

Spiritual Fathering Session 1: A Biblical Basis for Responsibilities in the Home

Much of this information comes from a family worship website by Kerry Ptacek

This is NOT group therapy to help with deep family problems. If you need family counseling, you may want to contact John Lane.

We live in a day where many Christians are seeking revival. I submit that what we need is what I would call “responsible discipleship.” This was common in the early 1700’s. Many American Christians at the time could read the Bible in Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Aramaic. They spent much time studying the Word of God. That generation was the one that experienced the First Great Awakening. Perhaps if we stopped chasing revival (a short-term experience) and started pursuing responsible discipleship, we would wind up with both, but it is not easy. Responsible discipleship involves stretching ourselves, “fathering” ourselves.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 18:10-14. Two men walked into the temple. One congratulated himself (self-nurture, self-mothering), the other stretched himself (self-challenge, self-fathering). The parable ends with this verse:

"I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:14)

Notice that only one of the two who walked into the temple was called a man by Jesus at the end of the parable. The use of the “divine passive” (“be humbled,” “be exalted”) tells us that it is God who is pushing down on a man who mothers himself and it is God who is exalting a man who fathers himself.

By engaging in this study, you are saying that you know that are not all that you need to be. You are not wanting to nurture/mother yourself anymore. You are wanting to stretch/father yourself.

What we will cover: Material I wrote on giving spiritual leadership at home, largely based on Deut 6:6-9

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ⁴ "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; ⁷ and you shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up. ⁸ "And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(1) Based on this passage, there are five applications:

Put it on your heart (we must study the Bible ourselves first)

Teach intentionally (have a structured, intentional time of instruction) because:

It says first to teach them *diligently*

It will be a reference point for the incidental teaching

There is so little teaching in the church today (little structured discipleship)

Teach incidentally (“talk of them”), meaning that you refer to your intentional teaching in casual situations

Take it with you (today), that would mean something like carrying an ipod with the Bible on it)

Put it up (put Scriptures up where everyone can see them around the house)

(2) How to pray for your family, especially when it comes to generational sin

(3) Book on marriage

Materials needed: Pencil/pen when you come.

To those of you whose children are already grown: God has a lot to say to grandfathers, as well

Remember: This is going to cost you some time—maybe an hour a day. If you are looking for a place to find time in your schedule, decide which TV program you will not watch.

One more note: You will need to ask your wife to plan to come on week 4 (July 28). It will be more than worth your time.

Introduction

According to church pollster George Barna, only 22% of people ages 25-29 attended church in the past week. Most of them never intend to go again. This means that, if your family is an average Christian family, and you have two children, the chances are that both of them will never attend church once they leave home. The answer to this dilemma is *not* to adjust what we are doing in church.

What, then, is the answer?

Family Worship in the Old Testament

Reminder: Old Testament worship involved the entire family. Witness: "But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose, **you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants**, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all your undertakings. (Deuteronomy 12:18-19, NASU)

Joshua rehearsed God's covenant with Israel with entire families present. Witness: "There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with **the women and the little ones and the strangers** who were living among them. (Joshua 8:35, NASU)

Jehoshaphat's urgent prayer for help against the enemies of Judah was offered up while entire families were present. Witness: "All Judah was standing before the LORD, **with their infants, their wives and their children.**" (2 Chronicles 20:13, NASU)

Nehemiah led the dedication of the newly rebuilt wall with entire families rejoicing together. Witness: "...and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, **even the women and children rejoiced**, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar." (Nehemiah 12:43, NASU)

Family Worship in the New Testament

Family worship in the New Testament can be found in Acts 2:46: "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart..." (NASU) the phrase "from house to house" is better translated "**in each one's house.**" It is best translated in a distributive sense, rather than a progressive sense.

The Priority of Family Worship

Note that, in Moses' last address to the children of Israel, he reiterates the responsibility that fathers have to their children: "Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, **which you shall command your sons** to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. 47 "For **it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life**. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess." (Deuteronomy 32:46-47, NASU) Here, God is stressing that His commandments are not merely a trifling thing. It is literally a matter of life and death for our children. If they learn His laws and obey them, they will live. If they do not learn them, or if they disregard them, they will be dead, even while they live. They will be failures, even amidst the short-lived trappings of external success. (randall) To put it in a more positive way, when we teach the Word at home, it is not idle. It will begin to *actively* work in their lives, as well as in ours.

Male Headship is God's Plan

^{NAS} **Ephesians 6:1** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), ³ that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. ⁴ And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4 is addressed to fathers specifically. In verse one, the Greek word for parents is given ("goneusin"). In verse two, the Greek words "pater" and "mater" are mentioned for fathers and mothers respectively. If, in verse 4, if Paul had wanted to use the word for parents, he would have used the same word he had just used in verse 1. If he had wanted to address mothers alone, or mothers along with fathers, he could have inserted "mater." Instead, he addressed fathers *only* and fathers *emphatically*. This word is in the vocative case, which is a form of specific address. It means that Paul is singling the addressees out from the masses. In essence, he is saying, "You there, fathers, yeah, I'm talking to *you*, and to no one else." This is consistent with Jewish practice. The Talmud (rabbinic commentary on the Old Testament) states that the *father* is "bound to teach his son." Jewish instruction of children was very different from that of the Gentiles. Gentile children were usually instructed by women or by slaves. (Ptacek, pp. 36-7)

The Consequences of Male Passivity

Case 1: Adam

The most common example of male passivity, and its consequences, are found in Genesis 3:6: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." (NASU)

Question: What should Adam have done? *Answer: Corrected the error as it was spoken.*

Question: How can we apply this today? *Answer: When some untruth comes from the media, or from friends, or any other source, correct it immediately.*

Note: It will help your wife if you will talk with her and tell her that you are going to take a more active role in being the spiritual gatekeeper for the family, that you are going to correct lies that enter the home, because you do are responsible before God to do that, just like Adam was, even though he failed.

Case 2: Eli

1 Samuel 2:22-30 ²² Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ²³ And he said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people?" ²⁴ "No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD's people circulating. ²⁵ "If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death. ²⁶ Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men. ²⁷ Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Did I *not* indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt *in bondage* to Pharaoh's house?' ²⁸ 'And did I *not* choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I *not* give to the house of your father all the fire *offerings* of the sons of Israel?' ²⁹ 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded *in My dwelling*, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?' ³⁰ "Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the LORD declares, 'Far be it from Me-- for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed."

Eli is the personification of the truth that it is not enough to be a good man. He evidently was a good man, but he did not train his sons as the scripture commands. As a result, he suffered, his family suffered and the entire nation suffered. In the end, Eli died, his sons died and one of his daughters-in-law died. Eli was rebuked for his failure. Notice that, when God rebuked Eli, He described Eli as "honoring your sons above Me." (1 Samuel 2:29) When we fail to restrain our rebellious and dishonoring children, we participate in that dishonor, showing more honor to our disobedient children than to God. Note also that, in 1 Samuel 3:13, Samuel *does* speak to them, but their conduct had been so outrageous as to merit removal. When we fail to take drastic action in response to blatant rebellion, we dishonor God. (randall)

Lesson: We must not only share the truth with our children, but *give consequences* if truth is not followed.

Case 3: Hezekiah

Isaiah 39:6 - 8 ⁶ Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. ⁷ 'And some of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you shall beget, shall be taken away; and they shall become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" ⁸ Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "For there will be peace and truth in my days."

Note, in Isaiah 39:6-8, Hezekiah's complete indifference to his son's generation. His self-centeredness is likely the undoing of his son. Hezekiah was a great king, indeed, there was no king like him before or after him in all Judah (2 Kings 18:5). Contrast that with Manasseh. Manasseh was so wicked that the scripture does not even use the other kings of Judah as a measuring stick. The scriptural record says that he "seduced [Judah] to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel." (2 Kings 21:9, NASU) Not only was he evil himself, he led the entire nation to be more wicked than the nations that God had destroyed before Israel. A stronger portrayal of wickedness cannot be imagined. What a difference one self-absorbed father can make between one generation and another! (randall)

Question: What should Hezekiah have done? *Answer: Beg God to have mercy on his son, and on his generation.*

Question: How does this apply today? *Answer: By not getting so involved in career, etc. that we are unaware of the spiritual danger our children may be in.*

Case 4: The Men of Jeremiah's Day

Notice the sorry state of Judah just before the captivity, especially in regard to the lack of male spiritual leadership, recorded in Jeremiah 44:15-19:

“Then all the men who were aware that their wives were burning sacrifices to other gods, along with all the women who were standing by, as a large assembly, including all the people who were living in Pathros in the land of Egypt, responded to Jeremiah, saying, 16 ‘As for the message that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we are not going to listen to you! 17 But rather we will certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths, by burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, just as we ourselves, our forefathers, our kings and our princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food and were well off and saw no misfortune. 18 But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine.’ 19 ‘And,’ said the women, ‘when we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made for her sacrificial cakes in her image and poured out drink offerings to her?’ (NASU)

Before commenting on this, let us rehearse the evolution of Baal worship. Baal worship began as the worship of El, which was the worship of the true God, albeit with limited revelation apart from the way God revealed Himself to Abraham. Melchizedek appears to have been a worshiper of El. Soon, however, the pagans began to teach that El had a wife, Asherah. Soon, they taught, El and Asherah had children. Baal was among them. As time went on, Baal began to move to the forefront, and El faded into the background. Eventually, Baal married Asherah and became the supreme god, himself. Although this is the basic pattern, pagan worship evolved in different ways during the history of Israel. At times, female deities were exalted to the highest place, as is the case when the women of Judah were rebuked for offering sacrifices to the “Queen of Heaven” in Jeremiah 44:15-19. In that passage, in verse 19, note the passivity of the men to their wives’ idolatrous behavior. All manner of immorality accompanied idol worship: homosexuality, prostitution (a role common among the priestesses), and child sacrifice were all common. This is one of the most tragic aspects of pagan worship: it warped the biblical view of the family, where God portrays Himself as a father, and His people are called His children. (Ptacek, p. 20)

To redefine the family is to meddle with the very essence of God Himself, who has chosen to reveal Himself in terms of the family. To redefine God is to alter family and gender roles and to change the moral structure of society. He who trifles with one effaces the other. (randall)

Question: What should the men have done? *Answer: Lead their families to worship the Lord alone. The answer is in doing the right thing, not just in avoiding doing the wrong thing.*

2 Dimensions to raising your children

Introduction

The lyrics to a contemporary song say, “Does it really matter if we’re saving the world if we should lose our family along the way?” (quoted in Ptacek, p. 39) This perfectly summarizes the current plight of the church in contemporary America. We cannot change the world until we have obeyed God, allowing Him to transform our families by the power of His word.

In the Old Testament, God always portrays His role among His people in one of three ways: Master and servant (entire Old Testament), Father and child (from the Exodus on), and Husband and wife (from mid-Isaiah on—after the fall of Samaria). (Ptacek, pp. 21-22)

Each of these word pictures were viewed as relating to family. Notice, too: A child only has one father, a wife only has one husband, and a servant only has one master. *God is speaking loudly.*

Ephesians 5:22-6:9 presents us with the same three relationship analogies as are found in the Old Testament: Wife and husband, child and parent, servant and master. (randall)

Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 5-6 are the main scriptures that we will draw from as we explore what the Bible is teaching on the subject of family responsibilities.

The Man’s Responsibility to Himself: Put it on Your Heart

Deut 6:4-9 "Hear, oh Israel! The Lord is our God! The Lord is one! 5You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up. 8You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (NASU)

How can we diligently teach something we don’t know ourselves? It follows that, if we love God, we will love His word, and we will spend time rehearsing His word over and over.

