

Running Header: FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

Helping Families Regain the Discipleship Process

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Chapter 1 – Introduction and Statement of Problem

Introduction

For centuries, parents have worked hard to discover the secrets of raising children in such a way that they love and follow the teachings of the generations before them. In recent years, there have been volumes upon volumes of literature written and millions of dollars of research done to answer this same question, “How does a parent pass on to his or her children the important values and ideals of their generation?” In the evangelical Christian community, it is no different. There have been numerous studies and books written. There are new and old ministry models popping up all the time. There have been major and minor movements within and without the church, all pushing for the same result: Passing the torch of faith in Christ to the next generation. Unfortunately, all the effort and work seems to be producing less and less authentic, Christ-centered believers, in those who follow this generation, specifically teenagers.

The failure to produce a generation of Spirit-filled, Christ-centered teens is not for lack of effort, but rather for lack of proper attention to methodology outlined in Scripture. God has clearly given His mandate for raising children, and for the best way to impart spiritual truth to kids. The church, however, as a whole, has replaced His mandate with its own programs and ideas for discipling children and teens. In spite of what God has ordained in His Word, and in spite of what secular and Christian research across the board states, the church has continued to promote its own brand of faith training under the auspices of Youth and Children’s Ministry. Rather than having a generation of authentic, Christ-following teens, the church has raised a generation of teens who think they are spiritual but don’t really know what true faith in Christ means in their daily lives.

Statement of Problem

According to what God has said in His Word, the best way for a child to know God and to grow an authentic faith in Christ, His son, is to watch it modeled in the home as they grow up. In many places in Scripture, God tells His people that they will impart to their children a fear of Himself when they keep His commands and live them each day in all they do. Often God is quoted telling mom and dad to keep their house in order for the sake of giving spiritual health and wisdom to their young. For example, “These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD directed...you to observe...so that you, your children and their children...may fear the LORD...and may enjoy long life.” (Deuteronomy 6:1-24). Very clearly, God has ordained mothers and fathers to be the primary disciplers of their own children. The church is given the task of growing mom and dad so that they are equipped to carry out God’s commands in their homes.

Not only does God’s Word state that the best design for discipling youth is in the confines of the home, but sociological and family health research states the same. It is almost a universal finding in all kinds of studies that the number one influencer of teens and children is mom and dad. Even the dad or mom who leaves when a child is young and never interacts with their child, often tends to have more of an impact on that child than all the teachers and pastors that child will have in a lifetime, though the impact in these cases is usually negative. Science and research has proven that what God has outlined is truth: Parents are without a doubt the biggest influence in the life of a teen.¹ Why then are families and churches doing what they are doing?

Reasons for Problem

Taking a look at the typical church and family relationship, there are a number of ways that ministry is done that flies in the face of the Biblical message and the current research. First of all, when a family comes into church, they are immediately shuffled off into ministries that are age-related. Very rarely is a church discipleship program designed with intentional forward thinking for the family as a whole. Some social functions are family oriented, but discipleship is fairly well segmented by age. Mom, dad and kids do not learn together. Even the actual church service is often segregated as many churches are moving to “youth church” or “children’s church” models.

Secondly, the programming that happens during the week, the off-Sunday ministries, are also age segregated and often overwhelmingly time consuming. The typical church has an AWANA or Boys Brigade/Pioneer Girls night, a Junior High night and a Senior High night. The teen ministry often has drama or puppets or game night as well as an opportunity for key kids to grow further through ministry, Bible study or outreach. There are also mid-week prayer nights for mom and dad as well as choir, small growth groups and other ministry opportunities for adults. The family is constantly “fed” and kept busy by the church, but at the same time, kept apart by scheduling separate discipleship.

A third problem with the way churches and families currently operate is in the realm of expectation and authority. Often, there are more expectations for a youth pastor to step up and disciple teens than there are for parents to live wholesome, Christ-honoring lives and disciple and train their children. In spite of the knowledge that parents have the greatest influence on teens, parents send their students off to youth programs, expecting that the youth pastor and staff will somehow over-ride all that happens in the home and create fully mature disciples out of their

children. The Word of God is taught in church and at youth functions for a few hours a week, but the parents are living sub-standard or inconsistent Christian lives in the homes and wondering why their teens do not hold to the Christian values they say they espouse.

Lastly, while churches and families are well aware of the facts, neither side is doing anything to change the way ministry is done. Mom and dad are increasingly busy and not following or practicing the Biblical values in which they say they believe. As well, if church leaders, as a whole, are aware that mom and dad are not healthy, it seems they are addressing the problem with the wrong solutions. Rather than addressing the issue and refusing to let parents get away with their lack of spiritual maturity, their solution seems to be bigger and better youth ministry programs. These programs fall short of the Biblical design of healthy parents committed to raising healthy families.

Purpose for Research

All this adds up to trouble for the church. While the parents are too busy working for their kids' college fund, the second car and their 401K, they are leaving the teens to be discipled solely by the church. While the church may be doing an adequate job filling the gap, it is doing the family an extreme disservice by allowing immature parents to continue giving up their God-given responsibility to their children. In a sense, what the church has done is taken over the job of parenting. The church has allowed parents to sit back and live lives that are less than fully committed while church programs and personnel impart spiritual truth to their children. While many will defend the current paradigm with examples of teens' lives that have been changed through the church, those many examples cannot compare, and will in fact pale, to the results that will come when parents and church leaders move to a model that places mom and dad back

into the primary discipling role. The Body of Christ will continue to see diminishing commitment to the faith until they decide to prescribe to God's written and proven methodology for raising children.

If, however, churches and families can be taught that the key to raising mature followers of Jesus begins with mom and dad, if primary discipleship duties can be brought back into the home, then a change may occur in the forth coming generations of believers.

1 For further study on this topic:

"...adoptees fantasize...about the mothers and fathers they don't know; consequently, the biological parents influence their children in intangible ways that neither they nor we might ever understand or suspect."

from Adoption Nation By Adam Pertman (p. 180)

"Parents are the single most important influence on children's decision to smoke, drink, or use drugs, yet many parents do not fully understand the extent of their influence."

from The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. Malignant Neglect: Substance Abuse and America's Schools. 2001.

