indicated that their families had engaged in family devotional or worship time only twice or less in the previous two months. This statistic is consistent with research reported by both Jones and Barna.¹⁰

Similarly, over 75 percent of the parents surveyed did not believe the church is the place where children should receive most of their Bible teaching; presumably, these

⁸ See table A1 in appendix 2.

⁹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 216–17.

¹⁰ In the research conducted by Jones, 67 percent of respondents indicated they had engaged in family devotional or worship time twice or less in the previous two months (Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 217). Similarly, Barna reported that approximately 5 percent of families share any type of worship experience together outside of church during a typical month (George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003], 78).

parents believe the home is where children should receive the majority of their Bible teaching. However, over half of the parents surveyed acknowledged they had read or discussed the Bible with their children twice or less in the past month.¹¹ The study conducted by Jones reported almost identical findings—approximately 55 percent of parents had read or discussed the Bible with their children twice or less in the previous month.¹² These discrepancies are substantive, further demonstrating the inconsistency between family discipleship perceptions and practices.

One noteworthy discovery was that 85 percent of parents agreed to some degree that their families were simply too busy to do regularly family devotions or Bible reading.¹³ This was significantly higher than the 49 percent that responded similarly in the research conducted by Jones.¹⁴ The research conducted for this project is consistent with Barna’s assertion that children often receive spiritual teaching only when it is convenient for parents.¹⁵ Sadly, this percentage did not change upon completion of the ministry resource that accompanied this project.¹⁶ Again, the data presents a contradiction—it is irreconcilable to acknowledge that family devotions and worship are a priority in one’s family while also admitting that the family is too busy to engage in those practices.

This troubling discovery prompted me to conduct a brief follow-up survey in hopes to identify some of the potential obstacles to parental engagement in family discipleship practices. Similar to the results of the pre-implementation survey, parents

¹¹ See table A1 in appendix 2.

¹² Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 217. Barna reports a similarly troubling statistic: on an average week, less than 10 percent of parents who attend church with their children read the Bible, pray, or participate in an act of service together (Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, 78).

¹³ See table A1 in appendix 2.

¹⁴ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 216.

¹⁵ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, 73.

¹⁶ See table A2 in appendix 3.

unanimously indicated that engaging in family discipleship practices were important. Nevertheless, their responses also indicated several areas that hindered their engagement in family discipleship practices—child(ren)’s involvement in sports, parents’ work schedules, and technology were the three most notable potential obstacles to parental engagement in family discipleship practices.¹⁷

Project Strengths

The project had several strengths, beginning with the ministry resource developed to help improve family discipleship perceptions and practices. Jones commends the use of a tool similar to the ministry resource created for this project as a helpful starting point for equipping parents.¹⁸ To my knowledge, this is the first time a resource of this kind has been produced at OHBC and placed in the hands of parents to help them better understand their primary role in the spiritual formation of their children and equip them for the task. The resource was not only practical, but also accessible—it was designed to be a non-intimidating starting point for families that were new to the idea of family discipleship. Again, this is consistent with Jones’s recommendations for the use of such a tool to equip parents. Jones insists that any tool developed to equip parents for “family faith talks” must be “clear, brief, and adaptable to a wide variety of circumstances.”¹⁹ The resource created for this project meets all of these criteria.

Prior to the creation of this resource, parents were acknowledged as the primary disciple-makers of their children (and research indicated they were indeed aware of their responsibilities), but there was little or no practical equipping of parents to fulfill their responsibilities in the spiritual formation of their children. Essentially, we were

¹⁷ See table A3 in appendix 6.

¹⁸ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 156.

¹⁹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 156–57.

calling parents to their God-ordained role without helping them walk faithfully in obedience to God’s command. As Danny Bowen points out, equipping necessitates more than simply telling someone to perform a specific task—it “requires intentional effort to enable someone to do something that they couldn’t do before so the church’s capacity to fulfill the Great Commission is multiplied.”²⁰ The resource developed for this ministry project was the first step in creating a culture where parents are not only acknowledged, but also intentionally equipped to fulfill their role as the primary disciple-makers in the lives of their children.

Another strength of this project is that it has led to the pastoral staff of the church thinking more deliberately about family discipleship and how to be more intentional in partnering with parents to promote the spiritual growth of children and students. This development alone makes the efforts of this project worthwhile. More information about the future of OHBC as it relates to family ministry is included in further detail below.

Project Weaknesses

The most glaring weakness of this project was the low response rate of participants completing the post-implementation survey. With less than 50 percent of initial participants completing the post-implementation survey, it is clear that proper steps need to be taken to make similar future initiatives more successful. It is possible that the low response rate was the result of the busy season in the life of the church during which the project was implemented. In the future, the church calendar would need to be considered more carefully along with the seasonal obligations of families. Considering these two variables, it would likely be determined that there is a better time or season to

²⁰ Danny R. Bowen, “Be a Family By Equipping Parents,” in Timothy Paul Jones and John David Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry: A Collection of Ideas for Your Church* (Nashville: Randall House, 2015), 71.

implement similar family discipleship initiatives.

Additionally, the low response rate may be a result of the method of implementation. While the ministry resource is an excellent tool that I hope to revise and build on moving forward, it simply isn't enough. Some families, particularly families that are new to the concept of family discipleship, will likely require supplemental instruction in the form of in-class or video-based training. Differences in learning styles may mean that providing parents with a resource to read and implement is a helpful start, but it is not sufficient for equipping parents to fulfill their role as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

It should also be noted that another significant weakness of this project is that it failed to consider how to minister to what Jones refers to as “spiritual orphans,” that is, children with unbelieving and/or uninvolved parents. Jones warns that any family ministry that does not consider and minister to spiritual orphans is not family ministry—rather, it is “family idolatry.”²¹ As I consider the families present at the initial luncheon where the ministry project and resource were introduced, all of the homes represented were homes with at least one believing parent. Subsequently, the results from their pre-implementation surveys indicated that they were largely aware of their spiritual responsibilities as parents, even if they failed to live those responsibilities out on a consistent basis. In light of this, considerations for how OHBC might better minister to spiritual orphans moving forward is briefly discussed below.

Finally, Timothy Paul Jones points out that family-equipping ministry means not only acknowledging and equipping parents, but also holding them accountable as the primary disciple-makers of their children.²² Another weakness of this project was a lack of intentionality in holding parents accountable in their commitment to participate. While

²¹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 169.

²² Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 132.

this is much smaller than holding parents accountable to their role in the spiritual formation of their children, it is still symptomatic of a ministry culture that not only must improve in equipping parents, but also in holding them accountable. For this project in particular, parents would have benefited from more consistent communication (i.e., weekly encouragement over the six weeks of implementation) as well as more opportunities for parents to ask questions and provide feedback.

Ultimately, this project was conducted with the objective of equipping all parents—not just the parents of middle school students—to function as the primary disciple-makers of their children. Since the project was initially delimited to the middle school ministry division at OHBC, the project would need to be repeated across the remaining age-segmented ministries, namely, the children’s ministry (preschool through fifth grade) and the high school ministry (ninth through twelfth grade) in order to measure family discipleship perceptions and practices in families that have children that fall into the alternate age divisions.

In order to accomplish this, we must first consider conducting the study during a different time of the year. The low number of post-implementation responses in the initial study revealed that fall is a busy season in the life of OHBC and is not the ideal time for implementing subsequent ministry projects. A more ideal time would be early in the year (January through March), as both the church calendar and most family calendars seem to be less cluttered. Additionally, the ministry resource would require minor adjustments to accommodate the different levels of cognitive abilities in children of various age groups.²³ Finally, families—particularly those new to engaging in family discipleship practices—would benefit from pastors and ministry leaders equipping parents by modeling family discipleship practices to them. One example of such

²³ A helpful tool in accommodating various levels of cognitive abilities is LifeWay’s “Levels of Biblical Learning” (“Levels of Biblical Learning,” LifeWay, accessed March 16, 2020, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/special-emphasis/levels-of-biblical-learning>).

modeling might include ministry leaders recording family devotions that take place at home or spiritual conversations that take place in the car and publishing those videos for parents to see how other families engage in family discipleship practices, thus equipping and encouraging them to do the same.

Theological Reflections

The entirety of this project was predicated primarily on two biblical truths: (1) parents are to serve as the primary disciple-makers of their children (Deut 6:4-9; Ps 78:1-8; Eph 6:4), and (2) the church is called to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). Together, then, it is the role of the church to equip parents for their primary work of ministry, which is making disciples of their children. As elaborated on in chapter 2, there are several implications to consider as the church fulfills this obligation. The implementation of this project considered several of these implications.

The gifted individuals listed in Ephesians 4:11 are charged with the task of equipping the saints for their works of ministry—in the case of this project, equipping the saints includes equipping parents to disciple their children. Particularly relevant in this project was the role of the pastor or teacher. One commentator points out that the role of the teacher is to provide instruction that is consistent with sound doctrine and applicable to everyday life.²⁴ In this way, the ministry resource created and given to participating parents during project implementation was an act of teaching; through the resource, parents were instructed in their role as primary disciple-makers and equipped with practical suggestions for living out their role in the rhythms of daily life. Along these lines, the ministry project served as a form of pastoral shepherding as well—not only were parents instructed in their role, but they were exhorted to live in obedience to God’s Word by actively engaging in the spiritual formation of their children.