Question: How can this be done? Answer: Through study, memorization, reading, corporate worship, singing scripture songs and meditating on a portion of the word.

We must begin here ourselves, or we will never be able to train our children properly.

The Man’s Responsibility to His Children: Teach Intentionally

“Teach” (verse 7) means to whet, to sharpen. When a knife is whetted, it is put up against a spinning stone, turning one way, then another. The stone does the work, but a person must bring the blade into contact with the stone. It is not necessary to labor and lecture long in teaching children. The word will do the work. All we need to do is bring them into proximity with the word.

Question: In addition to family devotions, how can be done? Answer: through Bible videos (there are some good animated ones [NEST has some good ones]) when they are young, through scripture songs, and through contemporary Christian music as they get older.

The Man's Responsibility to His Children: Teach Incidentally

Notice that there is a place for discussion, as well. "You shall talk of them..." (verse 7)

Question: **What is presumed here?** Answer: That fathers will be spending time with their children. Here is the principle: Hold up the standard of God's word in every circumstance you share together.

Question: When can this be done? Answer: (1) after you watch a movie together, discuss and compare its values to what the word teaches, (2) after you watch a T.V. program or watch a play, do the same, (3) after a game that your child participated in, or that you watched together, do the same, (4) as you enjoy vacation together, look for opportunities to do the same, (5) as you coach them through school, watch for similar activities, (6) as they form relationships, do the same.

Perhaps most importantly, do the same after church. They have just heard the truth, so lunch after church is an extremely important time to reinforce the truth and to answer any questions.

After they get older, another way to do this is to read a good book together, even if it is a secular book. Buy two copies and sit down together at the end of each day, reading a chapter or so. Afterwards, discuss what was said, and whether it lines up with God's truths. Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker call this "doing book" in Preparing Your Son for Every Man's Battle.

Over a period of time, you will be teaching them to evaluate all of life against the plumbline of God's truth. If your children really grasp this habit and make it their own, when they leave for college, you will not have to worry about what is going to happen. You will have done your job. You will have grounded them firmly in the word of God, but with an important distinction: **You have not only taught them Bible verses and biblical concepts, you have taught them to apply these truths to their lives.**

This is critical in our day, when the world continually feeds its untruth into our lives and the lives of those we love. Perhaps this is what Paul meant when he talked of putting on the whole armor of God. When we rehearse God's truth over and over, we are covered by His protection in a world that would otherwise certainly defeat us. **God has not left us defenseless! He has given us a plan.** If we come to understand it and apply it, we will become a powerful force as a church once again.

The Man's Responsibility to His Children: Take It With You

In ancient Egyptian culture, it was common for people to wear bracelets as amulets to protect them from harm. God is saying, "Replace superstition with reminders of what I have commanded you." This means that, as we continue to immerse ourselves in God's truth, we should do everything we can to minimize the untruth that we are exposed to. **This does not mean living in a world with a "bunker mentality," where the world is viewed as "the enemy."** It just means not exposing ourselves unnecessarily to a mindset that we don't really agree with anyway. Think about it: If you are a republican, would you constantly read, and listen to, democratic speeches. You wouldn't necessarily stop your ears each time one of them is giving a speech, but you would probably limit your hearing of those you disagree with, and do all you can to give attention to those with whom you agree. How strange that many Christians spend more time listening to things they don't agree with than what they do agree with! **We must guard ourselves from the two extremes: (1)"bunker mentality" and (2) simply drifting with the world.** In short, the scripture is telling us to use every opportunity to discuss the truth of God's word in every imaginable circumstance.

The Man's Responsibility to His Children: Put it Up

It has been common for people of all cultures through history to tie a string or some sort of reminder on their fingers in order to keep from forgetting something important. God is saying that, however we do it, we need to keep His commands in front of us, so as not to forget them, because they are very important.

Perhaps the best way to do this is for the father to try the following possible strategy: (1) pray for each member of his family, asking God what each of them needs. (This is different from asking God what their sins and weaknesses are.) As God gives insight, the husband/father can then (2) go to a concordance or a topical Bible that highlights scriptures that address these needs. As these verses come to light, he will likely wind up with scriptures in certain categories, for example, some verses dealing with honesty, some dealing with encouragement, some dealing with how to handle trials, others dealing with perseverance, etc. He can then (3) approach his family and ask each member what their favorite verse is in each category. Then he can (4) have each family member make their own printup of their verse (easily done today on computers), have each one framed and put up in the house. Then, you have a powerful reminder of God's truth that directly relates to the members of the family, and the family helped to put it all together! These reminders can be out in the open, where everyone can see them, or in the room of the person who selected and made them. **Remember, though, it is important to pick verses that apply to each person in a practical way, not just their "favorite verse."** Favorite verses have a purpose. They usually encourage or provide comfort, but we also need reminders of what God wants from us, as well. **It is not enough to teach, it is not enough to discuss, we must put up visible reminders, as well.**

1. Pray for each member of the family, asking God to show you what their individual needs are.
2. Go to a concordance or topical Bible, finding several scriptures that apply in each of these areas.
3. Run your scripture list by each family member, asking them to choose their favorite scripture in each area.
4. Have each family member (or perhaps just the children) print up all the favorite verses on the computer and put them up throughout the house. You will have reminders everywhere you go, in the areas where your family needs to be strengthened the most, and everyone in the family got to help.

The Man's Responsibility to His Children: Guard and Nurture Them (Gen 18:19)

Don't feel like you have to lead your family like anyone else does. Every person and every family is different. Ask yourself, "What is the Bible telling *me* to do?" God has designed your family uniquely. What He leads you to do will fit who *you* are and who *your family* is.

Someone was sharing with me this week that he had trouble praying out loud. This can be a big hindrance to leading your family spiritually. I also had a hangup with this when I was a child, on into my teenage years. My parents were patient with me, knowing that I would come around when the time was right. They gently encouraged me, and I eventually grew out of my hangup. It will help if you will begin by praying out loud when you are alone in traffic, etc. You may want to get your cell phone out and act like you are talking to someone because, really you *are* talking to someone!

Genesis 18:19 is the first mention of parental instruction in the Bible:

“For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.”(NASU)

The words used indicate that God meant for Abraham to communicate authoritative instruction, not just advice. The word “keep” means to guard, but with nurturing care. This word alone speaks volumes as to how we are to lead our families. Our leadership is authoritative. We are to guard our families against the perversities of our culture, but we are to do so as nurturers. **The truth is authoritative, but our families need more than just authority. They need nurture. While authority may affect immediate behavior, only nurture changes hearts. There are two possible extremes here: Nurture without authority, or authority without nurture. There is also another possible pitfall: Going back and forth, from one extreme to the other.**

Genesis 18:19 is a striking verse, in one respect: the context of this verse. The context is that the angels of God are telling Abraham that they are about to judge Sodom and Gomorrah because of the wickedness of their society. Here you have two families juxtaposed: Abraham and his family, being brought up “to keep the way of the Lord,” and Sodom and his family, who blended in with their culture, eventually resulting in judgment falling on the society where they had chosen to make their home. **We must be especially diligent to identify the sins of our culture that are diametrically opposed to our faith, and teach our children why they are wrong, where in scripture these sins are spoken against, and how they can stand strong against temptation in those specific areas.** This is the duty of parents, not the church. The church can support parents but, according to scripture, this is the duty of parents alone. (randall)

Question: What are some of the sins of our culture that are in direct opposition to our faith?

Eph 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (NASU)

Here, the same twin concepts are present: Guarding and nourishing. The New Testament admonition to guard concerns the father, himself—he is to guard himself from provoking his children to anger.

Question: What are ways that fathers can do this? Answer: (1) displays of anger by the father himself, (2) an unpredictable temperament in the father. (3) inconsistency in standards (the father does not live up to his own standards), (4) unreasonable expectations, (5) unreasonable consequences/needless severity, (6) not communicating expectations or consequences clearly, and (7) commands alone without a loving relationship.

The nourishing is found in the second part of verse 4. The phrase “bring them up” literally means “nourish them to maturity.”

The Man's Responsibility to His Children: Discipline and Instruct Them

The conjugation in Ephesians 6:4 means, "Don't do this, but rather do this." (Ptacek, p. 37) It means that the alternative to doing the wrong thing is to do the right thing. This tells us that the way to not provoke children to wrath is to observe what follows in the rest of the verse.

This verse tells us exactly how God wants fathers to nourish their children: with discipline and instruction. "Discipline" is a strong term, meaning firm instruction and consequences that go with it. "Instruction" is a milder term, meaning gentle admonishments and reminders. Only the Holy Spirit can guide a father into understanding which of the two is needed in any given situation but, as a general rule, children need more discipline when they are younger, and more instruction as they get older.

Some teach that it is wrong to bias children about matters of faith until they are old enough to decide for themselves. In response, we should note: (1) that to do so would be tantamount to leaving a garden alone until the plants are mature, without nutrients, without weeding, (2) we instruct our children early on in other areas of life, (3) we teach anyway, by our example (those who do not pray are teaching their children not to, as well), (4) the heathen are not hesitant to pass on their own values (or lack of them), (5) if the parent does not teach a child, someone else will, (6) matters of faith are more important than any other truths that can be taught so, above all things, the truths of the Christian faith should be taught. (Albert Barnes)

The word for "bring them up" in verse 4 is the same as "nourishes" in Ephesians 5:29: "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church..." (NASU) The man in the home, both as husband and father, is to nourish his wife and children to maturity. It means an intimate nurturing. This is to be done directly, not indirectly.

^{NAS} **2 Kings 10:1** Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters and sent *them* to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel, the elders, and to the guardians of *the children of Ahab*, saying,

Notice that, in 2 Kings 10:1, Ahab did not raise his children himself, but left the task to guardians. Child-rearing is too sacred a duty to be farmed out, even to Sunday School teachers, Christian preschools, Christian academies, youth ministers, etc.

Fathers are called to correct, not punish, their children. The proper mix is discipline and instruction. "Discipline" means tutelage, or education by training, disciplinary correction with a mind to nurture. Notice the two references to the Lord in verses 1-4. Children obey in the Lord, and parents administrate instruction and discipline in the Lord. If we nurture in the Lord, they will obey in the Lord. (randall)

Discipline them so that they shall love you all the more. We should discipline our children, not because we are angry, but because it is the right thing to do, and it is the right thing to do as long as we line up with scripture. To do otherwise leaves a child open to nursing wounded feelings, rather than leading to repentance. (commentary)

Spiritual Fathering Session 3

A Further Biblical Basis for Responsibilities in the Home

“Whatever a man feels to be of vital importance, he endeavors to set it before his family.” (Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg)

“Listen, oh my people, to my instruction! Incline your ears to the words of my mouth! 2I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark sayings of old, 3Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. 4We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. 5For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children, 6That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, 7That they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments, 8And not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart And whose spirit was not faithful to God.” (Psalm 78:1-8, NASU)

Much of what follows is especially applicable to grandfathers, as well as fathers.

The Man’s Responsibility to His Children: Rehearse God’s Mighty Acts

This psalm is a maskil: a psalm to give instruction.

We ignore the instruction at our own peril.

Note the words “incline your ears” and “listen” in verse 1. This is similar to “give ear” and “consider” in Psalm 5:1. Imperatives R used both in commands from God 2 man, commands from man 2 man, & urgent prayers from man 2 God.

Psalm 5:1 Give ear to my words, O LORD, Consider my groaning.

The thought is the same.

In the same way that we sometimes want to take hold of God’s coattails and plead loudly for His divine attentions, so the psalmist takes us by the shoulders, looks us in the eye and shakes us firmly saying, “You must, for your own sake, listen to what I am saying.”