Sex, Drugs And Alcohol: Parents Still Influence College Kids' Risky Behavior, Study Shows

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/02/080210094643.htm>

Parents Influence Children's Success, Duke Social Psychologist Says

http://www.dukenews.duke.edu/2004/08/success_0804.html

Research About Parental Influence

<http://www2.pmusa.com/en/prc/facts/research.asp>

Teens Say Parents Most Influence Their Sexual Decisions

http://parentingteens.about.com/od/teensexuality/a/teen_sex7.htm

How Parents Could Influence The EQ and IQ of Their Children

<http://www.brainy-child.com/article/parentrole.html>

How Do Parents Matter? Let Us Count the Ways

<http://www.apa.org/monitor/julaug00/parents.html>

Why We Love Who We Love

<http://www.rd.com/living-healthy/why-we-love-who-we-love/article15357.html>

The Influence of Parents' Religious Practices on Young Adults' Divorce Attitudes

http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6WX8-4S7B2JK-1&_user=10&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&_view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=ca928b6f9d975a5d453b8c4bbe5f4955

Parents Can Help Teens Choose 'Good' Friends, Study Finds

<http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/adolfrnd.htm>

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

God created humankind and gave His Word as a blueprint for successful living. Unfortunately, in many cases, humans have thrown the Bible out and are living according to their own wisdom and convention. God still works and interacts with His creation because He loves it and has promised to do so, but too often humans settle for second best options. These plans that fall short of God's design are successful to an extent, but would reap much greater spiritual fruit if God's designs were implemented instead.

The easiest way to see this truth unfold is in the world of natural law. God has set forth certain laws like gravity and inertia. When a person seeks to understand and respect these laws, their body remains in good physical, working order. If a person were to try and fly off a cliff with their arms, they would directly violate God's natural law and soon find their body in bad shape physically. So while they violated the natural law and suffered, they may still be alive, but living with less physical freedom due to their injuries. God's design for them may not have included broken bones, but because they violated a law, they live with a "second best" lifestyle. But natural law is not the only area in which God has given humans clear direction for healthy living.

God has decreed that sexual relationships are designed for the marriage bed. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." (Hebrews 1:4) This law is violated all the time and the consequences range from unwanted pregnancy to sexually transmitted disease and emotional trauma. While many have made mistakes in this realm and are surviving, those who have been faithful to God's plans and intentions are the best off, living according to God's best plan. The same is true for parents and the church.

God has given families, specifically parents, a very clear mandate on what is the best way to provide their children with an authentic faith in Jesus Christ, the living God. The Bible is full of direct commands and inferences that tell parents how best to suit the generations to come with a fear and reverence for God. Well known Bible scholar and teacher, John MacArthur (1982) said the following:

Psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors and sociologists inside and outside the church offer a massive library of suggestions and solutions. But even though they light the lamps with their most excellent efforts, the drunkenness and darkness seem to be deepening. God made man, woman, marriage and family. And He alone can take away the confusion, dispel the darkness and put the light...in the world of His creation. All efforts to save the family, then, depend on that divine light. So we turn to the Bible...There we find God's pattern for the family. (p.7)

As will be seen, the current research on the matter is in accord with the teaching God has given, but for now, a look at the Biblical evidence will suffice.

When the children of Israel had left Egypt and were moving into the Promised Land, God gave them a clear mandate on how to impart authentic faith to their children.

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9).

God commanded the Israelite people to live out His Word and commands in everything they did.

His commands were to be a regular part of their lives, so much so, that their children would see God through the lives of their parents.

God wants authentic faith to be passed down from generation to generation by the consistent obedience of His commands by mom and dad. This is also proven in God's address to the Israelites three verses earlier.

“These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.” (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)

Why has he given this command? God desires moms and dads to live according to His commands in all things so that they will live a blessed life and pass that fear of God down to their children.

While some would argue that this is a single Old Testament passage, it is a principle that is stated and assumed all through Scripture. God repeats the command again through Moses in Deuteronomy 11:1-5, 16-21.

“Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always. Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the LORD brought lasting ruin on them. It was not your

children who saw what he did for you in the desert until you arrived at this place.”

He tells the parents that their responsibility is to relate what they saw God do, as in their own experiences, and teach them how God works to save them and guide them. They are, in fact, commanded to instruct their children in the ways of God. Ephesians 6:4 states: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” It is a clear command for fathers to be instructing their children in God’s truth.

Paul certainly understood the importance of church leadership, as he spent his ministry raising up and training leaders and pastors for the early church. His time in prison was spent writing letters of encouragement to the churches and church leaders to help them in their faith. In 1 Timothy 3:5, Paul tells Timothy that one of the prerequisites for being a church leader is having your house in order. (“If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?”) In this passage Paul places the importance of raising children of faith in a household of faith as more critical than positions of leadership in church. If a man cannot prove his ability to be a spiritual parent at home, he cannot be given the task of being a spiritual “parent” in the church.

Similarly, other Scriptures imply that it is the duty of parents to be the ones who build faith in the lives of their children. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 says, “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” Paul implies that a father is expected to be the one urging his children to live a life worthy of God. In Proverbs 14:26, Solomon writes, “He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.” Once again, it can be seen that God’s Word is telling parents that it is their work in the faith that will build the faith of their children.

There are many other Scriptures that speak on the subject of discipling our children; some stronger than others. Here are just a few. In Matthew 27:25, those calling for the crucifixion of Jesus, by their own admission understood that their actions would affect their own children. There was an understanding that their guilty actions would have repercussions on their children. In Job 1:5, Job is cited offering regular sacrifices to God for his children, just in case one of them had sinned. Job clearly felt a burden and responsibility for the spiritual well-being of his offspring. And in Joshua 4:6, Joshua commands that rocks be built into an alter so that when the children ask what it means, the parents would share with them what God had done in the lives of the parents.