²⁴ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 545.

Finally, throughout the project parents were introduced to the concept of functioning as both teachers and evangelists (Eph 4:11) in their own homes.²⁵ The resource created for this project equipped parents to not only instruct their children, but to specifically share with them the good news of Jesus Christ. As the most formative influence in the life of a child, parents need to be equipped to share the gospel with their children with confidence. As Steve Wright notes, parents’ “perceived lack of ability to articulate biblical soteriology in ways a child can understand” often results in increased anxiety for parents.²⁶ The ministry resource created for the project seeks to combat the lack of soteriological clarity for parents by providing them with a biblical overview of the gospel that is accessible for their children. As a result, the project equipped parents to fulfill the Great Commission by making disciples in their own “Jerusalem” (Matt 28:19; Acts 1:8)—that is, in their own homes. The ultimate hope is that, not only will parents share the gospel with their own children, but also partner with their children in sharing the gospel with others.²⁷ According to the post-implementation survey, it appears this ministry resource helped increase parents’ confidence in sharing the gospel or at least engaging in spiritual conversations with non-Christians—90 percent of participants indicated they had witnessed to or invited a non-Christian to church at least once in the previous year after completing the ministry resource.²⁸

It should be noted that equipping parents to function as the primary Bible teachers in their homes is central to the spiritual formation of children. Scripture

²⁵ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 155, 178. Jones indicates that effectively equipping families includes “training parents to teach their children,” and equipping parents “to serve as ministers and missionaries first within their own households.” Adding to this, Shirley insists that parents have the role of both teacher and evangelist in their homes (Chris Shirley, *Family Ministry and the Church: A Leader’s Guide for Ministry through Families* [Nashville: Randall House, 2018], 48).

²⁶ Steve Wright, “Family, A Context for Evangelism,” in *Practical Family Ministry*, 32.

²⁷ Michael S. Wilder, “Building and Equipping Missional Families,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 247.

²⁸ See table A2 in appendix 3.

commands parents to diligently teach God’s Word to their children, seeking opportunities in the rhythms of everyday life to instruct their children in the truth of God’s Word (Deut 6:6-7). Furthermore, research supports the supremacy of Scripture in the spiritual formation of children. In a recent study conducted by LifeWay, regular Bible intake was noted as the single most positive influence on the spiritual health of children as they grew towards adulthood. Commenting on the research, Magruder points out that regular Bible reading in the home requires parents to assume the role of disciple-makers rather than “hoping the church will handle all of the disciple-making skills.” Magruder goes on to suggest at least one way the church can help establish regular Bible reading habits is by providing resources to help parents.²⁹ The ministry resource created for this project was one step towards establishing parents as Bible teachers in their homes—the post-implementation survey indicated an increase in the frequency at which parents read and discussed the Bible with their children.³⁰

Furthermore, this ministry project equipped parents to fulfill at least a part of their responsibility to help build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12). As each member of the body fulfills his or her respective ministry, the body of Christ as a whole is strengthened.³¹ Believing children are members of the body of Christ; therefore, as parents used the ministry resource as a tool to disciple their children, they were actively “building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12).

At least one way this ministry project helped parents engage in “building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12) was by confronting false doctrines and deceptive philosophies, similar to those that Paul warned the Ephesians about (Eph 4:14). False teaching and deceptive philosophies are just as prevalent today as they were when Paul

²⁹ Jana Magruder, *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2017), 52–59.

³⁰ See table A2 in appendix 3.

³¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551.

penned his letter to the Ephesians—therefore, churches must equip parents to identify and confront them. Perhaps most troubling in the day in which we live is the pseudo-gospel of moralistic therapeutic deism, which stands in opposition to the true gospel of Jesus Christ. As Tad Thompson notes, “the gospel is the most important category of truth for [parents] to stock in [their] spiritual pantry.” Thompson goes on to present several false gospels that are often preached today before presenting parents with an overview of the true gospel.³² The ministry resource created and placed in the hands of parents, particularly the family discipleship content, was likewise based on a biblical understanding of the gospel. This was done in order that parents would have access to a tool to help them guard their children from being “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, [and] by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:14).

Finally, this ministry project propagated the theme of unity that is foundational to the book of Ephesians as expounded on in chapter 2. One of the benefits of the ministry resource created for this project is that, by encouraging parents to engage in the spiritual development of their children and giving them practical steps to help them, the project served to promote unity within the homes of the participating families. In a time in which individual obligations often have families going in different directions, the resource (particularly the family devotional section) encouraged parents with practical suggestions for bringing their families together for a unified purpose and focus—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

On a more ancillary note, the ministry resource created for this project provided parents with a concise theology of the family, as well as a more accurate view of the role of the church as it relates to families. This is important, considering the

³² Tad Thompson, *Intentional Parenting: Family Discipleship by Design* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 23–33.

following comments from Barna:

How do parents reconcile the apparent contradiction between saying that they have the primary responsibility for the spiritual development of their children and their practice of dropping off the kids for others to provide virtually all of the spiritual instruction that their children receive? Based on their upbringing and the prevailing cultural assumptions, they believe that their church is the best provider of spiritual nurturing for their kids.³³

Through this ministry project, parents were helped to understand the primary nature of their role in comparison to the supplemental role of the church in training and nurturing children's faith. It is on this increased clarity of the roles of the family and the church that OHBC helps to build on moving forward.

Moving Forward

The future of ministry to families at OHBC will look increasingly different as a result of this ministry project. The preparatory research conducted prior to implementation clearly indicated that parents matter most when it comes to the discipleship of children. Therefore, churches, including OHBC, must make intentional efforts to equip parents for their role in the lives of their children.

Keeping with the theme of unity in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, one of the opportunities this ministry project has afforded OHBC is the potential for greater unity across various age-segmented ministries moving forward. Currently, there are three primary age-segmented ministries—children (preschool through fifth grade), middle school (sixth through eighth grade), and high school (ninth through twelfth grade)—each of which has its own pastoral staff member charged with leading and overseeing his respective ministry area.³⁴ While the delimitations of this project limited the scope to the middle school ministry, this project has initiated conversations among the pastoral staff

³³ Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, 79.

³⁴ The existing model at OHBC is most closely aligned with what Jones refers to as a "segmented-programmatic ministry" (Timothy Paul Jones, "Family Life Curriculum" in *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims*, ed. James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep [Nashville: B&H, 2012], 289).

and leadership at OHBC about how we might better minister to families across the various age-segmented ministries. Ministering to families effectively will require greater unity across both the staff and their respective areas of ministry as OHBC seeks to create a comprehensive plan for partnering with parents. The pastoral staff and leadership team must work to create mutual understanding across all age-based ministries (children, students, and parents) of the importance of partnering with parents and equipping them to fulfill their God-ordained role in the lives of their children. This would be a unifying, yet tedious work as various ministries and leaders think critically about their current practices and how they might reorganize and repurpose activities and events that are already happening for the purpose of encouraging and equipping parents.³⁵ As both staff and non-staff ministry leaders make efforts to better equip parents, they are both “equip[ping] the saints for the work of ministry” and “building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). At least one way in which the staff and ministry leaders might work towards this goal is through the development of what Jones refers to as a “Comprehensive-Coordivative Curriculum” for Family Life Education.³⁶ Additionally, Bowen provides churches with an accessible “master plan” to help them more effectively equip parents to disciple their children.³⁷ As the leadership at OHBC strives to acknowledge, equip, and hold parents accountable, it’s important to remember that transitioning to a ministry culture that thinks both consistently and intentionally about equipping parents and families will take continue to take a significant amount time and effort.³⁸

At least one way in which OHBC might better equip parents moving forward is

³⁵ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 132.

³⁶ Jones, “Family Life Curriculum,” 290. Jones uses the terms “family life education” and “family ministry” interchangeably throughout the chapter. While a full treatment of the development of comprehensive-coordinative curricula is unnecessary here, the process as described in detail by Jones might prove to be a helpful tool in establishing a unified approach to family ministry at OHBC.

³⁷ Bowen, “Be a Family By Equipping Parents,” 75–78.