In Psalm 78, we are told to teach our children.

To teach them God’s commands and God’s ways is our highest service to them.

To fail to do so would be the highest form of neglect.

Note, in verse 4, it says, “We will not hide [His deeds] from our children.”

To not pass on the wonderful works of God is tantamount to hiding them from our children.

It is a more neglectful act than if we had deliberately withheld their inheritance.

In fact, this *is* their spiritual heritage!

Notice that rehearsing the mighty deeds of God encourages obedience (verse 7).

Commandments alone are not enough.

Hearing of how God acted on behalf of His obedient people literally inspires obedience.

We live in a generation that is becoming increasingly ignorant of the commands of God, but those who do know the commands of God are increasingly unmotivated.

We must pass on God’s mighty works to the next generation.

Rehearsing the mighty deeds of God builds character. (verse 7)

The psalmist is telling us to teach our children:

**Put your hope in God during difficult times,
not forgetting the things He has done for us in trying circumstances before.**

Here, fathers are being told to recount God's mighty deeds,
in order to build into his children the character that responds in faith under duress.

It is the father's responsibility to catalogue and communicate God's mighty deeds.

This can include: His deeds in scrip, in the local church, in relation to the immediate family and each individual within the family.

**This psalm says that rehearsing the mighty deeds of God will correct generational sin (verse 8),
at least when it comes to stubbornness and rebellion.**

We live in a time when stubbornness and rebellion nearly always go unchecked by parents.

Here, we have laid down before us a remedy.

Parents need not stand by helplessly.

God shows us the way out but, unfortunately, **we are pointing the finger in the wrong direction.**

This is not the fault of public schools that don't allow prayer.

It is not the fault of a liberal supreme court,

it is the fault of clueless and derelict Christian fathers.

It is far more convenient to blame the world for our own problems,

but doing so has not alleviated our present condition. (randall)

We are to recount His wonderful works.

Question: How many of us have shared our testimony with our children?

Verse 1 says that rehearsing the mighty deeds of God is a law

—something that has the same type of authority as a law handed down from God Himself.

Verse 5 says that teaching our children is a command, not just a good thing to do.

Verse 7 puts two things in opposition: Forgetting the works of God and keeping His commandments.

If you do one, you will not do the other.

This implies that our children will need reminding, not of His commands, but of His works.

As we rehearse His works,

they will learn that they can trust God and not have to break His law to get their needs met.

What does "Thou shalt not steal" teach?

That God will meet our needs, therefore we will not have to steal in order to meet our own needs.

(Same with adultery, etc.)

When we rehearse all the ways that God has met our needs,

stealing will be seen as an idiotic act practiced only by those who have not seen God act on their behalf.

Lying will be viewed the same way.

All the commands of God make sense in the context of His wonderful acts on behalf of His people.

So, when they are caught lying, the thought is, "Hey, you don't have to lie! It's totally unnecessary!"

Verse 8 says that we will respond in rebellion or in trust.

In the mind of the young, nothing infuses trust in God like hearing stories of God's provision from their parents. At the same time, nothing diffuses a spirit of rebellion like hearing such accounts of God's faithfulness.

How many generations are mentioned in verses 5-6? Four.
Our work is not done until our children teach their children.

God's acts of deliverance are effective for each generation, not just one.

They are not to be hoarded. They are meant to be passed on.

Deuteronomy 4:9 says that we are to not only teach our sons, but our grandsons, as well:

"Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life, but make them known to your sons and your grandsons." (NASU)

This assumes living in close enough proximity so that this can be possible. (randall)

The Power of Symbolism

Symbolism is a powerful way to teach.

It transcends the event, itself, lasting long after the event is over.

As it is repeated over and over, the lesson is reinforced.

But symbolism is only powerful when it is interpreted.

Note especially the interpreting role of the father:

7 "Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. 8 You shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' " (Exodus 13:7-16)

"Now when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, 12 you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD.... And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' then you shall say to him, 'With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. 15 It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb...' " (Exodus 13:7-8, 11-12, 15, NASU)

"And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" (Exodus 12:26-27, NASU)

The father led the Passover service in Israelite society, at home.

He not only led it, he interpreted the meaning of it to his children.

Feel free to set up symbols in your home. Example:

God brings your family through a difficult time (financial, emotional, etc.) You find a medium-sized rock, have the children paint it and write a Scripture verse on it that reminds everyone of what a great God we have. Then, over the years, when guests come over, the children can be taught to explain to guests what that rock stands for.

The Man's Responsibility to His Children: Dedicate

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

The Hebrew word for "train up" is "chanak," which means to "dedicate" a child in the way he should go. Deut 20:5 says, "Who is the man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it?" and 2 Chron 7:5 says, "The king and all the people dedicated the house of God." This is a stronger term than "train up."

Here is a biblical foundation for baby dedication, but it is more than a mere ceremony. It is the setting aside of that child for the purposes of God.

Baby dedications in a church service frequently have so many distractions that the meaning can be lost. It might be a good idea to have a similar prayer of dedication for use at home, when the child is sleeping. Perhaps the pastor or children's minister could come to the home, if possible and pray with the parents, as they set the child apart for God's purposes in the home environment, where the child will be more comfortable (and more likely to be resting!) It would be very meaningful for the child if the whole thing were videotaped, so that the child could have that as a lasting memory of his/her parents' love, and of God's plan for him/her from the beginning. You may want to ask your child if he/she would like to be privately re-dedicated.

Dedication requires more than a one-time event. It requires consistent, godly training.

Three children dedicated from birth in scripture (other than Jesus): Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist.

Question: Which one did the worst? Which one did the best?

Assignment: Check out which father figure was the godliest

(Manoah, in Judges 13-14, Eli in 1 Samuel 1-4, and Zacharias in Luke 1), and then compare the boys.

In the first two cases, God's word came to the mother, not the father.

This is an indication that they were more receptive to God's message than the boys' fathers were.

In John's case, God's message came to the father.

Lesson: It is not enough to dedicate your child to God as a one-time event, as important as that is.

That merely sets him apart.

The godly upbringing that only a father can provide will ensure that he will not depart from the way he should go. Only this ensures success.

The Man's Responsibility to His Entire Family: Dedicate

Listen to this verse.

^{NAU} **Joshua 24:15** "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

In Josh 24:15, Joshua is not presenting a scenario where people are deciding between serving Yahweh or not.

The choice is whether to serve Yahweh or the gods of the culture.

We all serve someone or something.

Who we will serve is the only issue.

Joshua is saying that, though others in the cong of the "people of God" may decide 2 serve the gods of his day, he would decide for his family who they would serve.

As the head of the household goes, so goes the family.

Question: What are some of the "gods" that church people often wind up serving?

This could easily be a public declaration before the people of God, much like Joshua's was.

(The way Brad did it, spelling out what it means to serve the Lord)

I encourage you to come forward Sunday with your family,

telling the church that you have decided that you will be a family that serves the Lord.

Talk with your family first.

Ask that the pastor or I pray a prayer of dedication over you in front of the congregation.

Bring your wives along next week.

TOUR OF ONLINE BIBLE TOOLS

Spiritual Fathering Session 4: The Husband-Wife Relationship

“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:22-24, NASU)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body.” (Ephesians 5:25-30, NASU)

“Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.” (Ephesians 5:33, NASU)

The Husband-Wife Relationship: A General Look

Two extremes: Husband committing spiritual abuse, wife usurping husband’s authority.

Ephesians 5:21-6:9 is all about guarding against rebellion on the one hand and abuse of power on the other.

Question: What is the natural result of rebellion? Answer: Disorder.

Question: What is the natural result of abuse of power? Rebellion.

The same is true of church leaders and church members. Look at Hebrews 13:17: “**Obey your leaders** and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” (NASU) Now compare this with 2 Timothy 2:24-26: “**The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome**, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.” (NASU) Along the same lines, look also at 1 Peter 5:1-4: “Therefore, **I exhort the elders among you**, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 **shepherd the flock of God** among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and **not for sordid gain**, but with eagerness; 3 **nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge**, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (NASU)

The church is to see to it that it does not fall into either extreme of rebellion or of abuse of authority. For those who instigate rebellion, God has a remedy, found in Romans 16:17: “Now I urge you, brethren, **keep your eye on [mark] those who cause dissensions** and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.” (NASU) Those that persist are to be dealt with according to the guidelines of church discipline laid down in Matthew 18.

For those who abuse pastoral authority, God has a remedy, as well, found in 1 Timothy 5:19-20: “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. 20 **Those [elders] who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all**, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.” (NASU) This appears to be after all the other steps of church discipline have been covered.

God desires that the parent-child relationship be guarded against these two extremes, as well: “**Children, obey** your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. 4 **Fathers, do not provoke your children** to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Further, Paul desires that the master-slave relationship be kept from these same vices: “**Slaves, be obedient** to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. 9 And **masters**, do the same things to them, and **give up threatening**, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” (Ephesians 6:5-9, NASU)

When it comes to the husband-wife relationship, Paul’s goal begins with order but, as we will see, he has another goal in view, as well.

To help us get a grasp on what God expects of us in the area of husband-wife relationships, let us first look at three passages. The first passage is addressed to the wife, the second to the husband and the third, as summary verse is directed to both. Here they are:

“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:22-24, NASU)

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body.” (Ephesians 5:25-30, NASU)

“Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.” (Ephesians 5:33, NASU)

The key to right relationships in the home is a correct understanding of the truth. Everything else must flow from the truth. There is one truth for the woman and one for the man in Ephesians 5.

The Truth: THE MAN IS THE HEAD OF THE WIFE (Ephesians 5:23)

The word “head” means governor. Paul is saying that “the man should not be a tyrant, and that the woman should not be the governor.” (Adam Clarke) The scripture always finds the proper place between the extremes of imbalance.

Notice that, right away, Paul addresses the issue of who the husband IS, rather than what he is to do. The scripture says that he is to BE the head, not that he is to lead. This is more of a matter of perspective than anything else. **It falls primarily to the woman to see that this truth is understood. If the family continues to fall into a pattern where the woman is taking the leadership role, the answer is not for her to confess to usurping his authority. Rather, she should confess that she is not viewing him properly as the head of the home. When she sees him in the proper light, she will act accordingly. We tend to attack the action, when in many cases the root problem is simply a lack of really understanding the truth.**

The Wife's Attitude: Respect (Ephesians 5:33)

The correct understanding of the truth should lead to the proper attitude. The proper attitude is given in verse 33: respect. This can be translated reverence, fear, or awe. When the wife understands that he is her literal head, she will respond to him in the proper attitude. Again, it is premature to point to specific instances of submission or lack of it, before addressing the attitude of respect. A woman who sees her husband as her God-ordained head will respect him, and if she respects him, she will in turn follow him.

This attitude of respect toward her husband will pay dividends for her in her relationship with her children. Proverbs 1:8 is best translated, "Hear the instruction of your father, **and you will not** forsake the law of your mother." If the wife wants respect from her children, she must see to it that they hear the instruction of their father. If they are taught to honor him, they will, in due course, adhere to their mother's teaching, as well. If the wife wants to be honored by her children, she should set the example by honoring the father of her children, especially when he is giving spiritual leadership.

