FAITH AT HOME
Equipping Families to Make Disciples
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Today, there are more resources and programs focused on teaching God's inherent truth than ever before. Churches have access to an enormous amount of Bible study materials from well-known and qualified theologians. Pastors, leaders and teachers have the ability to find an almost unlimited supply of curriculums designed specifically to lead people to a deeper walk in their journey with the Lord. The church, now more than ever, is well-equipped with the resources they need to make disciples. Steve Wright, in his book ReThink stated, “The church must excel in instructing and equipping moms and dads in all aspects of family life, especially discipling their children.”

I will be the first to say that pastors, leaders and teachers are directed by the Lord to offer discipleship opportunities with quality and excellence. It is time for us to roll up our sleeves and get to work equipping “people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12, NIV). Discipleship will cost us everything we have, but it will be the greatest investment of our ministries.

However, the door swings both ways. Moms and dads need to be fully engaged and take advantage of the church’s discipleship offerings. Parents have the opportunity to strategically and purposefully integrate their family into a local church that stands on solid Biblical teaching and offers quality discipleship opportunities.
How connected are parents with what your church offers regarding discipleship? Parents today have the chance to engage in small groups, discipleship groups, mentoring groups and prayer groups to become growing disciples. However, there is a sad reality.

Many parents have used the church not so much for their own spiritual edification, but as a place to drop off their kids so the paid professionals can provide biblical education for their children. Many parents are not engaging, and this lack of teamwork must end. The church and the home need to come together, work together and even pull together as one. When both the church and the family are unified, they will be able to accomplish extraordinary things.

There's a story about two old farmers who entered their horses in a horse pull competition. The object of the contest was to hitch the animal to a weighted sled and have the horse attempt to pull the sled a certain distance. The first farmer’s horse won first place by pulling a 700-pound sled. The other farmer’s horse finished second. The runner-up horse was only able to pull a 500-pound sled.

After the contest the two farmers decided to hitch both horses together to see just how much weight they could pull together. Many people assumed that the two animals would pull 1,200 pounds. To everyone's amazement both horses together pulled the 1,200-pound sled with ease. They didn't stop there. The horses pulled 1,400, 1,600, even an 1,800-pound sled. The farmers kept adding weight to the sled, and the two horses together were able to astonish the crowd by pulling 1,900 pounds.

This is an awesome illustration of the importance of teamwork. God has designed the church and the home to come together as a team when it comes to discipleship. The church is commissioned to provide the equipping, and the parents are given the privilege to be the primary disciple-makers of their children. When the two come together, God can do some incredible things in the life of the family.

The church and the home have the potential to be the most viable and influential institutions for discipling kids when both work together as a team. It is our goal at the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina’s Faith at Home Ministry to partner with you and equip you, so you can equip the parents of your congregation to be disciple-makers of their homes. To accomplish this objective, we believe it is vital that parents become eager learners of the Bible, authentic doers of His commands and intentional teachers of Scripture to their children.
CHAPTER 1

EAGER LEARNERS, AUTHENTIC DOERS, INTENTIONAL TEACHERS

At a Christian conference, I had the opportunity to speak to several church leaders about family ministry. During the meeting I played a game called, “Do you remember when...?” I asked the group questions like, “Do you remember when all you had in your house was a black-and-white TV? Do you remember when $5 was enough to be considered gas money? Do you remember when stores closed on Saturday night not to reopen until Monday morning?”

These questions quickly divided the room into two distinct groups. The first group, who was around 50 years old and older, sat back in their seats and let their thoughts walk down memory lane. Their minds were flooded with fond memories, recalling what life was like in their childhood homes. They reflected on heartwarming times of days gone by. While the first group was steeped in nostalgia, the other group was sitting up in their seats in disbelief thinking, “What are these people doing? How could there have been anything good about those old days?”

Eventually, the younger group in the room came to the realization that their counterparts were not aliens. They began
to see that there were many more benefits to those old days than they first realized. My purpose for playing this game was actually strategic. I wanted to get people to think about the vast differences of our culture today versus what life was like just a few short decades ago. At that point, I made a slight transition in the game.

While the entire group was hanging in the moment, I began to ask a series of questions pertaining to issues Christians have encountered over the last 40 to 50 years. I asked, “Do you remember when all the couples living in your neighborhood were married instead of just living together? Do you remember when you heard for the first time that someone you knew was homosexual? Do you remember when there was never a thought of gay couples getting married?”

These were only a few of the questions I asked to get the crowd thinking about how our society has changed over the years. As you may have guessed, my goal was to bring into focus the collapse of biblical principles and to expose the lack of Christian influence in our homes.

This game has proven to be a great tool to get people of all generations to think about the environment in which the current generation is growing up. As we stand back and look at the panoramic view of today’s cultural landscape, we find ourselves asking an important question. What have been the contributing factors to get us in the situation we are in today? Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to this difficult question. However, it does lead us into a healthy evaluation process.

There are many variables that can be linked to our current cultural climate, but there are two prominent elements that begin to surface. Of a long list of contributors, our sex-crazed culture easily lands somewhere near the top. However, the other major factor to our cultural tailspin may come as a surprise. The tension that exists between the church and the home has also proven to be an unexpected contributor to this problematic trend.

When asked to complete this well known advertising phrase “sex ______,” what is the first thing that comes to your mind? My guess would be that you responded by saying “sells.” We live in a sex-crazed culture where sexual images are coming at us from every direction. Movies, television, publications and the music industry are relentlessly pounding our culture with risqué dress, provocative pictures and tantalizing lyrics.

It should come as no surprise to parents that children, especially teens, are targeted by these industries. Their minds are constantly bombarded with a myriad of false ideas. They constantly hear lies like: “Have sex anywhere, with anyone, whenever you can. You are the
authority. No one tells you what to do. You need to dress like this celebrity if you want to be cool.”

It doesn’t stop there. Many of today’s iconic performers show little to no regard for morals or modesty. They will say and do anything if it means they can maintain their popularity in the public eye. In other words, they will do whatever it takes to stay popular. Unfortunately, in many cases today that means the new up-and-coming pop-stars have to be more X-rated to outdo their predecessors. Sadly, these ideologies are accepted, embraced and, in many ways, imitated by many kids and teens in our culture.

Another cause for our culture’s downfall can be attributed to the tension that lies between the church and the home. From pastors’ perspectives there is nothing they want to see more than every child and student in their ministries following the Lord and growing deeper in their relationships with Christ. Pastors know and understand that sports, grades and popularity with peers are important parts of a young person’s life. But hands down, making Jesus the absolute Lord of their lives is at the top of the list.

Nothing should rival having God at the forefront of anyone’s life. There is no surprise that parents are quick to stack their hands on top of their pastor’s hand. They too want nothing more than for their kids to believe in Christ, be a light in a dark world and spend their lives serving the Lord.

But here is where the tension comes into play. Many parents will have a Jesus plus ______ (fill in the blank) mentality when it comes to their children’s lives outside of church. Their words say, “I want my kids to get saved and live for Jesus,” but their actions suggest, “now that you’re saved, we can concentrate on other important things.”

For instance, parents want their kids to get saved, but they will over-encourage their children to participate in sports with the assumption that their little athlete will receive a scholarship to pay their way through college. More times than not, playing sports fills a family’s calendar leaving little room for church activities.