³⁸ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 116.

through incorporating a comprehensive plan for “rites of passage” or “milestones.”³⁹ Haynes defines these moments as, “an event, preceded by a period of instruction from parents, which celebrates a spiritual development point in a child’s life”⁴⁰ and further insists that establishing rites of passage are a helpful starting point for ministry leaders seeking to move the congregation toward family-equipping ministry.⁴¹ Currently, the only rites of passage or milestones that we consistently acknowledge and celebrate in participation with parents at OHBC are child dedications and high school graduations. Effectively, parents commit to raise their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4), but we have failed to equip them in any meaningful way to fulfill their responsibilities beyond providing a couple of resources to parents at their child’s dedication. Essentially, children are progressing through the various age-segmented ministries of OHBC while families receive no consistent equipping and are rarely encouraged to intentionally mark and celebrate additional spiritually significant moments. Part of the transition to a family-equipping model would be to provide parents with resources and training that will help them engage their children at different stages of their child’s spiritual development.⁴²

Another way in which this project might enhance ministry practices moving forward is the implementation of family worship weekends. As discussed at length in chapter 3, children are not “the church of tomorrow”—believing children are very much a part of the church now. At least one way in which we might better portray this reality in

³⁹ This systematic equipping of parents at various significant points in their children’s spiritual lives has been referred to as “faith processes” (Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 166), “legacy milestones” (Bryan Hanes, *The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting* [Nashville: Randall House, 2011], 59-60) and simply “milestones” (The Village Church, *Family Discipleship: Helping Your Household Establish a Sustainable Rhythm of Time, Moments and Milestones* [Flower Mound, TX: The Village Church, 2015], 28-32).

⁴⁰ Haynes, *The Legacy Path*, 60.

⁴¹ Brian Haynes, “Building a Milestone Ministry in Your Church” in *Trained in the Fear of God*, 193.

⁴² Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 164.

our church is by systematically incorporating children into the worship gathering. While a complete programmatic overhaul to a family-integrated model is an unnecessary overreaction, there is value to involving children in the adult congregation—after all, Paul assumed children were present in the gathering when he addressed them explicitly in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 6:1-3). Currently, while middle school and high school students join adults for the Sunday morning worship service, elementary-aged children have their own designated Sunday morning worship gatherings. One way that we might better acknowledge the role of children in the body is by presenting them with opportunities to worship alongside their parents during family worship gatherings planned periodically throughout the year. By doing this, not only would we be acknowledging children as members of the body, we would also be encouraging parents toward family discipleship practices. By creating opportunities for families to sing together, read Scripture together, and pray together in the context of the congregation, we might leverage these opportunities to encourage families to practice the same disciplines on a smaller scale in their own homes.⁴³

In the meantime, other initiatives for acknowledging, equipping, and holding parents accountable as the primary disciple-makers of their children have already been discussed. For example, OHBC recently reformatted midweek programming to provide adults with a variety of groups and classes to attend on Wednesday evenings. There are multiple classes available on a rotating basis, each of which addresses a different topic or audience (i.e., men’s study group, women’s study group, marriage, finances, church membership, topical studies of the Bible, etc.). The lead pastor has expressed a desire for at least one of these future classes to focus on equipping parents to engage in family discipleship practices. The research discussed in chapter 2 as well as the research

⁴³ For more on the importance of family worship, see Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

conducted during the implementation of this project point to the vital need for churches to help parents engage more consistently in family discipleship practices. Furthermore, focusing one of these classes on equipping parents is at least one way in which the teachers gifted to OHBC might better fulfill their responsibility to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:11-12). Tweaking the existing class format to better equip parents is also consistent with Jones’s admonition to use “current practices in [the] congregation as catalysts for equipping parents to lead family faith talks.” Jones consistently warns against the temptation to add new programs for the purpose of equipping parents—rather, existing programs, classes, etc. can be repurposed or leveraged to equip parents to disciple their children.⁴⁴

Another area that the ministries of OHBC must consider moving forward is how to best minister to children from broken homes and homes with unbelieving parents. There are a significant number of children and students present each week that come from such homes and, if OHBC is to continue the transition to a family-equipping model, it must not do so at the expense of ministering to children and students whose family lives are less than ideal. Along with efforts to equip parents, OHBC must consider how to train and equip “families of faith” to both disciple “spiritual orphans” as well as make efforts to share the gospel with their unbelieving parents.⁴⁵

Finally, as a pastor, one of the most significant ways I can equip those God has entrusted to my oversight is by serving as an example to them (Eph 4:11-12; 1 Pet 5:3). While this was not explicitly incorporated into this ministry project, the project has reminded me of the importance of not only being diligent in the discipleship of my own children, but in modeling that to other parents and families in our church. In fact, Mark Dever insists that modeling and serving as an example to the flock is in and of itself an

⁴⁴ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 157.

⁴⁵ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 168–70.

act of discipleship.⁴⁶ Moving forward, our desire is to be more intentional in opening our home and lives to other families in order to exemplify, albeit imperfectly, how parents should make intentional efforts to serve as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

Personal Reflections

One of the unintentional benefits of this ministry project was the effect it had on my relationships with both parents and with other ministry leaders. During the planning and implementation of this project, I had frequent opportunities to discuss spiritual matters with both parents and children—not that these conversations did not happen before, but as of recent these conversations seem to be more frequently initiated by parents. One possible explanation is that, once parents understood my ultimate goal was to better serve them and their families, they felt more comfortable approaching me regarding spiritual matters with their children. Similarly, during the course of this project other ministry leaders were able to see that I had put much research and thought into ministry to families. As a result, I have had several encouraging conversations with leaders who are beginning to think more intentionally about how we might better minister to families.

As helpful as this project has been (and hopefully continues to be) across the ministries of OHBC, perhaps the most significant impact of this project has been in my home. In *Family Ministry Field Guide*, Jones points out that equipping families doesn't begin in staff planning meetings—in his words, “it begins in the homes of the leaders in your ministry You can't lead a family ministry with any degree of integrity unless you become a family minister in your own household.” Jones goes on to point out that equipping families “requires ministry leaders to come to terms with their own failures

⁴⁶ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 61–62.

and struggles when it comes to family discipleship.”⁴⁷

This ministry project has been a sanctifying tool in my own life. As I have read, researched, and written, I have also had to wrestle with my own failures and shortcomings as the primary disciple-maker in my own home. There were times when, in my efforts to acknowledge, equip, and hold parents accountable to their God-ordained role, I had to repent of my hypocrisy in calling other parents to do the very things that I had been practicing with very little consistency in my own home.

Yet, despite my failures the Lord proved himself faithful. The most memorable moment of this project was getting to watch my oldest son grow in his understanding of the gospel, culminating in his profession of faith shortly before the conclusion of the implementation phase of the project. Not only was I able to witness my son place his trust in Jesus, but it came at the same time that I was making efforts to encourage and equip parents to share the gospel with their own children. I consider this to have been an act of God’s kindness in my own life; there is no better confirmation of the importance of parents in the spiritual lives of their children than being able to lead my own son to place his trust in Christ, nor is there a better motivator to continue acknowledging, equipping, and holding parents accountable to their God-ordained role.

Conclusion

One of the greatest responsibilities of parents and families is to actively engage in the discipleship of the next generation (Deut 6:4-9; Ps 78:1-8; Eph 6:4)—both Scripture and research confirm that, when it comes to the spiritual formation of children, parental influence matters most. While parents are primarily responsible in the spiritual formation of their children, they are not alone in this task. As part of his sovereign plan, God has designed the church to function in such a way that God’s people are equipped

⁴⁷ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 138.

for ministry (Eph 4:11-12); at least one of the ways in which the church is called to “equip the saints” is by equipping parents to function as the primary disciple-makers in the lives of their children. As churches make ever-increasing efforts to acknowledge, equip, and hold parents accountable to their spiritual responsibilities in the lives of their children, it is then that the coming generation might “set their hope in God” (Ps 78:7).

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your perceptions and practices of family discipleship. This research is being conducted by Jonas Larkin for the purpose of assessing the value of a doctoral ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions in the way that best corresponds to your perceptions and practices of family discipleship. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Directions

This survey is intended for parents with at least one child that is living at home and currently in the middle school ministry at Oak Hill Baptist Church in Somerset, KY. For purposes of this survey, “church leaders” includes any member of the pastoral staff, deacons, Sunday School teachers, or adult volunteer leaders.

To ensure your privacy, instead of using your name, please use a 4-digit code that is unique to you and that you will be able to easily recall for a future survey. To help avoid duplicate codes, please avoid using repetitive or linear 4-digit codes, such as “0000” or “1234”.

Your 4-Digit Code

Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey¹

Part 1: Parental Perceptions						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule.						
2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.						
3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.						
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.						

¹ Copied from Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011). Used by permission.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
5. I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together.						
6. Parents, and particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.						
7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.						
8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth.						

Part 2: Parental Practices						
	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past <i>week</i> have I prayed aloud with any of my children.						
10. How many times in the past <i>week</i> has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?						
11. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?						
12. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?						
13. How many times in the past <i>two months</i> has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?						

	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
14. How many times in the last <i>two months</i> have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?						
15. How many times in the past <i>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?						
16. How often in the past <i>year</i> has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?						

