

Disciple Your Kids:

Raising Radical Followers of JESUS

DiscipleYourKids.NET

Young & Rebekah Le

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SUMMARY

It is ultimately God's work!

THANK YOU

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Disciple Your Kids/Children: Raising Radical Followers of JESUS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Rebekah Le is a nurse in Houston, TX. Born in Vietnam, she escaped on a boat and came to the US. Coming from a Godly family, she grew up in church. While doing ministry and attending nursing school, she met Young. She has been a nurse for 25 years. When not in the hospital, she serves in church and lives to share Jesus. She holds an MA in Church Leadership.

Young Le is a Pastor in Houston, TX. Born in Vietnam, he came to this country as a teenager. By God's grace, he put his faith in Jesus Christ while in engineering school. After finishing a 25 year career with OSHA, he now does ministry fulltime. He has earned an MA in Pastoral Ministry from Lancaster Bible College Graduate School. His dream is to make Disciples of Christ who, in turn, make other disciples.



DEDICATION:

This book is dedicated to the love of my life, Rebekah Marie Le. You are the greatest wife, mother, and ministry partner I could have ever imagined. Thank you for co-writing this book. I am thankful that God also allowed us to raise three incredibly gifted and Godly men. I want to express my gratitude to Editor Krissy Risser for her advice and assistance in this manuscript.

ENDORSEMENTS:

Pastor Young Le has a remarkable zeal for edifying children towards becoming disciples. He has been awakening believers to become radical followers of Jesus for the last 20 years. Through his ministries, many young students' lives have been transformed into a life of Christ-like discipleship, a life glorifying to God. Throughout their 20 years of practice, discovery, and learning, Pastor Young Le and his wife, Rebekah Le, have encompassed their experiences in this pivotal book *Disciple Your Kids: Raising Radical Followers of Jesus*.

They challenge Christian parents to instill a legacy of faith for the generations to come. Today, our younger generations are facing the ever-present threats of secularism. This book suggests simple, yet powerful ways to train our children to be faithful children of God. I strongly recommend it to every Christian parent who desires to raise their children to be Christ-centered, gospel-focused radical followers of Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Hyoung Min Kim Asian Ethnic Groups
Facilitator Southern Baptists of Texas Convention

Rev. Young Le loves discipleship, and especially has compassion in helping others make disciples of Jesus. In *Disciple Your Kids* and in any conversations with him, he always mentions discipleship, making as many disciples as possible for the Kingdom—starting with your own children. With solid study and insights, this book will be very helpful for parents or anyone who desires to disciple children for Christ.

Rev. Jacob Ngoc-Trien Vo
President of Vietnamese Baptist Men's Associations of
North America

As we travel around the world, the glaring element missing in the church today is making disciples. As Pastor Young Le states so well in his book, the Church is missing the mark by parents not making disciples of our children. Many of you have heard about the 10/40 window. There is another window called the 4/14 window. More

people trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior between the ages of 4 and 14 than any other age group. In other words, people are more open to the gospel during these ages. We are living examples of followers of Jesus Christ. But what example are we showing? What message are we preaching by our lives to our children? As Pastor Young Le states, our discipleship of our children must be intentional and must be a focus of our parenting, not outsourcing it to the church leaders. Discipleship is a process whereby we intentionally guide our children through the process of learning Christ and living out Christ through our words and our lives.

Dr. David Nelson President of Crossing Cultures International <http://www.crossingculturesint.org>

I find the teachings from Young and Rebekah Le to be very instrumental. Having worked with youth and young adults for over 20 years, I find that they hunger for a deeper relationship with their parents. Parents discipling their kids is important and **needed!**

Ken Kong, Director, Southeast Asian Catalyst and Southeast Asian Minsitries
The Navigators. <http://seacleaders.com/>

There are few books other than the Bible that can have a lasting impact on one's life; however, this book is one of them. Shedding light on how discipling our children is not an optional, peripheral issue to be delegated to others, it emphasizes that this is the expectation of every Christian parent. The book is not just a commentary on society though, it goes on to give practical, wisdom-based, biblical examples of how to fulfill this component of the larger Great Commission, and how this was put into practice in the authors' lives as they disciplined their own three children.

Krissy Risser, Editor of "Disciple Your Kids"

This book is a must have. Discipling your kids is the only way for your children to own their own faith. I highly recommend this book if raising

godly children is important to you.

Laura Funk, Life-long friend

Parents need to be aware of the current world view of this generation and wake up. Be alert and prepare our kids for the spiritual battle they are in every day! The war is on! This book has some great insights and practical helps in equipping and training parents so they can effectively disciple their children in the midst of the daily battle of life. We whole- heartedly agree that it is not enough to send our kids to church. We, the parents, in our God-given authority, must be engaged! Discipling our children is hard- work, but well worth the effort!! The rewards are for all eternity!

Thanks for sharing and may the book be used for God's glory. We feel blessed to know you both and you have been a godly example to us and many on what it means to invest in the lives of our children and take the discipleship of our kids seriously. After all, their souls are at risk!

Don and Tabitha Nguyen, MD and Missionary to Cambodia

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, we have discipled many young people. Now, they are married and having kids of their own. It is my intention to come along side these young families to convince them to intentionally disciple their kids as they live out God's mission for their lives.

Disclaimers:

On Parenting

This is not a book on parenting. This is not a theological book on parenting. This book is our story. It details our convictions, our methods, and our journey. My hope is that it will start discussions.

On Marriage

This is not a book on marriage. A marriage that honors God and follows the biblical ideal of oneness is essential to disciple Godly children. Unfortunately, it is too large a topic for a single volume. Without a biblical marriage, this advice will not be very helpful. If your marriage is struggling, then parenting problems are a symptom. You need to address your marriage first.

On My Family

We are not an extraordinary family. We have many flaws & I hope that you do not get the wrong impression of my family. This book will fail to adequately portray our faults, but we still hope that the details of our successes will be useful.

On Broken Homes

This is not a book on single parenting or parenting a home where one parent is a nonbeliever. Those situations are unique and advice has to be tailored to the situation. In the future, I may write another book to address how the church can come alongside these families.

On Generalities

The world is a great deal more complicated than I can convey. For the sake of brevity, I generalize about the world we live in. There is a great deal of more nuances to the

story than I have time to detail. If I have the time, I will footnote to temper my writing. Please forgive me for this weakness.

Purpose:

As you read this book, reflect on your calling and reflect on your children. Consider how you will take the necessary sacrifices to radically disciple your children.

Radically Discipling your Children requires:

- Choosing a Legacy
- Developing a Strategy
- Making Sacrifices
- Investing Time

Definitions:

I recognize that everyone has a different background. Therefore, I have defined certain essential terms.

The Church-

The church usually refers to the Universal church of all saved Christians past, present, and future. In this book, it refers to the visible local church.

Discipleship-

Training someone to be like Jesus in everyday life; a lifelong unfinishable transformation from sinner to saint that occurs in the life of every believer.

See Matthew 28:18-20 (Jesus provides explicit instructions for all Christians)

See Deuteronomy 6¹ (God's parenting guide; how Jesus was likely raised²)

¹ Ultimately, we are living in New Testament time. However, God gave these instructions to parents of a people He set aside as holy. While not everything in the OT is prescriptive, it can be very helpful.

² Textually, there is no direct proof of this. However, we infer that since Joseph was a "just man" (Mat. 1:20) that he also raised Jesus according to God's Word.

CHAPTER I: WHY DISCIPLE YOUR CHILDREN?

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We are losing the battle for the souls of our children

We are losing the battle for the souls of our children.³ Everywhere I look I hear of kids who have grown up as “Christians” that have gone bad. Katy Perry’s first album was filled with gospel music. Now, she has transformed her image and used her sexuality to sell albums. Her parents were both pastors. Justin Bieber’s mother chose against aborting him because she was pro-life. He professes to be a Christian, yet his life is tabloid fodder. Marcus Mumford, the namesake of Mumford and Sons, was raised by national leaders of the Vineyard Church in the United Kingdom and Ireland. One of his hit songs repeatedly uses the “f-word.” He says, “I wouldn’t call myself a Christian.”

Ironically, the fastest growing religious group is not a religious group at all. This segment is labeled the “nones.” These are young people who have dramatically rejected any official religious label. On the surface, it might be easy to sympathize. Christians have a bad reputation and perhaps these young people do love God, but are eschewing the bad press. However, Jesus has none of that. He says, “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my father in heaven.”⁴ Maybe they are unaware and maybe they are poorly taught, but those who choose not to acknowledge Jesus Christ are courting eternal life without God and within Hell. Allegiance to Jesus Christ is costly and the rise of the “nones” is a sign that our children are falling away!

³ Can God lose? No, if he chose someone, there is no way he would fail. However, I believe that Christians are failing in their responsibilities to make disciples among their children. In the end, God wins. However, as 21st century American Christians, we are failing.

⁴ Matthew 10:32, Luke 12:8

The Barna group reports that 59% of young people will leave the church. The same church Jesus declared that “the gates of hell will not prevail against it!” Imagine that for a second. Think of the last youth event you attended. More than half of those kids, the ones singing and raising their hands at Jesus’ name will, essentially, walk out the back of the auditorium and not be coming back next Sunday. Imagine your own family, you have two children and one of them will not know the love of God. Let me offer a caveat: church attendance does not equal salvation. At the same time however, the church was founded by Jesus Christ and is the vehicle through which the world is being saved. How can a follower of Jesus Christ not be part of the body of Christ?

For twenty years my wife and I have been in youth ministry and have seen countless young people fall away. We started out as middle and high school group leaders. We drove the kids between events and shared our lives with them. Eventually, I served as a Youth Director and became the Elder overseeing the youth ministry. The exodus is real. Of the ones who stay, most are merely religious. While they are in name Christian, their lives do not reflect the supernatural sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. In the words of James, their faith is “dead.” In our twenty years, we have seen children who were brought to service as newborns, raised in the nursery, taken on mission trips, and leaders in youth group, walk away. We tried everything. We orchestrated events. We held Bible studies. We preached as loud as our throats could bear. Yet, they rushed the door and left.

Make no mistake about it. The “silent” exodus is the norm.

Make no mistake about it. The “silent” exodus is the norm all across American

Christendom. Across every denomination, liberal or conservative, the same story is playing out. A Korean pastor told me the same thing is happening in their churches back home. This is an emergency! As a Christian parent, you should be frightened. Whether you like it or not, you're children are like the talents that were handed out to the servants. One day, the great King will ask for an accounting. This is more important than your career. This is more important than your house. This is more important than your ministry. Let me remind you, your first priority is JESUS and your family is second.

The culture has already made a huge shift.

The culture has already made a huge shift. We are living in a post-Christian world. For the rest of your life, you will be pushing against the grain of this world. At the center of these forces stand your children. To do nothing is to quit. Unfortunately, the souls of our children are at stake and to a certain level, God expects you to train your children up in His way.

PAUSE and Consider:

Take a moment. Read Deuteronomy 6. Consider the job that God has given you.

Why? On one level, there are many complex sociological and cultural forces at play. Modernism, which declared that "God is dead!" has given rise to pluralistic Post-Modernism. Scientific invention has had serious implications for our society. "The Pill" has severed the physical link between sex and marriage. The world as we know it is in violent upheaval. Regardless, God is faithful. As a Christian you have been given the Holy Spirit and by the power that raised Christ from the dead, you can succeed at parenting.

However, there is one gigantic issue I have not addressed. Over the last twenty years, I have seen a systematic, willful, and terrible refusal to disciple their children. Parents and the

church have failed to disciple their children. The spiritual training of the child is not responsibility that God has given the church.⁵ It is the job of the parent. However, let me clarify what I mean by discipleship.