**CHURCH & HOME TENSION**

A. Surrendered to Christ  
B. Sports star  
C. GPA & SAT  
D. Popularity
Other parents want their children serving the Lord, but they push their kids to make straight A's to give them an added edge on their high school transcripts. Students can easily feel pressure to put in long hours of study to make the higher grades, giving them no room or energy for personal discipleship.

Moms and dads want their children to be surrendered followers of Christ and evangelize the lost. However, many are afraid of their children not being socially accepted. They will strongly insist that their kids attend all the popular gatherings, wear the newest fashion and stay up-to-date with the latest gadget. When a home emphasizes these priorities, it has the potential of conveying the materialistic attitude, "We have to keep up with the Joneses."

To be fair, there is nothing wrong with being a sports star and excelling in athletics. Sports teach teamwork and promote physical health. The same is true with school. There is nothing wrong with making good grades and working hard to achieve academic excellence. God is delighted when we desire to learn about all He has created. In the same way, having a lot of friends and being popular in social circles is wonderful. The Lord has made us for fellowship.

Looking back at the church and home tension list on the previous page, points B through D can give a surrendered follower of Christ many great opportunities to share his faith and be a light to others who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus. But when moms and dads place greater priority on the portion of the list that has no eternal significance, it sends a contradicting message.

On the one hand, children who have put their faith in Christ hear the church saying, "God is first and everything else is second." But on the other hand, their parents are constantly elevating a lifestyle that is focused on temporal things. In the end, children and students are pulled in two different directions, which can easily lead to confusion. As a result, tension is created between the church and the home.

In my 20-plus years of student ministry, I've seen first-hand what happens when parents allow this sex-crazed culture to penetrate their home. A child can form the wrong ideas about themselves and other people. I have also watched parents persistently push their kids too hard in the non-eternal directions. Children can develop a poor perspective about the material things God has placed in this world. When moms and dads allow either or both of these prominent cultural elements to enter their homes, the children are the ones who ultimately suffer. This is a problem.

The good thing is solving problems is what the Bible does best. That truth never ceases to amaze me. But what
really blows me away is the fact that Scripture, which was written thousands of years ago, actually speaks about this exact same problem. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is giving the children of Israel some final reminders and instructions before entering into the Promised Land.

The 120-year-old prophet gives them some important information regarding their obedience to God’s Word. He makes it crystal clear that their continued prosperity and their family’s future blessing in the new land hinges on the nation’s compliance to God’s requirements. The reason Moses gives the Israelite nation this counsel is simple. He knew about the pagan people who occupied the Land of Promise and the wicked idols they worshiped.

When you study the Old Testament and learn about the gods that the Canaanite nations worshiped, you find two prominent idols among their pantheon of deities — Asherah and Baal. Asherah was known as the fertility or sex goddess, while Baal was the prosperity or materialism god (also known as, a god of temporal things).1

When you take these two gods and compare them to the issues we face in our culture today, you find eerie similarities. Our families are confronted with the same idols the Jews encountered. The only difference is we no longer call them Asherah and Baal. We call them lust and greed, which is all based on self-centeredness.

Moses wasn’t only speaking to the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy; he is also whispering into our ears today. God’s Word says as much to us now as it did back then. Isn’t it interesting how timeless and relevant the Bible is?

When we step back and try to piece together our discussion to this point, we come to a disturbing conclusion. The sex-crazed, materialistic culture seems to be plummeting more and more out of control. Our children and homes are under an enormous attack. As we see immorality, drugs and a host of other issues becoming more out of control, many Christians sit in bewilderment and ask, “What could possibly be next?”

With the growing darkness overshadowing our world, many Christians feel hopeless. Christ followers desperately want to know the answer to this most pressing question, but they are almost afraid to ask, “Is there any hope for our children and grandchildren?” Even in our growing anti-Christian culture, I will be the first to answer with a resounding, “Yes!” There is hope! How do I know this? Simple. God the Father is in heaven on His throne and His Son, Jesus, is seated at His right side. As long as the Godhead is in place, there is always hope — hope for our culture, hope for our children and hope for our homes. But where do we begin, and does God have an answer?
The answer starts with humility. The Bible says in James 4:10, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (NIV). We have to acknowledge to the Lord that we have been unfaithful to Him by committing the many sins related to false gods like Asherah, Baal and others. Once we have sought repentance and turned our hearts back to Him, it becomes easy to find the answer to this complicated problem. Fortunately, we don't have to look any further than back to the instructions Moses gave to the children of Israel.

Israel, God’s chosen people, were faced with an ominous task. The nations that occupied the Land of Promise were no pushovers. According to Deuteronomy 7:1, there were “seven nations larger and stronger” than the nomads that roamed the desert for 40 years. But they were no match for the Lord of Hosts. God had a plan to rid the land of the pagans and make good on His word to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses explained to the Israelites that the Lord would be the One who “drives out before you many nations...” (Deuteronomy 7:1) and it would be their job to “destroy them totally” (Deuteronomy 7:2) and “break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles” (Deuteronomy 7:5).

The Lord’s plan to conquer the land would give His people houses they didn’t build, wells they didn’t dig, vineyards they didn’t plant, and the opportunity to begin a new life. But this was only part of His overall strategy. God would also instruct Moses to share with the Israeli parents and grandparents His blueprint of how to grow and thrive in the Promised Land now and for generations to come.

Moses said to Israel in Deuteronomy 4:1 and 9, "Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you... Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (NIV).

When we break down these two verses, we clearly see the Lord has three things in mind. God tells leaders of each home to be eager learners of His Word, authentic doers of His Word and intentional teachers of His Word. In short, God is saying, "Make disciples."

Notice the Bible says, "hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you." When Moses uses the word teach, he is naturally implying that his audience is made up of learners. (So the first principle is learn.) As he continues, Scripture says, “Follow them.” Moses instructs them next to not just be hearers of the Word, but to also be doers of the Word. (Now we
The end of Deuteronomy 4:9 combines the efforts of the learner and doer of God’s Word into a practical conclusion.

The Bible says, “Teach them to your children and to their children after them.” Unapologetically, the Lord narrows his audience to a specific group of people. To make sure there is no confusion, God gives the teaching responsibility of His laws and commands to the parents and grandparents. (Now we have learn, do and teach.) Why does He do this? It’s simple. There is no group of people better suited to share the Lord’s instructions with the next generation. Parents and grandparents are not only commissioned to pass their faith down to their children, but they also have the most time and influence in their young lives to be able to do so.

The Lord set up the Israelites then, and He equips His followers today in a perfect, yet simplistic, way. Putting the “Learn-Do-Teach” methodology into action gives the next generation the greatest chance to be prosperous and successful. It takes determination to be an eager learner. It takes an uncompromising attitude to be a sincere doer. It takes total and complete surrender to be the teacher your kids and grandkids need for the world they are encountering.