The Wife's Responsibility: Submit to Her Husband (Ephesians 5:22, 24)

All of this will result in the wife naturally submitting to the wishes of her husband. This is not natural to the world—only to believers. **We are a product of our times, and the times tell us that a woman is able to make her own decisions for herself. In most cases, this is true. Most women are able. Ability is not the issue. Able or not, she is still to defer the decision-making process to her husband when her husband is giving direction.**

The question here arises: Should she submit to him if he asks her to do something that is contrary to scripture? The answer is "no," but with specific qualifications. Albert Barnes gives the following guidelines:

- (1) Be sure it is a matter of clear scriptural obedience and not just a whim of your own**
- (2) First pray about it, to see if there is a way you can comply with his wishes and still obey God**
- (3) Make attempts to quietly and respectfully win him, according to 1 Peter 3:1**
- (4) If you feel you must proceed in a different direction from what your husband wishes, do so in a way that does not communicate rebellion or contention**
- (5) Redouble your efforts to comply with his wishes in all other areas, affirming him in every way possible**

This brings out a previous point: If the attitude of respect is in place, the outward act of submission is automatic. A wife can outwardly do her husband's wishes, while harboring a resentful attitude that is very displeasing toward God. That is not submission

Example:	Wife # 1	Wife #2
Situation	Husband asks her to do A	Husband asks her to do X, against the teaching of scripture
Response	She does A with a stinky attitude	She does Y, with a beautiful attitude, following the guidelines above

Which one is really submission? Which one is pleasing to God?

The Wife's Teacher: Her Walk With Christ (Ephesians 5:22)

The wife is told to submit to her husband “as to the Lord.” For some women, their relationship with their husband falls rather naturally into place. For some, it comes with time and much effort. Often, past relationships that involve abuse of one sort or another cause her to associate her husband with previous offenders. For this second kind of woman, all is by no means lost.

Notice that Paul associates her relationship with her husband with the Lord, not with anyone else. As she develops her love relationship with Christ, she will be able to learn to give and receive love there, and will be able to transfer what she has learned there into her marriage. Every time she yields herself to Christ's wishes, she is making it easier on herself to do so in relation to her husband. The fact that she was not loved in previous relationships can be overcome by her present relationship with the living Lord.

The same can be said of churches that have been abused by previous leadership. As long as they focus on the abuse of the past, they will continue to respond inappropriately to their current leadership. But as the people in the church develop a love relationship with Christ, they will learn to respond to Him as the Head of the church, freeing them to respond more lovingly and trustingly to their current leadership. This is why a personal spiritual walk with God is essential in order for us to have healthy churches and healthy homes. A woman can have a horrible background and still have a wonderful marriage if she has a vibrant walk with her loving Savior, and a church with a history of explosions can do the same thing. This is the only way for cycles of abuse to be completely broken. Only a genuine relationship with a loving, healing Savior can retrain us for present earthly relationships. What a privilege to have such a master Teacher as the Lord, Himself! Jesus taught us that, if we love Him, we will keep His commandments. If we love our earthly authorities, we will follow them, as well. The disconnect is usually transferring skills from one relationship to the other.

If we allow Him, Jesus will teach us that our walk with Him has direct bearing on our relationships with others, and that is certainly true of the wife and her relationships to Christ and her husband. God Himself will teach her what true love really is and, as she compares her husband to her loving Lord, she will see him as a representative of Christ, and not as a representative of a failed human example.

The Result: Order

The goal of all of this is order. God desires that we have order in the church, in our society, and the family.

For a woman to do this willingly yields to her what she so deeply desires—order in her home. Granted, she may have to take the short end of the stick on some issues where she would prefer otherwise, but she will receive in return something far more valuable—a peaceful, orderly home. There is not a woman alive who does not desire this.

The Second Truth: THE MAN AND HIS WIFE ARE ONE

25 Husbands, **love** your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and **gave Himself up** for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the **washing** of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but **nourishes** and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body.” (Ephesians 5:25-30, NASU)

Three duties of the husband are given in Exodus 21:10. In this verse, Moses is addressing a possible situation where a man has married his female slave, then has taken a free wife in addition. For such a situation, Moses states:

"If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.” (NASU)

So, in the Old Testament, a man’s duty to his wife consisted of: Food, clothing, conjugal rights. These are all external duties.

Here, Paul adds an internal duty: love. But Paul goes beyond just dealing with duty in this passage. He gives the truth that provides underpinning for the duty: She is your own flesh.

Oneness is only used in two relationships in scripture: Christ and the church, and husband-wife.

It is never used in relation to children and parents, or in slave and master. The only human relationship this applies to is husband-wife, and it is mentioned in reference to the husband and the way he should regard his wife. Men, more than women, need to be reminded that they are one. Women have a tendency to bond more easily, and to see things in these terms. Men tend to be more independent. But when we marry, we are not independent. We are one.

This oneness is in the unlikeliest of sources—between the sexes, as unlike as they are. **This difference is the very reason for such unity.** The two parts complement one another. It is our differences that make the unity possible. (randall)

The wife is spoken of as the husband’s own flesh—she is a part of him. **If this truth were fully realized, the divorce rate among Christians would plummet.** The one who is kind to his wife is kind to himself, the one who neglects his wife neglects himself, and the one who deliberately harms his wife harms himself. **Given this truth, it is an act ultimate selfishness for a man to love his wife.** The head cannot say, “I am going to stab my leg.” That would be preposterous, because the head will register the pain from the leg. Both are members of the same body. For a man to hurt his wife is to hurt himself. For him to neglect her is to neglect himself. For him to cherish and nourish her is to lavish the same care and affection upon himself. **Although it immediately requires a cost, that cost is ultimately more than made up for by the return on the initial investment.** Just as a man who believes in a wise financial venture will one day reap more than enough rewards to repay his initial investment, so a man who believes in the trustworthiness of God’s word will be repaid handsomely for all the pains he takes to show love to his wife. If we believe the truth that we are one flesh, we will act accordingly, and we will reap the rewards.

Notice that men have the same training grounds as women do: Their personal walk with God. Christ Himself is set up as the example of love. Every time a man reads of Christ's patience with His disciples, he understands that that is how he needs to treat his wife. Every time he reads of Christ's suffering in Gethsemane while His disciples slept, he is to remember that, if need be, he is to be longsuffering with his wife. Studying Christ will literally train him to love his wife. **This is yet one more reason why personal Bible study is so important to godly living in the home.** One could ask for no better mentor than Christ, Himself.

It is clear here that God wants more than just order. He wants love to prevail. The laws of mathematics are God-given. They have order. But there is no love there. The laws of physics have order, but there is no love there either. Only in the laws of human relationships does he desire to move past orderliness to a place where love literally is the ruling force. This is true both in the home and in the church. **In the home, orderliness begins with a woman's submissiveness, but love begins with the man, and his understanding that he is one with his wife.** Just as the wife's understanding that her husband is the head is the key to orderliness, the husband's understanding that she is one with him is the key to his love. If he is not loving her as he should, he need not confess his lack of love. He must first confess that he has not properly understood that she is one with him, and that he is one with her. When he understands this, he will treat her properly.

"Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband." (Ephesians 5:33, NASU) **Here, "each one" means every one of you individually. Paul leaves no one exempt.** Some couples by nature fall rather easily in to the pattern of submission and loving headship mentioned by Paul. **But it is more than just a matter of natural inclination (or lack of it). It is a command.**

The Man's Responsibility to His Wife: Sacrifice

When it comes to sacrifice, Paul mentions that Christ "gave Himself" for the church. **This does not mean submission**, as some would teach, otherwise, we could interpret the passage to teach that parents should obey their children, and slaves, their masters. **This means doing things that would normally be against one's wishes. It means taking pains to attend to her needs.** (getting up in the middle of the night to take care of the baby, etc.) (randall)

Note the actions that are specified for the both the husband and the wife do not involve great deeds. They are ordinary, almost unnoticeable, but they are of the most powerful sort of deeds, for they are everyday deeds. These are the most transforming, for they intersect our lives at the most basic level. (randall)

The Man's Responsibility to His Wife: Wash

The instructions to the husband include the phrase “that He might present her to Himself.” This is an allusion to Psalm 45:13-15:

13 “The King's daughter is all glorious within. Her clothing is interwoven with gold. 14 She will be led to the King in embroidered work. The virgins, her companions who follow her, Will be brought to you. 15 They will be led forth with gladness and rejoicing. They will enter into the King's palace. (NASU)

The objective of Christ, regarding the church, was to sanctify her, not just to save her. **A husband's work is not done unless, through his ministry to her, she is becoming holy and set apart for the purposes of God. This is to be done by the sanctifying power of the word of God.** Jesus prayed, in John 17:17: “Sanctify them [His disciples] in the truth. Your word is truth.” (NASU) Note that this is the husband's responsibility, not the pastor's, not that of the ladies' ministry in the church. It is his, and his alone. (randall) At the same time, it is important to point out that it is not the husband's job to perfect his wife. It is God's job to make her holy, but it is the husband's responsibility to bring the word of God into her life, so that God can do his work, not only to sanctify her, but to make her literally brilliant in the glory of God Himself. Only the husband can bring the word of God to her in this way, but it is God who performs this ministry. (randall)

In biblical times, a bride spent a long time, often months, preparing herself for her husband. “Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women — for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women — 13 the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.” (Esther 2:12-13, NASU) Notice, also: “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” (Revelation 19:7, NASU)

Just as water washes the body, so the word washes the heart. Verse 27 is properly translated, “That He might present the church to Himself as glorious.” Notice, however, that sanctification precedes the glory. (randall) She will not be beautiful until she is holy and glorious. She will not be holy and glorious until she is washed. **Here then, is the entire pattern: Washing leads to sanctification (holiness). Sanctification (holiness) eventually radiates outward in the form of glory. This is a work of God, involving the ministry of her husband.**

The Man’s Responsibility to His Wife: Nourish

When instructing husbands, Paul uses the Greek word “ektrepho,” which is translated “nourishes” in Ephesians 5:29. The same word used in Ephesians 6:4, where Paul instructs fathers to “bring them up” (“ektrepho”) them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This word means to nourish to a point of maturity and strength. In all family relationships, the husband is to have the same disposition as a gardener would have, patiently giving the plants the environment they need, mixing water, nutrients and protection from the elements, until the plants are strong and healthy. A gardener knows that change will not occur overnight. He knows that, if he provides the proper environment for his plants, they will still look pretty much today, the same as they did yesterday. But he also knows that, over time, God will reward his faithfulness. **A God-given combination of patience and faith is required in order for the gardener to enjoy the reward of his diligence.**

A gardener who nurtures is keenly attuned to the needs of an individual plant. This speaks to a kindness that goes beyond a mere prohibition against a man requiring his wife to do something unbiblical. If he is nurturing her, he will also attuned to her individual needs, and will be careful not to require anything of her that would force her to stretch beyond the limits that her constitution would allow. **A relationship laced with commands and blind loyalty is not a healthy relationship. This is not what is taught in scripture in relation to marriage. (randall) The more a husband issues forth commands, the less likely it is that he is loving her as he should. (Albert Barnes) This sort of conduct is foreign to one who nurtures. A woman can no more thrive in this kind of environment than a rosebush in the desert. Tender, constant concern and attention—that is what is spoken of here.**

In Summary

<u>Partner</u>	<u>Truth</u>	<u>Attitude</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Result</u>
Wife	Her husband is the head	<u>Respect</u>	<u>Submission</u>	<u>Personal walk w. Christ</u>	<u>Order</u>
Husband	His wife is one with him	<u>Love</u>	<u>Sacrifice, Washing, Nurture</u>	<u>Personal walk w. Christ</u>	<u>Love Prevails</u>

“Remember from where you have fallen.” (Rev 2:5a)

There are three high points in church history: The early church, the Reformation and the First Great Awakening.

Reminder: If we are going to really learn, we must be willing to stretch beyond our culture, our denomination and our generation.

History is important because God speaks through what He does as well as through what He says.

The Early Church

Early Christian worship at home always centered on a shared meal.

Scripture reading and teaching were included, along with prayer and singing.

Note that **Paul taught from “house to house.” (Acts 20:20)**

In the spirit of scripture, listen to the words of the early church fathers.

