

PARENTING IS A MINISTRY SERIES
TRAIN UP YOUR CHILDREN
WORKBOOK

VOLUME 3 OF 4

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Craig Caster



Discipleship
Individual Study
Small Groups

Train Up Your Children is volume 3
in the Parenting Is a Ministry series.

Other Titles in the Parenting Is a Ministry Series

Transformational Parenting (volume 1)
Loving Communication (volume 2)
Biblical Discipline (volume 4)
Leader's Guide

Other Workbooks by FDM.world

Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple by Craig Caster
Discipleship Takes Vision and Strategy by Craig Caster
Forgiveness and Reconciliation by Craig Caster
Marriage Is a Ministry series by Craig Caster
Understanding Teens by Craig Caster

All FDM.world workbooks are recommended for individual study, for small groups, as discipleship tools, and in counseling.

Please note: All blank pages from the original workbook have been removed.
Some page numbers may be skipped for this reason.

Train Up Your Children

Parenting Is a Ministry Series

Volume 3

For Traditional, Blended, and Single-Parent Families

Craig Caster

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

Phone: (619) 590-1901

Email: info@FDM.world

Websites: www.FDM.world

Train Up Your Children, Parenting Is a Ministry Series, Volume 3, by Craig Caster

ISBN 978-1-7331045-8-6

Print and Electronic Version Copyright © 2020 by Craig Caster. All rights reserved.

01052024 revision

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked AMPC are taken from the Amplified® Bible (AMPC). Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version, 1987 printing. Public domain.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *THE MESSAGE*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication—whether in printed or e-book format, or any other published derivation—may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission.

Contents

Preface.....	vii
Introduction.....	ix
Lesson 1: God's Management Style.....	1
Lesson 2: Looking to God's Word.....	9
Lesson 3: The Power of a Father.....	17
Lesson 4: Disorder in the Home.....	25
Lesson 5: Biblical Roles.....	31
Lesson 6: Teaching Biblical Truth.....	47
Lesson 7: Discipling Your Children.....	55
Lesson 8: Principles for Discipling.....	61
Lesson 9: Having a Godly Home.....	69
Lesson 10: Be Unified.....	75
Appendix Resources.....	79
Endnotes.....	115
About the Author.....	119
About Family Discipleship Ministries.....	121

Preface

Most parents would agree on at least two things: raising children can be wonderful *and difficult*. Adjustments must be made for the uniqueness of each personality, and keeping children entertained can be a challenge. But the real bummer is discipline. Couples must work as a team, single parents are working without backup, and every parent faces the challenge of protecting and training each child from birth to adulthood. *When, where, how, how much, how often, how long, and is this really working* are just a few of the questions crowding the thoughts of a parent staring into the face of a precious, disobedient child. The truth is, most parents today are not sure where to turn, believe their own parents did just an okay job, and feel poorly equipped themselves.

But there is help for those who will listen. God, the creator of all things, has not left us without guidance. He is the creator of the institution we call family and has given us clear instructions in His Word on how to be successful. We need to take this seriously because we have an enemy. The Bible tells us that the devil, Satan, is working against us and would love to break down the strength of the family, which is also an attack against the church, society, and our Christian witness to a lost world. But God, knowing all our needs, gives us both His Word and the Holy Spirit, which is enough to win any battle.

Sadly, most Christians are not aware that the Bible is relevant for raising children, so they turn to past experience or worldly philosophy for help. But now is the time to listen and seek God's wisdom and guidance to strengthen our families. If we are not willing to submit to our Creator, then what can we expect for the future? When we operate outside of God's will, the result is chaos and destruction. It may come slowly, so we hardly notice, but the end is pain.

The Parenting Is a Ministry series will help you learn God's plan for raising children. Whether you function as a traditional family, blended family, single-parent family, or grandparents raising grandchildren, God's parenting principles are effective and conclusive. We are all God's children, parent and child alike, and He would never leave us without the possibility of a joy-filled, successful life.

May God bless you through His wonderful, life-changing principles and bless your family as you allow Him to transform you into the parent He desires you to be.

Pray this prayer together.

Dear Lord Jesus, we are asking for Your help and wisdom to be parents who honor and glorify You. Please give us the faith to trust You and the grace to change those things we are doing wrong. Help us start doing Your will in the way we love and train our children. Amen.

Introduction

This workbook is designed to bring you onto the path of discipleship, which means walking in God's principles. When we use words like *walk*, we hope you understand that living in these principles is just as fundamental as learning to walk.

The goals of our workbook are:

1. to show you that God provides principles for parenting,
2. to equip you with tools and applications for applying these principles, and
3. to guide your family into the forgiveness, healing, and unity that comes through obedience to God.

Family Discipleship Ministries exists to help educate the body of Christ in vital areas. Failure in discipleship is directly related to failure in parenting. And how do we know this? By what we have seen, experienced, and found in proven statistics today.

The Process

The study is divided into four volumes. Start with volume 1 and continue through each volume in order. Skipping to a volume or section that sparks your interest is tempting but not advised, because each volume and lesson build upon one another. For example, you really want to master disciplining your child so you move ahead to that study, but there are biblical principles that must be learned before you can discipline in a godly way. Work toward completing one lesson each day for five days. Building daily study with consistency is a key to spiritual success.

These principles have been tried and proven successful. I have experienced it in my own life, my own family, and also through the lives of countless people in counseling and parenting classes. Please understand, this is *not* a "Five Easy Steps to Parenting" manual. Biblical discipleship is challenging work and will require you to change some of your attitudes and behaviors. The process will require commitment and sacrifice to successfully implement the principles.

Starting Each Day

- View each daily study as time spent with your God, and expect Him to speak to you through His Word.
- Start each day with prayer, asking God to reveal where you need to change and to empower you to apply what you are learning.
- Have a reflective mindset. Do not rush through the material just to say you finished it. Give God time to speak to you, and meditate on what you learn.

Things to Note

- This work is a new priority and will require dedicated time. The lessons are to be done daily. If you miss a day, *do not skip it*, but work to complete all lessons in order.

- At times we start projects and do not finish. Consider the importance of your parenting responsibility and make a decision to faithfully complete this study. Pray about your priorities and what you are placing ahead of this commitment. Enlist the help of an accountability partner for prayer and study if necessary.
- If married, your spouse is an essential partner in this effort. Study together or separately, but always discuss what you have learned as it relates to marital and parenting issues and changes.
- Lessons may vary in the amount of information presented. After you complete each one, look ahead to the next lesson to plan your time with God and get the most out of it.
- Space is provided for answering questions and recording your thoughts and prayers. If you have downloaded and printed this workbook, we suggest you put it in a three-ring binder and include additional paper for personal journaling and notes.

DIG DEEPER

This section marks an opportunity to read Scripture and relate it to the subject being presented. During this discipleship process you will become more familiar with the Bible, biblical principles of parenting, and what God expects from you as a parent.

Self-Examination

As you study biblical principles, this section provides time for self-examination, finding areas where personal improvement is needed. Space is provided for listing insights, confessions, and prayers for strength and wisdom to make those changes. One aspect of the discipleship process is personal accountability. If God reveals that you have sinned against your spouse or children, confess your sin to them and ask for forgiveness. Practice this regularly even if it is not noted to do so.

FACT FILE

Boxes like this one provide definitions of words or phrases from the Bible. We have taken great care to use well-known, theologically sound Bible dictionaries and commentaries for clarity, referenced when possible. Many of these definitions appear in *Appendix T: Glossary*.

ACTION PLAN

After you study the biblical principles, this section challenges you to take action and apply what you have learned to your life. To be true disciples we must understand that God not only desires that we grow in knowledge, but He also requires that we live it out.

Appendix Resources

Please take advantage of the appendices at the end of the workbook. They are there for your growth, and we refer to them throughout the workbook. Before you begin this wonderful journey, please fill out *Appendix A: Parent Commitment Letter* (volume 1).

Leader's Guide

A leader's guide is available at FDM.world under Free Ministry Downloads. All materials on our website focus on discipleship and are provided free of charge.

Lesson 1

God's Management Style

To train up our children, we must understand that discipline and training are most effective when a healthy relationship exists between parent and child. If this relationship is strained, or weak, the parent's role as teacher and trainer is hindered. Without a positive relationship the exercise of authority actually creates hostility. Our modern penal system, primarily based on punishment, is a good example of this principle. Punishment alone does not produce reformed individuals. Statistics¹ reveal that most, after release, will commit a crime and return to prison.

Although discipline is a part of training, effective parenting depends more on love. The most powerful motivator for encouraging children—and teens—to make right decisions is love. Even though they are older and fighting for independence, teens are equally in need of consistent parental love. When we do not use loving communication with our children, we are reducing their desire and affecting their ability to make good choices. The Bible has much to say about love because God wants us to understand the importance of loving one another. As we learned in volume 2, He defines love clearly in 1 Corinthians 13. God gave us these guidelines to evaluate ourselves, correct any mistakes, and properly communicate love to our children.

A discussion on love is not complete without mentioning the bond between husband and wife. This is a relationship where loving communication is absolutely necessary. It is the foundation and the source of a successful partnership. And this partnership is the starting point for administering discipline in the home. If agreement does not exist between husband and wife, it will confuse children and undermine discipline. Parents must consistently use loving communication with each other and also during the process of disciplining their children.

Notice that this workbook comes *after* the one on love. Training is essential, a mandate from God to parents, but it is most effective when a child is first secure in your love. Loving communication and training work together and build upon each other. Love without training produces a self-centered child with weak character, while discipline without love will provoke and embitter, foster rebellion, and may emotionally cripple them.

Training Is Twofold

1. Discipling Your Children

The first essential of training up a child is discipleship—teaching biblical morals and values. As we disciple our children, we instill God's Word into their hearts by both example and instruction. It is the parents' responsibility to teach a child how to identify right and wrong behavior, how to pray, how to study God's Word, and how to have an abiding relationship with God. A child is not born with biblical "morals and values;" they must be learned. God not only commands but considers it a privilege for parents to disciple their children (Deuteronomy 11:19).

FACT FILE

Disciple (verb)—Instilling God's Word, morals, and values into our children's hearts through example and instruction; teaching them to pray and how to have a relationship with God (spiritual training).

Discipline—Instilling the character traits of a mature adult, which are personal responsibility and self-control, into our children (behavioral training).

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.
(Genesis 18:19)

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.
(Deuteronomy 6:7)

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

DIG DEEPER

After reviewing the following verse a few times, describe what the Lord is saying to you. Even though it is specifically addressed to fathers, every wife is equally important in her God-given role as helpmate. As mentioned before, parents function as a team, and both are responsible for discipling and disciplining their children.

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

God has given clear and specific instruction in this verse, which we will be referring to throughout the study of training up a child. Our children are His children, and His desire is that they are given every opportunity to become spiritually mature adults. It is our responsibility to learn His plan and then adhere to it. The verb tense of *bring them up* indicates continuous action, to do and continue doing without stopping, and is also a command. We are to do this faithfully until a child is no longer our responsibility.

However, a misconception must first be addressed. God did not give the church primary responsibility for this task. Many years in family ministry have shown me that more than 90 percent of children from Christian families are not being disciplined at home. Parents have relinquished this responsibility to the church because most fathers never received any training in how to disciple their children, or they have misplaced priorities. Praise God for fathers and mothers who are exhorting other parents to take responsibility for the spiritual training of their children—discipleship within their homes. The church is

FACT FILE

Bring them up—*Ektrepho* (Greek). To nourish, rear, feed. To nurture, rear, to bring up to maturity such as children, in the sense of to train or educate.²

Training—*Paideia* (Greek). Chastening, because all effectual instruction for the sinful children of men includes and implies discipline, correction ... as the Lord approves.³

Admonition—*Nouthesia* (Greek). Warning, exhortation, any word of encouragement or reproof, which leads to correct behavior.⁴ It is the idea of having a corrective influence on someone by imparting understanding.

commissioned by God to support, come alongside, and encourage parents and families (Ephesians 4:11-16), not to take away the responsibility of discipling the children.

2. Building Character

The second essential of training up a child is instilling the character traits of a mature adult, which are personal responsibility and self-control. No one is born with these traits, nor do we naturally acquire them. These qualities result from training. God's Word clearly teaches that this is the role of the parent—as well as spiritual discipleship.

Self-Examination 1

Are you discipling your children in the Lord at home? ___ Yes ___ No

Explain your answer.

If not, are you willing to learn and start? ___ Yes ___ No

Write your prayer asking God for the faith and wisdom to apply the things you are about to learn.

Before we dive into discipleship and discipline in the coming lessons, God's management of the home must be understood. If our homes are out of order, they will not be strong, protective environments to raise our children.

Using God's Management Style

God has not given parents an impossible task, because He has given us His Word and His Spirit. In His Word, God gives us specific instructions regarding raising children and, with the Holy Spirit inside us, we have the power to do all things according to His will.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses mean and how they relate to our task in parenting.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.
(Ephesians 1:11)

And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. (Ephesians 1:19)

God has outlined a management style in His Word, which we must follow if we desire His blessing on our endeavors. Our responsibility is simply to search His Word and obey what He tells us to do, in His power and might.

For Single Parents

All these instructions may not apply specifically to your situation, but you may be called upon to give advice to other parents and, to respond in a biblical fashion, you will need to know what God says about this subject. Additionally, you may marry again. So learn these principles as wisdom and understanding that God wants to teach you, to prepare you for what may be in the future. God wants every believer to know the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). If you do not know, how can you counsel your own children correctly in this area? Turn to *Appendix I: Essentials for Single Parents* to find helpful insight and encouragement for parents raising their children alone.

Blended Families

If you are in a blended-family marriage, none of these instructions change. Nowhere in His Word did God say if you are a blended family, you are excused from this management style. God does not have plans A, B, and C. He has only one plan that we are all to follow. See *Appendix J: Parenting the Blended Family* for more help and encouragement for blended families.

The Logic of a Management Style

If you have worked in a group setting, large or small, you know a management style was in place. Without this structure, there is no leadership. Disorder, division, and chaos will bring devastating consequences. Since a home is a group, our homes must operate according to a management style—God’s management style.

Many families have suffered major problems because their homes were out of order. The division present within the home is reflected outside the home as well. When Christian families are

disobedient to God, even out of ignorance, they malign the Word of God and ultimately God Himself.

Christian couples must agree to embrace what God's Word says. If you adopt any other standard for family management, you are not under His blessings. When we are disobedient to God's management style, there are consequences. God has warned us for our protection and, as with any disobedience, He will administer discipline so we repent and come in line with His Word.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what God promises to do to all His children.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the Lord loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.”

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:3-11)

Consequences can come in many forms: feeling separated from the Lord, lacking the strength to live for Him, no peace or contentment, confusion, turmoil, depression, and contention, just to name a few. But the good news is when we line up with God's Word and repent, He will restore us and keep us on track. God uses these negative consequences to get our attention.

DIG DEEPER

List the negative consequences when we do things our own way.

But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek. (Romans 2:8-9)

The Institution of Family

Since the family is an institution created by God, it is subject to His design. In order for a family to operate correctly, God has ordained that there must be leadership and authority within it. Let us now look to the structure He established for this vitally important institution.

FACT FILE

Self-seeking—Doing things in our own way, using ours or this world’s wisdom in making choices.

According to the account in Genesis, God, seeing that it was not good for the man to be alone, gave him a helper, or a helpmate, “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’” (Genesis 2:18). Notice the word He used here is *helper*, not *leader*. God formed the man out of the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7), but He also formed or literally built the woman out of the rib of the man (Genesis 2:21-22). God was demonstrating the role that the husband and wife would have in each other’s lives. They would be mutually dependent upon each other. The man needed companionship—and help. God provided that help through the woman. A woman would make up for what was lacking in the man, and vice versa. The woman’s life came from the man, and man’s life would proceed from the woman.

Self-Examination 2

Wives, do you want to be a helper/helpmate to your husband? ___ Yes ___ No (Tell him now.)

Husbands, are you willing to admit to yourself and your wife that you need her? ___ Yes ___ No (Tell her now.)

Are you open to learn how to work together under God’s management style? ___ Yes ___ No

No Conflict

On that day there was no power struggle, no conflict, no misunderstanding between them, and no battle of the sexes. They were naked and not ashamed. They were oblivious to evil and absolutely innocent.

God made the man responsible for tending the things He created. Genesis 2:15 says, “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.”

Further we read, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). God instructs us to see the relationship between husband and wife as one—unified. Both need to be in agreement, thinking as one, following what the Bible says.

Sin Erodes God’s Management Style

Unfortunately, as we turn to Genesis 3, we learn that domestic tranquility was short-lived.

In Genesis 3:1, the Serpent enters the scene with no introduction or explanation. We learn that, in contrast to man’s innocence, the Serpent was shrewd and cunning. Satan disguised himself as a shining serpent to converse with and ultimately deceive the woman.

FACT FILE

Deceived—To cause to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid, to believe a lie, to be lead astray, or ensnared.

Take note as you read: Where was Adam when this was happening? Why didn’t he step up and lead here? Adam’s lack of leadership and interceding makes him equal in blame. Husbands, do you want to do what Adam did in your family?

In verses 1–8 (NASB), the downfall of man unfolded:

Satan planted doubt in Eve’s mind.

Indeed, has God said . . . (verse 1)

Satan lied to the woman.

You surely will not die! (verse 4)

Satan enticed Eve with an evil desire.

For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (verse 5)

Satan deceived the woman, and she sinned.

The woman saw . . . she took from its fruit and ate. (verse 6)

When she took and ate, she was deceived, believing the lies of the Enemy.

Satan used the woman’s influence toward her husband to encourage him to sin.

She gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (verse 6)

God’s order had been violated. The couple’s relationship to God and to each other was marred. Stripped of their righteousness and innocence, they would suffer the consequences of their rebellion. The curses resulting from the fall are recorded in Genesis 3:16–19.

To the woman He said:

“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;
In pain you shall bring forth children;
Your desire shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you.” (verse 16)

The word *desire* in Genesis 3:16, also in Genesis 4:7, means “a desire to dominate.” The man has been given authority over his wife, yet she would thereafter struggle to submit and have a carnal desire to not yield to her husband’s leadership.

Adam did not obey God’s instructions when he failed to lead and protect his wife, but rather did as she requested, and he also was cursed (verses 17–19).

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife.”
(verse 17)

By failing to guard his wife from Satan’s spiritual attack, by failing to lead, and by following her into sin, Adam neglected to carry out the responsibility God had given him to oversee his family. He would forever be held responsible for sin entering the world. The curse of sin continues to take its toll. In countless homes, husbands struggle with insecurity in their leadership role, and just as many wives are resisting their husband’s attempts to lead. Typically, men today follow the example of Adam by failing to exert their authority in the home, and women, like Eve, feel they do not need protection and demonstrate a desire to rule.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin.
(Romans 5:12)

Concerning this subject, one commentary says:

God gave headship to man before sin entered. Paul argues this fact from the order of creation (man was created first) and the purpose of creation (woman was made for the man) (1 Cor. 11:8, 9). Also, although it was Eve who sinned first, it is by Adam, the head, that sin is said to have entered the world. He had the position of head and was thus responsible.⁵

Husbands, are you willing to learn to protect and lead according to God’s Word? ___ Yes ___ No

Wives, are you willing to hear and yield to God’s instruction in how to manage the home?
___ Yes ___ No

God’s Plan

God never intended for a woman to be the authority figure in the home, instead to be her husband’s helpmate. The man needs the help and support of his wife to fulfill his role as head of the family under the lordship of Jesus Christ. This is God’s wonderful plan, the management style that we, as Christians, are to follow to be blessed.

Lesson 2

Looking to God's Word

We are to seek and obey God's will and purpose, not our own or what we find in worldly philosophy.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how this applies to following, or not following, God's management style in your home.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

Paul was concerned that the Colossians would be cheated by following unbiblical philosophies. When it comes to marriage, parenting, and how the home should operate, there are plenty of worldly philosophies, traditions of men, and principles of the world that are *not* according to Christ. The word *beware*, or "be aware," encourages us to watch for what is happening around us. In this case, it warns us to use godly discernment to separate truth and error. We must have discerning minds that can identify and lay hold of the truth to fight off any lies.

FACT FILE

Cheat ("[take] you captive" in NASB)—To plunder or rob as when plunder is taken in war. In this case it is to rob believers of the complete riches they have in Christ as revealed in the Word, plus His power and intervention.

Many families have been cheated by believing lies and therefore have forfeited the blessings and peace that comes from functioning according to the principles of God's Word. The conclusion is that the worldly philosophies, traditions of men, and principles of the world rob us from what Christ wants to do in our families.

The question you need to ask yourself is, Have I been cheated by believing something that is not based on God's Word? Many times we do not examine ourselves, instead just go with the flow. We who are spiritual are to "[judge] all things" (1 Corinthians 2:15) and operate according to the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of man or of this age (1 Corinthians 2:5–6, 13).

As we move through God's management style, "be aware" of the leadership structure within your home. We must willingly abandon the influence of all traditions, cultural norms, ethnic traits, or past personal experience if they are contrary to God's ways. This may be very hard because it requires breaking some generational sins or bad habits and totally changing the way we operate and think. But we serve a God of great compassion, and He will empower you to change so you may "be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Ephesians 4:23).

Under the Influence

We need to “be aware” of letting our thinking and behavior be influenced by these philosophies.

Culture (Ethnic)

Some people say, “In my culture (meaning ethnic background), this is the way we do it.” Or “As a [fill in your ethnic background], the woman has no say so in the home, or the woman does all the training of the children.” But if you are a Christian, you must put your cultural beliefs aside because they are in direct conflict with the Word of God. Many times cultural beliefs are just preferences with no moral implications, and it is totally fine to practice them. However, when a cultural belief is contrary to the Bible, it becomes a moral conflict, which is sin. We must always check our beliefs about marriage and family with God’s Word.