As good as that is, here’s the best part: God doesn’t just tell us to implement the “Learn-Do-Teach” strategy in our homes and then leave us hanging to do it the best we can. The Lord gives us detailed instructions in His Word on how to accomplish this arduous task. As we will see in the remaining chapters, God reveals to us easy ways to incorporate disciple-making into the rhythm of our lives so that it can become a natural part of our homes.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR THE PASTOR, LEADER OR TEACHER:**

- Do the people in your congregation lack focus, conviction and stamina when it comes to disciplines of the faith?
- Are there inconsistencies in disciplines such as in-depth study of the Bible, living a life of holiness and integrity, and discipling others based on God’s standards?
- Are we living in a day similar to the days described in Judges 2:10 when “another generation grew up who neither knew the LORD nor what he had done for Israel” (NIV)?
- Read on and let’s explore together what God’s Word has to say about equipping believers to become the disciples and disciple-makers the Lord has designed them to be.
EAGER LEARNERS

Brian Herbert once said, “The capacity to learn is a gift, the ability to learn is a skill, the willingness to learn is a choice.” Learning is essential in life. That’s why the Bible gives the simple instruction to “learn” God’s commands and “follow them” multiple times in the book of Deuteronomy (4:1, 10; 5:1; 6:1; 8:1; and 11:1). Jesus gives the same invitation in Matthew 11:29 when He says, "...take up My yoke and learn from Me..." (NIV).

Paul tells us in Romans 15:4, “For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures” (HCSB). Paul also writes in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another...” (NKJV).

Peter also gives us the same simple instruction when he says in 2 Peter 1:19, “So we have the prophetic Word strongly confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to it...” (HCSB). John gives us reassurance when he says in 1 John 5:3, “For this is what love for God is: to keep His commands. Now His commands are not a burden...” (HCSB).
Each of these verses have one important thing in common. The Lord expects His followers to read His Word (learn) and do what it says. The days of the prophets are gone. It’s been about 2,000 years since Jesus walked the earth. Paul, Peter, John and the other disciples have all passed away. When Peter mentions, “...we have the prophetic Word,” he is reminding us that we can personally own a book that is directly from the heart of God. The Lord has made sure we can have His infallible Word, His personal revelation, His instruction for life in our possession so that we may have hope (Romans 15:4, HCSB).

Jesus also mentions in John 14:26, "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (NIV). God has seen to it that we have the Bible plus His Holy Spirit. What more do we need? That’s why He doesn’t hold back when He tells us to "learn" and “follow” His commands.

The Bible not only gives us the simple instruction to learn, but it also provides excellent examples of people who loved learning. All those who gathered near Capernaum to hear Jesus preach were astounded by His message. The Bible says in Matthew 7:28-29, “When Jesus had finished this sermon, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, because He was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes” (HCSB). Also, as the church was in its beginning stages, Scripture tells us that the believers in Acts 2:42, “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers” (HCSB).

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of eager learning is displayed by a woman named Mary. During His ministry, Jesus traveled throughout Galilee. One day He came to a small town named Bethany. In Luke 10:38-39, the Bible records that Jesus "entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord’s feet and was listening to what He said" (HCSB).

Mary found no greater place to be than sitting at the feet of Jesus as He taught. Her entire attention was riveted on their honored guest. There was nothing that would distract her from consuming every word that came off the lips of her Lord. Mary was captivated. Why? She loved Jesus. As a result of that love, her priority was to listen to Christ’s words for the sole purpose of allowing them to rule her thoughts, actions, attitude, speech, etc. (See Luke 11:28.) Mary beautifully modeled the attitude of an eager learner.

How awesome would it be to have churches in North America filled with eager learners like we see in Scripture? People who are "astonished by Christ’s teaching." Parents who "devote themselves to the teaching of God’s Word" and want to “sit at the feet of Jesus." God wants moms and dads who intently want to study the Scriptures,
listen to quality Bible teaching, seek to hear the Lord speak to them through prayer, and authentically do what He says. Wouldn’t it be great to see parents leading their families this way?

For this to occur, there must be a priority shift in parents’ lives. The Bible makes it clear that as born-again believers in Jesus Christ, we are to be learners of Scripture. To be a learner of the Word, a person has to be a reader of the Word. To be a reader of the Word, one has to make reading the Word their priority. When the Word is a believer’s priority they, like Mary, will be captivated by the Savior and want to be imitators of Him (Ephesians 5:1). Why? Because they love Jesus and want to be obedient to Him.

Is this happening in our churches? For many moms and dads, it is. They are in the Word daily and striving to live out God’s Word each day through the power of the Holy Spirit. Their desire is to be eager learners and authentic doers of His Word. They are on fire. As exciting as that is, the sad reality is that the percentage of parents who are in that group is small and seemingly decreasing in size. Thus a second group emerges who have a plethora of shallow rationalizations for why they do not make learning God’s Word a priority.

Is this really a problem? Should there be any concern? When we read books, articles and reports from reputable organizations like the Barna Group, George Gallup and the Pew Report, we get overwhelmed by all their data and percentages. Regrettably, there is a disappointing common thread found in all their research — America is biblically illiterate. As a matter of fact, it could be said the North American church has become biblically anemic and, perhaps, anorexic.

Many Christians are not searching the Scripture for its deep, life-giving truths. There is little to no time spent digging into God’s Word to know Him more intimately. By and large, the people who fill our pews Sunday after Sunday have Bibles they do not read and consequently do not obey. Therefore, those who call themselves believers in Jesus Christ lack power and vitality, and are overall weak in their faith. Here’s a thought: perhaps it’s time to remove the man caves from our homes and replace them with studies instead.

As often as I can, I like to talk to parents and ask them questions about their Bible knowledge, their theology and Scriptural facts. I try to use my conversation to maneuver to the question I really want to ask which is, “How’s your daily time with the Lord?” For the “on fire” group, they always have something good to say. But it’s a different story for those in the group that’s “not on fire” or “stagnant.” I hear a wide variety of reasons, excuses and confessions as to why their intimacy with the Lord is so lacking.

For some people, time is the big issue. They are too busy with family or their job, so therefore Bible reading gets
postponed or squeezed out all together. Others complain that Scripture is not relevant in today’s world (Hebrews 4:12-13), so they spend little to no time in the Word. Some will only read depthless devotionals or selective portions because they see the Bible as too confrontational to their preferred way of life (2 Timothy 3:16).

There are those who neglect reading Scripture all together for the simple fact they are not disciplined (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Then there are others who try to justify their lack of daily Bible reading from the standpoint that Scripture is too hard to understand (John 8:43, 1 Corinthians 2:14). Needless to say, this is not an exhaustive list of excuses given by parents who fight against learning God’s Word. This leads to the question: “Are parents letting the Word dwell in them richly” (Colossians 3:16)? I’d say not enough. We definitely have a problem.

Why do we have a growing number of parents in this “stagnant” group? There are numerous answers that could be given. For instance, things are going so well in America that Christians have dropped their guard. Or, pastors are setting the bar too low by preaching feel good, Christianity-lite messages from their pulpits. Or, parents think salvation is enough, so putting forth the effort to be a learner of God’s Word is not necessary. All these and more are plausible causes.

However, there is one common denominator that lies underneath our current situation that is actually the culprit — parents are not in love with Jesus. The evidence is seen in a single New Testament quote by the Lord Jesus. He said in John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commands” (NIV). It’s important to consider the verb tense of “keep.” It is in the imperative mood. This means the word is an absolute command. No ifs, ands or buts. True love will result in true obedience.

What does complete obedience look like in parents’ lives today? It looks like Mary’s life. It’s moms and dads being fed and challenged by great Bible teachers. They want nothing other than to be taught the Word of God. Complete obedience is seen when parents hear Jesus say in Matthew 11:29, “take up My yoke and learn (imperative mood) from Me” (HCSB), and it fuels their desire to dig deep into the Scriptures. Their study increases their knowledge of the Word and empowers them to authentically live out God’s directives.

