

Family Discipleship



*LEADING YOUR HOME THROUGH
TIME, MOMENTS, & MILESTONES*

**Matt Chandler &
Adam Griffin**

Foreword by Jen Wilkin

“What an insightful, helpful book! I love the fresh yet thoroughly biblical approach to family discipleship. The emphasis on discipling your family through time (daily, ongoing practices), moments (unplanned, spontaneous occasions), and milestones (special events) will enable you to see more clearly how to bring the gospel into all of life. I’ve never read a book on this subject with so many practical suggestions for bringing a Christian influence on your children from their birth to the end of their days (and long after you are in heaven). Begin reading this book and I think you’ll find, like I did, that it starts strong and gets better with every chapter.”

Donald S. Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Family Worship*;
Praying the Bible; and *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

“If you are a flawed parent who doesn’t have it all together, but believes that God desires to use you to shape your kids toward knowing and enjoying Jesus, pick up *Family Discipleship*! It’s a profound yet down-to-earth guide to help you form a framework for your home that fits your personality and gifts.”

David Robbins, President and CEO, FamilyLife

“Yes! This is the framework families need. Both paradigm shifting and practical, this resource will demystify the idea of family discipleship and challenge you to utilize the opportunities right before you.”

Ruth Chou Simons, Founder, GraceLaced Co.; author, *GraceLaced*; Cohost,
Foundations podcast

“*Family Discipleship* is an outstanding resource for families. Like a life raft in a vast sea of parenting advice, this book offers parents a framework for one of their most important tasks when raising children—teaching them to know and love the Lord. Theologically rich, incredibly practical, and genuinely realistic—this is a book I hope all parents put on their bookshelf.”

Laura Wifler, Cofounder, Risen Motherhood; coauthor, *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments*

“In *Family Discipleship*, Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin make you feel more excited than ever to call yourself a parent, while also casting a gripping vision for why we should take discipling our kids seriously. This book is a clarion call to every Christian parent: family discipleship matters, it is doable, and it’s our joy-filled responsibility both to God and to the next generation.”

Ryan and Selena Frederick, Founders, Fierce Parenting and Fierce Marriage;
authors, *Fierce Marriage*

“*Family Discipleship* is a rare resource—intensely practical without becoming a simplistic, one-size-fits-all ‘how-to manual.’ Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin have provided a framework that challenges and equips parents to fulfill their divine calling to disciple their children in all seasons of life. This book is realistic in its approach, acknowledging the imperfections we all have as parents, and yet very helpful in guiding parents to develop a strategy that fits their unique families. Parents will be challenged to model a life of faith, develop intentionality around God’s word, seize everyday discipleship moments, and celebrate life’s milestones. Most importantly, parents will be encouraged that this great task of making disciples of their children is empowered by the work of the Holy Spirit through them.”

Afshin Ziafat, Lead Pastor, Providence Church, Frisco, Texas

“This is one of the best books I’ve read on family discipleship! Chandler and Griffin bring wonderful insight to the challenge and joy of everyday parenting—and refreshing perspective on the immense responsibility of disciple making in our own home.”

Noe Garcia, Senior Pastor, North Phoenix Baptist Church, Phoenix, Arizona

“Parents have the greatest opportunity to disciple their children, but many parents haven’t experienced discipleship themselves to even begin to know how to do that. In the current ‘Pinterest-perfect’ era of parenting, stress is high for mom and dad as they try to raise their children in the Lord. *Family Discipleship* takes you just as you are, and will show you the way regardless of your level of confidence. Deep and practical, *Family Discipleship* is highly recommended.”

Mark Matlock, coauthor, *Faith for Exiles*

“There is a need and a place for books about how to implement family-equipping ministry in the local church, but that’s not what this book provides. *Family Discipleship* fills a very different need that’s every bit as important as field guides for churches: it provides parents with the simple and practical tools that they need to disciple their children. Richard Baxter once pointed out to pastors that if they will train parents to disciple their children, these practices of family discipleship ‘will not only spare you a great deal of labor, but will much further the success of your labors’ as a pastor. This book then provides pastors with a simple way to ‘further the success’ of their labors.”

Timothy Paul Jones, author, *Family Ministry Field Guide*; C. Edwin Gheens
Professor of Christian Family Ministry, The Southern Baptist Theological
Seminary

Family Discipleship

Family Discipleship

*Leading Your Home through Time,
Moments, and Milestones*

Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin

Foreword by Jen Wilkin

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home through Time, Moments, and Milestones

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover Image and Design: Ryan Jarrell

First printing 2020

Printed in the United States of America

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-6629-5

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-6632-5

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-6630-1

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-6631-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Chandler, Matt, 1974– author. | Griffin, Adam, author.

Title: Family discipleship : leading your home through time, moments, and milestones / Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: “Helps parents establish a discipleship plan to raise their children in the love of the Lord”— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019059556 (print) | LCCN 2019059557 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433566295 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781433566301 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433566318 (mobi) | ISBN 9781433566325 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Parenting—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Christian education of children. | Discipling (Christianity)

Classification: LCC BV4529 .C4285 2020 (print) | LCC BV4529 (ebook) | DDC 248.8/45—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019059556>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019059557>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

LB	30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20			
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

From Matt:

To Audrey, Reed, and Norah. Thank you for
being a part of this experiment.

From Adam:

To Cassie Bryant and Caroline Smiley, whose contributions
and friendships are essential elements of this resource.
And to the love of my life, Chelsea Lane, and our three boys:
Oscar, Gus, and Theodore. One of my greatest hopes is that
Chelsea and I will get to see generation after generation of
Griffins growing in the knowledge and favor of God.

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Foreword

I remember well the day my pantry was demolished by four elementary-aged Wilkin children on the hunt. For once, they were not on the hunt for food. Their school could earn credits toward the purchase of books and equipment by collecting small pink coupons printed on cereal boxes, can labels, and, as it turned out, just about every item in my pantry. To motivate them, teachers offered extra credit for bringing in a certain number of coupons. The scavenger hunt didn't stop with that first pantry raid. On trips to the grocery store, the kids would choose one cereal over another based on whether it had the telltale pink square printed on the box. The recycle bin and trash can were sifted through. Overnight, we went from unconsciously choosing and disposing of items in our pantry to scanning for a pink square I had never noticed before.

Those pink squares were suddenly everywhere. And by paying attention to them, a lot of good could be accomplished. All we needed was a heightened awareness of the opportunity and an understanding of the goal.

