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MOVING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARD BIBLICAL  
LITERACY AT NEW HOPE CHURCH  
IN NEW HOPE, MINNESOTA

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

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

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by  
Jonathan Mark Kimmel  
December 2021

**APPROVAL SHEET**

MOVING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARD BIBLICAL  
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IN NEW HOPE, MINNESOTA

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I dedicate this project to my amazing and supportive wife, Megan, our children, and the middle schoolers to whom I get serve and minister.

I pray you will all know the one, true God more deeply and walk more closely with Him because of the Holy Spirit's work through this effort.

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## PREFACE

I have had the privilege of ministering to middle school students in two different church settings over the past eight years. I am continually convinced that with the right teaching and discipleship middle schoolers can change the world. I hope some of this passion is conveyed in the work that follows.

I have been blessed by amazing teams of adult volunteers who see the potential in each middle school student who steps through the doors. I have a remarkable team in Tracy Maas and Kendall Soderstrom who I have the pleasure to minister alongside. They help make ministry, and the pursuit of this DEdMin, possible. My advisor and friend, Dr. Kevin M. Jones, has been an incredible blessing on this journey. I have an incredibly supportive wife, Megan, who is my best friend and partner in life and ministry. And our children, Baelyn, Sage, and Andrew, mean the world to me and I pray they will be blessed by this effort as they grow in our home and in the Lord.

I am forever grateful to the influence of my parents, Mark and Kim, who raised me to know, fear, and trust the Lord. Thank you for always pointing me to Jesus, for holding family devotionals, and for taking us to church.

Jon Kimmel

New Hope, Minnesota

December 2021



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The vision of New Hope Church is to be “a Christ-centered community for all peoples, moving toward Jesus and taking others with us.” This vision can be seen in many areas, both on a weekly basis<sup>1</sup> and in visionary planning.<sup>2</sup> However, a key to moving toward Jesus and being able to take others to Him is to know the Word of God. A trend in many American churches, and New Hope Church is not exempt from this, is to move away from using Bibles and away from explicitly teaching from them. In this shift, many parents slowly stop teaching their children the basics of how to use their Bible and the main story line of the Scriptures. As the church and parents join in this cycle, children are left biblically illiterate. Is it a wonder then that many teens fail to see the Bible as applicable and necessary, let alone the inerrant Word of God? By pushing students toward biblical literacy and equipping parents to disciple their children, pastors and church leaders will see the local body impact the lives of young teenagers for their good and God’s glory.

#### **Context**

Since the 1960s, New Hope Church (NHC) has been a flagship church in the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA). What began as a children’s Bible class in

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<sup>1</sup> The vision of NHC is seen in the diverse leadership and welcoming atmosphere present every Sunday morning. Each age and gender specific ministry operates as a small group or a discipleship based ministry. These elements help to create a welcoming atmosphere where people engage the Word and grow in Christ-likeness together.

<sup>2</sup> New Hope Church, “Our Purpose,” accessed April 9, 2021, <https://newhopechurchmn.org/about-us/our-purpose/>. This vision is carried out by focusing on five key elements: all people, church planting, life groups (small groups), leader development, and living with purpose.

1946, grew to become Crystal Evangelical Free Church in 1949. In 1984, following years of growth and multiple building additions, the church secured a property in the neighboring town of New Hope, Minnesota. It would take until 2007 to change its name to match its “new” location. God’s faithfulness continued as the church grew in number and favor with the community. In the early 1990s the church purchased two other properties within a mile of its main building. What is now known as the Extended Campus (EC) became the home of numerous church ministries. Currently, the EC houses global outreach, care ministry, and student ministries (sixth through twelfth grade).

The primary focus group for this project is middle school students (grades six through eight) and their parents or guardians. The middle school years are a crucial age group to reach with the gospel and solid doctrine. They are more mentally capable than elementary age students and more moldable than high school aged students. Yet, middle school tends to be one of the most neglected age groups inside of the church. People often shy away from this age because of their awkwardness or their body odor (or overwhelming scent of body spray). Adults lack understanding in how to reach young adolescence. This lack of focus and understanding on the middle school age is an underlying cause that perpetuates the specific issues addressed in this project.

The youth ministry of NHC has been blessed with faithful leadership; faithful both in tenure (the previous two youth pastors served for ten and six years respectively) and in solid, accurate, biblical teaching. The two common factors of unhealthy youth groups—youth pastor turn over and lack of good Bible teaching—have not been present at NHC. NHC has also faithfully budgeted for and staffed a middle school pastor as well as a senior high pastor. Staffing two youth pastors is done in part because of the need to focus on both age groups, but also due to the size of the youth group and the need for multiple staff to effectively shepherd them. In light of these advantages one is left to wonder why certain dynamics, or weaknesses, exist in the NHC middle school youth ministry and how a youth pastor can change the culture of this local church.

A weakness in the church is a lack of understanding the early adolescent age. Many churches have failed to equip, empower, and invest in such a critical age, which hurts the church body as well as the individual student as the students fail to feel included in the local body. Feelings of exclusion, at a time in life where they are seeking inclusion, contribute to a lack of interest in true Christianity because students do not see the merit of Christianity from the very place that professes love and inclusion. Ronald Nydam writes, “Questions of right and wrong, about the importance of moral imperatives . . . may all be secondary to their primary concern for spiritual survival methods such as finding acceptance, having friends, and wanting to get up in the morning. . . . The day must matter; they must matter, or else life becomes drained of its significance.”<sup>3</sup>

A second weakness is that students entering the middle school youth group appear to have a general lack of biblical knowledge. Despite a student’s ability to provide a “Sunday school” answer, most are biblically illiterate in that they could not begin to tell you where they got their answer in Scripture. This illiteracy is also seen in a lack of regular Bible reading and an inability to answer basic questions on a text right in front of them.

The third weakness is the number of ill-equipped parents and adult leaders in the church when it comes to reaching, teaching, and discipling middle school students. Many adults, parents included, throw their hands up and hope or assume the majority of age-specific issues will simply be outgrown. While some issues are out grown, it is a risky copout to sit back and wait for change. Little material out there equips parents to effectively reach and disciple their middle school student. Tragically, the church is not effectively contributing to the solution.

These issues do not only exist at New Hope Church. They are present in many churches. Numerous conversations with fellow youth workers reveal that they struggle

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald Nydam, “Early Adolescence: Venturing toward a Different World,” in *Human Development and Faith: Life-Cycle Stages of Body, Mind, and Soul*, ed. Felicity B. Kelcourse (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 221.

with the same issues. These issues are noted in works such as Timothy Paul Jones' *Family Ministry Field Guide*, Andrew Root's *The End of Youth Ministry?*, and Wayne Rice's *Reinventing Youth Ministry Again*.<sup>4</sup> This project is being completed because of a deeply rooted belief that middle school students and middle school ministry cannot be an afterthought to elementary programming or an add on to senior high youth group. Parents of middle school students cannot be allowed to wait for this phase to end in order to parent their teenagers. Similarly, the church cannot be unaccountable to their lack of resourcing this age group and those who serve them.

### **Ways Forward**

The project focused on addressing each of these issues through a specific curriculum. The curriculum provided lessons to increase biblical literacy, written in a manner that allows the outlines to be used as a template for other lessons as well as for parents' own discipling. The research findings that guided the curriculum writing were used to further the understanding of middle school aged children for church leadership and parents.

Biblical literacy is not specifically a middle school problem. In the desire to reach more people and create "fun" environments for children, many churches have defaulted to an attractional model that creates a Sunday school hour consisting of playtime, snacks, and a short lesson while coloring a picture. There is nothing wrong with this layout if the lessons taught are teaching students the Word of God and how it impacts their lives. The issue is that most lessons are read off a paper and have little application to the life of a child. This results in students entering middle school with little understanding of God's Word and nearly zero ability to apply it.

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 23-30, 95-117; Andrew Root, *The End of Youth Ministry? Why Parents Don't Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 19-50; Wayne Rice, *Reinventing Youth Ministry (Again): From Bells and Whistles to Flesh and Blood* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 14-55, 135-56.

The curriculum sought to help students not just know the books of the Bible but understand what they are saying and, most importantly, how what God is saying applies to their lives. Teaching to this depth and effectiveness can be done by understanding the development stages of a middle schooler, the best ways to teach a middle schooler, and then creating lessons using this understanding. A few things must be present regardless of research findings. First, the Bible and the God of the Bible must be central in all that is taught and discussed. Second, there must be material for leaders and parents to use to follow up the lesson time. Finally, those teaching must lead by example. Their lives must reflect a dependence on God and His Word, or all of their efforts will fall on deaf ears; hypocrisy of the teacher is earplugs to the student.

By writing the curriculum to include parent and leader components, the adults in the church are set up for success. At the outset of implementing the curriculum with students, parents and leaders were trained to better understand the middle school age both developmentally and educationally. The curriculum included a tutorial on how to use the parent and leader material to its fullest potential.

The education and equipping of parents and adult volunteers would lead to a greater understanding of the middle school age in the greater church body. As understanding begins to grow, the quantity and quality of willing leaders will grow, parents will begin to engage their middle schoolers, and church leadership will begin to see the change.

### **Rationale**

Middle school students are often allowed to be apathetic and distracted instead engaged and challenged. No one raises to a low bar and that is precisely what today's culture has set for so many middle school students. When parents and church leaders who know how to most effectively connect with, teach, and disciple this age group come together, amazing, God-honoring, and kingdom growing things will happen.

The context highlights three specific reasons why a focus on middle school students and adult leaders is so important. The primary reason is to address the group's biblical illiteracy. Students are unable to recall biblical answers, many cannot find a passage in their Bible, and, based on interpersonal conversations, the average student reads their Bible once per week or less. This habitual shift cannot be sufficiently addressed on Sunday mornings nor should it be left to Sunday mornings alone. Equipping parents and other adult leaders to encourage students and hold them accountable is key to making this shift.

The second reason to focus in on middle school students and leaders is the need for parents and church leaders to better understand the middle school age. Some parents feel like they have things under control only to reflect and realize they had no idea what they were doing. Others plan to wait out the "phase" while still some embrace the age group. Imagine the impact of the church where students are rooted in the Word of God and parents actively engage in the discipleship of their children.

The third reason is the need for resources. Many parents who do not engage their children fail to do so because they are unaware of resources to help them or they simply do not know where to start. Having material that is clear to understand and implement will be a catalyst for the discipleship process inside the home.

The second and third rationales highlight the paramount need to reach such a vital age. Middle school students, ages 11-13, are uniquely positioned to think deeply and individually but are still moldable. They have not yet solidified their own personal worldview and are thus the oldest moldable age group in the church.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to move middle school students toward biblical literacy while simultaneously equipping parents and adult leaders to more effectively connect with and disciple middle school students.

## **Goals**

Teaching middle school students to become biblically literate as guided by four goals which were measurable. As an outflow of the planned curriculum, parents and church leaders learned how to best teach, connect with, and disciple middle school students.

These goals included the following:

1. The first goal was to assess middle school students' current biblical literacy and Bible reading habits as well as assess families' current discipleship practices.
2. The second goal was to create a curriculum that taught middle school students how to read, understand, and apply the Bible while simultaneously equipping parents and church leaders to more effectively reach and disciple 11 to 13-year-olds.
3. The third goal was to implement the curriculum to increase middle school students' Bible literacy while simultaneously equipping parents and adult leaders to better connect with, teach, and disciple middle school students.
4. The fourth goal was to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in how it increased middle school students' biblical literacy and how well it equipped parents and adult leaders to teach and disciple middle school students.

## **Research Methodology**

Four goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess middle school students' current biblical literacy and Bible reading habits as well as assess families' current discipleship practices.<sup>5</sup> This goal was measured by administering the Student and Family Spiritual Practice Survey (SFSPS).<sup>6</sup> This two-part survey utilized questions with multiple choice answers as well as the Likert scale. It included a SFSPS for students and a SFSPS for parents to address these specific areas. This survey was given to fifteen families with at least one middle schooler. This goal was considered successfully met when fifteen families (parents and the 11 to 13 year old) completed the survey and the results were analyzed, providing a more accurate picture of biblical

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<sup>5</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1.

literacy among middle school students and the current spiritual practices of their families at NHC.

The second goal was to create a curriculum to teach middle school students how to read, understand, and apply the Bible while simultaneously equipping parents and church leaders to more effectively reach and disciple children in the age range of 11 to 13. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, and applicability of the curriculum.<sup>7</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to implement the curriculum to increase middle school students' Bible literacy while simultaneously equipping parents and adult leaders to better connect with, teach, and disciple middle school students. This goal was measured by the successful implementation of the eight-week curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met once all eight lessons had been taught and all booklet-based family discussions had occurred.

The fourth goal was to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in how well it increased middle school students' biblical literacy and how well it equipped parents and adult leaders to teach and disciple middle school students. This goal was measured by re-administering the SFSP survey and comparing pre- and post-curriculum results. This goal was considered successfully met when the repeated-measures analysis of variance demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

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



## Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

*Discipleship.* Following Jesus is an all of life, for the rest of one's life, commitment. *Discipleship* must be understood as helping another live all of life for Christ. At the fullest scope, *discipleship* is leading someone to Christ, and teaching them all that Christ has commanded and how to live life in Christ.

*Family devotions.* *Family devotions* refer to the intentional time spent seeking the Lord together, parent and child/children. For clarity and uniformity, this project uses Donald S. Whitney's approach of read, pray, and sing. Read the Bible together, pray together, and sing praises to the Lord together.<sup>8</sup>

*Middle school student.* For this paper, *middle school student* refers to students in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. These grades most often consist of 11 to 13-year-old students.

*Parent(s).* For the sake of continuity *parents* will refer to a student's caregivers. *Parents* could be biological or adoptive parents, an aunt and uncle, older siblings, other family members, or legal guardians.

Four limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-curriculum surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the participants to be honest about their previous and current involvement in their child's spiritual formation. To encourage honesty, participants were assured their answers would remain confidential. Second, the effectiveness of the curriculum was limited by students' regular attendance to Sunday and Wednesday gatherings. A third limitation was the small group leader's willingness to use the provided discussion prompts and engage the students outside of regular scheduled gatherings. The final limitation was the parents' use of the devotional booklet at home. If the students did not regularly attend, if the small group leaders did not buy in, or if the parents did not initiate family devotions using the provided booklet, then

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<sup>8</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 44-51.

it would be difficult to measure how effective the curriculum had been. To offset this limitation, each week of the curriculum was implemented in regularly scheduled youth programming and gentle, encouraging prompts were sent to parents.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project sought to engage parents in the spiritual formation of their children. While engaging parents benefited the entire family, the project only focused on parents engaging middle school students, not elementary and high school-aged children. The biggest delimitation of this project was that it was limited to an eight-week curriculum. This timeframe gave adequate time to write, evaluate, and teach the eight-week curriculum as well as provide the necessary time to conduct the post-curriculum survey once the lessons have been taught.

### **Conclusion**

When middle school students are intentionally invested in and disciplined by parents, pastors, and small group leaders, they will feel accepted, valued, and will be equipped for the Christian life. As they grasp the Word of God and how to read it and apply it to their lives, they will be prepared for life after youth group. Adults can learn much from the Scriptures and from developmental science and use this knowledge to give middle school students Jesus in ways that deepen their faith and engage them in kingdom work now. The process starts with the leadership in the church and in the home. From the parents in the home to the youth pastor at church, empowering students with the Word of God will change the family, the church, and the community for humanity's good and God's glory.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GROWING STUDENTS IN BIBLICAL LITERACY

It is not uncommon in suburban Minnesota to hear parents make comments along the lines of “I want what’s best for my kid,” “I just want them to be happy,” or perhaps the combination of the two, “I just want my kid to succeed in life.” What parent does not want to see their child happy and doing well? The irony is, even in an evangelical church, that is the extent of the statement. There is little acknowledgment of God, His will, or His calling. What is meant by best, happiness, and success is very worldly. Andrew Root points out,

The highest moral good for parents in our time is to protect their children through oversight, helping prepare them for the competitive rat race of modern society, finding happiness in who they are in this fast-paced life. . . . Your life becomes your kids’, because this not only give you meaning but also promises to provide a hypergood of their safety, which will produce the ultimate hypergood of happiness.<sup>1</sup>

Parents are more concerned about their child’s happiness and worldly success than in the condition of their child’s soul and their Christian contentment. Two of the key ways this twist of parental priorities is seen is in the biblical illiteracy of young teens as well as in the lack of family discipleship/devotional time.

The blame cannot be placed solely on the parents. Many churches, despite bearing the name evangelical and preaching the necessity for Scripture to be the foremost authority in the lives of believers, do little to equip the saint to use the Bible. In light of these general observations, as one seeks to instruct middle schoolers toward biblical literacy, the need for church and family partnership cannot be overlooked. What follows

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Root, *The End of Youth Ministry? Why Parents Don’t Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 31.

is a biblical basis for moving middle schoolers toward biblical literacy and how that should happen; equipping the church and parents to partner in this process.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reveals how God-fearing parents, Jews in the old covenant, Christians in the new covenant, respond to God's grace and mercy by passing along the knowledge of, and obedience to, the laws and actions of God to their children. Second Timothy 3:10-17 brings this response into the new covenant. Christians are called to disciple others, for Christian parents, this includes their children. As 2 Timothy 3:16 points out, God has provided the main tool, His Word, for betterment and growth. Finally, Matthew 28:16:20 drives home the importance of not just telling others about Jesus, but walking alongside them, teaching them all that Jesus has taught and done, using Scripture, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to see them come to Christ, grow in Christlikeness, and go out and make disciples. For Christian families, this must be done inside the home as well as out in the world. When the lessons from these three passages are considered together, there is an unquestionable importance on the discipleship of children and the priority of all Scripture in this process.

### **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

The book of Deuteronomy provides an excellent summary of the Old Testament law and God's expected response to the law. Daniel I. Block highlights this: "The book of Deuteronomy functions as a theological manifesto, calling Israel to respond to God's grace with unreserved loyalty and love."<sup>2</sup> Israel's primary response was to love God with all that they were. Flowing out of this love for, and devotion to, God was a response of obedience to God. Part of Israel's obedience to God was to make Him known, to celebrate Him and His work; this started in the home.

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 25.

It is also important to note that this call and response of Deuteronomy is still very much a reality for Christians today. This is what Jesus is teaching in Matthew 5:17: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”<sup>3</sup> Christians today are in the new covenant. This does not mean, however, that the laws of God in the old covenant do not apply or that the expected response of love and obedience is waived. Jesus teaches this in Matthew 5. He is not against following the law; He is against the legalism of the Jewish leaders. In addition to Matthew 5:19, Jesus’ use of the law in His own teaching furthers this point. In His life and teaching, Jesus, along with other New Testament writers, repeats the importance of the moral law.<sup>4</sup> To see this more clearly, one must have a deeper grasp of Old Testament instruction.

Moses, sharing the instructions of the Lord God with Israel, records in Deuteronomy 6:4-9,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Moses is teaching Israel to love God with all of their being, to talk about God in every activity and context, and to dwell on God and His law daily. God should be so prevalent in the life of an Israelite that even their gates and doors, with God’s law on them, serve as reminders of God’s work, provision, and deliverance. The Jewish person was also expected to pass down their faith and knowledge of God by teaching the laws and things of God to their children. From verse 7 it is understood that this included a call to formal spiritual

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is quoted from the English Standard Version.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1992), 107-8.

education in the home as well as casual conversations that were an outflow of loving God with all of one's life.

J. G. McConville, in his commentary on Deuteronomy, helpfully points out the inter-related nature of all of life being used to love God and teach these things to your children. Commenting on verses 6-9 he writes, "These verses expand the idea of wholehearted obedience . . . that is the whole teaching of Moses, are to be 'upon your heart' . . . they are likewise to be passed on to the next generation."<sup>5</sup> If one is to love the Lord God with all of his being and think upon and talk about the laws and works of God, then one cannot raise a child and not teach the child about God. Raising children to know and trust in the commands and workings of God is a natural element, or outflow, of loving God with heart, soul, and might. It is not a stretch then, since Jesus had the Shema in mind, to think that the command to teach children would have been assumed as He expounded on what the greatest commandment was.<sup>6</sup>

While discipleship, from parent to child, should come naturally, it cannot be taken for granted, it is a command after all.<sup>7</sup> Yet this command, when done from an outflow of loving God, should just be a way of life. Peter C. Craigie points out that these commands are followed not in legalism but as a response of understanding. Understanding the commands leads to talking about them inside and outside the home—they permeate every area of the life of man.<sup>8</sup> Teaching one's children about God's works and God's law should be commonplace

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<sup>5</sup> J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 142.

<sup>6</sup> Jesus answers the question of what the greatest commandment is in Matt 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-34, and Luke 10:25-28.

<sup>7</sup> See Deut 6:5-9; Ps 78:2-4; Prov 22:6, 23:13-14; Eph 6:4.

<sup>8</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1976), 170.

Teaching children the commands of God was key to Israel thriving and remaining in the Promised Land. Duane L. Christensen clarifies that not only does the command to teach children and children's children (Deut 4:9) point to the importance of spiritual education, but also "the future of Israel depends on the transmission of the experience of God's mighty acts in history and his demands to each successive generation."<sup>9</sup> The command to teach children was, and is today, paramount to the future of God's people.

The teaching of the children was so important to God, and thus to Israel, that the instruction to teach the things of God to one's children is repeated throughout the *Torah*. Moshe Weinfeld points out how Deuteronomy 6:4-25 mirrors the layout of Exodus 13:1-16. Exodus 13:1-16 reflect the Gilgal traditions in Joshua 4:6-7, 21-24. Each passage directs parents to teach their children as the child asks about the celebrations of the Jewish faith. These celebrations, such as Passover, then serve as a catechesis for Israelite parents.<sup>10</sup> Teaching of children was part of daily life for the Israelites; it was part of their celebrations, and it was to be continuous.

Deuteronomy itself served as a resource for Jewish parents and adults in teaching future generations. Christensen goes as far as to refer to Deuteronomy 6:4-9:29 as a "pedagogical tool to instruct each generation on what it means to be part of God's chosen people."<sup>11</sup> Applied today, parents are no less expected to teach their children diligently the laws and works of God. Deuteronomy still serves as a "pedagogical tool" for parents. However, parents now have the entirety of the law, prophets, and the New Testament at their disposal as resources to teach their children the things of God.

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<sup>9</sup> Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6a (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 81.

<sup>10</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 5 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 328-29.

<sup>11</sup> Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 137.

Deuteronomy clearly lays out the expectation of loving God with all of one's being and teaching God's commands to one's children. Parents cannot love God with all of their being and not teach their children the things of God. This is significant in the conversation about middle schooler's biblical literacy. If a Christian truly believes, then how can he not teach his children about the One, True God and, in doing so, train them to read His Word?

The hard reality of biblical illiteracy is that at least some of those who claim to be Christians are not teaching their children about God or His Word. For if parents are doing what God calls them to, then there would not be a biblical illiteracy epidemic inside the church. However, parents cannot be the only place conviction rests. The Western church, in many ways, has enabled parents to take a back seat to their children's spiritual formation. Whether it is age specific ministries or a lack of solid biblical teaching, the church is essentially telling parents "we've got this, you are off the hook."

Tragically, like many in ancient Israel, many parents neglect the commands to diligently teach and talk about God with their children. Today, even parents who acknowledge their responsibility to teach their children do not follow through. These failures led to children in ancient Israel growing up not knowing the works of God and the law of God. As a result, they turned to the gods around them which consistently cost them their promised land. Today, as children grow up not knowing what God has done and what God is calling them to, they turn to the gods of the culture around them, which will cost them their souls. Parents must step into this gap but first the church must step back into training, resourcing, and providing accountability for discipleship outside of its walls.

With a greater grasp on this Old Testament instruction, the way it threads through the New Testament, especially in Jesus' teaching, becomes increasingly clear. However, Jesus was not the only New Testament teacher who perpetuated the command



to teach one's children. Specifically, Paul had Deuteronomy 6 and the Jewish customs of the time in mind when he wrote his second letter to Timothy.<sup>12</sup>

### **Second Timothy 3:10-17**

Paul's second letter to Timothy is full of instruction for Timothy as well as the church. This advice is just as applicable in 2021 as it was in the 60s. Paul's exhortations of Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:10-17 provides insight into church and family responsibilities as well as the primary resource for discipleship and spiritual growth. Addressing Timothy, Paul writes,

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra – which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:10-17)

The first implication to notice is tied up in the first three verses. Paul explicitly says that Timothy has followed him in all things. Timothy has learned the gospel, observed Paul's conduct, purpose, and faith, and how these things then play out in Paul's life. These things were not observed or learned from letters. In Acts 16:3-4, Paul takes Timothy to minister alongside him. In person, sharing life, Timothy watched Paul live missionally. From circumcising Timothy (Acts 16:3) to modeling a life of following God and teaching others, Paul equipped Timothy to continue ministry without him. John Calvin, in a sermon on this passage, said, "No one will ever be a good or effective teacher if he cannot offer

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<sup>12</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 621-22.

himself as an example of all that he teaches.”<sup>13</sup> Paul lived this out as he disciplined Timothy, both in the context of Acts 16 and later in writing instruction and encouragement found in 1 and 2 Timothy. Through these things Paul provides a solid example of what it looks like to live out the instructions of Deuteronomy 6 and, ultimately, the Great Commission.