Ignatius of Antioch (50-107 A.D.), who was **mentored by the Apostle John**, said:

“Fathers...teach [your children] the holy scriptures and also trades, so that they may not indulge in idleness.”
(The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians)

Concerning marriage, **Tertullian (155-230)** writes,

“What a union of two believers—one hope, one vow, one discipline, and **one worship!** They are brother and sister, two fellow-servants, **one spirit and one flesh**. Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit. They **pray together, fast together, instruct, exhort, and support each other**. They go together to the church of God and to the table of the Lord. They share each other’s **tribulation, persecution and revival**. **Neither conceals anything from the other. Neither avoids, neither annoys the other**. They **delight** to visit the sick, supply the needy, give alms without restraint, and in daily zeal lay up their offerings before the altar without scruple or hindrance...**Psalms and hymns they sing together, and they vie with each other in singing to God**. Christ rejoices when He sees and hear this He gives them His peace. Where two are together in His name, there He is, and **where He is, there the evil one cannot come**.”

(cited in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, pp. 364-5)

Question: How many couples do you know who live like this?

What do you see here that we should pray that God would restore to Christian marriages?

John Chrysostom (347-407) encouraged every head of the family to be a spiritual shepherd, noting that he must give an account for both his children and his servants. (Schaff, vol. 3, p. 545)

The Decline of Family Worship in the Early Roman Church

Soon thereafter, however, the spiritual leadership of the family was dealt a blow from the most unlikely of sources: **the church itself.**

The emerging Roman church was free from persecution after 313 A.D.

Reasons for the decline: By the end of the fourth century, monasticism had been embraced by the church. Some of the “faithful” left their families to join these monastic orders. (Schaff, vol. 3, pp. 214-216) **Celibacy was viewed as somehow being more spiritual than marriage.**

Family life was viewed as somehow inferior and thus,

the spiritual leadership of a father/husband came to be viewed as almost a contradiction in terms. (Schaff, vol 2, pp. 391, 395)

Soon bishops were expected to be celibate, as well, even though they were not monastic. (Schaff, vol. 2, 412-13) **In 385 A.D., Pope Siricius banned clergy marriages.** (Schaff, vol. 3, p. 247)

This decision was supported by the Roman emperor. (Ptacek, p. 43)

Almost at the same time, **the veneration of Mary** became a widespread doctrine of the church. **The church began to teach that her virginity was perpetual, not just prior to the birth of Jesus, as scripture teaches.** (Ptacek, p. 44)

On top of this, family instruction faced another unlikely antagonist: **the advent of church buildings.**

The first church building was erected in 230 A.D. (Schaff, vol. 2, p. 200),

but the golden age of cathedral construction did not come until after the church was freed from persecution in 313.

After that time, the building of Christian houses of worship became more and more common, eventually being sanctioned and funded by the state during the reign of Constantine. (Ptacek, p. 44)

Early Christian gatherings were in the homes of believers.

Now they were in larger buildings, losing both the intimacy and the family atmosphere of the early church.

(Note that churches that are exploding today have cell groups that meet in homes.)

Worse still, was the practice of seating in these church buildings.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, in *A History of Christianity, Vol. I. Beginnings to 1500*, (pp. 201-2) tells us:

When the congregation gathered, the men were on one side of the church and the women on the other... The youths were by themselves, sitting or standing. The older people were to sit and the mothers with children had a special place.”

Contrast this practice with the truth of God, found in Exodus 10:9.

Here, God speaks to us through a conversation between Moses and Pharaoh.

As background to this passage, when Moses originally went to Pharaoh,

he (Moses) requested that the Israelites be let go so that they might worship Yahweh at Mount Sinai, where God had spoken to Moses in the burning bush.

Pharaoh originally dismissed Moses’ demand out of hand.

But now, after several plagues had weakened his kingdom, Pharaoh was willing to strike a compromise with Moses: The men alone may go, but the women and children must stay.”

Here is Moses’ response:

“Moses said, ‘We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.’ ” (NASU)

God does not desire worship to be segregated along gender or generational lines.

God wants us to worship Him as families.

We live in a church culture that has sadly mimicked the world.
The world has taught us to divide ourselves along generational lines.
Age-graded Sunday Schools were patterned after the teachings of Horace Mann, and how he thought the public schools should be patterned after factories. Imagine!
Churches that are copying the pattern of factories!

When families visit most churches, the first thing they do when they get out of the car is scatter!
The youth go one place, the children go to another place, the parents go to yet another place, and the same pattern is often repeated in church!
We say the church is a place for the whole family,
but in many churches, there is rarely a time when the family is actually “whole!”
What we actually mean is, we have activities for every individual age group,
but you will never be together as a family.

Billy Graham has rightly lamented the fact that 11:00 to 12:00 on Sunday mornings is the most segregated hour of the week in America.

As true as that is, it is only a fraction of the tragedy!

We are also divided along generational lines

and, as if that weren't enough, we have divided once again over styles of worship.

People who prefer one style come at one time, and people who prefer another style come at another time.

So, what do you do if you have a good friend who prefers the “other” style of worship?

Too bad, styles of worship are more important than relationships.

In fact, styles of worship are now our *basis* for relationships!

In a broken world, we have nothing more to offer than a pathetically balkanized church!

What kind of a witness is that? Do not even the heathen do the same???(randall)

Thus, family instruction was replaced by church instruction, and the ideal of the family was greatly devalued by the church itself, contrary to the scriptures. The father as the head of the home was replaced by the priests, bishops and the pope as the recognized spiritual leadership in Christian society. (randall)

The Reformation and the Revival of Family Worship

It took the Protestant reformation to bring us back to our biblical and early historical roots, when it comes to family Bible instruction.

This was largely due to the fact that **the Bible was now available to the masses in their own native tongue,**

whereas it had previously been hoarded by the clergy, who were practically the only ones who understood Latin,

the only language in which the church had allowed the Bible to be translated.

Originally, this was not a problem,

but **with the breakup of the Roman Empire, various new nations developed their own language, often very distinct from Latin,**

rendering the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible) literally unreadable by almost everyone.

Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg in **1517**.

By **1526**, **William Tyndale** wrote, “every man ought to preach in word and deed unto his household and to them that are under his governance.” (Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They really Were*, note 96, p. 242)

The Geneva Bible, printed in 1599, added notes “for household use.”

It was this Bible that was brought to the New World by the Puritans.

A number of the notes in this Bible spoke in favor of family worship and of biblical instruction from the head of the household.

J. I. Packer notes: “It was the husband’s responsibility to channel the family into religion, to take them to church on the Lord’s Day and to oversee the sanctifying of that entire day in the home, to catechize the children and teach them their faith, to examine the whole family after each sermon, to see how much had been retained and understood and to fill any gaps in understanding that might remain, to lead the family in worship daily, ideally twice a day, and to set an example of sober godliness at all times and in all manners. To this end he must be willing to take time out to learn the faith that he is charged to teach.” (*A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, p. 270).

In 1643, the Episcopalians, the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians all convened and crafted the Westminster Confession, which was completed in 1649.

The preface to the Confession was addressed “especially to heads of families.”

A second preface stated: “A family is the seminary of church and state.”

Worship was broken down into three types: personal, congregational and family.

It was taught that the advance of godliness depended on faithfulness in all three disciplines. (Ptacek, pp. 47-8)

How paltry our measurements of spirituality seem today!

Question: We measure spirituality by what means?

Answer: Church attendance, participation in other church activities, and a daily quiet time. (randall)

Directions were given to church leaders to visit the homes of their members, inquiring, among other things, whether they had been consistent in family devotions.

After a first and second warning, a head of household was barred from communion for failing to lead his family spiritually.

This was not viewed as being abnormal in any way, as churches regularly practiced church discipline then.

This tells us how widespread family devotions were at that time. (Ptacek, p. 48)

The leaders of the church, as well as heads of households were to encourage private worship, as well. **This was all viewed as the purvey of the church: to encourage godliness outside, as well as inside, the church.**

Ministers existed, among other reasons, to encourage heads of households to lead their families spiritually. (randall)

On Sundays, the entire family discussed what they had learned through the sermon.

The wife and children were invited to ask questions.

There was no children’s church. This was the time designed for the children to ask questions.

If a point was made that was hard for children to understand, the father took it upon himself to try to explain, as best he could, what had been shared from the pulpit. (Ptacek, p. 50)

This was a time where the wife could ask her husband a question at home, if she had any, as the scripture directs in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: “The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35 If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.” (NASU)

Beyond discussion, the rest of the day was devoted to Bible study, reading, meditation and prayer.
(Ptacek, p. 50)

Family instruction was not optional.

Indeed, it was regarded as the highest priority of the Christian home.

It was the duty of the father/husband, and his alone.

If he were not fit to lead in this way, he was expected to become fit as soon as possible, most notably through personal Bible reading.

If he refused to do so, he was to be ashamed of himself, and it was understood that the duty fell to his wife.

If she did not take up the responsibility, she was also to be ashamed.

In essence, the thinking was, “If he will not do it, shame on him.

If she will not take up the mantle which he has discarded, shame on both of them.”

(The Directory for Family Worship, Section 4)

Family Worship in North America

Family worship was important in the New World.

Note how all the pictures of Puritans in America show the Puritans together as families. (randall)

In the early part of the eighteenth century, godliness was on the wane, but churches took action to reverse this.

Here is a quote from **the Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706-1788** (p. 116): “The synod do earnestly recommend it to all our ministers and members to take particular care about ministerial visiting of families, and press family and secret [private] worship according to the Westminster Directory, and yet they also recommend it to every presbry [pastor] at proper seasons to enquire concerning the diligence of each of their members in such particulars.”

All of this was recommended in order to “revive the declining power of godliness.”

Family worship was revived and, as a result, the First Great Awakening swept the New England colonies. It is important to note that this was the only strategy recommended to bring spiritual vitality back into the church, it was the only strategy used, and it had spectacular results.

George Whitefield, one of the central figures of the Great Awakening said, “Every governor of a family...ought to...instruct those under his charge in the knowledge of the word of God.” (George Whitefield, “The Great Duty of Family Religion,” p. 32)

Another leading figure of the Great Awakening, **Jonathan Edwards**, in his farewell address to his congregation, said, “We have had great disputes how the church ought to be regulated... , but the due regulation of your families is of no less, and in some respects, of much greater importance... Let me now therefore, once more, before I finally cease to speak to this congregation, repeat, and earnestly press the counsel which I have often urged on the heads of families, while I was their pastor, to great painfulness in teaching, warning, and directing their children, bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord, beginning early, where there is yet opportunity, and maintaining constant diligence in labor of this kind. Remember that, as you would not have all your instructions and counsels ineffectual, there must be government as well as instructions, which must be maintained with an even hand, and steady resolution, as a guard to the religion and morals of the family, and the support of its good order. Take heed that it be not with any of you as it was with Eli of old, who reprov'd his children, but restrained them not, and that, by this means, you do not bring the like curse on your families as he did on his.” (Jonathan Edwards, “Farewell Sermon,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 1*, p. 206)

The Presbyterian Directory for Family Worship stated: “The head of the family...ought to be careful that all members of his household, duly attend, and that none withdraw themselves unnecessarily from any part of family worship, and that all refrain from their common business while the scriptures are read... We are of the opinion that the Sabbath evenings, after public worship, should be sacredly preserved for this purpose. Therefore we highly disapprove of paying unnecessary private visits on the Lord’s day, admitting strangers into the families, except when necessity or charity requires it...(Chapter 15) (Growing up in my family, we were told to tell our friends that Sunday was “family day.”)

Family worship continued, especially in the south.