APPENDIX 2

PRE-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY RESULTS

Table A1. Family discipleship perceptions and practices survey:
Pre-implementation results

Part 1: Parental Perceptions						
	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule.	--	12	19	37	25	8
2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.	--	10	6	23	35	27
3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.	27	15	35	19	4	--

	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
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.	23	65	--	12	--	--
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.	42	23	15	8	8	4
6. Parents, and particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.	4	4	--	19	46	27
7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.	38	42	19	--	--	--

	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth.	--	4	15	27	46	8
Part 2: Parental Practices						
	Never (%)	Once (%)	A couple of times (%)	Three or four times (%)	Five or six times (%)	Seven or more times (%)
9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past <i>week</i> have I prayed aloud with any of my children.	27	8	15	8	8	35
10. How many times in the past <i>week</i> has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?	15	15	21	25	12	12
11. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?	12	4	38	19	15	12
12. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?	12	4	29	25	19	12

	Never (%)	Once (%)	A couple of times (%)	Three or four times (%)	Five or six times (%)	Seven or more times (%)
13. How many times in the past <i>two months</i> has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?	38	23	19	--	12	8
14. How many times in the last <i>two months</i> have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?	15	8	42	8	8	19
15. How many times in the past <i>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?	27	19	27	19	4	4
16. How often in the past <i>year</i> has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?	35	8	31	15	0	12

APPENDIX 3

POST-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY RESULTS

Table A2. Family discipleship perceptions and practices survey:
Post-implementation results

Part 1: Parental Perceptions						
	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family's schedule.	--	--	--	60	20	20
2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.	--	10	--	--	60	30
3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.	10	60	--	30	--	--

	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
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.	--	80	20	--	--	--
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.	30	40	20	10	0	0
6. Parents, and particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.	40	20	30	--	10	--
7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.	30	60	10	--	--	--

	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth.	20	60	10	--	--	10
Part 2: Parental Practices						
	Never (%)	Once (%)	A couple of times (%)	Three or four times (%)	Five or six times (%)	Seven or more times (%)
9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past <i>week</i> have I prayed aloud with any of my children.	10	10	20	--	20	40
10. How many times in the past <i>week</i> has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?	--	--	40	40	20	--
11. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?	--	--	40	10	40	10
12. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?	--	--	30	10	40	20

	Never (%)	Once (%)	A couple of times (%)	Three or four times (%)	Five or six times (%)	Seven or more times (%)
13. How many times in the past <i>two months</i> has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?	10	--	50	--	20	20
14. How many times in the last <i>two months</i> have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?	10	--	30	40	--	20
15. How many times in the past <i>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?	10	10	40	20	20	--
16. How often in the past <i>year</i> has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?	--	30	10	10	10	40

APPENDIX 4

MINISTRY RESOURCE EXPERT PANEL EVALUATIONS¹

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess a resource created to:

- 1) Raise parents' awareness of their role in the discipleship processes of their children, and
- 2) Increase parents' engagement in the discipleship processes of their children by equipping them with

This research is being conducted by Jonas Larkin for the purpose of assessing the value of a doctoral ministry project. In this research you will assess a written resource. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Directions

Using the rubric provided below, please read and assess the resource created to increase parents' awareness and engagement in the discipleship process of their children.

Background Information

Name (please print): Aaron Case

Your role with respect to assessing this curriculum:

 Academic (i.e., professor)
 X Professional (i.e., pastor or minister)

Date submitted: 9/12/2019

¹ The original evaluations from the expert panel were received in various types of files. They have been collected and adapted for the purposes of including them in this appendix. This resource evaluation rubric was adapted from Timothy Andrew Brown, "Equipping Parents to Disciple Their Children Using Faith Milestones at Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Brighton, Michigan," (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

Resource Assessment				
<i>Expectations</i>	<i>Quality of Meeting Expectations</i>			
Develop resource to raise parents' awareness and engagement in the discipleship process of their children.	Did not meet expectations (value = 1)	Partially met expectations (2)	Met expectations (3)	Exceeded expectations (4)
A. The resource accurately and clearly articulates the role of parents in the spiritual formation of their children.				X
B. The role of parents in the spiritual formation of their children as described in the resource is based on a proper understanding of Scripture.				X
C. The resource accurately and clearly articulates the role of the church in the spiritual formation of children.			X	
D. The role of the church in the spiritual formation of children as described in the resource is based on a proper understanding of Scripture.				X
E. The devotional content of the resource clearly articulates the essence of the gospel.				X
F. The devotional content of the resource is based on Scripture and uses it appropriately.			X	
G. The resource provides parents with practical help for engaging the discipleship process of their children.				X
H. The resource presents content in a well-organized, coherent manner.				X
I. The resource is accessible to parents at various levels of spiritual maturity.				X
J. The resource is accessible to a variety of family contexts (nuclear, single-parent, adoptive or foster, etc.)				X
J. The resource is well-designed; it looks appealing and professional (see sample).				X

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess a resource created to:

- 1) Raise parents' awareness of their role in the discipleship processes of their children, and
- 2) Increase parents' engagement in the discipleship processes of their children by equipping them with

This research is being conducted by Jonas Larkin for the purpose of assessing the value of a doctoral ministry project. In this research you will assess a written resource. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Directions

Using the rubric provided below, please read and assess the resource created to increase parents' awareness and engagement in the discipleship process of their children.

Background Information

Name (please print): Todd W. Meadows

Your role with respect to assessing this curriculum:

Academic (i.e., professor)
 Professional (i.e., pastor or minister)

Date submitted: 9/16/2019

Resource Assessment				
<i>Expectations</i>	<i>Quality of Meeting Expectations</i>			
Develop resource to raise parents' awareness and engagement in the discipleship process of their children.	Did not meet expectations (value = 1)	Partially met expectations (2)	Met expectations (3)	Exceeded expectations (4)
A. The resource accurately and clearly articulates the role of parents in the spiritual formation of their children.				X
B. The role of parents in the spiritual formation of their children as described in the resource is based on a proper understanding of Scripture.				X
C. The resource accurately and clearly articulates the role of the church in the spiritual formation of children.			X	
D. The role of the church in the spiritual formation of children as described in the resource is based on a proper understanding of Scripture.				X
E. The devotional content of the resource clearly articulates the essence of the gospel.				X
F. The devotional content of the resource is based on Scripture and uses it appropriately.				X
G. The resource provides parents with practical help for engaging the discipleship process of their children.				X
H. The resource presents content in a well-organized, coherent manner.				X
I. The resource is accessible to parents at various levels of spiritual maturity.				X
J. The resource is accessible to a variety of family contexts (nuclear, single-parent, adoptive or foster, etc.)				X
J. The resource is well-designed; it looks appealing and professional (see sample).				X

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess a resource created to:

- 1) Raise parents' awareness of their role in the discipleship processes of their children, and
- 2) Increase parents' engagement in the discipleship processes of their children by equipping them with

This research is being conducted by Jonas Larkin for the purpose of assessing the value of a doctoral ministry project. In this research you will assess a written resource. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Directions

Using the rubric provided below, please read and assess the resource created to increase parents' awareness and engagement in the discipleship process of their children.

Background Information

Name (please print): Melissa Tucker

Your role with respect to assessing this curriculum:

- Academic (i.e., professor)
 Professional (i.e., pastor or minister)

Date submitted: 9/19/2019

Resource Assessment				
<i>Expectations</i>	<i>Quality of Meeting Expectations</i>			
Develop resource to raise parents' awareness and engagement in the discipleship process of their children.	Did not meet expectations (value = 1)	Partially met expectations (2)	Met expectations (3)	Exceeded expectations (4)
A. The resource accurately and clearly articulates the role of parents in the spiritual formation of their children.			X	
B. The role of parents in the spiritual formation of their children as described in the resource is based on a proper understanding of Scripture.				X
C. The resource accurately and clearly articulates the role of the church in the spiritual formation of children.			X	
D. The role of the church in the spiritual formation of children as described in the resource is based on a proper understanding of Scripture.			X	
E. The devotional content of the resource clearly articulates the essence of the gospel.				X
F. The devotional content of the resource is based on Scripture and uses it appropriately.				X
G. The resource provides parents with practical help for engaging the discipleship process of their children.			X	
H. The resource presents content in a well-organized, coherent manner.			X	
I. The resource is accessible to parents at various levels of spiritual maturity.			X	
J. The resource is accessible to a variety of family contexts (nuclear, single-parent, adoptive or foster, etc.)				X
J. The resource is well-designed; it looks appealing and professional (see sample).				X

APPENDIX 5
MINISTRY RESOURCE¹

The following pages contain the ministry resource created for use in the implementation phase of the ministry project.

¹ This resource was originally created using an alternate software and does not conform to formatting for ministry project. As a result, images of all ministry resource pages are included in this appendix.

FAMILY MATTERS



Equipping Parents for Family Discipleship



FAMILY MATTERS



Equipping Parents for Family Discipleship

© 2019 Oak Hill Baptist Church
2135 Oak Hill Road
Somerset, KY 42503

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A WORD FOR FAMILIES

When it comes to the spiritual formation of a child, *family matters*. Research and studies point to the undeniable reality that families, particularly parents, are the most influential factor in a child's spiritual growth. This should not surprise us—it is by God's design.

As this guide will elaborate on, God's design is for the home to be the primary place where children receive spiritual nurture. To be sure, the church serves a significant albeit supplemental role. Nevertheless, the home should be an environment where authentic faith is first modeled by parents and then taught to the children God has entrusted to their care. The term employed in this guide to describe this process of modeling and teaching is family discipleship.