In verse 15, Paul notes that Timothy has been taught the Scriptures from infancy. While this is hyperbole, Quinn and Wacker point out that “infancy” was used to drive a major point home. It was “meant to heighten the basic affirmation to the utmost. There was never a moment in his conscious life that the teaching of Scripture had not touched.”<sup>14</sup> Timothy was not only disciplined by Paul but also by those who raised him.

Jewish culture furthers this understanding of family discipleship. Craig Keener points out that in a Jewish home it was expected that the father educated the children, especially their sons, in the Jewish law. He continues to highlight Timothy’s situation by noting the role mother plays in the early years and how most Jewish boys began this education in the Jewish law by age five or six. Furthermore, referencing Tobit 1:8, Keener points out, “Those living without a living religious father also learned from grandmothers if they were still living.”<sup>15</sup> Despite the lack of a spiritual father, Timothy was raised to know God by his mother and grandmother. This foundational understanding of raising a child did not stop when Jesus fulfilled the law and prophets. It continued on in the early Judeo-Christian life, preparing Timothy for the mighty things God would do through him.

Timothy is set in stark contrast to the “evil people and imposters” of verse 13. Timothy is different due in large part to his upbringing. While it is not explicitly stated, it is safe to assume that Timothy’s mother and grandmother were following their cultural

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<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Second Timothy*, trans. Robert White (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2018), 312.

<sup>14</sup> Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 757.

<sup>15</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 617.

and scriptural duties as they saw to Timothy's upbringing. Paul's comments on the devout faith of grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice (2 Tim 1:5) point to how they raised young Timothy to know and follow God in accordance with the Torah. Regarding the community of faith versus the community of opponents facing Timothy, specifically in reference to Timothy's mother and grandmother, Luke Johnson helpfully points out, "In this community, women are not the weak and silly captives of charlatans, but are themselves those who can hand on the true faith to children and raise them within the symbolic world of Torah."<sup>16</sup> Timothy was raised in the knowledge and fear of the Lord by his mother and grandmother and was then disciplined by Paul. However, Paul does not stop there when reminding Timothy that he is equipped to handle what lies ahead.

Timothy, like Christians today, have Scripture as their main resource or equipping tool. There has been debate over the years of whether "Scripture" in 3:16 references all of the Bible or just the Old Testament. Little substance comes from this conversation and it would be foolish, in light of the wide acceptance of the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the New Testament texts, to discount the New Testament. William Mounce helpfully points out, "Although Paul uses different terms to describe the OT and the gospel, they all refer to the message of God and need to be interpreted together. Timothy's ministry centers on Scripture: the OT and the gospel message."<sup>17</sup> One can quickly deduce that not only is the Bible vital to spiritual growth and well-being, but, in light of the message of 3:16, there is no better discipleship resource. Robert Yarbrough, in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, notes that Scripture is primary in bringing about the beliefs and

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<sup>16</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New Testament in Context (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996), 90.

<sup>17</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 555.

actions that mirror God’s character and ultimately help the Christian stand and face whatever challenge arises.<sup>18</sup> Christians must be saturated in the Bible.

Since “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16), Christians seeking to raise anyone up in the Lord cannot neglect the Word of God, nor can the Word of God be second to any other tool. Parents must know the Bible and teach the Bible to their children. The Scriptures were once viewed as a sort of educational tool for parents and family to use to pass on the Jewish faith to the next generation. When the words from 2 Timothy 3:16-17 are taken to heart, the whole of Scripture should be the primary tool in raising children to know, fear, and walk with the Lord.

The reality of God’s Word being primary goes beyond the home. It must start in the local church. While 2 Timothy is a very personal letter from Paul to Timothy, the implications of personal application would have had lasting impact on the church. Paul expected his letter to be read to the church in Ephesus.<sup>19</sup> The public reading of 2 Timothy would aid Timothy in addressing false teaching (1 Tim 1) through the preaching of the Word (2 Tim 4), while addressing certain elements of church structure (1 Tim 2; 2 Tim 2). Thus, the letter would have been read to the Christians in Ephesus and the example of Timothy’s life would have been on full display. Between these two elements, it is not a stretch to imagine Timothy urging the church to raise their children in the ways of the Lord and that Timothy was shepherding them to such ends. The church today needs to set the same expectations and do this same equipping of parents as is seen in 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

Using the Word of God, church leaders can, and must, equip parents to raise children to know and follow God by equipping them with the Word of God. Parents must

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<sup>18</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018), 431-32.

<sup>19</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 463-64.

step into this calling<sup>20</sup> with a sense of urgency. This combination will equip the next generation of church leaders while also creating a mission-minded generation to change the world now, not just when they are older. When pastors and church leaders take 2 Timothy 3:10-17 to heart, they will equip their congregations to know the Word, study the Word, and apply the Word. When believers hold 2 Timothy 3:10-17 to be true, they will seek to know the Word, apply the Word, and help others, especially those they are raising, to do the same. In doing so, the church takes steps to fulfill the Great Commission.

### **Matthew 28:16-20**

The last words Matthew records of the man he gave up everything to follow are life changing. Jesus calls his followers to a life of action. No amount of petty theological arguments negates Jesus' call to bring others to a saving knowledge of Him, to make disciples, and teach them. This is not optional. This is world changing. This starts in the home.

Matthew 28:16-20 records Jesus' interaction with, at the very least, the eleven disciples:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus' closest followers met Him on a mountain and their response was to worship. The reality is that when humanity comes face to face with God, when humanity sees God at work, humanity does what it was created to do—worship God. Today, we do not get to see Jesus with our physical eyes, yet God still reveals Himself in His Word and in His working through His Word. Once again, humanity is reminded of its need to be in the

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<sup>20</sup> See previous section which unpacks this calling found in Deut 6.

Word of God, to dwell on it, and to teach it to others. How can humans do this if they are biblically illiterate?

Whether the “some” referenced in verse 17 is describing “some” of the eleven or is alluding to a greater crowd beyond the eleven is of little matter for the thrust of this passage. While D. A. Carson uses linguistics to argue for a larger crowd than the eleven, ultimately, he points out the implications of these final words are implications on all followers of Jesus: “The injunction is given to the Eleven, but to the Eleven in their own roles as disciples. Therefore, they are paradigms for *all* disciples. . . . It is binding on all Jesus’ disciples to make others what they themselves are – disciples of Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup> These words were not spoken by Jesus simply to move the disciples into ministry and start the church, they were intended to be the mission of the church and the mandate for all who bear the name Christian. The Christian cannot discount these words as only for the first disciples nor can they be seen as limited to a select few disciples today. These words must be the foundation for every Christian life, family, and church.

Not only are the implications of these verses for all disciples of Jesus, but all disciples of Jesus are given the backing and authority to carry them out. Craig Blomberg motivationally points out, “Jesus has the right to issue his followers their ‘marching orders,’ but he also has the ability to help them carry out those orders.”<sup>22</sup> The reality for disciples is that God has commanded His followers to make other disciples and promises, with all of His authority, to be with His people. Disciples of Jesus are to make other human beings disciples of Jesus with the confidence that the Lord is sovereign and equips

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<sup>21</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 666.

<sup>22</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 431.

them for the task.<sup>23</sup> This is true as Christians go out into the world and as Christians live in their home with their children.

With such an emphasis on making disciples, it is paramount to understand what it means to make disciples. This command goes beyond simply talking about Jesus. It requires time, intentionality, and teaching the Bible as well as life skills.<sup>24</sup> Donald Hagner points out that “disciple” connotes “learner” and clarifies, “The emphasis in the commission thus falls not on the initial proclamation of the gospel but more on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship . . . explained by the instruction ‘teaching them all that I have commanded.’”<sup>25</sup> It is not discipleship to just proclaim the gospel message nor is it discipleship to just impart head knowledge, any more than discipleship is, as Carson offers, not limited to baptism and teaching; if anything, baptism and teaching are an outflow of discipleship.<sup>26</sup> Discipleship encompasses bringing others to a salvific relationship with God, teaching them what He has commanded His creation, helping them apply it, seeing they grow in Christ-likeness, and sending them out to make more disciples.

Jesus begins this commissioning of making disciples by instructing His followers to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While most scholarly commentary on verse 19 focuses on the timing of the trinitarian reference, it is important to pay attention to the underlying implications of baptizing a person. Baptism is for those who are repentant of their sins and profess Jesus as their Savior and Lord. John Nolland captures this in his commentary on verse 19: “No doubt we are to understand that the

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<sup>23</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 665.

<sup>24</sup> Teaching someone to know and follow Jesus in all of life includes helping them “do” life. This might be teaching a young man how to tie a tie, use tools, play a game, etc. These life skill moments provide additional context for spiritual discipleship as well.

<sup>25</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol 33b (Dallas: Word, 1995), 887.

<sup>26</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 668.

confession of sins . . . and the ritual washing, marking in a concrete manner God's reception of the act of repentance made by the penitent . . . are also to be marks of this new Christian baptism."<sup>27</sup> The commissioning of Christians to baptize and teach implies that discipleship does not begin with baptism, or even conversion, but with evangelism. If Christians are to fully obey this commission, then they must be telling non-Christians about Jesus. When the Spirit awakens a soul to repentance and salvation they are then to be baptized and taught all that Jesus commands.

Teaching all that Jesus has commanded requires time and intentionality. It also requires the Christian teach *all* that Jesus has commanded. Jesus' words are not to be picked through. Leon Morris drives this point home: "We should not miss the significance of *all the things*. Jesus is not suggesting that his followers should make a selection from his teaching as it pleases them and neglect the rest. Since the teaching of Jesus is a unified whole."<sup>28</sup> The reality of this command is that the disciple of Jesus must know his Bible and be prepared to teach it to others.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" is often the proof text for a global, or overseas, mission emphasis. It is not in the scope of this work to fully critique this use. However, this work does depend on a solid understanding of "go" and "nations." When Jesus says "go," He is once again sending His followers out. He is calling His disciples to action. Some will undoubtedly be called to the other side of the planet, but others will not be called to leave their home. However, their calling is the same: go and make disciples. Bloomberg succinctly frames this sending: "Jesus' main focus remains on the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be."<sup>29</sup> "Go" may not send all disciples around the world, but "go" means all disciples are sent to make more

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<sup>27</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 1267-68.

<sup>28</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 749.

<sup>29</sup> Bloomberg, *Matthew*, 431.



disciples. When Jesus sends his followers to the nations, he is broadening the *goers* focus from Jewish people to all people. Jesus is removing any distinction so that those making disciples would go to all of humanity.<sup>30</sup> The Great Commission thus calls all disciples of Jesus to make more disciples of Jesus wherever God has placed them.

This means that the Great Commission not only applies to the church, but also to places of employment, circles of influence, and inside the home. The church must train Christians to carry out the Great Commission in every space they find themselves. For Christian parents, disciple making starts inside the walls of the home with their own children. To not take this approach to discipleship and parenting is to fail at the specific commands placed on parents as well as the broader command given to all believers to make disciples. For the Christian parent, going to the nations begins by going into families with intentionality and teaching children all that Jesus commanded. This requires teaching children the Word of God.

One should consider the insights of these three passages as a whole. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 one sees, unequivocally, that parents are called to raise their children to know and follow God. Christians are called to make disciples, parents are instructed to disciple their children, and the Word of God is the primary tool to both equip the believer for discipleship and teach new believers who God is and, as a result, who they are and how they should live. In 2 Timothy 3:10-17, amongst many other things, Christians are given the Word of God, which is useful for all of Christian life, including the fulfilling of the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:16-20 Christians are called to bring others into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and teach them all the things Jesus has commanded. These three passages have immense theological implications on the individual Christian, the family, and the local church.

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<sup>30</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1265-66.

## Theological Implications

As one considers the implications of these three passages, not to mention other texts that echo similar instructions,<sup>31</sup> the Christian gains a sense of purpose and calling. It becomes impossible to separate one's identity as a Christian from his life mission of bringing others to Jesus and teaching them all He has commanded. The church then, being made up of individual Christians and families, collectively shares the same burden. When these three entities function as an interrelated whole, the church will be changed for the glory of God.

### Implications for the Individual

When one refers to the individual Christian, it is not to insinuate that the Christian can or should be following Jesus alone. "Individual Christian" specifically refers to the individual human being having a personal relationship with God and seeking to understand and live out the will of God. For this person, living out their faith in obedience to God's Word drastically impacts, for good, the family and the church because the individual Christian is committed to Christ, the Word of God, the church, and the authority of each.<sup>32</sup>

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9.** Deuteronomy was written with a more communal context than what is experienced in the west. However, the implications of its directives are still applied to the individual Christian or, in context, the individual Jew. The command to love the LORD with all of one's being is a command Jesus repeats in His own teaching in the New Testament.<sup>33</sup> One of the main ways love for God grows is

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<sup>31</sup> For more texts related to Duet 6:4-9, see Gen 18:19, Duet 4:9, 11:19, 32:46. For more texts related to 2 Tim 3:10-17, see Matt 4:4, 5:17-20, Rom 15:4. For more text related to Matt 28:16-20, see Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:44-49, John 14:15-17.

<sup>32</sup> Willard H. Taylor, "Christian," in *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Richard S. Taylor (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983), 103-4.

<sup>33</sup> See Matt 22:37 and Luke 10:27.

through the increase in knowledge of Him. This “growth in knowledge” once again drives Christians back to the importance of reading the Bible and applying it to their lives.

While this text has direct implications on parents, which will be discussed next, the individual is not free to neglect the obsession over God’s Word. Christians should constantly remind themselves of God’s commands and promises. Moshe Weinfeld explains this reality for the Old Testament Jew: “Constant awareness of the divine message is demanded. It should be tied to the body like an amulet and should accompany the person all the time.”<sup>34</sup> The same can be said for the Christian today. The commands of God should be so prominent in the life of the Christian that he cannot help but talk and think about them as he comes and goes and as he works and rests.

This commitment to God’s Word is not about the words themselves, though they should be held in the highest regard. The commitment and obsession to know the Word of God is because it is primarily through the Word that the Christian knows God. This is the individual’s motivation to read the Bible. It is not about reading the Bible as another daily task—that would be a waste of time. It is about knowing the God revealed in the words, commands, and teachings. As one meets the One True God, these words become sweeter than honey and more precious than gold (Ps 19). This reality drives the Christian out into the world proclaiming the commands, faithfulness, and promises of God.

**Second Timothy 3:10-17.** As the Christian seeks to grow in Christlikeness he must be in the Word of God on a regular basis. A growing desire to know and read God’s Word reflects a true belief that the Bible is inspired by God and useful for the equipping of the man of God (2 Tim 3:16-17). As one reads the Bible, he discovers more of who God is and what God is calling him to. As he experiences this reality, he wants more of

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<sup>34</sup> Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 341.

God's Word. While reading the Bible is not a reflection of a saved or unsaved status, the reality of what the Bible is to the believer means Bible reading should be an ever increasingly frequent discipline in the life of the Christian. Regardless of age, if a Christian can read, he must be reading their Bible.

The Christian, like the example of Paul to Timothy, must have others in his life who serve as mentors, or disciplers. Ideally, for the Christian child, mentorship/discipleship is found in their believing parents as well as others in the church.<sup>35</sup> The mentorship/discipleship context is one of the places where, using Scripture, there can be rebuke and training to continue to mature in faith. These relationships are also a place, in addition to church elders and pastors, where questions of what one reads in the Bible can be addressed.

Finally, by knowing the Word of God, being shaped by it, and following other godly examples, the Christian will be able to tell who the evil people and imposters are (v. 13). One must first know the truth that makes him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (v. 15). To know the Truth and be shaped by it, one must be reading it and applying it. James puts it bluntly in James 1:22: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." In doing so, the Christian grows in Christlikeness and begins to impact, for the kingdom, those around him.

**Matthew 28:16-20.** As a follower of Christ grows in Christian maturity and understanding of God's Word there should be a natural outflow, or application, of the Great Commission. The individual should see himself as part of a greater mission and purpose. Believers are called to boldly proclaim Jesus and teach all that He taught wherever God has placed them. God calls Christians to this greater mission and promises to be with them on the mission. For some, this may mean moving, for others it means

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<sup>35</sup> In addition to the inferred example Timothy had in his mother, grandmother, and Paul, Titus 2:1-7 clearly expects older men and women to teach and be examples to younger believers as to how to live as a Christian.

viewing each circle of influence as an opportunity to make more disciples. Regardless of geographical location, this mission also includes those living under the same roof.

To teach someone to obey all that Jesus commanded, one must know and be constantly growing in a deeper understanding of what Jesus commanded. Some knowledge will come from fellow Christians, and other knowledge will come from hearing the Word preached, but daily influence can only be found when one is committed to being in the Word, studying it, and applying it. The Christian must live out the implications of 2 Timothy 3:10-17 to affectively and effectively live out the implications of Matthew 28:16-20.

### **Implications for the Family**

Few question the importance of family and few experience family the same way. Each family is different, and each has baggage that causes dynamics to be unique. While the ideal nuclear family is one man and one woman in a monogamous marriage raising children together, we live in a sinful world where sin has impacted even the family. Humanity's brokenness does not discount the importance of family, but instead highlights it. J. W. Drane points out that, in the Old Testament, "the family was held together by traditional concerns . . . providing employment, together with education and socialization for children, and a religious identity for all."<sup>36</sup> Drane points out how similar the New Testament family dynamics were to those of the Old.<sup>37</sup> The Old and New Testaments certainly valued family and raising children in the Lord and modern neglect of these tasks is not acceptable for any reason.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9.** The implications of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, on the family, are explicit. Parents and children alike are to love God with all of their being. Parents are

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<sup>36</sup> J. W. Drane, "Family" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 494.

<sup>37</sup> Drane, "Family," 495.

to teach God’s commands to their children diligently and at every point of connection in their day. When they are in the house, when they leave the house, when they are going to bed, and when they are waking up, the commands of God are to be the center of discussion. This includes a more formal time of instruction, such as family worship, as well as during the casual daily happenings of a family. Parents are to also set up their homes in a way that points their children’s and their own attention back to God. This is also true for grandparents and other family members, such as believing aunts and uncles.

This instruction is the reality Christian parents must enter into with their children and their children’s children, yet this is not the norm in many Christian homes. Timothy Paul Jones points out, “In many churches, there is a significant gap between what is and what ought to be . . . few parents are actively involved in their children’s spiritual development.”<sup>38</sup> One of the driving reasons for the lack of parental involvement is a low level of expectation, training, and accountability from the local church.

**Second Timothy 3:10-17.** Despite the personal nature of this epistle, three familial implications must be considered: (1) the role of biological family, specifically parents and grandparents, in spiritually raising a child; (2) the role of other Christians joining in the discipleship process; and (3) the tool families and Christians should use in discipleship.

The general aim of this passage is not specifically discipleship in the church or in the home. However, in highlighting the paramount status of Scripture in the life of Timothy and the church, Paul offers insight into relationships where proximity to other believers and Scripture has brought about maturity. Beginning with the third implication, Scripture must be front and center in the lives of parents and other Christians as they seek to disciple children, whether biological or through a mutual faith in Jesus. This does not

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<sup>38</sup> Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 16.

eliminate other resources but instead should serve as a bar for which these resources are considered.

Resources used in discipleship must drive children into the Bible. These are resources along the lines of a guided Bible study, resources that teach people how to use and understand their Bibles, and even a family devotional book that includes Bible reading and explanation. The risk in using resources that do not utilize God's Word but instead utilize the author's thoughts, feelings, and experiences are far too great, in the long run, to justify their use. These risks include, but are not limited to, teaching poor theology and doctrine, elevating emotion over truth, developing a preference for soft commentary over God's Word, and ultimately, biblical illiteracy. Parents must teach their children God's Word and use the Word in the discipleship of their children. They must also implore any other believer who would invest in their children to do the same.

The first implication is heavily tied up in the third. The first implication is that family members, specifically parents and grandparents, are raising a child to know and walk with the Lord. They are discipling and mentoring. In verse 15 Paul alludes to Timothy's acquaintance with "the sacred writings" since childhood. Paul began his second letter to Timothy referencing, in 2 Timothy 1:5, the sincere faith of his grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice, which is now Timothy's. Paul is acknowledging the gift of believing parents and grandparents who teach the Scriptures to their children. This is a lesson for all believing parents today to teach their children the Bible.

The second implication is an outflow of the first two. As parents teach their children about God using God's Word, they will see the importance of other believers investing in their children. As already stated, this process should be taken seriously by parents. Parents should ensure the discipleship is Christ-centered and biblically sound. This, in part, can be discerned by the resource(s) used and the fruit of the discipler's life.

If these relationships do not form organically, then it is wise for the parent to seek out others to spiritually invest in their children.<sup>39</sup>

**Matthew 28:16-20.** The discipleship alluded to in 2 Timothy is explicitly commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28. This command and the promise that accompanies it apply to the family in two major ways: (1) how the parents and children should view their roles and interactions with one another; and (2) how the family should view their collective mission.

Christian parents and children have the proximity and relationship needed to bring each other to Jesus and teach one another everything that Jesus commanded (vv. 19-20). This process begins as parents teach their children, from an early age, all about God and what His Word teaches. When teaching their children seems like a daunting task, parents must remember the promise in verse 20: Jesus is with them. God does not just call parents to disciple their children, He resources them and He is with them. As parents disciple their children and the children mature, they in turn can do the same for younger siblings and even the parents.

The Christian family is uniquely created and placed in context to live out the Great Commission both individually and collectively. Entering into this mission together, the family can share Jesus with friends, neighbors, peers, etc., all while having one another's the support and accountability. A family who disciples one another using God's Word, and steps out together to fulfill the Great Commission, is one of the most, humanly speaking, powerful evangelistic and discipleship bodies the church has.

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<sup>39</sup> This is not a command placed on parents in the Bible. However, there are enough examples of discipleship happening in Scripture that discipleship should be a value a parent holds and seeks for their child to experience.



## Implications for the Church

The church is where parents and guardians must be trained and equipped to raise children. The church is where believers must be taught, equipped, and sent out to fulfill the Great Commission. The church must be more than something religious people do on Sundays. As Richard Taylor puts it, “The Church then is a divine institution, founded by Christ and composed of true believers. It is the community of redemption, constituting a new and unique race, united by the Spirit in the blood-ties of Calvary.”<sup>40</sup> When the blood-ties of Calvary are the lens through which church leaders, individual members, and families see the church, the church will function as Christ intended it to. When the church functions as Christ intended, families will thrive and Christians will lovingly, dutifully, and habitually make disciples in and around their homes.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9.** The directives in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 are the practical outworking’s of the Great Commission lived out in the family. Only one other thing must be noted regarding the implications on the church: the church, from its earliest forms in Genesis and the call on Abram, to Pentecost, to the modern day understanding, has been tied to family. Even the imagery of God as Father and his people being brothers and sisters and co-heirs with Christ is wrapped up in familial imagery.<sup>41</sup> If a church is to live this reality out, then each member must feel some sense of responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the spiritually young. Each member must teach the commands of God to the children and the spiritually immature in the church context. For some, the act of teaching will occur in formal settings such as teaching Sunday School, for others, it is practicing: “Talk of them [commands] when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way” (Deut 6:7). This passage alone cannot be directly applied as a directive for church members being responsible for the spiritual education of another’s child. However, when all three

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<sup>40</sup> Richard S. Taylor, “Church,” in Taylor, *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*, 114.

<sup>41</sup> See Rom 8:15-17 and Eph 1:3-5.

passages are considered it is safe to expect a sense of responsibility to see the children of the church raised to know, fear, and walk with God.

**Second Timothy 3:10-17.** While 2 Timothy is a pastoral epistle, written to a pastor, it is safe to assume the letter would have been read to the church at Ephesus and the directions offered would have benefited both Timothy and the local body. Timothy and the Ephesian church were reminded of the paramount need to hold fast to Scripture and to keep it central in all of life. They were also reminded of the impact of personal discipleship through the example of Paul to Timothy.