Jesus called us to, "baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Teaching them all I have commanded you." Deuteronomy 6 states, "these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Discipleship means teaching your children what a Christian does, why a Christian lives, and who their ultimate hope is. It means living out for them what it means to be like Christ. It means walking with them as they learn to renew their minds. It means teaching them everything that Jesus has commanded us to do. Ultimately, it is about fostering an atmosphere where God has the opportunity to change their hearts. You are not capable of saving their souls. However, you have a duty to raise them in a way to glorify God. I cannot stress it enough this is your job. It is an exceedingly difficult task. You have to somehow be a stronger influence than everything their friends say, what they see on the web, and what they see on TV. You need to deal with behaviors while really getting heart change to happen. In the end, even if you do everything right, your children may not share the faith that you have. Simply put, believing in Jesus Christ is supernatural. On final judgement day you will stand before the great King and be able to say, in the power of your Spirit, I did everything I could.

You are busy. We live in a world where

⁵ We believe the local church is comprised of groups of families. However, each family is primarily responsible for their children. The church has a secondary responsibility to compensate for broken & failing families.

we are all overworked, overstressed, and totally exhausted. It is easy to feel that you do not have time to raise your children well. For the busy parent, church programs are awfully attractive. Instead of reading the Bible to your kids, you can just take them to church. It is easy to believe that a seminary trained children's pastor is better equipped to teach your child than you are. However, that's not true. The world's greatest AWANA, funniest Sunday school teacher, coolest youth leader, and most intelligent pastor are not as good as you. It is easier though! Programming is seductive. It tells you that a few hours on a Sunday will inoculate your kids. Really?! Will a few hours of church overcome twenty five hours of secular schooling?

The world is teaching us to outsource raising our children. It says that Daycare is as good as parent care. That elementary school certifications mean as much as parenthood. Thus the youth pastor is a parent alternative. Before I become too zealous, all of these things can be good. A good daycare, Christian school, or church can be a supplement. However, just like protein powder does not replace real food, none of this outsourcing replaces real parental discipleship.

One of the world's biggest phrases on parenting is, "it takes a village to raise a child." Especially among Asians, we believe that our kids can be raised by their grandparents, aunts, uncles, or others. Maybe those people can all be positive influences. Maybe a Big Brother or Sister is good. However, they cannot replace you. More than that, they are not responsible for your children. You are!

PAUSE and Consider:

Who is the biggest influence in your child's life? (Who spends the most time with them?)

Parents and the church have failed to disciple their children.

The great lie parents believe is that they can have "X" and Jesus. Maybe it's the American Dream: a nice house, a high-paying job, and safety. Maybe it's a successful career. Maybe it's the acclaim of the world. Whatever your "X" is, beware of it. Here's how Jesus puts it: "Therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Actually, this includes your children. Jesus wants your entire life. If Jesus is not the center of your existence, than nothing I write will help you. This book is primarily about honoring God in the area of parenting. In the context of childrearing, this means that you will need to sacrifice in order to disciple your children. The secret parenting ingredient is time. You will need to pour a great deal of time into your children. No ration of "quality" time will replace a significant investment of your week in your child's life. There are significant moments in your child's life. There are times when you can have deep and meaningful conversations and they occur at unpredictable intervals. You cannot make them happen. However, you can try to be there as much as possible so that you can capitalize on them when they do occur. Again, the lie is that you can have "X" and Jesus. This extends to honoring God in the way you disciple your children.

The world is teaching us to outsource raising our children.

In many ways, the church is not doing a good job of combating the tendency towards outsourcing. Our modern church is primarily about attracting masses of people. As Ed Stetzer⁶ pointed out, everyone sits and stares up onto the stage. Our services mirror the movies. It creates an environment where people treat the church akin to a big show that they watch once a week. We have been converted into consumers. However, this consumer mentality works poorly in terms of discipling our children. If we expect to bring our children to an event twice a week,

⁶ I heard Ed preached on this subject at Synergize in Florida in January 2014.

and leave with “good” little Christians we will be sorely disappointed. Discipleship is not a movie we can pay to have. Can churches operate in a better way? Yes! However, in my years of ministry every church I have seen is imperfect and, to honor God, parents need to take an active role, even if the church does not.

As a successful couple, my wife and I had many choices. Our lives shared many characteristics of your average American success story. Both of our families were made refugees by the madness of the Vietnam War. Unfortunately for us, we were on the wrong side and had no choice but to leave. Coming to the States at ages twelve and fourteen respectively, we had nothing. We spoke practically no English. We had no educational advantages. With the death, terror, and upheaval of the war as a backdrop, we strove to build a good life for ourselves in this country. Eventually, we ended up in professional careers. I became an engineer working for the federal government. My wife completed nursing school. We had many choices as a young family. At that time, we were both Christians. The world told us that we could be “good” Christians and also pursue career, as well as live in a huge home and drive nice cars? We had many, many options.

We could have attended an American church. Unlike many of our peers, we speak excellent English and fit in well in any mainstream American community. It surprises some that we started learning the language in our teens. We could have left the ethnic church at which we served. There were many large churches that offered a seat on Sunday morning and a giant array of programs to plug our children into. It would have been easy to believe that the church could have solved our problems.

But, we had a mission! God had redeemed us from sin and death. He called us to live a life to disciple others. This included our children. In the end, I believe that our God can give us everything. He owns everything. Why would an heir of the Creator of the heavens and the earth

trade in our service for money or fame? Many choose this path. We decided to dedicate our time and energy to bringing others into the Kingdom of Heaven. The first step started with our family. If we could succeed with our own children, then we would be equipped to reach the world.

The biggest reason we are losing our children is because we expect the church to do what the family is designed to do. If we believe that all scripture is God-breathed, then we can learn from God’s instructions to the Israelites. He clearly places the responsibility on the parents to teach the next generation the story of His goodness. Today, we have this odd idea that church (with its Sunday school, nursery, and youth ministry) is designed and equipped to prepare children to follow God. This idea is not supported by scripture. Sunday school and youth ministry are products of our modern concept of church. This thinking isn’t biblical! Ultimately, the building blocks of the church are families⁷ that are following after God. The church then goes out and serves as a vehicle for reaching the lost. It also serves the widows and orphans. Before you and I can partake in the mission, we must engage the first battlefield: our own home. As parents, you can be the biggest influence in the lives of your children. Will you bring them closer to God or drag them away? Let’s us consider a few sections of Scripture.

Matthew 28 details our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. In our modern church, we have lost sight of this. As a pastor, people have the mistaken impression that I have a greater connection to God. They believe I have what they do not. That it is my job as a pastor to save the lost, teach their children, and serve God. On the day Jesus died, the veil between the Holy of Holies was torn. A place that only the high priest, a lineage passed down from generations could enter, was changed. Through Jesus, we all have

⁷ This statement is from my practical experience. Functioning churches inevitably consist of families. Usually, elders and deacons are a part of families.

equal access to God. There are not special classes of Christians. We are all heirs of God. Imagine that we were all children of Bill Gates or Warren Buffet. The legacy of wealth is guaranteed. That's why Jesus gives the Great Commission to all of us. It is everyone's responsibility to baptize and teach His commandments. It is everyone's responsibility to disciple.

Psalms 127 reminds us that children are a legacy (or heritage) given to us by God. This is a strange concept to the American mind. Western society, Americans in particular, subscribe to a very potent form of selfishness and individualism. We often think in terms of our own personal glory and our own achievements. This is not the biblical thought. Our God is one who punishes from one generation to the third generation. More than that, our God thinks of legacy. By His son, we are able to have faith like Abraham. In the same way, we must change our thinking. Our children are not merely a responsibility. They are the part of us that will live on after we pass on. They are our legacy. Will you leave an everlasting or temporary legacy?

Deuteronomy 6 gives us a general idea of the methodology. The concept is essentially simple. Discipling our children is a matter of time and repetition. At all times, the commands of God and the story of His redemption should always be retold. We must repeatedly share with our children from where our hope and strength come. They need to know in Whom we put our faith. The world is filled with many gods in which to believe. Some follow money, hoping that he will give them safety. Others worship fame, hoping for a sense of satisfaction and personal value. We worship Jesus Christ. He is the Son of the living God. By Him, everything was made. By Him, we are made holy and our sins are forgiven.⁸

2 Timothy 2:2 outlines our major task. It is our job to teach the Word of God. More than

⁸ There is more to discipling than just knowledge. Children need to be taught love, hope, and faith. These things are taught through modeling. This is why it is essential to spend time with your children.

that, we need to find others who will, in turn, pass on this knowledge to others. Like the martial art masters of the movies, we must seek to make disciples. It is not an easy path to follow! Our children are our greatest and most strategic opportunity to do so. Our task is to replicate.

1 Timothy 3:2 details our goal. While the characteristics are for the selection of church leaders, they are also a blueprint for what all Christians should aspire to be. They do a great job of outlining the characteristics that a Christian should exemplify. It is important to remember that these external characteristics are signs of an internal transformation. Do not fall into the trap of training only the external. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for hypocrisy. They were clean on the outside and inwardly filled with evil. If you fail to reach the heart of your children, you are only creating behavior modification that is more than likely temporary.

CHAPTER II: THE GREAT COMMISSION AND OUR LEGACY

<http://www.DiscipleYourKids.Net>

Your idea of a legacy determines your children's destiny.

Your idea of a legacy determines your children's destiny. My father was not a Christian, and I am the first in my family to know God. Will I be the last? Or will I be the start of a glorious history? Could I be like Abraham whose God was known to his children and his children's children? Today, you and I are a part of Abraham's legacy. God promised that Abraham's descendants would be as many as the sands along the shore. Through Jesus, we are grafted into the family of God and can count Abraham as our great ancestor. Abraham started a tremendous legacy.

You and I have the same challenge! We are arbiters of the legacy we will leave. Make no mistake everyone leaves a legacy. The things you do affect future generations. What will your legacy be? The legacy you choose to leave will determine your child's destiny. The proverb goes, "An apple does not fall far from the tree." Where will you spread your branches? As Americans, we often value the self-made person. We have this thought that the past is irrelevant. We believe that a man from nothing can become somebody. As a Vietnamese person, I place a high value on the legacy of family. I am indebted to my father and his father. While not Christians, they set a legacy for me. They chose to be men of honor! They stood for what they saw as right, and it put them on the wrong side of the war. However, the example they set has reaped rewards in their children and grandchildren. They built a family of integrity. In the end, they did not build on Jesus Christ and so their legacy is limited. You must choose what legacy you intend to leave.

This is a serious decision. Look beyond your lifetime and consider this question: "Who

do I want my children and my children's children to be?" As Christians, this concept of legacy takes on new meanings. We know that this world is coming to an end and that only the eternal things will last. This is how Paul describes it:

"Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."⁹

As Christians, the foundation of our existence is Jesus Christ. However, on top of His work we layer our own offerings which include, the places we invest our time and the places to which our money is given.

You have a choice. You can choose between worldly "success" (the so-called "American Dream") versus a spiritual legacy to disciple our children. You can pursue "success" in its many forms. The world is insidious. Often, Christians don't intend to pursue success. They believe that they can follow Jesus and have "X." The thinking often starts off with these kinds of statements.

God wants me to have a good life. A nice car isn't a sin.

If I am rich, I can give the money away.

If people see me as successful, I'll make Christians look good.

I know my family needs me, but they need me to provide.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

These statements are not necessarily wrong. Yet, they reveal a heart that is not pursuing the Kingdom of Heaven. God has everything and He loves you. Everything you need, including the things your family needs, God will provide! He has promised this. Do not believe that you need to do God's job. He has given you the job to disciple your children. Teach them what it means to grow in the fear of the Lord. Show them what a disciple of Christ does!