Culture (Worldly)

Our culture, or the “philosophies and principles of this world,” is all around us. The wisdom of the world comes via media (books, TV, movies, magazines, internet, social media) or often through education and peer pressure. Any of these can influence us to view marriage and family through the lens of the world. Beliefs and philosophies get so ingrained that we actually believe it’s the truth—the way we are supposed to operate—until we compare it to the Word of God.

Religious Traditions

Many religious teachings about marriage and parenting have become traditions. For example, “In our religion we have always done it this way.” But let’s be like the Christians in Berea who, after hearing the teaching of Paul, “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Do not blindly take anyone else’s word on truth, not even mine, but open the Word and verify that it is true.

Traditions of Men

Traditions are beliefs and behaviors that are passed down from one person to another, one generation to another. This happens all the time with marriage and parenting styles. Too often parents give their grown children bad parenting advice, such as, “When we raised you, we did it this way so you should too.” As Christians, we all must make tough decisions when it comes to following Christ. When the Word of God is our standard, we must always honor God and His Word above all others, including our parents. Not all traditions have moral implications, but when they do, they must be rejected.

Jesus’s Perspective on Traditions

Dealing with the confusion of separating tradition from truth is not new. Jesus had to deal with certain religious leaders who preferred to live their lives according to the traditions that dominated the religious culture in which they were raised. We see now, by reading Scripture, that by stubbornly refusing to give up those ideas taught to them by men, they eventually rejected the Savior who came to save them.

All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition . . . making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do. (Mark 7:9, 13)

Jesus told them that God had given instructions (commandments) to live by, but they were following man-made rules, or principles, not truth. By doing this, they were making the Word of God of no effect. In this context, the Pharisees said they could not take care of their parents financially because the money was “corban,” a sacrificial gift to God. In reality, they were saving the money for their own purposes. They had devised a way of legally avoiding the fifth commandment to honor father and mother.

We tend to spiritualize, or put our own twist on Scripture, to suit our own purposes. Jesus told them, “In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7). No word or deed goes unnoticed by the Lord.

Biblical Traditions

Some traditions we should hold tightly. Paul told the church at Thessalonica, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Paul was saying stand firm and hold onto the biblical truths that had been given to them by the apostles through their preaching and letters. We must all hold tightly to the truth.

Jesus’s Perspective on Family

Jesus also gave an exhortation on whether to follow a family member’s principles or His.

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.
(Luke 14:26)

Jesus was not saying that to love Him we must hate our families, spouse, or children. Rather, if it comes to a choice of doing something God’s way or our parents’ way, the world’s, or our own way, we must choose God’s way. The word translated in this verse as *hate* would be better translated “love less,” meaning that our love for God, His Word, and what He desires is so great that neither our desires nor our families’ will keep us from obeying what He wants. That is the commitment of a true disciple. In Christ’s day, Jews who became followers of Christ were shunned as those who had abandoned the faith of Judaism. Often their family would cast them out.

We cannot let any other relationship cause us to compromise the truth in Christ, no matter how it may look to others. And as Christians, we will sometimes be considered strange when we follow biblical principles that are contrary to the world’s viewpoints.

In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. (1 Peter 4:4)

We should look strange, because we are strangers, aliens to the world, and God’s Word now dictates and governs how we do all things.

At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)

DIG DEEPER

Describe who God says you are and what He has called you to do.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

These may be controversial issues, but we need to put all other ideas aside and fully embrace what we find in God's Word.

Biblical Leadership in the Home

God created the institution of family and has established a line of authority, clearly appointing husbands and fathers to lead. In understanding this, our goal must be to fulfill God's will and purpose, and to glorify Him.

Fill in the chart below based on these verses.

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:18-21)

_____ is the head of Christ.
_____ is the head of the man.
_____ is the head of the woman.
Children are to submit to _____.

It seems that these Scriptures would clear any debate, but division still exists among certain circles of thought. The debate is raised over whether or not the man is the head over the wife. Is the husband really to be the leader of the home? This question must be answered by both the husband and wife. They must agree on God's perspective and then embrace the roles God has designed for each of them. As we learned in lesson 1, the natural desire of the woman will be to rule as part of the curse (Genesis 3:16). God did not put that in the Bible by accident, but for us to understand that a struggle will occur, and we must become subject to His will.

The word *head, kephale* (Greek), is translated different ways in the New Testament. One Greek scholar explains its use in the metaphorical sense as it appears in 1 Corinthians 11:3. If you look up each of these passages, you will understand the importance of the headship principle. For our purposes, it describes the relationship between husband and wife.

FACT FILE

Head—The chief or lead person to whom others are subordinate.

Metaphorically of persons, i.e., the head, chief, one to whom others are subordinate, e.g., the husband in relation to his wife (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23) insofar as they are one body (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:8), and one body can have only one head to direct it; of Christ in relation to His Church which is His body, and its members are His members (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19); of God in relation to Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). In Col. 2:10 & Eph. 1:22, God the Father is designated as the head of Christ.⁶

First Corinthians 11:3 says, “The head of Christ is God.” It is very clear from the Gospel of John that Jesus fully submitted to the Father’s will (John 5:30). His food was to do the Father’s will (4:34), planned before time began so we would be saved (Ephesians 1:4). Jesus willingly submitted to the headship of the Father—all the way to the cross.

Jesus Christ was functioning in the role of Son and Redeemer, even though He was equal with God in every way. The issue is not who is better or more qualified. Jesus was just fulfilling the role that was given to Him. In the same way, the husband/father or the wife/mother has been given a role by God in which to function. It is not who is better or more qualified. We are all equal in God’s sight. It is who God designed you to be: a man is a husband/father; a woman is a wife/mother.

Christ is the head of the church. Ephesians 1:22 states, “He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.” God the Father gave Christ authority to function as the head of the church. What is our role, or how are we to relate to Christ as the head? We are to have an attitude of willingly submitting to the Father’s plan of Christ being head of the church, we are to recognize that Christ has all authority (“all things under His feet”), and we are to willingly submit to Christ. Obedient Christians acknowledge this and act accordingly.

Christians understand that “the head of every man is Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:3). Mankind, and in this case the husband, is to submit to Christ. Again, as Christians we willingly submit to Christ because He is the head. Furthermore:

The head of woman is man. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. (Ephesians 5:23)

We come the following conclusions about biblical leadership in the home from these verses:

1. Just as Christ is the head of the church, so is the husband the head of the wife. Husband, this is your calling, role, and how you are to function.

2. Just as the church is to submit itself to the headship of Christ, so the wife is to submit herself to the headship of her husband. Wife, this is your calling, role, and how you are to function.
3. Just as Christ has the responsibility of leading the church because of His headship, so the husband has the responsibility of leading his wife and his family because of his headship.
4. Just as God the Father had a plan in making Christ the head of the church, so He has a plan in making the husband the head of the wife and family.

Isn't This Outdated?

Some say we need to update the Bible to fit our times. But the Bible has proven itself to be the source of truth in every century and culture, including ours. It never becomes outdated.

To illustrate that headship does not change over time, let's look at Abraham and Sarah from 1 Peter. When Peter wrote this letter, it was about AD 64, and here we are about two thousand years later. In 1 Peter 3:1-7, he covered the subject of husbands and wives. Peter encouraged wives to be submissive to their husbands (3:1-4) and then used the story of Abraham and Sarah to illustrate his point.

For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. (1 Peter 3:5-6)

Abraham and Sarah lived about two thousand years before this was written, and Adam and Eve lived two thousand years before that. Let's follow the timeline from creation: God designed the husband to lead and Eve to help. Two thousand years after that, Abraham and Sarah were following the same pattern. Then another two thousand years later, Peter was directing the New Testament believers to follow the same pattern. We gather from this that four thousand years did not change how God designed marriage to work at creation. If God was going to change the management style, He would have done it in the New Testament. Since the Word of God is complete and we are not to add to it or take away from it, then we need to embrace it.

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.
(Deuteronomy 4:2)

Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32)

Do not add to His words,
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:6)

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18)

DIG DEEPER

Describe what many people will be doing prior to Jesus's return.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

We must not forget that all are born with a sin nature that wants to follow Satan, the world, or the flesh. Therefore, if not watchful, we can wind up polluting God's management style with philosophies that are contrary to Scripture. That is why we must weigh every thought and action against His precious Word. Ignorance will not stop the negative consequences from happening.

A Successful Woman

If you remember the TV series *Full House*, DJ was played by Candace Cameron (now Bure) whose brother, Kirk Cameron, starred in *Growing Pains*. She is still acting and is also successful as a wife and mother. Candace met her husband, Val Bure (a Russian hockey player), at a charity hockey game, and not long after they were married and had children. After being married ten years, here is what she had to say about marriage and God's management style.

Like any marriage we've had our happy days and our growing pains (no pun intended), but it wasn't until nearly a decade into our marriage that I really began to understand the impact that my role as a wife could have in this union. With some changes of my own, I was excited to discover that an already good relationship could be transformed into a great one.

The first step I took was understanding that although marriage is an equal partnership where husband and wife are equally important, we aren't designed to share the same roles.

Holding the Bible, I read, "For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman: but the woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:8-9 KJV).

Today's society had me believe that there should be no differences between a man and a woman. Society had it wrong. Val and I were created equally but differently, and so we have differing responsibilities in our marriage—mine being his helpmate. God created Adam, and when he saw that Adam was alone, he created Eve to be his helper.

Was this an important lesson in reshaping me? Very much so. . . . If we can learn to yield to the authority God has placed in our lives, in turn we learn that our flesh must yield to our Spirit.⁷

Self-Examination

Describe what the Lord has revealed to you about your disposition as a husband/father or wife/mother.

Lesson 3

The Power of a Father

Fathers, you must truly understand the power God has given you. It is supernatural. You have influential power over your children that is absolutely beyond anyone else's influence.

For years, studies have proven the power of a father in the life of his kids. Many of these studies looked closely at the family dynamics in the lives of men like Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Adolph Hitler, and many hardened criminals. The one thing they all had in common was either no father or a very bad relationship with their father. On the other hand, when we study some of the most powerful people in the world, who have blessed our society, we see that most of them had healthy relationships with their fathers.

God put it in the hearts of children to look instinctively to their daddies for affirmation, encouragement, and value. But for some reason, as we grow up and raise our own kids, we forget how influential our dads were to us, not realizing how damaging our lack of proper leadership or our words and actions can be.

I have a huge King Solomon sword in my office. It is beautiful. I use it as an illustration in counseling. I say, "Dad, every time you get angry and yell at your child, it's just like using that sword to slice the heart of your child."

When you act harshly toward your child, you are abusing that influential power God has given you. Your children know you are supposed to lead. They want you to lead in all areas of your home, especially in the area of training them. That is why you must lead as Christ did.

Stepfamilies

A blended family does not qualify for a change in management style. As a "step-in" dad, you must still lead, and as a "step-in" mom, you are still to do as the Bible instructs. Neither of you should demand that the children call you Dad or Mom, nor embrace you like a biological father or mother. But children must understand that biological parenting is not the issue. You are going to do what the Bible says, which includes participating in the training of *all* the children.

I estimate that this issue has played a major role in as many as 80 percent of the divorces among blended families. These couples felt that their particular circumstances exempted them from these biblical principles and failed to embrace them. In reality, the Word of God instructs us that all children belong to Him. They are merely loaned to us by God to love and train. God's plan does not change when the children live in a blended family.

See *Appendix J: Parenting the Blended Family* for additional issues to consider.

Leader, Not Dictator

Headship is not dictatorship or lordship, but loving leadership, with Jesus Christ as the example. When our house functions in any other way, we are in direct disobedience to God. More

specifically, the husband, or father, is to lead as God instructs, not as a dictator with a heavy hand. God’s Word describes leadership in this way:

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24–26)

DIG DEEPER

Considering the above verse, what are some key characteristics that mark a servant of the Lord, and what are the hopeful end results?

We are all servants of the Lord, and the exhortation is to be gentle to all. Please notice that gentleness also needs to be expressed to those who are in opposition to us.

When someone insists on the letter of the law, “You will do it my way,” they miss the whole point of godly leadership, which ultimately leads people to truth and reconciliation. Dictatorship leads to quarrels and separation.

FACT FILE

Gentle—“Denotes seemly, fitting; hence, equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law; it expresses that considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case.”⁸

Paul, a great leader, teacher, and apostle of Christ, is described in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 as being “gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” His behavior toward the Thessalonian church was similar to that of a concerned, loving mother. When dads meet opposition, this is the disposition we need to use. We don’t ever compromise the truth or Word of God, but we must be willing to adjust and cooperate with our wives.

Christ showed that He was a servant-minister. As fathers and husbands, we must have that same understanding. It goes back to our strong foundation. As we rely upon God’s strength, He gives us the ability to serve as Christ did—gentle to all, patient and humble.

In humility means “without pride or arrogance.” Many men resort to the dictator’s style by saying, “I’m the man; do what I say. I’m supposed to lead.” But that is not the way God wants us to lead; that is the way of the flesh.

However, the father, leading as Christ did, is not passive or uninvolved. He does not relinquish his God-given responsibility or authority to his wife in the area of training. Many men today are saying to their wives, "I work; you take care of the kids." Meanwhile, their wives are thinking, "I wish this guy would step up to the plate! I've been hoping and praying that would happen."

To show how our culture has changed the husband's role, we just need to look at a dictionary. I refer to an old dictionary periodically, a big leather-bound *Webster International Dictionary*, published in 1939. The word *husband* in that dictionary is defined as follows: "one who manages or directs his household, a married man, leadership and/or authority within a house, to manage prudently."⁹ A 1996 version of the same dictionary says: "a male head of household."¹⁰ That is it! The 2012 version says: "The state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband and wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law; the state of being united to a person of the same sex in a relationship like that of a traditional marriage."¹¹

What are the major points that have changed?

The word *management* in the 1939 version is defined as: "to conduct or direct, to handle successfully or cope with, to conduct, guide, administer, to render and keep one submissive, to guide by careful and delicate treatment, to treat with care, to husband."¹² Isn't that amazing? You will not find that in today's dictionary.

My Wife, My Helpmate

God has given me a wife to complete me. Since God says she is the one who completes me, I must look to her for input, especially about the emotional condition of the hearts of my kids, which many times I do not see. Truthfully, as a man and the way God has wired me, I am not tuned into my kid's emotional needs. Most men can relate to this.

When my children were young, if I would come home, and the chores were not done. I would be thinking one thing: *They need to be done now. Why did my wife not reinforce this?* I was ready to call down the discipline. I saw things in black and white, and as a man, I wanted to fix it.

Rule: Lawn is to be mowed by 6:00 p.m. every Thursday.

Consequence: Child would receive discipline, and it is mowed the following day.

It is logical and clear. Most men are wired like this because we are designed to be leaders. Gradually I learned to do a little investigating, getting my wife's input, which clued me in to new information: "Honey, he was up until 2:00 a.m. because he has finals this week. I told him he could do his chores tomorrow."

I am the leader of the family, but my wife is a gift from God. She is my helpmate. It is my male nature to see this situation from a different perspective. But my wife has helped me to be more sensitive and consider situations differently.

However, it should be the exception, not the rule, for a wife to change the discipline plan laid out for the children. She is to submit to her husband's leadership and discipline plan, but husbands also need to seek help from the wife's sensitive and nurturing nature to help them become better fathers and disciples for Christ.

Because of my wife's input, I understood the stress my son was under and why she made that decision. This did not mean that every time the children wanted out of doing a chore, or wanted to change a rule, that they could go to their mother and she could make changes on a whim. We must work together as a team to prevent manipulation of what we have established.

As men, we need to embrace how God made our wives: they complement us because they often see things we miss. We would be foolish to say, "I'm the man, and it's going to happen this way." Yet some men do exactly that, which is not following what God says. Your wife completes you as your helpmate. You must endeavor to work with her—in unison.

At times we did not agree, and my wife had to choose to submit. By doing so, she trusted God. Even when I was wrong, God blessed us, not for any other reason than we desired to do things His way. When these situations happened, she didn't always do it happily. But she didn't pout, frown, and ignore me. She had learned to trust the Lord with my authority, and she was blessed. If she wanted to change a rule and its discipline, she knew to first speak to me. I wasn't always right when I made a decision. But, praise the Lord, we learn from our mistakes too.

Women are commonly more driven by their emotions and may react to situations based on their feelings. If they allow these feelings to rule in the area of training, many will not follow through consistently with enforcing rules or issuing discipline. Men need to understand that most women must fight harder than we do against the urge to "let it go" or not administer discipline. (While a small percentage of men are driven by their emotions, they usually marry women who are not—showing God's sense of humor.)

Men need to gently say, "Honey, I understand they had a hard day, but discipline is what needs to happen at this time." Training is about working together and showing love to our children.

DIG DEEPER

List what God says He will do for those He loves.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:
"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the Lord loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives." (Hebrews 12:5-6)

~~ACTION PLAN~~

Husbands, list some of your wife’s gifts and strengths. (For example: “She is more discerning of the children’s feelings” or “She helps me see the children’s point of view.”) Then thank her for the gifts God has given her, and let her know you want her input.

Discuss the issues to work through and list them here.

To begin to work as a team using God’s management style, pray together His help.

Resistance Brings Consequences

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

When Paul wrote this, the Roman government was ruling over the Jews with a heavy hand. The Jews wanted to be released from Roman authority because of the oppression and unfair treatment. Paul was addressing Christians being persecuted for their faith, whose natural tendency was to resist the authorities. But the only time to resist is when authorities ask us to sin or not share the gospel (Acts 4:18-20). So Paul took extra time in Romans to explain God’s perspective on authority. We can draw some basic principles from these passages.

“There is no authority except from God” (verse 1).

That is pretty specific—no authority. In this case we have government over all citizens (Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17), but God also speaks of the church and pastors’ authority over all believers (Hebrews 13:7, 17), the headship of husband over wife (1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9; Ephesians 5:22), the rule of parents over children (Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 6:20-22; 23:22; Luke 2:51; Ephesians 6:1), and the position of masters over all employees (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22; 1 Peter 2:18).

“The authorities that exist are appointed by God” (verse 1).

God orchestrates things and controls who is in authority. That means good government officials and bad, good pastors and bad, good spouses and bad, good parents and bad, good employers and bad. We may not understand this, but that is what the Word of God says. This same word for *appointed* is used in Acts 13:48: “As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Why do you think there were, and are, so many martyrs? Christians have been killed under the hand of government (and other authorities) because they would not deny their faith, even when threatened with death. The martyrs lived and died by the principle that God appoints all authority.

“Whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God” (verse 2).

Resisting authority is rebelling directly against the Lord. By resisting this order, you bring divine judgment on yourself (verse 2). God spoke these spiritual laws into existence. They are like the physical laws we reviewed earlier, like gravity. Gravity is a good thing; it keeps us down here on the earth with our feet firmly on the ground. That is what God’s truth does, keeps us firmly planted in His will so we can receive His blessings for obedience.

Excuses

Husbands, since God has appointed you to lead, you are in authority, and God has called you to this position. If you say, “I know I am supposed to lead, but . . . ,” you are resisting what God has ordained you to do, breaking a spiritual law, and bringing judgment upon yourself. This judgment can come in many forms: lack of power to live the Christian life; trouble understanding God due to your disobedience; diminishing intimacy with the Lord resulting in loss of peace, joy, confidence, or contentment; and much more.

I have heard many excuses for not leading: “My wife is a better leader.” “She is more educated.” “She is better with the kids.” “She has more patience.” “I am not a real leader.” “I don’t know how.” But more than likely you are leading something at your job, and I bet you are pretty good at it.

A wife might say, “I know God says I need to submit to the authority of my husband, but” She may not have physical pain immediately as a consequence, but she will eventually experience pain. The consequences are painful in the same way a man will suffer, as mentioned above.

When we choose to walk in the light, we have peace, joy, and contentment. When we don’t, these gifts from God will begin to fade. Depression, unfulfillment, and unhappiness will soon follow, along with many possible physical ailments.

Out of Order

When I started counseling one couple, the wife looked like she had five hundred pounds on her back. She was hunched over and looked depressed. She sat down and poured out her heart: how her house was a mess; she and her eighteen-year-old daughter were not speaking to each other; she and her fifteen-year-old son argued all the time; she was depressed, on medication, and seeing a psychiatrist. She went on and on. I asked her husband where he was in all of it. When he agreed with her concerns, I asked what he does about it.

“When she wants me to help, I help her. When she comes and gets me, I go in there and yell and say, ‘Alright, that’s enough,’” he explained.

The mom said she knew that’s not the right thing to do and explained why she was leading in the area of discipline rather than her husband: “My background is in psychology. I’ve been trained in this area. I can better deal with the children than my husband. I can communicate with them and talk things out.”

I shed light on the issue: “So you are depressed, you feel like giving up, and you’re tired of the way you feel, right? Do you know why you are in this physical state? For sure one of the main reasons is because your home is out of order. You feel that way because you are supposed to. It’s a consequence of disobedience to God’s way. You’re leading in the area of discipline, and your husband is supporting you. That’s backward. That’s not the way it’s supposed to be done.”

From creation forward, the authority structure God has ordained for man is: God, man, woman, children. It does not have anything to do with inferiority. It simply means the husband—not the wife—is head of the home, which includes the training of children. Think of it this way: Dad is the president. Mom is the vice-president. Does it hurt to think that way or to hear that? If so, you need to take it up with the Lord. You need to ask God to help you trust Him in this area. Husbands need to protect their wives and take the lead at home.