Completely obedient parents are Christians who faithfully allow the Word to dwell (imperative mood) in them richly (Colossians 3:16). They let nothing distract them from intentionally letting the Word live in them abundantly every day. If moms and dads would surrender their lives and become completely obedient to the Lord, homes in our culture would transform. Being an eager learner of God’s Word would be the way of life (John 14:21, 23), and the “stagnant” group would cease to exist.
When parents truly love Jesus and His Word, and, as a result, want to obey Scripture, something extraordinary has the potential of taking place in their homes. Moms and dads can be an integral part of their family’s growing faith. Not only that, they can also lay a solid God-centered foundation for future generations. However, there is one piece of the puzzle the Bible says is still remaining. Ephesians 5:18 says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (NIV). Without the filling of the Holy Spirit, parents do not have the ability to love Jesus properly, understand Scripture adequately or obey God’s Word sufficiently.

Next to the new birth, there is nothing more important for Christian parents than to understand the infilling of the Holy Spirit. How can moms and dads in today’s culture be filled? There are three important truths to consider from my mentor Dr. Bill Bennett:

**THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A COMMAND.**

In Ephesians 5:18, “be filled with the Spirit” answers this question. Take note of the following aspects of the command to “be filled.” This command is in the imperative mood. It is not optional. Every believer is commanded to be filled and controlled by the Spirit. The command is plural which means that the command is given to all of us – not just to “super saints” or “spiritual giants.” The command is in the passive voice. This means we do not fill ourselves. The filling comes from an outside source – the Holy Spirit. The command is in the present tense. This means the filling is a repeated event. This truth should make us shake in our boots! It should make the foundations of our souls tremble with fear that to not be filled with the Holy Spirit is a grievous sin.

**THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TAKES GREAT EFFORT.**

*To be filled, there must be a desire to be filled.* Being filled begins with desire. As a good football coach tells his embattled troops at halftime, “Guys, you gotta want to!” Jesus said “If anyone thirst or hunger, he will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6; John 7:37). Does this describe you? Are you thirsty – maybe a little desperate – for a closer walk with God? Do you ever find yourself crying out with the psalmist in Psalm 42:2? “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (NIV). Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit controls you, you will have a hunger and a thirst to know God and grow in Him. Out of this acute, life-defining thirst comes the Spirit-controlled life.

*To be filled, you must denounce all the known sin in your life.* Confession of sin is critical, but denunciation is a step beyond confession. I might confess to a problem with impure thoughts, but what good does that do if I later open my laptop and browse pornographic websites? Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:1, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves...
from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (NIV).

When we come to be filled with the Spirit, we have to cleanse our hearts through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have to say, “God, if there is any sin in my life, if there’s something I’m doing that isn’t pleasing to You, put Your finger on it.” Parents need to say to the Lord as the psalmist does in Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me.” (NIV). In other words, show me where my sins are, Lord, and I will denounce them. I will confess them. I will turn from them.

You can’t be filled with the Holy Spirit while you’re harboring your own little pet sins. Maybe it’s a place to which you go, a relationship in which you’re involved, the types of entertainment you indulge in, or a habit you’ve clung to for years. Regardless, of what it is, it’s something that you know violates God’s standards. You will never be filled with the Spirit of God until you denounce it, confess it and forsake it. The Holy Spirit is not just a title. The Holy Spirit is a person, and He doesn’t enjoy living in an unclean environment. If there is known, unconfessed sin in your life, the Holy Spirit will not take control. The very fact of your sin is evidence that He is not in control.

To be filled, you must die to self. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means you have to die to self (2 Corinthians 4:10), and it requires yielding to His control. It means taking yourself off the throne of your heart and enthroning Jesus. Romans 12:1-2 are absolutely essential verses related to the Spirit-controlled life.
**THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT REQUIRES SURRENDER.**

We’ve probably all encountered individuals who say they have rededicated or recommitted their life to Christ. Perhaps, you’ve even said or done this yourself. A better word is surrender. Surrender is just the opposite of rededication of life or what we call commitment. When we commit to the Lord, we name the terms of our commitment. When we surrender, we let Him set the terms.

The infilling of the Holy Spirit is the control of the Holy Spirit over the believer’s life and occurs when one surrenders his life completely to the control of the Holy Spirit. Luke 5:26 states that the disciples were “filled” with fear, meaning they were controlled or dominated by the emotion of fear. The word “filled” in Luke 5:26 is the same word found in Ephesians 5:18, “Be filled with the Spirit.” While the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs only once, the infilling may occur at a crisis moment, but it continually occurs as one surrenders to the Holy Spirit. Can one lose the infilling? Indeed, they can and often do.

What would a Spirit-filled, God-loving, Bible-learning, obedient parent look like? They would be constantly motivated to be an eager student of the Bible. Their prayer would be powerful. Their testimony would be pure. Sincerity would be in their worship. Their words would be uplifting. Hope and joy would fill their hearts. Thanksgiving would be on their lips. Their authentic integrity would be obvious. Parents would seek unity with others and love sacrificially.


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**REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR THE PASTOR, LEADER OR TEACHER:**

Spirit-filled families are the homes I hope for. Are you encouraging parents to do whatever it takes to be filled with the Holy Spirit so they can be eager learners of the very words He inspired? If so, how?

Every generation will be beneficiaries.
Undeniably, Michael Jordan was the greatest professional basketball player during the late 1980s and 1990s. With a lifetime average of 30.1 points and 5.3 assists per contest, his six NBA championship rings prove MJ was a dominant force on the court. However, an interesting bit of trivia that is hard not to notice is that during his illustrious basketball career, he was never the highest paid player in the NBA.

When asked why he never held out on his contract to force the Chicago Bulls to pay him more money Jordan replied, "I have always honored my word. I went for security. I had six-year contracts, and I always honored them. People said I was underpaid, but when I signed on the dotted line, I gave my word." After his career, several high-profile players demanded contract renegotiations. A reporter asked Jordan if he were still in the game would he stand on his previous decision. Michael quickly stated, "What if my kids saw their dad breaking a promise? How could I continue training them to keep their word?" He went on to say, "You stand by your word, even when that might go against you."
Whenever I hear stories like this I cannot help to connect them to people of the Bible. People in the Old Testament like Joseph, Moses, Hannah, and Daniel, as well as others in the New Testament like Mary, Joseph, Paul, and, of course, Jesus were all known for their integrity. Scripture is not only full of people with integrity but saturated with ways believers can live a pure and blameless life.

One passage that stands out most is found in Philippians 1:9-10. Paul challenges the church at Philippi with the importance of personal and relational integrity. He prayed, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (NIV) (italics added).

There are several words in these verses that need a closer look. Notice how Paul says in Philippians 1:9 that he is praying for the believers’ love to abound in knowledge. The Greek word he uses for knowledge (epignōsis) means to have a deep, advanced understanding of Scripture. It is a keen grasp of Scripture that can only occur when a follower diligently studies (learns) the Bible.

He then mentions he is praying for their depth of insight (aisthēsis). This word refers to the understanding given to believers by the Holy Spirit to rightly apply God’s truth in their lives. It means followers have the supernatural ability to comprehend biblical, moral and spiritual concepts. In other words, they have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Paul goes even deeper as he uses a simple transitional phrase “so that” to move from knowledge and insight to the word discern in Philippians 1:10. Discern (dokimazō) implies that Christ’s followers examine, investigate and study the best ways to obey and please the Lord (Ephesians 5:10) in all they do (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Because of their great love for Christ, believers desire to live at only the highest spiritual levels of maturity. With all their hearts, they are no longer just committed to the Lord, but they are surrendered to Him. Their faith is growing stronger, not weaker. There is such a transformation in their lives, they base their actions, thoughts, attitudes, etc., on God’s Word and not on the whims of their old way of life.