You have a choice. You can pursue fame, fortune, and glory or you can pursue a lifestyle to disciple your children. Each of us has only a limited amount of time. What will your priority be? Do you hope to impress your boss or your children? Do you want to be remembered as a "good person" or an outstanding parent? You can't have both. That is the essence of Jesus' statement, "You cannot serve both God and the love of money."¹⁰

Doing what Jesus has called us to do and be takes intentionality.

Doing what Jesus has called us to do and being who He has called us to be takes intentionality. The entire world is structured to force us into its mold. Schools create competition and tempt us to give everything to be "the best." The web is filled with a giant array of things: sleek laptops, sweet cars, chic handbags, timeless jewelry; anything your heart could desire is for sale. There are dozens of causes that say, "You can be significant!" "You can save the poor, fight environmental abuse, or right the wrongs of this world." "You could be a Savior!" The danger of each of these things is not that they are categorically wrong. Remember our mother Eve! She wanted to be like God and acquire wisdom. Yet, she chose to achieve those things by disobeying God. This was her downfall.

Unattended, we will pursue the world's idea of success. Without the power of God's Spirit at work within us, it is all we know. No one needs to be taught to sin, it is within us! Only

by renewing our thinking, with God's wisdom, can we know that which is good and pleasing to God. If you do not choose to pursue what God wants, you won't. Even if you choose, you need to structure your life towards that end. "A goal without a plan is just a dream."¹¹

We need to find those select few that will continue teaching it to others.

2 Timothy 2:2 calls us to pass on what we have learned from Jesus. More than just teaching it to other people, we need to find those select few that will continue teaching it to others. We are not merely trying to convince others about the truth of our ideas. We are looking for those radical few that are willing to dedicate their entire existence to passing on what Jesus has revealed to us! It is not enough that your daughter or son agree theoretically about who Jesus is. God's truth has to radically alter who they are. Christians are those people whose lives have been radically reorganized by what they have learned. It changes what we love, how we operate, and why we live. The simplest test of someone's faith is to ask, "Do you share Jesus with others who will do the same?" The problem with modern Christianity is we misunderstand what it means to be a Christian. Changing your religious status to "Christian" is not the same as Jesus' idea of disciple!

Read this (Jesus spoke these words). *"Now great crowds accompanied Him, and He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out*

¹⁰ Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13

¹¹ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

to encounter another king in war; will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple.”¹²

Now let us imagine how this looks for your family. You want to raise daughters and sons who love God with all their heart, soul, and mind. They intellectually have a solid understanding of the Bible and can relate this to the world in which they live. Not only do they know God’s truth, but they know what it looks like to live it out in this world. They also aggressively pursue life change so that they can live in obedience to God’s truth. Finally, they dedicate their lives towards sharing this with everyone and anyone. All of this is rooted in a heart that God has transformed because He has saved them from sin and death.

Up until this point, I haven’t talked very practically about how to disciple your children. That’s about to change. Chapter 1 was about establishing the situation and the need for discipleship of your children. Chapter 2 addresses how discipleship fits into the broader context of your mission as a Christian. Now, we start on the important things.

First, your idea of the legacy you want leave determines how you will prioritize the upbringing of your children. We’ve discussed legacy in broad terms, but basically you decide what future your children will have. This vision of the future determines how you will raise your daughter or son. It sets up what school you will put them in. It frames what activities with which they will be involved. It changes how much time you will spend with them and in turn the kinds of jobs you will take. Your vision of legacy means

¹² We assume that you are disciples of Christ and that you see your children as the best opportunity to make more disciples of Christ. If you are a disciple of Jesus, than you should be discipling.

everything when you are raising your children.

PAUSE and Consider:

Take a moment. Write down or record a rough idea of what you want your legacy to be.

Even before our children arrived, my wife and I wanted to serve the Lord. After coming to faith in Him, we realized that the only thing important in life was to share Jesus with others who would keep sharing. Our lives were driven by Christ’s mission. If you are versed in modern Christianese, we structured our lives to be “Missional.” In every day common sayings, we chose everything on the basis of serving God: careers, the city we lived, the things we did, the ministries we were involved with, the schools we attended, the cars we drove, and the lifestyle we adopted. We understood Christ had a unique purpose for our lives. We believed that God had particular works that we were especially suited for and trained to do. Everything we had, including our plans, focused on Christ’s mission for our lives.

At the center of all our activity was discipleship. We made time to spend with others. In small groups or in the context of doing events, we focused on creating opportunities to share our lives with others, communicate God’s truth, and create disciples. For us, it was a small transition to apply this thinking towards raising our children.

Parents, you have only one chance to raise your children. The clock is ticking the day you bring your child home from the hospital. You have a window of opportunity. The first twenty years of their life you will have almost daily contact with your children. This season of life is critical! You have one chance to make a tremendous positive or negative impact. Twenty years seem like a long time, but this season is a hurricane of activity. You will be so busy that it will pass in an instant. Now is the time to make a change. More than just time, you have the attention of your

children. They will not ask you to play with them forever. In this time, it is not what you say that makes the greatest impact. It is the consistency of who you are. Nothing will destroy your witness to your child more than hypocrisy. Be consistent in who you are and be worthy of imitation of Christ. They are watching and God is keeping an account.

God gave you stewardship of your children for a season to disciple in the way of Jesus Christ. Never forget what an awesome burden that is! It is a privilege. In the parable of the talents, each talent was worth an estimated \$660,000. Your children are worth infinitely more than that. Each of them was made by the living God. For the servants in the parable, they were only given money. For a time, you have the duty and privilege to disciple your children in the way of Jesus Christ! It is a task that He has explicitly laid out in His Word. You will have no excuse for failing to do so. You cannot bury your children away and tell the Lord you were afraid of failing.

Let me share with you a warning: *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”*¹³

Notice that there is no parental exception in this warning.

The goal is to make disciples, not just raise “good” children. For the person who is not truly a disciple and has not forsworn all else, the Christian is equated with the “good person.” Their vision of the future is a family of people who do not commit crimes, gives to charity, and is outwardly moral. You are attempting to raise disciples of Jesus, who serve from the heart outward. To do this, you have to build relationships with your children. Not that you are their best friend or buddy, but you need to be the person that they know loves them unconditionally. They must trust you. They

need to know that they matter to you. Creating this kind of deep relationship is essential. This kind of relationship will be the bridge to their heart. When they are struggling with real issues, you will be able to deal with the biggest of life’s issues and dilemmas. This relationship is built with time. No volume of gifts can compensate for systematic emotional neglect. Again, you are after heart change. Consider this word from Proverbs, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”¹⁴

It is not enough to just *want* to disciple; it has to be intentional. Discipleship is not an accident. It is not a product of coincidence. You have to intentionally make time to spend with your children. Find a job that allows you time for your children. It will likely pay less. One way we did this was with a calendar. We intentionally scheduled time with our children. We made it a point to eat together and use mealtime as discussion time. Meals were a place where we dissected the day and shared more of our motivations with our kids. (At first, we used a refrigerator hung family calendar and eventually started using google calendar. Everyone has their own calendar, but we all have access and it allows us to adjust. This allows us to have family and discipleship time.)

Reject the world’s definition of “success” and chose to make the time to disciple.

Essentially, we rejected the world’s definition of “success” and chose to make the time to disciple our children. If God blesses you, there is no guilt in having success. However, pursuing success instead of discipleship tempts God’s disapproval. We skipped career success and a great deal of money, so we could have more time with our children.

We gave up many promotions and switched jobs. I was once appointed to a training position within the Occupational and Health Administration. This meant that I traveled and ate on the government’s free money. I was able

¹³ Luke 17:2, Matthew 18:6

¹⁴ Proverbs 4:23

to visit most parts of the country as part of this job. I was also positioned to meet many people important in the organization. However, I chose to take a demotion to limit my traveling. I wanted to be with my children and not on the road. In my 25-year career, I stayed at the entry level position of an inspector. My God never failed to provide for me and my family. My wife chose to work part-time as a school nurse. When she graduated, the nursing shortage was acute and she could have earned huge sums of money working heavily at the hospital. Instead, she took a humbler position and spent many days with our sons. In the larger scheme of things, it was a small sacrifice.

We lived below our means. I cannot stress this enough. Live below your means. Have a wartime mentality, as John Piper likes to say. We are engaged in a way with the enemy of mankind for the souls of all creation! We lived in a house far below what we could have bought. We have not bought a brand new car in twenty years. The secret to dealing with the loss of income that accompanies discipleship is to spend less. Ask yourself, “Do I need this or do I want this?” A need is something you will die without. A want is something that will not result in your death. Forsake the pleasures of this world, for the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ our Lord. Never fear, God will provide you with what you need.

We lived our lives by one big question. The question was, “How can my young family, indirectly or directly, make disciples?” Our primary discipleship battlefield was the hearts and lives of our children. We had the greatest responsibility and opportunity to teach them the way of the Lord. But we also looked for others! We looked for opportunities in which we could have a positive impact in other families. Look for like-minded families. Look for groups that will allow you to mentor your child alongside others. In other words, “Who will our legacy be?” The apostle Paul was not trying to plant as many churches as possible. He was focused on people. If you notice, he devotes entire chapters to

naming the brothers in the faith! He was looking at the number of disciples.

Do not waste God’s time! Spend your moments on what matters. I have a picture in my house with a caption that reads, “One life to live, only what’s done for Christ will last.” For decades, this has been my thought. I am not my own; I have been bought by precious blood. The time I spend is God’s time. I cannot waste it. Maybe you have hobbies; most aren’t evil. Is the time you spend on them well spent? If you are a young father, do you waste time on video games? Do you watch pointless TV and movies? This time has been lent to you. God will ask for an accounting.

PAUSE and Consider:

Take a moment. What is one thing you secretly know is a waste of God’s time?

Budget! The young couples of this generation are not very good at budgeting. It is, likely, a generational divide. However, to maximize the time with your family, reduce what you spend. The money that you have is not your own. It has been lent to you by God. Decide how much you want to spend eating out. Decide how you want the money you have spent and stick to it. A monthly budget meeting was a regular thing for our young family. We discussed our incomes and our spending plans. Money and especially financial trouble can quickly become a huge distraction. It is a fairly simple way to work towards being able to spend more time discipling your children.

Pay your debts! In the parable of the ten bride maids, Jesus spoke of people waiting for the return of the groom. Half planned ahead and didn’t miss out. You never know when the opportunity God has for you will be there. If you are chained by debt, you will be unable to do what God has for you! Or, more likely, it will happen later than it could have. We set out to pay off our

mortgage so that we might have the freedom to pursue ministry pursuits. When my wife and I quit our jobs to spend one year as missionaries in Vietnam, we were able to. That trip was the culmination of decades of disciplined debt reduction. We aggressively paid down the debt we owed. This started with small incremental steps.

We are not saying that discipling your kids is your only mission.

We are not saying that discipling your kids is your only mission. However, if you are pursuing God's call for your life, you **MUST** make the sacrifice and the priority to disciple your children. For us, God has called us to serve among 2nd-generation Asian Americans. God has called us to mobilize Asian Americans toward discipleship and to reach out to South East Asia as an oversea mission field. Yet, the task to disciple your kids are equally significant compared to the ministries outside the home.

PAUSE and Consider:

Who has God called you to? How do you plan to live out the call? Are you intentionally discipling your kids? And if so, how are you doing that? How would you maximize the time available to be with your kids? What must you sacrifice to make the time?