When Parents Disagree

Dads, you must step up to the plate of leadership within the home. You are to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). You can learn how to set the rules and discipline to train your children, but you must be motivated to do this in unity with your wife to keep peace, at least as much as depends on you (Romans 12:18). But what if you and your wife disagree concerning an issue with the children?

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (Colossians 3:18)

Ladies, you must submit to your husband’s leadership, unless his request is in direct conflict with scriptural commands. If your husband is not saved and says, “Don’t talk to our children about God,” that is directly against scriptural mandates to teach your children (Deuteronomy 6:7).

For example, you have an unsaved husband who does not go to church, and your fifteen-year-old son doesn’t want to go to church anymore. So Dad says he doesn’t have to go. Should you try to discipline your son or become angry with him because he is choosing Dad’s side instead of yours? Do you hold back affection or debate with your husband? No, none of these things are good. Trust in the Lord, yield to the authority of your husband, and pray. It is hard to do, but God’s Word is clear. No exceptions. There are consequences when a wife tries to undermine that authority. As a Christian, God “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).

Blended Family Issues

What if you are the stepdad in a blended family and your wife does not agree to some of the house rules for her biological children? The moment the wife says, “I don’t like that rule; I don’t think my son should have to do that,” she is taking things out of God’s hands and saying she can do this on

her own, in her own strength. If the wife does not agree with a particular discipline, then she must trust the Lord to work it out. Obviously it will take patience and time to work through these issues.

Moms, when your nonbiological child challenges your authority as a step-in mother, tell them it's what Dad wants. When they tell you you're not their mom, you can reply: "That's right, I'm not your mother; you already have a mother. I'm not trying to tell you I'm your mother, but when I married your dad, I embraced the authority structure in God's Word. And God's Word says that he must lead. So I'm supporting him. If you don't like the rules and discipline, you can take it up with him. In the meantime, you need to accept the rules and discipline."

Disagreements regarding the training of the children is one of the main reasons so many blended families end in divorce. The attitude of "I discipline my kids and you discipline yours" opens the door to a nonbiblical management style. There are no biblical grounds for that whatsoever. When you design your training process together, it is for all kids living in your home. All children are gifts to us from the Lord (Psalm 127:3).

Lesson 4

Disorder in the Home

Many couples have an unbelieving spouse, or one who is disobedient to the Word, and it is not easy for them. God promises blessing but does not promise an easy road. We sometimes fail to embrace the verses that speak of self-denial, the cross, and denying one's life to follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24-25).

Doubting Your Husband

The most powerful thing a wife can do according to God's Word is to let her conduct—not critical or non-affirming words—motivate her husband. Scripture tells the wife to put her trust in God and surrender to God's ways, and He will do the work.

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

This verse speaks to a wife with a problem. Her husband is not obeying God's instructions. He may be ignorant, rebellious, or an unbeliever. He may even proclaim to be a Christian but does not act as such. There are no specifics about the area of disobedience, but the instruction to the wife is quite specific: continue to be submissive.

When husbands make foolish choices or bad decisions in how they speak to or discipline their children, and the wife disagrees and knows God does too ("even if some do not obey the word" from verse 1), the natural tendency is to debate and argue until she wins him to her perspective. This is natural because a mom loves and desires to protect her children. The Bible says to win a husband over "without a word" (verse 1). It is one thing to say, "Honey, here is another way to look at or deal with this situation, but I will follow your leadership and your decision," but totally different to debate or manipulate with bitter anger, defensive threats, and non-affirming behavior like sarcasm, criticism, pouting, and rejection. A Christian wife is to be praying for her husband to be a godly leader, or if he is unbelieving, for him to be saved.

God's Goal

The focus of this verse is the potential to win a husband into fellowship with the Lord ("may be won"). Wives, do you realize this is God's goal? In 1 Peter 3:1-6, God tells wives how He designed the relationship to operate. It is not a promise but a pathway on which God can work through you to bring your husband to Himself. And there is no time limit on following His plan. By remaining faithful to God's will for you, you are ministering to your husband and glorifying God through obedience. This process can transform both you and your husband by Him.

FACT FILE

Submissive—*Hupotasso* (Greek). "A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden."¹³

"The New Testament usage of this word, meaning 'to submit,' 'be subject to,' or 'rank under,' is common (cf. 1 Peter 2:18; 3:5; 5:5; Luke 2:51; 10:17, 20; Rom. 8:7; 10:3; 13:1, 5; 1 Cor. 14:32, 34; 15:27; 16:16; Eph. 1:22; 5:21, 24; Phil. 3:21; Titus 2:9; 3:1; Heb. 2:5, 8; 12:9; James 4:7)."¹⁴

God created woman to be the helpmate, and a husband will know—by observing, contemplating, and looking upon his wife’s conduct—whether she is supporting him. A wife has great influence upon her husband, either leading him toward God or away. One writer says a wife may have “things in her conduct and temper which would mar the beauty of her piety, and prevent any happy influence on the mind of her husband.”¹⁵

FACT FILE

Observe—To look upon, to behold and contemplate.”¹⁶

Chaste conduct—Abstaining from all behaviors toward your husband that are contrary to God’s will.

So how does a wife accomplish this obedience? It starts in the heart. First Peter 3:3 speaks of a woman’s natural concern for her hair, jewelry, and apparel (today we would add makeup), which is okay in the proper perspective. On his radio show and in his sermons, the late Pastor J. Vernon McGee said, “If the barn needs painting, paint it.” But God, in verse 4, defines real beauty and feminine character as “the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” God wants us to renew our minds (Ephesians 4:23) and strengthen the inner person (Ephesians 3:16), for out of our hearts spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23) and our actions (Matthew 15:18–19).

Self-Examination 1

Wives, what do you think “very precious in the sight of God” means in 1 Peter 3:4?

God is the one who ultimately watches. When a wife is trusting God and responding properly, it is “very precious” in God’s sight (1 Peter 3:4). God wants a woman to know that if her heart is gentle (meek, mild with forbearance), she has a quiet spirit (tranquil, undisturbed), and she is willing to submit, this is of great value to Him. The reason can be found in verse 5: “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.”

God created woman for a specific relationship to man, and when she takes the role of wife, or helpmate, obedience means submitting to the management system He has designed. To do this, a wife must willingly yield to the authority of a husband (unless it is sinful, as explained above).

During my years as a counselor, I have seen countless marriages on the verge of divorce, with papers already filed, totally turn around when husband and wife follow God’s plan. Husbands get saved, those who are already believers are inspired to learn and grow spiritually, and restoration comes to the entire family because the wife trusted God and yielded to His plan.

For more about marriage, go through our Marriage Is a Ministry series.¹⁷

The Downward Spiral to Disorder

Dads, how do you act—or react—at home? For the first few years of my son Nicholas’s life, he got me angrier than any human being on earth. I would overreact, yell, spank in anger, and generally do the opposite of love when he made mistakes. My wife was not happy about this overreacting. As a nurturer, she wanted to protect her little chick from his foolish father. Because I was out of control, she began defending him and correcting me in his presence. I didn’t like how she undermined me. This conflict was the natural result of our handling of things in an unbiblical manner. Dissention set in, and our marriage relationship was affected. Unfortunately, this same scenario is all too common. I’m thankful that the Lord used the downward spiral in my home as a wake-up call for me.

Eli, a high priest in the Old Testament, had two sons who “were corrupt, they did not know the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:12), but they served as priests within God’s house. Eli heard everything his sons were doing, heard they lay with women (1 Samuel 2:22), and finally said to them, “No, my sons! For it is not a good report I hear. You make the Lord’s people transgress” (1 Samuel 2:24). But then did nothing about it. He did not stop them. God had warned him many times, and He finally spoke through the prophet Samuel:

For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.
(1 Samuel 3:13)

This did not just happen overnight. It was a downward spiral. In the next chapter, both he and his sons died as part of God’s judgment. Eli showed poor leadership concerning his family, which gave a bad testimony and set his family on a course of destruction. Dad’s, we need to act when our kids are disobedient, but in a gentle and loving way.

A foolish son is the ruin of his father,
And the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping. (Proverbs 19:13)

A “foolish son” is one who will not yield to the authority and discipline of a father. That was not the case of my son; it was my sin to react in anger when he broke a rule. However, the second principle of this verse points out that being contentious is the wrong way for a wife to respond to her husband. It should be noted that a wife who argues constantly with her husband, over child-rearing or any other issue, is in disobedience. (Note: if violence is present, the issues change.)

One noted Christian author wrote about these Scriptures more than a hundred years ago, showing that the issues have not changed.

How unhappy the home where both a foolish son and a contentious wife are found! They are very likely to be found together; for where the wife disputes her husband’s authority, siding with the children in opposition to his proper discipline, the effect on the home will be anything but good. It is a very common thing to see parents disputing and wrangling before their household. The deadly result is that the sons and daughters learn to despise the father’s authority and to defy the mother’s correction when she does attempt it. These children grow up with a

lawless, disobedient spirit, bent on having their own way and persisting in their refusal to submit to proper discipline.¹⁸ —H. A. Ironside, 1908

Is there a similar scenario in your home? ___ Yes ___ No

~~ACTION PLAN~~

If so, list the problems and confess them to God, asking Him to forgive you. Then go to your family and ask them to forgive you. As you walk in humility and obedience, God will both bless you and empower you to follow His ways in your home.

Establishing Order

Unless God is allowed to intervene and establish His order in the home, the downward spiral continues, eroding the foundation of the marriage relationship. Over time, the loss of respect and trust adversely affect intimacy in the marriage. Most men will only hold out for so long when this happens, yielding in most areas to preserve the sexual relationship. When Dad steps back, Mom steps up to the plate, becoming the main disciplinarian and authority over the children, believing she can do a better job than her husband. Dad only gets involved when things get out of hand or if Mom asks for his input. But this is not God's plan.

This system may work for a while in homes with complacent children. However, if you have a strong-willed child, or when adolescence hits, watch out. This system will crumble. When mothers abandon their God-ordained role of nurturer, cherisher, and cheerleader to become leader, disciplinarian, and coach, their children will eventually resent them, their husbands will criticize them, and they will bear the guilt of being out of God's will.

Our main objective in life should be fulfilling God's will and purpose, and that includes glorifying Him within the walls of the home. Along with King David, our attitude and purpose should be integrity:

I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart. (Psalm 101:2 NASB)

When we design substandard methods for managing our families, we are living in disobedience and dishonoring God within our homes. Although you may have years of unbiblical habits in your marriage, change must start now. Change is always hard at first, but the rewards for obedience far exceed the work and sacrifices.

Begin with a willingness to embrace God's management style. Dads, you must commit your laziness and fears to God and step forward as the leader. Moms, you must put your trust in the Savior, support your husband's decisions, and follow through by daily stepping back and allowing him to lead. Your children may be in a state of shock for a while, but you must proceed in obedience to the Lord and watch Him work.

That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:12)

Self-Examination 2

Evaluate your management style as a couple. Keep in mind that the purpose of this exercise is not to find fault in your spouse but to allow God to speak to you about your own weaknesses. Be aware that if you respond with resentment or pride, you will be hindered from yielding to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

1. Dad, when your children are in your presence, do you discipline them (or do you leave it up to your wife)?
___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes
2. Mom, do you consult your husband for input on all aspects of discipline with the children?
___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes
3. Dad, do you listen to your wife's input about the emotional state of your children?
___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes
4. Mom, do you keep information from your husband, not informing him on everything regarding the children? For example: "We can't tell daddy about this because he will get really upset."
___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes
5. Dad, when mom says no and the kids come to you, do you always consult with your wife before responding? For instance, do you ask your children, "What did your mom say?"
___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes
6. Mom, do you find yourself arguing with your children, defending yourself and your rules or disciplinary decisions?
___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes
7. Parents, have you sat down together and agreed on the rules and disciplines you will use with your children?
___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes
8. Parents, do you disagree in front of your children over rules or discipline issues?
___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes

Biblical answers are: 1-Yes, 2-Yes, 3-Yes, 4-No, 5-Yes, 6-No, 7-Yes, 8-No.

If your answers did not match these, there's a good chance your management style is out of order. Most couples have room for improvement in their management style.

~~ACTION PLAN 2~~

If you have been convicted by this evaluation, take some time to list a few specific issues. If married, discuss them as a couple, ask each other for forgiveness, and make a commitment to change.

Lesson 5

Biblical Roles

Because God places such high value on the family, and He knows raising a child is challenging and often overwhelming, He has lovingly provided parenting principles in His Word. Never intending dads and moms to try and figure things out, He gives us clear direction for our responsibilities.

This lesson is divided into the father's role and the mother's role. But when it comes to parenting, these overlap. Even though the father has the primary role of teaching and disciplining the children, Mom will need to do this when he isn't there. And just as the mother has the primary responsibility to nurture her children, Dad will need to put on the hat of a nurturer at times. If a mother tends to have a disciplinary mindset, she will need to cultivate the tender side of love, nourishing and caring for her children. You will see that Paul took on all these characteristics with the people in Thessalonica, a church he dearly loved.

Part 1: The Father's Role and Responsibility

Along with knowing you are called to lead, other important biblical concepts for fathers go hand in hand with leadership.

Principle 1: The responsible father is a *servant-priest* over his family.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word. (Ephesians 5:25-26)

Paul made it very clear that as Christ, our High Priest, loves us and gave Himself for the church, so the husband is to do for his wife (which also implies his family). The goal is to sanctify, which is to make clean, render pure and holy, also known as sanctification. This happens through the husband/father's leadership—he leads the way. The objective is to cleanse, which is to purify from the pollution of sin and selfishness. Our instruction manual is the Word of God. The priests in the Old Testament were stewards of the Word of God, and so it is with the husband/father.

In a sense, we fathers are to pastor our families. He has placed us as priests over our homes. A priest has the authority to perform the sacred duties of a religious institution, such as the family. The sacred rites of the family include spiritual discipleship of both wife and children, overseeing the discipline of the children, keeping fellowship in church a priority, directing the finances, and being a godly example. When fathers perform their function, they are not only serving God but their wives and children also.

In the Old Testament we read of Job who, acting as priest of his home, regularly rose early to make "burnt offerings" (animal sacrifices) for his children. Though we no longer offer sacrifices for sin, fathers fulfill this priesthood through spiritual leadership in their homes, by disciplining and praying with their families.

And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly. (Job 1:4-5)

Notice that Job did this *regularly*, which means he practiced this type of leadership. His concern was that his children might have sinned against or cursed God. He cared about their relationship with God. What a godly example.

The father is not the sole disciplinarian or discipler of the children. However, he is to make sure that this is carried out. Sadly, in most homes today, mothers are the spiritual leaders and the main disciplinarians. We will cover more of this in detail in the next two lessons. Most men have not been taught to see themselves as priests.

Fathers, are you willing to accept this calling from God to be a priest? ___ Yes ___ No

As Christian parents, our primary goal should be raising children into godly, mature adults. We should diligently pray for our children as the apostle Paul prayed for the young Thessalonian believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12 NASB). As a priest, the father should lead the way in this, making it a priority.

Self-Examination 1

After reading the Scriptures below, Dads, explain how these passages relate to your relationship with God. Second, if obeyed, how would it affect your relationship with your family?

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. (Ephesians 4:1)

Describe how principle 1 applies to you.

Principle 2: The responsible father works to support his family.

For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not to be a burden to any of you. (1 Thessalonians 2:9)

Paul was letting the church know that he worked hard to make money, to obey God, and not be a financial burden to them. He knew God had set a standard for man to work. In the garden of Eden, God told Adam he was to tend and keep it (Genesis 2:15). Paul’s occupation outside of pastoring was tent making (Acts 18:3), and he worked diligently to support himself. Paul’s concern was not just for his own needs. He said in Acts 20:34, “Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.” Yes, he wanted to take care of his own needs, but he was also concerned with the welfare of others.

This is a very serious subject when it comes to the family, since Paul also exhorted men that “if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). “Denied the faith” means he is not living up to what God expects from those who have a relationship with Him. The personal pronouns are directed at the man, and this is a strong statement. One commentator says:

To default on the basic care and support of a family member is the same as denying the faith, for no one can claim love and allegiance to God and at the same time neglect his or her family (see Matthew 5:46–47). To do so makes a person worse than an unbeliever, for even unbelieving idol-worshippers understood the responsibility of caring for family needs. . . . Our families provide an arena in which we can demonstrate the quality of our love for God.¹⁹

This is not saying women cannot work, but please notice where the leadership and responsibility lie—with the man.

DIG DEEPER

List the biblical principles concerning work from the following verses.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10)

Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:12)

And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. (Titus 3:14)

God's Word is not suggesting that fathers work to the point of neglecting their families, but rather to work responsibly, that the family not be burdened financially. The responsible father is instructed to maintain a job to care for the needs of his family, while not neglecting the priorities of a husband and father. The Scripture below also shows the importance of taking care of one's family.

For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. (2 Corinthians 12:14)

Describe how principle 2 applies to you.

Principle 3: The responsible father is a *witness* of Christian faith to his family.

You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:10)

Paul pointed to the unblemished testimony he had, not only before the church in Thessalonica, but also before God. This is not bragging, but simply pointing out that the church could follow his example. The same should be true concerning our leadership as husbands and fathers. God, our families, and other believers should be able to see that our behavior represents Christ.

Paul identified three distinct principles that characterized his behavior and made his faith authentic. This does not mean perfection, but direction. Even Paul struggled at times (Romans 7:18; 1 Timothy 1:15). But these were principles he practiced on a regular basis:

1. Devoutly—Holy, pious, sacred, dedicated to God. This describes your abiding relationship with Christ. When you are devoted, or dedicated to God, that relationship is the source of a sacred life, and the following two behaviors normally follow.
2. Justly—With integrity and honesty, just, uprightness of character and behavior, daily desiring to live life according to what pleases God. When you know the Word of God, you can judge what is right and wrong. As a husband and father, is it your desire to be obedient, empowered to do what you never could do before? You have His divine power working in you (2 Peter 1:3; Romans 1:4; 2 Corinthians 12:9).
3. Blamelessly—Faultless, able to stand a critic’s scrutiny. As you move along in obedience to God’s will, you are transformed into the image of Christ and your godly behavior becomes evident to others.

Fathers are called by God to be spiritual leaders in the home and role models to their children. A responsible father does not compromise in his speech, nor does he find pleasure in things that might offend his children or make them stumble.

Self-Examination 2

Identify how living the following truths could affect your relationship with your children.

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:10)

But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.
(2 Corinthians 4:2)

Describe how principle 3 applies to you.

Principle 4: The responsible father makes time to *train/disciple* his children in the faith by *exhorting* and *comforting* them.

As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children. (1 Thessalonians 2:11)

Paul's leadership style in the church is compared to a father training his children. It infers that this is how fathers are to treat their children. There is a strong reference that obedience to God is the goal. He identified three specific parts to this training:

1. *Exhort* (*parakleo* in Greek)—To call to one's side, to aid; to encourage, admonish, or exhort someone to do something. This verb is a present active participle, which means Paul continued to do this so they could grow in their relationship with God. He had a positive impact on their lives, and that is the type of leadership we must have as dads. We are to come alongside our children and help them grow in the things of the Lord. The attitude has to be like Psalm 34:11, which says, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord."
2. *Comfort*—Encourage; to inspire, support; console in time of trouble or worry; soothing encouragement designed to cheer up and to inspire correct behavior. This type of fatherly influence cannot fail to inspire correct behavior in our children. Many times it means we must die to ourselves and put on tender love.
3. *Charge*—Implore; to be engaged, paying attention, and making sure the training is taking place. *Urging* (*martyromenoi* in Greek) implies "the delivery of truth and was likely meant to convey the more directive functions of a father. A good father encourages and provides guidance. Yet Paul did not claim ultimate authority over his [spiritual]

children . . . , requiring of them what he willed. Rather, Paul’s function as their Christian father was to train believers in order that they should ‘live lives worthy of God.’ It was not Paul’s own will but the Heavenly Father’s that governed both his actions and the guidance he gave to the church.”²⁰

This model falls right in line with *Loving Communication* (volume 2). Love is the driving motivation behind each one of these words. When Paul began with “As you know,” he was calling them to remember that he did not neglect to train/disciple them. It was an undeniable fact that he inspired them to godliness through proper training.

What a perfect picture for us as dads to follow. We are to train our children, to raise them up to maturity through discipleship and proper discipline. The responsible father does not neglect his God-given role, or delegate it to his wife, but assumes authority as the leader, shepherd, and servant in the home.

Describe how principle 4 applies to you.

Principle 5: The responsible father is a *teacher-manager* in his home.

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

We used this Scripture earlier to show the direct relationship between a father managing his home and bringing his children to godly maturity. This passage is meant to show a father two possible effects of his influence. First, the vital importance of using that influence with love is to direct a child closer to the Lord. It is to use his influence to *not* provoke his children to wrath or toward sinful or destructive emotional behaviors. This is not to say that mothers are not a part of the training or that her influence is not impactful. They are to be involved in all aspects of discipline and discipleship, but not the one ultimately responsible. Second, “bring them up” means they are to make sure the training of the children is taking place.