In this book, Matt and Adam want to give you that kind of heightened awareness. They want to bring to your attention three simple opportunities for family discipleship that you already have in your possession but might not have top of mind. Parenting can put us into a fog, rendering many of us in survival mode, ready to pronounce any day in which everyone makes it to bedtime alive as a raging success. But we know in our hearts that more is required of us than survival.

We cannot afford to simply make it through the day. Those survival days have a way of turning into weeks, and into months and years. Before we know it, opportunities to point our children toward faith in meaningful ways have fallen to the wayside in favor of just getting by.

But Christian parents want to be those who wisely steward the season of raising children. Psalm 90:12 says, “Teach us to number our days / that we may get a heart of wisdom.” We want to be good at numbering these precious days.

My husband, Jeff, and I have raised those four coupon-collecting kids to adulthood. I observe that the common exchange between empty nesters and those whose nests are still full often leans either toward “Just wait” or “Just treasure this season.” The first response is not helpful, but to be honest, the second one isn’t either. It’s encouraging, yes, but it lacks the practicality most young parents are desperately seeking. We do love our children—deeply so—but we want to channel that affection into action. We want to love our children not merely in word or in feeling, but in deed.

You hold in your hands a book that offers not just encouragement, but practical help. Through the framework of time, moments, and milestones, Adam and Matt help you develop eyes to see opportunities for family discipleship that are readily at hand, though easy to overlook. They offer their own experience not as normative, but as a starting point for us to think creatively about how to adopt similar practices to point our families to Christ. I have seen these three tools help the families in my own church and community do just that. It’s amazing what we can accomplish with a heightened awareness of the opportunity and an understanding of the goal. I pray this book gives you both.

Jen Wilkin

Acknowledgments

We are inexpressibly indebted to the NextGen and Communications staff of The Village Church, whose input greatly improved the clarity and usefulness of these ideas.

Worthy of particular note from within those staffs are the contributions and advocacy of David Roark. This resource would not have happened without him.

We owe a great debt to Anne Lincoln Hollibaugh. Her ideas contributed significantly to the material, particularly the distinct roles of the family and the church in family discipleship.

We are incredibly grateful for Ryan Jarrell, who patiently and expertly designed our cover. Also, we would be remiss not to deeply thank our editor Tara Davis and the whole team at Crossway who worked untold hours to create a book worth reading and to help readers find it.

While this is an original work, we are far from the first people to write about family discipleship. We formed our own terms and definitions, and went our own directions, but a lot of our thoughts on *time*, *moments*, and *milestones* were inspired by conversations we had about the ideas presented in Timothy Paul Jones's *Family Ministry Field Guide*. Other books like *The Shaping of a Christian Family* by Elisabeth Elliot, *Family Worship* by Donald S. Whitney, *Raising Kingdom Kids* by Tony Evans, *God, Marriage, and Family* by Andreas J. Köstenberger, and *The Legacy Path* by Brian Haynes, as well as the teachings and writings regarding Christian families by Charles Spurgeon and

Acknowledgments

others by Howard Hendricks, also helped us as we formed the thoughts presented herein.

Last but far from least, this resource would not exist without the collaboration and contributions of Caroline Smiley and Cassie Bryant. It started as a meeting in April 2012 simply trying to clarify the discipling role of parents at The Village Church in Dallas. The sweet season when we were all coworkers starting our families and shepherding the families at The Village Church will hopefully pay dividends for generations.

“Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD.”

Psalm 102:18

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children.” —Deuteronomy 4:9

“We deeply want a revival of domestic religion. . . . The Christian family was the bulwark of godliness in the days of the Puritans, but in these evil times hundreds of families of so-called Christians have no family worship . . . and no wholesome instruction or discipline. . . . How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advance when his own disciples do not teach his gospel to their own sons and daughters?”¹ —Charles Spurgeon

“God has given you one of the greatest privileges imaginable: the privilege of helping shape the future of another human being. Someday your children will no longer live with you—but what will their memories be? Will they only be of bickering or conflict—or will they also be of love and joy and happiness? Don’t let your frustrations or weariness crowd out your love.”² —Billy Graham

“The job has been given to me to do. Therefore it is a gift. Therefore it is a privilege. Therefore it is an offering I may make to God. Therefore it is to be done gladly, if it is done for Him. Therefore it is the route to sanctity. Here, not somewhere else, I may learn God’s way. In this job, not in some other, God looks for faithfulness.”³ —Elisabeth Elliot

“God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve him. In all the world this is the noblest and most precious work, because to God there can be nothing dearer than the salvation of souls. . . . There is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.”⁴ —Martin Luther

Introduction

Children are immeasurably valuable. You, a parent, are the guardian of an immortal soul, a cherished human being, an incalculable treasure, the very image of God himself. When it comes to parenting, sometimes you get to enjoy it and sometimes you have to endure it. It is wonderful and unpredictable. It is the most fun, upsetting, messy, beautiful, disappointing, and encouraging position in the world. Raising kids is an endlessly challenging adventure, and it comes with a never-ending list of responsibilities. One of the grandest of those responsibilities is the call to all parents to be disciple-makers in their own homes. A disciple-maker is a follower of Christ helping others follow Christ. No matter what your household looks like, your family is the primary instrument and environment for discipleship in all the fantastic and flawed ways that it might be worked out. Your persevering and often thankless spiritual leadership in your home is one of the most important things you will ever do with your life.

Your kids need guidance, and you are their guide. We want to inspire and empower you for the magnificent call on your life to lead your household in befriending and following Jesus, and, as you'll see, that plan does not have to be complicated. If your family already feels overloaded, this plan will not push you over the edge with a new burdensome list of obligations, but rather develop a strategy that helps easily weave in everyday ways for your family to worship God and talk about the gospel of Jesus. The hope of this book is to prepare you to equip your family for the work of ministry and to help them grow

up in every way into Christ (Eph. 4:15), following a plan that is well thought-out and sustainable. As you read this book, you will realize that not only can you do this, but you can't *not* do this. To parent without deliberately discipling your child is to build your family's house on a foundation of sand.

God himself has called you to disciple your children: to teach them to obey all that he has commanded and to see Christ formed in them (Matt. 28:20; Gal. 4:19). Whether you are a new parent or your kids are older, our desire is that this resource will get you and your household on the same page concerning how you will address the spiritual upbringing of the next generation. We will help you establish a sustainable rhythm of gospel-centered living through our framework for family discipleship—*time*, *moments*, and *milestones*. Utilizing the framework will bless your family and focus your discipleship, no matter the number, age, development, or personality of your children.