The Bible presents a very strong system for bringing children into a healthy relationship with God: Mom and Dad. It is not hard to understand why this is true. God gave the commands for parents to live His truth because He knew this was the best way to convince a child that God is real. Science has been unable to put God in a test tube and prove His existence. Philosophy has failed in its attempts to mentally reconstruct God in believable form. Archaeology has yet to uncover the artifacts that will once and for all prove to all mankind that God created the Earth. These disciplines will continue to fail because that is not God's design.

God has stated over and over in His Word that our life with Him is a walk of faith and that no one will find God without faith. Faith is not best understood through facts and experiments but through real life experience and relationships. It is hard to believe in a God who says to trust Him with every need until one watches someone else trust Him and have their needs supplied. It is difficult to pray to the air and expect an answer unless one has continuously watched someone else pray and have their prayers answered. It is almost unthinkable for someone to step out in faith in any matter, unless they have the encouragement from others who

have done so and seen the mighty hand of the Living God in action on their behalf.

God, having given humans all they need to know about Him through faith, expects that children will learn that same faith by watching others. They will imitate the faith of those they see most often, their fathers and mothers. This is why God says so often and in so many ways that it is of utmost importance for parents to live their faith as genuinely as possible. God knows that the children watching in the wings will pick up on the faith of their parents. He commands parents to live according to His laws because He knows what is best for them and their children. Hosts of authors and researchers have testified to this truth. Doctors William and Martha Sears stress that the “first and most important step towards successful parenting is to commit yourself wholeheartedly to God” (Sears & Sears, 1997, p.19). Bruce H. Wilkinson, founder of Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, shares that parents cannot expect to raise a child in the ways of the Lord unless they themselves are experiencing, first-hand, the works of the Lord in their own lives (Wilkinson, 1996). Don Nori (2005) states, “the lives of children are intended to be primarily molded by what they experience at home” (p.17).

In God’s command to the Israelite parents, He commanded them to always be thinking about His laws. No matter what activity they were involved in, sitting, standing, walking, lying down, they were to always be broadcasting the commands of the Lord. This continual seeking of the Lord’s path would serve as a foundation for the children. God expected the parents to be learning His Word as well as applying it to every part of their lives. Were they to hear the commands and not obey them, they would be doing a disservice to themselves and their children, for their children would not learn to fear and have faith in God. Were they to not know the commands and therefore not live them, the same consequence came to them and their children. The same principle is true for families in the church today.

If a parent chooses to hear God's Word but fails to obey, for whatever the reason, he/she is breaking down God's system and endangering the spiritual welfare of their children. God's design, and therefore the best choice for families, is that parents seek to always live out God's Word in all areas of life. When parents get spiritually lazy or go off target, they put their children at risk. Few parents would disagree with this truth. In fact, nine out of ten parents of children under age 13 (85%) believe they have the primary responsibility for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters, while 11% said their church is primarily responsible (Barna, 2003). Yet there does seem to be a lack of adherence to God's teachings on the matter. So if parents and churches understand these truths, what is the problem?

George Barna (1998) reports that only 33% of Born-Again Christian parents claim that their church or faith has been a dominating influence in the way they parent. Instead of using their faith, beliefs and Biblical teaching, they are using modern wisdom and the prevailing thoughts of the time, as well as their own history and background, to make decisions about raising their children. This fact alone tells us that the bulk of North American church families are not doing what the Bible tells them to do, that is, they are not following the teachings of passages like Deuteronomy 5 and 6. In addition to that only 21% of born-again Christians are involved in a discipleship process for spiritual and individual growth (Barna, 2000). According to Barna (2000), the discipleship process involves "two complimentary components: becoming a committed, knowledgeable, practicing follower of Jesus and instilling that same passion and capacity in the lives of others" (p.24). If parents are not intentionally being disciplined themselves, then it is certainly fair to conclude that parents are probably not discipling their own children. And even if they are, they cannot be doing it correctly if they are not involved in personal learning to hone their parenting practices. This will have a negative effect on their children, as

children see their parents claim to have faith in God, but not authentically living it, or at least not making it a priority (i.e., it is only words). Barna (2005) said the following in another study that asked parents what the most important outcomes were for their children in life:

“Only three out of ten born again parents included the salvation of their child in the list of critical parental emphases,” he noted. “Parents cannot force or ensure that their kids become followers of Christ. But for that emphasis to not be on the radar screen of most Christian parents is a significant reason why most Americans never embrace Jesus Christ as their savior. It is a fact that parents still have a huge influence on the choices their children make, and it is also known that most people either accept Christ when they are young or not at all. The fact that most Christian parents overlook this critical responsibility is one of the biggest challenges to the Christian Church” (Barna, 2005).

With their inability or lack of desire to take the reins of their children’s spiritual well-being, parents have gone away from the teachings of Scripture and made a mess.

Parents simply do not understand that they are the single most important factor, humanly speaking, in the spiritual development of their children. Many research groups and experts have proved this, as well. Dr. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, describes the influence a father has on his children. He said, “A father holds awesome power in the lives of his children, for good or for ill. Families have understood that fact for centuries” (Dobson, 2001, p.57). Andy Stanley (2001) maintains that there are seven foundational needs a teen has to understand and embrace to truly be a disciple of Christ. One of the seven “checkpoints” he documents is the need to understand authority. Teens cannot love God fully without submitting to His authority through parents (Stanley & Hall, 2001). No submission to authority equals no submission to God. Robert Lewis (1997) states the same when he points out the need for a parent, specifically

fathers, to influence their children. Whether a parent realizes that they are the primary influencer in their child's life or not, they are. And because most have either not embraced this truth, or are unequipped to act on it, the church has stepped in to rescue them, but has done so in a harmful way. Because parents are not doing their job, churches have become the primary disciplers of children and youth. This has wrecked havoc in homes and churches alike, by usurping the parents' God-given task to be their child's primary discipler.