Slaves were frequently included, and the children of slaves were given biblical instruction. (Ptacek, p. 57)

Family records make mention of family worship.

One man stated that not one member of his family in a century was an unbeliever.

He attributed this fact to family worship. (L.J. Wilson, *History of a Southern Presbyterian Family*, pp. 13-14)

The Decline of Family Worship in America

By the middle of the nineteenth century, evidence of the widespread decline of family worship began to appear.

In 1847, a minister, **J. W. Alexander**, lamented, “In a period when the world is every day making new inroads on the church, it has especially invaded the household. Our church cannot compare with that of the seventeenth century in this regard. Along with Sabbath observance, and the catechizing of children, family worship has lost ground. There are many heads of families... and (according to a scarcely credible report) some ruling elders and deacons, who maintain no stated daily service of God in their dwellings.” (J. W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, pp. 1-2)

By the middle of the nineteenth century, family worship was in a noticeable decline. One of the reasons for this was the industrialization of society.

Men were with their families less than before but, as Alexander pointed out, common laborers still managed to work all day and make time for family devotions twice a day. (Alexander, pp. 36-7)

They demonstrated that our priorities, whatever they are, will continue to win out. Since the time of Alexander, the work week has decreased remarkably. Certainly, this is no longer a viable excuse.

Along with this, there were numerous financial opportunities available to men.

They set their affections elsewhere.

This is a curse that remains with us to this day. (Ptacek, p. 62)

In addition to this, in the northern states, the practice of apprenticeship took boys out of their homes at an early age.

After boys reached the age of 9 or 10, or of 13 to 14 (historians differ on the exact age), boys were taken from their homes for seven years and taught a trade. This took them away from their families entirely.

Another current that had affected society was the Enlightenment.

The Great Awakening was largely a religious reaction to the Enlightenment. This had a positive affect on young America, but the mindset of the Enlightenment ran deep in our psyche.

Children were no longer viewed as having a sinful nature from birth so, women, who were gentler by nature, could train children without troubling the men. (Ptacek, p. 62)
This is one reason why it is good to read the writings of saints that have preceded us.

The Sunday School Movement

On top of all this, family devotions were disrupted by the most unlikely of all sources: the Sunday School movement.

The Sunday School was started by **Robert Raikes** toward the end of the eighteenth century.

Having visited the factories, Raikes was moved at the sight of wretched, cursing children who were being forced to work.

Knowing that all of them had unbelieving parents, he knew that, apart from some type of intervention, they would never be converted.

He embarked on a mission to help them.

Originally, the goal of Sunday School was to provide instruction for poor children, for orphans, and for children who did not have a believing father.

The content was not only religious, but secular, as well.

Raikes desired to educate these children on the one day that they (the children) didn't have to work.

The American Sunday School Union was formed in 1820, across denominational lines.

Soon, denominations themselves formed their own Sunday School Boards. (Ptacek, pp. 62-63)

Before long, however, Sunday School became more than a means of outreach. It became a way for Christian fathers to release their biblical responsibility.

At first, the Sunday School was viewed as a partner with the family in teaching children.

Within fifty years, the majority of children in Sunday Schools were from church homes. (Ptacek, pp. 63-64)

In 1859, B.M. Smith of Union Seminary sounded the alarm: "These schools are not designed to be substitutes for home teaching, when parents are capable of performing their duties. That too many misuse them has led some to depreciate their value. But this is wrong. Rather let the fault of parents be checked. Such institutions are too valuable, as supplying the only means of religious instruction to thousands of destitute children, to be discarded because indolent, self-indulgent parents choose to devolve on others their own peculiar duties. But while continuing as zealously as ever to instruct children at home, parents can derive valuable aid to regularity and system, so important in all departments of instruction, by making the Sabbath-school lesson, at least in part, the home lesson also. Thus will the child not only be more certainly prepared for the duties of class, but he will be incited and encouraged by having the care and interest of parents manifested on his behalf." (B. M. Smith, *Family Religion*, pp. 186-7)

As good as this quote appears on the surface, there is a flaw encapsulated in the middle of it.

What is it? Answer: "Fathers" have been replaced by "parents." (Ptacek, p. 64)

Remember, the biblical injunction is to fathers specifically, and it is now being replaced by "parents."

It was this type of thinking that validated thinking of many fathers that they were no longer needed.

They could entertain other pursuits, since the wife and Sunday School teachers were viewed as adequate spiritual custodians.

Seeking to be freed from their God-given responsibility the men of that generation sinned against their children's generation—a sin whose consequences are still with us to this day. (randall)

In 1892, the Presbyterian church published “Religion in the Home.”

Notice how the parents (not fathers) are mentioned, and how they play a secondary role to that of the church:

“In the supreme task of religious education, parents should cooperate with the church by setting their children an example in regular and punctual attendance upon the sessions of the Church School and the services of the sanctuary, by assisting them in the preparation of their lessons...”

L.J. Wilson, a Southern Presbyterian, lamented, “On Sabbath morning they are hurried off to Sunday-school where the teacher strives for thirty to forty minutes to teach them lessons they ought to have been taught at home during the week. And this is all the religious instruction the little ones get. What will be the effect upon the coming generation?” (L.J. Wilson, *History of a Southern Presbyterian Family*, p. 102)

Youth, Children’s, Women’s Ministries and Men’s Ministries

The advent of youth ministries and children’s ministries took the church even further away from the biblical standard. Young people were now instructed, totally apart from their families and from their parents’ authority. While this can be helpful in non-Christian homes, it is never the biblical pattern for believing families.

Our churches look frighteningly similar to the early Catholic churches, where the youth sit in one place, the older people sit in another place, etc.

We say that the church is a place for the whole family, but it has become a place for each individual age group.

Many churches actually work against family unity.

Notice that, in many churches, once the family gets out of the car, each age group has a different place to go, and they often don’t even see each other again until after the service is over.

There is no common experience to discuss.

There are no questions for children to ask.

Even if the head of the home were to try to exercise his God-given role, he has already been greatly handicapped by the church, itself!

We have a church that has taken its cue from an age-graded society.

In a balkanized world, the church lamely mimics, instead of holding up the standard of God’s clearly revealed word. (randall)

In truth, the only biblical youth minister is the head of the home. The only biblical children’s ministry is the home. (randall)

If a church has a youth, or children’s minister, his or her primary task is to assist the Christian home.

Sadly, most churches replicate activities that should be undertaken by families, plus they often schedule programs at night, which sets the church up as competing with the family. (Ptacek, p. 80)

Children have not been the only casualties of this abdication of men, and of the church's co-opting their role.

Women have suffered, too.

Instead of being ministered to by their husbands, as they wash them in the word, (Ephesians 5:29) they have often **found solace in women's groups and women's Bible studies.**

Again, this is a valid ministry to women who have no husband, or whose husbands are lost, **but for the believing family, this is a poor substitute.**

As time passed, women become more and more prominent in the church, and men left the church, or relinquished their responsibilities, in droves.

By the early twentieth century, this was a recognized problem and organizations like **the YMCA emerged to give men a viable place in religious life again.**

However, they were in no way connected to their families.

The family, in the context of religious life, was now more divided than ever.

Men now had a place again, but it was not in connection with the family. (Ptacek, pp. 67-8)

They were alone, women were alone, youth were alone, children were alone.

There was no sense of family within the church, and the family itself had been splintered by the very church that had once seen its primary role as supporting the believing family. (randall)

Spiritual Fathering Session 7 Assessments Regarding Family Worship

The Lilly Foundation Study

Several years ago (1980's), the Lilly Foundation conducted a study, comparing churched and unchurched adults. They found that most of the adults in church had been raised in Sunday School. However, they found that a similar percentage of unchurched adults had also been raised in Sunday School. Probing further, they compared churched and unchurched adults who had been brought up with family devotions. Here, the difference was striking. Almost all those who experienced family devotions growing up were active members of a local church as adults. Those who did not experience family devotions were nearly always unchurched.

Conclusion: *We are trying to fix the wrong thing.*

Churches are beside themselves, trying to fix up church so that the lost will come, and the saved will stay. As valuable as the church is, it was *never* meant to substitute for home instruction, as commanded in the Bible. *We have exchanged a God-ordained method of instruction that has worked for one that doesn't work.*

Reasons Why Men Do Not Lead Their Families Spiritually

First, there is a cultural reason why family worship is not often practiced in our culture. Family worship does not come as naturally to us, partly because **our western culture emphasizes the individual, while eastern culture emphasizes corporate identity and family.** (Japanese piano students)

So, why do men not lead their families spiritually? Ptacek lists four reasons (pp. 70-1):

(1) Wrong priorities. We must decide what has to go in order to make room for what is most important, or our children run the risk of being a part of the 80% who defect from the church, never to return. (randall)

(2) Perceived inadequacy. Men often know less about the Bible than their wives do.

But this is a self-fulfilling prophecy that can be reversed.

As a man exercises spiritual authority, he grows in his adeptness.

Men should know this.

Many of us were not adept at sports when we first started, but we practiced and eventually saw results.

This also applies to learning a **musical instrument** or a particular **subject in school.**

God will help a man who humbly confesses his inadequacy. and who asks for help so that he can assist his family, as God has commanded him. (randall)

(3) Sin. Family worship actually has the potential to make the leader of the home holy.

As he studies the word, the father/husband will become aware of his own shortcomings.

Confession prior to sharing God's word with the church is essential for the conscientious minister.

So it is with the father/husband.

Being in this position regularly can be used as a tool by the enemy to condemn but,

if it is handled correctly, the process of condemnation can be reversed,

and it can actually be used of God to lead a man to experience personal holiness, like never before. (randall)

(4) Distractions. Perhaps a family argument before devotions, or a conflicting schedule, or tiredness or illness—all these things can interfere. (Ptacek, pp. 70-1) **The head of the family must not only make family worship a priority, but communicate that priority to the rest of the family, as well so that distractions rarely interfere. Scheduling devotions around a meal is often the best way to make it happen regularly.**

Thus, the morning and the evening seem to be the best times to schedule.

Bad moods in one family member (in the husband/father himself!) are no reason to avoid family devotions.

Emotions never interfere with our other prioritized activities. We go to work when we are in a bad temper.

Children go to school. Emotions should never be given priority over the word of God. (randall)

Think of how you feel when your wife is "not in the mood."

The Benefits of Family Worship

J. W. Alexander, in Thoughts on Family Worship listed fourteen benefits of family worship (Ptacek, pp. 58-61):

Benefits to the Head of the Family

(1) It promotes the personal faith of the family head.

(2) It activates the spiritual gifts of the head of the family.

Here, he first mentions the **various hindrances to the head of the family exercising spiritual leadership:** “**lack of education, consciousness of small attainment, slowness of speech, natural diffidence [lack of confidence], pride or false shame, and a sense of inconsistency in life.**”

Indeed, inadequacy and an awareness of one’s own weaknesses are a factor here.

But these same weaknesses do not prevent us from instructing and disciplining in other areas.

In truth, if every father genuinely searched his own heart before he disciplined his children, he would never discipline them at all.

While it is good for each of us to search our hearts, we can never let the condemnation of the enemy keep us from obeying the clearly revealed commands of God.

We must ask for forgiveness and plead for His grace to overcome our weaknesses and, if need be, we must humbly confess to our families that we are all growing together in certain disciplines of the faith. We must keep in mind that **all of our weaknesses, whether they are obvious to our family members or not, are only a part of the picture.**

The other part is the grace that can come through us as we impart God’s truth through our own unique giftedness.

Of all people on earth, a man’s family is tolerant of his own tendencies, because they live with him.

Remember that Moses was unskilled in speaking, but he grew into his role.