Inside this book you'll find Scripture to consider, questions to answer, structures to implement, and ideas to try out in family discipleship. Answering the questions and filling out the charts are the indispensable core of this resource, building your unique family plan onto the framework. Even if you skim everything else, don't skip those. Consider answering the questions and filling out the charts with the invited insight of a mentor couple, counselor, or pastor. Share them with your church community for accountability. If you're married, lean on these tools to get your spouse and you aligned on your family discipleship plan.

This is not, however, a "silver bullet" blueprint for building the perfect family. Inevitably, the ideas you experiment with or efforts you put into the discipleship of your home will not always meet your expectations. We can assure you that family discipleship seesaws between disappointing and delighting. When it comes to discipleship, your kids will not always respond the way you want them to. That is okay; no kids do. You are not doing this solely to illicit a desired response, but out of obedience to the call from God on your life as a parent.

Your family is not the only one whose plans completely fall apart, who accidentally “used a bad word” instead of capturing a family discipleship moment, whose family discipleship time ended in an argument, or whose candlelit family holiday tradition ended with wax in the carpet and a burn or two. Plans fall apart and people fall short. Take comfort that even in the Chandler and Griffin homes, which will often serve as examples throughout this book, we are far from perfect. Not only we, but every mom and dad we know, the godliest men and women we know, have some residue of shame to battle and a great need for grace regarding what they wish they would have done and what they regret saying or doing as they have led their families. At the same time, some of their fondest memories and proudest parental moments came in the midst of family discipleship. There is joy to be mined from the work of instructing your children. “A wise son makes a glad father” (Prov. 10:1), and “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7).

As a parent, you will sometimes feel inadequate. That might be especially true when it comes to your own understanding of God or his word or your ability and qualifications to teach it. Set your mind on the promises of God and *his* ability instead of feeling discouraged by a preoccupation with your inabilities. You, Mom or Dad, cannot save your child’s soul. Your child’s salvation “depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16). If your child’s salvation depended on the quality of your parenting efforts, it would not only make parenting overwhelming but it would make salvation impossible. Your child will not love God only if you are a good enough parent, or run from God if you are in any way found wanting as a mom or dad. Just as in your own life, it is by grace through faith that your kids will be saved, “this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). What a privilege it is, then, knowing that God could do as he wishes without us, but that he still invites us flawed moms and dads into how he saves and raises a child to know him.

Unfortunately, not every one of our children will know him. Many of us, sadly, will have prodigal children, kids who rebel and run from the Lord. It is one of the most heartbreaking realities for Christian families. If you find yourself the parent of a spiritually wayward son or daughter, remember this: there is no such thing as a “hopeless case” or a “lost cause” when the God of the Bible is involved. Who can he not redeem? Who can he not transform? “The LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear” (Isa. 59:1). Patience, compassion, grace, and prayer are in order. Also, remember that a prodigal child is not the cruel punishment of a malicious God because of some parenting failure of yours. Repent and redouble your efforts over your parental shortcomings? Yes. But it does you no good to torment yourself repeatedly with *would’ve* and *could’ve*. All we have to rely on for our children’s eternal destiny is the knowledge that God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6). God delights to redeem a human soul, and heaven rejoices when even one sinner repents.

God the Father and Jesus Christ are not looking at each other anxiously, crossing their fingers, and hoping you will solve the salvation of your child before it’s too late. No one gets to steal credit from God for a child’s deliverance from sin, and you should not beat yourself up when, in spite of your best efforts, your children rebel and run from God. You have no boast and no hope but the cross of Christ. That’s it! Literally, you have nothing to brag about or feel self-pity for. You have only this, what Christ has done freely for you already. And your only hope for a rebelling child is that the Father would draw him or her to himself and hopefully use you in the process.

Fortunately, discipling your kids is not a task God intends for you to carry by yourself. Yes, you’ve been given the gift of a life to steward, but you are to parent with a holy deference, asking the Holy Spirit to do what you cannot in a life that he loves more than you ever could—empowered by that same Holy Spirit for all that he asks you to do in leading your family. God never asks you to do anything that he does

not empower you to do. In our own moments of parenting remorse, we are reminded that our role is to plant seeds of truth, water them, and pray that God will give them life and growth as we trust in his goodness and mercy over all our shortcomings. Family discipleship requires divine reliance: “Unless the LORD builds the house, / those who build it labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1). Relying on a kind, gracious, and loving God gives us plenty of reasons to be optimistic about raising this generation. Unlike God, you are not all-powerful, all-knowing, or all-present. You are not always right, always just, or always good. But your child’s heavenly Father is, and he even loves the lost and wandering sheep. You don’t know what the future holds, but you know the one who holds the future—trust him.

Despite bumps along the way, many of us will see faith sparked in the lives of our children through intentional discipleship. We will feel and know the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst as we gather, and we will have the opportunity to celebrate as we witness God reveal himself to a new generation. Never relent in praying to the Lord for his movement in your family. You and your child belong first and foremost to your heavenly Father, who knows you the best and loves you the most.

Some of you are just starting your parenting journey and might be filled with the optimistic bliss of a freshly germinating family tree. Some of you have been doing this for a while, and the thought of family discipleship may fill you with a foreboding skepticism or pessimism. We could all use a dose of reality. Discipling a family is costly and far from easy. Parenting is hard work, and no one does it perfectly. You will mess up countless times, but leading your family to follow Christ can be simpler and more enjoyable than your moments of doubt may make it seem. No one is pretending the job ahead will be effortless, but do not assume that it cannot be fun and life-giving too. Your God is the God of joy and creativity and imagination.

In Christ, we can absolutely do this, undaunted by the hurdles along the way. In Christ, we can absolutely enjoy this and glory in the

fruit of our efforts, for true fruit comes from abiding in the true vine, Jesus Christ. “Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:1–2). God calls us to join him in witnessing his power in the lives of our children and to take a significant role in his work. Hallelujah!

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be used by parents to create a plan for the spiritual leadership of their home. Read this book actively—making notes, writing in your answers to the questions, and filling out the charts designed to organize your plan. This will serve to develop your own personal philosophy and methodology for the spiritual leadership of your home. After you’ve finished the book, use the charts as a reference as you parent, and be ready to readjust as your children’s needs change and grow. Be careful, however, not to make the plan take precedent over the person. It is not easy to be a kid. Every plan needs to be built with the person in mind at all times. The plans we want you to make are to serve your family, not, as we might sinfully tend toward, to manipulate a family to suit your plans.

Many engaged couples head to a bookstore looking for resources to help in preparation for marriage. Many married couples likewise shop for books to work through, wanting to work out various relationship related issues. There are a seemingly infinite number of books, devotionals, workbooks, and curricula for couples to choose from. When you become a parent, a similar world of resources opens up to you about how to navigate pregnancy and giving birth. You can find countless books about discipline and setting boundaries with kids. There’s even a great and growing reserve of resources on talking with your kids about sex and other sensitive topics. Unfortunately, for some reason, it is much harder to find a good book to help you develop a strategy to lead your kids spiritually.