Churches and parents have created a real problem in that they desire to have the next generation adhere to their belief system, but they simply are not making that happen. By way of example, Josh McDowell's research is telling. He said, "Large portions of our youth - a majority of whom say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ - are involved in inappropriate, immoral, even illegal behavior" (McDowell, 1994, p.8). His study showed that in a three month period, the surveyed teens (aged 11-18) had lied to a teacher, parent or adult (66%), cheated on an exam (36%), or had physically hurt someone (20%). Young people from Christian homes, by the time they were 18 had engaged in the fondling of breasts, genitals and/or had sexual intercourse (55%). Eighty-four percent of those surveyed attended Sunday School and youth group at least once a week. As well, only 15 percent of churched youth agreed with the idea that universal truth exists (McDowell, 1994). Clearly, a large portion of our churched children are not getting properly disciplined, even though they are attending church functions on a regular basis. The problem is that parents have disregarded the biblical instruction given them by God, and the church has stepped in to help, but gone about it the wrong way. Rather than taking over for the parents, the church needs to train and equip parents to disciple their own children, with the church in a supporting, not surrogate, role.

As the church moved forward in the last century, it has hurt the family and the future

generations greatly. As churches build their Children's and Youth ministries, more and more parents are relying on the church to grow their kids spiritually. Parents are bringing their children to church and church programs, and they say they are living the Christian life, but unfortunately for the vast majority, they have become lazy in their own spiritual journey. The church has tried to fill in the gap for busy, hurting or uninformed parents, rather than push back on parents to fulfill their biblical mandate. The number of youth and children's ministries and organizations has increased dramatically in the last half a century but as Mark DeVries (1994) points out, very little has changed for the good because of them. He wrote:

George Barna's research indicates, "since 1970, there has been no appreciable change in the proportion of adults who attend church services at any given time during the week."

The Lilly Foundation discovered that 40 percent of those who were confirmed in the 1950's and early 1960's "no longer belong to a church or attend church regularly, yet still consider themselves to be religious" (DeVries, 1994).

DeVries (1994) also shares the problems the United Methodist Church has in its "inability to retain...young people, after their maturity, in the church" (p.25). Clearly, what the church is doing is not working to the desired level.

Instead of taking over for parents, churches and church leaders need to help parents understand what it means to be a true follower of Christ, then see their parental role as important and *then* properly equip the parents to fulfill their biblical calling. It is not that parents don't know the problem exists. Andy Stanley (2003) wrote about helping parents rethink their position on life and family. He said: "I have spent hundreds of hours with men and women who have cheated their families for the sake of their career goals. They all admit to knowing there was a problem...But they felt trapped...The discomforts of home drove them to work even longer hours.

Others went to the gym. Some to the bar. A few found comfort in the arms of a coworker or friend” (Stanley, 2003, p.11). Parents feel the pain and the church sees their failure and hurt, but rather than building the parents up and addressing the wrongs in their life that have caused the problem, the church has taken the easier path: create programs that minister to teens and children, rather than confront parents. Only one out of every five parents of children under 13 (19%) has ever been personally contacted or spoken to by a church leader to discuss the parents’ involvement in the spiritual life and development of their children (Barna, 2003). The church is responding, but it is responding with programs rather than addressing the root issues: the need for parents’ spiritual maturity; the need for parents to accept responsibility for raising/teaching their children biblical standards; and, the need for parents to be responsible for the spiritual birth and growth of their children.

The church needs to apply real help, help that adheres to biblical guidelines and addresses the true problem. Earl Palmer wrote in the forward of Mark DeVries’ (1994) book, “the most substantial ministry with the most long-lasting positive result is that ministry that relates to young man and women as members of families” (DeVries, 1994, p.14). The church must move parents to a place where they see themselves as spiritual leaders, leading by example in the home and relying on the church as a support, not a substitute – a training center, not a child-care center. Sue Miller and David Staal (2004), wrote about how to improve a church’s weekly children’s ministries:

Today’s children’s ministries share common ground with these biblical patriarchs - it requires a modern-day leap of faith for someone in a local church to dare pull out a blank sheet of paper and change the way ministry is done. In many settings, there are years or even decades of tradition standing guard against change (Miller and Staal, 2004, p.21).

And while it will be a difficult task to change the traditions we have created, it is well worth the effort. In fact, it is perilous if we don't. Don Nori (2005) captures the real heart of what the church needs to relay to parents, "Let us look again at our priorities. Let us understand that our future is as secure as we have formed our children into vessels prepared to carry that which God poured into us from the generations before us" (p.11). Dobson (2001), as well, shares the following reason to get it right. He quotes Barbara Jackson as saying, "It is far easier to build strong children than to repair broken men" (Dobson, 2001, p.60). The research compiled in this Action Research Project is designed to help churches drive parents to become spiritual leaders in the home.

Chapter 3 – Intervention Design

As indicated by the research, parents need to first understand their role and have a desire to want to change. No church or church staff can force this to happen, and no church or church staff can see the inside of the heart, so it is impossible to force compliance or perceive intention. However, it is possible to take those parents who seem to have a desire to be spiritual leaders in the home and move them along. It is not that one should give up on the others, in fact, church leaders should constantly be sharing in every forum possible the truths outlined in the Bible about parenting, but rather, there needs to be a concentrated effort to help the parents who recognize their need. Rather than continually “yell” at parents and point out their failures or basically take over their jobs, churches and faith-based organizations as a whole, need to regularly teach parents about their role, and then provide proper training and structure for those who are ready to step into their God-given role. When parents reach this point, they need tools to help them fulfill their desire to raise their children biblically. The following is a plan to put one such tool into the hands of willing parents.

Because parents still need to be informed and taught about their role, this intervention will require two parts: a teaching and learning segment, preparing the parents for their “new” role; then, a tool designed to allow the parents to put their new learning into practice. The first segment will be designed to move parents to a place where they understand their role and have a strong desire to change their practices and bring them more in line with biblical teaching. The second will be a multi-dimensional tool that gives parents opportunities to be successful implementing their plans. For the purpose of this research, the latter will be designed and documented in much more detail than the former. The reason for this choice is that plenty of

research and teaching has been done on the roles and responsibilities of parents and more than many sermons have been preached on the topic as well. What has not been flushed out or developed to an equal extent, is a tool that parents will need to make this a reality.