For some of you, family discipleship may be an entirely new concept. For others, family discipleship may be something you've been doing for years, whether you realized it or not. Wherever you fall on the spectrum, this guide is for you—to equip you to begin your own family discipleship rhythms or to encourage you to continue the work you've already started.

There are a few things to make clear from the start. First of all, this guide is in no way comprehensive or exhaustive in nature; rather, it is exactly what the name suggests—a guide. It is a primer of sorts to get you thinking about intentionally and consistently engaging in family discipleship.

Additionally, it's important to recognize that families come in different shapes, sizes, and structures. Whatever "family" looks like for you—nuclear family, single-parent family, shared-custody family, adoptive family, foster family, etc.—this guide is designed to fit into a wide variety of family contexts.

Finally, family discipleship is hard. It takes work. It can be messy. Awkward moments abound. If the concept is new to you, it probably seems intimidating. Yet none of these excuse us from the work that God has called us to as parents and guardians. He who has called us to this important work is faithful and will equip us to do all that he has asked (1 Thessalonians 5:24; Hebrews 13:20-21).

As one pastor and author has said, "Your greatest contribution to the kingdom of God may not be something you do but someone you raise." May this remind us that, when it comes to the spiritual formation of children, family matters.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is two-fold:

- 1 To increase your awareness of the significant role you play in the spiritual development of the children God has entrusted to your care, and
- 2 To equip you with a tangible resource to help you establish a rhythm of family discipleship practices in your home.

Immediately following are brief sections that explore both the role of the family and the role of the church as it pertains to the discipleship of children. These two sections serve as a guide to hold both the family and the church accountable to their respective roles in the discipleship and spiritual development of children.

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL CONTENT

The guide concludes with six consecutive weeks of family devotional content. Family devotionals can and do cover a wide range of topics—a quick internet search reveals that there are plenty of topical studies available for families. However, the content for this family discipleship guide is centered on that which Paul referred to as an issue “of first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3)—the gospel.

Why the gospel? Because understanding the gospel is essential to understanding the rest of Scripture. It is indeed “of first importance,” therefore, it is essential that we understand it and proclaim it to others, especially those that God has entrusted to our care. Finally, in a world full of deceptive philosophies, false narratives, and misinformation (Ephesians 4:14; Colossians 2:4) it is good for us to be reminded of the truths of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1) and impress them on our hearts and the hearts of our families.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

“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 frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is considered to be a foundational passage on the topic of family discipleship. This passage contains:

- The command for parents to model a life of obedience to God’s Word
- The expectation that parents will teach their children about God and his Word
- Practical instructions for parents to model and teach God’s Word to their children

Essentially, the role of the family in the discipleship of children is to **model** and **teach**.

MODELING

If you’ve ever flown on a commercial airline, you’ve probably heard the safety information that the flight crew is responsible for relaying to you, the passenger. There’s one part of their routine that stands out—the part where, in the event of an emergency where the oxygen masks drop from the overhead compartment, passengers are encouraged to first put the mask on themselves before helping their children.

To most parents this seems counterintuitive—after all, at the very core of being a parent is self-sacrificing care. That is to say, most parents’ natural reaction is to respond to their children’s distress before addressing their own. But there is a principle here: before we can help others breathe, we have to be able to breathe ourselves. If we don’t pause for a moment to make sure that we’re breathing in the life-sustaining substance that our bodies desperately need, how can we help others do the same?

The same is true of our spiritual lives. We are only able to impart to our children what we already know of God and his Word. Unless we first breathe in the life-giving truth of the gospel and the life-sustaining truth of God’s Word, we are incapable of helping our children in these areas.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

Modeling is living in obedience to the command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). Modeling means serving as a godly example to your family.³ As imperfect beings, we are incapable of modeling perfect obedience to God. Yet in those moments when we fail, we have the opportunity to also model true repentance.

Modeling is not a false pretense—it is authentically pursuing the Lord through his Word, prayer, worship, community with other believers, and other spiritual disciplines in such a way that our children see our priorities and realize the importance of these things in our lives. It is through our consistent, yet imperfect modeling that our teaching becomes authentic.

TEACHING

According to the passage in Deuteronomy, it is out of the overflow of parents’ hearts that they are to *diligently* teach God’s Word to their children. To teach diligently means to instruct our children with consistency, energy, and perseverance.

Teaching your children about God’s Word might seem like an intimidating task. But notice the places and times that God lays before parents as opportunities to teach their children the truth of his Word:

- **“when you sit in your house...”** The home is an ideal place for parents to teach God’s Word to children. It’s the place where our children spend most of their time and ideally are surrounded by a family that lives out the truth of God’s Word in tangible ways for them to see.
- **“when you walk by the way...”** While most of us don’t do a lot of walking by the way, we do spend ample amounts of time in the car going to and from school, sports practice, church, etc. What a great opportunity to redeem the time by engaging in spiritual conversations with your children!
- **“when you lie down...”** The bedtime routine, especially for those with younger children, is a great time to remind our children about God’s love for them. Before bed is the perfect time to recount the events of the day, confess where we’ve wronged one another and ask for forgiveness, and submit our cares to God in prayer.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

- ***“when you rise...”*** While mornings can be difficult trying to get kids up, dressed, fed, and out the door, they are a great opportunity to start the day being reminded of God’s promises. The morning provides a natural reminder that God’s mercy is new and his grace is sufficient for the day ahead.

To recap, parents have the opportunity to teach God’s Word to their children when they wake up in the morning, while they’re at home, while they’re out and about, and before bed each night. In short, the naturally-occurring rhythms of everyday life present ample opportunity to diligently teach our children the life-giving truth of God’s Word! Let us commit to leveraging these opportunities so that our children might set their hope in God (Psalm 78:1-8)!

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Scripture presents parents as the primary spiritual influences in the lives of their children. While God intends for parents be the primary disciple-makers of their children, they certainly do not go at this task alone. What, then, is the role of the church as it relates to the spiritual growth and development of children and families? Consider the following passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

According to Paul, the church has been gifted with leaders for the purpose of “equipping the saints for the work of ministry.” As discussed above, one of the primary responsibilities (or “works of ministry”) for believing parents is to diligently teach their children about God and his Word, raising them in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Therefore, it is the role of the church to help parents as they model and teach the truths of God's Word to their children. The church serves a supplemental role to parents, encouraging, equipping, supporting, and training them to carry out one of their primary “works of ministry.” Listed below are a few examples of how the church might support parents as they disciple their children:

- Pastors and ministry leaders modeling and teaching God's Word to parents
- Surrounding parents with a community for mutual encouragement and support
- Ministry leaders and volunteers modeling and teaching God's Word to children
- Creating age-appropriate environments for children and students to receive supplemental instruction and teaching
- Providing parents with helpful content and resources to assist them as they model and teach their children
- Reminding parents of their spiritual responsibilities in the lives of their children and holding them accountable

Finally, it's important to note that the church also supports families by caring for “spiritual orphans”—children whose parents are not believers and, therefore, have no involvement in the spiritual development of their children. The church is uniquely positioned to surround such children with the love and nurture of caring, godly families that model and teach them the truth of God's Word.

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

The remainder of this guide is in the format of devotional content divided up into six consecutive weeks, each of which focuses on an element of the gospel and/or its implications. As a parent, consider reading through the devotional content with your family each week—at the very least, read through the content yourself and use it as a reference as you follow the various prompts listed each week.

Each week includes four separate prompts to help you establish family discipleship rhythms based on those set forth in Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

AT HOME

These are prompts and/or action steps that take place when the family is gathered together in the home, such as a family meal or some other scheduled time together.

AS YOU GO

These are prompts and/or action steps that take place while you're out and about (car rides, shopping trips, going out to eat, etc.)

WHEN YOU LIE DOWN

These are prompts and/or action steps intended for nights and evenings, especially prior to bedtime as the day comes to a close.

WHEN YOU RISE

These are prompts and/or action steps intended for the morning hours before the busyness of the day begins.

WEEK 1 | GOD

What is the gospel? If you were to ask that question to one hundred different people, you'd probably get almost as many different answers—some right, some wrong, and many somewhere in between. Yet, according to Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth, knowing the gospel is “of first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3). In other words, there is nothing more important than a right understanding of the gospel—what it is, why it matters, and how we should respond.

It's tempting to begin an explanation of the gospel with Jesus Christ—after all, the word “gospel” literally means “good news” and there is no better news than that of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet while beginning with Jesus certainly is not wrong, it is incomplete, because the gospel is a story that has been unfolding from the beginning of time. Therefore, it is only appropriate that we start with the One who was there in the beginning—God.

As the creation narrative unfolds, we see God creating, forming, and speaking all things into existence—light, darkness, stars, clouds, mountains, oceans, tiny insects to gigantic mammals, all of it perfectly good and created to reflect the goodness and glory of the Creator (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20). Yet, as wonderful as all of these things were, they pale in comparison to the crown jewel of God's creation.