This is surprising, since Scripture makes the spiritual leadership of the home such a huge priority for parents, to bring up children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Although many catechisms, kids’ Bibles, albums, and family devotionals are available, there is a lack of resources that help parents see why and how to use those tools to disciple their families as part of an overarching plan.

We should say up front that this is not a parenting book. At least, not in the traditional sense. This book is not about helping you navigate learning styles, different formative stages, strong wills, birth order, punishments, obedience, and so on. Those books exist, and many of them are very helpful. This book fits into the missing space that exists in intentionally designing spiritual leadership in the Christian home.

Having some level of accountability will be essential to the sustainability of your family’s rhythm of family discipleship. This material will best serve you if it is not read by only you. Our hope is that this book could be read as an aid to help you get on the same page with your spouse or community as you consider your plan to disciple your kids. If you are in a Christian marriage, we encourage you and your spouse to read it together and use the discussion questions to help you get in sync with how you will lead your kids in following Christ. If you are a single parent or if you have an unbelieving spouse, we encourage you to use this resource as a motivator to ask some of your trusted church community to go through the framework of *time*, *moments*, and *milestones* with you as you consider how to disciple your household together. If you have older children, think about having them walk through this resource with you and offer them the opportunity to foster ownership in it alongside you.

If you are about to become or just became a parent for the first time, we hope that this will be a resource for you to establish good rhythms from square one. If you have been parenting for a while and feel like you are lacking in the area of family discipleship, or if you just became a Christian, we hope using this book will help you gently, patiently,

and intentionally redirect your family in ways that will help them see all that they have in Christ.

At the time of writing this book, the Chandler home is parenting teenagers and the Griffin household is still making its way through elementary school. The advantage for you is that we are each in different phases of parenting, and that will likely come through when we share what the family discipleship framework looks like for each of us. We hope our examples are helpful, but obviously every family is different, and different developmental stages mean that every family will have to keep evolving its strategy as they go and grow. The framework can be universally applied in infinite ways that accommodate every kind of family at every stage of life, and we'll do our best to help you design your unique plan.

What We Are Not Saying

Before you dive into this book and hear all that we have to say about family discipleship, it is critical that you fully understand what we are *not* saying about leading your family. The following list is essential reading for understanding the rest of the book.

- *We are not asking you to make your kids the most important thing in your life.* Your first love is Jesus. Your personal priority is to love your God. In fact, you cannot love and *lead* your family if you do not first love and *follow* your God. It's easy to make our kids, whom we love so much, our ultimate love. But that is not what is best for you or for them. While we do not want to diminish the value of any human life, we want to be experts at fighting the temptation to put our family first in a way that usurps following our God. Investment in your kid's talents is good, but there's an insidious nature to hearing how special your kid is compared to others. Remember that you are making disciples whose gifts are to serve the Lord, not arranging a family to center on your kids, even if they have exceptional talents.

- *We are not putting responsibility for your child's salvation on you.* First of all, we are not promising that family discipleship as laid out in this book will lead to salvation for your kids. Your child's faith does not rise or fall based on how well you follow the precepts of this book, nor does it depend on your proficiency as a parent. When Christ calls his people to make disciples, he is not saying that you should or even could make or force your children to be followers of Christ. Making disciples is about stacking and gathering the kindling of truths, but only God can spark the fire in this work. So all the more, seek the sovereign, providential, faith-growing God to save your kids and to use you in the process.
- *We are not shaming you.* We hope that as you read this book, a conviction around leading your family with an eternal purpose will take root and grow. But if you begin to hear convincing lies of condemnation or your heart feels defeated and sinking in shame or guilt, stop reading, take a deep breath, and remind yourself that Christ came that you might be free from sin and condemnation. It is great to walk in godly grief that leads to repentance, righteousness, and lessened burdens, but no part of us is casting accusations of poor parenting at you by reminding you of the work God has asked you to join him in. God is not the god of perpetual disappointment, as many parents tend to imagine him. Don't be so hard on yourself. Brother or sister, please hear us: Christ came not to disgrace you but to offer you grace. Lord, deliver us from evil and equip us for this task!
- *We are not unduly comparing you to other families.* While it is fine to learn from other families and we will share some personal stories in this book, we are not asking you to compare yourself in such a way that you will feel either insecure or superior about your role in your kids' lives. You, and only you, are your children's parent. This is not someone else's job; it is yours. God is not looking at you and wishing your kids had been born into a different household or patting you on the back because you're outpacing your neighbor, but he is imploring you to pick

up the mantle of responsibility to lead your family in following Christ his Son in all the ways he has gifted you to do so with your unique best.

- *We are not asking you to fake it.* The nature of being a parent is that your kids have often seen you at your worst. This is why Christian parents have to be fluent in repentance language—owning where we’ve failed, apologizing to our kids, and letting them hear us as we cry out to God for forgiveness. You are not perfect. We know that. But your life as an imperfect example does not excuse you from the responsibility to repentantly press forward in grace-driven effort toward the goal that God has laid before you, to see your kids come to a knowledge and faith in God and learn from every error and hardship along the way.
- *We are not saying you are alone in this.* Not only do you have in your hands what we hope is a helpful resource from some pastors who care about the next generation, but we would call you to press into your local body of believers to do this together with them. Spur them on to love and good works in their families and invite them to do the same in yours. Beyond the church, Christ himself has promised that he is with you. He commands you to disciple your family, but he does not command you to do this without him.
- *We are not saying every parent is qualified to disciple their kids.* For numerous reasons—most notably all forms of abuse, abandonment, or various forms of besetting sins—parents can disqualify themselves from being in a position of authority in a child’s life. This is all the more reason why the church needs to be equipped to rally around a family and to evangelize the community. In the modern pandemic of absentee parents, especially fathers, kids who need a family should find the family of God ready to spiritually fit the bill.
- *We are definitely not minimizing how important this is.* While this entire list is true, we would be unloving to then minimize the gravity of the duty laid on us as parents. You are important to your kids. Family discipleship is important to God and to

your family. It's part of why God put this child under your care. We can all confess how our priorities have selfishly been disordered by the things in our life. Where does this sit with your other priorities? Many Christian families would say that disciplining their kids is important. We are asking you to consider, How important? Is this the lifeblood of your parenting strategy? We are not saying that having other commitments in your family is inherently destructive, but it is evil to, in any way, communicate by action or inaction that anything else trumps your walk toward eternity as a family.