At this point, Paul has set the stage to reveal how this knowledge, insight and discernment are played out in a believer’s life. He begins with the word pure. “Pure” (eilikrinēs) has two possible meanings according to blueletterbible.org. The first meaning is “pure, sincere or unsullied.” The second meaning is “found pure when unfolded and examined by the sun’s light.” Another definition describes pure to mean “without wax.”
In ancient Rome fine pottery was hard to manufacture, thus making it an expensive commodity. For instance, skilled pottery merchants would turn clay on a wheel to shape it into a thin, lightweight, round plate. When the potter was satisfied with his work, it would be kiln dried until cured. Once the firing process was complete, the unblemished finished product would bring the potter a sizable profit. However, there was always the risk of thin pottery developing cracks as it cured. Potters with integrity would simply discard the fractured products and begin again. On the other hand, the more unscrupulous potters would fill the cracks with hard, dark wax to hide the flaws of the piece. Once the plate was glazed or painted the imperfections were concealed and sold as perfect merchandise.

Wise buyers were always cautious when purchasing pottery. They knew to inspect a dealer’s product before buying. The customer would hold the plate up toward the sun to allow light rays to shine through the pottery. If they were able see dark streaks in the piece, they knew the merchant had most likely filled the cracks with wax to cover up defects. This became such a common practice that integrity-minded sellers would stamp their pottery with the Latin words sine cera (without wax) as a guarantee of high quality. Scripture here is plainly saying that believers are to have a sine cera (without wax) inward lifestyle.

Even though our lives are filled with cracks, the Lord urges believers to aspire to live with an inward integrity at all costs. Of course, this idea has a direct connection to John 14:15 where Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commands" (NIV). A "waxless" Christian, even though covered with many flaws, will strive with all his heart to honor the Lord by obeying His commands. His love for Christ compels him to surrender his thoughts, attitudes, desires and all other inward characteristics to live in ways that please his Savior (Ephesians 5:10).

Paul strategically couples the word "blameless" (aproskopos) with the word "pure" for an important reason. Pure carries the idea of an inward integrity, while blameless conveys outward integrity. Blameless, as defined by blueletterbible.org, means, "having nothing to strike against, not causing to stumble, and, not leading others to sin by one’s mode of life." Blameless implies that believers are not to succumb to sinful conduct. Their goal is to spur others on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

Blameless followers live with a clear conscience (2 Timothy 1:3). Their hearts go out to those who do not know the Lord so they are never interested in pleasing themselves. They would rather seek out the good of others (1 Corinthians 10:33) to hopefully lead them to Christ. Blameless believers never lead people astray with their words or actions. They would never want to cause anyone to stumble or fall. Along with Paul, believers would say, "Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with
integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God’s grace” (2 Corinthians 1:12, NIV).2

When pure and blameless are combined in this context, the Lord is instructing all believers to live with inward integrity before the Lord and have external integrity before man. Is this at all possible for Christians to accomplish in their own strength? No. Fortunately, God has sent His Spirit to indwell and fill followers of Christ because we are hopeless without Him. Therefore, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are more than capable of living a pure and blameless life.

It is becoming more and more evident that our world needs Christians to be more influential in their workplaces, schools and communities. Without a doubt, the church can be the one place that teaches about living a pure and blameless life. Church leaders have the opportunity to hold their members accountable to these standards so they can grow spiritually mature.

Paul addresses this subject in Ephesians 4:11-13 when he writes, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (NIV). The Bible is clear that the church is only part of the maturing process.

Moses, on the other hand, says in Deuteronomy 6:7, “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” (NIV). True followers of Christ need to eagerly learn God’s Word through their own personal study, devote themselves to a church where the Bible is properly taught, then live out their pure and blameless lifestyle in the workplace, school and especially in the home. There is no greater place to model how to live a pure and blameless life than with the people you are with the most — your family. This is a critical truth for parents.

Do moms and dads understand the importance of "impressing" God’s commands on the lives of their children? Some do. But based on the current cultural landscape, there is cause to believe many do not. We are in a cultural crisis when it comes to people living a pure and blameless life. There are countless reasons for this deficiency in our world today. But one of the main causes for our cultural demise is the lack of integrity in the home. Parents are living unrighteous lives and are oblivious to the short-term and long-term effects it has on their children. What causes this? I believe parents grossly underestimate the influence they have in the lives of their kids, especially when it comes to area of religion.
Way, way back in 1967 — (I know you don’t remember) — but television stations were required by law to run one anti-smoking commercial for every three cigarette commercials. One of the anti-smoking commercials begins with a father painting his home on top of a ladder that’s leaning against his house. The camera slowly pans downward to show his young son painting away just like his dad on a much smaller ladder also leaning against the house. As the father-and-son team work on their project together, a voice-over announcer makes the statement, “Like father, like son.”

The next scene shows the father and son duo driving down the street in their Ford Mustang convertible — with the dad behind the wheel and his son safely beside him in the customized car seat, complete with his own steering wheel. As they approach an intersection, the father puts his arm out of the window to signal to other drivers that he is about to make a left turn. Without hesitation, the son quickly copies his dad’s hand signal and makes the same gesture outside his window.

Next we see the father-son pair giving their Mustang a bath. In the background, the dad has a rag in one hand and a hosepipe in the other. The father is washing and rinsing the driver’s side front fender. In the foreground, the son is stooped low beside the passenger’s side front tire. Just like dad, the son is working hard on the tire with his sponge for cleaning and a squirt gun for rinsing. As the two enjoy working together, the boy playfully pops up from his squatted position and surprises the dad by shooting him with his squirt gun.

As the commercial continues, the father-and-son twosome are together taking a leisurely walk in their neighborhood. The dad sees a rock, bends down, picks up the rock and tosses it into some woods. Just like his father, the son also finds a rock and throws it into the same patch of woods.

The commercial’s final scene has the tired father-and-son pair sitting next
to a tree, resting from their busy day of activities. The father reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out a pack of cigarettes. He takes out a cigarette, lays down the pack beside his son, puts the cigarette to his lips, strikes a match and lights it while his son quietly sits beside him observing his every move.

As expected, the son looks down at the pack of cigarettes, picks it up, and curiously looks into the pack as if to mimic what he has just seen his father do. As the boy examines the cigarette pack, this time the voice-over announcer asks a question, “Like father, like son? Think about it!”

This 1960s commercial is unbelievably accurate regarding the copycat nature of children. It is amazing how much influence parents have on their kids. This advertisement depicts the truth that children can and will imitate the things they see and hear, especially when displayed by their parents. Now my question is simply this: what do your kids see and hear from you that they imitate? It is probably more than you think.

More times than not, children do what they see their parents do. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," and "a chip off the old block" are very true
sayings. These illustrate the incredible comparisons between parents and their children. There are numerous similarities in looks, demeanors and inclinations that can be uncanny.

From a spiritual standpoint, however, it is astonishing to see the parallels in the parents’ spiritual maturity levels and that of their children. In his book, Parenting with Kingdom Purpose, Ken Hemphill drove home this point when he said, "Most parents who want to know where their kids are headed religiously just need to look in the mirror."3 In many cases, the spiritual levels of the parents and their kids are remarkably related.