READ GENESIS 1:26-28

God created man and elevated him above the rest of creation. Unlike the rest of creation, man was created in the very image of God. That has a wide variety of implications, but at least one of them is the fact that man was to reflect God's image by exercising authority and dominion over the rest of creation. But, of course, man was not the ultimate authority—that position is reserved for God alone.

READ GENESIS 2:15-17

Even though God created man in his image, man was still created. All of creation exists under God's authority. Only God retains the right to tell man how to live. God alone establishes the boundaries in which man is to live in order to honor and please him as the good and perfect Creator. God was the ultimate authority for the first humans to walk the earth—and he remains the ultimate authority over every human being on the earth today.

WEEK 1 | GOD

AT HOME

In the garden, Adam and Eve enjoyed intimate fellowship with God. Set aside time this week to enjoy time in close proximity with your family—have a family meal, watch a movie together, set up a family game night. These are just a few examples; whatever you choose to do, strive to enjoy uninterrupted time with your family!

AS YOU GO

Use the following question to prompt a discussion with your family during a car ride this week: “What does creation—the sky, stars, clouds, trees, lakes, animals, etc.—tell you about God and what he is like?”

WHEN YOU LIE DOWN

The end of the day is a good time to reflect on the events of the day, both the good and bad. Pick a night this week and ask your children to recount the “highs” (best moments) and “lows” (difficult moments) of their day. Using wise judgment, share the highs and lows of your day with your children. Finally, spend a few moments praying together—thank God for the highs and ask him to help in the lows.

WHEN YOU RISE

The morning hours are a great time to get outside and take in God’s creation. Weather permitting, strive to spend at least one morning this week outside reading about God’s creation while experiencing his creation. Genesis 1-2, Psalms 8 and 19:1-6 may be helpful passages to consider.

WEEK 2 | MAN

Most of us have received the following prompt: “I’ve got some good news and some bad news. Which do you want first?” No matter how you respond, you’re going to hear both. A proper understanding of the gospel is similar. While the word “gospel” literally means “good news,” it’s important that we understand why it is good news—and in order to understand that, we have to deal with the bad news.

So far, we’ve established that God is a perfect Creator who created all things good. At the pinnacle of his creation were humans, male and female, both created in the image and likeness of God to reflect his glory to the world that God had charged them to exercise authority over. As the Creator, God remains the ultimate authority over all of his creation and, therefore, reserves the right to establish boundaries for his creation to live by in order to honor and please him.

READ GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Seemingly immediately after God explicitly states the boundaries that man is to live by, Satan shows up on the scene in the form of a serpent. Through a series of well-crafted lies, the serpent convinces the first couple that God is restrictive and that he is withholding from them that which is truly good. Rather than submitting to God’s good boundaries, Adam and Eve take and eat of the forbidden fruit. Little did they know, their act of rebellion would have massive consequences—not only for them, but for all of creation.

READ GENESIS 3:8-13

After a feeble attempt to clothe themselves and cover their own guilt and shame, Adam and Eve try to hide from God in the middle of his own creation. Once their efforts are again proven futile, they resort to a form of petty blame-shifting. Sadly, we often follow the same pitiful course of action when faced with our own sin. We try and cover it by our own good deeds. Sometimes we foolishly think we can run and hide from God. When we’re finally found out, we try to play the victim and resort to blame-shifting. Despite the first couple’s best efforts to clean up their mess, the consequences remain.

READ GENESIS 3:16-24

The consequences of their sin are far-reaching. Anxiety, conflict, pain, suffering, and tension all become part of the human experience. But the most significant consequence of all? Separation from God. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden and out of intimate communion with God.

WEEK 2 | MAN

But this isn't just a story about Adam and Eve. Their story is our story. Their sin became our sin and, therefore, we share in the same consequences (Romans 3:23; 5:12). This is very bad news, indeed.

AT HOME

Try to find a time this week when your family is together at home and use the following questions to start a discussion about authority and boundaries in your home:

- Who makes the rules in the home? Why do they get to make the rules?
- What are some examples of rules that exist in the home?
- Overall, what purpose do these rules serve (i.e., protection, safety, well-being, etc.)?
- What are the consequences for breaking the rules that have been established in your home?

AS YOU GO

The serpent deceived Adam and Eve in the garden with a series of well-crafted lies. As you are out and about this week, look for places and ways in which the world still seeks to convince us to believe the lies of the enemy (i.e., in advertising, through media such as movies and music, on the magazine racks while checking out at the store, etc.). Discuss some of the lies you discover with your family. Ask them which lies from the enemy they are most tempted to believe.

WHEN YOU LIE DOWN

Try to find a couple of evenings or nights to spend time reflecting on the day with your children. Model confession and repentance for them by asking God to forgive you where you sinned and fell short. Ask them to do the same. Their confessions (and yours, for that matter) might be vague and general—and that's ok! It's a great step towards recognizing we all sin and fall short and that we are in need of a Savior.

WHEN YOU RISE

Choose a morning this week (preferably the morning after you spend time reflecting, confessing, and repenting) and read Lamentations 3:21-24 together before everyone goes their different directions for the day.

WEEK 3 | CHRIST

Have you ever been in a pitch black room—a room so dark that you can't even see your own hand in front of your face? That's where our story left off last week: Adam and Eve believed the serpent's lies and rebelled against God's good and perfect design for their lives. The consequences were tragic—conflict, pain, suffering, death, and ultimately, separation from God. Because of their sin, we are born bent towards sin and rebellion (Psalm 51:5)—therefore, we share in Adam's and Eve's consequences.

If this were the end of the story, the outlook would be dark and hopeless, indeed—like being stuck in a pitch black room with no way out. But there is a tiny glimmer of hope—a distant light that will one day swallow the darkness.

READ GENESIS 3:14-15

We've read about the consequences that Adam and Eve would experience as a result of their sin, but in these verses God turns his attention to the serpent. God curses the serpent for his act of deception, but he also speaks of a future event where the serpent will struggle with one of Eve's offspring. However, where Eve failed, her offspring will ultimately prevail.

God promises victory over Satan and, ultimately, over sin. The rest of the Old Testament points to this promised offspring (i.e., Isaiah 9:6-7). Who, then, is this offspring that is assured victory over Satan's evil schemes? It is none other than Jesus Christ—the promised Messiah, the Son of God “who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-4

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the central elements of the gospel. It was Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life, fully pleasing to God the Father. It was Jesus Christ who died to pay the penalty for our sin. It was Jesus Christ who rose from the grave to assure the imminent victory over sin and death as was promised way back in Genesis.

Apart from Christ, there is no hope. Apart from Christ, we are stuck in a dark room with no way out—“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4-5). This is the good news of the gospel!

WEEK 3 | CHRIST

AT HOME

According to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, it is good for us to be reminded of the gospel. If you are a believing parent, share with your family this week about when and where you responded to the gospel. Encourage other believing family members (spouse, children, other family members living in the home, etc.) to reflect on and share their experiences of putting their trust in Jesus.

AS YOU GO

Prior to Jesus's crucifixion, the cross was a symbol of pain, suffering, and death. Anyone who was hung on a cross was considered to be cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Yet, through Jesus's death and resurrection, the cross is now commonly seen as a symbol of victory. As you're out and about this week, encourage your family to pay attention to how often the symbol of a cross shows up in day-to-day life (architecture, art, bumper stickers and decals, clothing, jewelry, tattoos, etc.). Use those symbols as reminders of the gospel and the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

WHEN YOU LIE DOWN

As we consider the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ this week, use a night or evening to read through the accounts of the night before the crucifixion (Matthew 26:36-47; Mark 14:32-50; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-11) and discuss the following questions:

- What thoughts, emotions, and feelings did Jesus appear to experience the night before his crucifixion?
- Would you say Jesus was motivated by those thoughts, emotions, and feelings or was he motivated by something else? If something else, what was Jesus motivated by?
- What were the thoughts, emotions, feelings, and actions of Jesus's disciples the night before his crucifixion?
- Imagine being in the same situation, not fully understanding what was happening to Jesus or why it was happening. What do you think your thoughts, emotions, feelings, and actions would have been if you were there?

WHEN YOU RISE

According to Scripture, the best news the world has ever heard came in the early morning hours: "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said" (Matthew 28:6). Leverage a morning (or multiple mornings) this week to read the accounts of the resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10) and remind yourself and your family of the event that changed all of human history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

WEEK 4 | RESPONSE

Imagine being in a courtroom where you're standing in front of a judge. You're guilty and there's no denying it. The evidence has already condemned you. Your public record is littered with violations—it is far from perfect. The judge is about to sentence you, but not before a man steps forward to speak. Unlike you, this man has a perfect record—he has perfectly obeyed the law in every way. There is no charge that could possibly be brought against him, and in an act that makes the entire room gasp in shock, he has just offered to take your place—to give you his perfect record in exchange for your imperfect record as well as the punishment that comes along with it.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

This single verse from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is packed full of the good news of the gospel. "For our sake"—that is, for our benefit, our good, and ultimately, our hope—God "made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin." This is significant because Jesus was entirely without sin—unlike Adam and Eve and unlike us, Jesus never once sinned against God the Father. Therefore, his record is perfect.