Do Not Be Afraid

The most common command in the Bible is to not be afraid. It is repeated 365 times. We think it bears repeating as we begin this resource together. Parents, do not be afraid. Yes, disciplining the next generation is a daunting privilege, but God is with you, and if he is with you, who can be against you? Can anything or anyone wrestle you or your family away from God? We are confident that God can use you to lead your family to him.

Let this sink in and believe it: it is never too soon and it is never too late to start disciplining your household. This adventure starts every day anew for every one of us. Every new day brings new mercies. Every new day brings new opportunities. There is not one day where you are on this journey alone. You are accompanied by the God of the universe, who loves your kids more than you do. He is your children's heavenly Father. Another chance, a fresh attempt, a rejuvenated effort starts right now. Lord, have mercy!

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” —Deuteronomy 6:5–7

“But once let the family altar be forsaken, and let parents forget the natural duty of ordering their households before the Lord, and you may guard the church as you will, your labor will be vain: you have cast down her hedges—the bear out of the wood shall waste her; you have taken away the tower of the flock, and when the wolf comes he will find the sheep an easy prey. Christian parents . . . with all my heart would I say to you, do not sin against the child by your ill example or by your negligence as to his salvation, but seek the Holy Spirit that to your own offspring you may fully discharge the solemn duties which providence and grace have thrown upon you.”¹ —Charles Spurgeon

“The single greatest reason why we are losing our young people today is that the home is no longer the place where faith is transferred. Parents, the primary purpose of the home is the evangelization and discipleship of your children. You cannot outsource this vital component in the rearing of your children.”² —Tony Evans

“Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief of the means of grace. . . . If these are duly maintained, all the means of grace will be like to prosper and be successful.”³ —Jonathan Edwards

“A Christian home is more than a house full of Christian people.”⁴
—Howard Hendricks

The Family That Disciples

No one can help or hurt a child like a parent can. Parents are powerful. “Father” and “mother” are society’s most influential roles, which makes being a parent one of the highest honors and most immense responsibilities. If you are blessed enough to have someone who calls you “Mom” or “Dad,” be honored. Embrace that title with great trepidation and enthusiasm, speaking what is true, loving, and kind and making the most of the influence afforded to you.

The role you hold, “parent,” is one commissioned by God himself. It is no accident that you are your child’s mom or dad. Whoever your children are, born to you or brought into your family, God has knowingly chosen you to train and care for them, to teach them all that he has commanded. If you are a parent, you are automatically in the position of disciple-maker in your child’s life. A disciple-maker is not, as some might believe, a role reserved for so-called super-Christians. Making disciples is the job of every follower of Jesus. This is your purpose in your home: making eternal deposits in your children. Your faith is more influential than you think. Your family is the primary instrument and environment for discipleship in the life of your child, and your calling in this life is to give the discipleship of your home your unique best. Your child is not only your progeny; he or she is your

protégé. Everything you have learned from and about following Christ is to be passed on to your children to the best of your ability.

What Is Family Discipleship?

Family discipleship is the important and mostly ordinary spiritual leadership of your home. Put simply, family discipleship is leading your home by doing whatever you can whenever you can to help your family become friends and followers of Jesus Christ. Christians not only *ought* to disciple, but they *must* disciple if they are to truly follow Christ. This is the quintessential role of every Christian parent. You cannot be a Christian family if you are not a disciple-making family, because your family can't truly follow Christ if you are not doing what Christ commanded—trying to become more and more like him and leading others to do the same.

Discipleship is both what we heard Jesus command and what we saw Jesus doing. Discipleship is essential to both the message and the method of following Christ. Jesus's method of discipleship was not intended to be unique; it was prototypical. He invited people to follow and live alongside him so they might lead others in like manner. He could have started a formal training school. But instead he built his training around time in his presence as he exercised his trust in the Father, practiced relentless love for all people, and carried out his mission with his disciples. The Great Commission is for you to similarly make disciples of those who do not follow Christ, including those born or brought into your home. To disciple your family as Jesus disciplined his twelve, think less of your children as students in your home-university and more as apprentices invited to study and exercise the way of God they see in and hear about from you. When your kids ask questions, think of ways that you might give them an invitation for an answer just like Christ did: "Come and you will see" (John 1:39).

Willfully or not, all parents are perpetually discipling the children around them. Children are watching and listening to you as they form their impressions of the world, of faith, and of what it means to be an

adult. As a Christian parent, wield that influence to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Good family discipleship is both intentional and consistent with a clear goal to see your kids conformed to the image of Christ.

Because it takes intentionality and consistency, it requires a plan. Christian parents should have a strategy. Every household should regularly be designing, adjusting, and reforming a plan for family discipleship. The family discipleship framework this book proposes, presented at the end of this chapter, is a trellis for that plan to grow on. It takes advantage of the many small and large interactions a family has in order to impart the gospel of Jesus Christ and hopefully see the next generation be “born again to a living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3).

Family discipleship assumes two essential truths that undergird this entire resource. First, parents have the potential to be the most influential person in a child’s life. Second, God has clearly commanded that the highest priority of parenting is helping children know, follow, and trust him.

Family Discipleship Is Not . . .

Family discipleship is not free-form spiritual exploration. Family discipleship is indoctrination, teaching the doctrines and worldview of God as laid out in his word without yielding to the contrary opinions of the world or apologizing for the potential offensiveness of that truth. *Indoctrination* has become a bad word in our culture that loves the idea of letting children choose for themselves what *they* think is true. What a disastrous deception! To not tell your kids what is true is the opposite of loving. We are helping the next generation navigate a perilous journey of life through temptations and malicious misinformation. Do not set your children adrift in the desert of this world and cross your fingers that they find the narrow path to the sole oasis.

Family discipleship is not using the word of God in order to get your way. It is not using the threat of God’s displeasure in order to get your kids to be quiet or sit still or stop bothering each other. Behavior

manipulation is driven by fear, but obedience to God is driven by sincere love and gratitude. A well-behaved child is not the same thing as a disciplined child. While the Bible has a lot to say about godly behavior, and obedience is an important aspect of discipleship, behavioral modification is not our main goal. It is far too easy to raise a Pharisee, a child who knows and follows the rules of God but whose heart is far from him. We want our kids to be obedient to God not because they are intimidated by him (or by us) but because they genuinely love obedience and they trust God's love and care for them. Family discipleship pursues sincere heart change in kids, true Christian transformation. Being in a position of authority, it is easy to twist the word of God in order to serve your purposes. It is easy to create a home where it seems like God loves us when we are good and is angry when we are bad. The truth of the gospel is that God always loves us infinitely better than we deserve. We obey because he loves us. He does not love us because and only when we obey. Our kids need to be taught that God loves them beyond their deserving and that obedience breeds joy. Likewise, familial love should also be love without petty conditions. Your kids will not always meet your expectations. It is essential that you love the kids you have and not some version of them you wish you had. We want you to have a family that never doubts just how much you love them because in your relationship your affection and commitment are blatantly obvious.