The man’s leadership role in the home is so vital that Scripture requires any man up for leadership in the church be first and foremost committed to fulfilling his leadership role at home. Leaders are called by God to set an example for the people. This does not mean there is one standard for leaders and another standard for the people. Paul urged the Corinthians, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). The home life of a pastor or ministry leader is like a miniature church where he shepherds his family. Paul gave explicit instructions to Timothy on how God wants His church to function by outlining the qualifications for pastors and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1–13. A pastor must be:

One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence. (1 Timothy 3:4)

God says a pastor or ministry leader must first carry out the leadership role of a good husband/father by managing his house well. This is so important that Paul said in verse 5, “For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” If the leader can lead his family, which is small compared to the church, then he meets the qualification. Scripture is clear that a man who is not the spiritual leader in his home is disqualified from church leadership. Again, this does not mean perfection, but it does mean he has a firm grasp on godly leadership in his home. According to God’s instructions, one author says:

FACT FILE

Rule—To manage, lead, shepherd, and guide. “By implication this means to take care of something, to be diligent, to practice.”²¹

Paul demanded that the church leader be exemplary in controlling his own family. He was to raise children known for their obedience and morally upright behavior. The verb for “manage” carries the idea of governing, leading, and giving direction to the family. The same Greek word appears in 1 Thess. 5:12 (“are over you”), and 1 Tim. 5:17 (“direct”), and also in v. 5 (“manage”). The term demands an effective exercise of authority bolstered by a character of integrity and sensitive compassion. Its use in v. 5 with the verb “take care of” defines the quality of leadership as related more to showing mercy than to delivering ultimatums.²²

But it is not just the pastor/elders who need to have their homes in order, so do the deacons. The leaders are to set an example the congregation can follow, especially when it comes to families.

Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. (1 Timothy 3:12)

What a blessing to have strong, godly families. It is a self-evident truth that this occurs when men are guided by the Bible, a perfect resource that provides all the information we need for success. God is so good.

Describe how principle 5 applies to you.

Self-Examination 3

Fathers, what have you learned from these five principles?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____
- 9. _____
- 10. _____

Dads, you have been chosen and ordained by God to lead and serve as a priest over the institution He created—your family. Quit looking at your inabilities and weaknesses and start looking to God’s promises (2 Peter 1:1-4) and His grace (2 Corinthians 12:9-10) to enable and empower you to accomplish the tasks He has given.

ACTION PLAN 1

Fathers, how does this biblical role differ from your current parenting style, and what changes need to be made?

Commit these principles to prayer each day, asking God to work them out in your life.

Part 2: The Mother’s Role and Responsibility

Mothers, besides knowing the role as a helpmate to your husband, key biblical principles guide the relationship with your children. You are the caring influence. As we turn to 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, we see how Paul used motherly terms to describe his behavior toward the believers at Thessalonica. Even though these biblical principles can apply to all Christians, these are solid truths for mothers.

Principle 1: The caring mother is *gentle* with her children.

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.
(1 Thessalonians 2:7)

FACT FILE
<i>Gentle</i> —Mild, peaceable, quiet, and composed.

This was quite a statement about the apostle Paul and his fellow ministers, since they were leaders who regularly used their authority. But their purposes were not selfish, rather carried out for the good of others. The Bible says they were “among” them, serving with a gentle and kind spirit. Noted Bible scholar and author, John MacArthur says:

The term gentle is at the heart of this verse. It means to be kind to someone and encompasses a host of other virtues: acceptance, respect, compassion, tolerance of imperfections, patience, tenderheartedness, and loyalty.²³

What a picture of gentleness. Paul was focusing on how he acted among them. He behaved this way: “Not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4). His whole motivation was that of pleasing God. Some women are gentle by nature, while others have a tougher demeanor. But, since God is going to test your heart to see if you are gentle toward your children, you should be ready to confess any wrongs when they come up, repent, and be transformed. It goes without saying that a gentle mother is not out of control, angry, yelling, judging, or manipulating toward her children.

The word *were* in this verse, as “we were gentle,” originated from a Hebrew word implying a state of change, condition, or the passing from one state to another, to become.²⁴ This is a perfecting process, and by determining to yield daily to the Holy Spirit, God will cause you to become all He calls you to be.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses say about gentleness and how it applies to parenting.

A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1 NASB)

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach,
patient. (2 Timothy 2:24)

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to
yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.
(James 3:17)

Describe how principle 1 applies to you.

Principle 2: The caring mother nurtures her children.

As a nursing mother cherishes her own children.
(1 Thessalonians 2:7)

The picture here is a mother breastfeeding her child. The mother and child both know this is the place of nourishment, love, and attention, which is the way God has designed the mother-child relationship. A loving and caring mother wants to give to the infant but, as a child grows, this type of sacrifice and intimacy can fade away or become dulled.

FACT FILE

Nurse—The act of nursing, suckle, nourish, train; something that nourishes, to supply with nourishment; to educate or foster, to further the development of someone or something.

Paul brought to remembrance his actions toward those God had placed under his care. He revealed that his heart toward them was faithful and tender like a nursing mother. Paul used many examples of motherly love. Galatians 4:19 says, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” First Corinthians 4:14 says, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.” He also directed believers to imitate him, as he imitates Christ.

From conception, and throughout the life of her child, a mother is called to nurture. While methods change with the maturity of a child, a mother’s heart should always be to nourish and build up. The role of a mother is to show her children love and acceptance by actions and words. A nurturing mother does not use harsh words, ignore or push her children away, or withhold affection from them. She does not indulge in mind games or sinful manipulation as discipline.

Remember, love is the most powerful motivator, not just a demonstration of feelings and emotions. And unselfish love is only possible through a relationship with Jesus Christ, by abiding in Him. This involves knowing God’s Word and going to Him in prayer for wisdom and strength. He can enable you to give continuously, expecting nothing in return, just as a mother loves her nursing infant. Take heed to what one author says:

If a nursing mother does not feed herself, she cannot feed her baby. If she eats certain foods, her baby will get sick. Similarly, the spiritual diet of a Christian parent is vitally important to the health of a newer Christian. The gentleness and unselfishness of Paul as a spiritual parent shines through in this illustration.²⁵

Self-Examination 4

How are you doing in your abiding relationship with Christ?

Describe how principle 2 applies to you.

Principle 3: The caring mother cherishes, or tenderly cares for, her children.

Cherishes her own children. (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

FACT FILE

Cherish (“tender care” in NASB)—To give heed to, to pay attention to, to minister, to soften by heat, to keep warm as of birds covering their young with feathers (Deuteronomy 22:6), to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care.²⁶

Paul used the Greek word *thalop*, translated as *cherishes* in the NKJV of the Bible. Take special note of the words “her own children.” God had given Paul the responsibility of not only bringing believers into His kingdom, through preaching, but also treating them as his own spiritual children. For Paul, that meant responsibility and concern so great that he compared it to motherhood. The phrase “cherishes her own children” evokes thoughts of protective, tender care toward children who cannot be considered so precious by any other. The NASB translation of “tenderly cares” indicates continuous action. Isn’t that the truth? A mom’s work is never done when it comes to cherishing and ministering to her children.

A Christian mother will keep her heart soft and tender, which is not always easy. Because such love brings vulnerability, mothers can be tempted to become hardened or calloused from the disappointments of neglect, rejection, or rebellion of their children. Frustration, fatigue, and worry are other pressures that can affect a mother’s mood. To remain strong, a mother must continually be yielding, asking the Holy Spirit to guard her heart (Ephesians 4:30; 5:18). A tender mother forgives her children and seeks their forgiveness when she has been wrong (Matthew 6:12, 14–15).

DIG DEEPER

Describe how these verses could help you be a better mom.

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Philippians 2:3)

Describe how principle 3 applies to you.

Principle 4: The caring mother *affectionately longs* for her children.

So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

FACT FILE

Affectionately longing—“The Greek word, translated fond affection (*homeiromai*; used only here in the New Testament) means to long for someone passionately and earnestly, and, being linked to a mother’s love, is intended here to express an affection so deep and compelling as to be unsurpassed. Ancient inscriptions on the tombs of dead babies sometimes contained this term when parents wanted to describe their sad longing for a too-soon-departed child.”²⁷

“Affectionately longing” is a love that is expressed through physical contact and acts of kindness. It cannot be overstated that a truly loving mother must affirm her children with hugs, kisses, encouraging words, and other appropriate displays of affection. An affectionate mother knows her children individually and studies how to make each child feel special. *Longing* indicates continuously keeping them in your thoughts, desiring their companionship, and being creative to remind them of your love by perhaps baking cookies, leaving notes in their lunches, or spending time doing activities with each child individually.

ACTION PLAN 2

Ask God to show you any hindrances that may be keeping you from being affectionate toward your children. List some ways you are and can be showing affection.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how this verse inspires new attitudes or actions toward your children.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another. (Romans 12:10)

Describe how principle 4 applies to you.

Principle 5: The caring mother gives of herself to do what is best for her children.

We were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

FACT FILE

Impart—This verb has the idea of sharing something, which one already retains in part.

Paul and his companions not only preached in Thessalonica, but they also imparted their lives for the sake of Christ. In this context it literally means, “they gave up their souls—their real inner beings—for the sake of the Thessalonians. A woman who fulfills the biblical role for motherhood does the same thing when she, at great cost to herself, unselfishly and generously sets aside her life for the benefit of her beloved children.”²⁸ A godly mother understands that her priority is to place the loving and training of her children before self-interest. She loves her children with God’s supernatural love, despite their mistakes, failures, and sins.

Describe how principle 5 applies to you.

Self-Examination 5

Mothers, what have you learned from these five principles?

1. _____
2. _____

3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

ACTION PLAN 3

Mothers, how does this biblical role differ from your current parenting style, and what changes need to be made?

Commit these principles to prayer each day, asking God to work them out in your life.

Lesson 6

Teaching Biblical Truth

Since we have learned to build a *strong foundation* in Christ and how to properly love our children while working within God’s management style, we are prepared to train our children. Many believe that raising good children primarily depends on discipline, but it is important to understand that there are two processes essential for bringing them to *maturity*. The first is *discipling* (spiritual instruction), and the second is *disciplining* (instilling character).

Introduction to Discipleship

Providing spiritual instruction for our children is called discipling. Leading your child to Christ is a great blessing, but so is the responsibility of teaching them spiritual truth. It is never too early to begin lovingly introducing a child to the Lord, to talk about His desire to have a relationship with them. Parents can fall into error, believing a child is too young to learn or that this training should be done in Sunday school. Praise God for His church, and all who contribute to the spiritual growth of our children, but the main responsibility for discipleship belongs to parents. If you need help in this area, turn to *Appendix K: Leading a Child to Christ*.

All Christians must understand that discipling others is not an optional responsibility but a calling from God. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His followers for a time. As He prepared to ascend to the Father in heaven, He delivered a command we call the Great Commission. Jesus’s instruction was not only to the disciples of that day, but to be passed down to all believers. We know this because His command was to “make disciples of all.” May this Scripture give you a passion for making disciples of all, especially your children:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

The original language of this Scripture is Greek, and it is very specific. “Make disciples” is the main command, and the rest of the sentence supports the action of the verb *make*. *Go*, *baptizing*, and *teaching* are all participles that refer to “make disciples.” The emphasis of Jesus’s command is to “make disciples,” which is an imperative verb that means, “to do and continue to do.” This means we must be intentional about discipleship. It should be an ongoing discipline for every believer, which includes making disciples of our children. To carry out this vision, we must understand three things.

First, what is a disciple?

To make a disciple, we need to understand the biblical definition. In Classic Greek, *mathetes* (disciple) is what we would call “an apprentice,” one who not only learns facts from the teacher but also other things, such as his attitudes and philosophies. In this way the *mathetes* was what we

FACT FILE

Disciple (noun)—*Mathetes* (Greek). A student, learner, or pupil, but it means much more in the New Testament. It is a follower who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct.²⁹

might call a “student-companion,” one who doesn’t just sit in class listening to lectures but rather follows the teacher to learn life as well as facts³⁰ and progressively takes on the character of the teacher.

Our homes, and anywhere we go with our children, can be a classroom for them to become a disciple of Christ. It is where they learn true Christian conduct, attitudes, and philosophies. Just like the saying “more things are caught than taught,” your children are watching you and they catch, or *mimic*, your actions even more than what you say.

As we read the Gospels, we see how Christ disciplined His chosen twelve men. They spent about three years learning, watching, asking questions, listening to His teaching, and even imitating His behavior. The disciples were followers of Christ, and wherever He went was their classroom. Jesus taught them as they went from one life lesson to another. When they did not understand, He stopped and explained (Mark 4:34) or clarified (Mark 8:15–21), and when they lacked faith, He rebuked them (Mark 9:19–29). During Jesus’s public ministry, as He responded to all who came to Him, He continuously said, “Follow My example, learn from Me, and be My disciple.”

Your children can learn to be a disciple of Christ through your words and actions. They also can learn to be a disciple of unrighteous, worldly desires and behaviors. They will follow your example, whether good or bad.

Self-Examination 1

How would you view the classroom of your family as husband/father or wife/mother? Are there bad habits or behaviors that need to be stopped? If so, write a confession to the Lord, along with your commitment to change.

Second, how do we “make disciples”?

Now that we understand the meaning of discipleship, how do we follow through and make disciples? We need to follow Christ’s example. And He has told us what is expected. Jesus’s mandate to “make disciples” and “teach them diligently” (Deuteronomy 6:7) is an exhortation to all, but for our purposes we are concentrating on parenting. Parents have more influence over children than anyone. Thankfully, God has supplied us with enough information to help us guide our children in the right direction.

FACT FILE

Make disciples (verb)—*Matheteuo* (Greek). To make a disciple (Matthew 28:19; Acts 14:21); to instruct (Matthew 13:52) with the purpose of making a disciple.

“Make disciples” is not the same as “make converts,” though it is surely implied. The term *make disciples* places somewhat more stress on the fact that the mind, as well as the heart and the will, must be won for God³¹ by instructing new believers on how to follow Jesus, to submit to Jesus’s lordship, and to take up his mission of compassionate service.³² It also involves bringing people into relationship with Jesus as pupils to teacher and getting them to take His yoke of instruction upon themselves as authoritative (Matthew 11:29), accepting His words as true, and submitting to His will as what is right.³³

This definition describes the purpose and process that Christ followed with His disciples. Meditate on it, and then answer the next question. Most people have never given this subject much thought. So it has not become a priority within their parenting. The fact that most fathers or mothers were not discipled by their parents leaves them with no example, even those who were raised in Christian homes.

Self-Examination 2

Describe the essential points for making a disciple.

DIG DEEPER

Notice what Paul was encouraging the believers to do in Philippi. What are the key principles in this verse on how to disciple our children?

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9)

Third, what is discipling (discipleship)?

To “make a disciple” is to help another become an imitator of Christ. When obeying Christ’s command to do this, discipling (discipleship) is the process we follow. Even though these specific words are not used in the Bible, the concept is clearly portrayed by the way Jesus taught His followers and throughout the New Testament. Although this relates to all discipleship and defines what Christ did with His disciples, it also describes how to disciple our children. Further study identifies the biblical concepts to use with them.

FACT FILE

Discipling or discipleship—“Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.”³⁴

Truly discipling our children means having intentional relationships with them. This is our responsibility. Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, or walk alongside Him, but He was intentional by taking the first step. We must realize that intentional relationships do not happen by accident. A predetermined plan must be maintained and consistent.

Scripture says we are to “[speak] the truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15). Having the proper attitude when discipling our children requires a commitment to lovingly help them grow toward maturity in Christ. Love is the most powerful motivator. An atmosphere of love prepares your child’s heart to receive instruction, especially when you challenge them to do what is right. Jesus challenged His disciples in a direct and uncompromising way, but it was always done in love. When a child is secure in your love, they are more apt to listen and obey what you are saying.

Discipling Children to Be Like Christ

We must never lose track of the goal: to teach our children about Jesus Christ so they will experience His love and learn His ways. Too many parents try to make their children into copies of themselves, or what *they* want them to be. The apostle Paul revealed God’s will when he wrote, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). This is the biblical goal of discipleship: helping our children find out who they are in Christ. Jesus spoke of this principle in Matthew 10:25 when He said, “It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher,” and in Luke 6:40, “Everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” The single, overriding truth is that the disciple will emulate the teacher.

To be “perfectly trained” is the Greek word *katartizo*, which means “to put a thing in its appropriate condition, to establish, equip so it is deficient in no part.”³⁵ As parent-teachers, the objective of discipleship is to share the gospel with our children, leading them to receive Jesus as Savior; show them how to abide in Christ each day; and teach them how to study the Bible, understanding the concept of being transformed into His image (Romans 8:29).

Since God has commissioned us to make disciples on a continuing basis, the privilege of discipling our children never ends, even when they leave home. We are to be available, always in prayer, ready to share godly wisdom, instruction, and encouragement when they need us. Discipling becomes a way of life, where we are always following Christ ourselves, and talking regularly to others about God’s goodness and our need to follow Him in all things.

DIG DEEPER

How does this verse describe the process of discipleship?

But we all . . . are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Self-Examination 3

Pause to examine yourself. Are you experiencing this transformation? If so, write a praise report to God. If not, write a prayer for God’s help, asking Him to make this real in your life.

Discipleship and Your Strong Foundation

We saw the necessity of building life upon a foundation of intimacy with Christ in volume 2, lesson 6. Through this relationship alone comes our stability and strength and the power to accomplish God’s will and purpose. We also studied Deuteronomy 6:1–6, where God told the children of Israel that they, and their sons and grandsons, were to carefully observe His commandments out of love for Him. The faith of the fathers was to extend to following generations. Spiritual training (discipleship) of the children was the God-given privilege and responsibility of the parents. These biblical directives have not changed. We are to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) and “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). To neglect or refuse to actively disciple our children is direct disobedience.

We disciple our children first by our examples and then by our instruction. As we raise our children, they observe what we say, but what we do is even more powerful. Our examples can influence them to follow God—or rebel. When they see hypocrisy in us, it can breed rebellion in them.

Self-Examination 4

In what ways has your strong foundation grown since starting this series? How have you set aside time for prayer and the Word? Is this your daily priority? If not, why? What needs to change?

Hypocrisy Breeds Rebellion

If we want our children to walk with the Lord, we must be examples. Charles Stanley wrote, “Nothing makes the kingdom of God more compelling to unbelievers [or Christians] than Christians who demonstrate the Spirit’s life within them.”³⁶ And nothing makes the kingdom of

God more unappealing and undesirable to our children than growing up in a home where Christianity is preached but not practiced. When your children see a double standard—you say one thing but do another—they learn to do the same and, by your example, lose respect for you and the God you proclaim.

“Do as I say but not as I do” literally defines hypocrisy. Too many Christian parents are living by this philosophy. Jesus delivered harsh words to the scribes and Pharisees who said the right things but behaved the opposite:

Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:
“These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.” (Matthew 15:7-8)

A hypocrite is someone who acts phony, or is a counterfeit; a man who assumes and speaks, or acts, under a pretend character.³⁷ Like an actor playing a role, part, or character that is scripted for him, Jesus called these people hypocrites. They were acting the part, saying the right things, but He knew their hearts. We must be very careful that we are not one person in public or at church, and someone different at home. Many of us are very motivated to act our best at church, putting on godly character and looking like a Christian, and then find it more difficult to act that way at home.

Most of us have seen this hypocrisy in other Christians, but how many of us have considered ourselves? You may have even felt the sting of such behavior in another, thinking “I can’t believe a Christian would do that to me!”

Self-Examination 5

Describe what you felt in that situation.

Now put yourself in your child’s place. How do you think they feel when you behave as a hypocrite?

When kids grow up in homes where God’s love and true Christianity are lived out, they will not as easily be drawn into the world, where truth is compromised and righteousness is mocked. Be careful, parents. The Enemy will use anything to draw our children away from Christianity, including our bad behavior.

Self-Examination 6

Are you telling your children one thing yet excusing the same behaviors in yourself? God tells us not to judge others, but to judge ourselves. Has God revealed any hypocrisy in you while reading this lesson? If so, write about it now. Ask God and your children to forgive you, and commit to change. Remember to ask for forgiveness each time you fail (1 John 1:9).

DIG DEEPER

Describe what Paul was saying about having a good testimony toward others.

Therefore I always exercise and discipline myself [mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites, and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects] to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God and toward men. (Acts 24:16 AMPC)

Thomas Woodrow Wilson, twenty-eighth president of the United States (1913–1921), served as president of Princeton University (1902–1910). While president of Princeton, he spoke these words to a parents' group:

I get many letters from parents about your children. You want to know why we people up here in Princeton cannot make more of them and do more for them. Let me tell you the reason we cannot. It may shock you just a little, but I am not trying to be rude. The reason is that they are your sons, reared in your home, blood of your blood, bone of your bone. They have absorbed the ideals of your homes. You have formed and fashioned them. They are your sons. In these malleable, moldable years of their lives, you have forever left your imprint upon them.³⁸

The parents' influence in the home cannot be underestimated.

Lesson 7

Discipling Your Children

Moses described how parents are to disciple their children. He was talking with the Israelites, explaining how the love of God and His Word begins within the parent’s heart. Then parents are commanded (“you shall”) to diligently teach their children.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them [God’s Word] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 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. (Deuteronomy 6:5–9)

These passages are relevant to us today, declaring that we are to teach God’s precepts and commandments diligently to our children—both through instruction and by consistently living out the gospel. In my experience, less than 10 percent of parents in the body of Christ today are discipling their children. Instead, they have left this God-given responsibility to school or church.

Somewhere along the line, many parents have determined that it is someone else’s responsibility to instruct our children in spiritual things. However, not one single youth group or children’s ministry worker is mentioned in the Bible. I was a youth pastor, and I praise the Lord for youth pastors and the work they do for our kids. But God says to you and me, as parents, that it is *our* responsibility to disciple our children. Other Christians and Christian organizations will never have the depth of influence over them that we do. They are here to assist us—not take our place.

Have you ever talked with a teacher or youth leader about your child’s spiritual growth? It is important to know and work with the people instructing your children. For example, ask how you can reinforce the Sunday lesson at home during the week. If you have not been discipling your child, this can be a way to get started.

Self-Examination 1

List the people, places, and practices that are currently helping your children grow spiritually.