The researcher will find parents who have already committed themselves to biblical parenting and are willing to try a tool designed to make them successful. These parents need not be any specific gender, race or social class, they just need to be parents who have decided to become their child's primary spiritual leader, pointing them to Christ-like living. Parents will be given a tool that helps them, on a weekly basis, live out these desires.

The tool will be designed in such a way that parents of all types can use it. A brief survey of parents indicates that two of the biggest reasons parents don't disciple their own children regularly is the lack of time and the lack of knowledge of how to do it. This tool, referred to as the FOCUS Pack going forward, will need to be time-sensitive and extremely user-friendly. FOCUS is an acronym for: Fun, Outreach, Connect, Uplift, and Scripture. An activity in each of these five areas is presented to the family weekly for their participation. Parents will be encouraged to set aside one evening a week to work through the FOCUS Pack with their family. The intended outcome is that parents, in this process, will gain the discipline and knowledge needed to begin taking back their God-given role of spiritually nurturing their children.

The FOCUS Pack will be designed to do more than teach Sunday School lessons, as "teaching" the Bible is not the only mandate God gives. Clearly God outlined a process in which parents share not only God's truth from His written Word, but also how He has been working in the lives of the parents and the world around them. The FOCUS Pack must be centered around the Word of God, but also include a way to create a shared experience that gives testimony to God's work in the life of the family, as well as others. It must be usable by anyone,

whether they have a Bible college degree or not. The same anecdotal research proved over and over that one of the top five reasons parents don't teach their children God's Word is their own feeling of inadequacy to properly handle the Word. Also, it must be something that the entire family can enjoy together, no matter what ages are represented. All family members must be able and have a desire to engage.

After the FOCUS Pack is designed, it will be handed out to willing participants. They will be given instructions how to use the FOCUS Pack over a thirteen-week course. The families, parents and children, will then be asked to answer questions using a created online survey. The results will be documented. The questions asked will cover what the family did previously to intentionally disciple their children, how they used the FOCUS Pack, and what results they found from using it.

As stated previously, for most parents, the problem is not desire but ability or perception of ability. It is the hope of the researcher that two major outcomes be reached. First, through the sustained use of the FOCUS Pack, the parents and families involved will begin to gain the ability to disciple their children at home. Second, the families, and especially the parents, will achieve a more optimistic outlook for their spiritual future, one less dependent on church programming.

Chapter 4 – Intervention Implementation

As discussed in the previous chapter, the researcher created a FOCUS Pack and implemented its use among approximately fifty families. The FOCUS Pack was designed with five basic parts: Fun, Outreach, Connect, Uplift, and Scripture. Each part has a specific purpose, as described in the following text. Led by dad and/or mom, each section was carried out one night per week by the families.

F is for Fun

One of the important features that needed to be built into this tool was enjoyment for the entire family. Each family member needed to want to be part of the family night, no matter his or her age. The *Fun* section brought the family together around a game or activity. While many families are very creative, many are not. This section gave specific instructions and games to play so that the burden of creativity did not prevent the planned FOCUS activity.

After one version of the FOCUS Pack and feedback from families, the researcher changed the format of this section. The first round had a specific activity that was designed for families in general. The second round had two different appendices in the back: one contained activities for families with older kids, and one contained activities for families with younger kids. This way the families could choose which activity best suited them.

O is For Outreach

When considering God's Word and his plan for humanity, it was important to incorporate a section that helped families look outside themselves to see what God was doing in the world

around them. This would help their vision of God and His work. It was also designed to help families get out of their self-centered, busy world that seems to be one of the factors that keep families from engaging in true discipleship. One cannot be a true disciple of Jesus and not engage the world.

The *Outreach* part of the FOCUS pack gave families a specific activity that required them to do something for someone else. Some examples are: bake cookies for a neighbor, make a card for a sick person, write a thank you note to a school teacher, etc. Together, families strove to be a blessing to others and watch God at work in the lives of strangers and friends and loved ones.

A second version of the *Outreach* section was created in the same vein as the second *Fun* section. A list of outreach ideas for different aged families was found in the back of the FOCUS Pack. One set of activities was designed for families with teenagers and one set was designed for families with children age twelve and under. Older families might engage in raking leaves at a neighbor's home, while a family with young children might draw pictures for someone who is in the hospital recovering from illness.

C is for Connect

One of the biggest outcomes needed for home discipleship to take place is family connection. Life is so full of action and happenings, families barely have time to eat a meal together, much less talk about what is going on in their individual lives. The *Connect* section gives families a small group activity that is discussion-based. It was designed to allow them each time to share what is going on in their own world. The activities included, among other things, sharing the best and worst thing that happened that day, lists of favorite things, and even back rubs. During the *Connect* section, a set of rules, outlined in the pack, were followed to help

the family maintain an atmosphere conducive to relationship building.

U is for Uplift

There are often relational issues in the home that become more strained due to the way information is handled. For example, a teen may become more and more irritated with their parent when a particular activity is denied, like going to a party. The teen begins to focus regularly on their own desires and selfish ambitions. The parents become the target of anger and aggression.

Prayer is designed by God to take one's heart and mind off one's self and on to Him and others. When prayer is implemented in a life, selfishness begins to dissolve. The *Uplift* section of the FOCUS Pack is designed to do just that. Help the family learn to give God their problems and stop laying them at the feet of others. The focus on praying for parents and children will help to change perspectives. In the example above, a teen that honestly prays for his/her parent to make wise decisions will likely be less critical of that parent's decisions.

S is for Scripture

As parents desire their children to grow in the knowledge of God's Word, but feel incapable of teaching it, the FOCUS Pack helps them along in this pursuit. Simple Bible lessons that are applicable to all families are designed to guide the family. They will read a specific story or passage and then answer a few questions that will begin discussion. Together, the family can read and discover God's Word with Dad/Mom leading the way.