By the way Paul describes the Word of God—how it “makes one wise for salvation” and is useful in Christian growth—it is safe to assume the Ephesian Christians would have prioritized the centralization of Scripture. There would have been an expectation that it was central to their small cooperate gatherings and in the discipleship of one another. The Word of God must be central in the church today.

Though there is not a prescriptive call to discipleship in this specific passage, there is certainly an example set through Paul and Timothy’s relationship. This awareness, along with discipleship directives elsewhere, such as in the teachings of Jesus, would have greatly impacted the Ephesians’ understanding of how to function as a church. Specifically, in light of 2 Timothy 3:10-17, they would have kept the Scripture front and center in their lives and in the lives of their brothers and sisters in Christ as they met to disciple one another.

The church in the West is in desperate need for men and women to hold fast to the truths of God’s Word, apply these truths, and be equipped for every good work. The church today must prioritize the centralization of teaching the Bible, using it to correct and train its members, and sending the saints out equipped for every good work. The church must teach its people how to read, study, apply, and teach the Word of God to others. In doing so, the church will fulfill the Great Commission.

**Matthew 28:16-20.** When Jesus spoke these words, He was giving His followers, the eventual first church planters, their mission. As a body, the church must engage in bringing others to Jesus, baptizing them when they come to faith, and teaching them all that Jesus commanded. The church must also train its members to do this commission in the world and in their homes.

Pastors and church leaders must lead and shepherd their congregations in a way that causes the lay person to catch the vision and urgency of Jesus' final command. The gospel message must be central to all teaching so that congregants are reminded regularly of their need for a savior and the Savior they have. For the Christian, it should be second nature to speak of the glories of Christ with whomever is around. When the pastor brings his people back to the gospel, time and again, he begins to feed them spiritual meat<sup>42</sup> as they learn the depths of God's Word and richness of biblically accurate theology. As the pastor leads and teaches toward fulfilling the Great Commission, the church begins to reach the neighborhood in which it sits, people come to Jesus and, in turn, they join the church. The church must engage not only in global mission, but in local mission utilizing the hands and feet of the local body of Christ. The church must live out the Great Commission in its neighborhood. Christians living out the final command of their savior, as if eternity depended on it, is what the western world so desperately needs. Pastors must cultivate this mindset in how they preach, structure church discipleship, and plan how local outreach is done.

The church must also equip individual Christians in the church body to view the Great Commission as a way of life. Training church members to view their neighborhoods, places of work, schools, grocery stores, coffee shops, and the home as the mission field to which they have been commissioned will not only fulfill the command, but will change the world. The Great Commission includes how the church trains, equips,

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<sup>42</sup> See 1 Pet 2:2 and Heb 5:11-14.

and holds accountable parents in the raising of children in their home. Parents should be evangelizing their children, teaching them all that Jesus commanded, and bringing them along in living out the Great Commission in their neighborhood, school, and friend groups. These kinds of families will be mighty discipleship bodies. Fulfilling the Great Commission in the home requires the church and the pastors in the church to train parents and children to such a calling; a calling that goes back to the Torah.

### **Conclusion**

The church and family are both responsible to see children brought up being taught all the things God has commanded. Parents are directly responsible to be teaching their children in the home (Duet 6:4-9; Matt 28:16-20). The church is responsible for training, equipping, partnering in the teaching of children, and holding parents accountable to this task (Duet 6:4-9; Matt 28:16-20; 2 Tim 3:10-17). The Bible must be central to this process.

If the Bible is to be central to this process, then biblically literate pastors must train parents to be biblically literate as well. Together, biblically literate pastor and parents must train up the next generation to know the Bible and in turn love and serve the True God they meet in its pages. In doing so, parents will truly help their children discover what is best. The question is, how can the parent and the church teach children most effectively.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO GROWING STUDENTS IN BIBLICAL LITERACY

Chapter 2 highlighted the biblical and theological foundation for teaching middle school students to be biblically literate. To go about this biblically, students and youth pastors cannot rely solely on what they learn in the hour or two at youth group each week. As alluded to in chapter 2, students need more than youth group—they need the church, parents, and adult leaders to partner together. The church and the home must be on the same page. This chapter will consider, on the practical level, how youth group can best educate a student, how parents can be equipped and partnered with, and how adult leaders can play a lifechanging role in the process of moving middle school students toward biblical literacy. Prior to the practical considerations, it is important to look at the basics of an average middle school student’s cognitive abilities and best teaching practices. To begin, it is important to understand why it is worth the youth pastor’s time to focus on biblical literacy in middle schoolers.

#### **Middle School Students and Biblical Literacy**

Many of the problems in the local church today can be traced to biblical illiteracy. Many doctrinal divisions and petty arguments continue because too many Christians are ignorant of what the Bible actually says. Unfortunately, the illiteracy problem seems to be getting worse. Barry Shafer notes, “The church today, including both the adult and the teenage generations, is in an era of rampant biblical illiteracy.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the negative trends, the ship can still be righted.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Shafer, *Unleashing God’s Word in Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 14.

As the next section will show, middle school aged students are, developmentally, at the best age to focus in on biblical literacy. In doing so, with the proper resources and promptings, the lessons being taught to middle school students can also impact their parents. This not only sends the next generation on as biblically literate Christ followers, but it also begins to address illiteracy in older generations.

A youth pastor can move students toward biblical literacy in numerous ways. Paramount is the need to keep students rooted in the Bible while teaching them how to know and use the Bible. Getting students in the Word, using a structure where there is a lesson, then a small group, and then a home study, capitalizes on key relational and learning dynamics while providing a context for students to study, process, and ask questions about the Bible.<sup>2</sup> If students leave middle school with basic exegetical concepts under their belt, then they can hone these skills during high school and deepen their understanding of God's Word in the process.

This project puts forth is a method in which students are taught key concepts about the different literarily genres of Scripture while simultaneously walking through a book of that genre.<sup>3</sup> Students learn a concept and see/hear it implemented in the teaching of the epistle. They then go into small groups and implement and discuss what they learn. The following week helps students put these skills into practice in both self-study time and in a family worship context. Not only does this provide repetition, but it also has students immediately applying concepts they have learned. These principles take root in a short eight-week lesson series.

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2020), 295.

<sup>3</sup> The project teaches students how to read, study, and apply an epistle while teaching through Paul's letter to Titus.

A practical win is a student is in middle school youth group for six semesters.<sup>4</sup> While one can get into elemental differences, which are helpful at higher levels of study, for the purposes of middle school biblical literacy, there are six genres of Scripture. Jon Nielson helpfully breaks Scripture into six genres: narrative, prophecy, wisdom/poetry, apocalyptic, gospel, and epistle.<sup>5</sup> If the youth pastor teaches on one genre each semester, then all six will be covered by the time students leave middle school youth group. Additionally, each genre can be taught in a short enough time frame to allow for other series to be taught during the school year. The high school youth pastor can take these exegetical principles and incorporate them into his teaching to further ingrain them in the students heads and help them in their personal Bible study.

If students are taught to properly read, study, and apply their Bible, then the next generation can begin to reverse the plague of biblical literacy. Biblically literate students will always have Scripture to guide them and help them process life's hardest questions. They may not always feel they have a pastor to help. To send students off to high school unable to open their Bibles and find answers is a miss on the part of the Bible teacher. Teaching students to be biblically literate requires much more than just a transfer of information; the youth pastor needs to understand how to teach middle schoolers and how to help the adults in their lives disciple them and further their growth in biblical literacy.

### **Middle Schoolers and Teaching**

No one raises to a low bar. Spoon feeding the right answers only provides correct answers to specific questions. What if, instead, youth pastors taught with their

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<sup>4</sup> This is assuming middle school is 6th through 8th grade and youth group functions on a school year basis.

<sup>5</sup> Jon Nielson, *Bible Study: A Student's Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 18.

students' futures in mind? Karen Estep, in laying out the constructivist theory,<sup>6</sup> points out that “the individual should be able to build beyond what they have learned, constructing their own understanding and theologically-informed perspective on life, work, and family.”<sup>7</sup> Youth pastors need to teach students the Bible in a way that does just that—equips students to think theologically on their own and find answers to their questions using their Bibles. To do this effectively, it is vital to have some understanding of a middle schooler's mental capacities.

Middle school students, or early adolescents, are beginning to think abstractly. Their brains are developing during this time of life which allows them to move beyond the foundational thinking of an elementary-aged child and begin to process the hypothetical as well as the real.<sup>8</sup> The idea that middle schoolers still only need basics, taught only in concrete ways, cripples their spiritual growth. That said, middle schoolers are in an age of change, and they are not yet adults. There must be balance of concrete and abstract teaching.<sup>9</sup>

Concrete teaching should be done in a way that challenges young teens to process the implications of what they have heard. Abstract teaching should be done in a way that the teacher can provide a concrete explanation of the abstract topic/focus. In doing so, students are learning to process abstract teaching and apply it to their own life. The youth pastor needs to come prepared to teach and serve as a tour guide through the personal processing and application of the Word.

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Estep, “Following Topographical Details: Learning Theory and Curriculum,” in , James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 107-111.

<sup>7</sup> Estep, “Following Topographical Details,” 111.

<sup>8</sup> Allan Wigfield, Susan L. Lutz, and A. Laurel Wagner, “Early Adolescents' Development Across the Middle School Years: Implications for School Counselors,” *Professional School Counseling* 9, no. 2 (December 2005): 113.

<sup>9</sup> Tracy Huebner, “What Research Says about Balancing the Concrete and the Abstract,” *Educational Leadership* 66, no. 3 (November 2008): 86.



Teaching should also account for the reality that middle school students are in a phase of life where they are incredibly moldable. Mark Oestreicher and Scott Rubin point out that early adolescents parallel the earliest years of life in which they are constantly observing and learning. However, unlike the toddler versions of themselves, early adolescents are now questioning nearly everything and beginning to make their own conclusions.<sup>10</sup> Not only should the youth pastor expect and welcome challenges and questions, but he should also teach in a way that helps students find the answers. By teaching students how to read, study, and apply the Bible as the youth pastor teaches through the Bible, pastors equip students to find the answers to their questions and sets them up to think theologically for themselves for the rest of their lives.

The lessons themselves should be engaging and relatively short. The attention span of early adolescents is roughly fifteen to twenty minutes.<sup>11</sup> Inside this short window, information is best retained in the first ten minutes. Retention quickly and steadily declines after that.<sup>12</sup> Illustrations or visuals should be varied and concretely connect to the main point(s) of the lesson. One could also consider using a video one week, an object lesson another week, a personal story another week, and so on.

Finally, by looking at all the components of the lesson time (lesson, discussion, follow-up study) there should be elements of repetition around key points and concepts. Neuroscientist Frances E. Jensen says that “‘frequency’ and ‘recency’ are the key words here—the more frequently and the more recently we learn something and then recall it or use it again, the more entrenched the knowledge.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Oestreicher and Scott Rubin, *Middle School Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide to Working with Early Adolescents* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 33-38.

<sup>11</sup> Alvin W. Howard, *Teaching in Middle Schools* (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Company, 1968), 71.

<sup>12</sup> Richards and Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching*, 247.

<sup>13</sup> Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Youth Adults* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 73.

Just as important as the considerations mentioned is the environment the youth pastor creates. Jackie Magnuson refers to this as *climate*, there is a physical and emotional environment all teachers need to be aware of. Physically, is the space welcoming to middle schoolers? Emotionally, is this a place they feel safe?<sup>14</sup> Not in a modern, liberal idea of “safe space,” but instead, can they ask questions and those questions be welcomed? Can they be their unique pubescent self in this space?

Beyond the space and culture of the group, the youth pastor should consider teaching in a way that motivates his students and helps them learn. There are many ways to motivate students, but two notable motivators that every youth pastor can focus on are the relationship students have with the youth pastor and helping students see the information being taught to them is relevant.

The youth pastor needs to intentionally invest in their relationships with students. This begins by using their names (not “hey bud”). It continues by following up with things they share, asking them about their lives, showing up to events, and being consistently present and accessible to them. If students know the youth pastor cares, then they are more likely to listen to what he has to say.

Stopping at building relationships is not enough. The youth pastor needs to also teach in ways that help students actually learn. While this section is addressing this very thing, there is one more key element to consider—helping students see that what they are learning matters. Show them the big story; teach them how their story is part of God’s meta-narrative. One should help them see that life is bigger than the moment, teaching them to see life through the lens of eternity. They should be taught the reason and purpose for which they were created<sup>15</sup> and suddenly that Bible becomes extremely relevant, even to a middle school student.

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<sup>14</sup> Jackie Magnuson, “Brain-Based Education from Theory to Practice,” *Middle School Family and Consumer Sciences* 94, no. 1 (January 2002): 45.

<sup>15</sup> Consider Isa 47:1-7; Matt 5:16; 1 Cor 10:31.

When students see the Bible as relevant and authoritative, it becomes easier for them to soak in the Word of God. As the youth pastor prepares to teach, he should keep in mind that students learn more easily when they can draw a connection to from what they are learning to what they already know.<sup>16</sup> Youth pastors can use stories and object lessons to help students engage with what they already know. Then, as the new information is being taught, the youth pastor can help make that connection.

By using both concrete and abstract methods when teaching middle schoolers, the teacher hits the student's developmental sweet spot. Coming prepared, and with the expectation of being challenged, the teacher capitalizes on the ornery nature of this developmental phase. Understanding a student's attention span and ways students retain information allows the teacher to maximize impact while teaching students the Bible. Setting up the room and considering the environment the students are entering sets everyone up for success. However, no matter how great of a teacher the youth pastor is, he cannot teach and disciple students alone. Practically speaking, the youth pastor needs to utilize other adults in the church and partner with parents.

### **Dual Purpose Small Groups**

Students need adults, other than their parents, who care about them. Adults willing to invest in and disciple middle school students have an incredible amount influence in students' lives. By recruiting adult small group leaders who are willing to invest in the lives of middle school students, the youth pastor creates an environment for discipleship relationships to blossom. With the proper questions to guide discussion, small groups become a place of processing and recalling (repetition) what students have just been taught.

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<sup>16</sup> Susan A. Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 18.

Addressing the importance of Christian peer relationships in a teenager's life, Kenda Creasy Dean, referring to the results of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), notes, "Equally important are adults who befriend teenagers."<sup>17</sup> A youth small group presents an ideal context for adults in the church to "befriend" teenagers. The challenge becomes training adults how to befriend middle school students and how to lead a small group of them.

Youth leaders need to have the expectation that their role extends beyond the weekly youth group gathering. A leader who checks in on a regular basis and occasionally gets together with his students outside of church will have a deeper impact in a shorter amount of time than the adult who only engages during the structured youth group time. The youth pastor needs to cast this vision and recruit leaders, asking them to take on a role bigger than asking a few questions on a Wednesday night. The youth pastor also needs to layout a few practical ways and events for leaders to reach out and invite students into activities.

Students need more than an adult friend. Providing the resource for adults to befriend students is great, but insufficient on its own. The youth pastor must also be intentional in the development of small group questions and in the training of small group leaders who will implement the questions.

Small group questions should be written in a way that help students apply the lesson to their lives. As noted, this is best done by intermixing concrete questions with more abstract ones. Helping students think through the message and its specific application to their lives, with the help of their adult leader, not only further engrains the main points in their brains, but equips students to think about and apply lessons and sermons for the rest of their lives.

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<sup>17</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73.

A simple way to put this into practice is to begin with an ice breaker question that gets student thinking about their lives in a related area to what the lesson discussed. For example, in talking about epistles, students could talk about how they feel when they get notes/cards in the mail. Students are then primed to discuss and understand the basic tenants of an epistle. From here, a few questions could be asked that help students reiterate the key points of the lesson. With this concrete and repetitive reminder, students can then begin to process these points, more abstractly, as they apply it to their lives. These application questions should build on the concrete points while opening the door for students to draw lines from the concrete to the hypothetical contexts that await in the week ahead. Using questions that have students recall what they were just taught and then apply this information to their lives, with the help of an adult small group leader, sets up the adult youth leader for success. A leader who can help students process and apply information will quickly endear themselves to middle school students (even if that endearment is shown by students pranking their leader).

Youth leaders will grow in their ability to lead a small group as they gain the experience of leading a small group. However, the youth pastor should provide the youth leaders with a realistic expectation of what to expect in a middle school small group. The short attention spans, random interruptions, and deer in the headlights look should not be taken personally nor should leaders feel they are wasting their time. Along with giving leaders lesson overviews and small group questions prior to the gathering, youth pastors should also provide a few “crowd control” suggestions for leaders to utilize as needed.

Beyond small group time, leaders should be encouraged and resourced to connect with their students outside the walls of the church. Leaders should participate in retreats. Retreats are relational and discipleship catalysts. Beyond retreats, the church should have an account to reimburse leaders for ice cream, coffee, or pizza they get with their students, if budget allows for it. Leaders should be provided with ideas of things to

do with their students, like movie nights, campfires, hikes, cookouts, etc., all to build relationships, which provide the context for deep discipleship.

Students need adults in their lives. This happens when adults are recruited, equipped, and step in to lead youth group small groups. Training leaders how to facilitate discussions using questions written on the lesson, how to connect with middle school students in and outside of the church walls, and encouraging them along the way will have an incredible impact on the spiritual health of the students and the youth group. However, the youth pastor and other adult leaders do not have the same level of influence as parents.

### **Partnering with Parents**

Parents hold significant influence in the lives of their children. Even teenagers who find parents annoying are heavily influenced by their own parents. Christian Smith and Melinda Denton note, “The most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Richard Ross, commenting on the NSYR, notes, “For the most part, teenagers do not reject the faith of parents and important adults . . . instead, they almost perfectly mirror that faith.”<sup>19</sup> Youth pastors need to capitalize on this reality if they want students to be fully and biblically discipled. Not only do youth pastors need to partner with parents, but they also need to equip them to disciple their teen.

Timothy Paul Jones bluntly points out that “churches have presented moms and dads with the impression that active participation in the discipleship of children is optional for parents.”<sup>20</sup> Many youth ministries are primary guilt holders in this regard. However,

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<sup>18</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Ross, *The Senior Pastor and the Reformation of Youth Ministry* (Nashville: CrossBooks, 2015), 16.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to*

just because that is how it has been does not mean that is how it should be moving forward. This presents the youth pastor with two primary tasks: get fellow staff on board for parent discipleship and equip parents for the task at hand.

Youth pastors need to get other church ministries on board if they are to see parents called and held accountable for the discipleship of their children. This begins by intentionally using language that focuses on the family and the parents. It is asking questions of how different ministries are preparing adults to disciple their children. It is also taking advantage of opportunities to talk about family equipping ministry with other staff. Church ministries often lose sight of the bigger discipleship picture for their specific ministry focus. All pastors need to be regularly reminded that the work God has called them to is to equip the saints. Jones writes, “The role of God-called leaders in the church is to encourage, acknowledge, and equip fellow members of the church (Eph 4:11-13) to serve as ministers and missionaries first within their own households, and then far beyond their households (Acts 2:39).”<sup>21</sup> Church staff must not only teach and equip the saints to make disciples, but they must also model this by making disciples themselves. These words taken seriously can change the vision and culture of a church.

At the same time the youth pastor is working on the staff, he needs to be training and equipping parents to disciple their children. Training parents does not have to be an overwhelming endeavor. Most youth pastors are not in places to offer full blown parental counseling, but they are in a position where they should be calling and gently reminding parents to disciple their children. This can be done by considering spaces the youth pastor already overlaps with parents (church, before/after youth group, etc.). Any of these places can be areas the youth pastor calls and equips parents to disciple their children. Parents being trained by the youth pastor, other staff, or even guest speakers during occasional

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*Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2011), 83.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 178.

youth gatherings is an easy win. If that is not possible, then carve out one night per semester for parents to be invested in.

This training should be multifaceted. Train parents to hold family worship. Consider resourcing them with Donald Whitney's work *Family Worship*.<sup>22</sup> Spend time helping parents understand the pre and pubescent phases they are (or are about to) walking through with their children.<sup>23</sup> Finally, help parents know and understand what their students will be learning in youth group. If there will be "at home resources," make sure parents know where to find them and how to use these resources.

The most important way the youth pastor can train and equip parents to disciple their children is to focus on the health of the parents' faith. Gary Parratt and Steve Kang argue that "one of the greatest ways to help parents be better parents is simply to help them grow in their own faith and walk,"<sup>24</sup> which requires partnership with other ministries. Parents who know what they should do but who are spiritually dying will not effectively disciple their teen. A youth pastor should consider sharing what he is reading in God's Word and what he is learning from his lesson series. The youth pastor should ask them what they are learning in their quiet times as a way to gently urge them on in their own soul care, in addition to how their faith walk is in the tumultuous season of parenting teens.

While the works cited above help to train and equip parents, the youth pastor still needs to intentionally partner with parents. An easy place to begin this partnership is to provide parents with a follow up question to engage their student after youth group each week. This not only equips the parent, but it also offsets the habitual "did you have

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<sup>22</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> James Dobson, *Preparing for Adolescents: How to Survive the Coming Years of Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). This is still one of the most helpful resources in beginning to understand early adolescents.

<sup>24</sup> Gary A. Parratt and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 164.



fun?” response. While youth group should be fun, that should not be the primary evaluation of the evening. Many youth pastors practice checking in with their student and leaders throughout the week, but could add parents to the list of those being checked on. With no agenda, the pastor could ask how they are doing and how he can pray for them. Plan a full school year out so parents know when events are and how much they will cost. The pastor should also be available and present where parents are. During drop off and pick up, he could try to be outside getting face time. Linger before and after church services. When parents and students are struggling, the youth pastor could make time to sit down and meet with them, and then follow up. These suggestions begin to scratch the surfaces of the potential ways to connect and partner with parents in the discipleship of their middle school student. Ultimately, this partnership with parents requires the greater local church staff.

### **Partnering with the Local Church**

The hard reality for a youth pastor doing all that has been discussed is that if parents are not being discipled, then they will most likely not disciple their children in the home. If discipleship in the home is not taking place, then much of the work to partner with, train, and equip parents is essentially a waste of time. For parents, and even adult leaders, to be discipled, the youth pastor needs the church and other pastors in the church to disciple the adults. Ross points out that, unlike the youth pastor, the senior pastor is positioned to have the leverage, clout, and capacity to disciple adults who in turn make disciples of younger Christians.<sup>25</sup> Depending on the size of the church, other pastors and ministry leaders may be positioned to disciple adults as well. The youth pastor must push for the discipleship of adults with everyone who sits in a position to disciple them.

Many youth ministries are all but disconnected from the rest of the church. The youth pastor can change this as he seeks to partner with other pastors and church leaders

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<sup>25</sup> Ross, *The Senior Pastor*, 3.

with a shared vision to see all believers be discipled and make disciples. It is a long road but one worth traveling; people's souls are on the line.

### **Partnering with the Senior Pastor**

Ross notes the paramount importance of the senior pastor's role in youth ministry: "Senior Pastors are uniquely positioned in the church to champion a biblical, disciple-making revolution in youth ministry that even skilled and well-educated youth ministers are unable to make."<sup>26</sup> The senior pastor's role is not a direct, hands on, influence of the youth ministry itself. It is vision casting the importance and expectation of Christians discipling one another and it is teaching the congregation how to go about this. Practically speaking, the discipleship culture is cultivated through the language, teaching, and example of the church's leadership. The youth pastor likely does not have a voice to change adults' spiritual practices, nor regular time in the pulpit or a position of leadership to change the language and direction of the church. The senior pastor does. However, the youth pastor should have sufficient access to the senior pastor in which he can share the need for partnership in these areas.

It is important to remember that the senior pastor is in charge. The youth pastor brings this information and request for partnership as a second or third in command. The youth pastor must be humble, unassuming, and confident that this endeavor is worthwhile. Moving adults in the church into a discipleship mindset is too important to come across as arrogant or accusatory. This will only shut the door moving forward. Conversations should begin with the youth pastor's vision for youth ministry and ways they are moving it forward. From there, the youth pastor can cast the vision of seeing adults discipled to make disciples, starting in their homes. Let conversation flow and work together to come up with the most helpful language and next steps. Collaboration will breed buy in; the youth pastor must get the senior pastor on board. When this happens, the church will be

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<sup>26</sup> Ross, *The Senior Pastor*, 1.

changed for the glory of God, the good of its congregation, and the community around the church will see the love of Jesus because the church will invest in one another and in their community, as the church should.