Discipling Starts within a Parent's Heart

We find an essential aspect of discipling in Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" (wholeheartedly), soul, and strength (your whole being and life). This command to love God is given often in Deuteronomy (7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20). We can conclude that this exhortation is foundational and essential to successfully discipling our children. When 6:6 says God's words "shall be in your heart," or upon your heart, it refers to having an intimate, loving relationship with Him.

A noted Christian author wrote:

For the love of God to be of the right kind, the commandments of God must be laid to heart, and be the constant subject of thought and conversation. "Upon thine heart:" i.e., the commandments of God were to be an affair of the heart, and not merely of the memory.³⁹

An *abiding* relationship is essential. Our hearts need to change and be constantly changing, growing closer to God. As we learn and grow, we can communicate what God is giving us. What an awesome privilege. As you and I share the Word with our children, we will see them falling in love with the same God we love and serve.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how the psalmist felt about God's Word. How did this affect his life?

Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:11)

Oh, how I love Your law!
It is my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97)

I delight to do Your will, O my God,
And Your law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)

What is God asking us to do in this verse? What can we expect from Him?

Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know. (Jeremiah 33:3)

We must disciple our children diligently.

Deuteronomy 6:7 talks about the committed attitude we must have when discipling our children. Teaching them diligently indicates a proactive approach to communication through both our words and deeds.

Deuteronomy contains information given to God's children, the Jews, yet is equally descriptive of His will for us today. The analogy indicates that just as words are cut into a stone tablet with a sharp object, so the law should be impressed on the hearts of the children of every generation.⁴⁰ God's Word tells us that His law is to be written/hidden in our hearts (Psalm 119:11). This is a learning process, it does not just happen overnight. We must be diligent in our own learning, then diligently teach our children. God's Word is what we are teaching, because it is truly living and powerful, and it can reveal the thoughts and intents of the heart, both good and bad.

FACT FILE

Diligently—Perseveringly attentive; steady and earnest in application to a subject or pursuit; prosecuted with careful attention and effort; not careless or negligent.

DIG DEEPER

Describe the power of God's Word and apply it to everyday life.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

We see that a diligent personal commitment to seeking God and following His Word is essential and must precede our efforts to disciple others. Our children will know when our words and actions differ, which is defined as hypocrisy. Our goal as parents is to introduce our children to the love of God and His Word. Our most powerful influences are love and truth. Hypocrisy breeds rebellion, but seeing the fruit of God's Spirit in our lives will lead them to put their faith and trust in Christ.

When our children were at home, my wife and I found that one of the best tools for influencing our children and teaching them about Christ was the life we lived out day after day. We

committed ourselves to being examples of Christ, acting the way God wants. No parent can be perfect, but we can commit to the process of being transformed by God's Holy Spirit and, as our children observe us, this becomes one of the greatest tools of discipleship.

DIG DEEPER

List the warnings and exhortations to parents. How many generations are included?

Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren. (Deuteronomy 4:9)

Discipling and Equipping

Discipling an individual involves more than good biblical instruction. The goal is to help guide them to spiritual maturity so they can go on and disciple others. The "each one teach one" is a process of multiplication, and can eventually impact the entire world. We are reproducing Christ in our children through our Christlike attitudes and behavior. Just as Jesus did with His disciples, we are equipping them with weapons to fight the spiritual battles they will encounter in the world. The Bible gives insight into this vision for our children:

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.
How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. (Psalm 127:3-5 NASB)

Our children are gifts from God, His blessing, which should bring great pleasure to our homes. God calls children a "reward," and we need to value them as precious gifts, not see them as a burden. We have a responsibility to bring them up as God has instructed, being good stewards of the time. Children are portrayed as "arrows," not only in the quiver but also "in the hand of a warrior." This refers primarily to the father, since God has assigned him ultimate responsibility over the home.

We currently live in a culture that utilizes guns, bombs, missiles, and drones for war, rather than bows and arrows. Visualize yourself back in history, or think of a film where arrows were used to assault the enemy from a distance. A skilled warrior aimed his arrows and hit the target; therefore the picture of "arrows in the hand of a warrior" describes a child, in the hand of a parent, skillfully pointed in the right direction. Here is what one author says concerning this verse:

Arrows must be shaped. No arrow begins straight, ready for battle. The soldier who would shoot a straight arrow must spend time whittling and shaping the branch into a well-fashioned arrow. So it is in raising children. Sons and daughters must be

trained at an early age to pursue righteousness... This involves biblical instruction, moral correction, firm discipline, and loving affirmation.⁴¹

It is important to perceive our children as weapons for the cause of righteousness. An arrow is something you shoot out, away from you. It is an offensive weapon, fashioned to assault the unrighteousness of the world in which we live. Arrows are also seen as a defensive weapon: children prepared to overcome worldly temptations and the ungodly influences of peer pressure.

Parents are to equip children to influence their world for God.

They are arrows shot with great energy, going beyond the family—to a place where the LORD calls them to serve. Their influence can be great, sometimes beyond the community, the city, state and even the nation. This is the correct purpose and prayer for our children, rather than selfishly holding them back for our own desires and comfort.⁴²

Many parents think, *If I can just get my kids through high school free from drugs and sex, I've won.* But that is a passive posture. God wants you to perceive your children as offensive weapons that you are aggressively equipping to impact their world for righteousness. As the adage says, "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time."

Consider this example. Someone gives you a beautiful piece of land, completely clear of any plants, weeds, or trash, with the richest soil ever found, and says, "Here, this is yours. Do whatever you want with it." You decide to wait a year or so to develop it. How foolish to believe the land will be in the same condition as you received it. Instead it will be full of weeds from the dropping of seeds reproducing over and over again.

That is what the world is doing: dropping seeds of deception and corruption into the untended soil of our children's hearts. If we are not there, tilling that soil and instilling God's Word into their hearts, then who is? No one else one has greater power and influence over our children. God wants us to use that opportunity to plant His truth. It is our responsibility. We cannot be passive, or the Enemy will invade. If we diligently plant the seed of the Word of God in our child's heart, God promises it will bear good fruit (Matthew 13:23).

Self-Examination 2

Have you been faithfully tending to the fertile soil of your child's heart? How can you improve?

Can you identify any weeds or corruption in that soil? List any invaders that need to be removed.

When I was a youth pastor, parents would often call me, saying, “Hey, I don’t know what you’ve been teaching my kid on Sunday nights, but he’s been talking about God. I think you’d better meet with him. I think he’s ready to accept Jesus Christ.”

My response was always the same. “Why are you calling me, telling me to do this? Why aren’t you sitting down with him? Have you ever thought about leading your own kid to Christ?”

We already learned that parents should begin introducing their children to Christ at an early age. But we also must realize that salvation is God’s work. We are not responsible for *making* our kids accept Christ. Jesus taught in John 6:44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” Your child cannot be saved without hearing the gospel. It is our responsibility to be continuously teaching our children what is right and wrong, what the Bible says about all things (Matthew 28:20). We must explain to them who Jesus is, how to have a relationship with Him, and how to abide in Him each day.

Lesson 8

Principles for Discipling

God's plan for discipling our children, found in Deuteronomy 6:7–9, contains five principles.

Principle 1: Discipling Inside the Home

The first instruction from Deuteronomy 6:7 is “Talk of them when you sit in your house.” To talk to someone, we must spend time with them. God first says that teaching should take place in your house, because this is where we spend the most time with our children. Parents should be in control of what happens at home. Dads, you are to set the example and make sure this is happening. You have the leadership role in the home.

The Hebrew word for *sit*, *yasab*, is a verb, an action word. Even though we think of sitting as inactivity, we can see from this context that God is telling us to be busy with biblical instruction. This does not mean you are to have a Bible discussion every time you sit down with your child, but it should make us stop and think about how we are using our time at home.

Warning: We live in a time where electronics and media activities have replaced relationship interaction. Many children check out by watching TV, playing video/computer games, texting, and interacting on social media. They can do this for hours, and many parents allow it because they are busy doing their own things. So we must diligently watch how time is being spent in our homes.

Directly and Indirectly

The practice of discipling at home can be approached two ways: directly and indirectly. Direct-instruction discipleship is the time you set aside to have devotions with your children. It is a planned activity that involves the entire family.

If you have young children and teens, it is wise to separate for study time. It can be challenging to keep a five-year-old and a teenager focused on the same Bible study. In some homes the father and mother teach at the same time, dad in one room with the older kids, and mom in another with the younger ones.

Indirect-instruction discipleship occurs when God presents an opportunity for an informal or unplanned discussion of spiritual things. This usually means a parent must immediately set aside other personal activities. For this to happen, parents must make themselves available.

When my children were younger, I was not always available to communicate with them. As a fix-it kind of guy, I always have some kind of tinkering to do around the house. For the first four years of my marriage, on my way home from work, I would think, *Which project am I going to tackle tonight?* I would get home and immediately start on that; meanwhile, my little boys would follow me, wanting my attention. Within a few minutes, they would realize I did not really want them around, so they would start playing by themselves, or bugging my wife, because I was wrapped up in *myself*.

We all get into ruts like this until days turn into weeks, weeks into months, and so on. Then one day our kids don't want to talk to us, so they turn to peers or unhealthy relationships for comfort. All too often, when they become teenagers, we become interested in being with them, but it's too late. Thankfully, I did not let my problem get that far. I learned that when I got home, my most important job was tending to my family.

Making Time

By the time my oldest was five, I learned that my most important ministry was at home. Every day I would pray, "Okay, God, I'm coming home. Help me to be a servant; help me to be available for my wife and kids." I would have no other agenda than my wife and children. I learned that home is my first priority, not my work or hobbies. Instead of jumping into a project, I would make myself available to talk. In my home, the best place was in the kitchen. Both of my boys would run in and jockey for my attention. They would sit there for thirty minutes to an hour, telling me about their day. They knew Dad was available to listen. That is the first essential of communication: *availability*. This time is made—not found.

After I made myself available, I learned to communicate better. One of the important lessons is *do not lecture* during this time. This goes for both moms and dads: don't lecture. When my son Nick would launch into a story, I was quick to respond by lecturing him about what he should have done. My wife helped me to see that they just wanted to talk while I listened. They did not need a four-point sermon. They needed a dad who would listen.

On one occasion, Nick was telling me about a problem he was having with another student at school. When he finished, I merely said, "Nicholas, what would be the right thing to do here? Maybe we should talk to this kid's dad."

"Dad, I can work this out on my own." He was not open for any input at that moment.

Three days later, Nick and that student ended up fighting, and both were suspended from school for two days. Instead of saying, "See, I told you so," I sat down calmly and said, "Nick, if we had sat down with this boy's dad, and talked it out, do you think you would have gotten in a fight?"

"No," he said.

I continued, "Okay, you've got two days of suspension from school. During those two days, I have some projects for you to complete for your discipline."

Kids do not always listen to our instructions. But those times are wonderful opportunities for a life-training exercise. However, to accomplish this, you must be available, approachable, and communicate with them.

When your children become teenagers, you realize they are not pursuing you as often for discussion. They often do not want to talk when you want to talk. They start pulling away, and you must learn to adjust.

When my boys were older teens, I counseled two nights a week and would get home late. I learned that, although I was tired, I still needed to be available for my kids. My first ministry is not the people who come to see me or the people I speak to—it is my family. Teaching them takes sacrifice. For many teens, their time for talking is close to our bedtime.

Loving communication is the foundation for healthy communication. (See lesson 1, or review volume 2 for more details.) This involves being willing to interrupt our own activities, with a positive attitude, and finding out what makes these times easiest and most enjoyable for the kids. The best place may be sitting at the kitchen table, in the living room, or out in the backyard. Every child is different, and you need to take the time to get to know each one individually.

Self-Examination

After learning the principle of indirect instruction and the importance of being available, are there any changes you need to make? If so, write a prayerful desire for change.

Principle 2: Discipling Outside the Home

Deuteronomy 6:7 continues with another aspect of discipling children: “When you walk by the way.” Walking indicates activity. God gives us plenty of opportunities to instruct our kids while driving in the car, working outside in the yard, camping, surfing, or wherever we are.

God’s instruction reminds us to be sensitive to His Spirit at all times and in all places. When we are seeking God, we will see that He opens “windows” of opportunity to share at the most unusual times. When we take advantage of these opportunities, we are being diligent in our training.

I have great memories of surfing with Nick when we talked for long periods of time. It was like we forgot about surfing as we shared ideas about God’s creation and how wonderful He is. I remember camping with my son Justin and talking for hours about the concept of dating. With my daughter, Katie, we’d lie on the trampoline, after jumping so long my knees were killing me, and talk. There are many opportunities for us to share God’s wonderful truths and promises with our children. Some of the greatest Bible studies with my kids were not planned; they just happened in the course of daily living. We truly must be mindful of every opportunity.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what Jesus was doing in this passage, how available He was, and how He approached sharing the Word.

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

Then He spoke many things to them in parables. (Matthew 13:1-3)

ACTION PLAN 1

During which outside activities can you share biblical principles with your children? Ask God to remind you of these opportunities when they come your way. Ask Him for the boldness and wisdom to bring Christ and His perspective into an activity you are doing with your child.

Principle 3: Discipling in the Morning and Evening

Deuteronomy 6:7 says you should pursue discipling your children “when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Think of the last thing on your mind when you go to bed and the first when you get up in the morning. All too often the pressures of this world squeeze out thoughts of God, and He automatically becomes last on the priority list. Jews were instructed to, at least, recite Scripture in the morning and evening as a continual reminder of God. In this context, the parent can lead by example. The goal is to grow in our commitment to God and help our children develop the same practices.

ACTION PLAN 2

Do you pray with your kids in the morning and evening? How often do you pray with them? If you feel you do not have time, consider praying with them while taking them to school. Identify when you can start praying with them, listing the days or times.

I prayed with my children on the way to school and each evening before going to bed. They would come into our room, gather around the bed, and we would all pray together. When my boys became teenagers, we would often have great discussions after our prayer time until 10:30 or 11:00 p.m. The kids often wanted to talk about their friends, struggles they were going through,

or poor choices they were making. It's a great thing to have your teenagers wanting to talk to you. By trusting the Lord and applying these principles, I witnessed God doing a work in my kids that was absolutely glorious. I am still reaping the benefits of these blessed times, and I know this is God's desire for you and your family too.

Scripture says to "be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). We must look for opportunities at all times, being mindful of God's command that we teach our children both diligently and continuously.

ACTION PLAN 3

This week, be mindful of times with your children. For example, while driving them somewhere or during an outing, ask God for a teaching opportunity. Discuss as husband and wife how you can begin to use these times more effectively by instilling biblical principles, and write them here.

Colossians 1:10 says, "That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." For this to happen, we must go back to our foundation. Through our devotional time and obedience, we increase our knowledge of God, grow closer to Him, and are inspired to good works.

While I am terrible at remembering Scripture, and usually can't quote one from memory, I remember principles very well. I can easily remember throughout the day what I read in my devotional time that morning. Many times, issues with my children came up that were directly related to what I learned that morning. When opportunities presented themselves, I would remember what I had read and share it with my kids. Consequently, they are convinced I am an amazing theologian. The truth is, I am not. I merely have the right foundation.

DIG DEEPER

Identify the psalmist's attitude in the morning and evening. What was he doing and how can that help your devotional time?

My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord;
In the morning I will direct it to You,
And I will look up. (Psalm 5:3)

Evening and morning and at noon
I will pray, and cry aloud,
And He shall hear my voice. (Psalm 55:17)

To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning,
And Your faithfulness every night. (Psalm 92:2)

I rise before the dawning of the morning,
And cry for help;
I hope in Your word. (Psalm 119:147)

Principle 4: Discipling by Personal Example

God wants us to be constantly in mind of His teachings. Deuteronomy 6:8 says, “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” The Israelites not only memorized the Bible, word for word, and rehearsed it over and over to internalize it, but they were also to wear visible reminders. God knows our human tendency to forget and neglect.

Since we use our hands for just about everything, binding something there would be a continual reminder of it throughout the day. The “frontlet” is a small leather pouch worn on the forehead, indicating constant meditation on Scripture. Not likely you could forget something dangling in front of your face. These constant reminders are an example of what God desires from us as parents: to be mindful at all times of our responsibility to disciple our kids, both by personal example and by looking for opportunities to share God’s love and Word with them.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how the psalmist’s words apply to what you are learning.

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalm 1:1-3)

If you are putting God first, He will bless you in times of difficulty and trial. Your leaves will be green and you will be producing fruit, even in seasons of drought.

List the biblical principles from the following Scriptures that can help you be a godly example to your children.

Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess. (Deuteronomy 11:8)

Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart. (Proverbs 3:3)

Principle 5: Discipling by Having a Godly Home

This fifth principle will be covered in the next lesson.

Lesson 9

Having a Godly Home

The fifth principle from our passage in Deuteronomy says of God's laws, "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (6:9). *Doorposts*, from the Hebrew word *mezuah*, means "the upright framework of a door, or side posts of a gate or window." *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* notes the following:

In Deuteronomy 6:9 and 11:20, the Hebrews were instructed to write the commandments on the doors of the houses and on the city gates. This practice is still followed by the Jewish community. Every Jewish home has a small metal or wooden container mounted about shoulder-height on the doorpost of the house. This container, which itself became known as a mezuzah, has inside a small piece of parchment inscribed on one side with the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and 11:13-21, and on the other side with the word Shaddai, the Hebrew name for God Almighty.⁴³

These passages of Scripture, also known as part of the Shema, are fundamental truths to be obeyed. We can conclude that God wanted these passages fixed to the doorposts so everyone entering the house would be reminded that submission to God and His Word was the commitment of that home. Everything must meet His approval.

All who enter your home, your friends and your children's friends, your stuff and your children's stuff, must glorify the Lord. Part of discipling our kids is monitoring the things we allow in our home. God wants our homes to be a righteous environment, glorifying to Him. About forty years after Moses wrote Deuteronomy, the people of Israel were getting ready to enter into the promised land. Their leader, Joshua, set out a challenge in the form of a choice.

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

Joshua knew, as the leader of his own home, that choices would be ahead. Just like the world today, there were people in the promised land who did not serve the Lord, know Him, or have the morals and values He demanded.

DIG DEEPER

List what choices were presented to the people below. Why was making the right choice so important?

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

Worldly Influences

Romans 1 includes a long list of sinful behaviors that were going on at that time, which are still going on today. The apostle Paul closed that chapter with a stern warning: "Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:32). As parents, the responsibility is ours for what happens at home. According to this Scripture, we are judged for both our own bad choices and what we approve for our family. You are guilty not only if you do these sins, but also if you find pleasure in approving them. Think about the entertainment you allow and enjoy at home: television, movies, video games, music, magazines, and other media.

Parents often say, "When you're eighteen, you can watch this type of movie." But we need to realize that age is no qualifier for sin. This sounds like a reference to something that is inappropriate at any age—true for us and true for our children. Immorality is inappropriate at any age, and at any time, and should be stopped.

One father came up to me after I taught a parenting class, explaining that he and his teenage son had gotten into a big argument over music. His son said, "Dad, what about your Pink Floyd albums? I've read the lyrics of those songs, and they are bad. They're no better than what I'm listening to." That father told me those Pink Floyd albums ended up in the trash because he had learned that hypocrisy breeds rebellion.

Many Christians today pay more for cable TV than they give in tithes. Just imagine what God will say to us when we stand before Him: "You paid \$47.50 every month for cable that poisoned both yours and your kids' minds, and you gave how much to My church?" *Ouch!*

Amazingly, many Christian parents sit right next to their children, laughing at shows full of sexual innuendos and destructive worldly philosophies. It is no wonder we have an epidemic today of young women “rooming” with guys—a disaster waiting to happen. Meanwhile, our media keeps pumping this type of philosophy into our kids’ minds, and we open the door and let it in. We must take a stand.

My wife received a women’s magazine, and I casually glanced through it. I happened upon an article about how to please your “man”—not your husband—but your man. That article was pornography in print, in a standard women’s magazine.

Ladies, you can read those types of articles and look at Victoria’s Secret catalogs and think they do not affect you, but they do. Women often check out women more than men do. When you look at a beautiful woman’s body, you are not thinking the way men do; you are not lusting. You are thinking, *I hate her. Just wait until she has three kids.* When mature men, young men, and even boys see a woman dressed provocatively on TV, or in a magazine, their reaction is different. In today’s world, sexually explicit pictures or written content is everywhere: billboards, cell phones, TV ads, online, and every type of magazine.

Things have certainly changed. When I was young, the only thing we watched was Disney on Sunday nights. Can you imagine, back in the seventies, watching Disney with your mom and dad, and a Victoria’s Secret commercial coming on? My dad would have shot a hole through the TV, and someone at ABC would have heard from him for sure. That would have ended our Disney watching night. If you look closely at the content of movies, you will find that PG13 movies (and equivalent video game ratings) often have ten times the amount of sex, sexual innuendos, and cussing as an R-rated movie. Satan knows exactly what he is doing to our kids. You must be aware of these things, and you must know whom you can trust.

My wife and I have certain Christian friends we can trust with movie selection. Have I seen an R-rated movie? Absolutely. But I choose them carefully, based on the content. Likewise, you need to decide, between you and your spouse and the Lord, what you will allow. Remember, hypocrisy breeds rebellion.

Not So Subtle Emphasis

I walked into my son Justin’s room when he was twelve, and he was playing a video game. Periodically, little captions would pop up when the characters walked up to each other. While I was watching over Justin’s shoulder, some cuss words popped up. I said, “Justin, what’s that?”

“Oh, Dad, I don’t read those.”

“But wait a minute, how much of that language comes up?”

“Well, they use it throughout the whole game.”

“Turn it off,” I said. “Whose game is this?”

“My friend at school loaned it to me.”