After creating the FOCUS Pack, the researcher enlisted a gathering of families at Sandy

Cove Ministries to promote the biblical concepts taught there. The teaching was done over a weekend in four separate sessions. It outlined the importance of parents regaining their role as primary disciplers of their children. Much of the research presented in chapter two of this document was outlined with the families and the Bible was used heavily as a proof-text. As well, throughout the weekend, the families were led in various activities that were similar to activities found in the FOCUS Pack. The purpose of this was to model to families that they can have fun and learn spiritual concepts together. The researcher then handed out the FOCUS Packs for use in homes. The FOCUS Pack has been included as Appendix A. The researcher understood that doing an entire FOCUS, once a week for thirteen weeks, might be tough on some families. Some families would struggle with the project due to lack of practice in the past. Because of this likelihood, the researcher asked families to at least try to have a “family night” once a week, even if they did not get through the whole FOCUS Pack. Some families started with the small step of just doing one part of the FOCUS Pack, while others worked to implement the entire curriculum. This allowance came as an act of grace by the researcher, as the researcher realized just how far this project would push families out of their norm.

Approximately 150 families participated in the learning and activities. Many of those took FOCUS Packs home, but fifty-six families committed on paper to follow the pack and aid in the research. When the fifty-six were asked to complete the online survey to track their results, eighteen families logged in and gave their responses.

Chapter 5 – Presentation of Findings and Results

After spending a weekend teaching and interacting with approximately 150 families, the researcher gave a FOCUS Pack to those families willing to take it. The families were asked to use the FOCUS Pack and then answer a few questions via online survey. Fifty-six families agreed to this process by signing a response card and giving their email address to the researcher. Eighteen families actually worked with the FOCUS Pack and answered the questions online. The researcher believes that the difference in the number between those who committed to the process and those who actually participated fully is explicable. It is very possible that the response was smaller because typically, people get excited about new learning they discover, but over time, they become less excited. While they agreed to help in the research and enjoyed their new learning, weeks later, there was not enough motivation to complete the task. As well, it is possible that they tried but failed, and the failure was embarrassing. This could show all the more reason for church leadership to continually emphasize and encourage home discipleship and regularly support parents in their efforts.

The survey questions were designed to quickly and efficiently reveal whether or not the FOCUS concept could help families implement discipleship in the home. The researcher needed to know what the families did previously for spiritual growth at home. Did they have family devotions? Did they do any fun bonding together? Did they do any intentional teaching in the home or did they rely on the church or something else? Much of these were answered in the responses to the first question. Also, the researcher needed to find out what outcomes families were experiencing as a result of using the FOCUS Pack. Many positive results were experienced, as chronicled in the answers to the second question.

Since the purpose of the FOCUS Pack was to help entire families grow spiritually, it seemed appropriate to get the perspective of the children, as well. The third question was designed to find out how the teens and children were responding to the FOCUS Pack. While the FOCUS Pack had two separate sections, one for older and one for younger families, most of the responses came from younger families, that is, those with children less than twelve years old. However, it should be noted that many families chose not to answer this question for unknown reasons.

The last question was designed to gauge whether the families found value in the FOCUS Pack. For this experiment, the researcher set the true test of value at whether or not a family would recommend the FOCUS Pack to other families. The results were, again, very positive, and are recorded in the final question as a percentage.

The following is the gathered results from the eighteen families who attended the Sandy Cove weekend, listened to the teaching, agreed to try the FOCUS Pack, and completed the online survey. The questions asked by the researcher are in bold type, followed by answers from each of the eighteen families. The researcher changed misspellings written in by families, but did not make grammatical corrections.

Researcher: Please describe what you did as a family to intentionally disciple your children before creating a "Family Night" or using the FOCUS Pack.

Family 1: There was never anything very structured. Basically, we would use different devotional books the kids may have at any given time. We have had family worship times and frequently use real-time/real life situations to talk through and disciple our kids.

Family 2: It was really hit and miss for us.

Family 3: Before incorporating the FOCUS idea we usually did a weekly fun night, usually in the summer where we cycled through the kids each week. They picked a menu for dinner, made a grocery list, shopped with mom, then made the meal and dessert. After dinner they would then get to choose either a movie or game to play with the family. As to the scripture part I do devotions with the kids each morning while they are eating breakfast before school. They also have prayer journals that they keep updated and when a prayer has been answered they mark the date on it and put it in an “Answered Prayer” jar. It is full so one day we are hoping to open the jar and read the answered prayers. When they are young we cut out pictures and make a prayer journal. Even though they can’t read they at least know the picture and can make an effort to pray for that person or thing.

Family 4: As I said before we have done family time for a while...they know it is important for all of us... for our unity and our family health.

Family 5: Nothing we are very unpredictable so we don’t really keep a constant ritual with family affairs. However, what ever we do we always close and attempt to enjoy the moment.

Family 6: Explain that God has chosen your family. Your mother and father are important as well as sisters/brothers. God gives us time to spend with one another so do not make other plans-
-it's our time.

Family 7: It was more one-on-one w/ the kids.

Family 8: We have an extensive family devotion time every night using age appropriate materials for each child. It takes about 30 minutes each night. We have two children that are four years apart in age. They also spend time on Alert Cadets each Sunday (Alert Cadets is like Boy Scouts but it is Christ-centered. There is a lot of Scripture memory work as well as character development activities. The fathers participate and earn awards along with the sons. If you have

never heard of Alert Cadets, the link is <http://www.alertcadet.org/>).

Family 9: Let kids be involved in planning - set it up so they know it is coming

Family 10: Studying scripture and prayer time together.

Family 11: Shepherding a Child's Heart and Raising Kids God's Way

Family 12: We are the grandparents, we bring our grandchildren every year to "The Last Hurrah" so our approach is different.

Family 13: We wanted to give them space to be the person God created them to be, but nudge them in certain areas when necessary. We have always prayed regularly with our kids. We do a lot of stuff together as a family; sports, wii, shopping, and we feel that these are good places to interact plus instill Godly principles when the situations arise.

Family 14: I made them aware that Thursday night was now family game night and that the kids would need to do their homework and anything else before we started.