God has deliberately placed each child in the lives of their parents. There is no mistake. His goal is for moms and dads to prepare them to live out each day with integrity to honor Him. Discipleship with every child begins at home. God’s design is to have every child living with the most influential people in their lives to constantly talk with them concerning God, help them properly think about God and show them how to carefully obey God. In the end, parents are ultimately responsible for preparing them for eternity. Let that sink in! Therefore, if children, especially teenagers, are ever going to experience a healthy relationship with the Lord, they need moms and dads striving to live inwardly pure and outwardly blameless lives of integrity.

Needless to say, this is a serious matter. Parents can ill afford to take living a life of integrity for granted. They must faithfully be eager learners of the Word of God and deliberately live it out with consistency. Why? Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research observed, "Students are experts at noticing inconsistencies between what parents say and do."4 It is easy for parents to talk the talk, but the real issue comes down to whether they can walk the walk.

Norma Schmidt is a parent, a hospice chaplain and a parenting workshop leader with a master's degree in special education. She has stated, "My mother had put her finger on an essential truth: Kids absorb the values they see adults putting into action. Ever notice how quickly kids spot any inconsistency between what we say and what we do? Long before kids can spell 'hypocrisy,' they notice when our actions fall short of our words."4 Author Robert Fulghum adds, “Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.” Kids need to see us “walking the talk.”5

In fact, we teach kids best when we practice being what we want to see in them. Parents need to understand that hypocrisy is a serious issue. Nothing undermines a mom and dad’s efforts in training their children in righteousness than when their actions and God’s Word do not match up.

Author John Maxwell put it another way when he said, "we teach what we know, we reproduce what we are."6 By and large, what parents think about subjects, what they say concerning issues and how they respond to
Integrity is a critical issue in our culture today. Our homes need moms and dads living an authentic life now more than ever. We will never be perfect, but it should be our heart’s desire to live with godly integrity.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR THE PASTOR, LEADER OR TEACHER:

Integrity is a critical issue in our culture today. Our homes need moms and dads living an authentic life now more than ever. We will never be perfect, but it should be our heart’s desire to live with godly integrity.

Are you teaching how to live a pure and blameless life to your congregation?

Are you striving to live it yourself first?
CHAPTER 4

INTENTIONAL TEACHERS (Part 1)

Not too many years ago I was standing outside the church’s student center welcoming teenagers and their friends to our Wednesday night youth event. I always tried to greet each teen as he or she came into the building.

One night, two dads walked into the student center each with his teenager in tow. Without hesitation, I greeted the fathers and their children. We engaged in some small talk, and they went inside the building. It was refreshing to see these men leading their kids to church on a Wednesday night. I remember the thought running through my mind that these men were being great examples to their teens.

Ten minutes later, as I was still welcoming arriving students, the same two dads walked past me on their way to the parking lot. This time they didn’t stop to chat. As they walked past me, I overheard one of them say, “We’ve got an hour; want to go get something to drink?” My earlier warm thoughts and feelings drained right out of me! I was speechless!

As I watched them get into a car and pull out of the parking lot, several questions ran through my mind. Why were these fathers...
dropping off their teens and then leaving? Why were they not staying? We had adult programs running at the same time that we had our youth event. Why didn’t they go to one of those? Needless to say, I felt reduced from being a youth pastor to a babysitter.

After that night, I knew there was something wrong, but I wasn’t exactly sure what it was. Over the course of several days and weeks, I went to Scripture in search of the answer. After pouring through numerous passages, the Lord showed me a single verse. Nestled just after the Shema, the Lord describes and defines His perfect plan for parents and their families. The Lord says through Moses, “Impress them on your children.” This may appear to be a simple phrase with little meaning but don’t let it fool you. It speaks incredible volumes.

The New International Version translates the first word of Deuteronomy 6:7 as “impress.” Other Bible translations render the beginning of the verse as “repeat them” (HCSB), “repeat them again and again” (NLT), and “teach them diligently” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV). In the original Hebrew language, the root word is actually shanan (שָׁנַן), which means “to teach and to sharpen.” However, what makes shanan such a unique and poignant word in this text is how the Lord led Moses to use it grammatically. Just before Israel was to leave the desert and enter into the Promised Land, their determined leader pronounced shanan (שָׁנַן) with the “piel” stem.

Now before you start yawning and your eyes glaze over with sheer boredom from this Hebrew lesson, hang in there with me for just a few minutes. There is a method to this madness. The reason I bring up all these seemingly insignificant details is because there is great beauty and power in what seems to be meaningless.

Moses is not the only one the Holy Spirit led to use the word shanan in Scripture. Solomon, Isaiah, David and other psalmists use the verb shanan in their writings. But Moses, in Deuteronomy 6:7, is the only one in the entire Bible who uses this word in the “piel” form. When any verb has a “piel” stem, the word has an intensive or intentional action. For instance, the phrase “he broke the glass” when spoken in the “piel” voice literally means “he smashed the glass to pieces.”

When the root word shanan, which means to teach and to sharpen, is combined with the intensity of the “piel” verb form, this important word takes on a special meaning for parents. What we find is God instructing parents to intensively teach their children His perfect and infallible Word. God instructs moms and dads to intentionally sharpen their kids with Scripture for all of life’s challenges. Moses pulls no punches with this word. He emphasizes the importance of parents being proactive as they
prepare their children to encounter each day equipped with the principles of God’s Word.

Moses expounds on the word shanan in the remaining portion of verse seven to take the verb to a deeper level. With the idea of parents intensively teaching and intentionally sharpening their children with the Word of God, the frequency of their teaching and sharpening is also crucial.

Just after Moses tells us to “impress” God’s Word into the lives of our children, he gives instruction on how to actually make that happen within the rhythm of each day. He says in Deuteronomy 6:7b, “Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (NIV). What is God’s prophet talking about? Simply, as the primary disciplers, the Lord has given moms and dads the privilege and responsibility to intentionally engage their children daily in something known as faith talks and God moments.

Faith talks are those times throughout the day parents can intentionally discuss an aspect of Scripture the Lord is using in their lives or in the life of their child. One example is having a conversation about the pastor’s Sunday morning sermon during lunch. Helping children apply the points of the message to their lives at school and while they are with their friends will allow them to connect the Bible to everyday life.

Another way to intentionally discuss Scripture is while parents are putting their children to bed. When moms and dads are eager learners of God’s Word, they will be able to share from their own study what the Lord is teaching them. With simple questions, moms and dads can help their kids process the activities in their lives from a biblical perspective.

Faith talks can be devotions parents have with their kids at breakfast before everyone heads off for the day. There are countless ways to have faith talks. Object lessons, upcoming holidays, special events and more can provide great opportunities to talk about the Lord. But the key to faith talks is they need to be intentional and take place in the rhythm of each day.

The objective of faith talks is for moms and dads to frequently, strategically and purposefully have discussions about God’s Word with those precious gifts the Lord has entrusted to them. However, there is one important aspect of the faith talk strategy I need to mention. Disciple-making parents need to regularly use faith talks on simple topics to help them segue into more in-depth topics and harder teachings of God’s Word. In other words, parents need to connect with their kids on basic issues so they can connect with them on deeper levels. Why? Children need to be constantly prepared for the intense battles they face outside of the home each and every day.