Family discipleship is not a way to raise popular kids. Raising kids who follow Christ means you are preparing a generation ready to be comfortable being different and even looked down upon by a culture that thinks they know better. While it is certainly not the goal to raise kids to be deliberately irritating to the world, it should absolutely be your hope to have children who will not shy away from what is true just because it does, in fact, irritate someone. What you believe as a Christian is offensive to modern sensibilities. Let this sink in: if God graciously saves your child, many in the culture will be repulsed by your child. At the very least, disciplined kids will be considered "weird."

Your son or daughter's faith will not impress the world. Your children will be hated because of who your God is and what he is like (Mark 13:13; John 15:19). We need to raise up a generation who is ready to be distinctly different from their peers, righteously abnormal. In a lot of ways, that's the opposite of our natural inclination in how to raise our children. Raising kids who are ready to be hated means raising kids who unashamedly love God even in the face of loathing and alienation. Regardless if the insults of the world are naive or legitimate, we pray your children will be ready to stand firm in the midst of a world that despises them. You will need to put in substantial effort to nurture kids who are ready for that. You are raising kids who will hopefully pursue generosity over comfort, righteousness over acceptance, and selflessness over self-esteem for Christ's sake.

Family discipleship is not a strategy to become an admired parent. Fight the temptation to lead in order to become an impressive mom or dad and instead impress upon your kids their desperate need for a heavenly Father. Your identity is rooted in being a child of God not a parent of your child. This is not about you finding affirmation in the affection or admiration of others. This is not about building your personal legacy or making junior versions of yourself. Family discipleship shapes children into the image of Christ, not the image of their mom or dad. You are not crafting a child to fit a mold of perfection for human admiration and parental pride. This training in righteousness is not a competition or an avenue for egotistic displays of family superiority. Will you get something out of it? Absolutely. It is incredibly rewarding. But that is not why you do it. We do it for the love of our kids and the love of our God.

Family discipleship is not always the most appealing path. Family discipleship is not the path of least resistance. For kids, authority, training, and regulations seem like adversaries to freedom and pleasure. "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). The unpruned vineyard does not yield the

best fruit. You don't disciple because it is painless. You disciple because you believe it is best to serve and obey the God who knows what is best and is what is best.

Family Discipleship Is Important

Consider all the planning you put into the physical and intellectual needs of your children. You prepare meals. You make living arrangements. You choose a school. You clothe them. You protect and warn them against the dangers of their world. You establish rules, consequences, and rewards. You could not claim to love your child and send them out unfed, unclothed, or uneducated. You could even be arrested for the neglect of many of these needs. Family discipleship is the charge to realign your priorities, to acknowledge that the spiritual feeding and the spiritual covering of your children needs to be as vital to you and your family as your children's physical feeding and physical covering. "While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:8).

Clothe your children? Yes, of course, every day, but also help them put on the full armor of God so that they may be able to stand against the devil's schemes (Eph. 6:10-18). Feed your kids? Yes, of course, every day, but also give them Jesus, the daily bread of life, so they will not hunger or thirst for eternity (John 6:35). Give them a safe place to live? Yes, of course, every day, but teach them to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives that they may inquire of God and delight in his beauty (Ps. 27:4). Get them an education? Yes, of course, but teach them to discern good from evil and right from wrong, otherwise they will choose what seems right and it will lead them to death (Isa. 5:20; Prov. 14:12). If your children are successful and they get everything they ever want, what good is it if in the process they forfeit their eternal soul (Mark 8:36)? We want you to have no greater joy in your child's life, nothing that even comes close, than that they are walking in the truth (3 John 4).

It is not only important to your kids that you disciple them; it is also important to us—all of us. What could be more revolutionary in a community than a collection of families raising kids to be friends and followers of Christ together? The Lord working through large-scale family discipleship would revitalize a church and revolutionize an entire society. It is the power of God at work transforming lives and overthrowing the rule of sin in our own homes! It is setting whole households and therefore whole communities on mission to love God, love people, and make disciples that make disciples.

Yes, your family discipleship is valuable for the whole church and your community, and the whole church should be invested in seeing your kids come to know their Savior, but you should also know that training your children to know and follow Christ is a job that first and foremost belongs to you. Though you are far from alone in this mission, God rests the responsibility for their Christian education squarely on your shoulders. We live in a day and age where it is far too easy to put off or pass off the Christian discipleship of our children.

Discipling your child is not primarily your church's job, your child's school's job, or your pastor's job. This job is yours. This job is vital and requires your unique best. You are irreplaceable in it. This job begins again for you today regardless of how long you have been parenting. This book is a plea and a tool for you to embrace God's call on you as a dad or mom to intentionally get in your kid's life around their greatest need, their spiritual development. The Lord who has given you this assignment can equip you for it, and he will not forsake you in it.

Sadly, this critical Christian mission has too often solicited non-chalance and inactivity from mothers and fathers, even those who themselves walk with the Lord. Family discipleship is not a joyless duty for which you should reserve some leftover energy; it is a priority of the highest order and the essential centerpiece of your household's rhythms. Making disciples at home is not "one more thing" to add to your list of parental tasks. It is *the* thing, the primary mission and calling that should undergird every single interaction your family is

fortunate enough to have. That may seem like hyperbole, but we are trying our best not to do you the disservice of understating just how significant family discipleship is in a Christian home.

Discipling your family is one of the most crucial, weighty, and enjoyable jobs you will ever undertake. It is simultaneously rewarding and draining, fulfilling and frustrating. It is a fantastic daunting privilege, one that should never be taken lightly. Because it is an assignment directly from God himself, we believe focusing on doing it well is worth earnestly putting in all the time, energy, emotion, and painstaking work it may demand. With all your family has going on, you may think you don't have time for family discipleship. The truth is, with all your family has going on, you can't afford *not* to be dedicated to family discipleship.