CHAPTER III: PLANS

“When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary.”

~Thomas Paine

“Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. Seeming to do is not doing.”

~Thomas Edison

<http://www.DiscipleYourKids.Net>

Planning is important. Discipleship is not an accident. Most Christians understand this. We plan how we will eat. We plan how we'll get to work. We figure out how to pay for our housing. Everyone plans. Ironically, Christians have made a virtue of carelessness. God is working out everything for our good. Yes, ultimately we have no control over what will happen, but there is a big difference between knowing that God is in ultimate control and intentionally refusing to plan because you expect God to compensate for your carelessness. Is the student who procrastinates more holy because she utters a prayer before taking the test? No! The faithful student would study, knowing that God has given her a mind and time to study, and put success in God's hands. You and I have no ultimate control over the spiritual success of our children. Just like the faithful student, it's our job to carefully use what God has given us, our access to our children and the time we have available, to engage in disciple making. Success is not up to you. Yet, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”¹⁵

Planning is not a lack of faith. Faith is your belief in God as you trust Him regardless of the circumstances. The outcome is secured. God will win! At the same time, planners can turn into people who are tempted to worry. They are so concerned with the future that they cease believing God's promises. They cease believing

in God's ability to deliver His promises. As you consider the future of your child, beware of these two extremes. The parent that makes no plans for her/his child is a poor steward and is not being a faithful servant. The parent who deletes God from the equation has lost sight of what being a Christian is all about. To succeed as a parent, you must be able to plan to the best of your ability and leave the results in the hands of Almighty God. Trust that He is better and greater than you.

I would encourage you to develop a theology of planning. Decide how you will approach faith and planning. At its core, the issue of faith and planning is really about faith and works. That issue is greater than the scope of this book. It is also an issue in which every Christian should have an understanding.

Most parents don't intentionally neglect their children.

Why do I emphasize planning? It is because of what I have seen over the last twenty years. Most parents don't intentionally neglect their children. Very few parents intend to fail at discipling their children. Most Christian parents want to raise God-fearing children. Ironically, we've observed that many parents have very clear plans for their children's academic and athletic pursuits. They know which dance studio will be best. They have an idea of best schools and most strategic majors. But when it comes to spiritual disciplines, it is a hit or near miss. Parents seem to operate on the

¹⁵ Galatians 6:7

idea that regular church attendance, which allows children to pick up moral/social cues of good behavior, will result in dedicated disciples.

Spiritual growth is no accident.

Spiritual growth is no accident. God fearing children, as the Bible points out, are trained that way. Their parents make a concerted effort to read the Word of God with their children. They talk with their daughters and sons about what it means to be a Christian. They freely discuss their motivations and drives with their children. They see their family as a priority. In their adulthood, this good training will become a reality in their future families.

Prioritization is the key.

Let me share with you, how we planned. We set priorities. We had big goals: discipleship, church ministries, and time for children. We then broke these big ideas into practical steps. For example, we wanted our children to learn the Word, so we searched for a program that would help them memorize the Bible. We ended up with AWANA and we worked with our kids to help them put God's Word to memory.

Periodically, we revised our plan in order to refocus our priorities. Always, we made ministry and discipleship time a priority. Prioritization is the key. We had a vision of what we wanted our kids to know and do, to the glory of God. While we wanted them to be healthy, it wasn't necessary for them to seriously do sports. We would rather have them actively involved in a thriving church, with youth leaders that invested in our children. It was painful for us, but we eventually left the Vietnamese church which we were serving. The church wasn't ready to provide an English-speaking youth ministry for our children. This was a critical time. As Vietnamese, we have a rich heritage and culture. However, we wanted our sons to be Christians more than Vietnamese. A youth ministry that communicated Jesus effectively, *in their language*, was required. For you, the challenge is to create an environment where they can see and hear the Gospel in a real

way: this means a church with strong small groups and small group leaders and a place where they teach the Gospel. It may mean for a season you attend a church that might not fit you and your ministry calling in order to disciple your kids.

Daily, we maintained a "to do" list. This was a general daily task list that needed done. We have a family calendar filled in with activities and tasks. We would write these things down and make changes as necessary. We planned as a family. My wife and I did not have separate ministries and activities. We integrated our schedules so we were both involved. Parenting is a team effort. Mothers and fathers have roles that teach children different things. You can't outsource childcare to your spouse. If you have time, do a little research on the effect of absent father-figures. The statistics are alarming.

Develop a strategic plan to raise responsible children.

As soon as they are capable, our children were given a checklist of chores and responsibilities. Also, we rewarded them for doing their responsibilities. At the start, they were young and it would have been easier for us to buy a dishwasher. However, clean dishes wasn't the goal. We were aiming for young Christians who were responsible. Children and teens, especially males, develop best under pressure. They need to know that their actions have real consequences. This is a key concept. As a parent, you are temporary. Eventually, your children will make most decisions without you and parenting is process of slowly giving them complete control. You exist to protect them from serious failure, but you are not giving fish. You are teaching them how to fish.

The biggest problem with teenage boys is that they don't understand that their actions have real consequences. They are bad at seeing how a bad grade in middle school affects their ability to get a good job twenty years later. As parents, we do not want to prevent all of their mistakes. We want them to be responsible for all their actions

and learn from what they do right and what they do wrong.

One of my sons started washing dishes at the age of four. He needed a stool to reach the sink and one of us needed to be with him to keep him safe. It was not more efficient. He ended up covering the ground with water; it took five towels to clean it all up. It was also a great way to start teaching responsibility early. The lessons he started learning then, have stayed with him to this day. Now, I don't worry that he will fail in college. I know he is responsible.

At the age of eleven, our sons started working as paperboys. The money was not the main goal. However, they learned to wake up at 5:30 am to bundle papers. They learned to faithfully deliver the papers on time. They learned how to deal with customers. They were responsible for their paper route. Today, I know that I can recommend them for jobs and ministries. I don't fear that they will disappoint me.

The Generation X and Y Christians do not value character as much as previous generations. They place emphasis on passion and loving Jesus. Passion is good, but character is essential. People will not take your ideas seriously, if you have bad character. If you want people to take your ideas about Jesus and eternal life seriously, your witness must be excellent.

Look at Stephen, the first recorded martyr. The early church needed people to fairly distribute money to widows and orphans. He was selected because he had a "good reputation." This character, which led to a position of authority, allowed him to effectively preach the Gospel. Responsibility is not merely about being "good", it is an element of character. Witnessing is as much about character as it is about the message.

The Bible teaches us to value character instead of appearance.

Develop a strategic plan to raise responsible children. We controlled media. We live in an age

of information. Your children are under attack. Every website, TV show, game and online conversation teaches your child something. Girls, from an increasingly young age, are taught to value how they look. At a young age, this is about being "cute" and, eventually, it evolves into being "hot." This message comes from all forms of media. The Bible teaches us to value character, instead of appearance. Teach them this value. Offer rewards for character and set an example of valuing character. For boys, the seduction comes from the idea of "fun." Young men are taught that purpose in life is overrated and that having "fun" is everything. From online videos to games, they are taught to be shortsighted. The Bible teaches that "whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus..."¹⁶ They need purpose beyond the world's shallow guesses.

My wife and I chose to limit media in our house. We had no TV. Internet use was monitored and filtered. The world has grown increasingly darker since the days of dial-up internet. As a parent, you are slowly helping your children to "renew their minds". That means you need a strategic plan to determine what information is fed to your children. Beware of their friends. Just because you hold good values, doesn't mean that your next door neighbor's child won't show your child pornography.

However, strict control of media is not permanent. Eventually, your children will need to make their own decisions. They need to be taught Biblical values of personhood and purpose. Teach your daughters and sons that God looks past the physical and into the heart. Teach them that the meaning of life is to "fear God and keep His commandments."

As they grow in this knowledge, give them the opportunity to make choices about what they watch and do. Your home is a safe place for them to work out what it means to love God and do what is right. Create those opportunities for them.

¹⁶ Colossians 3:17

You need to develop a plan for media consumption in your home. It needs to include education to counter what the world is teaching them. It also needs to prepare them for the day when they will be in charge of the information they consume. Remember, this is why relationship is essential. While under your roof, you may be able to force them to do what's right. When you have a strong relationship, then you will be able to talk with them about what you value and why. This is training for when they are on their own. If you are merely the morality police, then you will have little impact once they are out of your reach.

PAUSE and Consider:

Where do you intend to make the sacrifices in order to make the time to disciple your kids? Do you have a plan? Do you have a priority list? Where do you place spiritual formation among academic goals?

You have the authority

In order to effectively disciple your kids, you must understand the spiritual authority that you've been given by Christ. From a biblical perspective, as parents you are charged with this awesome responsibility and you are endowed with authority to carry out this task. To carry out the great commission, as it pertains to your home, and the charge given in Deuteronomy 6, you need to come to term with your parental authority.

Many parents feel insecure because of their sinful past. Sometimes, this is a result of a non-Christian backstory. It can also be a result of experiencing poor parenting ourselves. Without a clear understanding of our standing before Jesus Christ, we can be crippled in our ability to disciple our children because we are haunted by past failures. It is tempting to turn to "professionals." As Christians, we need to be confident that our sins are forgiven by the work of Jesus, that our success is a product of His care for us, and that He is making all things work together for our good. If we are confident in these things, than

we will be able to disciple your kids boldly and compassionately.

Understand that your salvation is not dependent upon your parenting performance. We all have shortcomings. God is aware of them. I would encourage you to know your own weaknesses and lead humbly, striving for transparency. As a fallen human being, you don't have to pretend to be perfect for your children. Model daily repentance and pursuit of Christ for your family.

Since you want your children to love Jesus, you have to carefully assess your parenting style. Your children will want to do many things that aren't glorifying to God. It is easy and tempting to lead them in a way that leads to bitterness. Instead, the essence of biblical discipling your kids stems from the idea of servant leadership. Just like Jesus (the King of everything) came as a servant, parents lead their families by being servants.

Birth to Pre-Teen:

The birth to pre-teen years are an important phase where the disciplines of sleeping, eating, structured activities, world-view teachings, and the Gospel. If needed, spanking may be helpful to address defiant and deliberate disobedient behaviors; however, discipline needs to be part of a process that culminates in love and restoration. Spanking should not be applied in anger. The Bible clearly teaches, "spare the rod, spoil the child." However, the principle being taught is not specifically physical discipline; it is encouraging discipline in general. The end goal is to make a disciple who makes disciples.

In our family, each of our children had unique temperament and had a distinct threshold of physical spanking. Whatever the case, the net result should always be restoration. This occurs when the child understands clearly the severity of his or her actions. Often times, it is more important to repeat the rules in order to ensure that you are not unfairly disciplining. Save

spanking for willful and defiant behaviors. We do not spank because of clumsiness or childishness. It is very important that both you and your spouse agree on the terms of disciplines. It is best to have both husband and wives to team up for disciplines and restorations. In those pre-teen years, we list family and behavior rules. We not only negatively discipline but we also positively reward good deeds. Words of praise and affirmations are equally important.

We intentionally pay attention to the heart attitude of the child in regarding to obedience. Outward obedient actions must follow with a glad heart attitude. The way you assess their heart attitude is through one on one conversation. Always ask open ended questions rather than “yes” or “no” questions. I recall countless times where I would ask each child individually to have an audience for this purpose, to learn from my child of his bent and heart desires. This takes disciplines and focus of purpose.