Keep in mind, the overarching goal of faith talks is to help kids be more firmly rooted in their faith. The writer of
Hebrews puts it best when he says, “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:13-14, NIV).

Faith talks need to be well thought out, practical, biblically based and relevant concepts related to today’s tough life issues. They need to be interwoven with basic as well as deep biblical concepts to better develop each child spiritually. But most importantly, they need to be done consistently.

Not only are faith talks an important component in making long-lasting disciples of children, but also taking advantage of God moments are vital, as well. Like faith talks, God moments are for the sole purpose of leading children into a deeper love relationship with God the Father. However, the difference between a faith talk and a God moment lies in the fact that it cannot be planned. The frequency of a God moment does not depend on the parent. The God moment occurs when the Lord decides.

Usually out of nowhere, God shows up and then shows off. He just happens to be where you are in an unexpected way at an unexpected time. He shows up in a phone call from the doctor. He shows up in a breaking news report. He shows up in the grandeur of a mountain landscape. He shows up in a random act of kindness.

God moments are times when moms and dads are driving down the road and something comes on the radio that could be used to spark a spiritual conversation. Parents could talk about the lyrics of the last song that was played on the radio and discuss how the message of the song promotes or discredits Christlike living. It is in those moments that the Lord is giving parents a unique opportunity to see Him from a different perspective and give them the opportunity to talk about Him in a new way.

Without a doubt, these are special glimpses with which the Lord blesses us. However, they come with a warning. They can be easily missed. When our schedules are overloaded, when we’re too busy, when we’re pre-occupied with our own needs or when we are unfocused spiritually, God can be right in front of us and we will not even see Him. We can be blinded. That’s why it is so important for pastors, leaders, teachers and especially parents to have margin in their lives.

Parents’ eyes and hearts need to be trained to see and anticipate the daily movement of God in and around their lives. When they expectantly keep themselves attuned to the Lord’s interaction in their own lives through prayer and Bible study, He will show
Himself in some unbelievable, unforgettable and teachable moments. These are the moments that bring hope to our families.

In wartime, a soldier would prepare himself for combat in many ways. One of the ways he made himself ready was to inspect his equipment to ensure each piece was in perfect condition to give him the greatest chance of victory. Before going into battle, the soldier would take a sharpening stone to hone the blade of his sword. He would carefully place the surface of the stone on one side of the blade and repeatedly stroke that side of his blade. Then he would repeat the process on the opposite side.

Intensively and intentionally the soldier would work on his weapon, alternating from one side to the other, until his blade was razor sharp and ready for battle.

After the soldier returned from battle, he would inspect and clean his equipment again. To prepare for the next altercation, he would take his sword and meticulously repeat the honing process to have his saber ready for the next encounter. Sharpening takes a great deal of time, but every second proves to be well worth the repetitious effort.

Like sharpening a sword, when parents regularly have biblically-based faith talks and take advantage of God
moments, their children will be sharper and better able to stand against the onslaught of the world’s battles. Sharpening children may take a lot of time and a great deal of intentionality on the part of parents, but the blessings and rewards of raising kids who are in love with the Lord and not in love with the world are endless.

When you have discussions with parents on these ideas, some will ask, “How can busy parents be obedient to the Lord and, at the same time, pass along their faith to their children?” When you look into the Hebrew language and do an in depth study of the nuances of the word shanan, we see the Bible’s instruction to parents more clearly. Moses’ special use of shanan is a specific instruction to parents to make discipleship a natural part of their lifestyle. The answer comes back to one simple idea: intentional disciple-making in the rhythm of each day.

I have found that moms and dads always have enough time for the things they have to do. They will even make time to do the things they like to do. But I have found everyone has to be intentional to do the things that are hard to do. Teaching kids spiritual truths can feel like a daunting task. There are always obstacles. The road is never easy. It requires parents to have guts. However, as long as God is on the throne, you will have more than enough power through the Holy Spirit to get the job done. When dedicated and determined parents intentionally give of themselves to instruct and hone their children with God's Word, nothing will compare to the benefits. The rewards that moms and dads will receive are eternal. Never stop sharpening your children because their life (both temporal and eternal) depends on it.

Would you like to hear the parents of your congregation sharing with you how faith talks and God moments have transformed their homes?

If you would like to learn more about training the parents of your church to have regular faith talks and be ready for God moments with their children, contact Mark Smith at the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina by phone at (800) 395-5102 x5647 or by email at msmith@ncbaptist.org.
CHAPTER 5
Zach Bumgarner was a former student in my youth ministry. During high school, he was a three-sport letterman in football, basketball and baseball. By his sophomore year, Zach was making his presence known as a starter on the varsity football team. After graduation, Zach received a scholarship to play football at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. At 6 feet 4 inches tall and 268 pounds, he was quickly positioned on the offensive line. Zach is a beast.

Periodically, I try to catch up with Zach to see how the team is doing, what his classes are like and what the Lord is doing in his life. Without fail, our conversations about the team and school go quickly. We spend the majority of our time talking about what God is doing in and through his life. What a praise!

One day, I was doing some Scripture reading on the “teach” aspect of the “learn-do-teach” methodology. My study was focused on how parents can help their children learn God’s Word. As I meditated on different passages, the Lord gave me an idea on how to best communicate and illustrate this important concept. I quickly realized this analogy would help moms and
dads better understand the essence of being a disciple-making parent.

Before I took my next breath, I was thumbing through the contact list on my phone to find Zach's number. I had a burning question that needed to be answered. He was barely able to get the words "Hey Mark" out of his mouth before I interrupted him and asked, "How does your coach teach your football team new plays?" I know for Zach this was an abrupt beginning to the normal protocol of our conversations, but this was urgent.

Zach was gracious and without hesitation began to answer. He described how his coach will take a notepad, scratch paper or a napkin to design a new offensive play. He draws a rough sketch of the play with the traditional X's and O's, full of lines and arrows. The X's and O's show where each player is to be positioned on the field, and the lines and arrows describe blocking assignments or what direction a player is to run. Every mark on the page has a purpose.

The coach gathers the offensive team together in a classroom and takes them through four important steps to get them ready for game day. His first step is to distribute the well-crafted play (a final draft) to each member of the offense. The coach discusses how the play works, what situation it needs to be run in, what defense it would work best against, etc. His goal is to thoroughly explain the play until his players have a solid grasp of how it works. The coach is insistent that the players be as knowledgeable of the play as he is. After class, they are expected to study and memorize the coach’s design, just as they have memorized all the other previously introduced plays.

After each player understands their responsibility and how to execute the play properly, they go out to the practice field for the second step. The offensive unit lines up in their positions and does what is called a "walk-through." Each player stands in his designated spot and simply walks to the proper location prescribed by the play. The players are so proficient, you would think the coach had drawn the lines and arrows on the grass. This is the second most critical point in the process. The team is now taking the playbook and putting it into motion, but in the safe confines of their private practice facility. When all the players have been sufficiently drilled and the coach is satisfied with their performance, he has the offense put on their practice uniform for the third step. This is the most critical part of the practice.

Fully dressed with pads and helmets, the coach has his offensive players set up to run their new play. This time, however, they are faced by the defensive unit. They run the play half speed, three-quarter speed and then full speed until they have worked out all the kinks and can execute the play to perfection. The coach has his
team run and rerun the same play because repetition is the key. The coach isn’t satisfied until his team has studied the playbook, done a walk through and flawlessly run the play in a mock situation. After the offense has mastered the play, the team is now ready to implement their new weapon when the opportunity presents itself in an upcoming game.