### **Partnering with Other Ministries**

If the size of the church allows for multiple staff focusing on various ministry areas, then one should consider these fellow ministers to be partners. New Hope Church is blessed to have a women's ministry director, a men's ministry pastor, and a pastor of life groups (small groups). All three of these roles focus on the spiritual growth of adults in the church. The youth pastor needs to engage and partner with these ministry leaders for the sake of the youth in the church. These ministry leaders need to be teammates instead of siloed individuals. Parrett and Kang convincingly point out, "Wise leaders in the teaching ministry of the church will see themselves as integrative partners rather than isolated specialists."<sup>27</sup>

Adults participating in life groups and attending men's and women's ministries know and respect the staff leading these respective ministries. Similar to getting the senior pastor on board with discipleship language and vision for ministry, the youth pastor can influence these ministry leaders to do the same. These adult ministry leaders are writing and teaching content to the adults in the church and should be utilized in their platform to change the church and the home.

Christians should be making disciples (Matt 28:18-20). Adults with children in the home should be doing this in their homes. Ministry leaders working with parents should teach these adults this command and equipping them to go home and disciple their children. In these efforts, it makes sense for adult ministry leaders to work with the youth pastor and children's ministry lead to most accurately equip parents to this task and to promote partnership between parenting and the ministries of the local church.

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<sup>27</sup> Parratt and Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful*, 171.

The beauty of what the youth pastor is asking his fellow staff to do is that there are no major changes needed. It is not a request to launch a new ministry but instead to rethink current ministry efforts to better equip participants to make disciples. Jones writes, “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.”<sup>28</sup> A simple shift in language and expectations in adult ministry settings can have a huge impact on the church and on the home.

For the youth pastor, these changes most likely need to start in youth ministry. Let fellow staff see the impact of biblical discipleship and teaching so that there is clout to the asks. The youth pastor should teach the Bible unapologetically and faithfully and train adult leaders to disciple students. He should teach, train, and show students how to disciple others and urge them to go and make disciples. As these small changes happen, parents and staff will notice and shifting toward an all church equipping and discipleship strategy can begin to take shape.

### **Conclusion**

Many students grow up in church and are never taught how to read and study the Bible. As a result, biblical literacy is a plague in the Western church. Proper teaching of middle school students along with the formation of discipleship relationships between adults and middle school students can drastically change this. It is important, in teaching, to consider the environment students are being taught, students’ attention spans, the need to vary teaching styles, adults in students’ lives, the messages from the broader church body and staff, and what the teacher’s life is modeling to the students.

A thoughtful and invested youth pastor can teach students the basic exegetical principles of each genre of Scripture over the students’ three years in middle school and then reinforce these principles as he teaches students over their four years in high school.

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<sup>28</sup> Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 132.

A youth pastor who does this and involves adult leaders and partners with parents can drastically impact a church's biblical literacy. This change will see a more unified church, living on mission, and making disciples who make disciples, which will begin in the home.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

The idea for this project developed over the last eight years of ministering and teaching middle school students. Middle schoolers are not too young to be spiritually challenged and given theological meat (Heb 5:12-14). Middle school students are not too young, but they are often biblically starved. Building a curriculum that teaches them how to read, study, and apply different genres of Scripture not only spiritually feeds a middle schooler, but it also equips them to eat solid spiritual food the rest of their lives.

A second motivation for this effort came from the disconnect between students and parents in regard to spiritual conversations. This curriculum was developed with an intentional *at home* component. While this component was done at home, it was intentionally never referred to as homework. This manageable *at home* work required students to study Titus on their own while also providing questions for study and interaction as families.<sup>1</sup> This family time was promoted through weekly email and text reminders to students' parents.

The third component of this curriculum is the result of our youth ministry methodology. Our church values small groups and, as such, the youth ministry utilizes a small group structure as part of our gathering, education, and discipleship process. Desiring students to use and apply what they were just taught, a specific small group curriculum component was created alongside the lessons.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 6.

## Preparation

The content of this curriculum was researched and written over a six-week period beginning the week of September 28, 2020, and concluding the week of November 2, 2020. A panel of experts began reviewing each lesson as it was written.<sup>2</sup> Suggestions from the panel of experts were considered and revisions were made. The lessons,<sup>3</sup> small group discussion questions,<sup>4</sup> and the at home booklet<sup>5</sup> were completed on December 17, 2020.

Prior to implementing the curriculum, which began on Wednesday January 13, 2021, parents were resourced and informed about the Spring 2021 series. Parents were resourced via a “parent covid care package” courtesy of New Hope Church Student Ministries. This package included, among other fun things, a copy of Donald S. Whitney’s *Family Worship* and a note encouraging them to read and implement Whitney’s advice, taking advantage of the forced time at home. Parents and their students were also asked to complete the pre-curriculum survey.<sup>6</sup> The request to participate in this electronic survey was sent out on Tuesday, December 15, 22, and 29, 2020, and January 5, 2021, via email to all New Hope Church families with a middle school student.

Two final elements of preparation happened on the first week of January 2021. First, I created group text message threads for each small group. These threads included parents and the adult small group leaders. Student were not included in these threads. I then pinned these threads so they were on the top of my text message inbox. On January

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 3 for curriculum assessment rubric.

<sup>3</sup> See appendix 4 contain the lesson manuscripts.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 5 for small group discussion questions/leaders guide.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix 6 for at home booklet.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1 for the survey and appendix 2 for the survey results.

5, 2021, I sent text messages to each of these threads introducing myself and the reason for the group text thread.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, on January 6, 2021, leaders gathered for the regular Spring leaders meeting. In this meeting, leaders walked through the curriculum and the vision was cast for the importance of their role and implementation of the small group curriculum.

### **Expert Panel**

The expert panel who evaluated the curriculum was made up of three seasoned teachers/ministry leaders. One expert, who currently serves as the senior pastor of New Hope Church, earned his Doctor of Ministry from Dallas Theological Seminary, and has served as a senior pastor for the past twenty-six years. A second expert, a pastor who earned his MDiv at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, served as a youth pastor for six years, and currently serves as the Reach Students Director where he oversees youth ministry, nationwide, for the Evangelical Free Church of America. The third expert serves as the Director of Women’s Ministry at New Hope Church. She earned her MA in Christian Studies from Providence Theological Seminary. Her insights not only provided a female perspective but were also incredibly sound theologically.

Due to the nature of the project, the panel individually reviewed each lesson,<sup>8</sup> along with its accompanying small group content and at home booklet material. Any changes that needed to be made were done so immediately and sent back for approval. Each lesson and its accompanying material were reviewed, edited, and approved prior to the implementation of the curriculum. Nearly all feedback was marked as sufficient or

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<sup>7</sup> Each text was made specific to that age and gender. It read, “Hey Parents, this is Pastor Jon, you’re getting this because you are a parent of a boy in a 8th grade small group. As this year begins, I want to attempt to connect more consistently/ easily . . . this is my personal number, feel free to reach out separately or connect through this thread with me and other parents of 8th grade boys.”

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 3 for the assessment rubric.



exemplary. The only feedback marked less than sufficient was due to a typing error and was addressed immediately. The lesson was approved the same day by the panel.

### **Small Group Leader Training and Expectations**

Small group leaders meet for leader training the Wednesday before small groups begin. Leaders and staff have a meal together and then walk through the semester content, the expectations of leaders, and the events of the upcoming semester. The only connection of this specific leader's meeting and this curriculum is that this curriculum was the content of the Spring 2021 semester. What follows reflects the regular expectations of volunteer leaders.

Leaders are asked to review the lesson summary and discussion questions prior to arriving at youth group. During youth group gatherings, leaders are also asked to participate in ice breaker games, serve as greeters, help connect new students to regular attenders, and facilitate discussion during the small group times. Leaders are also expected to connect with their students, at least once, throughout the week.<sup>9</sup> The leader training focused on each of these specific areas. Time was spent giving an overview of the lessons and the ultimate aims of the teaching series. A portion of the meeting was given to advice and role play in regard to leading small group discussion. A short amount of time covered expectations and policies and the meeting concluded with leaders praying for students, by name, in their regular small group meeting spaces.

### **Student and Family Spiritual Practice Survey**

The Student and Family Spiritual Practice Survey was developed to gauge the parent/student spiritual interactions outside the walls of the church as well as gauge students' understanding of the Epistles. The survey was developed and tested as part of

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<sup>9</sup> This point of connection can be via text message, snail mail, in-person, email, or social media (Instagram or Facebook only). The goal is to be discipling students beyond the walls of the church.

Danny Bowen's *Applied Empirical Research 80950A* seminar in January of 2020. Ultimately, the survey was created as a Google Form and sent to families electronically.

### **Implementation**

The curriculum was originally written and designed to be taught over the course of eight consecutive weeks. Due to Covid-19 restrictions and ministry changes that resulted from the government's response to the virus, the curriculum ended up spanning the majority of the Spring semester. The first lesson was taught on January 13, 2020, and the final lesson was taught on March 24, 2020. Each lesson, taught on Wednesday evenings, was the launching point for the accompanying material. What follows is based on a week that begins on Wednesday and ends on Tuesday.

#### **Week 1**

**Lesson.** The curriculum began with the lesson "What Is your Bible? The Basics."<sup>10</sup> The lesson was taught over a twenty-minute period and covered reasons it is important to know the Bible, why students can trust the Bible, the meta-narrative of the Bible, and the basic components of the Bible. Students were given their "at home booklets" and shown the different elements of the booklet. In part of this lesson students were told that the Bible is alive and active. In an effort to help them experience this, students were challenged to read the Gospel according to John over the course of the first week.

**Small group.** Lesson 1 was followed immediately by small group discussion time. Small groups are based on grade and gender. Each small group has two adult volunteer leaders. Leaders are given "Small Group Leader Guides" which provide a brief overview of the content, a discussion ice breaker, pointed discussion questions, and a

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<sup>10</sup> All lesson manuscripts can be found in appendix 4. Each week where there is a lesson referenced, that lesson is found in appendix 4.

closing prompt of some kind.<sup>11</sup> Each small group time lasts for thirty-five to forty-five minutes.

The first discussion time brought students to a place of evaluating how much they know about the Bible and whether they truly trust and follow it. Small group discussion ended with a time of helping students set a specific time, each day, that they would do their John reading.

**Parent communication.** An email was sent to parents thirty minutes prior to the end of youth group. The weekly email provided a short summary sentence of that evening’s lesson and discussion.<sup>12</sup> It also, occasionally, provided a question or two for parents to engage their students with on the way home from youth group. This first week, in the place of questions, the email asked parents to encourage their child to read John and even consider reading with their middle schooler.

On the Monday following each Wednesday, a text message check in/reminder was sent to parents.<sup>13</sup> I created group text message threads for each small group. These threads included parents and the small group leaders. I kept these threads on my phone as a way to interact with parents as well as quickly send a copy and pasted reminder each week. The text message for this Monday asked how their students were doing with their John reading and if parents had chosen to join in the reading.

The majority of interaction, both via email and text message, came as a “thank you” reply from parents. A couple notable remarks will be discussed in the weeks below.

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<sup>11</sup> All small group leader guides are in appendix 5. Each week were there is a small group discussion referenced, that guide is found in appendix 5.

<sup>12</sup> The emails sent to parents, each week, can be found in appendix 7.

<sup>13</sup> The text message content, sent to parents each week, can be found in appendix 7 following the corresponding Wednesday email. For example, lesson 1 was taught on Wednesday, January 13, 2021. It was followed up with an email to parents on the same day. A text message was then sent on Monday, January 17, 2021.

**At home booklet.** The first week of at *home study* was a seven-day breakdown of the Gospel according to John. Students were taught about the importance of knowing God through His Word and that the Bible is living and active. Reading through John was set up to help them experience meeting with God through His Word.

## **Week 2**

**Lesson/small group.** This week youth group was a middle school and senior high combined “connect night.” These nights are built into the schedule to help foster community through fun and shared experiences. This evening was our annual cardboard sled derby. Each small group builds a sled out of nothing but cardboard and duct tape to race down the sledding hill the following Sunday. Due to the unusual structure of the semester, families were instructed to read through 1 Timothy in “off weeks,” applying the principles they are learning about epistles.

**Parent communication.** This week’s Wednesday parent email included a reminder about Sunday’s sled derby and directions to read 1 Timothy and identify the contextual elements. The following Monday a text message was sent to each parent text thread asking about the 1 Timothy reading and whether there were any issues answering the contextual questions.

**At home booklet.** This week, with a small note at the end of their week 1 study, students were instructed to read 1 Timothy with their parents. This was not originally part of the plan but ministry shifts, due to Covid-19, forced too many “off” weeks. In an attempt to keep the information fresh, students were encouraged to be in the Word weekly with their parents/family.

## **Week 3**

**Lesson.** Lesson 2 was taught on week 3. The second lesson covered the basics of an epistle. Students were instructed to hand write a letter to a loved one and their letter

was the object lesson for explaining the basic hermeneutical elements of an epistle.

**Small group.** The second small group took the information learned about epistles and put them into practice. Students began by reminding one another about the specific hermeneutical elements of an epistle. Then, as a small group, students practiced these skills by reading through the book of Jude.

**Parent communication.** The Wednesday email communicated a brief overview of the lesson on reading an epistle, provided a follow-up question for parents to ask their middle schooler, and a reminder about the at home booklet work for that week. The Monday text message asked about their time reading Titus together and an encouragement that I was praying for their time of family worship that evening.

**At home booklet.** This week students taught their parents about how to find the context of an epistle. They then read and looked for the context of Titus. The following night students used a study Bible to check their answers. Monday introduced them to a time of family worship. Tuesday wrapped up their study with a time of reflecting back on what they learned over the week.

#### **Week 4**

**Lesson.** Lesson 3 of the curriculum finally began the study of Titus; specifically, the salutation of Titus 1:1-4. The main point of the lesson from a “studying an epistle” standpoint was the amount of context one learns from the salutation. It is paramount that these verses are not just skimmed past but read and used to understand what comes next. Spiritually, these four verses remind of the eternal hope in Jesus, the impact of solid biblical preaching, and the importance of discipleship.

**Small group.** Small group discussion sought to help students take what they were just taught and apply it to their own lives. While the majority of the questions focused on the context learned in the salutation, the majority of the time in conversation revolved

around students' salvific knowledge of Jesus Christ (or lack of knowledge). Leaders were encouraged to share the gospel with any questioning student while also encouraging believing students to consider who they could proclaim the gospel to that upcoming week.

**Parent communication.** The parent email, sent out Wednesday evening right before the end of youth group, gave a quick synopsis of the salutation to Titus and a reminder that Monday they would be studying it as a family. I also included a note encouraging parents to reach out if they had any questions. Monday's text message asked how family worship was going in their home and if they had any questions about the salutation to Titus.

A parent of a sixth-grade boy, via text message, thanked me for the email and text updates/reminders. They went on to encourage other parents to put forth the effort to establish a regular rhythm of family worship. This was a wonderful, unplanned affirmation of what the curriculum was asking parents to do.

**At home booklet.** This week students were encouraged to gather their families together on Thursday evening to teach them about the first four verses of Titus. On Friday they were introduced to a Bible study method that helped them engage in a self-study and application of Titus 1:1-4. For family worship on Monday, families read Titus 1:1-4 and Matthew 28:16-20 and discussed how these passages were related and what they are called to do as Christians. They were then prompted to brainstorm and pray for opportunities to tell others about Jesus. Thursday rounded out their week with a review of what they learned the week prior.

## **Week 5**

**Lesson/small group.** This week the entire youth group (sixth–twelfth grade)

gathered for a worship night.<sup>14</sup> During this time I taught from Colossian 1:15-23<sup>15</sup> and urged students to set their eyes on Jesus by viewing life through the lens of Scripture. This short sermon was preceded and proceeded by times of worshiping through song.

**Parent communication.** Parents were emailed prior to the end of the worship gathering and encouraged to ask their students what they learned about Truth. Because this was another off week, parents were instructed to read 1 Timothy 2 and utilize the Bible study method their child used the previous Friday. Monday's text message was a reminder to read and discuss 1 Timothy 2 with their student if they had not yet done so.

**At home booklet.** Student were reminded that in off week(s) they were to be reading and discussing 1 Timothy with their parents. There was a misprint in the at home booklet that told student they would be studying 1 Timothy 3–4 when in reality they would be in 1 Timothy 2–3. This was communicated to parents via email.

## **Week 6**

**Lesson/small group.** This week was the second connect night of the semester. Students and their families were invited to a local sledding hill during the time of normal youth and children's programming. This time was set aside to create bonds between families in the church as well as students and their adult volunteer leaders.

**Parent communication.** An email was still sent to parents despite a second week in a row of not meeting for regular youth group. This email was a reminder to move on to 1 Timothy 3. Parents were encouraged to use the “what does it say, what does it mean, and how does it apply to us today” approach. Monday's text message changed up

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<sup>14</sup> The youth ministry team created worship nights to provide a space for student to gather to hear the preaching of the Word and engage in musical worship in our church sanctuary. This was motivated by the Covid-19 restrictions in Minnesota that kept us from engaging in musical worship in our youth space.

<sup>15</sup> The high school ministry was walking through the book of Colossians during this time. Additionally, the lesson from Col 1:15-23 complemented the upcoming lesson in Titus 1:5-16.

the normal reminder with a simple encouragement that their job as a parent mattered and that they were being prayed for.

**At home booklet.** In as in the previous week, students were reminded to read and discuss 1 Timothy 3 with their parents.<sup>16</sup>

## **Week 7**

**Lesson.** Finally returning to “normal youth group,” the lesson focused back into Titus, specifically Titus 1:5-16. The hermeneutic principle taught the difference between prescriptive and descriptive literature. The point was made that Christians need to understand the differences because it impacts how believers read and apply different types of literature. Spiritually, this lesson drove home the paramount need for Christians to boldly cling to the truth.

**Small group discussion.** Small group discussion was designed to help students see the stark contrast between “above reproach” and “reproachable” living. With this distinction students moved into application of what their life/actions teach those around them.

**Parent communication.** Since truth and character matter, the Wednesday email, sent thirty minutes prior to the end of youth group, encouraged parents to prioritize family worship and study in Titus 1:5-16. The Monday text message asked parents to consider what roadblocks were in the way of family worship becoming a regular habit.

**At home booklet.** On Thursday, students led their families through Titus 1:5-16. Additionally, students explained the differences between descriptive and prescriptive writing. Friday’s self-study had students back in Titus 1:5-16 using the “read, reflect,

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<sup>16</sup> Due to the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, there were no more “off weeks” in which families were encouraged to continue through 1 Timothy. However, families who wanted more were encouraged to finish the 1 Timothy reading on free evenings.



respond” method. Monday put the family into the same passage for family worship and concluded with a time of praying for one another. Like the other weeks, Tuesday served as a reflection on what the students learned over the course of the past week.

## **Week 8**

**Lesson.** Lesson 5 walked through Titus 2:1-10 and the need to hold to Truth and live it out. Students were taught the importance of sound doctrine and how false doctrines sound good but do not hold up when one needs them. Sound doctrine matters because what one holds to be true will be seen in how one lives. How one lives and what one believes needs to be fostered and held accountable in community. Practically, students were encouraged to consider who they look up to as an example of what it looks like to follow Jesus.

**Small group.** Discussion on the fifth lesson circled around two elements: how the doctrine students hold true impacts their lives and how people in their lives influence them. To drive home the importance of influence and doctrine, discussion wrapped up posing the question, “How does the thought of someone looking up to you as an example of following Jesus impact how you view knowing and apply the Bible?”

**Parent communication.** Parents were told that students learned about how knowing truth and living it out matters. Parents were encouraged to process, with their student, how knowing truth and actions are related. On Monday, parents received a text message reminding them of how vital it is for their kids to be saturated with the Truth in a world that rejects truth.

It took a while, but some parents began interacting with the text message threads this week. A parent of an eight-grade boy responded via text message that despite the inconsistencies of engaging the at home booklet, they were growing in the regularity of their family worship times. Similarly, parents of a sixth-grade boy shared how they have used this time in Titus to establish a family worship time after dinner each Monday. A

family with a seventh-grade boy shared the rhythm of listening to the Bible after dinner each night using a Bible app.

**At home booklet.** On Thursday, students brought their small group discussion into their home, looking at who are models of following Jesus for each of their family members. Friday's self-study had students dive deeper into maturing as Christians and what things help them mature (readings from Phil 2:12-15 and 2 Tim 3:16-17). Monday's family worship was designed to push the family to reflect on how they as a family hold, or fail to hold, to the Truth and live it out. Tuesday rounded out the week with self-reflection on what the students gleaned from their time in the Word that week.

## **Week 9**

**Lesson.** Lesson 6 focused on Titus 2:11-15 and how Jesus is the example and motivation for how Christians are to live. Titus 2:11-15 provides the why, or the motivation, for why believers follow the instructions of Titus 1-2:10. The hermeneutic principle of the week was letting words like "for," "but," and "therefore" serve as reminders to look at what was said before.

**Small group.** Since the lesson was heavy on explanation and light on application, small group discussion focused on application. Students wrestled with how they are called to live, what helps them live this way, and what (who) motivates them to live this way.

**Parent communication.** Wednesday's email provided a sentence overview of the evening's lesson as well as a prompt to consider how Jesus and the Bible train them to live for Christ and not the world. Monday's text message to parents was an ask of how I could be praying for them.

A parent of a seventh-grade girl replied to the Wednesday email thanking me for the lesson summaries. She stated how helpful they have been for her as she follows up with her child.

**At home booklet.** Thursday provided a family study of Titus 2:11-15 while Friday was a self-study in the same passage. The family study helped families consider what their choices and actions show their hope is in while the self-study had students consider how they were being trained in the characteristics listed in Titus 2:11-15. Monday's family worship looked at Titus 2:11-12 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and discussed how the two passages worked together. Thursday rounded out the week of study with personal reflection on what was learned.

## **Week 10**

**Lesson/small group.** This week the lesson and small group time blended. Students, with the help of their leaders, prepared and taught on a portion of Titus 3:1-11. Each small group had thirty-five minutes to prepare a two- to five-minute lesson on a few verses. Leaders were provided with prompting questions to help students come back prepared to teach accurately on their assigned verses.

**Parent communication.** Wednesday's email explained the unique nature of the evening and encouraged parents to ask their students to explain to them, the parent, on what their small group taught. Monday's text message to parents asked if how their time in Titus 3:1-11 had been that week and how they felt things were going when it came to engaging their middle schooler in the Word.

**At home booklet.** On Thursday, families studied Titus 3:1-11 and discussed how to specifically apply these words to their individual lives as well as apply the principles to them as a family unit. In Friday's self-study, students reflected on Wednesday's teachings, both their own group as well as the other five groups. In their

reflection they were to pray about their biggest take-a-way. Monday's family worship began with checking in on Friday's application points and praying for one another. Families then focused in on Titus 3:3-7 and celebrated how they have seen God at work in their lives. Thursday rounded out the week with reflection on what students had learned.

## **Week 11**

**Lesson.** The last lesson of the curriculum, from Titus 3:12-15, focused on the importance of not just knowing what God calls Christians to, but actually doing it. Too often Christians know what the Bible says but fail to live it out. It is in living it out that Christians bear fruit.

**Small group.** In the final small group discussion, students considered different ways that God teaches and communicates with them (Bible, fellow Christians, pastors, parents, etc.) and how it is God working through these things. Students then discussed what their actions reveal about what they truly believe; what kind of fruit they are bearing. Finally, groups made plans for how they could encourage each other to "good works" and fruitfulness.

**Parent communication.** The final email to parents provided a brief overview of Titus 3:12-15, and an encouragement to look for God opportunities and step into them as a family. Parents were then asked to retake the survey via a link provided in the email. Monday's text message encouraged parents to continue pursuing Jesus with their children by reading another epistle together with their student. A second text message was sent asking parents and their students to take the survey again. The text message provided a link to the electronic survey.

**At home booklet.** On Thursday, families studied and discussed Titus 3:12-15. Friday's self-study had students review the basic hermeneutics of epistles and to jot down their key take-a-ways from Titus. Monday challenged families to press on by beginning

to study Philippians together. Thursday challenged students to read the rest of the epistles on their own using the hermeneutical principles they learned over the spring semester.

### **Moving Forward**

As future ministry years come, the plan is to expand on this method of teaching students, and families, to be biblically literate. In the fall of 2021 I plan to teach through the wisdom and poetry genre followed by the gospel genre in the spring. The larger vision is to teach through the six major genres of Scripture over the six semesters a student spends in the middle school youth group. Each genre will include lessons, small group discussion guides, parent communications, and the at home booklet. The lessons learned in this initial undertaking will be taken into consideration to best teach middle school students how to read, study, and apply the Word of God.

## CHAPTER 5

### MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

This project was developed to help middle school students increase their biblical literacy while also growing parents and adult leaders in their ability to disciple middle school students. The means to this goal was an eight-week curriculum written to teach middle school students how to read, study, and apply an epistle. The small group content and at home booklet provided connection points for parents and adult volunteer leaders to better engage their middle school student(s). This chapter will evaluate the purpose and goals of the project in order to assess its overall effectiveness. Strengths, weaknesses, and what could be done differently in the project are discussed to learn how to do this better the next time around. Finally, the work concludes with theological and personal reflections.