God often calls people to a task for which they appear to be unfit.

(3) It makes the head able to teach.

As has already been mentioned, God enables us for the task as we take up the task.

The waters of the Jordan did not part until the children of Israel stepped out into them.

Psalm 37:23 says, “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and He delights in his way.” (NASU) “Steps” presupposes motion.

We walk in the light He gives us and, only then, does He *establish* our steps.

Then, He delights in his way.

Notice the progression in Psalm 37:23:

We step out in obedience to His revealed will, He establishes our steps and, in the end, He delights in our way.

But it all starts with us obeying, before our steps are established.

It is our job to step. It is His job to establish.

Ability will come, but only after obedience.

**(4) It is a means of the head's sanctification.
If a man responds correctly to the word of God,
instead of his weaknesses being a hindrance to his spiritual leadership,
his spiritual leadership will serve as a means to make him more fit to lead.**

He will allow the word of God to convict him.

He will ask the Lord to cleanse and strengthen him, so that these inconsistencies will not continue to show themselves.

Sooner or later, the one leading in family devotions will notice that he is of a different disposition at that time than at other times.

This naturally leads the head of the household to examine his own life.

**Alexander says, “The Christian householder will feel himself constrained to say,
“I am leading my family in solemn addresses to God! What manner of man should I be!
...Humble Christians are led...to be...circumspect,
and to order their ways in such a manner as may edify their dependents.” (Alexander, p. 49)**

(5) It makes the head a better father and husband.

This serves as a check against becoming too entwined with work and other activities.

It brings the man back before his family again and again.

**“In the shop, the market, the field, the highway, the office, the exchange, and even in the pulpit,
the father may forget that he is a father.**

**He cannot forget it when the curtain has dropped,
when the circle draws more closely around the hearth,
when the wife of his youth welcomes him to prayer,
and when the eyes of his little ones are fixed on him as the minister of God to their souls.**

**I no longer marvel that Christianity becomes a dying, empty thing,
in the houses of those... where there is no joint worship of God.**

**In the rage for amassing wealth, which threatens the church among us,
and especially in our great commercial cities,
there is an estranging process going on which we fear is too little observed.” (Alexander, pp. 53-55)**

**Note his choice of words: “There is an estranging process...,” all for the sake of “amassing wealth.”
How he speaks to our generation today!**

It comes back to the fact that we value space more than we value time.

I urge us every one to consider long and hard before upgrading to a bigger home.

**It is a long-term obligation that will nearly always involve money, which can be replaced,
and take our time, which cannot be replaced.**

**We have an opportunity to turn our wealth-crazed society on its head
—to live before them, along with our families, in such a way that others, Christians included,
will want to know what our secret is.**

It is there in the scripture, but practiced by so few.

Benefits to the Family

(1) **It is a daily practice.** This he contrasted to “Sunday only” Christians who, sincere as they might be, do not have the daily reminder of scripture to assist them.

(2) **It counters worldliness and materialism.**

This is especially important in an industrialized society.

Our society places too much emphasis on providing the best for one’s family in material terms, at the expense of the best spiritually.

Regular family worship helps to keep this worldly philosophy at bay.

(3) **It is the best way to teach children the Bible.**

“The daily reading of God’s holy word, by a parent before his children, is one of the most powerful agencies of a Christian life.

We are prone to undervalue this cause. It is a constant dropping, but it wears its mark into the rock.

A family thus trained cannot be ignorant of the word.

The whole scriptures come repeatedly before the mind.

No part of juvenile education is more important.” (Alexander, pp. 62-63)

What a powerful combination!

The voice of the earthly father and the heavenly Father, teaching as one!

Every time the children hear a Bible story, they will remember the first place they heard the story— and who told it to them! (randall)

(4) **It promotes intellectual improvement.**

To study the Bible is to sharpen the mind for other, lesser disciplines.

Remember, the Bible is the truth, plus it is also great literature.

Those who hear it, read it and study it in order to be more familiar with the Source of Truth will reap fringe benefits, as well.

(5) **It strengthens the family.**

It strengthens young people against peer pressure.

Alexander understood that a strong family was the best way to cure the ills of society.

Strong families nurture a society that has respect for authority.

“Family worship promotes habits of order.

It brings a stated regulation into the house...

and above all it adds strength to the principle of subordination and obedience...

The habit of so doing must be formed under the parental roof.” (Alexander, pp. 165-6)

(6) **It promotes sound doctrine.**

One need only look at American history to see that this is true.

The industrial revolution, the dates of which vary from one historian to another, began as early as 1780 and was completed around 1840.

These dates parallel the gradual decline of family worship. As families disbursed, so did family worship.

This is also the period where cults began to spring up.

Witness the following cults and the dates they were started:

Mormons	<u>1830</u>
The Church of Christ	<u>1832</u>
Seventh-Day Adventists	<u>1863</u>
Christian Science	<u>1875</u>
Jehovah's Witnesses	<u>1876</u>

These facts speak loudly!

As family devotions fell into disuse, heresy began to multiply and flourish.—[randall]

(7) It educates the parents.

This is a natural means whereby the husband may minister to his wife, as well, washing her with the word. (Ephesians 5:26)

This will encourage her to submit more naturally to him, as well.

The husband, too, will become much more intimately acquainted with the word as he teaches it.

(8) It preserves the spiritual leadership of the head of the family.

Here, Alexander states that any man who does not lead his family in regular instruction is not the spiritual leader of his home.

(9) It changes the world. By seeing our lives, some in the world are convinced to convert.

Although many, who remain unredeemed, are indirectly affected, the affect is real, nonetheless, and contributes to a more orderly society.

Keep in mind:

- (1) **The only two elements of family “worship” mentioned in scripture are instruction and discipline. Music, although it is normally a part of corporate worship, is entirely optional.** (Ptacek, pp. 72-3)
- (2) **Brevity will help everyone like family devotions. It is more effective to have 5 minutes every day than to have a one-hour session once a week.** (Ptacek, pp. 71-2)
- (3) **While it may be tempting to let a more biblically-literate mother do the teaching, the scriptural injunction is clear: this is the role for the father to take.** (Ptacek, p. 72)
- (4) **The husband/father should look for other opportunities to teach God’s truths during the day, not just during the “official” time.**
- (5) **The word of God is what is to be held forth in family devotions, not “devotional readings,” as good as they may be.** (Ptacek, p. 73)
- (6) **The wife/mother must be careful not to contradict her husband in front of the children, even if she has more biblical knowledge than he does. If she has a question about something taught, she should ask him privately.** (Ptacek, p. 73)
- (7) **Consider this pattern:**
 - (a) **For younger children, a simple Bible story, culminating in the main point of the story may be sufficient, followed by a related prayer.**
 - (b) **For older children, longer passages that involve commands can be incorporated with still longer stories. It can be a good move to let one of the children read a passage. Care should be taken to still summarize and close with a relevant prayer.**
 - (c) **For children nearing adolescence, some of the “gross” stories and more shameful aspects of biblical history can be covered. Simple questions can be posed, with an answer ready to be given, closing with a related prayer.**
 - (d) **For adolescents, anything in the Bible can be read, studied or discussed. More complex questions can be raised, even some that good Christians disagree on. God can now be presented as authoritative, yet also not fully comprehensible. If covering the entire Bible is a goal that has been set, now is a good time to begin pacing toward that end. Closing with relevant prayer is still essential.** (randall)
- (8) **Time must be given to the preparation of family devotions. Several things must be decided:**
 - (a) **What is to be studied.** It is important to pray about the direction God wants you to go before you begin. Perhaps a character should be studied, perhaps a book, perhaps a particular truth or a character trait to be modeled or avoided. **It is best to pray for each member of the family.** Where is each one in his/her walk with God. What is the strength of each family member? What challenges are they facing? What is Holy Spirit wanting to say to each one? These questions will help provide direction. (randall)
 - (b) **How the study will take place.** A good study bible, like the NASB Study Bible or the NIV Study Bible, is essential. Both of these have good study notes and a chain reference. A good commentary, such as Matthew Henry’s (many notes, often quite long, but very helpful) or Albert Barnes’ (not as long, but also very helpful) or Adam Clarke (a bit shorter still, but quite good) is also very helpful in getting a studied opinion. A good concordance, such as Strong’s or Young’s is also quite helpful. (Ptacek, p. 73)
 - (c) **What distinctive talents each member of the family can contribute.** One may be good at drawing, another may be good at researching on the computer, another may be good at reading aloud, and another may wish to find specific locations on Bible maps. Blending the God-given talents of the family will help the Bible come alive in a way that is unique to that one family. What a blessing! (randall)

Caution: Not all of your ideas will go over. It won't be "heaven come down" most of the time. ("Woe unto you and you and you," genealogies) Your goal is a long-term goal. Also, family devotions will not solve all of your problems. Still, it will be a tremendous help in many areas. Most of the results will not be readily seen for years. Remember, the more you teach on the subjects that will help your family, the more likely you are to give them truth that will help them, either now, or at some point in the future. Again, we are looking for long-term results.

Here are some examples of how to do devotions for various age groups:

EXAMPLE 1: Two young children, ages 6 and 3**Step One: Pray.**

In prayer, the father/husband asks God to reveal to him what the needs of his family members are. As he prays, he remembers that his oldest child is having trouble adjusting to his new school. As he continues to pray, God “plays the tape” of a recent event: the youngest child had a bad dream. Now she is afraid to go to bed at night. As he continues to pray, he also remembers that his wife is often exhausted, trying to balance her home and work responsibilities.

The next day, as he prays, he is seeking to discern which need is the most important one to address first. While all the needs are important, he senses that he can find practical ways to help his wife carry the load (he decides to do the laundry for one week), and he basically needs to listen to his oldest child as he adjusts to the new school and offer advice, as opportunities arise. The need of his youngest child may be the one that needs to be addressed by scripture.

Step Two: Search

Now, he gets help from his Bible tools. He has a concordance, a topical Bible and a study Bible. First, he searches his topical Bible for a story that might help. He looks up the word “fear.” He finds that he has two options: Fear of God and Cowardice. He decides to look up the word “courage” instead. Since he has such a small child, he decides to try to find a *story* that would help his child, so he looks at where it says, “Courage: Instances Of.” He sees many examples, but he decides to go with the story of David and Goliath, since Goliath must have looked really scary to most people.

Next, he decides to find a short verse that will help his child remember the story. He looks up the word “afraid” in his concordance. He finds that this word is used a lot in the Bible, so he goes to the Psalms to narrow his search quickly. There, he finds Psalm 56:3 “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.” He looks at a couple of other translations and decides to go with the NIV translation because it is a bit shorter: “When I am afraid, I will trust in You.”

Step Three: Plan

As he reads the story, he decides that he will retell it, emphasizing how big Goliath was, how scared the Israelite army was, how much courage David had, and the reason for his courage: he believed in God. Then, he would tell how David hit the giant with the stone and how the giant fell down dead. He decides to write the story down as follows:

Have you ever been afraid of something? Some people are afraid of the dark. Some people are afraid of other people, especially bigger people. Some kids are afraid of monsters, even if they know there is no such thing as a monster. There was a boy in the Bible who learned that he didn't have to be afraid, because he knew he could trust God, who is bigger than anything. The boy's name is David. When he was a boy, a very tall man named Goliath decided to scare God's people. He said, "I bet nobody will fight me, because I am soooo big." He was right. No one would fight him, because he was soooo big. But David had learned to trust God. He said, "I will go a fight Goliath because, even if he is bigger than me, God is bigger than anybody. I don't have to be afraid of him." So, he found a few small stones and took them with him. When he saw Goliath, he said, "I'm not afraid of you! God is bigger than anybody!" Then he put one of the small stones in his sling and threw the stone at Goliath. When the stone hit Goliath, he fell down, dead. All of God's people were so happy because Goliath was dead. He would never make anybody afraid again. But David knew why Goliath was dead. It was because God was with him, and God helped him. God can help us, too, when we are afraid of something. The Bible says, "When I am afraid, I will trust in You." You know, grownups can get afraid, too. When we do, we can remember what the Bible says, and so can everybody. Let's say it together: "When I am afraid, I will trust in You." O.K., good! Now, let's pray. Dear God, help us to remember that there is never anything too big for you. Help us to trust in You, like David did. Help us to remember that You are with us to help us. Amen.