“I don’t want to see it in this house again.”

One time when Nick was a teenager, I came home and there were five kids in his room, laughing their heads off. They were playing his friend’s video game. Nick called me into his room to see what they thought was so funny. The game featured a well-endowed woman in a hot-pants outfit kicking, shooting, and beating up all kinds of bad guys. The funny part was that while she was doing this, her breasts were bouncing all over the place. The boys were dying laughing. Although it did look funny, I told him it was not appropriate.

“Wait, Dad, wait.” He immediately went into the programming mode and changed the setting so the woman’s breasts were no longer bouncy. Then he did the same kick, showing me that her breasts did not move.

“But, Nick, why do you think they have that program? Because of the emphasis they’re putting on it. Turn it off. Let’s not have it in the house again.”

I had to implement a new rule, no video games in our house without my approval.

The internet is just as dangerous, if not more so, than video games. Make sure you have software to protect your kids (and dads) from pornography. From 1998 to 2003, more than 240 million pornographic web pages were added to the internet, over one hundred thousand per day.⁴⁴ And every day the pornography industry is using the smartest people in the world to try to find ways around your protection.

Pornography is an epidemic among our teenage boys, and it can be just as addictive as heroin. We need to be in tune and involved. We need to monitor their social media, chat rooms, and other apps. Smart phones have opened a door to many more temptations for our children. Even with the advanced technology of parental controls provided by apps and service providers, we must continually monitor their efficiency and available communication. We need to get involved and be aware of these avenues of possible evil that can and will corrupt our children.

The Privacy Issue

Many parents have heard, “Get out of my room!” or something similar. Including me. When Nick was thirteen years old, I was in his room and we were discussing our rules on the type of music we allowed in our home. Finally he said, “Okay, now will you get out of my room?”

I sat down in his chair and said, “What? Who said this was your room?” He did not answer me, so I continued, “Nick, let me tell you where that lie came from: the pit of hell. I don’t have a lease with you, and you’re not paying me rent. I am responsible for everything in this house. When I stand before the Lord, when I die, you’re not going to be standing next to me, saying, ‘God, those were my CDs and my tapes; don’t hold my dad responsible.’ God’s going to hold me 100 percent responsible for everything in this house. Yes, you have different interests, but if they don’t meet the standard that I have set as a priest in my household, those things will not be allowed in my house. And this room will never be yours. This room is mine. Because I love you, and you’re my child, I allow you to live here. It doesn’t matter if you’re thirteen or thirty-five. If you live in my house, my standard will remain. So please, Nicholas, don’t listen to that lie again.”

DIG DEEPER

What did Jacob do as the leader of his home? What was his concern, and why do you think it was so important?

And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone."
(Genesis 35:2-3)

ACTION PLAN

Spend time as husband and wife discussing the changes you need to make after reading this lesson. Think of TV shows, movies, games, posters, books, internet, social media, cell phone apps, or anything God shows you that needs to be changed. List your changes and write your commitment to make things right. See *Appendix L: Inappropriate Entertainment* for additional information.

Make a commitment to investigate and learn more about protective software to help you monitor their communication. Find more information on our website, FDM.world.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary offers great insight to close our study of these five discipleship principles from Deuteronomy:

God's people were responsible to meditate on these commandments, to keep them in their hearts. This enabled them to understand the Law and to apply it correctly. Then the parents were in a position to impress them on their children's hearts also. The moral and biblical education of the children was accomplished best not in a formal teaching period each day but when the parents, out of concern for their own lives as well as their children's, made God and His Word the natural topic of a conversation which might occur anywhere and anytime during the day (v. 7).⁴⁵

Lesson 10

Be Unified

Statistics from 2000 showed that when a mother in an unsaved family is the first one to accept Jesus Christ, there is a 17 percent chance the rest of the family will come to know Christ as well. When a father is the first one to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, there is a 93 percent chance the rest of the family will come to know Christ.⁴⁶

Dads, you have supernatural, ordained power from God. Use it. Do not be tempted to relinquish your responsibility. As we study these principles, do not think, *I can't do that. My wife is a better spiritual leader. She knows the Bible better than me, so I'll just let her do it.* Forget your insecurities. This is what God has commissioned and ordained. He will empower you. Jesus wants you to become like Him. He gave us the best example of the importance of discipleship and how to disciple others.

As parents, we must constantly evaluate ourselves biblically, being faithfully obedient to Scripture to avoid hypocrisy when training our children. God is not looking for perfection, but cooperation, and He wants transformation. If you are using screaming and yelling for discipline, misrepresenting Christ, and not leading by asking forgiveness of God and your family when you fail, this will affect your ability to get your children's attention. God forgives our failures, but we still must consistently obey His principles to bring about the transformation of both ourselves and others.

Self-Examination

Parents are to be one in mind and judgment, in unity. Describe what Scripture says about the biblical principles for unity. As a couple, identify where you need to be more united.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.
(1 Corinthians 1:10)

Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. (Philippians 2:2)

These principles apply to all two-parent families, including blended families. Mom, if you have an unsaved husband, can you disciple your kids? Absolutely. If you are a single mom, can you disciple your kids? Absolutely. What if you are a grandparent or foster parent? Absolutely.

The Powerful Tool of Prayer

Prayer should be a fundamental part of discipleship. God's Word tells us we must "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). God tells us to come boldly to Him (Hebrews 4:16); to ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7:7); and to bring everything to Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6). As leaders of the family, fathers should pray with their wives and children every single day. The father is to set his mind on being a godly example in everything. God has given us a powerful tool in prayer, therefore we should incorporate it into our daily lives. In lieu of a missing father, single moms can be all these things to their children.

In my family, I was the only one who got to hear my shy, little daughter pray. She would not pray in front of my wife or her brothers. By her teenage years, she was praying with more intelligence and intent than most adults: for God's strength, for forgiveness of her sins, for her friends and family, for people's salvation. Her prayers often brought tears to my eyes. I have had the privilege of watching her grow into a young lady of prayer because we prayed together every night. After praying with my daughter, my teenage boys would join me and my wife in our room, and we would all pray together. It was powerful and a tremendous blessing.

Instilling God's Word

Instilling God's Word in our children is the heart of discipleship. God tells us to "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge" (2 Peter 1:5). We must be diligent to learn God's Word for ourselves, then we can pass the Word to our children. "Giving all diligence" suggests a consistent, uninterrupted pattern. To that end, family Bible studies should be done regularly, not when you happen to have time. You must make a plan and stick to it.

Couples can split the duties, if that works for you. I disciplined my sons as they were growing up. Since my daughter was homeschooled, my wife disciplined her. When we had our weekly Bible study nights, all participated together. I also spent personal time with my daughter in the evenings when we prayed together. I would invite her to share by asking, "What did you learn today in your Bible study?" That opened the opportunity for me to expand on what she was learning and to oversee her spiritual growth.

Seven Steps for a Weekly Bible Study

Step 1: Keep it simple.

The objective is to put God's Word in your child's heart, not produce a Bible scholar. There are plenty of age-appropriate materials available to help you have a great Bible study. See the short list in *Appendix D: Recommended Books*.

Step 2: Keep it short.

Family members vary in attention span. Be sensitive to the fact that Bible study should be a fun family time, rather than a lecture.

When I started doing Bible studies with my kids, I was a youth pastor and my kids were very young. The first few times I did it, Nick would come in and be upside down on the couch and twisting around and throwing the pillow up in the air. I would get frustrated.

“Nicholas, sit up! Stop it! We’re doing a Bible study now!”

When we went to bed, my wife said, “Honey, when you teach the high school, you have fun with them. So why, with your own kids, do you get all uptight?”

I did not have an answer. So I learned to make our time together fun, not a lecture. Chocolate shakes and popcorn are okay. Plus, I learned that Nick listens better upside down.

Step 3: Make it exciting.

Get in touch with your own love and excitement for the faith, and then transfer that to your children. Are you excited about being in the Word? Are you excited about what God told you today? Are you excited to see the work God is doing in and around you? If you are not excited yourself, it will be a lecture every time.

When our boys were young, they watched hours of a Christian, animated video series about people in the Bible. My son Nicholas, now a man, can still remember things he saw on those videos when he was a kid.

My daughter and I used to play Bible board games when she was young. Often we would play it three times in a row. We could spend more than an hour in Bible studies that way. She would pull a question-and-answer card. I could expound on the answers to the questions, and she loved it.

Step 4: Be flexible.

All families experience unexpected circumstances. Your kids may start soccer or baseball or dance, and you should not say, “No, you can’t play baseball because Thursday night is our Bible study.”

I think our family has had a Bible study on every night of the week at some point. Nick started a band. Since he had band practice, we moved to Sunday nights. Then Justin got into volleyball, and he had practice. So we moved it to Tuesday nights.

You must be flexible, but not so that any spontaneous event is an excuse to postpone Bible study.

Step 5: Be consistent.

While flexibility is sometimes necessary, you must be consistent in your Bible study, thereby maintaining your commitment. God blesses obedience.

For example, parents consistently gather the family for Bible study over several months, then summer comes and schedules change or the family goes on vacation. The Bible study is put on hold, and they say they’ll start back next week, or the week after, or maybe the one after that. Then suddenly there is a crisis going on in their house, and they realize that it has been months since the family gathered together for Bible study.

Step 6: Be realistic.

Keep your standards high but your expectations within reason. The process of teaching your child about God continues throughout a lifetime. You are sowing valuable seeds that will take time to grow, mature, and bear fruit. Remember that love is the most powerful motivator, so keep a balance between love and discipline as you teach and train up each child.

One father told me he made his kids read a chapter from the Bible every day and write one full page on what it said to them. He was convinced that he was teaching his kids the Bible, but I could tell by his wife's reaction that she did not agree with his method. I asked him what happened when they did not fill up the whole page or if what they wrote was not acceptable. He told me very proudly that he makes them do it over.

Use materials and a teaching style suited to the age and abilities of your pupils. For parents who struggle with what to do, or how to make Bible studies fun, ask a teacher from your Sunday school if you can sit in and observe how they interact with the children. Look for what sparks the children's interest and ask the teacher for a little help.

Step 7: Get started.

Perhaps the most important step for your study is to get started. Change is always a bit uncomfortable, and you may be nervous and afraid things will not go according to your plan. Review the points above and pray to God for wisdom and strength to do His will for your family. Do not let fear, pride, your job, or insecurity about your inabilities get in your way. You have more influence over your children than anyone. Use it for them. They already love you, and they desire and need your parental attention and care.

One summer, we simply used a devotional called *Our Daily Bread* because things were so hectic. Justin read the Scripture, Nick read the story, we each gave our input, and we prayed. It was simple, but effective.

When my kids were teens, and I saw them with their Bibles open, it just blessed me. They were mature enough to search God's Word for themselves. When I was a teenager, the last thing I ever picked up was a Bible. It never crossed my mind. I would have never made the time to do something like that.

To this day, I exhort my children to be in the Word and in prayer on a continuous basis. I taught them how to have a personal, daily devotional life, but we all need to be encouraged once in a while.

Do not allow the world to dictate what your children believe. Make time to disciple your kids.

Appendix Resources

These appendices are included as additional resources. They are found throughout all four volumes, but not all appendices are included in each volume. If you wish to review a specific appendix, find where it is located in the list below.

Appendix A: Parent Commitment Letter	Volume 1
Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ	Volume 1
Appendix C: Developing Daily Intimacy with God	Volume 1
Appendix D: Recommended Books	Volumes 1 & 3
Appendix E: Trust and Forgiveness	Volume 2
Appendix F: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation	Volumes 2 & 4
Appendix G: Improving Your Loving Communication	Volumes 2 & 4
Appendix H: Showing Love to Your Child	Volume 2
Appendix I: Essentials for Single Parents	Volume 3
Appendix J: Parenting the Blended Family	Volume 3
Appendix K: Leading a Child to Christ	Volume 3
Appendix L: Inappropriate Entertainment	Volume 3
Appendix M: Disciplining Behavior	Volume 4
Appendix N: Rules and Consequences	Volume 4
Appendix O: Positive Reinforcement	Volume 4
Appendix P: Chore List	Volume 4
Appendix Q: Questionnaire for Teenagers	Volume 4
Appendix R: Questionnaire for New Adults	Volume 4
Appendix S: Parent Self-Evaluation	Volume 4
Appendix T: Glossary	Volumes 1-4

Appendix D

Recommended Books

While there are many excellent books to deepen your relationship with God, we recommend the following to guide, teach, and challenge you.

Discipleship Books

Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple by Craig Caster
Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God by Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King
Man to Man by Charles R. Swindoll
 Marriage Is a Ministry series by Craig Caster
Men of Courage: God's Call to Move Beyond the Silence of Adam by Dr. Larry Crabb

Devotional Books

Daily Experience with God by Andrew Murray
Drawing Near: Daily Readings for a Deeper Faith by John F. MacArthur
Every Day with Jesus: First Steps with New Believers by Greg Laurie
Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God by Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King
Meet the Bible: A Panorama of God's Word in 366 Daily Readings and Reflections by Brenda Quinn and Philip Yancey
Moments Together for Couples by Dennis and Barbara Rainey
My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers
On the Other Side of the Garden: Biblical Womanhood by Virginia Ruth Fugate
Streams in the Desert by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman
The Love Dare Day by Day: A Year of Devotions for Couples by Stephen and Alex Kendrick
The Power of a Praying Wife by Stormie Omartian
The One Year Book of Psalms by William J. Peterson and Randy Petersen
Understanding Teens by Craig Caster

Devotional and Discipleship Books for Children and Adolescents

Bad to the Bone: Fifteen Young Bible Heroes Who Lived Radical Lives for God by Miles McPherson
Favorite Bible Stories by Carolyn Passig Jensen (various ages)
God and Me! Devotions for Girls by multiple authors, including Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer, Diane Cory, Linda M. Washington, and Jeanette Dall (various ages)
Gotta Have God: Fun Devotions for Boys, Ages 2-5 by Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer
Gotta Have God: Cool Devotions for Guys by multiple authors including Legacy Press, Linda M. Washington, and Jeanette Dall (various ages)
Growing Little Women: Capturing Teachable Moments with Your Daughter by Donna J. Miller, with Linda Holland
Talksheets by David Lynn (various books for junior high and high school)
Youth Devotions by Josh McDowell

Appendix I

Essentials for Single Parents

God's original plan for the family was to bring the man and woman together in the love and commitment of the marriage relationship. He would then bless their love and commitment with the gift of children. In an environment of intimacy, love, and submission to their Creator, the parents would love and train their children in God's ways. God desired that the fruit of the marriage relationship would be godly offspring.

The Lord has been witness
Between you and the wife of your youth, . . .
She is your companion
And your wife by covenant. . . .
Did He not make them one, . . .
And why one?
He seeks godly offspring. (Malachi 2:14-15)

When the man and woman turned from their creator and sinned in the garden of Eden, their intimacy with God was destroyed, they were expelled from the garden, and God's original plan for the family was affected. The fall resulted in disunity and contention between the man and the woman, which continues to dominate and destroy male and female relationships and marriages today. In addition, the offspring from the marriage inherited their parents' sin nature and suffered like consequences. Single-parent families, resulting from death, divorce, and children born to unmarried mothers, were a consequence of the fall of man.

Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. (Matthew 19:8)

The first single-parent family recorded in Scripture was Hagar, Abram and Sarai's (Abraham & Sarah) Egyptian maid, and her son, Ishmael, fathered by Abram. Sarai was unable to bear children, therefore she urged her husband to father a child with Hagar. Sarai later changed her mind and resented Hagar and her son. On two occasions Hagar had personal encounters with God.

Hagar's first meeting with God was before the birth of her son. Having been harshly treated by Sarai, she fled to the wilderness. God met her there and confirmed to her that He heard her affliction. He counseled her to return to her home and instructed her to name her son Ishmael, which means "God hears."

Her second visitation with God was a few years later when she and Ishmael, driven from Abraham's home, departed and wandered in the wilderness. Certain that she and her son would soon die, she lifted up her voice and wept. God proved to this single parent once again that He is the God who hears. God comforted her, counseled her, and opened her eyes to His will for her and her family.

Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble;
You will prepare their heart;
You will cause Your ear to hear,
To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
That the man of the earth may oppress no more. (Psalm 10:17–18)

Read the account of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16:1–16 and 21:9–21. Our culture has changed drastically since this family lived several thousand years ago, but single parents today share many of the same struggles, needs, feelings, and emotions. Though this biblical account centers on a woman, single fathers and mothers alike know the hurt of rejection, loneliness, and fear for their children, as well as financial crisis. Consider the following important principles we learn from Hagar’s experience with the God who hears.

- The Angel of the Lord (an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ) found Hagar in the wilderness.
- The Angel of the Lord guided her amid her distress.
- He gave her His promises.
- He gave her hope for her future and the future of her son.
- Hagar responded to Him with faith calling God *El Roi*, the God who sees.
- God heard the cries of her son.
- He spoke to Hagar about the welfare of her son.
- God commanded Hagar to lift up her son and hold him by the hand.
- God opened Hagar’s eyes to see His provision.
- God was with Ishmael.

The important lesson we learn from this story is that God sees, hears, cares, and is waiting to intercede in the single-parent family. He loves the children in these homes, children who have suffered loss through death, divorce, or abandonment by those who were called by God to love and train them. We learn that God not only hears, but He heals. God is waiting to demonstrate His faithfulness and power to you and your children. You must respond as Hagar, with trust and obedience.

Principles for Single-Parent Families

1. Receive your daily strength and guidance from the Lord.
2. Single parents must spend time daily with the Lord. If our busy lifestyles overrule our intimacy with Christ, we will soon find ourselves powerless and overwhelmed by our circumstances.
3. We need God’s perspective, wisdom, hope, and guidance every day. Parents must set the example, showing their children what it looks like to live a godly life amid difficult circumstances.

The helpless commits himself to You;
You are the helper of the fatherless. (Psalm 10:14)

4. Encourage your child to have a relationship with the other parent.
5. Even if the other parent is not fulfilling their role in a consistent and biblical manner, your children need to have a relationship with that parent. Never compromise your child's physical or emotional well-being. As your child grows and matures, they will make their own choices about their relationship with the other parent.
6. Make every effort to promote unity with the other parent.
7. If possible, agree on your rules and methods of discipline. For this to happen, parents must set aside all selfishness and unforgiveness. Life can become stressful and confusing for a child who routinely must go back and forth between different homes. When parents can work together, it helps to eliminate some of this confusion. When children witness their parents working together, it is a blessing for them. In some cases, this is not possible. Never put your child or yourself in an emotionally or physically dangerous or damaging situation.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.
(Romans 12:18 NASB)

8. Accept your child's desire to see the other parent.
9. You must not allow yourself to be overwhelmed that your children are spending time with their other parent. Your attitude can set the stage for behavior problems. This transition is hard enough on the children. Don't let a poor attitude on your part add to the confusion. Be sensitive to your child when they arrive home after visiting the other parent, ready to listen and express happiness if they had a good time. If necessary, remind them that they are home where your rules are the standard.
10. Establish yourself and your children in a Bible-teaching church.
11. While there is no perfect church, there is a perfect church for you and your children. God's Word exhorts us to do the following:

Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.
(Hebrews 10:25 NASB)

Those who are planted in the house of the Lord
Shall flourish in the courts of our God. (Psalm 92:13)

12. The church is God's family. Your children need the love, stability, mentoring, and parenting of other members of the family of God. Children from single-parent families need to have healthy role models and see how two-parent families function.

A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows,
Is God in His holy habitation.
God sets the solitary in families. (Psalm 68:5-6)

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.
(James 1:27)

13. Pursue friendship, fellowship, and fun with other Christian families.

14. Being unmarried, many single parents feel that they do not fit in with married couples. Although because they are parents, they also do not feel that they fit in with singles. The result can be loneliness and isolation. If parents are lonely and isolated, their children will either follow their example or pursue a social life on their own. Take advantage of extended family, your children's school activities, and opportunities to participate in fellowship and social functions through your church.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

15. If the need arises, seek godly counsel.

16. If you feel that there are issues and situations in your life or the lives of your children that need immediate attention and solutions, you may want to seek biblical counseling from your pastor or a qualified Christian counselor.

Where there is no counsel, the people fall;
But in the multitude of counselors there is safety. (Proverbs 11:14)

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
But he who heeds counsel is wise. (Proverbs 12:15)

Appendix J

Parenting the Blended Family

The blending process can be challenging for both parents and children. The five issues below are the most common challenges blended families face. This appendix will help you identify the problems and provide practical steps to address them.

Issue 1: Loss and Hurt

Stepfamilies are often created from a painful loss affecting both parents and children. Divorce happens for many reasons, but no matter what the reason is, parents and children are hurt. It is important that both parents understand why the divorce happened, including their own participation in it. While our nature is to place blame others, in most—*not all*—cases, both husband and wife had some input as to why the divorce happened.

If a person is ignorant to God's will as a husband, wife, or parent, how can they honestly examine their own part in the failed marriage?

For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye"; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:2-5)

Four Important Steps in the Healing Process

Step 1: Spend time investigating what God's will is for a husband and wife.

If you did not have a good example and you were never disciplined in how to be a husband or wife, there is a good chance you made mistakes and have some ownership in the discord of your previous marriage. To be healed, and to learn to not repeat the same mistakes, you need to investigate what God's will is for you as a husband or wife as you go through these parenting materials.

"First remove the plank from your own eye" (Matthew 7:5) means to know what your faults were, using the Word of God as your only measuring tool. Go through a biblically based marriage study such as our Marriage is a Ministry series (FDM.world). You will learn what God's purpose is for marriage and His instructions about how to fulfill your spouse's companionship needs.