Pre-teens and Adult children:

There will be times when your authority rubs against your children’s natural bent/desires. You must learn to hold the line. You are your child’s authority. You don’t need their approval; you want their respect. In this stage, you must have spent quality of time one on one with your children. It is through relationship that you foster heart change, not obedience based on authority. You need to know the non-negotiable issues. It is always easier to discuss the emerging issues before they arise. Instead of dictating behavior, we strive to suggest positive alternative. Make an effort to discuss realistic expectations and boundaries. Be very clear on rules and boundaries. Communication is key. As small children, there is little room to reason. As older children, the goal is to prepare them to effectively handle the world without your presence. Every issue become a discussion beginning with “What do you think”? “How do you feel”? “What would you do in order to honor God”? “What is God telling you to do”? “What does the Bible say about it”?

In this stage, discipline comes in the form of privilege removal. Spanking is no longer effective. A positive reward system can be monetary, in addition to the weekly allowance. As the children become more responsible, you must allow them more freedom to make responsible choices for themselves.

In summary, as parents you never forfeit your authority. With a clear pattern of giving more freedom to do wise things, you exercise your authority as your children grow up to be dependent on the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Eventually, you will cease dictating, and begin dialoguing to assess the desires of their heart. Always maintain a good relationship in order to continue teaching through love and accountability.

CHAPTER IV: THE HEART

“The heart has its reasons which reason knows not.”

~Blaise Pascal

“The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable —who can understand it?”

~Jeremiah the Prophet

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There are two fundamental types of change. Some changes are from the outside in. Behaviors are enforced and the teacher hopes that by forcing certain actions that change will leak into the heart. The Bible advocates the opposite.

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will place My Spirit within you and cause you to follow My statutes and carefully observe My ordinances.” Ezekiel 36: 26-27

Ask God to change the fundamental sin nature at work inside of your child.

As we see from this passage, change is the result of a new heart and a new spirit. The Spirit is of course, the Holy Spirit. Let me discuss an oft misunderstood element of being a disciple of Christ. We are, by nature and choice, hard-hearted. We have no natural love of God. By the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are given an entirely new heart and a spiritual power that makes it possible to obey God!

As parents, we are after heart driven change! First, you must understand that this change is a miracle that God has made possible. Therefore, the first and most important step of pursuing this kind of change in your child's heart is prayer. You are asking God to change the fundamental sin nature at work inside of your child! Make no mistake, this is a miracle. Beg

Almighty God! There is no alternative. The first and final parenting task happens on your knees. The change that really counts is from the inside out. (Incidentally, how many times have you sung “From the Inside Out”?) As a parent, sometimes you have to enforce behavior change. To keep your children breathing, you force them to wear seat belts and carefully cross streets. What you really want is a child who knows the value of their life and is carefully making decisions to live life safely. Their heart attitude is more important. If you reach the heart, the actions typically follow.

The problem of discipleship is we focus on doing and not the status of the heart. Let me explain, most of the time discipleship is turned into a long checklist of “good” behaviors. It is easier to measure and enforce behavior. However, behavior alone does not equal heart change. As parents, we need to use behavior as a measuring device to see the status of the heart. We need to become comfortable talking about “why” our children do things. Talk with them. Engage with their motivations and thinking. That's the time when you are actually making a dent in their heart attitudes. Beg God to create opportunities, so you can do so. Many times those conversations are divine appointments. Change is the Holy Spirit at work in their hearts. The final goal is spiritual maturity in Christ. *“We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” Col 1:28*

By dying on the cross, Jesus took care of the “legal” consequence of our sins and gives us access to the Holy Spirit. Lifelong discipleship is the Holy Spirit’s department. He makes it possible for us to become “mature in Christ.” The same holds true of your children. You are working under the Holy Spirit to affect life change in your children. Your goal is to see evidence of spiritual maturity in them. You want to know that their hearts have changed because of what they do and the attitude they have when doing. So the next logical question is, “How do we do this?” Answer: Engage the heart, the head, and the hands. Ask questions about the heart issues. In other words, address the attitude. The attitude your child has is very important. It is a direct link into how they feel about a situation and a measure of where their heart is. Secondly, inform the head. Logically tackle the issues. When dealing with problematic issues, explain the reasoning. Let them into the “how” and “why” that determines your actions. Finally, direct the hands to do what is right. While the ultimate goal is heart change, identifying and directing good behavior is necessary. Children grow into the ability to make decisions and, accordingly, the early years require a lot of behavior management. However, never underestimate your kids. They have a huge capacity to think and talk. You never know when an insightful moment will appear.

When the kids were young, we started them with music lessons. They hated them. Every day they were supposed to practice on the piano and it was a war to get them to do it. At six or seven years old, they were too young to understand the value of music and for a season, we used behavioral modification. However, we watched their attitude. We knew, in the long term, that only a change in their attitude towards music would result in real results. Eventually, they started to play songs they enjoyed. They found others who enjoyed music. They found an audience for their talents. Best of all, they learned to worship the Lord through music. It was a slow process. Today, my sons have a different challenge. Though they love to play, they need to balance music with the

demands of school. We decided early on that we needed to affect heart change, but we could not allow them to quit. We compromised. We used discipline and rewards to get them to play, but we cultivated an attitude change. We helped them find a reason to play. We helped them see it as a way to glorify God. In the long term, that made all the difference. We are not after mere obedience. As Christians, we are motivated by the love of God. His overwhelming love gives us powerful motivation to do what is right! In the same way, we need to find ways to motivate our children by love. If they love music, then it is no burden to practice. If they love their family, then chores are not loathsome. If they love God, then boring church services are more than bearable.

Life Stages

Keep in mind the developmental stage your child is at.

Ages 0-3 children need lots of sensory stimulation. Create a rich environment for your child. Resist the urge to occupy them with tablet computers or television. You can have a significant impact on their cognitive development by interacting with them. At this stage, they are drinking in the world around them at an incredible rate. Their brain is undergoing some unbelievable changes. As a parent, you are likely exhausted, but persevere and enjoy these moments. In the first twelve months, it is unwise to force eating and sleeping patterns onto your child. Every child is radically different and it is difficult to force a particular eating and sleeping schedule early on. As they grow, you can slowly train them to a more fixed schedule. It takes effort and does not happen all at once. Don’t give up!

Ages 4-10, relationships are critical during this stage. This is the imprinting stage. During this time, they are recognizing who their parents and extended family are. Spend time with them. Talk to them. Tell your children about God and explain the world that is around them. If you fail to begin a significant relationship with them at this stage, it will pay dearly in your teen years.

This is the time they are wired to start building trust. Show them that they can trust you. This is the time when you must present the gospel in ways that they understand. It is important to have many opportunities to hear the gospel preached.

Child Evangelism, Awana, Story times, and Adventures in Odyssey stories are some venues to accomplish this.

Ages 10-16 is the age where relationships become more one on one. Your conversations should be driven by the child's interests. Take the opportunity to redirect the conversations to heart issues and attitudes. This is the time where you affirm the early childhood faith lessons. They are slowly coming to the realization that there are different viewpoints in the world. Do not suppress their curiosity; those are opportunities to grapple with big worldview questions. Maximize this to involve them in peer to peer conversations that affirm their faith. At this time, teens often develop significant friendships outside of the family. Carefully monitor the influence of these friends. At this point, our children's friends consisted mainly of peers from church and their Christian school classmates. We created opportunities for their friends to visit. Specifically, we had sleepovers and hangouts at our home. Interestingly, their friends had diverse backgrounds. Some were Pentecostal and others were from mainline denominations. In any event, the sleepovers were a great opportunity for our kids to learn about different opinions in the world.

Ages 16-21 is the time when you need one on one time to address their worldview. It's also when they concretely set their individual life purpose and choose a direction. This period often reveals the quality of early investments into your children. At this stage, many parents fail to effectively launch their children. It is imperative that you convince them that they are more responsible for their life than you are. Beware of subsidizing unhealthy life directions and enabling them to avoid responsibility. Many young people perpetuate adolescence because

parents are willing to subsidize their irresponsible lifestyle. With our 16-21 year old children, we approached monetary issues using the "Need vs Want" framework. We define "Needs" as things that are required or important for life. Essentially, "Needs" are things that we cannot afford to be without or that are important investments. "Wants" are things that would be nice. Let's look at two examples of how this works. Let us look at driving. In high school, parents feel a huge pressure to pay for their children to drive. At this point, some parents feel their teens need to drive. It is an American Right of passage. As for our family we consider it a "want." There are other ways to get to school that cost less. More importantly, a functioning car is a significant expense. Add to that the cost of gas and insurance. With our children, we weighed whether the item in question was a "Need" or a "Want". Eventually, driving turned into a "Need." After high school, it became difficult practically to transport children to school, work, and other events. At that point, we agreed that it had become a "Need." For our children, we agreed that a college education is a "Need." In our society, to secure a future college has tremendous advantages. We classify it as a "Need." However, parents of college students are often suckered into paying for the "college experience." Ultimately, college is about providing your children with a career. This does not necessarily mean they need to live in a dorm. They can live at home and commute. They can attend community college for the first two years. They do not need to go to a prestigious college. Most of these things are "Wants." College considerations are very unique to the child. For our children, we were able to start them out at community college, allowing them to live at home, and then transfer to a four-year school. This allowed them to save money. We did not force them to make these choices. My eldest was accepted into graduate school and the school of choice was in another city. In this situation, living independently is now a "Need." Also, be careful of sending your children off to school without a clear strategy. College is too expensive. If they do not know what they want to do, allow them

to shadow and explore careers. It is better to take a year off to discern a career path than to pay money hoping that college classes will reveal the answers. Truthfully, college classes are poor measures of future job satisfaction. Classes are very unlike work.

At every developmental stage, present the gospel at the child's level and allow for the Holy Spirit to convict them. Remember, you are not capable of forcing belief. It is a personal decision. Redirect your conversations to the heart issues and attitudes.

Parenting is all about the relationship you have with your children. Being an authority figure is easy; it is the relationship that makes you a parent. Make the sacrifices to spend time with your children. No one can disciple your children more effectively than you. It is both your divine role and privilege. Ford's slogan is "Quality is Job #1." True discipleship happens when parents intentionally do it and avoid outsourcing it to the church or other people.

As we served God in and outside of church, we disciplined our children as we did ministry. Church leaders, those who volunteer, and those who are paid, are routinely tempted to abandon their children to "do ministry." Your children are your primary ministry and there is no reason to leave them! At the core, the issue is trust. As a Pastor or Deacon, you may feel like the church will not survive without you and there are situations where you have to make incredibly difficult decisions. You may have to sacrifice your ministry to effectively parent your children. Make no mistake that's what God wants. Consider the biblical criteria for picking an elder/pastor/deacon, "one who manages his own household competently, having his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?)" If your household and your children are in chaos, how can you be at church? For you, the priority is your own family. Never fear, God will take care of the people in

your ministry. It may be the most painful decision you ever make, but in the eternal calculus you are responsible for your children, and that does not carry the same responsibility as your ministry.

Make your home a community center.

One of the ways you can avoid this situation is to make your home a place of ministry. By making your home a place of ministry, you are not partitioning your life. You are also maximizing your time. You need to think of your home as a community center. It is a place where people come to see the family of God in person. It is also a great way for your children to see you model being a Christian. Discipleship is more about modeling than about lecturing. Importantly, the Bible calls all church leaders to be "hospitable". Literally, this term means "fond of guests."

There are a few practical keys to making your home a community center. First, folding tables and chairs are a great way to always have room for more people. They are great because they take only a few moments to set up! Second, the strategic shopper can keep the freezer stocked with cheap, but quick food to feed your guests. In our home, this usually means frozen eggrolls or fried rice. Food is one of the keys to community. Third, watch the balance! Set clear boundaries and firm schedules. Being "hospitable" is part of what it means to be a Christian, but clearly define what times you are available to have guests and where. As we did ministry, our home was open to youth workers, small group members, and our extensive extended family. In fact, my wife's mother spent nearly four years living with us. She needed constant medical care, so our home had different people staying over on daily basis during those years. However, we portioned off the bottom floor of our house for her care. In that way, we were able to give her and my family some space.