However, God made Jesus to be sin—that is, on the cross, God heaped all of our sin onto Jesus. It was there on the cross that God poured out all of his wrath toward sin onto Jesus. By his death on the cross, Jesus completely satisfied God's wrath and made the full payment for sin (Colossians 2:13-14). And what was the purpose? "So that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God."

Return to the courtroom scene. The judge has restored order to the court and now you stand before the bench alongside the man who has graciously offered to exchange places with you. The judge puts the proverbial ball in your court—you can reject the man's offer and personally experience the full penalty of your imperfect record, or you can accept the man's offer, trusting that his perfect record imparted to you is sufficient to spare you from the punishment you deserve. Which will you choose?

While the illustration is not a perfect one, it helps us understand what Christ has done for us. He has willingly taken the punishment for our sin and offers us the gift of eternal life if we will confess and repent of our sinfulness and trust that his life, death, and resurrection are the only sufficient payment for our sin.

WEEK 4 | RESPONSE

AT HOME

Set aside a time (or multiple times) this week to read and discuss the following verses with your family: Romans 3:23-24, 5:17-21, 6:23, 10:9-13.

If your family is large enough, you might have a different person read each passage. Depending on your family's schedule, you might set aside four different times to read a single passage together, or you might set aside time to read through all four passages in one sitting. Whatever works for you, as you read and discuss these passages consider the following questions: what do these passages mean? How should we respond to what these passages tell us?

AS YOU GO

If you are able, make a playlist for your family to listen to during your commute to and from school, practices, and other activities this week. Include some of the following songs that communicate the truth of what Jesus has done for us in his life, death, and resurrection:

- "Behold the Lamb" by Kristian Stanfill/Passion
- "Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery" by The Village Church
- "Cornerstone" by Hillsong
- "Death Was Arrested" by North Point
- "His Mercy is More" by Shane and Shane
- "Jesus Paid it All" by Kristian Stanfill
- "Lamb of God" by Vertical Worship
- "Living Hope" by Phil Wickham
- "Mighty Cross" by Elevation Worship
- "The Passion" by Hillsong Worship

WEEK 4 | RESPONSE

WHEN YOU LIE DOWN

Hopefully over the last few weeks you have begun to establish a rhythm of having spiritual conversations with your children and, ideally, you have had the opportunity to have several discussions about God, sin, Jesus, and the good news of the gospel. Look for an opportunity one night this week to ask your children about their understanding of the gospel.

- Does the gospel really sound like good news to you? Why or why not?
- Does any part of the gospel still seem confusing to you? If so, what?
- Do you have any more questions about God, sin, Jesus, the gospel, etc.?
- How do you think we should respond after hearing the good news of the gospel?

WHEN YOU RISE

Set aside a morning to fast and pray for your family this week. If your children (or other family members) have never placed their trust in Jesus, earnestly pray that they would respond to the gospel. If your family has already responded to the gospel, pray that they would continue to grow in their walk with the Lord and produce fruit evident of a life surrendered to Christ.

WEEK 5 | THE CHURCH

“Here is the church; here is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people!” Do you remember that clever little rhyme and its accompanying hand gestures? As clever as it might be, it’s actually a little misleading.

When most of us hear the word “church,” we probably think of a building—a specific location or space where people gather to worship; but how limited this view is! The reality is that the church is not a building full of people—the church *is* the people!

READ EPHESIANS 4:1-16

The church, often referred to as “the body of Christ” in Scripture, is the collection of believing men, women, and children that love and serve one another and the community around them. As one discipleship resource puts it, “The church is the men and women who carry our burdens, share our sorrows and celebrations, pray with us, encourage us and receive our crisis phone calls late at night.”⁴

So why include a section on the church in our ongoing consideration of the good news of the gospel? Because the church is central for those that have believed the gospel and placed their trust in Christ!

The overarching goal of this guide is to help you establish discipleship patterns—reading and meditating on Scripture together, praying together, etc.—in the natural rhythms of your family. Yet, for those who have trusted in Christ, our family extends beyond those whom we share a home or name with. As believers, we are brothers and sisters in Christ, sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, and together we make up the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). We are the church!

WEEK 5 | THE CHURCH

AT HOME

Invite another family from church to your house this week—for a meal, for a movie, for games, or something similar. Create space in your routine this week to “do life” with others that God, in his providence, has placed in your life.

AS YOU GO

Use the car ride to church this week to pray (if you’re driving, please keep your eyes open!) for the services, the pastoral staff and ministry leaders, other members that will be attending, and for yourself—that you would be attentive and receptive to what God is teaching you in his Word by the power of his Spirit.

WHEN YOU LIE DOWN

Reflect with your family and talk about something each of you learned or found interesting from your time with the church this week—something that stood out to you from the sermon or a Sunday school lesson, something that challenged you from your Life Group time, or even something said in a conversation with a friend or fellow church member.

WHEN YOU RISE

If you’re involved in a Sunday school class, ask the church staff for a copy of the class roster. If you’re in a Life Group, make a list of the names of the people that make up your small group. Spend some mornings this week praying for the names on those lists. Invite your children into the process by obtaining a roster for their respective class or group as well.

WEEK 6 | RESTORATION

We've used the popular "God, man, Christ, response" framework as the basis for retelling the good news of the gospel.⁵ As helpful as this framework is, there is still yet more of the good news of the gospel to unpack! Another framework that has been used to explain the gospel message as it unfolds throughout Scripture is "creation, fall, redemption, restoration." While the first three elements are similar, the fourth element of restoration is worth exploring further.

Our retelling of the gospel story up to this point has been largely at a "ground level"—meaning we've focused on the personal effects, namely, the penalty of our sin and the salvation offered to us through Jesus Christ. But the good news of the gospel extends beyond our personal experiences—the gospel is good news for all of creation!

READ GENESIS 3:17-18; ROMANS 8:20-22

Adam's and Eve's single act of rebellion resulted in all of creation being cursed. Therefore, sin led not only to our separation from God; it also resulted in the devastating corruption of God's good creation. In short, every disaster, tragedy, or trouble experienced in creation is the result of sin.

But we must remember the gospel is good news—not just for us as individuals made in God's image, but for all of God's creation. Whereas those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation are a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), God has also promised to restore all of his creation that has been destroyed and distorted by sin.

READ REVELATION 21:1-5

In this passage, John is recounting a vision he received of what would happen during what is commonly referred to as the "end times." While Revelation is full of images and scenes that, quite honestly, are hard to interpret, there stands this promise near the end of the book: God will restore or "make new" his creation and, just as in the garden of Eden, God will once again live in close proximity and intimate relationship with his people for all of eternity in a place with no tears, no pain, no suffering, no death, and no more separation from our gracious and loving Creator. This is very good news, indeed!

WEEK 6 | RESTORATION

AT HOME

As believers, this world is not our ultimate home—we have been promised a better eternal home with Jesus. This week gather with your family while at home and use the following discussion prompts:

- What are some things you enjoy about our home?
- What are some things you do not enjoy about our home?
- What makes our home unique—the stuff in it or the people who live here?
- Read John 14:1-3. What kind of place do you think Jesus has prepared for us? What do you think it will be like? Who do you think will be there?

AS YOU GO

We see the brokenness of our world dozens of times every day. As you are out and about with your family this week, encourage them to try and spot some of the brokenness that surrounds them (i.e., hunger, poverty, crime, immorality, broken families, etc.) As you go, ask them to point out the things they see that remind them of the brokenness of our world. Ask them what it is they see around them that they hope God will one day make right.

WHEN YOU LIE DOWN

Take an evening to talk with your family about how they have personally been affected by the brokenness of this world. Ask them about things they have experienced that resulted in tears, mourning, pain, suffering, tragedy, etc. Finally, remind them that, as difficult as this world can be at times, because of Christ our hope is an eternity where none of the brokenness of this world exists (Revelation 21:4).

WHEN YOU RISE

Pray that God would open your eyes to see the brokenness around you and that he would use you to be a light in a dark world. Encourage you children to pray with you as well, asking God to work through them to push back the darkness in the spheres of life they inhabit.

NEXT STEPS

So now what? You have learned about the roles of both parents and the church in the spiritual formation of children. You have been striving to model a consistent walk with the Lord to your children. You have spent the last several weeks teaching some of the most significant truths of God's Word to those that he has entrusted to your care. What's next?

Family discipleship is a journey—and quite honestly, it's a never-ending one. Not one of us will reach perfection this side of eternity; therefore, we will always have room to grow in our walk with the Lord as we model it to our families. Similarly, our children (and us, for that matter) will always have room to grow in knowledge and obedience to God's Word (Romans 11:33).

Hopefully over the last few weeks you have grown increasingly comfortable engaging your family in spiritual conversations. Maybe your eyes and ears have been opened to opportunities to teach the truth of God's Word to your children in the naturally-occurring rhythms of everyday life. Perhaps you've even started establishing some consistent discipleship routines, such as reading Scripture and praying together as a family.