Remember: God created marriage, and if we do not look to Him (His Word) for how to do it correctly, and instead lean on our own understanding and do it wrong, this is sin. You can't ask God to forgive you if you don't know what it is you did wrong. And you don't want to repeat in your current (or future) marriage what you did in the past marriage.

Step 2: Find healing through forgiveness.

Christ is the only one who can heal the hurts caused by a divorce or a spouse who hurt you. If you want to be healed and move forward, you need to take these steps.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

We need to confess our sins to the Lord—those things His Word revealed that were your part in the failed marriage. As Christians, we can never justify our sin because a person has hurt us. Nor can we justify our sin due to ignorance.

He who covers his sins will not prosper,
But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

We are also instructed to confess our sins to the one we have sinned against.

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16)

Do you want to be healed from the pain of the divorce? Remember James 5:16. If we do this we will be healed. You can do it in a phone call, a letter, or an email. The Word of God is clear; you must ask them to forgive you. If remarried, it is important to involve your current spouse in this process. You don't want to promote any jealousy.

Step 3: You must be willing to forgive them.

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25)

You can do this in the same letter or email when you are asking them to forgive you. To tell them you forgive them does not mean what they did was okay or right. The purpose for forgiving them is for Christ's sake, to do His will and for your own healing. See *Appendix E: Trust and Forgiveness* in volume 2.

Step 4: Seeking reconciliation with an ex-spouse is not always possible.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24)

Reconciliation with an ex-spouse or the child's other biological parent means several things:

- Agree not to speak evil of each other, especially in front of the children.
- Do not discuss certain subject matters in front of the children (financial issues, child support, etc.).

- Try to cooperate in the rules and disciplining of the children to minimize the child's confusion and increase the effectiveness of raising them toward maturity.
- Work together and cooperate where the children are concerned (spending time with other parents, vacation, etc.).

Abuse, violence, drugs, alcohol, or living an unhealthy lifestyle can all contribute to reasons why reconciliation may not be possible. But when possible, not attempting reconciliation will cause you to not experience healing from the Lord. And in many cases bitterness will come out in ways that will hurt your children: bad-mouthing the other parent, unwilling to work with other parent, and so on. There is no guarantee the other parent will cooperate or be reasonable. Your part is to be open to working on it—but without compromise.

Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.
(Hebrews 12:15)

Those roots of bitterness can spring up and spew poison upon those around you:

- You might speak in an un-honorable way toward the other parent.
- You could be unwilling to work with them to schedule time with the other parent, set the rules, or agree to discipline.
- Your unwillingness to forgive could also make a mockery of your faith. Hypocrisy is Satan's tool to push our children away from trusting God, and it breeds rebellion in our children.

When you come to Christ to praise Him, to receive from Him, to ask for His help and blessings, do you want Him to hear you and respond to you? Remember Matthew 5:23–24: “Go your way. First be reconciled to your brother.” Trusting the Lord means you are willing to obey Him and do what He asks of you. Are you ready? Pray and ask for His grace to help you.

Helping Your Children

Divorce is one of the most devastating things a child can experience. Most children in blended families have experienced difficult trials and deep wounds that are often not dealt with before they are asked to accept a stepmom or stepdad and maybe stepsisters or stepbrothers. Often the parent seeks out their own emotional support through a relationship before the children have time to adjust and find healing themselves.

It is common for children to believe they are responsible in some way—that they are the reason why the divorce took place. They believe if they could have just acted better or helped more in some way then the divorce wouldn't have happened. You must reassure them often that this is not the case.

You need to reassure them that their normal misbehaving had nothing to do with the divorce and they could not have done anything to stop the divorce. This reassurance needs to be given with

gentleness and the utmost empathy for your child. Some children struggle more or longer than others in this area. If one of your children is taking a longer time working through this, be patient with them and be willing to listen and reassure them with love and truth.

It is also common for children to be confused over why God would let this happen. The child cannot understand why God didn't stop the divorce from happening if they love and need both of their parents so much.

First, help your child see things from an eternal perspective.

They need to understand how God's sovereignty and His providential permission work for His ultimate purpose, even in painful situations. Many parents think their children need to be at least twelve or older understand this truth, but I have witnessed young children at the age of six grasp this and accept it. The truth is that children can grasp the truth much easier than adults. But the way you explain it to them is important. A parent needs to present this truth at the child's level *and believe it for themselves.*

At the end of the seven years, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked to heaven. I was given my mind back and I blessed the High God, thanking and glorifying God, who lives forever:

His sovereign rule lasts and lasts,
his kingdom never declines and falls.
Life on this earth doesn't add up to much,
but God's heavenly army keeps everything going.
No one can interrupt his work,
no one can call his rule into question. (Daniel 4:35 MSG)

FACT FILE

Sovereign—Possessing supreme power, unlimited wisdom, absolute authority, all-knowing past, present, and future.

O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me,"
 Even the night shall be light about me;
 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
 But the night shines as the day;
 The darkness and the light are both alike to You.
 For You formed my inward parts;
 You covered me in my mother's womb.
 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
 Marvelous are Your works,
 And that my soul knows very well.
 My frame was not hidden from You,
 When I was made in secret,
 And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
 And in Your book they all were written,
 The days fashioned for me,
 When as yet there were none of them.
 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
 How great is the sum of them!
 If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand;
 When I awake, I am still with You. (Psalm 139:1-18)

These verses teach that God knows each of us intimately. All our days were fashioned or created by Him. Before you knew God, or accepted Him as Lord and Savior, He knew you and predestined all the days of your life. God gave all of us the gift of freewill. He chose you that you might follow Him and gave you the freedom to accept or reject Him.

God, investigate my life;
 get all the facts firsthand.
 I'm an open book to you;
 even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.
 You know when I leave and when I get back;
 I'm never out of your sight.
 You know everything I'm going to say
 before I start the first sentence.
 I look behind me and you're there,
 then up ahead and you're there, too—
 your reassuring presence, coming and going.
 This is too much, too wonderful—
 I can't take it all in! (Psalm 139:1-6 MSG)

God has given mankind freedom to do good and freedom to do evil; that includes doing things their own way. Therefore the reality is that God's children live in a fallen world and are often touched by the evil around them that others have caused. If God shielded His children from all evil, allowing only good, the unsaved would only be motivated to turn to Him for the guarantee of an easy life.

You can give your child an example using your own relationship with them. You can say to your child, "If you only told me you love me and do what I ask of you if I give you something like a toy or candy, then you are only doing it for what you can get. That's not love."

It's not God who made these bad things happen, but God promises to help you through it.

Don't let anyone under pressure to give in to evil say, "God is trying to trip me up." God is impervious to evil, and puts evil in no one's way. The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer. (James 1:13-14 MSG)

God does not make bad things happen, but when they do happen, He does want to help us.

God is the only one who can heal the broken hearts. If the child is questioning God (Why did You make this happen?), is mad at God for it happening, or blaming Him, then they are not allowing God to help them and heal their broken hearts.

For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them. (Matthew 13:15)

The child needs to be praying for the faith to trust God in His perfect plan in giving all people free will. They need to pray for God to help them through this difficult time, ask Him to heal their broken heart, and respond to those who thought they are to blame in some way with, "No, I am not to blame. God loves me and I did not cause this to happen." Reassure your children that God knows the pain they are experiencing, and it is His will to help them through this painful ordeal.

Second, it is important that they don't become bitter at you or the other parent.

Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.
(Hebrews 12:15)

If we become bitter at someone, this will cause us to become bitter ourselves. We will feel sad, angry, and confused as well as treat others in a bad way. For example, a poisonous berry bush in the backyard made you feel really sick every time you ate its berries. So would you eat those berries *yourself* if you wanted someone *else* to become sick?

It's the same with anger and bitterness. If you are mad at someone, would you eat those berries hoping the person you are mad at would suffer in some way? No, that would be foolish. That's why God teaches us not to be bitter at others, even if they hurt us. We are to forgive them because the only one we are hurting is ourselves if we do not.

Becoming bitter, being angry at someone, and not forgiving them is like eating those poisonous berries. Just like God forgives us for our sins, He tells us we must forgive those who hurt us.

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25)

You might have to help them with this prayer:

Lord, help me not to be bitter at my dad/mom. Please help me to forgive them and not become angry. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

Share with them that forgiveness is the only means of breaking the cycle of blame and suffering—and in many cases destructive, sinful behaviors that stem from these hurts. Forgiveness offers the way out. It does not settle all questions of blame and fairness, and often evades those questions altogether. It can allow a relationship to start over, if possible, and heal the wounds caused by others.

This truth is demonstrated in the life of Joseph (Genesis 37–45), which can help your children see how God works in these painful trials. Though he was mistreated, betrayed, abandoned by his brothers, sold into slavery, and imprisoned—not because he did anything wrong—all these hurtful things that touched Joseph's life happened because of bad choices that his father and brothers made. However He refused to allow the root of bitterness to take hold of his life. Shortly before being reunited with his brothers, he testified of the healing work that God had done in his life during the years of separation as demonstrated in the naming of his sons.

Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."
(Genesis 41:51–52)

To *forget* in this sense does not mean to cease to remember, but to let go, to cease to let the memory of hurtful things control your present life. Joseph's blessed life and fruitfulness were directly related to his trusting God and not harboring bitterness or resentment. The word *resentment* means to feel again. Joseph chose to trust God with these painful experiences and his past.

Third, unforgiveness imprisons us to past hurts and hinders the potential for a fruitful life.

During Joseph's years alone in Egypt, he allowed God to heal his heart, which had been broken by his own brothers. Later, when given the opportunity, Joseph extended love, forgiveness, and grace to his brothers.

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life ... and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.... He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him. (Genesis 45:5, 7, 15 NASB)

Joseph truly believed what he said:

But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. (Genesis 50:20)

“Meant it for good” means God will, as He did with Joseph, take these painful experiences in our lives and use them to make us stronger in our faith. There was no blaming, no explanations demanded, only the voice of mercy and forgiveness. The way was cleared for Joseph and his brothers to be reunited and begin a new relationship.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Issue 2: A Negative Preexisting Disposition

When a child is still hurting over their parents’ divorce or hoping their parents would get back together, they struggle with accepting the new marriage, the stepparent, authority, and siblings. This is why it is so important to help the children work through the forgiveness and healing prior to moving ahead into another marriage relationship.

In some cases, especially with children age twelve and up, if they don’t want any help or choose to hang onto the hurt or bitterness, there is little a parent or parents can do other than pray, be patient, and continue to fulfill their role as a parent.

However a child should not hold their parents hostage and keep them from moving forward into a relationship with someone and getting remarried. A parent should allow enough time for a child to work through these things, typically a minimum of one year.

Help your children understand God’s perspective in raising children.

After being remarried, exercising patience without compromising authority. Discipline is very important. God has called you to be the authority over your children.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise. (Ephesians 6:1-2)

As a stepparent, you needed to accept your God-given role in this family when you said, “I do.” When you got married, you did not only say that to your spouse, you said it to God also. *I do* means, “I take this spouse to tend to him/her according to Your will, God. I accept the responsibility as a husband/wife and parent in this family. I accept the authority role to the children who dwell within our home—to love and train them according to Your will.” When a husband and wife embrace this and together manifest this before their children, this will create the correct reality within the home, and the children will eventually yield and embrace it.

It is important for you, as the parents, to explain to your children that we, as Christians, are here to do the Lord’s will. God is the creator of the family, and we are looking to Him for how to run our family. His Word teaches that both parents are to work together in the training of the children.

God has defined the authority in the home.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.
Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.
Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.
(Colossians 3:18–21)

The father is the head over the home, but the mother is also part of that authority structure over the home. They are to work together in training up all the children in the home.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1–2)

God is the one who establishes the authority within the home, and we need to trust Him. If we don't, verse 2 says, "Those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." It doesn't mean damnation, but more of God's discipline. A parent who does not accept this authority or a child who will not yield to it will experience inner turmoil. No joy. No peace. No contentment. Feelings of confusion, anger, and frustration will fill their hearts and minds; depression will follow.

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for
"God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble."
Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:5–7)

Scripture clearly says parents are the authority over the children—but so are elders. If a parent marries, they are to embrace and establish a godly authority and management plan according to the Word of God. If they want God's intervention and help in the blending of the family, they must yield to God's instructions. No place in Scripture do we read that a child or this world are to dictate what or how we do things, which includes how we establish the authority in our homes.

- "Submit yourself to your elders." This includes the stepparent.
- "God resists the proud." He allows the internal misery and depression to continue until they yield to Him.
- "But gives grace to the humble." God will bless those who accept His will and His authority and yield to it, and He will give them the strength to walk according to His will.
- "Casting all your care upon Him." If they turn to God, asking for the strength to be healed from the pain of the divorce and accept their parents' decision, He will give them the inner peace and joy that comes only from Him.

Both parents need to exercise patience.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24–26)

God gives clear instructions on how to respond to those children who are struggling in this area:

1. *Not quarrel* means don't argue. It takes two to argue. Use His Word as your defense.
2. *Gentle* means not being harsh, mean, or in anger—but doing things in love.
3. *Able to teach* means bringing clarity to the situation. This includes helping them understand why you are an authority in the home. Help them understand why they are struggling. Make it clear for them how to find healing from the trials that have touched their life. Explain why their wrong behavior and breaking a rule requires discipline.
4. *Patient* is a process—not in your time. You need to press on and stay consistent.
5. *In humility* is with a humble heart, not acting like you are better than them, but you are equal in God's sight. You've been called and anointed by God to this position. You did not earn it.
6. *Correcting* means not retreating. You need to accept your authority, follow through, and implement discipline. Do not let the child's bad attitude or the threat of going to live with the other parent dictate if you follow through or not. It also means not disengaging, becoming solitude, or giving up.

Doing the will of God as a husband, wife, and parent is one of the most powerful things you can do to help your children work through this negative preexisting disposition toward either of you. These principles are not something you cover only once. Life's situations will give you many opportunities to revisit these biblical principles and apply them to your parent/child relationship.

Issue 3: No-Home Syndrome

After the divorce many children find they are living in two separate home environments. They are essentially shuffled back and forth between the homes of the biological parents on a weekly, monthly, or bimonthly schedule.

This can create difficulty for the child to feel settled and secure in one or both homes. Make sure this “no-home syndrome” doesn't happen to your children. If both parents have remarried and their new stepparents have children, this adds to the difficulty for them to adapt and feel like either of their homes feels like *home*.

Here are practical suggestions to help your children through this.

Suggestion 1: Unity in Leadership

It is critical that the leaders (husband and wife) of the blended family are unified and working

together according to God's management style in the home. Biology does not supersede God's command for the man to lead and the woman to be his helpmate in leading, loving, and training the children dwelling in the home.

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:30-33)

Suggestion 2: Cooperative Parenting

Make a sincere attempt at developing a cooperative parenting plan between your home and the home of the other biological parent. Pray and ask the Lord to impress upon the heart of the other biological parent the long-term importance of cooperative parenting with a plan to help in the child's weekly or monthly transitions between homes.

Don't let the Enemy influence the way you communicate with your ex-spouse in developing and managing the cooperative parenting plan or any other matter that is better served by both parties. Do not attempt to dominate your ex-spouse or control all the decisions you think are important. Make room for cooperation, without compromise.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29)

Submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21)

Suggestion 3: Homecoming

Especially with younger children it is important to give attention to the child returning from the other home. They may want to share about their adventures, challenges, and disappointments. It is important that you fight the temptation to be jealous of any wonderful adventures they had or belittle their disappointments. Be a good listener. Rejoice with them when they are rejoicing about special opportunities they experienced, even if there is unresolved conflict between you and the other parent. Don't let the unresolved issues between ex-spouses infect your relationship with your children. Be careful to speak only what will edify your child and impart grace to them about the other parent, their habits, their spoiling the child, or their mistakes with the child.

If your child reveals that he lives by less godly standards while in the home of the other parent, do not discipline them for something the other parent permitted. Instead be wise about when and how to disciple your child on these matters as a part of your regular discipleship time with your child. Another helpful thing is to consider a little extra grace for a very short period of time when the child first arrives back in your home. If there is no or very little structure at the other home, you can expect the child to need some time to adjust. For the first day use one gentle reminder or warning (not two or three) before you discipline them.

To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born,
And a time to die;
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck what is planted;
A time to kill,
And a time to heal;
A time to break down,
And a time to build up;
A time to weep,
And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn,
And a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones,
And a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace,
And a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to gain,
And a time to lose;
A time to keep,
And a time to throw away;
A time to tear,
And a time to sew;
A time to keep silence,
And a time to speak;
A time to love,
And a time to hate;
A time of war,
And a time of peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

Different seasons in the child's life require different approaches to managing the reconnecting of your relationship with your child after they return from their time with their other parent. You are learning important insights on how to always communicate in a loving way to your children.

Suggestion 4: Not a Weapon

Your child is not a weapon to fight the battles between you and your ex-spouse. Except for extreme circumstances of imminent serious danger to the health of your child, do not use your child as a weapon against your ex-spouse to achieve any of your own goals.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the

same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Your ex-spouse is not the enemy. Satan is the enemy. How you interact with your ex-spouse should reflect the will of God, not your own will.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

You may be tempted to bad-mouth your ex-spouse or use your child as leverage either against or to get something from your ex-spouse, but it is important that you do not do this. It is not only sin, but it hurts your child and fosters these feelings of not belonging.

Suggestion 5: Fair Parenting

Many homes of blended families have the presence of stepsiblings. In these cases it is important to make certain there are no favorites. You have made a commitment to God to love and train all the children He gives to you, either through biology or remarriage, *with no partiality*.

I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.
(1 Timothy 5:21)

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. (James 2:1 NIV)

Issue 4: Financial Impact

The financial impact of divorce can be significant. Divorce can impact the resources of one parent differently than the other parent. No matter what the reasons for your financial condition, you should employ a financial strategy that protects the child from playing any role in resolving financial differences between you and your ex-spouse.

Do not permit any pressure from either your ex-spouse or child to influence you to make unwise financial decisions and deter you from following the budget you and your spouse have agreed to. Make sure you are employing proper financial planning and maintaining your financial boundaries for the long-term financial health of your family.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Peter 5:6-9)

When circumstances arise that impact your budget such as sports, trips, special events, planning for education, cars, and many other possible considerations, it is good practice to prayerfully consider inviting your ex-spouse to participate in a manner that is reasonable. Remember, this is an *invitation*, not an *expectation*.

Before you extend the invitation, you should have already established a plan for making the final decisions on financial matters based upon factors such as your blended family's financial condition, the financial practices with the other children in your home, the plan you and your current spouse have agreed upon, and other possible criteria.

In some cases your ex-spouse will not participate for financial, personal, or selfish reasons. This is not a time to inform your child that they will miss the opportunity because of some failure of the other parent. Your communication with your child should not imply anything negative about the other parent or project fault on your ex-spouse for a failure to meet your expectations for financial participation. Simply communicate your family's decision regarding the matter without casting dispersion or blame on others.

If a financial situation arises and it is beyond your ability to pay for it entirely, it is okay to let your child know what you can do toward helping. Then let your child talk with their other biological parent to see if they can pay the rest. Open, honest, and fair is the key to helping your child in these situations.

Warning: If the stepfather is the primary bread winner in the family and his children are living in the home, it is important to make sure all the children are treated fairly when it comes to these financial decisions. These financial events as well as inheritances and trusts for your biological children are handled differently. Seek out good financial planning advice in this area.

Issue 5: Affirmation Needs

Different seasons of emotional growth in the life of a child may bring natural desires to spend more time with the same-gender parent. This is very normal between the ages of twelve and seventeen. Don't be offended or allow the Enemy to cause you to become bitter and treat your child or ex-spouse in a sinful way.

It is normal for a young man to desire more time with his father and a young woman to desire more time with her mother. This should not be discouraged. Even if the living arrangements dictate a specific amount of time in each home, be flexible to meet the desires of your child to spend extra time with the other parent as the child grows into adolescence. Resist the temptation to use this change as a bargaining tool against your ex-spouse and become jealous or turn it into a money issue. However *do not* do this if it is a toxic or dangerous environment for your child.

Be conscious of your child's sensitivities regarding how to express affection as they develop into young men and women. The God-ordained changes they will experience during the season of adolescence will possibly impact the child in their need to spend more time with a particular parent. Good communication and loving responses to the child's requests should be the standard here. Don't be offended. This is a natural season for change to take place. Instead look for ways to reinforce your love to the child and be willing to adjust the visitation if necessary.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Philippians 2:3)

Remember Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. To everything there is a season.

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

This is not a guarantee but an idiom that means we are to adapt to our children's needs to love and raise them without compromising the truth.

Appendix K

Leading a Child to Christ

The only requirement to become a child of God is to believe and receive the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible does not designate a specific age a child must reach to experience salvation. Jesus urged parents to bring their little children to Him and rebuked those who attempted to keep the children away.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

But Jesus called them to Him and said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” (Luke 18:16–17)

Most small children will respond to an invitation to ask Jesus to come into their hearts. Their innocence, sense of wonder, and trusting hearts provide fertile soul for the gospel. A child must understand the following truths, which should be explained in simple, age-appropriate language. As they mature, they will grasp the deeper meaning of these truths.

1. God made us and everything around us. He loves us and watches over us from heaven.
2. God is good. He has never done or thought anything bad.
3. All people are sinners. This means *every person* has done naughty things. Provide examples of sin: lying, stealing, hitting others, etc.
4. Acknowledge to the child that you have done naughty things and that you too are a sinner.
5. Ask the child if they have ever been naughty. You may need to remind them of something naughty that they did recently.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

6. God loves us even though we are sinners. He wants to forgive us. Explain that *to forgive* means to not be angry and to not remember that we have sinned.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

7. Jesus is God’s Son. He lived in heaven with His Father. A long time ago Jesus came to earth. He came to tell everybody how much God loves us.
8. Explain that because all people are sinners, Jesus died on the cross. Jesus did not stay dead. Three days later He came back to life!
9. Because Jesus died and rose from the dead, God will forgive us for all our sins if we believe in Jesus.