Key bonding moments often happen outside of the home. If you are running errands, take your child along. Bring them with you as you go through the daily rhythms of life. Stop for

a special treat and take a moment to see where they are in life.

At the age of 9 or 10, key things start happening to your children. These are when puberty begins and it is also the time when conversations about sex need to begin. My wife taught health classes as a school nurse in the public schools. We knew for a fact that, in our world, kids are exposed to sex at an increasingly young age. I recommend beginning a conversation at age 9 or 10. At the age of 9 or 10 is the age when rational reasoning is starting to emerge. At age 10, I took my sons on separate 10 day trips with me. This one on one time is designed to create space to have important conversations. It is a landmark that marks the shift from child to young man/woman. Please remember that the modern idea of the teenage years/adolescents is a relatively modern invention. In the biblical context, children were considered personally responsible for their actions at about 12 years of age. No, we did not emancipate our children at twelve. We systematically transitioned responsibility to them during these years.

Make the sacrifice to be at your children's events. Everyone has different love languages, but one of the strongest ways you can demonstrate the depth of your commitment to your children is to come to their events. They want to know that they are more important than your job or ministry and they should be.

We made a point to teach our children theology, spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible reading/memorization), and the like in our home. This is often called spiritual formation. However, this was not necessarily rigid and ritualistic. We set aside Sundays to worship God by going to church. In addition to that, we also set aside time for things like AWANA and church activities. There is nothing wrong with having your child formally learn about theology and your faith. It must be done cautiously. We are after heart change and not mere external behavior. We also carved out a space for family time. To this day,

we still routinely eat dinner as a family. There is no TV or radio in the background. Meals are our time to socialize and bond as a family. Each year we also seek to go on a vacation. The destination can be just about anywhere. The key is to foster time with one another. As a parent, you are strategically creating times to model and discuss what it means and looks like to be a Christian. The vacation time also allows you to affirm your love for your children.

We engaged our children in the ministry. However, we did so carefully. Do not force your children to show-off. Especially in the context of church, this can turn swiftly toxic. Following Jesus is not about pretending to be "good." Leading musical worship, being part of skits, and performing should come from a heart of worship, not as a desire for social advancement. In the same way, we wanted our children to learn music for their enjoyment. We were not pressuring them to work for acclaim or the praise of man. We wanted them to look to God for acknowledgement. As you look at your child's involvement in athletics, music, and church; check your motives. For a long period, we did not allow our children to perform music in church. We didn't want to confuse their motives for serving versus worshiping God. However, we took them to nursing homes to play for the elderly without the church peer pressure. Many parents unintentionally have raised little Pharisees by making public performance a priority. God cares much more about your child's character and motivations than their external appearance. King David was the smallest and least impressive of his brothers, yet God saw the genuine nature of his heart; that's why he was chosen. God knows your motives as well.

Like many other things, we are willing to go far outside our comfort zone to allow our children to hear good messages. We took our children to see "Switchfoot", a popular Christian band several times. It was uncomfortable for us and I was wearing earplugs the entire time. But the band has a very good message with the music style that my children loved and I wanted

to encourage my children. As the years have gone by, my sons have become comfortable as musicians and they meet up with their friends to worship God musically. They have a sophisticated understanding of worship and know what God is measuring in a worship service.

School choice to maximize discipleship time.

In academics, we strived for competence in Reading/Writing/Arithmetic and not just grades. Grades can be based on a variety of factors aside from how well your children master the material. In school, the goal is the skills they are learning. As a parent, make an effort to assess, aside from the report card, how well your child is learning in school. In the early years, we were focused on character development and, for this reason, we sent our kids to Christian school. Eventually, we started homeschooling.

The issue of education is a huge debate among parents. There is no perfect approach. Every district, Christian school, and homeschool community is different. As parents, you may or may not be positioned to effectively homeschool. However, let me share with you our observations of all three school types, the approach we took, and the reasons why.

Public School:

My wife worked as a school nurse for eleven years. She was sent to both Public and Private schools. She noted that, especially in the younger grades, the education seemed wasteful. The students were overloaded with activities in an attempt to keep them under control. Also, self-control and discipline in classes were often neglected. Some teachers did a good job, but many were unable to, and principals were sometimes unable to maintain control of the schools. For the elementary grades, this was not what we were looking for.

However, in middle school and especially high school, public schools generally offer rigorous and high quality academic instruction. Simply put, public schools are able to afford the

equipment and the salaries to teach Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics.

Unfortunately, there is a problem. First, public schools mean a lot of influences are coming at your child. Some children have the necessary self-control and discipline to focus on what's important and resist distractions. Some do not. Second, the public schools are bloated with activities. From the plethora of sports teams, clubs, and student activities, discipleship can be easily squeezed out of your child's schedule. As a youth minister, I have witnessed Christian kids driven away spiritually due to school activities like band and games.

Also, some kids excel in this environment and others are sidetracked by distractions. If your child ends up in low academic "tracks", look carefully at the reasons. More often than not, your child is able to do better spiritually, but is not applying themselves.

Christian School:

In the lower grades, Christian schools have a number of advantages. The biggest is in the area of discipline. Christian schools tend to have stronger discipline plans and the principals are willing to deal with problematic behaviors. For rowdy and distracted younger children, this can be very good. Also, Christian schools tend to use time more effectively. There is less bureaucracy and busywork tends to be kept to a minimum. However, in middle school and especially high school, the quality of academic teaching may suffer. Usually, this is because those subjects can be very expensive to properly teach. Also, Christian schools do not have the network and connections afforded to public schools.

Homeschooling:

Homeschooling can be very hard or easy. It depends on the level of support in your area. For us, there were many options. There were a variety of homeschool co-ops nearby. So the quality of science education was not entirely on us. There was also pre-made curriculum in the form of

cyber schooling.

Homeschooling really depends upon you. If you have an extensive education, it is easier to teach your children. Also, homeschooling is very time consuming. Teachers are specialized to know how to effectively teach and also to have special knowledge of only one subject. As a homeschooling parent, you need to know everything.

Moreover, homeschoolers can be very sociable. In our community, there were hundreds of homeschoolers. As a result, there were many opportunities for socializing.

Our Approach:

In the early years, our children were primarily in Christian school. They were very rowdy and the structured environment was good for them. Each of them spent three to six years in this environment. We wanted to have them in a predominantly Christian environment during those early years. Eventually, we experimented with public schooling, but we wanted to be flexible enough to go to the mission field, so we ended up using a cyber-school curriculum to homeschool our children. We transitioned from Christian school and drifted towards homeschooling because we wanted to tailor the education of our children to their strengths. We also wanted to avoid the wastefulness of the current school system. Between traveling to and from school, as well as the breaks between classes, and the distractions in class, public schooling can be very time inefficient. Overall, it does a good job educating many students, but we wanted more unique teaching. As both of us have Master's Degrees and strong backgrounds in science, we were well equipped to do so. This allowed us to spend a whole year in Vietnam, while continuing to educate our children. We also supplemented their education by taking them to see historical places all across the country. As a family we have visited Ft. McHenry, Colonial Williamsburg, Washington DC, Springfield, and many other historical places all across the US.

The bottom line is that we made homeschooling efficient to intentionally have more time for family discipleship, church activities, and socialization with their peers. This would require more of your time to drive them to these activities. Honestly, that is an area we made huge sacrifices, in order to make the time. As the result, our children were involved in AWANA, the local neighborhood activities, and church ministries. From our perspective, it was worth it. Our children were academically prepared, socially adequate, and effectively disciplined. They also had music lessons and eventually became worship leaders with ability to play multiple instruments.

In the end, the results have been very good. All of our children were ready to start college early. They each had the opportunity to choose public high school or take classes, through dual enrollment at the local community college. Our first born started taking college classes at fourteen; the younger boys started at fifteen. They did well in their classes and in many ways, were better prepared for college because our homeschool approach was to develop an independent learner.

Church choice based on Christ not culture.

Many parents look for a church with activities for their children or teens. We had a different perspective. When we started going to Newsong Fellowship Church in Lancaster Pennsylvania, it was our intention to serve. Our mission was to serve Jesus. Immediately, we started by hosting small groups and mentoring the young adults in the church. We helped them work through the college years, get married, and discover careers. God blessed us and the same young people we worked with mentored our own children. We worked hard to create a community where faith was affirmed through peer to peer relationships.

One of the biggest temptations and deceptions in our society is the confusion between Christ and culture. Jesus is not a straight ticket Republican, who defends gun rights and

campaigns for fiscal reform. Jesus, in His day, never sided with political parties. The message of the Kingdom of Heaven transcends all of this. Each of you is the product of your culture. Maybe part of it is your Asian heritage and part of it American. Biblical values are different. In some places, biblical values coincide with the culture at large, but as parents you will need to work hard to uphold biblical values and to draw distinctions your children will understand.

For us, we modeled discipleship to our children and made it clear, with our actions, that we were interested in telling people the Gospel and helping them grow in the faith. We intentionally avoided cultural issues and focused on Christ. Christ over culture! We wanted disciples of Jesus more than we wanted Vietnamese-speaking kids, patriotic American citizens, fiscal conservatives, or environmentalists. We decided what was important and what was negotiable. This can be incredibly hard to do. Each of you is the product of a particular culture and there can be immense pressure to force your kids into the same mold. You must ask yourself, “What legacy do I want to leave my children? What do I really think matters?” For my wife and I, we firmly believe that “Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

For our family, we had to make a serious choice. We tried for years to develop an environment within the Vietnamese church that would witness to our children. However, the church, at that time, was unwilling to commit to an English ministry. They hoped to perpetuate Vietnamese culture, which isn’t necessarily a bad pursuit. However, for us, we wanted a Christian environment in a language our children spoke. For years, we were misunderstood. Leaving the Vietnamese church was incredibly difficult. In many ways, we fit poorly elsewhere, but our children were Americans and we gave up what we considered comfortable, so they could know God! Our extended family misunderstood and saw our absence as a rejection of our Vietnamese heritage. By God’s grace, the decision was made right and while it was painful, we would

not change what we did. Our children heard the gospel in a powerful way at the Anglo church to which we moved. The children saw Christ work in our lives and appreciated our small cultural sacrifice for spiritual investment.

PAUSE and Consider:

Are you focusing on behavior or heart change in your children? What does that look like in each of your children’s life stages? What type of school setting would maximize your time to disciple your children? Are you serving at your local church? Do your children see Christ through your life? How? How are you partnering with the local church in discipling your children?

CHAPTER V: DESTINATION

<http://www.DiscipleYourKids.Net>

We live in an imperfect world and not everything goes according to plan. In your parenting journey, there will be many detours, but never forget the destination! Your goal is to raise a disciple of Christ. Picking the right school, carving out time from your career, and dealing with issues can be very time consuming. Don't let those things distract you from the goal.

A disciple of Christ with character.

I would encourage you to take the time and read the character qualities that Paul lays out for church leaders (elders and deacons). These are found in 1 and 2 Timothy, as well as Titus. The essence of these character qualities are summarized in the phrases "above reproach" and "dignified." For a future elder/pastor, the person must have personal integrity and a reputation that is publically known by all. The best example is Billy Graham. As a man, he never claimed to be sinless, but he was known for his personal integrity. Consider Jimmy Carter. Many people disagreed with his politics, but no one doubted his integrity. They knew that he was "good" man. A future church leader must have a stellar reputation for people to trust them. As parents, this is the future goal. You are looking to raise children with stellar reputations, people of character.