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

The purpose of this project was to move middle school students toward biblical literacy while simultaneously equipping parents and adult leaders to more effectively connect with and disciple middle school students. The families that completed both the pre- and post-curriculum survey demonstrated that the project achieved its intended purpose. Middle schooler students answered more questions correctly and parent/student conversations and family devotional time increased or stayed the same.

#### **Student's Biblical Literacy**

While thirteen families participated in the Student and Family Spiritual Practice Survey prior to the implementation of the project, only four participated in the post-

implementation survey.<sup>1</sup> This group of four families represents only 6 percent of the youth group.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, the results provide a hopeful future for the project curriculum. Table 1 shows the average score of each student’s responses to the seven biblical literacy questions in the SFSPS. A repeated-measures analysis of variance, which calculates the average score on these seven questions, both on the pre- and post-curriculum SFSPS, shows a 21.4 percent improvement

On the surface, there is a drastic 21.4 percent improvement in the students’ scores. It should be highlighted that two students improved by one correct answer (which provided a 14.3 percent boost from their pre- to post-scores), one student stayed the same, while one student improved on four questions (which provided a 57.2 percent boost from their pre- to post-scores). If the statistical anomaly is discarded, the average score increases from 80.9 to 90.5. This is just shy of a 10 percent increase. The hopeful element to note is that three of four students improved their Bible knowledge from this curriculum. The “move middle school students toward biblical literacy” portion of the purpose is considered successful.

Table 1. Biblical literacy questions pre- and post-project implementation

Identification Number	SFSPS Pre-Implementation	SFSPS Post-Implementation
19508832	6 out of 7 = 85.7%	6 out of 7 = 85.7%
51838808	2 out of 7 = 28.5%	6 out of 7 = 85.7%
801530	5 out of 7 = 71.4 %	6 out of 7 = 85.7%
903	6 out of 7 = 85.7%	7 out of 7 = 100%
Average Score	$\bar{x} = 67.8$	$\bar{x} = 89.2$

<sup>1</sup> A fifth family responded but filled the survey out a total of three times and all three times provided the exact same answers. Since this information does not change the average results, it was elected to be withheld from the evaluation of responses as it is unknown why the third response from the same identification number was submitted.

<sup>2</sup> There were 65 middle school students registered for youth group this year.

## **Equipping Parents**

The behind-the-scenes element of this project was to equip parents to connect with and disciple their middle school student. As noted in chapter 4, parents responded positively and gratefully to the emails, texts, and guidance found in the at home booklet.

A positive affirmation of the project is that three of the four parent respondents showed a positive improvement in their perception that NHC partners with them in the journey of discipling their middle school student. The fourth respondent replied “agree” to both the pre- and post-survey. Additionally, two respondents moved from “agree” to “strongly agree” when asked to respond to the statement. “I feel I am primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of my child.”<sup>3</sup>

While the parent responses to the questions/statements regarding “feeling equipped” showed no positive or negative change, those questions may not be the most accurate depiction of how this project helped parents. Perhaps the most accurate measurement of whether this project equipped parents to connect with and disciple their middle school student was the pre-and post-implementation frequency of family devotions, spiritual conversations, and prayer time.

The two major foci of the project, in regard to parents, was to provide resources for family devotions and encouragement toward more frequent spiritual conversations. A hopeful by-product was to see an increase in parent/student prayer time together and casual conversations using daily happenings to talk about God. Figure 1 shows that the two major foci did in fact increase while the two elements largely unaddressed in this work actually decreased.<sup>4</sup>

It is likely, as the numbers suggest, that the increase of family devotional times and spiritual conversations are a direct result of the curriculum and parent communication.

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<sup>3</sup> These changes can be seen in the response comparisons in appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup> The numeric values in this chart were found by taking the frequency of each event, per week, in each of the four families and finding the average frequency of the four families. This average was found for pre-implementation and post-implementation.



The decrease in prayer time together as well as letting the everyday things of life spark God-centered conversations have two potential explanations. First, these items were asked about in the pre- and post-surveys but were not explicitly discussed in the curriculum. A second variable is the chance that parents answered more accurately/honestly on the post-SFSPS than when they took the pre-SFSPS. Despite the two decreases, in light of the project’s focus and the two positive increases in parental engagement/discipleship, the goal of equipping parents can be seen as a moderate success.

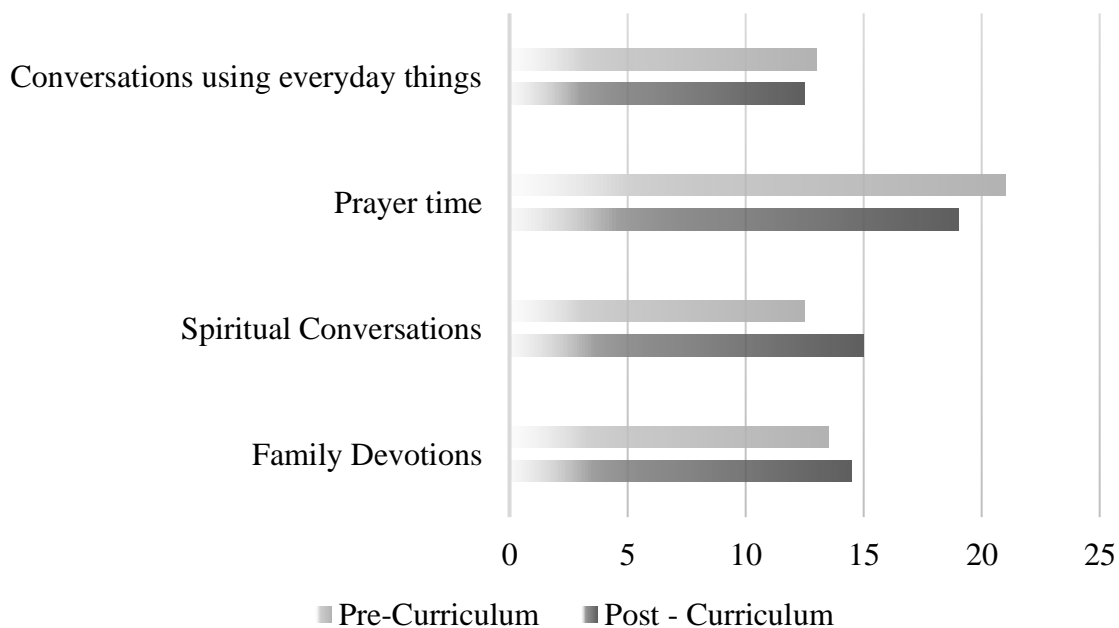


Figure 1. Family spiritual disciplines

### Evaluation of the Project’s Goals

As discussed, this project set out to accomplish one purpose. This purpose is considered successfully met, or not, based on the four measurable goals discussed in this section.

## **Goal 1**

The first goal was to assess middle school students' current biblical literacy and Bible reading habits as well as assess families' current discipleship practices. This goal would be considered successfully met when fifteen families completed the SFSPS. With only thirteen families responding to the pre-curriculum SFSPS, this goal was not met. Three factors likely contributed to this failure.

In a youth group that has averaged 70-80 middle schooler students per year, this particular school year only saw 65 middle school students register for youth group. This meant the average weekly attendance was also down. Wednesday night middle school youth group averaged just shy of 50 students a night. This down tick does not excuse or justify the lack of responses in such a large pool, though it is a factor that must be considered.

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic forced parents and students home and online. One of the negative outcomes of everyone moving online was that people stopped reading/responding to emails. This was seen in regular communication along with communication regarding the SFSPS and curriculum. Students and parents alike only did what was "mandatory" online and most other things fell to the side. People were "onlined out" and did not care to do more on their screens.

Finally, before this survey, parents had never been asked to fill out a survey by the youth department or myself. The newness of the ask, along with the lack of physical interaction, likely were the main culprits to the failed goal.

## **Goal 2**

The second goal was to create a curriculum to teach middle school students how to read, understand, and apply the Bible while simultaneously equipping parents and church leaders to more effectively reach and disciple 11 to 13-year-olds. For this goal, the

curriculum lessons, small group guides, at home booklet, and parent communication were utilized.<sup>5</sup>

This goal was evaluated as successful once the curriculum had been created and evaluated by an expert panel, receiving sufficient or better over 90 percent of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully completed as 100 percent of the curriculum was evaluated as sufficient or exemplary. This goal was met prior to implementing the curriculum with students and families.

### **Goal 3**

The third goal was to implement the curriculum to increase middle school students' Bible literacy while simultaneously equipping parents and adult leaders to better connect with, teach, and disciple middle school students. Chapter 4 of this project detailed the process of implementation. This goal was to be considered successfully completed once all lessons had been taught and all at home booklet content had been worked through.

Students were asked on the post-curriculum survey if they had attended regularly and done the at home booklet.<sup>6</sup> Despite the dismal response rate, responding students and families affirmed that they did work through the at home booklet. Goal 3 is considered successfully completed.

### **Goal 4**

The fourth goal was to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in how it increased middle school students' biblical literacy and how well it equipped parents and adult leaders to teach and disciple middle school students. This goal would be considered

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<sup>5</sup> See appendices 4-7.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 2 for SFSPS results.

successfully met when the repeated-measures analysis of variance demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Table 1 displays the pre- and post-curriculum scores, revealing a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. Additionally, as figure 1 shows, there was a slight increase in the frequency of family devotions and parent/student spiritual conversations. With these two sets of results considered side by side, goal 4 can be considered successfully met.

### **Strengths of the Project**

There were four notable strengths to this project. The curriculum drove students into their Bibles and asked them to read, study, and apply God's Word in deep ways. The planned communication portion of the curriculum engaged parents at a new level. The leader guide and training helped foster deeper discussions and connections between students and their small group leaders. On a larger scale, fellow NHC staff have noticed the impact of moving toward a family ministry model (as opposed to solely focusing on the targeted age group).

By intention, students were instructed how to read, study, and apply an epistle. They were then taught through the epistle of Titus using the hermeneutics previously learned. Students then discussed the lessons with their small groups. Following small groups, students went home and studied Titus and other epistles throughout the week, both on their own and with their family. The main focus was always on God's Word and what it was teaching, not on funny stories or goofy lessons (though they did help communicate basic hermeneutic principles).

Parent interaction increased with the planned parent emails and text messages. While reciprocal communication was limited, numerous parents expressed appreciation for the overviews, follow ups, and reminders. This small effort led to an increase in parents feeling equipped, by NHC, to disciple their middle school student.

While little changed in the resourcing and equipping of adult volunteer leaders, the intentional small group curriculum helped foster a deeper sense of community in each small group. While there was no survey regarding this element of the curriculum, both leader feedback and this increased intentionality with students outside of youth group were noticeable.

An unintended strength of this project was the buy in it created from fellow church staff to broaden their ministry focus to come alongside families and collaborate with other ministries in the church to better serve parents. As this is being written, conversations are occurring regarding how to better serve families, and specifically parents, in birth-twelfth grade ministry. Collaboration is beginning to occur even outside of “family ministry” to include men and women’s ministry in the conversation of equipping parent to be the primary disciplers of their children. While this project did not set out to broaden ministry scopes or increase staff collaboration, there has been buy in to what is happening in middle school ministry and an interest in making this level of intentional Bible teaching and discipleship training church wide.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

While overall this project was a success, three main weaknesses need to be noted. These weaknesses include a global pandemic and a resulting lack of parent training prior to implementation, a lack of responses and the received responses not reflecting the youth group as a whole, and a lack of training parents and leaders on the learning styles of middle school students.

The project was written and implemented in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused multiple issues. First, it eliminated a parent meeting where parents would learn about the curriculum face-to-face. Second, due to the abundance of screen time, parents and students were not nearly as engaged in online meetings as they were in person. This caused parents to be learning the information and curriculum at the same rate/time as their students. While this was not detrimental, it would have been

advantageous to have briefly walked through the eight-week curriculum with parents prior to implementation. Covid-19 also forced ministry restructuring, which stretched the curriculum from being taught over eight weeks to being taught over thirteen weeks. This forced the implementation of “off-weeks” that can be noted on many Tuesdays in the at home booklet.

Another weakness was the general lack of participation in the pre- and post-SFSPS. More concerning than a failed goal, the lack of responses caused the pool of answers to not be reflective of the youth group. It appears that the most invested and committed families participated while others did not pay attention to the survey asks, and potentially the family devotional times. In this lack of responses from the majority of families, it seems like the curriculum was a win for families already engaging in the church and in family discipleship. Despite the intentionality, it seems that the curriculum did not aid parents who needed the most help in discipling their students. Additionally, students who needed the most help in regard to biblical literacy did not participate in the survey and therefore it can only be speculated that they did not benefit from the curriculum as it was designed.

Finally, a third weakness of the project was that there was no space created to inform parents and adult leaders regarding how to better connect with and disciple middle schoolers. The curriculum did encourage time in the Word, in prayer, and in relationship with one another, but at no point did it explain best learning practices or how a middle school student’s brain works to parents or adult leaders. This was partially an oversight and partially due to Covid-19 and the lack of in person training opportunity. All three of the weaknesses are considered in the next section.

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

The primary elements that I would do differently are directly tied to the weaknesses discussed in the previous section. In addition to these specific elements, I would also have spent more time teaching students “what is the Bible?” prior to diving

into the focus on epistles. This project is serving as the start of a larger curriculum plan. Since this work will continue to be built upon there will be opportunity to incorporate these changes.

The first change would be to teach this curriculum in the timeframe in which it was originally designed. Moving from eight to thirteen weeks elongated the curriculum beyond its intended design and beyond the interests of some students. Additionally, the longer time frame seemingly caused parents to fade away from the initial excitement and buy in to the project. While these changes were due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is still worth noting the importance of the original time frame.

Second, I would work to get more respondents to the SFSPS. Having implemented the survey on paper rather than electronically during a parent training and then a parent debriefing would have drastically increased parent participation in the survey. Additionally, having students take their portion of the SFSPS in person rather than depending on a parent having them do it online would have increased the number of student responses. This increase would have provided more accurate insights to the effectiveness of the project on the larger group.

While the third weakness, and change, was also due to Covid-19 restrictions, I would have more intentionally trained parents and leaders in understanding how the middle school brain learns best. This would have increased buy in from parents and further encouraged and equipped leaders in their small group discipleship of middle school students.

Finally, I intend to create a mini lesson series on “what is the Bible” to serve as a preamble to other genre lesson series. While the first lesson of the curriculum addressed “what is the Bible,” it was not enough to help students truly grasp what their Bible is. This short series could be added before any future genre of Scripture lesson series or serve as a standalone series to help student know more about their Bibles.

## **Theological Reflections**

Reflecting on the project as a whole I feel a parent training needs to be developed. While some parents jumped into the curriculum with their child, many seemingly did not. Training parents to step into their God given roles needs to be a growing element of this curriculum.

A parent training, one that goes beyond the basics of utilizing the at home booklet of the curriculum and actually trains parents how to disciple their children, would have a tremendous impact on the local church. A once-a-year training, where Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4 are unpacked and resources are explained and given to parents, would be incredibly beneficial. Not only would parents be equipped and called up, but the church would return to a place of authority and accountability for the parents and the family.

## **Personal Reflections**

This project set out to address biblical illiteracy in middle school students. I observed this problem in my own students over the past eight years of youth ministry. I thought there had to be something more than just changing the youth group structure or adding yet another *thing* to an already overflowing schedule. The truths I held loosely—that students need to be taught basic hermeneutics and adults needed to disciple them—served as the impetus for the purpose of the project. Despite knowing these truths, I found myself growing in deep conviction that this is in fact the way forward.

Throughout this project I have become all the more convinced that the thing students need most is Jesus. Second to that is the need for students to be able to accurately read, study, and apply the Bible to their lives. Christian community is important but will change multiple times over the course of their lives. Church leaders are important, but they too will come and go. The Word of God will always be there and will never change. The most important thing a youth pastor can equip their students with is not the latest responses to culture but how to use their Bibles so it becomes the lens through which they



view all of life, their default tool and resource they turn to. When students are equipped to go to use God's Word, as God intended, students will follow Jesus long after their time in youth group is over.

The research for this project also confirmed the paramount need for me, and all youth pastors, to engage parents. This needs to be more than an email. There needs to be a development of relationship between the youth pastor and the parents. This relationship fosters a discipleship partnership where teens are best nurtured and disciplined in how to follow Jesus and grow in His likeness. Biblical teaching is important. Events that foster relationships inside the youth group are fun and valuable. However, youth ministry must move beyond these primary foci and work to turn the hearts of parents back to their teens and the teens' hearts to their parents.

### **Conclusion**

For years, parents and church leaders bemoan the plague of students leaving the church after high school. The response has often been to "fix" youth ministry. This fix is often in the structure of youth ministry, such as the 1980-1990's attractional youth ministry fad, and seldom in the pedagogy of youth ministry. This is insufficient for the bride of Christ. As the SFSPS results show, though a small population, student and families grow when they are equipped to engage God's Word accurately and in community.

This work, Lord willing, will serve as the launching pad for a middle school curriculum that walks through all the genres of Scripture during a student's time in middle school. This hermeneutic foundation will be capitalized on and enforced as they engage Sunday sermons and high school youth group lessons.

This work is a result of the passions God has placed in my heart for middle school students. I truly believe they are the best age group to reach and equip with the Word of God. I pray that this work, and what flows from it, would equip students for a lifetime of following Jesus and making Him known. I pray I will continue to press on in

the work God has called me to and that the those he has entrusted to my shepherding would go out of the building and change the world because they have been called and equipped to do so.

APPENDIX 1

STUDENT AND FAMILY SPIRITUAL  
PRACTICE SURVEY

**Agreement to Participate**

The research you are about to participate in is designed to assess the current spiritual practices, or disciplines, of middle school students and their families. Pastor Jon Kimmel is conducting this research in order to collect data for a ministry project. This survey is designed to be taken before the project and then at the conclusion of the project. All information you provide will be confidential and at no time will you or your middle school student be identified with your response. You will use an ID number in order to stay anonymous while still allowing your answers to be compared in the pre and post surveys.

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

Yes, I agree to participate

Personal ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Initial and 6-digit birthday, ex: J092385)

Since your middle school student is a minor, please check “yes” or “no” and type out your name as means to signing consent for your student to participate in this survey. Again, neither you or your student will ever be identified with the answers you provide.

Yes       No

Parent’s Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT AND FAMILY SPIRITUAL  
PRACTICE SURVEY**

Please check the box that best answers each question or prompt. Think about the average occurrence, not specifically this past week.

**The Parent Portion**

Questions:	Never	Less than 4x a month	Once per week	2-3x's per week	4-5x's per week	Daily
1. How often do you have a specific family devotional time?						
2. How often do you have spiritual conversations with your children?						
3. How often, other than mealtimes, do you pray with your children?						
4. How often do you talk about God using the everyday happenings in life?						
5. How often do you have personal time in the Word and in prayer?						
Questions:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I am primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of my child.						
7. I feel capable of having spiritual conversations with my middle school student.						
8. I feel prepared to have spiritual conversations with my middle school student.						
9. I feel equipped to hold and lead a regular family devotional time.						
10. I feel that NHC partners with me in the journey of discipling my middle school student.						

Please check the box that best answers each question or prompt. Think about the average occurrence, not specifically this past week.

### The Middle School Student Portion

Questions:	Never	Less than 4x a month	Once per week	2-3x's per week	4-5x's per week	Daily
1. How often, outside of church, do you read your Bible?						
2. How often, other than mealtimes, do you pray?						
3. How often do you talk to other people about God?						
4. How often does your family have a devotional time together?						
Questions:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewh at	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. I understand what I'm reading when I read the Bible.						
6. Time at youth group on Sundays and Wednesdays helps me know God and the Bible.						
7. I am comfortable talking to my small group leader and asking questions about life and faith.						
8. I can talk to my parents and ask questions about life and faith						

APPENDIX 2  
SURVEY RESULTS

Table A1. Pre-curriculum survey: Parent responses 1

<b>PIN</b>	<b>1118</b>	<b>9497</b>	<b>19508832</b>	<b>51838808</b>	<b>801530</b>	<b>70007000</b>	<b>19813027</b>
How often do you have a specific family devotional time?	Daily	Never	Once per week	Once per week	Daily	2-3 times per week	Less than 4 times per month
How often do you have spiritual conversations with your middle school child?	Daily	4-5 times/week	Once per week	2-3 times per week	4-5 times/week	Daily	Once per week
How often, other than meal times, do you pray with your children?	Daily	< 4 times/week	Daily	2-3 times per week	Daily	Less than 4 times per month	4-5 times per week
How often do you talk about God using the everyday happenings in life?	Once/week	4-5 times/week	Daily	2-3 times per week	Daily	Daily	2-3 times per week
How often do you have personal time in the Word?	Daily	Daily	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month
How often do you have a personal time of prayer?	Daily	Daily	4-5 times per week	2-3 times per week	Daily	4-5 times per week	Once per week
I feel I am primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of my child.	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
I feel capable of having spiritual conversations with my middle school student.	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat
I feel prepared to have spiritual conversations with my middle school student.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat
I feel equipped to hold and lead a regular family devotional time.	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat
I feel that NHC partners with me in the journey of discipling my middle school student.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Table A2. Pre-curriculum survey: Parent responses 2

<b>PIN</b>	<b>28135575</b>	<b>8082008</b>	<b>2510</b>	<b>1102</b>	<b>68111</b>	<b>903</b>
How often do you have a specific family devotional time?	Never	4-5 times per week	Daily	Never	Daily	4-5 times per week
How often do you have spiritual conversations with your middle school child?	Once per week	Daily	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	2-3 times per week	4-5 times per week
How often, other than meal times, do you pray with your children?	Less than 4 times per month	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week
How often do you talk about God using the everyday happenings in life?	2-3 times per week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	Daily	2-3 times per week
How often do you have personal time in the Word?	Daily	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	2-3 times per week	4-5 times per week
How often do you have a personal time of prayer?	Once per week	Daily	4-5 times per week	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	4-5 times per week
I feel I am primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of my child.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
I feel capable of having spiritual conversations with my middle school student.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel prepared to have spiritual conversations with my middle school student.	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel equipped to hold and lead a regular family devotional time.	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
I feel that NHC partners with me in the journey of discipling my middle school student.	Agree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat

Table A3. Post-curriculum survey: Parent responses

<b>PIN:</b>	<b>19508832</b>	<b>51838808</b>	<b>801530</b>	<b>903</b>
How often do you have a specific family devotional time?	2-3 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	Daily	4-5 times per week
How often do you have spiritual conversations with your middle school child?	2-3 times per week	Once per week	4-5 times per week	Daily
How often, other than meal times, do you pray with your children?	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	Daily	Daily
How often do you talk about God using the everyday happenings in life?	2-3 times per week	Once per week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week
How often do you have personal time in the Word?	Daily	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	2-3 times per week
How often do you have a personal time of prayer?	Daily	2-3 times per week	Daily	4-5 times per week
I feel I am primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of my child.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel capable of having spiritual conversations with my middle school student.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
I feel prepared to have spiritual conversations with my middle school student.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
I feel equipped to hold and lead a regular family devotional time.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
I feel that NHC partners with me in the journey of discipling my middle school student.	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat



Table A4. Pre-curriculum survey: Student responses 1

<b>PIN:</b>	<b>1118</b>	<b>9497</b>	<b>19508832</b>	<b>51838808</b>	<b>801530</b>	<b>70007000</b>	<b>19813027</b>
How often, outside of church, do you read your Bible?	Daily	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	Daily	2-3 times per week	4-5 times per week
How often, other than mealtimes, do you pray?	Daily	4-5 times per week	Daily	2-3 times per week	Daily	Daily	2-3 times per week
How often do you talk to other people about God?	2-3 times/week	Once per week	Daily	Daily	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	Once per week
I understand what I'm reading when I read the Bible.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree
Time at youth group on Wednesdays helps me know God and the Bible.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree Somewhat
I am comfortable talking to my small group leader and asking questions about life and faith.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat
I can talk to my parents and ask questions about life and faith.	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree
How many books are in the Bible?	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
The Bible is primarily about _____.	God	God	God	God's creation	God	God	God's creation
An Epistle is a _____.	Letter	letter	letter	a follower of Jesus	God	letter	letter
An Epistle is best understood by reading it _____.	In sections	as a whole (long form)	in sections	in sections	in sections	in sections	in sections
Who wrote the book of Titus?	Paul	James	Peter	Paul	Paul	Paul	Paul
Titus is what genre of literature?	Epistle	Epistle	Epistle	Narrative	Epistle	Epistle	Epistle
Which one of the following is addressed in the book of Titus?	Qualification for church leaders	Qualification for church leaders	Qualification for church leaders	The life of Jesus	The Moral Law	Qualification for church leaders	Qualification for church leaders
Do you have a desire to study the Bible outside of church?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table A5. Pre-curriculum survey: Student responses 2