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)

10. Jesus now lives in heaven with His Father. He also wants to live inside our hearts.

11. Explain that if they invite Jesus, He will come to live in their heart. They will become God's child.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

12. Ask the child if they want Jesus to forgive them for their sins and live inside their heart. Explain that even though God is in heaven, He hears us when we talk to Him.

13. If the child is willing, ask them to repeat, sentence by sentence, the following prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. Please come into my heart and be my Lord and Savior. Thank you for forgiving me. Help me to live for you every day. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

Appendix L

Inappropriate Entertainment

Consider the entertainment in your home to determine what, if any, needs to change. Review and discuss as a couple if married.

1. Make a list of the music, videos, computer/video games, magazines, posters, television programs, movies, books, blogs/vlogs, podcasts, phone apps, social media, and other forms of entertainment that you or your children are currently enjoying that need to be eliminated. A simple question to help you sort through this exercise is this: If Jesus visited your home today, would He would approve of these materials?

2. Do you need to make some changes in your home in this area? Yes No
3. Write your commitment to make changes where needed and to diligently disciple your children about appropriate forms and content of entertainment.

Effecting Change

Parents should be careful not to act impulsively or like tyrants in an effort to make these changes. Parents should not go through their teen’s bedroom with a vengeance, tearing posters off the walls or destroying music. Your children should be approached with love and humility, without anger or arrogance.

If you have previously allowed inappropriate entertainment in your home, take the following steps:

1. Pray and seek the Lord’s guidance and wisdom.
2. Discuss and agree as a couple on what items should be discarded.

3. If your child has purchased these items with their own money, with either your explicit or implied permission, you may, if applicable, offer to replace the inappropriate entertainment with reasonable, appropriate entertainment of your child's choice.

Discuss together your plan of action about how you are going to make these changes. Write your plans.

Appendix T

Glossary

These definitions are taken from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, G & C Merriam Company, and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers.

abide: To stay, remain, to continue in a place, to endure without yielding.

accountability: Subject to giving an account, answerable, a statement explaining one's conduct.

admonition: *Nouthesia* (Greek). Warning, exhortation, any word of encouragement or reproof, which leads to correct behavior (Ephesians 6:4). It is the idea of having a corrective influence on someone by imparting understanding.

affectionately longing or fond affection: *Homeiromai* (Greek). To long for someone passionately and earnestly, and, being linked to a mother's love, is intended here to express an affection so deep and compelling as to be unsurpassed (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Ancient inscriptions on the tombs of dead babies sometimes contained this term when parents wanted to describe their sad longing for a too-soon-departed child.

approve: To continually put to the test, examine prior to the approval of your action.

arrogant or proud: To be conceited; feeling or showing self-importance, disregard for others. Proudful; giving oneself high rank, or an undue degree of significance.

attitude: A posture or position; a feeling, opinion or mood.

bears all things: *Bears, stego* (Greek). To hide, to conceal. Love hides the faults of others, covers them up. It keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water or the roof the rain.

behavior: The act or manner of behaving.

believing: *Pisteuo* (Greek). Having faith in, or to be firmly persuaded in something. It indicates an attitude of expectant hope.

blamelessly: Faultless, able to stand a critics' scrutiny. As you move along in obedience to God's will, you are transformed into the image of Christ, and your godly behavior becomes evident to others.

brag: To talk about oneself, or things pertaining to oneself, in a boastful manner; to boast.

bring them up: *Ektrepho* (Greek). To nourish, rear, feed (Ephesians 6:4). To nurture, rear, to bring up to maturity such as children, in the sense of to train or educate.

charged, implore, urging: *Martyromenoi* (Greek). Implies the “delivery of truth” and was likely meant to convey the more directive functions of a father. A good father encourages and provides guidance, which the mother does also.

chastening or discipline: *Paideia* (Greek). Correction or training. There is a consequence for every offense; some type of training/correction will follow. Used in Ephesians 6:4.

cheat: To plunder or rob as when plunder is taken in war. Translated as “take you captive” in Colossian 2:8 NASB. In this case it is to rob believers of the complete riches they have in Christ as revealed in the Word, plus His power and intervention.

cherish: To give heed to, to pay attention to, to minister, to soften by heat, to keep warm as of birds covering their young with feathers (Deuteronomy 22:6), to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care. Translated as “tender care” in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 NASB.

communication: The act of communicating is the exchange of thought, message, or information.

confess: To agree with God that what you did ignorantly or deliberately was a sin.

consequences: That which follows from breaking a rule. When you have a rule, there must be a corrective consequence for breaking that rule.

controlling: To exercise power over, to dominate or rule, to restrain, a restraining force.

countenance: *Paniym* (Hebrew). Has the literal meaning of *face* (Genesis 43:31; 1 Kings 19:13) but also means the reflection of a person’s mood or attitude such as being defiant (Jeremiah 5:3), ruthless (Deuteronomy 28:50), joyful (Job 29:24), humiliated (2 Samuel 19:5), terrified (Isaiah 13:8). Scripture shows a bad countenance (Matthew 6:16) and a good one (Psalm 4:6).

defiance: When a child rebels against the authority and the discipline that follows their foolish act of immaturity.

defile: To pollute, render impure; or corrupt.

devoutly: Holy, pious, sacred, dedicated to God. This describes your abiding relationship with Christ. When you are devoted, or dedicated to God, that relationship is the source of a sacred life.

diligently: Perseveringly attentive; steady and earnest in application to a subject or pursuit; prosecuted with careful attention and effort; not careless or negligent.

disciple (verb): Instilling God’s Word into our children’s hearts through example and instruction, teaching them to pray and how to have a relationship with God (spiritual training of morals and values).

disciple (noun): *Mathetes* (Greek). A student, learner, or pupil. But it means much more in the New Testament. It is a follower who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of

conduct. In Classic Greek, “an apprentice,” one who not only learns facts from the teacher but other things such as attitudes and philosophies. The *mathetes* could be called a “student-companion,” one who doesn’t just sit in class listening to lectures but rather who follows the teacher to learn life as well as facts and progressively takes on the character of the teacher.

discipleship/discipling: An intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.

discipleship (direct): Instruction-discipleship is the time you set aside to have devotions (Bible study) with your children. It is a planned activity that involves the family.

discipleship (indirect): Instruction-discipleship occurs when God presents an opportunity for an informal or unplanned discussion of spiritual things. This means the parent is paying attention, seeing those opportunities.

discipline (of children): Instilling character traits of a mature adult (Ephesians 6:4), which are morals, values, personal responsibility, and self-control; training behavior.

discouraged: *Athumeo* (Greek). The root word is *thumos*, which means “violent motion or passion of mind, such as anger, wrath, or indignation.” Adding the *a* (alpha) before it makes it negative, meaning “without” passion; despondent, disturbed in mind, and indicates loss of courage (Colossians 3:21).

edification: *Oikodome* (Greek). To build up for the spiritual profit or advancement of someone else, used to indicate building up a house or structure.

encourage or comfort: To inspire, support; console in time of trouble or worry, soothing encouragement designed to cheer up and to inspire correct behavior.

endure all things: To endure, *hupomeno* (Greek), To abide under, to bear up under, suffer, as a load of miseries. Patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe nor hope.

envy: Discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another’s excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages; malicious grudging.

exhort: *Parakleo* (Greek). To call to one’s side, to aid; to encourage, admonish, or exhort someone to do something. We are to come alongside our children and help them grow in the things of the Lord.

faith: *Pisteuo* (Greek). To have faith in, trust; particularly to be firmly persuaded as to something. This is more than just giving a mental assent; it means to act on what is believed.

foolishness: Lack of character, deficient in understanding, unwise, brainless, irrational, ludicrous, a lack of judgment.

forsake: To deny. Daily align our priorities to God's Word, which places His will over ours.

gentle: Seemly, fitting; equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law. Expresses that considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case.

genuineness: *Dokimion* (Greek). Something that has been tested and approved. Used of metals that had been through a purifying process to remove all impurities.

glorify: To reflect, to honor, praise; to give esteem or honor by putting him into an honorable position.

head: The chief or lead person to whom others are subordinate. Metaphorically of persons, e.g., the husband in relation to his wife (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23) insofar as they are one body (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:8), and one body can have only one head to direct it; of Christ in relation to His Church, which is His body, and its members are His members (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:10, 19); of God in relation to Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). God the Father is designated as the head of Christ (Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 1:22).

heart: *Kardia* (Greek). The seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses; the mind.

heart: *Lebab* (Hebrew). Mind, inner person (will, emotions). The word primarily describes the entire disposition of the inner person.

hurts: Can cause a person to harbor bitterness toward others. Can also affect our relationship with God and His sanctification process in our lives. If we allow a hurt to turn into bitterness, this will affect the grace of God needed to walk and grow spiritually, and it can negatively affect those around us. Hebrews 12:15 says, "Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

hypocrite: Someone who acts phony, or is a counterfeit; a man who assumes and speaks, or acts, under a pretend character.

impart: This verb has the idea of sharing something, which one already retains in part.

integrity: Indicates singleness of heart, not double-minded; one who walks according to God's will and exemplifies His righteousness.

justly: With integrity and honesty, just, uprightness of character and behavior, daily desiring to live life according to what pleases God. When you know the Word of God, you can judge what is right and wrong.

kind: *Chrestos* (Greek). To do good; denotes being gentle, merciful, sympathetic, gracious, and good natured in contrast to harsh, hard, sharp, bitter, or cruel. The idea of moral excellence.

knowledge: *Epignosis* (Greek). Thorough participation in acquiring knowledge, and applying it.

longsuffering or patience: To be long-tempered, the opposite of hasty anger; involves exercising understanding and patience toward people. Requires that we endure circumstances, not losing faith or giving up.

love: *Agape* (Greek). The response of God's heart toward unworthy sinners. God's love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love, His Son bringing forgiveness to man. God's essential quality seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others' actions; it involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires. *Agape* is choosing to love unconditionally.

love: *Phileo* (Greek). The response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. Distinct from *agape* and speaks of esteem, high regard, and tender affection and is more emotional. Friendship love; determined by the pleasure that one receives from the object of that love. *Phileo* is conditional love.

make disciples (verb): *Matheteuo* (Greek). To make a disciple (Matthew 28:19; Acts 14:21); to instruct (Matthew 13:52) with the purpose of making a disciple. It is not exactly the same as "make converts," though it is surely implied. The term *make disciples* places somewhat more stress on the fact that the mind, as well as the heart and the will, must be won for God by instructing new believers on how to follow Jesus, to submit to Jesus's lordship, and to take up His mission of compassionate service. It also involves bringing people into relationship with Jesus as pupils to teacher and getting them to take His yoke of instruction upon themselves as authoritative (Matthew 11:29), accepting His words as true, and submitting to His will as what is right.

manipulation: To control or play upon by artful, unfair, and insidious means, especially to one's own advantage.

meditate: To moan, utter, or growl muttering sounds, like reading half aloud or conversing with oneself, interacting with the text so it would soak into your mind. As a tea bag soaking in water permeates the liquid, so meditating on Scripture permeates our minds. In the biblical world, meditation was not a silent practice.

minister (noun): A servant or waiter, one who oversees, governs, and fulfills.

minister (verb): To adjust, regulate, and set in order; to serve, render service to another; to labor for the Lord as a servant.

morals: Defined by what is right and wrong from God's perspective.

not rejoicing in iniquity: When you see someone fall into sin or make a mistake, you are not happy or vindictive toward them.

nurse: The act of nursing, suckle, nourish, train; something that nourishes, to supply with nourishment; to educate or foster, to further the development of someone or something (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

perfect or mature: *Teleios* (Greek). Goal or purpose; finished, that which has reached its end, term, limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing (Ephesians 4:13).

perfectly trained: *Katartizo* (Greek). To put a thing in its appropriate condition, to establish, equip so it is deficient in no part.

persecute: To pursue in a manner to injure, grieve, or afflict; to oppress; to set upon with cruelty; to cause to suffer.

personal responsibility: The ability to take care of oneself; to follow through on things you have committed to do, or the things required, without anyone else having to prompt you; taking ownership, being accountable and accepting responsibility for your actions.

power: *Dunamis* (Greek). Dynamic strength or ability to do what only God can do.

punishment: A measured amount of pain to motivate, or the infliction of a penalty. Punishment is part of the overall discipline plan, but it is different from a corrective consequence. Punishment motivates a child to yield to parental authority and accept the corrective consequence.

purpose: An intended or desired result or goal.

react: To act in response to a stimulant or to stimulus, to act in opposition.

reacting in the flesh: A Christian reacting to a situation in a sinful manner, in the habit of their old fallen nature, or reacting in their strength and understanding rather than the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

rebuke: To convict, to prove one in the wrong.

rejoicing in the truth: Having great joy; rejoicing at what is true based on God's promises.

repent: To resolve; to amend one's life as a result of contrition for one's sins; to feel regret for what one has done or omitted to do before God. To turn around and go another direction; to change one's mind, will, and life resulting in a change of behavior; to do things another way.

respond: React positively or favorably.

responding in love: Responding with the inward guidance, love, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

revenge: To inflict injury in return for an insult.

reward: A great precious value.

rightly dividing: Cutting something straight as you would in carpentry, masonry, or with cutting a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

- rude:** Characterized by roughness; harsh, severe, ugly, indecent, or offensive in manner or action.
- rule:** To rule, manage, lead, shepherd, and guide. By implication this means to take care of something, to be diligent, to practice.
- scourges:** Entails all suffering God ordains for His children, which is always designed for their good. It includes the entire range of trials and tribulations, which He providentially ordains and which work to mortify sin and nurture faith.
- seek and set your mind:** Imperative verbs, indicating the action is a continual process. *Seek* means “to look for and strive to find.” *Set your mind* refers to the will, affections, and conscience (Colossians 3:1–2).
- seek first:** A command to do and never stop (Matthew 6:33).
- seek your own way:** Pursuing what best fits your own interests without any concern of how your actions or ways affect others. Unwilling to receive input, which includes instruction from God’s perspective.
- self-control:** The ability to govern oneself emotionally, physically, and spiritually; the ability to not always yield to the path of least resistance.
- self-seeking:** Doing things in our own way, using ours or this world’s wisdom in making choices.
- shutdown:** Room restriction with no friends, phone, radio, computer, games, or iPods.
- sin of commission:** We sin acting out of our own authority. God says do not do that, and we do it anyway. For example, God says don’t steal (Ephesians 4:28), but we steal.
- sin of omission:** We sin by not doing what is right by God. He commands us to do something, and we decide not to do it or, out of ignorance, we treat our children according to what we feel is best, *not* doing God’s will. For example, God says to forgive, but we refuse to.
- steward:** Overseer; manager; one who acts as a custodian, administrator, or supervisor.
- study:** Imperative verb; a command to do and to continue to do. Denotes a zealous persistence, to be diligent, to make every effort to do one’s best, to be eager and earnest in accomplishing a goal.
- submissive:** *Hopotasso* (Greek). A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.
- thinks no evil:** *Logizomai* (Greek). Used as an accounting term, meaning to put things together in one’s mind, to count or add up, to occupy oneself with calculations.
- thoroughly equipped for every good work:** God intends for us to understand His will and be empowered to follow through in obedience.

train up: *Chanak* (Hebrew). To dedicate or set aside for divine service (Proverbs 22:6).

training: *Paideia* (Greek). Chastening, because all effectual instruction for the sinful children of men includes and implies discipline, correction, as the Lord approves (Ephesians 6:4). Discipline that regulates character. Also to cause to grow as desired; to make or become prepared or skilled.

transformed: *Metamorphoó* (Greek). From which we derive the word *metamorphosis*. To change into something entirely different, as a caterpillar to a butterfly.

values: Principles or actions you live by. Your behavior shows what you value most.

voids: Something that has been left out. God has placed within us emotional needs that are as important as our physical ones. If we do not have air to breathe, water to drink, and food to nourish our bodies, we will eventually die. God has placed emotional development needs within every child. If not met, they can cause serious emotional and psychological problems as an adult.

For example, a child has certain developmental emotional needs that must be nurtured through loving authority, with consistent proper discipline. If these needs are compromised or not provided, a void is created within the child. This often occurs because parents do not understand their God-given responsibilities or the extent of their influence for good or bad. Most children cannot identify what is missing—what the void is—but they will instinctively try to fill it with something. A lack of real love and proper discipline can make a child vulnerable to addictions or emotional and psychological problems that lead to destructive behavior. When followed, biblical instruction can produce a healthy relationship with your child and an emotionally healthy person in your child.

wiles: *Methodia* (Greek). From which we derive the word *method*. Indicating craftiness, cunning, and deception. The term was often used of a wild animal that cunningly stalks and then unexpectedly pounces on its prey. Satan's evil schemes are built around stealth and deception.

Endnotes

1. Mariel Alper PhD, Matthew R. Durose, and Joshua Markman, "2018 Update On Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-Up Period," Bureau of Justice Statistics, May 23, 2018, <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6266>.
2. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), 557.
3. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 1088.
4. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 1017.
5. William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Second Edition* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 35.
6. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 860.
7. Candace Cameron Bure and Darlene Schacht, *Reshaping It All* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011) 108–09, Kindle.
8. W.E. Vine and F.F. Bruce, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, vol. 2 (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1981), 144–45.
9. *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition Unabridged (Springfield, MA: G & C Merriam Company, Publishers, 1939).
10. Patrick McCawley, *Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary Revised Edition*, Office Edition, (Wilmington, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996).
11. *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2012).
12. *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*.
13. Blue Letter Bible, accessed 2013, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/hupotasso.html>.
14. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Peter* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 177–78.
15. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Explanatory and Practical*, ed. Robert Frew, vol. 10 (London: Blackie & Son, 1884), 157.
16. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 646.
17. Craig Caster, Marriage Is a Ministry series, Family Discipleship Ministries. This downloadable series is available at no cost on our website, FDM.world.
18. H. A. Ironside, *Notes on the Book of Proverbs* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Bros, 1908), 246–47.
19. Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, *Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 101.
20. D. Michael Martin, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 84.

21. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 1220.
22. Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 112.
23. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2002), 45.
24. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 367–68.
25. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, Dallas Theological Seminary (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1 Thess. 2:7.
26. Vine and Bruce, *Vine's Expository Dictionary*.
27. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 46.
28. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 47.
29. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 936.
30. J.D. Watson, *A Word for the Day: Key Words from the New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2006), 321.
31. William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002), 999.
32. Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 577–78.
33. Thomas L. Constable, *Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Matt. 28:19.
34. Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 17.
35. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 842–43.
36. InTouch Ministries, accessed August 23, 2012, http://www.intouch.org/you/article-archive/content?topic=fruitful_living_article.
37. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 5274.
38. Steven J. Lawson and Max Anders, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76–150* (Nashville, TN: Holman Publishers, 2006), 289.
39. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), Deut. 6:6.
40. Warren Baker and Gene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 1179.
41. Lawson and Anders, *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, 289.
42. Ivan Raskino, *A Pastor's Commentary on the Psalms* (New Delhi, India: Mountain Peak, 2015), 772.
43. Walter A. Elwell, PhD and Philip W. Comfort, PhD, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 889.

44. Focus on the Family, accessed 2006, <http://www.family.org/socialissues/A000001155.cfm>.
45. Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Deut. 6:6–9.
46. NavPress, accessed 2006, <http://www.navpress.com/EPubs/DisplayArticle/3/3.11.32.html>.

About the Author

A fool. A student with dyslexia. A high school graduate with a third-grade reading level. An ignorant husband and abusive father. All described Pastor Craig Caster at one time in his life, but God had a different plan for him. Despite Craig's fear of public speaking, God called him to full-time ministry in 1994. He stepped out in faith without formal education or a seminary degree. He was ordained in 1995 and has since written four books; disciplined many men; counseled hundreds; led countless to Christ; and taught thousands through marriage and parenting seminars, men's retreats, and pastors' conferences throughout the US and internationally. All by the grace and power of God.

Although Craig gave His life to Jesus in 1979, his transformation started when he began to abide in Jesus and His Word daily. He truly believes Jesus desires a close relationship with each one of us. His life is forever changed because he pursues this relationship and is completely dependent on Christ.

Be Encouraged

If you are struggling to trust that God can work in and through your life, be encouraged by Pastor Craig's story. Don't let your past sins, learning disabilities, fear of teaching or speaking, or lack of education stop you from being obedient to the call of God on your life. God desires to make you His disciple, and if you are married or have children, He wants to form you into a spouse and parent who honors Him. His grace is amazing and limitless. He loves you and desires to be glorified through you.

God's Promise to You

Thanks be to God for His abundant promises and provision. Meditate on His promises from the words of "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1-8)

About Family Discipleship Ministries

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM), a nonprofit ministry established in 1994 by founder and director Pastor Craig Caster, strives to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to minister to families. To accomplish this goal, FDM offers workbooks, supporting videos, and online materials for individual study, small groups, home-group study, and one-on-one discipleship. They conduct seminars on marriage, parenting, understanding teens, and church discipleship planning.

FDM's ministry goal is to exhort, train, and equip leaders of Christian churches to develop a vision for discipleship and provide biblically solid workbooks to help them minister to their church families. Since 1995, thousands of people have completed the marriage and parenting classes, and hundreds of churches within the US and abroad have ministered to their congregations using FDM materials. Their ministry also helps many families through free online resources found at FDM.world.

FDM actively ministers internationally in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, Singapore, Japan, and China. Find out more at FDM.world.