You face a formidable challenge: to be part of how God raises up for himself men and women who are “blameless and innocent, children of God” ready to “shine as lights” in a “crooked and twisted generation” (Phil. 2:15). Christian parenting often means knowingly instilling unpopular ideas as we teach our kids to obey all that Jesus commanded. We are raising kids the world may hate, and we want them confident in Christian audacity, ready to swim upstream in a godless culture adrift from holiness. Every step of the way, your kids and you will be tempted to conform to the patterns of this world, so pray God would “lead [you] not into temptation, but deliver [you] from evil” (Matt. 6:13) and transform you by the renewing of your minds (Rom. 12:2).

The good news for us is that in a helplessly broken world full of suffering powerless people *all* children who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how will they call on him if they do not believe? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear about Jesus unless you tell them? And how are you going to tell them unless you strategically spend time with them? Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ. Even if your children are difficult and oppositional and argumentative—like

the prophet Isaiah said of the children of Israel—let’s hold our hands out to them all day, every day (Rom. 10:13–20).

Most importantly, family discipleship is important because it aligns our hearts with what is true, the reality and supremacy of God. You and your children are both mutually dependent on God. In a world of distractions and lies, as well as a pervasive internal desire for autonomy and control, we need to remember the God who invites us into the joy of relationship with and reliance on him. God both demands and deserves your family’s worship. What other motivation or justification do you need for leading your family to follow Christ? “Whatever you do, work heartily. . . . You are serving the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23–24).

Talking about your parenting can be a sensitive endeavor. Understanding how weighty this task is can lead us into a downward spiral of negative reactions. It is easy to feel afraid of how many ways we will surely mess this up going forward or regret opportunities already past. To feel ashamed of our personal and ancestral dysfunctions and to tremble at the thought of passing the worst of our sinful legacies on to a new generation. To feel insecure about our own insufficiencies and inadequacies. To feel a sense of impending resignation, already inclined to give up when it gets too difficult. All these feelings are common, but they are not rooted in the gospel confidence and blood-bought freedom we get to walk in as those who trust in Christ. In family discipleship, as in all else the Lord calls you to, God’s “grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9). Christ has commanded us not to worry, so do not torment yourself with disturbing what-ifs. You can have urgency without anxiety.

Family Discipleship Is Mostly Ordinary

Everything that you do with your family becomes a part of your family rhythm. Your rhythm is what your family will consider ordinary, what you do every day or regularly that feels normal. What are the touch points where your family crosses paths on a regular basis? What are the habits that form the sequences of every week’s events? Meals, sports,

shows, church, sleep, work, vacations, and so much more make up the pattern of your family's life together. Family discipleship, in order to be rightly ordered and sustainable, should not only be something to "add" to your family's routine; it needs to be woven into all of it. It needs to be ordinary. This is the foundational purpose of what we call the family discipleship framework. Having a plan for family discipleship *time*, *moments*, and *milestones* helps intertwine the discipleship of your children into every ordinary aspect of what your family does together and thus creates a sustainable rhythm.

In the Chandler family, we have gotten to see God do some extraordinary things in our kids' lives. We have witnessed two of our kids becoming believers on the same night while in two different places. We even got to be in the baptism waters with them as they shared how God had revealed himself to them. Those moments are every Christian parent's dream come true.

However, highlights are not the norm for Chandler family discipleship. Our family discipleship has often been marked with difficulty. The vast majority of it can best be described as unremarkable. Much of the time we gather as a family and many of the gospel conversations we have are ordinary and less than memorable. In fact, by and large, our family devotionals have felt like they are not working. I don't ever remember thinking, "Wow. That was really powerful." Yet, after all the everyday forgettable and routine interactions we have had, we now see our kids demonstrate what they picked up from our *time*, *moments*, and *milestones*. And we thought they were barely paying attention!

Family discipleship needs to be part of the ordinary rhythm of your family. It takes resolve and intentionality to leverage the times your family crosses each other's paths, even in the smallest ways. Granted, while much of what we teach in this book involves leveraging the intersections of your family's already existing life, dedicating your family to Christ may require sacrificing other demands on your schedule, especially since reprioritizing family discipleship may involve reevaluating how you are spending your time. More common than replacing

commitments in order to accomplish our discipling goals will be re-purposing your existing family times, bringing profound purpose into the normal everyday intersections of your family's life to make family discipleship ordinary.

Don't expect every family discipleship interaction to be superlative. It's not that we want to just go through the motions in a dry or lifeless manner; but we expect a lot of normal and unremarkable gospel-centered conversations. Family discipleship will sometimes be like a hearty meal and at other times a light snack. On some more rare occasions, your family discipleship will be like a sweet dessert treat to truly delight in. While dessert is great, it is not your main food staple. In order for family discipleship to be normal, it will be best if it's simple. The simplicity of the framework that organizes the rest of this book is intended to help your strategy for leading your family be free from unnecessary complexities and be clear enough to be sustainable, effective, and memorable.

Spiritually Leading a Family

What does it mean to "lead your family"? This is one of the principal questions guiding the content of this book and one we often get asked as pastors. Put simply, leading your family means going first, initiating what needs to be done. It starts with you. Whatever your family needs, meeting the need begins with your action. In the case of spiritual leadership, that means that you are responsible to initiate and maintain a culture of discipleship in your home. It will not happen without you. You have more influence in your family than you perhaps realize. Using your profound influence to line up your kids behind you and say to them, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1) is your spiritual leadership.

To lead is to serve. To be a truly great parent you will have to focus your energy on others, not yourself. Christ embodied and taught this reality. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the

Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:26–28). For a husband, leading his wife is synonymous with serving his wife. For a parent, leading the family is synonymous with serving the family. You serve to lead. That means to be a Christian leader, you will have to fight the entitlement and pride that comes so easily with authority. Parents are as much mentors and servants as they are masters. Parenting is often draining and thankless work. You have to literally condescend to be a godly parent. You are not to take your position and “lord it over” those under you. Your role is to identify the needs of those under your care and sacrificially meet them. Determining how your family needs to be served is the same as determining how you will lead them.

Spiritual leadership of your home starts with considering the spiritual needs of your home. The greatest spiritual need of your family is every family member’s desperate need for salvation in Jesus Christ, to know and trust him. More important even than teaching your kids to trust in the wisdom of God’s instruction is teaching your kids about the salvation available to them in Christ. Of course we don’t teach only the gospel, we also teach the law, the way to live. Your children will not naturally know how to live, think, and speak in ways that honor God nor how to discern which influences honor their Lord. They will need your guidance. The greatest way to lead and serve your family is to utilize *time*, *moments*, and *milestones* to teach your family about the good news of salvation in Christ and what it looks like to obey all that he commands.