<b>PIN:</b>	<b>28135575</b>	<b>8082008</b>	<b>2510</b>	<b>1108</b>	<b>68111</b>	<b>903</b>
How often, outside of church, do you read your Bible?	Less than 4 times per month	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	Daily	Once per week
How often, other than mealtimes, do you pray?	Daily	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	2-3 times per week	Daily
How often do you talk to other people about God?	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	Once per week	Daily	2-3 times per week
I understand what I'm reading when I read the Bible.	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
Time at youth group on Wednesdays helps me know God and the Bible.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
I am comfortable talking to my small group leader and asking questions about life and faith.	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Disagree	Agree
I can talk to my parents and ask questions about life and faith.	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree
How many books are in the Bible?	66	66	71	66	66	66
The Bible is primarily about _____.	God	God	God	God's creation	God	God
An Epistle is a _____.	Letter	letter	Letter	letter	letter	letter
An Epistle is best understood by reading it _____.	in sections	in sections	in sections	as a whole (long form)	in sections	as a whole (long form)
Who wrote the book of Titus?	Paul	Paul	Peter	James	Paul	Paul
Titus is what genre of literature?	Narrative	Epistle	Epistle	Poetry	Epistle	Epistle
Which one of the following is addressed in the book of Titus?	The Moral Law	Qualification for church leaders	The Moral Law	Qualification for church leaders	Qualification for church leaders	The Moral Law
Do you have a desire to study the Bible outside of church?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table A6. Post-curriculum survey: Student responses

<b>PIN:</b>	<b>19508832</b>	<b>51838808</b>	<b>801530</b>	<b>903</b>
How often, outside of church, do you read your Bible?	4-5 times per week	Once per week	Daily	Daily
How often, other than mealtimes, do you pray?	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
How often do you talk to other people about God?	2-3 times per week	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	4-5 times per week
I understand what I'm reading when I read the Bible.	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Disagree Somewhat
Time at youth group on Wednesdays helps me know God and the Bible.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree
I am comfortable talking to my small group leader and asking questions about life and faith.	Agree	Agree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat
I can talk to my parents and ask questions about life and faith.	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
How many books are in the Bible?	66	66	66	66
The Bible is primarily about _____.	God	God's creation	God	God
An Epistle is a _____.	letter	letter	letter	letter
An Epistle is best understood by reading it _____.	in sections	as a whole (long form)	in sections	as a whole (long form)
Who wrote the book of Titus?	Paul	Paul	Paul	Paul
Titus is what genre of literature?	Epistle	Epistle	Epistle	Epistle
Which one of the following is addressed in the book of Titus?	Qualification for church leaders	Qualification for church leaders	Qualification for church leaders	Qualification for church leaders
Do you have a desire to study the Bible outside of church?	Yes	No	Qualification for church leaders	Yes

Table A7. Pre and post-curriculum survey responses compared

PIN:	19508832		51838808		801530		903	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
How often do you have a specific family devotional time?	Once per week	2-3 times per week	Once per week	Less than 4 times per month	Daily	Daily	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week
How often do you have spiritual conversations with your middle school child?	Once per week	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	Once per week	4-5 times/week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	Daily
How often, other than meal times, do you pray with your children?	Daily	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	Daily	Daily	4-5 times per week	Daily
How often do you talk about God using the everyday happenings in life?	Daily	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	Once per week	Daily	4-5 times per week	2-3 times per week	4-5 times per week
How often do you have personal time in the Word?	4-5 times per week	Daily	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	2-3 times per week
How often do you have a personal time of prayer?	4-5 times per week	Daily	2-3 times per week	2-3 times per week	Daily	Daily	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week
I feel I am primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of my child.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel capable of having spiritual conversations with my middle school student.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
I feel prepared to have spiritual conversations with my middle school student.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
I feel equipped to hold and lead a regular family devotional time.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
I feel that NHC partners with me in the journey of discipling my middle school student.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat
How often, outside of church, do you read your Bible?	4-5 times per week	4-5 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	Once per week	Daily	Daily	Once per week	Daily
How often, other than mealtimes, do you pray?	Daily	Daily	2-3 times per week	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily

Table A7 continued

PIN:	19508832		51838808		801530		903	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
How often do you talk to other people about God?	Daily	2-3 times per week	Daily	4-5 times per week	2-3 times per week	Less than 4 times per month	2-3 times per week	4-5 times per week
I understand what I'm reading when I read the Bible.	Agree	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree Somewhat
Time at youth group on Wednesdays helps me know God and the Bible.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Agree
I am comfortable talking to my small group leader and asking questions about life and faith.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Agree Somewhat
I can talk to my parents and ask questions about life and faith.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree
How many books are in the Bible?	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
The Bible is primarily about _____.	God	God	God's creation	God's creation	God	God	God	God
An Epistle is a _____.	letter	letter	a follower of Jesus	letter	God	letter	letter	letter
An Epistle is best understood by reading it _____.	in sections	in sections	in sections	as a whole (long form)	in sections	in sections	as a whole (long form)	as a whole (long form)
Who wrote the book of Titus?	Peter	Paul	Paul	Paul	Paul	Paul	Paul	Paul
Titus is what genre of literature?	Epistle	Epistle	Narrative	Epistle	Epistle	Epistle	Epistle	Epistle
Which one of the following is addressed in the book of Titus?	Qualification for church leaders	Qualification for church leaders	The life of Jesus	Qualification for church leaders	The Moral Law	Qualification for church leaders	The Moral Law	Qualification for church leaders
Do you have a desire to study the Bible outside of church?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

APPENDIX 3

CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

<b>Middle School Biblical Literacy Curriculum: Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Lesson One Evaluation</b>					
<b>1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The content of the curriculum is doctrinally sound.					
The content of the curriculum is theologically sound.					
The content of the curriculum is exegetically accurate.					
The lesson clearly communicates the main topic.					
The lesson clearly ties into the respective small group discussion.					
The lesson clearly ties into the respective family devotion(s).					
The lesson and corresponding material are age and developmentally appropriate.					
The lesson is easily applied to one's personal Bible reading.					
The small group study and questions bring about personal application of the topic.					
The family devotions would be easily implemented in the home.					

APPENDIX 4  
CURRICULUM LESSONS

**Lesson 1: What Is Your Bible? The Basics**  
1.13.21

Pray.

One of the worst feelings in the world is being lost. Like, truly not knowing where you are or how to find your way out of that situation. I remember as a little kid hiding in the clothes rack when I was shopping with my mom. While she knew right where I was she decided to teach me a lesson and quickly moved from where I knew she was. When I popped out of the clothes rack she wasn't there and as an eight or nine year old, I panicked. I was that kid in the store yelling "mooom" like I was about to die. Fast forward about 25 years and I was hunting and it was very early in the morning and pitch black outside. I thought I knew where I was and where my tree stand was only to end up in super thick brush and get twisted around in the woods in the dark. That same panicked feeling rushed back over me and I stood in the woods yelling "mooommm". I didn't, but that feeling was very real even as a grown man. Being lost is the worst.

That is why the most consistently helpful features on my phone is the maps, or GPS. You may not fully appreciate this until you can drive, but being able to put in your destination and find the fastest route is so incredibly helpful. I can be nearly anywhere and if I'm lost or have no idea how to actually make it home, I can open "maps" click "home" and within seconds I have two or three route options to get me home. It's crazy! It be great if life came with a maps app. But wait a second... it does!

What tool do we have at our disposal that could serve as a GPS to how we are to live and what we are called to do with our lives? The Bible. I'm here to tell you that when you know how to read and study and apply the Word of God there is nothing that it doesn't address or give guidance for because it teaches us about the God who made us and all that we know. It may not be super specific like should I eat a ton of candy or cookies? But it does talk about what we put into our bodies and how we treat our bodies and how we should use all things in moderation and not be addicted to anything. But other things, it's super specific. Like how should I respond to my parents – with honor and respect whether you think they deserve it or not. As we get to know God more and His Word more it becomes the lens through which we view all of life and the filter that guides all our decisions.

Here is the thing, the Bible is super helpful in helping you know who God is, who you are, and what life is all about. However, if you do not use your Bible and if you do not know what it says, it will never be a source of guidance in your life. Then, even if you use it, if you don't understand what it is teaching, it still won't guide you like you need it to. There are a lot of people out there, even pastors, who claim to teach the Word of God and yet lead other people astray because they don't understand what they are teaching. Using and understanding your Bible does not require some big fancy degree –

most of it is simply applying logical things that you already know, and asking the Holy Spirit to help you understand and apply what you are reading. Today I'm going to give you a brief overview of what the Bible is, and then throughout this week you're going to discover that a bit more on your own, and next week we are going to dive into a specific genre – or style of writing – of Scripture.

What is your Bible? Where did it come from and what is in it? How does it fit together? Why should I trust it?

Your Bible is a collection of God inspired writings, comprising 66 books - 39 Old Testament books, 27 New Testament books. Each book, inspired by God – meaning they were written by human hand but God gave the human being the exact words to write down.<sup>1</sup> The Bible is a literary work of art made up of six different genres – or type of writing. There is narrative, prophecy, wisdom/poetry, apocalyptic, gospel, and epistle.<sup>2</sup> Each genre has unique characteristics which impact how we read, study, and understand what it is saying. Over your time in middle school youth group we will attempt to discuss and study each genre. Starting next week we'll dive into the epistle, or letter genre.

We know the Bible is inspired by God, we know this from verses like 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”<sup>3</sup>. We know that it is a book made up of 66 small books that include six different genres. But how do all these books tie together?

Aside from each book and genre being about God and revealing bits of information about God to us, the Bible tells one big story. This big story can be thought of happening in four major acts: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. We see creation happening in Genesis one and two, the fall occurs in Genesis three, redemption begins to be seen in Genesis three and carries on throughout the Old and New testaments culminating in the work of Christ, and restoration is partially realized by the church now and will be fully realized when Christ returns.<sup>4</sup> These four acts all tell one story about God working for His glory and our good. So as we read any part of the Bible we can use the bigger story to help us understand the shorter stories we study.

Finally, for today, why can we trust the Bible? Remember I said the Bible we have today is made up of 66 books – 39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament. These books were accepted as Scripture – given by God – through a process called canonization. We call the books in the Bible the canon which comes from a Greek word meaning rule or principle. This means over a long period of time, as God inspired the human authors, people and groups of people would check the new work by asking questions about who the human writer was, is the message consistent with other books

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Nielson, *Bible Study: A Student's Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Nielson, *Bible Study*, 75.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture in this curriculum is taken from the English Standard Version.

<sup>4</sup> Ed Stetzer, “The Big Story of Scripture (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration) In Pictures: Your Input Requested,” *The Exchange*, November 28, 2012, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/november/big-story-of-scripture-creation-fall-redemption.html>.



we already had, and is there evidence this is from God. As books passed this strict test they were accepted as from God and added to the canon.<sup>5</sup>

The Old Testament was finished and held as the Jewish Scriptures somewhere between 300 and 150 BC.<sup>6</sup> So when Jesus talks about the Old Testament as the Word of God and claims to be God and be the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law and Prophets, it not only affirms they are from God, it also points us to the words of the New Testament being true and trustworthy.

As Jesus' followers began to write what we know as the New Testament, church leaders began to assess if these writings were given by God or just the work of men. In the 200s and 300s church leaders saw the need to clarify what from this time period was from God and what was not. In 393 at the council of Hippo and in 397 at the council of Carthage what we hold in our hands today was formally recognized as God's Word.<sup>7</sup> Why does this matter – from the time these things were written down, they were known to be from God. In other words, there was nearly no questioning its authority – from the writers and witnesses who knew the human writers – it has been held that this is truly the Word of God. The councils and evaluations only affirmed this.

The other big reason to trust the Bible is how historically accurate it is. Jesus affirms the Old Testament and His life, death, and resurrection, prove all the prophets were accurate in what they said would happen. Then we come to the New Testament, and when we look at historical things like genealogies – you know, those long lists of names that are impossible to read – and church and political leaders who are mentioned, and we compare them to history books from that time, these were real people, really living, really holding their positions. This doesn't even get at the geological proof or the literary backing the Bible has.

In short, the Bible is given to us by God. It is made up of 66 books, 39 Old Testament and 27 New. It is historically accurate, it claims and has proven to be without error, it has been tested and evaluated time and again and it tells one big story. There is one more thing I want to challenge you guys to do this week. I want to challenge you to read the book of John. That is 3 chapters a day. Let it guide your thoughts and actions this week – apply what you read. And see for yourself what we've just talked about today. Read it and jot down your thoughts and what you learn in this little book (hand out "at home" study). Bring it back next week, completed, and ready to take notes on Epistles. Any questions?

Pray.

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<sup>5</sup> Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *77 FAQs about God and the Bible: Your Toughest Questions Answered* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2012), 159-61.

<sup>6</sup> McDowell and McDowell, *77 FAQs about God and the Bible*, 160.

<sup>7</sup> McDowell and McDowell, *77 FAQs about God and the Bible*, 161.

## Lesson 2: Studying an Epistle: Setting up Titus

1.27.21

I love getting mail. How many of you get excited when something comes for you in the mail? Not bills or junk mail, but getting a letter or a card from someone is such a small thing that makes me happy. With technology today, hardly anyone sends notes anymore. Emails are not quite as meaningful as a hand written note – even if they are faster and you can say more. Getting a note in the mail is fun! (don't forget to mail out letters to each student!)

Back before all this technology existed, guys I'm old, I was alive when emails became a thing, if you wanted to communicate with someone you either talked on a land line or you wrote them a letter. There was also a time, I'm not this old, when phones of any kind weren't a thing and letter writing was state of the art. This is a big reason why we have the epistles, or letters, in our Bible. The men who wanted to teach or share or correct a local church would write and send a letter when they themselves could not be there. Letters, or Epistles, make up 21 of the 27 New Testament books. The letters, or epistles, can be categorized into 3 categories: church letters, pastoral letters, and general letters.

Church epistles are letters written to specific churches and they include Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Pastoral epistles are letters written to specific church leaders and they include 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. General epistles are letters written to general or wider audiences and they include Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> John, and Jude.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of church, pastoral, or general these are all letters and we should approach them as such. The categories just help us better understand the who and why as we begin to study them. We'll get to that in a few minutes.

Now, I want you to take a piece of paper and a pen or pencil and write a letter to a parent or grandparent. It's just a quick note. Begin by addressing them, who you are writing to then begin the actual letter by identifying who is writing this, you. In this letter I want you to include a very brief update about yourself. If there is something you would like to tell them include that here. Next, share something about them you are grateful for. Then, close the letter with some sort of encouraging sentence. For example, "I'm so glad you're my mom, thanks for being the best ever." Then sign it. Take five minutes and do this now.

Keep this letter in front of you. I want you to quietly read the third sentence you wrote. Does this sentence make sense on its own? If not, read the sentence that comes before and after it. Even if it doesn't communicate everything you set out to write in this letter, it makes sense on its own. However, in order to fully understand why you wrote those words, it would be best to read the whole letter, right? Additionally, while you intended this letter for a specific person, anyone could read it, study it, understand it, be encouraged by it – right? You now have a basic understanding of how to read and study an epistle in the Bible!

When epistles were written they would have been received like someone would receive a letter. There were not chapter or verse or headings. The epistle of Titus, which we'll begin studying next week, would have looked similar to what is in front of you right now. With that in mind, one of the most helpful things you can do, when studying

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<sup>8</sup> Nielson, *Bible Study*, 109-10.

an epistle, is to first sit down and read the whole thing. As you do that, it is important to learn who wrote it, who was it written to, why was it written, and when was it written.<sup>9</sup> These answers give context to your study. That means you understand a bit more about the time, people, and culture it was written in. This is important because as you seek to understand what an epistle is teaching it is very important to remember what you are reading “cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her reader.”<sup>10</sup> Take your letter for example, if someone other than who you wrote the letter to was reading it, in order for them to best understand it, they need to know a bit about you, the author, a bit about the recipient, the reader, and a bit about why you might have written the letter and when you wrote it. So, in my letter, written to my mom, I tell her that I love her and she is the best mother in the whole world. If Harry picked up this letter and read “I love you, you are the best mom in the whole world” He would think “this doesn’t apply to me” or “wow Jon loves me but I’m not his mom.” But since Harry knows my mom and knows me and would have an idea as to why I’m writing this letter he might instead walk away thinking “wow, Jon is a sweet son and a loving person... maybe I should write a letter to my mom.”

This is all called context and it will help you properly understand and apply God’s Word to your life. Don’t neglect this. If you can’t find the answers to who wrote it, to whom did they write, when did they write it and why, consider finding or buying a study Bible (I really like my ESV Study Bible). At the beginning of each book it tells you the answer to these exact questions.

After you read the letter and answer these questions, spend some time figuring out how this letter fits into, and contributes to, the big story the Bible is telling (remember, we talked a bit about that last week: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. This will help keep your mind in touch with what the Bible teaches as a whole and help you more accurately understand and apply what you are reading. For example, in Titus 1:7 we read, “For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain.” Now, if someone tends to be angry or have outbursts or is arrogant or greedy, if we forget about the redemption part of the story, it be easy to say this person will never ever be an elder or we could even question whether they were a Christian. However, when we remember that Jesus died to forgive and set us free from our sins, we understand this verse to not be questioning salvation or making a statement that anyone who sins can’t be an elder, but instead it is saying the elder must be mature enough in Christ that these things are no longer true of him. The bigger story helps us understand this.

So, we read epistles like a letter, because that is what they are. In order to best understand them it is helpful to know who wrote it, to whom were they writing, why were they writing and when were they writing. This context, coupled with seeing it as part of the big story sets us up for success as we look at individual portions. Any questions.?

Pray.

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<sup>9</sup> Nielson, *Bible Study*, 110-11.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 74.

When I was in college I worked at Lowe's. It was a great set up because I could work at the one near my school during the semester and when I went home for summer I could transfer to the store by my parent's house. I had many interesting experiences with humanity during my time there. One of them that sticks out to me involved my friend Chris. Chris and I both have dark hair, we had very similar builds, we were the same age – really, we could pass as brothers, or if he had freckles, perhaps twins. Chris's main thing was selling fencing. I usually drove a fork lift and helped with lawn and garden stuff. The only reason that matters is at some point, a week before the incident, Chris sold an older gentleman some fencing. At some point, the gentleman either was not given some parts that he needed, or he misplaced them. Regardless of the cause, I was standing in an aisle of the store restocking shelves and this seemingly random elderly gentleman walked up to me and began to, not so kindly, inform me of how incompetent I was and how Home Depot was better and some other mean words that I cannot say. When I told him I had no idea what he was talking about but would be happy to help – it was like pouring gasoline on a fire. He was a very angry man. I tried to explain that I had not sold him any fencing but he didn't believe me. That was, until, Chris turned the corner to see what was going on. The old man looked at me, looked at him, looked at me, stepped over to Chris and began his whole mean, yelling, spiel all over again. While there were many issues going on in that man's life, one of the more immediate things was that he was addressing someone he did not intend to. He literally had the wrong guy. It is important, when you want to convey a message, to address the correct person or people. This is one of the reasons why the beginning of a letter, one where the author and the reader are identified, is so important. Not all letters need a formal salutation, a word or phrase of greeting that begins a letter,<sup>11</sup> but they are helpful.

A letter with a decent salutation provides some context, specifically who the intended audience/reader is. Fortunately, for us, letters, or epistles, included in the biblical canon – the rule, or expectation for what makes the cut – often have even more information which sets up the reader to successfully understand what they are about to read. Think back to the letters you wrote last week. If you simply typed that letter and sent it to your mom and it had no salutation, so it just read "I love you and I think you are great," and then begins to say whatever else you include, it is a confusing start to the letter. But, by simply including something like "dear mom," she already knows this is from one of her children.

Turn to Titus chapter one. Today, we are going to look at the salutation Paul includes in his letter to Titus. We are going to study this together and then work on application in small group. The epistle of Titus is in the New Testament. The New Testament includes the books, in order: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 & 2 & 3 John, Jude, Revelation. Titus falls after first and second Timothy and before Philemon and Hebrews.

Look with me at Titus 1:1-4, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,<sup>2</sup> in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began<sup>3</sup> and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our

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<sup>11</sup> *Webster's New II New College Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 977.

Savior; <sup>4</sup>To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”

From these four verses, which make up Paul’s salutation to Titus, we learn at least five things about what we are setting out to study. Who wrote it? Paul (v1). What qualifies him to write? He is a servant of God and an apostle, or messenger, of Jesus (v1). What motivates him to write? The sake of the faith of God’s elect and that they would know the truth which was made known through the preaching of the Word, which Paul has been called, by God, to do (vs1-3) Who did he write to? Titus (v4). And who is Titus to Paul? A true child in faith (v4). This means Paul likely led, or was involved in, Titus coming to faith in Jesus.<sup>12</sup> The Paul finishes his salutation with a kind greeting which also helps set up some future content in the letter. But we’ll talk about that when we get there in the coming weeks.

Not only do we learn who is writing this, receiving this, and why this letter is being sent, we also see some big Christian truths that should be an encouragement to us. We learn that as true Christians we are promised eternal life. We can also imply from this positive, that the opposite is true, those who are not Christians do not have eternal life, but instead, eternal punishment. We learn that this promise of eternal life, the good news of Jesus, the Gospel, has been made known through preaching it – preaching the gospel simply means to proclaim or teach it. If we keep in mind the whole message of Titus and the big story of what the Bible is teaching, we know that the way people come to know Jesus, to have eternal life, is primarily through other people preaching, or proclaiming the good news of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> We know this is a call placed on all followers of Jesus, to teach others about Him (Matthew 28:16-20).

All of this from four simple verses most of us read and do not think twice about. Tonight, in our small group discussion we are going to step into this epistle, this letter, and begin to study it and apply it to our lives.

Pray.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018), 474.

<sup>13</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 379-81.

## Lesson 4: Titus 1:5-16 Truth and Character Matter

2.24.21

There have been many things that have changed in our culture. Many things that were once widely accepted as “wrong” are now not only viewed as okay but almost expected. For example, not even twenty years ago it was held that you shouldn’t live with your girlfriend or boyfriend until you were married. Now it is pretty common to meet a boyfriend or girlfriend living together and with no sense that it is wrong. Or, not even five years ago, it was common place to acknowledge a human being was born either a male or female and to think otherwise meant they needed to see a psychologist. Now, it’s expected that you can choose your gender and be open to whatever someone else says their gender is regardless of the fact they were born with male or female chromosomes that will never change. My point is this, when we reject truth and lower our standards, whether individually or with a friend group, or culturally, our character weakens and we begin buying into lies and even go as far as rejecting truth. We see this reality playing out in Titus one when Paul tells Titus to rebuke the Cretans who were teaching lies and had no moral compass.<sup>14</sup> Paul drives home the need for people to have godly character and hold tight to His truths.

This is one of the reasons why Paul is so blunt in writing to Titus about who should lead the church and what should be true of those bearing the name Christian. Turn to Titus, remember it’s a letter in the New Testament and it falls after 1&2 Timothy and before Philemon and Hebrews. Paul is writing to Titus Let’s read Titus 1:5-16.

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—<sup>6</sup>if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup>For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup>but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup>He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. <sup>10</sup>For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. <sup>11</sup>They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. <sup>12</sup>One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” <sup>13</sup>This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup>not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. <sup>15</sup>To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. <sup>16</sup>They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Notice, verse five gives us more insight into *why* Paul wrote Titus. “To put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town.” Paul is following up on issues he and Titus have already discussed, issues Paul is aware of but hasn’t been able to address personally.<sup>15</sup> These issues are seen throughout the letter. Two are identified in

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<sup>14</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 398.

<sup>15</sup> Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 477-78.

these twelve verses. One issue is cultivating leadership in the church. The other is dealing with false teachers.