However, there are two ways to get this kind of reputation. First, many people choose to deceive others. This was the fundamental problem with the Pharisees. They wanted to have spotless reputations and focused on rule following. They missed that God is not interested in outward behavior, as much as He is interested in the contents of our hearts. God saw that their reputation was an illusion. Second, the difficult path is to be "above reproach" by the outflowing of your heart. As Christians, we have access to

the supernatural purifying power of the Holy Spirit and, through Him we can become truly selfless people. This is the kind of character you are seeking to develop.

As you parent, engage in conversations about what being "above reproach" looks like. This broad characteristics look different in a variety of settings and you need to help your children see what this looks like. The world we live in is sinful. It is easier to succeed dishonestly and without integrity. As Christians, we are to be a "holy" people. This means that we are set apart. We operate in a different manner for different reasons. We believe that God is capable of giving us everything and He is working the circumstances of our lives for good, no matter how desperate life may seem. Because of this, we can boldly live lives "above reproach." Even though it comes at great personal cost, we depend on God and not our own actions to provide for us.

10-day trip with dad.

For this reason, we took our children on a one on one 10 day trip. We have sons and that's why we felt a trip with dad was strategic. We used this trip to clearly say what we hope to see in the life of our child. They need to know, from an early age, what we see as essential for living a "good" life in the service to God.

Launching ceremony.

For the same reason, we hold a "Launching" ceremony at sixteen. It serves two purposes. First, we let our children and community know that our child is entering a new stage of life. She/He is responsible for their decisions. Second, we use it as an opportunity to set the goal. We charge them to serve God with their whole lives and have the kind of character that qualifies them to

lead the family of God. As part of the ceremony, we affirm the child's faith and remind them of their baptism. We charge them with a clear life vision. We strive to include witnesses from our community. What does a launching ceremony look like? It's a huge celebration, a big party with lots of food where we invite family and friends. We've held the ceremony at home and in church. At the party, we acknowledge that there is a change in responsibility. We try to set the party up to appeal to whoever we're launching. We have different people come up and speak about our child. They offer encouragement and also advice. As parents, my wife and I explain to our son that he is considered responsible in our eyes and we charge him to aspire to be a Godly disciple of Christ. In many ways, the ceremony is our version of a Bar Mitzvah.

Sixteen is a strategic age for several reasons. In our society, most children will expect to be in school for another six years. However, we think that at sixteen it is critical for children to do their best. The life they will lead is greatly affected by the quality of their work in the final two years of high school and their performance on a variety of challenges in these years. For our firstborn, we were on mission in Vietnam. However, we still conducted a video/YouTube recorded "launching" and we made it public to our friends, church, and extended family. Even though we were not there with our oldest son, we made it clear that he was launched with all the responsibilities and privileges.

Life does not go according to plan, but that is "okay". Our lives are divinely orchestrated by God. This means that detours are part of His plan. Maybe your child finishes college and realizes that their major was wrong. Maybe the school they want doesn't accept them. Maybe a relationship falls through. We need to fall back onto God's providence and believe that He does not allow anything to happen without a purpose. Therefore, teach your children to embrace academic/career success and failures as a part of God's ongoing work in their lives. The defining

quality termed "grit" by some sociologists is the ability to persevere in pursuit of long term goals. It is important to develop an attitude of perseverance in your children. If you give them short term success by being a helicopter parent than they will be ill equipped to deal with real failure.

It is also important that they pursue life's goals with clarity and realistic expectations. Aim to teach them to think critically. A career in the arts is always an option, but they need to know what that means. Most musicians are not famous and wealthy. They need to know what they will be making and the kind of work they will be doing. Give them realistic numbers! They also need clarity about who they are. As parents, you always want to be encouraging, but do not feed delusions. You should be a safe place for constructive criticism. If they develop into the kind of person, who is humble enough to say, "I don't know," they will be better off. Everyone is not special. Most people are not the exception.

Theology of faith and work.

Work with them to develop a solid theology of faith and work. As a Christian, this is an essential concept to work through. They need to both trust God who is in ultimate control and desire to work diligently to please God. The two extremes with this can be deadly. Some children grow up to believe that God is a genie and that He blesses without regard to what they have done. This is not true! Some children believe that God is, practically, irrelevant. They envision God as someone who does not interfere with their lives and therefore claim all the credit for the successes. Both are wrong, but to understand and live out God's command to work with the perspective of God's providence and sovereignty, takes time.

Failure is good. You want children with grit, who won't quit at a task if they believe that it is important to what they really want in life. As a parent, that means you need to strategically give them opportunities to fail or succeed and where they have to make decisions. We allowed

our children to work through failures and to work through difficult decisions. It was their choice when it came to school. If they wanted to attend public high school, we would have made it happen. With clear boundaries, we allowed them to make many choices with their peers. We opened the door to allow their friends to come to our home. At the same time, it was not open season. We set the guideline that we'd need to know their friends' parents.

We helped our sons identify their strengths and weaknesses. By knowing these things, they were equipped to make informed decisions about where to spend their time and what to do for a career. We did not tell them to only consider becoming a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. We helped them, in faith, to dream big. High expectations are essential! We wanted them to believe, that by God's grace, they would be able to do things that were very difficult. At the same time, they also knew that there were second and third options for most decisions. Our first born pursued a career in teaching before switching to law school, and finally settling on a career in medicine. While we could have made decisions for him, we knew that he was responsible for his own decisions and he had to make choices for himself. We were always available to discuss and, if asked to give our honest opinion. Just like our approach with young adults (16-28) who were not our children, we served as coaches.

At the same time, we never put life goals above the Christian mission of discipleship. In our minds, telling the world about Jesus and helping people grow in their faith is the only thing that matters. While it is important to help your children work through life's goals, they should not be above our task as Christians. Moreover, if you aim to raise Godly men and women, who have the qualities to lead the church, then you can't really go wrong. While not every Christian will meet the standards of Eldership/Deaconship/Deaconesship, they are great standards to pursue as a life time goal.

Aim for Godly character, enjoy the smooth teen years.

Because of how we raised our children, we did not struggle with many issues that plague many parents. Namely, we didn't struggle with distracting girlfriends or an overwhelming need to keep up with a consumer culture. Our kids never demanded the latest technology. On the whole, they adopted the frugal and Kingdom-minded philosophy that we taught and modeled. They had the perspective that dating and marriage was something that happened when they were ready to be married.

PAUSE and Consider:

When do you cast life visions to your children?
Where is your focus in raising your children?
Where and when do you plan to do that?

CHAPTER VI: DISCIPLING IS A JOURNEY, NOT AN EVENT!

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It takes a great deal of time.

Discipling your children is a lifelong journey that takes a great deal of time. It's something I have discussed a great deal. There is no replacement for investing significant amounts of time into the life of your children. Time will allow you to accomplish many important objectives.

1. Seek God's will for your child. God knows who your child will become and He has a particular life journey that he/she will go through. As you learn about your child, consider how they fit into the body of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven.
2. Get to know your child. Not only are they your heritage, but your relationship with them can be one of the most important you have in your life. Build trust and you will be able to speak into their life. Remember, while you may hold the legal position of parent, you earn the right to guide them.
3. Learn about your child's personality and talents and spiritual gifts. What are they like? What are they good at? What makes them unique in this world? This requires a great deal of listening and observing. Kids also change dramatically; be wary of seeing them as they used to be. Imagine who they could become.
4. Invest in your children. Capitalize on their strengths and improve upon their weaknesses. Just like the coach of a great team or the owner of a company, you need to see what they are good at and what they could do with those talents. Feed the areas in which they have potential. In area of

weakness, work with them to make solid improvements. Can you imagine anything more important than pouring into your children?

This journey is like driving a manual stick shift car.

This journey is like driving a manual stick shift car. It takes much more effort to drive a stick shift car than the regular automatic car. The driver must learn when to push the gas pedal as he/she engages the clutch at an appropriate speed. When all fails, you apply the break as you engage the clutch. Discipling your children is like driving a stick shift car. You grant additional life exposures as you measure the level of forward movement in a smooth and safe way. We allow our children to have more and more exposures and freedom as he/she demonstrate responsibility. More gas is allowing more freedom to enter the world such as driving, internet, friends, and peer activities. The clutch is the control where we clearly set boundaries. Always be prepared to use the brake when necessary. Slowly but surely, engage your children in real life issues such as TV, internet, Cell phones, driving, sleep overs, choice of music, etc..

In the end, your children should be dependent upon God and not you! Their lives should be driven by the leading of the Holy Spirit and God's Word. Life is incredibly short, by now you have probably witnessed the death of grandparents and elderly mentors. Maybe some of your close friends have died young and unexpectedly. You are temporary and, sadly, you have little control over when your time is up. As you parent, this dictates that you prepare your children to be wholly dependent from God from an early age. How can you do this practically?

Essentially, you direct them from finding support through you and encourage them to go to God. As soon as it is feasible, we have them set up of a bank account to put their savings in, as well as deposit money earned from any jobs they may be working. While we monitor what they are doing, the account is in our name.

As they go through the different stages, we give less and less direction. Especially after the launch, the key is to not only officially give them the responsibility, but to also practically force them to make their own decisions. The key in these interactions is to ask questions like, “Have you prayed?” or “What’s God’s wisdom on this situation?” We also strategically developed their ability to participate in ministry. At first, they generally help out, but eventually we increase their involvement and level of responsibility.

A key concept to understand is that rules without relationship leads to rebellion. Too often parents attempt to force their children to do what they see as right. While you can do this, at some point your children leave your span of control. At that point, the status of their hearts is revealed. If you have grounded your expectations in the context of relationship, then your children will respond appropriately. If not, the rebellion that they have been suppressing will be revealed. Ground your rules and expectations in the context of a caring relationship!

Every child has different talents and spiritual gifts in the context of ministry. As our children grew, we gave them the chance to exercise their gifts, as well as experiment with what they were good at. Sometimes, parents see these opportunities for family glory. That was not our goal. We wanted our children to experience serving God. This could mean allowing our children to each have the chance to lead the family and church group in worship. Sometimes we had them plan outreaches or other church events. Sometimes they were given opportunities to intern at church. Maybe they helped run a church camp. In other situations, they might volunteer in

the nursery.

Do ministry as a family.

As much as possible, we did ministry as a family. If my wife and I were part of an event, our children attended and helped out. As an entire family, we were on mission together. In some seasons, this meant that my wife and I attended a church outside of our comfort zones. For a season, we were at an Anglo church on mission to prepare as we disciplined young adults. In others, my sons were part of a Vietnamese church and on mission in Vietnam where they did not speak the language. Most of the time, it was our calling and mission that took the priority. When possible we clarified with our church and ministry the boundaries. When serving at Kirkwood Church, we informed the church that our children were called to another ministry and that we would support them apart from our official church ministries. At New Song Fellowship, a college commuter student ministry was born and our children grew and they served in leading the start-up of that ministry.

Another example of doing ministry as a family came at times when we needed a worship band at an event in which my wife and I were involved. My sons would fill this role. We didn’t have them play constantly because we didn’t want to foster suspect motives, but we included them from time to time. When we did medical missions, our sons helped. They did simple jobs, but they also had the chance to watch compassion in action. This trip that they went on actually inspired two of my sons to pursue a career in medicine.

When they were younger, we went to nursing homes. To honor the elders and minister to them, we would play music or talk with them. Our kids were brought along on these trips and given an opportunity to be involved. We went to homeless shelters and served lunches. We steadily built up their experience in real ministry. In the early years, they often helped out at Vacation Bible School. This gave them the opportunity to

practice discipleship with younger children.