Next, he decides to let his six-year-old draw a picture of the story while he is telling it.

Step Four: Execute

The father/husband brings his "cheat sheet," in case he forgets something in the story. He gets some crayons for his six-year-old, and opens his Bible to Psalm 56:3. He gives the crayons to his son and tells him that he will get to draw a picture of the story he is going to tell. He tells the story, as he has written it, looking occasionally at his notes. He then asks his son to show everyone his picture, and describe what is happening. Then, they all hold hands and pray together.

Follow Up

The father/husband knows that he needs to follow up at bedtime, as well. So, when he is going to put his child to bed, he reminds his child of the story and prays again with her.

EXAMPLE 2: Two older children, ages 9 and 7**Step One: Pray**

As the father/husband prays for his family, he remembers that his oldest son is being teased at school because he is not athletic. As he prays for his younger son, he immediately focuses on his rebellious tendencies, especially toward his mother. He senses that the main focus should be on his youngest son. He discerns that the basic need is for discipline.

Step Two: Search

He looks up the word “discipline” in his concordance and decides to narrow his search by focusing on the verses in Proverbs. He soon recognizes that several of these verses list the many benefits of discipline: life (6:23b: “Reproofs for discipline are the way of life.”), knowledge, (12:1a: “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge”) riches and honor (13:18: “Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline”), wisdom for the balance of one’s life (19:20: “Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days.”), and removal of foolishness (22:15: “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.”)

In addition, he notices that 3:11-12 teaches that the source of discipline is God’s love. He seizes upon this as the main truth that needs to be taught, knowing that this is one of the main problems with his son: He does not understand that mother loves him, and that all her attempts to discipline come from a heart of love. He remembers also that one of the children in his son’s class is never disciplined by his parents and that, consequently, that child is spoiled and miserable.

Step Three: Plan

He decides to break up his study into seven sessions. In the first one, he will read the story of the prodigal son, focusing on the son’s refusal to accept discipline, how this led to his near ruin, and how coming back under the discipline of his father led to rejoicing and life once again. Not remembering exactly where this is in the Bible, he remembers that the story says that he eventually came to his senses, so he types in the phrase “came to his senses,” which calls up Luke 15:17. When he goes to that verse, he finds that, yes, there the whole story is, beginning in verse 11!

He decides that he will make sessions two through six into a game. He will print up (or photocopy) Proverbs, chapters 6, 12, 13, 19 and 22. He will put at the top of each page, “Bible Treasure Hunt.” Then he will tell them that finding truth in God’s word is just like a treasure hunt. The one who finds the treasures hidden there will have a peaceful, productive life. He will then ask them to write on their sheet of paper everything that that particular chapter has to say about discipline. Perhaps they will find other things that he has missed. He will ask his wife to make these treasure hunt pages look really cool by finding a good font and some good clip art to add to it.

On lesson seven, he will ask them to write down all the benefits of discipline that they have discovered. He will then remind them of how the prodigal son nearly lost his life when he left discipline, and how he gained his true life back when he came under the discipline of his father again. But this time, he will emphasize something he did not mention before: The love of the father. It was because of his *love* that the father had disciplined him, and it was his love that caused the father to welcome him back so quickly. Discipline comes from a heart of *love*. Then, he will read Proverbs 3:11-12: “My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.”

Once the ideas are in place, he shares them with his wife, and she helps him print up the scriptures and the worksheets.

Step Four: Execute

On day one, he tells everyone that they will read a story from the Bible called The Prodigal Son. He asks his oldest son to read the introductory verses of the passage, his wife to read the verses that talk about the boy being in want and deciding to return to his father, and then the youngest son to read the verses that talk about the boy returning to his father. He asks them what they think the boy needed the most, in order to keep him from leaving home and losing his fortune. They offer various ideas, and then the father/husband introduces the concept of discipline. He then shares that they will be talking about discipline for the next few sessions. Then he closes with a prayer that God would give each of them wisdom so that they could have a full and meaningful life.

On days two through six, he reminds the family of their topic, gives them their worksheets, and gives time for discussion after the worksheets are filled in. Then he closes with prayer.

On day seven, he passes out all the previous worksheets that have been filled in, then he asks them to make a list, drawn up from their worksheets, of all the benefits of discipline. After this is done, he tells them that he will put their final worksheet on the refrigerator, as a reminder of how happy their lives will be if they accept discipline. Then he reads the story of the prodigal son again, but he tells them that he is going to call the story “The Loving Father,” instead of “The Prodigal Son,” because the father’s love is the real point of the story. After he reads the story again, he reads Proverbs 3:11-12 and closes in prayer, then collects the final worksheet from each child and places them on the refrigerator.

EXAMPLE 3: Three older children, ages 12, 10 and 8**Step One: Pray.**

As the husband/father prays, he thinks of how his older two children (girls) are having trouble getting along. His youngest child, a boy, has always had a hard time making good grades in school, even though he tries very hard. His wife struggles with a couple of issues: low self-esteem and guilt. As he continues to pray, he seeks to discover what is the true root to all of these behaviors. He discerns that all of them, in their own way, is needing encouragement.

Step Two: Search

He goes to his topical Bible and looks up the word “encouragement.” It is not there, so he decides to look under “blessing.” That doesn’t help, either, so he looks up “strength.” Another dead end. He thinks and thinks. Perhaps faith is what is needed. So, he looks up “faith.” He decides to try “Faith: General References Concerning.” He looks at several verses until he finds Psalm 78:7, which says that the children of Israel “should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God.” So, he embarks on a project to help his family recall the works of God.

Step Three: Plan

He shares the idea with his wife. They decide together to make a list of all the times God intervened in their family, or in the life of any one of them, in particular. She remembers how God took care of them after she lost her job ten years before. People in the church gave them food, she was able to find a part-time job, and they budgeted carefully to get by on less for one year until she found another job in her field of expertise. He remembers how, when they were very discouraged one time, the pastor of their church shared a verse of scripture that was exactly what they needed. She recalls the time when their oldest daughter was at the point of death. After much prayer by the church, she was gradually healed. After thirty minutes, they have a list of fifteen instances when God clearly intervened. They decide to only share three of them at family devotions, just to get the others started. Then they will ask everyone to make their own list. Afterwards, they will print the list up and frame it. They will entitle it “The Awesome Works of an Awesome God.” The list will be hung out in the open, where everyone can see it. Anytime a family member gets discouraged, someone else simply points to the list and (in a nonjudgmental way!) remind them that God can be trusted.

Step Four: Execute

As they meet together, the husband/father says that it is easy for everyone to get discouraged from time to time, but if people are continually discouraged, the enemy is seeking to wear them down and make them ineffective for the Lord. He asks them to listen as he reads a passage of scripture that will help anyone who is continually discouraged. He reads the passage, then tells everyone that they will be making out a list of the mighty works of God, both in their own life, and in the experience of the family. He shares the three examples that he and his wife agreed to share. He then tells them to split up and meet again in ten minutes, with their lists complete. After they make their lists, they come back and share them with each other.

Afterwards, he recites a few more from the list he and his wife have made earlier. Then he asks the middle child, since she is savvy with the computer, to make all of their lists into one big list and print them up neatly with a catchy but readable font selection. He tells them that their mother will have the list framed and hung where everyone can see it so that, anytime anyone is discouraged, someone else can point to the list on the wall and remind them of their awesome God. Then he leads them all in a prayer of thanksgiving for all the awesome things God has done for them in their years together.

EXAMPLE 4: Four children, ages 19, 17, 14 and 12**Step One: Pray.**

The husband/father recognizes that his two oldest children have not really developed their walk with God. They have no noticeable desire to pray or to read their Bibles on their own. He also realizes that his youngest child is not relating well to his peers, either at church or at school.

Step Two: Search

For the sake of his two oldest children, he thinks it best that they go through the entire book of Psalms. The youngest could probably stand a good dose of Proverbs. So, he decides that he will go through both books over the next six months. Since he has an NIV Study Bible, he feels confident that he has good study notes to help him understand some of the more difficult passages.

Step Three: Plan

He counts the verses in each book and finds the Psalms has 2,467 verses, and Proverbs has 1,015. He divides both books into 183 days (half a year). On average, if he covers 13½ verses in Psalms and 5½ verses in Proverbs every day, he will finish both books in six months. He reads the introductory notes on both the book of Psalms and Proverbs. He decides that he will take a day each on introducing each book, then get started with the scriptures, themselves.

Step Four: Execute

In the first sessions, he tells the family that, given our culture, it is hard to keep our focus on God. In fact, many people have a hard time really knowing how to talk to God. So, it is wise for us to learn from the manual where we find more prayers than anywhere else in the Bible: The book of Psalms. This will make us thirsty for God. It will teach us how to talk with Him in all kinds of situations. So, we will take little bite-sized pieces of the Psalms over the next several months.

The husband/father shares what he has learned from the introductory notes on the book of Psalms in his study Bible, then leads in prayer.

The next day, the husband/father shares that we live in a society where people are really disconnected from one another. Knowing how to relate to other people is a skill that has become increasingly rare. He says that, if we will learn how to relate to one another, as well as to God, we will greatly increase our chances of being successful in life. He then shares what he has learned from the introduction to the book of Proverbs in his study Bible and leads in prayer.

Follow Up

As he proceeds through these books, he comes across a couple of passages that are not explained to his satisfaction in his study Bible. So, he goes online and finds some free commentaries that give him the help he needs to understand those passages.

Bible Study Tools**Bible Websites**

Bible.com (Free entire Bible is available in several translations. Type in verse reference, key word, phrase.)

Crosswalk.com (Same as Bible.com, but parallel option also available. Other tools must be purchased.)

Biblegateway.com (Same as crosswalk, but has a topical Bible option, as well. Two free commentaries and several free audio Bibles.)

Free Bible Software

Crosswire.org (downloadable Bible study tools)

Esword.com

Freebiblesoftware.com (software is available for suggested donation)

Bible Software at a Price

PC Study Bible, found at biblesoft.com. Starts at \$50.00 for 14 translations, 20 commentaries, much more.

Logos, found at logos.com. Prices start at \$150.00 for 11 translations, 2 commentaries and much more.

Bibleworks More advanced. Very helpful for serious Greek and Hebrew study. Starts at @ \$400.00.

Good Study Bibles

Life Application Bible (Practical helps for everyday living.)

NASB Study Bible (Thorough, but understandable notes. Very helpful with hard-to-understand passages.)

NIV Study Bible (Same notes as NASB Study Bible. Translation is easier to understand for many.)

Children's Bibles

Hands On Bible (Especially good for ages 7 and up. Has a special family devotion section.)

New International Readers Version (good introductory study Bible for older children)

Online Helps

Heritagebuilders.com

New-life.net

Familymanweb.com

Shepherdserve.org/family_devotions.htm

Two Final Reminders

Use humor! Sometimes, the Bible is funny all by itself. (The book of Esther is full of humor, if you look for it.)

Be real! Talk about your own experiences with Bible truths that you have learned (and are learning!). It will help everyone know that you are walking along with them, not standing over them.