Before we go into this letter there is another important distinction we need to learn about to help us better understand and apply what we read. When we approach a passage, we need to keep in mind how we should understand the text. Is it, write this down, descriptive, as in it is describing events that have happened? Or, is it prescriptive, as in it is prescribing how to do something? Other than Acts, all of the writings in epistles are prescriptive – meaning they prescribe how to go about things. This is an important distinction because this is where a lot of people take the Bible out of context not because of what it says but because of what was intended by the writer is not being fully understood in light of what the reader is hoping to make the Bible say. Here is an easy example. In the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we read of Jesus having 12 disciples. This is descriptive writing. The writers are describing how Jesus went about discipleship and teaching. We can learn from this but the primary reason for these accounts is to know and understand the life of Christ better. It is not prescriptive – meaning you do not have to have a group of 12 people following you around who you are teaching and sending out into the world. You should be discipling and being disciplined but how you do that is better learned from prescriptive teaching, like that of epistles, than it is from descriptive accounts like the gospels. We learn about Jesus and want to be like Jesus from the descriptive accounts in the gospel, but not all of that is commanded of us. For example, you can't die for the sins of the world but you certainly benefit from learning about the one who did. Summary: descriptive describes something that has taken place which we can learn from but isn't necessarily directly promised to happen to us. Prescriptive is prescribing how to do something. Prescriptive writing includes directions, commands, and even promises that we should apply to ourselves and our church. Titus is prescriptive. Paul is telling Titus, and us by extension. how to deal with things.<sup>16</sup>

Knowing this is prescriptive, it is telling us how to go about something, let's look at Titus. Let's start with the leadership, or elder qualifications, in 1:5-9. Paul has told Titus to appoint elders, now he tells Titus what qualifies a man to be an elder. Elders are to be mature believers. What does a mature believer look like? "If anyone is above reproach" serves as the summary and what follows is how one is above reproach.<sup>17</sup> Follow with me starting in verse six. They are married to one woman, their own children should be Christians and not rebellious, he must not be arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunk, violent, or greedy. He is to be hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to what the Bible says, teach according to what the Bible says, and he must rebuke, or correct, those who don't.

That is some serious responsibility. However, if we stop and think about it, especially in light of the bigger story of the Bible, these are really characteristics that should be true of all of us as a Christian. While these characteristics are specifically listed out to help Titus assess who can be an elder (and someday when you are looking for a church when you move away, make sure the leadership meets these character standards) but these things should also be true of us as Christ followers. The more mature we are in our faith the more these things should characterize our lives. As we follow Jesus these things should become every increasingly true of us.

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<sup>16</sup> John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2006), 21-3.

<sup>17</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 388.

As Paul explains why this kind of character matters, he also explains why holding to God's Word matters. Paul starts in 10-13, essentially describing the opposite of what an elder should be, then tells Titus to "rebuke them sharply so that they may be sound in the faith." Titus needs to tell them what the truth actually is so that they will believe and teach truth instead of lies. It matters because truth and character matter and the way you live will ultimately reveal what you truly believe. What you believe will impact how you live on this earth and where you spend eternity.

The last two verses really drive home the need for Godly character. To those in Christ, all things are pure, we have the Spirit renewing us and growing us in Christ likeness but those outside of Christ can do nothing spiritually good. Their minds and their consciences are defiled. How can you tell what someone believes? Look at 16, "they profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." Why should you care about your character and holding to the truth? Because if you don't you will believe almost any lie that sounds good or promises you happy feelings – these lies will ultimately leave you empty, broken, and drifting ever further from the Truth of God.

Your actions will reveal what you truly believe. You may not read 1:5-9 and say "this is me" but because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, if you confess and believe, the Holy Spirit will grow you into maturity so that this is reflective of who you are. Your effort will not bring about Christian character and maturity, only God can do that. Seek Him. Confess when these things are not true of you and ask the Spirit to work in you and bring you to maturity.

We are going to wrestle with these things in small group.

PRAY.



## Lesson 5: Titus 2:1-10 Hold to Truth and Live It Out

3.3.21

**Illustration:** Whole plate vs. broken plate that does not look broken. These two plates look the same. They are the same color, shape, and size. For all you can tell, from a distance, they are the same thing and will do the same work, i.e. they'll hold the same amount of food. However, one of these plates is not the same. We'll come back to the plates in a second.

In Titus 2, Paul urges Titus to teach sound doctrine, that leads the church to know the truths of God and to live it out. Doctrine is a fancy word for a set of beliefs that are held to and taught.<sup>18</sup> At the most basic level I can put it, sound doctrine is teaching what the Bible teaches. Sound doctrine leads to Christians maturing in their faith and living their faith out. Specifically, in this passage, Paul is telling Titus to see to it that the older are living lives that set an example to the younger and that they are investing/teaching others how to live a life that knows, follows, and honors God while helping others do the same. It starts with verse one. "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine."

Back to the plates. It can sometimes feel annoying or over the top, or "super holy" to be so nitpicky about sticking to what the Bible says. Some go as far as to say things like theology and doctrine do not matter because they are just different opinions, or that it divides Christians, or that it doesn't matter because it is so old. First off, those stances, while incorrect, are doctrine in themselves. Regardless, weak doctrine and sound doctrine matter. They look similar from a distance. Both sound "Christianity." Both seemingly deal with matters of God and the Bible. However, when you really need it, when your understanding of God and how you are to live comes into tension with the world around you, your weak doctrine will crumble because it is not sound. (Hold up "whole" broken plate and pull apart) Just like this plate that looks like the other, it will hold nothing and it may even hurt you because it is not sound, it is not solid. This is why Paul has been so focused on character and truth here at the beginning of his epistle to Titus. Knowing and applying God's Word matters.

Let's read Titus 2:1-10 together. Remember this is a prescriptive letter written to Titus. That means, because it is an epistle, we need to keep the overarching themes in mind while reading this section. And since it is prescriptive, we need to remember the commands and instructions are written to Titus and his church **and** as the church today, we can safely apply these instructions to our church, youth group, and our personal lives. With that in mind, Titus 2:1-10,

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. 2 Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. 6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. 7 Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, 8 and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to

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<sup>18</sup> Willard H. Taylor, "Doctrine," in *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Richard S. Taylor (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983), 173.

shame, having nothing evil to say about us. 9 Bondservant are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

The “but” as well as the instructions to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” point directly back to the end of chapter one where Paul is telling them to be aware of false teachers who are spreading good sounding lies and leading people and families astray. At its most basic level, Paul is instructing Titus to teach the church God’s Word and teach them about the One True God so Christians will know these liars and not believe what they are saying.

Positively, one of the clear results of people knowing God and God’s Word is in how they live and interact with others. Paul goes on to highlight five application points of this directive in the lives of “older men (v.2), older and younger women (vv.3-5), young men (v.6), Titus himself (vv.7-8), and slaves (9-10).”<sup>19</sup> Verses 2-6, “older men are to be sober minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness” while “older women are to be reverent [or respectful] in behavior, not slanderers [don’t talk bad about others] or slaves to much wine.” In fact, they are to teach what is good and train younger women to be good wives and mothers. Even the young men, look in verse six, are to be self-controlled. Something they see and learn from the older men. Titus is then addressed being told to, in word, and action, to live in such a way that no one can shame him or the church. Then Paul closes this section telling slaves the same thing – be respectful and don’t talk bad about your master behind their back. Now, why does this matter and how do we apply it?

It matters because sound doctrine matters. Doctrine is a set of beliefs that are held to and taught. Doctrine, what you actually believe to be true, will impact how you live and interact with the world around you. False doctrine will lead you away from God and the life He calls you to while sound doctrine will lead you towards God and the life He calls you to.

Secondly, all this matters, how you live matters, what you believe matters, because ultimately this life is not about you. False doctrine, lies of the world, tell you life is about you, about you being happy and discovering yourself. These are lies that will leave you broken and empty and without purpose and without hope. Instead, think of the sound doctrine of the Bible – life is not about you. It’s about God. Look at every reason Paul gives to us as to why our doctrine and behavior matter. Older men and women and younger women are addressed and Paul says at the end of v.5, so “that the word of God may not be reviled.” If you claim to be a Christian and follow the Bible’s teaching but live in ways that are not in line with its teachings, you cause others to question and even have a distaste for the Word of God. Titus is addressed as a pastor and told that it is so no one will have anything “evil to say about us.” The us is referring to all Christians.<sup>20</sup> Those who bear the title Christ follower. Live as a Christ follower for the sake of the name and honor of Christ and His church! Finally, after addressing slaves, Paul says, at the end of verse 10, “so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” It’s all about Him.

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<sup>19</sup> Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 508.

<sup>20</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 414.

When life is about us, we miss our purpose. When life is about God and His glory and His Kingdom, and making Him known – we have more purpose and hope in this life than we could ever fulfill. This is why sound doctrine and application matter. Our lives are given by God, redeemed by God, and called by God, so it makes sense that we know and apply God's Word to our lives. So how do we apply this. Three quick questions: how often are you seeking to know and apply the Word of God? what areas of your life are more about you than about God? And, who are you looking up to as an example and who is looking at you as an example? We'll talk about that more in small groups.

Knowing and applying God's Word matters because we are not paying attention to the soundness of our doctrine, to how biblically accurate something we are being taught is, we eventually buy into things about God that are like this broken plate – it looks good, seems just like everything else, but when push comes to shove and you actually need it, it's a broken mess. We must know and live out the truth, the Bible, and we must live it out. We must know the truth, the Bible, and we must live it out.

Pray

## Lesson 6: Titus 2:11-15 *Jesus, Our Motivation*

3.10.21

When I first began wrestling my least favorite part was drilling the same move over and over and over and over again. I didn't understand why this was important. No one really explained it to me, at least not in a way that I found helpful. But, I loved the sport enough I kept drilling moves over and over and over and over. It wasn't until my second year of wrestling that I realized why drilling was so important. Up until this moment, every match was slow and hard for me. I had to think about everything I was doing, which made it very difficult to win. But then, at a tournament one day, it clicked. I realized after the match that I hadn't thought at all about what I did, I just did it. It was muscle memory. This is why drilling was so important. I knew how to react when certain things happened and I didn't have to go through a mental check list anymore, I just acted. That's why drilling over and over and over was so important. Many of you, whether an athlete or musician or a thespian, understand the importance of muscle memory and practice. When you experience the payoff it all makes sense, even when it's repetitive and even boring in practice.

In a similar way, when we are just told to do something or not do something because it's what the Bible says, but we don't see the greater reason, it's hard to fully apply what we are being told. Like, I'm supposed to honor my parents because the Bible says so. Or I should wait until marriage to have sex, because the Bible says so. Yes, the Bible says so, but if that is the extent of your understanding of "why" you'll likely not see it as important. But if you are taught that following the Bible's teaching is actually important, not because the Bible says so, but because it honors God and is for your ultimate good, there is more weight to the words, right? This is what Paul does in Titus 2:11-15.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. <sup>15</sup> Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

"For" points us back to what we studied last week. In a nutshell, last week we looked at the importance of knowing and holding onto the truth and living it out; how our character and actions reveal what we truly believe. I said that since our lives are given by God, redeemed by God, and called by God, so it makes sense that we know and apply God's Word to our lives. Paul says this, in a more poetic way, adding a sense of urgency and importance to these commands.

Why does truth matter? Because the lies of the world will not save anyone, they lead to momentary happiness at best and an eternal separation from God in hell. Instead, "the grace of God has appeared," this is Jesus, "bringing salvation for all people." Jesus died for everyone who comes to him. Paul highlighted, in chapter one, those who do not come to Jesus, they instead choose lies, teach lies, believe lies, and live out lies. We see this in the world around us constantly. Lies about sexuality and gender, lies about being true to yourself, lies about deserving to be happy, lies about what matters most. When we buy into these lies we are led astray and fall into worldly passions. But, when we come to Jesus, when we seek Him – the salvation for all people – we renounce, or reject, ungodliness and worldly passions and instead live lives that reflect the instructions in 2:1-10. We live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in our present age.

This is why truth matters. Truth matters, knowing the Bible matters because sound doctrine, biblical truth impact the choices we make and how we live. “Proper behavior stems from proper theology.”<sup>21</sup>

Why does how we live matter? Because we are “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” Let’s let the Bible interpret the Bible here. Someone read 2 Corinthians 5:21. God takes our sins and forgives them by placing them on Jesus who pays the price we were cursed to pay. We should have died but instead we are given life and the righteousness of God. This same Jesus who died for us, makes us righteous, calls us to live as righteous, and promises to come back and end evil forever, that is what we are waiting for. Righteousness is referencing someone who is upright and moral, Jesus was perfectly moral and upright. So should we continue in our worldly, sinful ways or confess them as sin and ask God to help us put them to death? Someone read Romans 6:1-4. In our new lives, given to us when we come to Jesus and confess Him as savior and Lord, we are to live like Jesus lived.

We follow what the Bible teaches because it is the Word of God, it helps us know God, it helps us grow in love and obedience to Him, and it truly is what is best of us. The words of 11-14 are things that are true of all Christians. Verse 15 Paul turns his attention to Titus, the pastor of the church in Crete and says “declare these things; exhort [strongly point people to something] and rebuke [disapproval of something] with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”

Understanding these words requires us to know a bit of a deeper context about what was going on in Crete. We know many were being led astray by false teachers – which is why Paul’s wording is so strong, to encourage Titus to speak the truth. We also know, from Cretan culture there were issues with authority, especially authority that was calling for life change.<sup>22</sup>

Now, how do we take these instructions and apply them roughly 1,960 years later? We know what it says, we just talked about what it means, now let’s talk about how it impacts us. First, it gives us the why, or the motivation for why we should live for Jesus in ways that follow what the Bible teaches us. Second, it gives us a mirror in which to look and consider how our lives compare to what Paul is calling Christians to live like.

Just like being told to do something when there is seemingly no good reason to do it, if your only reason for doing the right thing is to stay out of trouble, you’ll eventually not worry about doing the right thing. But when you understand the reason for something, even if you don’t love the thing, you’ll do it because you see the value of doing it. The Bible calls us to something so much greater and better than anything this world can offer us. It’s true of life now and in eternity. God’s way is better because God is better. God’s way not only brings Him glory, but is truly what is best for you.

Secondly, as you look at Titus 2, there are numerous characteristics or qualities that are pointed out as needing to be true of God’s people. This is not a list of “do this and you’ll get into heaven.” It is a list of characteristics that will become true of you as you seek after Jesus, who brings salvation for all people and whose Word trains us to

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<sup>21</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 421.

<sup>22</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 433.

reject the world and choose Him. When you see areas where you're life doesn't match, stop and pray and ask God to help you address these things and live more and more in line with what His Word teaches.

If you come to Jesus, if you confess Him as Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit makes your heart new and begins to renew your mind. This means the Holy Spirit helps you believe and live it out. This renewing is an ongoing, life-long process. Your new life will desire God more than the world. You will experience conviction of sin and begin to understand that God's way is actually, truly, not just churchy pastor answer, it truly is what is best for you now and for all of eternity. His way honor and glorifies Him and is for your good. The world's way defiles all involved, is based on lies, and will ultimately end in misery. We'll process this more in small groups.

Pray.

## Lesson 7: Titus 3:1-11 Focused, Prepared, and Equipped

3.17.21

Tonight we are going to change it up. You're going to start in small groups and return, after 35 minutes, to teach the group on a few verses. You are going to put into practice what we have learned over the last six weeks together. Your leader will have a sheet with prompts to help you be ready to teach the rest of us on your verses. Here is a hint, use what we have already studied to better understand what you are going to teach. Also, a lot of your verses are the practical outflow of the instructions in chapter two. It may be worth rereading chapter two together (perhaps read Titus 2 – 3:11 before jumping into your specific verses).

When we begin studying an epistle we read the whole thing so that we have a better idea of why it was written and what it is communicating. So, you are free to go back in your books to help you find the answers to the prompts. You'll come back and have five minutes to teach the rest of us: What is the overarching theme/message of Titus and how do these verses carry that forward? Is this descriptive or prescriptive writing? What does that mean for us? Then, what do these verses say (read them), what do they mean (remember context) and how do we apply it.

Pray and send (ask leaders to set a 35 minute timer and be back by 7:30).

Below are the grades/gender/verse breakdowns. Italics are notes for the M.C. (youth pastor) to help guide the teaching times, or follow them up to ensure accurate information has been passed along.

vv. 1-2 (7<sup>th</sup> grade girls)

*Christian behavior, especially living in a rather rebellious society. These specific elements are reflective of the issues in the culture and ways Christians will look different than the world around them – still applicable to us today, regardless of culture.*

v. 3 (7<sup>th</sup> grade guys)

*Pointing to our depravity and that we looked just like the world before Jesus.*

vv. 4-5 (8<sup>th</sup> grade girls)

*But God! Our sinfulness is addressed by God, through his goodness, loving kindness, etc. We are made new when we come to Jesus – the Holy Spirit works to make us new!*

vv. 6-8 (8<sup>th</sup> grade guys)

*The Spirit is ours in Jesus, through Jesus we are heirs to a heavenly kingdom and this hope and purpose, our salvation in Jesus and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit outflows in how we live.*

v. 9 (6<sup>th</sup> grade guys)

*Avoid foolish arguments. Know what is petty and unimportant and what is important and worth fighting for.*

vv. 10-11 (6<sup>th</sup> grade girls)

*What to do with someone who engages, constantly, in petty arguments or causes division in the body of Christ – warn them and then be done with them. Loving God and the church – unity, is more important than petty arguments and someone who is unwilling to repent and change.*

## Lesson 8: Titus 3:12-15 Learn and Do - Be Fruitful

3.24.21

**Object lesson:** One at a time select a student who has never used a hand saw, select another student who has never used a drill, and select a student who has never used a brad nailer. In turn, teach each student how to use the tool, show them how to use the tool, but do not let them use it. Then ask them if they have ever used the tool. Point out that despite knowing how to, they still have never done it. Then, let them use the tool. (Make sure to let the person with the saw go before the nailer, so there is something to nail to the board.)

When God calls us to engage in good works and be fruitful it is not enough to just say we are called to these things, you actually have to live this way. You cannot say you have used a tool before, even if you know how to use it, if you have not actually used it. What Paul is getting at in the closing of his letter, among other things, is that Christians must learn what God teaches and then they actually have to do it. Doing these things does not make you a Christian. However, your actions reveal what you truly believe so doing what the Bible teaches reveals you actually believe God's Word and in God Himself. Not doing what the Bible teaches, even if you claim to know what it says, reveals you do not believe in God or that the Bible is worth following. Christians learn what God teaches and calls us to, and we do it.

Let's read Titus 3:12-15 together, we are finishing Titus today! Remember, this is a letter or epistle, written and sent personally from Paul to Titus. Paul is writing to encourage and offer some direction to Titus regarding his pastoral leadership in Crete. Crete is a secular town that did not take well to authority and being told what to do. Titus, a pastor, is an authority, calling the people to something greater than worldly passions. He calls Titus, and the church, to know and apply the truth of God's Word, to live differently than the world around them, to do good and seek unity in the church. Paul closes the letter, or epistle to Titus with these words, (Titus 3:12-15)

When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. <sup>13</sup> Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. <sup>14</sup> And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

We started with the statement, Christians learn what God teaches and calls us to, and we do it. Remembering all the other things we talked about through this epistle, look at verse 14. "And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful." The word learn here is not referring to simply learning information but instead "to learning and putting what one has learned into practice."<sup>23</sup> Like the tools, it is not just knowing what to do, it is knowing and actually doing it. You learn what God commands. In Titus these are things like be submissive to rulers, be obedient, be ready for every good work, speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, and so on (3:1-2). You know and you do.

"Good works" is meeting the needs of others, it is doing the right thing, it is learning to see what the needs are and then actually meeting them. It is your faith, your

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<sup>23</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 459.



sound doctrine, lived out.<sup>24</sup> The immediate example of this is in v. 13 where Paul asks for Zenas and Apollos to be sent on their way and that they lack nothing – the church, under Titus’s leadership, sees they are prepared with what they need for their mission. Urgent needs can be supporting missions, but they can also be as simple as a friend needing help or someone to talk to. It could be a homeless person in need of shelter. We, as Christians, must not only know what God teaches and calls us to, we must actually do it. So, good works, is simply an outflow of doing what God teaches and calls you to.

When you learn and do, you will be fruitful. Paul says “not be unfruitful.” This is the result of sound doctrine and good works. Ultimately, being fruitful is making God famous. You are fruitful as you show people Jesus by doing good works, meeting needs, AND as you tell others about Jesus, making your sound doctrine known.

Why does this matter? Because, life, much like the Bible, is not primarily about you. Yes, you are involved. Yes, you learn much about yourself as you read the Bible and live life. But the Bible is God’s Word given to us as the main way God reveals Himself to us. And this life is not about being true to yourself, it’s about being true to God, it is about making Him known and Him glorified and when this is your mission and purpose in life, you will find this is actually what is for our ultimate joy and ultimate good. You will find much joy and life in reading and applying and doing what the Bible teaches. It is all about God and for His glory.

This is done in community. Paul closes his letter with greeting to the church, the true Christians in Crete. He does this because he truly cares about them and desires to see them walk with Jesus. This is why Titus was left in Crete, to see that the church was put in order.

We are going to take what we just learned – know what God calls you to and live it out, let your faith dictate how you see the world – and apply it to our lives in small groups. Let me pray and I’ll send you on your way. PRAY.

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<sup>24</sup> Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 558.

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APPENDIX 5  
CURRICULUM: SMALL GROUP CONTENT

The following pages the contain images of the small group content in the form of the leader guide.<sup>1</sup> This guide was provided to adult volunteers for the purposes of facilitating the small group time of the youth gathering.

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<sup>1</sup> This content was created using images and formatting which match New Hope Church's style guide. Due to these differences, the images are presented in this appendix.

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## SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE

### HOW TO READ YOUR BIBLE

1.13.21

#### **Leader Preparation:** *(Do this, at some point, before youth group)*

- Think of a time, that you can share, when you were lost. How did that feel? How did you find your way to where you needed to be?
- Think of a time you experienced God's Word being a guide in your life/decision making process.
- Have an answer ready for "why is the reading/knowing/applying the Bible important?"
- Read through the small group questions and skim the "at home" booklet for this coming week.

#### **Small Group Time:**

##### **ICE BREAKER:**

Share a highlight of Christmas Break.

##### **DISCUSSION STARTER:**

Share about a time you were lost.

- How did you feel?
- How did you find your way back to where you needed to be?

##### **CONTENT DISCUSSION:**

- How would you answer "what is the Bible" if someone asked you?
- How do you know you can trust the Bible?
- Do you let the Bible guide your life?
  - o How do we let the Bible guide us?
  - o When and what will you be reading in the Bible this week? Be super specific.
    - Their booklets have them reading the Gospel of John this week. Help them set a specific time and place they'll be doing this reading. Encourage them to set a reminder on their phone or calendar.

##### **CLOSE IN PRAYER:**

- Ask for prayer requests and don't forget to pray over the application of when and what will they will be reading in the Bible.
  - o LEADER, make a note and plan to follow up / check in on prayer requests and Bible reading this week.

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## SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE

### STUDYING AN EPISTLE

1.27.21

#### **Leader Preparation:** *(Do this, at some point, before youth group)*

- If you haven't yet, check in with your students (*say hi, follow up on prayer requests, see how Bible reading is going, etc.*)
- Read through the small group questions and skim through week 2 of the booklet
  - o How can you engage your group in this discussion?

#### **Small Group Time:**

##### **ICE BREAKER / DISCUSSION STARTER:**

What is your favorite thing to get in the mail? Why?

##### **CONTENT DISCUSSION:**

- Who did you write your letter to?
  - o Have a student or two read their third sentence. Then have them read their whole letter (*if no one is comfortable reading theirs, feel free to share yours*).
  - o Encourage the students to send, or give, their letters to their intended reader this week.
- What is an epistle?
  - o How many categories of epistles are there?
  - o What are the things we need to figure out to know the context of the letter? (*who wrote it, to whom did they write it, why did they write it, and when*)
  - o What were the main 'acts' of the big story the Bible tells?
    - Why is this important to keep in mind?
- Practice (*if no one has a study Bible, come borrow one*)
  - o Open to the book of Jude, read it and answer the following questions together:
    - Who wrote it?
    - To whom did he write?
    - Why was it written?
    - When was it written?
    - How does it fit into and contribute to the bigger story?

##### **CLOSE IN PRAYER:**

- Remind them this week their book will take them into various parts of the Bible, some will be solo while other days are with your family.
- Close in prayer
  - Pray for the week ahead ● Engaging God's Word with family ● Prayer requests.