Zach went on to mention a fourth part of their process — accountability. He told me that there are points during the game when either the offense is off the field or during halftime when the coach can make any necessary adjustments (or chastise a player). After their contest, the team gets the chance to watch game film the following week to critique all their plays and learn where they need to improve.

I could not believe what I was hearing. It was fascinating to hear Zach describe how his coach prepared the team to run new plays for a football game. But what really blew me away was how this approach can be implemented by parents in their homes. The principles are the same. Zach laid out an excellent model for moms and dads to follow in their efforts to intentionally disciple their children.

The coach used the two methods of teaching that Moses describes in the book of Deuteronomy. It’s easy to see the first method he used. As you recall from chapter four, the Hebrew word shanan means to intensively and intentionally teach in a repetitious way. The coach employed the shanan teaching style to introduce his offense to their new play. In the classroom, the coach would draw and redraw the play on the marker board to teach his players his new offensive strategy.

In their personal study time, the players would commit the play to memory for later use in practice and on game day. On the practice field, they would run and rerun the play until it was perfectly executed. Repetition was one of the key ingredients he used to teach his team. Understandably, this technique made the new play become second nature to the team.

However, did you also notice the second method the coach used to help his players learn the new play? He knew his players gather information in one of three basic ways — visually, auditorily, or kinesthetically. He used these three methods to teach his team. Educators refer to these three primary ways of learning as learning styles. Moses, on the other hand, calls this the lamad teaching style.

Deuteronomy 11:19 says, “Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (NIV). Much like shanan, the word “teach” in this verse has a special meaning. Moses used the Hebrew word lamad with the “piel” stem to intensify and give it an intentional action. As you remember from chapter four, the phrase “he broke the glass” when spoken in the “piel” voice literally means “he smashed the glass to
pieces." When you combine the root word lamad, to teach with the intensity of the "piel" verb form, the definition of "teach" becomes "to cause to learn."

The phrase "to cause to learn" leaves us with a question. How do you cause someone to learn? There is only one way to discover the answer to this puzzling question — the Bible. King Solomon gave us some fatherly advice to consider in Scripture. The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6, KJV).

"Train" in the original Hebrew language is chanak. According to pastor David Jeremiah, this word has a unique meaning. He said, "An Arab midwife would rub crushed dates on the palate of a baby's mouth to stimulate the instinctive action to suck, so that the child could be nourished. Over time the concept of training up came to mean 'to create a thirst or a hunger within a child for the godly things of life.'"¹

The phrase translated "in the way" is the Hebrew word derek. In his book, Parenting: From Surviving to Thriving, pastor and author Chuck Swindoll gives excellent insight into the word derek. Swindoll writes, "One visual image associated with derek is that of an archer's bow, which has a natural curvature to it... Each child, like a bow, comes with a shape, or a bent, that is natural to him or her. If a bow is to be useful, it cannot remain in its natural, relaxed state. An archer must work with the bow's characteristic curvature, so he can bend the wood in the right direction, and string it so that it might become a source of power."²

Each person has a unique coding that enables him or her to learn. It was evident that Zach's coach understood this principle well. Did you catch how the coach handed out a diagram of the play drawn on a piece of paper? Did you also notice how the coach used the marker board in the classroom? These tactics were strategically aimed at his visual learners. When a visual learner can see the X's, O's and arrows illustrated on paper or whiteboard, their comprehension level increases.

Did you also note how the coach also had a meeting with the team to talk about how the play works, what situation it needs to be run in, what defense it would work best against, etc.? Most likely there was a two-way exchange allowing the players to discuss and ask the coach questions. For an auditory learner, this brings learning to life. Not only was there a visual aspect to the teaching time, but the coach also utilized verbal communication.

After the notebooks were closed and the classroom time was complete, it was time to put the play into motion. Perhaps this was the most important component of the teaching process for the kinesthetic learners. The coach physically engaged the team in walk-throughs. After the walk-throughs, he
slowly worked them up to running the play at full speed. This is a beautiful picture of the lamad style of teaching in action and what it looks like to cause someone to learn.

Like the coach, parents should consider using Moses’ two teaching approaches. The coach was intentional, intensive and repetitive. Parents can do the same. He also studied his players’ natural makeup, tendencies and habits of learning. Moms and dads can easily follow the coach’s example in this area, as well. By tapping into both the shanan and lamad styles of teaching, the coach was able to customize a strategy to get his team better prepared to win on game day. Parents who adopt this strategy will find disciple-making in the home attainable, natural and fulfilling. An investment on this level will give children the biblical foundation they need to thrive and conquer each day.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR THE PASTOR, LEADER OR TEACHER:**

With all the new ideas, Hebrew words, and illustrations flying around, it seems obvious to stop and ask a few questions:

- Does it seem like every day gets more challenging for Christians?
- Does today appear more filled with temptation than yesterday?
- Are children today living in a world that is darker than the one their parents grew up in?
- How well do you think parents are preparing their children for game day?

Perhaps the wrong questions are being asked. Instead of asking how well are moms and dads preparing their kids for game day, maybe we need to ask this question:

- How well is the church equipping the parents (Ephesians 4:11-12) to be the primary disciple-makers of their homes?

Now the tough question is, are you willing to educate your parents on how to teach their children by using the shanan and lamad teaching styles? Not only does the next generation need you but every generation needs you.
EPILOGUE

PLANTING TAMARISK TREES

“Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.” — Genesis 21:33 (NIV)

Abraham lived an extraordinary life. Oftentimes, the simple words of Genesis 21:33 get lost between the captivating narrative of Abraham’s oath with Philistine leaders in Genesis 21 and the greatest test any father could endure in Genesis 22.

What seems out of place — Abraham planting a tamarisk tree in the harsh, dry conditions of the Negev desert — is actually an exclamation point in the text. This act is Abraham’s declaration to future generations that he is making an investment in their lives.

Despite severe desert conditions, the tamarisk tree survives with minimal water. It grows slowly, taking decades to mature. Over time, the tree is able to produce shade, the most precious commodity in any hot, sun-drenched land.

So why did this 100-year-old man plant a tree that takes so long to become useful? Simple. He was not planting it for himself. Abraham planted the tamarisk tree for generations to come.
The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina's Faith at Home Ministry was created to help churches lead families to plant tamarisk trees. Faith at Home works alongside pastors, staff and church leaders to assist in developing a family disciple-making strategy based on God's Word.

The goal is to encourage parents to be eager learners of the Bible, authentic doers of His commands and intentional teachers of Scripture to their children. We would love the opportunity to partner with you and your church to make Faith at Home a reality in your congregation. Simply contact:

Mark Smith, D.Min.
Senior Consultant, Family Evangelism and Discipleship
Baptist State Convention of North Carolina
205 Convention Drive, Cary, NC 27511

Office: (919) 459-5647 or (800) 395-5102 ext. 5647
Email: msmith@ncbaptist.org
www.FaithAtHomeNC.org
Facebook & Twitter: FaithAtHomeNC

When churches refocus their ministries from this perspective, parents discover new ways to be disciple-makers of their children in the natural rhythm of their daily lives. Lives can be changed in extraordinary ways when families apply this approach to the children God has entrusted to them.
INTRODUCTION

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