Then again, maybe this hasn't come as easily as you hoped it would have; busy schedules, unexpected circumstances, family tensions—all of these things and more can significantly impact our ability to disciple our children. If that has been your experience, know that God is patient, gracious, and kind. His power is on display in our moments of weakness and seasons of discouragement (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In the end, be encouraged to keep pressing forward on the path of family discipleship. It is right because it is a part of God's good design for families—therefore, God will equip you with everything you need to accomplish the task he has called you to (Hebrews 13:20-21).

To serve you and your family moving forward, the following pages contain a list of helpful books, resources, etc. to help you and your family continue in family discipleship practices. If you have questions about family discipleship, resources, or any of the content found in this guide, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the pastoral staff for help.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BIBLE READING PLANS

Visit esv.org/resources/reading-plans to view and download several free Bible reading plans.

DEVOTIONAL RESOURCES

- Chambers, Oswald. *My Utmost for His Highest*. Discovery House, 2017.
- Gallaty, Robbie and Kandi. *Foundations: A 260-Day Bible Reading Plan for Busy Believers*. LifeWay, 2015.
- Gallaty, Robbie and Kandi with Gus Hernandez and Tim LaFleur. *Foundations New Testament: A 260-Day Bible Reading Plan for Busy Believers*. LifeWay, 2018.
- Guthrie, Nancy. *One Year of Dinner Table Devotions and Discussion Starters: 365 Opportunities to Grow Closer to God as a Family*. Tyndale, 2008.
- Machowski, Marty. *Long Story Short: Ten-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God*. New Growth Press, 2010.
- Machowski, Marty. *Old Story New: Ten-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God*. New Growth Press, 2012.
- Tripp, Paul. *New Morning Mercies: A Daily Gospel Devotional*. Crossway, 2014.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

- Bettis, Chap. *The Disciple-Making Parent: A Comprehensive Guidebook for Raising Your Children to Love and Follow Jesus Christ*. Diamond Hill Publishing, 2016.
- Joiner, Reggie and Carrie Neiuwhof. *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connecting Your Family to a Wider Community*. David C. Cook, 2010.
- Kostenberger, Andreas J. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. Crossway, 2010.
- MaGruder, Jana. *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith*. LifeWay, 2017.
- Moore, Russell. *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home*. B&H, 2018.
- Peace, Martha and Stuart Scott. *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family*. P&R, 2010.
- Prince, David E. *In the Arena: The Promise of Sports for Christian Discipleship*. B&H, 2016.
- Rienow, Rob and Amy. *Five Reasons for Spiritual Apathy in Teenagers: What Parents Can Do to Help*. Randall House, 2015.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS (CONTINUED)

- Sande, Ken with Tom Raabe. *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home*. Tyndale, 2002.
- Stanley, Andy. *Choosing to Cheat: Who Wins When Family and Work Collide*. Multnomah, 2003.
- Tripp, Paul. *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*. P&R, 2001.
- Tripp, Paul. *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*. Crossway, 2016.
- Tripp, Tedd. *Shepherding a Child's Heart*. Shepherd Press, 2005.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Family Worship*. Crossway, 2016.
- Witmer, Timothy Z. *The Shepherd Leader at Home: Knowing, Leading, Protecting, and Providing for Your Family*. Crossway, 2012.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

- Carlson, Lindsey. *Growing in Godliness: A Teen Girl's Guide to Maturing in Christ*. Crossway, 2019.
- Crowe, Jacqueline. *This Changes Everything: How the Gospel Transforms the Teen Years*. Crossway, 2017.
- ESV Student Study Bible. Crossway, 2011.
- Forster, Katherine. *Transformed by Truth: Why and How to Study the Bible for Yourself as a Teen*. Crossway, 2019.
- Gallaty, Robbie and Kandi. *Foundations: A 260-Day Bible Reading Plan for Busy Teens*. LifeWay, 2016.
- Gallaty, Robbie and Kandi with Gus Hernandez and Tim LaFleur. *Foundations New Testament: A 260-Day Bible Reading Plan for Busy Teens*. LifeWay, 2018.
- Harris, Alex and Brett Harris. *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations*. Multnomah, 2008.
- Hughes, R. Kent and W. Carey Hughes. *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man*. Crossway, 2012.
- Piper, John. *Don't Waste Your Life*. Crossway, 2018.

NOTES

1. Quote attributed to Andy Stanley though the original source is unknown.
2. Adapted from The Village Church. *Family Discipleship: Helping Your Household Establish a Sustainable Rhythm of Time, Moments, and Milestones*. The Village Church, 2015.
3. The Village Church. *Family Discipleship: Helping Your Household Establish a Sustainable Rhythm of Time, Moments, and Milestones*. The Village Church, 2015. p. 7.
4. The Village Church. *Family Discipleship: Helping Your Household Establish a Sustainable Rhythm of Time, Moments, and Milestones*. The Village Church, 2015. p. 5.
5. For a more in-depth treatment of the “God, man, Christ, response” framework, see Gilbert, Greg. *What is the Gospel?* Crossway, 2010.



An Oak Hill Baptist Church Resource

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APPENDIX 6

OBSTACLES TO FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY AND RESULTS¹

Obstacles to Family Discipleship Survey

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess potential obstacles to family discipleship. This research is being conducted by Jonas Larkin as part of an assignment for course 80950A: Applied Empirical Research. In this research, you will answer questions in the way that best corresponds to your family's current family discipleship practices. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Directions

This survey is intended for parents with at least one child that is living at home and currently in the middle school ministry at Oak Hill Baptist Church in Somerset, KY.

Note: for the purpose of this survey "family discipleship practices" refers to activities that take place within the family and home that serve to promote the spiritual growth of children and families (i.e., family Bible reading, family prayer, family devotions or worship, etc.).

¹ This survey was originally utilized in an assignment for Applied Empirical Research (80950A, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, January 2020). The survey was created online using Google Forms. It has been reformatted for inclusion in this appendix.

Table A3. Obstacles to family discipleship survey results

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Does Not Apply (%)
1. My family is too busy to engage in family discipleship practices.	22	44	11	22	--	--	--
2. My family prioritizes family discipleship opportunities by strategically planning them.	--	22	22	56	--	--	--
3. My child(ren)'s involvement in sports makes it difficult to engage in family discipleship practices.	11	22	11	33	22	--	--
4. My and/or my spouse's work schedule makes it difficult to engage in family discipleship practices.	11	22	11	33	22	--	--

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Does Not Apply (%)
5. I do not feel confident enough to lead my family in family discipleship practices such as Bible reading, prayer, family devotions, etc.	33	22	22	11	11	--	--
6. Leading my family in Bible reading, prayer, family devotions, etc. makes me feel like a hypocrite.	33	44	11	11	--	--	--
7. My church has failed to help me establish a plan for engaging in family discipleship practices.	33	44	22	--	--	--	--
8. My child(ren)'s involvement in non-sports related extracurricular activities makes it difficult to engage in family discipleship practices.	11	67	--	--	--	--	22

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Does Not Apply (%)
9. I do not feel that engaging in family discipleship practices is important.	78	22	--	--	--	--	--
10. I believe the church is the primary place where children should receive spiritual instruction.	56	22	11	11	--	--	--
11. My spouse's lack of spiritual maturity or lack of faith in general makes it difficult to engage in family discipleship practices.	67	11	--	--	11	--	11
12. My child(ren)'s lack of interest discourages me from engaging in family discipleship practices.	33	22	33	11	--	--	--

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Does Not Apply (%)
13. Technology, such as TVs, smartphones, video games, and other similar devices, makes it difficult to engage in family discipleship practices.	--	11	33	56	--	--	--
14. My child has disabilities or disorders that make it difficult to engage in family discipleship practices.	11	11	--	22	--	--	56
15. My family status (i.e., single-parent, shared custody, etc.) makes it difficult to engage in family discipleship practices.	56	--	--	--	--	--	44

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING PARENTS OF OAK HILL BAPTIST CHURCH IN SOMERSET, KENTUCKY, TO DISCIPLE THEIR CHILDREN

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

The purpose of this project was to transition the student ministry of Oak Hill Baptist Church in Somerset, Kentucky, to a family-equipping model by equipping parents to disciple their children. Chapter 1 provides the context for the ministry project, as well as project goals and research methodology.

Chapter 2 contains biblical and theological support for the project by examining Ephesians 4:11-16 and implications from this passage that pertain to equipping parents to disciple their children.

Chapter 3 contains practical considerations for how and why churches must equip parents to fulfill their role as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

Chapter 4 is an overview of the implementation phase of the project, including summaries of the planning, design, promotion, and implementation of the project.

Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the project, including theological and personal reflections as well as commentary on how the project will be leveraged moving forward.

VITA

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EDUCATION

BBA, University of Kentucky, 2009

MA, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Student Pastor, Oak Hill Baptist Church, Somerset, Kentucky, 2012-