At church, we found activities for them to be engaged in and serve as leaders. A great deal of the ministry we asked them to do was of the humble kind. To build character, we asked them to clean up, set up chairs, and babysit kids. In church, there are many of these opportunities. We avoided giving them in the limelight. We wanted them to know that, in God's eyes, good service was a matter of the heart and not the notoriety.

Learn ministry as a family.

As they grew we made sure they had plenty of material to learn about God and the work of the ministry. We filled our house with Christ-centered entertainment. For many years, we took our kids to local Christian libraries and filled their minds with God centered thinking. Our home was filled with children's books about God. It was stocked with many kinds of reading material. As a family, we watched things like VeggieTales or listened to Adventures in Odyssey. Many of these things are more moralistic and that has a place. However, be sure that the gospel is being presented as well. When there were ministry conferences, we brought them with us. They learned Walk through the Bible alongside us. As they grew, we took them with us to bigger conferences. We talked about what the church should be like and how God is using the church. Eventually, we started going as a family to larger conferences. Recently, we attended the Baptist convention as a family. Our church had many student events and they were part of them. Sometimes that church had outreaches and our children volunteered. When they attend retreats, we reminded them to go with a servant mindset. They went on a variety of short term mission trips. Eventually, some of these trips took them overseas.

Coach your children to do ministry on their own.

As they grew, we coached them to do independent ministry. In one instance, my sons and a group of peers organized a monthly gathering called Newsong Fellowship. On Saturday evenings, a

group of Christians got together to fellowship, eat, worship through songs, and study God's word. Our sons did many roles. Sometimes they planned Bible studies and practiced with the worship music. Sometimes they rotated responsibilities in order to gain ministry experiences. At one point, they were able to draw at least eighty people to a Saturday Night event.

PAUSE and Consider:

Discuss how you might re-order your priorities to make the time to disciple your children? As a couple, discuss and agree on what how when where decisions of your children's involvements and choices? Do you have plans to learn and do ministry as a family? Have you consider what and when you would encourage your children to do their own ministries?

CHAPTER VII: SLAY THE DRAGONS

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Over my twenty years of ministry and discipleship, I have had a front row seat to many of the issues common among today's youth. I would like to address a few of these.

Entitlement

First, let me share a little context. We live in a postmodern society and much of today's culture can be traced to the writings of existentialists. The postmodern, unconsciously, believes that life has no meaning other than the meaning that it is given. This leads to a society where incompatible truths and beliefs are equally accepted. It also leads to a society that is selfish and pursues pleasure. Paul addresses this issue saying "If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." In many ways, this mirrors the modern catchphrase "YOLO" (You Only Live Once). As Christians, we believe that there is another life and our current lives hold great meaning, beyond what we can gain for ourselves.

Many in this generation feel entitled. As parents, this can be incredibly frustrating. Many parents, especially immigrants, understand how difficult it is to create a safe and comfortable life. Many of our children do not have the same perspective. They have been given an incredible good life and assume that everyone has a good life. Moreover, they believe that everyone deserves a good life. It is possible to cognitively explain this to a child and not see a change in their behavior. The best way to deal with this bias is to help them see a connection between work and reward. Demonstrate to your child what work looks like and help them see that work leads to reward. As I discussed before, we tied their allowance to chores. We wanted to teach them that nothing in life is truly free. So, while it may seem unkind, we did not just give them money. Once they grew older, we helped them find jobs delivering

newspapers. As an adult, it was a huge waste of time. It would have been much easier for me to work extra hours at work for the same money. As a parent, the job was a Godsend. It allowed my children to have a true appreciation for the value of work. As they grew older, we encouraged them to get "blue-collar" or service jobs. We wanted them to see and know the quality of life without education. My sons have worked in grocery stores and as CNAs in hospitals. Having them work this kind of job gave them appreciation for the tremendous opportunity they have in college.

Always make a connection between study and work. Especially for young men, children find it difficult to grasp the concept of delayed gratification. They find it hard to forgo immediate reward for a greater future reward. School is an extreme case of this. In school, children need to forgo a great deal of fun in order to succeed. If they do so, it helps them find their way into a future job that is better. To help deal with this, we emphasized the connection between work and study. We continually explained school as a job that was making money for them in the future.

Ultimately, we did not force our children to take on our lifestyle. If they wanted to find a lower paying career and live a lifestyle of lesser means, we were supportive. However, we clearly helped them learn exactly how much money they would need.

We taught them a great deal about the intersection of work, time and money. Let me summarize what we explained. First, we taught them that time was a priceless resource. No amount of money and prestige can give back time that has been wasted. In our worldview, time is life that has been given to us through the sacrifice of Jesus. Second, we taught that money

was necessary in our world. To live requires a certain level of money. At the same time we emphasized that money does not bring happiness or fulfillment. Purpose, in life, can only be found in Jesus. Third, we emphasized the value of work. In our education, work has two primary purposes. It serves as an opportunity to witness. As a Christian, work is a place where we can proclaim, through our lives, the goodness of Jesus. It also is a means to provide. Work is the means that allows us to acquire money to both provide not only for ourselves, but also for others. We emphasized that work is essential, but that it does not give purpose. Purpose is found in Jesus. Fourth, we taught them that only what is done for Christ will last. In the context of work, money, and time; time is the most important resource. While work and money are needed in our world, we taught them to rely on God for provision and not their own labors. More importantly, we taught them to minimize their spending. In turn, this allows them to work less. The extra time can then be put towards what is eternal. As Jesus himself said, “Store up treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy.”

Laziness

Laziness is the problem of every generation, but for several reasons it is very common among today’s children. Because of the affluence of Americans, we are able to do for our children many things they normally would have had to do for themselves. It is important to develop children who also have a positive attitude towards hard work.

As a parent, never do anything for them if they can do it for themselves. This starts out young. They need to be trained to do dishes, clear the table, and help out around the house. As they grow older, this means expecting them to contribute. Even if it might be easier as a parent to do something, fight the urge to do so. Each of these situations is a small training ground that will set the stage for future tasks that are much more important. It is better for them to fail under your supervision and within your support. At the same

time, be available to help them out of difficult situations. There are times, where for the sake of the future, it is best to intervene. Also, always be available to give advice and help as they ask. Just because you aren’t doing work for them, doesn’t mean they can’t hear your advice.

Finally, continually remind them that their work matters to God. As Christians, laziness is a sin. We are to do everything “to the glory of God.” We teach our children that God himself ordained work and laziness is the incorrect response to the God who died so that they could live.

World view according to the Internet

Pre-formed Worldview

If you skip my entire book, but read only one section, this is the section I’d like you to read. The greatest tragedy among this generation is that their worldviews are being shaped by outside forces and not the values of their families. As parents, we’ve dropped the ball. In a typical family, the kids start forming a worldview at an incredibly early age (9-10). They are fed ideas mostly from their friends and, the biggest non-family influence, is the internet. At this early age, children don’t explain themselves well, but they are forming opinions all the time. The internet serves as a buffet of information that creates this viewpoint. Sadly, parents aren’t talking about the foundational things this early.

Most parents start talking through issues with their kids in the teenage years. By that time, it is too late! The kids have already formed opinions about gay marriage, the truth of the Bible, and the church. Many parents detect that their kids, right under their noses, have become rebels. Parents react by trying to force their kids to agree with them, but it is too late. These parents end up reinforcing the ungodly ideas with which their kids have agreed.

This generation reacts in a very interesting way. They are extremely confident in their opinions, but do not talk or argue about their

ideas. In an age of information, children react by ignoring most of the messages that are sent to them. This includes the activities they experience at church. As parents, you have to capture this interest of your children. This is hard. You are competing with all the collective entertaining and technological wizardry of the internet. Many parents assume that their kids agree with them, when this is not in fact true. The only way to know about these sorts of things is to have a strong relationship with your children.

A Tale of Two Families

If you are a young parent, now is the time to act. You must be vigilant about what messages (via internet, friends, or television) your kids are hearing. We live in an age of information and you need to develop a media plan for your family. Decide what influences you want to reach your child and work to achieve it. The internet is the most important invention of the century. It is changing everything. For the first time in history, practically the entire knowledge and opinions of the human race are all at the fingertips of your child. If you don't direct what they read, see, and discuss; they will be seduced by the messages of this sinful world.

If you are the parent of an older child, the situation is not impossible. You just need to understand that your children have already assumed a position that is likely not in agreement with yours. You cannot force them to change their minds. All you have left is to dialogue. If you have a good relationship, then they will hear you out. Remember these issues are not dealt with in a single conversation; you are entering into a dialogue. Be patient. The second defining characteristic of this generation is their ability to believe paradoxes. They can be Christians and believe that all roads lead to heaven. It is not logical, but yelling or arguing will not convince them. You slowly have to rewrite the worldview that they have unconsciously absorbed.

Here are a few ways to do that:

- Help them discover their own solutions to life's problems. Instead of telling them what you consider the "right" answers, present to them your viewpoint. Remember they consider all viewpoints valid and, by nature of their postmodernism, feel somewhat obligated to hear your view. At the same time, ask questions. Ask what their solutions are and carefully offer small criticisms.
- At young ages, it is alright to show and tell. Once they are older, shift to asking questions and discussing answers. This is often called the "Socratic Method." Socrates was famous for asking probing questions, rather than giving firm answers. It is more time consuming than just arguing, but it forces critical thought.
- Listen to their struggles and dilemmas. Think as if you are a coach and walk them through tough issues and life's paradoxes. Regardless of how troubled you are by their choices, position yourself to speak into their lives. Do not destroy your relationship because you want to be right. Maybe you are. Regardless, if they know you love them, they will always be willing to talk. That is a special privilege parents hold.

Life's realities

After we launch them, we honestly tell them about life's realities. Here's a short list.

- o Money/Budgeting and How the World is Very Unfair
- o Work and Office Politics
- o People and How Terrible They Can Be
- o The Ministry and The World of Church Politics
- o The Hypocrisy of Most Christians/Churches

PAUSE and Consider:

Are you engaged in your children's consumption of the internet? Discuss with your spouse how you would help your child overcome entitlement and laziness. Think of a social topic where your children differ from your perspective, discuss how you would share and instruct them.

SUMMARY

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It is ultimately God's work.

In conclusion, discipling your children to become radical disciples of Jesus will require you to: choose a Legacy, develop a Strategy, and make the sacrifices to make the time as you are on mission. Whatever God has called you to, do it as you bring your children along. For a season, make sure that you have the time to build a relationship with your children as you preach the gospel, model the gospel, and live it out before their eyes. In the end, you are dependent upon God. Jesus has taken away the legal consequences of our sin. The Holy Spirit is at work to make us into saints. One day, God will end sin across world and the Kingdom of Heaven will be here.

Psalms 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain; unless the Lord watches over a city, the watchman stays alert in vain."

This verse teaches that, without the Lord, our work is in vain. Unless the Lord disciplines your children, you labor in vain. It is ultimately His work! As a parent, you do everything you can. At the end of the day, we have to let God do His work. Never forget, if we let other people disciple our children, we fail. It is your responsibility. Take ownership of it and steward well what God has blessed you with. On the last day, He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

THANK YOU

<http://www.DiscipleYourKids.Net>

I'd like to say a quick "thank you" for reading this book. It is our hope and prayer that you would join us in this conversation "How to Disciple Your Kids". Please visit DiscipleYourKids.net and tell us your story as how God has called you and your journey in raising radical follower of Jesus.

I need your help! Please take a minute to leave a quick review on Amazon. Thanks so much!

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