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## SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE

### TITUS 1:1-4 A SALUTATION

2.3.21

#### **Leader Preparation:** *(Do this, at some point, before youth group)*

- Read Titus 1:1-4, the small group questions, and skim through the booklet.
  - o Why is a salutation so helpful to understanding a letter?
  - o If you haven't already, check in with your students – how is their study going?
- Look over the “gospel talking points” on the back in preparation of possibly sharing the Gospel

#### **Small Group Time:**

##### ICE BREAKER / DISCUSSION STARTER:

- Have you ever had someone just start talking and you have no idea what they are talking about?
  - o What would have been helpful to have so you could have known what they were talking about?  
*(context, through process, back story, etc.)*

##### CONTENT DISCUSSION:

- What is a salutation?
- Why is knowing things like who wrote a letter and who received a letter important?
- Ask who, this week, read the epistle to Titus. *(If no one has, spend a few minutes reading it - together.)*  
Once you have read it, or if most students have read it, read Titus 1:1-4 and answer the context questions.
  - o Who wrote it?
  - o Who did they write to?
  - o When did they write?
  - o Why did they write it? *(what's the main messages/themes)?*
- Looking at the salutation, what are Christians promised?
- How is this promised made known?
- Do you know Jesus in a way that you are confident you have eternal life?
  - o No? – share the gospel *(if you're not sure where to begin, see talking points on the back of this sheet)*
  - o Yes – then ask, as a Christian then, what are we called to proclaim to others?
    - Who will you teach about Jesus this week?
      - When?

##### CLOSE IN PRAYER:

- How did your at home study go last week? How did it go with your family?
- Close in prayer – be sure to pray about the answers to the final questions.

**GOSPEL TALKING POINTS:**

- Our Sin problem
- Our sin solution
- How the solution can be ours

***Example:***

When God created everything it was good. Humanity had a great relationship with God and life was good. But then humanity chose what God had told them not to. They chose their own selfishness over God's command. Sin entered the world and impacted everything, including humanity. Now we are born with a sin problem. Apart of Jesus we are not good. Only because of Jesus, life, death, and resurrection can we, and anything we do, be good. If we believe in our hearts that Jesus lived, died– in doing so He took our sin and punishment, and He rose again, He is alive in Heaven – if we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that He is our Lord we will be saved.

*(Genesis 1-3, John 3:16, Romans 3:10-12, Romans 10:8-10)*

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## SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE TITUS 1:5-16 TRUTH & CHARACTER MATTER 2.24.21

**Leader Preparation:** *(Do this, at some point, before youth group)*

- Read Titus 1:5-16, read through the small group questions, and skim week 4 of the at home book.
- Spend a few minutes praying for each of your students.

**Small Group Time:**

**ICE BREAKER:**

High, Low, Yay God

Go around the room and have each person share a high point and a low point in their week. Additionally, have each student share one way they have seen God at work in their life.

**DISCUSSION STARTER:**

Why does truth matter?

**CONTENT DISCUSSION:**

- On a piece of paper make two columns. One side label "above reproach" the other label "reproachable." Then list out what is true of someone above reproach and someone who is reproachable.
- What are the reasons Paul gives as to why this matters? *(Pull from verses 9, 13, and 16)*
- Why is Paul so concerned about the truth?
  - o What's at stake when someone teaches lies instead of truth? *(Heaven and Hell)*
- What does your life, both in word and in works, teach to those around you?
  - o Does something need to change? What?

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:**

- Remind them to keep doing the at home stuff and learning about God and what He calls us to.
- Pray
  - o Requests
  - o Pay special attention to any "things" shared in the last question



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## SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE TITUS 2:1-10 HOLD TO TRUTH & LIVE IT OUT 3.3.21

### **Leader Preparation:** *(Do this, at some point, before youth group)*

- Read Titus 2:1-10, the small group questions, and week 5 of the book.
- Check in with your students *(if you haven't already)*
- Think about another Christian(s) who have invested in you. What did they do? What was their impact on your life?
  - o Consider sharing this as part of your small group discussion

### **Small Group Time:**

#### **ICE BREAKER:**

Who do you look up to, or, who do you consider to be your hero? Why?

#### **DISCUSSION STARTER:**

- Who can tell me what "sound doctrine" means?
  - o Why is sound doctrine important?

#### **CONTENT DISCUSSION:**

- Read Titus 2:1-10
  - o What do you see the older men and women being commanded to do? What about the younger men and women?
    - Do you have any "older" Christians in your life who you look up to as an example for how to live for Jesus?
    - Consider who in your life is looking up to you as an example, who comes to mind?
      - How does the thought of someone looking up to you as an example of following Jesus impact how you view knowing and applying the Bible?

#### **CLOSE IN PRAYER:**

- Spend time praying that our lives, in action and word, would show Jesus to the watching world.
- Remind them to keep on with the at home study.

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## SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE TITUS 2:11-15 JESUS OUR MOTIVATION 3.10.21

### **Leader Preparation:** *(Do this, at some point, before youth group)*

- Read Titus 2:11-15, the small group questions, and skim week 6 of the book.
- Check in with students (if you haven't already)
- Think about an area of your life that you have struggled to turn over to God. How have you dealt with it on your own? How have you turned this area over to God? What difference has that made? Consider sharing this as part of the last questions this week.

### **Small Group Time:**

#### **ICE BREAKER:**

Share one thing you have learned through your at home study.

#### **DISCUSSION STARTER:**

How are we to live upright and godly lives? *(who makes it possible?)*

#### **CONTENT DISCUSSION:**

- Read Titus 2:11-15
  - o How are we to live upright and godly lives?
    - Who makes it possible? What is our role?
  - o How does having someone you look up to, remember this conversation last week, help you live in line with the Bible's teaching?
  - o What is your motivation for living in such a way?
    - How are you doing at living out the Bible's teachings?
      - What areas need to be prayed over?

#### **CLOSE IN PRAYER:**

- Pray for requests and areas that need to be addressed
  - o Make a note and plan to follow up with students, this week, regarding what they have shared.

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## SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE TITUS 3:1-11 FOCUSED, PREPARED, & EQUIPPED

3.17.21

**Leader Preparation:** *(Do this, at some point, before youth group)*

- Read Titus 3:1-11, go over the small group plan for Wednesday, skim week 7 in the book
- Spend time studying your small group's assigned verse(s) so you're prepared to help your group prepare and teach. Reach out to Jon if you have any questions.

### **Small Group Time:**

Tonight, your group is going to teach the rest of the youth group part of Titus 3:1-11. Below is a breakdown for each group. Use the "tips" and "prompts" to help prepare your group to teach. You will have roughly 30 minutes to prepare to teach. Your group will have 5 minutes to teach on your verse(s). **PLEASE RETURN TO THE COMMONS AT 7:30** – set an alarm if you need to!

### **PASSAGE BREAKDOWN:**

7<sup>th</sup> grade girls: vv. 1-2

7<sup>th</sup> grade guys: v. 3

8<sup>th</sup> grade girls: vv. 4-5

8<sup>th</sup> grade guys: vv. 6-8

6<sup>th</sup> grade guys: v. 9

6<sup>th</sup> grade girls: vv. 10-11

### **TIPS:**

Start with prayer – ask God to help you understand and be able to teach these verses. Go back / forward and use other verses in Titus to help you understand and teach this section. Use a dictionary for any words you don't understand – consider explaining them to the group. Use your notes from past lessons and studies. Work together. Plan who and how you are going to teach this, practice teaching it. Come back to the Commons ready to teach. There are paper and pens in your box for notes and organizing your lesson.

### **PROMPTS:** *(Be sure to teach these things)*

What is the major theme of Titus? How do our verses carry this theme on? Is this prescriptive or descriptive writing?

What does that mean for us? What do these verses say? What did Paul intend to communicate when he wrote them to Titus? How do we apply it to our lives today?

### **CLOSE IN PRAYER:**

Pray before leaving your room, ask God to lead and be honored in your teaching time.

See you at 7:30 in the commons!

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## SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE TITUS 2:11-15 JESUS OUR MOTIVATION

3.24.21

**Leader Preparation:** *(Do this, at some point, before youth group)*

- Read Titus 3:12-15 and the discussion questions.
- Check in with your students.
- Think about a time Christian community made a difference in your life. Consider sharing this story as part of the last question.

**Small Group Time:**

### ICE BREAKER:

What is something you would really like to learn how to do?

### DISCUSSION STARTER:

What are some ways God teaches us? *(Bible, small group leaders, pastors, parents, Christian friends...)*

### CONTENT DISCUSSION:

- Read Titus 3:12-15
  - o What does it mean to learn to devote ourselves to good works and to be fruitful?
    - Who makes this possible?
    - How is your relationship with Jesus?
  - o What do your actions (your works, the fruit that you bear) reveal you truly believe?
  - o How can you go about continuing “good works” or what needs to change so your actions match what you claim to believe?
  - o How can we, as a small group, “learn to devote ourselves to good works and not be unfruitful”?

### CLOSE IN PRAYER:

- Pray. Pray for the group as they devote to good works and being fruitful. Pray for requests.
- Encourage them to continue the challenges in the weekly study.







## Thursday • Week 2

### PARENT CONNECTION

Ask your parent, or your whole family can do this together, to let you explain how to begin studying an epistle. Then, together read Titus and see if you can answer the context and big story questions (below).

Who wrote it?

Who was it written to?

When was it written?

Why was it written?

How does this letter contribute to the bigger story of the Bible (Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration)?

**Close in prayer, thanking God for giving us His Word.**

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## Monday • Week 2

### PARENT CONNECTION

Gather as a family/household, and if you don't already do this, have a time of family devotions or family worship. This time can be as simple as read the Bible, pray together, and sing. Below is a prompt to help you and your house do this together.

**Read: Philippians 1:19-30 together.** (Remember, context is important – Paul is writing to the church at Philippi to thank them for their partnership and give them instruction to encourage them to live out their Christian faith.)

#### Discuss:

- What was Paul's outlook on life and death?
- How was this Paul's perspective?
- How does this impact how you think about how you live your life? Why?

**Sing:** Pick a favorite hymn or worship chorus – if one does not come to mind, try Amazing Grace.

**Pray:** Close your time together by asking someone to pray for the week ahead and thank God for the time in His Word together.

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© Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians in The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Tenthredine Publishing Company, 2002), 1.

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## Friday • Week 2

### SELF-STUDY

Grab a study Bible (ask your parents if you don't have one, if they don't, there are some commentaries on Biblegateway.com that will help you).

#### Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand God's Word.

Read the introductory information about the letter (epistle) to Titus. Answer the same questions you did with your parents/family and see how you guys did. If there were any differences in your answers, go and talk about it with your family.

Who wrote it?

Who was it written to?

When was it written?

Why was it written?

How does this letter contribute to the bigger story of the Bible (Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration)?

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## Tuesday • Week 2

### PERSONAL REFLECTION

Go back over your notes and answers to the other days this week and refresh your memory on what you have learned.

What is an epistle?

What are the tips for best understanding and studying an epistle?

Consider youth group last week and your time in the Word throughout this week. What are your main take-a-ways from this week?

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## Thursday • Week 6

### PARENT CONNECTION

As a family, read Titus 2:11-15 and discuss:

- Remember: Who wrote this? To who? Why did he write?
- What does "ungodliness and worldly passions" mean?
- How does Jesus train us to renounce (reject or stop doing something) these things?
- Instead of ungodliness and worldly passions, what should we be hoping in? (see vv. 13-14)
- Would you say you are hoping in worldly passions or the grace of God?
- What about as a family, what do our choices and actions say our hope is in?

Spend a few minutes praying about your answers above.

Close with a favorite hymn or worship song. Consider pulling up "How Great Thou Art" with music and lyrics.

30

## Monday • Week 6

### PARENT CONNECTION

Begin by praying that God would guide your time together.

Read Titus 2:11-12 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and discuss:

- What do these verses have in common?
- What is our main resource for being trained/equipped to live for Jesus?
- How are you doing spending time with God on your own?
- How are we doing as a family?

Pray that God would either strengthen these things or keep them as a staple in your lives.

Close by reading Psalm 1 together. Have at least two people read it, in its entirety, out loud. (Have it read more than once.)

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## Friday • Week 6

### SELF-STUDY ON TITUS 2:11-15

Begin in prayer, ask God to lead and guide you in this time.

Read Titus 2:11-15

In Titus 2:11, what does "for" point you to?

What does "the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people" mean?

Flip back to last Friday, who or what grows you in Christian maturity?

Read Titus 2:11-14 again. How are you being trained in these things?

How is your training going?

Close by praying for these areas of training in your life.

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## Tuesday • Week 6

### PERSONAL REFLECTION

When you see words like "for" "therefore" and "but" what should you do before reading on?

When you begin to study an epistle, what is helpful to read first? (Read the whole thing at once, the ending, or pick a random place to start)

• Why?

Reflect on the lesson and your study this week, write down your major take-a-way.

Close in prayer use the A.C.T.S. method. Spend time in adoration ("adoring" God); confession (confess your sins); thanksgiving (thanking God for His faithfulness and gifts); and supplication (offer your requests, and other's requests)

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## Wednesday Notes • Week 7

TITUS 3:1-11 – FOCUSED, PREPARED, AND EQUIPPED

My groups passage is \_\_\_\_\_

Notes on Titus 3:1-2:

Notes on Titus 3:3:

Notes on Titus 3:4-5:

Notes on Titus 3:6-8

Notes on Titus 3:9

Notes on Titus 3:10-11

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## Thursday • Week 7

PARENT CONNECTION

As a family, begin with Prayer asking God to help you understand what you read and apply it to your lives.

**Read Titus 3:1-11 and discuss:**

- What does it mean? (Remember the context of Titus, revisit week Thursday of week 2)
- Why did Paul write these words? What was he addressing?
- How does it apply to our lives today? (Is there a command to obey, a promise to claim, a sin to avoid, an application to make, and/or something about God?)
- How will you personally apply these things to your life?
- How can we as a family support one another in applying these things?

**Pray about these application points**

Close with a favorite hymn or worship song. Consider pulling up music and lyrics for "Great is Thy Faithfulness".

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## Friday • Week 7

SELF-STUDY ON TITUS 3:1-11

Begin by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to help you understand and apply what you read.

**Read Titus 3:1-11 and reflect on your notes from Wednesday.**

What stood out most from your groups teaching?

What stood out most from another groups teaching?

What is something you need to be applying to your life or remembering more regularly? Why? How will you do this? Be specific.

**Close by praying about this application.**

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## Monday • Week 7

PARENT CONNECTION

Begin, together as a family, by sharing prayer request. Check in on how Thursday's application points are going. Now take a few minutes and pray with and for each other.

**Read Titus 3:3-7 and discuss:**

- How have you seen God at work in your life, making you new?
- How have you seen God at work in the life of someone else sitting with you?

**Spend a few minutes in prayer, asking that God would continue to work in and through you. Pray that you would have eyes to see Him at work.**

Close by singing a favorite hymn or worship song. Consider pulling up music and lyrics for "Jesus Paid It All"

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## APPENDIX 7

### PARENT COMMUNICATION

The following parent communications were sent out throughout the implementation of the project. Each email was sent out approximately 30 minutes before the end of each youth group gathering. Similarly, each text message was sent out each Monday at approximately 4:30pm. Below is the content of each email and text message as they were sent to parents.

#### **Week 1**

##### **Wednesday Email Lesson 1 (1.13.21)**

Dear Parents of Middle Schoolers,

Tonight, we began our walk through Titus. Well, kind of. We began our study but started by looking a bit at “what is the Bible.” Ask your student if they can give you an overview of the “big story”. Your student was handed a booklet for lesson notes and study throughout the week. This week your student will be challenged to read the Gospel of John as a foundation for where we are headed in our study. Please encourage them to do the daily reading. Consider joining them in the plan or even reading together as a family.

Beginning in two weeks there will be two days a week that you are asked to gather as a family, or at least the middle schooler with their parent(s), to engage in the study. Take a few moments this week to flip through the booklet your student has brought home. When we have regular youth group meetings your student should come with their booklet and their Bible.

Thanks for partnering in helping your child know and apply the Bible!

Jon

##### **Monday Text Lesson 1 (1.17.21)**

Happy Monday! Pastor Jon just checking in. How is your student doing being in the

Word this week? Are you reading it too? Praying for your week ahead!



## Week 2

### **Wednesday Email (1.20.21)**

Dear Parents of Middle Schoolers,

Tonight, we held our annual sled build. Join us on Sunday at Hidden Valley Place Park at 2:30! This week, there won't be regular reading in the booklet. In these "off weeks" students are being challenged to slowly read through 1 Timothy with you. This week, read 1 Timothy 1 and make a note of who wrote it, who did they write to, and why did they write.

Looking forward to our sled derby on Sunday and finally beginning our look at epistles next week.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Jon

### **Monday Text (1.24.21)**

Hey parents, how has your time in 1 Timothy 1 been this week? Did you guys have any issue answering the questions?

## Week 3

### **Wednesday Email Lesson 2 (1.27.21)**

Good Evening Parents,

Tonight, we took another step to better understanding Scripture. We looked at what an epistle (a letter) is and some key things to keep in mind as we read, study, and apply them. As a follow up, you might ask them "what is one thing you learned about epistles tonight?"

On Thursday you'll be asked to read the book of Titus (it's a short read) and answer a few questions. This is designed so that your student will have to fill you in on some of what we talked about and to, if you're not currently in the habit, get into the Word with your middle schooler. On Monday you'll gather once more to have a time of family worship. If this is new to you, just borrow your child's Titus book and walk through "Monday – week 2".

Next week, when we gather, we'll begin Titus! We'll look at Titus 1:1-4. (Please send your student with their Bible and their booklet.)

Grateful for you!

Jon

### **Monday Text Lesson 2 (2.1.21)**

Good evening! How was your study of Titus on Thursday? (If you forgot, do it on Tuesday) Praying for your time joining in family worship tonight!

## Week 4

### Wednesday Email Lesson 3 (2.3.21)

Salutations Parents,

This evening we dove into the *salutation* of Titus (Titus 1:1-4). This Thursday and coming Monday your family will be in Titus 1:1-4. The Titus booklet gives you an outline to follow on both days. I pray this will be encouraging and helpful to your in home discipleship. Know you can always email, text, or call if you have any questions.

Next week, when we gather, we'll be at the main campus for a worship night. If you'd like to stick around and join in worship, you are invited and welcome! If your student would rather you not, feel free to hang around the back pews or sneak into the balcony 😊.

In two Wednesday's we are planning on joining with the elementary and family team at Elm Creek Park for some tubing! Praying for you and your students.

Jon

### Monday Text Lesson 3 (2.8.21)

How is family worship going in your home? Have any questions on the salutation to Titus? How are your students responding to doing this with you?

## Week 5

### Wednesday Email (2.10.21)

Good Evening Parents,

This evening was our worship night. If you joined us, thank you for coming! If you couldn't, we talked about focusing on Jesus and God's Truth in Colossians 1:15-23. Ask your student what they learned about truth 😊. Since this is an "off week" you and your student are challenged to continue in your reading of 1 Timothy by going through 1 Timothy 2. As you and your middle schooler read, see if you can identify if there is a command to obey, a sin to avoid, a promise to claim, and/or if it teaches something about God. On another night, find time to discuss your findings and how they apply to your lives.

This next Wednesday we'll be joining together for a sledding night at Lions Valley Place Park! 😊. Additionally, please let me know if you need/want any resources on family worship or on the book of Titus.

Blessings,

Jon

### Monday Text (2.15.21)

Love it or hate it, Monday is here... but almost over :) Just a friendly reminder to study 1 Timothy 2 with your student and know that the youth team and I are praying for you! Hope to see you Wednesday for some sledding!

## Week 6

### **Wednesday Email (2.17.21)**

I hope this finds you warm,

This evening was our tubing night at Lions Valley Place Park. It was a blast! As a reminder, this is another “off week” so engage your middle schooler, or whole family, in 1 Timothy 3. As a general approach ask: what does it say (actually read it), then comb back through the passage and ask what does it mean (what did Paul intend to communicate to Timothy), and how does it apply to our lives today?

Praying for favor as you pursue Jesus and your middle school student. Looking forward to reengaging Titus next week.

Jon

### **Monday Text (2.22.21)**

Just a note to remind you that you are prayed for and that your job as a parent, pointing your children to Jesus truly matters, and is incredibly important. Thank you for stepping into it!

## Week 7

### **Wednesday Email Lesson 4 (2.24.21)**

Parents,

Tonight, we finished Titus 1 (looking at 1:5-16). This will be where your student, and family worship, will be set this week. Again, Thursday and Monday have an outline with questions and to walk through together. Please prioritize these times together in the Word, it matters 😊. Our main focus together, tonight, was that truth and character matter. I hope that comes out as you and your family engage in text, especially that it stuck with your middle schooler.

If there is any way we can better serve, love, and/or equip you, please let us know.

Onward,

Jon

### **Monday Text Lesson 4(3.1.21)**

How is family worship going? Is it hard to make it a habit? Keep fighting for it! It will have a bigger impact than you think.

## Week 8

### **Wednesday Email Lesson 5 (3.3.21)**

Parents,

Tonight, we started Titus 2 (2:1-10) with the main emphasis being the need to hold to the truth and live it out. Thursday and Monday, in the Titus booklet, have outlines to follow for family worship. Spend time considering the answers and applications both individually and together as a family.

Next week there is a slight change of plans. Instead of a worship night we'll be having regular youth group and finishing chapter two of Titus!

For His Glory,

Jon

### **Monday Text Lesson 5 (3.8.21)**

In a culture that insists there is no absolute truth, it is paramount we are teaching children The Truth. Know, apply, and live out the truths of God's Word. Praying for your times of family worship!

## Week 9

### **Wednesday Email Lesson 6 (3.10.21)**

It's Wednesday Night!

This evening we finished chapter 2, looking at Titus 2:11-15 and how Jesus is our ultimate motivation for all we do. This includes why we value truth and living as God calls us. This week, the outlines for family worship, on Thursday and Monday, challenge you to think about how Jesus and the Bible train you to live for Christ and not the world. I'll be praying these times are challenging, stretching, and ultimately drawing you and your family closer to Christ.

Next week we'll begin chapter 3! I'm so encouraged by this journey together and I hope you are too!

Blessings,

Jon

### **Monday Text Lesson 6 (3.15.21)**

Ahh Mondays... even snowy ones aren't so bad when you get to pursue God with your children. Praying for you this week! Anything specific I can be praying for?

## Week 10

### Wednesday Email Lesson 7 (3.17.21)

Good Evening Parents,

Tonight, we began Titus 3, looking at Titus 3:1-11. We took a bit of a different approach this evening as each small group studied, prepared, and then taught the rest of the group on a verse or two. Ask your student what verses they taught on and what they learned. Once again, Thursday and Monday, in the Titus booklet, have outlines for your time of family worship.

Next week we'll finish up Titus!

Blessings,

Jon

### Monday Text Lesson 7 (3.23.21)

How has your time in Titus 3:1-11 been? How is it going engaging your middle schooler (and other children) in the Word?

## Week 11

### Wednesday Email Lesson 8 (3.24.21)

Parents,

Tonight, we wrapped up Titus, looking at the conclusion of the letter in Titus 3:12-15. Our main emphasis was learning to see God opportunities and step into them. I hope this comes through as your student talks with you about this passage during your family worship on Thursday and Monday. As we end our formal time in Titus, Monday will offer a challenge I hope you and your family will step into.

Thank you for partnering in pointing your students towards Jesus and helping them better read, study, apply, and live out God's Word!

If you filled out the parent/student survey at the beginning of our study, would you kindly fill out the "follow-up survey"? You can do that here:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfTdmvrAqXdML1MPE8CjAL5\\_3BO7Rh7viCyQgzNP4uAmiG7Cg/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfTdmvrAqXdML1MPE8CjAL5_3BO7Rh7viCyQgzNP4uAmiG7Cg/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0)

Grateful to partner in ministry with you,

Jon

### Monday Text Lesson 8 (3.29.21)

Just because Titus has ended, don't stop pursuing Jesus with your children. Step into the Philippians study and use the tools you learned studying the epistle of Titus to help you study the epistle to the Philippians.

### Text Two

Also, if you did the "pre-survey" please take a minute to do the "post -survey"  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfTdmvrAqXdML1MPE8CjAL5\\_3BO7Rh7viCyQgzNP4uAmiG7Cg/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfTdmvrAqXdML1MPE8CjAL5_3BO7Rh7viCyQgzNP4uAmiG7Cg/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0)



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## ABSTRACT

### MOVING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARD BIBLICAL LITERACY AT NEW HOPE CHURCH IN NEW HOPE, MINNESOTA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Kevin M. Jones

Chapter 1 serves as an outline to this project. It provided the context for which this project takes place, rationale for the work, and the purpose for it. The purpose of this work is to move middle school students toward biblical literacy while simultaneously equipping parents and adult leaders to more effectively connect with and disciple middle school students. Chapter 2 provides a detailed biblical backing for this work by looking at Matthew 28:18-20, Titus 2:2-6, and Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Chapter 3 looks at the cognitive abilities of middle schoolers and their ability to learn, meditate on, and use the Bible as a life guiding resource in their lives. Chapter 4 provides the results of the pre- and post-surveys while chapter 5 looks at the implications of the surveys and the impact of the developed curriculum.

## VITA

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BS, Shippensburg University 2008

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