Creating a Family Discipleship Culture

Culture is built around values, beliefs, and behaviors. Every family has them whether you have identified them or not. Your family has a unique set of personalities and preferences, expectations and rules, hopes and histories. Your family culture is the atmosphere of your home, and it is shaped by how graciously you respond to sin and failure, how you react to accomplishments and good behavior, and many

other factors that contribute to your collective family identity. Every family is different but each individual contributes to your unique family culture shaped by your combined values. Some families value athletic achievement. Some families focus on academic accomplishments. Some regularly gather around the kitchen table for a board game or a family meal while others pass each other like ships in the night. Some homes love peace, quiet, and privacy while others don't feel normal if the house isn't boisterous and busy. Some homes are rife with conflict and some are serene. Designing a family discipleship culture takes having a head of household that purposely sets the tone of the spiritual environment. It is a home that makes family discipleship important and normal. It prioritizes biblical values and incorporates them above and alongside the other values and idiosyncrasies of the family's culture.

Some families may go so far as to craft a list of stated values or a family mission statement. It's a worthy exercise to consider the foundational guiding principles of your household. In the Griffin home, on the wall in the hallway leading from our bedrooms is a framed declaration that "The Griffin family will strive to know God, to make him known, and to honor him in all that we do." If we are considering whether or not to go somewhere or do something, we hold the question up to this mission to determine if our family will invest our valuable time in it. If we don't believe it will honor God, we do not do it. We also have a list of stated values. That same poster states that "we value discipline, obedience, repentance, grace, and fun." This is what we build our family interactions around. If you were to spend a week in our home, I hope you'd see the evidence of those values lived out.

Regardless of whether you have a written and communicated set of values or mission, your family has a culture. Having some clear, shared values creates a safe, shared culture. Be intentional about fostering a culture that values spiritual development. Find ways to make that clear in the way you prioritize your time together and the things you discuss using the family discipleship framework.

What Is the Family Discipleship Framework?

Almost all pictures come in one shape, a rectangle. Whether it's a snapshot of a birthday party or a mountain landscape, chances are the picture has four straight sides and right angles at all four corners. Since pictures come in rectangles, so do picture frames. Each empty rectangular picture frame is suited to contain infinite possibilities within its finite squared limits. The frame can hold whatever portrait of whatever moment frozen in time you are willing to put into it.

The design of the family discipleship framework is similar to a picture frame. It doesn't matter what your family picture looks like, it can be put into this four-piece frame. The framework is likewise universally applicable. The four sides of the framework are simple and yet profound enough to provide structure to your discipleship and give you clarity and support.

But what about single parents? Blended families? Kids with special needs? Spiritually divided homes? Older families? We know every family is completely different. For that matter, every family member is unique. Every individual child and every parent is one-of-a-kind, and each person may be different tomorrow than they are today. But some things about families are universal regardless of the makeup of your home. First, as we've said, no matter what your household looks like, your family is the primary instrument and environment for discipleship. Second, your family context can be served by planning around the family discipleship framework.

As simple as it is, this framework can fulfill its function in any family. It can be a valuable resource even in families where members differ in their views of God. Whether they've professed faith or not, we encourage you to include all adults and children in your family in these *times*, *moments*, and *milestones*, while constantly praying that those who have not been born again one day will be.

The four pieces of the family discipleship framework (defined below) make up the backbone of this book and summarize our strat-

egy for the spiritual leadership of our homes. *Modeling* has to do with your personal spiritual life as a parent. *Time, moments, and milestones* are our strategy for imparting your faith to your children by building a new gospel-centered and sustainable family rhythm.

- *Modeling*. Serving as a godly example for your family, living out your genuine walk with God, and demonstrating true repentance where and when you fall short.
- *Family Discipleship Time*. Creating intentional time built into the rhythm of the family's life for the purpose of thinking about, talking about, and living out the gospel.
- *Family Discipleship Moments*. Capturing and leveraging opportunities in the course of everyday life for the purpose of gospel-centered conversations.
- *Family Discipleship Milestones*. Marking and making occasions to celebrate and commemorate significant spiritual milestones of God's work in the life of the family and child.

Beginning with the End in Mind

Think about your family. What images come to mind? Think through each member of your family individually. What is each personality like? What does everyone struggle with? What is everyone good at? Now, when it comes to the spiritual life of you and your children, what do you want your family to look like? What do you want them to do? What do you want them to believe?

As we enter into the meat of this book, let's begin with the end in mind. A child disciple of Jesus Christ is a child who loves God, loves people, and imparts what God has revealed to them to others. You love what you know, so if you want to love something more, then learn more about it. That means that much of family discipleship will involve teaching our kids about God and teaching them about people in our efforts to help them fall in love with their Savior and their neighbor. Think about what that would look like in your own home. If we are

going to lead a family dedicated to following Christ, what are we asking God to do? What are we hoping for him to change?

We assume that many of the families that are using this book have kids who do not trust Christ. It is important to remember that discipleship begins before conversion. Is it okay to challenge an unbelieving child to learn about, follow, and obey Christ? Absolutely. That does not mean that in every way we treat nonbelievers as believers. But it does mean that in order to plant seeds of truth in our children's lives we do not hesitate to call them to what is true just because they do not believe it yet. In children, heartfelt behavior will often outpace mature belief and will precede genuine conversion. A child can speak a heartfelt prayer and demonstrate a heartfelt obedience long before he or she actually possesses genuine faith and a committed personal walk with God, a heart fidelity.

So let us give every effort to conduct ourselves as parents in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, hoping to see him rescue, redeem, and transform our kids and calling them to follow our example.

One of the greatest responsibilities all Christian parents have is to be disciple makers in their homes.

Discipling your family can feel like an intimidating task, but it doesn't need to be overwhelming or complicated. With a simple plan in place, discipleship is something every parent can do.

Pastors Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin have made it their mission to help you develop a sustainable rhythm of gospel-centered discipleship focused in three key areas: time, moments, and milestones. Filled with suggestions, sample plans, and Scripture references, this book begins with the end in mind—equipping you to create a unique plan for your family as you raise your children in the love and fear of the Lord.

“Theologically rich, incredibly practical, and genuinely realistic—this is a book I hope all parents put on their bookshelf.”

LAURA WIFLER

Cofounder, Risen Motherhood; coauthor, *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments*

“I've never read a book on this subject with so many practical suggestions for bringing a Christian influence on your children from their birth to the end of their days.”

DONALD S. WHITNEY

Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Family Worship*

Matt Chandler (BA, Hardin-Simmons University) serves as lead pastor of teaching at the Village Church in Dallas, Texas, and president of the Acts 29 Network. He lives in Texas with his wife, Lauren, and their three children.

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PARENTING / DISCIPLESHIP