Family 15: Count 1, 2, 3, then if they did not do as they were told, put them in time out or take away their privileges.

Family 16: I always try to include prayer together and always during crazy times. I try to use every opportunity as an example of what God would like us to do.

Family 17: Rushed devotions before going to sleep: read a quick Bible story and prayed.

Family 18: We would have bible/prayer time together. We would also intentionally engage our neighbors and children's friend's families. A lot of what we did was more informal and along the way discipleship; bringing in spiritual parallels in conversations along the way.

Researcher: What outcomes have you seen in your family/children because of the time you have spent working through the FOCUS Pack or in a "Family Night" scenario?

Family 1: The kids bond better together as friends and value the relationships within our family without always having to have a friend over or be at a friend's house. They've learned we can have fun together when it's just us.

Family 2: Not much of a difference yet, although there are some great ideas in there.

Family 3: Now that we follow the FOCUS plan we are more organized. We can then follow the schedule and the kids are aware of what is expected during the night and for planning beforehand. I enjoy the time with the kids as a family. It is great to see them search for outreach opportunities at school and at church and to discuss during the week around the dinner table. It helps them to realize all that God wants for us as Christians, which is most importantly to love one another.

Family 4: We respect each other more...when there are bumps in the road so to speak we are able to keep a smile on because we know we love each other and are there for each other...

Family 5: We bond closer together.

Family 6: I feel that all of my children, except one, have a real love for the Lord. She had a bad experience with church members, due to our being poor, and she has not been able to get past that but we continue to pray for her. They know where the adults stand for the Lord and they know that they are important, too.

Family 7: Closer knit and we can organize ourselves better.

Family 8: We did not participate in it long enough to answer this question.

Family 9: Increased friendships between each other. Less fighting.

Family 10: No real specific outcomes, but combining it with a family meeting, we feel we all know what page we are on and have a more defined sense of what we are doing and roles we play in our family.

Family 11: We are all very close - the lines of communication are open and they love The Lord and understand that God is the Authority. Learning to obey Mom and Dad now is the training growing foer obeying God and being able to hear His plan for their lives.

Family 12: Not actually using the Focus Pack but we are trying to apply the principles.

Family 13: The kids like to be at our house with their friends. We get a lot of feedback from there friends that they enjoy the environment at our house. As they get older we spend time interact with them and their friends through text messaging and Facebook.

Family 14: The kids and myself look forward to Thursday nights as it is a time for us to laugh together and play a fun game. The kids showed a great interest in the game nights as well as the "missions" of the church.

Family 15: The outcomes I have seen are the children being more tolerant of one another, talking in less emotional tones. It is a pleasure to see us together in one room for 20 minutes. So it has brought togetherness also.

Family 16: We have had better attitudes and almost no yelling since the family fusion weekend.

Family 17: When we have family night every week, I think the kids feel like we are more connected and are less whiny and complain less.

Family 18: Spiritual growth. Excitement about family night. Missional mindedness. Consistency. Expectation.

Researcher: If possible, ask your kids to make some comments on their experience with "Family Night." Please type their responses below.

Family 1: Girl (Age 10) - "I think its a good way for the family to be able to spend time together and to have fun."

Family 2: They love it! Any time together is fun. They love the "specialness" of Family Movie Night, or going to the park. They look forward to it. They feel like a team. Girl (Age 10) – We played twister, flashlight tag. We made cards for Ms. Glenda whose husband died. We made eyeglass craft from Labor Day Family Fusion Weekend at Sandy Cove. I like when we play flashlight tag because I am small so it was hard to find me and I always was last to hunt because I always was last to be found. We played monopoly and daddy won.

Family 3: Boy (Age 7) – It is really fun. We do a lot of fun bible stuff. Like bible trivia. And twenty questions. We get to play flashlight tag in the dark and regular tag in the day light.

Girl (Age 4) – I want to play twister and we attack people and instead of 2 player we can play 4 players. Boy (Age 14) – We played soccer. We got to carve pumpkins. I enjoy it and look forward to it. I've learned that dad is the smartest person in the family. Learned that mom likes to cheat for the answers.

Family 4: Our kids like family night. They enjoy spending time with each other and being with us as parents...they have fun with us all together...

Family 5: N/A Sorry I'm doing this at 1:30 am is quite silence in here and can't wake them up but must say that Sandy Cove had a very strong impact in their lives and can't stop singing the songs learned.

Family 6: They look forward to spending time together.

Family 7-15: N/A

Family 16: My daughter loved the family weekend and I know if we can get into the family focus pack she will enjoy that too! Even though we haven't used the pack I think a family night is extremely important. thanks for all your hard work on the fusion weekend. hope this helps.

Family 17: Boy - "I don't think we do it very often, I think we need to do it more often. It needs

to be fun. We need to take turns deciding what to do. I like to play on the computer. I like it when we have family night." Boy - "Likes to play Monopoly, computer and chess. I like it when we have family night."

Family 18: Liked it. Assignments could be less complicated so we can complete all 5 parts. Activities could be big-less. Family could do a better job with follow through. We took too long to take our completed activities to the right person. More creative cover; needs more color.

Researcher: Do you recommend other families begin using the FOCUS Pack or establish a regular "Family Night?"

Strongly Agree	44.44%	(8 respondents)
Agree	44.44%	(8 Respondents)
Somewhat Agree	5.56%	(1 Respondent)
Somewhat Disagree	0.0%	
Disagree	0.0%	
Strongly Disagree	5.56%	(1 Respondent)

It should be noted that the respondent who filled in the box "Strongly Disagree," shared how their family time was good, their kids looked forward to it, and it helped them grow. There was nothing negative about their answers, only positive. Therefore, it is quite probable that the Respondent misread the box and actually strongly agreed.

After analyzing the results, two major themes emerged. The first is that families who had no intentional plans for home discipleship greatly benefited from the FOCUS Pack. Parents described some failure and some success, but seemed very pleased with the overall idea and

function of the FOCUS Pack. Parents described better relationships between their children and with them. Families appreciated the organization and intention of the FOCUS Pack. Also, children described very positive reactions to the family time together, something all too important if parents expect to continue successfully. The combination of parent and child experiences with the FOCUS Pack were very good overall.

The second theme that emerged was families that already have a regular time together were less impacted by the FOCUS Pack. The researcher anticipated this, as the FOCUS concept was designed for families with a desire to disciple at home, but did not have the knowledge or ability to do so. It did not come as a surprise to the researcher that a parent who was already discipling at home would grab a FOCUS Pack and use it as another resource to accomplish their already established family discipleship goal.

The FOCUS Pack was designed to give parents who desired to disciple their own children a tool that would help them in their pursuit. It was also designed to be something the entire family would embrace. Based on the final results, the FOCUS Pack seemed to have accomplished this goal for the majority of the users. It put discipleship back into the home, at least for thirteen weeks, and gave parents a glimpse at a new model that could move them closer to God's design for the family.

Chapter 6 – Reflections, Conclusions and Recommendations

It has taken this researcher ten years to complete this work. The researcher began with a pompous attitude that felt Christian parents were pretty much ruining their kid's lives and the church at large was all too eager to help. In fact, the original title of this work was "How North American Youth Ministry has Destroyed the Family." The researcher had a very poor respect for the struggling family and a disdain for traditional youth ministry as a solution to the problems families faced. Time and maturity, as well as looking in the faces of hundreds of struggling parents, has tempered and softened the heart of the researcher. The researcher still sees a large majority of families that are more than willing to let the church take over their discipleship role and too many churches eager to step into the role. Rather than seeing the church as intentionally destroying family, the researcher sees people and a system that need to be undone and moved. This is why the FOCUS Pack, or something similar, is still viewed by the researcher as a viable solution.

The FOCUS Pack will not solve the problem of parents who do not want to change the system or have no desire to be their children's primary discipler. It will, however, be a tremendous starting point for parents who know what their commission is and just need help in getting there. The FOCUS Pack gives parents a specific tool that will guide them to success in their goal of being the spiritual leader in the home. The FOCUS Pack, along with careful nurturing from the church, will go a long way to helping parents.

At the start, the answer was simple, preach to the masses how they have missed God's calling and repent of your ways. Now, after seeing that most parents really want to be successful as spiritual leaders but just don't know how, it is the belief of this writer that the way is paved

much differently. Parents need to be taught that there is hope and that God designed families to thrive, not just survive. Once that vision is caught, and it will not be done through one sermon but through many interactions and teaching styles, families need to be patiently carried along the road to repair. It is not an overnight transformation. It will take more than a “program” to bring the needed change. Often it will be three steps forward and one step back. Families need guidance, encouragement, and regular handholding along the way.

Part of the reason for this long-term approach is that the current systems of youth and children’s ministries in the typical church are so ingrained, that they have become part of the accepted cultural norm. No one planned to harm families, no one decided the church does a better job, it just sort of happened over time, like so many other things. Parents slowly let go and churches slowly grabbed on. It will take careful weaning to bring families and churches back to health.

The writer believes that there are two primary and equally important places this process must start. The first is in the hearts of Dad and Mom. Parents need to understand the importance of their calling and decide not to allow church programs to replace their authority. They need to hold, with reckless abandon, to the ideal that God designed them to lead, and the church to help them lead. If Dad and Mom would adhere, whole-heartedly, to their calling to be spiritual leaders in the home, half of the battle would already be won. Parents will make plenty of mistakes as they try to lead. But just the fact that they understand their purpose, and are trying to attain it on a regular basis, will likely create enough positive growth in the family that the mistakes will have minimal impact overall.

Second, and equally important, is the church leadership. Churches don’t need to be sent packing, but they must intentionally take a stand for family first discipleship. Youth pastors

especially need to be taught to design their program elements with the family as the highlight of the discipleship process and not as an after thought. They need to be given the authority by church elders, pastors and deacons to push discipleship back on immature Christian parents who desire the youth pastor to assume the spiritual responsibilities of parents. No longer can the church youth ministry be heralded as “the place” where our children/teens go to grow spiritually. If a teen is not growing spiritually, the finger cannot be pointed at the youth pastor, but at home. This will take guts, as a less mature parent who does not believe the philosophy will tend to leave the church if the finger is pointed back at them. Sadly, many church leaders find it easier on the budget and heart to lay blame on the youth pastor, rather than move to intervene in the home.

The researcher has personally been moved to take action. The researcher was a youth pastor/youth worker for 17 years. During this research project, the researcher has since left vocational youth ministry and is actively working with church leadership to restore parents to their rightful role in the church. It is a hard process and requires patience and long-term, objective plans. The researcher is working hard to be patient in dealings with parents, always casting the vision and trying to model it in the researcher’s own home. Slowly the vision is catching on. Probably, this has been the writer’s biggest learning - being patient and setting a long-term course of action, rather than expecting overnight changes.

There are two recommendations that come from the writer to two very different audiences. The first is to parents and families who wish to align themselves more closely with God’s vision for family: be intentional. The FOCUS Pack will not make families more mature by itself. It is the use of the pack, or something similar, along with intentionality by parents that will bring about the desired outcome of home-based spiritual growth. This does not mean that families

ought to avoid church programming all together. It does mean that families need to be careful not to attend church functions to the exclusion of family time.

The second recommendation is to churches that wish to build stronger families: be patient. Change will not happen overnight and it will require much patience. Setting a ten-year plan for slow implementation and vision casting is probably more realistic than a ten-month plan. Also, it will require buy-in from many sources, including children's ministry, youth ministry and church leadership personnel, so cast vision deep and wide.

Overall, the writer believes that the intervention was successful and accomplished its stated goals. Families, who heard the messages of discipleship in the home and desired to implement it, were successful at doing so and had good things to say about the process. In many cases, family relationships began to see healing and restoration, as well as new frontiers opening. What remains to be studied, is how many times a family needs to go through a FOCUS Pack experience before it can stand on it's own and not rely on an outside source for discipleship material. The researcher believes that that answer will be different for each family, as each family is unique and has it's own set of characteristics.

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